

The Briar Wire

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Senior Melody Cooper Named 2025 Presidential Medalist

During the Student Involvement Recognition Ceremony on April 24, Melody Cooper '25 was named the 2025 Presidential Medalist.

Sweet Briar's most prestigious award given to a student, the medal is presented to a senior who has demonstrated exemplary intellectual achievement, in addition to distinction in some or all of the following areas: service to the community, contributions to the arts, enlargement of the College's global perspective, athletic fitness and achievement, and leadership and contributions to community discourse.

"Melody is a wonderful example of the Sweet Briar student who does it all. She has earned so many distinctions during her four years at our college," said President Mary Pope M. Hutson '83 in her remarks. "She has helped make our campus a better place. I'm confident that Melody will continue to make a difference in every community she becomes a part of, wherever her life beyond Sweet Briar takes her."

As a Sweet Briar student, Melody has earned many intellectual achievements. With a stellar 3.9 grade point average, she is a Presidential Scholar and member of three honor societies: Alpha Lambda Delta, Alpha Psi Omega, and Omicron Delta Kappa. Hailing from Detroit, Mich., Melody is a triple major, studying

archaeology and ancient studies, English and creative writing, and history. She also studied abroad in England through the Virginia Program at Oxford, interned with the Interlochen Center for the Arts, completed a Certificate in Arts Management, and served as a gallery and museum assistant. Also in service of the arts, Melody serves on the editorial board of *Red Clay* and is deeply involved in theatre, both behind the scenes and performing on stage, appearing in seven productions at the College.

Melody has contributed to our community in many ways through Student Life, including three years as both a resident advisor and member of the Judicial Committee, spending two of those years as its chief justice. She has been a student representative on the Lectures and Events Committee, as well as an active member of numerous clubs and organizations such as the Bum Chums, Earphones, Paint N Patches, Sweet Dancers, and more. Following Commencement, Melody plans to study poetry as a part of the University of South Carolina's M.F.A. program.

"Every year, the winner is someone



who deserves it so much, and it's just an honor to be a part of that. Seeing who's gotten it in past years, I'm honored to join the ranks. I'm very proud," Melody said of receiving this honor. "I feel like I've grown up at Sweet Briar in a really special way. I've found lifelong friends, and I've grown academically in very real ways. This has been home for the past four years. It will be hard to leave, but I'm excited, I'm ready."

While the president and president's cabinet ultimately decide on each year's recipient, nominations are invited from all faculty and staff. Each nomination includes supporting documentation of the nominee's accolades and accomplishments. Each winner receives a medal, a replica of the one worn on ceremonial occasions by the College's president. ●

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Dear fellow alumnae and friends,

In May, the Sweet Briar College campus community, along with families and friends, experienced the College's 116th Commencement ceremony. There was much to celebrate during the days prior, including Senior Week events like the senior fountain jump, Champagne Toast (featuring our very own Celebration Chardonnay!), Fancy Hat Brunch, and senior rides.

You can read more about the ceremony at sbc.edu/news in the article, "She Who Earns the Rose May Bear It: Sweet Briar Graduates 104 Seniors During 116th Commencement Ceremony," some of which I am including below, as it speaks to the academic excellence of our students, who are now alumnae.

Following a week of rain that saturated the grounds on campus, the Class of 2025 walked across the stage in the Fitness & Athletics Center's Upchurch Field House on May 17, closing out years of hard work, scholarship, and tradition. Roses earned, the graduates received their diplomas in front of the hundreds of students, faculty, staff, family, and friends who gathered to celebrate this inspiring class of 104 scholars hailing from 22 states and 13 countries.

During the ceremony, remarks were delivered by several community members, including Melody Rosalie Cooper '25, this year's Presidential Medalist; Safiya Crutchfield, president of the senior class; Lara Jost '25, vice president of academic affairs of the Student Government Association (SGA); and Isabella Paul '25, president of SGA.

"We as a collective are who we are today because of the people sitting

around us right now. As we walk across the stage and drive through the gates for the last time as students, I want us all to remember that. Remember that it will be impossible to forget our time here because our time here has embedded itself within us, forever changed," Melody said.

President Mary Pope M. Hutson '83 closed the ceremony with a charge to the Class of 2025 as they spent their last moments as undergraduate students.

"As Sweet Briar students, you've shown your mettle, you've shown us that you can face challenges, that you can speak out in support of what you believe in," she said. "Now, it's time for you to take your talents to the wider world and work to make it a better place. You can do this. You are Sweet Briar women. The world is waiting for you and we are eager to see what you will accomplish next!"

Prior to Saturday's Commencement ceremony, seniors and their loved ones also attended the Awards and Baccalaureate ceremonies on May 16, providing opportunities to reflect and celebrate all they have accomplished during their time at Sweet Briar. The Class of 2025 already boasts a 70% job or graduate school placement rate with 43 students starting a job and 31 continuing their education. Seven of the graduating seniors earned Honors degrees while 10 were initiated into Phi Beta Kappa.

Best wishes for a wonderful summer,

Claire Dennison Griffith '80
Vice President of Alumnae Relations and Development



Norma Patteson Mills '60 Presented with Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

During Sweet Briar's 116th Commencement ceremony on May 17, Norma Patteson Mills '60 received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the College.

In its 124-year history, this is an honor that the College has rarely bestowed on an individual. Following a lifetime of extraordinary service and generosity to many arts and cultural organizations, Norma truly deserves this special title.

A native of Amherst, Va., Norma was interested in attending Sweet Briar from childhood. She entered the College in fall 1956 as a proud member of the Class of 1960, pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology. She left Sweet Briar at the end of her junior year to get married to the love of her life, Olan Mills, and move with him to his hometown of Chattanooga, Tenn.,

though she never forgot Sweet Briar.

She completed her psychology degree at the University of Chattanooga and earned a degree from the Education for Ministry Program at Sewanee: The University of the South. Throughout their lives together, Norma and Olan have been philanthropic leaders and visionary donors to a number of nonprofits and institutions, including Sweet Briar College. They have joined others in transforming the city of Chattanooga through their service and commitment to their community. In recognition of their extraordinary generosity to the College, which has supported a variety of vital purposes, Sweet Briar's Memorial Chapel was renamed the Mills Chapel in 2021.

In addition to her generosity, Norma has also dedicated her time to inspiring



others to give through serving on several campaign cabinets for Sweet Briar. She served on the Sweet Briar College Board of Directors and is also a former member of the Alumnae Board. She and Olan have been regular attendees at events supporting the College. Furthermore, Norma was honored with the College's Outstanding Alumna Award in 2005.

"Clearly, Norma Mills has a deep appreciation for the value and benefit of art and culture on the spiritual well-being, creativity, and intellectual lives of the people in the communities she and her husband are part of," President Mary Pope M. Huston '83 said while presenting the degree during Commencement. ●

SENIOR GAMES



Natalie Cockey '25

American University, master's of international affairs: U.S. foreign policy and national security and a certificate in diplomacy



Sanjita Pokhrel '25

Eli Lilly & Company, pharmaceutical scientist



Safiya Crutchfield '25

Southern Methodist University, master's of science management with a concentration in marketing



Scarlett Raney '25

Dinwiddie County Public Schools, middle school English teacher

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Senior Games
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Paola Arias '25: University of Toledo, master's in cosmetic science and formulation design

Aunannya Banik '25, University of North Carolina - Charlotte, Ph.D. in chemistry and nanoscience

Molly Booth '25: University of Maine, master's in chemical engineering

Ava Rockefeller Campbell '25: University of Washington, master's in museology

Jolin Daughety '25: One Child Center for Autism, registered behavior technician

Ariel Hullender '25: University of Arkansas, Ph.D. in biology

Elizabeth McElveen '25: American University, master's in philosophy: social policy and applied ethics

Ashley Maggiora '25: University of Virginia, master's in mechanical and aerospace engineering (UVAccelerate 4+1 program)

Cassie McCabe '25: Millsboro Animal Hospital, veterinary assistant (ahead of veterinary school)

Jenna Prevett '25: Marquette University, law

Victoria Tew '25: Florida Institute of Technology, master's in behavior analysis professional practice

ADDITIONAL SENIOR GAMES

Preservation Workshop Shines Light on Stewarding Campus History

Sweet Briar College is known for many things, especially its incredible campus with beautiful historic buildings dating back more than 100 years. Chief among them are a series of buildings designed by Ralph Adams Cram, an influential architect who used his signature style to establish the College's own aesthetic.

On Sweet Briar's 2,847-acre campus, 22 buildings are recognized on the National Register of Historic Places. These older buildings play an iconic role in the College's built environment, and require careful stewardship and maintenance to protect Sweet Briar's architectural history. This need resulted in a unique opportunity for campus community members to participate in a historic preservation workshop on April 28 to learn about the upkeep needed and techniques used to preserve these important structures.

"Our historic buildings need special care. Projects like this are important because there are not enough people in trade professions," said Kelly Pratt, training coordinator for the Campaign for Historic Trades, which facilitated the workshop and is a part of Preservation Maryland. "We need to do workshops on campuses like this to get people reinvigorated and excited about the trades. It's a stepping stone to introduce people to a profession that they didn't know was there."

Sweet Briar welcomed representatives from the Campaign for Historic Trades and MCWB Architects to focus on these topics for the workshop. Students, staff, alumnae, and friends learned about the process of building a structure like the Bell Tower and Gray Residence

Hall back in the early 1900s, including creating bricks by hand. During the workshop, participants tried their hands at making a brick themselves while reflecting on the important role these structures play in our community and the College's history through the creation of a memory board.

"I am amazed at what went into making these bricks in the first place," said Lola Bailey '95, chair of Sweet Work Weeks who participated in the workshop. "The students said the same thing: we'll never look at the buildings on campus the same way."

Workshop participants also practiced spraying down and brushing the bricks in lieu of using a power washer, which would cause damage. They learned the importance of doing a condition assessment to identify the root causes and factors that cause damage before starting remediation efforts, as well as how to properly clean and care for historic masonry.

"I like that the workshop has been very hands-on; I like that we're spraying water and using brushes to scrub the building," said Asmita Bhandari '27. "I like the idea that they want to restore the history of the building. I'm grateful to be in a historic district and study here."

"I think it's fantastic that we're teaching young women about preservation and why this matters and why this campus matters. This is a special place," said Eric Kuchar, senior manager at MCWB Architects. "We're getting action, we're getting excitement, we're getting people focused, and hopefully it will spread and create energy around trying to make these buildings come back alive." ●



COLTON EQUESTRIAN ARENA



Opening of the Colton Equestrian Arena

On April 11, Sweet Briar College unveiled the new Richard C. Colton, Jr. Equestrian Arena with an official ribbon cutting! The new covered riding arena will be used for competitions, practices, clinics, and instruction. In addition to remarks from President Mary Pope M. Hutson '83 and Coach Merrilee "Mimi" Wroten '93, we were joined by Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry for the Commonwealth of Virginia Matt Lohr; Colton Foundation board member Matt Waldron, who spoke on Mr. Colton's behalf; and Claudia Tucker and Chris Adams of the Amherst County Board of Supervisors.



Introducing a New Alumnae Engagement Metrics System

Alumni giving plays an important role in the success of any college. For many years, alumni giving was the sole indicator of alumni satisfaction according to the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and was a factor that affected *U.S. News and World Report* rankings.

At Sweet Briar, we have traditionally placed a strong value on alumnae participation, with results often surpassing the national average, and we will continue to track class giving participation rates. However, in recent years, a shift has occurred in the higher education landscape, broadening the term alumni participation to include many types of alumni engagement.

In May 2023, *U.S. News and World Report* announced that it would no longer include alumni giving as a factor in its rankings. Several years before that, CASE began developing a task force dedicated to addressing the need for an industry-wide framework to better measure alumni engagement. As a result, they launched a new Alumni Engagement Metrics survey, now called CASE Insights on Alumni Engagement. This survey enables institutions to measure alumni engagement across four modes: philanthropic, volunteer, experiential, and communication.

Sweet Briar College alumnae have always been an engaged community. We see your support when you come back to campus for Reunion, volunteer during Sweet Work Weeks, share your love on social media, attend admissions fairs, and make a meaningful gift to the Sweet Briar Fund. We, at Sweet Briar, are committed to maintaining the importance of philanthropic giving reflected in participation rates, but we will be implementing additional ways to recognize how alumnae engage with Sweet Briar in the coming year. We have begun tracking these metrics using the CASE Insights on Alumni Engagement, and our hope is to develop ways in which we can honor our most engaged alumnae, as we have done in the past with participation.

Sweet Briar will be able to better recognize and measure the many ways alumnae engage with the College through the following metrics:

- **Volunteer Engagement** includes all the ways you actively give back through service—whether you're mentoring students, planning events, serving on a board or committee, recruiting prospective students, or representing your class or regional network. While not tracking actual hours of service, this metric directly honors the effort and leadership you contribute.
- **Experiential Engagement** captures your participation in events and programs that bring the alumnae community together—such as reunions, Sweet Briar Days, panels, virtual meetups, or career networking gatherings. These experiences build community and keep the alumnae connection vibrant.
- **Philanthropic Engagement** refers to financial contributions of any size. Every gift matters and helps sustain programs, scholarships, and resources for future generations. Giving is one more way to show pride and commitment to our shared legacy.
- **Communication Engagement** looks at how you interact with institutional content—such as submitting class notes, commenting or engaging with social media, or keeping your contact information up-to-date. These actions help us stay connected and informed.

Together, these four areas reflect the many dimensions of alumnae engagement and help ensure that your efforts are acknowledged and celebrated. You are more than a donor—you are a volunteer, a leader, a connector, and most importantly, a Sweet Briar alumna! We look forward to sharing these metrics with you and providing additional insight in the near future. In the meantime, we ask that you **continue to do what you have always done so well: support Sweet Briar College and the next generation of alumnae.** ●



LEFT

Members of the Alumnae Alliance Council enjoy time together at the Boathouse during a spring meeting.



In honor of the Class of 2025, make your annual gift before June 30!



ABOVE

The student body celebrates the Class of 2025 during the traditional Lantern Bearing ceremony.

With the end of the 2025 fiscal year fast approaching on **June 30**, time is running out to make a tax-deductible gift to help Sweet Briar reach its fundraising goals! Your gift can support students through:

- Greatest Needs
- Student Scholarships
- Academic Support
- Stewardship of the Natural and Built Environment

WAYS TO GIVE

Make a gift **online** at sbc.edu/give. It takes less than five minutes and a receipt will be emailed to you. If you prefer to make credit card gifts over the phone, please call the Office of Alumnae Relations and Development at **434-381-6131**. Please send **checks** to the Office of Alumnae Relations

and Development at P.O. Box 1057, Sweet Briar, VA 24595.

For **IRA Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)** or Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) gifts, please contact the Alumnae Relations and Development Office by phone or email at alumnae@sbc.edu.

For gifts by **wire transfer**, please call the Office of Alumnae Relations and Development to obtain the instructions for the transfer.

If you plan to make a **gift of stock** to Sweet Briar, please contact the Office of Alumnae Relations and Development for stock transfer instructions for your broker. We will need to know the name of the stock and the estimated value.

THANK YOU