



Winthrop University

October 16, 2025

Rock Hill, SC

**U.S. DISC GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP**

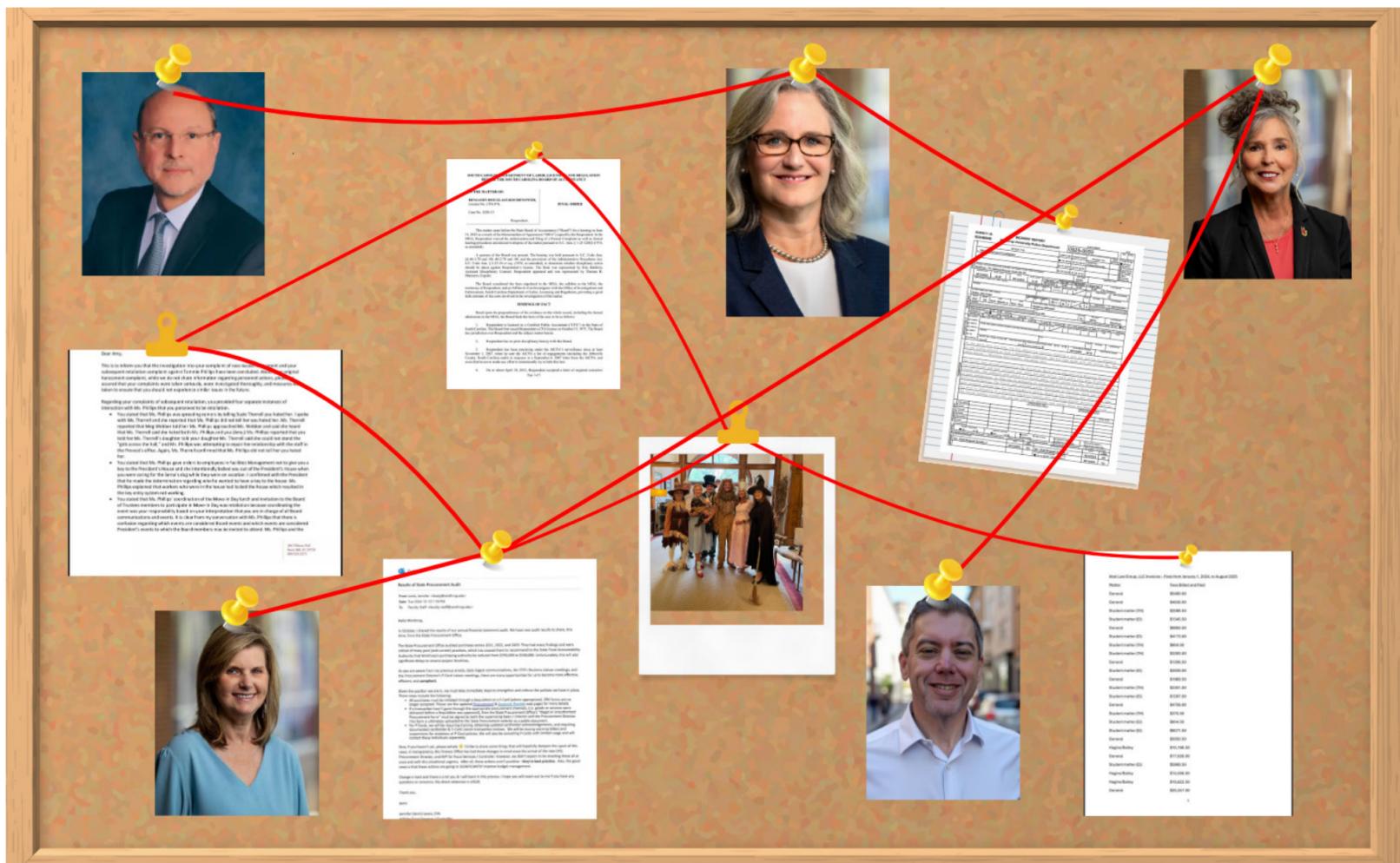
Winthrop yet again hosted the U.S. Disc Golf Championship from Oct. 9-12. Hear from players and see photos from the event on page 6.

**NEW THEATER PRODUCTION**

Following “To Watch as Life Passes You By,” see what new production is playing out of Johnson Theatre from Oct. 22-26 on page 4.

**LOGAN FEDERICO CASE**

Staff writer Gabriela Griggs discusses the Logan Federico case in Columbia and the death penalty in South Carolina on page 3.



Documents and photos of people involved in these cases  
**(Top row photos, left to right):** Ashley Abel, Amy Bailey, Tammie Phillips  
**(Bottom row photos):** Lisa Cowart, Halloween photo of the President’s office following Kimberly Faust’s firing, Todd Hagins

Graphic design by Kellan Hudson

**FOIAs, discrimination, retaliation: Winthrop’s legal suits multiply**

Former general counsel Todd Hagins is accusing the university of retaliation and not following Freedom of Information Act laws following his termination in September 2024, while Office of Student Affairs Executive Assistant Amy Bailey is involved in an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission case involving alleged discrimination and retaliation.

**Clark Vilardebo**  
 Editor-in-Chief  
**Zachary Bell**  
 Managing Editor

Last semester, allegations of racial discrimination and retaliation against higher-ups in the president’s office rocked the campus. In May, reports from FITSNews and The Herald revealed that former Winthrop General Counsel, Todd Hagins, filed a Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) complaint against the university. The complaint alleges the university fired him for “refusing to retaliate against an employee who complained about its ‘blatant racism.’” This came after Amy Bailey, executive assistant for the Office of Student Affairs, filed an EEOC complaint that claims she was a victim of workplace retaliation after she lodged

racial discrimination complaints against Tammie Phillips, executive director to the Office of the President. In response to these claims, Winthrop’s vice president for communications and marketing, Ellen Wilder-Byrd, provided the following statement: “Winthrop University takes claims of racism and retaliation seriously. At present, we have received one EEOC charge and are responding appropriately. The University denies all allegations of racism and retaliation. The described incidents were fully investigated and addressed appropriately as required by law. As this is an ongoing legal matter, we cannot comment further at this time.” Since these complaints were filed, Winthrop has found themselves

embroiled in multiple lawsuits, including a Tort Claim Notice and FOIA lawsuit – both submitted by Hagins. In a statement provided to The Herald, Winthrop denied all alleged allegations and said it would hire outside counsel to “vigorously defend the lawsuit.” During these ongoing suits, The Johnsonian has obtained documents that raise questions about the accuracy of Winthrop’s claims. **Background synopsis** In a complaint with the EEOC, longtime Winthrop employee, Amy Bailey, accused the university of retaliating against Winthrop employees who reported racially charged language from university leaders. In her charge of discrimination, Bailey alleges instances where Tammie Phillips, now

secretary to the Board, used racially charged language. According to Bailey, the first instance was in June 2023, when Phillips supposedly referred to a former coworker by the N-word. On April 29, 2024, Bailey sent an anonymous email on behalf of a Winthrop student to her then supervisor, Hagins. This email alleges that Phillips used the N-word at a student protest on campus on April 4, 2024. Later that year, on June 27, 2024, Bailey said in an email to Hagins that Phillips’ racial comments created a hostile work environment. In July, Bailey alleged in a complaint that Phillips sought to displace her job and rewrite her duties as retaliation for her complaints. In response to these alleged uses of the N-word, Winthrop opened an investigation led by Lisa Cowart,

former vice-president of Human Resources. According to Winthrop’s answer to Bailey’s EEOC, Winthrop carried out a prompt and thorough investigation, and remedial action was taken against Phillips, although the specifics have not been made publicly available at the time of publication. **Amy Bailey EEOC complaint** On Nov. 7, 2024, Bailey officially filed their EEOC complaint with the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In the complaint, Bailey alleges that Phillips used the N-word on two different occasions – in June 2023 and April 2024. In June 2024, Bailey sent an anonymous email on behalf of a Winthrop student regarding the

April 2024 incident. In July 2024, Bailey was chosen to be the Director of Legal Operations and served directly underneath Hagins. Shortly thereafter, Bailey filed a complaint against Phillips with Human Resources “regarding job displacement and racial charged language.” According to the EEOC, “Thereafter, I began to experience more pervasive retaliation.” Bailey then makes the claim that “Ms. Phillips conspired with Lisa Cowart to alter my job duties” following the complaint to HR. On June 2, 2025, Winthrop filed their answer to Bailey’s original EEOC claim through outside counsel Ashley Abel and his firm Abel Law Group, LLC. In the 15-page document, Phillips makes various claims regarding an alleged **Cont. on pg. 2**

## Police Blotter



Chase Duncan  
Copy Editor

### Student nearly causes collision in marijuana stented car, referred to Dean of Students

A WUPD officer responded to the intersection of Stewart and Park Ave. to assist the Rock Hill Police Department with a traffic accident involving three Winthrop students on Oct. 3. The vehicle almost caused a collision and the officer detected a strong odor of marijuana coming from the vehicle. The three students in the car were reported to the Dean of Students office. Police responded and provided transport to Piedmont Medical for care.

### Person sleeping at The Thread trespassing property

A WUPD officer conducted a property check at The Thread on Oct. 7 at 6:25 a.m when they observed a person who appeared to be sleeping in the building. The officer told the person they could not stay there and would be trespassed due to Winthrop holding classes in the building.

### Suitemates reported to Dean of Students office over bathroom disagreement

A WUPD officer on patrol was flagged down in reference to a dispute between two suitemates and the bathroom they share. The students were referred to the Dean of Students office to settle the disagreement.

### Burglary alarms activated twice in Roddey Hall

On Oct. 8 at 10:50 p.m., a WUPD officer responded to Roddey Hall in reference to a burglary alarm being activated in room 122B. The officer investigated the room and found no sign of entry. The doors were subsequently locked and the alarm reset. The next day, an officer responded to a burglary alarm being set off in Roddey Hall again, where they learned that a Health Services employee had activated the alarm. The alarm was reset.

### Winthrop lawsuits I Cont. from pg. 1

workplace affair between Hagins and Bailey.

The claims range from Phillips observing that “Hagins and Bailey were in Bailey’s office with the door closed and were often overheard whispering” to “Bailey intentionally sat next to Hagins in the [restaurant] booth and when they were ordering food, Bailey ordered for Hagins, which Phillips thought was a little unusual.”

Phillips also claimed that “Bailey often came in late...then 10 minutes later, Hagins was seen coming in late also.”

When asked about these claims, Hagins and Bailey vehemently denied them.

“I categorically deny Tammie Phillips’ baseless affair allegation against me, a tactic I and others have witnessed Phillips use before to derail Winthrop employees’ careers. Phillips timed her defamation when I and the other subject of the rumor stood as witnesses to her,” Hagins said. “I’m appalled that VP of HR Lisa Cowart literally laughed off this grave cabinet-level accusation, merely asking if it was true, exposing a shocking lack of leadership and support for all Winthrop employees.”

Further in the document, Phillips starts claiming that she actually heard Bailey using racially derogatory language.

Phillips claims on March 21, 2024, Bailey made the comment “I can’t get her to date anyone except the little Negro boys” when her daughter walked towards them with a Black male student.

Phillips also alleges that it was Bailey using racially derogatory language at the fountain protest where Bailey claimed she heard Phillips use the N-word. Phillips claims that “Bailey made a derogatory statement about the black students’ dreadlocks.”

In response, Bailey said, “I deny Tammie Phillips’ claim of an affair with my ex-supervisor. It was and is a defamatory smear in an attempt to ruin my career and assassinate my character. Further, her accusation that I engaged in racially insensitive language is a blatant lie.”

After these claims, the document goes on to state, “While Phillips acknowledged using the insensitive word, it was not in the context of Phillips referring to Bailey, to any Winthrop employee or student, or about any person.”

In an audio recording acquired by The

Johnsonian between Cowart and Bailey, Cowart says that “she [Phillips] was surprised you [Bailey] made the complaint – she thought you were friends.”

Winthrop’s answer concentrates on the anonymous complaint written by Bailey.

13, 2024, shows this too.

When it came to assisting with “specialized and confidential” duties for the Board and president, the comment stated “Amy [Bailey] has performed wonderfully in this area.”

- February 15, 2023 Hagins begins work with Winthrop University as General Counsel
- March 2023 Hagins begins additional work as Secretary to the Board
- March 2023 Bailey is hired as an assistant to the President's office
- April 2024 Alleged N-word incident at Winthrop fountain
- April 2024 Winthrop receives anonymous complaint about use of N-word from an unnamed Winthrop leader
- June 2024 VP of Human Resources, Lisa Cowart, opens an investigation into the incident
- July 2024 Cowart and Phillips propose altering Bailey's duties, which Hagins believes is retaliatory
- July 24, 2024 Bailey submits a claim of retaliation to Cowart. Cowart investigates this claim and finds them to be without merit
- July 30, 2024 Cowart concludes her investigation. Phillips acknowledges using the N-word. Remedial action is taken, but no specifics are provided to Hagins
- September 9, 2024 Hagins is fired
- November 11, 2024 Bailey files her EEOC against Winthrop. She alleges a hostile work environment and retaliation
- May 1, 2025 Hagins files her EEOC against Winthrop. Alleges wrongful termination
- June 2, 2025 Winthrop responds to Bailey's EEOC
- June 26, 2025 Phillips is formally named Secretary to the Board of Trustees.
- September 7, 2025 Hagins filed a Tort Claims Notice. Seeking over \$250,000 in restitution from Winthrop

Timeline of events described in filings and other documents

The crux of Winthrop’s argument for the discrimination complaint is “she does not belong to the racial minority about whom the alleged comment was made or referenced.”

As to the retaliation claims, Winthrop’s answer states “The four very specific, alleged instances of retaliation were investigated by Human Resources and found, very objectively, to be without merit whatsoever.”

In Bailey’s answer to Winthrop, filed on Aug. 8, 2025, by Burnette Shutt & McDaniel, PA, they highlight the claims of questionable behavior by Phillips.

“Ms. Phillips multiple statements of perceived questionable behavior by Ms. Bailey do not appear in her one-year review and were not any part of that evaluation. Her review stated Ms. Bailey’s performance exceeded expectations and it is strange that this is the first time Ms. Bailey has been told her performance was not satisfactory.”

Bailey’s supervisor evaluation form, completed on March

Graphic design by Kellan Hudson

Her overall performance was described as “a dedicated and valuable employee... always willing to assist in any task we are involved in.”

Bailey’s response also pushes back on Winthrop’s focus regarding the complaint, stating, “Similarly puzzling is Winthrop’s assertion that informing Mr. Hagins of her complaint of racism is somehow evidence that Ms. Bailey was not performing her job well or somehow deserves the treatment she has suffered.”

The answer wraps up with “Truthfully, of 15 pages of a position statement, so many pages are dedicated to matters utterly unrelated to the instant complaint that it begs the question what is the purpose of any of this.”

### Todd Hagins EEOC complaint

On May 1, 2025, Hagins officially filed an EEOC complaint alleging retaliation for investigating racial discrimination. The complaint

emphasizes the alleged retaliation that happened toward Hagins starting in June 2024, though it does focus on discrimination in the final pages.

The document mentions the claims of an affair against Hagins, including that “Cowart downplays it, and according to Bailey laughs.”

Further on though, the document states that Phillips and Cowart attempted to change Bailey’s job description during the height of the investigation.

“July 2024: ... She [Cowart] further tells Hagins that she met with Phillips, and they both worked on a change to Bailey’s job description. Cowart provided Hagins with a copy of Bailey’s job description with her own handwritten requests to modify Bailey’s duties. Cowart and Phillips propose altering Bailey’s duties, which Hagins identifies as retaliatory,” the document reads.

Hagins’ EEOC complaint names president Serna more, including a request to “Not think like Winthrop’s attorney but Bailey’s boss” in regards to changing Bailey’s job duties.

Hagins’ argument is that “Phillips’ repeated use of the racial slur during work, excused by Cowart, creates a hostile work environment under Title VII” and university leadership “retaliated against her protected activity (complaining about racism) under Title VII.”

In the last page and a half, Hagins provides additional allegations against the university in regards to racism and discrimination, going as far to say

“Hagins is prepared to testify and direct investigators where to obtain the following evidence.”

The claims range from trustees being concerned that Winthrop is viewed as a “gay university,” requests to reduce the number of Black students on its publicity materials, and fears that Winthrop is viewed as an historically black college and university (HBCU) and attempting to recruit more white, male students.

One claim states that “trustees wanted to pass rules to prohibit students, particularly Black fraternity members from ‘dancing at graduation.’”

A resolution for an October 2023 meeting from the trustees on June 23, 2023, shows there were indeed requests made to change ceremony rules.

“The Board is cognizant of the need to balance such displays of excitement and joy during institution-sponsored ceremonies with the decorum of such ceremonies; and WHEREAS, the Board understands the importance of protecting the rights of students and their families to enjoy the recognition of their achievements without disturbance from others...,” the resolution states.

The Johnsonian reached out to Phillips and president Serna in regards to these claims, and the following statement was provided from Wilder-Byrd:

“These are personnel matters which are considered by Winthrop to be confidential, and accordingly the university will not

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10/15/25, 9:34 AM Winthrop University Employee Portal

Rating: Meets Performance Requirements (MP)

Comments: Amy communicates regularly with me and makes sure I am aware of and prepared for meetings and events. She keeps the calendar for the Secretary to the Board of Trustees and makes sure he is aware of and adheres to his schedule.

Description of Job Function: Performs other related duties as required.

Success Criteria: Percentage of Time: 5

Current Year Focus: Rating: Exceeds Performance Requirements (EP)

Comments: Amy is always willing to assist wherever she is needed and often times takes on many tasks without being prompted or asked.

Description of Job Function: Plans, coordinates, and executes BOT events, ensuring all details are carried out as planned. Communicates with food service vendor, Facilities Management, and other campus offices to ensure smooth execution of events. Performs administrative functions on the Space Request System. Collaborates with campus departments on various special events produced on behalf of the university.

Success Criteria: Ensuring the details of preparing for Board of Trustee, meals, meetings and events, including last minute requests or changes, are taken care of and any issues that may arise are resolved.

Percentage of Time: 20

Current Year Focus: Rating: Exceeds Performance Requirements (EP)

Comments: Amy takes great pride in making sure all details of the BOT meetings and events have been taken care of and handles any issues that may arise.

Description of Job Function: Assists with answering and routing incoming calls and greeting visitors and directing them to the appropriate office. Assists with commencement ceremonies and incoming and outgoing written correspondence, as needed.

Success Criteria: Percentage of Time: https://winthrop.peopleadmin.com/portal/performance/reviews/2750/evaluations/550 3/5

Picture of Bailey’s evaluation document via Amy Bailey

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## Winthrop lawsuits | Cont. from pg. 2

provide comment about the factual circumstances of those matters and Winthrop's determinations regarding them. As this is an ongoing legal matter, Winthrop cannot comment further at this time."

### Hagins' FOIA lawsuit, Tort claim and other financial matters

The EEOC complaints are not the only legal challenges Winthrop is facing right now.

Hagins filed a separate lawsuit in September 2025 alleging 29 violations of South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The lawsuit also names Board Chair Joel Hamilton, and Phillips.

Hagins, who served as general counsel and secretary to the board until his termination, alleges that Winthrop evaded meeting requirements in order to hold secret votes about student tuition, fees, budget items, and new academic programs.

The 29 alleged FOIA violations occurred during 8 board meetings from 2024 to 2025.

News of this suit comes after Hagins and Bailey filed EEOC complaints against Winthrop. Hagins, who served as Winthrop's general counsel, accuses Winthrop of violating FOIA when they terminated his employment.

According to Hagins, former Chair of the Board, Glenn McCall, who died this past July, organized a secret meeting of the Board to discuss and vote on Hagins's termination. According to the Board's bylaws, Winthrop failed to notify the public about the meeting.

"Hagins also knew if Winthrop had done so he had rights under FOIA to allow the public to be present during any termination or disciplinary procedure against him before the Board," Hagins says in his complaint. "Hagins is aware the Board has never published any minutes related to any meetings held on September 9, 2024, or any previous date in which his employment was discussed."

Another point of contention revolves around McCall and Vice Chair Kathy Bigham. According to the lawsuit, McCall and Bigham exceeded the 6-year term limit in Winthrop's bylaws by serving a seventh year.

In an official press release, Hagins said that McCall and Bigham's extended tenure with the Board casts doubt on the trustworthiness of the Board as well as any decisions the Board has made.

"Bylaw and FOIA violations may invalidate board actions," Hagins said, "including voting in Tammie Phillips as Secretary to the Board while under federal investigation."

In June 2025, the Board voted to promote Phillips to the position of Secretary to the Board. The decision followed allegations earlier in the year that Phillips had used racist language and engaged in a retaliation campaign against Bailey and Hagins.

Accordingly, Hagins is seeking an injunction from 16th Judicial Court voiding the results of the June 2025 Board office election, and an injunction forbidding Winthrop from continuing "to act upon, enforce,

spend money or receive money related to any votes subject to the declaratory judgment."

Hagins alleges the Board spent \$50 million in allocations, contracts, and bonds that were subject to secret votes. According to Hagins, the Board's behavior, and failure to communicate with the public, represents a lack of commitment to transparency.

In response to these allegations, Winthrop provided the following statement to The Johnsonan, "These are personnel matters which are considered by Winthrop to be confidential, and accordingly the university will not provide comment about the factual circumstances of those matters and Winthrop's determinations regarding them. As this is an ongoing legal matter, Winthrop cannot comment further at this time."

In a Tort Claim Notice filed with the S.C. Insurance Reserve Fund, Hagins is seeking compensatory damages for lost salary and benefits in excess of \$250,000. This figure does not include damages relating to defamation.

According to Hagins, his termination was the result of him informing university leadership of illegal and unethical acts committed by Winthrop employees and board members.

Among those named are Vice President of Human Resources Lisa Cowart and outside counsel Ashley Abel. The Johnsonian reached out to Abel and Winthrop's HR for a comment but had not heard back at the time of publication.

"His [Hagins] termination was in direct retaliation for his efforts to report

and remediate illegal and unethical conduct occurring at Winthrop University," the filing reads. "Mr. Hagins was further retaliated against for protecting another employee, Amy Bailey, who was discriminated against by Winthrop University."

In this filing, Hagins cites certain incidents, and claims that these incidents contributed to a hostile and retaliatory work environment that demonstrated "a pattern of public ridicule, retaliation, and discrimination against employees perceived as disloyal to President Serna."

One alleged incident involved a Halloween decoration in October 2024. According to the filing, Phillips and Serna used costumes and props to emulate a scene from the Wizard of Oz that depict a previously terminated employee as a "witch" and "b\*\*\*h," declaring that the former employee was "dead."

Hagins also alleges that he was subject to sexual harassment and racially discriminatory conduct. According to Hagins, Winthrop leadership failed to adequately investigate and remediate complaints of racist language and retaliation.

As part of this filing, Hagins is seeking relief for lost salary and benefits in excess of \$300,000, as well as damages for defamation, emotional distress, reputational injury, and loss of professional standing. He is also seeking punitive damages against Winthrop to deter future misconduct.

### Where things stand now

At the time of publication, Winthrop has paid Abel Law

Group, LLC around \$139,853 dealing with Hagins and Bailey's cases, according to invoices from the law firm dating from January 1, 2024 to August 2025 – though this number could be higher.

However, Hagins' cases have now been moved to Jeffrey A. Lehrer of FordHarrison LLP out of Spartanburg, S.C.

Bailey says that as far as she knows, Abel is still handling her case.

Hagins says mediation is scheduled around late November, while Bailey doesn't expect to hear anything until the government shutdown ends. Bailey's last filing requested that the EEOC take the case up.

Bailey is also preparing to amend her EEOC complaint after filing a harassment complaint with the Winthrop University Police Department.

According to the incident report, filed on Sept. 14 under case number 0925-0059, Bailey filed the report after being notified of various posts on YikYak directed at her and her daughters making references to her EEOC case.

The report also

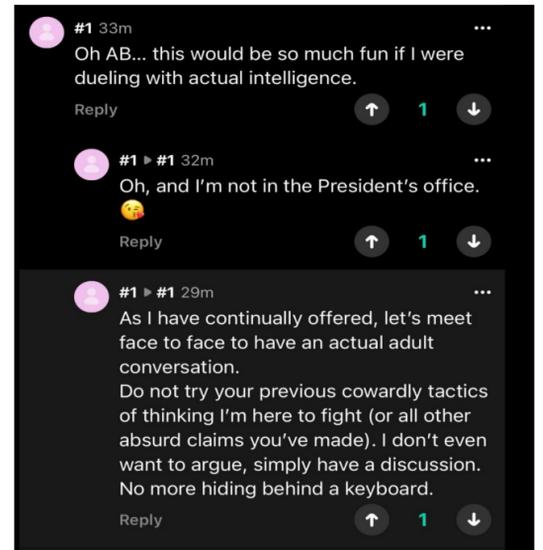
states that "she [Bailey] has reason to believe that Lauren Serna and Tammie Phillips could both be involved in making those comments. The Victim also supplied screenshots of Lauren Serna texting the Victim seeking a meeting and discussion in relation to various posts on social media."

A screenshot from the incident on September 13 does show a YikYak user mentioning meeting in person with Bailey.

"Oh AB... this would be so much fun if I were dueling with actual intelligence... As I have continually offered, let's meet face-to-face to have an actual adult conversation. Do not try your previously cowardly tactics of thinking I'm here to fight (or all other absurd claims you've made.) I don't even want to argue, simply have a discussion. No more hiding behind a keyboard."

Bailey also said that she's looking into having the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) look into the matter.

Hagins says that he "anticipates filing additional lawsuits."



Screenshot of YikYak incident described in Bailey's police report

photo via Clark Vilardebo

## Current updates on the death penalty in South Carolina

Information on the current state of the South Carolina death penalty and a spotlight on the developing case of the murder of Logan Federico.

Gabriela Griggs  
Staff Writer

South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson has recently called upon his office to urge the death penalty be given to Alexander Dickey, a man accused in the murder of 22-year-old Logan Federico during May of this year.

AG Wilson, in a letter written to Fifth Circuit Solicitor Byron Gipson in charge of the case, said he believed Dickey to be past the point of rehabilitation.

"This case includes charges that qualify as statutory aggravating factors, including that a murder was

committed while in the commission of burglary in the first degree. A review of Mr. Dickey's prior criminal history of numerous convictions since 2014 reveals an individual that has failed to be rehabilitated by prior incarcerations or prohibition supervision."

Public records show that Dickey has been frequently committing crimes throughout the past ten years. Currently, he has around 25 felony counts and 40 charges. His record shows counts and arrests for arson, robbery, and burglary, amongst

others. Wilson says this history is proof that he is a candidate fit for the death penalty.

"[Dickey's] past history, as well as his current violent crime charges show an appropriate candidate for the ultimate punishment," Wilson said.

Federico's father, Steve Federico, has also spoken out criticizing the South Carolina criminal justice system's treatment and communication of this case. Steve Federico spoke before a House Judiciary Subcommittee in Charlotte on Sept. 29.

"[Dickey] should've

been in jail for over 140 years for all the crimes he committed," Steve Federico said. "[Dickey] was committing 2.65 crimes a year since he was fifteen years old, but nobody could figure out that he couldn't be rehabilitated. I haven't heard a damn word from Byron Gibson in South Carolina. Not one word. Four months, no communication... how pathetic is that?"

In response to Federico's testimony, Gibson's office claimed that they have been maintaining consistent communication with the family, even citing a recent phone call that

occurred on Sept. 11.

"This office is committed to regular communication with the Federico family throughout the pendency of this case," Gibson's office said.

Following their response, Gibson also wrote back to General Wilson about his process in the case. Gibson said his office was still reviewing the evidence of the case and that they were not ethically in a position to confirm or deny whether they'd seek the death penalty yet.

"The decision to seek the Death Penalty in any case should not, cannot, and will not be

taken lightly," Gibson said. "It would be reckless, irresponsible, and unethical for my office to make this decision without first having conducted a comprehensive review of all evidence in this case. To make such a determination a mere four months into the case, without investing the due diligence necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of all facets of the evidence, would set a dangerous precedent. In the meantime, Mr. Dickey remains in pre-trial confinement without bond, where he will stay until this case is

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## Coming soon: The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee

Brought to life from the College of Visual and Performing Arts: spelling, singing, and self-discovery take center stage with comedic relief sprinkled throughout the musical.

**Caroline Smith**  
Staff Writer

From the stage to our in-house theater, the Tony Award-winning musical comedy, created by Rebecca Feldman, with the music and lyrics by William Finn, and a book written by Rachel Sheinkin is brought to life through the actors and actresses right here in our school community.

The musical follows six misfit pre-teenagers contestants for the championship title in a spelling bee and shares their backstories along the way and five adults in the gym of Putnam Valley Middle School.

The tone of the musical is fast-paced, witty, and includes heartfelt themes through the portrayal of adolescence and coming-of-age, competition, and self-discovery. It combines

comical humor and emotional depth that creatively shifts from moments of laughter and giggling to scenes where the tenderness is surprising.

Taylor Morgan, who plays Vice Principal Douglas Panch, said he's proud of the work the actors, stage managers and designers have put into the play.

"I would like to share that everyone in this production has put a lot of work into it and nothing could have been done without every piece working together," Morgan said. "From our stage manager to their Assistant stage managers, the actors to the director, the designers to the box office. Each of these pieces have and will allow for us to put on an absolutely phenomenal show." Morgan's vice

principal character is a dry and deadpan word announcer who holds a past of mystery and a specialty for weird example sentences. His past experience consists of performing in "Beauty and the Beast," "Matilda" and "Frozen Jr."

"At Winthrop I have performed in the One Act Festival multiple years and was a part of 'Constellations' and 'Antigone.' I have also directed 'Almost Maine,' my senior year of high school," Morgan said.

Charlito "Chip" Tolentino, played by Landon Watts, is last year's bee winner, a Boy Scout whose confidence is rattled by an unforeseen hormonal distraction. Watts has been involved in musical theatre for the past about seven years and has played lead roles in 'Annie,' 'The Little

Mermaid' and 'Beauty and the Beast.'

Watts said he first watched this play in 7th grade and found its humor hilarious and unique.

"I remember going home and thinking this show was purely comedy," Watts said. "Dig deeper. Comedy in this show is surface level. Think deeper into the message and the plot behind every character. I didn't realize that until I started working on the show and now I feel like a fool for it. So dig deeper and find the true message behind the show."

Other characters in the play are played by student actors and actresses like Mason Hall, Lily Moore, Grayson Skidmore, Noelle Wheeler, Mattie Washburn, Connor Rothberg, Devontaye Merrill, Caro Richardson,

Daniel Shrank, Samuel Tillman and Patrick Fleming, among others.

The assorted members of the cast and tech crew are excited for opening day.

"I am extremely passionate about the audience participation in the show. When people come to see it they are allowed to add their name to a list outside of the theater and can be pulled on stage from that to participate in the first act of the show. I believe this is an awesome part that makes Putnam a crazy show every night and molds it into a completely unique theatre experience," Morgan said.

Tech crew member Kya Sullivan said she is looking forward to helping with her first college theater

production.

"The thing that I am most excited about this production is experiencing how Winthrop productions are different from my high school productions," Sullivan said.

Watts said the cast members are still laughing and having a good time rehearsing all of the jokes they'll be making on stage.

"It's truly hilarious, the cast still isn't getting over all the funny jokes made, but behind all that it's a message of heart and soul," Watts said.

Winthrop's rendition of "25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" will run from October 22-26, 2025. For students tickets are \$10 with a Winthrop ID and counts for Cultural Event credit, and the general admission is \$15.

## Confronting censorship during Winthrop's 14th Annual Book Ban Event

The English department hosted event discussed the current state of book bans, and students who attended the event shared their thoughts on it with the Johnsonian.

**Riley Brodie**  
AC&T Editor

**Caroline Smith**  
Staff Writer

On October 7th, Winthrop University's English department partnered with the Literary Society to hold the 14th Annual Banned Book event on campus.

The event opened with a game of trivia, followed by multiple presentations regarding SC Legislation and banned books led by Dr. Amanda Hiner, Dr. Casey Cothran, and Dr. Amanda Campbell. A few of the specific

American Library Association reported that, "Pressure groups and government entities (. . .) initiated 72% of demands to censor books in school and public libraries." Parents accounted for 16% of censorship demands and library users accounted for only 5%.

The American Library Association additionally stated that most frequent censorship demands were in regards to, "false claims of illegal obscenity for minors; inclusion of LGBTQIA+ characters or themes;

books must be up for review and, almost certainly, banned if they contain any "sexual content"; this begs the question of what exactly fits into these parameters," Williams said. "Is it just explicit sex scenes, or does it target sexuality as a whole, gender, identity, and other topics that children are exploring? I think we know the answer."

Williams also shared a personal sentiment regarding the topic.

"When I was growing up, books helped me to find myself. Books helped me to love the skin I'm in while living in an area where there weren't many people who looked like me. Books helped me explore my sexuality and understand that I'm not wrong or confused," Williams said.

Kayli Thorsen, a junior integrated marketing communications major and vice president of the Literary Society, echoed similar views.

"Sir Francis Bacon is famously attributed as saying that 'knowledge is power.' Attempts by pearl-clutching bureaucrats and hate-filled reactionary groups like Moms for Liberty to ban books in schools and libraries are a direct threat to both the knowledge and power of the American people," Thorsen said. Thorsen continued,

"For many people from poor or uneducated backgrounds, public schools and libraries are a primary source of knowledge that cannot be gained in any other place. That is why protecting the freedom of these institutions from censorship is so important. Banning books keeps people ignorant and powerless."

Thorsen also discredited a common misconception regarding the topic at hand.

"Many college students do not believe that book banning and censorship will strongly impact them because they are adults whose educational content is less restricted than K-12 students. This is not true – a lack of knowledge and a deliberate withholding of information is concerning for everyone. A less educated and well-read population causes many issues for society, such as widespread poor decision-making, ignorance, and prejudice. The best cure for problems like racism, sexism, and homophobia is a good education, especially one starting at a young age."

Williams pointed out how censorship has consequences for students at Winthrop.

"Censorship affects us. We learned at the Banned Books Event

that our own Dacus library has a few titles up for review and possible removal. College students tend to think that since we're adults now, we don't have to worry about censorship and restrictions, yet here we are," Williams said.

Aneley Johnson, a junior sociology major and the social media manager for the Literary Society, holds similar views about censorship as Williams and Thorsen.

"We learn from the past and from others' opinions and experiences: the information we learn from others keeps us from repeating past mistakes. Knowledge helps us challenge and criticize those in power, while censorship aims to prevent us from critically thinking and challenging those in power. Everyone has the right to knowledge, as it teaches us empathy and rights and wrongs," Johnson said.

Johnson shared her love for the commonly banned book, "Animal Farm," and the possible implications it has on government regulation.

"This was the first book about government I read in middle school. 'Animal Farm' specifically taught me that the government doesn't always have your best interest in mind. When there is an injustice within a system, you have the

right to stand up and reject that system, even if it causes pain," Johnson said.

Multiple attendees of the Banned Book Event shared their favorite banned books.

Sofia Weihrauch, a sophomore, said, "My favorite banned book is "[The] Perks of Being a Wallflower" as it feels very raw in its description of growing up with mental health issues and trauma. The main character is navigating through high school, friendship, love and loss and I find the discussion of these in the book to be important and relatable for many."

Freshman Cadyn Bagley said, "I really appreciate "Flamer" by Mike Curato. It shows the experience of closeted teens in 1995 and I think that perspective for queer closeted children is really unique."

Bagley also shared a testament regarding the harmful impact of book bans.

"I used to work at a library that had to remove books from shelves all the time. I saw many books with diverse main characters get removed, and it broke my heart. I hated that the future kids would not be able to read about experiences they might run into as a human in this world. So I can say without a doubt, I hate book bans."



photo by Zoey Molina

Table featuring pins from the event and books currently being banned books covered included "This Book Is Gay" by Juno Dawson, "A Court of Thorns and Roses" by Sarah J. Maas, and "Nineteen Minutes" by Jodi Picoult.

According to the ACLU, South Carolina currently leads the nation in state-mandated book bans, with a total of 22 removed or restricted books in K-12 public schools.

In 2024, The

and covering topics of race, racism, equity, and social justice."

Multiple event attendees and members of the Literary Society Executive board took the time to discuss their thoughts on book bans and censorship.

Khalia Williams, a junior elementary education major and president of the Literary Society, questioned the reasoning for book bans in South Carolina.

"In South Carolina,

## Running on caffeine and deadlines

**Kira Rich**  
Staff Writer

By mid-semester, absences are at an all-time high, exhaustion lingers in the air, copious amounts of caffeine replace breakfast, deadlines blur together and a full 8 hours of sleep seems unfathomable. Burnout isn't limited to just finals week anymore. Instead, it lingers throughout the year.

The majority of college students have to balance more than just their classes, whether it be work, their social life, campus involvement or internships. For some students, day-to-day life starts to feel redundant and mundane, making the need to excel exhausting.

College culture has made sleepless nights and constant

movement the standard for success. The lack of a break is proof of these efforts. But unfortunately, the crash is inevitable and leads to crippling exhaustion.

Burnout creeps in when the line between working hard and overworking completely disappears.

It's not just the academic load but the emotional one too. Students have certain expectations set by their families to live up to — maintaining a lively social life is crucial, as well as creating a solid plan for life after college. Aside from that, many work long hours or even have second jobs just to make ends meet, which limits time for self-care and studying.

Social media adds its own sense of pressure. It puts people in this unspoken competition

as peers post their internships, trips, and overall achievements.

It forces people to get inside their own heads and wonder if they're doing enough. Even if posts aren't about successes, there's always another trend or aesthetic to follow.

There's no point in posting if it doesn't embody the coziness of fall or completely romanticize your life. It all feeds into the loop of internal comparison, which makes the exhaustion weigh heavier.

Burnout presents itself in different ways. Some simply lack motivation, while others feel numb or detached.

Burnout isn't always dramatic — sometimes it can be struggling to focus in class or brushing off plans to rest. The issue is how normalized burnout

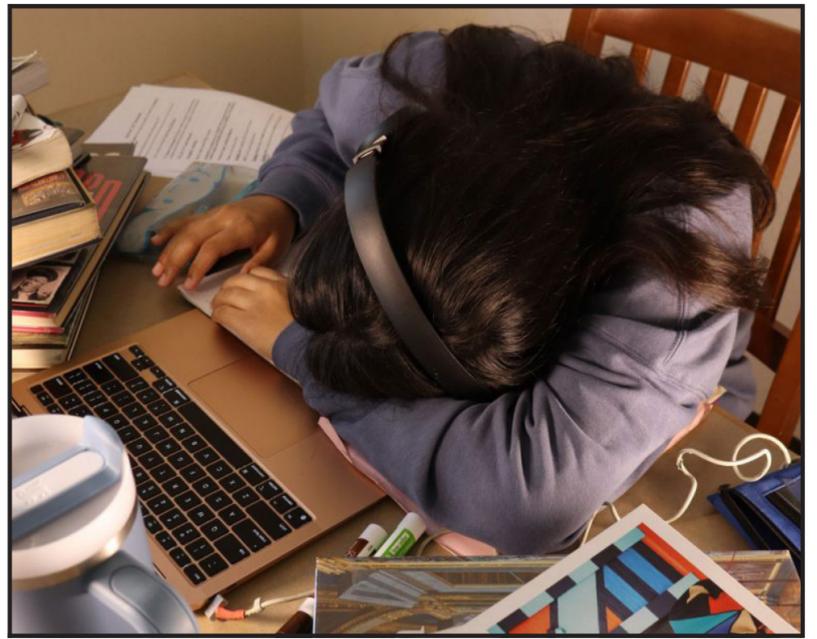


photo via fchornetmedia.com

College student slumped over laptop

symptoms have become.

Colleges often preach self-care, but in an environment that constantly rewards overwork. Providing access to health services such as free

counseling helps, however, only real change can come from shifting the perspective and expectations around productivity.

The belief that rest is earned only after success needs to

change. Burnout is the result of overworking for too long with little to no breaks. Rest is a necessity for productivity, and should be treated as such rather than a reward.

## From memes to murder: Tyler Robinson and social nihilism

Meme culture poisoned a generation, and only seems to get worse.

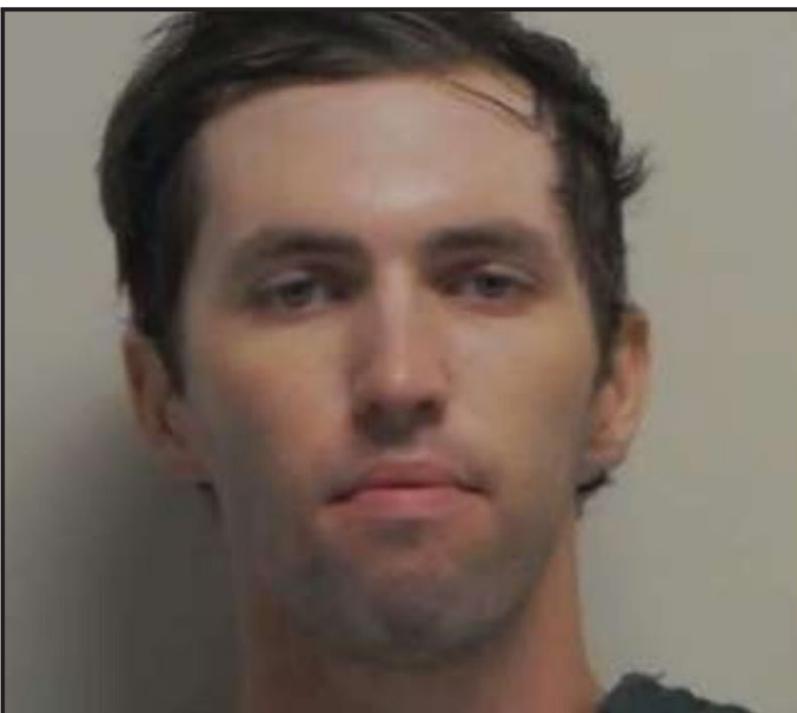


photo via CNN.com

Recent mugshot photos of Tyler Robinson upon arrest

**Kyan Feser**  
Staff Writer

“Notices bulge OwO what's this?”

This message was engraved onto a bullet by Tyler Robinson, the 22-year-old killer of Charlie Kirk.

As a victim of childhood internet access, I recognized the phrase instantly, and it is not political. Rather, it references a sexually-charged sector of the furry community, an art community focused on anthropomorphic animals.

Aside from the large queer population of furries, the phrase is simply a meme, and served no political purpose with Kirk.

In fact, most of the engravings on Robinson's bullet casings were steeped in internet culture. One even referenced the alt-right meme

“Bella Ciao,” an antifascist anthem ironically associated with followers of Nick Fuentes, a white nationalist.

So why these engravings? Robinson explained for himself over text, court documents revealed: “The fuckin messages are mostly a big meme, if I see ‘notices bulge uwu’ on fox new I might have a stroke.” Boom, the kicker.

They were all a “big meme.” I am not surprised that Tyler Robinson was radicalized, and it starts with modern meme culture.

I have laughed at memes my entire life, so I'm familiar with the culture. That said, memes are shifting in a concerning way. In my eyes, what started as genuine gags have evolved into

one of two things: coping mechanisms or radicalization tools.

On the side of coping mechanisms, it seems people cannot be serious anymore. Memes follow any tragedy, and distasteful memes at that. In recent memory I have seen countless memes about Diddy, d4vd (musician turned pedophile and murderer), and of course, Kirk.

None of these memes discuss something serious, but instead make light of heinous situations. They place layers of irony onto something sinister, allowing people to desensitize themselves and laugh them off.

I have heard young kids say “no Diddy” or “don't Diddy me” without understanding the context, and growing up in such an

uncaring, unserious environment kills empathy. Memes are breeding nihilism.

Even in non-political memes I feel this nihilistic tone: a feeling of “we have to joke about everything, otherwise we will remember our awful world,” and it is killing my generation. Nothing matters anymore, everything is a big joke, so why even try in this world?

Congratulations! If you feel this way you are one step closer to radicalization, and memes will do the trick.

To me, memes have felt extremely political since the 2016 election. Communities like 4chan (the infamous message board, or at least its political users) and other right-leaning groups have embraced memes to promote their rhetoric, and the

algorithm loves them for it.

The more controversial the better, and right-leaning posts tend to spark conversation. Interacting with one feeds users more, and pipelines are born.

Similarly, these conservative memes can equally radicalize leftists, as exposure to constant hatred can fuel similar emotions. Combine these pipelines with the general “nothing matters” undertone of memes, and you get Tyler Robinson.

Furthermore, Robinson was heavily involved with Discord, a messaging app notorious for its problematic communities.

Court documents revealed Robinson's confessions on the app, and how

his acquaintances condoned the murder, if not ignored the weight of the situation. If Robinson surrounded himself with these people, then the assassination was honestly inevitable.

In the end, Charlie Kirk's assassination feels less like a statement, and more like a joke. A national “shitpost,” in a sense — the logical climax of a meme-ridden ecosphere where the ultimate joke is life itself.

What Robinson brought was not freedom, but the birth of a martyr for alt-right politicians who seek to marginalize people, and we have already seen the effects of the murder.

Kirk feels like the beginning, and I predict many more assassinations in the future.

October 16, 2025

## Wind, Willpower, and Winthrop: USDGC 2025 Delivers Disc Golf Drama

Winthrop University hosts the 2025 United States Disc Golf Championships, filled with unforgettable memories and history being made into the record books.

**Maurion Jamison**  
Staff Writer

The 2025 United States Disc Golf Championship (USDGC) returned to Winthrop University with electric energy and high expectations. Fans packed the iconic eighteen hole course to witness the sport's elite battle for glory.

From the first tee on Thursday, the wind played a starring role, testing precision and patience. Paul McBeth opened with a bogey free -10, setting the tone for a fierce competition.

Round two saw Ricky Wysocki tie the course record with a blistering 1102 rated performance.

His aggressive play and pinpoint putting kept the leaderboard tight heading into the weekend.

By Saturday, the field narrowed as Anthony Barela surged with clutch birdies on holes thirteen through seventeen. His calm demeanor and powerful

drives gave him a slim edge over seasoned veterans.

Missy Gannon dominated the Throw Pink Women's Disc Golf Championship, defending her title with poise and precision. Her second win solidified her legacy and inspired a new generation of female athletes.

Sunday's final round was a pressure cooker for all the cheese, with Barela, McBeth, and Wysocki trading leads across the front nine. Spectators were locked in as each shot carried championship weight.

Hole seventeen proved pivotal, with Barela threading a risky forehand through the treacherous laced fairway. The crowd erupted as his disc took a hold within Circle 1, sealing his momentum.

On hole eighteen, Barela needed par to clinch the title and delivered with a textbook upshot and confident putt. His victory marked a career milestone and a new



photo via Instagram/@usdgc

Anthony Barela, 2025 United States Disc Golf Champion

chapter in disc golf's competitive landscape.

The Winthrop Coliseum course proved again why it's referred to as disc golf's grandest stage. Its blend of beauty and struggle that challenges every aspect of the players' game.

Vendors, fans, and media filled "Championship Village," celebrating with merch drops and putting contests. The festive atmosphere reflected disc golf's growing popularity and community spirit.

"It's growing, people

are discovering the sport and I think COVID helped with that on one side because everybody wanted to get out and it's a good reason to do so," said Skeet Scinski, a vendor and disc golf player at the championships.

With record attendance and global livestream views, the 2025 USDGC set a new benchmark for professional disc golf. The sport's future looks bright, with Winthrop's course continuing to be a hub for the sport's growth.

## Every set counts: Volleyball team thrives on effort and energy

Winthrop University volleyball leads off with a strong start to 2025 season.

**Dakota Gold**  
Staff Writer

Winthrop's volleyball team kicked off the season with a scrimmage on Aug. 14.

The Eagles bring momentum from last season, where they reached the Big South Championship and the National Invitational Volleyball Championship.

They return with the top contributors from last season.

Avery Jolley (senior)

leads in kills, Isabella Murray (senior) leads in assists, and Sophia Matthews (sophomore) leads in digs.

The season began with a challenging game against Samford, where they lost in five sets after leading 2-0.

Though the loss hurt, performances by Jolley (13 kills) and Teagan Sychterz (12 blocks) showcased what the team is capable of.

Winthrop hosted Gardner-Webb,

opening the conference play and continuing the 18-game win streak against the Bulldogs.

One highlight of the season thus far was the close game against High Point University. The Eagles rallied to win in a five-set thriller.

During this match, Jolley crossed the 1,000 career kills mark.

This match overall proved that the team knows how to come back in the face of adversity.

The team prides itself on the effort and energy put forth by the players and the coaches.

"We've had a lot of great coaches since my freshman year, and they do a great job in providing us with the tools to get better, but also pushing us to be a player-driven team and giving us autonomy in that sense," Jolley said.

"They also provide great leadership in growing us as people, which I think helps our

program excel."

The team builds community as they encourage each other on and off the court.

Jolley said that they have become more honed in on the process of maintaining a "championship culture" over the years. This includes pushing one another towards their goals.

A tough loss came at home this past week as Winthrop lost 2-3 to USC Upstate, breaking

their home win streak.

Even through the losses, the team's spirit and ability to bounce back will prove to be a threat in the conference play.

The Eagles have made for an exciting season so far as they band together to face challenges.

Their next match is on Oct. 17 against Charleston Southern.

Winthrop volleyball's current overall standing is 9-6.



photo via Instagram/@winthropvolleyball

Winthrop volleyball celebrates together after winning a point

Omar Woods | Sports Editor  
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# NEWS

October 16, 2025

## Logan Federico case | Cont. from pg. 2

resolved.”

The original letter from General Wilson gave Gibson and his office until Oct. 10 to publicly decide whether or not to pursue the death penalty for Dickey, but that deadline has since been negated by Gibson.

The murder of Logan Federico, and especially the treatment of the case by the South Carolina Justice System, has brought forth further national attention, like House representative Nancy Mace (S.C.) said on

X, formerly known as Twitter.

“What happened to Logan Federico right here in South Carolina was not random, it was the deadly consequence of weak-on-crime leadership,” Mace said. “She was just 22 when a repeat criminal with nearly 40 arrests and 25 felonies dragged her out of bed and executed her in cold blood. This monster should have been behind bars. Instead, South Carolina families are paying the price for a justice system

who protects criminals and betrays victims.

South Carolina will not be a safe haven for predators. Logan’s father is right, this revolving-door ‘justice’ system is a disgrace, and we will fight until it ends.”

As of 2025, South Carolina currently has 24 men on death row, with the oldest sentence dating back to 1989 and the most recent dating 2019. None of these inmates currently have any planned execution dates.

South Carolina has continuously been facing national attention for its death penalty practices, having executed the first person by firing squad in the United States since 2010 during March of this year. It is one of only five states that currently utilize firing squads as a legalized death penalty, alongside Mississippi, Utah, Oklahoma, and upcoming, Idaho, as of July 2026.

The case of Logan Federico has brought

upon high waves of criticism towards the South Carolina justice system, particularly in how it appears to leniently charge and treat repeat offenders. It’s especially timely too considering the fatal light rail stabbing of Iryna Zarutska in Charlotte last month, a case that is also receiving national attention due to the perpetrators extensive criminal record.

While there is no current verdict on Dickey’s sentence,

Federico’s father and General Wilson continue to promote the death penalty for this case.

“You will not forget her, I promise you,” Steve Federico said. “You will be sick and tired of my face and my voice until this gets fixed. I will fight until my last breath for my daughter. You need to fight for the rest of our children, the rest of the innocents, and stop protecting the people that keep taking them from us. Please – you have the power.”



photo via Columbia Police Department

Photo of Logan Federico displayed during a Columbia Police Department press conference May 5, 2025



photo by Marshall Keely/via SpectrumNews1

Stephen Federico, fourth from left, speaks before members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee in Charlotte.

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