



May 2026

COMMENCEMENT

[Commencement Ceremonies Celebrate Over 700 Graduates](#)



Winthrop celebrated more than 700 undergraduate and graduate students during two Commencement ceremonies on May 9. Mike Whitehead '87, '94, founder and chief executive of the Center for Intentional Leadership, delivered the Commencement address and shared his insights with the Class of 2026 during both ceremonies. In addition, [seven graduates were recognized for having the highest GPA in the class](#). [Take a look at photos](#) from the special day or [view the recorded ceremonies](#).

NEW GRADUATES

[Newest Graduates Are Ready to Take the Next Step](#)



Gabriel Powell, Timothy Speaks and Elizabeth Ryerson were among the more than 700 graduates who earned their Winthrop degrees this month. Their post-graduation plans vary. Powell turns pro in esports, Speaks heads to Emory University and Ryerson will attend Vanderbilt School of Medicine and Graduate School. [Read more about them](#) and their plans.

FACULTY AWARDS

[Faculty Members Earn Annual Awards for Teaching and Service](#)



Three outstanding faculty members were recognized during Commencement ceremonies. Associate Professor of Computer Science Andrew Besmer received the Distinguished Professor Award. Assistant Professor of Special Education Amy Clausen earned the Outstanding Junior Professor Award. A third faculty award – the Jane LaRoche Graduate Faculty Award – was presented to Charles Randle, an associate professor of accounting.

NEW CENTER

[Winthrop Announces New Center for the Environment](#)



A new interdisciplinary hub at Winthrop will unite students, faculty and community partners from Rock Hill to Charlotte — and beyond — around shared environmental goals. The institution has launched the Center for the Environment, a university-wide initiative designed to accelerate interdisciplinary collaboration, deepen community partnerships and equip the next generation of environmental leaders with the skills to drive lasting, meaningful change. The center's soft launch coincided with the ribbon-cutting for the newly renovated Sims Science Building and Dalton Hall on April 21.

PHILANTHROPY

[Largest All-Cash Gift Received in Honor of Late Educator](#)



Winthrop received the largest all-cash gift in its history, a remarkable \$2.5 million that will create teacher education scholarships and fund a professorship. The family of the late Virginia Bellune Collier '30 made the gift in her honor, ensuring \$2 million will go toward teacher education scholarships, preferably in STEM disciplines, and \$500,000 will fund a professorship in the College of Arts and Sciences.

PARTNERSHIPS

[Winthrop and SCRA Partner to Launch Innovation Hub](#)



Winthrop and the South Carolina Research Authority announced on April 23 the launch of an innovation hub that will be housed at the university. Winthrop's innovation hub is one in the statewide network of hubs designed to accelerate investment and strengthen South Carolina's emerging technology ecosystem in key regions across the state. The new initiative will establish innovation hubs at Winthrop and in Columbia, Charleston, Greenville, Aiken and Florence. These hubs will be central regions for collaboration, resource sharing and support for high-potential tech companies as they grow from ideas to impactful enterprises. Winthrop's hub will handle York, Chester and Lancaster counties.

LEADERSHIP

[Alison Hamilton Joins Board of Trustees](#)



Alison Jean Hamilton '92, '95, of North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, was recently elected by the S.C. General Assembly to the Winthrop University Board of Trustees. She assumes the vacant seat for the 7th Congressional District and her term is effective immediately. A financial advisor, she has served as a member of the Winthrop University Alumni Association Board. In addition, she started the Myrtle Beach Alumni Association Chapter. Hamilton earned a B.S. in business administration with an option in economics and an M.B.A. from Winthrop. She is one of eight family members to attend the university.

IN MEMORIUM

[Winthrop Mourns Passing of Emeritus VP Frank Ardaiolo](#)



Frank Ardaiolo, an emeritus vice president for student life, passed away May 5 after an extended illness. He retired in 2018 after 29 years of service, making him one of the university's longest-serving vice presidents. He was proud of the fact that an exceptional number of student life professionals under his charge at Winthrop advanced to prominent positions in the field. Memorial contributions should be designated to the Student Veterans Annual Restricted Fund at Winthrop. Memorial contributions may be made online [here](#).

DAY OF GIVING

[Thanks for Supporting Bleed Garnet Give Gold!](#)



Thank you to all of the donors who supported the April 21-22 Bleed Garnet Give Gold Day of Giving! Together, nearly 1,100 Eagles contributed over \$339,700 to support 121 funds across campus. [Check out the full results](#) and [hear a special thank you message](#). Every share, cheer and gift helped make this day unforgettable. Although the campaign has ended, you can still [make a gift here](#).

[A Message from the Alumni Director](#)



Congratulations to the Class of 2026, and welcome to the Alumni Association! Members of the Class of 2026 were invited to celebrate their final days as students with [Senior Week](#), May 4-7. A variety of events honored their accomplishments, commemorated their time at Winthrop and aided in the transition from student to alumnus. We also celebrated 84 [Legacy students](#) at the Legacy Commencement Celebration! We toasted to their accomplishments and presented graduates with a commemorative token they wore at Commencement. Now, we turn our attention to Flight Paths with the Provost in Myrtle Beach on May 28. [Read more of my letter](#) for additional details on upcoming events.

The mission of the Alumni Association is to honor the traditions and values of Winthrop University through the engagement of alumni worldwide.

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