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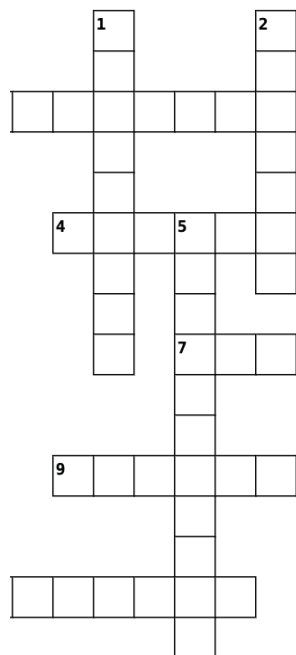


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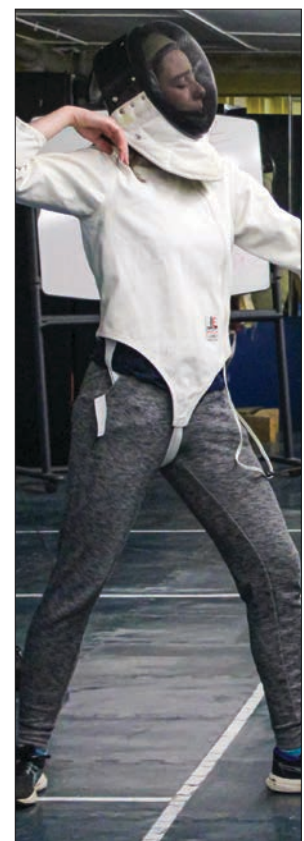


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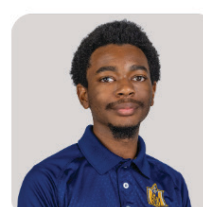
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# Vet clubs, University to hold memorial for student

**River Murt**  
News Editor  
rmurt1@murraystate.edu

Samantha Dalton will be honored with a memorial by her peers and family in Murray.

Dalton, a pre-vet major from Clarksville, Tennessee, who died last semester on Dec. 11, 2025, will be memorialized by the Vet Tech/Pre-Vet club, Animal Welfare club and Christian Veterinary Fellowship.

The memorial will be held at 10 a.m., Monday, Feb. 16 at the Arboretum on 300 Hickory Drive.

Barbie Papajeski, veterinary technology and pre-veterinary medicine instructor and senator, shared the information with members of the Faculty Senate.

"In remembrance of Samantha ... Vet Tech/Pre-Vet Club, Christian Veterinary Fellowship and Animal Welfare are coming together to have a memorial tree planted in her name," Papajeski said. "Samantha's family will be traveling to Murray this day to join us. Our clubs wanted to invite all Carman facul-

ty, graduate assistants and students to join us in remembrance for Samantha."

The Vet-Tech/Pre-Vet Club also announced the memorial on their Instagram page, and said all are welcome to attend.

"We want you to join us for a prayer and planting of a memorial tree in loving memory of Samantha Dalton," the post read. "She was a beloved classmate, friend and Carman student."

Ron Patterson, Murray State president, gave his condolences in a campus distributed email following her passing.

"On behalf of our campus community, we extend our heartfelt condolences to Samantha's family and friends."

Patterson provided information for those experiencing grief.

Counseling services are available by emailing [msu.counselingcenter@murraystate.edu](mailto:msu.counselingcenter@murraystate.edu) or by phoning 270-809-6851. Faculty and staff can call 800-441-1327.

Patterson said students have 24/7 access to timely regardless of time or location, as part of the University's partnership with the online mental health counseling service.



Photo provided by Lissa Bennett

Samantha Dalton, a pe-vet major, pictured above.

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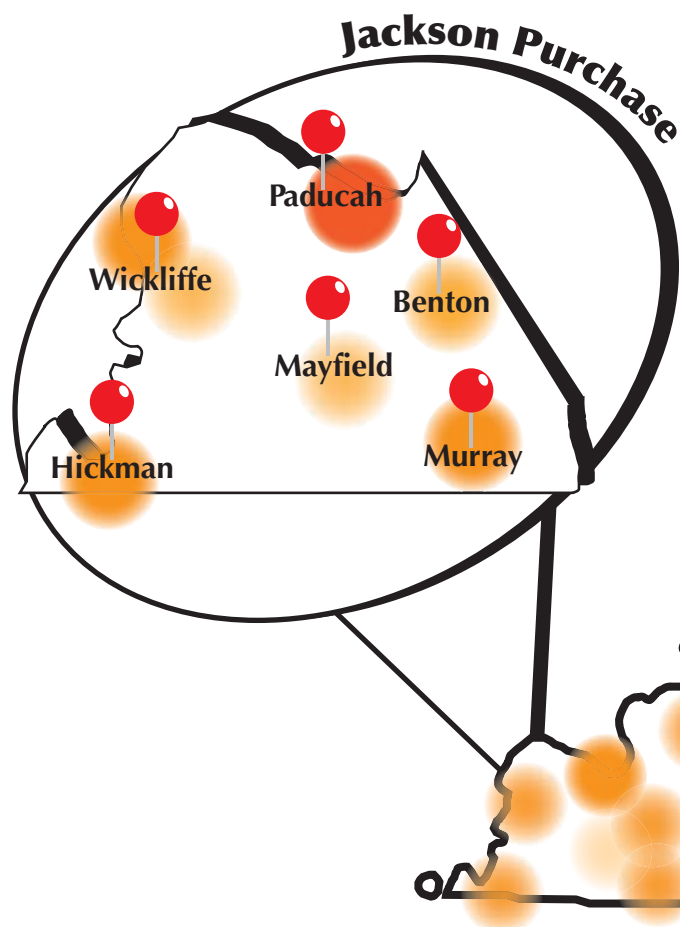
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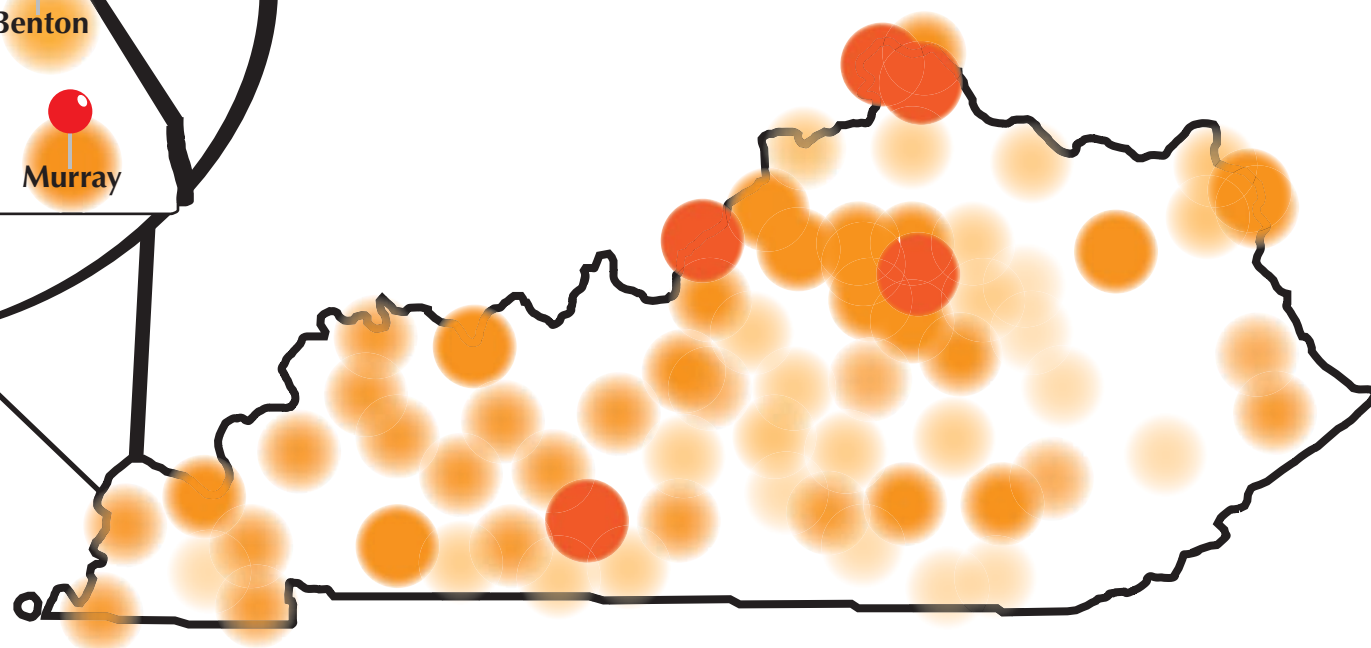
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## Arrests in Kentucky reported by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

*Jan. 20, 2025 - Oct. 15, 2025*



Graphic by Avery "Gingy" Poston/The News

Rough geographic data from Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, accessed through open records requests from ICE. The more color density, the more activity.

# Agencies sign co-op agreements with ICE

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Several Jackson Purchase law enforcement agencies signed agreements to cooperate with ICE.

Law enforcement agencies in 39 states have signed Section 287(g) since President Trump took office last year. These agreements include jail enforcement, Task Force and Tribal Task Force models and Warrant Service Officer programs.

The Task Force model was originally discontinued in 2012 for Civil Rights abuses, according to the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

But it was revived by Trump shortly after taking office.

### What is a Section 287(g)?

According to ICE's website, the Section 287(g) agreement allows the agency to delegate law enforcement at the state and local levels, and with Indian tribes via another statute, to "perform specified immigration officer functions under ICE's direction and oversight."

Under the agreement, the Jail Enforcement, Task Force, Tribal Task Force and Warrant Service Officer program models are described.

**Jail Enforcement:** to identify and process removable aliens, either with criminal or pending criminal charges.

**Task Force:** authorizes law enforcement to act with limited immigration authority during their routine.

**Tribal Task Force:** authorizes tribal law enforcement to act with limited immigration authority during their routine.

**Warrant Service Officer program:** authorizes the training, certification and authorization of law enforcement by ICE, to serve and execute warrants.

The following Jackson Purchase law enforcement agencies have signed this agreement.

Each have signed for the Task Force Model.

- Carlisle County Sheriff's Office; signed Dec. 8, 2025.
- Fulton County Sheriff's Office; signed Nov. 11, 2025.
- Hickman County Sheriff's Office; signed Nov. 14, 2025.
- Hickman Police Department; signed Jan. 7.
- Marshall County Sheriff's Office; signed May 5, 2025.
- McCracken County Sheriff's Office; Jan. 26.

The Excel spreadsheet of this information, and for every other agency in Kentucky and the nation, can be found on the page for Section 287(g), or it can be downloaded as a Google Sheet from the online version of this story on The Murray State News website.

The agency also provides a spreadsheet of potential law enforcement partnerships. It can also be found on the site, or The News.org.

At this time, no more Jackson Purchase law enforcement are listed on either spreadsheet, but ICE does operate in the region, according to the Kentucky Center For Economic Policy.

### ICE activity in the region

The map displayed on The Kentucky Center for Economic Policy's story on ICE, "Amid Mounting Harms, Kentucky Is Ramping Up Anti-Immigrant Enforcement," posted on Feb. 5, shows ICE activity across Kentucky.

According to the map, Paducah and McCracken County are the more dense with ICE activity, followed roughly by Wickliffe, Hickman, Mayfield and Murray.

Samuel Bierds, Murray Police Department Chief, said to The News the department has not signed a Section 287(g) agreement with ICE, confirming the spreadsheet, however, continues to collaborate with

local, state and federal partners in the interest of apprehending criminals for safety of the community.

"Our officers do not ask about immigration or citizenship status during routine interactions, and our focus remains on addressing violations of criminal law and protecting community safety," Bierds said. "We remain committed to our mission of providing public safety with integrity, fairness and professionalism for all who live, work, study and visit our community."

Calloway County Sheriff's Office did not reply by press time for publication.

### Proposed ICE legislation

Kentucky has four bills in session with the intention of increasing the powers of ICE, beginning with House Bill 47.

The legislation would require Kentucky State Police to operate within the perimeters of the Task Force Model, and for participating officers to receive annual ICE training.

HB 62 criminalizes the employment of "unauthorized" aliens as a Class D misdemeanor. HB 76 would require persons to require proof of citizenship ...

Read more on our website:



# SGA candidate application deadline declared

## Elections to follow; award nominations due date announced

**Baden Grubbs**

Contributing Writer

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The deadline to become a candidate in the 2026-27 Student Government Association elections is Feb. 17.

Cesar Villeda, SGA director of election ways and means, said the names of applicants will be recorded following a candidates' meeting at 5 p.m., Feb. 18, in the Barkley Room on the third floor of the Curris Center.

The identities of all participants will remain confidential until the meeting.

Available positions are SGA president, executive vice president, vice president for administration, vice president of finance, Residential College Association president, and academic, residential and at-large senators.

In a campus announcement from the University, Don Robertson, vice president for student affairs, said students interested in running in the election need to know the requirements.

"A student must have one academic year of SGA involvement by the election date to qualify for SGA president and executive vice president," Robertson said. "To qualify for VP of Administration or VP of Student Connections you must have one semester of SGA involvement. SGA involvement means any role or participation in the four branches ... Student Senate, Judicial Board, Campus Activities Board or Residential College Association. This qualification does not apply to any other roles on SGA."

Robertson also advises students should refer to the



The Student Government Association meets every Wednesday, 4 p.m. in the Barkley Room.

SGA constitution and Senate Bylaws for information and additional qualifications.

Elections will be opened on MyGate from March 9 to 10, closing at midnight. The results will be announced at the weekly Student Senate meeting on March 11.

Applications can be submitted on SGA's page on the Murray State University website, under the "Applications" tab.

Bill 90-25-V1, passed by the Board of Regents on Jan. 21, tightened the requirements for a student to vote in SGA elections.

It means anyone currently taking a course at Murray State University can vote in SGA elections, but

excludes staff, faculty and dual-enrolled students to participate.

Kade Gambill, SGA adviser and Student Activities Coordinator, said the SGA annual award nominations are now open.

The deadline for nominations is March 5, and the winners will be announced at the Senior Breakfast.

The Ralph H. Woods Memorial Award recognizes students who have demonstrated outstanding service and leadership on campus.

Applications are submitted as resumes along with three letters of recommendation. The nominee is not required to be affiliated with any student organizations, but must be a graduate of either December 2025 or May 2026.

The Max Carman Outstanding Teacher Award recognizes faculty members who demonstrate exemplary teaching and the ability to inspire students both inside and outside the classroom.

Students may nominate any faculty member with four or more years of full-time teaching experience at Murray State.

The Jim Baurer Service Award recognizes a staff member who has shown great dedication to the students of the University.

Information about the nominee should be presented by a student, along with a letter from a department chair or director detailing the nominee's service. All full-time staff members who have been employed for at least five years are eligible.

Gambill also announced student leadership award nominations are due by April 1 and encouraged the senate to complete them.

# Campus union demands GOP stop tenure attacks

**Harper Spaulding**

Staff Writer

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After the state legislature introduced a new bill challenging faculty tenure positions, Murray State professors demand an end to attacks against tenure.

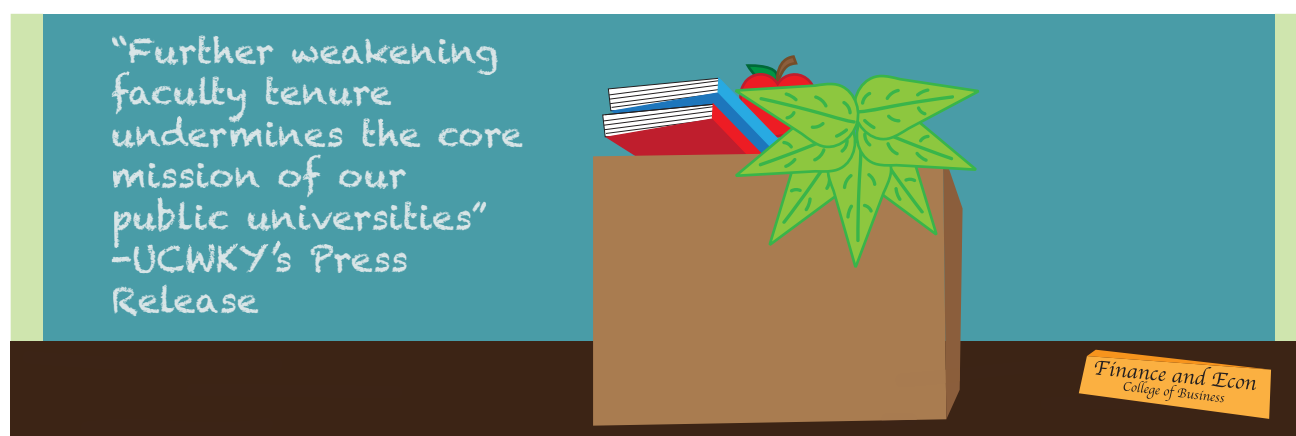
On Jan. 27, Kentucky legislators introduced House Bill 490, which allows university administrators to establish a process to remove faculty members for financial reasons, regardless of the faculty's status.

Shortly after the bill's introduction, the United Campus Workers of Kentucky sent a demand letter to the bill's sponsors, Rep. Aaron Thompson, R-Russell, and Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, protesting the bill and what they call an attack against faculty tenure.

"Further weakening faculty tenure undermines the core mission of our public universities," UCWKY's press release read. "When faculty can be removed for shifting financial reasons, academic freedom is chilled, shared governance is sidelined and decisions about education are driven by cost-cutting rather than student learning. This approach will only harm student and worker outcomes on campus and lead to the further corporatization of our universities."

The bill, which passed the House Postsecondary Education committee and is now headed to the House floor, allows for the removal of faculty for "bona fide financial reasons." Among the reasons listed for removing faculty is low enrollment in particular programs or majors. If passed, the proposed legislation stipulates an effective date no later than July 1.

In an interview with The News, one UCWKY spokesperson said this new avenue for removing faculty is damaging in an environment already seeing attacks against higher education. The spokesperson said this



Graphic by Avery "Gingy" Poston/The News

is only one in a long line of bills attacking higher education, but could open the door to more ideological attacks on professors and other faculty.

"The way it's written, it's about financial reasons. But if you look at the implications of it, it can have far-reaching effects," the spokesperson said.

Michelle Panchuck, an associate professor of philosophy and member of UCWKY, said this bill is damaging for tenured faculty and professors in low-enrolled programs. The bill's vague language, Panchuck said, stifles academic freedom and endangers faculty studying controversial topics.

"The purpose of tenure and other protections on pre-tenure and non-tenure track faculty are to allow for academic freedom, so that a professor can follow their inquiry wherever it leads," Panchuck said. "Because all of these terms are quite ambiguous and don't have clear stipulated legal definitions, this would al-

low for faculty to be terminated for almost any reason at all. And so that creates an environment where free inquiry can't really take place."

Speaking on the effects this bill will have on low-enrolled programs, Panchuck said many academic programs on campus are relatively small, but have a big impact on students' critical thinking and may serve as part of the University's core curriculum. Panchuck said programs like humanities and fine arts are small but fundamental for the University.

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# KY Attorney General stands on antisemitism law

**Harper Spaulding**

Staff Writer

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Russell Coleman, Kentucky attorney general, defends law aimed at ending antisemitism on college campuses amid legal challenges.

On Jan. 12, Murray State University sent an email to students informing them of the campuses' new antisemitism policy. The policy was adopted after the signing of Kentucky's Senate Joint Resolution 55, which required Kentucky universities to adopt policies against antisemitism. Following a lawsuit by University of Kentucky law professor Ramsi Woodcock challenging the law's definition of antisemitism, Coleman signed a brief defending the law.

"There's no place for antisemitism in the Commonwealth, especially on Kentucky's college campuses," Coleman said in a press release. "Universities exist to encourage and expand the minds of their students, not to spread fear, exclusion or violence."

The policy adopted by this law reiterates Jewish students' religious protections and their right against being harassed. The policy also expressed punishment for any student groups found to be supporting "designated terrorist organizations."

The following policy uses the definition of antisemitism employed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews," the policy reads. "Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

Woodcock was suspended from his position last July



Russell Coleman, Kentucky Attorney General

for criticisms made against the state of Israel. Woodcock, who runs the website antizionist.net and has repeatedly referred to the nation as a colonial project engaged in apartheid and genocide, hosted a petition on his website calling for global military action against Israel. UK President Eli Capilouto called Woodcock's

remarks "repugnant" and said it called for the destruction of people based on national origin.

UK suspended Woodcock pending an investigation into his comments. In response, Woodcock sued the UK in November for violating his First Amendment rights. In that lawsuit, Woodcock also levied legal action against the Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, seeking an injunction against the use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

The IHRA's website lists examples of antisemitic language such as comparing Israel's action to the Nazi's or "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor." According to Woodcock's lawsuit, the IHRA's definition of antisemitism can be used to punish constitutionally-protected remarks critical to Israel under Title IX.

Woodcock's lawsuit also mentions that the passage of SJR 55 was helped in part by members of the Heritage Foundation's "Combat Antisemitism Movement."

The Heritage Foundation is a conservative think-tank known for its proposed Project 2025. The lawsuit also quotes Kenneth Stern, one of the drafters of the IHRA definition, who spoke out against its use in legislation.

"The IHRA working definition of antisemitism that is being adopted as a de facto hate speech code at universities around the country was never intended to be used to determine whether speech should be disciplined," Stern said. "It was never intended to be used by campus administrators at all."

Woodcock's lawsuit is still ongoing, but seeks a declaration that SJR 55's incorporation of the IHRA's definition violates the First Amendment and would prevent the Department of Education from using the definition in enforcing Title IX proceedings.

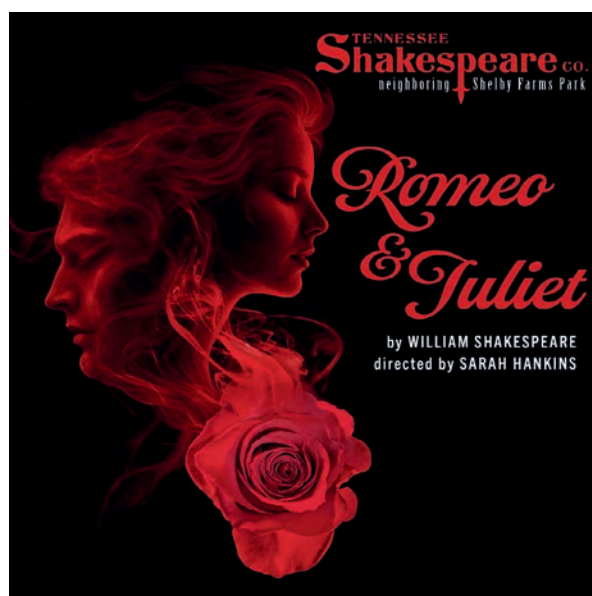


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# Patterson: 'I have the best job in America'

## MSU president talks extra break, new doctorate program, more

**Zach Simmons**

Editor in Chief  
zsimmons@murraystate.edu

It's easy to assume that the president of a university is always busy and can't find time to relax like the rest of the campus community. However, that wasn't the case for Ron Patterson.

In The Murray State News' first interview with Patterson since November, he said this was "the first time in probably 10 years" that he didn't work during break.

"My family had the opportunity to travel up from Corinth, Mississippi," Patterson said. "They spent four days with us during the Christmas holiday and that was just phenomenal."

Patterson made it clear that he did keep checking his email throughout the break, but said it was nice to spend time with family and go see the Christmas lights at the park and also take them to Patti's for the first time.

Right after a nice winter break, Murray State University, other universities and K-12 school systems were given another break due to the recent winter storm that blew through our area and other places across the country.

Patterson was firm in saying that every decision that was made for Murray State was made with students and faculty at the forefront of planning.

"First and foremost, I thought we responded well," Patterson said. "I thought we got out in front of the storm and made institutional decisions in line with what we do here at Murray State. I don't worry about other institutions. I worry about the students, faculty and staff here."

Patterson noted that they received reports from the National Weather Service and made decisions based on the information they had on that given day.

In all of the campus updates regarding the weather, the term "Campus Weather Preparedness Committee" was used. Patterson said this committee started out with four people and expanded to 11 to make sure everyone necessary was involved.

"Every time I enter a room, I always ask, 'Do we have the right people in the room?' After the first couple of meetings, we decided we didn't have everybody we needed," Patterson said.

The members of the committee included: Bob Pervine, Chris Fike, David Looney, Don Robertson, Jason Youngblood, Jill Hunt, Laura Foltz, Ryan Orr, Shawn Touney, Wendy Cain and Patterson.

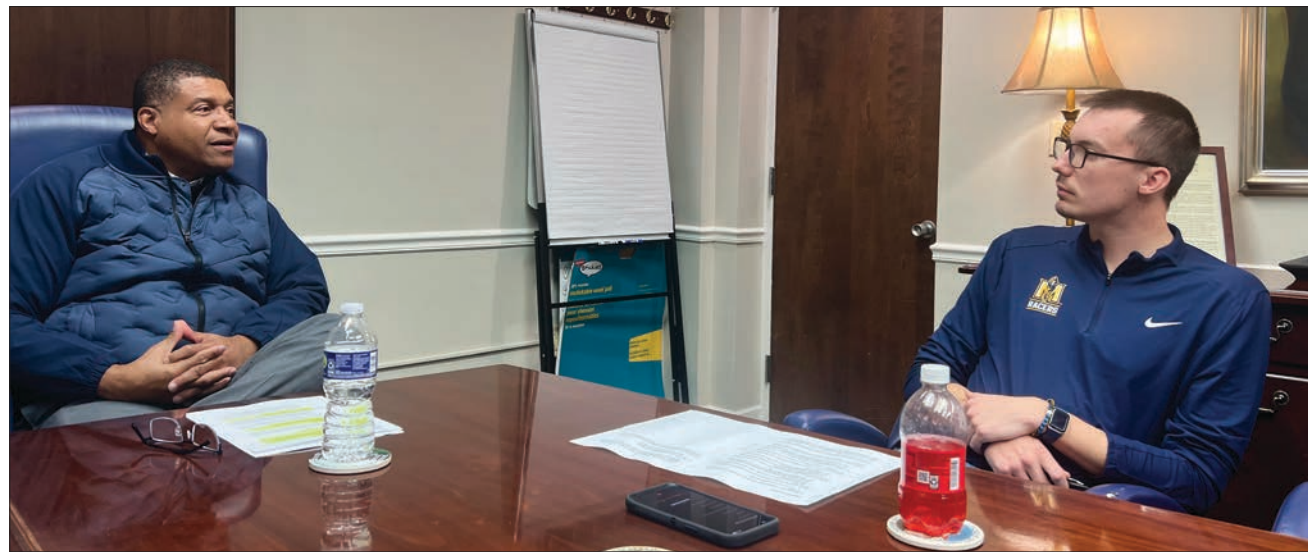
Some factors were out of their control, like the snow and ice blocking some parking areas but, Patterson said preparation helped to provide adequate parking to serve the campus population.

"The evening before the snow started to fall, Jason and the facilities management team spread treatment on the sidewalks and roads around campus," Patterson said. "I got out every other day and drove around campus and if I didn't, I spoke to the people who plowed my driveway and they always had a good report."

Patterson said he hasn't heard any negative feedback in terms of responsiveness but said if there are any concerns, he'd love to know so "we can consider those when we're making future decisions."

Patterson discussed the decision to fully cancel classes over having them online. He said that with external communications with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the ice that affected parts of the South, they decided to let students leave early and not worry about online classes.

"We maintained a constant stream of communication with the Campus Weather Preparedness Committee, Jason, the TVA and Murray Electric," Patterson said.



Murray State president Ron Patterson and The Murray State News Editor in Chief Zach Simmons talk during their interview on Feb. 3.

"We wanted to make sure that if they knew about a potential power outage that we would be in the know so we could act responsibly."

Patterson mentioned being prepared for generators as well, but said that generators have to turn on immediately so they can't be tested without a real-world situation.

Approximately 700 students remained on campus scattered across the residential colleges and Station 74, Patterson said. A plan was in place for box lunches to be served if needed and that each student still on campus was factored into every decision that was made.

On March 13, 2025, the Kentucky General Assembly passed Senate Bill 77. This amended statute KRS 164.295, allowing for Murray State University to offer a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine. On Jan. 30, the proposed program received full approval by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

"Fifty-three years ago, we started this journey. Words cannot describe how impactful this will be for his excellent university," Patterson said. "I'm excited for our pre-vet and vet tech program students. I'm excited to meet the needs of the shortages in rural Kentucky, the region and the Commonwealth."

Patterson praised Laura Hoffman, the head of the department of veterinary technology and pre-veterinary medicine, for her work in presenting to the council.

"(Hoffman) excelled. She represented Murray State University well," Patterson said. "(The Council) was very impressed with her presentation and the information she shared, but also with her responses to the questions they had at the end."

Patterson said the next steps involve a site visit from the American Veterinary Medical Association, starting construction on the new building (which he said will hopefully break ground in April), building a website and answering questions that may arise on the way to the first group of students by fall 2028. Once the first group of students are enrolled, the AVMA will come back for an accreditation visit.

The legislature is in session for 2026 and Murray State University is requesting funding, starting with \$48.6 million for the University's asset preservation pool.

"If you look at our campus and footprint, the Quad area has some of the oldest facilities on campus," Patterson said. "It is important that we continue to invest in those facilities through deferred maintenance. We do not want to be an institution that tears down our founding buildings just because of the age of the

facilities. We want to maintain, beautify and allow them to showcase our spaces on campus."

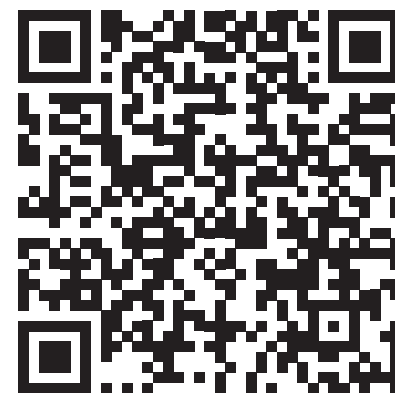
The University also requested \$100 million for building system improvements. While still used for deferred maintenance projects, Patterson said they want to use that money to "maintain the life of the facilities" and make it meet the needs of students, faculty and staff.

Patterson also spoke on his stance about House Bill 490 which would allow for the "removal of faculty members at public postsecondary education institutions for bona fide financial reasons; require the boards of regents and trustees of the institutions to establish the process for removal based on financial reasons with specified parameters."

He made it clear that Murray State University "does not support" the bill.

"We want to be able to work with our shared governor structure, students, faculty and staff as it relates to situations that arise where we have to make cuts," Patterson said. "We want to have the flexibility and the latitude to work with those constituent groups to make mission driven decisions."

He also said though they hate when those situations arise, the University wants to maintain control and have input and "don't want law to drive that decision."



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CUPID  
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ROMANCE  
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FLOWERS

SWEETS  
ARROWS  
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GIFTS  
FEBRUARY

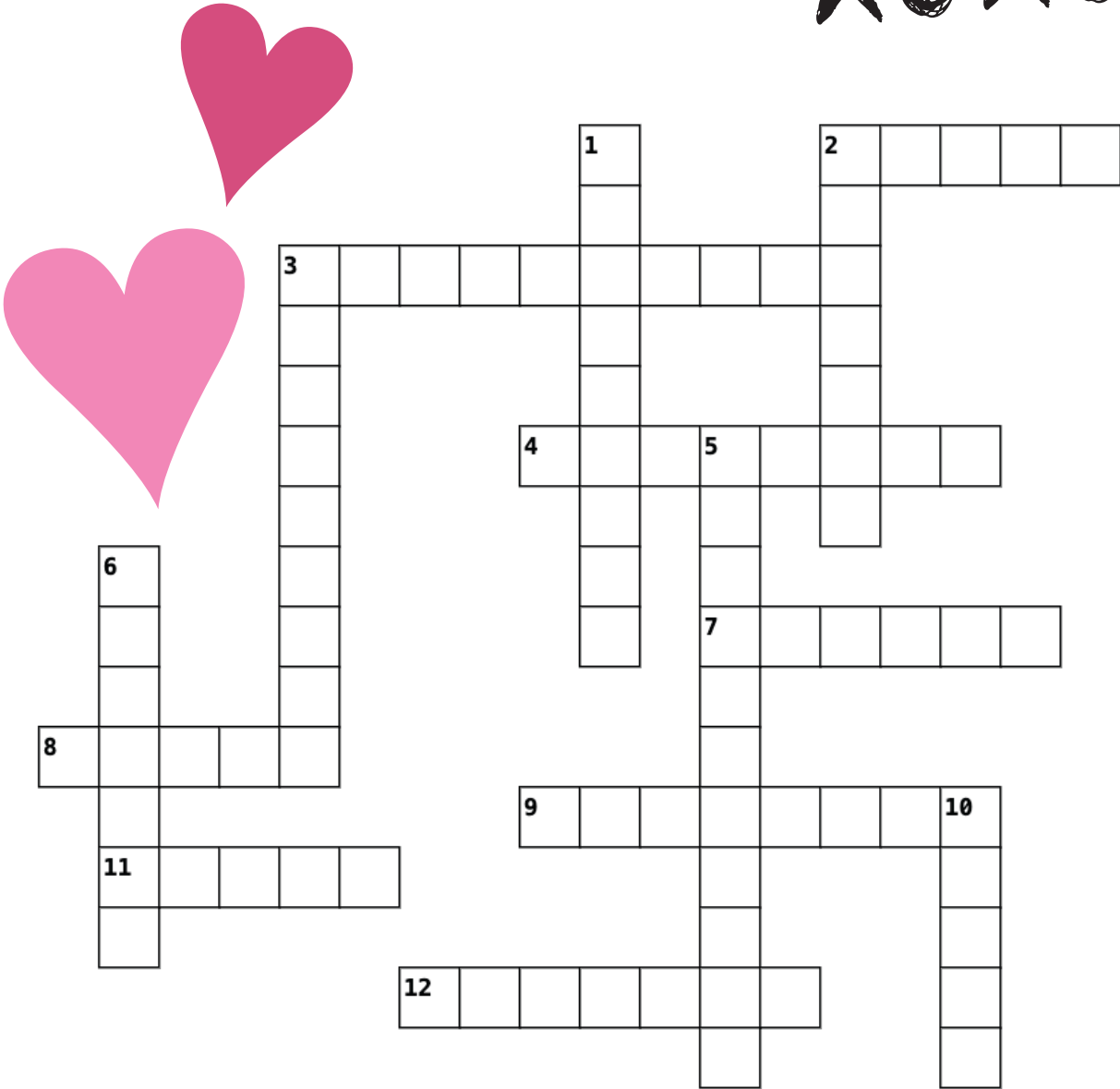
XOXO

### ACROSS

- 2. THE GOD KNOWN FOR HIS ARROWS OF LOVE
- 3. AN OLD PAGAN FESTIVAL AT THE ORIGIN OF VALENTINE'S DAY
- 4. THIS GUY BANNED VALENTINE'S DAY IN 1563
- 7. IS OFTEN HOW THE GOD ABOVE IS DEPICTED
- 8. THE ROMAN GODDESS OF LOVE
- 9. THE POPE DECLARED VALENTINE'S DAY VALENTINE'S DAY
- 11. LOVE IN FRENCH
- 12. THE MOTHER OF VALENTINES, CREATED THE FIRST MASS-PRODUCED VALENTINES

### DOWN

- 1. THIS ERA IS KNOWN AS THE BEGINNING OF THE CARD EXCHANGING TRADITION
- 2. A POET WHO MADE VALENTINE'S ROMANTIC
- 3. THE PHRASE BASED ON THE COUPLING OF BIRDS
- 5. SOME SOCIETIES HAD LOVE LOTTERIES
- 6. ADDED TO THE VALENTINES AS AN INSULT TO UNWANTED ADMIRERS
- 10. THE ORIGINAL VALENTINE WAS A...





Above, sophomore guard KJ Tenner looks toward the ref in hopes of a foul being called during Monday night's loss to Northern Iowa. Top right, coach Ryan Miller hypes up his team after a hustle play against Northern Iowa. Right, Javon Jackson drives for a layup.



Above, senior center Fred King checks out of the game and greets teammates Dylan Anderson and Brayden Shorter. The Racers lost 89-60 to Northern Iowa at home Monday night. Right, Romon Doman gets tangled up with Northern Iowa guard Geon Hutchins after Doman dove for a loose ball.

Photos By :  
Kris Fister  
Ali Garrett  
Lindsey Hopper  
/ The News

# Journalism conference spotlights storytelling, nostalgia

**Gray Hawkins**

Features Editor

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The doors close and the music starts up. Young twenty-somethings and the professors who drove them mingle around small tables with little, plastic cups of lemonade and chat to their hearts' content. Others linger on the sidelines watching the band, of course, but keeping an eye on the crowd as well. They search for someone chatty and scout for an interesting story hidden beyond a nametag.

Sure, it's a social event. But it's also a competition. With one hell of a deadline.

The 2026 Southeast Journalism Conference, hosted by Georgia Highlands College, began with a mixer for college journalists to greet, meet and make connections — but many of us entered the scene with an ulterior motive, handed to us on a slip of paper on our way through the door.

Sixteen categories of on-site competition weighed on students' minds. How will the photographers find the perfect shot under harsh fluorescent lights? What is going to spark enough interest and inspiration in the team of podcasters to create an award-winning segment? Can the feature writer crank out 1,000 words in 20 hours with a grand total of seven minutes in interviews?

The Superstation, a small cover band from Georgia, performed a setlist of well-known theme songs paired with the punk-rock atmosphere of sleek guitars, a Blink-182 sleeveless shirt and a bright red Misfits sticker popping out against the dark sound system behind them.

The show offered attending students and advisers the chance to relax and melt into the background of the night's unorthodox entertainment. A student weaved his way through the crowd with bounce in his step as the beat played on. Groups reminisced on favorite childhood tunes as the band cried, "Go, go Power Rangers!" Reece Leddy, sports editor of the Belmont Vision, danced and headbanged along to the music, telling a new acquaintance from The Murray State News about his own punk band back home and good-naturedly bragged about the Belmont Bruins beating the Racers a week prior.

On the flip side, it delivered prime opportunities to get the photos, inspiration and 1,000 words we were looking for. Photographers and videographers darted around the stage for the perfect angle — one student even abandoned his tripod to lie flat on his back. When The Superstation's enthusiasm sent a mic stand crashing down, he and his peers, with expensive camera equipment in hand, must have felt lucky when it fell perfectly between them and no one got hurt. Whoever snapped a good photo of it in action must have felt even luckier.

Katie Baxter, adviser to the Six Mile Post and professor of digital media and communication at Georgia Highlands College, coordinated the entire mixer,

from the food to the music. She said she chose The Superstation so students in the arts and entertainment on-site competition had something fun and out of the ordinary to work with.

**“I wasn't sure how to feel about the band, but now, I realize it might have been the perfect choice.**

**-Erin Erter**

"I think covering something a little outside the box is a lot more fun," Baxter said. "I always joke that the weirdos are my favorite people, and with these guys, we've got that bit of nostalgia, we've got thinking back and feeling emotions."

For Baxter, the nostalgia of The Superstation's performance served as a jumping-off point for student competitors to engage with this year's theme of Southern culture and its intrinsic link to storytelling.

"We all know that person who will sit and tell us a story about when they were a kid, or places or where things used to be," she said. "Stories make us feel things. Stories are there to make us be better people. When I think about stories, they've all already happened. What better way than to pull some nostalgia from childhood into telling those stories and making you feel things?"

Erin Erter (they/them), opinions editor of The Reflector at Mississippi State University, was one such arts and entertainment competitor tasked with this storytelling assignment. Erter was unable to participate in the on-site competitions in 2025 as a member of the university hosting SEJC, but this year, with a notepad and handheld tripod at the ready, they said a "new level has been unlocked" along with new anxieties.

"Last year, when I had conversations with people, I felt kind of out of their experience (and) like I couldn't relate," they said. "But now I'm really in it, and I can relate to people. I'm getting a lot of cool conversations and meeting a lot of great friends, and we're all just kind of sitting with the anxiety of being here — but also, the excitement of being here."

Erter said the mixer began with some frustration on their end, having just learned that arts and entertainment was a multimedia category rather than strictly writing-based; however, they said when Superstation began to play, it "really changed things" for how they considered the event and the competition.

"It's really hard to be serious, be a serious journalist in the back writing notes when the band is playing the 'Full House' theme," Erter said. "Coming in, I wasn't sure how to feel about the band choice, but now, I realize it might have been the perfect choice. ... You have all these people who are professionals



Gray Hawkins/The News

Photographers and videographers continue working as another student fixes the fallen microphone.

at what they do, college-level professionals, serious about their craft — and they're covering such an unserious thing. I think that was a really brilliant choice."

Despite their doubts, Erter went on to take second place in the arts and entertainment on-site competition.

**You have all of these students covering the exact same thing ... No two stories will be alike.**

**-Katie Baxter**

The Superstation closed their concert with the popular theme song of "Friends," to the delight of the clapping crowd. Baxter opened the floor for eager reporters to interview the band members and lingering audience members. In a flurry of notepad pages, camera clicks and the improvised lighting of a smartphone flashlight, temporary competitors and new friends got to work.

Baxter said the reason she loves the on-site competitions at SEJC is because they use a shared experience to generate personal and original stories.

"With the way that we tell those stories, we're also thinking about our own perspectives, our own experiences and how we perceive those experiences, to share with others," she said. "You have all of these students covering the exact same thing, and they're all doing it in their own unique way. No two stories will be alike. Everything will be different."

Staff members at The Murray State News traveled to Cartersville, Georgia, on Thursday, Feb. 5, for the 2026 Southeast Journalism Conference.

The News returned to campus with four awards: Kristopher Fister, associate photo editor, placed second in photography; MacKenzie Rogers, associate editor, placed second in on-site infographic design; The News placed fourth in magazine publication; and The News placed fifth in newspaper publication.

This marks the first year of Murray State's participation in SEJC.



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# Get out of the dorms with hobby-based campus clubs

**Ainsley Beatty**

Chief Copy Editor  
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After a week of canceled classes and being stuck indoors, now is a perfect time to discover new campus clubs and organizations to get you out of the dorms.

Murray State has an abundance of student organizations open for anyone to join. If you're looking to connect with a community over a shared hobby or interest — or find a new one — here are a few clubs to check out.

**Board Game Club** is a social club for anyone who loves a casual or competitive game night.

LB Anderson, a sophomore creative writing major and vice president of the Board Game Club, said the Board Game Club values community and “fun for all students.”

“We play board games, meet new people and discover new ways to make our friends mad arguing house rules during Monopoly,” she said. “We’ve got all kinds of games to choose from, so you’re sure to find something you like. Find a group or play with friends.”

Anderson’s favorite part of the club is the “dedication and passion” of officers and members.

“I have made some incredibly close connections and have never felt nervous or out of place,” she said. “If you like board games, card games or hanging out with friends over rage-inducing cardboard sprawls, you should be there.”

Board Game Club meets at 5 p.m. every Wednesday in Waterfield Gallery. The games are related to each week’s theme. For more information, check out their Instagram: @msuboardgameclub.

**Photo Club** is the place for you if you have an eye for photography and are looking for an artistic community.

As described in their Instagram bio, Photo Club is

a place where students “learn different photographic skills and share our passion for the medium.”

Katie Hart, a senior photography major, is the Photo Club president. Whether a student is taking photography classes or simply interested in photography personally, Hart said the group is great for anyone to engage with other students who are “just as passionate about photography as they are.”

Photo Club’s big events every year are a trip to the Elk and Bison Prairie at the beginning of the semester and two holiday sales, Monster Mash in the fall and the Valentine’s Day Sale in the spring.

“My favorite part of the club is the events and opportunities we get to go to, whether that (is) traveling for a conference where we get to meet awesome photographers and other students, or the simple activities we as a group plan and host together,” Hart said. “A student can share their own artwork or projects in photography and get great feedback from others.”

Isabel Bolanos, a senior studio art major and Photo Club vice president, said the club is a “very calming and welcoming environment.”

“My favorite part would be seeing everyone who is interested come together and share our work,” she said. “We give feedback on what we can improve and try out. I love that we have people gather around and get to know each other.”

Photo Club meets every two weeks in Doyle Price Fine Arts 735. To stay updated, check out @msu\_photoclub on Instagram.

**Creative Writing Club** is for writers looking for a calm space and community engagement.

Cassie Stone (she/they), a senior English secondary education major and member of the Creative Writing Club, said the club is a relaxing space for anyone both longtime writers and anyone “trying to work up the courage to start for the first time.”

“Most of the meeting time is dedicated to giving

members a place and time to sit down and get some writing done, with an opportunity to share their progress and ideas during the last five to 10 minutes,” she said. “I’ve personally used the club time both for personal writing and catching up on papers for classes.”

Stone’s favorite aspect of the club is the collaboration and support from the group.

“People stepping forward to talk about and get excited to share their writing is my favorite part,” she said. “A lot of our regular attendees are fairly withdrawn, but everyone has still been very welcoming and supportive, which can be a huge motivation boost.”

Creative Writing Club meets at 4 p.m. every Friday in the Oakley Student Lounge.

**Yarn Club** is a community for fiber artists of all kinds. Knitting, crocheting, embroidering and the like are welcome.

Students can bring a project to work on while connecting with and learning from fellow crafters.

Eleya Conway, a sophomore communication disorders major and acting president of Yarn Club, said meetings are “very chill” and a calm place for anyone to hang out.

“My favorite part about Yarn Club is having this safe space to express myself,” she said. “I would suggest people come to Yarn Club if they are looking for a place to make friends or destress from classes.”

While there have been some adjustments this semester due to leadership changes, Conway said she hosts Yarn Club meetings at on Tuesdays in Oakley Applied Science 104. The room is also open to members on Thursdays at their own discretion. To learn more, visit @msu\_yarnclub on Instagram and join their GroupMe for updates.

There are many more opportunities to join clubs and connect with like-minded students on campus. For a full list of registered student organizations, visit the Student Organizations and Registration webpage.

## Dining Guide



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- Lunch buffet on Sundays
- Friday night specials
- Meat & three daily specials
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# OPINION: The Grammys are more than awards

**Owen Hansen**  
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The 68th annual Grammy Awards, the biggest music event of the year drew millions of viewers to watch their favorite musicians, producers and songwriters perform and be recognized for their art this past year. To me, however, the star of the show this year wasn't just one you'd find on the Hollywood Walk of Fame; it was the clear message printed on small pins and declared in passionate speeches, "ICE OUT."

Over the last couple of months, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE, has become an incredibly contentious topic. The Trump administration's strict anti-immigration policies have led to ICE performing what can only be called a witch hunt for undocumented immigrants. Echoing history's darkest years, ICE rips families from their homes and from each other, detaining them within disgustingly inhumane detention centers. In this year alone, eight people have lost their lives to ICE officers or while in ICE custody.

In light of recent events, specifically the murders of Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, the detainment of a five-year-old boy, Liam Ramos, and the ICE occupation of Minneapolis, American immigrants need passionate and loud support more than ever. At this year's Grammys, some of music's biggest names did just that.

Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, better known as the Puerto Rican singer Bad Bunny, left with three Grammys under his belt. Among these awards was Album of the Year, one of the Grammy's four biggest awards, for "DeBÍ TiRAR Más FOToS." It was the first all-Spanish album to receive the award in Grammy history, a major win for Latin music and artists. In his first acceptance speech of the night, Bad Bunny opened with a simple, powerful message: "ICE OUT."

"We're not savage, we're not animals, we're not aliens, we are humans and we are Americans," he said.

This message holds significant weight when it comes from the current biggest Latin artist in the world.

Bad Bunny wasn't the only singer to vocalize their support for immigrants and distaste for ICE during an acceptance speech. Artists such as Billie Eilish, Shaboozey, Kehlani and Olivia Dean lauded immigrants for all that they do and have done for America



Graphic by Owen Hansen/The News

and its identity. Additionally, dozens more celebrities, such as the Biebers and Carole King, showed their support with pins that proudly declared "ICE OUT." Justin Vernon, lead singer of the band Bon Iver, wore a whistle to support the communities of Minnesota and all they've done to protect their immigrant neighbors.

It's apparent that a large portion of the public disapproves of ICE. According to a recent NPR poll, about six out of 10 Americans believe ICE has gone too far and is actively diminishing the overall security of the nation.

To voice their disapproval, many go to social media, where they make and share posts denouncing ICE and its goals. Unfortunately, social media activism for the average person is limited in scope. Due to the way algorithms work, most are unlikely to make their voices heard to those who need to hear them. Outside of rare instances of virality, most of the people who see, listen to and share your posts are those who already agree with you, not the fence-sitters who don't engage with activism or the people against your viewpoints. To bring those people to your side, you need a larger platform.

This is where it can be game-changing to have celebrities step in.

Musicians hold much influence in our lives. As we've seen with artists such as the Beatles, Elvis

Presley, Michael Jackson and Taylor Swift, the large fanbases of pop sensations are inescapable cornerstones of society. The number of people that famous artists reach is undeniable.

People are significantly more likely to listen to the viewpoints of people they respect. I've watched as my sister, a person who used to never engage with politics, became more politically informed and opinionated after listening to artists she likes such as Taylor Swift, Chappell Roan, Harry Styles and Olivia Rodrigo. Artists who people trust are more likely to sway opinions than strangers online, or even a lot of politicians.

When Bad Bunny and his peers made anti-ICE statements at the 2026 Grammys, they reached out to millions of people tuned in to watch their success. They took their moment of glory and shifted the attention from themselves to a cause they care about. Actions like this are impactful, as the atrocities ICE has committed in the last couple of months cannot go ignored. It is times like these where we need the biggest names in the world to step in, and so they did.

When I look back on this year's Grammy Awards, my first thought will not be the awards or the performances. It will be the clear message of "ICE OUT," delivered by people who understand the influence they hold and how they should use it.

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Kristopher Fister/The News

Redshirt senior outfielder Jackson McCoy hits a ball.

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After a rigorous record-breaking road to the 2025 Men's College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska, head coach Dan Skirka's Racer baseball team, consisting of 19 newcomers and 18 returners, look to fill their own big shoes.

The Missouri Valley Conference chose Murray State's baseball team as the conference's preseason favorite going into the 2026 season and the team boasts a league-high nine players on the conference "Players to Watch List," including newcomers Kristofer Hokenson and Kainen Jorge.

Holding a 209-152 record with the team, Skirka isn't looking to change the pace this year; rather, he is focused on sticking to what has worked.

"Our goal is to be the best version of ourselves," Skirka said.

In only six seasons with the Racers, he has led them to a conference championship, an NCAA Regional title, a Super Regional title, two back-to-back 30-win seasons and the program's first College World Series appearance.

Graduate student outfielder Dustin Mercer led the Racers with his .355 batting average while also leading in hits with 92 and triples with five in the 2025 season. Overall, Mercer played 60 games in right field, batting second the entire season behind redshirt senior outfielder Jonathan Hogart who batted .338 and played every game in center field that season. Hogart was a huge help to the Racers offense with his leading 26 doubles and 22 home runs. His offensive power led to him being signed by the Philadelphia Phillies on a free agent deal in 2025.

The Racer's third-hole hitter changed throughout the season between senior infielder Carson Garner and junior catcher Will Vierling. Both hitters showcased their strengths at the plate with Garner's .276 average and Vierling's .312. Garner had the second most home runs on the team with 17 and the second best slugging percentage with .573. Vierling was drafted by the Philadelphia Phillies in the 11th Round in 2025. In 47 at bats with the Phillies single-A affiliate Clearwater Threshers, he has nine hits, six RBIs and one home run.

One of the top players to look forward to watching this season is senior pitcher Nic Schutte who was voted MVC preseason pitcher of the year. In 2025, Schutte placed a 5.16 earned runs average in 96 innings. In the postseason, he struck out 20 in 17.2 innings. His best pitching performance occurred on Sunday, April 6, 2025, where he pitched an 8-inning complete game with 10 strikeouts while only allowing two hits. Over the entire season, he had 97 strikeouts and a .233 opponent average.

One of 18 returners, Schutte is one of the team's most reliable leaders. He attributes a large portion of the team's success and cohesiveness to their relationships off the field.

"Other teams really don't get that deep and that vulnerable with their team," Schutte said. "I think it's good to be vulnerable with their teammates and just know that they have your back and no one's here to judge you."

Another pitcher who dominated in 2025 and is hungry for more is junior pitcher Jacob Hustedde who finished the season with a 5.09 ERA in 40 innings with 40 strikeouts and only 28 walks.

Both senior pitcher Dylan Zentko and graduate student pitcher Kane Elmy showed starting potential in the previous



Kristopher Fister/The News

Senior starting pitcher Nic Schutte delivers a pitch at Johnny Reagan Field.

season. Zentko had 54 strikeouts in 52 innings with a 4.15 ERA, demonstrating his abilities as a power pitcher. Elmy, however, only has 28 strikeouts in 56.2 innings while still upholding a 4.45 ERA due to being more of a pitch-to-contact pitcher.

As the season amps up and the Racers begin this year's journey, Skirka maintains a sense of warmth and gratitude towards the Murray community and Murray State fanbase.

"Being a part of something bigger than yourself is so neat," Skirka said. "When you keep that on the forefront of your mind and remember your why, we stay motivated."

Although Racer Nation is eager to see their team back at the College World Series, Skirka's coaching style emphasizes personal growth and maintaining the novelty of college athletics. While remaining dedicated to facilitating a family environment, Skirka and his coaching staff are looking forward to an impactful, meaningful and memorable season.

"We're a part of something special whether we win one game or 56 games this year," Skirka said.

The Racers kick-off the season with a series against the Ohio University Bobcats at 3 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 13, in Carbondale, Illinois. Their first home game is at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, March 3, against Middle Tennessee State University.

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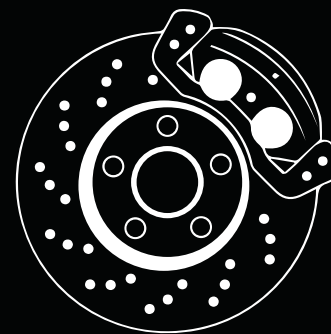
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# Rifle claims sixth straight OVC title

**Riley Staton**  
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The Murray State Rifle team earned their sixth consecutive Ohio Valley Conference championship and swept the all-conference awards on Sunday, Feb. 8, in Martin, Tennessee. This marks the Racers' 20th and head coach Allen Lollar's 12th conference title.

The Racers entered the 2026 OVC Rifle Championship as one of the strongest national programs, holding the 11th place position in the standings. Following a successful 2024-25 season that saw the Racers go 8-3 with a perfect 2-0 conference record, along with posting a 4719.934 aggregate score in competition, Murray State looked to their new and returning shooters to lead them to further success.

Sophomore shooter Carlotta Salafia proved herself the most decorated member of the Racers in the 2025-26 season, securing awards in multiple categories. The Pezzana, Italy, native won the 2026 OVC Air Rifle Athlete of the Year award, as well as a placement on the OVC Air Rifle First Team. Salafia also secured a spot on the Smallbore First Team. Salafia matched multiple personal bests set last year at the Racers' match against Memphis on Wednesday, Feb. 9, including match highs in both air rifle and aggregate, with 599 and 1,189 in each respective category. Salafia's 1183.334 average aggregate score on the season is 15th nationally.

This success follows a 2024-25 season which also contained numerous accolades. In the previous year, Salafia won

OVC Freshman of the Year and Air Rifle Co-Athlete of the Year, as well as a spot in both divisions' Newcomer and First Teams. Salafia was also awarded for her academic excellence, becoming a CRCA Scholastic All-American. Salafia also placed in the top five in both nights of the OVC Championship, with a fourth-place finish on night one, and a second-place finish on night two.

Freshman shooter Lea Soulé also dominated her division in the 2025-26 season, winning OVC Smallbore Athlete of the Year. In addition, Soulé won the division's Freshman of the Year award, along with a spot on both the Air Rifle and Smallbore First Teams. Soulé also secured a spot on both the Air Rifle and Smallbore Newcomer Teams. Soulé dominated the OVC Championship with a second-place finish on night one and a fifth-place finish the night after. This performance follows a Jan. 4 outing where she scored a career-high 596 in air rifle.

There were many other individual performances throughout the season worthy of mention. Along with Salafia and Soulé, junior shooter Emma Lawrence found a spot on the Air Rifle First Team, along with being one of two members of the team to register a perfect 4.0 GPA. Joining Lawrence on the team was junior shooter Caroline Martin, who would also make the conference's Smallbore Second Team. Martin also played an important role in securing the OVC title for the Racers, as she tied for fifth place in the second day of the championship match.

Freshman shooter Abby Ballard also played a major part in securing the



Photo by Murray State Athletics

Murray State's air rifle team poses with their trophy.

conference championship for the Racers, placed on both the Smallbore and Air Rifle Second Teams, while also winning a spot on the Newcomer Teams for both divisions. She would also place in the top 10 for both categories in the championship game, placing eighth and ninth, respectively.

The Racers now have two final matches before the national qualifiers to prepare for a national playoff push. The team posted a 4721 aggregate over the University of Memphis' 4715 on Wednesday, Feb. 11 at the R.F. Fogelman Family Rifle Range.



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# HOME SPORTS SCHEDULE

## FEBRUARY

13- WBB VS. VALPO @ 6 P.M.  
 15- WBB VS. UIC @ 1 P.M.  
 15- MBB VS. BELMONT @ 5 P.M.  
 18- SOFTBALL VS. UK @ 3 P.M.  
 19- SOFTBALL VS. GREEN BAY @ 3:30 P.M.  
 20- SOFTBALL VS. SOUTH DAKOTA STATE @ 3 P.M.  
 20- SOFTBALL VS. NORTH TEXAS @ 5:30 P.M.  
 21- RIFLE VS. NCAA QUALIFER @ 9 A.M.  
 21- MBB VS. EVANSVILLE @ 3 P.M.  
 21- SOFTBALL VS. NORTH TEXAS @ 4 :30 P.M.  
 22- SOFTBALL VS. IU INDY @ 11 A.M. & 1:30 P.M.  
 26- WBB VS. INDIANA STATE @ 6 P.M.  
 28- WBB VS. EVANSVILLE @ 2 P.M.

## MARCH

3- BASEBALL VS. MIDDLE TENNESSEE @ 3 P.M.



Graphic by MacKenzie Rogers

# It is time to take a stab at fencing

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Sports Editor

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In a clandestine corner of Murray State's campus, anonymous, masked people with body armour can be found fighting tooth and nail with three-foot swords, valiantly defending the University's honor. Not all are fit for this kind of combat – in fact, only the bravest, boldest, most honorable warriors can manage making the treacherous journey to ... Wait. Carr Health Hall?

It's actually the fencing club – the only student organization in which you can stab people for fun – and for free.

Murray State's fencing club's self-sufficiency and determination has kept the club spirit alive for over four decades. With multiple tournaments every year against nationally-ranked competitors, the team is hard at work every week creating a balanced community that prioritizes personal growth, teamwork and of course, sword-fighting sweetness.

McKenna Ice, junior pre-veterinary medicine major and fencing club president, began her fencing journey on a whim. After seeing the opportunity for exploration and camaraderie in the practice room, she was hooked. Throughout her four active semesters, Ice has become the cornerstone of the team. With the help of the rest of the leadership team, she organizes tournament sign-ups, leads club meetings and is a mentor for all who come through the fencing room's doors.

Aspiring masters of the sword come from far and wide to study this intricate art. Though the team frequents campus recruitment events, many are drawn in simply by live action combat.

"I was taking a tour to see the campus and out on the lawn I saw two people attacking each other with swords, which, at the time, was the coolest thing I've ever seen," said freshman physics engineering major Harper Horton.

Although many current club members came on their own accord after seeing the club tabling on campus or



Mya Bolton/The News

Senior McKenna Ice and freshman Harper Horton begin their duel in the fencing club's practice room.

locating it on the list of Murray State's student organizations, others were recruited by one, cherished member of the club.

While modest, Corey Crick, a sophomore electrical engineering major, is the glue that bonds newcomers to the regular club attendees, creating a cohesive connection between first-timers and old-timers. He is both quick-witted and agile-footed, rounding up talent from the deep corners of campus and teaching them the swift ways of the sword.

Despite the inevitable aggression and competitive nature of the sport, this club is set apart by their sibling-like companionship and colorful affinity for collaboration. It is a safe haven for all who are searching for a somewhat outlandish, invigoratingly enriching hobby with arguably practical applications. Stephen Sersaw, a sophomore criminal justice major, describes the club best:

"You can stab people for free and for fun," Sersaw said.

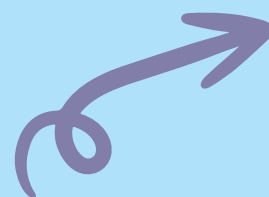


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