

# The Outlook

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## Is MU prioritizing athletics over academics?

*A look into Monmouth's athletics spending for the 2024-2025 school year*

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In recent years, MU has made a significant investment in athletics, particularly after the institution became a member of the Coastal Athletic Association (CAA) and transitioned to a Division I university. Students are taking notice. This academic year, "The Outlook" received many inquiries from students who overwhelmingly, although not exclusively, expressed their concerns about these investments, so

we decided to investigate. Is Monmouth prioritizing athletics over academics?

On July 1, 2022, Monmouth University joined the CAA. Twenty-three of Monmouth's 24 Division I athletic teams joined the CAA in the transition, with women's bowling the lone exception. Monmouth University's President, Dr. Patrick F. Leahy, said at the time the move will allow Monmouth to "compete at the highest level but do so in a fiscally responsible way," according to the Monmouth Magazine.

"We were pleased to receive an invitation to the CAA a few years ago and decided to accept it for a variety of reasons," Leahy explained to "The Outlook." "1) From an athletics standpoint, it allowed us to step up into a more competitive league and consolidate almost all of our teams (except bowling) into one conference. 2) From a visibility standpoint, it allows us to compete up and down the East Coast from New England to South Carolina, which are increasingly important recruiting

markets for us. This year alone, membership in the CAA has enabled us to place 70 broadcasts on television in those markets, half of which are produced by our students in the Parton Broadcasting Center. 3) Joining the CAA allows us to associate with and collaborate with other prestigious academic institutions – like Northeastern, Drexel, Stony Brook, Hofstra, William & Mary, Elon, and Charleston – helping to burnish the academic reputation of Monmouth."

The transition to the CAA resulted in Monmouth's abrupt departure from the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC). By not giving a three-year notice of their exit, Monmouth University paid a \$1 million penalty to the MAAC, according to the "Asbury Park Press" article, "It's official! Monmouth athletics joins Colonial Athletic Association, as Hawks begin new era." In addition to the penalty, a source that spoke to the "Asbury Park Press" revealed the University had paid \$500,000 to join the CAA.

Federal law requires non-profit organizations that spend \$750,000 or more in federal grant money in a single fiscal year to be audited, meaning a certified public accountant (CPA) or auditing firm examines the organization's financial records. KPMG LLP in Short Hills, New Jersey, conducted the University's audit for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2023. According to the audit reviewed by "The Outlook," the University paid \$1,605,000 to change athletic conferences.

"The total gross operating budget for the University last year was nearly \$275 million. After all aid was distributed and gifts were removed, the total available operating budget was \$165 million. The athletics operating budget was just 10% of the total," Leahy explained.

He went on to discuss how most of the university's operating budget is allocated to academics and instruction. "We are an academic institution that serves close to 5,000 students. Therefore, nearly 80% of our net operating budget – that is, after allocating \$80 million in financial aid to students – is committed to program expenses, leaving just over 20% for various support functions."

From the previous fiscal year,

Leahy clarified that the athletics operating budget increased due to several factors. "Athletics operating budgets increased slightly due to increased travel costs of playing in the CAA. Athletics fundraising to offset these costs also increased... The total budget for academics increased year-over-year, even though our total student population decreased by 3%. While we have the finest students ever, we have the lowest total enrollment in 20 years. This puts pressure all over the budget," he said.

"The Outlook" also reviewed copies of the University's Form 990s for the fiscal years ending in both June 2022 and June 2023. According to the filings, King Rice, the Head Coach of the men's basketball team, made \$588,343 in total compensation for the fiscal year ending in June 2022. For the next fiscal year, ending in June 2023, Rice's salary increased to a total compensation of \$613,394, rendering him the second-highest paid employee at the University. In addition to Rice's salary, which is the third highest of the CAA's 13 men's basketball programs, a source that did not wish to be attributed

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PHOTO TAKEN from Monmouth University.

## Dr. Mihaela Moscaliuc selected as a member of the 2025 class of Guggenheim Fellows

**TAYLOR MEMOLI**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/NEWS EDITOR

Dr. Mihaela Moscaliuc, Ph.D., Professor for the Department of English and English Graduate Program Director, has been selected as a member of The Guggenheim Foundation's 100th Class of Fellows.

The honor of a Guggenheim Fellow includes a grant that is awarded by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation that allows recipients to "pursue independent work at

the highest level under 'the freest possible conditions,'" according to the Guggenheim Fellowship website.

"The news was humbling and slightly numbing (but in a good way). I was too excited to react or even share the news," said Moscaliuc. "It's a huge honor to join the 2025 cohort of fellow artists, scholars, and scientists, and to be part of this 100-year-old tradition. In practical terms, it means that I should be able to take some time off from other obligations and focus on my writing. This gift of time is

invaluable, and one I wish I could share with every writer."

With the fellowship, Moscaliuc will be using her grant to advance her field of study and passion: poetry.

"I will be working on poems (and maybe some non-fiction pieces) that revolve around cross-cultural systems of belief and attitudes toward death. My writing practice involves immersive reading and social isolation, so I hope for plenty of that, as well as

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# Athletics over academics?

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within the Athletics Department claims that Rice lives in a single-family home provided by the University.

“Some employees have housing negotiated as part of their contracts,” Leahy explained about Rice’s housing. “When this happens, there is no annual cost to the university, besides the regular maintenance costs on a facility owned by the University.”

In Feb. 2024, the men’s basketball team travelled to Boston, Massachusetts, to play Northeastern University. Another University employee who spoke with “The Outlook” without attribution shared that the University paid for the team’s bus driver to stay in the Four Seasons Hotel Boston. Analysis by “The Outlook” found the cost of the hotel’s generic room in February to be approximately \$565 per night.

“I’m not sure what’s behind this question. We do not book members of the athletics travel parties in the Four Seasons Hotel or in any other luxury hotel,” Leahy responded.

“The Outlook” also requested the University’s most recent Form 1023, which includes additional financial and budgetary information, but the University denied the request despite the form being considered a public record. “The University did not retain the original paperwork filed with the IRS from the 1950s when the institution applied for exemption under section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code; because, prior to July 1987, there was no requirement to show a copy of the Form 1023 to anyone,” explained Mary Bryne, Associate Vice President and Controller.

According to Mark Drozdowski, a senior writer for BestColleges with 30 years of experience as a university administrator and faculty member, just 25 of the roughly 1,100 NCAA schools in 102 conferences made any profit from college athletics in 2019. Monmouth’s football program is in the NCAA’s Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) alongside 125 other schools. Of those 125, not a single one reported a net positive revenue, with the average FCS football program losing \$14.3 million annually as of the time Drozdowski’s article “Do Colleges Make Money From Athletics” published in 2019.

Since the University does not publicly disclose its athletic spending, “The Outlook” found if Monmouth lost the median FCS revenue loss this past year, \$14.3 million, that would be the equivalent of 307 students paying full 2024-2025 tuition of \$46,552 to cover the net revenue loss generated by Monmouth’s football program for the year.

The Knight-Newhouse

College Athletics Database publishes data found in at least one of the following: self-reported by an institution, found in NCAA financial reports, and/or reported by the federal government through the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act. Since some schools, like Monmouth, do not disclose athletics spending publicly, Knight-Newhouse could only access the records of six schools that play football in the CAA (See Figure 1).

Leahy guaranteed that Monmouth’s football team does not lose any revenue compared to the other schools in the same division. “With payments to play away games against big-time opponents, as well as with annual fundraising, our football program covers its operating expenses. Even if you allocated all athletics scholarships, it would cost less than \$1 million per year to field a nationally competitive football program,” he said.

During the Fall semester of 2024, the University suffered budget cuts that affected various aspects of campus, including the Math Learning Center, Writing Center, and student workers across campus.

“I am not in the loop in terms of athletic spending,” explained Joseph Coyle, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Science. “Their budget and fundraising are not something I, even as a Dean, would be involved in, so unfortunately, I would not be able to say anything specific about their budgeting. For example, I do not know what, or even if, there is a disparity in terms of budgets. Athletics play a significant role in the student experience, and I would trust that the upper administration, those that determine budgets, are making decisions that benefit all parts of the University.”

Coyle continued, “We have had a somewhat constrained budget over the last couple of years due to many factors—lower enrollment, for example. Doing most things costs money and, to be honest, doing science can be expensive. We have been working collaboratively across the school and university to meet any shortfalls where we can. It’s not ideal, but could be a lot worse.”

David Golland, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, pointed out that student-athletes also deserve the chance to succeed as part of the student body. “When thinking about University Athletics and its operating budget relative to Academic Affairs, it’s important to remember that—contrary to the fact that we call these University units divisions—they are not divided,” he said. “Any purported separation between the two would be highly porous. For one thing, the students who participate in Monmouth Athletics are students first. For another, participation in athletics enhances the overall college experience, the experience of

being a student.

“Being a student-athlete means one’s education comes from both professor and from coach,” he continued. “It also comes from one’s fellow students, and our athletic teams are just as important for our students’ development as are academic teams like the Debate Hawks and campus organizations like the Monmouth Players, the SGA, or ‘The Outlook.’”

“Our athletics spending is lower than other schools in our conference,” Leahy said. “The fact that we are as competitive as we are, given our much smaller budgets, is a testament to our incredible coaches and support staff. For example, just last weekend our men’s lacrosse team for the first time beat Delaware, a much-better resourced, perennial national powerhouse.”

However, some voices on campus expressed their concerns with what they view as giving investment priorities to athletics over academics. Tanner Purdy, SGA President, shared that he has seen the favoring of athletics and athletes over regular academic studies. “Naturally, there are inherent differences in the experiences of student athletes when compared to traditional students. The time commitment alone is one the greatest challenges that a student athlete faces. As a result, they receive additional support not available to traditional students like priority registrations. They also receive specialized tutoring, counseling, and academic intervention through means that are not available to traditional students. Student athletes are in a unique position and deserve these services as a result. Yet, do traditional students with exceptional non-academic time commitments receive the same benefits? The answer is no.”

“It is true that all students have access to resources through CPS, Center for Student Success, and others, but for our traditional students there is not necessarily someone to ensure their general welfare at any given time,” Purdy continued. “Many students hold jobs off campus, are heavily involved in clubs, have full course loads, face significant financial burdens, and more. These are the students who may need the exact kind of support that our student athletes receive. As a senior who has been heavily involved across our community, I can confidently say that through my years hear at Monmouth, prevailing sentiment has been that the mission of athletics holds priority over the academic goals of the institution. This is reinforced by dozens of students, faculty, and administrative leaders who have privately shared with me their concerns on athletics spending. This sentiment, like any other, can evolve over time. In the last four years I have seen incredible improvements in support for traditional students, however,

**North Carolina A&T 2023:**  
\$4.37M  
**Stony Brook 2024:**  
\$8.92M  
**Towson 2024:** \$5.48M  
**University of Maine 2024:** \$5.55M  
**University of Rhode Island 2023:** \$5.74M  
**William & Mary 2024:**  
\$8.79M

PHOTO GRAPHIC by Taylor Memoli.

**Figure 1: Total football spending (Information from Knight-Newhouse).**

there is more work to be done. I am confident that university leadership understands this and will continuously make improvements so that no student feels left behind. Our mission should be to build support systems that end the perception of two standards of care at Monmouth University.”

Monmouth Athletics is a major employer of students and provides them with valuable opportunities to gain real-life experience working in various departments. Catherine Senatore, senior business administration major, has worked with athletics for four years and believes the spending on the department is justified.

“As a smaller Division I school, the events and expenses can come with a higher price tag than some might expect,” Senatore began. “A large part of the University’s marketing strategy comes from athletics. Potential students are found all across the country and world, and athletics plays a huge role. Students want to support a winning program, and athletes want to be a part of the winners. I believe sports program funding comes from their own donations and raising money, along with their school budgets. I think that sometimes students can get caught up thinking about how money is being spent on campus, but in reality, it is all done for the enhancement of their experience,” Senatore explained.

She continued, “I do not think the school prioritizes athletics over academics. I think it also depends on the interests and type of media which students, faculty, staff and members of the community are looking at. Obviously, people more interested in athletics or academics will view content related to those topics. Overall, I think it is based on perspective, but nothing is done intentionally.”

While students who work with athletics benefit from the department, students of the general body do not understand the justification for the amounts spent on its budget. Kristen Frawley, senior social work and sociology major, commented,

“The amount of money the school spends on athletics concerns me because we have yet to see it pay off. Our sports teams do not perform very well, yet a majority of the teams were moved into a better conference, and are mostly insignificant to students who are not directly involved. I know there are efforts from the administration to get students to care more about athletics, but I don’t think the campus community has responded to it quite yet. I believe there are many areas of the school that would benefit greatly if just fractions of the money spent on athletics were redirected. Coach salaries are outrageous while adjuncts and full-time educators still struggle with appropriate compensation, even after the recent faculty contract was settled.”

Owen Bros, junior history and political science major, voiced some of the same concerns. “I don’t get how they spend so much on football and basketball. The University should lower tuition by 3% every time the football or basketball team loses and maybe they will win a game.”

However, President Leahy defended the spending on athletics and argued that academic side of the house has the largest budget on campus. “Spending on academic instruction, support, and financial aid far outweighs spending on athletics—by a significant multiple.”

Overall, students at the university and other university stakeholders need more transparency and information about how spending decisions at the university are made.

“The university should take steps to improve transparency around all aspects of its budgeting process, not just athletics spending. Shared governance is a grounding philosophy in higher education and keeping transparent funding processes are at the core of this approach. As tuition payers, students have the right to open the books and see where their tuition dollars are spent. When municipal government distributes funding, taxpayers hold the right to see allocations and have their voices heard. In situations where government withholds

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# Athletics over academics?

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funding amounts, taxpayers in NJ hold the right of transparency through the Open Public Records Act. Local governments, public colleges, school districts, and more are affected by these laws. Yet, students at private colleges are left in the dark and do not have these same protections. That is fundamentally wrong," Purdy argued.

"Monmouth has the opportunity to be a national leader in funding transparency for private universities. As an institute of higher education, we exist for

the public good and should be held to the same standards as a public institution. Transparent funding is as common sense as transparent grading. Individuals and communities thrive when transparency exists. Dozens of studies have shown that funding transparency in any setting provides accountability and encourages efficiency. It is time for Monmouth to open the books and show students how tuition dollars are being spent," Purdy concluded.

# Guggenheim Fellows

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some traveling through Latin America and Eastern Europe," Moscaliuc explained.

"I am indebted to all the writers who inspire me and whose work is a form of mentorship, and also to my students, who never fail to amaze me and who keep me excited about teaching and writing," she continued.

Moscaliuc's achievement is an honor for Monmouth University, and her fellow staff celebrate her achievement.

"I am very happy for my colleague and friend Dr. Mihaela Moscaliuc, and this is a great distinction for Monmouth University," said Jeffrey Jackson, Ph.D., Associate Professor for the Department of English. "To be selected a Guggenheim Fellow is a very prestigious and highly competitive honor, and with her rich contributions to literary scholarship, translation, and creative writing, she is an exemplary member of this year's highly impressive class, the Guggenheim's 100th. With the generous terms of the award, Dr. Mosaliuc will be able to make even more transformative contributions to her scholarship and teaching."

"I'm so delighted for Dr. Moscaliuc. To receive a Guggenheim is an enormous honor that is very validating of one's work, and I extend my huge congratulations," said Alena Graedon, M.F.A., Associate Professor for the Department of English.

Stacey Ayers, Administrative Assistant for the Department of English, reflected on Moscaliuc's work, as well as her character. "I'm no poetry expert, but I've had the privilege of knowing Mihaela as a colleague and friend. Her passion, depth, and dedication shine through in all she does — and her poetry is no exception. The Guggenheim Fellowship is a remarkable and well-deserved recognition of the extraordinary talent she brings to

the literary world."

"Dr. Moscaliuc is an incredible advocate and role model for our creative writing and literature students. She is a great scholar and a powerful poet, a transformative teacher and a dedicated mentor, and an effective graduate program director, and an energetic community builder. We're enormously fortunate to have her as a colleague and as an integral contributor to our English department and Monmouth University," said John Hanley, Department Chair for the Department of English.

Students of Moscaliuc also congratulated her on her achievement, as well as reflected on her worthiness of this honor.

Meghan Reilly, senior English major, expressed, "Dr. Moscaliuc is incredibly deserving of this honor. I had the privilege to take her Seminar in English class, which focused on migrant poetry and analyzed themes of displacement and postcolonialism. I have learned so much from her as a professor, as a working poet, and as a person."

"She is incredibly generous, supportive, and humble, while effectively translating the passion she has for teaching, her work, and her students' success. It is professors like Dr. M that make learning an influential and transformative experience here at MU. I look forward to seeing everything that she accomplishes in the future!" Reilly continued.

Timothy Pakrad, senior English major, said, "I have been so lucky to consider Dr. Moscaliuc a mentor as well as my advisor. An artist and educator are hard to find in one. Congratulations, Dr. Moscaliuc, your impact is so appreciated and deserves to be celebrated."

"Dr. M is one of the most encouraging professors I've had to opportunity to get to know at Monmouth," Melaina Carrara, senior English major, concluded. "She is always pushing me to be better and always has a kind or inspiring word to share. I'm so excited and happy for her that she's been given such an incredible honor."



PHOTO COURTESY of Taylor Memoli.

# Taylor Memoli's senior goodbye

**TAYLOR MEMOLI**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/NEWS EDITOR

The English language consists of close to one million words, and during my time at "The Outlook," I have used a plethora of them. From "protest" to "achievement," "shame" to "success," I have covered 34 news stories that have occurred on this campus and contributed 76 articles to the paper in total. I have always loved to write. I never cared what it was, just as long as I could create something by rearranging a set of words in a certain order. My writing portfolio contains poetry, prose, fiction, nonfiction, screenplays, plays, and now, after my time with "The Outlook," journalism.

Journalism was never my first passion, and it wasn't even English; it was always film. My whole life, I have been spewing useless behind-the-scenes film facts, ever since I was a little girl and my dad showed me all of his favorite movies that were not appropriate for my age ("Pulp Fiction" being one). I spent my time before Monmouth in NJ Film School's screenwriting classes and loved it immensely. But when I came to Monmouth, I left that behind and decided to study Education, stupidly, following the crowd of choosing a major that will guarantee you a job out of college.

I came to Monmouth as an English education major, and there is no other word to use than "hate." So when I decided to prioritize my happiness and study something that made me not miserable, I chose English and creative writing with a minor in film, a non-traditional way to tighten up my screenplays and become

the best writer I could be. To get more writing in about film, I decided to become a contributing writer for "The Outlook" to review and discuss the movies I loved.

Two days after I dropped education and decided to focus more on my film reviews, I received a message from our then Entertainment editor—and little would I know, one of my now best friends—Gabrielle Sangataldo, offering me the position as she became Editor-in-Chief, and little did I know it would become one of the happiest decisions of my life.

Since then, I have not thought about education once (Until writing this goodbye). All I knew was writing, movies, and editing, and there was no other word to explain how I felt than "happy," and when Gabrielle asked me to become Editor-in-Chief and News Editor after she left, there were truly no words to describe that feeling. I had finally found my calling.

I would be lying if I said my time here at "The Outlook" didn't come with many challenges. The time this position requires is no joke, and I wish more people understood and appreciated what we do here. My team and I put our blood, sweat, and tears into this paper, and I am eternally grateful for their dedication. Without them, "The Outlook" would not be what it is today.

This journey was not easy, but I am so grateful I did not have to do it alone. To anyone who has ever helped me, thank you, but specifically:

To Kristen Frawley and Brian Silva, the two best friends a girl could ask for. Thank you for listening to my endless rants about campus politics and keeping my spirits high on those Tuesdays that felt like the day would never end.

To my parents, Sandy and Neal Memoli, the people who believed in me long before I ever knew what I wanted to do

with my life. I love you both endlessly.

To Dr. Courtney Werner, my amazing advisor, who guided me through this journey at Monmouth. Always a friendly face waiting for me whenever I needed help with anything. For our advising meeting, where we would talk about anything and everything, and sometimes actual advising.

To Dr. Marina Vujnovic and Tarra Emery, the two people always willing to help me with whatever I needed and provided me with friendly and comforting faces on that craziest of days.

To Bailey Fredericks. My partner in crime thought out this whole journey (and partner in Porta and Jmacs). You were the best partner I could have ever dreamed of through this journey, and I thank you for putting up with my crazy ideas and (sorry) last-minute article coverage whenever I needed it.

And lastly, I want to thank my mentor on this journey, and someone I am so happy to still call my friend to this day. Gab, when you asked me to be the Entertainment editor of this paper it was truly one of the happiest days of my life. Since then, I have fallen in love with journalism, and that is all thanks to you. You taught me everything I know, like, no joke. And you still put up with my question from beyond the bounds of the Monmouth University campus, and I will forever be grateful to you for believing in me. I am proud to call myself a student journalist and it is all because of you.

And with that, I will see you all in the movies. To all of our readers and the people who believed in this crazy journey I am on, I want my last word (or words) ever printed in this amazing paper to be this: Thank you.

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# Scoring big or spending too much? Editorial staff reflects on Monmouth's athletic spending

## EDITORIAL STAFF

This week, "The Outlook" published a story on the university's athletic spending. In this week's editorial, the editors of "The Outlook" discuss perceptions of academic spending and what we have heard from our fellow students. As a private university, Monmouth does not have to disclose its spending in any area.

When asked if the university should be transparent and open with its athletics spending, one editor said, "Yes, for the cost of tuition at Monmouth University, having knowledge of where that money is going is pretty important to me. The school makes it so secretive which leads many to wonder if there's something being hidden." Another said, "If the university administration is so upset with us for simply asking questions, I think that shows why students are so critical of athletics spending. The secrecy and closed-door policy on athletic spending is directly causing the suspicion by the students on the university's spending in this area." Another editor added, "Yeah, I don't see a reason why it should be secret. If

you're not hiding anything, why is this so secretive and private?"

When asked about what editors have heard on athletics spending, one responded, "My professor told our class that the school paid for the basketball team's bus driver to stay in the Four Seasons hotel. Are you kidding me?" Another responded, "Knowing student-athletes get unlimited meal swipes during each meal period yet other students not in athletics can only have one meal per period is outrageous. I support student-athletes, but this is ridiculous." Another editor said, "Many faculty share their concerns with the athletic spending in our classes and to hear some of the numbers they present are pretty shocking." A third said, "I feel like I don't hear too much, but it's always sort of a joke. Like when someone says 'I wish I had this' we always say 'thank athletics.'"

The editors also commented on whether or not they think students view this as an issue. One replied, "Yeah, I think there's a perception that athletics is this elite department that gets all this money while many part-time faculty and ad-

ministrators make little compared to their colleagues. I heard from many students who saw the basketball team's trip to Italy and the football team going to Butcher's Block and felt like they were treated as second-tier being a regular student." A second editor stated, "It absolutely is. I think if the administration spent time speaking with students, they would understand the perception that we are viewed as less than student-athletes. Many of my friends are student-athletes, and I support them fully and now the hard work they do. Still, it seems as if they are treated so much better than those of us participating in other groups and clubs. For many students, it seems the university focuses more on Bruce Springsteen and athletics than on academics and education."

The general consensus among the editors was that if the university provided more transparency on athletic spending, there would be fewer rumors and less unanswered questions about the spending on athletics. "The Outlook" has heard from many students and faculty asking us to look into athletic spending and that story can be found on the front page of this week's paper.



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# Can the Knicks go all the way?

CHRIS ARP  
STAFF WRITER

With the 2025 NBA postseason officially underway, the New York Knicks look to be in the best position they have been in years. The team is finally healthy and if they play up to expectations, they can make a deep run and potentially win it all. I think if the Knicks stars Jalen Brunson, Karl Anthony Towns, and Mikal Bridges play the way they should over the next couple of weeks, the Knicks have the ability to beat the defending champion Boston Celtics and have a shot at winning the whole thing.

The #3 seed New York Knicks are facing the #6 seed Detroit Pistons in the first round of the playoffs. The Pistons are a young up and coming team, with PG Cade Cunningham leading the team to their first postseason appearance since 2019.

In Game 1 of the series, the Pistons were outplaying the Knicks until the end of the 3rd quarter, when the Knicks went on a 21-0 run and sealed the game. If it wasn't for the run, I think it would've been a nail biter at the end. I also believe that the Knicks did not play up to their expectations, and that with more games in the next few days, they will click throughout all four quarters.

While the Knicks are heavy favorites in this series, it will be interesting to see where they go after it ends, assuming they win. Next up for the Knicks would be the winner of the Boston Celtics Vs. Orlando Magic series, of which the Celtics are heavy favorites. Another reunion against the Celtics would be an extremely difficult task for the Knicks, as the Celtics eliminated them in last year's playoffs and would be

avored to knock them out this time as well.

Getting out of the Eastern Conference alive would be a huge accomplishment for the Knicks who haven't even made it to the NBA Finals since 1999! As much as winning the whole thing is always the main goal, getting that far would be a lot of progress made.

I asked Sophomore Monmouth student Jason Lacosta if he thinks the New York Knicks have the potential to win the whole thing this year. He replied, "I think the Knicks can win the finals because their team is built for the playoffs. They built their team strictly to match up with Boston in the playoffs and the playoffs are completely different from the regular season. I think the Knicks have the best player on the planet in Jalen Brunson, especially in the clutch, and with defensive pieces like Bridges, Anunoby, and Robinson, they match up with [the Celtics] nicely. If they guard the three point line in the playoffs better than they did in the regular season, they can beat anyone". I agree with Jason's points, as after losing to the Boston Celtics last year, they built the team this time around to get past that team.

It all comes down to who is hot at the right time in my opinion. That's the greatest part of sports. If you're hot at the right time, you will win. If the Knicks get hot and start to play good basketball over the next few weeks, they have the chance to win it all. That is a big if, but IF they play well, they have a good enough team to beat anyone. Yes, even the Oklahoma City Thunder, who have the best record in the sport this season. Crazy things have happened, and the next few weeks should be an exciting time as everything unfolds.



PHOTO TAKEN by Matthew Boyle.

## Mike Gruseke's senior goodbye

MICHAEL GRUSEKE  
OPINIONS EDITOR

I remember visiting Monmouth University's campus for the first time back in 2020 like it was yesterday. After touring the campus, I knew I wanted to come here as I loved everything about the area and what the school had to offer. Little did I know that in a blink of an eye I would already be at the finish line, getting ready to officially graduate. When people say "college goes back fast", I think that is truly an understatement.

Moving onto campus back in the Fall of 2021, I did not know what to expect like many others. I had no idea what clubs or activities I wanted to get involved in on campus. I took some time to strictly focus on academics and getting adept to my new life in college before being involved in anything on campus.

As a Communications major, I knew what "The Outlook" was and heard about in my classes as a freshman, but I never thought I would eventually become an editor by the time senior year rolled

around.

Before getting involved with "The Outlook," I joined Kappa Sigma, where I served as a Recruitment Chair for multiple years and made many friends that I will keep in touch with after graduation.

I also was a part of a sports radio show here at Monmouth for a few years on WMCX radio, which I highly recommend doing for any people that love sports. Not every school gives free access to professional experience like going on air for the radio station or being able to be published in "The Outlook" weekly.

It was not until the beginning of my junior year, the Fall of 2023, that I decided to join "The Outlook." At the time I was trying to bulk up my resume and get more experiences, but also had a high interest in writing. I was self aware that a subject like Math was not my strength, but instead writing, so I figured "The Outlook" was the place to be for me.

I ended up being correct, as in my junior year I enjoyed writing many stories for the Sports and Opinion sections.

I started off as a contributing writer, but jumped up to a staff writer pretty quickly, as I wrote for the paper weekly, sometimes doing multiple stories a week. The amount of time I spent writing for the paper during my junior year ended up being recognized, earning me the role as Opinion Editor for my senior year (2024-2025).

As an editor, my role was different for the paper, but I still made sure to write many more Sports, Opinion, and Entertainment stories.

This past year as an editor was a great learning experience, but also fun. I gained more professional experience, which I am grateful for, and I was very lucky to be partnered with a great team of editors that I looked forward to working with every week.

"The Outlook" is a great place to start to gain real world experience. I am proud to say that upon graduation I have 35 stories published professionally that I wrote within the span of 4 semesters.

I will always remember my time here at "The Outlook" as a positive stepping stone in helping me further my professional career and am excited to see what the future holds for the paper. Thank you Monmouth University for everything!



# Who will win the NBA Finals?

INTERVIEWED by MICHAEL GRUSEKE



"Thunder in 4."

- Matt H.



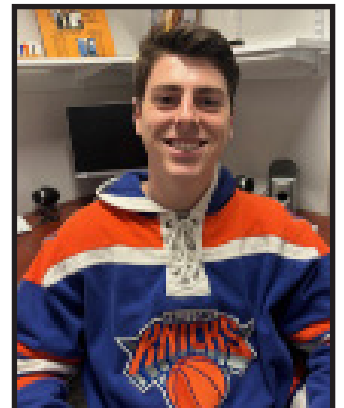
"I think the Knicks will win the championship."

- Brooke B.



"I think the Knicks will win the NBA Finals."

- Allie C.



"LeBron will win the championship."

- Luke M.

# Senior spotlight: Taylor Memoli

JEFFERSON GONZALEZ  
STAFF WRITER

When Taylor Memoli first stepped onto Monmouth University's campus, she wasn't sure where college would take her. "I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life," she said. "I knew I loved to write and tell stories, but I never really knew where that would take me." Now, three years later, that uncertainty has turned into direction. As she prepares to graduate, Memoli leaves Monmouth with a deep appreciation for journalism, a passion she credits entirely to her time at "The Outlook," the university's student-run newspaper.

"My experience with 'The Outlook' gave me a new love for journalism that I can't wait to explore for the rest of my life," she said. "It completely changed my college experience. It gave me a place where I felt like I belonged and a community I love spending time with and looking out for."

Though journalism would become the heart of her time at Monmouth, it wasn't what brought her there in the first place. "I was drawn to Monmouth because of the beach, as many of us were," she said. But what made her stay wasn't the ocean views, it was the people. "I truly met some of the greatest and most important people in my life." The newsroom at "The Outlook" quickly became more than just a workspace. It became a home base. "My office at 'The Outlook' is my favorite place on campus," she said. "I love being able to leave my door open when I'm working there and be able to talk to my team and anyone else who stops by. It's a space where I feel comfortable and at home."

Outside of "The Outlook," Taylor says she wishes she had gotten more involved earlier on. "Join more clubs sooner," she said. "It truly is the best way to meet people on campus and get involved with the community while gaining real-world experience."

When asked what advice she would give to students who may feel unsure or out of place, she emphasized the importance of con-

nection. "I truly believe you will be able to find your people," she said. "By joining clubs and attending events on topics that interest you, you'll be able to find like-minded people. Join the student newspaper if you need an idea!"

With graduation on the horizon, Memoli is focused on entering the field of journalism and hopes to break into the world of entertainment coverage. "After Monmouth, I plan to go straight into any type of journalism job, then hopefully into entertainment journalism and film reviewing and eventually, screenwriting," she said. "Although I'm scared of the uncertainty surrounding graduation, I'm excited to give my future all I've got and see where I end up."

Memoli's story is one that many Monmouth students may recognize, coming in uncertain, finding a community, and leaving with more clarity and confidence than expected. What started as a curiosity became a calling and what felt unfamiliar slowly turned into home.



PHOTO COURTESY of Taylor Memoli.

## Submerged in storytelling: ARTECHOUSE NYC

HENRY BOODY  
STAFF WRITER

Last Friday, a small group of Monmouth students stepped away from the buzz of campus noise into a basement full of light, sound, and sensory overload. The trip, co-sponsored by HawkInteractive and the Art Club, brought students to ARTECHOUSE, a high-concept digital art space neatly tucked in an old boiler room underneath Chelsea Market, New York City. The day spanned from an afternoon of city exploration, inspiration, and a little wandering.

An immersive exhibit titled "Submerge Project" transformed walls and floors into living storyboards using projection mapping, motion graphics, and ambient sound. Some pieces told a story, some a feeling, all an experience. The space moved between large-scale abstract sequences, surreal landscapes, and interactive moments that placed students inside the art. You didn't just look at the visuals, you were inside them.

"I really enjoyed how the moving images were projected all over the walls and the floor," said Jefferson Gonzalez, a senior communication major and president of HawkInteractive. "It really felt like you were actually there."

The trip itself started with a simple conversation. HawkInteractive had already been planning a spring semester trip when Jefferson Gonzales connected with Art Club president Mia Ossandon, who was organizing something similar. The

clubs joined forces, booking the same shuttle, and opened it up to the student body. Most attendees opted to stick to the itinerary for a side tour of the Whitney Museum, already en route. While others, including myself, spent time walking the High Line, an old central railway turned art-filled scenic trail near the Hudson River, scoping out local pizza joints, and soaking in the Chelsea atmosphere before regrouping at the main event.

While unconventional compared to a traditional art museum, ARTECHOUSE aligns almost too perfectly with HawkInteractive's goals. "Our main emphasis is experimenting, and experimenting with new technologies," said Gonzalez. "This is definitely one way projections can be used. We had a recent event with projection mapping, so it ties in neatly with that. There's more than you think you can definitely think outside the box."

Associate Professor Dickie Cox, faculty advisor for HawkInteractive, emphasized just how important this kind of experience is for students. "It is incredibly difficult to describe the phenomena of immersive video remapping... without embedding one's own body in such a space," he said. "Witnessing this kind of media firsthand is transformative... it brings a new lens to bear in the design process students are learning."

The sentiment echoed strongly across the group. For senior business major, Michael Moscoso, who had never been to a digital museum, the exhibit flipped his expectations. "My thoughts on digital art used to be, like, drawing on an iPad or something," he said. "But seeing the short films

helped me realize digital art is an experience. It can really immerse you."

In addition to the awe-inspiring main exhibit, the space featured interactive installations developed by NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program. Some used motion sensors, others responded to voice or proximity. One shared trait: an experience designed to be touched, felt, and explored.

For Cox, watching students engage with these tools was a highlight. "The students were inspired and said we should make projects like these... what they did not realize was that I had modeled several of the Communication Department's courses and equipment purchases around concepts I learned through my previous work with ITP..." he said. "So I was delighted to see that projects and technologies that inspire me at my core are now inspiring Monmouth students."

And that's kind of the beauty of the trip. It wasn't just a club outing or quick city escape. In many ways, it was a look at where the media is headed, and students can take part in building such an experience. In a few hours, we experienced art in motion, tech made tangible, and stories told across every surface.

"I hope these kinds of experiences drive students to be curious and to go searching for new opportunities to see what is happening creatively in emerging media and design spaces," Cox said. "I hope the work of others inspires their own work."

As someone who spent too long staring at a single shifting pattern projected on the floor, I'd say it worked.

## HawkTank spotlight: AlumLinks

AVA MCGINTY  
FEATURES EDITOR

Creating a platform that makes it easy for students and professionals alike to form meaningful connections, for the purpose of networking is what junior business student Blake Marushak has set out to do with his business, AlumLinks.

The app reimagines networking by eliminating the "transactional feel" that can be associated with other popular networking platforms.

Inspired by Fraternity and Sorority Life, especially his time as a brother of Sigma Pi, Marushak said, "So we have such a vast, vast network of amazing alumni and we don't really know how to reach out to them. That's been a big problem. Not with our chapter, but with every other chapter here at Monmouth, and Greek life as a whole. ... You can definitely use things like LinkedIn, but LinkedIn gets a bit troublesome because after a certain amount of time after an alumni has graduated, they eventually take their organization out of their bio."

Recognizing a gap in how undergraduates can contact alumni from their college, club, or specific organization, Marushak has created an app-based software that allows users to connect with alumni for different job opportunities, internships, and to build professional relationships. The app will be available on a website forum as well.

Marushak expressed, "I really want to push that you are able to connect with your proper alumni. Let's say, for example, an alumni has a job opportunity. Why would they not want to hire someone that was in the same organization, club, or school?" The app will also

support a feature that allows employers to sign up for AlumLinks and post a job where they can swipe on candidates, and candidates can do the same for job postings.

Marushak has been working with the Center for Entrepreneurship, specifically the Director, Alison Gilbert, after she gave a presentation to one of his classes. He explained, "I kind of pulled her aside at the end of class and really asked about the different aspects of it. And it's been really interesting because I was lucky enough to get into HawkTank at the right time, they had the application closed, I think a week after I had had talked to her, and luckily I've been working on this business for quite some time now."

Marushak has been getting support from various parts of the Monmouth community, including Joe Palazzolo, Ed.D., a lecturer in the Department of Management and Leadership within the Leon Hess Business School, and Sigma Pi faculty advisor. "I would say Alison and Dr. Palazzolo have definitely been the two that have been pushing me in the right direction," said Marushak.

The HawkTank finals will take place on Apr. 29 at 5 p.m. in the Center for Entrepreneurship. Marushak elaborated, "It's actually pitching your idea to real investors and who knows, maybe someone in the room could be a possible investor for my business so I'm definitely treating it as as real as possible and not so much just a school event, but this is an actual thing that I can carry into the real life."

Marushak concluded, "Building the pitch and everything is definitely awesome and I'm extremely happy to be a part of it as a finalist."

# Bailey's senior goodbye

**BAILEY FREDERICKS**  
MANAGING EDITOR /  
LIFESTYLES EDITOR

I never procrastinate. I like to think that it is one of my best qualities; I have never submitted an assignment late, I haven't even ever pulled an all nighter just to get a paper in on time. I get assignments done days before their due dates because I absolutely hate the stress and anxiety that procrastination fosters. I never understood why people procrastinate... until now.

I'm currently writing this article on Sunday, April 20 at 1:58 p.m. To preface, I prefer all articles for the paper to be completed by Sunday before 1:00 p.m., meaning this is the first time I've missed a deadline. I suppose the streak couldn't last forever.

To be honest, I have been dreading writing this article. It is my last time publishing in "The Outlook," my final moment being considered a student journalist, and my last chance to leave my mark on this campus - talk about pressure.

So, I guess the best way to kick this off is by explaining a little more about myself. Hi, my name is Bailey. I'm a senior here at Monmouth studying communication. I'm the President of Monmouth's chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America and the Managing and Lifestyles Editor at "The Outlook."

Now that the boring stuff is out of the way, let's dive a little deeper. When I first arrived at Monmouth as a freshman, I was overwhelmed to say the least. My class workload mixed with an inconsistent, ever-changing schedule immediately showed me that college is light-years away from what I experienced in high school. Freshman year flew by in a blurry mess of mixed emotions, lost friendships, and a heaping pile of (fun) mistakes.

By sophomore year, when the

euphoria of being away from hometown rules faded away, I found myself incredibly bored and out of place. I was taking an Introduction to Journalism class and was working on an article about the Department of Music and Theater Arts' adaptation of the musical "Fun Home." I figured a good article was going to waste just being submitted for a class assignment; so, on a complete whim, I reached out to the Editor-

in-Chief at the time, Isabella Hanna, and asked if she would be interested in publishing my first ever article. She said yes and asked me to come into the newsroom for a meeting. From then on, I found a new home.

I always loved writing growing up. I was the kid in school who got excited for English class and cheered when we had the opportunity to creatively write. Coming into college, I lost that spark when I was enrolled in gen-ed classes that honed in on themes of math and science. Further, "The Outlook" provided me a space to reignite my passion for writing. I've enjoyed every second of being a part of such an amazing club and team that provides an outlet for creative thinkers to work together, showcase their talents, and improve their journalism skills in unimaginable ways.

I've been going back and forth between what I want my farewell message to leave

behind, and honestly, all I can think of is to say thank you. Thank you to Isabella for giving me a chance, thank you to past editorial staffs for seeing my potential, and thank you to our advisor, Dr. V, for an incredible amount of help and guidance. Lastly, of course, an enormous, monstrous, giant, immense, thank you to this year's editorial staff, and especially our Editor-in-Chief, Taylor, for not only making an astounding team, but for also simply being amazing humans. I have made countless memories in the newsroom that will last a lifetime.

Now, for my advice to any students who cared to read this far: get involved. Don't spend your few college years doom scrolling in your dorm when you could be out meeting new people, exploring the world, and discovering lessons about life. I know it may be scary and overwhelming, but our time on earth is not meant to be spent living comfortably. Put yourself out there, conquer your fears, do it even when you're tired and unmotivated, have a breathtaking time, and thank me later.



PHOTO COURTESY of Bailey Fredericks.

# The ultimate Summer bucket list

**EMILY STACHERSKI**  
STAFF WRITER

With summer right around the corner, it's the perfect time to create your own summer bucket list filled with 10 must-do activities that will make the 2025 summer season unforgettable. You can do these activities with friends, family, or even by yourself if you want! Most of the items will also be able to be completed even on a budget.

**1. Make a summer playlist:** Having this playlist can make the rest of the items on the list more fun. It's a way to capture the essence of the season with your favorite, upbeat summer tunes. Whether you're sharing it with friends or enjoying it solo, this personal soundtrack will help you keep the memories you make and enhance the vibes.

**2. Take a road trip to a**

**nearby city or town:** This is an easy way to escape daily life without needing to travel far. Going to dainty, small towns or exploring a big new city offers so many possibilities for fun. You can take in the scenic views on your drive, try local food, see cool landmarks, and overall make spontaneous stops throughout the day.

**3. Have a picnic:** This is the perfect way to soak in the sun, relax outdoors, and spend valuable time with family or friends with your favorite foods. You can pack your favorite snacks and bring the coziest blanket. Not only can you choose your own foods, but the scenery as well! You have the option of going to a local park, a beach, or even your own backyard. It's an affordable, easy way to make the most out of the nice weather.

**4. Watch the sunrise or sunset at a scenic spot:** There's something so beautiful about witnessing the sky come to life with all the different colors. The peaceful-

ness of the early morning, or the calm of the incoming night, is a great moment to embrace nature's beauty and recharge either with your favorite company or alone. The unforgettable view will leave you refreshed and ready for the next moment of fun.

**5. Try a new recipe:** This is a great way to freshen up your summer bucket list with different cuisines and flavors; you can even experiment with fresh, seasonal ingredients like different fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Cooking something new can be exciting and rewarding. Not only will you enjoy the experience, but you get the added bonus of enjoying a delicious homemade dish in the end.

**6. Host a backyard barbecue or cookout:** Hosting a get-together is a must-do to bring together good food, great company, and fun memories. You can get out the grill and make some iconic summer meals. Enjoying time together by eating, chatting, and playing games

is a great way to spend summer evenings.

**7. Have a craft day:** Whether you're working with paint, beads, or fabric, crafting allows you to unwind and express your creativity. You can make anything you want including personalized gifts, home decor, paintings. This is another activity you can choose to do with friends or by yourself. Additionally, it will once again add a sense of accomplishment when you finish your project.

**8. Have a movie marathon:** Having a movie marathon is the ultimate way to unwind and enjoy your summer. Bring blankets, popcorn, and your favorite summer movies. Iconic summer movies you can add to your "must-watch" list include "Mamma Mia!," "Teen Beach Movie," "Dirty Dancing," "The Parent Trap", and "500 Days of Summer".

**9. Have a bonfire:** This is one of the most quintessential summer activities that is a must on your list. Buy

ingredients for s'mores, grab your favorite people, head to the backyard, and enjoy the warmth of the fire under the stars. The cozy atmosphere screams "summer" and is another great way to capture the magic of the essence of summer nights.

**10. Spend a day at the beach:** If you're reading this, you have a great beach available to you right here in Long Branch. This activity alone is a great way to spend a summer day because you have so many options on what to do. You can sunbathe, play volleyball, swim in the ocean, build sandcastles, take long walks along the shore, or pack food for a beach picnic. The salty air mixed with the warmth of the sun makes a day at the beach an unforgettable way to enjoy summer.

With these 10 must-do activities, you're sure to create lasting memories and make the most of your summer. Let this list inspire you to embrace the summer moments and make your 2025 season one to remember!

# Class of 2025 graduation playlist

**LORELAI HILARCZYK**  
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

**W**ell, it's that time of year, Hawks. It's graduation season, which means the class of 2025 is about to be on their way to bigger and better life experiences. I've created a playlist compiled of 25 graduation inspired songs for those looking to get in their feels before they get their degree. Here are 15 tracks as a preview to what's on the full compilation. Congratulations, Monmouth seniors, and best of luck on your endeavors!

**"Vienna" by Billy Joel:**

While graduate is the time to speed up and start your new life outside of college. There's still the importance of slowing down you crazy child and realizing you really do have time. Joel does a great job of reminding us of that.

**"Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)" by Green Day:**

I feel as though this song needs no explanation. It's the perfect anthem to reflect on all the good times you've had in college and how it all led you to this moment.

**"Closing Time" by Semisonic:**

Well in a way it is closing time

on your college career and now it's time to "let you out into the world."

**"You'll Always Find Your Way Back Home" by Hannah Montana:**

Not to make you cry anymore than you needed to but this Hannah Montana hit is perfect for this time of year. And just remember, you'll always have a place here at MU.

**"Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac:**

This Fleetwood Mac classic encompasses what it means to grow up and move on from somewhere. Take some time, breathe, and let all the frustrations out.

**"Young Blood - Acoustic" by Noah Kahan:**

Kahan said it best, "Keep your time, keep your mind, keep your humble/Start your life in the middle of the jungle/You/You, young blood." Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

**"You're On Your Own, Kid" by Taylor Swift:**

While this song might not be the most motivational, it's important to remember that your independence is so valuable.

**"Where'd All the Time Go?"**

**by Dr. Dog:**

This otherworldly song matches the exact feeling of growing up and watching the world around you. It also has this wonderful nostalgic feel to it.

**"Ribs" by Lorde:**

The way Lorde describes "getting old" with vivid imagery will have you playing your own college montage in your mind.

**"Yesterday" by The Beatles:**

There's nothing like a Beatles song to reflect on what life means. It's important to stop and realize all you've accomplished and will continue to achieve. But, it's okay to "long for yesterday."

**"Revival" by Zach Bryan:**

While the lyrics might not reflect graduation the overall vibe and production of this track match it completely. It also has an otherworldly feeling of celebration.

**"My Way" by Frank Sinatra:**

This classic Sinatra track is a reminder that we all do things our way. The journey of how you got here is specifically unique and beautiful. You took the blows and did it all your way.

**"NOKIA" by Drake:**

Needless to say, the class of 2025 has brought the function to campus in every single way. Shoutout to the graduating editors at "The Outlook."

**"As It Was" by Harry Styles:**

Come on, Hawks, we want to say goodbye to you!

**"Unwritten" by Natasha Bedingfield:**

This track is absolutely all encompassing in terms of graduation. The world is wide and there's so many different paths to take, it's all about staying true yourself and knowing that your story is still "Unwritten."

This is just a preview of the music compiled on the playlist. You can listen and enjoy the full the soundtrack by scanning the Spotify QR code below.



IMAGE TAKEN from Spotify.

## Class is dismissed: Best graduation scenes in film

**MARISSA ALVAREZ**  
STAFF WRITER

**G**raduation caps are thrown into the air, symbolizing new beginnings. Gowns are worn, and smiles reflect the achievement of earning a degree or diploma. Pictures are taken to capture the monumental moment. For the class of 2025, this will soon become a reality. For those graduating in the upcoming years or thinking about high school graduation, there are movie scenes that enhance the experience.

**"High School Musical 3: Senior Year" (2008):**

The graduation scene from "High School Musical 3: Senior Year" reminds us that "We're All in This Together." It evokes nostalgia and bringing back memories of stars like Zac Efron, Vanessa Hudgens, and Ashley Tisdale. Nothing was better than turning on the Disney Channel to watch this classic. The audi-

ence cheers for each student as the teacher announces which school they will attend and the next step in their journey. It's a bittersweet moment as the movie series comes to an end. Still, it serves as a reminder to graduates always to follow their passions. It highlights the importance of friendship and a supportive community as they embark on new chapters in their lives.

**"Legally Blonde" (2001):**

Elle Woods, portrayed by Reese Witherspoon, is initially known for her beauty in the comedy film "Legally Blonde." However, she proves her intelligence and determination throughout her journey at Harvard Law School. Through hard work and perseverance, Elle impresses everyone around her, including herself, ultimately earning her law degree. This empowering story conveys a powerful message about self-belief, challenging societal norms, and staying true

to oneself. As Elle builds her confidence, she discovers her true potential as a successful lawyer. The journey culminates in a memorable graduation scene where she delivers a speech that reinforces the film's theme: "It is with passion, courage of conviction, and a strong sense of self that we take our next steps into the world. Remembering that first impressions are not always correct, you must always have faith in people. And most importantly, you must always have faith in yourself."

**"Booksmart" (2019):**

The coming-of-age comedy "Booksmart" follows two high school friends, Molly (Beanie Feldstein) and Amy (Kaitlyn Dever), who are the valedictorian and salutatorian of their class. After years of hard work and strict adherence to rules, they realize on the eve of graduation that their classmates have successfully balanced academics and partying, while they have not. Determined to make up

for lost time, the best friends embark on a wild and chaotic night filled with parties, misadventures, and unexpected self-discovery. For those who can relate, this film is a witty and heartfelt celebration of friendship, individuality, and stepping out of your comfort zone. It reminds us that it's never too late to discover new things about yourself, especially when graduating and starting a new chapter of your life.

**"Lady Bird" (2017):**

The excitement of moving to a new city, exploring a different state, and meeting new people is especially appealing to someone from a small town who wants to embrace new experiences. Christine "Lady Bird" McPherson (Saoirse Ronan) is a strong-willed and outspoken high school senior living in Sacramento, California, during the early 2000s. She embodies the dream of many who yearn for change as graduation approaches, as she navigates the realities of new experiences.

Christine aspires to escape her small-town life and attend college on the East Coast, far from her working-class family and Catholic school background. The film beautifully captures the bittersweet and the emotional rollercoaster of identity.

As graduation approaches, the emotions and experiences depicted in films like "High School Musical 3," "Legally Blonde," "Booksmart," and "Lady Bird" resonate deeply with graduates. Each story not only celebrates the achievements and milestones of students but also emphasizes the importance of friendship, self-discovery, and embracing new beginnings. These films remind us that while graduation marks the end of one chapter, it also opens the door to countless opportunities and adventures. By drawing inspiration from these narratives, graduates can approach their future with confidence, passion, and a belief in their own potential, ready to take the next steps on their journey.



# Inside “A Minecraft Movie”: A sit down with Chris Galletta

LORELAI HILARCZYK  
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

“A Minecraft Movie” has taken the internet and cinemas by storm. The homage to the 2011 video game features a star-studded cast of Jack Black (Steve), Jason Momoa (Garett Garrison), Emma Myers (Natalie), Sebastian Eugene Hansen (Henry), Danielle Brooks (Dawn), and Jennifer Coolidge (Vice Principal Marlene).

Not only has this film been a huge success, but it’s also sparked nostalgia among the younger generations who grew up playing the game. Its lighthearted, silly nature is the exact feeling needed to be brought back into people’s lives. From taking over social media with videos of “Chicken Jockey!” to the outside of your McDonald’s Happy Meal, “Minecraft” is here to stay.

I had the pleasure of sitting down with one of the film’s writers, Chris Galletta, to chat about his career, the creation of the film, and the reception the movie has received.

Galletta always knew he wanted to be in film since he was a little boy after seeing “Masters of the Universe” (1987) and “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” (1989). He discovered his love of writing, and went to film school in New York at St. John’s and then Columbia, to major in screenwriting. For Galletta, writing has become second nature, fueling him to keep creating.

“A Minecraft Movie” came into the picture as a writing assignment from Warner Bros. Studios, supplied by his agent. He wrote several drafts and a final draft in late 2023, but the “Minecraft” movie has been in development since 2014. Other writers had written drafts of the movie as well, and the ultimate goal was a finished product that clicked with the cast, producers, and director.

“This one [this film] seemed to fit. So I kept writing on it, and I got really close with the director, and we kind of rewrote the film together,” He said. Galletta specifically wrote the “shooting script” of the film, which was used throughout filming on set in New Zealand in early 2024.

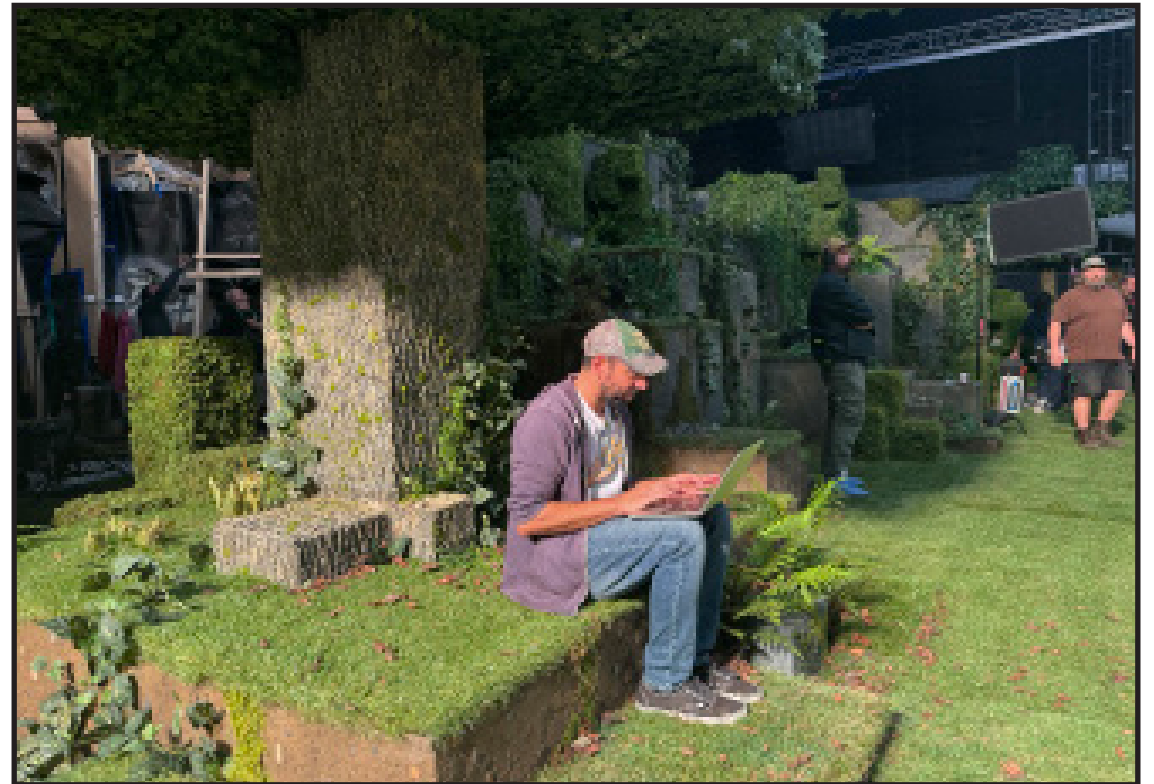
The director, Jared Hess, who you might know from creating the 2004 film “Napoleon Dynamite,” and Galletta worked closely on set, including rewriting dialogue to fit certain actors after casting, adding funny bits, and staying true to the world of “Minecraft.”

Safe to say, Galletta remained

heavily involved after the script had been written. “I talked with the producers a lot about changes that I kind of had nothing to do with in terms of visual effects, but we would talk creatively about what it would all mean to the story. I tried to stay as involved as I could because I really cared. I love the movie. You’re on set with these people, you feel a sense of— It gets into your blood a little bit,” Galletta said.

As I mentioned after casting, some characters were tweaked to fit that actor’s personality. Black’s character Steve originally had a British accent and was definitely not the outlandish, wildly hilarious Steve we got on the big screen. One distinct characteristic of Steve that was added because of Black was those hilarious, spontaneous songs like “Steve’s Lava Chicken,” “I Feel Alive,” and “Ode to Dennis,” all of which have become viral videos and memes.

“Ode to Dennis” is a special one to Galletta since he was there during its creation and even plays guitar on the track. The fans in theatres simply could not contain themselves after hearing this song and seeing a villager get emotional with a single tear as



Chris Galletta on the set of “A Minecraft Movie” in New Zealand.

PHOTO COURTESY of Chris Galletta.

Black serenaded his beloved pal.

“The audience does like that song. It makes me happy because it’s extremely silly. We’re so happy because fans are deciding what they love, and it’s never the thing you expect,” He said.

Another aspect added because of the actor was Momoa butchering the Spanish language

as his character, Garett Garrison.

Those moments had me rolling over in laughter at the sheer stupidity and good fun of it all. Everything wasn’t imagined on the fly (pun intended), though. Many moments were depicted through stunts and CGI technical aspects, such as the village fight scene or the elytra wingsuit flying

scene. The block tree scapes, the villages, and parts of the caves were all scenic designs physically built to create that immersive experience.

“We have a really smart fanbase of basically computer programmers. So you kind of have to wink at them and try to bring them in, in a smart way.” He continued, “We were really happy with the techno-blade stuff and the ‘Boots of Swiftiness’... And people are pumped that that’s in there.” Along with some help from the creative team over at Microsoft, Galletta and the rest of the team are endlessly proud of the design elements they created for the film.

Galletta, along with the rest of the cast and production crew, dove into the creative process by playing the game a lot, and I mean a lot. “We played. We all played. Jack Black played the most. He played every day, literally every day,” Galletta mentioned. Their dedication to the game paid off as they produced an extremely accurate depiction of what it would be like to walk inside the “Minecraft” universe.

The success of “A Minecraft Movie” has exceeded everyone’s expectations. The nostalgic moments of the Overworld and Nether come to life on the big screen, have the fans going wild in the theatre.

While Galletta does not specifically condone the behavior of bringing live chickens indoors for the iconic “Chicken Jockey!” scene, he’s thrilled to see the fans take this film to a new level. He said, “You just want people to see the movie. The idea that it’s like a hit is crazy. ‘Cause I’ve worked on stuff that no one sees, so this way is better.” This film has truly made everyone “yearn for the mines.”

## “A Minecraft Movie” through the eyes of nostalgia

RILEY KINDLER  
STAFF WRITER

I was six years old the first time I opened “Minecraft.” I had a friend who was a few years older than me, a third grader, who had a PC in her basement and pulled me down there one rainy day to show me something her brother and her had found. It was “Minecraft.”

Multiplayer didn’t exist at the time, so I sat behind her and watched as she built a simple house. It was so boring that a hyperactive first grader should have been bored, but I was mesmerized. I went home that day and begged my mom to dish out the \$10 to get me my own copy of the game.

My friends and I built insanely complex houses and Redstone creations, pouring hours into every build. Now I even have the soundtrack saved onto multiple of my Spotify playlists, and they make me tear up every time they play.

Therefore, when it was announced that there was a movie in development, I nearly cried from pure childhood joy, but somewhere deep inside, it was also from fear. It’s common

knowledge that most video game adaptations, except for a select few, aren’t faithful to its source material. “Minecraft” is different, because the game has no real plot, but I was more worried that they wouldn’t keep the aesthetics. How can you have a movie about “Minecraft” that doesn’t honor the block?

Thankfully it did. The movie looks exactly the way six-year-old me would want it to. The grass in the movie has layered textures, the mobs are built out of squares, and the doors have the same patterns. Steve built himself a base in a mushroom, something I loved to do as a child. His “Lava Chicken” stand reminded me of dispensers I’d made in my youth. I remember when the Nether, villages, and elytra were added to the game, and seeing those things on a big screen made my inner child’s heart sing.

Part of the reason I had a great experience with this movie was the theatre I saw it in. My roommate and I went to a theatre in her hometown at 10PM, so naturally, there was only one actual child there. Instead, the room was filled with teenagers.

The IMAX theatre was nearly sold out, and the moment the loading screen hit, the space was filled with claps and cheers. I knew I was in for a good time. A lot of people do not like noisy theatres, and normally I do not, but this was a special exception. This felt like an “Endgame” level theatre, a community in that room that I hadn’t felt since I saw “Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour.” The passion in that room was unmatched. Everyone cheered when the Overworld was shown, the Nether, YouTubers and game developers making cameos, and when different biomes were introduced.

It gave the fans exactly what they wanted: the exploration and unpredictability of the game we were raised by. Kids my age who weren’t sporty or particularly intellectual or outgoing found a home in that game. I wouldn’t have thrived through quarantine if it wasn’t for that game, and I love it because of that. Was “A Minecraft Movie” good movie? No. But did it give my inner child another chance to hop onto multiplayer and punch a tree? Yes.

# More than 150 university presidents sign letter condemning Trump administration

**BRENDAN SHEEHAN**  
POLITICS EDITOR

**M**ore than 150 University presidents signed a letter titled, "A Call for Constructive Engagement" taking aim at the Trump administration over what the presidents view as, "unprecedented government overreach" in higher education. The letter can be found at the American Association of Colleges and Universities webpage.

"As leaders of America's colleges, universities, and scholarly societies," the letter began, "we speak with one voice against the unprecedented government overreach and political interference now

endangering American higher education."

The leaders in higher education expressed willingness to work with the government on, "constructive reform and do not oppose legitimate government oversight."

In addition, they wrote, "our colleges and universities share a commitment to serve as centers of open inquiry where, in their pursuit of truth, faculty, students, and staff are free to exchange ideas and opinions across a full range of viewpoints without fear of retribution, censorship, or deportation."

In part, they close with, "most fundamentally, America's colleges and universities prepare an educated citizenry to sustain our democracy."

The letter was signed by

several New Jersey-based college and university presidents. These include Hubert Benitez of Saint Peter's University, Michael Bernstein of The College of New Jersey, Gregory Dell'Omo of Rider University, Christopher Eisgruber of Princeton University, Joe Bertolino of Stockton University, Jonathan Koppell of Montclair State University, and Jonathan Holloway of Rutgers University, among others.

Monmouth University President Dr. Patrick F. Leahy was not a signatory on the letter.

The letter comes the day after Harvard University announced it was suing the Trump administration after it froze billions of dollars in federal funding to the university.

The Trump administration

issued the freeze after Harvard refused to submit to a list of demands to the administration, despite the demands being sent accidentally by the White House.

In addition, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) threatened to block Harvard from enrolling international students unless they comply with the administration's demands, according to "The New York Times".

In addition to Harvard's freeze, the Trump administration has halted \$790 million in grants to Northwestern University and more than \$1 billion to Cornell University, citing the university's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion

initiatives.

The letter was published in the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which states it is, "working with our chapters and allies to defend and advance higher education as the Trump administration and many state governments are accelerating attacks on academic freedom, shared governance, and higher education as a public good."

Monmouth University's faculty union, better known as FAMCO, is a collective bargaining chapter of the AAUP.

Below are many of the universities whose presidents have signed on to the letter. Dozens of higher education experts signed on as well:

American University	Colgate University	University of San Diego	SUNY Brockport	Dominican University
Franklin & Marshall College	University of Washington	William Paterson University	Williams College	Hamilton College
Peninsula College	Connecticut College	University of Hawaii	Stony Brook University	Fordham University
Oberlin College	Maryville College	University of New England	Yale University	The New School
SUNY Geneseo	Allegheny College	Hollins University	Saybrook University	Wheaton College
Middlebury College	Rhodes College	Mount Holyoke College	Nazareth University	Colorado College
Pacific Lutheran University	Skidmore College	Rutgers University	Brown University	Bowdoin College
Saint Peter's University	Ithaca College	Lewis & Clark College	Oakland University	Smith College
Trinity College (CT)	Rider University	Lafayette College	University of Maryland	Bennington College
Emerson College	Westminster University	Carnegie Mellon University	Hofstra University	Rockford University
The College of New Jersey	Princeton University	Bates College	Duke University	Le Moyne College
Stockton University	Amherst College	University of Pennsylvania	University at Albany	Dickinson College
Reed College	Clark University	Wellesley College	Wesleyan University	Heidelberg University
SUNY Cortland	Harvard University	Northeastern Illinois College	University of Virginia	Davidson College
Whitman College	Boston University	Capital University	College of the Holy Cross	College Unbound
SUNY Delhi	Kalamazoo College	Suffolk University	University of Baltimore	Bryn Mawr College
Bard College	Susquehanna University	Montclair State University	Columbia University	The Evergreen State College
Beloit College	Colby College	Kenyon College	SUNY Potsdam	Southwestern College (NM)
Vassar College	University of Denver	Cornell University	Swarthmore College	Otterbein University
Carleton College	Grinnell College	Tufts University	University of Dayton	Rollins College
SUNY Oneonta	Union College	Drew University	Illinois State University	And others...

## Beyond our coverage

"The Outlook" is committed to bringing you the most important and essential news coverage on Monmouth University's campus. However, we live in rapidly-changing times and continue to strive to inform you of local, national and international headlines of the utmost importance.

*Compiled by Brendan Sheehan*

### Local

"Nadine Menendez, wife of ex-senator, found guilty on all counts" (New Jersey Globe)

"Baraka promises to battle Trump in fiery 'State of the City' address amid run for NJ governor" (NJ.com)

"NJ budget cuts back help for intellectually disabled people at Shore" (Asbury Park Press)

### National

"Hegseth shared detailed military plans in second Signal chat that included his wife and brother" (CNN)

"The Dow Jones is on pace for its worst April since 1932" (Wall Street Journal)

"Bernie Sanders Rally Crowd Size Tops 30K in District Trump Won Three Times" (Newsweek)

### International

"Pope Francis dies at 88 from stroke and heart failure, Vatican says" (Yahoo)

"Dozens killed as Gaza sees 'truly extraordinary' rise in Israeli attacks" (Al Jazeera)

"Putin suggests he's open to Ukraine ceasefire talks with Zelenskyy" (NBC News)

**TO/ The Outlook**

Hello, everyone! My name is Taylor Memoli and I am so honored to be this year's Editor-In-Chief and News editor! I can't wait to work with each of you. I am so passionate about *The Outlook*, and I hope all of you will want to share that passion with me. Student journalism is incredibly important. As students, you have the right to know what is going on within your campus, and at *The Outlook*, we promise to promote honest and informative articles that educate students on what is going on around them here at Monmouth University. If anyone has any questions or story ideas for *The Outlook*, please feel free to reach out to me at any time! My email is s1321538@monmouth.edu. Happy reading!

- Taylor Memoli, Editor-in-Chief and News Editor

Hi everyone! My name is Bailey Fredericks and I'm this year's Managing Editor & Lifestyles Section Editor. I'm so excited for this year & to read all the awesome articles everyone writes! If you would like to write for the lifestyles section or have any other questions about *The Outlook*, please email me at s1321296@monmouth.edu!

-Bailey Fredericks, Managing and Lifestyles Editor



**Real Estate Club**

Hello everyone! The 19th of this month is a career night in the Bey Hall auditorium at 6:30 p.m. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at s1322694@monmouth.edu.

- Margaret McNeil, President



**WMCX**

Here at WMCX, there is so much space to grow and use your voice! With opportunities such as broadcasting Monmouth University's home basketball games, having weekly talk shows on a variety of topics surrounding sports, music, pop culture, or politics, or becoming part of the E-board, there's a place for you at WMCX! If this sounds like something for you, come to one of our weekly meetings every Wednesday at 2:45 in Plangere 236. Our doors are always open if you want to come and visit us upstairs. And stay tuned for some exciting events happening later this semester!

- Beyonce Carranza, Program Director (VP)

**HAWK TV Hawk TV**

Hawk TV is excited to be back for this semester! We are the student run television station on campus, and it is a great opportunity to meet new people and get involved! Our studio is on the first floor of Plangere, and we currently have four shows. Hawk TV News shoots biweekly on Tuesdays starting at 7 p.m. and alternates with the Creation Corner that starts at 7:30 p.m. On Wednesdays we film our sports show called the Extra Point and Thursdays, our pop culture show called Triple Scoop, and both of those begin at 7 p.m. We hope to see you this semester!

- Ava McGinty, Hawk TV Secretary and Executive Producer of Hawk TV New



**LASO**

The Latin American Student Organization (LASO) brings students together to celebrate Latin American culture. The club is open to everyone and hosts events like Día de los Muertos and their annual Outdoor Movie Night where they show a movie from latin american and have latin american cuisine. LASO also supports minority representation and encourages leadership. It's a great place to meet new people, learn about different traditions, and be part of an inclusive community.

- Jeff Gonzalez, general member

**PRSSA PRSSA**

Hi Hawks, join the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) & Shadow PR, Monmouth's student-run and nationally affiliated PR firm, for meetings every Wednesday at 3 p.m. in Plangere 234. PRSSA gives students the opportunity to gain real experience in the PR world through hands-on work with local clients and guest speaker events. All majors & grade levels are welcome!

- Bailey Fredericks, Co-President



**"College Core" - WMCX**

Tune in every Wednesday from 1-2 p.m. for rocking tunes and gossip!

xoxo - Bailey

**MU CD College Democrats**

We have 34 reasons you should join the College Democrats. Join Team Freedom today!

- Owen Bros, President



**College Republicans**

We are so excited to see you all and work to preserve your freedoms on and off of campus this year!

-NJFCR Chair Jacky Bruno and MUCR Chair Giavanna Cangialosi



**MONMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**

SCHOLARSHIP WEEK

**April 18, 2025 to April 27, 2025!**

Monmouth University's tenth annual Student Scholarship Week continues for just a few more days! Don't miss out on all the great things taking place all over campus!

**And don't forget to get your *Scholarship Week Passports* in!  
You could receive a Dunkin Donuts gift card and even be entered into the  
Grand Prize Drawing!**

The Scholarship Week Committee thanks everyone who participated and helped make this week a success. Congratulations to all students who are participating! And congratulations to all faculty mentors who helped these students in their success! We look forward to next year!

For more information and a full list of the week's events, visit:  
[monmouth.edu/provost/student-scholarship-week/](http://monmouth.edu/provost/student-scholarship-week/)

**SPECIAL THANKS TO THE  
OUTLOOK'S 2024-25  
EDITORIAL TEAM + STAFF!**



*The Outlook's Advertising Team extends a heartfelt gratitude to the entire editorial team and staff for their constant dedication and hard work throughout the entire school year.*

Special thanks to:

- Taylor Memoli – Editor-in-Chief/News Editor/Creative Director
- Bailey Fredericks – Managing/Lifestyles Editor
- Taylor Memoli – News Editor
- Michael Gruseke – Opinion Editor
- Lauren Bevacqua – Features Editor
- Lorelai Hilarczyk – Entertainment Editor
- Brendan Sheehan – Politics Editor
- Mairead Spellacy – Sports Editor
- Kiley Hubbard – Comics Editor
- Henry Boody - Photographer
- Bryce Goodwin - Advertising Manager
- Marina Vujnovic, Ph.D. – Faculty Advisor
- Tarra Emery – Office Coordinator

# SPRINGFEST

2025

**RIDES, LIVE MUSIC, GAMES,  
VENDORS, FOOD TRUCKS, ANIMALS,  
AND MORE!**

**April 27th**

**12pm-4pm | Commuter Lot**

**Rain location: Ocean First Bank Center**

# Campfire Night & More!

April 24 - 8 pm, SC Patio

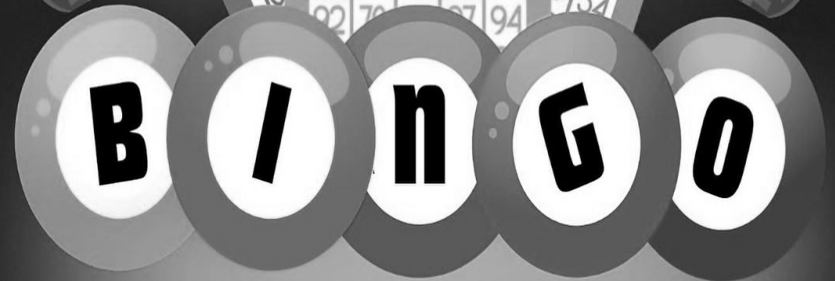
**COME JOIN THE FUN!**

Trivia, Prizes, Music,  
Campfire Food, and  
Plushies!



SAB PRESENTS

# BINGO BIG money



APRIL 25, 2025

OCEANFIRST BANK CENTER  
7:30PM-10PM

SURPRISE GUEST CALLERS FOR  
BIG TIME PRIZES!



# SAVE THE DATE!



FRIDAY, APRIL 25 @ 5 PM

FOLLOWING MONMOUTH VS. DELAWARE at 2 PM

**DINNER ON THE DIAMOND**

WITH MONMOUTH SOFTBALL

MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY STORE

# Spring 2025 READING DAY SALE



T-Shirt  
\$10

Sweatpants  
\$15

Hoodie  
\$20

Tuesday, April 29th  
Doors open at 9am!

Items available while supplies last. In-store, select styles only. No additional discounts. Final sale.

# Sean Ketchen scores in double overtime in win over Delaware

**NATALEE MATTEI**  
STAFF WRITER

The Monmouth Hawks took down the Delaware Blue Hens Saturday Apr. 19 thanks to the double overtime goal by Sean Ketchen, a graduate midfielder, and a stunning performance by the graduate goalkeeper, Tommy Heller.

The Monmouth Hawks and Delaware Blue Hens fought in a scoring battle on Saturday afternoon. Neither team was able to extend a lead that was larger than two goals. By the end of the first quarter, the game was tied at three a piece. Monmouth was able to manage a 7-6 lead at the end of the half. That lead was thanks to Ty Caffarelli, junior attacker, who scored three goals in the second quarter.

At the end of the fourth quarter, Monmouth led Dela-

ware 11-10. With just 23 seconds left on the game clock, Tyler Owings, sophomore midfielder, scored to force the matchup into overtime. Both teams seemingly lost their footing due to the high temperatures in the extra frames, causing unnecessary turnovers and a second OT frame. Despite those hardships, Ketchen was able to put the ball in the back of the net with just over 90 seconds left on the clock. Ketchen's game winning goal was his second of the game. This win was the Hawks first win in overtime in over a year. The Hawks were able to stay alive for nearly two overtime brackets because of Heller's stellar performance in net. He tallied up 17 saves on 27 shots on goal. That was his second straight game with 17 saves, almost meeting his season high of 19.

It was Caffarelli that started the scoring battle. Just three minutes and eight



PHOTOS COURTESY of Anya Kazmierczak.

**Sean Ketchen** capitalized the win for the Hawks in double overtime to secure their win for the first overtime win since March 2024.

seconds into the first quarter, Caffarelli scored both the game's first goal and his first of five, assisted by Nick Teets, senior midfielder. A little more than two minutes later, Delaware's Brendan Powers, took advantage of a

man-up advantage, evening the score at one a piece. Power's goal was assisted by Hank D'Ambrogi. Powers ended the game with four goals. Caffarelli's five goals were a match for his career high number of

goals in a single game. The Hawks next matchup is against Fairfield University Stags at Rafferty Stadium on Apr. 26, where they look to build off their end of season momentum.

# Hawks overwhelm Rutgers in resounding victory

**EMILY STACHERSKI**  
STAFF WRITER

On Tuesday, Apr. 15, the Monmouth baseball team delivered a dominant victory, beating Rutgers for the first time since 2016, showing off their offensive and defensive strength.

In the first inning, Monmouth wasted no time getting to work. Six men got on base, two of them scoring runs. The next inning, the Hawks put four on the board, extending their lead to 6-0. Senior Jay Bant hit a two-run double, grad student Chris Andrews gave up a sac fly, and junior Nick Lovarco had an RBI double, aiding the Hawks to the start of their victory.

After Rutgers continued to get beat by our defense scoring no points, junior Aidan Bretschneider and Bant both got RBI base hits leaving the team with a big 8-0 lead. Throughout the first

five innings, Monmouth's pitching staff only allowed four base runners. At the bottom of the inning, the Hawks scored their most points of the game. Eight

players got on base and five scored thanks to Andrews', Lovarco's, and junior Simmi Whitehill's RBI singles.

With the score 13-0, Rutgers finally made their way

onto the board, pairing two runs at the top of the eighth. Without a response from MU at the bottom of the inning, Rutgers had the bases loaded but was unable to score

anymore thanks to pitcher Derek Benzinger's double play. This ended the game with a Hawks victory of 13-2.



PHOTOS COURTESY of Anya Kazmierczak.

**Aidan Bretschneider** recorded two career-highs with three hits and three runs.

# Wrestling for More: Monmouth's Club Team Pushes for D1 Status

**SAMANTHA TATE**  
STAFF WRITER

On Mar. 12, three athletes from the Monmouth Wrestling Club traveled to the Brookshire Grocery Arena in Shreveport, Louisiana, to compete in the National Collegiate Wrestling Association National Championships. While their accomplishments deserve recognition, their story extends beyond their victories on the mat. The club is fighting for success in competition and the acknowledgment and support needed to elevate the program to Division I, joining the ranks of other athletic programs on campus.

The three Wrestling Club athletes earned their place in Louisiana through standout performances this season. Current senior captain Luke Petaccia, his co-captain and rising senior John Dooley, and freshman Noah Niemiera each represented Monmouth on the national stage, demonstrating talent and dedication and competing until the last possible week in the season. Petaccia took fourth in the Bob Quade Cyclone Open and third in the Mid East Regional tournament, qualifying him for nationals. Dooley is now a two-time regional champion for Monmouth and went 11-2 in his 2025 matchups. Niemiera became the first freshman throughout the club's history to compete at nationals. Additionally, following the conclusion of their season, both Dooley and Petaccia earned the title of NWCA Scholar All-Americans.

Despite competing at the same level of difficulty and commitment as many other collegiate Division I programs, the Monmouth University Wrestling Club has yet to receive the honor of no longer being just a "club" team. "Honestly, the 'club' in our name is not justified. We wrestle in open tournaments that include teams from NCAA D1 all the way to D3. Monmouth County produces some of the best wrestlers in the country, and they just pass right through us to go wres-

tle D1 elsewhere. We've got the talent right here, we just need the platform to keep them home," Dooley said. The transition from a "club" to D1 involves key legal hurdles, including Title IX, budgeting, scholarships, and making sure everything fits into the school's athletic department. Yet the foundation for a varsity wrestling team is already in place, with only legal and financial restrictions standing in the way.

As of November 2019, before Monmouth's move from the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference to the Coastal Athletic Association, the university had an athletic budget of approximately seventeen million dollars, according to former athletic director Marilyn McNeil's 2019 interview with the Asbury Park Press. With an already competitive roster, supporters argue that instead of allowing for talented athletes to walk right through West Long Branch, Monmouth should invest in

recruiting and elevating a program that is already proving itself.

"As a student-run organization, we take pride in our accomplishments and will continue to grow and turn more heads. If we aren't being recognized now, that's ok, as it will come in due time," Petaccia said. Besides the clubs' own Instagram ([monmouthwrestling](#)) and Sigma Pi's Fraternity on campus ([sigmapimu](#)), there was no publicity about this competition.

"We have three guys that attended one of the four biggest wrestling tournaments in the country, so it was really surprising when students didn't know about it," Niemiera said. For those on the mat, the need for recognition is not about validation—it's about opportunity. Wrestling at a high level requires resources, exposure, and recruitment, all of which the club doesn't get handed to them. Despite this,

the team continues to work, doing what they can to help grow into a team.

Despite their successes, the financial battle to support the athletes is ongoing. Unlike CAA-funded programs, the team receives minimal financial assistance from the university. According to the club's captains, they have gotten \$3,500 total from the school specifically from the Student Government Association (SGA). However, this barely meets the requirements for what it takes to operate a competitive wrestling program. Most of their funding comes from the wrestling community—supporters willing to invest in the team's future, such as friends, family members, or even the athletes themselves. "We've had thousands and thousands of dollars donated by people who believe in what we're building," said Dooley. "On Monmouth's most recent Giving Days, we raised more than some of the Division I

programs here, which says a lot. The support is real."

One of the team's biggest backers has been the Slendorn family, a name well known in New Jersey wrestling circles. Their contributions, as well as many others, have helped with the costs of traveling, housing, and any clothing necessary to be suited up for nationals. Additionally, with funded programs with dedicated training facilities and personal trainers, the Monmouth wrestlers have found and created their own space to train and work. "We even built our own mat room on campus ourselves, just to practice," said Dooley. None of their successes would be achievable without the guidance and motivation from their coach, Jake Benner. He wrestled for Ocean Township High School, where he was an individual state champion wrestler and obtained a record of 142-1. Later, he went on to wrestle at Rutgers University Division I program for four years and graduated in 2022. Now, he is training his team to follow a similar path as he did, with just as much success. "It is technically a club, but the athletes we have take it much more seriously than that. We have practices three to five days a week during our 'season,' and although the practices are all optional, we almost always have full participation. It is really special to see everyone's commitment to the team."

Their ability to thrive despite these obstacles is a testament to the passion and determination within the program. But the question remains—if a team can raise this much outside support, compete at a high level, and draw attention from the wrestling community, why isn't Monmouth investing in its success? The wrestlers believe the school already has the foundation for a Division I program, it just needs the commitment to make it happen. Dooley said, "Not to toot our own horn, but respectfully, we've done more than some of the D1 programs here. We're proud, we've earned it, and the recognition is overdue."



PHOTOS COURTESY of @sigmapimu on Instagram

*John Dooley won two regional championships, becoming the first in school history to do so.*

# The Outlook



# The Outlook

"The Outlook" hosts  
Ellen Jovin's The  
Grammar Table



THANK YOU  
FOR READING

- "The Outlook"  
24-25 staff



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