New Science and Engineering Research Center Opens

Facility is among the most technologically advanced in Virginia

by Kelli Caplan | January 10, 2026

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Christopher Newport's new cutting-edge Science and Engineering Research Center (SERC) is officially open, ushering in a new era of innovation and designating the University as a hub for progress in Hampton Roads and beyond.

The 83,000-square-foot building, which features traditional brick CNU architecture, is anything but traditional inside. It is brimming with state-of-the-art research and teaching spaces and labs that elevate the University's offerings and ability to prepare students for the ever-changing world. It is considered one of the most technologically advanced facilities in Virginia.

> "For years, for decades to come, our students will advance knowledge here," said President William G. Kelly. "They will improve lives here. Our students will prepare for careers we can't even imagine, and our researchers- students and faculty - will find solutions to challenges that don't yet exist."

The new center will offer Captains opportunities to deepen their knowledge and skills in the fields of physics, computer science, information science, cybersecurity, engineering, kinesiology, mathematics education, neuroscience, and business. It provides critical teaching and research space for the School of Engineering and

Computing (SEC) and the Department of Mathematics.

“Seeing this building come to life is incredibly meaningful to me. It represents an investment in the future of kinesiology and health research at CNU and the students who will learn here for generations to come. The labs and resources inside this space will help shape meaningful research and prepare students to make a lasting impact in their communities and beyond,” said Lydia Elkins, ‘26 Biology.

The completion of SERC “shows us what is possible when people work together to advance a common goal for the region and for the Commonwealth,” said Board of Visitors Rector Christy Morton ‘01.

Not only is the center a game-changing asset for students focused on careers in STEM, it also establishes a launch pad and research access to propel community and area industry seeking innovative ways to grow and excel.

“This is a building that serves everyone at CNU, and I, we, are committed to ensuring it services the Hampton Roads region, and through the research, the learning and the programming that will take place here, this building will service every Virginian,” said President Kelly. “Every part of this magnificent building, every laboratory, every microscope, every classroom, every drone, every makerspace, every 3D printer, every square inch, is dedicated to the future.”

Jennifer Dunn, who serves on the Board of Visitors at CNU and is vice president of communications at Newport News Shipbuilding, one of the area’s largest employers, believes SERC will create a workforce pipeline for the region.

“CNU isn’t just building the next generation of scientists, researchers, and technologists, they are building leaders with a well-rounded education in the liberal arts. All of our businesses will be better from the knowledge, insight, and passion that these Captains will bring to our teams,” said Dunn ‘95.

SERC brings to life a wide array of opportunities. SERC features a two-story drone lab to develop and test uncrewed aircraft and other robotic systems, an avenue to ready students studying computer science and engineering for work in the high demand technology sector.

For Aubrie Kooiker, ‘26 Computer Science, the idea of being able to have access to a large drone lab is exciting, as it will allow her to broaden her skill set and elevate her drone experience and expertise.

“As a senior research student, I have been limited to flying small drones in a cramped, makeshift cage due to lack of space. With the SERC's new robotics lab, I get to expand to using larger drones with a huge, dedicated flying area, which I look forward to working with for my master's thesis this upcoming year," she said.

The center offers a demonstration classroom to showcase chemistry, physics, and engineering phenomena. Also included in the building is an exercise lab and biomechanics lab to support the growing major of kinesiology.

“We are extremely excited for the opening of SERC and the possibilities this space will provide for our students, faculty, and community. The labs and technology in the SERC will expand opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning that will bring course content to life, fostering development of the technical skills needed to excel in their professional lives. This building also provides unique spaces unlike others nearby in Virginia,” said Dr. Nicole Guajardo, Vice Provost of Academic Success and Engagement and former Dean of Natural and Behavioral Sciences.

Anton Riedl, head of the SEC, said SERC presents creative, scientific, and pioneering ways to enhance the research being done on campus.

“One of the most visible additions is the new Robotics and Autonomous Systems Lab, which includes dedicated space for assembling robotic platforms alongside a two-story open area equipped with a motion capture system for testing drones and mobile robots,” Riedl said. “In addition, the School of Engineering and Computing will have a new Cybersecurity Networking Lab, two additional faculty-student research labs, a dedicated capstone project lab, and a range of flexible teaching and project spaces.”

A makerspace is an integral part of SERC, providing students and faculty the chance for collaboration and innovation using various fabrication methods, including 3D printers and other computer numerical control machines. The dedicated space will foster a culture of entrepreneurship at CNU as it inspires connection with the professional community.

All of the building's specialized spaces, labs, and classrooms are designed to strengthen the University's focus on research and the broad implications it can have on and off campus.

"Our success in attracting external funding, along with our recent recognition by the Carnegie Foundation as a Research College and University, reflects that commitment. The new Science and Engineering Research Center takes this work to the next level by providing state-of-the-art spaces for cutting-edge research, innovation, and product development," Riedl said. "With the addition of a makerspace and machine shop, our students and faculty can now move seamlessly from theory to prototype, gaining experience with modern manufacturing techniques and turning ideas into reality."

Riedl believes SERC will give students a platform from which to make important discoveries and gain sought-after skills and knowledge that will not only amplify their CNU experience, but also equip them with a competitive advantage in the work world.

"Our students and faculty are very much looking forward to moving into the new building and taking full advantage of these new opportunities," he said.

SERC Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting