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KIANA THE CAPTAIN MEETS LESTER THE TURTLE

PRE-MED STUDENT ON MISSION TO BECOME A VETERINARIAN

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | February 27, 2024

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Christopher Newport has not only provided Kiana Lawson with engaging professors and supportive peers, but also with a broad network of zoo keepers, animal shelter workers, vets, and finned and furry animals. And all of them, even little Lester the Turtle, have reinforced her lifelong dream of being a veterinarian.

Making Connections with Kiana Lawson



Lawson, '25 [Cellular, Molecular, and Physiological Biology](#), is on the pre-vet track and is diligently working to ensure that she has embraced every opportunity on and off campus to make her ambition a reality.

“College is an investment,” she said. “I have tried to pour into it as much as I can. I have milked as much opportunity out of my four years as I can.”

Lawson, a [Pre-Med Scholar](#), has volunteered at the Virginia Zoo, the Virginia Living Museum, and the Peninsula Regional Animal Shelter. This summer, she will be interning with a large-animal vet in Iowa.

“I have known I wanted to be a vet since I was a child,” Lawson said.

In middle school, there was a focus on animals and she was able to interact with all sorts of creatures. In high school, she worked at a vet’s office. Each experience has driven home that she is on the right track. When her dog suddenly got sick last summer, Lawson witnessed first hand how critical emergency veterinary medicine is, and how there is a shortage of vets to handle such situations.

“It created a sense of urgency for me and gave me a deeper meaning of the profession,” said Lawson, also a member of the [President’s Leadership Program](#) and the [Honors Program](#).

When it came to choosing a college, she wanted her school to be in close proximity to opportunities to work with animals. Christopher Newport fit the bill.

“I wanted a place that would challenge me academically, but was also close to zoos and aquariums,” Lawson said. “I have found that here. I have been able to do so much as a pre-vet student.”

Lawson shadowed zoo keepers to learn animal husbandry at the Virginia Zoo in Norfolk. At the animal shelter, she watched as vets took care of the stray animals. And at the Living Museum, just a few miles from campus, she is working with aquatic turtles. She is especially fond of an aquatic turtle named Lester, for whom she is working on developing activities to keep him entertained and engaged.

“I have loved all of it,” she said. “I am so thankful for it.”

In addition to her work with animals out in the field, Lawson has also ramped up her resume with diverse opportunities offered by CNU on and off campus. She has traveled on a [study abroad](#) trip to the Amazon rainforest to study tropical ecology and biodiversity.

Her inquisitiveness and drive to learn as much as possible has resulted in her doing undergraduate research on the ability of mummichog fish to spawn along the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. She will be presenting her findings at a conference later in the year.

“At other universities, research for undergraduates can be very few and far between,” Lawson said. “That’s one of the great benefits of CNU.”

She has fully embraced the [four pillars](#) of a CNU education: study abroad, undergraduate research, service and internships.

Lawson’s experiences at Christopher Newport have broadened her knowledge base, and in turn, deepen her passion for veterinary science. Recently, she took a master class on suturing offered by the CNU National Minority Association of Pre-med Students Chapter (MAPS). Learning what it feels like to stitch up an animal or a person added a new dimension to her career plans.

“I enjoyed it so much that I decided that maybe I will specialize in surgery,” she said. “I had never thought of that before.”

Having a pre-vet advising track at CNU, she said, has helped shape her trajectory.

The track provides a way for students to seek guidance from professors about their medical aspirations and the best path necessary to achieve them.

“It’s nice to hear different perspectives. It’s been very helpful to me,” Lawson said. “I am blessed and fortunate to go to a school that is so committed to providing experiences and where all students want to help each other and the professors are always willing to help.”

The many facets of her education have allowed her to build a diverse foundation that has been bolstered by a wide variety of experiences on and off campus. She knows those building blocks must be in place if she is to achieve her goal of admission to veterinary school. There are only 30 vet schools in the United States, she said, so admission is

highly competitive with acceptance rates of 10 percent or less.

When Lawson, from Chesapeake, Va., started looking at colleges, she toured CNU. From the time she stepped onto campus, she knew it was meant to be her home for the next four years.

“What sold me on CNU was the community. It was 10/10,” she said. “I took the campus tour. I loved how people held the doors open and greeted each other. It was a great environment. It was the right choice for me.”
