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### CAPTAINS CONVERGE ON STATE CAPITOL

#### STUDENTS LEARN AND LOBBY.

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | January 30, 2025

*Above: This is the Captains in the Capital delegation with their signature CNU scarves. (photo by Ben Leistensnider)*

*Read time: about 2 min*

Captains are converging on the Virginia State Capitol to turn its historic spaces into learning places.

Through four programs, students are meeting legislative and government leaders, learning the lawmaking process and even buttonholing members of the General Assembly to promote policy proposals.

### CAPTAINS IN THE CAPITAL

The largest CNU delegation came by bus for the annual Captains in the Capital event. Organized by the Wason Center for Civic Leadership, the group included students representing the Wason Center, the President's Leadership Program, Community Captains and the Student Government Association.

A highlight was when they were asked to stand and be recognized in the House and Senate chambers.

"I would like to welcome Christopher Newport University to the Capitol today," said state Del. Shelly Simonds, who



Criminology students and Dr. Steve Keener visit the House Chamber as part of Criminal Justice Reform Lobby Day (photo provided by Prof. Keener)

represents Newport News and introduced the Captains. “On behalf of myself and Delegate (Jeion) Ward (‘95), who is an alumna of CNU and a Captain for Life, today is their annual Captains in the Capital Day, where sixth President William G. Kelly, along with several faculty and staff, accompany students to Richmond to learn about lawmaking in the Commonwealth.”

In addition to observing the legislative sessions, the students met with lawmakers and their staff and members of the staff of the Attorney General and Governor. They also met with Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM LOBBY DAY

Criminology Professor Dr. Steven Keener '12 guided students on a more targeted mission. As part of Criminal Justice Reform Lobby Day, seven students met with other criminal justice reform advocates from across the state, then had five meetings with legislators and legislative staff to discuss specific criminal justice reform bills.

“Not only do the students learn on this trip, they also have the opportunity to put their knowledge and their passion to good use, urging legislators to consider policies that would improve the quality of life for many Virginians,” Keener said.

## SOCIAL WORK ADVOCACY DAY

Social Work Professor Dr. Diane Griffiths brings social policy students for a similar day of advocacy. In class, the 16 students learn the legislative process, select and research a proposed bill, build an advocacy plan for it and then take that plan to Richmond. Once back on campus, they reflect on their experience.

“Our legislative advocacy day allows students to build their skills in engaging with policy-makers to advocate for issues that impact vulnerable Virginians,” Griffiths said. “Social justice, with its accompanying call to action, represents one of the six core values of social work.”

## UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SHOWCASE

Four CNU students are showing off their research through a new initiative directed by Dr. David Salomon, director of Student Research and Creative Activity. The Network for Undergraduate Research in Virginia (NURVa), which Salomon co-founded, sponsors the upcoming inaugural Undergraduate Research Showcase at the Capitol.

The students are preparing posters for display and hope to meet influential lawmakers and staff.

Connor Auby, '26 Neuroscience, and Hunter Moore, '26 Neuroscience, will showcase "The Impact of Snakeskin Knockdown on Health and Disease," research in Microbiology and Neuroscience conducted with Neuroscience Professor Dr. Anna Salazar.

Olivia Walker, '27 Psychology, and Marcelo Viteri, '27 Psychology, will display the results of their research in "The Effect of Employee Observations of Procedural Justice in Deserved and Undeserved Rewarding Work Environment," conducted with Psychology Professor Dr. Jeffrey Gibbons.

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