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## VIRTUAL REALITY LAB DELIVERS WORLD TO CAMPUS

## VR HEADSETS BECOME ELECTRONIC PASSPORT FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | December 4, 2025*Read time: about 2 min*

Jay Doran may be seated in a McMurrin Hall lab, but he's actually exploring the ruins of Pompeii, strolling around and examining the ancient Roman archaeological site.

Doran, '26 [History](#), is one of the Captains test driving the new Virtual Reality Lab (VRL) recently launched by CNU's [Institute for Public Humanities](#).

By simply putting on the lab's virtual reality headsets, Doran and other students are able to see, touch, and experience important historical sites and events all over the world without leaving the Great Lawn. The headsets double as electronic passports, as they provide an opportunity to "travel" to places like Pompeii or Anne Frank's home in Amsterdam.

The humanities institute is using technology often reserved for STEM fields to bring to life languages, classics, music, English, and history in a captivating and immersive way.



"CNU is making huge advances in technology that you don't typically see in humanities," Doran said.

The University has invested almost \$200,000 in establishing the lab, which occupies a space once home to a computer lab. It features multiple stations equipped with cutting-edge Meta Quest and Apple Vision Pro headsets.

“Traditional classroom content and skills still matter, even in the age of artificial intelligence. But VR offers another way for students to work closely with faculty to develop skills of research, analysis, writing, oral communication, and collaboration, among other skills. Virtual reality is another form that allows us to immerse ourselves in the human experience - across time, space, and in varied situations so we can gain understanding, perspective, and empathy,” said Dr. Andrew Falk, associate dean of Humanities and director of the Institute for Public Humanities.

The lab will offer a large library of different VR options, many of which will be created by CNU faculty and students.

It is slated to officially open in the spring, but in the meantime, the lab is being fine-tuned by students and faculty. The lab will be available to the entire Christopher Newport community, and there will be continued collaboration with community partners.

The VRL, Falk said, sets CNU apart in both its commitment to technology and to the humanities.

“At other institutions, a VR lab cannot always be found, and when it is, it typically rests in the hands of STEM faculty and students. But at CNU, an investment has been made in the humanities. We have cutting-edge digital technology - in VR, but also in augmented reality, podcasting, ArcGIS digital storytelling, documentary film production, and archaeology conservation and preservation. And it’s all available to our students and faculty in state-of-the-art labs and studios,” Falk said. “As I like to say, ‘The humanities does not cede the ‘T’ in STEM’ because we, too, can become high-tech humanities and incorporate cutting-edge technology in the undergraduate experience and in service to faculty scholarship.”

Several faculty members have already contributed VR content.

Dr. Mary Wright, associate professor of English, took a VR camera to New Orleans to produce a tour focused on the city’s rich literary scene past and present.

“While creating my project, I experimented with narration, provided information backstores that my audiences need to understand material, and melded the visual, the audial, and the textual into a creation that can be used, modified, and rebuilt anytime. I loved being a filmmaker, a sound engineer, and a storyteller,” she said.

Using VR, students will be able to walk the tour with Wright and gain new perspectives by seeing and learning about all of the destinations “in person.”

“VR connects the viewer’s imagination with curated scenes to form a powerful union of knowledge within a shared atmosphere,” she said. “Similar to digital writing, a creator can redefine a typical narrative sequence while inviting users to find their own stories within each scene. Essentially, these powerful tools offer faculty boundless opportunities to take students places around the world, infuse our instruction, and support the individual imagination that must always be nurtured, all while never leaving McMurran Hall.”

Meanwhile, Doran, who graduates in the spring and hopes to attend law school, said he will carry the knowledge and inspiration he gleaned from his high-tech humanities experience at CNU to help him succeed in his next chapter.

“It has enhanced my education greatly, giving me new and marketable skills that I suspect will contribute greatly to my career after graduation,” Doran said.

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