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ANCHORED IN ACHIEVEMENT

CONVOCATION 2025 CELEBRATES TOP SCHOLARS AND FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS.

by [Kelley McGee](#) | May 16, 2025

Read time: about 4 min

As the academic year drew to a close, the University honored the exceptional achievements of students and faculty during the 30th annual Convocation for the Conferral of Honors and Awards, held at the Ferguson Center for the Arts. The ceremony recognized graduating seniors who have earned Latin Honors, including cum laude, magna cum laude and summa cum laude, and honored faculty who achieved promotions and tenure.

President William G. Kelly praised students for their academic success, and expressed his gratitude to the faculty for their outstanding teaching, mentorship and commitment to providing research opportunities for students.



Grace Walters '25 and Rector Christy Morton '01

“This event is second in importance only to Commencement, as we formally progress with our seniors on their journey to becoming graduates of Christopher Newport University and Captains for Life,” said President Kelly. “Today we honor those graduating seniors who have performed at the very highest levels of academic excellence throughout their time at Christopher Newport. We also celebrate our distinguished faculty who have reached important milestones in their careers. Our faculty, our students and every member of our community truly represent what it means to be anchored in excellence.”

During the ceremony President Kelly presented the Gregory P. Klich Academic Achievement Award, the highest recognition of academic excellence at Christopher Newport, to Grace Walters '25. The Klich Award is presented annually to a Captain who has completed at least 120 credits, earned the highest number of credits at CNU, and maintained a 4.0 GPA. Walters received a \$5,000 prize.

“Grace has excelled in and outside of the classroom. She is highly motivated and an exceptional student, double majoring in Computer Science and Philosophy with a minor in Leadership Studies. As a President’s Leadership Program and Honors Program student, she also served as a student intern in the Student Records Systems office and participated in many service projects and undergraduate research. In just a few weeks, Grace intends to pursue work with Epic, a software development company. Grace, we applaud your academic excellence!” said President Kelly.

On behalf of the Board of Visitors, Rector Christy Morton '01 awarded promotion, tenure, emerita and emeritus status to select faculty members.

“Today, we recognize faculty members who are making an important transition in their professional lives, faculty whom the Board of Visitors has promoted in academic rank, faculty upon whom the Board has conferred tenured appointments, and finally those retiring faculty upon whom the Board has conferred emerita and emeritus status,” Morton said. “We so appreciate teacher scholars like you for your unwavering dedication to continual learning, the advancement of knowledge, the integration of scholarship into teaching and the development of innovative industry-relevant curriculum. Because of faculty like you, Christopher Newport continues to receive national rankings and recognition, including U.S. News and World Report ranking CNU as the number one regional public university in Virginia.”

Faculty is organized into ranks: Instructor, Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Master Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor, and Distinguished Professor.

“Promotion is the result of a careful peer review of a candidate’s teaching, scholarship, and campus and professional service records,” said Provost Quentin Kidd, adding that the process of earning tenure generally takes more than six years.

Emeritus status was also conferred on four faculty members.

“These are faculty who have served their active time as professors but whose knowledge and wisdom is such that we want to keep them around in some capacity, if they wish, as a permanent reminder of the affection and respect generated by a career of dedicated and distinguished service,” Kidd said.

Dr. S. Lynn Shollen, Associate Professor in the [Department of Leadership and American Studies](#), [Quality Enhancement Plan \(QEP\)](#) Director, and the 2024 Alumni Faculty Award recipient for Outstanding Teaching and Mentoring, was the distinguished keynote speaker. In her remarks, Shollen reminded students that the process of self-discovery doesn’t end with graduation, but instead evolves throughout a lifetime of learning and growth.

“Your identity, and therefore your authenticity, is ever-evolving. This question of who you are in a particular space will arise continuously for you, even into adulthood as long as you are challenging yourself by entering new spaces. If you strive to be a lifelong learner – and that’s part of the power and promise of an education embedded in the liberal arts – you will be asking this question throughout your entire life,” Shollen noted. “Pay attention, because how fascinating it will be to watch your answers shift as you self-reference your core authenticity to adapt, gaining experience and wisdom to become even more of your authentic self, and how fascinating it will be to witness the sensemaking of you, and your impact in this world, expand over time.”

Dr. Matthew Hettche, Associate Professor of Management



and Marketing and [Department Chair of the Luter School of Business](#) was selected as the recipient of the 2025 Alumni Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching and Mentoring, awarded for exceptional commitment to teaching and learning excellence and to University citizenship.

The Hon. Nate Fontaine '07, President of the CNU Alumni Society, noted Hettche's reputation for being "deeply humble" yet "in possession of an incredible resume filled with meaningful and critical service to both the University and his field of study."

"A fellow alum captured things best when they noted, 'It amazes me how he's able to unite the past and present members of the Luter School of Business to develop professional skills and to create meaningful connections that span across retirement or graduation,'" Fontaine said.

The list of faculty members who have been promoted or granted tenure is as follows:

PROMOTION TO SENIOR LECTURER

- Crystal E. Shelton, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Lecturer of Political Science
- Qingyan Tian, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Lecturer of Leadership and American Studies

PROMOTION TO MASTER LECTURER

- Kristen Skees, B.F.A., M.F.A., M.L.I.S., Senior Lecturer of Fine Art and Art History

TENURE

- Michael S. Lapke, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Engineering and Computing

TENURE AND PROMOTION TO ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

- Patrick X. Gardner, B.A., M.T.S., Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion
- Chelsey L. Hamm, B.M., M.M., Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Music, Theatre, and Dance
- Hessam Keshtkar Vanashi, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Engineering and Computing
- William B. Phelps, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Engineering and Computing

PROMOTION TO FULL PROFESSOR

- Jeffrey A. Gibbons, B.A., M.S., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology
- Christi L. Harris, B.F.A., M.F.A., Associate Professor of Fine Art and Art History
- Matthew R. Hettche, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Associate Professor, Luter School of Business
- Elizabeth J. Jelinek, B.A., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion
- Ann E. Mazzocca Bellecci, B.A., M.A., M.F.A., Associate Professor of Music, Theatre, and Dance
- Darlene A. Mitrano, B.S., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Molecular Biology and Chemistry
- Kelly J. Rossum, B.M., M.M., D.M.A., Associate Professor of Music, Theatre, and Dance
- Janet C. Steven, B.S., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Organismal and Environmental Biology
- Alice E. Veksler, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Communication
- Andrew J. Velkey, B.S., M.A., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology
- Linda M. Waldron, B.A., M.A., M.A., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology

THE AWARDING OF EMERITA AND EMERITUS STATUS

- Nathan W. Harter, B.A., J.D., Professor of Leadership and American Studies
 - Timothy R. Marshall, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology
 - Antonio C. Siochi, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Engineering and Computing
 - Lisa S. Webb, B.S., M.Ed., Ph.D., Professor of Molecular Biology and Chemistry
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