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COMPETITION

CNU'S VICTORY STREAK CONTINUES.

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | November 15, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

The Captains have once again brought gold back to campus, winning a prestigious international leadership competition in Chicago. It's the fifth time CNU students have won the competition in the last seven years. Christopher Newport's Blue Team came in first among 16 undergraduate teams from across the country at the International Leadership Association's Student Case Study Competition. CNU's Silver Team and White Team also performed strongly.

Not only is it the fifth time CNU has taken home the gold since 2018, it is the tenth consecutive time Captains have placed in the top three spots of the annual competition. All of these wins were against nationally-ranked schools, including Jepson School of Leadership at the University of Richmond, Gonzaga University, and Warren Bennis Leadership Institute at the University of Cincinnati.

“This win and the collective efforts by all speak to the belief that CNU is an exemplar in the area of leadership development,” said President William G. Kelly. “The performance by our students and the faculty and staff is a testament to the fact that we are anchored in excellence in all that we do.”

The “Blue Team” was led by Samuel Raymond, ‘24 [Computer Science](#), and included Jaime Steigerwald, ‘25 [Global Commerce and Culture](#), and Allison Cooley, ‘26 [Kinesiology and Neuroscience](#).

The [Department of Leadership and American Studies](#) and the [President’s Leadership Program \(PLP\)](#) collaborate on supporting Christopher Newport’s involvement in the competition.

All of the team members this year are part of PLP, which “equips students with the tangible skills required to influence positive change for the greater good,” said Lacey Grey Hunter, Director of PLP.



“This most recent victory on an international stage demonstrates the strength of Christopher Newport’s commitment to developing leaders who effectively engage in the leadership process,” Hunter said.

The competition required each team to identify a problem relating to environmental leadership. The Blue Team chose to focus on the environmental impacts of the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy and then worked to propose a leadership-based solution that could be applied to other Olympic and large-scale events.

The team has met regularly since July, working diligently and cohesively to create a presentation titled “Nature vs. Sport: The Biodiversity Stakes of the 2026 Italian Olympic Games.”

“Novelty, attention to detail, and enthusiasm set us apart,” Raymond said. “The crux of our presentation was the blending of unique and lesser-known leadership theories (some created by our own faculty) into a coherent and actionable model rather than relying on what was widely known.”

Victoria Carrico, assistant director of PLP, worked with the students throughout the entire process and was with them in Chicago. She watched proudly as they triumphed.

“Knowing that Sam, Jaime, and Allison had poured every ounce of their energy into this project for almost four months made it all the more meaningful to watch their hard work pay off,” she said. “They are the kind of bright, driven, exceptional students who make me remember why I love working in both the field of leadership studies and in student affairs, and it was so rewarding to see them shine on this global stage.”

Competing was exhilarating for the students and winning felt deeply rewarding, considering all the hard work and thought that they, and Leadership Studies faculty advisors and PLP staff, poured into competition preparation.

“I immediately felt an overwhelming sense of pride in our efforts as a team. Looking around and seeing our fellow Captains, who also competed, cheering us on was so surreal. Knowing we had put our everything into this, the victory was rewarding, to say the least,” said Cooley, who competed at ILA for the first time.

Being part of the competition, Steigerwald said, was “incredible.”

“I love the field of leadership studies, and being surrounded by so many big names, from Peter Northouse to Cynthia Cherry, was surreal,” she said. “Knowing these people thought our research was credible and intriguing was one of the most rewarding aspects of my CNU career.”

Winning first place not only rewarded the team’s hard work, but members said it also underscores CNU’s strong focus on leadership.

“Across our three teams, this demonstrates CNU’s capacity to produce students who raise and set the standards of preparation, performance, and professionalism,” Raymond said. “It continues CNU’s reputation as a serious leadership university. Behind every victory is a successful support network, so this really highlights the faculty and

staff who gave us insights from their range of competencies as well as encouragement.”

Steigerwald agreed, saying that the success at the competition reinforces CNU’s reputation as “one of the biggest names in leadership out there.”

“It was incredible to hear people perk up when I would say I was a student at CNU. For me, this win has only reinforced my admiration for this school and this program,” she said.

Dr. Lynn Shollen, Associate Professor of [Leadership Studies](#) who served as a faculty advisor to the Blue Team, said, “The reputation for success that CNU has established in this competition, and within the ILA organization, speaks to the consistently remarkable caliber and dedication of our students, leadership studies faculty, and PLP staff.

“We continue to challenge our students as thinkers, writers, creators and collaborators,” she said. “We continue to build and emphasize the importance of practical application of leadership education and development within and beyond the classroom.”

The Captains hope to extend their winning streak at next year’s conference in Prague, Czech Republic.
