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CLASS OF 2024 GRADUATES WITH POMP

TIME AT CNU MARKED BY GRIT, ACCOMPLISHMENT

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | May 13, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

Cheers reverberated across the Great Lawn Saturday as more than 800 students, wearing caps, gowns and huge smiles, gathered for Christopher Newport's first hybrid Commencement ceremony.

"To the Class of 2024, I have one message for you today: You are ready. Let me say that again: You are ready!" President William G. Kelly told the students, the first to graduate under his leadership. "You are anchored in excellence."

Saturday's Commencement was brimming with significance for the Class of 2024. They ended high school amid the beginning of an unprecedented global pandemic. Most were denied a traditional graduation ceremony. In light of their tumultuous start to college, this graduation was momentous, a tribute to their perseverance.

As "Pomp and Circumstance" played, the 847 graduates streamed in, radiating excitement. This class waited a long time for this special moment, and the graduates savored every minute. It was finally the Class of 2024's chance to shine and be recognized.

"You look great in your caps and gowns and I hope you are enjoying the pomp and circumstance," Kelly said. "You've earned it."

Board of Visitors Rector Lindsey Carney Smith Esq. '01, recounted the uncertainty covid brought to the graduates'

freshman year, one filled with masks, social distancing, and virtual classes. She commended them for the strength they exercised in the wake of adversity.

“You have made it! The light at the end of the tunnel is upon you, and it is so bright and so great, beckoning you to the next stage of your life of significance,” she said. “Embrace that light and allow your spirit to push to face and overcome new challenges, take new adventures, make new friends, and most importantly, help someone, positively impact their life. Show them what it means to be a Captain of Christopher Newport University.”

The hybrid Commencement format was unique this year, combining a traditional ceremony with personalized traditions. The Class of 2024 gathered for the conferral of degrees before beginning a Grad Walk, which provided each student the opportunity to walk across the stage at a set time to receive their diploma as their proud family and friends stood just feet away, and in many cases had the honor of placing the traditional academic hood representing the achievement of a bachelor’s degree on the graduate. First Lady Angie Kelly greeted and congratulated each Captain as they stepped onto the stage.

From there, there were a slew of CNU traditions for graduates to enjoy, including throwing the pennies they received freshman year into the Tribble Plaza fountain, ringing the iconic Hoinkes Plaza bell, and exchanging handshakes and hugs as they progressed through the faculty gauntlet.

“Take lots of pictures today,” President Kelly said. “Take it all in.” “If you start to doubt yourself, stop and reflect on all that you have overcome and all that you have accomplished,” he said. “Reflect on your experiences here at CNU, draw strength from walking into Regattas for the first time, walking into a class or a lab on that first day of classes, stepping onto the Ferguson stage or the TowneBank Stadium field for the first time...so many experiences that you took on and you took them on during a period in our nation that few had ever experienced. The frightening became the familiar.”

Students were given the choice of how they wanted this year’s Commencement to be carried out, and the class, having an elevated sense of the importance of togetherness, opted to gather collectively one last time to celebrate each other’s accomplishments.

“This is a first for CNU. We’ve never tried a commencement quite like this and I’m grateful to the student leaders who suggested we do it and offered great ideas about what was important to you,” President Kelly said.

In addition to the undergraduate Commencement, Christopher Newport held a [Graduate Commencement](#) on Friday, during which advanced degrees were conferred upon 61 students in the subjects of teaching, science, and financial analysis, and also a [special ceremony for athletes](#) who were unable to attend Saturday’s graduation because they were slated to compete in games.

Saturday’s Commencement began ceremoniously with English Professor Dr. Jay Paul, senior faculty member and Director of the Honors Program, knocking the mace three times on the platform, also a first for the event. Faculty looked on proudly as newly minted Captains for Life they had mentored and infused with knowledge during the past four years were given their charge to go out into the world, be happy, and do good. President Kelly encouraged them to be confident in their abilities, and to use what they had learned as Captains to propel them to success as they move ahead.

“You know the material. You have the knowledge and skills to succeed. You know yourself. You have lived and learned according to the values of honor, service, scholarship and leadership,” President Kelly said.

“Class of 2024, Mrs. Kelly and I wish you long, wonderful lives full of significance and full of love. We are so proud of you. We will never forget you.”

Before the ceremony drew to a close, President Kelly led the class in his trademark saying. “Would you please join me for one last ‘Go Captains?’” he asked eagerly.

The class joyfully agreed, jumping at the chance to be united in CNU spirit a final time.

“As always...,” Kelly shouted.

“Go Captains!” the Class of 2024 bellowed back with one voice, finishing the defining sentence proudly and loudly.

