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CAPTAINS WIN LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

CNU TEAM DEFEATS SQUADS FROM 12 COLLEGES

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | March 14, 2024

Above: Leadership Challenge competitors and coaches Zack Kelly, Bennett Cooper, Rachel Thornton, Marissa Ferland, Eric Michals, Hannah Gifford, and Victoria Carrico

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Students from Christopher Newport won a national competition by demonstrating their skills in communication, crisis management and adaptability.

The team of President's Leadership Program students defeated squads from 12 colleges at the 14th annual [Leadership Challenge Event](#) (LCE) at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan.

The team earned high praise from the judges. "One of the best I've ever seen," said one judge while another commented that the Captains "blew the competition out of the water," according to the CNU coaches.

The competition is a full day, live, interactive leadership simulation focused on crisis management. Participants develop solutions to complex social issues as they work both individually and in teams to uncover deeper social issues hidden beneath the surface of a seemingly simple problem.

"The LCE allowed me to apply my education in a high stress environment," said Bennett Cooper '24. "It required me to be confident in what I know. It really was a confidence booster for me."

CNU Coach Victoria Carrico said the students are judged on their ability to adapt, think critically, collaborate, and communicate as information about the problem unfolds throughout the day. The simulation focused on the

response to an ice storm that had shut down an entire city. The outcome is dependent on the leadership decisions made throughout the course of the competition. It tests students' ability to communicate effectively under pressure and challenges them to think about how they can create lasting, positive change as they face a real-world crisis.

Carrico, assistant director of the President's Leadership Program, and student coach Zack Kelly '24 guided the team that included Marissa Ferland '24 (team captain), Cooper, Hannah Gifford '24, Eric Michals '24, and Rachel Thornton '24. Kelly and Ferland competed on the CNU team that earned a 2nd place finish last year as well as two other awards.

Carrico and Kelly led weekly training sessions over two months, culminating in the trip to Kansas. "This competition truly allows students to put their theoretical knowledge of leadership to the test, and I'm beyond proud that our students were able to come out on top," Carrico said.

Thornton described it as a one-of-a-kind opportunity to apply the leadership, communication, and other skills learned in class. "You have the opportunity to learn from leadership professionals, react to and solve issues with your team, and share your big ideas with others," she said. "Even before you travel, you will get to practice team building through weekly meetings and bond with other students passionate about leadership and problem-solving."
