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# BUSINESS STUDENT OPENING CAREER DOORS FOR OTHER CAPTAINS

## CNU NEXT EXPANDS OPPORTUNITIES ON AND OFF CAMPUS

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | April 23, 2025

*Read time: about 2 min*

Annabelle Puckett '25 recognized early on that business was her passion.

When she was 9, she tried her hand at commerce, starting a small neighborhood business. She set herself up for success with business cards, invoices and client lists.

When it came time for college, the seasoned entrepreneur was in search of a school that would help her grow her business acumen. When she stepped foot on the CNU campus, she sensed right away she had found that place.

"I knew I wanted to come here. I fell in love with the beautiful buildings, friendly faces, and buzz of everything going on," she said.

She quickly became part of the buzz.

Over the past four years, Puckett has made her mark. But her most recent endeavor may be her most enduring and impactful. She has launched CNU NEXT, which stands for Nurturing Emerging Executive Talent. It is a collaboration between Christopher Newport and the Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce (VPCC).

The idea is to bridge the gap between CNU and the community by bringing businesses and students together. To make it happen, she has worked closely with faculty at the Luter School of Business and staff from the Chamber.

“CNU NEXT was created with one goal in mind: to keep talented CNU students right here on the Peninsula by helping them build meaningful connections with the local business community early on,” said Puckett, who is majoring in [Finance](#) and [Management](#).

The [Luter School of Business](#) student is confident that her vision will expand CNU’s reach in the community and in turn, help students focus on tackling real-world business challenges, make connections, and hopefully, as a result, find their dream jobs in Hampton Roads.

The concept of CNU NEXT was born after Puckett met Bob McKenna, president of the Chamber. It occurred to her that there was a lot of potential in bringing the University and Chamber together, both to help students and businesses.

CNU NEXT is an advisory board composed of students, faculty and Chamber representatives. It has three main components:

- An internship program that will match students with internship goals.
- A speaker series that will identify potential speakers from local businesses who can share insights on industry trends, career development and leadership.
- Classroom projects, which will offer Chamber businesses the opportunity to submit proposals to CNU students and professors.

“For the Chamber, this collaboration is a great way to engage the next generation of business leaders, develop future hires, and stay connected to what students are learning and valuing in today’s workforce,” Puckett said.

The group’s objective is to keep as many CNU graduates on the Peninsula as possible in jobs that they love.

“We want students to know about all the opportunities on the Peninsula and want to stay,” said Puckett, also president of CNU’s [Women in Business](#) club and a member of the Captains Educational Enrichment Fund (CEE-FUND). “So many students come here, go to school, graduate and leave. We want to change that.”

CNU NEXT expands the University’s ability to have an impact on regional businesses by both offering them a highly-skilled pool of job candidates and by providing expertise from students and professors to help them address market challenges and thrive.

As Puckett, who is exploring different job options, works to get CNU NEXT off the ground, she is hopeful that it will continue to flourish, even after she graduates.

“I love Luter. It has been such a great experience for me. I am so fortunate to be part of such an amazing program,” she said. “I hope that I have planted the seeds for this deep enough that it will grow.”