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## BIENVENIDOS AL CAMPUS!

### CAPTAINS WELCOME SPANISH COMMUNITY GROUP TO CAMPUS

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | September 25, 2025

*Read time: about 3 min*

Chris Lewis '26 stood in front of a crowd of visitors on campus and raved about what makes Christopher Newport special.

And he did so flawlessly in Spanish.

“La biblioteca original fue construida en mil novecientos sesenta y ocho pero tenía muchas renovaciones,” he told the group, explaining that the University's original library was built in 1968 but has since undergone many renovations.

Lewis received a robust round of applause and smiles as he shared details about the school he loves with a group of Spanish-speaking women who were at CNU for the first time.

“It's important to be inclusive to everyone so that they have the chance to explore campus and see what CNU is all about,” said Lewis, who is majoring in [political science](#) and minoring in [Spanish](#). “All people should have the privilege of visiting our beautiful campus regardless of what language they speak.”

The tour was part of an assignment from his [Spanish in the Community](#) class. It not only provided Spanish practice for Lewis and his classmates, but also forged a strong connection between the University and the Spanish community.



The women, wowed by the students' abilities, were awestruck by the beauty of campus and the descriptions of its buildings the students offered in their native tongue.

Members of a social group from the Peninsula Agency on Aging (PAA), the women live in the area but none had ever stepped foot on campus. Until the tour, they had no idea how dynamic and welcoming the University was, and how many opportunities are afforded to its students.

"This is my first time. I think it's amazing," said Marca Diaz. "We are very much enjoying it. It's important to mix different people and languages. It's a great idea."

Being invited to come to CNU for the tour was exciting, said Rosie Garland, who was also on the tour.

"This is a wonderful thing for the Spanish community. We are very grateful to be here," she said. "The students are doing so well."

The tour was the brainchild of Dr. Kevin Anzzolin, who teaches the class and has placed a high priority on community engagement. The mission of the class "is to provide students with awareness of how and why Spanish language and Latino culture are central to the Hampton Roads area," he said.

As part of the class, Anzzolin's students have read to youngsters at local libraries, will learn from a professional medical interpreter, and will soon visit a local business specializing in folk medicine specific to Latino culture.

"The course provides snapshots of issues affecting the Latino community, tasks students with learning some grammar and vocabulary, and provides the means for students to take part in the community," said Anzzolin, lecturer in the [Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures](#).

The tour proved to be a win-win for the students and the community, offering a way to come together and learn from one another. It also aligns with goals of the University's [Strategic Compass](#) to make Christopher Newport as inclusive as possible for both students and neighbors and to connect with the community.

"I hope students have a chance to listen, learn and be heard - across languages and across generations. When students have the opportunity to truly listen and not just to words but to the stories, experiences, and wisdom embedded in different languages - they discover that communication goes far beyond vocabulary and grammar," Anzzolin said.

Bringing community onto campus forges a deeper connection on many levels. It offers insight to students and also blurs the line that often separates the community from the campus

"Creating a welcoming environment is essential because it breaks down barriers that might otherwise make community members feel that the University is an exclusive or intimidating place," Anzzolin said. "When people feel genuinely welcomed on campus, they begin to see the University as their university, a place where they have a voice. This sense of belonging transforms the relationship between 'town and gown' from one of separation to one of partnership."

For Jewel Yarney '28 and Stefani Lopez '27 the tour provided perspective and practice.

"Connecting with the community is what I think is really important," Yarney said.

As Lopez got to know the women, she said, relationships were formed and goodwill was palpable. Not to mention, she was able to sharpen her conversational Spanish skills.

"Even if there is a language barrier, this shows we can support each other," she said. "It's a learning experience for our students and everyone in the community."

The women, part of a PAA program called Cafecito, which means "coffee time," often visit new places, giving them a wider view of the area in which they live.

"It's very, very important because our seniors need interaction and socializing," said Clara Laury, community health coordinator at PAA. "Today has been wonderful. The students are doing great, and I love seeing the interaction between the two generations."

Anzzolin expects the tour to be the first of many, and that the experience will inspire students to do more in the community and for the community to not be strangers on campus.

“I hope inviting a group like the Peninsula Agency on Aging underscores the University's commitment to our larger community in Newport News and Hampton Roads,” he said. “Universities aren't just for young people! They are living, breathing multigenerational and multilingual places meant to serve the community.”

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