

NEWSROOM

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [2025](#) / [May](#) / President Kelly's Spring Commencement Remarks

PRESIDENT KELLY'S SPRING COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

May 17, 2025

Read time: about 5 min

Editor's note: President Kelly gave the following remarks as prepared for delivery at the 2025 Conferring of Degrees on May 17, 2025

Good morning, It is a truly great day to be a Captain!

Today is truly a day to celebrate. We celebrate and lift up the graduates of the Class of 2025. We celebrate the families and friends who stood beside you throughout the journey! We celebrate our faculty who have poured their knowledge, their inspiration, their patience, and their heart into our graduates. We celebrate our hardworking staff and especially all of those who made this glorious day possible. How about this amazing Great Lawn - Thanks to our Grounds crew and everyone who pitched in this week!

Thank you Dr. Paul, Provost Kidd, Dr. Holland, Dr. McGuire, the bagpipers and the Wind Ensemble for your contributions this morning.

Today we gather to celebrate our community: Our Board of Visitors, and the dedicated boards and foundations who contribute so much to our success and of course our cherished friends and supporters. There are so many hands on the helm guiding this journey ... today we celebrate all in attendance with us and those watching online ... Thank you!

This is an historic moment in the life of this university. As the banners tell us, this is the 100th conferring of degrees in the university's distinguished history, and today we will welcome over 1,000 Captains to the ranks of our Alumni and officially welcome you as Captains for Life!

Captains, you are ready to excel in whatever you choose to do next. Whether it's starting your career or heading off to graduate school, you have the skills... the hard skills and the soft skills...and you have the knowledge to thrive.

Because your education was embedded in the liberal arts, you know how to think, and think critically, how to work collectively in groups and value the diversity that each member brings to a team, you know how to write and how to listen, and I know you know how to lead.

Thanks to our amazing professors, you are current with the latest thinking and technology in your chosen field.

That is a lot, but there is more...Our Core Values - honor, service, scholarship and leadership.

These four values are the secret sauce that makes CNU so special and why we are on our way to being the number #1 regional public university in the nation.

My message for you this morning is a brief but simple one... You are a Captain and soon to be a Captain for Life because of the way you live your life and embody the core values of this university we so cherish.

As I made my way around campus over the past week I have noticed a lot of cars being packed up, so many rooms being emptied, and thankfully a lot of Green-to-Go containers being returned to Regattas!

You have been putting aside so much of what became part of your life over the past four years and as you clean out, pack up, and recycle ... I ask you to ensure you never leave behind what makes your experience as a Captain special and different.

Please take with you and hold tight to our Core Values of Honor, Scholarship, Service, and Leadership.

We have collectively invested in them and I promise you they will serve you well if you make sure they serve as your compass for the journey ahead.

First and foremost...we value Honor. As Captains, you demonstrate honor in all you do. As an incoming student, you signed the honor code and over your college career you built upon the values instilled in you by your family and friends. You lived on a campus that embodies the words and spirit of that Honor Code and today you will go out into a world that needs you to live by that Code now more than ever.

Respect is an essential element of honor.

Throughout your time on campus you learned to demonstrate respect in many ways. You showed that respect with your compassionate and loving response to each other following the tragic loss of Forever Captain Ava Kilmer and we again extend our sympathy to her family, faculty and many friends with us today.

Just as we will not forget Ava, do not forget what was instilled in you here. Continue to live honorably in all you do and demonstrate respect in all the big and little ways and I guarantee you it will be returned to you 10-fold.

Service is another of our cherished values. As Captains, we serve others first, always placing the needs of the individual and the community before yourself. Captains contribute their time, talent and treasure to the university they love and the community they serve.

I am so proud of the many ways you have served your CNU community and the Hampton Roads region.

You give back through groups like Global Medical Brigades and your work with them in Belize over spring break, or your efforts in our local community with the Teacher's Aide Club whose support in our local classrooms helps offset the teacher shortage.

Thank you for your service... Wherever life takes you, your service will be needed.

Continue to be a Captain and continue to step up. I am certain you will reap the benefits of giving back whether it's in a far away location or in your local community. And please remember to pay it forward. You have already done that by giving the gift of your treasure for the senior class gift and, in doing so, you started to build a culture of philanthropy that will serve you...and your university for decades to come. Thank You!

Captains value scholarship.

You strive to be lifelong learners, always exploring, researching and educating, figuring out a new and better way to solve a problem or capitalize on an opportunity and the world is noticing. This year, CNU was designated as one of

the top research colleges and universities of its type in the country by the Carnegie Foundation. That's a tremendous honor for our faculty AND our students.

You have invested the vast majority of your life in attending school and learning new things and I know over your college career you have dedicated yourself to achieving the goal of crossing this stage and receiving your diploma.

I assure you ... to be successful going forward you must lean on the lessons learned on this beautiful campus. Remember ... Scholarship doesn't stop when the tassel turns.

Finally, we value leadership. It is a distinctive characteristic of Christopher Newport University. It permeates our campus.

We prepare our students to lead in the classroom, on the stage, on the field, in the community and across the Great Lawn.

Here is just one example: Noticing a gap in opportunities for women interested in business, a small group of students created the Women in Business organization to fill the void.

The group is only 3 years old and they have already built a network focused on exploring career opportunities, developing new skills, and assisting others to achieve their professional goals. That's leadership.

Captains value the strengths that every member brings to the team and we recognize the greatest joy in life is contributing to the success of those around you.

Carry forth the leadership lessons you have learned and build upon them as you go forward. Your college journey has been an incredible investment of time, talent, and treasure. I am confident that the work has paid off and I am certain you are anchored in excellence and prepared to set sail!

Mrs. Kelly and I join your faculty, staff, and coaches in our anticipation of what's to come next. We will watch with great pride as you go out into the world to Lead a Life of Significance!

Thank you again to all who supported our graduates throughout this journey.

Today is a great day for all of us to celebrate Christopher Newport University ... These graduates are proof that ... Our future is incredibly bright!

In closing, Graduates ... Take lots of pictures today, give lots of hugs, shake a ton of hands, don't forget to ring the bell, and toss your penny in the fountain ... and remember to take the core values with you wherever life may take you ...

But before you go ... Could I get one last Usie with the Great Class of 2025!

Angie and I are so very proud of you. We will never forget you. You did it!

Congratulations Graduates ... And as always ... Go Captains!
