

## NEWSROOM

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### MEET OUR NEW FACULTY

WELCOME TO THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF OUR ACADEMIC COMMUNITY.

by [Kelley McGee](#) | August 22, 2024

Read time: about 6 min

Christopher Newport is welcoming exceptional new faculty members. Meet some of the new teacher-scholars who will bring unique perspectives and experiences as they inspire and challenge our students.

### COLLEGE OF NATURAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

#### DR. SIKOYA M. ASHBURN [DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY](#)



Dr. Ashburn earned her BS in Neuroscience at Duke University and her PhD in Neuroscience from the Interdisciplinary Program in Neuroscience at Georgetown University. She has worked on a range of projects, including those investigating language processing, the underpinnings of Alzheimer's, structural MRI in adult dyslexia, and functional alterations of the cerebellum in children with learning disabilities, particularly reading and math. As a postdoctoral fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ashburn focused on the cerebellum's involvement in structural and functional brain networks relative to working memory in children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Dr. Ashburn's research will continue to use neuroimaging methods to elucidate the cerebellum's involvement in cognitive functions and neurodevelopmental disorders, which may then be used to improve current interventions.

"I am passionate about the interdisciplinary nature of psychology & neuroscience and look forward to sharing this with students as well as exploring it in collaborations with other CNU faculty," said Ashburn.

**Fun fact:** Outside of research, Ashburn can be found mentoring young women interested in pursuing STEM careers, and teaching neuro (brain) anatomy to all ages from children to medical students.

## DR. AZAD GHAFFARI

### DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS, COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING



Dr. Ghaffari holds a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and a master's degree in control engineering, focusing on robotic systems. His PhD research has explored model-free optimization algorithms and their applications in maximizing power generation from photovoltaic and wind energy conversion systems. Additionally, he has six years of industrial experience in the control, automation, and instrumentation of power plants and photolithography lasers.

His research interests include the safe control and navigation of ground and aerial autonomous vehicles, high-precision motion control of mechatronic systems, and extremum seeking control.

"From my first interactions with CNU, I have been captivated by the strong camaraderie and academic excellence within this remarkable community," said

Ghaffari. "I am honored to contribute to the ongoing success at CNU."

Fun fact: Ghaffari loves to travel and has visited 25 states in the past 10 years.

## DR. ABHISHEK PHADKE

### DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS, COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING



After completing his PhD from Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi, Dr. Phadke was happy to start the next part of his journey at CNU. His research interests span the broad Cyber Physical Systems domain with particular interests in drone swarms, vehicle and industrial robotics, blockchain applications and electric grids. Phadke says he enjoys tinkering with drones and other electronic devices. His goal is to make these real world systems secure and resilient to any disruption they might encounter.

"I am looking forward to furthering my research interests and collaborating with the wonderful student and faculty body at CNU. I am also very excited to teach from the broad and interesting course catalog available in the PCSE department and to design new courses that would prepare the students for their amazing careers ahead," said Phadke.

**Fun fact:** Phadke is one of the top (read as "best") players in the online MMO game, Pokemon UNITE.

## DR. AYAN ROY

### DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS, COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING



Dr. Roy completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in Computer Science at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, and earned his PhD in Computer Science from Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla. His research focuses on cybersecurity in vehicular networks, cyber-physical systems, and applying machine learning in these areas.

Dr. Roy says he's looking forward to engaging in meaningful research collaborations with students and colleagues. That "push beyond boundaries and drive toward interesting innovations by overcoming challenges together. Roy began teaching at the age of 15 in his neighborhood in India, where there were many kids who came from financially challenged backgrounds that needed extra help in subjects like mathematics and science.

"I aim to foster a learning environment where everyone's activity contributes to each other's growth and development," said Roy.



**Fun fact:** In his free time, Roy enjoys playing FIFA on his Playstation and cooking, especially Indian cuisine. He welcomes students to drop by his office around lunchtime since there's a good chance you'll get to try some of his homemade dishes!

## LUTER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

### DR. LONNIE CHENEY



Dr. Cheney completed his BS in Mathematics at Grove City College, his MS in Applied Physics and Computer Science at Christopher Newport and his PhD in Engineering Management from The George Washington University.

Cheney brings to the classroom over 30 years of experience as a program manager, technical manager, systems architect and systems engineer with Peraton Inc., Northrop Grumman, Inter-National Research Institute, and 3-G International, Inc. He has extensive experience in data management and data transformation predominantly with the Department of Defense Financial, Procurement, Travel, Personnel, Logistics, and Command and Control Systems. He has also been a lecturer for the past 17 years at Christopher Newport and George Washington University.

Cheney has been a Captain since 1992. "As a CNU alumnus, I am so excited to be joining the full-time faculty and looking forward to working with our students to help them to prepare for their future successes. Do what you love, love what you do."

Fun fact: Cheney is related to famed actors Lon Chaney ("Hunchback of Notre Dame," "Phantom of the Opera") and Lon Chaney, Jr. ("Son of Dracula").

## THE COLLEGE OF ARTS & HUMANITIES

### DOUGLAS CARPENTER, ARTIST IN RESIDENCE DEPARTMENT OF PERFORMING ARTS - THEATRE AND DANCE



Dr. Carpenter holds Vocal Performance degrees from UNLV (BM, DMA) and UCLA (MM). His doctoral document explored the application of pedagogy by Stanislavski, Meisner and Chekhov in music performance and its scientific basis in neuroscience and psychology. An accomplished classical crossover artist, Carpenter has won the American Traditions (2011) and Lotte Lenya (2013) competitions. His extensive performance career spans principal roles on Broadway, national tours, regional theatres, commercials, voiceovers, professional choral, and studio work. He has sung principal roles with regional opera companies, entertained on major cruise lines, and regularly performs as a soloist with symphonies worldwide.

"I am most excited to work in a small university community that affords the opportunity to really spend time with my students and help them grow individually and authentically as fully realized artists and people," said Carpenter.

**Fun Fact:** Carpenter comes from a large military family of 10 kids.

### CYNTHIA DAVIS DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Cynthia Vacca Davis is the director of the journalism minor at Christopher Newport University. A proud Captain for Life, Davis graduated from the MAT program in 2009 and served as an adjunct in the English Department from 2011 to 2022. In 2022, she served as a visiting assistant professor in charge of spearheading the new journalism minor. She is a longtime journalist, writing about faith and reporting community news for several outlets in the Hampton Roads area. She's the author of "Intersexion: a story of faith, identity, and authenticity" from Lake Drive Books. A fan of snacks and beverages, Davis can typically be found baking cookies in her office on Wednesday afternoons.

"Having been a part of building the journalism minor since its inception, I am thrilled to now be able to grow the program into a strong, vibrant part of the CNU community and the region beyond. I could not be more excited to work and learn alongside my students and faculty in this new, ongoing role," said Davis. "I am eager to connect my



students with real-world opportunities to cover news alongside working journalists. This semester, I am partnering with WHRO to immerse our capstone students in election coverage that will culminate in our local NPR election day coverage and an in-studio election night experience."

**Fun Fact:** Davis traveled to Nashville over the summer and was cast as a main character in a music video.

### **CRISTINA DE LEON MENJIVAR** **DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**



Dr. De Leon-Menjivar is a first-generation scholar in the Department of English. She has been teaching for more than 10 years in higher education and has worked at universities both around the nation and internationally. Also, as a chronically ill Latina, she is invested in pursuing research that works toward bettering health and medical communication for all people and communities.

"I am looking forward to sharing my passion for the medical humanities and looking for ways to build scholarly bridges between academic disciplines," said De Leon-Mengivar.

**Fun fact:** De Leon-Menjivar is a master swimmer and is working toward qualifying for the USMS National Championships next year.

## COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

### **DR. SARAH KOON-MAGNIN** **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL WORK AND ANTHROPOLOGY**



Dr. Sarah Koon-Magnin is a criminologist who focuses on social, policy, and institutional responses to victims of crime. Her research, teaching, and service interests include evaluating beliefs about sexual assault survivors, responses provided to disclosures of assault, and the impact of programs intended to improve the criminal justice response. Her current research focuses on the impact of the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative in a southern city and the implementation of a campus-based Sexual Assault Response Team at a regional public university in the South.

"I am so excited to join the faculty at CNU. Every single person I have encountered during this transition has been welcoming, enthusiastic, and happy to be at CNU," said Koon-Magnin. "It is clearly a student-centered institution and I appreciate the emphasis on building research experiences into the curriculum."

**Fun Fact:** Koon-Magnin was raised in a military household and lived in the Hampton Roads area twice during the course of her childhood. She says that familiarity makes it an inviting place to return as an adult.