

Hello, Newest Member of the UVA Community!

Please allow me to join the ranks of upperclassmen who have reached out to you to offer a warm welcome to Grounds and the University of Virginia. I am so glad that you are here. Your decision to go forward with your academic career this year as a member of the Class of 2024 in spite of the present uncertainty that comes with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and persistent social unrest of the last year is a courageous one. While surely no class in recent memory will have an experience like you will this upcoming year, I hope that I can as a member of the Class of 2021, a class similarly characterized by extraordinary circumstances during its first year, can offer you some advice, support, and sympathy.

The week before we, the Class of 2021 and myself, moved to Grounds in August 2017, the infamous Unite the Right rally took place in Charlottesville placing the city and the University firmly in the national spotlight in the ongoing debates concerning the legacy of the Confederacy and persistent racial injustice in America among other things. The fact that hate like that could manifest itself on Grounds was deeply unsettling for lots of us as we prepared to begin this new chapter of our lives. With that being said, I firmly believe that more good came out of that weekend than bad. It drew us together as an incoming class, as a school, and as a community. Moreover, it served as a catalyst for a number of important conversations that are only just beginning to take place elsewhere now. My hope is that the extraordinary circumstances of your first semester, and likely your first year, on Grounds will breed the same lasting friendships, fond memories, and personal growth that mine did.

As the intensity of the semester begins to ratchet up here in the coming weeks, remember to prioritize yourself and your health. Now more than ever this ought to be front of mind. You owe it to the people around you and, more importantly, yourself. Despite the fact that this year will pose a unique, and in many ways unprecedented, set of challenges to you as you make your transition, it is important for you to recognize that you are not alone. I am confident that your RA has detailed the breadth of support services for you. If you feel so inclined, do not hesitate to utilize them. There is no shame or stigma around doing so.

Additionally, I will say that during my time at the University I have repeatedly been struck by the quality of the people around me and the genuine sense of care people feel for one another. People, upperclassmen included, will not hesitate to help you if they can. You just have to learn to ask. The worst thing that can happen is somebody tells you no. This can be hard to do as an incredibly accomplished high school graduate making the transition to college. You may be accustomed to being the smartest person in the room (this in and of itself is not good moving forward; remember learning is a social process). Or, maybe you were like me and you just did not have to work all that hard because things just came easy to you. Regardless of you are you will need help at some point this year, so get comfortable asking for it.

I will leave you with this. Some people say that college will be the best time of your life just as some people characterize high school. This may or may not be true in your case. Shit, I do not know if it is true in mine three years later. What I can say is that as with anything, it is

what you make of it. While everyone is here to get a degree or two at the end of the day, I hope you come to realize that is not the end all be all. College is a place to learn about who you are and undergo immense personal growth. It is a place to make lifelong friends. It is a place where you can try new things without the fear of falling completely on your face. There are safeguards in place, so do not hesitate to take calculated risks. Even if they do not all pan out, you will inevitably learn a lot about yourself if you take the time to reflect on it.

Wishing you all the best!

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