

Hello, Class of 2024!

Welcome to UVA! I want to start by saying that, even though I don't know you, I'm proud of you – starting college itself can be scary and difficult; add on top of it a global pandemic, and you get... well, I don't need to describe what you get since you are living it yourself. I know that it may feel tough right now, but please know that everything really does pass and before you know it, you will be fully acclimated to college and UVA without the cloud of COVID-19 hanging over you!

This is the part where many of my peers writing similar letters will talk about some happy, perhaps cliché memories they've made while at UVA. And don't get me wrong, those are all really great. But I think I'll stick to saying what I myself would have probably liked to hear more explicitly as a first-year, albeit a perhaps unpopular opinion. And that would be that college is not necessarily the "best four years of your life." Now, I am not at all saying college is not awesome – for me, it has been satisfying to establish independence, be able to meet like-minded peers, and simply walk around Grounds while savoring the sweet spot between student-hood and adulthood. What I *am* saying, though, is that sometimes, college can be over-hyped. Over-hyped to the point where you could almost feel wrong inside for not being that student who works hard in class, makes great bonds with their professors, participates in and leads several extracurricular activities, and is the life of the party three nights a week. Because that way of life is supposed to be the "best four years of your life," right??

I'm here to tell you: no. At least in my experience and opinion, college really is somewhat romanticized. What people don't tell you is that sometimes, college really can be tough. Sometimes, it really does get overwhelming. Sometimes, you really do wonder what you're doing and whether you're on the right track. I had so many of these thoughts in my second year, a year where I was dealing with some level of depression and anxiety. Please know that I am not trying to scare you. Really, the thing about college is, *everyone* feels this pressure and overwhelm at some point to some extent – it's just that this "best four years of your life" mentality can act as a wall of sorts, preventing people to exchange genuine dialogue about their experiences. I am fortunate to have made a close circle of friends with whom I felt free to discuss these things, and I urge you to do the same. If all of us had just a few conversations where we took off our "best four years of your life" mask, we could break down this mentality that creates unneeded stigma amongst us students.

I wish you the best as you start your journey here at UVA. I know it sounds cheesy, but you really do belong here, which I like to think of as: you can *grow* here. I can't promise that the ride is going to be all smooth, but I can tell you that it will be worth it. I know it feels like a long time, but four years really do fly by, so just live out each moment, realizing that you will have fluctuations of ups and downs, happy and not as happy. But really, each moment is special and all of it is what makes your experience here truly yours.

Wahoowa!!

Your friend in the Class of 2021