

To my dearest First-Year,

Welcome to the University of Virginia! I understand that the current circumstances are not how you intended to begin your college career, but know that regardless of the hardships and difficulties staring you in the face that you will come out stronger and better for it in the long run. Having the opportunity to get a four-year education, especially one from UVA, is quite a blessing, so be sure to look for the positives as you begin this journey. I can honestly say, when I look back on my time as a student at UVA, I would not trade my experiences for the world, even with all the mess surrounding us now. So, get ready for some of the best times of your life - I promise.

When I enrolled as a first-year at UVA in the olden days (2017), I had no idea what my life would be at this time. I was pursuing a Bachelor's of Science in Biology, intending to go into the medical field, but I soon discovered that science was NOT for me. Through many personal struggles with my academics, my mental and physical health, and attempts to find new areas of interest, I decided to try a new field of study that brought me joy, while also challenging me. That new field was English, so I promptly switched all my coursework to English classes focused on reading and writing. I also started writing for the Cavalier Daily, a student-run newspaper on Grounds, and loved every second of it! Since making these changes in my academic and extra-curricular life, I have never been happier with myself as a scholar and an individual. At the time, I did not know I would come out of these struggles more secure in my identity, with stronger sense of self, and more confidence in my intellectual abilities. Why am I telling you all this? Well, I'm not saying that you are going to have your entire professional career uprooted by the Biology department, but if that does happen for some reason, it's not the end of the world. And it's important to remember that. So, if things don't turn out the way you planned three years from now, maybe that is what was supposed to happen, and you might be better off because the experience.

Regardless of if you stick to your plans or completely reinvent yourself, I know that UVA is happy to have you as a student and member of this community. I push you to try things that take you out of your comfort zone and push you to learn new things about different cultures and different areas of study. Also, take fun classes because you'll probably never get the opportunity to learn about German fairytales or Dracula in the next stage of your life. Have fun and BE YOURSELF. You'll find that the people you are your true self around, will be the people sitting with you in three years when you write a letter to a first-year. ;)

Best of luck in all you do and go Hoos!

Sincerely,  
Kaitlyn H.  
Class of 2021