

Hello, Class of 2024,

I wanted to take this opportunity to wish you well. I'm here, your classmates are here, and all of the people you interact with are here to help you through this difficult time. Gosh, I have no idea how I would handle my first year of college given these crazy times - I really admire your strength. You are going to have some extremely memorable years here at UVA, and I want you to feel as welcome as possible as you begin to make Grounds your home. It certainly has become a home for me over the past few years, and I want you to have a wonderful experience, too.

My experiences at UVA have sparked incredible amounts of joy, but not all memories are great. Don't get me wrong, I love it here, but it isn't perfect. I can't say that I regret much from the past four years, but I do regret not delving deeper into UVA's complicated history surrounding social and racial (in)justices. Despite that, I believe there is a lot of good at UVA - specifically in its students. We are an ever growing diverse set of thinkers, creators, and problem solvers. We seek to make the world a better place, learn to navigate complex societal truths, and pave a path forward to something greater. I met the love of my life here at UVA, by happenstance, when she sat beside me in an intro to Physics class during my first year. I met my best friends one night when we were struggling with circuit design theory in Thornton stacks at 1 am. I found my friend group by accidentally attending the wrong club meeting - but I still am a part of it today. My point is - good things seem to happen at UVA in the same places as the bad. You can probably find good friends if you look for them, but my experience has been that my best friends were found when my life got hard - and I can't think of a time period that has been harder than right now. I have the utmost faith in your class when I say: the greatest things will come in the face of adversity, struggle, and loss. So why not join a new club? Why not talk to the girl in your physics class? Why not go to a random club meeting (over zoom, of course)? You don't need to know exactly what you'll get out of something to make doing it worthwhile. Go out and seize your opportunity, explore this world you've been thrust into, and make it your own. There is so much out there that you can be a part of - from chess clubs, video game tournaments, dogsledding, lettuce clubs, outdoor recreation, climate activists, and so much more. I truly believe that UVA has a place for everyone, even if some things aren't a good match. And honestly, I went to a few events where the people around me were not my kind of people - and that is okay. I am happy to know that they found a home in their event, and it gave me hope that I would be able to find mine. You'll find yours too, probably where you least expect it.

I can't wait to hear about the class of '24 once I am an alum - I know you will do great things. Not because times are easy right now but because they are difficult. UVA has that effect on people. If you ever want to chat, you can email me at [mtb5te](mailto:mtb5te) - I'd love to meet you.

Good luck, and stay strong,

Matthew Bain