

Hi Class of 2024,

This is definitely an interesting and challenging year to be starting college. Along with all the usual nerves and uncertainty of moving away from home and into a whole new city with new people and classes and expectations that everyone feels during First Year, you are also having to deal with the generally chaotic state of the world right now. Even though it might feel like you aren't getting the "real college experience," I want to make one thing clear: there is no "real college experience." You make your experience what you want it to be and it looks different for everyone.

When I first came to UVA, I felt like I didn't really fit in. I did everything I could. I found friends, applied to a million CIOs, and spent a lot of time exploring Grounds, but I still felt like there was something else everyone knew that I didn't. I wasn't doing great in my classes, got rejected from almost everything I applied to, and my high school relationship didn't last (some of them do, but it's okay if they don't!). Everything that could go wrong did. However, looking back, I am so glad that all of those things happened. I realized I didn't want to be a doctor anymore and ended up finding the field I am really passionate about (psychology + cognitive science!). I kept applying to different orgs and found Class Council and Lighting of the Lawn where I met almost all of my closest friends at UVA. And I was much happier out of that relationship. I really believe that all of those things happened for a reason, and I wouldn't be where I am today without them. If things don't work out for you exactly the way you had imagined, try not to sweat it. I promise you will find your place on Grounds in your own time.

I want to end with some random advice that I have learned so far throughout my three years here.

1. Grades matter, but they also don't. Yes, you should try in your classes, but getting a bad grade on an exam or even in a class is not the worst thing in the world and you will still get a job or get into grad school.
2. Invest in people based on how much they invest in you. You deserve to have people in your life who want to be there.
3. Go to Office Hours. I know everyone says it, but when I started going I started doing way better in my classes. Also it doesn't hurt to have a few professors know your face if you need advice or a rec letter.
4. No one has it all together even if they look like they do. It's really hard to not be sucked in by the UVA culture of competing to be the busiest, most stressed, most caffeinated person who is sleeping the least and to feel like you aren't doing enough with your time, but try to remember that you never know what is really going on in someone else's life.
5. And when all else fails, just remember that shit happens and try to roll with it.

Get excited for the next four years!! They will be so amazing so enjoy them while you can!
WAHOOWA :))

Sincerely,
Ally, Class of 2021