

Dear First Year,

Welcome to UVA (whether you're in Charlottesville or not)! You have things a little rough right now. First year is kind of a mess sometimes anyway, and frankly, I can't even imagine what it is like for you right now. You might feel nervous about classes, meeting people, or any other number of things. But I hope that you know that that is totally valid, and that everyone else is right there with you (even fourth years). Every first year class' experience is different, and yours just happens to be different on a global level. You are just as part of UVA as every other class, and you're coming in at a time of major change in the world in more ways than one. And UVA needs you to make that change happen for the better.

I have been fortunate to have had such a great experience at UVA. When I look back at myself first year, I realize that I grew up a whole lot (which is kind of crazy, considering that I thought I was pretty grown up back then, too). I changed my major a bunch of times (that was really hard), fell asleep in the library more than a few times, and participated in as many traditions as I could (or wanted to, at least – you definitely can't always make time for them all!). I met people that I love and joined an education research team that showed me what I really care about. While I was creating all of those connections, though, I was pretty worried about the uncertainty of it all. I never knew if I was making the “right” number of friends or getting involved in the “right” number of clubs. Something that I wish someone had told me when I was a first year is: there is no “right” way to do UVA. Make friends, join clubs, go out, and stay in like *nobody* is watching. This isn't high school anymore – this is a chance to do what you actually want to do. Try new things, and if you don't want to do them anymore, then don't. UVA still has so many opportunities to join communities online right now. I have actually enjoyed it a lot more than I thought I would, so try your best not to skip things or decide not to join that club only because the meetings are online. You might be surprised, and you'll be forming relationships before you know it. Other people want to meet you.

I remember feeling anxious at the beginning of my first year, for better and for worse. Mostly everyone feels that way, so if you do, you aren't alone. But I know that you are going to crush this semester and your time at college.

Do whatever you want. There's nowhere to go but up.

Sincerely,
Sarah Kiscaden
Class of 2021