

Dear Class of 2024,

Welcome! Being a new college student can be terrifying. I remember constantly wondering how I was supposed to understand the material that I was learning in these advanced classes and how there was no way things could get harder. I want to make it clear to you all that you are here because the university knows you can succeed. Your brain will kick into a higher gear soon enough and classes will become less stressful as you find yourself able to make bigger and more important connections within your education.

Moving past academics, I think it's really important to tell you all that your experience at this university is exactly what you make of it. I knew one person coming into this university and I was a homebody. I never could have imagined that I would find my true home away from home in Charlottesville.

I was dead set on joining an a cappella group. In fact, I auditioned for all of them. I got one call back that didn't end up working out and was pretty crushed. When I was flipping through all the handouts from the activities fair, I kept coming back to the quidditch team. I tried out for the quidditch team two weeks into first year after realizing I hadn't worked out since I arrived in Charlottesville. Since then I've made lifelong friends, been to two national quidditch tournaments, refereed in the US quidditch cup, and made friends across the country in this insane sport. I never could have imagined that I would play quidditch.

I've since joined a sorority, volunteered with Madison House, been a part of Honor, played Survivor at UVA (made top 10), and been a part of the nursing student council. I've met hundreds of people and made more friends than I ever had before. Being a student at UVA doesn't mean just academics, it means finding who you're supposed to be by exploring your interests with people who share the same interests.

I've hiked humpback with my hall from first year, dressed up as a polar bear for ISC bid day, became a program director for Madison house, investigated cases in Honor, found a hidden survivor idol beside Alderman, and planned a quidditch tournament with more than 150 athletes in attendance. UVA has taken me from Philadelphia to Texas to North Carolina. I've met my future bridesmaids and coworkers in addition to the people that I'll see in ten years and spent hours catching up with.

Being an introvert with no idea of who I was in high school, I could never have imagined that I would do all these things, much less do them all in three years. I even told my RA first year I was scared of making friends and fitting in. This year looks different but I know that there's still time to do more. There are so many people that want to meet you and get to know you.

My words of wisdom for you are to meet people. Sit with new people while socially distancing during lunch, hang out with your hall safely, and join clubs that are able to function virtually. Be unapologetically yourself and you'll find your people and never want to be anyone else. College is hard but it's a lot easier when you know who you are and who your friends are.

You got this.

Peyton