

Hello, Class of 2024!

Welcome to the best university in the world! It's definitely a difficult time to start a new chapter of life, with us all being in the midst of a global pandemic, and social injustice in this country feels more depressing and divisive than ever. Trust me, I get it; we in the class of 2021 arrived on Grounds just a few weeks after the Charlottesville riots led by white supremacist groups, and tensions felt very similar to how they do right now. But despite all of the tough parts of life we're all going through, know that you are wanted here, and we can all work together to make this year safe and welcoming to all people! Whether you are on Grounds or learning from home, know that we at UVA, both administration and us students, are doing everything we can to make this year the best experience it can be.

I know that your first year will likely look much different than mine. So much of starting college is about meeting lots (and I mean LOTS) of people and finding a place where you truly feel at home. That is going to be harder than ever now, but there's a lot you can do to still accomplish that goal. While it's not as possible to attend large events, this is a chance to grow closer to your hall/suite! I remember being out of my dorm room for most of the day, whether at classes, libraries, or events, so I personally didn't connect with most of my hall that closely. You're all going to be in the same living space for most of the day, so it's a great opportunity to really bond with those guys or gals! All of us are disappointed that we're probably not going to be attending sports in person, but we can still get together in small groups with our closest buddies and cheer the hoos on! A big part of my first year was getting involved with Chi Alpha, one of the Christian communities on Grounds. I'm leading a small group for the third time now, and it's absolutely been a blessing and a huge part of my growth here at UVA. Whether it's the people I've met (and now live with) or the events we've had, I'm truly grateful for the community that I found in my first week of college. Whether with Chi Alpha or many of the other great groups here, even in this time where we feel more isolated than ever, there are still plenty of ways to get connected with one another!

If you're feeling anxious, disappointed, or just generally not as hyped as you thought you'd be about starting college, know that you're not alone and that those feelings are completely justified. Starting college is never easy, and you guys are doing it with circumstances that no one else has ever had to deal with. While I can't exactly fix all the issues with a letter, I think I can at least offer some encouragement as you join this great family. First of all, know this: it's all gonna be ok! UVA is academically challenging for a reason—we pride ourselves on our standard of excellence and the reputation that comes with it. You're going to be stressed about work sometimes, you're going to struggle with some lessons, you're going to have to work more than you did in high school. But coming from someone who has successfully passed 6 semesters in the Engineering school, trust me when I say that you can do it! Don't be afraid to ask for help, don't fret about one or two low grades, and focus on applying yourself to the best of your abilities, not worrying about the standards of anyone else. Every finals week feels like a marathon, but the feeling of finishing is so worth it every time! Secondly, know that this university is here for you. You wouldn't have been accepted if we didn't think you'd be a great fit here! You have earned a place in this community, and while that doesn't mean the work is done, it does mean that you can truly find a home here and experience all the great things about this place.

Finally, enjoy yourself! (Note: Please please please don't break the COVID rules, because we don't want to make Dean Groves sad) Even when a lot of student life looks different, you can still find ways to make the best of this year. Find a favorite spot on Grounds, hang out with friends until 3am, and hey, you can still streak the lawn in a socially distant manner (but if anyone gets in trouble for that, I had nothing to do with it). This is going to be a different year for sure, but let's go into it with the best attitude possible, and we can make this a great year to be a Wahoo! (And hey, we're technically still basketball national champs, so keep reminding anyone who tries to talk smack about us about that)

Sincerely,  
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