

Dear class of 2024,

My name is Marcelo Morales and I am a fourth-year in the College of Arts and Sciences. My majors are History and Spanish (with a concentration in Culture and Literature) and I am also in the European Studies M.A. Program.

I write this letter to you all in an effort to bestow some of the knowledge I have accumulated during my time at UVA. I also hope to inspire you to continue working hard as well as make you question and evaluate the spaces that you are in and the person that you are and will become.

As a first-year, I quickly realized that defeat was common, but not permanent. I learned that sometimes you can give it all you got and the class will not work out. Sometimes all that matters is that you meet the professor and build a good relationship with him/her. Sometimes all that matters is that you pass the class. What matters in a class is that you further your own skills not just in the topic but also in your study skills, in your writing skills, and in the way that you think. I learned intro classes can be harder than 3000+ level courses and that while a professor may have good reviews as an easy grader, it is actually the TA who grades and reviews your papers and exams. As a first-year I learned that I could give myself a "pass" for not doing well in an exam/class. You should too, at least for the first exam. There are a lot of new variables with every class, from the professor, to the way you study and the time/date of the exam. Be prepared to not do well, but also be willing to dust yourself off and give it another try. One exam does not make the class. Remember that in your first year, you need to adjust, you need to get perspective, and you need to learn how to grow on your own.

During my second year, I was further challenged mentally and academically. Second year taught me that everything I learned in first year could not be easily applied to second year. I needed to once again adjust, to new professors, TAs, classes, and challenges. In my second year I questioned the path I was on and thought about what I really wanted to do with my time here. Declaring a major might seem difficult, some of you may have already put yourselves on track to do something, whether you're in the School of Engineering or a nursing major, some tracks seem pre-set. The reality of it is that the tracks are dependent on your decisions. It is okay to question what you are doing. In the end, declaring a major is easy. It may take some time, but all it takes is one class. That class where the professor speaks and all you do is listen because you are so intrigued by what they are saying. For me, it was history. For you it may be something else. Whatever major you decide to go for, you don't have to justify it to anyone. Do what makes *you* happy here. There is no one else but you at this university so why be on a track someone else wants you to be in if you don't want that?

My third year was easy. At the end of your second year, most of you will have found your passion and declared a major for it. Some of you may not have found a passion for that major and still declared it. That's okay. As a third year, classes get really interesting because they are more focused and they will be more or less about what you are interested in. If you haven't already done so, and since I have not mentioned it yet, explore Grounds and Charlottesville. Third year reminds you that your time at UVA will end soon enough. Do those things that you've been waiting to do, but don't forget that classes will also be there so remember to stay

focused. Third year also brought with it many stresses, some that I had already experienced and some that I had not. Remember to always lean on people when you need to take a break. College is a marathon not a sprint, and while it may not seem like it, most people will be struggling just as much as you are. Ask questions, get some perspective, and continue pushing. What you don't want is to be a fourth-year, looking back on your time at UVA and thinking that you have not done enough. Be happy with what you are doing and continue to explore for new things to do. You've still got time.

My fourth year has not ended yet, and somehow, it feels like it will end really soon. There is still a very long time between now and graduation, but I can't help but feel like all that is around the corner. I have not seen everything that fourth year will bring, but so far, it has been good; stressful, but good. Everything that I have done at UVA has led me to this moment and will shape the rest of my time here. I am a Resident Advisor, a mentor, a team leader, a master's candidate. My time here has not ended yet, but if it did, I'm happy with everything I have done. I have met many amazing people, from friends, to colleagues, those people have shaped me and helped me get to where I am today. In your fourth year—which is still very far in the future for you all—I hope that you are also happy with where you are, but especially with who you have become. UVA will test you and will sometimes make you feel overwhelmed, so make sure that in your first year you are building relationships and gaining new skills and perspectives. Those all will be useful throughout your time here, but even more so in your fourth year.

I hope you have learned something from my time here and that I have been helpful, even if in some small way. My last piece of advice to you is to not give up. You may feel like you don't belong here, like you can't and won't fit in here. What's important to remember is that you have earned your spot here. Whether that is a full-ride, some scholarships, or no scholarships; you all have earned the right to call yourselves Hoos and no letter grade, professor, or class can take that away, so even when it doesn't seem like things will work out, keep working hard and do your best because trust me, things work out. I hope you don't let this year define you but instead *you* define *it*.

Though I can't meet all of you, I hope to someday meet at least some of you.

With much love and best wishes for you, Class of 2024,

Marcelo Morales, Class of 2021