

Dear Fellow Hoo from the Class of '24,

Welcome to UVA! This community is truly unlike any other. Whether you are on Grounds or in your hometown this semester, I hope you feel at home in the UVA community. I cannot even imagine entering college during these difficult times, due to the pandemic and the social injustices occurring in our country. I just wanted to take this time to remind you that you are *welcome* and *wanted* here at UVA.

Even though this year will undoubtedly look different from previous ones, there is still so much to look forward to here. Trying new things and joining a few organizations has significantly transformed my college experience and who I am as a person. One of my happiest memories at UVA so far was joining Alpha Phi Omega, the national gender-inclusive service fraternity. The rush process was entirely comprised of service events, where I got to get off Grounds and break that UVA bubble by entering and working with the Charlottesville community at a variety of sites. The first site I got to work with was Loaves and Fishes, a food pantry that empowers those who are food insecure by giving them the agency of “client choice.” They set up the pantry in the style of a grocery store, so those who come seeking assistance are able to choose what they want, instead of being just handed a generic box of food. This one experience soon blossomed into a passion for reflective and insightful service within the Charlottesville community. I had done service in high school, but we had honest conversations about our privilege as students to be entering these spaces. I learned about a variety of issues impacting the community, from affordable housing, homelessness, food insecurity, and so much more. With this newfound passion, I also found a home on Grounds with the organization. Broaden your horizons and join an organization that you would not normally. I cannot emphasize enough how much it could transform your life.

I can remember all the anxiety and uncertainty that comes with starting your first year of college, especially with these unprecedented times. Good luck with your first semester. If you need help at all, it is there. You have levels on levels of support here, and there are so many people who are here to help you succeed and want to see you succeed. You are so, so loved and supported here. Good luck with all your endeavors going forward, and if you ever need anything, don't be afraid to reach out!

Sincerely,  
Komal Kamdar  
A Friend from the Class of '21