

Hello Class of 2024!

As a member of the Class of 2021, I want to welcome you to UVA! First of all, I want to encourage and commend you on the choice to begin your college journey this fall. You've bravely chosen to step forward into this next season of your life in the midst of truly arduous circumstances, and that is worth acknowledging and celebrating! I sincerely hope that you have felt welcomed in your first few weeks on Grounds. I am thrilled to have you here, as are all members of the Class of 2021. Your presence here truly matters, and we cannot wait to see and hear of the incredible contributions you will bring to this community.

First, I want to encourage you by sharing a bit of my story. When I first stepped foot on grounds, I was uncertain as to what the future would look like, where I would fit in, what I would study, and countless other things. Not long after, however, I remember walking through the bookstore and seeing a shirt, the front of which simply read, "Family." It struck me that a school would think to make this shirt, as previously, I had seen school more as an obligation than as a place where I truly belonged. From that moment, I realized that UVA would be far more than a place to hear lectures and take exams.

As I began classes, joined clubs, and learned to navigate Grounds, I quickly met fellow students with whom I shared similar convictions and experiences. I had discussions with professors who clearly cared not just about the quality of my work, but also about my life and my development as a person. School rapidly became a place where I could truly be myself and where I could freely strive to become whatever I desired to be.

A significant mentor of mine used to tell me, "Live like you do in your dreams." UVA is a place where the pursuit of dreams is not only possible, but encouraged and celebrated. For this reason, I want to challenge you to embrace and cherish the time you've been given on grounds and to pursue your dreams with everything you have.

I'd like to offer a bit of practical advice as well. During your time as a member of the larger UVA community, you will have countless opportunities to become a part of smaller communities. I personally have worked out with the Running, Rowing, and Barbell clubs, and I have been extensively involved with the Christian ministries Chi Alpha and Intervarsity. Through these experiences, I have grown tremendously and developed relationships which I will undoubtedly cherish for years to come. As you begin your time at UVA, I want to encourage you to intentionally seek out groups of people with whom you can connect and share life. Though this will be quite different (and perhaps more difficult) in the midst of the pandemic, I believe intentionally seeking out these connections will prove extremely significant and life-giving.

Regarding where to invest your time, however, I'll share with you probably the most significant piece of advice I received as a new student: at UVA, seek to place your roots deep, not wide. Without a doubt, you will find yourself surrounded by incredible people, and there will be a myriad of outlets and causes vying for your time and focus. In order to develop meaningful relationships and leave a significant impact, however, I would encourage you to choose a couple of groups which align with your values and passions and to invest your time there. While surface-level involvement in five organizations might seem attractive, wholehearted commitment

to smaller circles will prove far more worthwhile in the long run. If you need to leave a community in which you don't fit, that's fine. But as a rule, remember "deep, not wide."

As you begin your semester, I also encourage you to reach out to upperclassmen, professors, and TA's whenever possible. Though it may seem cliché to say so, there are truly no stupid questions. Whether regarding class selection, study strategies, or the best lunch spots, I've found that members of this community are always ready and willing to share advice if I simply reach out and ask. In a community like that of UVA, there will always be others who are more capable and more knowledgeable than you are in certain areas, regardless of the extent of your experience and capabilities. Learn early on to embrace this extraordinary environment and the daily opportunities it offers for growth both in wisdom and in humility.

I'll leave you with three final things. First and foremost, you CAN do this. You are fully capable of conquering whatever you face now and whatever comes your way over the next four years. Secondly, things will get easier. We are in the midst of a uniquely trying time in American and world history. Things may seem hard now, and that's OK. You'll make it. Finally, you are never alone. You will face unprecedented challenges during the next several years. As you do, never hesitate to reach out to others and admit your need for help. You will find it.

I hope this letter encourages you, and I wish you the absolute best during your first semester. Alongside the Class of 2021, I will be cheering you on every step of the way!

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Charlie Curran
Global Security and Justice
Class of 2021