



Focus on University of Virginia

Founded in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson, University of Virginia (or UVA) is a flagship public institution that attracts large numbers of applicants from outside of Virginia who are otherwise applying mainly to private institutions. UVA's appeal is based on its reputation for academic excellence coupled with an unusual degree of school spirit and school pride and its successful sports program, honor system, and host of traditions. Its approximately 15,000 undergraduate and 6,400 graduate students enjoy the pretty, walking campus in Charlottesville, a town replete with both history and small businesses that appeal to student tastes.

Students must apply to one of the five undergraduate schools, the most selective of which are the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering and Applied Science. The other schools that admit students directly from high school are the School of Architecture, the School of Nursing, and, for Kinesiology majors only, the Curry School of Education. Students who wish to pursue other majors in the school of Education or majors in the Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy or the McIntire School of Commerce must apply initially to Arts and Sciences, from which they may be admitted to those other divisions later. Apart from those who wish to study Kinesiology, no one is expected to declare a major before the end of freshman or sophomore year, and the liberal arts core curriculum extends throughout the schools, making it easy to switch from one school to another.

All freshmen and 50% of sophomores live on campus, while more move to off-campus housing junior and senior year. To facilitate their acclimation, freshmen

take a College Advising course that meets weekly for 90 minutes. The classes for groups of 20 students are focused around themes, but are designed primarily to teach them how to use the library and other aspects of the university. The professors for these classes serve as the students' advisors until they declare a major, at which point they are assigned departmental advisors.

Historically, the university has been known for its Jeffersonian-inspired humanities-based education, and one of its unique programs, Jefferson Public Citizens, brings together a team of students from different disciplines to identify, research and address a public problem together.

In recent years the university's science education and research programs have acquired prominence as well. According to Dean of Admissions Greg Roberts, UVA has recently become more aggressive in expanding the scope of its programs.

Everyone agrees that UVA academics are challenging, but students say there is ample support available and their professors love teaching and want to get to know them. Sixty percent of undergraduates do mentored research or fellowships supported by grants. A Center for Undergraduate Excellence helps them to obtain these opportunities and funds.

The strong student-run honors system means that students can take their exams outside of class, and everyone leaves their laptops in the library without fear of theft. An Honor Committee reviews and adjudicates about 40 cases a year, most related to cheating, and the strict policy of "one strike and you're out" means that the vast majority of people here adhere faithfully to the code.

At the center of the campus (which is a UNESCO World Heritage site) is the Academic Village, designed by Thomas Jefferson to intersperse student residences with professors' homes, offices, and classrooms. It is still used just as Jefferson intended. The 200-year-old dorm rooms on the lawn where many events take place are highly coveted even though they have no bathrooms! The students who have the privilege of living in them are selected representatives of diverse university organizations, and they frequently host parties in their historic spaces.

Greek life is strong and responsible for many parties, too. These tend to be exclusive for safety reasons, but students say that there are always many events going on simultaneously so there's something for everyone socially. Although some of the clubs and organizations are competitive to get into, others are not, and most of the student body seems to enjoy that the university is steeped in tradition, with secret societies imbedded in the fabric of the campus culture.

UVA students are critical thinkers who enjoy engaging their classmates and professors in discussion and debate. When it comes to politics, the majority of them tend to be liberal, but the more conservative voices are welcomed and heard too. My tour guide described her classmates as "cool nerds" and pointed out a residence

hall called Brown College, where she says all different kinds of people apply to live and are “welcomed no matter their weird style.”

The admissions office’s commitment to filling 30% of each class with students from out of state means that each of the schools has two applicant pools that are evaluated separately. The admit rate for out-of-state students is generally approximately 20%, whereas for Virginia students it is closer to 40%. Legacy applicants from elsewhere are evaluated as if they were in-state residents.

UVA offers Unrestricted Early Action, but the only advantage of applying by November 1st is that these applicants will receive a response in December. Applicants are advised to apply early only if they don’t need their senior year record to improve their profile. Demonstrated interest does not figure into the admissions decision at all, but many other qualitative factors do.

Overall, 97% of the class of 2017 ranked in the top 10 % of their high school class, and their average SAT score was 2271. For Engineering applicants, the Math and Physics SAT Subject tests are important. For everyone else, two SAT subject tests are recommended but not required. Admissions officers explain that for applicants whose numbers are in the mid-range, the review process is holistic so an extra 40 points on the SAT or one more Advanced Placement course is less important than the activities and personal qualities gleaned from the essays and recommendations.

