

# THE CAVALIER DAILY

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MAC DOUCETTE, KAYLA MOORE & CAT WHITE | THE CAVALIER DAILY

Congratulations, Class of 2026

## TURNING THE TASSEL



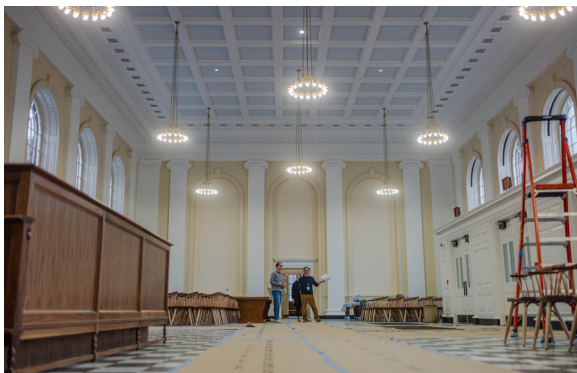
# FOUR YEARS IN BRIEF

CD News Staff

## Class of 2026, transfer students welcomed in convocation ceremony — Aug. 22, 2022

The President's Opening Convocation and Honor Induction took place in John Paul Jones Arena Sunday after the event was moved inside due to inclement weather. The Class of 2026 and transfer students heard from Class of 1994 alumnus Michael Lenox, Tayloe Murphy, professor of business administration and senior associate dean and chief strategy officer, University President Jim Ryan and several other leaders in the University community.

"Whether you're first generation or fifth generation, college will open doors for you and shake your life in ways that many of you probably can't even imagine at this point, and you will look back on your time here — I am confident — as four of the best, most enjoyable, most thrilling and most important years in your life," Ryan said.



## Alderman Library to reopen Jan. 8 after three years of renovations — Dec. 19, 2023

Alderman Library is getting a makeover. The modernized building will provide new amenities and studying locations for students when it opens Jan. 8 after being closed since 2020. Continued renovations and the moving of books and materials into Alderman will continue into the spring semester, even past the official April 4 grand opening.

Deputy University Spokesperson Bethanie Glover said that the official grand opening will take place a few months after the initial opening so that graduating students will have the chance to see and work in the library.

## Scott Beardsley appointed U.Va.'s 10th president — Dec. 19, 2025

Scott Beardsley, current dean of the Darden School of Business, was selected unanimously in a special meeting by the University's Board of Visitors Friday to serve as the University's 10th president. Beardsley was chosen out of four finalist candidates, and his appointment follows the resignation of former University President Jim Ryan June 27 following pressure from the Justice Department.

Board Rector Rachel Sheridan praised Beardsley as a candidate with "leadership skills required to navigate the challenges facing higher education today." Upon his appointment, Beardsley addressed the Board and members of the public who were in attendance — he thanked the Board, interim University President Paul Mahoney and Ryan for their leadership and described the appointment process as "rigorous and thorough."



## Students hold informal vigil on South Lawn in wake of shooting — Nov. 15, 2022

Thousands of students, faculty, staff and community members gathered at South Lawn at 7 p.m. Monday evening to grieve, heal, reflect together and honor the lives of the three victims of Sunday's shooting.

The informal vigil was organized by dozens of student leaders from CIOs and special status organizations across Grounds. Leaders passed out candles and orange ribbons to attendees, who congregated on South Lawn.

After 30 minutes of reflection, attendees slowly began to leave their candles at the base of the Homer Statue, in front of the players on the steps of Old Cabell Hall and at the Rotunda.

"Light in darkness," University President Jim Ryan reflected in an Instagram post. "Thanks to our students for lighting the way."



## Pro-Palestinian protesters form encampment near University Chapel — May 2, 2024

Students, faculty and Charlottesville community members gathered by the University Chapel Tuesday afternoon, forming an encampment to protest Israel's actions in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. The encampment — referred to as "Liberated Zone 4 Gaza" — comprised more than 100 people as of Wednesday afternoon, although the number of protestors fluctuated greatly as the day progressed. Several faculty were in attendance, with some holding a large sign reading "[Faculty for Justice in Palestine] at U.Va. stands with students." Faculty also served as liaisons with University Police and Student Affairs, who have said they will let the protests continue as long as they comply with University policy.

The encampment overlapped with a separate May Day protest on the Lawn, which was hosted by student activist group U.Va. Dissenters and the U.Va. Apartheid Divest Coalition, a movement advocating for the University to conduct an external audit of its endowment investments, among other demands. Speakers made it clear that the encampment near the University Chapel and the May Day protests were separate events, although attendees moved freely between the two.



## University and Charlottesville community members Run For Jim one last time — June 29, 2025

Hundreds of University and Charlottesville community members joined University President Jim Ryan outside Madison House Saturday morning to participate in a final Run With Jim. The Fourth-Year Trustees planned the event on a whim just a few hours after the announcement of Ryan's resignation Friday morning with volunteer support from the younger councils.

Run With Jim was a recurring event where Ryan invited students and community members to join him for a morning run around Grounds. Some students attended regularly, while others made it a bucket list item to check off before graduating, often during the traditional fourth-year Run With Jim that would take place at the end of each academic year.

## NEWS

## U.Va. alumni network gives graduates a path to stay connected

Through student programs, young alumni events, career resources and giving campaigns, the Alumni Association works to keep graduates connected

Brendon Bordwine | Senior Associate

Each May, thousands of students cross the Lawn for Final Exercises and leave the University as graduates. But for many, their relationship with the University continues through a network of alumni programs, regional events, career resources, reunions and volunteer opportunities coordinated by the U.Va. Alumni Association.

The Alumni Association is an independent, alumni-led organization separate from the University that works to connect students, graduates and alumni to one another and to the University. According to its 2025 Impact Report, the Alumni Association serves a network of more than 269,000 living alumni and supports programming that spans young alumni engagement, scholarships, career resources and Alumni Interest Groups.

Lily West, president and chief executive officer of the U.Va. Alumni Association, said in an interview with The Cavalier Daily that the Alumni Association views students as future alumni, rather than waiting until after graduation to build the relationships between students and members of the Alumni Association.

“The journey to becoming [an] alum doesn’t actually start when you graduate,” West said. “It starts when you get to Grounds.”

Mary Elizabeth Luzar, senior director of student engagement at the U.Va. Alumni Association, said the Alumni Association works to make students feel familiar with the alumni community before they graduate. The Alumni Association advises Class Councils and the Fourth-Year Trustees, hosts student events and begins communicating with new graduates shortly after Final Exercises.

Luzar said over the summer immediately following a student’s graduation, the Alumni Association sends a series of emails introducing recent graduates to alumni resources. She said Young Alumni Reunions, which are held in the fall, are often one of the first major alumni events recent graduates are invited to attend.

The next Young Alumni Reunion is set to be held Oct. 10 at the Ting Pavilion on the Downtown Mall and is open to the undergraduate Classes of 2026, 2025 and 2024 and their guests. According to its 2025 Impact Report, 2,205 tickets were sold to last year’s Young Alumni Reunion.

For students who have been involved in class leadership, the transition into alumni life can also include a formal volunteer role. After serving as Fourth-Year Trustees, some student leaders continue as Post-Graduate Trustees, helping maintain class con-

nections and support young alumni programming. The Alumni Association’s impact report states that more than 250 former student leaders serve as Post-Graduate Trustees each year.

Annie Zhao, vice president of Fourth-Year Trustees and fourth-year College student, said in an interview with The Cavalier Daily that many trustees expect to stay connected after graduation through Young Alumni Reunions and continued class involvement. She said Trustees typically remain connected to the Alumni Association after graduation by helping plan the annual Young Alumni Reunions and giving feedback on those events.

Zhao said the Class of 2026 has built a strong sense of connection through class traditions and events, which she expects will carry into alumni life.

“I’m confident that our class will continue to look back on our four years at U.Va. and think, ‘You know, this was a great time,’” Zhao said. “We had a lot of fun.”

Zhao said the alumni network can be valuable socially and professionally. As a Lawn resident, she said alumni frequently pass by her room and offer advice about life after graduation.

“I think we should take advantage of [the fact] that we have a strong network here,” Zhao said. “Whether it’s recent grads or alumni from 20 or 30 years ago, it doesn’t matter. You can learn from anybody at any time.”

Recent University graduates also said the Alumni Association helped make the alumni network feel more concrete after graduation. Kyle Woodson, Class of 2024 president and Class of 2024 alumnus, said the idea of an alumni network can sometimes feel distant while students are still on Grounds.

“I think for a lot of students the thought of an alumni network can seem kind of nebulous because it always seems a little bit far away, even as a third-year and early on in fourth year,” Woodson said.

Woodson, who became a Post-Graduate Trustee after serving as class council president all four years of his time at the University, said attending Young Alumni Reunions in 2024 was one of his first major alumni experiences. He said the event allowed him to reconnect with friends who had moved away from Charlottesville.

“YAR 2024 was super fun, and it was a great opportunity to see a ton of my friends,” Woodson said. “So it’s a great time to catch up with folks that I wouldn’t otherwise have seen because they moved away from Charlottesville.”

ville.”

Woodson recommended all upcoming graduates update their mailing addresses on the website in order to get communication from the Alumni Association and to join an alumni club in their new city or region as part of the U.Va. Clubs Global Network.

Chloe Lyda, Class of 2022 president and Class of 2022 alumna, said her first interaction with the Alumni Association came during her first few weeks at the University, when she attended a Class Council interest meeting at Alumni Hall.

Lyda said early introduction to members of the Alumni Association shaped her view of it as an organization connected to student life, not just post-graduate life.

“I feel like a lot of other universities and colleges, you only start hearing from the alumni network a month [before or] after you graduate,” Lyda said. “But they immediately start putting on events in the first few weeks of your first year and it doesn’t stop.”

After graduating, Lyda became involved in Post-Graduate Trustees, helping plan YARs and giving feedback on what kinds of events recent graduates wanted. She said involvement helped her stay connected with classmates she might not otherwise see.

“I wouldn’t otherwise see them if [becoming a Post-Graduate Trustee] didn’t happen,” Lyda said. “It keeps me connected [to] what everybody’s doing.”

Beyond reunions and class-based programming, West said the Alumni Association also focuses on career support for graduates. She said the Alumni Association works with the U.Va. Career Center to help students transition into alumni career resources, including one-on-one advising, networking groups, mentorship and speaker events.

The Alumni Association’s 2025 Impact Report states that more than 9,000 alumni were affiliated with at least one Alumni Professional Network in fiscal year 2025, while about 500 alumni were served through career advising sessions.

West said these resources are designed to support alumni beyond their first few months after graduation.

“We want to be thoughtful about how they transition into some of our support services, which will extend for decades beyond when they graduate,” West said.

The Alumni Association also maintains contact with graduates through Virginia Magazine, which alumni begin receiving after gradu-



BENVIN LOZADA | THE CAVALIER DAILY

Young Alumni Reunion, October 7, 2024.

ation through print editions sent to their mailing addresses. Luzar said the Alumni Association encourages graduates to update their addresses partly so they can receive the magazine, which covers University news and alumni stories.

The Alumni Association’s impact report also states that more than 191,000 alumni, parents and friends receive the quarterly print edition of Virginia Magazine.

Another aspect of alumni engagement includes giving, though Alumni Association leaders said they frame giving to recent graduates as participation rather than financial obligation. Luzar said Fourth-Year Trustees work with the Alumni Association and the University on the “Hoos Giving Back” campaign, which encourages members of the graduating class to make a gift at any level comfortable to them.

“The real spirit behind that is for every member of the graduating class to have the opportunity to give at whatever level is meaningful to them,” Luzar said.

West said recent graduates should not feel pressured to give large amounts, adding that the act of giving is more powerful than the dollar amount.

“This is about staying connected and participating in that act of giving back,” West said. “Don’t worry about the number. We’re grateful for anything and it can be directed anywhere. It’s just another way to stay connected to the institution and the more you do it, the more it will become a part of the habit that you get into, which again builds a lifetime of a relationship with the Alumni Association and with the University at large.”

The Alumni Association also ad-

ministers scholarships and endowments. According to its impact report, the Alumni Association administered more than 250 unique scholarships to students on Grounds to cover anything from tuition to full room and board. The report states that these scholarships in fiscal year 2025 totaled to \$3.2 million to more than 500 student recipients.

For recent graduates, West said staying connected can take many forms — attending events, reading alumni communications, joining regional groups, seeking career advice or even reaching out to alumni for mentorship.

“Hearing from a student or a recent graduate is often the best part of an alum’s day,” West said. “If you are concerned that you’re going to bother someone or you might be taking up too much time, let me tell you right now that you are probably one of the best things that is happening to that alum that day. So don’t hesitate. Reach out. And you never know where it’s going to take you.”

Luzar left a final note that graduates should see the alumni network as a community ready to support them after they leave Grounds.

“For all recent graduates ... there really is this huge, huge network of alumni who are ready to bring you into the fold and to support you,” Luzar said. “We just have something really, really special in our alumni network.”

# A look at administration changes since Class of 2026's arrival

The past several years have seen significant changes in University leadership — including for the University President and Provost

Abigail Larkin | Staff Writer

University administration has seen several major changes in the past few years, including, but not limited to, the roles of president, provost, vice president and chief Student Affairs officer, senior associate vice president and dean of students.

Here is a look at notable University administrative changes affecting all 12 schools and the University's health system. The graduating Class of 2026 witnessed these changes during their time at the University, with many changes occurring during the latter portion of their college careers.

## President

Former University President Jim Ryan announced his resignation June 27 after serving in the role since 2018. The announcement came in the wake of an investigation conducted by the Department of Justice into what they viewed as Ryan's refusal to dismantle the University's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies.

In a letter Ryan sent to the Faculty Senate Nov. 14, he wrote that he was told by former Rector of the Board of Visitors Rachel Sheridan and former Vice Rector Porter Wilkinson that the Justice Department attorneys demanded his resignation by 5 p.m. June 26. Otherwise, he was told "the [Justice Department] would basically rain hell on U.Va.," according to his letter. In her own letter to the Faculty Senate, Sheridan disagreed with Ryan's claim that she told him to resign, instead writing that it was Ryan who first suggested the idea of his resignation. Sheridan also denied any demands for Ryan's resignation made on behalf of the Board as a whole.

The University then announced a search committee for a new president July 25, which was chaired by Sheridan. While the search was in progress, the Board appointed Paul Mahoney, former dean of the School of Law, as interim president Aug. 4.

Mahoney served in the role until current University President Scott Beardsley, former dean of the Darden School of Business, was appointed unanimously by the Board Dec. 19. Beardsley's tenure began Jan. 1.

Prior to Beardsley's appointment, several University-affiliated groups — including Wahoos4UVA, Student Council and the Faculty Senate — expressed their lack of confidence in the Board to conduct a thorough presidential search free from federal influence.

Many University groups found the nature of the search for Beardsley, especially given Ryan's recent departure, controversial. Jeri Seidman, outgoing Faculty Senate chair and incoming faculty representative to the Board, said that she was disappointed by the Board's decision to select a new President amidst calls from multiple Uni-

versity stakeholders to wait until after Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D) took office in January. Spanberger argued that at the time of Beardsley's appointment, the Board had five members that had not been officially confirmed by the Virginia General Assembly, as Virginia law requires, and was thus not legally constituted.

In the months after Beardsley's appointment, some University groups began speaking out against the process leading to Beardsley's appointment. Among them, the University chapter of the American Association of University Professors expressed their disapproval of Beardsley's selection — suggesting that the processes by which he was selected by the Board were illegitimate and that Beardsley's credentials were not up to par with the University's former presidents.

## U.Va. Health

The University has seen major changes within the health system in the past two years. Craig Kent, former CEO of U.Va. Health and executive vice president for health affairs, and Melina Kibbe, former dean of the School of Medicine and chief health affairs officer at U.Va. Health, left their positions after they were named in a faculty letter of no confidence. The letter — sent to the rector and Board Sept. 5, 2024 and signed by 128 physicians — alleged Kent and Kibbe fostered a hostile environment that compromised patient safety and led to an ongoing exodus of expertise.

Kent resigned from his position in February 2025 after an independent review by Williams and Connolly. Kibbe did not resign immediately after the review, but later announced she left her position in July to become president of University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

University Medical Center CEO Wendy Horton also announced her departure in July, and left the health system in September to accept a new position as senior vice president and president of adult services at University of California, San Francisco Health. Horton was not named in the same letter of no confidence as Kent and Kibbe, but was later named in an ongoing lawsuit filed Oct. 3. The Oct. 3 lawsuit was brought by several U.Va. Health leaders and the spouses of two patients who died against defendants Kent, Kibbe, Horton and other physicians for leading illegal efforts to increase revenue.

U.Va. Health announced in September 2025 that Dr. Mitchell Rosner had been appointed to a three-year term as the new CEO of U.Va. Health. Rosner had previously held several positions at U.Va. Health, and had served as interim executive vice president for health affairs for seven months prior to his appointment.

The University had initially intended to select the next CEO after a nationwide search, but after several U.Va. Health leaders sent a letter to Mahoney and Sheridan recommending Rosner for the role, the rector and the Board decided to stop the search and name Rosner to the position.

"During his brief tenure as Interim EVP for Health Affairs, Dr. Rosner has gained and fostered the trust and respect of our faculty and lent much needed stability to a tumultuous period for U.Va. Health," the "more than two dozen chairs and leaders at U.Va. Health" wrote in the letter.

The positions of the dean of the school of medicine and the CEO of the University Medical Center have yet to be permanently filled. The University Health System announced the appointment of Colin Derdeyn as interim dean of the school of medicine early August, and Terrie Edwards as interim CEO of the University Medical Center Sept. 9. The University announced Tuesday that Kathy Baker, current chief nursing officer of the University Medical Center, will be replacing Edwards in the role of interim CEO of the University Medical Center, effective May 23.

## Executive vice president and provost

The role of the executive vice president and provost of the University involves close collaboration with the University president and overseeing a variety of activities within the University, such as teaching and research.

Since spring of 2025, there have been two unsuccessful provost searches.

Ian Baucom, former University executive vice president and provost, announced his resignation in January 2025 after being named president of Middlebury College. Brie Gertler has served as interim executive vice president and provost since his departure, and the first search committee was announced Feb. 6, 2025, following Baucom's resignation.

While it is still unclear why the first search was inconclusive, several sources told The Cavalier Daily that the search had been "highly unusual." The sources cited actions by Wilkinson, saying that she "implicitly vetoed" one of the leading candidates from being presented to Ryan.

The University told the community of the search's failure Sept. 9, but did not provide an explanation for the failure.

The second search committee was launched in September 2025, with Beardsley as chair. Beardsley then announced in a message to the search committee Jan. 14 that he would be stepping down as chair due to his new responsibilities as president, and expressed his hope that the new provost would be selected in March.



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Door to the Office of the Dean of Students, photographed April 30, 2026.

"It is hoped that a provost can be selected by March 2026, largely in line with the process timeline outlined in the Fall," Beardsley wrote.

However, the second search ultimately proved to be unsuccessful. University Spokesperson Bethanie Glover announced in a media release March 25 that the University would be pausing the search. The media release said Beardsley wrote a letter to the search committee, writing that the pause was a result of changes to University leadership and changes to the composition of the Board. In the months prior to the pause, Spanberger requested the resignations of five Board members in January and subsequently appointed 10 new members. Beardsley added that the University will recommence the search with a new search committee.

"This is a difficult decision, but I believe it will help us achieve a better outcome in the long term, ensure institutional stability and continue building trust in our community," Beardsley said in the letter to the committee.

## Dean of students

Nicole Hall began her role as senior associate vice president and dean of students March 2025, replacing former Interim Dean Cedric Rucker, who retired March 2025.

The role of the dean of students is primarily that of a liaison between the University leadership and students, as well as an advocate of student self-governance. The dean reports to the vice president and chief Student Affairs officer.

Hall has served in the role since March 2025, and she outlined her priorities to The Cavalier Daily at the beginning of her term, including supporting student self-governance and creating deeper connections with the student body.

"I think student self-governance at U.Va. is a very unique and compelling model for student development," Hall

said. "So I want to do everything that I can, to continue to support and to really build upon and enhance with them in partnership."

## Vice president and chief Student Affairs officer

The vice president and chief Student Affairs officer oversees several offices within the University, including the Office of the Dean of Students, the Department of Student Health, Counseling and Psychological Services, the Office of African-American Affairs and the University Career Center. The vice president and chief Student Affairs officer also reports to the president and provost, and helps shape students' educational and residential experience.

Kenyon Bonner, formerly a vice provost at the University of Pittsburgh, was appointed University vice president and chief Student Affairs officer in November 2023, and has served in the position since January 2024. He replaced Chris Holstege, interim vice president and chief of Student Affairs, who left the role in 2023 to return to his position as senior associate vice president of Student Health and Wellness.

Upon Bonner's appointment, Ryan remarked in a 2023 University media release positively on Bonner's fit for the role.

"He's as kind and genuine as he is talented, and I've been impressed by his appreciation for what makes U.Va. special," Ryan said.

Bonner leads roughly 300 student affairs faculty and staff who focus on different aspects of the student experience on Grounds. Bonner also oversees student governance organizations, such as Student Council, the Honor Committee and the University Judiciary Committee.

# Graduating leaders reflect on four years of self-governance

The former leaders of Student Council, Honor and UJC share their parting thoughts on the state of self-governance as the Class of 2026 prepares to graduate

Luca Bailey | Senior Writer

For fourth-year student leaders, the weeks before graduation are a time to reflect on the contributions of the outgoing class to the University's long-held tradition of student self-governance. The tradition, often considered unique from other higher education institutions to the University's experience, affords student-run organizations like Student Council, the University Judiciary Committee and the Honor Committee significant power to sanction their peers or to lobby on behalf of the student body's needs to other stakeholders.

In a series of interviews with *The Cavalier Daily*, the three most recent leaders of the Council, UJC and Honor shared further reflections on the state of the organizations they served in and the institution of self-governance after four years of administrative leadership and institutional change.

Student leaders, reflecting on the meaning of self-governance at the University, spoke on their reactions to federal scrutiny, interactions with University administrators and engagement with an inspiring student body.

## Clay Dickerson, former Student Council president

Clay Dickerson, former Student Council president and fourth-year College student, reiterated his belief that student self-governance is now "the most vulnerable, yet the most powerful" it has ever been.

In the wake of federal investigations into former University President Jim Ryan's alleged refusal to dismantle Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies, Department of Justice officials demanded his resignation. Ryan resigned in June, and in response, the Council passed a vote of no confidence against the Board Aug. 8. In its vote, the Council cited the Board's lack of support for Ryan in the buildup to his resignation and an unwillingness to include a sufficient number of undergraduate students on the search committee for his successor.

The Board appointed University President Scott Beardsley to the role Dec. 19 — less than six months after Ryan's departure. Student Council, in response, released a statement condemning what they considered a rushed presidential search.

Dickerson said the last year placed prominent student self-governance leaders in unique positions amidst unprecedented federal scrutiny to amplify the concerns of the student body.

"Last year, we had the opportunity to redefine our role in the University-wide community by asserting ourselves as voices worth listening to," Dickerson said. "We were able

to claim more ground and to expand the power of our voice. But that also comes with increased scrutiny on ... the things that we do ... There are just so many eyes on UVA. right now."

Beyond the subject of federal scrutiny, Dickerson also met with Beardsley Jan. 23. In this early meeting, Dickerson secured commitments of \$500,000 for Support and Access Services — a branch of Student Council that offers free resources to students like textbook reimbursements, legal services and a shuttle service to nearby airports. Beardsley also agreed to partner with Student Council in a matching-funds campaign to raise money for its endowment and reduce its reliance on the Student Activities Fee, and affirmed continued discretionary support for University traditions like Lighting of the Lawn.

Four days after Dickerson's meeting with Beardsley, the Council's Representative Body unanimously passed a resolution affirming their support for Beardsley in the name of institutional stability.

Upon reflection, Dickerson expressed a general concern that as student self-governance becomes more influential in University governance writ large, it attracts "doubters." The biggest challenge to self-governance, according to him, is a significant number of "non-students" — including a vocal minority of alumni, faculty and staff — who potentially discount students' competence as partners in effectively governing the University.

"We are infinitely capable, and it should be assumed that we are capable," Dickerson said. "We will prove you wrong, time and time again, until we are recognized as such."

Another challenge Dickerson noted was what he identified as a declining level of diversity in "prominent student self-governance positions," calling on students of all backgrounds to encourage their friends and fellow community members to contest these roles.

"[The decline in diversity] is a problem," Dickerson said. "There's not a single student at this University that couldn't do what I did, just as good and likely better than I did. It just takes a little belief. I think the University of Virginia is better when it's represented by a diverse cast of students. I say that as a white man."

Dickerson also said that increasingly in the future, an essential part of student self-governance at the University will include student leaders on the main campus helping to spotlight the concerns of students at the College at Wise and the Northern Virginia campus.

During his tenure, Dickerson and other Council members took steps to

strengthen the connection between the Council and the College at Wise's Student Government Association. As an example, Dickerson signed a memorandum of understanding with William Rudeseal, former SGA president and fourth-year College at Wise student. The memorandum was adopted Oct. 20, and constitutes a commitment between the Council and SGA to share crucial information and encourage mutual cooperation as part of shared efforts to upholding student governance.

"[Those students] don't have as much of a say," Dickerson said. "The burden falls upon ... our University community and students to very humbly recognize the value of those communities and those people."

## Allison McVey, former University Judiciary Committee chair

The University Judiciary Committee is a student-run judiciary body that investigates and adjudicates alleged violations of the 12 Standards of Conduct. In a March interview with *The Cavalier Daily*, Allison McVey, former chair and fourth-year College student, reflected on her time in office, in which she discussed her efforts to engage the University community with the work of UJC, and to decrease processing times in the face of an inflating number of cases.

The UJC is a student-run judiciary body that investigates and adjudicates cases involving the University's 12 Standards of Conduct.

In a subsequent interview with *The Cavalier Daily*, McVey noted that the uptick in cases is a new development for UJC. She said that in her first year, she remembers early conversations among its members and Executive Board revolving not around the caseload, but rather around how UJC could maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of University administrators and the student body.

"I think what we were experiencing [during my first year] was actually a lack of engagement," McVey said. "[There was] a lack of significant cases coming our way at the level and intensity that they are now."

She said since then, the attitude towards UJC on Grounds has changed. She said the shift occurred in part when University policy changed to give UJC the sole power to sanction Greek life organizations for hazing allegations.

McVey also said she believes UJC's involvement in more public-facing situations, such as the events of May 4, 2024, initially brought the body negative attention. On May 4, 2024, a pro-Palestinian encampment on Grounds was dismantled by local law enforcement, and over 20 students were arrested and controversially

charged, including by UJC. She said she hoped this attention from the UJC's charges, which were eventually dropped, "blossomed" into greater awareness about the UJC and its importance.

McVey predicted UJC's mounting caseload will remain a "continual challenge," noting that the student-run nature of the organization is both a virtue and "its biggest weakness." She pointed out that, though UJC's caseload is demanding, it is not a full-time job, and members must balance the responsibilities of the role with their education, slowing down its processes.

"The individuals who are the stewards of the process are students," McVey said. "[They] have classes and ... finals and they have stuff going on. That's what makes them most representative of their peers."

Both Honor and UJC were also named in the University's latest compliance report to the Justice Department, in which the University outlined steps it is taking to bring University policies into compliance with the Department's interpretation of civil rights law. According to the report, Honor and UJC have discontinued the use of implicit bias training for members.

McVey said that operationally, she does not feel as though much has changed for the UJC in light of the federal developments, but she did note that the current Trump administration's honing in on the policies and culture of higher education has had an effect on organizations like UJC, meriting greater caution from its members on "a granular level."

"I think at the present moment that we're in, where there's such a spotlight on higher education ... agencies of higher education institutions suddenly find themselves having to be more intentionally compliant with the changing policy priorities of the federal government," McVey said.

## Thomas Ackleson, former Honor Committee chair

Thomas Ackleson, former Honor Committee chair and fourth-year Engineering student, sent a written statement to *The Cavalier Daily* in which he reflected on Honor's last four years of work, hailing what he called "significant progress," much of which stemmed from Honor's switch to a multi-sanction system in July of 2023.

The Honor Committee is a student-run committee that upholds and supports "the Community of Trust" by trying and sanctioning students who have violated the University's honor code. For the vast majority of Honor's 180-year history, it operated under a single-sanction system,

which mandated that students found guilty of lying, cheating or stealing were to be expelled from the University. In the Spring of 2022, students overwhelmingly voted to change this single sanction to a two-semester suspension, before Honor rewrote its constitution and processes, switching to a "multi-sanction" system in 2023.

The multi-sanction system includes a variety of sanctions for different offenses committed by students, including writing apology letters, undergoing mandatory mentorship from an Honor-affiliated faculty member and the return of a stolen item or restitution.

"Like you'd expect when creating a new process and constitution, there has been a lot of work to build up fair and efficient procedures over the last three years," Ackleson wrote.

Ackleson also noted that the new process coincided with a "sharp increase" in the number of Honor cases which he believes reflects a "healthier Honor system" in which students are more likely to report allegations of wrongdoing.

"I'm proud of all of the Committee Representatives and Support Officers who have and continue to put countless hours into improving the system, advocating for students and community members, and upholding the Community of Trust," Ackleson wrote.

## Looking Forward

All three organizations have since undergone a change in leadership. UJC elected its new executive committee March 22, and Zach Davidson, third-year College student, began his term as chair April 1. Davidson expressed a desire to further strengthen the relationship between UJC and the student body. Honor elected third-year College student Genny Freed at its annual Graves Mountain Lodge Retreat March 27-29, and Freed took office April 6. Freed expressed a desire to increase transparency and efficiency in the sanctioning process.

The student body elected third-year Commerce student Michael Mitchell as Council President with 51.7 percent of the vote in February. Upon taking office, Mitchell expressed a desire to amplify the student voice when bargaining with other University stakeholders, prioritize building Student Council's long-term financial stability through an endowment and improve access to mental health resources on Grounds.

# Trustees and admin explain planning behind graduation

The Trustees are tasked with planning Valedictory Exercises, which includes selecting keynote speakers and soliciting recipients for class awards

Komal Reddymachu | Staff Writer

The Fourth-Year Trustees and University administrative members began planning and organizing this year's graduation weekend over a year in advance, according to Keoni Vega, Class of 2026 president and fourth-year College student. Graduation weekend includes Valedictory Exercises, the Fourth-Year Class Party Friday and the graduation ceremonies that take place Saturday and Sunday.

While the Saturday and Sunday ceremonies — such as the procession down the Lawn and departmental graduations — are organized by the University and individual schools, Friday's Valedictory Exercises are run entirely by the Trustees. These events include the presentation of class awards, the class gift and a keynote address from the Valediction speaker for this year — former University President Jim Ryan.

"There's a bajillion moving pieces that go into [planning Valedictory Exercises], and it takes well over a year for this weekend," Vega said.

The Trustees are a Special Status Organization entrusted by the University to plan events and provide services for the fourth-year class. Vega explained the scope of the Trustees' responsibility, including organizing traditional and ad-hoc events and communicating with the class.

"A lot of programming for the class is up to us — big traditions and fun things," Vega said. "Like making sure our class Instagram is populated, we have a whole bunch of merch drops, and making sure we're communicating [through] big emails and newsletters."

This year, Valedictory Exercises will be held Friday at 3 p.m. at John Paul Jones Arena. As the official kickoff to graduation weekend, the ceremony will be open to all students and their families without ticketing restrictions.

The Trustees announced Ryan as their Valedictory Exercises speaker April 1, posting a video to the Class of 2026 Instagram page in which fourth-year students were asked who they wanted as their graduation speaker. According to Vega, there was a consensus among the Trustees to invite Ryan, whose selection was rooted in his deep connection with the graduating class.

"Once President Ryan resigned, it became very clear that that was not only the person who should speak, but the person that our classmates were going to want to hear from," Vega said. "We were getting emails and DMs saying, 'Is this at all possible that he could be our speaker?' And it is our choice, and we knew we wanted him."

Unlike Contracted Independent Organizations, which are approved and funded through Student Council, SSOs are groups that operate on be-

half of the University. Vega described SSOs as groups that carry out functions a typical school would normally handle without operating under a fixed set of instructions from University administration.

"We don't have any specific instructions saying, 'this month you do this, and this month you do that,' we have full flexibility and autonomy from the University," Vega said.

Each year, class awards are given out at Valedictory Exercises to members of the graduating class. This year, the Trustees solicited recipients of three class awards — the Orange and Blue Award, the Cultural Fluency Award and the Community Service Award — all of which are presented at Valedictory Exercises. Though the Cultural Fluency and Community Service awards are given annually, each year the class gets to choose one award category themselves.

This year, the Class of 2026 chose the Orange and Blue Award, an award that is given out to a student that exemplifies the University and its values. The Trustees graduation committee — the group of students tasked with planning the valediction ceremonies and related events — aims to finalize the concept for the third award by the end of January, after which a call for nominations is sent out to the graduating class in February.

Nominations for the awards are solicited from the graduating class, and winners are selected by volunteer committees within the Trustees. Along with these, graduating fourth-years are also eligible to receive recognition from outside organizations not affiliated with the Trustees, including the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award and honors presented by secret societies.

The Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award recognizes two graduating fourth-year students and one faculty member each year and is announced and conferred during Valedictory Exercises. According to Vega, the ceremony also includes recognition from secret society groups, though the nature and composition of those awards varies.

Behind the process of planning Valedictory Exercises is a University advising structure that supports the Trustees without directing them. There are two advisors dedicated to advising both the Trustees and the Class Councils — Mary Elizabeth Luzar and Julia Gould. Luzar is specifically dedicated to assisting the Trustees, and guides the work of the Trustees with the underlying principle of student-self governance.

These advisors intervene when an idea suggested by the Trustees poses a safety concern or other obstacle that could prevent the idea from coming to fruition. Once ideas are proposed,



U.Va. graduation ceremony, photographed May 18, 2025.

BENVIN LOZADA | THE CAVALIER DAILY

the advisors share knowledge and experience from previous events or other trustee groups to help the current Trustees.

Also featured during Valedictory Exercises is the presentation of the class gift — a giving campaign organized throughout the year by the Trustees in partnership with the University's NextGen fundraising team. The class gift campaign allows graduating students to donate back to specific on-Grounds organizations, CIOs or causes that were meaningful to them during their time at the University. Annie Zhao, Class of 2026 vice president and fourth-year College student, co-founded CAVS CARE — a student-run CPR certification organization — and directed her class gift donation back toward it.

"[Co-founding CAVS CARE] meant a lot to me because that made a huge impact in my time at U.Va.," Zhao said. "Obviously, I donated back to the organization that I helped build, so that the next years after that, the organization can be bigger and better."

After Valedictory Exercises conclude Friday afternoon, the Trustees host the class party — a celebration Friday evening open to graduates and their families that has historically been held at Alumni Hall. This year, however, the Trustees will host the party in the Virginia Guesthouse, due to Alumni Hall being under construction.

"It's going to be a new venue for all of us, and we've been doing a lot of collaboration, partnership and communication with the staff at the Virginia Guesthouse," Zhao said. "I think

it's going to be an amazing event."

The event runs from 8-11 p.m. Friday and will include live music, food, a photo booth and class merchandise.

While the Trustees handle Friday's programming, the Saturday and Sunday Final Exercises ceremonies are the responsibility of the University's Office of Major Events. Cecil Banks, executive director for major events and external relations at the University, described in a written statement to The Cavalier Daily the scope of the weekend's University-organized components.

Final Exercises, held on Saturday and Sunday, is the University's traditional commencement ceremony. Banks described the event as centered on a procession of graduates down the Lawn. Graduates and their families will hear remarks from University President Scott Beardsley, Board of Visitors Rector Carlos Brown, keynote speakers — including Kenyon Bonner, vice president and chief student affairs officer, Saturday and Assoc. Commerce Prof. Sherri Moore Sunday — and Thomas Hall, chair of the Alumni Association Board of Managers. Following Final Exercises, schools and departments host individual graduation ceremonies across Grounds.

According to Banks, coordinating the University-organized portion of Finals Weekend is a 12-month-long process that draws on contributors from across Grounds.

"My team and I coordinate and plan for Finals Weekend throughout the year," Banks said. "I also lead a University-wide working group of over 100 faculty, staff and contractors, and

we meet throughout the year to plan all details for graduation."

The University also coordinates with 150 to 200 faculty to serve as marshals to facilitate the procession down the Lawn. In addition, more than 200 student, alumni and staff volunteers assist at information and ticket booths and collect balloons for donation to U.Va. Health Children's Hospital.

"Finals Weekend is no small feat," Banks said. "I'm grateful for the nearly 1,000 people that come together to make sure the weekend is special and runs smoothly for our graduates and their families."

This year's Finals Weekend also marks a notable shift in how certain identity-based ceremonies are organized. The University's March 31 civil rights compliance report to the Department of Justice stated that the Division of Student Affairs no longer organizes or hosts the Donning of the Kente Ceremony, the Lavender Ceremony or the Multicultural Recognition Ceremony — all identity-based graduation ceremonies historically held in connection with Final Exercises.

In the place of the identity-based graduation ceremonies, the U.Va. Alumni Association will host four graduation receptions during Finals Weekend at Newcomb Hall — the Multicultural Graduate Reception, the Kente Graduate Reception, the International Graduate Reception and the Lavender Graduate Reception. According to the University's Final Exercises schedule, each event will include remarks from student and alumni leaders.

# SPANISH TRANSLATION

## Trustees explican los preparativos de la graduación

Los Trustees se encargan de organizar la Ceremonia de despedida, que incluye la selección de los presentadores principales y de los candidatos para los premios

Translated by Giselle Moreno, Anthony Garcia Rangel and Blanly Rodriguez

*Nota de la editora: Este artículo fue escrito originalmente por Komal Red-dymachu. Trabajamos para preservar el significado original en la traducción, pero no lo podemos garantizar.*

Los miembros del Board of Trustees de cuarto año y el personal administrativo de la Universidad comenzaron a planificar y organizar el fin de semana de graduación de este año con más de un año de anticipación, según Keoni Vega, presidente de la clase de 2026 y estudiante de cuarto año. El fin de semana de graduación incluye la Ceremonia de despedida, la fiesta de la promoción de cuarto curso el viernes y las ceremonias de graduación que tienen lugar el sábado y el domingo.

Mientras que las ceremonias del sábado y el domingo — como la procesión por el Lawn y las graduaciones de los distintos departamentos — son organizadas por la Universidad y las facultades individuales, los actos de la Ceremonia de despedida del viernes están a cargo exclusivamente de los miembros del Board of Trustees. Estos eventos incluyen la entrega de los premios de la clase de 2026, el regalo de la clase y un discurso de apertura a cargo del orador de la Ceremonia de despedida de este año: el representante de la Universidad Jim Ryan.

«Hay un montón de detalles que hay que tener en cuenta a la hora de planificar [la Ceremonia de despedida], y se tarda más de un año en preparar este fin de semana», afirmó Vega.

Los Trustees son una organización con estatus especial a la que la Universidad ha encomendado la planificación de eventos y la prestación de servicios para la clase de cuarto año. Vega explicó el alcance de las responsabilidades de los Trustees, que incluyen la organización de eventos tradicionales y puntuales, así como la comunicación con la clase.

«Gran parte de la programación para la clase del 2026 depende de nosotros: grandes tradiciones y actividades divertidas», dijo Vega. «Como asegurarnos de que nuestra cuenta de Instagram de la clase esté activa, tenemos un montón de lanzamientos de productos promocionales y nos aseguramos de comunicarnos [a través de] correos electrónicos masivos y boletines informativos».

Este año, la Ceremonia de despedida tendrá lugar el viernes a las 3:00 p.m. en el John Paul Jones Arena. Como inicio oficial del fin

de semana de graduación, la ceremonia estará abierta a todos los estudiantes y sus familias, sin restricciones de entrada.

El 1 de abril, los Trustees anunciaron que Ryan sería el orador de la Ceremonia de despedida y publicaron en la página de Instagram de la promoción de 2026 un vídeo en el que se les preguntaba a los estudiantes de último año quién querían que fuera el orador de su graduación. Según Vega, hubo consenso entre los miembros de los Trustees para invitar a Ryan, cuya elección se basó en su profunda conexión con la clase que se gradúa.

«Una vez que Ryan renunció, quedó muy claro que no solo era la persona que debía hablar, sino también la persona a la que nuestros compañeros iban a querer escuchar», dijo Vega. «Recibíamos correos electrónicos y mensajes directos que decían: “¿Es posible que él sea nuestro presentador?” Y era nuestra elección y sabíamos que lo queríamos a él».

A diferencia de las organizaciones independientes contratadas, que son aprobadas y financiadas por el Student Council, las SSO son grupos que operan en nombre de la Universidad. Vega describió las SSO como grupos que desempeñan funciones que normalmente corresponden a una escuela típica, sin estar sujetos a un reglamento estricto por parte de la administración de la Universidad.

«No recibimos instrucciones específicas del tipo: “este mes haz esto y el mes que viene haz aquello”; contamos con total flexibilidad y autonomía por parte de la Universidad», afirmó Vega.

Cada año, se entregan premios de la clase a los miembros de la clase que se gradúan durante la Ceremonia de despedida. Este año, los Trustees solicitaron a los ganadores de tres premios de la clase — el Premio Orange and Blue, el Premio de Cultural Fluency y el Premio Community Service —, todos los cuales se entregan en la Ceremonia de despedida. Aunque los premios de Cultural Fluency y de Community Service se otorgan anualmente, cada año la clase puede elegir por sí misma una categoría de premio.

Este año, la promoción de 2026 eligió el Premio Orange and Blue, un galardón que se otorga a un estudiante que sea un ejemplo de la Universidad y de sus valores. El comité de graduación de los Trustees — el grupo de estudiantes encargado de planificar la Ceremonia

de despedida y los eventos relacionados — tiene como objetivo concretar el concepto del tercer premio a finales de enero, tras lo cual se enviará una convocatoria de candidaturas a la clase que se gradúa en febrero.

Las nominaciones para los premios son solicitadas a la clase graduada y los ganadores son seleccionados por comités voluntarios dentro de los Trustees. Entré estos, estudiantes de cuarto año que se están graduando también son elegibles para recibir reconocimiento de organizaciones no afiliadas a los Trustees, incluyendo el Premio Algernon Sydney Sullivan y honores presentados por sociedades secretas.

El Premio Algernon Sydney Sullivan reconoce a dos estudiantes de cuarto año que se están graduando y a un miembro del cuerpo docente cada año y se anuncia y se otorga durante la Ceremonia de despedida. Según Vega, la ceremonia también incluye el reconocimiento de grupos de sociedades secretas, aunque la naturaleza y la composición de dichos reconocimientos varían.

Detrás del proceso de planificación de la Ceremonia de despedida se encuentra una estructura de asesoramiento de la Universidad que apoya a los Trustees sin dirigirlos. Hay dos asesores dedicados a asesorar a ambos Trustees y los Consejos de la clase — Mary Elizabeth Luzar y Julia Gould. Luzar está específicamente dedicada a asistir a los Trustees y a guiar su trabajo con el principio fundamental de la autogestión estudiantil.

Estos asesores intervienen cuando una idea propuesta por los Trustees plantea un problema de seguridad u otro obstáculo que pueda impedir que la idea se lleve a cabo. Cuando las ideas son propuestas, los asesores comparten sus conocimientos y experiencias de eventos previos u otros grupos de trustees para ayudar a los actuales Trustees.

La presentación del regalo de la clase también se realiza durante la Ceremonia de despedida — es una campaña de donación organizada durante el año por los Trustees en colaboración con el equipo de recaudación de fondos de la Universidad NextGen. La campaña del regalo de la clase permite a estudiantes graduados donar a organizaciones específicas en la Universidad, grupos estudiantiles o causas que fueron significativas en sus tiempos en la Universidad. Annie Zhao, la vicepresidenta de la Clase de 2026

y estudiante del Colegio de cuarto año, cofundó CavsCARE — una organización para la certificación en CPR gestionada por estudiantes — y dirigió su donación del regalo de clase a esta organización.

«[Co-fundando CavsCARE] significó mucho para mí porque tuvo un gran impacto durante mi tiempo en UVa», dijo Zhao. «Obviamente, doné a la organización que ayude a construir, para que en los años que vengan la organización sea más grande y mejor».

Después de que la Ceremonia de despedida termine en la tarde del viernes, los Trustees van a organizar la fiesta de la clase — una celebración en la noche del viernes para los graduados y sus familias que históricamente ha sido en Alumni Hall. Sin embargo, este año los Trustees van a tener la fiesta en la Guesthouse de Virginia, dado que Alumni Hall está en construcción.

«Va a ser un nuevo lugar para todos nosotros, y hemos estado colaborando, trabajando en equipo y comunicándonos mucho con el personal de la Virginia Guesthouse», dijo Zhao. «Creo que va a ser un evento increíble».

El evento será de 8 a 11 de la noche el viernes e incluirá música en vivo, comida, una cabina de fotos y mercancía de la clase.

Mientras los Trustees se encargan de la programación del viernes, las ceremonias de graduación del sábado y domingo van a ser responsabilidad de la Office of Major Events de la Universidad. Cecil Banks, directora ejecutiva de eventos grandes y relaciones externas en la Universidad, describió en una declaración escrita a The Cavalier Daily la grandeza de los componentes organizados por la Universidad ese fin de semana.

Las ceremonias de graduación, celebradas el sábado y el domingo, son las tradicionales de la Universidad. Banks describió el evento como una procesión de graduados por el Lawn. Los graduados y sus familias van a escuchar comentarios del presidente de la Universidad, Scott Beardsley; de Carlos Brown, el rector de la Junta; de los presentadores principales — Kenyon Bonner, vicepresidente y director de asuntos estudiantiles, el sábado, y la profesora asociada de comercio, Sherri Moore, el domingo; y de Thomas Hall, presidente de la Junta Directiva de la Asociación de Antiguos Alumnos. Siguiendo las ceremonias de graduación, las escuelas y los departamentos tendrán sus

ceremonias individuales en toda la Universidad.

Según Banks, coordinar la promoción organizada por la Universidad en el Finals Weekend es un proceso de 12 meses que se basa en los colaboradores de la Universidad.

«Mi equipo y yo coordinamos y planificamos para el Finals Weekend durante todo el año», dijo Banks. «También dirijo un grupo de trabajo de la Universidad con más de 100 empleados y contratistas, y nos vemos durante el año para planear todos los detalles de la graduación.»

La Universidad también coordina entre 150 y 200 empleados que actúan como oficiales para facilitar la caminata en el Lawn. Adicionalmente, más de 200 estudiantes, alumnos y voluntarios van a asistir en bancas de información y de boletos, y van a coleccionar globos para donar al Hospital de Salud de Niños en UVa.

«Finals Weekend no es una pequeña hazaña», dijo Banks. «Estoy agradecida por las casi 1.000 personas que se van a juntar para asegurarse de que el fin de semana sea especial y que fluya para nuestros graduados y sus familias.»

El Finals Weekend de este año también marca un cambio significativo en cómo ciertas ceremonias basadas en la identidad son organizadas. El reporte del 31 de marzo del Departamento de Justicia sobre el cumplimiento de derechos civiles de la Universidad declaró que la Division of Student Affairs no va a organizar la Ceremonia Donning of the Kente, la Ceremonia Lavender o la Ceremonia de Multicultural Recognition — todas las ceremonias de graduación basadas en identidad, históricamente organizadas en conexión con la ceremonia de graduación.

En lugar de las ceremonias de graduación basadas en la identidad, la UVa Alumni Association va a organizar cuatro recepciones de graduación durante el Finals Weekend en Newcomb Hall — la Recepción de Multicultural Recognition, la Recepción de Graduados Kente, la Recepción de Graduados Internacionales y la Recepción de Graduados Lavender. Según el horario de los eventos de graduación de la Universidad, cada uno incluirá comentarios de líderes estudiantiles y de alumnos.



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We are so proud of the class of 2026 and have no doubt that you will make a profound impact on the world.

**Wahoowa,  
 The UVA Parents Program**



# LIFE

## 126 ways to bid Grounds farewell

The renowned yearly checklist encourages fourth-year students to embrace iconic traditions and everyday moments before leaving Grounds

Sydney Lambert | Staff Writer

With the start of the fall semester, fourth-years' countdowns to graduation slowly begin. Subtle reminders of the year's end peek through small moments and countless memories woven into University student life. Besides nostalgia, for many, this period motivates a sense of urgency to take advantage of remaining opportunities and embrace University cornerstones before their time on Grounds comes to a close.

And what better way to check off all that the University has to offer than with a list. Since 2007, the Fourth-Year Trustees have created a dependable, yet evolving list of "126 Things To Do Before We Graduate." This year, the list featured 126 items for the Class of 2026, which are intended to unite prospective graduates over the common goal of appreciating their final lap in full. The items on the list aim to give meaning to every stroll across the Lawn, meal on the Corner and late-night library lock-in.

These items are up to the discretion of the Trustees, making each year's list a little different than the last. List tasks encompass a wide range of University experiences, from getting a CPR certification to eating dinner at Asado to even taking a shower in the basement of Shannon Library. The comprehensive list sets a challenge that many soon-to-be graduates students become ardent about completing.

For participating fourth-years, checking off each task becomes a central part of their final year on Grounds. Fourth-year College student Kolbe Osarchuk and her roommates all adorned their bedroom doors with the poster, and have created a friendly competition that encouraged them to make the most out of their last year.

"We take [the list] pretty seriously. Our goal originally was to finish everything on the list," Osarchuk said. "It's just been a fun way to make sure that we're seeing all that U.Va. has to offer before we go."

Echoing this sentiment, fourth-year College student Amanda Southfield explained how the list introduced her to many of the quintessential University experiences, some of which she said she would not have known about otherwise.

"There [are] a lot of things on the list that I didn't even know existed, so [without the list], I probably wouldn't have been able to do as much," Southfield said. "I think that my mentality, regardless of the list, was to go into fourth year trying to experience as much of Charlottesville as I can, and do as many different things as I can."

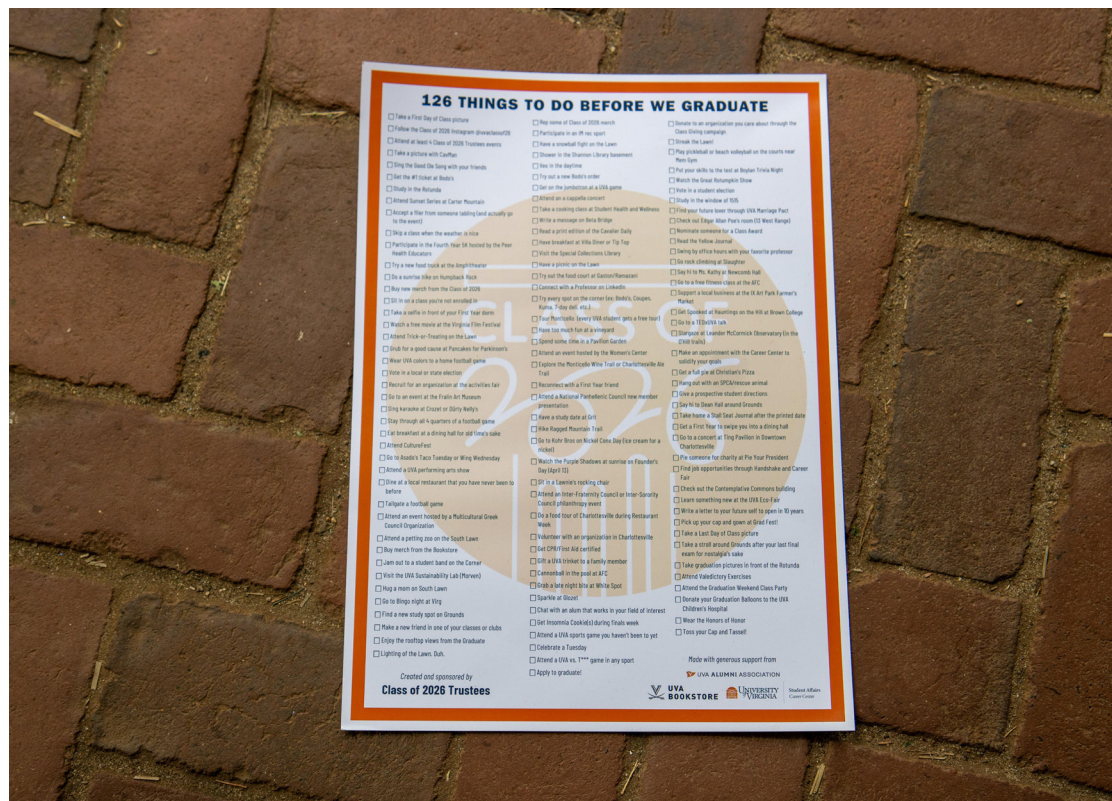
According to Osarchuk, the list has pushed her and her friends to get involved on Grounds in ways they never expected, drawing them into attending several University-sponsored events they might have otherwise overlooked. They have even carved out entire days to tick some items off the list — most notably, a packed fall morning when Pancakes for Parkinson's, the Fourth Year 5K and CultureFest all occurred on the same day.

Each year since its inception, the Trustees have added one new task to the list, allowing it to grow alongside each graduating class, culminating in this year's 126 items for the Class of 2026. Keoni Vega, Fourth-Year Trustees President and fourth-year College student, remembers putting the list together at the start of the semester, paying close attention to what he hoped students would take away from the experience.

According to Vega, his intention in weaving in a diverse array of activities ranging from Greek life philanthropy events to a cappella performances was to pull students beyond their familiar circles, encouraging them to meet new people and get into the habit of saying "yes" to experiences beyond their beaten path.

"Everything [the Trustees] work towards is bringing people together and creating community," Vega said. "I think that's really special in a place like U.Va., where there are thousands of undergraduate students all involved in different things."

Still, it is no simple feat to create camaraderie across thousands of students as they decide how to maximize their final months in Charlottesville. Annie Zhao, Fourth-Year Trustees Vice President and fourth-year College student, said she has noticed a sense of community emerge from students who have shared their progress on the list across social media, documenting their



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Since 2007, the fourth-year Trustees have created a dependable, yet evolving list of "126 Things To Do Before Graduation," which is intended to unite prospective graduates over this common goal of appreciating their final lap in full.

experiences in a way that other students can engage with.

Zhao said she does not merely see the list as an opportunity to bring University students together during their time on Grounds, but also sees it as a chance to create a snapshot of student life. She explained how the list can function as a tangible memory that alumni can look back on post-graduation and reminisce on what it felt like to be a student at the University.

"At the end of the day, yeah, it's just a poster, but it's also a year-long activity that we've put on," Zhao said. "Even after you graduate, you can still refer to this list [for] what U.Va. has to offer."

With connection across the class as an essential function of the list, the pursuit of these 126 items has fostered new friendships among aspiring list-completers. Southfield noted that by the time fourth year rolls around, many students have already formed enduring friendships and find it more difficult to meet new people.

Southfield explained how the list offers participants an opportunity to diversify their social

circles. For her, a list item resulted in her joining multiple intramural sports teams, where she got closer with peers from clubs that she had not interacted with prior to her fourth year. Southfield said she believes that the list's push to move outside one's comfort zone will even benefit students as they embark on new adventures after graduation.

"I've met a lot of people ... I'm closer to a lot of people that I didn't know before this," Southfield said. "I think there are real-world parallels [to] post-grad [for] a lot of the things that are on the list that I will hopefully try to do."

Similarly, Osarchuk noted how the list even encouraged her to reflect on how she can bring this habit of trying new things and taking advantage of what life has to offer into her post-graduate routine. She said she plans to take this spontaneous mentality with her as she moves to Chicago following graduation, creating a list of her own detailing everything her new city will have to offer.

"I'm list-building in my head, thinking about everywhere I have to go [in Chicago]," Osarchuk

said. "[I want to] find more niche things that wouldn't just be on a Pinterest bucket list."

At its core, the list was designed to shape fourth-year students' final year in Charlottesville through a shared feeling of accomplishment. Over the past four years, the Class of 2026 has built a sense of community through numerous events and undertakings — from planning First Year Formal to hosting study sessions in Clemons Library during finals — and now, in their fourth and final year, they built this bucket-list to guide them to the very end.

"Class Council is here for spirit, unity and to bring the class together," Zhao said. "This list does just that, because these are all activities that we have done in common. At the end of the day, we're graduating all as a Class of 2026 [with] these shared experiences."

# Balloons at Final Exercises — from the Lawn to a greater good

This favorite University tradition leaves graduates with a symbol of joy, then giving that joy back to a good cause

Claire McGinn and Ingrid Gay | Staff Writer, Life Editor

As a new class of graduates walk the Lawn, pops of color will mark the crowd. While the typical graduation fixtures of caps and gowns adorn the soon-to-be alumni of the University, there is something atypical in the hand of many students — a balloon.

These helium-filled novelties have become a staple at Final Exercises at the University. The tradition began in the past two decades as a way for families to spot graduates in the large, similarly-dressed crowd.

For the vast majority of graduates, Final Exercises is the last time they get to be a student on Grounds. The balloons, in tandem, are one of their final acts at the University. Annie Zhao, Vice President of Fourth-Year Trustees and fourth-year College student, highlighted how the tradition is a bookend for all of their accomplishments at the University and an avenue of expression for students.

“Everyone’s in the same gown ... as you’re walking down ... so having your balloons is [saying], ‘This is me. I am U.Va. I’m walking down the Lawn ... and I’ve graduated,’” Zhao said.

Each graduate chooses their balloon with a distinct meaning in mind, from something simple like a favorite color to a deeper childhood memory. Fourth-year College student Molly Isabella’s balloon is a goose. A tie back to her childhood nickname “Goose” given to her by her father — an alumnus of the University — the balloon is meant to represent the child she says goodbye to as she enters adulthood after graduation.

“[To me], the balloon is supposed to represent your childhood and packing up that era of your life,” Isabella said. “I thought a goose would be good ... My childhood nickname ties to my family and part of my identity.”

Ella Kreft, Fourth-Year Trustees Graduation Chair and fourth-year College student, has had a vital hand in this year’s Final Exercises, from organizing the commencement speaker to working with the Office of the President. From her volunteer experiences at past graduations, the balloons have become something she has loved due to the colorful individuality they bring for each graduate.

“Students are really able to choose what signifies their time at U.Va., their major [or] their interests,” Kreft said. “As you’re



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These helium-filled novelties have become a staple at Final Exercises at the University. The tradition began in the past two decades as a way for families to spot graduates in the large, similarly-dressed crowd.

walking, [the balloon is] like an indicator of what you’ve spent your time doing at U.Va., or maybe in your life or where you’re from, which is interesting.”

However, students find that with this tradition comes pressure to pick the perfect balloon. Many can feel as though they have to pick a mere entity or two to represent a whole chapter of their life. For Zhao, anxiety about having the quintessential encapsulating figure has caused her to remain undecided about what she will choose to carry with her down the Lawn.

“Why I’m kind of undecided on which balloons I want at this point [is] because it feels like it’s a display of who I am,” Zhao said. “I want it to be meaningful. I want it to be representative of all the good memories. But there’s only so many balloons you can have before it gets too jumbled.”

For many prospective balloon-carriers, the added pressures of aesthetically commemorating milestones on social media make them feel like they need to have the perfect graduation post. Isabella, a content creator who documents her life at the University, said this aspect has contributed to her stress about graduation.

“You want something that’s

very unique to you, and you want something that other people are going to be like, ‘Oh my gosh, wow, that’s such a good one’ or ‘What’s the meaning behind it?’ You want it to be significant,” Isabella said. “I definitely think there is pressure, especially at U.Va., because everyone has these crazy good ideas ... something that’s so significant they encapsulate it in the perfect balloon.”

The popularity of the University tradition only continues to rise each year. Seeing recent graduations’ increase in balloons, the “Balloon Brigade” — as it was dubbed by the Office for Sustainability — was formed in order to manage the large quantity of balloons.

Specifically, the Balloon Brigade has a system for how to handle the thousands of balloons to reduce waste. The balloons are not released — in accordance with the Commonwealth of Virginia’s illegalization of intentional outdoor balloon releases in 2021 — but instead collected as students walk down the Lawn. Once acquired, the majority of the balloons are donated to U.Va. Health Children’s Hospital, with excess then being distributed to local elementary schools or nursing homes.

The idea to donate the excess balloons came from Matt Weber,

senior advisor to the president and chief creative officer, in 2019, during his term as senior assistant to the president. For graduates like Zhao, the contribution to a greater cause makes the tradition even more special.

“One of my favorite parts about our volunteers at grad weekend is that they’re able to donate all of these balloons,” Zhao said. “I think that’s the best-case scenario of mass donation [and] handling of the balloons, is to give them to people who would love to have them, right? It would make their days to have balloons that are out of the ordinary.”

Though the balloons are a bright and colorful tradition to some, they can be a pesky hindrance to others. Some feel that besides bringing whimsy and originality to the ceremony, they can obstruct onlookers’ views of the renowned sights the University offers. For Lela Garner, sustainability manager for student outreach and engagement in the University’s Office for Sustainability, this apprehension is largely directed towards those who opt to string multiple mementos.

“While I appreciate the ‘feel-good’ aspects of a balloon-filled graduation, I do wonder if this element has grown a bit too large,” Garner said. “I’m person-

ally a fan of simply enjoying the beautiful architecture and history of the Lawn. Perhaps graduates could limit themselves to one balloon each so we can strike a better balance.”

With added balloons comes another possibility — repeated balloons. While the tradition is rooted in individuality, Isabella welcomes the idea that someone might also carry a goose just like her. Even though they would have the same balloon, she emphasized that the reasoning or choice behind the decision is what truly makes it unique.

“If there’s another goose, I would love that, because I want to ask someone else why they would have picked the same one,” Isabella said. “I’m very happy with the meaning that I chose.”

As they walk down the Lawn one final time together, each graduating class is bound together by students holding the string of the balloon that flies high above them. While these balloons may not go with them past the Lawn, they signify one’s last page of the chapter of student life at the University.

“The balloons are a sign of unity and joy ... [and] each person is able to express themselves through the balloons that they choose,” Zhao said.

# More than the menu

How writing about food reshaped my relationship with it — and helped me find connection to Charlottesville

Evelyn Maxwell | Staff Writer

For much of my life, reading a menu has been an exercise in subtraction.

I was diagnosed with Celiac Disease when I was two years old. Before I could understand a menu, my mom handled it for me. Before curiosity, before flavor, even before hunger, there was a quiet process of elimination — scanning for what wasn't safe, what questions I'd need to ask before even beginning to decide what I wanted. What feels effortless for others has always been more deliberate for me.

The ritual is second nature to me now, almost instinctive. Yet over time, that vigilance has also become a way of paying attention.

When you can't take a menu at face value, you learn to look closer. I notice the details others might neglect, like the way a dish is described or the care — or lack thereof — in how ingredients are sourced. I've come to understand that food is never just about what ends up on the plate — it is about the decisions behind it.

When I came to Charlottesville four years ago, I expected to find a vibrant restaurant scene, along with

the same careful routine I had grown used to — reading between the lines of menus, asking questions and often feeling like my needs were an afterthought. What I didn't expect was how much the process of finding places that truly considered me would come to shape my time here. Even less did I expect that it would lead me to start writing for *The Cavalier Daily*.

Writing about food initially felt like a natural extension of what I've been doing my entire life. I've spent years mastering how to move through restaurants with a dietary restriction — how to direct conversations with staff, which details matter, which places are worth returning to.

Putting my experiences into words felt useful, if nothing else — a way to share what I had learned with others managing similar restrictions. But over time, it became more than that.

Writing for *The Cavalier Daily* transformed how I experience food altogether. From restaurant reviews to recipes, it has moved me from simply navigating restaurants to truly engaging with them — appreciating how and why things are made, who is mak-

ing the dishes and what stories shape each space.

I began to notice the difference between accommodation and intention. The difference between a place that makes something work out of pure necessity and a place that considers you from the start. These differences, I've realized, are worth writing about.

Each restaurant and every chef I've reviewed offered more than just a menu. There were people behind every decision — owners who built something from the ground up, chefs who infused their dishes with personal history and teams who quietly shaped the experience.

My role, in many ways, has been to articulate and celebrate those details.

To write about a dish is one thing. To express the care embedded in it is another. I am part of a broader conversation — highlighting the people behind the food, the stories behind the spaces and the effort that often goes unnoticed.

In doing so, I've found a deeper sense of connection to Charlottesville itself. Yet what has impacted me most is how that connection has been re-

turned. When restaurant owners have reached out to express their appreciation — for the attention to detail, for the way their work is represented — it has reinforced that this kind of storytelling matters. Not just to readers, but to the people behind the scenes.

Even more, these exchanges with the community didn't stop at the written page. They followed me home.

Cooking has always been a constant in my life — a space where I don't have to question ingredients or second-guess what's safe. But in Charlottesville, my approach began to shift. What I experienced in restaurants didn't just shape my writing — it started to influence what I created in my own kitchen.

I found myself returning from restaurants with ideas — trying to recreate dishes in ways that worked for me, not as exact replicas, but as interpretations. I took inspiration from conversations with chefs, and cooking became a bridge between what I experienced and what I could create. Sharing recipes with readers became a way to translate experience into something tangible.

This idea — that food is, at its core, connective — is what I keep coming back to.

Charlottesville is, in many ways, a map of my experiences. It is so much more than a collection of restaurants — it is a network of moments including everything from first visits, favorite orders and conversations that lasted far longer than the meal.

Now, as I think about leaving, I find myself returning to this feeling more than anything else. Not specific dishes, but the sense of experience that comes with them.

For most of my life, I thought my relationship with food would always be defined by what I couldn't eat. Writing changed that.

What once felt like a limitation has become a way of seeing — one that has allowed me to seek, and help create, spaces for connection. And in the end, it has allowed me to find connections in places I once thought were out of reach.

## ROUNDTABLE: Fourth-year favorites

Three graduating Life desk writers reflect on the classes, events and Charlottesville staples that shaped their college experiences

Blaine Hutchens, Grace Traxler and Lindsay Lian | Staff Writers

Three graduating staff writers reflect on their favorite courses, University traditions and Charlottesville locales that came to feel like home. These favorites are a snapshot of the experiences they will carry with them long after their time at the University.

**What is your favorite Charlottesville staple?**

Grace Traxler, Staff Writer: Mine is unequivocally Ragged Mountain Running & Walking Shop on the Corner. Working there for the past two years has been one of the most meaningful parts of my time in Charlottesville. Through my experiences fitting customers for shoes, I have become better at listening, paying attention to details and making conversation. The Lorenzonis — the family that owns Ragged — have made patience and kindness integral to their store. The Charlottesville community would not be the same without them. I know that the friendships I've made and lessons I've learned at Ragged will stay with me long after I leave.

Blaine Hutchens, Staff Writer: The Grit Coffee on Elliewood Av-

enue is the Charlottesville staple I couldn't have lived without. Grit's warm, inviting atmosphere provided a much-needed space to work. I can say with certainty that around half of all my schoolwork was done from the café's second floor. Meeting friends at this Corner staple for a cup of coffee will definitely be one of the things I'll miss the most.

Lindsay Lian, Staff Writer: I would be remiss not to give Coupe Deville's its proper recognition. Walking up the Corner Parking Lot, I can peer over the Coupe's fence and see friends gathered around the stage or perched on the elevated stones. Visions of being surrounded by friends singing along horribly to Florence + The Machine's "The Dog Days Are Over" flash before me, and I am reminded of how precious these carefree moments are amidst the feelings of impending doom surrounding graduation.

**What is your favorite University event or tradition?**

GT: I love Foxfield. Standing in a field for five hours is not everyone's cup of tea but it is definitely mine. The best part about Foxfield is that

everyone you have ever met at the University is at the same place. Even though the internet service is bad, if you just keep wandering, you are guaranteed to run into friends and classmates from semesters past. Unexpected encounters are one of the best parts of life, and Foxfield is the place to make them happen.

BH: Each December, I've looked forward to Lighting of the Lawn as a way for members of the University community to come together amidst the stress of finals week. Something about huddling together in the 30-degree weather, listening to the a cappella performances and watching the Rotunda light show at the end makes it a really nice way to end the fall semester. Plus, if you know any fourth-years who live on the Lawn, visiting their rooms during the festivities provides a much-needed break from the cold and some hot cocoa.

LL: Despite not being much of a runner or an early riser myself, I have absolutely loved Run with Jim. The tradition brings together people of all ages — and thankfully, athletic backgrounds — welcoming sprinters and leisurely walkers alike. The route

follows a scenic tour of Grounds that felt like a Hannah Montana finale-esque reflection of my favorite spots throughout the last four years.

**In your four years at the University, what has been your favorite class?**

GT: This semester, I took ENGL 4559, "Aesthetic Theory", and it was the most engaging class I've taken. The questions driving this course were behemoths — how do we talk about concepts such as authorship, beauty, creativity and more in the age of artificial intelligence? Initially, I was drawn to this class because I am incredibly fearful of AI's hold on the world. We studied how various philosophers define these aesthetic concepts, while also looking at examples of and scholarship on computer-generated texts. Having a space to think about these philosophical questions has really sharpened my ability to articulate my opinions, and I know I will bring these skills with me as I begin a career in the media world.

BH: My history major seminar, HIST 4501, was the perfect opportunity to do original, independent re-

search in a small, relatively informal class setting. In what turned out to be a very hectic semester for me, this class was a nice way to set out on my own research course and produce a piece of work I was genuinely happy with. I opted for the English Legal History topic. Choosing a seminar topic that really interested me made the completion of this major requirement so much more enjoyable and fulfilling. Plus, working in a small group provided opportunities for better connection with classmates and my professor than in a lecture-style class.

LL: I took EBUS 2830, "Innovation and New Ventures" to fulfill a requirement for my technology entrepreneurship minor this fall. The project-based class was somewhat of an introduction to customer discovery, pitching and all things startup-related, and culminated in each small group of three to four students pitching a startup idea at the end of the semester. No two classes were the same, and sessions flowed seamlessly between guest lectures, paper airplane pitch competitions, heart-felt life lessons and murder mystery themed case studies.

## SPORTS

## TILOCK: The words beyond words

From hundreds of interviews, select standouts gave so much more than quotes for an article

Xander Tilock | Senior Writer

People react to articles in different ways. “Thank you” is a rare reaction, though. I was especially shocked to hear “thank you” from Tony Bennett.

In gathering insight for stories, I’ve spoken with hundreds of student-athletes, coaches, media, students, alumni, fans and more throughout my seven semesters with The Cavalier Daily. Back in October of 2025, a dear friend of mine, Jonah Werbel, suggested I compile a list of the “coolest people” I’ve met.

As I compiled the list, I reflected on the idea that many Cavaliers left me with more than article material — they also shared some valuable lessons. Here are some of my favorite characters from my 240-plus articles, and what I learned from them.

**Tony Bennett — service is everything, and it comes in many forms**

Coach Tony Bennett, the venerated leader of Virginia basketball from 2009-2024 and 2019 national champion, needs no introduction.

However, Bennett was not just a successful coach — players, fans, coaches and media regarded him as a great man who represented the Cavaliers honorably. His five pillars of humility, passion, unity, servanthood and thankfulness anchored Virginia to do things the right way. Win or lose, Bennett’s Cavaliers held their heads high and almost never engaged in unsportsmanlike conduct.

Bennett, among many things, is a philosopher of the game — and of powerful quotes, like the kind you put on a poster. Bennett reiterated one of those sayings frequently in the sunset of his time as Virginia’s head coach.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose,” Bennett said at his retirement press conference.

After Bennett’s retirement press conference, I spoke with him one-on-one for a few minutes. I thanked him for his service to the University. He responded by thanking me for my own service to the University.

I was surprised. I asked him how I could have possibly “served the University.”

Bennett said that telling the stories of the Cavaliers with high-quality writing was a form of service, a unique gateway for the fans to connect with the team. That was the final interaction I had with Bennett before his departure, and I have not since forgotten it.

**Mel Josephson — be sure to laugh**  
Josephson, a goalkeeper on the

women’s lacrosse team, is a fun character. She is part of a University improv comedy group called the “Whethermen” — and it is easy to tell why. Josephson was marvelously hilarious when I interviewed her back in May of 2024.

In our conversation, Josephson emphasized that lacrosse can be intense. It is called the fastest sport on two feet, after all. But through the calamity of lacrosse balls flying at her face at 70 miles per hour from point-blank range, Josephson is consistently calm. Perhaps her humor helps that — Josephson told me that improv is an essential artistic outlet to balance the stresses of being a goalkeeper.

Even though women’s lacrosse suffered postseason heartbreak after postseason heartbreak throughout the past few years, Josephson never let a loss drag her down. She carries an infectious energy that invigorates her team regardless of a game’s result.

Towards the end of the interview — a player feature ahead of the postseason — I asked her if she had any final comment. She replied, “see us May 26.” I asked her for clarification, and she reminded me that it was the date of the national championship game. That special kind of witty confidence still impresses me in reflection.

Our conversation reminded me that if we cannot find moments of joy irrespective of a specific outcome, then what’s the point of playing a game at all? No one wins every single time. Oftentimes folks forget that a sport is a game. After all, you “play lacrosse,” not “work lacrosse.”

**Bryce Perkins — there’s no such thing as failure, you either win or learn from struggles**

As I wrote back in May of 2025, junior quarterback Bryce Perkins did not have a good first day at the University at the start of 2018. He transferred from Arizona Western — a community college — to Charlottesville in the midst of a snowstorm. He had never seen ice or snow in his life. Amid uncertainty about joining a brand-new program for a chance that he knew would be his last, Perkins was forced to adapt quickly.

And adapt he did. He embraced Virginia with open arms, and, one year later, led the Cavaliers to a win over Virginia Tech and a New Year’s Six bowl appearance versus No. 9 Florida.

When I spoke with him last May, he explained to me that any opportunity is a chance for resilience and personal growth — especially when things aren’t going your way. After Perkins declared for the 2020 NFL



MAC DOUCETTE | THE CAVALIER DAILY

Xander Tilock was a sports editor for the 135th and 136th terms of The Cavalier Daily.

Draft, he went undrafted and was buried on the Los Angeles Rams practice squad. Then, in 2024, Perkins ultimately found himself stuck in the lesser United Football League. His response? Winning UFL MVP.

Perkins said he especially focused on resiliency when he was left without an NFL job — even after he played a few games as a third-string quarterback in the Rams’ 2021 Super Bowl run. Even though Perkins’ professional career hasn’t been what he’d hoped, he has managed to keep it alive through pure grit and an unbreakable love of the game.

I have thought about Perkins’ passion for the game throughout my writing career. Sometimes I look back on a story I wrote and think I could have or should have changed a few details. But regardless of how I feel a piece turned out in retrospect, I know that it ended up how it was supposed to. And regardless of where I thought I’d be by now, I love to look back and see how far my writing has come.

**Connor Shellenberger — home will always be home**

Connor Shellenberger is a Charlottesville kid. He grew up cheering on the Cavaliers, and went on to be a four-time All-American in lacrosse — wearing the Virginia uniform.

I crossed paths with Shellenberger a few times at media availability, and at the Final Four in 2024. That Final Four game, a brutal 12-6 loss to rival Maryland, was Shellenberger’s final collegiate game as a player. It was a

heartbreaking ending to an immensely fruitful chapter of Virginia men’s lacrosse.

As the final whistle blew, some players threw their helmets to the ground. Others cried. Some just stood still. Shellenberger hugged his teammates, then he faced the media with composure and poise. Always a class act, Shellenberger leads by example — a fitting trait for a hometown hero.

Postgame, Shellenberger said that his time as a Cavalier “means everything.” As it turns out, that time got extended — Shellenberger is now an assistant coach for the Cavaliers this season, still serving the team he has loved throughout his entire life.

I think that dedication to home is incredibly admirable. As I move on to a new chapter, I hope to carry that love of the University with me for the rest of my life, just like Shellenberger has.

**Laughlin Ryan — don’t forget to smile**

Ryan tore her ACL three times. That sucks.

She was a midfielder on the women’s soccer team from 2020-2025, and spent most of those years sidelined by injury. Ryan played in less than half of the total games during her time as a Cavalier. I wrote a feature on her before the 2024 season and was honestly surprised at how positive she was, considering her situation.

Fortunately for the Cavaliers, Laughlin Ryan is a trooper. When I occasionally stepped in to cover for the women’s soccer beat, I always saw No.

5 with a smile on her face.

“I don’t think there’s a more inspirational player on our team,” Coach Steve Swanson said during the 2023 season. “It’s an amazing story of the human spirit, that’s for sure.”

From our interview back in August of 2024, Ryan made her team-oriented mindset clear from the get-go — an interview intended to be about herself was actually going to be an interview about the whole team. For every question I asked her about herself, she would give an answer that revolved around her teammates. Her selflessness and joy were so powerful to the point where the article had to shift into a more comprehensive type of feature, one about Virginia women’s soccer as much as her own recovery.

During a short interaction with her parents, I could easily see why Ryan was so deeply rooted in gratitude and unity. At a game, they thanked me for writing about their daughter — it was the first time I’d heard that. Their appreciation was a valuable reminder that as journalists, we are writing real stories about real people. This service must be done with the utmost care.

But while The Cavalier Daily is certainly a service to others, it has also given me so much throughout my time here. So, I hope you are an avid CD sports reader or become one. You’ll learn so much from these stellar CD writers. The University sports community is one where you will find an abundance of lifelong lessons and memories.

# Senior Day? Try ‘Grad Student Day.’ Or ‘Here for a Year Day.’

In the age of the transfer portal, the emotional force of a landmark moment in a student-athlete’s life has been blunted in certain sports

Michael Liebermann | Senior Writer

Truitt Sunderland leaned on his lacrosse sticks. He glanced up at the empty metal bleachers as he spoke.

This had been his last regular-season game ever at Klöckner Stadium. His Senior Day. Before the game, he had walked out with his parents, Athan and Kate, hugging the coaching staff, smiling for a picture.

After four full years, he might never again play lacrosse in this stadium. His coach knew what it meant.

“It’s like, ‘Oh my gosh, this is it,’” Coach Lars Tiffany said.

Senior Day, for the most part, still carries a heavy impact in non-revenue sports like men’s lacrosse. But it is no longer such an emotional night for all basketball and football players honored. Many still have a graduate year. Or they are walking out representing a school they only moved to this year. Or they have been at the school four or five years and yet, most of their fellow seniors have not.

Senior Day? Try ‘Senior and Graduate Student Day.’ Or try ‘Here for a Year Day.’

Virginia football honored 56 players this season — 31 of them were graduate students. The men’s basketball team honored five players, and four of them were graduate students. They had all already had, at some other place, a Senior Day.

Of the 56 football players, 36 of them were transfers, and of the five men’s basketball players, all of them had first touched Grounds less than a year before their Senior Day.

“With the new style of college basketball, everybody bouncing around from place to place, you never get that connectivity,” graduate guard Malik Thomas said after his Senior Day.

The connective tissue — between a player and his teammates, a player and his school and the fans — never fully forms in the revenue sports. It renders Senior Day, once a stirring culmination of four years, a little flat. It can still be nice. But it is not the same.

“I couldn’t imagine one or two years,” Tiffany said. “That feels so different. I don’t want that model. I love the four to five year model.”

The old model is still visible at Virginia, down the road from John Paul Jones Arena and Scott Stadium, at places like Klöckner and Palmer Park.

The softball team held its Sen-



COURTESY VIRGINIA ATHLETICS

Graduate quarterback Chandler Morris was one of many players that transferred for one year.

ior Day April 26. It honored five players with framed jerseys and flowers in a ceremony at the intimate Palmer Park. All of them came here as freshmen. They joined a program two seasons removed from a record of 15-33, then stayed and shepherded it to the national rankings and new heights. This meant something.

“The senior class is why we are where we are,” Coach Joanna Hardin said. “There’s no question about that. They committed here. They stayed really faithful.”

It is possible that a similar atmosphere can be restored to revenue sports, that the stratification is not forever. Men’s basketball Coach Ryan Odom is trying. His team last season, constructed from a raid of the transfer portal, formed an unusual bond in just one year. Odom and his staff worked hard to make it. But as Odom knows, one bonded year can never be the same as four.

At his introductory press conference last spring, he described a core philosophy.

“Retain your players,” Odom said. “There’s nothing more im-

portant than retention. Because they understand the culture.”

He is doing it. He is retaining his guys. All 10 players with eligibility remaining are returning, a feat almost unheard in modern college basketball. And so maybe it is the next step in thickening that connective tissue and making a more meaningful Senior Day.

Maybe in March 2029, freshmen Chance Mallory and Martin Carrere and Silas Barksdale will lift their framed jerseys on a packed Senior Day. The gym might be stuffed with orange and blue and maybe some crimson for Mallory from St. Anne’s-Belfield School, and it will be the culmination of four years.

For now, Senior Day is most poignant at programs like men’s lacrosse, where most of the team’s players have spent four years together. They moved into first-year dorms together. They grew up together.

“Us all going through all the hard stuff, first, second year, whatever,” senior defenseman John Schroter said. “And kind of

all uniting together, Senior Day, last night of the season. It’s pretty special.”

On the team’s Senior Day, a few players stopped their warm-ups to stare across the grass at the video board. It showed messages from parents and friends, recorded from homes, from office buildings, shot from close up and far away, all to the gist of, “We’re so proud of you. What a ride.”

The ceremony featured underclassmen applauding the seniors and their flower-toting parents. Tiffany’s tradition is to start all his seniors, and backup goalie Kyle Morris’s saves triggered cheers louder than for any goal — except the one scored in the fourth quarter by senior attackman Burke MacFarlane.

Even still, the day lacked some of the finality of old. Of the 11 players the men’s lacrosse team honored, three of them, and maybe four or five, will return next season.

Not Sunderland. That’s why it meant so much. Maybe that is why he was so patient.

He emerged from the locker

room postgame and did an interview with one reporter. Then he waited calmly to do another interview, off to the side, while Tiffany held court.

He leaned on those sticks. His gaze floated around the field. Finally the head coach wrapped up, and Sunderland greeted the second reporter.

He fielded a question about Senior Day.

“Taking it all in,” Sunderland said.

*Cierra Lyles contributed reporting.*

# Breaking the 'athlete bubble', a wrestler found greater purpose

Senior wrestler Kyle Montaperto discusses the endeavors that formed his experience at the University beyond being a student-athlete

Lauren Halak | Staff Writer

When Kyle Montaperto stepped foot on Grounds four years ago, he had one objective in mind — win a national title for Virginia wrestling. But as he grew accustomed to the University, his goals expanded drastically. Through his experience as a “Lawnie,” president of the Student-Athlete Advocacy Committee, co-founder of Athletes in Medicine and more, Montaperto now reflects on the impact he has made on the University — and in turn, the impact that this community has made on him.

“I came here as a wrestler ... [but] coming to UVA. has absolutely changed so [many] of my priorities, values and expectations of myself,” Montaperto said. “I’ve got a curiosity now about the world that I did not have.”

Montaperto credited joining SAAC for helping open his eyes to the leverage the University’s student self-governance gives undergraduates to make change. Initially joining in his second year, Montaperto was later elected an administrative officer before assuming the role of president last April.

Montaperto said he began his presidential term amid a tumultuous and evolving college athletics landscape. Changes to revenue sharing across the NCAA and modifications to the University specifically — namely, the closure of the student-athlete dining hall — created uncertainty among the student-athlete community.

In cultivating solutions and taking on long-term projects, Montaperto has guided student-athletes through these experiences while working to foster community across teams. While he did not know what to expect entering his term, he said that his leadership was shaped by his goal of leaving the University better than he found it.

“It’s cool to be able to make things a little better ... [SAAC] never felt like work,” Montaperto said. “I’ve developed into somebody that’s not just going to sit around and passively go through my life ... I think we should always be trying to leave places better than how we found them.”

Under his leadership, SAAC accomplished its mission of providing more opportunities to unite the greater athlete community, hosting events including the Hoos Choice Awards this April, volunteering opportunities at the Ronald McDonald House and other events for student-athletes to spend time together outside of their respective sports.

Montaperto’s work with SAAC has also reflected his overarching desire to break down the “athlete

bubble,” encouraging athletes to get involved on Grounds beyond their team in pursuit of the full University experience.

“[Athletes] shouldn’t just be athletes,” Montaperto said. “[There’s] so many clubs here, so many interesting things to do here. I know everybody is more than just an athlete, right? More than just their sport.”

According to Montaperto, this distance between the “athlete bubble” and the rest of the student body is not merely figurative, but physical. Over a mile lies between Jefferson Park Avenue — where most Virginia wrestlers live — and the University’s Lawn, representing the larger divide between the two that Montaperto has sought to change.

Montaperto is one of three student-athletes living on the Lawn, joined by volleyball’s senior defensive specialist Kate Johnson and football’s senior linebacker Logan Kotter. For many student-athletes at the University, their experience can be singularly defined by the relationships built with teammates and other athletes — something Montaperto believes is harmful for both those involved in athletics and those who are not. While his efforts as SAAC president have guided the mission to bridge these groups, his positioning as a Lawn resident has also allowed for more organic connections between the communities.

“My teammates — who are about as far into the bubble of athletics as you can be — now they’re around when they’re coming to hang out over [on the Lawn],” Montaperto said. “They’re around my non-athlete friends ... I think a big thing that I’ve been able to do, or made an effort to do besides just [introducing] these people, is share what UVA. is about to my teammates.”

Last year, just one student-athlete resided on the Lawn — lacrosse player Tommy McNeal. Montaperto credited McNeal as part of the reason he considered living on the Lawn in the first place. As two pre-medicine athletes, the duo helped co-found Athletes in Medicine with former UT Dallas baseball player Isaiah Swann in 2022.

AiM provides support to pre-health student-athletes through mentorship, shadowing and professional development opportunities. Primarily, the club brings in alumni who now work in the medical field after being athletes at the University. One of these is Matt Snyder, Class of 2013 wrestling alumnus and former Lawn resident who is now a pediatric geneticist at UVA. Health. In connecting through AiM, Snyder also helped inspire Montaperto’s application for the Lawn. Snyder



COURTESY KYLE MONTAPERTO

Montaperto is one of three student-athletes living on the Lawn.

coincidentally wrestled in the same weight class as Montaperto and happened to live in the same Lawn room as McNeal.

Montaperto’s desire to leave communities better than when he arrived will carry on past his undergraduate career. A hopeful pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon, he will be applying to medical schools this summer and looking to work in a hospital in the meantime. But with his passion for cardiology, Montaperto has already contributed to UVA. Health’s Heart Family Fund — a fund that provides financial assistance with food, gas and lodging to families with children at the Children’s Heart Center.

In what he described as having the “biggest impact” on the local community out of all of his involvements, Montaperto fundraised \$5,689.88 for the fund by running in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal 100-mile ultramarathon in 2024.

Montaperto said he first heard of the fund in his first year, from the doctor who tested his heart during the medical screening the University requires for athletes. His father, who has run ultramarathon races of the sort before, further motivated him to go through with it.

“All the athletes have to get their hearts tested, and I was talking to the doctor who was testing my heart,” Montaperto said. “A lot of times people can’t afford this care ... it’s not just the procedures that are the problem ... People are driving hours to come here ... they’re get-

ting a hotel, and they’re having to pay for food ... a lot of people can’t afford that. So I saw that, was talking about that with the doctor, and [he was] just like, you know, ‘They got this fund here.’”

His original goal was to run 100 miles, but an injury ultimately stopped him 30 miles short of that goal. Montaperto said that missing the final stretch of the race was “the lowest I’ve ever been in my entire life” — and not necessarily because the running stopped, but because he would have raised an additional \$3,000-4,000 for the fund. In typical Montaperto zeal, he said he plans to try the race again to fundraise in April 2027.

Despite his jam-packed schedule with commitments and aspirations abound, Montaperto said he still makes time for other hobbies. He said he has looked to learn more and delve into new hobbies, inspired by McNeal’s advice to strive to represent Lawn residents well — as academically curious, intellectual students. Particularly, Montaperto said he has made more time to read during his year as a Lawnie.

“What [Tommy] said was ‘You live in the Academical Village — you should do academical things,’” Montaperto said. “That’s not wasting away in front of the television, but reading and learning about things that you haven’t learned about before.”

Another pastime has been hacky sacking with friends on the Lawn — a lighthearted relief from his other

more serious involvements.

“I get back from class and [will] just see my buddies playing with the hacky sack in front of my room, and then I’ll hop in,” Montaperto said. “We’re trying to get good enough to be able to compete with the UVA. sacks club. But we’ve got a long ways to go.”

Through his time at the University, Kyle Montaperto has carved a unique path guided by a desire to leave the University better than when he arrived. It is a path that blends athletics, academics and altruism in a desire to improve the student-athlete community — and some hacky sack here and there.

As Montaperto looks ahead, whether to another attempt at his 100-mile goal or to his future in medicine, his commitment to connection and the betterment of his community is likely to remain at the heart of whatever comes next. Currently, he is particularly looking forward to moving back in with his roommate’s dog, Moose.

“At UVA., we have such a unique opportunity ... to actually, as students, make changes and improve things and do something for people,” Montaperto said. “I have found that it’s very fulfilling ... you should always have a positive impact on every single space that you’re in.”

# PUZZLE

Quinn Connor | Puzzlist

Answers are available on the digital version of this puzzle which is published at www.cavalierdaily.com.

**ACROSS**

- 1 SHW test where a negative result is a positive
- 4 University the Virginia Club of New York shares residency with
- 8 40 winks
- 14 Pickup point at an amusement park
- 16 Consecrate with oil
- 17 *Goodbye, Coupe's wait*
- 18 Billy Joel song that's probably not about a Northern Virginia town
- 19 Net wt. of many pasta packages
- 20 Follower of "poli" or "comp"
- 22 Kymora Johnson and Johann Grünloh, astrologically
- 23 Merit
- 26 Armada
- 28 *Goodbye, Scott Stadium*
- 33 "We're killing it!"
- 34 Letters in the corner of a phone screen
- 35 Supports

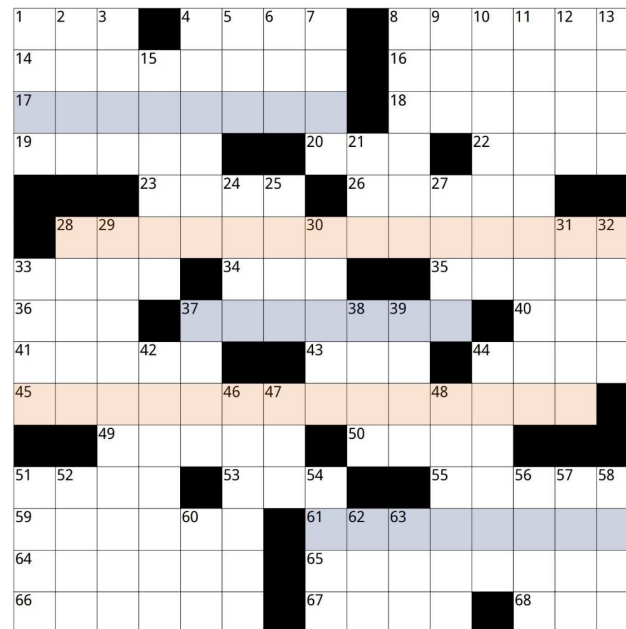
- 36 Word ENWR 2800, "Public Speaking" tries to eliminate
- 37 *Goodbye, dorms*
- 40 "Give \_\_\_ rest!"
- 41 Blume on Ivy document
- 43 Participate in the 4Y5K or the Charlottesville Marathon
- 44 Jefferson Park and University, for short
- 45 *Goodbye, University of Virginia*
- 49 CHEM 1410 or CS 1110
- 50 Figs. that never start with "666"
- 51 ACC school NNW of U.Va.
- 53 Johanna Mason's weapon in "The Hunger Games"
- 55 Broadway star LuPone
- 59 Roughly 60 percent of the world's inhabitants
- 61 *Goodbye, Carter Mountain*
- 64 It might accompany a whip
- 65 Ty Jerome, from 2016-2019 and again from

- 2023-2025
- 66 Contents of used blue books
- 67 "Sharknado" channel
- 68 Tina who walked the Lawn in 1992

**DOWN**

- 1 Normandy battle site of '44
- 2 Corner three-floored bar, familiarly
- 3 Citizen of Copenhagen
- 4 Designer purse with a gold monogram
- 5 "Grad u \_\_\_" (modern celebratory remarks)
- 6 Mauna \_\_\_ (Earth's largest active volcano)
- 7 Omar of "House"
- 8 Superman portrayer Henry
- 9 Unlucky "Wheel of Fortune" purchase for "CONGRATS GRADUATES"
- 10 Like much fraternity footwear in the spring

- 11 Time to work!
- 12 The "A" of AD
- 13 Groups hosting book fairs (abbr.)
- 15 Free-for-alls
- 21 Corp. money manager
- 24 Round caramel candy
- 25 Parental punishment that might be evaded with an iPad
- 27 Many a "Challengers" or "Heated Rivalry" TikTok
- 28 Marisa of "Spider-Man: No Way Home"
- 29 Some non-STEM classes
- 30 Surname on some tractors
- 31 What students may take to stay awake?
- 32 Mardi \_\_\_\_
- 33 Large bay
- 37 Disappear, as a snowman or the Wicked Witch of the West
- 38 "But this love is \_\_\_\_" (Titular Taylor Swift lyric)
- 39 Old heads that might also be "chopped"

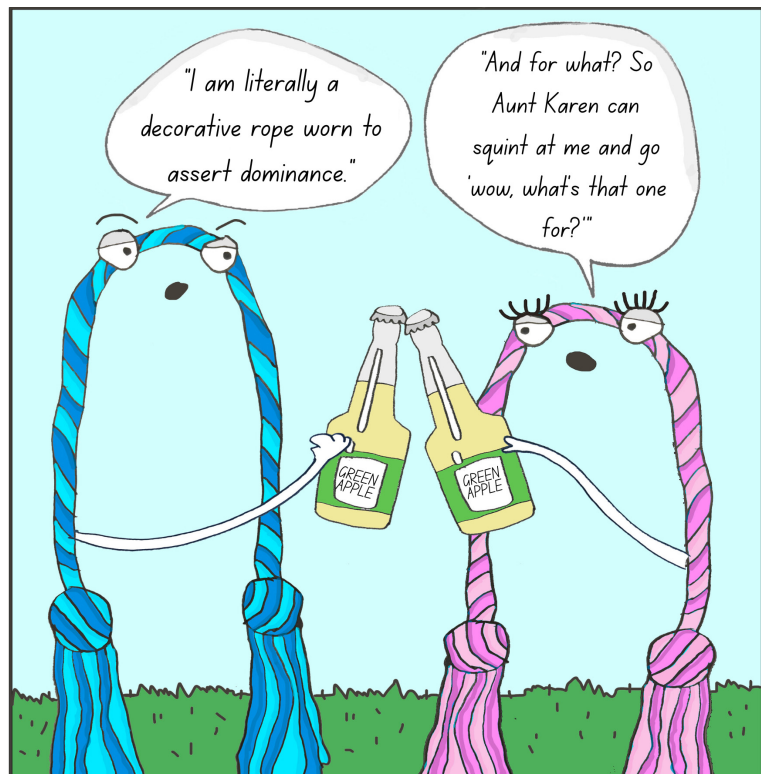


- 42 "Glee" cheerleader who delivered the line "You did this to me! You told Coach Sylvester about my summer surgery!"
- 44 Lash out at
- 46 Gets the word out?
- 47 Tic-Tac-Toe loser that looks like a sign-off
- 48 Live, as a fair ball
- 51 Transparent Minecraft block
- 52 "Stupid \_\_\_\_ stupid does"
- 54 List-ending abbrs.
- 56 End-of-workweek cheer
- 57 Megan \_\_\_\_ Stallion
- 58 "Just doin' my best"
- 60 No vote
- 62 E-\_\_\_\_ (0.15 mile stretch on Grounds)
- 63 Reproductive option, for short

# CARTOON

## Grad Cord Grievances

Blake Maguire | Cartoonist



## Oh, The Places You'll Go

Anna May Stouse | Cartoonist



# HUMOR

## PARTING SHOT: Reflections of a U.Va. President

Former Interim University President and forced retiree Paul Mahoney takes a final bow in *The Cavalier Daily*

*Editor's Note: This is a humor column.*

Thank you to *The Cavalier Daily's* executive editor — and my close and personal friend — Scarlett Sullivan for giving me the honor of sharing my story as the University's most influential president. After learning that former University President Jim Ryan got the top gig for Valedictory Exercises, I realized that the University community also wanted, no, needed a final goodbye from me as well.

When first introduced to the concept of *The Cavalier Daily* "parting shot," I was flabbergasted — what on earth would people have to learn from the people that were formerly in their role? How to engage the community? How to talk to the nice folks with lollipops at the Department of Justice? Passwords? Despite my initial befuddlement, I quickly became enamored with the idea of capturing my bildungsroman, my rise to the top and my "gone-too-soon" fall that captured the University community. Where else would I be able to

publish such a beautiful story than in the same rag that followed my every move last semester?

Oh, last semester ... it is hard to think that the Mahoney of it all was only a few months ago. I remember it vividly. One sticky morning in August, I got a call from former Rector Rachel Sheridan — a woman who would soon become my ride or die — that the Board of Visitors was greatly impressed with my raw, bad boy energy. She also uplifted my "lawyerly but also we're not just focused on that" background, as she revealed a coveted opportunity to me. The office of president had been recently vacated, and the University needed someone who looked like Mitch McConnell to successfully confuse the Department of Justice about the University's political persuasions.

"We need you, Paul." Rach said tearfully.

And there I was, ready to serve the University poorly in its greatest time of need. I learned many

things in the role, of which I will now share with you all.

First, I learned that the greater University community was different from my community back at the School of Law. While rLs will often hedge their commentary with strategic ambiguity — the "could-bes" and "one-might-assumes" — other students had no trouble calling me out. One private evening at the Fresh Food Company dining room, I spilled baked beans all over myself while watching "Cars 2" on my Samsung, and a first-year shouted, "This president eating beans!" Everyone laughed, but I.

More moments of humiliation like this would come, from being lambasted for not having some sort of presidential-jogging-themed activity — even though I have a weak stomach that can only be satisfied through a bean-forward diet — to getting some random flack about a thing I signed with the DOJ. What I realized from these moments is to ignore every mean thing people

might say about you — especially if it is true. Keep your head up, Mahomedogs.

Secondly, I was shocked to find that the label "Interim" in "Interim University President" actually had meaning — like most law phrases written in Latin, I just skipped over reading it. However, I came nose to nose with my own forced removal, right as my interim assistant reminded me not to buy all new curtains for Carr's Hill. Nor was I able to fit a new golden retriever puppy in the Board budget prior to my term's end. I had so much more in me to share with the University — so many fantastic, hip Instagram Reel ideas, and even more empty presidential promises to make. Yet, my dear friends, every great presidency must end tragically — Lincoln, Kennedy, Ryan and Mahoneyself as of Dec. 19.

Despite the tragedy of my removal after 137 days — if only the University waited for my big plans on the 138th day — there is

much to be thankful for, and many people whose names will go down with mine in the edit history for the University of Virginia's Wikipedia page. Thank you to Rach and Porter for securing me this job on the low. I know y'all had plenty of conversations about who you like more than Jim Ryan, and I'm glad I made the short list.

Thank you to the DOJ officials, my idols and master puppeteers. I will cherish the memories with you, getting wine and dined to sell out this institution. Harmeeet, I wish you the best for the top job of attorney general, where I know you will continue your brave defense of freedom by emailing college administrators at 2 a.m.

And Scott, my brother in rotational governance. Thanks for the move-out help. Hope the job goes okay.

**SCARLETT SULLIVAN** is the Executive Editor for *The Cavalier Daily*. She can be reached at [humor@cavalierdaily.com](mailto:humor@cavalierdaily.com).

## ADVERTISEMENT

U.Va. Class of 2026

### Grace Traxler



Dear Grace:

Congratulations on graduating!!! What an amazing run for you since leaving home. Making your way to UVA has made all the difference.

We love you so much and we are so proud of you. You made it look easy, even when it wasn't.

You certainly understood the mission for college. So many things contributed to your amazing college experience (and ours as a family). Much thanks to: UVA teachers and staff and leaders, the Cavalier Daily, Ragged Mountain, ADPi, John Street and phenomenal roommates, Runs with Jim, Virg, Oxford summer, 9/26/25 field storm (!), and countless other UVA and Cville people, places, and traditions. The UVA community is truly one of the greatest places on Earth. Grace, thank you for bringing it to our family.

Onward and upward! We can't wait to see what your next chapter brings. But savor today.

Love, Mom, Dad, Jack & Eve

P.S. Kairos!

# OPINION

## Why Cav Daily?

Why Cav Daily?

When I became editor-in-chief of The Cavalier Daily, this was the question that I asked my dozens of new editors. They wrote their answers on colorful pieces of paper which I hung around the newspaper's office.

This silly exercise might have seemed more natural in an elementary school, but for me, it was integral to building the newsroom which would center The Cavalier Daily's twofold mission — producing timely and insightful journalism and serving as an educational space.

Yet, I am realizing now that I never wrote down my “why.” So, as I prepare to leave this university, I want to capture how much The Cavalier Daily has meant to me.

I first joined the paper as an opinion columnist for a very simple reason — my mom thought I would like it. I quickly learned that I loved writing columns. I loved that every opinion piece opened new windows, platformed new questions and provoked new debates.

Most of all, I came to love thinking about the systems which

support subjective journalism. Yet, this type of journalism has been perceived more as a liability to be mitigated than as an integrated and integral part of a newspaper's attempts to showcase, host and platform debates. This is, in part, the fault of subjective journalists who stopped articulating their value.

So, as executive editor, my editors and I worked to articulate this value. We wrote editorials to unmask the Editorial Board. We encouraged opinion writers to interview stakeholders. We platformed satire to reflect the idiosyncrasies of student life. And we thought critically about how puzzles and cartoons uplift the multitude of fun, colorful ways that one can engage journalism.

To my subjective editors — Dan, Isabelle, Quinn, Sarah, Songhan and Wardah — you all were the best conversation partners, the people who challenged me to uphold my values and embraced subjective journalism's unique potential to engage audiences.

As I stepped into the editor-in-chief role, I carried these “whys” with me. I began my term as EIC just as President Donald

Trump and his administration began to fundamentally demolish taken-for-granted assumptions about journalism and higher education.

Perhaps this should have been at the forefront of my mind, but I was instead invested in the question of internal sustainability. I was focused on building processes that were sustainable from a literary, financial and operational perspective and which foregrounded training staffers, investing in multimedia and raising an endowment.

And then, former University President Jim Ryan resigned. It was a moment which brought together all my “whys” and demanded nuanced and continual coverage from every desk on the paper. And it required not losing sight of The Cavalier Daily's twofold mission as the paper of record and an educational institution.

Embracing both goals in the midst of a crisis was not easy, but the results speak for themselves — we wrote dozens of insightful articles, developed trust with community members, dramatically increased our readership, raised over \$400,000 for an endowment,

and had 31 staffers win awards from the Virginia Press Association.

We asked and worked to answer the questions which were critical to local audiences — what role had local governing institutions played in Ryan's resignation, what would the lived impact of these decisions be on community stakeholders and above all else, why U.Va.?

This relentless commitment to a local lens makes me most proud of the work staffers and editors did. We embraced this story's local particularity which often went underemphasized in national outlets and to which we had unique access. In doing so, we served our community and added critical nuance to a national story.

And like anything that is worthwhile, this work took a village. To my Managing Board — Hailey, Leigh, Scarlett and Will — you were my rocks, the people who kept me grounded and who never failed to meet the moments we encountered, no matter how large. To my Junior Board, I know that what you all did on a daily basis, from the small act of responding to a staffer's questions

to the big acts of changing desk-wide cultures, was not easy and not always visible. Each of you is brilliant, and your passion, attention to detail and dedication make this paper special.

In short, my “why” came to be equal parts about the people and the issues we tackled. I think that I never wanted to write down my “why” because it is constantly evolving. It changes with each space I enter into and each person I encounter. I never wanted to write down my “why” because journalism has felt like something which slowly became a natural part of how I learn about and participate in the communities that surround me. My “why” is many things, comprised of questions that I have asked and been asked, people who have supported me, and above all else, my deep belief in the ability of local journalism to impact and be impacted by the communities it serves.

*Naima Sawaya was the editor-in-chief of the 136th term, the executive editor of the 135th term, and an opinion columnist and senior associate opinion editor for the 134th term.*

## Thank you for trusting us

Many of us may have grown up constantly being warned to watch out for misinformation online, and being told which sources we could trust versus which ones we could not — “Wikipedia is not reliable” is burned into our brains from our lower school teachers. But the landscape of available sources has changed dramatically in our lifetimes, and there are serious challenges today with trusting information.

The pandemic coincided with when I began to embark on the adventure of figuring out the answer to the question, “What do you want to do when you grow up?” In that moment, nothing frustrated me more during the pandemic than watching how quickly misinformation spread. Trust eroded in our major institutions with severe and persisting consequences. That frustration left an impression on me, but I didn't quite know how just yet.

I arrived at U.Va. knowing I wanted to do something to get involved, and it just so happened that by the time I locked in, The Cavalier Daily was the only application that had not closed. I began filling it out, and I indicated that I wanted to join the Opinion desk.

“That will be easy, I have lots of

opinions,” I told myself. “News is boring anyway, plenty of people report that.”

After a year on the Opinion desk, I found myself hitting a wall. I did not have as many opinions as I thought. And realizing how many other people had opinions which they proudly shared online, I decided they probably did not need to hear mine. For a reason I can only describe as a gut feeling — likely the result of the aforementioned frustration with media literacy and trust — I decided to internally transfer to the News desk.

Now, of course, I can't imagine it any other way. From the moment I started, I sought to correct people's preconceived notions about The Cavalier Daily. The University community is full of a diverse set of interests — students, professors, workers, Charlottesville residents and more — and covering those interests was a great challenge. For starters, people tended to take our work less seriously because it was a student newspaper. And at a time when trust in the media has reached an all time low, The Cavalier Daily was not always exempt from that.

That all changed in June 2025. The resignation of our university president was not just a local issue —

it was a national one. With a massive spotlight on U.Va., The Cavalier Daily mobilized despite most of us in full-time internships as many as 13 time zones away from Charlottesville. We beat national outlets to stories, and beat stories to death. We looked in every corner and behind every door to ensure the community received the full story. We did it all while pushing for objectivity in the strongest degree. When Democrats were up in arms about what had transpired, we made sure to hear from Republicans too.

I observed a gradual — but noticeable — shift. The University community began to trust us, to realize what we could do with few resources and less experience. But it went beyond that as well. Hearing from friends and family far away, from colleagues in journalism in other markets, that they were reading our work reaffirmed my commitment to The Cavalier Daily. Hearing people shout “McCracken News” at me on the Corner — my Instagram handle — instead of just calling me Ford always made me smile. I don't think any of us look back on that experience feeling anything other than proud of the work the paper accomplished.

I owe so much to The Cavalier

Daily as an organization. Through the paper, I was able to discover my passion, to get good at it and to use it to work for the community. That passion undoubtedly propelled me to my next venture, covering politics in Washington.

I moved into video reporting, something I thoroughly enjoy because of the connection it gives me to the readers. It may be easy to doubt something you read on the internet, but watching a person tell you something feels more personal, I have always thought.

Thank you to the community for trusting us, for supporting our work and for funding it with advertisements and generous donations. Thank you to the news team for pushing me harder than I thought possible — I think we made each other better every day we did the job. I went from passively believing in objectivity to endlessly pursuing it as a reality. I learned to set my beliefs aside and critically examine my own reporting to ensure I was telling a story that anyone could say was fair. I did not always succeed, but I never stopped trying.

When people talk about lacking trust in the media, they often throw out the accusation that it is overly

biased. Journalists have bias. It is unavoidable and undeniable. But journalism is, in my mind, the best remaining public forum. If Democrats and Republicans won't be friends, won't debate ideas, won't date each other, don't like each other, don't trust each other and don't even have the same facts, then we need a solution.

I believe that journalism is that solution. Having worked in newsrooms with tens and with thousands, I can attest that by-and-large, journalists believe in the mission of objectively and factually informing the public. The more people reward actors who seek to shout the loudest with the wildest take, the more we have to lose as a society.

I can't promise you that journalists will get it right 100 percent of the time. But none of us would be doing the job if we weren't going to try as hard as we could. To the community — thank you for letting us try.

*Ford McCracken was a news editor for the 136th term, a senior associate and senior news writer for the 135th term, and a news writer and opinion senior associate for the 134th term.*

## It all works out in the end?

I would have never imagined myself writing this column four years ago, because four years ago, I had no idea I would end up graduating from the University. My high school friends spent most of their senior year May nervous, but ultimately excited, for college to start. I, on the other hand, felt bitter and sad and lost. I was committed to New York University but growing more and more certain that I had made a huge mistake. In the spring of freshman year, I applied to transfer schools and ultimately decided on U.Va. My mom will say that my decision was heavily motivated by the multiple bookstores on the Downtown Mall, and she's not that far off base. In truth, I didn't really know what I was getting into until I was in it.

The same can be said for my experience with *The Cavalier Daily*.

During my second semester at the University, I applied to write for the Arts & Entertainment desk. I had no journalism experience, but I had gone to NYU with the vision of one day becoming a music journalist — a vision that had very much fallen apart when I realized I was too indecisive and interested in too many things to

narrow myself that much at 18. However, I still wanted to give it a shot. Plus, one of my roommates, Leila, was a writer for the desk, so any chance to hang out with her more had to be worth it.

Fast forward to two years later, when Leila and I sat on the patio at *The Virginian* and tried to figure out how to accurately capture our time as the 136th term's Arts & Entertainment co-editors in these 900-word pieces.

I titled my parting shot after a lyric from one of my favorite Maggie Rogers songs, "That's Where I Am." I listened to "That's Where I Am" on repeat when it first came out during that other senior spring four years ago. For a few minutes as the track would play, I believed that maybe everything would all work out. And now, when I look back on my year as editor — and for that matter, college as a whole — I'm blown away at how much did.

The articles got published, the interviews were rescheduled, we had pieces for print. I transferred to a university I barely knew anyone at and had the time of my life. Our staff writers made it past setbacks and made their deadlines. I'm going to graduate college having ended up doing a

version of what I set out to do four years ago. It all works out in the end.

Or does it?

I've been breaking a cardinal rule and burying the lede. As I prepare to graduate, I can't say for sure that it all works out in the end.

Sometimes we make mistakes because we don't know any better, and sometimes we make mistakes even when we do. Unlike half of our school, I was not born with Google Calendar attached to my hand. I knew that time management would likely be a problem for me going into this position, and it was.

It's a tough job for a girl who hates her computer. There were quite a few articles I dropped the ball on. My GPA took a hit I am not proud of. There are stories I wish we had covered that we probably could have if I had just been a bit more organized. There wasn't a single week of 2025 that I felt like I had everything under control.

And still — I loved it all. Rather than trying to beat myself up, I write this all to say that progress is not linear. Sometimes, I had to make the same mistake a couple of times before I knew

what to fix. The fact that this improvement could be so incremental is what also made it feel so meaningful — like the first time I opened a draft and instinctively knew how to shape it, or how I write down everything in my planner now. Thanks to *The Cavalier Daily*, I got a thousand chances to try, fail and try again, learning a little more each time about what kind of writer, leader and person I truly wanted to be.

Much of that learning came from the incredibly hardworking and intelligent people I was surrounded by. Michael and Xander's awesome passion — and occasional flair for the dramatic — for sports that I used to care nothing about. Naima's otherworldly dedication as our editor-in-chief. Dana and Adair's A+ sense of humor, Blaine and Kate's kindness and Hailey's patience. My weekly dinners with the utterly brilliant Scarlett, who approaches everything she does with empathy, thoughtfulness and, perhaps most crucially, great outfits. These people have inspired me so much, and I feel lucky to know them.

Most importantly, I can't imagine having done this without my co-editor Leila — the first

person I talked to at U.Va., my second-year roommate and one of my best friends. My dad has always told me to surround myself with people who make me want to be a better person. How lucky I was to find that in you.

And to the staff writers we worked with — I really am so proud of you guys. Arts journalism often gets perceived as frivolous, even in the journalism world. Thank you for taking it seriously.

If given the opportunity, I don't think I would tell my 18-year-old self it will all work out in the end. I still turned my parting shot in late, after all, and at the time of writing this, I'm not sure where I'll be after graduation. It might not work out perfectly. Nonetheless, I know it will all be worth it.

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*Grace Traxler was an arts & entertainment editor for the 136th term and a staff writer for the 135th and 137th terms.*

## Making sense of chaos

While some of my fellow fourth-year *Cavalier Daily* staffers may use their parting words to share what they learned on the job at the paper, I would instead like to reflect on the forces that brought me to the basement of Newcomb Hall in the first place.

If you are unfamiliar with the concept of chaotic systems, it may unsettle you at first. It is the idea that we all live in deterministic systems that are dependent on, and highly sensitive to, initial conditions. In other words, the tiniest changes to our lives can ripple outward and produce dramatically different outcomes over time. But as chaotic as these "ripple effects" may seem, they are not random at all. Chaos theory tells us that chaotic systems are just that — systems — operated by underlying order and structure, shaped by previous interactions and decisions.

Now, you may be thinking, "What is a retired life editor doing, talking about mathematical theory?" I assure you, it connects — somehow — to my print night bakes and student life features.

When I arrived at the University, the last thing I thought

I would do was join the student newspaper. I had it in my head that journalism was fast-paced, stressful and austere — a poor fit for someone like me, a daydreamer and an unhurried writer. So, when I weaved through the tabling clubs on Peabody Lawn my first week of school, collecting flyers and signing up for mailing lists, I did not so much as glance at *The Cavalier Daily's* booth.

But as the year went by, little seemed to click. I walked out of countless CIO interest meetings feeling uninspired, and I recurrently opened my inbox to find that I had been, yet again, rejected from another club. In the wake of these setbacks, I found myself — to my surprise — browsing *The Cavalier Daily's* recruitment website. Maybe, just maybe, I could find a place for myself there, putting pen to paper about my interests in health and culture.

The following fall, I beelined to *The Cavalier Daily's* activity fair table and struck up a conversation with the only unoccupied member of the staff. Her name was Miriella Jiffar, and, as it turned out, she was a life editor.

It was this fortuitous encounter that convinced me to apply to, and later join, the Life desk. And three months after that, it was Miriella's decision to leave her editing post that allowed me to fill a vacancy on the newspaper's Junior Board.

I could never have predicted I would end up an editor for *The Cavalier Daily*. Yet, every choice and interaction within this chaotic system, timed just right — from the club recruitment chairs who turned me down, to the sports editor at the activity fair who turned away so I could talk to Miriella — willed it to be so.

And how grateful I am that this intricate web of chance led me to *The Cavalier Daily*. Otherwise, I never perhaps would have been privy to the sidesplitting quips of Dana Douglas and Thomas Baxter. I never would have spent print nights bathed in the gabs and giggles of Mia Tan and Delores Cyrus. I never would have encountered the warm souls of Grace Traxler and Leila Mohajer, nor the fiery passion of Xander Tillock. I never would have bonded with Blaine Hutchens over live edits, overheard-in-

the-office notes and all-too-many Slack messages. I never would have connected with Evelyn Lewis, who became one of my dearest Batten School friends. And I never would have met my fiercest supporter and most trusted confidant, Finn Trainer.

I never could have predicted that I would be steeped in this student journalist community. And yet, these people, and this place, constitute my fondest college memories and have shaped me into the woman I am today.

Many soon-to-be graduates may be afraid that whatever steps they take next — the job offers they accept, the relationships they hold onto or the cities they move to — will irrevocably set the course of the rest of their lives. According to chaos theory, that may be true. But I do not think it is something to fear. As my journey to *The Cavalier Daily* taught me, the initial conditions do not have to be perfect for things to work out. Even the toughest rejections, the most last-ditch ideas and the briefest conversations can set off meaningful paths. You may not know it at the time, but every moment

of life, good or bad, may slowly but systematically be leading you to something greater.

So, as I walk the Lawn and into this new chapter of young adulthood, I trust that my life journey will bring me to more good people and good places, even if I do not yet know who they are or where they will be. Because one grand, flawless decision alone will not define my future — it will be a series of small, impossible-to-predict moments that will make order out of this topsy-turvy, one-of-a-kind, precious life.

Thank you, *The Cavalier Daily*, for giving me faith in the chaos.

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*Kate Johnson was a life editor for the 135th and 136th terms and a food writer for part of the 134th and 137th terms of *The Cavalier Daily*.*

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## What's the Deal? On two decades of William Little's courses

Upon his retirement, Little is leaving an impact on his students' abilities to think critically about media and apply it to the world

Bridget Baile | Senior Writer

Assoc. Media Studies Prof. William Little has spent nearly 20 years teaching his students how to analyze film and draw deep connections to wider cultural and political contexts. To the dismay of many students — both those who have taken and who have yet to take one of his famed classes alike — Little taught his final class at the University in the Spring 2026 semester. After teaching wide-spanning genre courses from the gangster flick to the Western, Little later gained his notorious “cult following” of students from his seminar on the hit television show “Breaking Bad.”

This spring, Little taught his final course before retirement, MDST 3559, “What's The Deal?: Movies and the Make-Up of Trump's America.” The class examined President Donald Trump and his relationship to media, synthesizing themes and ideas from his previous courses. Fourth-year College student Molly Canipe, who had not taken any of Little's previous classes, found herself in the minority of a classroom filled with students who had taken — and loved — several of the professor's courses in prior semesters.

“If you're a William Little fan, you've taken everything he's ever taught,” Canipe said.

Little's transition into teaching media studies was gradual but essential to the development of his interdisciplinary teaching style. Moving coasts after attending Williams College in Massachusetts, he worked as an English teacher at the Harvard School — now known as Harvard-Westlake School — in Los Angeles. After getting his PhD in English from Indiana University, Little was offered a job at DePauw University, where he taught a range of primarily American-literature-focused classes for about 10 years.

In 2007, he moved to Virginia, and began working in the newly created Media Studies major at the University. He immediately began teaching genre courses in film — an area of deep knowledge for him — but had to educate himself on the broader discipline of media studies. According to Little, that year was auspicious timing for a deep dive into the study of media because the digital media landscape was growing more rapidly than ever before — Facebook was introduced in 2005 and the launch of YouTube and the iPhone came in 2007.

“I [began] ... studying media history and media infrastructures and media audiences, and I'm just trying to learn as much as I can, and that's separate from my study of film but related,” Little said. “Because ... in the

big scheme of things, it's not long before all of this innovation and change affects the film industry.”

The first class Little taught at the University was called MDST 3640, “American Gangster Film.” The course reframed the genre as a way of talking about the history of modern America, bringing in cultural issues such as immigration, assimilation and the interplay between criminality and business and analyzing films including “Pulp Fiction,” “The Godfather” and “Goodfellas.”

As he spent more time at the University, his courses continued to evolve, looking at the interplay between genre and American history and culture. His class, MDST 3630, “Screening Terrorism,” explored the relationship between media and terrorism in a post 9/11 era.

He cited his course MDST 3650, “Shooting the Western,” as pivotal for the evolution of his teaching career. Going into its formulation, Little said he was not intimately acquainted with the genre, as he had not grown up loving the “Western” genre of films and did not have family who held a particular interest towards them. He said that unfamiliarity, however, drew him towards the topic.

“I often will go towards something that I don't know much about because I want to learn about it,” Little said. “This is a recurring ... aspect of my whole career. I often find I want to teach about what I just want to learn about which makes for a really rewarding calling or professional experience, because I'm a perpetual learner.”

He said he developed a mantra he repeated at the beginning of every new semester of the course, insisting that knowing something about the Western was essential to understanding America. Little said he was fascinated by looking at the evolution of the genre and how modern interpretations challenged the genre's foundational problematic politics.

His course on the Western was pivotal for several reasons, notably for its influence on his “Breaking Bad” class — MDST 3115, “Breaking Bad: Once Upon a Time with the Pests” — which became one of the most popular and high-demand courses in the Media Studies department. According to Little, “Breaking Bad” was the perfect synthesis of the Western and the gangster film.

The “Breaking Bad” class was Little's first full course at the University to cover a singular television show, and Little said it took considerable effort to construct. Not only did Little pick specific episodes for students to dis-



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This Spring, Little taught his final course before retirement, MDST 3559, “What's The Deal?: Movies and the Make-Up of Trump's America.” Little said he plans on continuing to write creatively and critically after he retires, and remains intellectually curious.

cuss each week based on a particular theme or idea, but he also assigned texts to be read in conjunction.

“The reading is as important as the viewing,” Little said. “We can sit around and say, ‘hey ‘Breaking Bad’ is a cool show’ ... but we can't really do rigorous, analytical work unless we've got these readings.”

The readings inform Little's interdisciplinary classroom model, covering topics from feminist studies to psychoanalysis to political theory. According to Little, he often intentionally chose readings that did not relate to the film or show to give his students room to draw their own connections.

One book that Little extracted readings from for his “Breaking Bad” class is titled “The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property,” by Lewis Hyde. The book describes gift-giving as cross-cultural and universal, while emphasizing that a true gift is given without any expectation of return. Little's career has been characterized by making connections between the written and observed, and the theme of genuine gift-giving has come up both in and outside of the classroom.

“The students I've taught ... have given me incalculable gifts at every turn in every course, every semester, through what they've labored to cultivate in the way of their writing and their thinking and their innovative interpretive work on the films and the shows,” Little said. “I've just been really fortunate to be on the receiving end of those gifts.”

One gift appeared in spring 2022

when, after finishing Little's “Breaking Bad” course, a student approached him, telling him that he wanted to be a teacher. Little invited this student to help him develop a sibling course to his “Breaking Bad” class. The co-designed course focused on “Better Call Saul,” a follow-up prequel series covering the origins of Saul Goodman, Walter White's criminal lawyer.

Little would go on to co-design multiple courses with students, including this semester with “What's The Deal?: Movies and the Make-Up of Trump's America,” his final class before retiring. The class, co-designed with fourth-year College student Nicholas Sutherland, synthesized a number of Little's past courses while focusing on Trump in an era inundated with media engagement. The class looked at films that Trump has specifically referenced, as well as those that encapsulate the prototypical Trumpian figure or the complexities of the “Trump world.” Students, such as second-year College student Aidan Goldberg, credited Little's intertextual approach to helping them draw connections and provide clarity in a rapidly changing, seemingly senseless era.

“I think he fundamentally altered how I watch movies,” Goldberg said. “With [Little's class] you can watch that movie and read ... a French philosopher or an academic who writes in a completely different field, not in media studies, and you can connect that to the interdisciplinary, intertextual, genuine thirst for answering questions that you think films are ... bringing up.”

Several students mentioned that one of Little's unique qualities as a professor is the care and attentiveness he pays to both his students and the curriculum, with the reciprocal gift-giving of knowledge and critical analysis between student and teacher.

“I think he kind of inhabits every space he's in with all the effort he has to give,” Canipe said. “And he really cultivates a sense of expecting that from you as well, in a way that's really gratifying ... He believes in your capacity to be an analytical thinker ... and I think it's rare to feel like a professor believes in you in the same way that he does. I think it makes you want to be better.”

Little said he plans on continuing to write creatively and critically after he retires, and will remain intellectually curious. Although he has been teaching through many different eras of America — and his most recent class has explored current cultural issues such as domestic terrorism and white supremacy — Little said his classes have given him hope, not fear, for the future.

“I always go back to this. It's the art, it's the artists, it's the art communities that create these works that are so powerful and so rewarding,” Little said. “I know outsiders could say, ‘Well, what difference does a film make? Film doesn't make any difference. You can't change the world with a film.’ But I do think it can.”

# Graduating Miller Arts Scholars blend talents in final projects

Students combined their artistic talents and social identities, creating powerful pieces to share in their final semester

Carly Smith | Staff Writer

The J. Sanford Miller Arts Scholars Program fosters a community of growth, collaboration, learning and mentorship for undergraduate students heavily involved in the arts at the University. With applications open for first and second years, students are admitted to study one of five disciplines — Studio Art, Drama, Music, Dance or Creative Writing — with increased access to grants in their fields as well. Before the end of a Miller Arts Scholar's time at the University, they complete a final project that encompasses their journey throughout the program.

According to Mona Kasra, newly appointed director of the Miller Arts Scholars and associate drama and art professor, students are accepted into the program based on their engagement with the arts at the University alongside their academic achievements and a crafted portfolio of creative works. The 52 existing scholars, with 18 soon-to-be graduates, have each detailed their artistic involvements, past works and aspirations in profiles on the program's website. Applications are reviewed by faculty representatives of the five disciplines, with around 50 percent of applications being chosen in the last cycle for the latest cohort selected in March.

In the program, scholars of any year are required to take two seminar classes in addition to arts-related coursework — the fall seminar CASS 1010 and the spring seminar CASS 1011. In the fall, students build their academic and skill portfolios and learn about professional development relating to the arts, while the spring course focuses on interdisciplinarity across the five program disciplines, eventually creating a final, interdisciplinary project. The project was one of Kasra's new additions to the longstanding 15-year old program.

Kasra designed the final project alongside the co-presidents of the Miller Arts Scholars, fourth-year College student Maxwell Mitchell and fourth-year College student Jack Ireland. Kasra said she created this new assignment with the intention for students to teach each other and work together across disciplines. With each student having a different specialty, they are able to contribute in their own unique ways and embrace their respective talents and passions.

"I really wanted everyone to, now that they understood where they come from and how their works are very different from each other, to join together and create something together, or find an artistic avenue for the various disci-



COURTESY PARKER CHAPMAN

The 18 graduating scholars received their stoles and certificates as recognition for their completion of the program April 29

plines they bring in," Kasra said.

Scholars — working in groups of three composed of students from differing disciplines — were encouraged to create anything ranging from physical works to art exhibitions, performances and films. Elizabeth Moore, Miller Arts dance Scholar and fourth-year College student, worked with students involved in music and drama for her project, creating a video inspired by one of the music student's original songs.

"Since I'm a dancer and I'm working with a musician and [a drama student], we were inspired by a song that a musician wrote, and some of those themes are looking back on a past relationship and moving forward from that," Moore said. "The original lyrics to the song, we translated into a monologue, so that's what's being read by the drama student, and I have choreographed to the song, and then we put them all together in a video."

Autumn Hong, Miller Arts music Scholar and fourth-year College student, specializes in conducting. Hong's group consisted of herself and two drama students, the trio creating a short film entitled "Girl Dinner."

"It's about what women are consuming on social media. It's a commentary about how the internet exacerbates a lot of women's issues," Hong said. "There's a lot of different commentaries, like ones about how we see women in their bodies ... and

it's about how, as women, we often perpetuate these things by both consuming this content and creating this content and pushing it on to other women."

Hong's group decided to include both heavy themes and comical elements in their piece, relating to audiences by filming in the style of TikTok videos. Hong, with experience conducting, composed the score for the film, using music as a means of plot movement.

"The score really helps to tie it together," Hong said. "So that the audience can really see the progression and how the plot moves forward."

The project's interdisciplinary and collaborative focus also posed a handful of challenges for students. Hong said it was difficult to be vulnerable with her creative process, as she prefers to share with others only the final outcomes of her work. In regards to the initiative's logistics, Moore said her group dealt with scheduling conflicts and needed to stay mindful of shooting time-sensitive film sequences.

After months of preparation, groups presented their projects to the class, with the final scholars completing their presentations the week of April 26. Students received feedback during their presentations, giving them the opportunity to edit their pieces and apply their peers' suggestions before their final submissions.

"It's always cool to be able to

show something you've put a lot of time into ... and we got some really cool feedback," Moore said. "We had a few questions about video editing and putting in sounds."

Along with receiving constructive criticism from peers, Hong said she also appreciated being able to recognize everyone's hard work throughout the semester. The groups began their projects in February, and the work throughout these three-month processes inspired pride among students about their combined knowledge and creativity.

"They were just super ... receptive to it," Hong said. "As much as I love getting feedback and critique from my fellow students, it is also very awesome to be able to show off our accomplishments and celebrate them together."

Miller Arts Scholars also find opportunities for collaboration after becoming leaders within the group. This year, the executive board was composed of Hong, Moore, Ireland and Mitchell, with Mitchell acting as the teaching assistant for the seminar in the spring semester. Kasra said the board prioritized fostering interdisciplinary relationships within the Miller Arts program, hoping to create a warm, open environment.

"[Mitchell and Ireland] really wanted the program to be a lot more nourishing and also for people to be connected," Kasra said. "One of their ideas was to do monthly art

chats, we call it 'MAS Art Chats,' and they would have bagels, and anybody could stop by, talk about projects [and] talk about anything."

The 18 graduating scholars received their stoles and certificates as recognition for their completion of the program April 29, and also had the opportunity to present creative work that the Miller Arts program helped to fund. Moore said her experience as a scholar added creative expression and community to her time at the University.

"There's so many people who I've met who are involved in the other arts, and I would have just never met them," Moore said. "We all share a passion for art, but they're completely different forms ... and everyone's so enthusiastic to collaborate and work with you."

With the completion of these final projects and with Final Exercises approaching, Kasra said she hopes that scholars — especially graduating fourth-years — are able to take what they have learned and maintain their presence in the arts even if they are not physically present at the University.

"I really hope they stay connected to each other, to their own cohort, that they grew as part of their education here," Kasra said. "I really hope they will give back as they go do fabulous work themselves, whether they become producers or artists and actors and all sorts of great musicians."

# Disbanding: A look into a band's life after its members graduate

As student musicians await Final Exercises, they re-evaluate music's role in their post-grad lives

Sofia Hahn | Staff Writer

Anyone who listens closely on a given Saturday on Grounds will likely hear the soundtrack of a student band. The University harbors an unparalleled student band culture, resulting in the creation of various musical groups that span across ages, Greek letters and friend groups, united by the shared passion of playing live music together. However, the oft-deemed “best four years of one's life” can pass quickly, leaving these bands at a loss after graduating members leave Grounds.

Not only do the graduating members have to decide how music will fit into their post-graduate lives, but remaining band members also have to reevaluate the group's structure. With large careers looming and potential corporate ladders waiting to be climbed, it can be difficult to prioritize hobbies as students make their farewell tour of Grounds.

Made up of five fourth-years and one third-year, student band Irish Exit is forced to take its exit at the end of the spring semester. Bella Chadwick, one of the lead singers of Irish Exit and fourth-year College student, shared her plans to maintain her musical passion as a career by pursuing music marketing in New York City.

“Music has to be a part of my life in such a meaningful way,” Chadwick said. “I realized that there is a chance that I could continue doing music in a different capacity and manifest that love in a different way. I will say, though, there just is something about performing. It's just so special [and] just so magical, especially at U.Va.”

While music may continue in a professional sense following graduation, the excitement of performing live may be confined to the undergraduate experience. However, music can transform from a creative outlet into a much-needed break from work stressors. Aadit Rajangam, drummer for Irish Exit and fourth-year College student, said he was content without studying music or pursuing it professionally.

“I never really studied music in a way that I would ever be able to pursue it as a profession. But that's good enough for me,” Rajangam said.

With three Irish Exit members moving to New York City, they have discussed reforming the band in the future. In the meantime, Eli Bare, the band's bassist and the sole third-year Engineering student, plans to form a new group with fellow students whose bands are also disassembling.

“I guess I'm just gonna have to start looking [for a band] again,” Bare said. “But I know there are some other bands and some other people who will be in the same position as me.”

New York City just may be the University's very own Nashville as a meeting point for young artists also seeking a professional career — two fourth-years of the student band Lucky Number also plan to relocate here after graduation. Mary Jane Erskin, the band's lead singer and fourth-year College student, and JP Hoffman, Lucky Number's guitarist and fourth-year Commerce student, said they are eager about the idea of creating their own small-form acoustic version of the band. Having all grown up playing music, members of the group said they cannot imagine a future without their musical expression.

“I see myself playing some semblance of music for the rest of my life,” Erskin said. “I think we see ourselves at least coming together as much as we can, moving forward to play together.”

Louis Leouzon, pianist for Lucky Number and fourth-year College student, also acknowledged music's everlasting presence not only at the University, but in his life.

“Music's kind of been my most seriously taken hobby throughout my entire life,” Leouzon said. “So I don't really see that changing anytime soon.”

The group even joked about tentative plans to perform at Leouzon's wedding at some point in the future, showcasing the friendship that will remain strong long past college. However, Lucky Number has the potential to live on through the two second-year members of the band. Hoffman said the two remaining second-years plan to forge their own musical paths in their remaining time on Grounds.

Even newer student bands such as British Racing Green, which formed in fall 2025, have to grapple with the changes in the group's structure following graduation. Blake Richardson, British Racing Green's bassist, singer and sole fourth-year College student, is leaving the band in the hands of the remaining four third-years as she pursues a law career. However, Richardson said that musicality will accompany her throughout her adult years.

“Being in music spaces my entire life, they have a lot of different community spaces [such as] community orchestras or com-



OLIVIA THOMPSON | THE CAVALIER DAILY

munity music clubs,” Richardson said. “So I definitely plan on joining something like that ... It's always been a part of my life, and I assume it will continue to be.”

Despite the various members' unknown futures, members said the bands left an undeniable impact on each of their University experiences, and even more on how they approach daily life. Johnny Visoni, Irish Exit guitarist and fourth-year College student, reflected on the lasting impact the group had on his time at the University.

“It's made me a lot more social,” Visoni said. “[Irish Exit] put me out of my comfort zone. We played for pretty large crowds, and I never really did that in high school. It's made me a lot more comfortable playing with other people, for the people.”

This sentiment is shared among many of the bands playing their final notes on Grounds. Marshall Wenger, keyboardist for Irish Exit and fourth-year Commerce student, contended with the band's positive impact on his past four years and the bittersweet notion of that experience coming to an end.

“It's been pretty much my favorite thing I've done at U.Va.,” Wenger said. “I love playing music with people, and I think it's especially fun to be able to play for a lot of our friends at various gigs and have people come out and support us ... It's been a kind of integral part of my college experience.”

Spontaneity seems to be a common theme among college bands, where instruments can break and set lists may require last-minute adjustments. According to Richardson, not only have those experiences made for fun stories with the band, but they have also made her a calmer, more relaxed person overall. Moreover, each setback is experienced as a group, forming close bonds and chemistry that shines through the performances. Not only do they plan to bring music into their adulthood, but they will also carry the relationships created over the years.

“Music brings people together, like no other thing, and I've become so close with my band members,” Richardson said. “They're like family, and I feel like a lot of other things that you do ... it takes years to kind of form that, but being in a band, you're kind of tight for life.”

Some student musicians, such as Chadwick, have spent nearly their entire collegiate career performing live and crafting the inter-band relations.

“It's been so special to watch everyone grow individually within their own instruments, but also as a band ... go through a lot of struggles and challenges with each other to continue stronger. It's just been super meaningful,” Chadwick said.

Live music is a pillar of the college experience, where friends unite by dancing to the Red Hot Chili Peppers or the University classic “Valerie.” Jack Mitchell,

Irish Exit acoustic guitarist and fourth-year College student, said the inherent culture of the University encourages new bands to crop up and allows for anyone to follow their musical passion.

“[There's] a pretty low barrier to entry, too, just because there are so many other musicians,” Mitchell said. “U.Va. is just a great, great place to be in a band.”

Nonetheless, the platform given to these student bands is particularly special and enables them to blossom at fraternity events, local bars and everywhere in between. The result is an overwhelmingly positive, accessible music scene that encompasses all facets of the University yet unites its members through a love of performing their art.

“Live music is so special because it somehow hits these emotions that you don't get [from] Spotify ... You can feed off of other people's energies, especially off the crowd's energy,” Hoffman said. “Because of that, there are certain moments that we've played that you just can't replicate.”

While leaving the University music scene is inevitable upon graduation, the University will continue to welcome new generations of musicians to Grounds. No matter where life takes the graduating fourth-years, they will always have a home in Charlottesville and an opportunity to get the band back together.



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