Murray, James B

Thu 4/8/2021 5:41 PM

To: Cabrera, Nickolaus George

Nickolaus,

I join President Ryan in expressing sympathy to you for your experience; and in reassuring you that the behavior you have described has no place at the University of Virginia. Tolerance, civility and reasoned debate have been the hallmarks of educated citizens across virtually every culture and every age. These are virtues we should continuously promote at UVA. Likewise, we should condemn it when these fundamental human values are abandoned by anyone here. When any member of our community  responds to ideas with vitriol instead of reason we have fallen short in their education.

I hope that you will be reassured by the attention you have drawn from many alumni of different political persuasions. Regardless of our personal beliefs and whether those align with yours, we will always defend your right to speak freely and to be treated with dignity and respect.

I wish you strength and good luck in your career ahead.

Sincerely, Jim Murray, ‘68, Rector

On Apr 8, 2021, at 8:50 AM, James Ryan <president@virginia.edu> wrote:

﻿

Dear Nickolaus,

Thank you for reaching out, and I was sorry to read about your year.  Free speech is the lifeblood of any university, but that does not mean that we should condone personal attacks as opposed to the constructive—and robust—exchange of ideas.  Please know that we take very seriously reports of threats, harassment, and bullying, and I strongly encourage you, or any student who is feeling threatened, to [make a report](https://justreportit.virginia.edu/) and connect with Dean Groves about ways to resolve the issues you raise, including your decision about whether or not to transfer.  From your note, it sounds like you have had previous advisory conversations, and I would encourage you to keep open that line of communication.

Your letter also raises concerns about whether there is sufficient diversity of thought on Grounds and whether there is a climate that promotes divergent viewpoints among students and faculty.  I think that’s a fair question, and it’s worth taking a moment to share a few of my thoughts, since this is an area I have spent a fair bit of time considering.

I see viewpoint diversity on Grounds as a critical part of learning, and as critical to the preparation of students for the wider worlds into which they will enter.  I believe we can and should do more to help our students to have meaningful and respectful conversations about a wide variety of topics across intellectual and political differences.  No matter what policy positions we advocate for individually and collectively, there are great benefits to discussions across traditional intellectual and ideological divides. In my experience, engaging with ideas different from your own is one of the best ways to sharpen your own thinking and make your own arguments more persuasive.  You may even change your mind, and indeed, we should all be open to the possibility of changing our minds, even on topics about which we feel passionately.

This idea about focusing specifically on listening to and engaging with opposing viewpoints was part of the impetus for launching “Democracy Dialogues” in January.  The purpose of Democracy Dialogues is to deeply examine the most pressing issues facing our democracy, consider divergent points of view, and promote understanding of complex ideas.  All Democracy Dialogues will feature leaders or experts with different perspectives discussing a topic relevant to our democracy in a civil, respectful, and informative way.  It is my hope that these conversations can serve as a model to all of us in learning through disagreement.

As a University, we are also working to reaffirm our commitment to the free and open exchange of ideas across the political or ideological spectrum.  Fortunately, UVA has a wealth of expertise in this area, and I am delighted that First Amendment expert Leslie Kendrick, White Burkett Miller Professor of Law and Public Affairs and vice dean at UVA’s School of Law, is chairing the newly formed Committee on Free Expression and Free Inquiry.  The Committee will craft a statement that identifies the role that free expression and free inquiry play in UVA’s academic enterprise and how they shape engagement with the ideas of others.  I have asked that this statement reflect the University’s values, history, and its legal obligations as a public institution, and I look forward to sharing it with the UVA community and reflecting together on its messages in the months ahead.

Finally, I have also devoted my own office’s resources to more closely working with organizations around Grounds that are working to open lines of respectful dialogue across differences.  Members of my staff have invited meetings with various student groups across the political spectrum, including Young Americans for Freedom, to hear their views on and solicit input about what steps we might take to create an environment that is more hospitable to a range of viewpoints.  Students were receptive to initiatives that support these goals and demonstrated special interest in learning more about how to communicate around difficult topics such as racism, historical injustices, and encouraging civic participation.  My colleagues in the Provost’s office and I have also met with faculty to a similar end, seeking input about what we might do to promote viewpoint diversity on Grounds.  I welcome your ideas and any others.

In the meantime, I encourage you to connect with Dean Groves, and I wish you every success in the years ahead.

Best,

Jim

--

James E. Ryan

President

University of Virginia

**From:** Nickolaus Cabrera   
**Sent:** Saturday, April 3, 2021 2:10 PM  
  
**Subject:** An Open Letter Describing Experiences of Being an Open Conservative on-Grounds at UVA from Nickolaus Cabrera, First-year Student of the Class of 2024

Dear President Ryan, Provost Magill, Dean Groves, and the Board of Visitors,

I am Nickolaus Cabrera, a first-generation and openly conservative first-year student attending Mr. Jefferson’s University here in Charlottesville, Virginia on the University Achievement Award as an Echols Scholar. I plan to double major in Astronomy and Foreign Affairs with a minor in Public Policy and Leadership. I am also an active member of the Young Americans for Freedom at UVA and the UVA Student Council where I have served the past two semesters as an elected representative for the First Year Class of 2024.

First and foremost, I would like to thank you all for taking time out of your day to read this rather lengthy letter. Throughout this composition, I will voice the harassment, threats, and culture I have faced on-Grounds during my first two semesters at the University of Virginia.

In order to remain unbiased at all costs, I will simply display the facts of what I have gone through and what I am dealing with on a daily basis and how it has affected me. From here, I ask you to interpret it with the incorporation of only facts and how these instances may affect an individual, or how they might affect yourself if you were in my shoes…

I have faced tremendous challenges, harassment, cyberbullying, threats, and more. Quite frankly, if you didn't already know, my name has simply become commonplace for much of the UVA Student Body.

I have always known that I was a conservative-minded individual. I grew up with traditional family values and worked numerous jobs and internships to help give back to my community and save for college. These included bussing tables, going to Wyoming to conduct soil science research, and working at a local ice cream shoppe throughout high school. These derived and strengthened my conservative values. I for one had never thought I would become as vocal about my beliefs as I am today. Starting below, I invite you to read the timeline that I have written displaying the discrimination I have endured.

**August/September, 2020:**

Entered the University of Virginia having made Instagram posts which displayed my conservative ideology and affiliation with the Republican Party.

* Not much had occurred/was said to me about my beliefs.
* My former roommate had then departed for reasons unknown to me. Comments were left on my Tik-Tok account that I used briefly claiming I was “homophobic” as my roommate that had left was a member of the LGBT+ community.  I then had a conversation with the Dean of Students to discuss how I would move forward. I ended up staying in my dormitory, Balz-Dobie (I still reside in Balz-Dobie).

**October, 2020:**

I was “called out” for being a supporter of Former President Donald J. Trump in the Class of 2024 GroupMe. Memes were created and sent in the chat that encompasses 1931 students of the First Year Class of 2024

**November, 2020:**

I spoke out with concerns regarding a piece of legislation in my capacity as a UVA Student Council Representative. It included Professor Jeffrey Leopold and a comment he had made in one of his COMM 1800 classes. [During the meeting, Zyahna Bryant and graduate student, Jason O. Evans](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrdlkdzC4iQ&t=3s) had a plentiful amount to say about me as a person. I ask you all to watch this video and the entire meeting available on UVA Student Council’s website to draw complete judgement.

Current President of the UVA Student Council, Ellen Yates, quickly went to Twitter, as did Representative Bryant and others, condemning my actions and accusing me of “gaslighting” black individuals.

The Chair of the Representative Body of Student Council and President-Elect, Abel Liu, had asked me to join his office hours the following day. Upon joining, I was quickly ‘lectured’ about “gaslighting” and how what I said hurt individuals of the ‘BIPOC’ community.

I also noticed at this time that I was blocked on Twitter by my RA which I found to be unusual.

I am attaching an informal document that I sent to the current Chairman of YAF, Victoria Spiotto, in early November in order to help direct me to resources that would help me deal with the harassment that I was receiving, both psychologically and in case something physical were to arise (as in physical harm from others). The document includes many, but certainly not all of the screenshots of harassment that I have compiled on my phone (350+). I warn you that these messages do contain vulgar language and upsetting content.

I had also filed a police report as outlined in the document I have attached with this email.

November of 2020 was easily the second worst month that I have ever gone through, with the first being the uncertainty of my mother’s health in December, 2019. I never remember being as upset as I was in this one month, throughout my entire time in high school. However, I continued to cope as individuals of the Young Americans for Freedom at UVA would give me rides to and from Balz-Dobie (my residence hall), making me feel some level of safety, despite continued harassment. I have left some specific screenshots out of the document due to their entirely troubling manner. Today, as I read back through the tweets and comments, I hurt tremendously.

Since then, the University of Virginia has appeared on numerous new outlets regarding these issues including, but not limited to, [Daily Wire](https://www.dailywire.com/news/university-of-virginia-leftists-smear-conservative-student-group-f-you-put-a-lot-of-students-in-danger), [YAF](https://www.yaf.org/news/exposed-uva-student-govt-creates-strike-system-for-professors-who-offend-attacks-yafer-for-opposing-mob-rule/), [Campus Reform](https://www.campusreform.org/article?id=16386), and many more.

My last name, of hispanic origin (my father being born in Puerto Rico), has been slandered to c\*ntbrera, carbonara, crabrera, and more.

* “We smoking the YAF @ UVA pacc tonight”

* “All my homies hate N\*ck Cab\*\*ra”...

* “Fxck Nick Cabrera”

 the “\*” included in my name are so that tweets on Twitter cannot be found when searching “Nick Cabrera”

The three examples provided above are relatively light in comparison to the rest of the hate and harassment I have received.

As I walk past people on-Grounds, I hear “was that Nick?” (or something like it) echoed in the background… I also receive a series of unwanted stares from many students.

It is honestly a lot and extremely unwelcoming. One ‘Open Letter’ will not do what I have personally gone through any justice. At times I have found myself depressed and strongly considering transferring, despite choosing UVA over Notre Dame as my school of study due to financial and family reasons.

I am firmly disappointed by my experience at UVA thus far, especially the lack of empathy expressed by the administration.

I know that we can do better, especially with the treatment of conservatives on-Grounds.

I would like to note that the document attached only encompasses some (certainly not all) of the hate, harassment, and false accusations received from August to November of 2020.

**December, 2020:**

Harassment on social media platforms continued, with a peak after Young America’s Foundation posted video clips from the November 2nd UVA Student Council meeting online. The meeting was public. I was accused of sending Young America’s Foundation the video by members of the council. Hate continued to pour in as the videos were used against me. I invite you to see the clips here ([Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CHyRS06g1G1/), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/yaf/status/1329455261556289536?lang=en)). From those two links, you should be able to find the rest of the video clips posted. Young America’s Foundation is not at all wrong for posting these as the meetings are entirely open and transparent (however, the UVA Student Council has now implemented new “security measures” and requires all attendees to login with NetBadge as a result which arguably goes against its transparency and openness).

**February, 2020:**

I went to CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) in Orlando, Florida in late February. I posted about it on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/p/CL4H-nsndUv/) with the caption, “Unapologetically Conservative.” Comments arose as visible on the post. Due to an overwhelming amount of comments, I have since "archived" the post.

Recently, I have been put on a UJC trial for attending CPAC. Students were told, in the masses, to report me for removing my mask for a picture with an elected official who I would likely never see again in my life - although students (even when the student gathering limit was lowered) posted pictures and videos at large parties and Instagram posts as well. This UJC trial came after a conversation with the Dean of Students. The case has been recently “Dropped.”

<image009.jpg>

<image010.jpg>

I am clicking “Send” on this email as I think back to March 27th, 2020. This wasn’t the day I got into UVA, but rather the day I was accepted into Notre Dame, my childhood dream school. However, I did choose UVA so that I could be closer to my family, just an hour and a half away from where I reside in King George, Virginia and for financial reasons. In short, I want to be able to say that I don’t regret my decision to attend UVA, a university with such a strong and rich history, but in times like these, it's hard not to. This being said, as hard as it may be moving forward in the current political climate on-Grounds, I am most certainly here to stay.

<image011.png>

<image012.jpg>

I want you all to know that conservatives on-Grounds are hurt. They feel silenced. When we speak out, we are belittled, with absolutely no empathy or concern shown from the administration. This has to change if we want a more “equitable” future as the University of Virginia claims to enable.

I tell you all now- the Conservative Body at UVA knows that UVA as a whole can do better. Attention is given to people that place door signs with "FXCK UVA" but none is given to conservatives that are constantly having to reach out to UPD when a banner gets stolen from the amphitheater. Please ask us to be in pictures and talk to us more to understand what we have gone through. Yes, you may receive backlash from the Liberal Leaning Body at UVA by doing so, but if you practice the inclusivity as outlined by the EOCR non-discriminatory clause, this shouldn’t matter.

In my admissions essay for UVA, I wrote that I would paint “In Unity There Is Strength” on Beta Bridge. I stand by that. We can progress forward if we acknowledge how all people are being treated on-Grounds rather than picking and choosing for a public image.

I can be reached by email at [ngc6sa@virginia.edu](mailto:ngc6sa@virginia.edu) if you would like to further understand a conservatives perspective of the political climate on-Grounds.

May God bless you and your family during this Holy season (if you celebrate).

With all due respect,

Nickolaus Cabrera

--

**Nickolaus George Cabrera**

**UVA '24 | Astronomy & Foreign Affairs**

**Echols & UAA Scholar**

**First Year Student Council Representative**