

Sound Mind and Sound Body

LIVING THE BALANCED MAN IDEAL

The Lawn—Jefferson’s Vision for a Living, Learning Environment

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If you told today’s college student that they will spend their senior year living in a room a little larger than four office cubicles, with no room for an entertainment center, computer, and furniture, they would most likely rebel. At the very least, they would opt for a spacious suite with high-speed Internet access and a private bath. Unless you were talking to a student attending the University of Virginia and the room in question is located on The Lawn.

UVA, as it is known by its faithful alumni, students, and fans, is located in Charlottesville, Virginia. Its icons are the Rotunda and the academic village, nicknamed The Lawn. It is here Thomas Jefferson erected a monument to the pursuit of knowledge as he saw it—where students and professors live and learn side-by-side. There are two wings, full of rooms for the students, flanking the southern steps of the Rotunda, East and West Lawn. There are five two-story pavilions, where professors live and classes are taught, in each wing.

The resident of 44 East Lawn—**J.J. Kasper, Virginia '04**—has an experience that few students will ever have. Only a couple of doors down in Pavilion Nine, the Dean of the Business School wants to know if there is anyone on the Lawn available to baby-sit his daughter. Not exactly what you might envision for an elite student getting an invaluable interaction with professors. However, it should emphasize the living part of living-learning.

Only the Top 47

Living on The Lawn is a highly sought-after honor at UVA. In the Spring



It's an open-door existence living on the Lawn at UVA. Passers-by can look in and see living spaces, such as J.J. Kasper's, above.

of 2003, over 400 hopefuls applied for one of 47 spots. What does it take to be one of those 47? It requires a high GPA and involvement in both the campus and community. Brother Kasper is from Severna Park, Maryland and has a 3.94, double-majoring in English and Math. He was President of the Virginia Eta Chapter. For the past three years, he has served as a Judiciary Counselor for both the school and the Interfraternity Council. He spent two years in the Fellowship of Christian

Athletes and, for three years, was one of the Mascots for the school.

Kasper noted that his desire to get involved stemmed from older brothers in the chapter, “I remember when our former Chapter President Leondras Webster (**Leondras J. Webster, Virginia '02**) encouraged me to try out for the IFC Judiciary Council. Stevie Kaplan (**Steve A. Kaplan, Virginia '02**) got me involved with the Judiciary Council, and Pat Kelly (**Patrick M. Kelly, Virginia '02**) looked for someone to take over being

the mascot.” Kasper mentioned there was lots of interest in younger brothers who wanted to follow in his footsteps and live on The Lawn.

One thing Kasper stressed was that he was not a “Lawnie.” “Lawnies” are students who learn to live on The Lawn and proceed to join an organization just

As we talked, there were numerous people walking past his open doors. Every one of them looked in. Some glanced as they walked by, as if to say, “I know what one of those rooms looks like, but I am still going to sneak a peek.” Others paused to take in the sight. They quickly moved on as they did not want to disturb our conversation.

An Experience Few Have

So what does Kasper gain from his one year on The Lawn? His learning reaches beyond the classroom. His neighbors are not only the professors, but also 46 other high achievers. One can only thrive in an environment such as this. He likens part of his experience to living in a fraternity house, which he did during his time as President. “Much like the fraternity house is the center of activity, there is always something to do here on The Lawn. You have to be disciplined to manage your time, or you see everything and get

nothing done.” Three times a semester, the entire Lawn has dinner together. Once it was held in the Rotunda; another time it was a progressive meal in each of the Pavilions—appetizers in Pavilion One, salads in Pavilion Two, etc.

Professors invite the students over to their pavilions for different events. During Halloween, the same dean who needed a last-minute baby sitter had a chili dinner for several of the students. On another occasion, Kasper attended a garden party (each Pavilion has its own unique garden as set forth by Jefferson) hosted by Dr. Larry J. Sabato, a well-known political



MOLLY MORRISON

So, what is a Rotunda, anyway?

When Thomas Jefferson founded the University of Virginia in 1819, he envisioned a place where the student lived and learned alongside the teacher. The Rotunda was built to house the library, and its dome shape is modeled after the Pantheon in Rome and symbolizes the enlightened mind.

analyst seen on CNN and MSNBC. During the course of the evening, Mark Warner, Governor of Virginia, stopped by for a few minutes, mingling with the students and Dr. Sabato. At these events, the discussions can range from academic in nature to purely social.

In addition to the interaction with professors and students, Kasper is a part of the history of the school. On the outside of his closet, there is a simple list of names going back to the 1840s. Those names belong to the former residents of 44 East Lawn. In front of Kasper’s room, on November 12, 1840, law professor John A.G. Davis was shot and killed by a student. This upheaval led to the establishment of the nation’s oldest student-run honor system. Today, every student vows not to lie, cheat, or steal. Personally, Kasper feels the honor system is a bit too reactionary; the only penalty is expulsion from the school. While his view may not be the most popular among his peers, it is only in a place like UVA where students have that kind of discussion.

In the Jeffersonian spirit of living and learning with professors, Sigma Phi

MOLLY MORRISON



The Virginia Eta chapter house



MOLLY MORRISON

“If the condition of man is to be progressively ameliorated, as we fondly hope and believe, education is to be the chief instrument in effecting it.”

Thomas Jefferson to M. A. Jullien, 1818.

This statue of Thomas Jefferson is located on the steps of the Rotunda.

to build their resume and better their odds. While it may be a tough moniker to have, it illustrates that students at UVA want to be a part of Jefferson’s vision. They want to live next to their professors. They want to live on The Lawn and are very envious of those who do.

For his interview with *The Journal*, Kasper opened the double doors of his room to The Lawn. “I like to open the doors; it’s nice to have a breeze in here,” he explained. Part of it was true—he did enjoy a breeze. Part of it was for show—a show to those “Lawnies” wanting to see the inside of these rooms.



“My proudest moment as chapter president has been seeing more brothers want to be involved on campus. They are asking me, ‘What can I do to live on The Lawn.’”

**J.J. Kasper,
Virginia '04**



One of the 10 Pavilions on The Lawn.

Epsilon has developed the Residential Learning Community (RLC). While there are no chapter homes with a professor residing in them (as yet) many chapters have an increased level of interaction with a Faculty Fellow. They are members of the faculty intimately involved with a SigEp chapter.

When asked his thoughts on the Sigma Phi Epsilon RLC, Kasper explained, “I can see nothing but positive results in having a Faculty Fellow. It is difficult to find the right professor, and Virginia Eta is trying. We recently held a reception for the faculty on The Lawn. It is a start.” Before this year and before Brother Kasper, the chapter would never have hosted a reception on The Lawn. So why does your national Fraternity believe in a partnership with faculty? The belief is simple. Re-read this article and substitute the phrase “on The Lawn” with “in the Sigma Phi Epsilon chapter home.”

BY THE NUMBERS

Chapter: **Virginia Eta**

School: **UVA**

GPA: **3.10**

Chartered: **1907**

Total Lifetime Members: **1391**

Current Undergraduate
Membership: **56**

Residential Learning Communities—A SigEp Approach to Jefferson’s Vision

With enrollment at an all-time high on most campuses, the faculty-student interaction is weakened. There are just too many students in a classroom, and relationships with professors must be built outside of class. Sigma Phi Epsilon has created a more defined role for faculty advisors to help foster that interaction—the Faculty Fellow. A Faculty Fellow meets with chapter members on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. Their roles differ from student-to-student and campus-to-campus, but, in general, they mentor and guide undergraduates. Whether they answer questions about the campus or put SigEps in touch with resources to be successful, Faculty Fellows provide a vital link to the school and help enhance a young SigEp’s degree. Some attend

chapter meetings and have meals with the chapter. Others invite their colleagues to speak to the chapter.

On some campuses, Faculty Fellows have an office in the chapter house—that is right, an office. Brothers meet with the Faculty Fellow, study, conduct chapter business, and a whole host of other tasks. The results are impressive. Chapters that have a Faculty Fellow show a higher GPA than the rest of the Fraternity—3.098 vs. 2.939. The benefits are not just academic. According to Chapter President **C. Bryan Lassiter, Georgia '04**, “Having Victor Wilson (**Victor K. Wilson, Georgia**) involved has helped our chapter in so many ways. He helps the brothers find themselves. He is a counselor, role model, and friend.”



Dr. Yvonne Gentzler, Faculty Fellow for the Iowa Beta Chapter at Iowa State University.