

COMMENTARY



What goes with orange? Reflections of a Hokie in “C-ville”

When my fellow Virginia Tech alumni ask me what it’s like to be a Hokie in Charlottesville, I usually tell them it’s not so bad. Outside the immediate vicinity of the local university, it’s a nice, small city with some interesting amenities. Heading back to Blacksburg is an easy day trip. When my wife and I moved here in 2007, the United Methodist church a mile from our house had two Hokie pastors. And though the Hoos will likely beat us in football again some day, that’s not something we’ve had to worry about yet!

A few years after the move, I jumped at an opportunity to serve first on the support council, then on the board of the Wesley Foundation at UVa. Campus ministry was a rock for me at Virginia Tech, shaping me even before I met a transfer student at one September Wesley Singers rehearsal who eventually became my wife. College rivalries, silly or even occasionally serious, are one thing, but faith is quite another, and it seemed like a fun chance to help students along a path parallel to the one I’d trod a few years before.

It’s a little bit different here, of course. The language: first-years through fourth-years, “The Grounds,” calling

Ph.D.s “Mister” and “Ms.” rather than “Doctor.” The visuals: neo-classical architecture (oops, “Jeffersonian” – another one for language!) instead of military, clean-lined, gray limestone; different student demographics reflecting the universities’ different academic specialties. And let’s be honest: you’d never see a grocery store-sized, temporary J. Crew outlet materialize on the way into Blacksburg before move-in weekend, as happened on Route 29 inbound from Northern Virginia for the past few Augusts.

But what isn’t different? Start with the look on new students’ faces as they walk into the Wesley building in the middle of their first week of classes, looking for an environment they understand and in which they can be understood during the biggest transition of most of their lives. Move along to the service project photos on the wall – an afternoon gleaning with the Society of St. Andrew, or a spring break trip repairing homes. Talk to the student struggling academically for the first time, or reaching an understanding that a childhood dream career might not be their life’s vocation. Drop in on the conversations that make lifelong friendships. See the joy in graduations, marriages and other new beginnings built with what and who they’ve found in this place.

Listen for the response

to university tragedies, looking for Christ’s light amidst the darkness and helping our communities find a faithful response to the pain. Watch youth-group faith (important as it is for that phase in life) develop through study and action into the foundation for independent adult Christian life. Meet alumni bringing their children back to the place and the community that shaped their lives. They start out barely old enough to tell the difference between the Hokie Bird and CavMan – then years later they come back themselves, starting school and preparing to build their own adult faith.

This is what we do, in Charlottesville, in Blacksburg and beyond. This is why campus ministry matters — and why it’s been a privilege to help here in a small way, no matter whether game day pairs maroon or blue with our orange. 🍌

– Josh Crockett is a 2002 alumnus of the Wesley Foundation at Virginia Tech, a software developer in Charlottesville, and a member of Aldersgate UMC who served on the Wesley Foundation at UVa board from 2012-15. He revels in Hokie football each fall, then spends basketball season relearning humility. (This reflection was originally published in “The Wesley Word,” the newsletter of The Wesley Foundation at UVa, and has been republished with permission by the author.)