

Interview Questions for Alumnae (Swap out UVA when interviewing non-UVA women)

Tonya N. Jefferson, 1993, Asian Studies and History (double major)

1. Tell us a few things about yourself (family, job, things that bring you joy). Ms. Jefferson is single; she has never been married. She is 48 years old and knows seven languages. She started an import/export consulting firm in 2016. She has also returned to GW to finish her dissertation. It is important to note that she recently received a \$10,000 scholarship to continue her work through GW. She is currently waiting for the institutional review boards to approve her dissertation proposal. She loves music, singing, playing the piano, saxophone, and flute. She also likes gospel and jazz music the most.
2. What is your UVA story?
 - a. How did you decide to come to UVA? She had a full ride to Virginia Tech but didn't take it because many of her high school peers were attending. She did not want to be in the same environment as she was in high school. UVA had an Asian studies degree and no other colleges did in Virginia. This enticed her to go to school because of her experiences at the VA Governor's Asian studies program in 1989. She learned Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Her instructors were native speakers. She loved the challenge of learning Mandarin Chinese and still speaks Korean to this day. Asian studies was a top motivator for her to accept her offer from UVA.
 - b. What did you do when you were a student at UVA? Her extracurriculars were all music based. She was in the pep band; they did not have a marching band when she attended. She was in the saxophone ensemble, played piano, and sang for Black Voices. Black Voices was a traveling singing group; she fondly remembers going to Pittsburg. She was in an all-female, African American a cappella group; thousands of people came to watch this group. She felt very proud to have been a member. Ms. Jefferson was also involved

in some Asian groups and was a member of several educational honor societies. It was worth mentioning that she graduated in 1993 at the age of 20.

- i. Were women encouraged or discouraged to join extracurriculars? She was not fully aware of this encouragement or discouragement because she did what she wanted.
 - ii. Were some more welcoming than others? Ms. Jefferson didn't care of other people's perception of what she was doing. Therefore, she was not focused on how other people viewed her.
 - iii. Greek life experience? No, she did not have one. She had invitations to several, but never rushed. After all, she was involved in several other musical groups.
3. What is your favorite UVA memory? Her favorite UVA memory was going to the Freer and Sackler museums in Washington DC with one of her professors in Asian Studies. She was able to ride shotgun in his car. He was very personable and many students formed positive relationships with him. She frequently went to his office hours as he was helpful in her studies, as well as very kind. When Ms. Jefferson was teaching in DC after graduation, she again admired the artwork at the Freer and Sackler museums. A woman approached her and mentioned a teacher's program which was dedicated to writing curriculums for the art gallery. She applied and represented the DC chapter.
4. What was a transformative moment for you at UVA? When she was told she could graduate early because she had enough credits. Her friends were shocked that she could do that.
5. What was the most challenging thing about UVA? The most challenging thing about UVA was when she took a modern Chinese class and an ancient Chinese class at the same time. She spent four hours a day studying her languages in the language lab. She wanted to note that the most challenging thing ever was writing her senior thesis and having her computer crash. She lost her

thesis, which she needed to graduate. She went to the IT department as soon as it crashed; they salvaged about 60% of it. Therefore, she had to redo the rest. She cried and thought she wouldn't graduate when this happened. Luckily, she was still able to graduate early!

6. Tell us about a woman/women at UVA who inspires you – now, or during your time on Grounds.

When she was a first year, she lived in the Kent dorms. Her RA, who was an engineering student, was a part of the Divine Nine. She was really smart and nice. Ms. Jefferson noted that they are still in a Facebook group to this day.

a. What relationships did you form with other women and did you find it easy to make those connections? All of her relationships were pretty much formed around music. She connected through singing and playing instruments. She recounted a graduate music student who was able to play beautifully; she admired her ability to read notes so precisely.

b. What was the presence of women's groups and movements on campus like? She doesn't know exactly; it was harder to unite people without the presence of social media.

c. How many courses did you take at UVA that were taught by female professors? Could you talk a little about the courses they taught and the kind of diversity that the courses and the prof(s) represented? She only distinctly remembers one female professor, who she believes is still teaching. She was inclusive of everyone. Ms. Jefferson, one of the only African Americans in her classes, felt the female professor was diverse in her thinking.

7. What were your experiences with sexism or misogyny on Grounds? She remembers that at the gym, men would say that she couldn't lift. There was almost a competition between men and

women when exercising. She hated it because she knew that she could do whatever she set her mind to.

8. Was there an open LGBTQ+ presence when you went to UVA? She doesn't think so. Her first year, living in Kent, there were two girls who were together. Ms. Jefferson said that they hid it for a while before they came out. They received backlash when they did. They are all Facebook friends to this day.

9. Did you feel pressured to go into a certain field or avoid a certain field during your time in college? Her father pressured her into Chinese, rather than Asian studies in general. In high school, she wanted to do STEM and be a microbiologist. She was partially pressured by her father to change her area of study. After her first year at UVA, a professor encouraged her to apply to the Chinese summer institute. She applied and got in at 18. As it is a graduate studies program, she remembers everyone telling her she was so young. Many professors wanted her to study all Asian languages at UVA, rather than specializing.
 - a. Did you notice a disparity in the population of men and women in your major? Ms. Jefferson recounts that there were definitely more men in both history and Asian studies.
 - b. Do you know of any efforts your institution has made since you graduated to make their classes more inclusive? Ms. Jefferson noted the Carter G. Woodson Institute as being more inclusive. Their focus on African and African American Studies is of interest to her.

10. What was relationship/hookup culture during your time at UVA? A lot of people did a lot of hooking up. She dated someone for two years, but it did not work out due to their differences regarding wanting children.

11. Was there any talk about consent and respect on campus? If so, do you think it was thorough/helpful? She stated that they didn't talk about consent at all. She believes that this was a major problem.
12. What was your journey after leaving UVA? She said it was circular. She had a hard time finding a job; many didn't take her seriously because of her age. She was watching local news one day and they were looking for tutors. She called the company and they set her up for an interview. Because of her background in Asian Studies, they had a student for her who was Korean. She tutored this young Korean girl. They met at a church at first and the student eventually told her to come over to her house. They played piano and sang together. Later, they ate. This student told Ms. Jefferson to go to Korea if she ever had the chance. Ms. Jefferson later went and taught English there. Before she got to Korea, she applied to teach in Japan through the Jet program. She went through the first interview and they later denied her because of her skin color. The only negative thing Ms. Jefferson remembers about going to Korea was getting her luggage stolen. She first taught in private schools in Korea. At these school, she was payed less than her coworkers, even though many of the children wanted to take her classes. Later on, she saw an article looking for international teachers at the Korean public schools and applied. She got in to the program. She got to teach in a public high school and had a better living situation. She also auditioned to sing in Korean for a TV show and got in. She was on Korean television twice. She got background dancers during her performances. People treated her like she was famous. She would go to Costco and people would ask for autographs and pictures. She got to meet the most famous, Korean African American singer at the time; they exchanged phone numbers. She didn't want to come back to the United States.
13. Is there something you learned at UVA that you apply to your life now? She learned the importance of asking questions. She felt that UVA inspired her to inquire.

14. What does the UVA alumnae community mean to you? How have fellow alumnae affected your life/career/journey? She was frustrated with the alumnae hall. She wanted to claim the class of 1993 and 1994, but was told to only pick one, despite her ties to both. She's gone to three or four class reunions. She is on the reunions committee for her class as well. She is a member of the UVA Black Alumnae committee; the events are more often but she has only gone once. She is going to host a meeting online for the group this year! Lastly, she is in the UVA club in Richmond.
15. In your opinion, what is the legacy of women at UVA? She thinks it's important to discuss breaking down barriers. Many students were males when she attended. One of her female Asian friends was a chemical engineer and graduated early. She started out making \$90,000. We must work to break down female stereotypes, like women lifting at the gym, women in STEM, etc.
16. If you could impart a piece of advice to a female student on Grounds today, what would you tell her? She would tell her to follow her heart. Don't let anyone dictate who you are and who you're becoming. She stays stick to your calling and ground yourself. Think about what brings you joy.
17. Is there anything related to women's history at the University that you would like to learn more about? She would like to learn more about how many female UVA graduates are in history books. Ms. Jefferson questions, who are the female pioneers from UVA?
18. What do you think the biggest difference was in terms of your experience at UVA and what is going on now in 2021? The biggest difference is the pandemic. She also wanted to point out that UVA got rid of the Black Bus Stop (BBS) within the last 5-7 years. They got rid of it because apparently too many people were hanging out there. This removal was deeply disheartening for many students. Ms. Jefferson also noted that Charlottesville as a city has also changed so much.

She got lost when visiting recently because it was so different. There were lots of physical changes apparent on Grounds as well.

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