

Katherine Kamis  
Class of 2016  
Biomedical engineering degree

Sadie: So our first question is just tell us a few things about yourself so your family or your job, things that bring you joy, etc anything you wanted to say by yourself.

Katherine: Wow, what a broad question. Um, yeah. Guys, I'm Katherine, I graduated from UVA in 2016. I studied engineering, quickly found out I didn't want to be an engineer. I moved to DC after graduating and worked in consulting for a couple years, mostly doing healthcare stuff, which is what I'm like very passionate about, especially helping hospitals and, like, individuals who need to get health care and making sure they can actually access it. My family is from Virginia like 70% of UVA students. So it was really great being close to them, I had a little sister who went to Virginia Tech so we had a good family rivalry. Moved up to Boston two years ago to go back to school, so I'm at HBS right now, finishing up. I'm planning on moving back to DC and then moving to Chicago because my partner's in Chicago and will be also after school, he's in school too. It's great being in school again, I have like so much free time, you get to realize that once you enter the real world, unfortunately, you have less free time. I've been, like, with that free time, I really love to cook and bake. So I've gotten to do a lot of that during the pandemic. I also am a big outdoors person so love to run and hike and get outdoors with friends.

S: So what is your UVA story, so how did you decide to come to UVA and then what did you do when you were a student there?

K: Yeah so fun fact I really didn't want to go to UVA, I don't know where you're from Sadie, but I'm from Northern Virginia, and it was just like everybody felt like they went to UVA. It like wasn't cool, because in high school I guess it like feels like it kind of matters but people would be like, Oh, you're going to UVA like that's great but they're not like WOW you're going UVA. And so my parents like forced me to go to a SWE event when I was in high school which is Society for Women Engineers and I honestly didn't love it but applied because I mean it's in state and it's a great school, and I wanted to, I knew I wanted to do biomedical engineering. At that point Virginia Tech actually didn't have biomedical engineering when I was in school which makes me sound really old but it's a new program they just added. So, therefore I applied to UVA and Tech. I decided to go to UVA because I thought I was gonna love Georgia Tech but I hated it. Everybody like looked super sad, and I came to Days on the Lawn and people were like happy and excited. Um, best decision I made, or like kind of got pushed into. Ended up at UVA. What was my UVA story. I lived in Balz Dobie. Actually a lot of my friends from college came from my first year hall like I feel like I got pretty lucky in that way. There's like a group of us who just like all got along very well. Um, did first year, stated biomedical engineer. Some of the things I did when I was at UVA so I joined the guide service, the spring of my freshman year, wow I've been out for a while, my first year, I was on the honor committee, I was like in honor and then was on honor committee, my fourth year. But the thing I probably spent most of my time on was I did Dance Marathon. So I helped run that my third year and fourth year, which

was a ton of fun and something that I'm pretty proud of, like the work we did there fundraising for the UVA Children's Hospital. And it was a great way to like kind of get out of the bubble occasionally of, like, oh, like there's kids that are sick around the corner from us and we're like going to parties, which is like a lot of fun and whatnot but it was a good reality check. So made like a ton of friends through the guide service, and Dance Marathon, and honor. I did biomedical engineering and I figured out like pretty early on I didn't want to do it but like at one point I was like maybe I'll switch to the comm school. My mom told me that was bad idea. She's an accountant.

S: Other little parts of the question could be if you were in any, like the extracurriculars that you mentioned, did you feel like women were encouraged or discouraged in any way to join certain extracurriculars, did you notice some being more welcoming than others, and then any sort of Greek life experiences that you may have had.

K: Um, I was in a sorority for a day and then quite. Yeah, I like went through rush it wasn't a particularly, it was like a fine experience for me, but I felt like the sorority I ended up in didn't click with who I was, I went to the bid day and I was like, all the girls were wonderful and super nice and welcoming, but like, it was just not... like they weren't my friends that I had already made and not that that's like an indicator of, like, future friendships, but I think it's like at least a decent indicator of future friendships. Um, and so I felt like, I'm really, it's actually funny looking back at it I like said I didn't know who to tell like that I was quitting the sorority so I emailed the ISC president which is definitely not who you email. She never replied. Um, but yeah I feel like a lot of my friends were in two sororities and I ended up going to a lot of their events and essentially like very much felt like a member but didn't have to pay dues. Now, as a post grad, I think the one thing I regret about it, or regret may not even be the right word, is you have like a built in community that for like reunions and whatnot, like, whatever. Like KD or Theta will host a event for you to go to during that reunion and that brings back people. Um, I feel lucky that the guide service still does that but I think that kind of continued community is nice to have. And then on your question on like clubs and whether they were welcoming, I think I feel like I joined big enough organizations that they like already had talked about that like the guide service is like very conscious about inclusion and diversity. Same with honor. Dance Marathon is like definitely not as large of an organization. I think we did a good job of like making women feel included, I mean honestly like women... it's easier to convince college women to join an organization for kids than it is a bunch of guys. So we like tended to have a pretty girl heavy exec board with like plenty of exceptions, there were guys. Interestingly on like the engineering school Biomedical Engineering at least when I was there was like the highest percentage of women per like engineering major or something like 40%, women. Um, I think healthcare is just something that's like pretty attractive and like does fit into those stereotypical gender roles, um, but I never like walked into a class and I was like, Oh, I'm the only woman here.

S: What is your favorite UVA memory?

K: First of all, the first one that came to mind but I don't know if you can write in an interview, my fourth year we won the intramural sand volleyball championships, which was awesome and like

a highlight. And like celebrated afterwards because we were fourth years and had nothing else to do. Yeah. The poor first year on our team was like, oh, I need to go to the library. I mean I lived in a house with eight other people my third year so there's a lot of fun memories from that like there was like a snow storm and we built a snow fort in our front yard. We played stump in the living room which we definitely should have not done. We played that in our living room because our house was like, disgusting. My dad wouldn't come into the house, direct words he told me were I raised my daughter to live in a place better than this. I have a lot of fun memories from that. I have a friend, I guess. Okay, one last one is like at the end of college. One of my friends had a gorilla suit. It was like late one night on the lawn, and he put on the gorilla suit and was like scaring people on the lawn which was hilarious. Yeah, those are a couple.

S: What was a transformative moment for you at UVA?

K: I think, I mean two come to mind. Maybe one just from like a professional or whatever career standpoint, when I decided to stay in biomedical engineering and like stick it out and then like realized that I could do other stuff besides biomedical engineering after school, that was like pretty transformational, just because I think that has shaped my career path, as a whole. And then, like, on the personal side, my aunt passed away my first year of college, which was like pretty sudden, and I didn't go to the funeral because it's like first year of college, and I was busy and it was hard to get to and like, you know, I can make up a ton of excuses but that's a something I regretted immediately and like, still, still regret and I think it was a good lesson for like, even when life is busy like you gotta prioritize family, but I also had like amazing friends that helped with that experience. And then, I think, like throughout college, I don't know, hindsight is 2020, I think your friendships, like help shape you into the person that you are and like I was fortunate to find some like really amazing friends throughout college who like will be friends for life, are friends for life. Um, and I just think being able to share, like both good and bad experiences with them is like pretty shaping for how your future life goes. And as part of that, I mean, like, one. I think there's like always a friend or two that like disintegrate or fall out. I mean maybe you've kept all your friends throughout college but I think just like learning that that happens and like moving on was a good thing to realize in my fourth year, I feel like I was like, trying to hold on to a lot of friendships that were like wonderful people who we still loved each other but like it was not something we had to like force. Just because we like, I don't know. Were in the same class first year.

S: What was the most challenging thing about UVA?

K: Classes are always challenging, I mean school, school I think this challenging, I think, like, some of them, like if I think about, like the most difficult points I had for like learning moments, my fourth year of college, there was a referendum on honor committee to get rid of the no tolerance policy, like the one strike you're out policy. And I can't think of what they call it at UVA right now, and it, like, totally consumed my life, my friend's life, whatever. And at one point I was like this is... sorry, I know you're still at UVA, but like this is dumb like nobody gives a shit about honor when you leave, like when I talked about honor like, after college they were like, like what's that, you know, and it was kind of a realization. I think that was a pretty difficult

experience because some of my best friends were on the honor committee and like felt extremely passionate about it and like I didn't totally agree, and that caused like tensions in friendships that like weren't particularly fun. And then, I mean also on the personal side like, the kid I was dating and I broke up and that was like really difficult but you know you eventually get over that. But when I think about like the moments I cried in college it was over that, it was over joining honor committee... very different things, so, yeah.

S: Tell us about a woman or women at UVA who inspires you now or during your time on Grounds.

K: Um, two part answer. One, I didn't have many mentors who were women who were professors, Like, I can only think of one or two women professors that I had, every other one was male. I have like a couple of friends that really inspire me, Emily McDuff is like an awesome human being. She's such a positive influence on like everybody's life including her own. I've hardly ever seen the girl have like a sad day that she is even having a sad day she's like, more than happy to make someone else's day better. So, I think I like kind of strive to be like her she's one of my good friends from undergrad.

S: What relationships that you form with other women and did you find it easy to make those connections?

K: So, I think I mentioned, my first year hall, like, I ended up becoming really close to them. My roommate and then like two other rooms of girls were pretty close. And, I found it, I mean, if you asked like first year Katherine, I would probably tell you I have no friends because everybody thinks that or like no close friends, it takes a while to make actual close friendships. Um, but I think I got lucky in being able to form relationships in my first year. And then after that, a lot of my close female relationships were formed through organizations that I was in. Like we did similar activities and like had similar priorities, and like things that we cared about.

S: So you kind of went over this already or said something about it but how many courses did you take that were taught by female professors? If you wanted to go into the diversity within your department or the courses that you took.

K: Um, I can truly think of only two off the top of my head, the first year engineering, like English class was taught by a woman. And my fourth year thesis class was taught by a woman, my academic advisor was a male. He was useless, not because he was male but for other reasons. My thesis advisor was a male. I think only two. No, three, my Comm school, my accounting professor in the comm school was a woman. That's depressing I've never thought about that.

S: Were there a good amount of other women in your classes like as fellow students or not really either, was it mostly guys?

K: I felt like there was a good amount of women. It was probably less than 50% but I never felt like it was less than like 25. I was a Rodman Scholar, which is like the engineering version of

echols. Unlike Echols you'd have to take like a specific Rodman Scholar seminar. And so my first year, I think there was like 30 of us. Maybe 40, and only six of us were women, and that was probably the smallest amount of women that I had in the class and that's because it pulled from like all the engineering backgrounds. Like one of my best friends from college was also, I mean she was also my roommate and a Rodman Scholar so I felt like I had a community there just because I like knew her.

S: What were your experiences with sexism and misogyny on Grounds?

K: I mean, I'm sure, I know it exists. I can't think of a specific experience off the top of my head. Maybe I was just like blind to it. Or, like a specific experience like with myself involved.

S: Was there an open LGBTQ+ presence when you went to UVA?

K: Mhm. Yeah, for sure. Um, I, I'm gonna forget what's it called, MRC? Is that the name of the organization that brings together... Minority Rights Coalition. Yeah. Anyway, um, yes, there was, I remember doing like the picture on the lawn. One of my friends, well actually more than one of my friends identified as like gay or lesbian or queer at UVA, I like definitely can't speak to their experiences but they were pretty open about it. I don't know how they felt like whether the community supported them or not I would hope that they did, but I'm not sure.

S: Did you feel pressured to go into a certain field or to avoid a certain field during your time in college?

K: Because I'm a woman, or just in general?

S: I guess just in general.

K: No, I mean, my parents like encouraged my sister and I to go into hard skills fields like engineering or business. But I'm like the type of person that I like find things hard to quit so even though I say I wanted to quit biomedical engineering like I would have had a pretty hard time actually pulling that trigger. Yeah. So, no.

S: Do you know any efforts your institution has made since you graduated to make their classes more inclusive, so I guess that can mean engineering specifically. If there are more women in the field now than there were do you think, or?

K: I honestly have no clue. I, they've definitely sent me emails about it, and about the initiative, like I am sure that engineering school has initiatives around women and inclusion. I have not kept up with them. I think, honestly, most of what I see come through is like changes, and probably it's just because I'm like more plugged into this community like the guide service and it now has women's tours and like I see those types of things come through, but not from like a school wide perspective.

S: What was relationship and hookup culture during your time at UVA?

K: I mean I think a hook up culture like generally exists in college, I don't know if that's like unique to UVA but my friends at other schools have the same type of experience I feel like most relationships come out of a hookup and then like progress further into a relationship, which is just like, not what it's like in the real world. I would say, and I don't know if this is because, like my particular group of friends. But like, I think we all like watched each other's backs. Especially like when we were out drinking, like I full on went and knocked on a room once that a friend was in with a guy like y'all are too drunk. And this is not going to be a good situation. Not just me. Sorry, like other friends came over like we're gonna leave. And so, I also I was in school when that Rolling Stone article came out that UVA, and the fraternities. So I think there was a very, there were a lot of conversations, not necessarily about like hookup culture but about sexual assault and sexual harassment, and what UVA can do better to prevent those things. I'm not sure how successful those initiatives were it was my third year of college so the initial response was to not let like the ISC like wouldn't let girls go to fraternity events which in my opinion is like, not the right response like tell the boys to respect women, um, and cancel their events. And there were a lot of people who were really upset about that.

S: Um, so kind of similar to where you're going and getting into. Was there any talk about consent and respect on campus. And if so, do you think it was thorough or helpful so like my orientation we had to like watch a presentation online, you know being an active bystander.

K: I went through, you went through active bystander training, like your first year you go through that, like your RA talks to you about it, or at least my RA did. I, because I mentioned I think like, I had a group of friends that maybe were like, hyper, like hyper is maybe not the right word but like very aware of, like, the potential for like sexual assault when alcohol gets involved. And, like, would make sure friends were, I don't think we ever left a party without someone, or if we did like wanted to make sure they were okay. And I, I feel like my friends would never leave me at a party. My sister once went out in DC when she was under 21. When I was in DC, and our friend like left her at the bar to hook up with a random guy and she was like supposed to stay that friend's house, and it was like that was just like, even if my friends are really drunk they wouldn't do that to me Yeah. They're no longer friends. So we had that orientation my first year, I don't think there was much of a conversation like beyond during my first and second year. I know there were like, safe space trainings which actually isn't sexual assault now that I say that or sexual harassment. I'm sure I went through trainings when I joined like honor and guides, I don't find them particularly memorable. My third year of college is when the girl Hannah Graham was like sexually assaulted and killed, and then like right after that the Rolling Stone article came out. And so there was a lot of conversation on grounds about like drinking about sexual assault, about Greek culture, and what it like, and what can happen as a result of it. And so, I feel like, I think I went through some additional trainings as a result of it but it was mostly like conversations with friends that was where any sort of like discussion around sexual assault and harassment occurred. So, yeah, I can say I probably never, though, with all of that conversation, directly had, like it was only with my female friends, I don't think I ever had a conversation like that with any of my male friends in college.

S: What was your journey after leaving UVA?

K: Um, I went to DC, worked at McKinsey, did healthcare work in Dupont Circle and it was great. A lot of people move to DC from UVA so I had a lot of friends from there, and then made a number of friends from work. I met my partner when we were in DC on a dating app which is hilarious. But we, we both applied to business school, I guess now three years ago which is crazy. So he's at the University of Chicago. I'm here in Boston. My plan is to go back to McKinsey, I like want to work in the healthcare space, but more on the business side.

S: Is there something you learned at UVA that you apply to your life now?

K: Yeah, I use, I mean, teamwork right? Um, I don't know, I feel like I've learned, I've said this, so I don't want to be too repetitive, but I think I learned a lot about like friendships and who I am as a person. What I prioritize. And like how to maintain strong friendships and how to like keep doing things that are important. I think I also learned as I mentioned earlier, like the value of friendship or value of like family and making sure that you're there for people in life.

S: What does the UVA alumni community mean to you, so how have fellow alumni affected your life or career/journey after college?

K: Yeah, I mean I'm gonna say I'm still like pretty, pretty young, I'm only five years out. I mean I think alumni and my friends like, I mentioned some of my best friends came from UVA. And so, like, that's one part of the alumni community. I haven't used any of like the career job stuff. I think it is fun like here at HBS there's like, like 10 of us, who went to UVA undergrad, different years and whatnot. And when it like wasn't COVID we like all went to a bar and had like a UVA meetup and like I think having that type of community is pretty neat. And that we can continue to keep fostering it. I will say things like right after undergrad, I was like super plugged into the alumni community. I was like, really excited when I met someone who went to UVA or saw someone who went to UVA at a bar. And I think that like diminishes over time. That's like a super depressing note to end on.

S: In your opinion, what is the legacy of women at UVA?

I mean, I know that women were only admitted like in the 70s I remember that from the guide service which is like crazy. I don't know much about the legacy of women, I mean I know we have a woman astronaut which is pretty cool in the engineering school I don't know she's still there but um. Her name is like Catherine, something. I don't know much though about women after they've left UVA and what they've gone on to do. I mean, like obviously like Katie Couric and like Tina Fey like you know those guys, but like, not in a non celebrity way. Makes me feel like I should pay more attention to it. To be fair though I don't know that about males either.

S: If you could impart a piece of advice to a female student on Grounds today, what would you tell her?

K: So what I like, really, the guide service, like you have an opportunity to give like a swan song, like what are your lessons from UVA that you want to pass down. What I wrote about at least is like throughout your UVA experience like the things that you count. Like changes. Beginning, like for me my first year I was like worried about my grades, my GPA and like, then second year was like how many like organizations like big name CIOs, I forgot what they were called for a second there, like in the end like what is my involvement. And like third year it's about internships and jobs. And then, like, I don't know how I ended it and what I still think is true, is like at the end it's like really how many like friendships have you made that you can continue to count on. And so my advice would be school's a lot, work's a lot, but like, focus on your friendships also because they'll be lifelong friends.

S: Is there anything related to women's history at the university that you'd like to learn more about?

K: Great question. I think, probably, engineering, I don't know much about the women in the engineering school, I feel like I know about like general college experience because the guide service like talks about that on history reports or like at one point, I knew it, I admittedly don't remember it anymore. But I don't know much about like, what was the experience of women in engineering school, I'd love to know if they're at parity right now. At 50 50. They're probably not. Or when they even started getting close to it. Yeah they're definitely not. I bet it's like 70 30.

S: What do you think the biggest difference was in terms of your experience at UVA and what is going on now in 2021?

K: I mean, I think from when I went to college till now, in 2021, people are more aware of, like, the experience of women, of minorities, that are like different than their own. And looking at diversity and inclusion, not just as like counting numbers but as like what is a different experience that an individual brings. I feel like a lot of the conversations I had around diversity and inclusion when I was like, in undergrad was like, only based off race, and only based off like the number of people you're bringing in and not like intersectionality and like how then once these individuals are in the organizations, how do they feel and are they represented in. And so, I like to think UVA has moved forward in that way, like especially it appears in some ways from the outside that it has but I don't know if that's actually the case.