

## **Dr. Deborah Stroman**

### **1. Can you tell me a few things about yourself (family, job, things that bring you joy).**

I would say I'm in a very wonderful place in my life right now. I fight for justice and I do things that bring me joy. I think I came out of the womb as somebody who always tried to help someone who has less. I wanted to help somebody and give them a shot. That has led me to a lifetime of activism. That is very important to me. My connection to God, being spiritual. Holding people with grace. Understanding we serve a God of second chances. I am here in Chapel Hill. It's a wonderful place to live and there's a lot of wahoos here. I've been living here in Chapel Hill since 2007. This is home for me now. I've enjoyed being a professor at the university.

### **2. What is your UVA story?**

My UVA story starts with sports. I played a lot of sports growing up. I decided that basketball was my first love. Starting in 6th 7th grade I was in camps. The Philly area is a hot bed for basketball, which is where I'm from. That's where I met Debby Ryan, now retired hall of fame coach. It came down to Berkeley and VA. My oldest brother attended Berkeley. I came to spring fling and I didn't know UVA wasn't an HBCU. I decided I wanted to be closest to home. It was the best 4 years of my life. All of my friends have UVA ties. Officially I had to walk on to the basketball team. Then I earned my scholarship. I lived 2 lives. I lived on the side of being a Black student at UVA. Then I was an athlete. I had my 2 sororities, my basketball sisters, and my sorority sisters. And also the race and racism stuff. I brought that to UVA as well. I was involved in advocacy at the university. Everything from housekeepers rights to helping my peers. I remember I was involved with the Dean of Students office. Providing seminars and working them.

**i. Were women encouraged or discouraged to join extracurriculars?**

I was involved in a number of things. I definitely didn't give 150% to basketball cause I had many other interests. BSA, Fellowship of Christian Students, IMP, and Zeta Phi Beta, I don't remember women being discouraged at all. It was the late 70s early 80s , the voice, the presence, the way women show up , it's hard to hold us back . You aren't gonna see passive women at UVA. Generally they are leaders and about getting something done.

**iii. Greek life experience?**

I had some friends on the track and field and was leaning toward Delta. I didn't know about Black greek life. All of my friends were in the Phi Beta family. I'm hoping the wave will go back to understanding the importance of these groups. We were all friends anyway. That's how it all happened for me. We didn't have many Black students. Greek life was the majority. If you were black and needed something to do , it was in the Black greek community. We were all just one big Black Greek family. Very supportive of one another. We see that today even at reunions. In general we mix really well. For some people I'm sure they were following their legacy. But it really wasn't a campus with major rivalries. All supportive of one another.

**3. What is your favorite UVA memory?**

No. There's just too many. The closeness of my sisters in women's basketball. Crying together, laughing together. The physical demands on the body together. That's a bond that will never be broken. We didn't have separate gyms, we were all friends. Ralph Samson is a dear friend. Some of it is due to physical distance. I will say, may she rest in peace, Dean Sybil Todd. She was a wonderful leader. She gave me a lot of openings. I worked closest with her to help younger students develop well. Dean Angela Davis. She was very special, very caring. Some of our IMP activities. That was a good good time. Some of our service projects as a Zeta, I got to have a little sister and also we adopted a grandparent. Just so many wonderful memories.

**4. What was a transformative moment for you at UVA?**

Nothing in particular. Just normal development as an undergraduate.

**5. What was the most challenging thing about UVA?**

I would say balancing the books and the ball. Athletes today have a lot more resources. Like being able to have a meal at 7 or 8 or maybe 10 at night. When we got out we had to hit the vending machine. I can't imagine that today - a football player having no access to food.

I tell students today, especially athletes, you were brought to that university to be an athlete. Athlete first. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. You have to figure out how to balance everything. Engage, get good grades, If you're used to straight As... those days are over. SO do the best you can. Trying to burn both ends -- lends itself to depression, body shutting down. You can have it all, but I think it's about blending. Not balance, I don't believe in that.

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

One of my teammates - Valarie Ackermen. Now the commissioner of the Big East Conference. She was really instrumental in helping me believe UVA was the best place for me. You can't not mention your head coach - Debby Ryan. She was a hard coach. But the people who are hardest on you teach you the most. Dean Angela Davis. Dr. Vivian Gordan - she was a professor there. I'm almost afraid to do this - I don't wanna leave anyone out. Sylvia Terry - Office of African American Affairs.

**a. What relationships did you form with other women and did you find it easy to make those connections?**

Many many relationships. I am definitely a people person. I am an ambivert. I gain lots of energy from people. Then there's a time that I need to separate and take a break. But I have so many friends who would slow me down.

**b. What was the presence of women's groups and movements on campus like?**

There might have been a women's movement, but it was dominated by men. If you look at the Me Too movement now. There's men involved but founded by Black women. There wasn't a gender separation.

**c. How many courses did you take at UVA that were taught by female professors?**

Less than 5. Back then it was 120 hours to graduate, I wouldn't say more than 15 hours were taught by female professors.

**7. What were your experiences with sexism or misogyny on Grounds?**

No. 1. I'm from Philly 2. I'm an athlete. I was taught confidence and courage. Are we harassed, of course, but no.

**8. Was there an open LGBTQ+ presence when you went to UVA?**

I don't recall. One of my teammates decided to come out, it caused a huge ruckus in the athletic department and affected her playing time. But eventually people awoken. Who would choose a behavior where people would ostracize you. There's been a lot of growth. I don't recall too much.

**9. Did you feel pressured to go into a certain field or avoid a certain field during your time in college?**

Absolutely. My family has a gene for artistry. I told the coach I wanted to major in art. She said that's when we have practice and I had to choose something else. I did history and social studies education through Curry.

**a. Did you notice a disparity in the population of men and women in your major?**

No

**b. Do you know of any efforts your institution has made since you graduated to make their classes more inclusive?**

Yes absolutely. That's ongoing. Now with the awakening of America, we have task forces and such. I think Latinos and African Americans have been on this since day one. Sadly Mr. Floyd had to lose their life... I can go back further to Trayvon Martin. So now you have people saying "wow this is really bad" and of course we can't stop being vigilant. Cause these performative acts - they are just hoping they will crate conversation but as soon as we turn our heads it's back to the way it was.

**10. What was relationship/hookup culture during your time at UVA?**

We were not calling people up , we didn't have the tech. If you wanted to use the hall phone and you had to wait in line. Your chances were meeting someone at a newcomb hall party. You had to travel in groups with people with cars. Having the bus system helped, but yea you met them at a dance or at a party. Or maybe you met them in class, talked, and walked on Grounds together.

**11. Was there any talk about consent and respect on campus? If so, do you think it was thorough/helpful?**

I don't recall. I'm sure there was something in place. Being a Black woman, if I heard about it it was from the white fraternities. But you didn't hear about it on the Black greek side. If it happened, and I'm sure it did it was hush hush . It was in the white fraternities. I don't think that's changed at all.

**12. What was your journey after leaving UVA?**

SoI had an opportunity to continue basketball overseas. I said no. I had an opportunity for the NCAA program - like a big sister big brother program. Only 6 of us were selected nationally. I found out Carolina was starting a masters program in sports administration. After the masters I sold insurance like many athletes. I loved it. Then I went to Chapel Hill and did a Business

Leadership degree, then I found out there was an opening at Carolina. And I've been here since 2007. I have an entrepreneurship side. While I was in financial services I played golf. So me and a uva grad started a golf planning company. I have my own company where I do my race and racism advocacy. I put on educational events making the connections between advocacy in the community and in sports.

**13. Is there something you learned at UVA that you apply to your life now?**

The importance of connections and family. I love being the support for the people in the VA family. I have a saying, borrowed from a gentleman, “ It's not what you know or who you know, it's who knows you on a favorable basis.” You can't be everywhere, you need people who will serve as your ambassadors. You have to be more of a giver than a taker.

**14. What does the UVA alumnae community mean to you? How have fellow alumnae affected your life/career/journey?**

Means everything. I'm very connected to UVA. It's very very important. I'm proud of that orange and blue. We like to remind Black undergrads that we look out for each other when we graduate. That's very unique to our school. There's something about UVA black alumni. Being a leader is challenging systems. If you don't name it, how can you face it. There's some people that might be uncomfortable when I roll up because I am a truth teller.

**15. In your opinion, what is the legacy of women at UVA?**

One of strength and survival. Think of the first women. I'm sure there were cat called, assaulted. But now, A female president - President Sullivan. A female athletic director. I think that's another way that UVA tries to overcome its legacy of tradition, not in the positive way of tradition. Status quo or being stuck without evolving.

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

Explore. Don't settle. Take the time to take a class that you've always thought about. Take the time to get off grounds. Take the time to find out about sport life. Even if not an athlete, movement is good for strong health. Take a golf course. Young women need to explore. Don't get caught up in the GPA. If you have UVA behind your name and good recs, you're gonna get into the school you want. I'm saying this as a professor of a university. We look at the whole package. It's about getting to know people. One thing for sure, When you're talking about grad school - if you aren't sitting in someone's office, you are missing out. I get many rec requests and I can kick them out. When I know a student, I sit back and think about what I can say.

**17. Is there anything related to women's history at the University that you would like to learn more about?**

I'm always curious about Black women at UVA. I think we have a number of people working on the Black athlete. Um you know cville has grown so much - that town and gown experience. Maybe identifying the key institutions that brought us together - like Madison house identifying those institutions.

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

Resources, everything from transportation. We had the bus you guys have ubers, buses , scooters. Media, we had cav daily, but you guys can open up a laptop and read the NYT. We could only do that at Alderman. The food I'm sure you can imagine what our food looked like. You guys have so many options. I'm not one to judge and say which one is better. We had to fight and scrap.