

American Dream Come True

Now in my final academic year at UD, I still cannot believe that I am actually living in America. As I grew up in Cambodia where going to school is not an easy decision, attending a graduate school in the United States seemed like a dream until I finally did. Amazing people, great university resources, and world-class faculty members have made my experience as an international graduate student in the educational technology program at UD a dream come true.

Growing up learning how to speak English by watching Friends, a popular American sitcom, I have always been excited to learn more about American culture and what it is like to live in America. Therefore, applying to study in the United States has always been my goal. I was ecstatic when my UD admission status page was filled with confetti. Immediately, the number of tabs on my Chrome Browser multiplied. While the UD virtual tour videos, which I had watched hundreds of times before receiving the admission, was playing in the background, my search results for “What is the best restaurant near UD?”, “The best apartment near UD”, and many more started to pop up. It was the best day of my life.

However, the day only got better. Thanks to one of the greatest foreign student advisors at UD, Vina, I had all the information I needed. Therefore, flying alone for almost 24 hours from Cambodia to Philadelphia was never more comfortable, and fortunately, there was no sign of jetlag at all. On my way to my apartment, I was stunned by how everything was very different from my home country, such as the bigger road, the giant skyscrapers, and the car brands that I could not even pronounce. In a blink of an eye, I arrived at my apartment, and I saw a familiar face standing in front of it.

That was my roommate, the person whom I had found on places4students.com and had been texting with online for months. Finding a roommate online can be a gamble, but I hit the jackpot. I found the best roommate a foreign student can ask for. We hit it off right away. Unbelievably, the same thing happened outside of my apartment. Making friends at UD is not as hard as I thought it would be. I have always enjoyed going to the International Coffee Hour, meeting new people from different backgrounds, sharing about my cultures, and learning from theirs. The embracement of diversity at UD has helped me develop a sense of belonging and learn more about my own identity.

This embracement is also present in classrooms. Coming from a country where speaking up and asking a question in class can be considered offensive, I was very nervous about participating in class discussions at first. However, thanks to my classmates and professors, I never felt more empowered to voice my opinion and join discussions in classes. Unlike a typical class in Cambodia, everyone is genuinely interested in each other's opinion, and not just the professor's, which makes the learning experience very engaging, enjoyable, and productive. As I am an educational technology student, witnessing the technology in classrooms, on campus, and in Morris Library for the first time made me feel like Charlie in the Chocolate Factory. Back in my days as an undergraduate student in Cambodia, giving a presentation in class involved a very complicated process, including carrying the projector to class, finding the outlet, adjusting display settings on the projector and about ten other tasks while a simple the touch panel controls everything in classrooms at UD.

I had the most American experience when I joined my roommate's family for Thanksgiving. After hours of multiple bus delays, my roommate and I finally arrived in Massachusetts, and I was greeted with the biggest smiles from her parents. Thanksgiving Day may

be a great day, but preparing for Thanksgiving was very exciting. I had a chance to see how Thanksgiving foods were made, such as cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, roasted turkey, and her family's signature dish, deep-fried turkey. On Thanksgiving Day, I had the biggest meal that I had ever had for a long time, a similar feeling I had on a Lunar New Year's Day back in Cambodia. On the day that I left her house for the bus back to Delaware, I felt something cold drop on my head, and as I looked up and I saw my first snow ever.

All these unforgettable experiences were the reasons why I believe that coming to UD was the right decision. Being here at UD has opened my eyes to many new perspectives and opened doors to many opportunities that I did not know existed. Therefore, saying goodbye may be one of the hardest things that I have to do. However, UD will always be remembered as a place where my dream came true, my American dream.