

## **Finding your way “home”**

“What? You don’t drink ouzo? How come? So, is your house all white and blue with a lemon tree in your backyard? Do you ONLY dance on tables? Why did you choose Delaware from Greece?”

This is the usual set of questions I used to get every day when I met new people at the University of Delaware my freshman year when I arrived in the USA back in 2021. Seriously, I even had a standard list of replies in my head that I learned by heart to save me some time. Seriously, my roommate could answer those questions herself by the end of the first semester freshman year. But I was incredibly excited to answer these questions each time because I realized that I had stepped into a brand new world. The understanding that I also knew very little about the people and culture here came quite fast.

It all started with a one-way ticket from Athens to Newark International Airport in the middle of the pandemic. I left behind the familiar comforts of home, stepping into the unknown to pursue a dream far away from Patras, Greece at the age of 17. I had no idea what awaited me in Delaware, only that it would be life-changing. When I arrived, all alone, I felt a mix of excitement and uncertainty, but I also knew that this leap of faith was the beginning of something bigger than I could have imagined.

To top it all off, my suitcase was lost somewhere between Newark and Athens, leaving me without even the small comforts I had packed from home. It felt like the perfect metaphor for how far out of my comfort zone I truly was. I had come here with a purpose, and I was determined to make the most of this opportunity. I quickly immersed myself in the community,

and slowly but surely, Delaware started to feel less foreign and more like a new kind of home. I joined clubs, made incredible life long friendships, and started to explore not only the campus but the person I was becoming.

My academic journey at the University of Delaware was not without challenges, but it was also filled with moments of pride and accomplishment. Each semester brought new growth, and with hard work and perseverance, I earned a place on the Dean's List. One of the highlights of my time here was receiving the James R. Soles Award, which recognized my dedication to social justice and leadership. It wasn't just a medal or a line on my resume—it was a validation of the values I had brought with me from Greece and my family and the ways I had applied them to make a difference here in Delaware.

As I settled into my new life, I realized that my journey wasn't just about personal achievements; it was about using my experiences to help others. As the President of the Hellenic Student Association, I was able to channel my passion for my heritage into something meaningful. With my team, we worked to create a sense of belonging for international students, fostering a community where everyone could feel at home, no matter how far they had traveled. One of our proudest accomplishments was securing a grant from the Charitable Grant Committee of the University's Investment Club, which helped us launch an Olympic Games Museum, a charitable way to give back to our community on campus. This project celebrated our Greek heritage and brought students together in a shared appreciation of history and culture. It was a reminder that, no matter where we came from, we could create something lasting and meaningful when we worked together.

Looking back now, as I prepare to graduate, I can hardly believe how much has changed since I first stepped off that plane. The person I was then—an uncertain 17 year old freshman from Greece, unsure of where she fit in—feels miles away from the person I am today. Different major, different beliefs and a whole life ahead of her. Over these four years, I've not only gained an education but learned the value of resilience, hard work, and community. Each challenge I faced, from lost luggage to communication struggles, taught me the power of perseverance. And every success, from academic honors to leadership roles, reminded me why I had taken that leap in the first place.

My story is not one of easy success, but of persistence. It's about stepping out of my comfort zone, embracing the unknown, and proving to myself that I am capable of more than I ever thought possible, reminding myself that uncertainty can sometimes be a good thing. As I move forward, I carry with me the lessons of these past four years—the importance of resilience, the power of community, and the belief that, no matter where you come from or what obstacles you face, you can always find your way “home”.