The Welcome I Almost Missed

When I told my roommates I was finally arriving at the University of Delaware, I asked them to help me get my room key. I expected to meet just my roommates. But they brought their friends, about eight people altogether, to help carry my luggage. I had never met any of them. Only weeks earlier, I had told Delaware I could not come.

For much of that summer, my world had shrunk to a single web page: my U.S. visa status. My parents and I checked it every day. Each unchanged status made it harder to imagine myself on campus.

My journey to UD began in September 2025. My high school counselors encouraged me to consider the UK, Europe, Singapore, and Canada, but I wanted to study in the United States. Delaware became my first choice for chemical engineering, and it was the first university to admit me.

My family supported me in everything, and Dubai was my comfort zone. I had always wanted to live independently. Studying abroad meant learning to manage without the routines and people I relied on.

Then, on February 28, 2026, the safety I associated with Dubai was shaken by missile attacks. Our house was close to Dubai Airport. We heard sounds like thunder, and sometimes the doors shook. We remained safe, but classes moved online, and flights were canceled. I was preparing for my final International Baccalaureate examinations, trying to improve my results while the familiar world around me felt uncertain.

Then another shock came: the U.S. consulate in Dubai closed indefinitely. I would have to apply for my student visa in India.

Appointments were difficult to secure, but we managed. We traveled to India in late June expecting a short trip. On July 9, I entered my interview feeling confident. The officer examined my passport and said it was water-damaged. The interview otherwise went well, but I left with a 221(g)notice asking for a replacement passport.

After gathering documents, including original school records, we obtained a new passport within about a week and submitted it promptly. I hoped the visa would follow within two weeks.

Two weeks passed, then several more.

We had booked our flight for August 19. That date came and went. Delaware's classes began on August 25 while I remained in India. The university allowed me additional time to arrive, initially until September 8, and I began some coursework remotely.

After four days of remote classes, my confidence began to drop. It was difficult to concentrate on catching up when I could not say when I would arrive. Other students were meeting their roommates and finding their classrooms. I was refreshing the same page.

By September 2, I felt I could no longer rely on receiving the visa in time. I asked the U.S. Embassy in Delhi to return my passport, informed UD I wouldn't be coming, and prepared to study chemical engineering at the University of Bath in the UK. Even that plan depended on getting my passport back. We made repeated requests but received no definite timeline.

Then, on September 14, my U.S. visa arrived.

On September 15, I traveled to Delhi to collect my passport and flew back to Dubai that same day. After months of waiting, I suddenly had to decide quickly. Bath offered a fresh start. At Delaware, I would have missed almost a month of classes. My mind said Bath; my heart still said UD. What if I could not catch up?

Julie Lopez, my academic counselor, and others at UD continued helping me through the uncertainty. Recognizing how difficult it would be to catch up after missing almost a month of classes, they helped me create a revised course schedule, select subjects I could manage, and postpone others until a later term. Their flexibility reassured me, but I was still torn between starting fresh at Bath and joining Delaware late.

My parents encouraged me too. Their support made the challenge feel possible, although I knew the work would be mine. I finally chose Delaware.

UD extended my deadline again, and I arrived on September 19 with an updated I-20 and began attending classes in person on September 21. The university I had chosen a year earlier was finally a place I could walk into.

My roommates' welcome helped ease my fear of joining everyone late. We talked about everything, and I enjoyed hearing their perspectives. Slowly, I started to get to know people and make friends.

I also learned how UD works. Support is there through events, clubs, advisors, and professors, but no one hands it to you. You have to take an interest, find out what is happening on campus, and step forward yourself. What happened next depended on me.

There was little time to settle before classes. My professors gave me extra time to complete assignments. These adjustments gave me a way forward when I had been looking at the missed month as one overwhelming problem.

I had wanted independence, and now I was learning what it required: managing my time, taking responsibility for unfinished work, and asking questions when I needed help. I had spent months depending on my family to get to Delaware. Now, people I had never met were helping me settle in. Accepting their support became part of learning to manage on my own.

I am still catching up and finding my place. Most of my university story remains unwritten. But Delaware has already become more than the university that first admitted me. It is where people helped me begin when I feared I was too late.

Slowly, I am becoming a Blue Hen. When the next new student arrives with too many suitcases, I want to be one of the people waiting.

AI acknowledgment: I used ChatGPT to check spelling and grammatical errors. This essay draws on personal experiences and facts, and I used it to refine wording wherever required.