

Seasons of Growth: A Year at the University of Delaware

Fall – New Beginnings

I used to read about fall, the season that paints the world in hues of amber and gold, but only in books. Yet, my first experience witnessing a fall was when I arrived in the United States in August 2024. The leaves seemed to clear a path for me as I walked along the tree-lined roads to my first semester at the University of Delaware. However, fall was not the only world of change that UD brought to my life.

Before coming to the U.S., I worried that my struggles with making friends would follow me across continents. In Taylor Swift's words, "I have never been a natural, all I do is try, try, try." But that changed the moment I set foot on campus. From standing in long lines to opening a bank account to figuring out shuttle bus routes together, small confusions eventually became shared laughter in these everyday moments.

These connections soon carried over into the weekly International Coffee Hour, quickly becoming my favourite time of the week. Over steaming cups and sugar cookies, I met people from every corner of the world, each of us learning how to belong in a new place. Motivated by the warmth and openness of these friendships, my sister and I hosted our first Thanksgiving dinner that November. Friends filled our apartment with warmth and the aroma of dishes from home - Kenya's spiced pilau, Zimbabwe's sadza, Bangladesh's chicken roast, and India's biryani. I had expected loneliness in a new country; instead, that evening, surrounded by different accents, flavours, and stories, fear quietly melted away as friends became family.

Winter – Self-Discovery

Winter arrived softly, blanketing the campus in white and quiet beauty. Yet beneath its calm, I faced my hardest season. Before coming to the U.S., I imagined independence and adulthood as effortless confidence but instead found myself anxious about money and sending job applications into silence. The cold outside often mirrored the uncertainty I felt within.

Still, resilience grew quietly. After weeks of searching, my sister and I found a small apartment and turned it into our home with thrifted treasures and soft lights, filling it with the warmth we missed from family celebrations in India. By February, perseverance brought reward - I received my dream job as a Teaching Assistant in Medical Anthropology. It became more than employment; it reconnected me to my roots as a medical doctor, teaching me how culture shapes healing. That winter, I learned that patience and persistence, paired with openness to new experiences, can turn uncertainty into growth.

Spring – Fresh Perspectives

As spring unfolded, I felt my curiosity and perspective blossoming alongside the campus around me. I had arrived in the U.S. thinking that university learning would mean memorizing facts, writing lengthy papers, and adhering to strict rules. But my classes at UD challenged me to think differently. Professors encouraged questions instead of answers, discussions instead of lectures. At first, this openness was intimidating - I worried about saying the wrong thing or misunderstanding cultural references.

Yet, over time, I began to appreciate this freedom to think, explore, and connect ideas in my own voice. Spring at UD taught me to look beyond biostatistics and epidemiology - to see people, their histories, identities, and lived experiences. My education became more than my program of study; it became a journey of empathy, critical thinking, and connection.

Summer – Broadened Horizons

Summer took me beyond the campus, both physically and intellectually. Riding DART buses across Delaware, I explored neighbourhoods, markets, and local communities I had only seen in movies before. Each trip became a small adventure and a window into everyday American life. Back in India, I never would have expected that research could mean connecting so directly with communities - listening to their stories, understanding their challenges, and learning how health is lived beyond the classroom.

That summer, Delaware stopped feeling like a place I was visiting and began to feel like a place I belonged. I had expected research to stay within classrooms and data sheets; instead, it became a bridge between people and purpose. I realized that being an international student isn't just about studying abroad; it's about growing through the people you meet and the worlds you step into.

Fall Again – Coming Full Circle

Now, as I step into Fall 2025, the trees on The Green glow in shades of gold once more. The paths that once felt unfamiliar now feel like home, and I walk them with gratitude - for the friends who became family, the mentors who guided me, and the challenges that shaped my resilience.

I came seeking an education; I found transformation. Each season offered something unique: fall brought friendship and belonging, winter brought patience and perseverance, spring brought curiosity and new ways of thinking, and summer brought perspective and connection. I had expected to simply adapt to a new country; instead, I learned to grow, to belong, and to call it home.

As the leaves fall again, I see them not as endings but as symbols of growth - the quiet promise of new beginnings, reminder that I have grown far beyond the expectations, and the unfolding journey of who I am *becoming*.