THE ENGAGEMENTS
at the University of Virginia

What if mastering these...

Requires understanding these?
Hi! I’m Janet Spittler.

And I’m Jim Coan.

We co-direct the Engagements Curriculum, and we want to tell you a little about it.

The Engagements are a series of small, seminar-style courses that you’ll take in your first year at UVA. Altogether, they’ll amount to 8 of your 30-plus first year credits.

You’ll meet some of UVA’s most celebrated scholars and teachers, who’ll ask you think and talk about some of life’s most profound questions.

These courses don’t emphasize evaluation so much as participation.

They’re designed to help you see and express yourselves as much as learn about a particular subject, and they aren’t all the same.

You’ll choose one 2-credit course from each of the following four categories...
How does *creativity* help us make sense of ourselves, each other, and the world?

How does *art* move, convince, and transform us?

UVA should help you think critically about the nature of art and artistry, describe and analyze aesthetic experiences, reflect on the historical, geographical, and cultural differences that shape aesthetic experiences, and explore the role of art in everyday life, social evolution, political discourse, and even environmental crisis.

**THIS IS NOT A CAT**
EGMT 1520

Empiricism

How does evidence **inform** what we know and how we make sense of the world?

All through your life, you are going to encounter **claims about the natural and social worlds** that you’ll have to evaluate. You’ll have to **make decisions** based on evidence.

What does it mean to make an **evidence-based claim**?

**Empirical methods can help.**

UVA should help you to understand **what empirical evidence is**, to identify **knowledge** based on what is **observable**, to **evaluate claims** framed in empirical terms, and consider the limitations of empirical approaches in appreciating subjective phenomena.
In nature, variation is the rule.

In contemporary global society, pluralism reigns.

At the very least, UVA should help acquaint you with the richness and complexity of humanity.

But we should also help you reflect on inequities rooted in social, economic, racial, and cultural differences...

...understand how these inequities embed themselves in our norms and institutions...

...and consider how we express our differences in ways that can either perpetuate harmful discrimination...

...or enliven our common human experience.
How do we relate to ourselves, to others, to the world?

What are the behaviors, habits, and dispositions that constitute a good, responsible, and successful life?

Ethical decisions are inevitable—even ignoring conflict and controversy is itself an ethical decision! UVA should help you to articulate, evaluate and respond to ethical questions on purpose as you reflect upon different ethical traditions and really think about what it means to live a good life.

But UVA should also help you to see that some ethical differences can’t be reconciled. That is, sometimes, you will fundamentally disagree with others about what the ethical response to a problem should be. UVA should help you learn how to navigate those very difficult and inevitable moments... constructively.
Hi! I’m Bo Odom!

I administer the College Fellows Program and the Engagements Curriculum, and even teach my own Engagement classes.

There are a few final things I’d really like you to know about the Engagements.

First, each course is 7 weeks long. You’ll take two per semester in your first year.

Second, the Engagements classes are intentionally small. This is so you can get experience right away with participating—asking questions, expressing your views, and engaging in debate.

Third, we really want you to take risks. The College Fellows — the faculty teaching the Engagements classes — are ready for you to step out of your comfort zone. These classes are safe places to openly state your views and hear the views of others.

Finally, the Engagement classes are all different from year to year, even semester to semester. Expect variability! (Just like life!) Chances are good that your course is not going to be the same as your friends’. This is a feature, not a bug! Share what you’re learning with each other!

You’re going to see a lot of emails from me. Please, always feel free to reach out if you have a question about the Engagements classes or the overall program.
**PS:** Some students wonder how the Engagements will help them get into, say, the business or law school. Well, they might not. **Not directly.**

But **UVA** is about so much more than a single profession or specialty. **UVA** is about preparing you for **anything** you do!

And so the **Engagements** aren't there to prepare you to get into a particular school, but they absolutely are about preparing you to be a **better** doctor, accountant, CEO, teacher, lawyer, scientist, philosopher... **and student!**

They are about preparing you for life!
This comic-style introduction to the UVA ENGAGEMENTS CURRICULUM was made by Co-Director Jim Coan