

2026 UVA GRADUATION TIPS COMPLIMENTS OF



May 15-17, 2026

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*****PRE-Tip for 2027 graduation from Beth S.**

“Class of 2027 parents need to start calling hotels NOW; many start taking reservations 5/1; some say the Monday after graduation. Lodging websites aren’t all that helpful...call and get a PERSON at any hotels you are possibly interested in staying at. MANY of them pretty much triple their rates and require a 3-night minimum.”

Tips from Jenna M. - Attended '25 Graduation

Our daughter graduated on Sunday. We did a party an open house at our house on Friday from 12-4. Families came for lunch, appetizers, and drinks as they arrived into town. Saturday was fairly relaxed. We reserved a table at Chiswell winery and brought a picnic in the afternoon. I highly recommend! Send someone to the diploma ceremony early to save seats for your family – especially if your ceremony starts immediately after the lawn ceremony like ours did.

Tips from Sarah M. - Attended '25 Graduation

I will also add that staying in the dorms could not have worked out better. We paid extra for sheets and I would recommend bringing your own, but that is really the only negative. By staying in the dorms, we were able to get better parking, we didn’t have to check out of a hotel before graduation in the morning, we had a place to wait in between events, we didn’t have to check out until 8:00pm. We just stayed one night and had pizza delivered. We ate in a common area and just chatted, so fun. As you know the area around grounds gets bogged down with traffic. We were glad that we just unloaded, parked the car, and

didn't have to drive again until we were ready to head home. We had a step ladder for my 80 year old mom to get in and out of the lofted beds, which worked out great for her, so that is something to consider when planning for graduation. I wasn't excited about the common bathrooms but that really wasn't bad. They did have a men's bathroom and a woman's bathroom on each floor but not shared. We had two rooms and that was much more economical than what hotels charge that weekend, also UVA doesn't require a minimum night stay like some hotels.

Tips from Joan H. - Attended '24 Graduation

Our daughter graduated from the nursing program and using these tips from last year, we are able to get a seat on the aisle as she walked down and snag great seats for the nursing ceremony as well! I totally missed the memo on hotels for graduation, but we booked a lovely Airbnb in North Garden, 20 min south of Campus. This made for an easy ride in for Sunday graduation. ■ We arrived at 7:20 am for Sunday graduation and secured a parking spot under the bookstore (it was very open). Our plan B was to drop off most of the family including the grandparents and then park at the Stadium. ■ **The suggestion to use the color coded maps for seating was awesome!** We had great seats up front for the lawn ceremony. ■ **Tell your grad to take their ID.** Our daughter didn't bring her ID (she was in cap and gown) and she had to use an extra ticket for the ceremony. ■ **Go early to the nursing graduation.** Three of us made the quick 5 minute walk and secured seats before the lawn ceremony crowd adjourned. ■ On the lower lawn, to the left there was an unmarked building set up as a cooling station. It also has bathrooms.

■ We **ordered graduation lunch from Roots** and made the 5 minute walk from the lawn to pick it up. There were **picnic seats around the Rotunda** where we sat outside and ate. It was easy and everyone loved it. ■ The **Wegmans app** allowed us to preorder a graduation cake and pick it up in Charlottesville. Easy and delicious.

Tips from Rebecca T. - Attended '24 & '23 Graduation

Arrive at lawn entrance before the gates open, if you want to have ample seat choices. We arrived about 20- 30 minutes before they opened and were in the front of line. This allows ample time to get in, settled and select seating. ■ Check the diploma ceremony times and if it is close to the lawn ceremony time , **pack lunch. There may not be time to grab food with the crowds.** We packed sandwich supplies etc which we left in a cooler in the car and ate quickly between the two. It was a picnic time ! ■ Consider how the sun will be as it rises during the Lawn ceremony and think about shade on sunny days. ■ **If it**

rains and the ceremony is on the Lawn, it will be muddy. Wear rain boots/shoes and waterproof pants. The chairs will be wet as well. ■ Take a towel to dry seats as they may be moist from dew on a day even without rain. ■ It may be cool in the morning but likely will heat up so plan layers etc. ■ They usually sell coffee and some snacks near the entrance in case you need something that morning.

Tips from Laura S. - Attended '24 Graduation

Get there early to get a seat near the walkway if you want to have any hope of seeing your graduate walk. Seeing her was the best part of the day! We found a spot halfway down the lawn, not under a tree since it was raining, and it was great. ■ Figure out a spot to meet afterwards to get photos.

Tips from Scott & Vicky M. - Attended '24 & '22 Graduation

We had mobility issues both years and so we used and **highly recommend the handicapped-equipped Shuttle Bus from JPJ - there's easy parking there, short lines and we had help to get on and off** (a cousin in a wheel chair after ACL surgery in '22 and Vicky on a knee scooter with broken foot in '24). It was great that we had to be back at JPJ both times for department ceremonies too but that's probably just coincidence. And with the extreme heat in '22 and the rain in '24, **the bus was a nice refuge from walking everywhere**. In '24, Vicky **found seating under the handicapped tent** (between the Lawn and the amphitheater close to the front stage) but we were surprised how **quickly it filled up** and they **only let one person sit with her** (anyone else had to go elsewhere to sit or stand behind the tent). **Another drawback** was the sidewalk in front of the tent was perhaps the busiest walkway in the area for some reason and there were always people coming and going and sometimes standing still to take pictures blocking the view of everyone under the tent.

We also **discouraged older relatives from coming to the Lawn and celebrated elsewhere**. Because the boys lived in houses off Grounds, both years we did **graduation-evening picnic parties at their house** (in conjunction with housemates also graduating and their parents). For these we **brought almost all the food in coolers from Richmond where it was easier to pre-order and store during the day and we found Publix Party Trays to work great**. All 4 grandparents and other family members live in Richmond so there was less of a need for hotel housing and **they just came up for the day** (or for the evening picnic for those skipping the Lawn).

As for **spotting our graduates**, that too was nearly impossible from your seats unless you were on the aisle near the middle so we sent a **few of us with cameras to walk**

“upstream” towards the Rotunda and stand by the ropes during the procession and watch out for our graduate. When we saw them, they ran over and took a few pictures or at least looked over and waved. The best time for good pictures was definitely after the ceremony and not during.

One other tip we found helpful both on the Lawn and during the Department Ceremonies (especially if they are big ones) was to **let your graduate know ahead of time where the family was sitting - by phone or text - so they could look up and see us and feel loved.** Of course when their name is called and they walk across the stage they hear you cheer but sometimes it’s better to know before hand so they can look over during the procession, etc.

Digital ticketing was new in ‘24 and was a bit tricky at first but the security personnel at the Lawn entrances were all very helpful in getting it to work. The key is to **get those from your graduate as early/soon as possible** since once they’re lined up with their friends they are less likely to be checking their phones, hearing their phones and wanting to deal with tickets!

Tip from Jenna M. - Attended 2022 Graduation

In 2022 we made the decision not to include extended family because we didn’t have enough tickets for everyone. We were also worried about their frail health in the potentially extreme heat. It was very hot and we were glad that we didn’t include them. They were able to log in to see the festivities and we texted back and forth as they watched the graduation. **You can watch the Valedictory and Final Exercises ceremonies from anywhere via the live streaming webcast. Visit www.virginia.edu/live for additional information.**

Some friends had family stay at the hotel during the festivities but then joined in the other activities. There are also plenty of inside viewing options as well. This year we will do the same thing.

Another family had a picnic dinner on Friday evening before the Saturday graduation at **King Family Vineyard in Crozet** and that was one of the highlights of their weekend. They picked up food at **Food of All Nations**. No need for reservations. (other vineyards may also allow bringing in your own food—but check first!)

Make sure everyone has tickets (this year they are electronic) for both the lawn ceremony and the diploma ceremony.

Our son didn't get a balloon but he told us all the balloons he was standing near and sent us a photo. This was very helpful in finding him in the crowd!

Tip from Kelly W. - Attended 2022 Graduation - Lessons learned and tip to remember:

■ We have stayed at the Radisson Country Inn and Suites on 29 for two graduations, 2022 and 2019. It cost an arm and a leg, but I think it was about the same everywhere. Having said that, there was a very nice breakfast and it was central, so that was nice. ■ **In '22, we had two sets of grandparents with us. Two of them had mobility issues.** With the extreme heat that weekend, and a concern on the part of some of our party about Covid (and crowds), I was at a loss as to where to get lunch. I ended up **ordering from Roots**, which has a pick-up location near the corner, but not the same location as the main restaurant. I sent a couple of the kids to fetch the 10 bowls, brought drinks and dessert, and **we ate in the big lobby of the hotel where breakfast is served (tables). It was air conditioned, good, and no one was there at 1:00!** We opened some gifts, and had rooms to change in before some took naps and some headed home. (continued) That was my best idea of the weekend. :) ■ **For the remaining party, I made reservations at Monsoon Siam in advance.** The kids love it. It was good food. The atmosphere was okay. ■ **We went a second time to The Local for a graduation dinner. It was good, but I won't do it next time.** It was very loud, which was hard for grandparents. The food was very good, and \$55/person plus tax and gratuity. Going anywhere that isn't booked and loud is the challenge that weekend.

■ **Here is my only radical input: this was graduation #2 for us, and we have one more to go.** I think we'll end up doing all three differently, with regard to the ceremonies. Hoo #1: of course we got there as early as we could, so we could get good seats under a tree (absolutely critical). But despite the good, relatively well-positioned seats, the sound echoing off of the buildings on the lawn was such that we couldn't understand much of what was said, even though the volume was plenty loud. And our Hoo couldn't see us, or us him, so being out in the heat wasn't great. **I was SO happy the grandparents weren't there, because the heat would have been too much. So, for Hoo #2, we went to where he was before he walked on the lawn, hugged, took a picture, etc, and then we went to the air conditioned large room in Newcomb to watch the ceremony, 5 min away. Great video, great sound, and fantastic air conditioning!** Our Hoo joined us right after the ceremony and didn't mind that we weren't on the lawn. Next time, we plan on arriving in time to stand near the rotunda, watch her walk on the lawn in the standing room only area (once people see their Hoo, they leave and take a seat), and then go to a remote

viewing area again. I didn't feel like we missed out.

Tip from Michele W. - Attended 2023 Graduation

One thing we enjoyed with our older Hoo who lived in one of the Chi Alpha houses was planning an early dinner or late lunch at their house. **We had Chipotle deliver food. Sticks is also good for events like this.** We had brought extra lawn chairs and a folding table the day before. It was a fun casual time for our son, his friends and all their families. **I would also reiterate wearing comfortable shoes and not having grandparents that aren't hardy at tend the lawn ceremony.**

Another Tip from Kelly W. - Attended 2019 Graduation

■ **We booked our hotel 13 months in advance**, and most were already reserved at that time. Start trying around March of the year BEFORE your graduation. I think [HomeAway.com](https://www.HomeAway.com) homes book later. ■ **Most hotel rooms are around \$350/night with a 2-night minimum stay.** We stayed at the Country Inn and Suites on 29, near Stonefield, which was very nice and a convenient location. Great breakfast included. ■ **For dinner reservations, book 3 months in advance.** ■ **I got tickets for Monticello on Saturday morning** (we had a Sunday graduation) and it was not crowded or hot yet (afternoon got that way). It was a great multi-generational thing to do. ■ **Graduation morning, my husband dropped us off on grounds near the lawn, then he drove to park at JPJ and ride the shuttle.** That got us to the lawn and seated by 8:10. That time is not necessary, but it allowed us to get seats under a tree which was REALLY key to surviving the sun and heat. We were almost 2 hours early, but it was worth it. ■ **Some other ladies had told me that walking the lawn might not be enjoyed by grandparents due to heat and sun.** I AM SO GLAD they did not come. We enjoyed it, but the 4 hours in the crowd and heat would have been hard on them and taken away my enjoyment of it as I was thinking about them. I left the decision to the grandparents, but that was great advice!

Tip from Ann S. - Attended 2019 Graduation

If your student is graduating on the Non-Arts and Sciences Day ---

Tip #1 --- For a 10:00 start, the gates opened at 7:30 am. There were a few already lined up at that time. To pick a good seat, pay attention to when and where they walk. Your student is given a "flow chart" sort of map with color scheme, etc. The graduates ALL walk the lawn down the center aisle but then they split off and walk different aisles when they

hit the lowest lawn in front of Old Cabell. If you can sit on the aisle that they walk it is nice to give them a hug or a picture. When you select your seat, get one UNDER A TREE and you will be comfortable in rain and sun. Some people wore their program as hats and my daughter who was a mere few rows ahead was just about passing out in the heat because she was not under a tree.

Tip #2 -- Your student should have a clear bag, too. Stock it with half-frozen water bottles. They were DYING in the heat of 94-degree humidity and black robes. Frozen water would have been refreshing to drink and also to roll on their faces, etc.

Tip #3 -- For the ceremonies that follow graduation (getting the diploma) you might want to send one of your party there to grab a good seat EARLIER than the end of graduation. The nursing diploma ceremony was on the North Side of the Rotunda and even under the tent, it was very hot. Wish I had sent my husband to secure a good seat early or leave a program on a couple of seats. We ended up moving seats from the sun into cooler areas. Of course, by then the graduates were really really really fatigued!

Tip from Beth S. - Attended the 2019 Graduation

We had an incredibly fun and fabulous graduation weekend and now we are ALL very much the definition of EXHAUSTED!! Recuperation here may take a full week over here!

I definitely agree with booking hotels now for next year's graduation... to save the stress of scrambling later. We found it worth staying right there on Main Street / The Corner. No driving back & forth, SO convenient and EASY! We literally parked the car and only used it once on Saturday afternoon to go to a Comm School social function.

And yes, book your restaurants reservations early too - some as early as January 1! We found Orzo Kitchen did a great job for a nice group dinner Friday night.

It's a chaotic weekend to be sure, but if you take a "go with the flow" attitude, you'll have a TON of fun and amazing memories to last a lifetime!

And be prepared to be GOUGED on prices of things! Charlottesville business owners take FULL advantage of THAT opportunity!

We also didn't stress out about moving my son out of his lovely apartment ... We

were lucky that the move-out thing in his situation could WAIT! Not worth ruining the celebratory feel by dealing with that nasty chore!

Tip from Sandy P. - Attended the 2019 Graduation

I had elderly parents so I really had to think about their needs. Even if you don't get to the big ceremony super early, there are seats towards the back that are under a tree, near the restrooms and the viewing I thought was better because we were in front of a big screen. We left the 10am ceremony 5 minutes before it ended to avoid the crowd. Before the ceremony, we lined up where the graduates were going to walk down onto the lawn and our son was able to walk towards us and take a picture with us even when he was on the other side. That was pretty cool.

We ate lunch at the Christian Study Center. The place was very cool, there was a good amount of seating and it was not crowded because everyone was going to restaurants. They had a nice spread of sandwiches, salads, chips, and desserts and it was low stress!

Lastly, I prayed that I would not worry about all the details and asked God to help me to cherish this special day and my graduating son and be in the moment. It was an amazing day of gratitude to our Lord and all that our son is taking away from UVA!

Tip from Mary K., who attended the 2018 Graduation

I LOVED being there for the larger group graduation where the students finally get to "walk the lawn!" Many students carry a unique helium balloon so the parents can spot them in the sea of caps and gowns. **(ask your student if they want to carry a balloon and what kind, then order one online to be delivered to YOU. Call ahead to see which C'Ville local grocery stores will fill these balloons for a fee...get that task done for them the day before their graduation because they won't have time to get it themselves.)**

My son did not carry a balloon but he texted me when he was coming down the center aisle and which side of the aisle he would walk down. (They need to coordinate with you via text what part of the center ramp they will walk down so you might spot them. I told my son where we were seated; he texted me before he arrived so I got great pics!) **They all walk behind their individual school's banner, (school order is listed in the program)**

but many students walk with their friends -- not in alphabetical order. More fun than a HS graduation. You can actually call out their names so they might spot you.

There's a lot of cheering and festivity. Dress in layers. Wear comfy shoes! We arrived at the lawn before sunrise for the main ceremony (not showered or dressed yet; we tagged teamed for that) We sat in random chairs to wait for the gates to open. Later on, ushers told us to go back through the metal detector with our tickets, so we tag teamed (we saved some seats while others went through officially) so we could sit EXACTLY where we wanted to: front rows on the first level up from where the students sat, and on the side of the ramp where we knew our son would come down, and on the front row so when they turned, we had GREAT PHOTO OPS. Afterward, we moved to another location for our son's diploma ceremony which was smaller and more personal.

Your family should decide which ceremonies/events are most important to you.

"Valedictory Exercises" are on Friday and kick off the weekend; they are more relaxed and often have a fun speaker! If you already had to pay for a 3 night minimum lodging fee, you can enjoy Friday's 3pm ceremony. **The 2024 Valedictory speaker is Ryan Zimmerman.**

Many plan a special lunch or dinner sometime during the weekend. Some folks celebrate in larger groups with their student, their student's friends and other families. Organize or make reservations well in advance to accommodate larger groups. Do what suits your budget and your style!

One good option is **Graduation Day Lunch sponsored by The Center for Christian Study.** The students have a lot of social events that weekend, so coordinate with them ahead of time to make sure you have the time with them that you want and they have the time with their friends that they want. **(You will need to negotiate this; don't be surprised if they choose their friends/plans over your family plans but do let them know in advance what you'd like them to do with you!)**

Tip from Kelly H., who attended the 2016 Graduation

This tip is for Class of 2020 moms and beyond: Our extended family stayed in the dorms. UVA sends an email in the spring to make the rooms available. Much more reasonable on price and there is no minimum on number of nights reserved. Right next to O'Hill for easy breakfast before heading over to graduation. There are golf carts running from O'Hill to the lawn for grandparents and folks with disabilities. We are staying in the dorms again this year for Nathan's graduation (2017).

Our only issue last year was that they had the beds on the highest setting. We were not able to lower them, (stuck on and no tools) so it was a climb each night. Fortunately my parents are younger grandparents. THIS year we are taking a mallet and I requested the beds be lowered. We will have to wait and see if they lower them, but will be prepared to do it ourselves if necessary.

Tip from Karen S., who attended the 2015 Graduation

Paid daily (or shorter) parking may be had each day of that weekend at garage near Boylan Heights restaurant at Wertland and 14th Streets on the Corner. They sell **graduation weekend parking passes** which allow you to come and go as you please over that weekend. Saved us the stress of figuring out parking details and allow us to easily meet up with our graduate who lived near The Corner.

Tip from Margaret C., who attended the 2014 Graduation

You can claim a seat on graduation morning VERY early. I tried hard to find on the website what time they would “let people in”. I read 8am, though it was HARD to find this information. So I showed up ca. 6:40am with my Starbucks in hand, thinking I would be standing in line to go in to get a seat, and, WOW! There was no one “at the gate”, so to speak, and I could go in and take/save whatever seats I wanted. And I was definitely not the first person there. A man who had already claimed the seats I would have taken had been there since 6am! And I saw an old friend of mine close by who had arrived at 6:30. So.....**To get/save the seats you want, do not be afraid to go early.** Eventually the ushers will show up and will check your ticket. You will be able to leave to use the restroom, though you will have to leave something on your seat to keep it saved. I was not sorry I had done this as we had great seats and saw not only our daughter, but just about every graduate I knew coming down the center walk way. It was such fun to be able to shout out congratulations to them as well, and take pictures to send to their families.

Tip from Trudi H., who attended the 2015 Graduation

Graduation/The Lawn: ASK so you know where the students will process. Last year they processed down the middle so obviously you don't want to sit way to the side. **There are a few balloon places to pick up a gigantic balloon for them to carry as they walk so you can see them in the crowd.** If you go behind the pavilions while they are lining

up you might be able to get a calm picture if someone is out saving your seat. I think best time to get pictures is after the baccalaureate on Friday. Much more relaxed atmosphere. Otherwise arrange in advance for someone to get a picture of your family as it gets chaotic and then they want to talk to their friends. **The Stud Lunch** might be a good place to grab someone to take a pictures if you aren't wilted by then. We didn't get to **The Stud Lunch** until very late on Sunday and it was great.

Garden Party: If you want to reserve a garden (no cost/lottery pick) check to see if they have accommodations in case it rains. We had a number of the Intervarsity students put their names in the drawing so we were sure to get a garden but it POURED and we were soaked and ended up with all the food under the colonnades of rooms facing the library and newcomb. I scoped out the garden on Friday and found there were tables from another event folded up that weren't being picked up until Monday so knew we could use them which was great. Then Saturday during the graduation (ours was on Sunday) I convinced the guards to let me through so I could pull all the way up to the garden, unload and then pull out parking elsewhere. Try asking the residents of the pavilion if you could pretty please park there if you have food and other things you are carrying in.

Tips from Nancy R., who attended the 2014 Graduation

Blessing Opportunity: Graduation is a significant milestone in your child's life, providing you with an opportunity to give a blessing. **It doesn't matter whether or not there are academic accolades. Successfully navigating four years at UVA with its academic and social stresses is an accomplishment worthy of recognition.** I told our son how proud of him we were for pursuing Christ all four years, for passionately engaging with his studies and his friends, and for living honorably. While we celebrated his graduation publicly with extended family, his dad and I blessed him privately at the end of the day with these words, lingering and loving eye contact, and a big hug. It was a special moment.

Lodging: Most hotels in the area charge higher rates and require a three-night stay. **Start early (up to a year or more) to nab a reservation.** If you want to stay in a particular hotel, ask the staff how early you can and should book. **But there are other options: The University offers rooms in a few of the dorms. And you can always look at "renting" a house or apartment for the weekend.** We actually paid some young friends to let us use their small house. They cleaned up and put out fresh flowers before leaving the key for us (they stayed with friends, though we offered a D.C. getaway at our house as part of the exchange). We arrived on Friday, set up tables and chairs on the little

screened-in back porch, and served a candlelit dinner to our family and our son's fiancée's family. We had bought chicken and made sides and cookies. It was a deliciously peaceful start to a busy weekend. And for a two-night stay, the house was also an amazing deal: \$500 for 2 bedrooms, 2 baths, and a living area for four adults. The use of the kitchen helped our expenses too. **You can look online for house and apartment rentals as well.** Prices vary widely.

Balloons: Many of the graduates carry distinctive helium balloons as they walk the Lawn so their families can locate them. We inflated ours at Kroger's. I hear that helium is scarce these days (?), so you might want to call ahead and check to make sure it will not be a problem. **You can even buy a balloon on Amazon or somewhere local before having it filled at the grocery store the night before graduation. You'll need to leave it at your grad's apt/house that night as well. Yes, you will be tired!**

Restaurant Reservations: I reserved a table at the Local for Saturday night very early in the year, maybe February? **Call the restaurant where you'd like to have a special family meal and find out what their policy is.** Many of them have set dinner times and prices for graduation weekend.

Celebrations: Saturday afternoon our son and his housemates, together with the help of the parents, had a small celebration with Costco sandwiches, chips, fruit, and cookies. It was great to see everyone together and to take pictures. Later that night, we went to a dessert party hosted by another house. **Some UVA ministries add their own celebrations to the official University's.** With the changes being made to graduation ceremonies this year, peripheral festivities will be affected, I'm sure, but in 2014 our schedule also included **brunch at Bonhoeffer House Saturday morning and a most welcome box lunch at the STUD between ceremonies on Sunday.** Reservations with payment per lunch are needed for the latter.

Moving out: Include this exhausting item to your list of things to do graduation weekend if you plan to help. We traded cars with our son and left for home. **He and his friends cleaned up and moved out on their own... and I think the extra time he spent winding down and packing without any time pressure from us was actually a good thing for all of us!**

Tips from Laura W., who attended the 2014 Graduation

Our inlaws used the tickets and we sat on the ground right in front of where they

walked down the steps. I was able to take wonderful pics there as the nursing school was lined up right by the balcony area. **Make reservation for meals early! We ate out Friday night and just got sandwiches after graduation events and ate back at the hotel.** I'm glad we did because our grad wanted to go out later with friends and everyone was so tired!

Tips from Debbie A., who attended the 2014 Graduation

Consider making reservations at the Red Roof Inn on the Corner one year in advance and also signing up to be a Redicard member which gives you points for a free night's stay. Although the accommodations are nothing special, the hotel (like most others) requires a three night commitment, and the prices are greatly inflated, **it provides a free place to park your car on the Corner and you can walk to everything during the weekend including all the graduation events and the events at the Study Center.** It also included a continental breakfast each morning, and we ended up earning a free night's stay at a Red Roof Inn anywhere in the country on our Redicard from just that weekend. My husband hates traffic so if we needed to drive every day from a hotel to the Stadium to park, it would have made the weekend much more stressful.

Tips from Kathy B., who attended the 2014 Graduation

Housing Ideas: For you fourth year moms, you already have your hotel reserved. **If you are a third year mom reading this, reserve now, the rooms sell out quickly. Hotels require you to pay for three nights.** So alternate ideas are worth thinking about, like a house swap, or getting a dorm room. **(UVA website details how to do this.)** Some folks opt to only go down for graduation if they don't have lots of activities they want to attend because the cost can be ridiculous. We were very blessed to know a NOVA family with a fully equipped home in Batesville. Though it was a bit of a drive, it allowed us to prepare two special meals there — Saturday night with our son and his roommate's family — and a late lunch/early dinner after graduation with extended family. This kept us from the restaurant madness though it required a bit of organization ahead of time to shop and haul our delicacies.

Alternative Idea: Because of the lack of tickets for seats at Final Exercises, and the difficulty of getting around, many grands and siblings might want to consider driving the day of graduation and only attend the Diploma Ceremony. **Our son and D-I-L drove the two grands and had no problem leaving from Reston early morning and arriving in plenty of time to be dropped off at a shuttle bus to meet us at the Diploma Ceremony. Many of the smaller majors have their ceremony in a Pavillion and**

serve light refreshments beforehand.

What to Bring: Take a good look at weather.com the week before and pack with all possibilities in mind! We drivers have the luxury of stuffing the car trunk, so pack a lot of options! Definitely **bring a small bag you can carry with you to Valedictory/ Graduation/Diploma ceremonies packed with some** snack foods, water bottles, extra jacket, raincoat, umbrellas, sunscreen, sunglasses, camera and reading material because you will spend a LOT of time waiting. **Pack an extra camera battery and battery charger. Don't forget your cell phone chargers!**

Clothes: I made the mistake of wearing high heels on Graduation Day. Though I looked nice, and happy with the pictures taken afterwards, if I had a do-over, I would find an outfit that could be worn with low heels or more walkable, comfy shoes. There are a lot of cobblestones and uneven pavement on the Lawn. **Make sure you have a sweater or jacket with you** even if it may be warm, as that sunny spot you find early may be in the cool shade an hour or two later!

Final Exercises: We bought a humongous balloon at Harris Teeters on Saturday night and gave it to our son after dinner so he would have it with him and not have to find us to get it on graduation day. We texted him when we found our seats so he would know which side of the wide aisle to walk down. We were able to spot him because he walked right along the rope barrier erected to contain the graduates and he had the huge balloon. (They can walk with their friends — our son was a Math/Econ major and walked with his roomie, an Engineering Major.) There were three or four others with the same balloon but if you look at the program, you will see the order that each school processes which helps. **The closer you are to the ropes that define the walkway, the better for pics but a good zoom lens and no shame to stand on a chair also works :) Our son spotted me — not because I was yelling his name at the top of my lungs — but because I was up high :)**

Diploma Ceremony: After catching a pic of our grad as he walked The Lawn, I sat for a while, then slipped out of the graduation ceremony to snag good seats for our extended family for his Diploma Ceremony, which followed immediately after graduation. At our pre-set time and location, I met the grands and my other kids, greeted them, guided them to our saved Diploma Ceremony seats and gave them waters and sandwiches. (I did not miss sitting through the graduation speeches. My husband gave me the highlights.) **Though our son could have gone to two Diploma Ceremonies as a double major, he chose the one with the least number of graduates.** Still, it was very

long...We bolted as soon as possible after family pictures against the beautiful backdrop of leafy trees and the Pavillion Wall and headed back to our Batesville home-away-from-home for a celebratory early dinner. Traffic going back to NOVA was very congested, and we were exhausted, but very grateful for the beautiful, momentous weekend!

kind of near the downtown mall, but not on it. The food was fabulous and I think it was considerably less crowded than a lot of places were. **We did make reservations, and you have to put down a deposit which is subtracted from the meal, but I suspect that is standard most places that weekend.**