

### **Discovering My Reading Sanctuary**

On the drive to Virginia Tech move-in day, my mom asked me where I might like to study around campus. “Oh, I guess I’ll have to find a place I like. Probably the library or a classroom building, though. I know I won’t be able to work in my room, I’ll definitely find somewhere else to go and do my work.” She praised me for having the initiative to go someplace other than Hoge Hall, and encouraged me to explore my options and find the perfect location to work around campus. I was always told that it was too easy to get distracted when working in your dorm room. Even if I was able to stay on task, many people told me that it would be nearly impossible to resist crawling into bed for a nap. With this in mind, I was excited to explore campus, and find the perfect place to hole-up for a few hours and study. As an engineering student, discovering a study-spot would be key to my success and ability to learn. I felt like my well-being as a student depended on this supposed “study-spot” I was destined to find.

During the first week of classes, I explored several different famous studying locations across campus. I sat down in the Hancock Hall Atrium to read the textbook for my Life in the Built Environment class. The space felt open and welcoming, with the sun shining through the skylight and reminding me that it was a beautiful summer’s day outside. Desks line the edge of the first floor next to the



stairs, and it was here that I sat and read about humanity's relationship to the things we build and create. Although beautiful and bright, the Hancock Hall Atrium felt too busy for me. People were constantly walking through, trying to get to class. Sometimes, people even sat at tables together just to talk. This was encouraging and made me happy to see people enjoy themselves, but ultimately became a distraction to me as I was trying to learn.

Torgersen Bridge provided academic sanctuary for me to explore new concepts within calculus. I sat down at a large table with desk lamps and several chairs, taking notes on concepts



discussed that day during my Calculus 2 lecture.

Torgersen Bridge, lovingly referred to as “Torg”

by most Virginia Tech students, is a dedicated

silent study area. Everyone studying on

Torgersen Bridge is studying alone, and respects

the rules and doesn't speak. Although it made me

feel like I was studying in a highly academic

setting, the odd silence of Torgersen Bridge was

unsettling to me. It was as if Torgersen Bridge was the exact opposite of the Hancock Atrium. It was dark, silent, and peaceful, but I found myself unable to stay on task due to the complete and utter silence around me.

I discovered the Wallace Hall Atrium was the perfect place to relax and read about topics within microeconomics. Like the Hancock Atrium, it has a large skylight with plenty of natural sun lighting up the room. There are plenty of comfortable couches, desks, and tables to sit at, with plants surrounding different features of the room. The greenery and sunlight reminds me of how it feels to be outdoors, without having to actually sit outside in extreme temperatures. While

studying in the Wallace Atrium, I even spent a few minutes reading *Seven Days in June* to take a break from academia and gather my thoughts. The Wallace Atrium was less busy than Hancock Hall, but it felt almost too open for me to focus correctly. I could see what everyone around me was doing, and the couch I was sitting on was almost too comfortable. The Wallace Atrium was too comfortable for me to effectively study. Although these places allowed me to connect with reading in a new way, something just didn't feel right. I hadn't found the perfect place that I expected.

A few weeks into the semester, I found myself ill with the infamous "Hokie plague." Too exhausted to seek out a new study spot, I determined it would be best for me to stay in my room and work on my assignments. I settled into my desk underneath my lofted bed and got to work. I had my fairy lights twinkling above me, my Sony headphones playing Phoebe Bridgers softly in my ears, and a blanket wrapped around my shoulders. The sun was shining through the window, giving me the same feeling as the skylights within the Hancock Atrium and Wallace Atrium. Light from my desk lamp reminded me of the academic feeling I had while working at Torgersen Bridge. My roommate's plants decorated the space in a similar manner to the upper level of the Wallace Atrium. In spite of my sickness, everything felt perfect at that moment. I was able to read about the intricacies of integration for my calculus class, apply the economics topics I had been learning, and write about my relationship with literacy effortlessly.

My room quickly became the studying sanctuary I had been searching for. I read articles about literacy, blog posts on how to code in MATLAB, and documents about the Orbital Launch Vehicle Team's project proposals. I initially hated MATLAB, as I have no coding experience and my teacher chose to let my class learn how to use it on our own. Frustration was practically tangible in the air of Hoge room 249 for the several hours I spent trying to do my first

assignment. Through dedication and study, I was eventually able to formulate a solution and successfully code in MATLAB. Now, I am actually enjoying the process and solving problems with much less trouble. I was able to learn more about the design team that I joined, the Orbital Launch Vehicle Team.



Through the study of their past project proposals, I was able to better understand the goals of my team and learn how to apply them in my individual work for the team.

When I came down with laryngitis and lost the ability to speak for six days, my room became the place where I read messages between my boyfriend and I. It is the place where I have read the label on Dr. Pepper cans countless times, whether I'm transferring new cans to my fridge or cracking open a new one to drink while I work. The subtitles on *Game of Thrones* flash across my computer screen as I watch half of an episode at my desk each night. My gmail notifications pop up across my computer screen, and I read through my school email each morning in my bed before I get ready for the day. Although I read very different things within my room, it is relatively easy to maintain my focus on my studies while also relaxing and de-stressing from the day. When I watch *Game of Thrones*, I feel drawn into a magical world torn by



conflict. Reading the subtitles allows me to follow the dialogue and focus more effectively on the complex plot within the show. Studying allows me to feel prepared for learning and grow my confidence in new or unfamiliar topics. Although the things I am reading can sometimes be frustrating, I am ultimately able to reconcile my stress and discover new things.

Hozier, one of my favorite artists, released his newest album *Unreal, Unearth* the day



after I moved into Hoge Hall. On the night of the release, I found myself sitting in my lofted bed in the dark, reading the lyrics of each song like they were written specifically for me.

Music has always held a special piece of my heart. In the midst of transition and sadness at

the life I left behind me, that moment sitting on

my new bed in my new room, reading the lyrics to these songs, provided an emotional sanctuary for me away from the stress of reality. Rather than worry about the upcoming changes, I found myself at peace. Reading those song lyrics centered my thoughts and grounded my worries.

Since that moment, there have been several times that I have found myself sitting in the darkness on my bed watching song lyrics float across my phone screen. I am not an individual who meditates, but this habit serves as a sort of meditation to me.

Reading exists all around me. When I think about it, I am almost always reading something, whether it be texts from loved ones, readings for assignments, reading books on my kindle, or watching TV shows. It allows me to think and learn about many different concepts, both directly and indirectly. It helps me understand who I am as a person, and develop my thought process as an individual. I can learn about things that I love, whether that be orbital

mechanics, rocketry, or the complex lives of *Game of Thrones* characters. I can also work through frustrations with calculus, microeconomics, and assignments. Ultimately, reading is a tool that allows me to grow and develop as a person, which is vital to my wellbeing.