About the Virtual Spider Chat Program

The University will notify prospective students of the opportunity to participate in a Virtual Spider Chat. The chats are voluntary; prospective students are not required to participate. Virtual Spider Chats provide an informal setting in which a prospective student can collect additional information about the University of Richmond, the student experience, and university outcomes. Virtual Spider Chats are not used to evaluate a prospective student's admissibility and are not used by the admission committee. Interested prospective students request a Virtual Spider Chat on the admission website from June 1 through November 30.

Virtual Spider Chats are valuable for the prospective student, ARC member, and the University of Richmond. Benefits include:

For the Prospective Student

- The opportunity to learn more about Richmond from someone who has experienced life on campus.
- The chance to share his or her unique experiences with a representative of Richmond.
- Exposure to the University of Richmond's commitment to personal attention and service in the application process.
- Clarification of his or her interest in Richmond.

For the ARC member

- An increase in the visibility and accessibility of the University of Richmond in his or her geographic area.
- The chance to share the value of his or her Richmond experience with prospective students.
- An opportunity to potentially offer valuable information to the admission committee in order to assist in the admission process.
- A meaningful way for alumni to stay connected with the University of Richmond.

For the University

- Providing an opportunity for the ARC member to encourage the prospective student to visit campus and apply.
- Affording a personal touch to the process while enabling the prospective student and the ARC member to cultivate a unique relationship.
- Offering the University, the ability to learn more about the prospective student in order to customize communication.

The Admission Process

The University of Richmond practices a holistic, selective admission process in which there is no typical applicant and no simple formula that will guarantee acceptance. Alongside traditional measures of academic success – like grades, rigor of curriculum, test scores, and recommendations – admission officers evaluate each applicant in a holistic manner, assessing essays, involvement, special talents, creativity, independence, and life experience. Our goal each year is to enroll a well-rounded and dynamic first-year class, academically accomplished and diverse in every dimension. (For a comprehensive view of the most recent class, see the first-year student profile.)

Once the admission committee assesses an applicant's potential for academic success, the committee

members search for personal qualities that indicate ways in which the applicant might be a valuable contributor to the Richmond community. The committee recognizes that each applicant has a unique experience and background that can contribute to the overall Richmond experience. Insight shared in the student's letters of recommendation and personal essays enrich the student's application.

Prior to conducting Virtual Spider Chats, it is important to be familiar with the factors that the admission committee evaluates in the decision process. Please review admission, changes to testing requirements for 2021 applicants and financial aid practices.

The Virtual Spider Chat

Arranging the Virtual Spider Chat

Shortly after receiving a prospective student's Virtual Spider Chat request, the Office of Admission will identify an ARC member to match with the prospective student. The following criteria will be used in making the selection:

- High School Attended
- Academic Interests
- Geography/Location of Current Address

Once the match has been made, the Office of Admission will respond to the prospective student with the name of the ARC member and vice versa. The ARC member will then be responsible for making initial contact with the prospective student to schedule a meeting time within the next two weeks. It is important to respond quickly, recognizing the interest the prospective student has shown. This is a focus of the Office of Admission and should be for ARC member as well.

The agreed upon time should be convenient for the ARC member and the prospective student. If evenings work best, make sure to end the meeting at a reasonable hour. A general window of 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. tends to work well. Weekends may be the best time to meet, particularly on Sunday afternoons. Remember that prospective students are in school most weekdays, but late afternoon meetings may fit into their after-school schedules, too.

ARC members will need to download Zoom. Once an agreed upon date and time has been selected, the ARC member will schedule a Zoom meeting and send, via email, to the prospective student. Instructions and video tutorials are available here We ask that a secure meeting be created. Turning on the waiting room feature is the simplest, but you may also elect to use a password. To review these options, click here If a password option is selected, please be sure to provide the prospective student with the password along with the link to your scheduled Zoom meeting.

There may be times when there is a high volume of Virtual Spider Chat requests and an ARC member may receive multiple student pairings. It is the expectation of the Office of Admission that each prospective student receives an individual meeting to discuss their unique questions and interests. ARC members are not permitted to invite multiple students to conduct a group Virtual Spider Chat.

Preparation for the Virtual Spider Chat

To provide a consistent and professional experience for the prospective students, we are asking that you use the approved University of Richmond background. Feel free to have fun in choosing which

picture you would like! We have found the pictures under the Social Media Cover Photos to work the best. To add a virtual background, first you must save the provided picture to your computer. Once Zoom is open and you are in a meeting, or a fake meeting to be able to access your camera, select the arrow to the right of your camera and select *Video Settings*. From the left-hand menu, select *Virtual Background*. You will see a plus sign next to *Choose Virtual Background*; select the plus sign and add the image that you saved. Make sure your full name is displayed in profile and include a photograph in your profile, if possible.

When selecting a location to set up your webcam, be mindful of distractions or noises that may occur during your event. Try choosing a room that you can shut the door to or eliminate as much background noise as possible. We know you all are working from your homes probably with the rest of your family, so just try your best!

We would prefer for you to be sitting up and be attentive during your event; not slouched on a couch or laying down in bed. Even though we will provide you with a virtual background, it is still apparent if you are laying down.

While you do not need to be dressed up to host your Virtual Spider Chat, we do ask that you look presentable and neatly dressed. Business casual is appropriate.

Log into your Zoom meeting 5 minutes prior to the scheduled meeting time. Do not multi-task, record the meeting or take screen captures.

Length of the Virtual Spider Chat

Base the length of your Virtual Spider Chat on the depth and substance of your conversation. A chat should last long enough to allow for a full exchange of information. If the conversation is too short, the prospective student may feel rushed and it may not provide enough time for a meaningful discussion. **An ideal time frame is approximately thirty minutes.** If the conversation flow is going well, it may last closer to forty minutes. The idea, however, is to make the prospective student feel comfortable and engaged. If you are not achieving this balance after twenty minutes, do not prolong the experience if you feel that it may have a negative impact on the prospective student. Please note, if the ARC member is using the free version of Zoom, the chat cannot exceed 45 minutes.

Conducting the Virtual Spider Chat

The Virtual Spider Chat should be a positive experience for the prospective student and for the ARC member. Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind:

- Warmly greet the student in a positive, professional, and respectful manner. The student may be nervous so help relax the setting with an upbeat and engaging approach.
- Explain that the purpose of the Virtual Spider Chat is to initiate a two-way exchange of information. The prospective student will have the opportunity to ask questions while also sharing information. It is not evaluative, so it will not impact the prospective student's chance of admission.
- Try to lead the discussion in a direction that allows the prospective student to truly express his or her ideas, experiences, goals and interests. Let the prospective student do most of the talking through guided questions that lead to thoughtful discussion.
- As you learn of the prospective student's interests, watch for opportunities to discuss facets of Richmond that may resonate with the prospective student. If the prospective student expresses an interest in specific academic program you are not familiar with, we do not expect you to be an expert. Best practice is to refer any questions to the faculty members or

academic program coordinators directly. Please bookmark our list of [Academic Programs](). To locate contact information for each academic program, click on the program name, then click on the contact tab provided on the main page of the academic department's webpage. It is typically the last tab on the right.

- For questions regarding undergraduate student research or internship opportunities, please inform the student about the [Richmond Guarantee]() and direct them to the website to learn more about the process.
- Your questions should elicit comfortable conversation and allow you to learn more about the prospective student without making them feel intimidated or unprepared. When asking questions of the prospective student, try to encourage discussion that brings out their individual ideas, thoughts, or experiences. See Questions to Guide a Discussion (below) for ways to deepen the conversation.
- If a prospective student asks you a question and you are unsure of the answer, do not hesitate to say that you do not know the current response. In this case, suggest they email their [assigned admission counselor]().
- If you receive any Coronavirus/COVID-19 related questions. Suggest they review all plans and updates on the University's [COVID-19 website.]()

Overall, you should try to guide the discussion in a way that allows you to share as much about Richmond as possible while matching aspects of the University with the prospective student's individual needs, interests and expectations.

Concluding the Virtual Spider Chat

- As you conclude your conversation with the prospective student, make sure to thank them for meeting with you.
- Recap some of the information that you learned so it is clear you were actively listening.
- Ask the prospective student if there is anything that you have not discussed that they may want to share.
- If the parents are present, this is the appropriate time to invite them into the conversation and answer their questions or alleviate their concerns. Oftentimes, parents play an important role in the college search and application process.
- Invite the prospective student to follow up with you if any questions arise in the future.
- Emphasize that you appreciate the open exchange of information with the prospective student and that you hope that they learned a great deal about the University of Richmond.
- Encourage the student to explore our other virtual opportunities. A list of available options may be found on the [visit page of our website.]()
- Another great source of information for students is our [blog](). Our office has planned a series of service-oriented blog posts designed to help students successfully navigate the college application/admission process in the wake of COVID-19.
- The ARC member will end the Zoom meeting for all participants.

Situations to Consider

Interaction with Parents

In many instances, parents choose to attend the Virtual Spider Chat along with their child. If the parents want to sit in on the meeting, politely encourage them to wait off camera while you meet with the prospective student. Share with the parents that they will be invited to join you and to ask questions about Richmond at the conclusion of the conversation.

If the parents insist that they must be a part of the discussion, let them remain on camera. Note this and how the prospective student responded with the parents present in your summary. Stay focused on the prospective student, directing your questions to the prospective student rather than to the parents as much as possible. This is a very rare instance and will probably not happen to you.

Parents play a vital role in the college selection process. We want to make the parents feel welcome while emphasizing that the Virtual Spider Chat is an experience geared specifically for the prospective student.

Things to Avoid

- Do not become an advocate for the prospective student. While you may connect well with a prospective student and think they would be a great addition to Richmond's student body, the most important predictor of success at Richmond is something you will not have access to—the student's academic record.
- Do not make any disparaging remarks about another high school, college, university, or individual.
- Do not predict a prospective student's admission decision.
- Do not ask the prospective student about their class rank, test scores, or grades.
- Do not conduct Virtual Spider Chats with the children of close friends, relatives, or coworkers, or prospective students who you already know through other interactions. Additionally, ARC members are unable to conduct Virtual Spider Chats in an admissions year where their child is a senior in high school. Notify the Office of Admission if you have a connection to an assigned prospective student so that you may be reassigned to another candidate.
- Do not let your personal biases or political views interfere with the chat.
- Avoid debating with the prospective student over a topic that may be controversial.
- Do not provide the prospective student with any type of gift or Richmond memorabilia. See the Statement of Principles set for forth by the National Association for College Admission Counseling for more information.
- Do not comment on, ask the prospective student about or discuss race, religion, disabilities, or sexual orientation either in the chat or in the summary form. Richmond's non-discrimination policy makes it clear that every staff member, faculty member, and student has the right to work and study in an environment free from discrimination and harassment and should be treated with dignity and respect. The University prohibits discrimination and harassment against applicants, students, faculty, or staff on the basis of race, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, disability, presence of a non-job-related medical condition, status as a veteran, marital status or any classification protected by local, state, or federal law.

Questions to Guide a Discussion

As you begin a discussion with a prospective student, you may want to initiate the conversation with the following questions:

- What sparked your interest in the University of Richmond?
- What are you looking for in a college experience?

As the discussion evolves, you may find that the prospective student has a number of questions for you. If so, focus on answering these questions and let the prospective student lead the discussion. In many cases, however, you may need to guide the majority of the interaction, thus the following questions may be helpful in your conversation:

- Tell me about your academic interests. Do you have a favorite subject in school?

- Is there a particular area that you would like to study in college?
- Do you have a favorite teacher that has inspired your academic success? How has this experience evolved?
- Tell me about some of your extracurricular interests or leadership roles.
- What are you passionate about? (activity, hobby, issue)
- How will you act as an agent of change in college?
- If you could accomplish one personal goal, what would it be? Why is this goal important to you?
- What is the most significant contribution you have made at your school or in your community?
- What would your teachers say is your greatest academic strength?
- How have you changed throughout high school?
- What makes you a unique individual? How would you differentiate yourself from the rest of the applicant pool?
- If you could take a "gap year" between high school and college (and money was not a factor), how would you spend your time?
- Have you visited the University of Richmond? (Share opportunities/programs and encourage a campus visit)
- What questions do you have about Richmond?

Follow Up

Preparing and Submitting the Virtual Spider Chat Summary Form

Please complete a summary form immediately following the chat. Your summary form provides the Office of Admission with valuable information regarding a prospective student's interests and the need for any follow-up with the student.

Maintaining Contact Beyond the Virtual Spider Chat

Since we ask you to offer prospective students the opportunity to contact you in the future with questions, you may hear from them throughout the application process. Should you have continued meaningful contact with a prospective student, we ask that you send your notes to the Office of Admission so they can be added to the student's admission file. Email is the preferred method of contact.

In some cases, an applicant may contact you after the chat to inquire about the status of his or her application. In this case, suggest they email their assigned admission counselor.

After all decision letters are mailed for each application plan, we will let you know which of the students you met with were admitted to Richmond. Please contact these admitted students with a congratulatory email or phone call.

The applicant may attempt to contact you if his or her application was deferred, waitlisted or denied. In this case, suggest they email their assigned admission counselor.