

Ellie Diamant Oral History Interview

Interview Conducted by
Taylor Drake and Cathy Xu
April 2, 2019

Collection: Davidson College Archives

Title: Ellie Diamant oral history interview, 2019 April 2

Description: Ellie Diamant recounts what her Jewish background was like before Davidson College and how she came to Davidson, including what she knew about Jewish life and perceptions that those at home had of Davidson College. She talks about her involvement in Jewish student life and tells stories about navigating her Jewish identity and educating others about Jewishness, as a student and a leader. Diamant points out the diversity within Jewish identities and emphasizes her cultural, rather than religious, relationship to Jewishness and how that shaped her experience and identity formation at Davidson. She also lists out community members who she found support from. Diamant describes microaggressions that occurred and provides a critique of and suggestions for Davidson as an institution moving forward, in response to her time at Davidson, the November 2018 neo-Nazi doxxing, and contemporary student activism for Jewish Studies.

Biography: Ellie Diamant is an alumna of Davidson College, who graduated from the class of 2015 with a bachelor's degree in Biology. She was the president of Hillel at Davidson College in 2013. Post-graduation from Davidson College, Diamant received her master's degree in Conservation Biology at Columbia University and her PhD in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at University of California, Los Angeles.

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Interview History:

Interviewer: Taylor Drake and Cathy Xu

Transcriber: Cathy Xu

Editors: Cathy Xu

Reviewed by Ellie Diamant

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Setting Description: Zoom call with Ellie Diamant in Los Angeles, California and Taylor Drake and Cathy Xu in Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina

Transcript Notes: The following transcript has been edited for brevity and clarity.

CX: Cathy Xu

ED: Ellie Diamant

TD: Taylor Drake

CX: So, there are just some like logistical things that we have to go through first. So, the name of interviewer is Ellie Diamant, and the name of narrator is Taylor Drake and Cathy Xu. The location of the interview is Davidson, North Carolina and Los Angeles, California. The date is April 2nd, 2019. The purpose of the interview is to archive the experiences of Jewish members of Davidson's community and their experiences, and I need to ask for your oral consent for the recording of your interview to be transcribed and added to the Davidson College archives, and these materials will be made available for research by scholars for scholarly publications and other related purposes consistent with Davidson College's mission and regulated according to any restrictions placed on their use by the interviewee or the interviewer, and there will be an opportunity to approve your interview before it's placed in the archives and made available to the public. So, do you consent to all of that?

ED: Yes, I consent.

CX: Good, great, thank you. So, just to start off do you mind telling us a little bit about your relationship with Judaism before you arrived at Davidson?

ED: Yeah, so I grew up in a Jewish household, Jewish family. My parents are Israeli immigrants, so it was always very much a cultural relationship rather than a religious one. But I grew up, I guess, connected to the cultural history of it, and it was always very important to my family, but we, like history, you know, survivors in the family, all that type of stuff that's very common um, but at least to Israeli Jews, so yeah, so my connection was mostly cultural beforehand. Still is actually, yeah.

CX: Ok cool, and what brought you to Davidson?

ED: Um what brought me to Davidson. I really wanted to go to a small liberal arts college, and I really wanted to get out of the California bubble, so to speak. I wanted to have learning opportunities, kind of, in and out of the classroom by going somewhere I felt was quite culturally different from where I was from, and I really liked the personal attention and learning that was available at Davidson. I had visited like, like five times before I went there. My brother went there for a couple of years before, so he was a junior when I was a freshman um yeah so I learned a lot about the school, and I really liked the community aspect and the more individualized learning aspect of it.

TD: Were you involved in Jewish life at Davidson?

ED: Yeah, yeah, I was actually president of Hillel um my sophomore to junior year. My brother was president of Hillel before I got there, the year before I got there, and so I kind of immediately fell into Jewish life there. Yeah and so my freshmen...I don't know how it works now, but then it was years, so you were president or whatever leadership position you had was for the calendar year, not the academic year. So, I was president of, not president, I was head of something [laughs]. That's vague. My, my first year there, so year 2012 January to December, and then I was president the following year, and then I was actively involved the rest of my time there as well.

TD: Okay, so you said you kind of like fell into it because your brother was the president, but I guess could you speak to more like what motivated you to take up like an active leadership role?

ED: Yeah, I can definitely do that. So, I think I should back up. And just I don't know where y'all are from but LA is pretty largely dom—not dominated, but there is a large Jewish contingency here. My schools there were like thirty percent Jewish, and so it wasn't all that much something that like I identify as, kind of, as like a separate thing from most people. So, I didn't feel all that connected to being Jewish before I got to Davidson. It was more like—I'm more identified with being like Israeli or Israeli Jewish, or you know first-generation American type of thing, but when I got to Davidson, there just like weren't many Jews, and I kind of felt—I'm sure, I'm not sure, if we're gonna get into this later, but it was kind of like a constant, like explanation type of thing that you go through, because a lot of people are not from places with Jews or knowledgeable or whatnot, so I think that Davidson kind of made me feel Jewish in a different way than I had before, like in a, in a way that I felt more separate in that identity, and so, I connected to Jewish life—yes like partially, obviously because my brother was there, and you know, there weren't like a lot of Jews really involved in Hillel. There weren't many Jews there, period. And I know that there are more now, but like for reference, my sophomore year, so when I was president, you get like a list of all the Jews on campus, and there weren't more than 76 Jews on campus. That doesn't even include like people that don't even, you know, view themselves as Jewish, people that signed something their freshman year. So, I think I got involved in Hillel and just Jewish life broadly to kind of have that place of, in a way, connection to a community or other people that like kind of got it or were like authentically interested, like most of the people that came to Shabbat dinners, at least, freshman year weren't even Jewish. It was like the few Jews that were actively involved and then like kind of dragging their friends along. So, I don't know if that's still the case, but so, it was kind of nice. Like it wasn't, like I would go to interfaith things too, and it would be like, there would be questions you know about your relationship with God, and I'd be like, “oh you know, I don't really have one, because I don't believe in God, but Jewishness still exists,” and nobody really got it, you know, outside of those spheres, and Davidson is the most religious place I had ever been in. So, it was, it was nice to have a place where people kind of got your relationship with, in a way, your culture, and how it's separate, but sometimes related to people's faith. And yeah, so yeah, that's that's the I guess the background. I don't know if I was too long-winded.

TD: No, no that was great, yeah, thank you.

CX: Yeah, so I'm also interested in how like your brother was here on campus before and was very involved in Jewish life, like how much he had informed you about Jewish life at Davidson or Davidson's Presbyterianism before you even came.

ED: Um so, it's actually interesting. Um when my brother started going to Davidson, there was a rumor at least here um well I guess prep schools, a lot of schools here didn't really know about Davidson until Steph Curry joined the NBA, which was my brother's freshmen year, I think. But people, people had the notion that Davidson was an antisemitic place um, and so that was kind of a point of contention when my brother started going there as in like people would ask him about that all the time here um, and he had like a relatively good experience I think. I

mean, there were, there were a lot of issues. He's not doing the oral interview. I know that he's like super busy all the time um but he didn't really talk to me about those until I started going there, and I think that it's kind of just that attitude of like a lot of Jews have in places, just like yeah, you know, you go through it. It's not always ideal. I had heard a couple things that he'd tell me about like microaggressions. Um but Jewish life and getting it wasn't like a big deal to me before I got there. It was a bigger deal to him, and there was still a small sense of community, nonetheless, within the Jewish community there that he obviously was actively involved in, and like I knew about the Passover dinners and stuff, like that my mom had flown out to help him cook one the year that there wasn't catering. Never do that by the way.

TD: Never not cater? Never call your mom out to-

ED: Exactly. She, she was living in Israel, well, she had just moved back to Israel, and she flew over, she was like Mikey, "why do I have to do all of this?" So it was interesting. So yeah, I had heard that good stuff. It was a mix. We didn't really talk about it as much, until I got there and he invited me to things.

CX: So, how did changes in your relationship with your Jewish identity like manifest? Like you mentioned that you were in leadership positions in Hillel, but like I guess, more details if we can get any about like things that you would do, events maybe that you held.

ED: Yeah, um let me think. This was a number of years ago. I think I always, so my connection to Jewishness, I guess, I'll phrase it, because there is a distinction, I think with Judaism that was much more cultural. So, when I was president, I really tried to make a space, I guess, for a feeling of home for students in a way, um especially during the holidays. So I, any type of like any holiday and Shabbat dinners, so we did Shabbat dinners, I think, once a month. We obviously did Passover. We—I tried to do like Break fasts for Yom Kippur. We were involved in trying to like build transportation for high holidays at the synagogue, things like that. We tried, so I really, I hear that it's a lot better now than it was when I was a student there, but I think it's important to contextualize, and I don't know the years of the students you've talked to, so you might get a sense of what it was like eight years ago there. It was not long. So, there were like no real holiday parties. My brother had told me when he was president, Hanukkah for instance, he had a candle lighting event, and it was literally outside his dorm room. It felt like there wasn't even a place for them in the Union or anything like that, so I think my sophomore year, we tried to at least have a small table that we kind of assembled last minute in the union, just because there wasn't a space for us, and then the second year, my junior year, we did a—we actually managed to get a room in the union and have a holiday party, so things like that really just—at that time, it felt more like making Jewish life more accessible for students, whether or not they wanted to participate in it. So like, we didn't always have a lot of people come to Hillel events, but like I had heard feedback from Jewish students that it was good to at least have that option. So, we did like a lot of that and then the other stuff I was involved in some things with the school. So other than, I think, there was an interfaith Religious Council, so to speak, with Rob Spach, but you know, I was also brought in to talk to the dining hall people at Commons about how to make Passover...It was actually like what to do with matzah. It was really what they brought me in to talk about, but trying to make that a little bit more, what's the word, accessible, not accessible. It's more, I don't know, I don't know what the word is. Comfortable

for Jewish students during Passover and other holidays that was not always listened to, but I tried, so you know having more traditional foods out during Hanukkah, which did not happen, but also educating staff on like what is kosher, all those types of things, like what do you do with matzah, little things that I think, I think helped, so it was—it was a combination of trying to build Hillel a little bit but really trying to make, in a way, like a place of home or community or acceptance for the Jewish people there.

CX: And two of our classmates actually interviewed Hannah Sachs...

ED: Okay, she was right after me.

CX: Yeah, yeah, and so she mentioned that you were involved with the dining hall and explained matzah to them.

ED: It was ridiculous. They were like, "why can't we put it with the other crackers in the salad bar?" Like cause it's not a cracker. It's—[laughs].

CX: Yeah, so how did you feel or not feel Jewish students were included in the college's faith community? Like were there any resources that supported you as a Jewish student?

ED: So, we had, well okay. I did not feel all that included in the faith community, but I think that one of the primary drivers of that is that I think most of the Christian kids at Davidson don't view—or solely view Judaism or Jewishness or Jewish identity as a faith, which it is not, um at least like, and most of the Jews that I know are not religious or non believers and sometimes religious. I think that it's not really acknowledged or talked about or understood or even attempted to be understood, at least the time I was there, by the students that Jewishness is not only a religion. It's also a diasporic ethnicity and a culture, not just a culture but variation within a culture. Um so in that respect, I didn't feel all that included, because you know I mentioned I'd go to like these interfaith things, and it, like it was like a refusal to understand in a way, um is how I felt, even if you're constantly explaining an identity that—like to me like my ethn—my background is like I have kind of like most of the diaspora in in me, like my mom is a Middle Eastern North African Jew and my dad is a Polish Jew, and our traditions as like Israelis is very different than Americans. So like, there aren't many of us there if any, yet I was still having to explain everybody else's practices, so to speak, and like other you know other diaspora groups' relationship with Jewishness, but I felt like—so Rob Spach is like just an amazing human, so he was very welcoming, and he's still really really great. We've spoken since. And when I was there, it was a few years after they got a rabbi, which was a really big deal. Michael Shields. He is still I think slightly involved. I know he's got his own congregation now. So in that respect, I felt like, at least the the administrative portion of religious life on campus seemed to really care, but I don't think that the students cared, and I didn't get the sentiment that the administration really cared, which can affect you know education of the students in inclusivity and understanding, which is not something that's only the case for Jewish students I felt like.

CX: Did you interact with Rabbi Shields much, or...

ED: Yeah, so when I was there, it was—I've talked to like later presidents in the recent past, and I know he's not all that involved in Hillel now. When I was there, it was kind of like an intermediate period. So, my freshman year, he was pretty actively involved in Hillel, especially for the big Passover events, and we interacted for Passover and for High Holidays and trying to like create a space for students in the congregation, um so organizing more on that if you were involved in that.

CX: Okay, so you mentioned Rob Spach. Where else were you able to find support from while you were here.

ED: As a Jew?

CX: Were you able to? Like other than Rob Spach?

ED: I didn't really look, to be honest. I think um, there were maybe like two Jewish professors there. I didn't know any of them. I knew...I don't know if she's there. There was an art professor, Hagit Barkai. She's um she's Israeli, but we never really talked about that identity so much. Um no, it was mainly other students, I would say. I mean like I had some really wonderful professors, but they weren't Jewish, and it wasn't really like talked about that they were also not like—I was really close with Dr. Stanback, the professor with the birds, who's like I think in semi-retirement now, but he was more like, he was an atheist, so that was cool, and he had you know

Israeli friends, and he lived on the East Coast for part of his life, so like he kind of got it. Um so that was nice, but not really in terms of Jewishness, no.

TD: And I just wanted to go back and ask you about something you said earlier about rumors that were circulating at your prep school or prep schools in the LA community about Davidson is antisemitic place. I just— could you kind of like—

ED: Yeah, yeah, I can go back in time to what that was about.

TD: Yeah and like the headspace you were in like hearing that and going in to Davidson, and how—how that—how you saw that as a first year and throughout your time at Davidson.

ED: Yeah, okay. So here was the rumor. Okay well, let me also back up, because there is a larger thing. Davidson's in the South. Where are y'all from?

TD: I'm from Knoxville Tennessee, so I'm the same like latitude line of Davidson, yeah.

CX: I'm from Shanghai, so I'm just...yeah.

ED: So, a lot of Californians, and also just Jewish Angelenos kind of view the South as a bible-thumping type of place the extent that like, I remember when I got in, and when I decided that I was going to go there, like my friend's dad emailed me, saying like, "Oh like I hope they don't try to shove Jesus down your throat, like hope you'll be okay, like let me know if you need anything." Like I think it'll be fine. My brother said it'll be fine. So, there is that context that's,

you know, when you come from a place like this and go to a place that really has like no Jews or some Jews. That's honestly—I don't want to erase that community. There are a bunch of Jews in the South, but not at all to the extent. Um and I know from like, from my relationship with them that they have like experienced things I did not growing up. Um there was—so this is the rumor, and I don't know how much of it is true, and I'm sure that—I will actually, I'm not going to make assumptions, because I don't hear he's that great of a guy. So, um when the trustees voted on whether or not to um to take on a Jewish member of the board, um I believe the vote was held about whether or not they should allow, I think technically, it was increasing the number of non-Presbyterian trustees, something like that, to the board, and Belk left the Board of Trustees in response to voting for increasing the number for, or something like that, for a Jewish member. So, the rumor here was that Belk left the Board of Trustees, in response to allowing a Jew to enter the trustees, and and that, that was, you know, that was the the rumor here, that said that, that people had then said that he was antisemitic and like means that, you know, part of the school community is antisemitic etcetera. Now that being said, it might also be like in retrospect, thinking about it, because I I know, I think based on my conversations with—I forgot her name. We talked on the phone. I'm sorry, I think she's related to what you guys are doing, but she had, she had told me that there was like something super antisemitic that had happened in the 70s there, right? And I know that every generation of Jewish students that I've talked to at Davidson like has dealt with some degree of antisemitism, so I don't think it's completely unfounded, but yeah so that was the antisemitic rumor thing. And then, how did I deal with that when I was there? My brother said that it was a pretty accepting community um, but like yeah, but Jewishness was something he did have to explain, and he didn't really tell me about like some of the micro and less microaggressions that he had dealt with when he was there until, actually like until the the thing just recently happened, until like the Nazi issue that y'all have had on campus had happened and other things while I was there, so yeah. I don't know. I didn't think too much about it when I decided to go. It was more like something in the past.

TD: Yeah, definitely.

CX: Yeah, and would you be willing to share with us the like micro or less microaggressions that you or your brother experienced?

ED: So I'm not—I don't know. I don't want to share on my brother's behalf, um so I'll just share on my behalf. More cause like it's his own, you know, his stories. So, I didn't deal with anything really macro. Um it was all little things in my experience, and so I think there was—the matzah thing, I don't think is necessarily a micro-aggression but like on the, on behalf of the school administration, but we, wait there—okay, I got really really annoyed at this, and I think that it qualifies. Whatever, really pissed me off. So, they wanted to do like a Hanukkah celebration, and not a Hanukkah celebration, they wanted to include other religions in the holiday feast that they do at Davidson, by having desserts from the different holidays, and the head of the dining, not head, not Dee. I don't know if she's still there, but somebody below her, this guy, forgot his name, emailed me, because I was president at the time, asking for guidance on like what we eat in the holidays and what desserts we eat during Hanukkah, and I had like given him this like really long list and explanation, all that, like the holidays, all about oil and fried foods, and all that, and like there are really easy things you can do, like donuts, like very

very simple. We generally eat them like stuffed with jelly—whole explanation, like but if you're feeling lazy, you already have potato pancakes. We eat latkes, whatever. He emails me back like a few days later saying he's decided to make a challah bread pudding. Challah bread pudding. And I was like, we don't...Right? Exactly. Thank you. Sorry, I'm seeing your—I was so pissed off. But yeah, cause like a) we don't eat bread—I don't know of any Jew that eats bread pudding um...Do you eat bread pudding? Like is it? Oh, I don't know if you're Jewish, sorry, but whatever.

TD: No, I don't know if most people eat bread pudding. I just don't think it's good, but that's besides the point.

ED: Yeah, it's like, okay. We don't eat Challah on Hannukah, and then okay, I had emailed him back, being like we don't do this. Like this isn't—this is not a traditional food in any Jewish community that I know of, and I'm a part of a few um, so like can you—you can just fry potato pancakes that you have in your freezer for brunch, like that's completely fine. He did not change what he served um, and I was so pissed off, and he had you know the whole sign and how it celebrates Hanukkah, and I told him explicitly that that doesn't—that's not something that we do. So that pissed me off. And then, there were just little things, you know, things like just, there was—there were those instances trying to explain like what, you know, what Jewishness is to me, like that I don't believe in God and all these things, but it's tradition, but some people believe and people literally just being like, I don't understand, and kind of being done with it at that point. There are other things like being called on in class, because you are like the one Jewish student there. Like I remember in a religion class, where the professor was talking about Adam and Eve, and I guess in an environmental context, but um she had told the rendition of the story in a very Christian perspective and one of the things with the Hebrew—I don't know if you know this much about it—but um a part of the Hebrew is that a) the word for like domain over Earth can be translated two different ways, like a steward, or that you have dominion over the earth, and then b) like Hebrew gendered..like the the gender for the Hebrew word for Adam. It doesn't appear until after Adam and Eve is split, so there are some like religious scholars—I listened to a talk—there are some like religious scholars that would argue—Jewish religious scholars that that gender didn't really happen until the splitting of Adam and Eve, so God didn't make man. God made human, until they were split. And so, anyhow, so um she had said something. I raised my hand, and I was like, “oh I know that, you know, the Hebrew version of this, because you know, I know the Jewish Bible, um like this is what it is.” And then she like, you know, would ask me to translate things in Hebrew in class from like um from different sections of the Bible a couple times um, and I don't really read Hebrew. It was very frustrating, and it's the same thing, like just being asked, like literally in multiple religion classes, being asked for the Jewish perspective by the religion professor, you know? And I'm not a religious Jew, so it's very, it's very frustrating in my, in my viewpoint. I know like the one thing I'll say for my brother, I know that he had dealt—because he was open about this bit. He had dealt with missing class for—he missed class for Yom Kippur. He practices to an extent, like he fasts. It's a very holy day for him. And he had a math assignment due that day, and he asked for an extension, and he explained it was Yom Kippur whatever, and the professor said he could use one of his excuse—unexcused absences and unexcused misses for them. Um and that was never reversed, and he, I think, like many people at least his time and still in my time, just felt like it's not really something you have anywhere to go to to talk

about, you know, like to bring up that it might not be worth it. And so, I know that things like that had happened. I never missed class on the holidays um myself, because I didn't—I don't know my mom yelled at me, but I didn't want to miss anything, and I don't know if it's, because I felt like maybe it wouldn't be welcomed, but I'm honestly not sure, but I know that that's probably something other students dealt with, because it's probably not isolated. So yeah, those are microaggressions. I know that there were larger things that had happened, but are not like mine to tell, but nothing like, nothing like what has recently happened on campus.

TD: Yeah, thank you for sharing.

ED: Yeah, I don't know if that counts. That doesn't really count, I guess, in our society as a microaggression, but people telling you that you need Jesus is not like the best thing in the world.

TD: Oh no, yeah. I think that definitely qualifies as a microaggression.

CX: Yeah, yeah. Um so, a lot of the interviews that we've done, a question that we've asked people is, like when, like if they felt like they had to dilute their Jewish identity while they were at Davidson, and it kind of sounds like, like people would come in, um and they would be, like leave Davidson feeling more Jewish or like having to represent their Jewish identity more. And we were wondering how, like if that type of experience resonates with you.

ED: Yeah, yeah. I felt like I got more Jewish when I was there, and it's something my brother and I talked about a fair deal. Yeah so, that resonates with me. I don't know if you're getting—I don't know how you're reaching people um, but I don't know if you're getting a biased sample or not, because I am very well aware of some Jews on campus that I, like when I was there that I was friends with that like didn't do anything Jewish, and I don't know if that was one of the reasons, like being you know part of like this more like, white Christian American type of person. So I know a lot of Jews that that had happened to, like as in that they came, like felt like they had to represent Jewishness and then left more Jewish and more connected to their Jewish identity. But, I know that there are at least some Jews that kind of did the opposite, or maybe they became more Jewish when they left, but they definitely did not feel like they wanted to rep their Jewishness while they were there, so I don't know um how universal that is. But for me, definitely. My family in Israel made fun of me, cause like I'd go and be like, "oh, I'm president of Hillel." And they'd be like, "yeah, but you're not really Jewish." I was like, "fine" [laughs].

CX: I guess like, based on what you've told us so far, it kind of sounds like everyone knew that you were Jewish from the start. Is that true, or?

ED: I guess. I don't—I mean, yeah I guess, I feel like it's something you find out very fast there um, right? Because people go to church. I lived on a sub-free hall freshmen year.

TD: Oh okay, yeah. Empty on Sunday mornings.

CX: I did too. I did too, yeah, yeah.

ED: Yeah, so, I feel like yeah. I mean also because just because of my background. You can't really...I mean whatever your background is or like Yiddish words, or like, what do you, you know, what is that? Here it's obvious, so yeah, I guess. Yeah, I guess I embrace that a little bit.

CX: Um, and I guess talking about like feeling more Jewish, I guess, like did your relationship with your faith evolve or change after your time at Davidson and how?

ED: So, still don't have faith, um but I feel, I think a little bit more, I guess, aware of my Jewish culture, like I view it more as an identity, and like I've accepted it more as being a part of me, I think, than before I got there, I would say. Yeah like, more of an intrinsic—like an intrinsic part of me that I can't—this is gonna sound like such a self-hating Jewish thing to say, but like that I can't get rid of so to speak, um like that society is always gonna cast me as a Jew if that makes sense, and therefore it's a part of me, and therefore I am Jewish, I guess, which is probably a different relationship with Jewishness I had before. Before it was like always something some—somebody could potentially kill me for, and it was more like Israeli. Um that was a cultural identifier, and then after Davidson, it was more like, Israeli-Jewish-American, so to speak, rather than just like Israeli-American, and so I think I've been more involved in how, like what Jewishness means to me, like in terms of like my own personal sense of self and trying to kind of find that type of community outside of, um outside of Davidson, like finding or keeping friends that are Jewish that kind of get that, especially now with the increase in antisemitism, but I think that that's something that had started at Davidson.

CX: Okay, and I'm sorry to keep referring to like words that are like religious Jewish, religious Jewish identity.

ED: It's okay.

CX: I guess another question that would be like, were there major changes in Jewish life at Davidson during your time there?

ED: Um...yeah actually there were, yeah, um so I—when I—okay, I think some of the bigger changes was like the Jewish congregation of Lake Norman met in a church my freshman, sophomore, junior year, senior—senior year, I think the synagogue was built, um so I don't know how much students use that as a resource or the more—I mean, I also know it's—it's very Reform, and that was something that was completely new to me, um because it's not at all my background, um but I'm—I know that most of the Jews at Davidson are Reform, so I hope that they use it as a resource. That was a major change. It wasn't really used by students then cause like, it was literally just finished, I think, my senior year um—the end of my senior year. They might have used it for the last of the High Holidays that I was there for. The Jewish population grew massively while I was there. I think, I don't know the numbers at the end. I know that when my brother got his list his sophomore year, which was a year before I got there, it had probably no more than 40 some Jews on there. When I got the list, it was 76. I think there are over 100 now.

TD: Yeah. Right at 100 I think is the—

ED: Right at a hundred.

TD: Haven't broken a hundred yet.

ED: We were all, I don't know if y'all know about this. A lot of the former presidents, we all had a few phone conversations after the antisemitic graffiti, and like it was just really crazy, because like presidents that were like president for my freshman year um and like some former presidents going back to 2005 when like the last person to leave Davidson that was on the phone said like, "oh there are a hundred Jews there." People were like, "what?" Like that's crazy. There were only like you know, thirty or like less than than when they were there, so that's, that's a massive change. And I know that Shabbats were a lot bigger my senior year and actually had like some Jews there, religious Jews, so that was cool. That was definitely cool to see. And we also got a place in the Union for Hanukkah, so that was a big deal. It's the small things.

TD: Yeah, the small things...Um yeah, I mean, I—you spoke a little bit about how you and your brother had had conversations after what happened last November with the unmasking of the Davidson students with neo-Nazi affiliation, um what—could you walk us through kind of just your response to that? And how it's kind of um shaded your memory of Davidson or your experience at Davidson?

ED: Yeah, I can a bit. Yeah so, I guess I'll give you the play by play, and then I can give you my response. So okay, I got a message from I think Arielle Korman, who got a message from Ava something, who I didn't know. She was there after me. Um who got a message from the current president, I think, um about the graffiti, and I think they had forwarded the email by Carol Quillen, and then I messaged it to a few friends, and then I was looped into a conversation on Facebook Messenger between Arielle, Hannah, I think, and me um about some sort of response or something like that, to which it kind of exploded a little bit, um then obviously I told my brother, because we live in the same city. We're close. And then it kind of—it was more like an overwhelming response, so it kind of led to a chain of events...and a bunch of the former presidents, like cause we, you know, we know each other down a chain. It's a very small community. Um so my brother was like let's tell Drew, and you don't know Drew, um who was the president before my brother, after my brother? Before my brother, no, whatever, after my brother. He was the president after my brother who was a year above my brother. And then, whatever, a whole chain of people, and then we ended up having a conference call about like a) what happened and b) how to respond. And my brother and I had talked a lot, and I also talked a lot with my friend Dylan Goodman, who had graduated a year after me. He is quite involved in Jewish life now, um but I think the overwhelming consensus of response was that 1) there wasn't surprise. It was more anger and sadness at the lack of surprise. I think, if that makes sense. And um frustration that it was not communicated out to the community at large. Um so it was kept within, and I think that a lot of—I don't want to speak for the other presidents, but I felt like my brother and I um and friends that I had talked to had felt that Davidson kind of, they—Davidson has, I think, a problem where they don't take these moments to actually change, cause change that can last, so that was—that was the main takeaway we felt. We tried to like create response. I'm still honestly working on some of that, like trying to build a Jewish online network right now that we can hopefully interact with the

administration about. We had managed to talk to Carol Quillen. I wasn't a part of that conversation, except for like watching the notes on the Google Doc page. Um but yeah lack of surprise um, but sadness, but also it's just very frustrating when you see in all of our times there that nobody seems to really care, care about Jewish life, hardly necessarily care about Jewish life, but making more of an inclusive campus. Um I feel like Davidson does this thing not just with Jews. I think that like Jews are more a minority at Davidson, and like have a similar status to other minority groups where they put us in this kind of folder of diversity, and it's like, you can um, you can add a diversity class or you can like you know have a multi-cultural house, all those types of things, but diversity is still different. Like it's still othered in the way that the administration or like how, you know, how requirements are structured that it's separate from everything else that happens with Davidson. And in that separateness, it doesn't integrate and create a canvas that's inclusive and viewed as interconnected, and I think that that makes people feel marginalized, and and like for the kids that come from communities where they never dealt with diversity, or have like implicit or explicit bias, like they're not taught in a way that allows them to see these, you know, people that they don't have interactions with as non-others if that makes sense. I don't know if that's your feeling, but like since being at institutions that like really prioritize inclusive teaching and that type of stuff, it's like definitely that sentiment, you know, and I know that that's something that my brother like really really hated at Davidson. I mean he did not like strongly did not like at Davidson, and I did not like at Davidson, like it was—we were always kind of outside the bounds of like normal, so it's not a stretch to see something like that happen, especially like when all of us like all of the presidents knew like little things, larger things were in the past like that we know weren't really handled, or on the other side people didn't really feel like they could really talk anywhere, go anywhere, or would cause any change. It was more like well, you know, why talk about it if nobody's going to do anything about it type of thing. Whether or not it was explicitly stated, like there is kind of an inherent sense that you get, if that make sense. Yeah yeah, okay, so I guess that was like the response. Sorry, that went on a tangent.

TD: No, no, thank you.

ED: And like I sent you—I have written a thing kind of in response that I didn't know if I would like publish or not anywhere, and it was already like when we were talking about maybe doing a response in the Davidsonian, I think, but whatever. I sent that to you to kind of like—

CX: Yeah, thank you for sending that to us.

TD: Thank you.

ED: Yeah, you're welcome.

CX: Um, well I don't know if you've heard about like current student activism, especially for a Jewish Studies program.

ED: I have, yeah. It's exciting.

CX: Okay, yeah. We were wondering what your— like how you feel about that, and also like I guess in relation to the conversations that you were having with other Jewish students while you were like at Davidson.

ED: Um yeah, so when I was there, there was a Jewish professor in the religion department. I didn't take any Jewish courses, like yeah. I was never really honestly like interested. My mom got upset with me she was like, "you're taking all of these religious courses, but none of them are Jewish. You're gonna convert now. And I was like, no. So, I think that that—I think it's a really good thing to have a Jewish Studies department. I honestly never foresaw it happening, like it was not even something on our radar, to be honest. It wasn't even something we talked about then. Um I think. So, I think it's a really good thing. I don't think that it's sufficient for—I—for what I personally think Davidson needs, like I think that we should have it. I think it's a shame that there hasn't been something like that at Davidson, though we did have a couple Jewish classes before, but when—I think the professor died. I don't remember the circumstances, and I honestly don't remember when. It was right after I left, I think, or my senior year. And so, the fact that that wasn't— like that that vacuum wasn't filled immediately is disappointing to say the least. Um but Davidson has always been quite slow on their—on their non-Christian things and actually on everything to be honest, like I don't think they got like their first black woman professor until like the late nineties. Um so, not that surprising. I think it's a good stepping stone. I think it's good to like have a resource for students, so they don't always have to explain themselves um, and also like students that are actually interested in their Jewish identity have a resource they can actually use academically. I think that that's really good. I still think what I said before stands though, about how diversity is viewed by the administration, and how it's, it's still—it's still othered, like it's very important that it's a standalone thing for sure. I would love to see very easy fixes also be made to increase inclusivity and understanding of Jewish life on campus, and I'm like using the word inclusivity very specifically, because it's different than um than purely diversity or tolerance or equity, like inclusivity is about including Jewish life within the life of Davidson, or like normalizing it um within other courses, or you know fields of study, or campus tradition. Things like that that I don't, as far as I know, Davidson hasn't been doing, right? There hasn't been talk of that?

TD: I mean that—I think that might have been some of the defense to developing a Jewish Studies program is that like there are classes that are focused on kind of like on Jewish identity and Judaism, but I—yeah, I don't know, so I definitely see what you're saying. But yeah, thank you for like that insight. You're making me think a lot about my own commun—the queer community here and stuff, so I don't know, but sorry.

ED: Do you know Dylan Goodman?

TD: Um, no...

CX: Um I know the name.

ED: Is he on your list? He would probably be down to do this. He's queer, and he's Jewish, so he's had to—you know, at his time at Davidson, he's kind of dealt with the interaction of both of those identities.

TD: Yeah.

ED: It's something that we've talked a lot about. Um he'd be, he'd be an interesting person to talk to.

TD: Yeah, thank you thank you.

ED: He graduated in 2016.

TD: Okay, cool, so we must have [inaudible] I guess.

CX: Yeah.

TD: Great, great, so, but thank you.

ED: But yeah, Jewish Studies department, very good, very important. It's not enough.

CX: Well yeah, we want to be mindful of your time, so is there anything else you like to add to record today, anything you'd like to say to future generations that you haven't touched upon?

ED: Davidson is still a rad place, like just, I don't know. I feel like I'm just ranting a little bit, um I mean every place has a lot of problems. Davidson has a lot of growing but if Davidson has a lot of growing. But if only like, if they could apply their, their philosophy and learning and teaching to how they view otherness, I think it would be a much better place. Yeah, I don't know, yeah. I love Davidson. Side note: if I ever look for a job, and this is on the record, cool place.

[All laugh] TD: No definitely, definitely.

ED: Like honestly, just—just, whatever, it's on the record. It doesn't matter. Honestly, after, I told you, like I'm at my third institution now, like as a teacher and as a student, and like every week I'm like, "damn, you know, Davidson definitely had the best type of education that of all the places I've been at, like both as a teacher and a student, and I very much appreciate that, so I think that if they just put their minds to changing those things, it could really be a much better place for all the students there.

TD: Definitely, definitely, yeah, yeah. I guess I just want to ask one last question. Can you see yourself coming back? Like are you pursuing like teaching?

ED: I don't—I don't know. So, I'm on my second year of my PhD. People ask me this since, I guess, since I started my Masters, really. I'm, I—if I stay in academia, I would stay—I would do liberal arts teaching, like without a doubt, that's the route I would take. Because I—yeah, it's the education model that I love the most, and I think that it does the best for students um, like without a doubt, and it's something I like try to integrate as a TA, and like, so I'm at UCLA. UCLA has classes that are massive, so like a lot of them where individual learning is done by TAs—I think 70% of the teaching is done. So, I get the small class settings, and this is

something that I talked to them about actually, like this place should be more like that, and it's not. It's so sad. So, yeah. I don't know if I could see myself moving back to North Carolina, but you know a school like Davidson if I end up going that, like the academia route, would definitely be something that I would see. And I also know that my professor is retiring around the same time that I'm graduating here, so who knows, but whatever.

TD: Yeah.

CX: Alright, yeah.

TD: Well, thank you so much.

CX: Yeah, thank you so much.

ED: Feel free to reach out if you have any questions, and yeah, if you ever want to talk about life after Davidson or what have you. I'll be there this summer, no, next summer? Five-year reunion, so if you're still there.

TD: Oh, cool. Awesome. We'll be here.

CX: Yeah, two more years.

TD: Yeah, two more.

CX: That would be perfect. Thank you so much.

ED: Yeah, of course.

TD: Thank you!

ED: It was nice to meet you, bye. I love what you're doing.

CX: Thank you. Have a good rest of your day.

ED: You too, bye.