

Sharang Biswas '12
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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WOMICK: So to get us started off, my name is Cally Womick, and I'm here with Sharang Biswas. We are in Collis, and today is Sunday, May 12th, 2013.

So to get us started, why don't you talk about where you grew up?

BISWAS: So I was born in New Delhi, India, and I spent the first few years of my life there. Then there was a period where I moved back and forth from the United Arab Emirates and India, so I spent, like, a year in the UAE and then came back and then a year and came back. It's actually very confusing. Then, when I was, like, 7-ish, we again move to the UAE and stayed there, so from 7 'til I came to Dartmouth, I was in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

WOMICK: Okay. What kind of schools did you attend?

BISWAS: So in India, I attended a little bit of a—kind of an elite private school, G.D. Goenka Public School, so in India it used the British system, and a “public” school in that system is equivalent to a “private” school here, while I know in England a “government” school is what would be a “public” school here, so it's called G.D. Goenka Public School, but it's a private school. We had to wear, like, blazers. Like, I had a red blazer. I learned what the word “blazer” was. And I used to watch *Star Trek*, and there were phasers there, so, but I got them confused, and I'd say, *Oh, my God! Fire the blazers!* And my uncle would make fun of me.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: So we wore a tie and blazer, and everything was—maroon was the color. And that was, like, posh, right? And then in the UAE—well, there was a primary school I went to called Saplings. It was, like, a kindergarten, as well, in India. In the UAE I attended a primary school called Giggles, where I remember the bus driver would always think I was standing

in the bus because I was taller than everyone else, so he'd come and be like, "Why are you standing?" I'm like, "I'm not standing. And he'd look at me, he's like, "Oh, okay."

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: And then I went to a pri—so in the UAE, you don— all the public schools are—now I'm talking about the American [chuckles] sense public school. All the government public schools are Arabic medium, and so—and there's also a thing where—so, the UAE is a very expat-driven nation; it's only expats. Like, 10 to 20 percent of the population is actually Emirati. So private schools are really, really big. Like, everyone goes to private school. It's not like in America, where private school has a specific connotation.

And so I went to—I did go to an elite private school, though. It was called the International School of Choueifat [pronounced shoy-FAT], which is a network of schools across the world, mainly concentrated in the Middle East, but across the world. There are even some in the U.S., because they follow their own curriculum called the SABIS System. It's named after the founders, Saad and Bistany. And that's a mixture of, like, American system and Brit system and the Arabic system. It's all kind of mixed and special.

And so I went to that from third grade up to twelfth grade. My plan was [chuckles] if I didn't get into any of the colleges that I wanted to, I'd stay for the thirteenth grade because the Brit system has thirteenth, so our school had the option of thirteenth. And I did that for—and so I was in the same school from third grade to twelfth grade.

WOMICK: Wow. That's a long time.

BISWAS: Yeah. A lot of people find that unusual. So, you know when a lot of people tell me, "Oh, yeah, I was so sad leaving my high school friends," I think, *I was so sad leaving my, like, all-life friends*, because we'd gone to school for a *long time* together. We'd, like, grown up together and changed together and stuff, so—yeah.

And it was a very different system education wise than I've experienced and noticed in America.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. What were some of the differences?

BISWAS: So, first, I don't have a lot of experience first hand, but I've taught. I've been in the other end of the education system in America. Like, I've done, like, Tucker stuff and through the education department I taught at, like, Hanover High and stuff, so I only know that side.

So firstly, our curriculum. Teachers didn't design the curriculum for their class. The curriculum was centrally designed by the mother school in Lebanon. And it was distributed—like, distributed to the schools around the world. And obviously there were, like, special changes made for, like, in America they'd teach, like, American history; in Pakistan they teach, like, Pakistan history, things like that. So there were some changes, but in general it was centrally designed, so teachers just interpreted the material.

Every single week, we had a multiple choice quiz on every subject or the major subjects we took, and I like that idea a lot. So it was very simple. It wasn't, like, complicated. They asked us basically, like, basic application of a concept. So if the previous week we'd learned, I don't know, past tense of the verb "to be," in the multiple choice there was, like, "I ____." It would be, like, "was" or "were" or "will be," "is"—you know? And you just pick that. Or, like, if we'd learned how to do square roots, they'd ask us, "What is the square root of 36?" And you'd pick 4, 5, 6 or 7, you know? And that way, they tested very basically if you had any fundamental gaps in your understanding of any concept, and when the grades came out, you'd see exactly—you'd see, *Oh, I have a mistake in finding square roots of simple numbers.* And you'd be like, *Oh, I should check why I did that wrong.* And the teacher would get that as well. They'd look at that, and they'd address that. That was one thing.

Second thing: There was a lot of peer learning involved. So in the classrooms, groups of four students sitting together were called groups, and one of them was picked by the administration at the start of the school year to be the group leader, and in class the way the stuff was taught—like, let's say the teacher teaches a math concept, and then he'd give

us an exercise, and you'd work in your groups, and the group leader would, like, lead that.

And if there was—I was the head of the academics department in our student government. Our student government was called the Student Life Office. I became the head of the Student Life Office my senior year, but before that I was head of the academics department. And what we did, we organized peer tutoring. So if people needed help in subjects, we would have, like, a legion of, like, peer tutors to, like, tap into. If you didn't do well in those weekly quizzes, you would be forced to attend peer tutoring sessions and then repeat the exam. They were very short. They were, like, a half an hour long, each of them. To make sure that those fundamental gaps were filled. So that was the *good* side of the education system. That was really good.

And so the *bad* side was that our school focused very much on, like, science and math, and...we did really well. I think when I came to Dartmouth I was very well equipped in science and math, much more than many—not everyone, obviously, but many of my peers when we were starting introductory physics—so after introductory level, whatever—but, like, introductory level, I was much better equipped.

But we didn't give *any* emphasis on the humanities and the arts and even the social sciences or—economics a little bit, but apart from economics, not really at all. And that was really terrible. As in, like, we—it used to be that, for example, we'd have, like, actual books to read in an English class. Like, I remember sixth grade was supposed to be [*The*] *Magician's Nephew*, and when I was in sixth grade—when I had just joined sixth grade, I was super excited to read *The Magician's Nephew* because, you know, it's fantasy and I like fantasy. But that year, they changed the entire curriculum, where even the text—the English books were written *by* the central school, so they were really badly written, and they were, like, terrible.

And then tenth grade, we actually had to do actual books because we had external exams, O-levels and things, GCSEs and stuff. And so we did *Macbeth* and *Lord of the Flies*, so a) only two books in the entire year. Which was good except they were taught really badly, and only the

people who were motivated enough to read would actually, like, do it properly.

But then the eleventh grade, when there no external exam anymore, literally they taught us out of a book to, like, the Barron's SAT prep book. And then a worse one, the TOEFL book, which is Test of English as a Foreign Language, so, we were like, "Wait wait wait wait wait wait wait. We were learning *Macbeth* last year, and now we're learning out of this Test of English as a Foreign Language?" It was, like, "Recognizing indefinite articles," and I was like, "Really?"—so they didn't really care.

And then it was, like, the way English was taught was terrible. I never did a research paper in my life until I came to Dartmouth. I got into my freshman seminar, and I went to Karen Gocsik. I'm, like, "Can I do Writing 5 instead?" And she was, like, "No." [Chuckles.] Because, you know, space allocation. I'm not blaming them. But I'm, like, "No, I really need Writing 5." But it turned out that I did well in my seminar and stuff. But, like, my school—I don't think that was because of my high school prep; that was because I worked hard at that kind of work.

So humanities and art stuff was, like, negligible except French, but that's because the central school didn't do French. The central school in the Middle East did French. Lebanon didn't entirely fall in the Middle East category; it was kind of special. And they had a different head of the French, and she was much more sensible, so she actually put effort into the French curriculum.

But, yeah, so when I came to Dartmouth—like, for example, when I was picking schools, I was looking at the Ivy schools I wanted to apply to. I didn't want to apply to all of them; I wanted to apply to a couple of them. I was looking at Columbia. And you know how Columbia has the core where you have to take Lit Hum, Art Hum, Music Hum. I'm, like, *This is so scary. I'm not gonna apply here*, because I had never encountered the arts or literature properly, or music or anything in high school.

I liked Dartmouth because the distrib curriculum let you choose whatever. But it was only at Dartmouth *because* the

distributors that I realized that I *liked* other kinds of things, that I *wasn't* terrible necessarily. Like, I went to France. I did art history there. It was wonderful. Things like that.

I ended up getting two of my citations—three of my citations are in English classes. So I'm, like, *Oh, okay. That's interesting.* One of them is a literature class. Two of them are creative writing, but one of them was literature, so that was interesting. And I decided to go to Tisch School of Arts for grad school based on exploring other fields at Dartmouth.

And so that I think was the fundamental problem at my high school, and I went back—so I was very popular in my high school both—this is a self call—both with the students and with the admin. When I went back, I was talking to the director of the school about improving the English curriculum, and he basically blew it aside. He's, like, "No. Not important." And I'm, like, "Well, okay. Sure," even though I know other alums would come back to school and be, like, "Oh, my God, you need to—everyone," to the students, because, oh, yeah, our advising system for college was terrible. We didn't have one. Our advising system was basically other students. That's what I did. I talked to other students. I was lucky to have other students who I could ask, right?

But, so she—a lot of our alums would come back, and we'd chat with people. And one of my friends particularly was, like, "Yeah, you guys need to, like, be better at English because on my first English paper I got a C because I didn't know how to write," 'cause our school didn't teach us how to write, while my physics I'm acing.

Sorry. Am I just talking about random things too much?

WOMICK: No, it's great.

BISWAS: Okay. I do that, you notice.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

So did Dartmouth's location play any role in your choosing to come here?

BISWAS: Not at all. So none of my—so the schools—I only applied to schools in the U.S. and Canada, mainly because I know that universities in any other part of the world doesn't have—don't have as much freedom as in the East—as in North America. In North America you can change major and things like that. You can't anywhere else. And while I came in being like, *Oh, I want to do biomedical engineering*, there was also the idea of, *Maybe I don't like*—at that point, I thought I would only do engineering or science, so, but, you know, I came in being like, *Maybe I don't want to do bioengineering. Maybe I wanted to do chemical, or maybe I wanted to do biology*. And the U.S. and Canada have that. That's why I picked these two countries.

And *after* that, basically I picked—I applied to schools kind of based on prestige. That's really big in the Asian community, especially in the South Asian community, and then based on, like, specifics in the curriculum. So, like, I didn't apply to a school that didn't have a bioengineering program. I applied to Dartmouth—a) prestige—like, definitely. Like, I looked at all the schools in the Ivy League; and b) because I'm, like, *Oh, wow! So their engineering curriculum is, like, multidisciplinary, so it's even more open curriculum and stuff, and you get to do other courses*.

While I was scared of doing humanities and arts and stuff, it still inter—I was still, like, *I might want to do other courses, you know? It could have also been in the sciences, other courses, but not necessarily*. Like, that was that feeling that, *I want to explore other things*.

So that's why I picked Dartmouth. Because I had never visited the States. I'd visited Canada briefly. So like—and I'd lived in a desert, so any location [chuckles] I picked would be different. You know, I lived in Abu Dhabi.

In the end, when I decided on Dartmouth, you know, then I got deeper and I'm like, *Oh, yeah, it is in a rural location. That might be interesting*. And my dad was, like, "Yeah, it might help you, like, focus on your academics more." And I'm like, "Umkay, sure." I didn't really care about that as much. Some people were like, "Oh, it's very cold." I'm, like, "Whatever. I can deal with that. I prefer cold to heat." Some

people were, like, “Oh, there’s nothing to do.” And I’m like, “It’s a college. There’ll be stuff to do.”

So, yeah, otherwise, like, no other factor came into play. I didn’t look at, like,—because all schools’ websites say, like, “We have amazing academics,” “We have amazing extracurricular.” They all say the same thing. And then—so, there was very little—and I—obviously I looked at the *U.S. News* ranking thing, which now that I know more about the education systems and things, I’m like, *That’s kind of stupid.*

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: But at that point, I’m like, *Oh, U.S. News ranking! Oh, Dartmouth is, like, really highly ranked and Ivy League,* and stuff like that. So that’s why I picked Dartmouth.

WOMICK: Okay.

BISWAS: Sorry.

WOMICK: Did you have a chance to visit Dartmouth?

BISWAS: No. Never. I didn’t visit any of the schools I applied to. I came to Dartmouth, like, the day before Trips started. And I was supposed to not be allowed or something,—or two days before or something; I think it was two days. I was supposed to not, but because I was international I called the international adviser. And I’m, like, “Yeah, I’m arrived early.” And they were like, “Oh, you can move in early.” I’m like, “Awesome. Great.”

And I was met by the international coordinator/mentor person, who only later I found out was a horrible, horrible, horrible human being. Do you know him?

WOMICK: No.

BISWAS: But anyway—so, but at that time I’m like, “Hey! Thank you for helping me!” and stuff. And he was very nice to me. But, you know, and—so I arrived at Dartmouth. It was really rainy that night, that afternoon. It was like gray and rainy, but I was super excited. I was like, “Oh my god! Oh my god!” And here was a half-marathon going on, so there were all these

people everywhere. And I was, like, “Ahh! What’s happening?! Ahhh!”

And I moved in. My whole *khandaan* came, basically. My parents were here, and my aunt and uncle from DC were here, and they, like, set up my room for me and helped me move in to East Wheelock. I called Aryeh [Drager]. I’m like, “Hey, I’ve moved in early, so I’ll be here when you arrive.” (Aryeh was my roommate. He’s still around. He’s awesome.) And he’s, like, “Oh, awesome. Okay, I’ll arrive on this date, and you’ll meet my parents,” whatever, whatever.

And I remember the next morning—so I’d made a pact to exercise more. So I did karate back in high school, but I didn’t have it here, so I was like, *I should go*—. So in the morning I remember I went for, like, a jog or, like a fake jog, just like randomly running about.

I saw H-croo on the Green. And if you don’t know, this was the year when H-croo was at it’s height of craziness. With your year and following that they toned down a bit. But that year they were, like, *full*, okay? And I remember seeing them and listening to the really inane jokes that they were making when the buses were coming back or leaving. And I remember I just wanted to hang out, so I just ran up and down the paths of the Green [laughs] rather than anywhere—I just like, kept running [chuckles] here and there because I wanted to see what H-croo was doing—

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: —and stuff. Yeah. That was cool. Sorry. I keep going off on tangents. Is that a bad thing?

WOMICK: No, it’s okay. What was your trip like?

BISWAS: I really liked my trip. So I did organic farming, so I’m not outdoorsy at all, so I wanted to pick one of the easier trips. I did organic farming, and then I led organic farming as well for the ’13’s year. I led a bunch of things after that, but I really liked it. I liked to tell people that organic farming combines everything ‘cause you have a canoe trip to the farm. So that’s the water part. Then you have farming. Then you can go on, like, mini hikes around the farm. They’re mini

trails, so obviously it won't be like mountain hiking, but I tell people, "Yeah, it has hiking and farming and water, all of it in one trip." So that was really good.

The Safety Talk—when the Safety Talk happened—so, our year, the Safety Talk, they started out really funnily. So the first song they did was that one that was—I don't know the name of the song, but it was, like, [sings], "Somebody call 9-1-1." So they were doing the thing, and the Safety Dork, who I had a huge crush on, but anyway he was—I was really excited to learn about First Aid because I've always wanted to. So he started talking about how to like fish something out of someone's throat if they're choking. And, *Oh, this is so exciting. I'm gonna listen.*

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: And then a phone started ringing, and I'm, like, *Hughh! Who is this person with a phone, interrupting? What is this?* I didn't say that, obviously; but that's what I felt. And the Safety Dork was, like, "Hey, guys, could you turn your phone off please?" And that year an S&S officer had come and said, "Hey, everyone, please listen. This is very important." And another phone started, and I'm, like, *What is this annoying person with the phone? How disrespectful!*

And then they, like, burst out jumping and singing, and I'm, like, [Makes face of shocked, wide-eyed glee.]

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: And so at that moment I was, like, *I am so happy I'm at Dartmouth.* That was, like, a moment where I remember that clearly. Because I didn't do Dimensions and all that. I had no idea what Dimensions was until the *following* Dimensions, when I'm, like, *Oh, this is what Dimensions is.* Your—you guys' Dimensions, yeah.

And so that was great. And the trip itself was really cool. The farm is wonderful. We had a pizza oven. [Chuckles]. What more could you want? We had running water, a Porta-Potty, and a pizza oven. Wonderful! [Chuckles.]

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: But it was really cool. We decided we're not going to sleep in the barn. We're like, "No! We're gonna sleep outdoors 'cause we're on DOC trips." We slept on the lawn by the river. I tried the rope swing. And I'm not a terrible swimmer or anything, but it terrified me for some reason. I just was so scared. And I got a gash on my toe [chuckles], and one of the leaders was so excited. She's like, "Oh, my God, I get to use the First Aid knowledge!" We just cleaned the wound and put a bandage, but it was really fun.

One thing I only realized later that I didn't like, 'cause at that time I was so naïve and starry-eyed, was one of our leaders was telling us, like, stereotypes of all the different frats and what it means here, a different frat, which I'll talk about later, when I did trip leading. I was like, *Yeah, that wasn't a good thing. Like, I don't want to do that, ever.*

And the Lodge was wonderful. I—so, you know, the Lodge has the Lodge—so, in addition to the song they have, like, a skit kind of thing, or a sketch show kind of thing. And they tended to—they didn't do this—every year, but, like, some years they did it differently, but they tended to at that time pick a trippy in the group to be part of it, and so my co-leader was like, "Okay! When they start singing, just put your hand up. Just raise your hand." I'm, like, "What am I signing up for?" They're like, "Don't—trust us, Sharang." And I trusted them. My trip leaders were great. So, I'm, like, "Sure." And like I raised my hand, and they picked me, and it was Lodge's Next Top Model, was the skit. And, like, two of the Lodge Croo had to, like, walk up and down, and then I was one of the judges, and there were two other judges. And it was cool. So we each had to give comments. And I was very saucy in mine because, like, whoa! I was a saucy freshman!

'Cause the one before me had said, "Oh, you I'd like to invite back to my studio because you're awesome. I want to hire you." And I liked the other one better (because he was cuter), but anyway—[Chuckles.] I'm, like, "Oh, I actually want to give *you* the job. You're good, and I won't invite you to my studio, but I will invite you to my apartment." And like the whole Lodge was like, [screams] "Ohhh!" I'm, like, *Oh, God, what did I just say?*

And that year, one of the croolings—their mum was the vice president of PepsiCo or something, so she was in the audience. So I sat down. And she comes up to me, and she's, like, "Oh, you were really good," And I'm, like, "Oh, thanks." She's like, "Yeah. I'm the vice president of PepsiCo." I'm, like, "Oh! That's cool!" And then she said the weirdest thing. She's, like, "Yeah, the CEO," or some—one of the higher-up persons, "is Indian, you know?" And I'm, like, "...okay?"

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: "Sure. Yay!" [Laughs.] But—yeah. And that was also—it was really cool because the Sense of Place talk at the Lodge was given by the croo chief, the Lodge croo chief, Peter Rothbard, and he was gay, right? And it was really—'cause I'd been in the States for a little bit before Dartmouth. Like, right before Dartmouth I did this leadership camp thing, like, for a week, the week before Dartmouth or the two weeks before Dartmouth, in DC. And it was all, like, high school kids from all over the world doing this thing. But this was the first time I had met—one of my trip leaders was gay as well, right? But he didn't talk about that on the trip and stuff, at all. I only found out later. Well, I kind of guessed, but I actually found out later.

But Peter Rothbard talked about, like, being gay and being pre-med and being at Dartmouth and stuff, and that was really cool for me. I was like, *Wow, gay people are here*, because I remember *my* parents had—my mom had told me, like, "Don't ever tell anyone you're gay," like, whatever, no. Well, first they denied it was true, but then, like, "Don't mention it to anyone because the university will hate you and they won't accept you as students." And I remember my mom didn't want me to apply to Yale, which was one of the Ivies I was thinking of applying to, because it's known as the Gay Ivy, and she was like...

But when I came, I listened to Peter Rothbard. I'm, like, *Yeah, that's—I mean, you know, that's not that freaky, and he's talking about it*. And I was really—that was really cool. And then I came back from Trips, foreign, right? So we stayed back in our dorms. We didn't go back home or anything. I'm not gonna fly home.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: And I was super excited. Trips was wonderful. I was super excited.

The other international—there was one other girl from the UAE who I knew 'cause I'd met her before, and she was around. We hung out a lot. I met Nick Knezek. You know Nick Knezek. So I met Nick Knezek. He was one of my first friends at Dartmouth. We became close. I met Jenn Freise, and we, like—pre-/post-Trips trips. We were—it was just really nice.

And my trips—which I know are not true for everyone; a friend of mine, for example, did not like her trip. She was miserable. But my trip was really, really good. And I like to think that every trip I've led, except for the '15s trip, which was a disaster—the '14s, '13s and '16s—I like to think that they enjoyed their trip, too. The '16s actually—we've had six trip reunions so far with a maximum of one person missing at any of the trip reunions. And that is, like, unheard of. The '16 trippies—we like see each other—

My co-leader yesterday was telling me, "Yeah, one of our—I met one of them on the street, and they're like, 'We have to have another reunion at the end of the year because you guys are both leaving.'" And I'm, like, *Whoa!* So—I'm trying to have a tripee reunion with the '13s because I'm still here. It's rare for the trip leader to still be here for the thirtee—for any trip in their senior years. I'm going to try doing that.

But, yeah, Trips—I really, really liked my trip, and it was—I think it was a big part of making me feel so comfortable at Dartmouth.

WOMICK: What about moving into orientation? What was that like?

BISWAS: It was [chuckles] annoying because we had international orientation, so when people were doing, like, "Capture the Melon," I was in "The United States Tax System." I was literally—that was a lecture. We sat there. U.S. Tax System. I'm like, *Oh, my god!* And everyone's, like, "Oh my god! Come to the melon!" I'm, like, *You guys suck.* 'Cause I made

more friends among the non-international students, and so [chuckles] they're all, like, "Ahh!" And I'm, like, [Makes a grumpy, unhappy face.]

But really, it was fun. I remember picking—I had to decide, *Should I take honors physics? Should I take honors chemistry?* You know, all those things you could take. And I realized physics—I wouldn't be able to. I'm like, *Chemistry, maybe*, but I decided not to. I'm, like, *You know what? I don't want to. I'll just do normal stuff. It'll be great.*

Maybe that was the start of my decline, 'cause I felt—you know, in high school, I was valedictorian in high school, so I had felt, *Oh my god! I'm awesome. I'm super smart.* And then Dartmouth. I was, like, *Eh.* [Chuckles.] I got cum laude, I was glad, you know? Which, you know, it's a good thing to be glad about. That was pretentious. But, like, I didn't have the, like, *I need to be valedictorian.* My mum did. She's like, "You're gonna be valedictorian." I'm, like, "[Laughs.] At Dartmouth? Are you crazy?" But I didn't have that "oh my god" drive that all I need to do is academics, which I actually think is good. And I think Dartmouth encourages that. Like, yeah, I want to do well in my classes, but it's not the only thing.

But orientation. I remember going to—I was very excited about classes, though, and I remember going to different open houses. And it wasn't just science. I went to biology and engineering, but I wanted to go to the film department one because I wanted to take filmmaking. I'd done some filmmaking in high school with my friends. They were, like, shitty, but, you know. We'd done some. I ended up taking the class senior year. I went to the French open house, which was awesome because I spoke to Lynn Higgins, the head of the department, and learned that, *Oh, I don't need to take any French classes to get into the LSA+*, because I chatted with her and she was like, "Yeah, your French is actually really good, and I'll look your name up. I think you get credit for French 3 because of your AP. So you can just go on the LSA+." So, I learned that at the open house, and that was cool.

The lobster dinner was nice, kind of a rip-off because they actually charged us for it, if you'd remember. If you looked at

your account, it says “\$50 — Lobster Dinner,” and I’m, like, *What?* [Laughs.]

And then the president’s lawn barbecue—it was so funny. [Chuckles.] I read the invitation badly. It said, “Formal attire not required.” I read it as, “Formal attire required.” So I wore my full suit and tie and everything, and went on the president’s lawn, and everyone’s like, “Hey!,” and I’m like, [choked] “.ey.” [Laughter.] [Slaps table.] I met my floor, and they’re, like, “Hey, Sharang.” [Chuckles.] I’m, like, “Okay, I read the invitation wrong, guys.” [Laughs.] But it was hilarious. [Laughs.] Oh, wow!

The lobster dinner was fun. I met one of my closest friends at Dartmouth at lobster dinner, Mike D’Andrea, who lived in East Wheelock as well. You know Mike D’Andrea. Well, he’s a ’12. He’s one of my close friends. I still Skype with him a lot. I went to visit him winter break in DC. He wanted me to go to NYU rather than Tufts because Tufts is a human factors program, and he’s doing human factors. He’s, like, “No, Sharang. I want that to be unique to me out of the friends circle.” And I’m, like, [Makes a face.] [Laughter.] That was really funny. But I met him at the lobster dinner, so that was really nice.

So I actually met a lot of my really good friends at orientation. Andrew Ceballos—you know Andrew Ceballos, right? Yeah, you’ve met him. He’s another one of my close friends at Dartmouth. I met him at the “talk with your academic adviser.” There were, like, five of us. Three of them were named Andrew. One of them is Drew Wong. One of them was Andrew Ceballos and some other Andrew. I can’t remember who it was. But that’s how I met Andrew.

And then I find out he lived in East Wheelock. I kind of became friends with him, but I wasn’t really friends with him until—so we took physics together. And he sat next to me. He’s like, “Hey, I can sit next to you” because he knew me. And then the following term, we started working on—in Physics 14—we started working together in Physics 14. That’s when we became actual friends.

But, yeah, so orientation was good. I met one of my good friends there. Yeah, I can’t remember much more. I

remember feeling really bad about the fact that all blonde women looked the same to me, 'cause [chuckles] I wasn't used to seeing blonde white women. And then I remember feeling bad about how I remembered the names of men more than women [chuckles] and especially good-looking men, which I felt really guilty about. I was like, *Oh, my God*. So I talked to Nick about it, and Nick was, like, "Oh, don't worry. Like, I mean, it's natural." And I'm, like, "Okay."

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: And Nick Knezek likes to remind me a lot—we were having— one night, a bunch of East Wheelock people were sitting around, just getting to know each other at orientation. And we were doing the name—you know, go around and give a name and a fun fact. Like, "What should the fun fact be?" And I'm, like, *Oh, oh, why can't it be 'What one article of clothing do you want your sex partner to wear?'* [Laughs.] I was super saucy. I didn't realize. And everyone's like, *Okay*.

And I remember Nick Knezek picked glass slippers, and I made a comment, I was like, "Wait, wouldn't that break in them?" And Nick was, like, "What am I doing with a glass slipper? Why would it break inside them?" I was, like, "No, no, no. I mean, like, break and then go inside them" or something. It was really awkward and funny [chuckles] and hilarious.

And I remember Jenn Freise—'cause I met Jenn Freise at the film department open house, and she's, like, "Oh, yeah, you were so gentlemanly and proper then. And now you're not." And I'm like, "What do you mean I'm not?" She's like, "Well, you know, when you talk with professors you're much more proper. And so since I saw you in that regard first, I thought you were very, like, dignified and, like, upright." And I'm, like, "Oh..." And she's like, "You're not really like that." I'm, like, "Okay..."

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: It was nice. It was fun.

WOMICK: Yeah.

BISWAS: It was good, orientation.

WOMICK: So what about freshman year?

BISWAS: So freshman year, I was cool. So I wanted to—mmm. So every term, I knew—I was taking two classes towards the major and one class not, so I took physics and math, then physics and math, then engines and chemistry my freshman year. But freshman fall I took my seminar in philosophy and arguably—I mean, not arguably. What’s the right word? Admittedly, I didn’t pick philos—I wasn’t planning on picking the philosophy seminar. I’d gone to Gocsik, and I’m, like, “Can I take Writing 5?” And she’s, like, “I’m sorry.” You know, “It’s full” and stuff. She was, like, “However, I can recommend some good seminar professors who really help with writing.” And so she said, “Take Jeff Crocker’s Existence of God class.” Why am I saying Jeff Crocker? It’s not Jeff Crocker; it’s Larry Crocker. Sorry. That was really stupid.

So I’m, like, “You sure?” She’s like, “Yeah, he’s a very good professor.” So I did, because I would not have taken philosophy. That was something I’d be scared of taking. But I really liked the class. He was a great lecturer. I learned a lot of interesting stuff. It was really cool. I also realized I didn’t want to do any more philosophy, but that class was good, and I’m really into religion and stuff like that. That was really funny. I was the one in the class who was, like, “Wait. What is that?” Like, in every, like, biblical reference—‘cause everyone else knew them. I was, like, “I don’t know what that is,” Like, “What does that mean?” It was very funny.

Also Ken Lai—that’s how I met Ken Lai, who ended up joining Phi Tau with me. And I’m, like, “Oh, my God! I met you there!” And Matt Stone and a lot of people. Natalie Burkhard as well, yeah. We read each other’s papers.

Oh, I’m feeling nostalgic! [Laughs.]

But [chuckles], so that was interesting. And then I was determined to make my third class—I was trying to not take only science classes. Again, I was scared of certain things, but I knew I had to take ‘em for distribs. But, for example, I

was relieved that my literature distrib would be taken through my French class, which I also got a citation in, so I have four literature citations, actually. But anyway—because I would be in France.

But I'm, like, *Okay, but I still want to explore*. So I took anthropology; I took Aztecs. *Really fun class. I really enjoyed my Aztecs class.* And that influenced—I got the first year summer research grant, which stopped existing with your year. 'Cause, remember, the first-year office was dissolved at the end of my freshman year? So that didn't exist for you anymore. But it used to be \$1,000 you could get to do research as a freshman, in summer. And that was with my anthro professor, 'cause I really liked that idea. At the time, I was thinking, *Maybe I want to major in bioanthropology or something*. I didn't.

Then spring I took game design, which was also really good, with Mary Flanagan. And so I liked that a lot. I did well. My freshman fall, I got a citation in my math class. I liked my professor a lot, Vince Vatter. He was really cool. And I became friends with him, and I would go to see him and say "Hey" every once in a while to him, and then he moved because he was just a post-doc fellow.

So I liked freshman year. I remember freshman winter I was kind of freaking out—no. End of freshman fall I was kind of freaking out about my physics class, and I was, like, *Oh, my God, I suck at everything, and I hate everything, and I'm really bad at everything*. I remember Joey Anthony was, like, helping me. And he was, like, "Sharang, I'm not going to help you if you're going to be so negative." And I'm, like, "Okay." That was really good, I think.

And so that happened. But then, I don't think I was—I had depressive spells. That happens to me sometimes. It happens less now, actually, but it happens to me sometimes. I just—one day I don't feel like doing anything. It happened, surprisingly, many of the big weekends. I also had a huge crush on a friend of mine. You know, he was identified as straight and everything, and everything—that didn't work very well. He knew. I'm really good friends with him, so. But, you know, that was unfortunate.

But I think on the whole, freshman year was pretty good. I remember in freshman spring, at the end, we all had Champagne together in a room right at the end to be, like, *Aww*, celebrating the end of freshman year. *Aww*.

I also joined GSX and started getting involved with queer stuff, which was cool, like I said, for me, because growing up in the UAE, like, that did not exist.

There are people I met freshman year who I became good friends with, and I don't know if—you've probably experienced it, but that kind of petered out; you're no longer as good friends with them. It's not like you hate them or some-, but you just, like, diverge. That happened a lot. It made me sad because some people I'd really like to be more friends with 'cause I thought they were really cool. But that happened later on, I mean even out of the close friends circle.

But then, again, some people stay—talking about Andrew Ceballos. I Skyped with him two days ago, you know? Just chatting about random stuff. If I ever go to the West Coast or California, I'm gonna go visit him at Stanford. There's no question about that.

I also did really well academically freshman year. Like, really my best year. I got third-division honors my freshman year. No, *second*-division honors freshman year, yeah. I got third next year and then never got it again because I started taking hard engineering classes, which I figured out only later that I didn't like. But, yeah, academically it was good. Extracurriculars—I went to a couple of queer conferences. Pam [Misner] had, like, the Translating Identity conference we went to in Vermont. That was, like, kind of opened my eyes. I was like, *Wait, Transgender? What does that mean? Oh.*

I went to DPP, my DPP. And that was really cool. I liked that a lot.

I was in Transform for Pride Week. I remember being so excited about that. But that was spring, as well, so I was much less starry-eyed. But, yeah, I started hanging out in Phi Tau winter or something. Initially, I was frightened of the

Greek system. I was like, *What is this Greek system?* I remember over orientation they had a Milque and Cookies, and I went in. I was like, *Oh, my God, I'm in a frat. This is scary.* And I just left.

But—yeah. Yeah.

WOMICK: So that summer?

BISWAS: That summer. So that summer, I went home for a month and came back, and I was doing a couple of things. I was trip leading, so that was—I was training for trip leader. I was teaching in the ALPS program, which was the Accelerated Lang—no, that wasn't that—no, I think it was that year. Yeah, it was that year. I did it for two years, two different years. The Accelerated Language Program the Rassias department has. So I was one of the French drill instructors for the advanced—no, I did all three. I did beginners, intermediate, and advanced.

My advanced group was awesome. They were so nice. They have to do a skit in the end, in French, and they wanted me to be in the skit. [Laughs.] It was funny. It was like the Olympic games, and each of us are athletes of different countries. It was, like, hilarious. It was, like, really weird. And funny. We had this cute 70-year-old prison warden woman. She was, like, wonderful. No, no, she was a prison counselor, not prison warden. Different. But she was like this prison person and it was like, "Woah. You're like this tall [Gestures indicating small stature] and, like, 70." And she was, like, "Yeah. It's awesome."

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: It was awesome.

And I was doing—I got the National Institute of Environmental Health Science—I got a Superfund research grant from them, so I was working in the trace elements analysis core, doing arsenic analysis on human toenail. It was really fun to tell people that, like, my day job—like, "Oh, yeah, I'm smashing apart human toenail. Have to do it under the fume cover, otherwise I'll breathe it in." It was all pregnant woman toenail as well, 'cause the professor who

was sponsoring that thing—they were, like, looking at arsenic affect on pregnancy and natal development, and the way—the best way to get heavy metals—they collect in the hair and nails a lot, and so we'd be analyzing how much arsenic is in them.

And then I was doing my first-year summer research program, which was Exchange in Formative Period Mexico, looking at pottery shards. I don't think I did a very good job. But that was freshman summer. And so I don't think she expected me to do a very good job, but I don't think I did a very good job. I'm, like, "Awww," you know. Again, I'd had very little experience doing research and things. I remember designing the poster, and I remember it was terrible, but whatever. So that was that.

And then I was doing that. I was doing that. Yeah, I think that was the two main things. It was a fun summer because, like, I wasn't taking classes. But I knew '11s and stuff who were around. There were a bunch of other '12s around, as well, so I hung out with them. I knew some '11s. It was a really nice summer.

I remember the foam party being awesome. I remember going—Natalie Burkhard and I went to the foam party together. And also because her boyfriend at the time didn't like dancing or something, so we just went together. And I remember it was really funny because, like, we were dancing, and we had this thing where if any guy tried to, like, be fresh with her, I'd, like, grab her really tightly or something, and they'd think I was with her, so they wouldn't—[Laughs.]

And then at one point we were going out to wash because the foam was, you know, getting everywhere. And then this one guy I kind of knew tapped me on the shoulder, and he, like, winked at me surreptitiously. He's, like, "Well, have a good night." And I'm, like, "You're weird." [Chuckles.] It was a fun party, I remember.

And it was a good—my freshman summer was—it was fun. Like, I did all these research things, which was interesting. In two different fields: environmental chemistry and anthropology—archaeology. I did trip leading, which was

awesome. My first time trip leading—I'd say out of all my trips, even the '16s, which I great, I've only made friends, proper friends out of the '13 trip. Like, I'm actually friends with some of them. Not just, like, "friends." You know what I mean? Like, close friends. Like, Shivani [Bhatia] and I are still good friends. But all the other trips are people I'm friendly with; that's about it. Which is sad, but—oh, yeah, the trip was great.

My co-leader...who was my co-leader the '13 year? Kelly Bogaert was my co-leader. She was nice. I haven't kept in touch with her, really. But she was cool. And it was nice being part of trips. It was orgasmic farming again, so I knew the farm better than anyone else, even Kelly. That was nice. Oh, sorry, we called it orgasmic farming because we liked it so much it was orgasmic.

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: Also there were, like, three Indian people on my trip, and I was, like, *Hmm,—suspicious*. And then those three people also living in East Wheelock that year, one of them on my previous floor, and I'm, like, *Suspicious. Hmm*. [Chuckles.] It was funny. Yeah, it was a good summer. I also didn't realize how hot Dartmouth can get in the summer. I was like, *Oh, my god! It is so warm!*

WOMICK: [Laughs.] But you grew up in a desert.

BISWAS: Yeah, but people are like, "You grew up in the desert, so you're really used to heat." I'm, like, "No, no, no, no. I'm really used to intensely disliking the heat. I have had lots of practice in that," [chuckles] so—

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: Yeah.

WOMICK: Okay.

BISWAS: [Chuckles.] That was summer.

WOMICK: What about sophomore year?

BISWAS: Sophomore year. Okay. So, I remember—freshman spring Andrew had a change of heart. He'd gone from being chemical engineering to electrical engineering, and so we were all thinking about what we want to major in. I remember the biomedical engineering major had just emerged. I said, *Okay, I'm wanna do that.* I changed mine to engineering science later because it turned out that biomedical engineering major was intended for people who were doing pre-med, and you have to take both Orgo Chem classes, and I'm like, *Well, I'm not*—I took one. And I liked it, but, like, it's a lot of effort, and Orgo Chem 2—I even talked to J. Wu, my professor. I was like, "Do I need Orgo Chem 2? I'm doing bioengineering." And he's, like, "Probably not." And I'm like, "Pssh, fine. I'm not taking this." And I didn't take the bi—I took the engineering science major with just a focus in bio.

Sophomore year...was cool.

Oh, I forgot to mention: I started doing theater freshman year, freshman winter. So that was a thing. Sophomore year, I took my acting class, I think. I took Acting 1 sophomore year. I can't remember. I took Ling 1 sophomore year. That was amazing. I really liked Ling 1, with Tim Pulju. Such a good class. I took it with Mike. That was really nice. I liked being in class with my friends.

I did Sexperts training sophomore fall, and that was because I didn't know about it freshman year that you could do training, and it was, like, I wasn't on the blitz list, which was really annoying. That was great. I met Mayuka [Kowaguchi], one of my other really good friends. She's an '11. I Skype with her. She's actually coming up, maybe, from Japan next week, 'cause she works at a big consulting firm, so like she has a thing here. But she's also visiting her sister, who goes to BU or BC, and coming up to Hanover.

And I met Mayuka. Andrew and I did Sexperts training together. It was really funny because at that point *every single person* thought Andrew and I were dating. Because Andrew and I are really good friends, and we hung out together a lot, and *I* was gay, and not—it wasn't, like, hidden. Like, people *knew* I was gay. And Andrew had a long-distance relationship, so people didn't see him interact sexually with anyone. I mean, he was with *me* all the time,

and he was kind of silent and quiet. And he was very nice, and apparently being a nice guy makes you gay.

WOMICK: [Snorts.]

BISWAS: Whatever. And so everyone thought we were dating. And in Sexperts, *everyone* thought we were dating. [Chuckles.] 'Cause we'd, like, walk in together and sit together and then we'd walk away together and stuff. Kari Jo [Grant] thought we were dating. When we had our one-on-one interview Kari Jo was like, "Wait, you're not dating Andrew?" I'm like, "*Noo*." [Chuckles.] Andrew has a girlfriend! Not saying I wouldn't *want* to date Andrew. He's awesome, but, no, he has a girlfriend." Which, again, doesn't exclude him from dating me. I shouldn't say that. At *that* time I said that because later I realized that polyamory was a thing. [Chuckles.] But, "No, I'm not dating Andrew." But Sexperts was really cool. I became heavily involved in Sexperts after that. I helped in all the events. I became a Sexperts intern senior year. But that was sophomore—

Sophomore year I took acting. I took—I don't remember what I took in order. Like, I know all the classes I've taken if I liked them. I took—no, I took the film class junior year.

Sophomore spring was France, so I'll talk about that in a bit. Sophomore winter I did the polar bear swim the first time, because freshman winter I think I was depressed on that day. I had one of my down days.

Oh, also freshman winter I did skiing for the first time. I took the cross-country skiing course. I decided, *I want to do skiing but not downhill. I don't want to break my neck*, so I'm like, *I'll take cross-country skiing*. That was great. I also took—freshman year I took my first PE course in fall, was ballroom and swing. I finished my PE credits freshman year, but I wanted to take more because they were fun. Expensive but fun. [Chuckles.] My dad was, like, "I'll pay for them. You know, you're getting an education and not just class education, PE education as well, right?"

So sophomore winter I didn't take a PE class. I don't know why. I don't know. Sophomore fall I took Engines 21. That was a—a lot of work. You know Engines 21, right? The project class. That was a lot of work, and I remember. And

then sophomore fall. And winter I remember was—Andrew was pledging Zete, and that did not make me happy. I was kind of upset with him for that because I was like—I didn't like the male—I joined Phi Tau, but I didn't like the male fraternity system, and I really feel that Andrew and my relationship changed after he joined Zete. I'm glad he was happy, but I didn't like the fact that he joined Zete. And that, like, strained—we had, like, fights and stuff.

But I joined Phi Tau sophomore winter. I got a bid sophomore fall. Joined sophomore winter. That was nice. We don't have a pledge term or anything, so, like, it was nothing like, "Oh, pledge term was so—," it was like whatever. It was a term. When I was in Phi Tau. And that was nice.

I remember running for the Co-ed Council VP position and got it. I got it for two years in a row. And I did a—self call—I did a good job. I always ran lots of events for the Co-ed Council. The Council, otherwise, the year before didn't do anything. Elise would tell me, like, "By the way, you're doing a really good job because you're doing *something*, so whatever you do [claps hands] would be a good job because the year before, nothing happened." And I'm, like, "Oh. Thanks." [Chuckles.]

Spring was France. Wonderful. I'd never been to Europe before. I spoke French—self call—much better than anyone else on the trip. I'm, like,—I was near fluent when I was going, and so my first—I remember that first night, I was having dinner with my family, and we were talking about American politics, in French, and my host dad was like, "Oh, I'm glad you can do that because most students will not be able to do this on the first day." I'm, like, "Oh."

I felt in the language part I was little overqualified for the LSA+. But I didn't want to do the FSP because I needed to take two extra classes in French before the FSP, while the LSA+ I could just take. And I had—I wanted to plan my courses really well at Dartmouth. I did plan my courses really well, so I could take engineering and as many other classes as I want. It didn't want to take so many French classes. I wanted to explore many different departments.

So that's why I went on the LSA+. And I was a little overqualified language-wise, but not the otherwise. We had, like, literature and art history, and I didn't know any of it, right? So I feel like I did learn a lot. And even in language class, our professor was great. I learned a lot of neat stuff.

France was really nice. I felt for the first time I was becoming more independent, I felt, because, like, for example, the one experience I talk about a lot is I've gone to Rome for the holiday that we have on the LSA+. And I was staying with Mike, 'cause Mike was on the Italian LSA. So that was really nice.

One day he had to—so they still had class. Our holidays didn't align. So he went to class, and he sent me out into the city with a map. I would *never* have done that before, go into a city whose language I don't know and everything? I'd be frightened. A few years ago, I would have just sat in the room and been, like, "Nope, I will wait for Mike to come back. I have the Internet. I will just do bum stuff."

But I went into the city on my own. I got *lost!* I really got *lost*. I had to find someone with a phone to call Mike and be like, [in a high-pitched, frantic voice]: "Mike! [Makes sobbing sounds.] I'm lost!"

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: [Chuckles.] But I did it! And it was a big experience for me. I'm, like, *Oh, my God! I survived and—ah, wow!* I felt a lot more comfortable about being in the city because cities scare me. One of my biggest fears is being lost. It's a very frightening idea to me.

So France was great. I learned a lot of really neat stuff. I also got depressed sometimes because, like, when I was at home—I get depressed when I don't have people.

[Chuckles.] And, yeah, my host family was great, but they weren't always in. And, like, even when they were in, I couldn't always talk to them, and so I felt kind of like—like, some evenings I'd feel sad and I'd Skype. And Andrew'd broken up with his girlfriend, so he Skyped me. He was like, "Oh, I'm sad." And I'm, like, "Oh, Andrew, don't be sad."

And Shaun [Akhtar] had started fancying me in winter, so he would Skype with me and blitz me. I didn't know he fancied me. Really. Kind of.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: And that started when I was in France. And my friend and I were still fighting. We had a tumultuous relationship freshman/sophomore year because, you know, I fancied him and he knew that, and it was weird.

Oh! I didn't mention: My freshman summer, I went to see my first Broadway musical. All of us—like, me, Mike, Andrew, Nick, Edie [Wu]—we went to New York, stayed in New Jersey at Andrew's house, in his basement and went to watch *Wicked* together—oh, and Aviel [Worrede-Mahdi]. And that was ho-—it was great, but it was horrible because I had a depressive spell the *entire* period. Like, I was not talking. I was, like, [Glowers.] Kind of awful. But, you know, it was good.

And I remember someone told us—it was awful—but I remember we met some alums. We met some '11s in the city, who knew Nick from X.ado. And they told us, "Aw, that's so cute, all you freshman friends together. That's not gonna last. Your friendship is not gonna last." And it's kind of true. One of them doesn't like me. But anyway—

But, yeah, so anyway, back to freshman spring. France was awesome. The problem was, I only started really feeling at home at the end of the trip, you know? Because then I'd be used to buying bread and just going and doing stuff in France. I also found this really cool, nerdy, like, gaming store, like, two blocks from my house. The day I was leaving.

WOMICK: [Sharp intake of breath.]

BISWAS: I was so pissed. *I was like, If I'd found this before I'd, like, go here all the time.* A great way to learn French—you know, gaming with people as well. But I was so pissed!

I also ate so much exotic food it was not even funny. I went to a lot of movies, both with and without the others. France

was great. I really enjoyed my French off term. Oh, sorry. LSA.

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: LSA. It was really fun. And when I came back—so now I really wanted to do sophomore summer, even though international students—you have to do a lot of juggling to do sophomore summer because of the American government has annoying stipulations. So sophomore summer I managed to do some juggling, managed to stay. Boring term, honestly. Everyone's like, "Sophomore summer's going to be amazing, amazing." I took Engineering 24, Thermodynamics—25, sorry. Worst professor I've had, one of the worst professors I've had. Not the worst, one of the worst.

Then I took Genetics. Amazing class, but very challenging. And then Geopolitics. Really fun class. I really liked Geopolitics. Also I decided I wanted to take it because I wanted to take—the leadership camp I'd been to right before Dartmouth was very, like, U.N. focused on international relations stuff, and I wanted to revisit that. I'm, like, *You know what? I liked that so much, the leadership camp thing. I want to take a class about that. And I've heard Gov 5 and Gov 6 are really annoying to take, so I want to take a different one.* So I looked in the geography department and I found this class, Geopolitics and Third World Development. So I'm, like, *This is great.*

I took it. It was very challenging. Sorry. It was not *very* challenging, but it was like any other term; it wasn't like what everyone would say, "Oh, sophomore summer is super easy." Might've been because of the courses I took, but I had to take courses that would fulfill my major, and so I didn't take easy courses and stuff. So it was a normal term.

Strips was great, on the other hand. I remember going to Strips and feeling really rejuvenated. One of the Brit—Oxford exchange kids on my trip—and he was really cool. He was [imitates accent] Northern Irish. (I can do it really badly. Whatever.) And he'd be, like, [imitating accent], "I'm gonna take a wee leak." And we were like, "What does that mean?" [Laughter.] He was fun.

And Strips was great. Maryam [Zafer] was on my Strip. I like Maryam. Yeah, sophomore summer was nice. It wasn't bad, of course, but it was normal. I think that's also when I started Presidential sch—yeah, I did Howard Hughes Fellowship sophomore year, working with Solomon Diamond on multimodal neuroimaging. I did really badly in that, I feel.

And then sophomore summer I started doing my Presidential scholarship, which was Lee Lynd doing biomass conversion to ethanol. I did that that summer and then winter, not fall, 'cause in fall I was taking Orgo, and I told them, "I don't want to take—junior fall I was taking Orgo."

So I started that in summer, and I think that was better as a research experience. I kept trying to find engineering research experiences, you know? Because I'm like, *I am an engineer. I have to do this.* But, yeah.

So that was my sophomore—sophomore year I started fancying another friend instead of the one I've been talking about; another, like, big thing. I remember telling—this is the story you heard. Like, I'm, like, "If I ever fancy you, can you just punch me because that's so stupid?" And he's, like, "Don't be silly, Sharang. Sure. Whatever." But I started fancying him—

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

BISWAS: —sophomore year, which was sucky. Yeah, sophomore summer, though I lived in Phi Tau, and I started to fancy—well, I didn't start fancying Shaun until *after* we were sleeping together, actually. We started sleeping together. And I liked him, obviously. But I started fancying him after that. Then we kind of started dating.

They do say, right, like, "You'll meet sophomore summer the people that hook up and, like, get together." That actually happened! [Laughs.] That's really funny that that actually happened to me. [Laughs.] Because, you know, most of the things I never—you know, Dartmouth X and all those things, I don't experience. But this one, I did. So, yeah, that was sophomore summer.

WOMICK: And then junior year.

BISWAS: Junior year, I took Orgo my fall. I really enjoyed it. I really enjoyed Orgo. J. [Jimmy] Wu was an awesome professor. I wrote his tenure rec. I hope he got tenure. I actually don't even know. I should find out. 'Cause he was really good. He was also really young looking. [Laughs.] So the first lab—so I wasn't used to him yet, so I didn't actually remember what exactly he looked like. He comes up behind me. He's like, "Hey, Sharang, how's the lab going?" [Laughs.] I turned around, I'm like, *Who's this random kid asking me that? I don't know who this is!* And then, I'm, like, "It's great." And it dawned on me, *Shit, this is my professor!* [Laughs.] And I was, like, "Oh, it's great, Professor Wu." [Laughter.] I'm like, *Who's this rando?*

He was really fun, J. Wu. He was a good professor, and he was very engaging in lecture. And I didn't do—I did—I mean, I was very happy with what—I got a B+ in Orgo, which I was very happy with because I recognize it was a very challenging class. I didn't do—I know I didn't put work into it as much as other students did. Like, they'd do book problems. I did book problems for one week, and then I stopped. I just stopped doing them. I was like, *Ugh, I don't want to do them.* And I still did well, so I'm, like,—that was—

After France was when I feel my work ethic has started to decline, maybe because—maybe because, like, in France I was not doing any engineering or science, and then I came back and was doing again lots of engineering and science, and I didn't want to. I don't know. [Sighs] I don't know.

Junior fall I took Orgo. Remember what else I took... I'll have to think back. I'll have to, like, look at it. I have a record of all the classes I take 'cause I like my classes and stuff. Winter I did—I changed major from the bioengineering to the engineering sciences major; I didn't have to do the second term of Orgo.

Oh, yeah, sophomore summer—Genetics. One of the best classes I took at Dartmouth. Really good class. Patrick Dolph. So fun. My lab partner was also super hot, which was kind of fun. And my lab TA was amazing. She was so cool. Her name's Archana. She's Indian. She was just, like,

amazing. I invited her to FaculTea 'cause she was so cool. Anyway—

Junior year I took—I think I did Acting for Musical Theater my junior year, which I didn't think was a very valuable course. I liked Acting 1. Acting Musical Theater I don't think was a good choice, taking it.

I took Movement Fundamentals. Sorry, I took Movement Fundamentals my sophomore year, sophomore winter. It changed the term I took it, and I hated it. I didn't think I learned anything from it, while I'd been looking forward to it. Everyone told me it was an amazing class; you learn so much. But the term I took it, they changed it, so I didn't learn anything. But anyway.

I took [Michael] Bronski's film class, which was great. I took Sociolinguistics with [James] Stanford. That was great. I really enjoyed Sociolinguistics. Also, junior year I lived in Hitchcock, the French affinity housing, and that was really fun, and I became really good friends with Clément, actually, the French exchange student. He was really cool. I really liked Clément. We even joked that, oh, if he ever needed a guy for a threesome, he'd call me. [Chuckles.] We spoke—we hung out a lot.

I didn't say this: Sophomore year was when I went to Ivy Q for the first time at Penn! *That* was really cool. That was, like,—I remember being—I was, like, *Wow! There are so many really cool queer people!* (Well, I said “gay” then, but I would say “queer” now.) Because at Dartmouth we had a very small queer population, out queer population. But at Ivy Q at Penn, I was like, *Oh, my God!* Also my really good family-friend went to Penn, and so I declined housing at Penn from Ivy Q people and I stayed with him.

That was really nice. I remember we skipped one Ivy Q event to go walking in the city together and catch up, and we went to the science museum, which was ridiculously silly for us, but was fun because he was my friend, you know? He's one year older than me. He works for—he's, like, the one person I'm, like, really jealous of—no, not the *one* person. He's, like, one person who I am, like, insanely jealous of because he's so smart, so cool. He's, like, athletic. He is, like, cute.

He is—he did a management technology degree at Penn and is now working for Microsoft and earning a lot and being successful. And I’m, like, *I’m so jealous of you, Perky*. I admire him intensely. But that was really nice.

And so junior year I went to second Ivy Q at Columbia. That’s when I met the two people who I have been dating since. That was great, that I met them there, at Columbia. Nick was my host, so I slept with my host on the first night.

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: Yep, that happened. And then I went to visit one for spring break, and I visited Nick for summer, so—

But—yeah. So junior year was nice. I was dating Shaun and kind of was with the other two, too. I called them every weekend. Every Sunday I called them. Now I call them more often, but anyway—[Chuckles.] Because now we’re, like, dating, dating for years now. I called them a lot. That was nice.

Junior year. I think junior year was when I—no, starting sophomore summer, I started actually doing more organizational stuff at Dartmouth. I organized the Gender Neutral Orgasm workshop at Dartmouth, ‘cause I’d seen that at the Transcending Boundaries conference. I had—a lot of work. I got—lots of sponsorships I had to get. I got Alpha Phi and BG to sponsor partly. I got Women and Gender Studies and all these to sponsor. It was a lot of work. I worked with Kari Jo and Pam [Misener] on that. It was really good. It was a very successful workshop. I was very proud of it. I was very proud of it.

Also when I think Jasper Hicks wrote his whole article about it, like, “Whoo, Sexperts, Ahhh,” and I wrote a reply. And I remember *The D* made it much more scathing than I wanted to. They edited it and made it meaner, which I didn’t like, but—

But anyway, then I was Pride organizer. I remember that was when I brought—junior year was when I brought Brent Corrigan, I think, the porn star, to come and speak. That was also a lot of work. I had to fly him over from California and

everything. Though, of course, like I said, Kari Jo and Pam did a lot, especially Kari Jo. She did so much. Kari Jo is great, by the way. I'm just saying. I saved a spot for her at graduation this year under my tickets, engineering graduation.

Also, one thing I forgot to mention: Sophomore year. So freshman year I started drill instructing, right? And I met Phyllis Ford, who was the French department admin assistant, and starting sophomore year she started inviting me to her house for Thanksgiving dinner. And she still does, and I still go. And I bought her a birthday present and everything. It was her birthday last week. And I'm planning on, when I'm at Tisch next year, for Thanksgiving, to drive up—I wouldn't drive. I'll take a bus—to come up to Vermont and have Thanksgiving with her family. I really want to. Like, Leah [Nicolich-Henken] was, like, "You should come to my family in New York." And Nick: "We should just go to Connecticut with my family." But I'm, like, "No, I think I want to go to Phyllis's," you know? She calls me –her—my American mom. [Chuckles.]

But junior year. Junior year, I took snowboarding. I took snowboarding, beginners, three times: junior year, senior year, and fifth year. But I started taking it in junior year, and I'm, like, *This is amazing!* I *really* liked snowboarding. I just liked it so much! So I took it three times, even though I was progressing very slowly. That was something I discovered junior year.

Also I was vice president again of the Co-ed Council. That was—yeah, that was cool. I guess.

Yeah, so that was junior year. Like I said, I was doing more organizing. I went on my ASB... that year? Or was it—no, my ASB was sophomore year. I didn't mention that. My ASB—I went—no. No, no, no, no, no. Freshman spring break I did Dartmouth Global Leadership program. Ha-ha "Global"! It was in Vermont. But the idea was good. We lived at the Orgo farm, and—this was freshman spring break. I mean, we helped at the high school in Vermont. I taught chemistry and French, and that's where also I realized: *You know what? I really like teaching.* I mean, in high school I

liked it a lot, but I liked it a lot here as well. And we did a leadership program in the evenings—afternoons.

The following year, we went to the Cheyenne River. No. I don't know the order. The following year, I think I did Language in Motion. A smaller program. Yeah, right before I did France I did Language in Motion, which was a small program. I gave two presentations.

The following year, I think junior year spring break was when I did Cheyenne River ASB. We went to a reservation, a Lakota reservation in South Dakota. It was very rewarding 'cause it was something I never experienced before. It was, like, *Whoa! This is very new for me.*

Also I started becoming more interested in Native American stuff because one of the former Bureau of Indian Affairs chiefs had spoken at East Wheelock, and I'd gone to dinner with her, and I'd realized, *Wow! Native peoples are very invisible in this country.*

That's also when I met you, my sophomore year, right? Yeah. I met you my sophomore year at BG—at—ah! OPAL's thing. Ah! Ah! I said it, like, ten minutes ago, half an hour ago, an hour ago. What was it called?

WOMICK: DPP.

BISWAS: DPP, not DGLP. Yeah, DPP. That was cool. So I became friends with you, and I became friends with Lin Bo then. That was nice.

Anyway, so then—so that was junior spring break—junior spring was junior spring. Junior summer—the summer after my junior year—so spent it New York. Stayed with Nick for a bit, which was very nice. And then I went to Germany on the engineering exchange program. Loved Germany. My boyfriend was also in Germany at that time. I didn't get to go see him, but I got to Skype with him, and we played Dungeons and Dragons online. The new computer game had come out, and we played that a lot together. But I hated the internship. I was like, *This is so boring.* But I liked Germany. And we went to Berlin and met some of the FSP kids, and then they came here—to Hamburg and met

some of us. But...I hated that. I didn't like the internship. I don't tell people that always.

And then I went—I came back. It was senior fall, and I was, like, *Why am I doing engineering again?* I realized I didn't really like most of my engineering courses. I liked some of them. And I realized that *I don't think I want to be an engineer.* And it was freaky because it's senior year. But I'm, like, *Well, I'm gonna just finish the degree. I'll finish it, and I'll finish the fifth year because having a B.E. is valuable. Having a B.E. from an Ivy League school is very valuable.* [Chuckles.] So I just decided, *I'm gonna stick with it.*

But I realized I didn't want to be an engineer. So I remember looking for an internship for summer after my senior year, and I was talking to this alum. He was another gay Indian, so he—so I'm, like, *Oh, I'll talk to him*—who did Thayer, but he didn't want to do engineering either. He told me I should do management consulting, 'cause he was one of those consulting types. He's going to business school now. He probably must have finished by now. And I'm, like, "Oh. Okay."

And I went though the whole corporate recruiting thing, and I went to this one workshop where—like, What Is Recruiting? or How to Do the Case Interview. And they're talking about what do you do on a daily basis. I'm, like, [sadly] *This seems really, really boring to me.* [Long, sad pause.] So I didn't want to do that. I'm like, *Well, I don't want to do engineering. What do I want to do? Like, I don't know.*

And then I realized—so senior year, I started working in the game design lab again 'cause I had taken the class freshman year, and I started working again and I was like, *I really like this, you know? It's kind of fun.* So senior year—no, fifth year (which is now)—no. So what I did summer after senior year is just worked on campus, which is kind of a lame—was kind of a bad...—that's not what I was gonna say. Not bad in, like,—like, I didn't do anything worthy, I think. I kind of wasted it, doing stupid stuff. But, like, whatever. I lived in Tau.

Then senior—so fifth year, took by microbio in fall. I only took two classes. First time I only took two classes because it's

illegal for you to take two classes if you're an undergrad and you're foreign. It's legal, but you have to get OVIS to write you a letter saying yes, you're legally doing this. It's really complicated, so I never did. But fifth year, you can take two classes, so I took two classes, 'cause I'm like, *I'm taking Engines 89*, the huge project course, the capstone course. Like, thesis almost. And I took microbiology, *one* of the best classes I've taken, microbiology.

Oh, I also took, my senior spring I took my first creative writing class. I took Jeff Sharlet's nonfiction class. He gave me a citation, and I got one of my pieces published. So that was great. And I'm, like, *Hmm. Interesting*. And so I took his class again in winter. It was much harder, the second one, even though it's meant to be easier. But because the scope was different—I'm really bad at writing about personal experiences. And that's what it was about. And everyone else was—I have—Dartmouth—well, let me finish first.

So junior year. Then junior winter, I took Stats, Engines 93. Good class. I'm TA'ing right now. It's a good class. I liked 93. I like statistics. I finished my project, poop class, and did this creative writing class. I think I did badly in all my classes. I didn't do as well as I could have in any of them. I got a citation again in English, but I felt I did bad work except for one piece, which [chuckles] was about sleeping with straight guys. My prof said it was my best piece. But anyway—

I feel like—I feel I made a big mistake in my choice of major. I think I shouldn't have majored in engineering. I think I hated it. I didn't realize it until it was too late, because every time I took as few engineering classes as I could—I took—we're allowed, if we're majoring in engines, we're allowed to take some natural science courses. I took as many of those as I could because I like biology and chemistry. I liked those classes.

And then whenever I took engines I ended up not liking it, but, like, I didn't think about it. I was, like, *Oh, I'll like the next one*. I only liked two engines classes. Maybe three.

Then... it was too late, there's not much to do. But I didn't like engineering. I feel if I could redo it, I wouldn't redo Dartmouth. I really like Dartmouth. I really like the

opportunities that I had. I had lots of opportunities. I graduated cum laude, which I was surprised. I didn't know I was going to be cum laude. I won a senior award. I won the Ezekiel Webber 2000 award for LGBTQ activism, which is kind of cool. I also got \$100, which is also kind of cool. That was nice.

But if I could redo it, I'd probably change my major. I might still do engines modified with something, 'cause it's career-wise practical. I might do CompSci, 'cause I think I like that. And it's also very practical career-wise. I would have taken more Studio Art. Like, some of the classes I wouldn't have taken; I would have replaced them with some sculpture or animation, some more artsy kind of classes.

I graduated. At the moment, I have seven academic citations. One of them is in math; the others are French, French, French, English, English, English, so I was, like, — and when I told Andrew, he was, like, “Yeah. Why am I not surprised, like, it's in English?” And I'm, like, [Makes a face].

I feel I did a wrong choice in major, so when I was applying to grad sc— I didn't know— I had no idea what I wanted to do after— I applied for internships in product design firms and things and didn't get any of them. It's easier for foreign people to get jo— so there were two reasons I applied to grad school. It's easier for foreign people to get jobs with a graduate degree, and I felt I wanted to study something that actually I liked, you know? I mean, I liked core subjects, just not my major.

So I applied to five programs. Two of them were similar: the Tisch program that I'm going to, and MIT has a program at the Media Lab, which is very similar. MIT's comparative media lab— media program, I applied to. I applied to Cornell's human factors program and Tufts' human factors program. I ended up getting into Tufts and Tisch, and I ended up picking Tisch because they finally got through with financial aid for me, which is why I ended up picking them, 'cause I really want to go there, even though I liked Tufts. I wouldn't have applied if I hadn't. Like, I wouldn't have paid a \$70 fee if I didn't like the program, right?

And I hope that I will like—I think I will like it, but I hope I like it and I hope I do well, and I'm really worried because Dartmouth killed a couple of things in me. Dartmouth made a lot of good things, but it also killed two things. One thing is my interest in mathematics. I like math a lot. I still like math, but, like, the engines major says you don't have to take these math classes; you should just take these engines classes and it'll teach you the math along the way. I did that, 'cause I'm like, *Well, if I can not take these classes, I'll take other classes, you know?* 'Cause I liked taking other classes. And that was a mistake. I felt over my head in the math that we were doing.

In my Engines 23 class, Distributed Field Systems—I know nothing from that class. You ask me a single thing, I will know nothing. And I didn't know diff. eq. [differential equations] enough for that. And I feel like in upper-level class—like, my math,—I used to be really good at math. I used to like math. I used to love calculus. Not anymore. I think the Engines major did that to me. It also made me a lot less self-confident because I used to be really—well, I was very big-headed in high school, right? When I came here, I became less big-headed.

But I think now I'm a lot less self-confident. I doubt constantly, like, what I'm good at, if I'm good at anything. Like, will I be good at anything? Like, will I ever get a job that I like *and* will be able to perform well in? Like, am I making the right choice going to art school? Like, what if, like, everyone—I will look at some of the people who joined the Facebook group—like, graduates from RISD. And I'm, like, *Oh, wow! So you know a lot of design and art already.* Things like that.

And I'm, like,—I'm really worried that I will be pathetic. 'Cause I don't know if I'm good at—I don't think I'm good at engineering. I don't know if I'm good at sciences. I don't know if I'm good at art. I don't think I'm good at art. I don't know. I don't know what I'm good at.

I envy people who know kind of what they're good at because it's just like—no. I'm, like, *Okay, I want this kind of hybrid technology/art program* 'cause I tell people that,

“Yeah, I have technology skills, but I have artistic bent, and uhhh” I don’t know if that’s true. I just tell myself that.

One thing I’m good at is languages, but—and I’m freaking out because I’m, like, *Okay. So I’m going to Tisch and what if, like, I fail horribly and do really badly?* I won’t fail horribly because I think it’s hard to fail unless you’re not doing any work at all in these kinds of schools. You know, if you put some work in, you’ll be fine. But I won’t do well, maybe.

And I really worry about that. And I think that happened at Dartmouth, partially maybe because of my major, and I picked it, and—I don’t know. Maybe they don’t do a good enough job of discouraging you from majors. That might be a silly thing to say. They do a great job of *encouraging* you to take a major, but maybe they should be more discouraging. For all—not just for engineering, but like for all majors. Say, “Do you really like”—I don’t know.

You know how they say—I remember at the Lodge, when the professor gave a talk, it was all about “find your passion. If there’s one thing I can tell you: Find your passion.” I never found my passion in college. Like, that’s stupid. I didn’t. And I feel really bad. I’m, like, a lot of people know what they’re doing and are successful. Andrew Bloomgarden is, you know, working in computer science and doing really well and living with his girlfriend and everything. Andrew Ceballos: doing a Ph.D. at Stanford in electrical engineering. Like, what the hell? Nick Knezek ended up working for NASA, and now he’s going to grad school in physics.

And a lot of my friends ended up realizing they really liked something, or not, and doing that. Aryeh, who was super confused initially, is going for [an] atmospheric science Ph.D., and he’s really, *really* excited.

I never did.

And I’m not the biggest fan of sparkling water, but whatever. I’m just drinking it.

That feels weird. I felt—I don’t know. It feels uncomfortable. Like, I’m supposed to, like—like, my parents at one point were like, “What do you want to do?” I’m like, “I don’t know.”

And they were kind of like, “What do you mean, you don’t know?” Like “I really don’t know!” And I remember reading articles about how the new generation is much more like that and stuff, but that’s because, I mean, the whole point of having a good standard of living is so that you can, like, live. I don’t want to live a job and have a job that I don’t enjoy. Like, I don’t want to just be miserable when I go to work.

I was talking to Gus Browning, right? Gus Browning did an econ major. Now he’s a game designer for League of Legends, okay? I was talking to him in fall. He was online. I’m like, “Hey, Gus, I haven’t spoken to you in a while,” and we were chatting. He was saying he goes to work, does all this game design and comes back home and says, *Wow, I had so much fun today! Now what do I do?*

And I’m, like, *That is so cool!* I want to be able to enjoy my life that way. There’s no point—I don’t believe in afterlife and all that kind of stuff. So there’s no point if—not even have—the majority of your life goes to working at something you don’t like. Like, what’s the point? Survival? There’s no point in surviving if you’re bored. Like, I don’t see a point in living and not liking living.

And so I want to find my passion. I want to work in a field that I really like. I want to do what I really like. Otherwise there’s no point. And I don’t think I’ve found that. They talk about finding your passion at Dartmouth. I did not. Did not happen to me. [Pause.] I feel really bad about that.

I’m not saying Dartmouth is bad. I liked Dartmouth. I mean, there are horrible things about Dartmouth, but there’s horrible things about every place. But that is something that I did not get out of Dartmouth. Dartmouth failed in trying to make me find my passion, which is what Dartmouth says they’ll do, but it didn’t work for me. I found that I didn’t like engineering. [Chuckles.]

WOMICK: One down.

BISWAS: Out of how many gajillion, right?

WOMICK: [Chuckles.] So during your five years here now, how would you say that the college has changed?

BISWAS: I've been through how many deans and how many presidents? Like, three presidents, fourth one coming. Three deans. How many OPAL heads? I don't even know. Lots of new buildings. Foco changing; Visual Arts Center; Life Sciences Center; Gilman is no longer operative.

One thing we talked about a lot is my freshman year there were very few out queer people. We all knew each other. Like, we could count how many there were. We'd know each other. Now there are a lot more out queer people, but there's also less of a community feeling to the queer community, which is good and bad. There are lots of out queer people, which is significant, I think. Like, freshman year it wasn't—yeah.

I feel—well, I wasn't here for all those things, but from my freshman year experience, a lot more activisty stuff has been happening, which I support. That's a big thing.

[Sighs.] I can't—apart from those two things (and the buildings), and I don't know if I can answer that question really well because all I know is my experience, right? There are more engineers, more people interested in engineering. People seem shorter,—

WOMICK: [Chuckles softly.]

BISWAS: —the freshmen. Yeah, I think that's—I mean, I also don't know what's a change because Dartmouth is changing or because I'm growing up, because I remember freshman year it was much more acceptable for you to randomly talk to people and say hi and become friends with people. It's not as acceptable as you grow—

Also, Trips freshman fall—it's super okay to be friendly, and after freshman fall, it's like, not okay anymore. So, like, in a way, yeah, Trips is a lie sometimes.

One thing I always talk about is the Lodge dance party, right? After eating stuff, the Lodge dance party is so fun. And *not* sketchy at *all*. The Lodge dance party is just *fun*. And everyone's enjoying themselves, and there's just no, like, weird sketchiness. And the moment you come back to

campus, the first frat party—dance party you go to, it immediately becomes sketchy. Just that. But anyway, so some things.

I don't know if the changes I feel are necessarily because I'm moving up in the Dartmouth ladder or because Dartmouth is changing. But more out people and stuff is definitely true. I definitely see that, so. Could have been because OPAL started now putting in your application package, you can check "Are you interested in receiving information about the queer community, LGBTQIA, whatever, community at Dartmouth?" And so that must have made more people comfortable being like, *Oh, yeah, I can be out at Dartmouth.* Maybe. But, yeah, that's a big change, I've felt.

WOMICK: So who would you say is a part of the, quote, "Dartmouth community" if there is such a thing as the Dartmouth community?

BISWAS: I don't know. So, like, the—people like talking about Dartmouth has a community to it, a community feel and things. I remember one of my friends transferred to Brown, and she was telling me how the one thing she misses is the sense of community at Dartmouth, even though I think she's really happy at Brown. And I'm glad she's happy and she found where she wanted to be.

I don't know if we can say there's a sense of community. I don't really know, because there *are* a lot of different divisions. There are lots of divisions, and there are lots of people that don't keep track of each other. And, like, I knew a lot of people, but I'm very social. But I wasn't, like,—I don't know. It's hard to say Dartmouth is a community because there are so many different people, and it's—it's, like—yeah. And people don't always get along with each other. And, like, you can see that the athletes and the nonathletes don't often interact, and I don't know any women athletes, for example, who are in the mainstream sports, not like the club sports and things. Like, I don't know basketball players or volleyball players or all those. I know rugby players and, you know, things like that. Also because a lot of rugby people are in the queer circles. That might be why.

And, like, I don't know the big names in the frat circle. I used to, maybe, my year, but just because they were '12s—but otherwise I don't. And, like,—I don't know. I think it's hard to say "Dartmouth community." I think there are Dartmouth communities, but—yeah. I don't know.

WOMICK: Fair enough.

Do you think there are any people that have a better or easier time fitting in at Dartmouth or who are definitely—

BISWAS: Yeah. I know because I've talked to—I was talking to one of my friends once, the night before I had sex with him. That was fun. But anyway—and he was telling me how he never felt like he fit in at Dartmouth, and there are people who say they don't fit in at Dartmouth, and there are people, sadly, who say that they will never come back to Dartmouth when they graduate, which is very sad, of course. But, like, I'm not gonna say that that's bad. But it's *sad* that Dartmouth did something wrong with them and that they don't want to come back to Dartmouth.

I think I had a great time at Dartmouth. I also think that a large—you can't *blame* Dartmouth because what are you gonna blame, the trustees? They don't control this kind of thing, right? A lot of it is the students, and you have to find your own place, I feel. I think that's true in any college, though, or any place, that you have to create your own opportunity. I tell people, when I do tours—so I'm a Thayer tour guide, right? I tell them—I'm, like, "Dartmouth has a *lot* to offer. We also have an Ivy League budget, which is a lot. So there are lots of opportunities, but you have to take them yourself. You have to find all those research opportunities and foreign study programs. They're not going to tell you, 'Do this, do this.' You have to do it yourself."

I feel similar to the community—like, you need to—you have to find—and obviously—I mean, I'm not taking a position either way, that, *Oh, it's, like, your fault if you don't enjoy Dartmouth, or It's Dartmouth's fault if you don't enjoy Dartmouth.* I think it's much more complex than that. But I think it has to be both. The administration has to do stuff, but also students have to do stuff. And a lot about Dartmouth is, like, finding your place. And...you have to try. You have to

do it. And some people are very lucky. They manage to find their place. I think I did, right? Not in my academic major. Like, engineers are notorious for, like, “Thayer. Ah!” [Makes dismissive sound] Thayer!

I’m one of the class marshals for the engineering school. I *don’t* know why. Like, really. But I’ll accept it. [Both chuckle.] But, like, I was looking at the Thayer class marshals. Many of them take their photograph, the class marshal photograph, in Thayer. I’m like, [makes dismissive sound] *Hell, no! I’m taking mine in East Wheelock.*

So some people don’t find that, and it’s very sad. And I don’t know how to address that part. Whatever. Like—I think it has to be effort on both people’s parts.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Have you ever, during your time here, felt like you didn’t belong or like you were on the outside?

BISWAS: I feel always that I’m very stupid and not intellectual and smart enough. I feel that a lot. But I don’t feel that—I have never felt out-—like, not part of Dartmouth. I’ve never felt like I’m not a Dartmouth student or, like, people won’t accept me here. I’ve never felt that. Ever. In that way. I’ve only felt, like, *Why am I here? I’m not smart. Or Why am I an engineer? All the engineers are really smart.* That’s what I felt. Yeah. Maybe I was just fortunate.

WOMICK: How would you say that your time at Dartmouth has changed you as a person?

BISWAS: I’ve—I don’t know. Well, I’ve become more open-minded. When I came into Dartmouth—I grew up in the UAE. I was, like, *Oh my god, anyone who does pot must be, like, spawn of the devil,* for example. I’ve become more open minded that, yeah, you—you know. I’ve learned—I’ve become more intellectual. I’ve learned more than science. [Chuckles.] I have interacted with lots of different people.

I have def-—You know what they say about critical thinking. I think, yeah, that’s happened to me. Like, yeah, I’ve

developed critical thinking. Like, I think about things like that more.

France was big. I became more—I'm definitely more independent, I feel. Still not as independent—Nick, my boyfriend—*super* independent. I don't think I'm as independent as him, but I've become more independent, 'cause I lived a kind of a sheltered life in the UAE. You do if you're growing up in the UAE. Everyone does.

Can you hear me if I speak like that? [At a low volume.]

WOMICK: [Nods.]

BISWAS: Okay, good.

So that's happened. I've become more knowledgeable about the queer stuff, which is big. Funnily enough, I started truly figuring out what transgender meant because of a rugby player from AD. One night we were chatting, and he was saying to me, like, "This is what I think transgender means." And I'm, like, "You are so wise." He was a really cool guy. He was a really cool guy. He was—his name escapes me now, the guy who was in trouble for the blitz about President Kim. He's a really cool guy. I really liked him. He was very thoughtful. And he was telling me how he was trying to engage AD brothers in gender discussions and stuff. No, really.

But—it's a very nice view over there. You see how the hill is lit at the top and shadowy everywhere else? It's cool.

Yeah. I mean, I've grown up. Again, that's could be just me growing up. I'm totally independent. I've become more critical thinkingy. I have become more mature. I used to be less self-controlled [chuckles], I think, freshman year. I've become more thoughtful about my actions. I might have also become slightly more radical? I'm not sure about that. Some people would call me radical; some people would call me not radical. Maybe I'm moderate. I don't know.

I think I've learned to like people who I disagree with more than I did before. Like, I'm friends with people I disagree with, you know, on many counts. Like, Sterling [Beard], for

example, where I don't hold *many* of the views he has, but I like Sterling. He's not my best friend, but I still like him, you know? Like, I'm friends with you. I don't agree with *everything* you do, but I'm friends with you. I agree with a lot of things you do. I voted you to be vice president, right? Yeah.

WOMICK: How do you imagine your involvement with Dartmouth being once you leave here?

BISWAS: I want to be involved. I want to donate to Dartmouth a little bit, especially since a lot of the thing goes to financial aid. If I make lots of moolah, I will donate to Dartmouth and be, like, "You have to use this money to help foreign kids get internships." 'Cause they don't. It sucks.

I mean, I wanna—I do care about Dartmouth. I might be involved in DGALA, the gay and lesbian alumni group, maybe, because there's a lot of work that could be done there.

Yeah, I will come visit, definitely. I don't think I'll be one of *those* alums who's like, "Ohh"—but I'll come visit, especially as long as there are '14s, '15s and '16s still around, 'cause I know them. After that, I'll probably come a lot less. [Chuckles.] I don't know '17s or anything like that.

I know I won't donate a lot initially 'cause I don't have money, but a little bit 'cause I like the idea that it's going to financial aid, and I think education is important. I think on the whole, Dartmouth gives a very—I believe in the education philosophy of Dartmouth, where—trying to be liberal arts and holistic and stuff. I do think there are improvements.

That day that—you know, the special class cancel day. In my group session, we talked about, you know, they have a swim test? They should—as a requirement to graduate, there should be, like, diversity training or, like, learning-to-respect-other-people training kind of thing as part of graduation. That's more important than the really crappy swim test that we have. It isn't even a real swim test, right? I was talking to some people: like, a real swim test would be, like, get in a three-piece suit and jump in the water and do, like, four laps 'cause *that* will save your life one day. Doing a

dog paddle for that much won't save your life. You will die in a river. So we're talking about there are more important things, like learning how to respect each other and learning to deal with different people and stuff. So those—you know.

But I don't think I'll be, like, you know,—or I'm not planning, at least, to be, like, *I will run for trustee*. [Laughs.] *Or Alumni Council*. *Ahhh!* You know, that's not gonna be me. I'm not—I like Dartmouth, but I'm not, like,—I'm not the elite Dartmouth leader. I'm not gonna be president of Dartmouth. I don't know. I'm saying that now, right? But I'm not going to be president of Dartmouth later. I might be the next Phillip Hanlon. I don't know. Dartmouth alum president.

I feel I'll be distantly involved. Like, I'll try and join the alumni groups that I can, at least that I can afford. Apparently the Dartmouth Club of New York is really expensive? I've heard? So I might not join that [chuckles] while I'm a graduate student earning no money. But I'll—then I'll probably—like, Facebook groups and unofficial alumni groups, I'll try and join.

[Yawns.] I did—I overall—I was fortunate enough to have an overall very positive experience at Dartmouth. A lot of people don't. And I'm not saying this is Dartmouth's fault. Every school has people that didn't enjoy. But unfortunately, a lot of people had negative—and I'm not saying we should ignore that. We should *try* and create as many positive experiences as we can. Like, people are talking about—I remember when all those issues came up, people were talking about, “This happens at every school.” I'm, like, *It's true it happens at every school*, and that's one thing that I felt was badly marketed to the freshmen in that video. It felt like Dartmouth is a school that has all this—I felt like, *But every school has this*. But, on the other hand, some people were like, “This happens at every school,” we should—and I'm, like, *But we should still care about it, you know? It doesn't mean it's okay*. I was really glad we had that day, classes cancelled, where they were, like, “We want to try and address these issues.”

And, yes, if you're cynical it's a marketing gimmick and all that stuff, but, you know, it's up to the students as well to do things, and we should try and make things better at

Dartmouth, you know? Maybe as an alum I'll help do that? I don't know.

But I'll miss Dartmouth. It feels weird now 'cause last year, everyone was, like, "Boo-hoo, boo-hoo," but I was like, *Eh! I'll be here another year*—you know, another year that I probably won't enjoy very much because I'm gonna be in Thayer all the time, but...*now* I'm feeling bad again. I'm, like, *Oh, wow*. It feels like a frighteningly long time ago that I was, like, walking with Mike by East Wheelock, and the flower scent assaulted us, and we'd been fighting and we stopped fighting 'cause it was so nice.

Or, like, my friend and I were walking down the street. He hugged me 'cause I told him I'd fancied him. Or like,—you know, like, all these, like, small memories. Like, dancing with Kianna [Burke]—it was like a Chi-Gam dance or something—with Kianna—and she was, like, singing the song, and I liked the song a lot and I was really jealous that she knew the words, and I was like, *I want to know the words of the song*, and that was super fun.

Or, like, in the cabin, Agassiz Cabin for Strips, where Johnny was telling us, like, lots of Irishisms and, like, Irish words and how people at Oxford made fun [chuckles] of him for Irish words. [Laughs.] And that was really funny, 'cause we were all, like, "Whoo! Tell us about all this foreign stuff."

I remember talking with Nora [Yasumura] and preparing—I'm, like, "Okay, this is what I'm gonna talk about at DPP." And, like, preparing for that.

And then remember when—that was our—no, that might have been my year. I don't remember. Was it our year when Nate—that was when Phi Delt burned down, and Nate got a phone call, and he had to leave. And he was, like, "My house just burned down." And we were, like, "Oh, my god!" And, like, talking about that. I remember that.

Or, like coming back from Ivy Q—this year's Ivy Q I felt really different because the blizzard and—I don't know. I don't know. It was just weird. But last—all the other Ivy Q's I remember coming back being, like, *That was a surreal weekend*. Partly because I was really sleep deprived

[chuckles], but it was still very surreal. Because, like, going to Ivy Q was amazing. Amazing experiences each time.

But, because, like, going to the workshops and, like, all these queer people coming together and talking about these issues, and then I became an Ivy Q leader for the Brown Ivy Q and the Yale Ivy Q I was one of the Ivy Q leaders, and we gave a bid, so it's between Princeton and Dartmouth who gets Ivy Q next year. So it might happen at Dartmouth, right? If it happens at Dartmouth, I'll be so excited! If it happened at Dartmouth, I will definitely get involved with DGALA, and I'll try and get DGALA to do something at the same time.

'Cause that would be a very—we were talking, we were like, “Can you imagine 350 queer people brushing into Dartmouth?” Like, that would be so good for the campus, I think. And like, because, like, also that Dartmouth gets more Ivy Q tickets than any other school. Every school who hosts—the whole school gets more tickets.

We don't have that many out queer people at Dartmouth, but I'm sure if it happened at Dartmouth, we will target audiences who will want to attend these events and things. I think that would be great. And even if not just that, there will be a lot of interaction of people and stuff.

And the hosts who, like, host people—I think Ivy Q at Dartmouth is going to be amazing, and I wish I'd be here for that. That would make me so happy, to be here while Dartmouth hosted Ivy Q. But the years I was here, Dartmouth was not ready to host Ivy Q. Just, like, logistically. Collis was being rebuilt one year, this is happening one year, that was happening, the Hop was closed one year. Like, all our spaces were closed at some point the last few years.

But next year, if Dartmouth hosts Ivy Q, I will get involved with DGALA to try and do stuff. Even if I'm a grad student at Yale! [Chuckles.] Yale, what am I saying? Yale was where the last Ivy Q was. That's why. Even if I'm a grad student at NYU, I will try and make that happen. That's something that excites me. Yeah, that excites me about Dartmouth.

I'm going to sneeze. At some point it's gonna happen, but—yeah.

WOMICK: Is there anything we haven't talked about yet or that I haven't asked you that you'd like to cover?

BISWAS: I don't know. I mentioned how—I had an exit interview. If you do your B.E., you get an exit interview. And I remember telling Holly [Wilkinson]—I'm, like, "Yeah, I did not like my major, and I think it's"—I don't know. Like, the whole thing about finding your passion and stuff and finding your—I don't know. It's—it feels kind of weird, because it's hard to do that. At least for me it's hard to do that; a lot of people did it.

I feel—one thing, also, was weird. So Columbia—how they pick their valedictorian—I know a lot about Columbia. My boyfriend's at Columbia. How they pick their valedictorian was they pick—out of the top 10 percent, they pick the person who did the most student leadership and things like that. I think that's the best way of doing it. Like, often—I've been to many graduates, I'm like, *Who are you? I have never seen you before.* Even the 12s, I knew one of the four valedictorians. *I've never heard of you guys before.*

It's weird because Dartmouth advocates so much than just—more than just grades. Like, they like you to be involved in all that stuff, but when it comes to being valedictorian, like—like, while it's great having a titled valedictorian, I don't think they should be the class speakers. I think the person who speaks to the class are people who were involved in student leadership a lot of student activities or something more than just a 4.0. That's one thing I've always felt.

I feel it is challenging for Dartmouth to address as administration a lot of the issues that I'm bringing up. Like, I kind of—what the dean of the faculty said—he's like, "Yes, the admin can take all these measures, but it's up to the students to"—which is—yeah. I mean, I agree the admin can do stuff, but, like, yeah, the students have to do stuff as well. I mean, someone vehemently shaking her head being like, "No, the admin has to do everything." I'm, like, "That's not possible." The admin can't change drinking culture. You know, that's an American culture, right?

So, like, yeah, a lot of the problems—but, like,—I don't know. I am not smart enough to figure out ways to solve those

problems, you know? I believe education is gonna save the world, so educating people about these issues is the most important—and not just orientation. We talk about it at orientation, but then you forget stuff, and you get involved with real-life stuff at Dartmouth, I think, during Dartmouth.

Like, you know the Great Issues Scholars program? Talk about a way of, like—not Great Issues Scholars—but, like, use that to talk about things like sexual assault and gender dynamics and, like, treating other people the same and tolerance—or not tolerance. That's a bad word. Accepting people's other beliefs and things. Yeah.

I had a positive experience at Dartmouth. I don't think everyone else does. I was listening a few days ago after the Stonewall Lecture. One girl was talking about how after she was part of the protest, everyone was treating her so badly she had to go to mental health issues—or, I mean counseling. It was terrible to think this one woman is having such a terrible experience at Dartmouth. It was horrible.

One of Talene's [Monahan] pieces—one of the women she interpreted said, "More telling about Dartmouth is the reaction that these protests got." And I'm, like, "Yeah." Like, I disagreed with the protests. I did not think they way they happened was the right way to happen. I do believe that they have a right to protest, and I do believe the issues they were bringing up were very important. So, while I believe I didn't like the way they did the Dimensions protests, I still think they had a right to do so.

And the backlash they've been getting is terrible. And I think if Judicial Affairs does something—because they might have broken some Judicial Affairs stuff, maybe—I think it's totally between them and Judicial Affairs. It doesn't involve anyone else. Just like any other person who breaks any other rule at Dartmouth. I don't think the campus has a right to know what happens to these students. It's their business. I don't think they should be excessively punished because if they did break any rule, it's not something heinous because they went into a function kind of thing. Like, that's not a heinous rule they broke.

I think the issues they brought up are very important. But the telling thing was that a lot of people got really angry at them and gave all these death threats. And some people were, like, “Oh, yeah, but everyone gets death threats.” But that doesn’t make it okay. If I were to receive death threats, I wouldn’t think, *Oh, I’m fine with it*. I would be very upset about it. And so that one was very—the woman she was channeling during that piece was very—I think that was good. Like, more telling is the reaction people got.

And I think a lot of people—we sat up in Phi Tau the day before the class were cancelled. Six or seven of us sat in Phi Tau and debated this for three hours. We discussed. We talked about, “What is going on? What is happening? Duh-duh-duh-duh.” And at one point it got heated. Someone got angry at Blake [Neff]; Blake got angry at someone else, unfortunately. But on the whole, I think it was a very good discussion. We were talking about, like, why—should we have the class cancelled? What is the point to this? What issues did the protestors bring up? Were they justified in doing this? Even if they were or were not, what—you know? That was really positive, and I feel if it happened in Phi Tau I’m sure it happened in other places, you know?

I also got to second hand experience sexual assault at Phi Tau. I didn’t experience it. Something second hand. I know a number of people who were sexually assaulted. I know a number of them pretty well and personally. I know one of them who dropped out of Dartmouth because she was sexually assaulted on more than one occasion. She was one of my closest friends at Dartmouth. I know she liked Dartmouth. She liked it. She joined a sorority. She liked it. She really believed in their work. She really believed in, like, her education here. She was doing a major that she really enjoyed and stuff. She was enjoying it.

There were people I only found out a lot later that they’d been sexually assaulted. There were people I knew had been sexually assaulted; I didn’t know it had been at Dartmouth.

Freshman fall, when I was drill instructing, one of my drillees told me—she knew women who had been sexually assaulted by faculty. And I was like, “Whoa!” And she’s like, “This girl is

never gonna tell anyone that.” And I’m, like, “Whoa!” Now, that was freshman fall. I had no idea how to deal with that knowledge. I didn’t know what to think, what to do, you know?

I was involved with, in my fraternity, multiple cases of sexual assault by members of the house. I’m going to say “alleged” because, like, it’s not my place to say it was sexual assault, because I was not one of the two, and we can’t always say. One of them, we know was very violent. That happened in the past, and while it happened in the past, I had to still be part of it because we had judicial processes. And we know that was a violent case.

And there were two other things while I was there. And it was a not a violent case, and there was a lot of difficult decisions and difficulty in—I don’t know, it was just very complicated. Which I—and I know that sexual assault is a very complicated issue, but it was really—we felt—I felt powerless there. ‘Cause I’m like, *I don’t know what to do*. I think maybe more resources at Dartmouth should exist. More counseling maybe is what I hear about is a big problem, that when people have these issues you can’t talk to anyone, is what I’ve heard.

And, yes, peer advisers exists, but peer advisers can only go so far. We’re trained slightly, and we know about stuff. But when you’re a peer adviser, right, like—we have some training, but we’re not—but I wouldn’t—if I had really—I wouldn’t just go to a peer adviser. I want to speak to someone who is trained really heavily. And I think that doesn’t exist, maybe.

I mean, come on. One of our really good friends committed suicide at Dartmouth right after she graduated because she couldn’t feel like she could talk to anyone. I tried to get her to talk to people. I tried hard. I remember. I tried setting up a meeting with her and other people. It didn’t work.

So...there are all these weird—it’s freaky. ‘Cause someone once told me the statistic that there’s always one attempted suicide a year at Dartmouth. That’s, like, monstrous! Like, one attempted suicide a year is a *lot* of attempted suicides a year. Like, come on! That’s, like, a monstrous statistic.

And, like,—so all these weird things. And I feel very upset, and I feel sad that after hearing this girl talk after the Stonewall Lecture about how miserable she was right now and how her mum came over to visit her, to, like, take care of her for a bit. (Awesome, 'cause I met her mum.) And, like, all this negativity towards her. It wasn't—it wasn't nice. It felt—it felt, like, dirty. It felt, like, *What is this Dartmouth we're in?* You know?

Like, we have both interacted civilly with people we don't agree with. You were friends with Roger Lott, right? I don't think you agree with many of his ideas, right? I don't agree with *lots* of Blake Neff's ideas. Like, I disagree vehemently with many of his fundamental beliefs. But I feel I'm still civil with him, you know? And I think he's not a bad person at heart, you know?

And I don't see why—I don't want to be, like, sanctimonious, that I'm a good person, but I don't see,—like, with this girl, for example, I don't agree with her on some counts. I agree with her on more counts than not, but, like, the way she handled the protest was like—I didn't like that. But I still respect her. And I, more—I also respect what she was trying to do, you know? Like, I posted on Facebook—I don't normally post *bhashan* on Face—sorry, that was Bengali. I don't normally post giant things on Facebook, but I felt there was so much going on that I needed to, that I don't agree with the methods, but these are students who felt so silenced by Dartmouth and so powerless that they felt they had to do something, and they did something. And I respect that a lot.

And even if I didn't, like,—like I said, Dartmouth has taught me to be, I think,—think about people who I don't like or don't agree with more maybe. But part of it, like, I'm not gonna be mean to you 'cause I don't agree with you unless what I don't agree with you is 'cause you're really mean. [Chuckles.] If you're like murdering people or something? Ahh. Then I'd be mean to you, probably.

But, yeah, it's very freaky. Hopefully—I hope that day of cancelling classes will help in the long run 'cause it looked very positive, yes. And we had those discussions, yes, but I really hope that things happen. I want to go to town meetings

and say, like, we should try and hold events with other groups.

One thing we talked about at our discussions is, like, groups should just try and hang out with each other more and learn about each other more and acknowledge that they exist. I think that needs to happen. I think GSX needs to do that, too. We should try holding events not just with people we've always held events with but with other groups. Like, it might be time to be, like, GSX, AD—do you want to—can we hold, like, an event at your house? You know? And people'd be, like, "Oh, that's weird." But that's what we *need*, right? If we're complaining that people don't pay attention to—this is an example: People don't pay attention to queer people or they don't realize queer people exist. We're gonna have to make ourselves known that we exist. Maybe with the groups that we feel are the most hostile. I'm not saying AD is the most hostile, but, like, that the idea of the frats—like, those frats especially are, like, hostile, right?

Yeah. That's—[Pause.] Yeah. I don't know. I don't know. [Pause.] Yeah. Yeah. I think that's it. [Chuckles.] I don't know what else I can say apart from Home Plate food: so much better than FoCo food. Home Plate was the best place to eat on campus. They had the best food, hands down. That might be sounding like a crotchety alum, "In mah day, the fo-o-d was be-e-tah at Dartmouth!"

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

BISWAS: But it's true. I have been through different phases of Food Court, many different phases of Food Court. Home Plate was *far* superior, and the old meal plan was a) cheaper for everyone and b) you could choose what you wanted to eat and plan very well, much better than now. I mean, you've been through both the meal plans. That. That. And that.

WOMICK: [Laughs.] Thank you.

BISWAS: No worries.

WOMICK: And nothing else before I turn off the machines?

BISWAS: I think I'm fine. Yeah.

WOMICK: Yeah?

BISWAS: Yeah.

WOMICK: Okay.

[End of interview.]