

Alice Liou, Class of 2013
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
February 28, 2013

AL-JABER: Today is February 28, 2013 and I'm at Rauner Library with Alice— can you pronounce your last name? I don't want to mispronounce it.

LIYOU: It's just LEW.

AL-JABER: LEW, okay. And you're a '13?

LIYOU: I'm a '13.

AL-JABER: Great. So before we get started, I just want to get a little bit of a sense of who you are and who you were before you came to Dartmouth. So could you tell me a little bit about your life before you came to Dartmouth?

LIYOU: Sure. I was born in Edison, New Jersey, and I grew up there my entire life. So I was literally born in the hospital that is in our town, and have lived there ever since—up until I came to Dartmouth. And the town is very interesting. It's actually shaped like a doughnut with a little town in the center called Metuchen. So I've lived in this doughnut town my whole life. And it's been really great. The town is really actually ethnically and racially diverse. And so in my public elementary school, middle school, high school, I had a bunch of friends who came from a bunch of different backgrounds. So I would go to Bar Mitzvahs and Bat Mitzvahs. I'd go to a bunch of like Hindu ceremonies that my friends went to. I had a bunch of friends who were just involved in a lot of different things, and I got to see a lot of different cultures in my town.

I think that's been a great experience prepping me to come to Dartmouth, and was really, really valuable. I went to a public school in the town. And it's actually, fortunately, a really great public school district. So I feel like I've learned a lot, and I really love the town that I came from, and it's really prepared me for Dartmouth.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm. And so with that sense of diversity, was that something you were looking for while you were looking at schools?

LIOU: I think it's something that I always actually took for granted. So growing up with it, it was always something I had access to, and I didn't really think about my racial or ethnic identity or that of my friends. It was just something that I was always surrounded by. I went to Chinese school, and so like I had a lot of experience with my own culture and my language, like my home—I guess my parents' culture and their language—while I was growing up. And so it's not anything I ever thought about. I guess I just sort of projected my experience onto everybody else and thought that that was a normal, like a typical developmental pattern. So I didn't really consciously look for it when I was choosing to come to Dartmouth or to any other school for that matter. It was just something that I figured would find me no matter where I went.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm. And did you feel like your high school prepared you in terms of—like academically, did it prepare you for Dartmouth?

LIOU: I think it certainly did. It's unfortunate, though, because at least in New Jersey, how the public schools work is that there are tracks. So there are different academic tracks based on your student achievement. And I think my high school prepared me and all the other people in the honors and AP track really well. Whereas I know a lot of students who were in the remedial classes; I don't think it prepared them as well. But I was very fortunate to be placed in those classes. And I think that was a pretty good preparation for Dartmouth.

AL-JABER: And how did you hear about Dartmouth? Are you a legacy or—

LIOU: No. My dad actually made me apply to every Ivy League school. I hadn't really actually visited any of them, and I was just like, okay, I'll do it. Like he was like I'll pay for it, and I agreed. So I didn't really consider Dartmouth very in depth at all. I was just like, this is something my dad is making me do. I'm going to fill out the applications. And it wasn't until after I got into Dartmouth that I actually visited the campus.

AL-JABER: So what was it that made you choose Dartmouth in the end?

LIOU: So when I had gotten.... I hadn't actually visited any of the schools because at the time my mom was undergoing chemo treatment. So I wasn't like visiting schools during my senior year at all. But once I got in, my dad and I went to a lot of different—not a lot of different schools. Like the three schools that I was really considering going

to for my undergrad, and he and I came to Dartmouth, and it was a cold, rainy day. It was literally maybe like 37 degrees outside, and there were people wearing shorts. And I was just like what is this place? But my tour guide was really, really excellent. She just spoke about the place so enthusiastically. And then I came back a couple of weeks later for the Dimensions Program. And I don't know. I think I felt a sort of chemistry with this place...if it's at all possible to feel chemistry with a place. And I just—I knew I wanted to be here.

AL-JABER: Okay. And can you talk to me about the Dimensions Program? What was that like? That sounds like it was a sort of...made you really think like this is the right place for you.

LIOU: Yes. It's actually funny because it's kind of controversial right now. They're think of eliminating the Dimensions Show of the Dimensions Program, which is where a lot of the freshmen, the current freshmen, sort of pretend to be prospective students for the day. And then do like, at the end of the day reveal that they're actually freshmen through this like song-and-dance show.

That was like a huge contributor to me coming to Dartmouth. It was this sort of event. I had been talking to a lot of prospective students all day, not knowing that they were freshmen and at the end, when we were sitting at the show, these people just stood up all around me and started singing and dancing. I really thought like, wow! This is a place where freshmen—I didn't think of them as freshmen; I thought of them as upperclassmen—are really willing to spend a lot of time and energy preparing to welcome prospective students and sort of be silly and show us that this place is known for its great academics, and we're really serious about some things. But we're also a lot of fun, and we're not afraid to laugh at ourselves. And there's just this really like high energy, and it seemed like there was really a strong school culture here. So I chose to come definitely after that. It was like, I'm sold on this place.

AL-JABER: Oh, nice. So can you talk to me about your experience coming into Dartmouth? How was it integrating into your community? And did you establish a sense of community really early on, or was it something you settled on later?

LIOU: Yes. I think I was really, really lucky. I came to.... So I went to Dimensions and went home, and didn't think about Dartmouth for a little bit. And then when it was time to apply for Dartmouth Outing

Club trips, the DOC first-year trips, I was just so excited. And I kind of just put up my preferences, not really thinking about them, and was placed with this really great group of freshmen. And we had two really great trip leaders. So one of my best friends at Dartmouth I met on my first-year trip. Like literally the first day I came to college, I met her.

AL-JABER: That was lucky.

LIU: So it was really, really lucky. And on our section, our trip section—so there are a lot of different trips that make up a section—on our trip section we met our two other best friends. So the four of us had met on basically the first week of college. And two of them happened to be floor mates, so the other two of us would go visit them all the time on their floor. And then their floor was also really close. So their floor kind of adopted us as freshman floor mates, even though we didn't live there.

So like that whole group of us, there were like ten of us that hung out a lot. We ate every meal together. It was really, really nice. And that was my community my first year here. I didn't really spend too much time with my own freshman floor. But it was really awesome to find a group of people like right as I got on campus. And we've been friends ever since.

AL-JABER: Can you talk to me about your different roles in the Dartmouth community?

LIU: Sure. Okay. So right now I am the student director of Tucker's Alternative Spring Break Trip Program, which I was also a trip leader for last year and a participant on the year before. I'm also the Pan Asian Community—one of the Pan Asian Community—interns with OPAL, the Office of Pluralism And Leadership, which has been really great. And within the Pan Asian Community, I've also been the president of the Dartmouth Chinese Culture Society, which has been also really great. I'm also involved in the Rockefeller Center; I've taken a lot of classes there, but also done research in the Policy Research Shop, and I'm also a Rockefeller Leadership Fellow this year. Aside from that, I guess I'm a member of Casque & Gauntlet, a senior society. And I don't know. I can't even think of all the things that I feel like I've had the privilege of working with.

AL-JABER: So how do you juggle these different roles? And sort of which community do you identify with the most?

LIOU: Yes. That's definitely a tough question. I'm involved in them, I think each of those three things that I mentioned; at least a part of me is involved in them each day. So I work at the Tucker Foundation every day now. And I really love being involved in that because it's been such an integral part of my experience at Dartmouth since my sophomore year. So like I said, I went on an ASB my sophomore year, and then led one my junior year. And now I'm directing the whole program this year. So it's been something that has really helped me figure out like what I want to do after Dartmouth, and has really allowed me to meet a great group of really dedicated people who love community service and are dedicated to the idea of social justice. So it's always something that I can make time for because it's a mission I really believe in.

In terms of the Pan Asian Community.... So like I said, before I came to Dartmouth, I didn't really think about my racial and ethnic identity that much because I was involved in a community where everybody was involved in their racial and ethnic identities without really even thinking about it. So when I came to Dartmouth, I actually wasn't involved in the Pan Asian Community right away. It was like some of my friends were Asian, but most of my friends were really diverse. We actually always joked that if Dartmouth followed us around and took pictures of us, we'd make a perfect organic brochure because we're just a great collection of racially diverse and like sort of academically diverse people.

So when I got here, I was like, I'm involved in this really diverse group again. I didn't really think about seeking out my own group, sort of like the racial and ethnic portion of me. But during my sophomore year, I kind of missed being around...like I'd gone to Chinese School my whole childhood, and I didn't really get to practice that anymore or talk about Chinese culture, celebrate Chinese New Year on campus. Like I didn't really know where to find that community that was really an important part of my childhood. So I joined the Dartmouth Chinese Culture Society.

I think being at Dartmouth has actually made me a lot more aware of...a lot more aware of my identity in that way, like my external identity on how others perceive me and like how I fit into the Pan Asian Community in general, because the Pan Asian Community is so broad. It includes like Southeast Asians, it includes East Asians, it includes like basically everybody on that whole side of the earth. So like it's been really interesting to learn from that, too. And I've

met a bunch of really supportive mentors through that program who've challenged me to think about race and ethnicity.

AL-JABER: Hmm.

LIOU: And then the Rockefeller Center.... I'm a government major, so like a lot of the things I do are in Rocky and Silsby. And so in that sort of sense, it's very in tune with my academic identity at Dartmouth.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm. So it seems like when you first came into Dartmouth, you recreated your high school sense of community. And then you allowed it to broaden a little bit. Is that a fair...?

LIOU: Yes, definitely. When I came into Dartmouth, I definitely thought...like I was very set in what I thought was right for me. And I think it was a lot based on what I'd experienced in high school. So I was very sure that I was going to be a government major because I loved history in high school. And so I was like, oh, the logical path for me is to become a government major, maybe do something with Rocky. And maybe eventually go to law school.

And I hadn't been a critical consumer of who I was and like what I would do after Dartmouth until.... I think it was just like a fortuitous happening of things. I took a class my sophomore fall called Ethics and Public Policy with Professor Swaine in the gov department. And I think that was like the catalyst in my academic trajectory that made me sort of branch out and do an Alternative Spring Break trip and sort of think more critically about what I was going to do after Dartmouth.

AL-JABER: So you were very lucky because from other people I've interviewed, a lot of people struggle to establish a sense of community really early on when they get here.

LIOU: Yes, yes.

AL-JABER: But going back a little bit, a lot of people when they get here, they immediately are drawn to the Greek culture just to establish that sense of community.

LIOU: Yes. Mm-hmm.

AL-JABER: So were you ever interested in it? And are you in a sorority?

LIYOU: Yes. So my freshman friends and I, like that group of us, would often go to the fraternities for like just social events and things like that. But I, my sophomore fall, I wasn't really sure if I wanted to join a sorority. So I took that term to wait it out and watched as a lot of my girlfriends went through the rush process. And then my sophomore winter I still wasn't sure, and I was like, oh, my gosh! it's happening. I should make a decision. I don't know which one to do. So I decided, okay, I'll rush; because if I don't do it, I might regret it later. So I didn't really think about it. This is like I, again, wasn't critically consuming what was going on. But I went through the whole process and then found myself in a sorority. I was just like, oh, this happened too soon. And I kind of liked the people I talked to, and this could be a really great thing for me. I should just try it out and see what happens.

So I was involved in a sorority for I guess a year and a half. It was really great in the sense that I got to meet a lot of upperclass women who at that point I like just had not had a lot of exposure to before. And I made some really great friends. But ultimately, at the end of last year, I just decided that it wasn't one of those things that really defined who I was. It wasn't one of those activities that I woke up every day and like craved to be a part of. And so I thought about it a lot and decided that I would no longer be affiliated with them.

AL-JABER: But what was it that initially made you skeptical about this whole idea of joining a sorority? Because a lot of people are against this whole exclusivity of it, that there's sort of this distinction between the sororities and everyone else.

LIYOU: Yes.

AL-JABER: On campus.

LIYOU: So my sophomore fall, I guess I just didn't know if that was.... Because sororities aren't open to everyone. So I didn't really know a lot of people in sororities because I didn't know a lot of upperclass women. And I'd never really been inside of a sorority before. And I had a really great group of friends. So I didn't feel the need to sort of get another group of friends. I was like kind of satisfied with where I was.

But that term a lot of my male friends, as well as a lot of my female friends—I'd say actually almost all of them—decided to rush a Greek organization. And I was taking three major classes. So I was

like, okay, I'll just wait it out and see how their experience goes. And if they like it or if they don't like it, I still have another opportunity in the winter. So I was like, I'll just take it easy this term. And the next term, I was like, okay, I can't take it easy because there's not another opportunity in the spring to do it if I don't do it. And I was planning to study abroad like the next year in the fall. So I was like, okay, let me just try it. And trying it turned out to go by so quickly that I found myself in a Greek-letter organization really soon thereafter.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm. So is that normal for people to like...I'm not quite certain about the politics of it.

LIOU: Yes.

AL-JABER: Is that normal for students? How's the procedure in terms of like quitting your sorority? Is that normal?

LIOU: Oh, in terms of de-pledging, it's been sort of difficult. Or like it had been really difficult.

So last year at the end of—sort of in the middle of the spring; it was actually Dimensions again for the 2016 class. And I was talking to a lot of prospective students through all the organizations I was involved in. And I found myself answering a lot of questions that were like: What are your most important commitments at Dartmouth? Like what do you love most about Dartmouth? And like what would you say...like how would you sort of describe the organizations you're with? Like how much do you like them? And all of the ones I mentioned were not my Greek-letter organization. And I was harping a lot on the fact that the second question was like how much do you like being a part of those organizations? Like how integral is it to your Dartmouth identity? And I realized that I didn't find my sorority as being really important to how I identified at Dartmouth. So I figured if that's the case, then.... I really wanted to spend my senior year aligning myself with organizations that I felt really I could vouch for and that I really felt were a part of who I am.

So I decided to sort of tell—I told the president that I had the intention of de-pledging, and I was open to whatever that process would look like. But it took.... And she was receptive to it at first. But most of this conversation was happening over email. And it took almost like this whole—it took up to the beginning of this term for anything to happen. So that's been two and a half terms—

AL-JABER: Oh, wow.

LIU: ...That it took me to be able to de-pledge. And I think, one, it's like I'm sure like the leadership in the sorority is really busy. As Dartmouth students, we always talk about how busy we are. So I'm sure she had a lot of things to worry about, especially as a president of an organization. But I think it's also just like not a common thing. I don't think a lot—I don't know if a lot of people de-pledge. But I imagine it's not a common thing. So the procedures are a little hard to get a handle on.

AL-JABER: Are you still in touch with some of the friends you made while....

LIU: Sure. A lot of the best friends I made in the organization were actually '12's, and the reason I decided to...like the reason I think I was really propelled to de-pledge was because so many of them were '12's. And I didn't feel really connected to the people in my sorority who were '13's. And so, as the '12's were graduating, I was like, this is a perfect time to sort of step away. But I think our friendships definitely extend beyond our affiliation with this common group.

AL-JABER: So how has your sense of community changed over time? Are you still friends with the DOC friends that you made early on?

LIU: Yes. Okay. So this is another.... I'm telling this story, and I realize more and more how lucky I am. I am still friends with those people that I mentioned to you before. Basically the first person I met at Dartmouth is still friends with me; and a lot of the people I met my freshman year, we still hang out all the time. And I'm really lucky to have been able to grow with these people for the last three and a half years.

But I think my sense of community has definitely grown. Through the Alternative Spring Break Program, I've met so many more really close friends. I think it's mostly because having been able to do service together and reflect a lot on what it means and like how it's going to affect what we want to do with the rest of our lives. It involves a lot of deep conversations, has brought a lot of us close together. And, yes, I don't.... Last year I made a conscious decision that I was just going to ask people to lunch.

AL-JABER: That's a really good idea.

LIOU: Yes. Halfway through the term I like noticed that a lot of the time at Dartmouth, we run into someone and really, Hey! We should get lunch sometime. And it's sort of like this thing you just say in response to seeing someone. And when someone would say that to me or if I really meant it to someone, I would just ask them on a lunch date right then and there. And like, pick a time; let's talk about it right now. Because people are always like, I'll email you about it.

AL-JABER: They never do.

LIOU: And then it never happens. So I made a conscious decision to do that. And I've actually like been really pleased with sort of the community I've built, you know, having a meal with someone. It's really nice to connect with people about whatever they're feeling that day.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm. So a lot of what this project seeks to do is sort of find out how different members of the Dartmouth community went through times where they felt like insiders or outsiders. And have there been times where you felt like.... How would you see yourself? Do you see yourself as an insider in the Dartmouth community?

LIOU: That's very interesting. I don't think I've ever thought about this very thoroughly. And I've been talking a lot about how I haven't like been—like I wasn't an active consumer or a critical consumer of my identity in a lot of ways. I just kind of—I was these things and was involved in these groups, especially with race. And so I can actually pinpoint like a really specific incident that just happened at the beginning of this term where I felt like an outsider. Actually my friend Huan and I, who was one of the friends, like first friends, I made at Dartmouth, we wrote this article together.

AL-JABER: Yes, I've read it.

LIOU: In conjunction.

AL-JABER: It's very powerful.

LIOU: Thank you. So we were sitting in FoCo—so I guess the Class of 1953 Commons—together one Wednesday at probably the third week of term. And we were just talking, like hanging out. We've been friends, well, since literally the first week of school. And so I had not thought about, like until after this incident, I hadn't thought

about like, oh, do people see us as like just hanging out, self-segregating because we're both Asian, we're both Chinese?

Anyway. We were sitting together, and we were eating lunch. And towards the end of our lunch, this student, a male student, walked from behind me—and Huan was sitting across from me—so he walked from behind me like towards Huan, and when he approached our table, he spoke in sort of gibberish Chinese. Like sort of mocking Chinese. Clearly he had no sort of semantic understanding of Chinese; it didn't seem like he had ever taken a Chinese class or anything. It was just a string of noises that I think was an attempt at Chinese.

So when it happened, I was like super shocked, and Huan was super shocked. And we didn't say anything because we had no idea what this was that was happening to us. And then he walked away from us and approached another table with two students who were also Asian, and then said the same thing. So phonetically it sounded the same. And it happened, and Huan, the first question he asked me was like, "Did that really just happen?" And the first question I asked him was, "How should we have responded differently? We literally just sat here. We didn't do anything. We should have said something." And we got up, and we like kind of ran after this student to see if like, you know, like what he was doing or if he was doing this to more people. Because I think our concern mostly was that he was going to go and talk to more people like that. But he had already left.

AL-JABER: Did you know who he was?

LIU: No, we didn't know him.

AL-JABER: Okay.

LIU: So immediately thereafter, we were just like really shocked. And we were like, oh, my gosh! we should have done something. And we didn't know what to do so we went to—we're both Pan Asian Committee interns—and so we went to the Asian and Asian American advisor, Aerial Anderson. And we told her about this event. And she was like, "It sounds like you guys are really sort of thrown off by this." And she was like, "If I'm not stepping out of bounds, it sounds like this was a bias incident." And Huan and I were kind of laughing. But this has happened to us before. And like we don't know why we feel so weird about it. Like it's happened to

me like outside of Dartmouth before. So why I am taking so much offense to it?

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm.

LIU: And for the first time it sort of called into question for me... Because at Dartmouth I identify a lot with my academic identity or my extracurricular identity. I never first and foremost identify with my racial identity or with my ethnic identity. I guess he presumed that we were Chinese, which we both are. But I mean, we could have very well been another deviant of Asian, you know.

So it was the first time it ever had occurred to me that despite my sort of academic identity, my extracurricular identity, all the relationships I've built here, that I could be reduced to my race. And that definitely made me feel like an outsider. That despite the identity I have created for my Dartmouth self, I'm sometimes—all I might be seen as is what people can see externally. So that definitely made me feel like an outsider.

I think we were really empowered, though, to do something about it because we know—both of us have had experiences being insiders in our Dartmouth communities, of being heard and affirmed. We've both been on the Inter Community Council, for example, and have talked a lot about these sort of issues that happen here. And so I think we both, because we had experience being insiders and knowing how like sort of the institutional structure of support works here, I think we felt really empowered to say something about it and act on what had happened and use it as an opportunity to address the Dartmouth community as a whole.

AL-JABER: When you were first considering reporting this incident, did you ever think that it would garner as much attention as it did?

LIU: We both sort of just wanted to report. We didn't actually feel like we should report it. And Aerial talked to us a little bit and encouraged us like, you know, maybe like it is something. And I'm going to be a teacher next year, and I taught this past summer. So I was thinking a lot about like if a student, if one of my students, had been sitting next to me, how would I have reacted differently? Because I definitely, if a student was sitting next to me, would not have said nothing. The last thing I would want is for one of my students to think this is an okay way to be treated, you know. This is an okay way to sort of handle a bully or whoever. So I knew that I would

have said something, and I told Huan that. And he also felt very strongly about, you know, being reduced to just an Asian identity.

So we reported it, and we thought that was it. We didn't know what would happen really. So we like—we submitted the report, and it was online and then we both went to our separate ways and did our homework. And literally an hour later S&S [Safety & Security] called us and wanted to know more information about the incident. And literally a couple of hours after that, the president's office sent out the campus-wide email about the incident. I wish we had never... We did not expect at the moment of reporting...

Then the next day—maybe not the next day. Like two days after on Friday, we had lunch together again. And on the table that we sat down at, was a copy of *The D* that had an article written about the incident. And both of us had no idea that this article was being written. It didn't mention us by name, but it was describing the incident. And we thought it was a little mischaracterizing.

So we were like, do we want to say anything about it? Maybe this is a really good opportunity to sort of clarify why we did what we did and not just because we were really hypersensitive about it. We personally both didn't feel like super bad. It's not like either of us were losing sleep over it. But the article made it sound a little bit like that. So we wanted to sort of own what had happened to us and give it our own spin...not spin, but just attribute our feelings and our thought process to the incident. And also just—I think it was a great opportunity to talk about community at Dartmouth. Because it's not because we were personally offended that we did this. But we think that the reason we did this is because something like this shouldn't happen in a community that is supposed to be supportive of one another.

AL-JABER: So how do you feel like the Dartmouth community has reacted to you coming forward? Has the response been positive, supportive?

LIOU: We, again, have been so lucky to be on the receiving end of a lot of positive feedback. I had sort of—I was so scared for a couple of days. I didn't want to look at the comments on the article because that often is not the best place to be reading if you're the author for one of these articles. But I did a couple of days later and saw a lot of great comments. There are some people who brought up really interesting points, I think, about our approach to the article. And like how we conceived of community, and how we maybe should have

been more active about responding to the event. But I think all of that is really constructive. And it's unhealthy to think that a community can be a community without being in dialogue with one another. So I thought it was really great.

A lot of administrators reached out to us and gave us positive feedback. A lot of my professors personally blitzed me and said how much they enjoyed the article. So I think it's been really good. And if anything, it's created a lot of dialogue. I had a couple of friends whom I just met this year, and who just don't see eye to eye with me about a lot of things, come talk to me about the article. They wanted to know if I thought writing the article would perpetuate this problem of race being a big deal on this campus. Or things like that they kind of attributed to similar issues like sexual assault and hazing. How perpetually talking about it isn't actually doing anything about it. And so we had conversations about that, and that was very, very healthy to talk to other people who might not have the same opinions. And, you know, that's what community and learning and growing is all about.

AL-JABER: Yes. And you sort of made it clear in your article that this complacent attitude is not the answer. And this sort of incident that happened to you should not be seen as an exception to the rule.

LIU: Yes. That's I think so true. It happens...there have been a lot of incidents that are unreported, which is true of everything. And I think this is just something that we should feel more open about talking about. And not feel like... A lot of the times the things that happen at Dartmouth that might not be the most positive experiences, the burden is on the individual who's on the receiving end of the bias or the assault or whatever to come forward and say, I demand some sort of response to this. And that's really hard and sort of not what a community ought to look like. I think if we are really a strong community that cares about one another, it'd look a lot like the people who are thinking of perpetrating like actively think about whether or not this is something that's appropriate or respectful or indicative of what they think the community looks like before they even do what they're going to do.

AL-JABER: So other than writing the article, have you taken steps to insure that this doesn't happen again, or have you sort of distanced yourself from this sort of situation?

LIOU: Yes. I think.... So I went to the campus climate conversation immediately thereafter. And I've talked a lot to the people who have had sort of thoughts about it. And as a part of C&G, we actually had President Folt come over to our house a couple of weeks ago, like immediately following the event...not specifically about the bias incident, but just about a lot of issues that are going on on campus. And I think we've talked a lot to administrators like President Folt about sort of what we think the Dartmouth community looks like and getting a better understanding of how we can work towards that.

So I think a lot of it has to do with a lot of conversation and bringing faculty into this conversation and building bridges across the different segments of what makes up the Dartmouth community. So it's easy for, you know, like the Pan Asian community to get really riled up about this. But I think talking to a lot of student leaders about how this happens in their communities as well, and sort of how we can get this to be a conversation that we have comfortably with other students so that it doesn't have to be an ever-occurring event.

AL-JABER: And it's sort of interesting that this happened towards the end of your academic career.

LIOU: Yes.

AL-JABER: Has that really changed the way you see Dartmouth at all?

LIOU: I don't think so. I mean I knew that these things happened at Dartmouth, and certainly they've happened to some of my friends who are not Asian but are either African-American or Hispanic. And so I've thought a lot about it before, and I just didn't think. Every time it happens, you kind of wonder like, I can't believe this happens at Dartmouth.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm.

LIOU: Out of all the places. Like it's okay if it happens in New York City because, you know, like people aren't accountable to each other in that way. There are so many people in the city; you're basically strangers with all of them. How can you expect that community with them and that accountability? And I think what's jarring about it is living in such close quarters with everyone that....

AL-JABER: Yes. Especially since Dartmouth is known to be this close-knit community.

LIOU: Right. Exactly. And so I think it's very jarring when that happens. But I don't think like what I.... The way I see this thing, like how it reshapes my opinion of Dartmouth, is in a positive way for certainly—that was not grammatically correct.

AL-JABER: You're doing fine.

LIOU: It's sort of in this way that we can...you know as soon as this happened, administrators reached out to us. That we're in a small enough school that a lot of people, when they heard about it, were sort of asking, did you know the person? You know like something that wouldn't happen in a big school, like if we went to school with 20,000 other people, how could we possibly really know the person? Or would it have been easier to like...I don't know. It would have been harder had it not been at Dartmouth. And I think, you know, being able to write an op-ed and have it turn around in the next week and be published was a really great thing.

A lot of the times when I get frustrated with what happens at Dartmouth or how slow-moving the institution seems to be, I often think about how lucky I am to be at Dartmouth and feel riled up about things and feel really passionate about a lot of the things that happen here because it's small. So I can know what's happening in every corner of the Dartmouth community. I can feel kind of angry that the administration isn't doing something because I've been invited over to Dean Johnson's house to have dinner with her. It's sort of this really...you're angry because you're really close to the issues, and you can get really involved with it. So it's something that I don't think you can get at a lot of different places. And maybe at other schools students feel, you know, less angry or less upset about what happens in their communities. But I think it's sort of showing how much we have grown to love the place that we're so angry sometimes or frustrated. And I honestly think that that healthy cognitive dissonance will help us grow and improve this institution over time.

AL-JABER: Yes. I think what you're saying is accurate. Because there's less distance between the student and the administration.

LIOU: Yes.

AL-JABER: Just going back to the Dartmouth community and how you think it's evolved. Do you think.... Let's backtrack a little bit.

LIOU: Okay.

AL-JABER: Do you think that the Dartmouth location affects the sense of community, sort of that it's isolated, that it's away from everything else basically.

LIOU: I think so. Because if we went to school in a city and sort of for fun you could just leave campus really easily, I don't think it's sort of a place where you would see students always interacting with each other, because you can always opt out of the community. Here you can't really opt out of the community. I mean you can go in town, but in an hour or two you're going to come back because there's nothing else around here. So I think the location has a lot to do with it. It sort of fosters this type—this sense of community that we advertise to students, prospective students certainly. I think it has a lot to do with location. But once you're here, I think like location forces you to interact. But I think the more you interact, of course, the deeper relationships you build, and that community in itself sort of fosters itself. So once you build community with people, it's like a self—

AL-JABER: ...perpetuating.

LIOU: Yes. It's a machine that works itself because people want to get to know people better.

AL-JABER: I see. And how has your time at Dartmouth changed you as a person?

LIOU: Yes. It's definitely... So going back to how I said in the beginning, I was like, oh, I'll definitely come to Dartmouth. I'll major in government. I'll, you know, like sort of form what I had in high school for myself. And I was so convinced that I was going to go to law school. And I'll major in international—I'll major in government, concentration in international relations because that's what everybody does, and then I'll in four years go to law school. And I thought that's what I was going to do. Also I just didn't know what the alternative was.

But it's changed. Dartmouth, the academic experience, has really changed me in the sense that I thought critically about what I want

to do after Dartmouth. The extracurricular experience compared with the academic experience made me want to go into the field of education, which if you'd asked high school Alice if she was going to be a teacher, she probably would have laughed at you. She would have been like, why? I don't really like teaching or kids or any of those things.

So this sort of academic trajectory I've been on, taking that class that I mentioned earlier in the gov department, really made me think more about how I want to like live after Dartmouth and sort of be involved in community service professionally and work with students. And, yes. So after that it's really....

So it's really changed what I want to do career-wise, and it's given me sort of the clarity of calling teaching my vocation, which is not a word I would use lightly. It's sort of my calling. I'm not a very religious person, so saying that something is my calling is a big deal for me. But I think it's given me a lot of internship opportunities where I got to teach last summer. I'm like, "No, in front of the classroom is where I want to be and with students is where I feel most alive." So it's made me come alive in that way to really realize where I should be and have clarity and confidence about that.

So it's been really hard to convince my parents that, oh, I was going to go to Dartmouth and four years later go into law school. Now I tell them, "oh, now I'm going to be a teacher," which they didn't really expect would ever happen. But Dartmouth has equipped me with that sort of confidence that this is what I want to do, and this is where I belong, and this is what will make me most happy and help me articulate those feelings to my family. And I think I'll be a lot happier for it.

I don't know if... I'm sure if I hadn't gone here and gone to a bigger school and sort of stuck with my plan to go to law school, I'd probably be going to law school next year. But I think ignorance is bliss, so I probably wouldn't have known that that wasn't something I wanted. But I think I'll be a lot happier now being in a community where I can work with kids and also in a charter school where all of the teachers are really sort of invested in each other and invested in the movement of closing the opportunity gap and really reforming public school education. I know I'll have so much fun there, which is more than can be said, I think, if I didn't come here. So Dartmouth has definitely transformed me in that sense.

AL-JABER: When was it that... You mentioned that class early on.

LIU: Yes.

AL-JABER: But when was it you really got the sense that you wanted to change career paths?

LIU: Yes. So I think that class, that class really forced me to think about the ethics of public policy. And among the issues—so each class we talked about a different public policy issue. So we talked about torture, we talked about the atomic bomb, we talked about abortion, we talked about environmental justice, we talked about basically everything. And one of the things we talked about was educational inequity and also, kind of tangentially related, affirmative action. And the professor taught it really well.

So it would always open with a lecture, and then we'd have a discussion about the issues. And there were people in that class ranging from super ultra-conservative to super ultra-liberal. And the professor was really great because he never told you where on that spectrum he fell. So everybody was talking because they thought that their opinion could align with whatever the professor had.

And it really made me think a lot about the issue of educational inequity and how a lot of the issues that we were talking about in that class were related to educational inequity. That's there's a lot of, I don't know, there are a lot of sort of problems with poverty and hunger and homelessness and all these social ills that are really related to the fact that not everybody has access to a good public school education. And so that made me think a lot about applying for the ASB that I was involved in, which was on the issue of homelessness. And for that.... So that was in the fall I took that class, and I applied to ASBs that fall.

Over the winter break in preparation for our winter educational sessions, we had to read this book called "Rachel and Her Children" by Jonathan Kozol, which I would read every day and then like just cry afterward because it was about all of these children who were living in shelters across New York City with their families. And it really challenged my idea of homelessness. A lot of these families weren't homeless as a result of mental health issues or alcoholism or any of those things, but just a series of unfortunate events.

So a parent would get sick, and the other parent would have to take off from work to take care of that other parent, and they'd lose their job and then lose their house. And now they're all living, you know, in these terrible conditions. And the children couldn't go to school because you need a permanent address to apply for school in New York City. And they couldn't get the annual health reports to send the school in order to be enrolled in school. Or if they were enrolled in school, homelessness is so mobile that people had to move around across different schools all the time. So you weren't getting the proper curriculum for your age group.

So it was just like really disheartening. And it was even more disheartening when I saw—when we actually went to San Francisco for our Alternative Spring Break, and I saw these kids who were like just playing in a playground and looking so—just like any other kids and so full of potential and so happy and just not really thinking about school at all. But it just showed... I thought a lot about what it looks like for these kids in the future down the road if they don't get out of the shelter system. What their educational trajectory looks like, and as a result what the future—their whole future looks like.

So that really moved me and I came back and decided to take an internship in education. I worked at the New York City Department of Education my sophomore summer. So I wasn't on sophomore summer. And I was working at the DOE. And that also was just a constant emotional exercise, just working in the chancellor's office, and the chancellor is the head of the New York City public school system.

The group I was working with was in charge of all the incoming mail every day. So literally we would get like hundreds of letters every day from parents and students and teachers and principals and PTAs and like just everybody. Public officials even would write in. And they would tell us about all of the issues they were having in their schools. We'd also get emails and phone calls. So we were in charge of that. And because they were short-staffed in that group, that term I actually was able to do the work of a full-time associate. So I was really like fully immersed in what they were doing.

So halfway through, I realized.... First I would read all of the mail. And I'd be like, oh, this like really deserves its time because this school isn't serving its children well. Or this student isn't placed in the right class. Each of these issues to me seemed like the whole

world because it was someone's whole world. And so I'd think about it a lot, and I'd write my response and sort of ask people for what they thought the appropriate response was. And then I realized the "appropriate response" more or less was always a polite decline. Like, I'm really sorry that this is happening, but you know, student enrollment is really tight. And as you know, we can't move your kid to the class that he wants to be in. Or whatever.

So halfway through the summer it was just really weighing down on me because we were rejecting people left and right for all of their requests. And some of them were really important requests, I thought. Especially there was this one PTA that wrote to us, and they were like we need air conditioner because like there are like 13 students in this one class this one year—like fourth grade—who have asthma, and they can't breathe. We need an air conditioner, but we don't have the funds for it. Could you please help us somehow? And we had to decline that and I thought that was absolutely outrageous.

I think the straw that broke my back... I was so interested in education policy, I was like, I definitely have to get into the field of education through policy. My government major will help me get through that. I can go get my... get a master's degree in some sort of public policy and work in educational policy.

But the straw that broke my back and sort of dissuaded me from that all together was this one parent called in maybe the sixth or seventh week of my internship. And she called in every day for eight straight days. And I was just forwarding her phone calls to the Office of Student Enrollment. Because the issue that she had was a student enrollment issue, and we honestly can't answer that question directly. So I'd forward her and by the eighth day I was just like, okay, like what's up? You've been calling for eight days; there's obviously something very important. Let's hear what's going on. And she was like, my school has diagnosed my son with a learning disability, but he doesn't have one. And I was like, how do you know that? Because a lot of parents actually call in and say that. And she was like, Well, I took him to be privately evaluated after the school evaluated him, and I'll fax this information to you right away. But it turns out that he's actually reading two grades above grade level.

AL-JABER: Oh, my gosh!

LIOU: And she was so surprised that that was the result, she actually took him to be privately evaluated again. And the second evaluation said the same thing. And so she scanned all the information to us.

And it dawned on me like, wow, this kid reading two grades above grade level is probably really bored in class so he's acting out. And has been now diagnosed with a learning disability because he has like behavioral problems. And then it dawned on me that someone in this office who's never met this kid before, who's never even heard his story, it's just... I'm going to walk all of this information to this person. But this person who's never met this kid before is going to make a decision that determines whether this kid stays in special education or whether he goes to a gifted and talented program. Or whether he even gets to skip a grade. These two paths will determine the rest of this kid's life forever, and it's going to be so important. But this will be made by a bureaucrat sitting in a cubicle who doesn't know this kid.

AL-JABER: Yes.

LIOU: And it just killed me. I was just like so upset about it for days. And when I came back to Dartmouth—I studied abroad my junior fall—but when I came back to Dartmouth, I decided to take a lot of education classes and consider being a teacher. Because I knew that in my classroom I would have a more narrow locus of control, but it would be deeper. I know that like if one of my kids were acting out or, you know, not paying attention, I could really have a conversation with him or her and get to figure out what's going on. Like is this something attributed to the material? Are you not understanding the material? Or is there something going on at home? Or let's talk about this a little bit more.

So that was really the moment for me. And I took a lot of education classes and had a lot of professors there who encouraged me to get some teaching experience and see whether or not it was something I wanted to do. So last summer I taught at a program in New York. It's a college-access program. And it was so great! I would go back there right now if I got a phone call like, you can work here full time; we've decided to make this not just a summer program but a full-year program where you get to teach all the time in this school. I'd go like right now.

It was so phenomenal. I met so many wonderful kids who had become used to not being paid attention to in school, who were like

really surprised that they had teachers who cared about their educational future. For a lot of them it was the first time anyone had talked to them about college. And all of us, we were college interns. So we were college interns, but we were teacher interns. So we were teaching all of their classes, including elective courses, and we were eating lunch with them.

So it was the first time a lot of them had even heard about college or like why would someone go to college? Or what do you do after college? And we had a lot of really great conversations with them about those things. And it confirmed for me that after college I want to be in the classroom again. And so next year, I'll be teaching at a charter school in Brooklyn. And I'm so excited about it. I think it's going to be really great.

AL-JABER: Oh, you know this already?

LIU: Yes, I'll be teaching... It's a charter network that's very similarly run to the summer program I worked at. So actually I got to meet a lot of these people who worked at the charter network over the summer when we had joint events with them. So I'm really excited about that.

But, yes, that's something I would never have imagined myself doing if it weren't for Dartmouth and sort of the classes I took here and the internship opportunities I got as a result of being a student here. Like the funding I got from different programs on campus. I just couldn't have done it.

AL-JABER: So your Dartmouth experience, it would be fair to say it's been very positive for you.

LIU: Yes. I think it's been very positive. And I think a lot of things that have been a little more difficult have been such great learning opportunities. And I think, you know, yes, I think my Dartmouth experience has been really great. And I really do love this place.

AL-JABER: And I think we've answered all the questions more or less. Is there anything you want to add or something that I neglected to ask you in terms of the Dartmouth community or how you see yourself fitting into it?

LIU: Not really. I just hope that I can continue to be a part of it. I think this place is really very special. And I can't wait to share it with...

like whatever happens, whoever I meet, in the next part of my life, students that I have in the future or friends that I meet down the road. This place is, I think, something very sacred to me, and something I hope I get to share with those people.

AL-JABER: Great. Okay. I'm going to stop the tape now.

LIU: Okay.

[End of Interview]