

Hello everyone, my name is Sacha Boroumand and I am a senior graduating this quarter with a degree in Communications.

I came to UCSB knowing two things. First, I would make the lacrosse team; and, Second, I would get involved in Jewish life. Everything else, the journey that lay ahead, was extra.

I grew up in a Persian home, practicing traditional Judaism. My house was kosher and we celebrated all of the major holidays. Shabbat was a cornerstone of my childhood as we sat together as a family, enjoying traditional Persian-Jewish food, discussing our week, what was to come next week, and a few jokes here and there. My upbringing included synagogue Hebrew School, so I was exposed to a balance of traditional and Reform Judaism that I sought out at UCSB.

During my Freshman year, just as I was becoming comfortable with my friends, refounding the Jewish Fraternity AEPi at UCSB, and finding my place in the Jewish community, we were hit with COVID-19. I spent the next 6 months living back at home. My Jewish identity is deeply rooted in my relationship with my family, especially my grandfather. Being home allowed me to build a weekly routine centered around family and reminded me why I love being Jewish. While I loved being with my

family, especially for Jewish celebrations, I was ready to forge my own independent Jewish identity and path to leadership.

During that difficult year, even over Zoom and from a distance, Hillel provided me with the support I needed. The guys I was working with to launch the AEPi fraternity were on the Hillel Student Board before the pandemic. They would tell me about their pre-pandemic lives and how Hillel was a Jewish home for them. We found something to look forward to in our shared vision of creating a fraternity that would bridge gaps between the diverse population of Jewish students and serve as a safe space for all Jewish students, just like Hillel does.

When I returned to Santa Barbara, I was so excited to meet everyone in person. I went to the Hillel Welcome Back BBQ and was excited to see such a vibrant community. I decided to become deeply involved with Hillel, both for the future of AEPi and because it gave me a place to meet so many new people after more than a year of isolation. Not only did Hillel provide us with incredible recruitment opportunities, but as a brother himself, Rabbi Evan met with me to lend his familiarity with UCSB administration towards our goal to repair AEPi's previously fractured relationship with the university. Last winter, I was elected President of AEPi.

Over the past year, the relationship between AEPi and Hillel has been essential. Although we have more than tripled in size, we are still a young fraternity. Hillel has given us a space to host weekly meetings and lead large-scale community events such as the Walk to Remember this past February. This year I also served as Vice President of Finance on the Student Board. Before becoming President of AEPi, I was the treasurer, so I was very comfortable taking on this role. It felt really good to know that the staff and student Presidents saw something in me and wanted me to help them shape this new position. I developed a budget tracking system to enable the Student Board to develop an understanding of what it actually takes to put on the programs we do. This system has made the way we manage the Program Budget much more efficient, as I'm sure Rabbi Maddy and Sophie would agree.

Not only has Hillel given me the opportunity to develop my leadership skills, but has also served as a space for different Jewish cultures to come together. This year we have hosted a multitude of themed Shabbats, including Persian, Israeli, Tunisian, Italian, and Moroccan. This building has given us a space to host a Persian seder, an Israeli/Persian cookoff, and to learn about Sephardic Cultural memory from Professor Rivka Amado. We even used my grandfather's Persian haroset recipe at the Hillel Passover Seder. I have watched this year as Rabbi Maddy made Jewish culture a priority and sought out ways to

diversify the experiences of Jewish students, always keeping an aspect of education mixed in with the fun.

I love the diversity within our community here. On Friday nights, my friends and I begin at Hillel to enjoy a delicious Shabbat dinner, and then Shabbat-hop across the street to Chabad for even more! It is honestly really amazing to see the way the Jewish community is so diverse, unified, and strong.

One final area I need to highlight is how effectively Hillel supports the students during times of crisis such as antisemitism and BDS on campus. I previously mentioned how Hillel helped AEPi put on a Walk to Remember in February. This came in the wake of two antisemitic incidents within our community; one taking place on campus, and one in Isla Vista. Emotions ran high for Jewish students. The messages were loud and clear. Our classrooms and our homes are supposed to be safe places, but we were made to question that. As our “Jewish Gauchos” text group filled with outrage and calls to action, Hillel was there for us. We were welcome to use the building to decompress. Come grab a snack, a coffee, or some tea, and be with the community.

We called a meeting of our Israel Roundtable to allow Jewish leaders to share their ideas on how to respond. One of the AEPi brothers and now

President, Tom, came to me with an idea for a community-wide Walk to Remember. It was incredible to see how the community rallied around our call. This very room was filled to the brim with students and community members ready to walk the streets of Isla Vista. We heard from students and local politicians. We knew that Hillel had our back and that the greater Santa Barbara community supported us.

I have watched year after year as Hillel backs student initiatives to combat antisemitism on campus. Without the resources and expert advice from Hillel Staff, our Jewish students would not feel nearly as prepared to fight BDS over and over again. Our community is strong and resilient. We never back down and we never will. We are the only UC campus to have never passed a BDS resolution, and this community has no plans to allow any future resolutions to slip past our defenses. Jewish students make up 12% of the undergraduate population. I know that Hillel is here to make sure each and every one of us feel safe and happy on our campus.

So back to my first two points. First, I made the lacrosse team. In fact, immediately after this event, I will fly to Austin for the lacrosse national collegiate championship. Second, I became a Jewish leader. Hillel provided me with support during isolation, leadership opportunities, and a truly diverse and welcoming approach to Judaism and Jewish life. The

friendships I developed through Hillel were some of the most genuine I made in my time at UCSB. These relationships helped me discover the confidence I had in myself and my abilities as a leader. Thank you for enabling Hillel to be here for students like me.