

Good morning! My name is Jamie Orseck, and I am honored to be here today. I'll be graduating from UCSB in a few short weeks with my degree in chemistry.

I grew up in Connecticut where my family belonged to a conservative synagogue. I attended services for the high holidays, Hebrew school lessons, and the occasional Shabbat service. After my Bat Mitzvah, there was no strong force pulling me into the world of Jewish adulthood, and my Jewish connection began to fade. When applying to colleges, Jewish life on campus was really not a big factor in my decision making process, and to be honest, I had little intention of seeking it out.

Once I arrived in Santa Barbara, on my second day of classes at UCSB, my freshman year roommate Becca Greenberg dragged me along to the Week of Welcome Kosher Cookout at Hillel. I was promised free food and a place to meet new people, and since I knew almost no one here in California, I reluctantly decided to go. Looking back, going to that barbecue was one of the best decisions of my life. The Hillel student leaders I met that evening became my closest friends. They opened their arms to me and made me realize there is so much more to Judaism than what I had originally thought.

During that first week at UCSB, I decided to get involved, and help foster that feeling of belonging for every member of the Jewish community regardless of their Jewish upbringing. I started out by applying to the First Year Fellowship, where I met other new students. I began to get a feel for what leadership looked like in the Hillel atmosphere. I put myself out there and left my introverted, anxious high school self behind in exchange for a friendly face to welcome students to the building. I learned how to plan events, engage new people, and work with an incredible team to enable this community to thrive.

Then, suddenly, COVID hit. The end of my freshman year as well as the entirety of my sophomore year of college was entirely virtual, and I had to move back home to Connecticut. Having made that transition once, going back a few months later knowing that I was a different person was extremely challenging. Luckily, everyone at Hillel was ready and eager to find ways to make sure I, and many others like me, never lost that community we had just found. At that point, I had been accepted into the student board as our Vice President of Programming, and vowed to help create virtual spaces where students could feel welcome during the pandemic. Through game nights, Shabbat services, and Jewish learning fellowship classes all hosted over Zoom, our team of staff and students worked tirelessly to keep the spirit alive.

I am so grateful to say that after many months of the unknown, we returned to in-person programming with a burst of renewed energy. Hillel was here for us to overcome all the obstacles. One person at a time, one event at a time, we rebuilt the in person community we craved, needed, and loved.

Now, I am here, after having served as the Towbes student board co-president for the past two years, to share my journey. Student board members who came before me taught me how to be a leader, and how to be compassionate and dignified while doing so. My former co-president, Sophie Lerer, is now a professional on the Hillel staff here. She has consistently led by example, showing exactly the kind of determination and perseverance I hope to one day achieve. Santa Barbara Hillel has been the one constant presence in my life during the craziest four years I could have anticipated.

I understand my Jewish identity so much more now than ever before. Hillel has given me space and countless opportunities to discover it myself, thanks to your support. Most importantly, I really believe that my time here has shaped who I am as a person completely. I go through each day considering my own Jewish values, like kindness, empathy, and confidence. Throughout my time here, I have grown so much as a

leader, as a friend, and as a Jewish person, and I truly could not have done it without the support of this incredible community. Thank you.