“JL”

Interviewed by Kristen Diehl

March 3, 2020

Thank you.

Thank you. Our first question is just if you could tell us where you were born and maybe tell me a little bit about your family?

Yeah. I was born in Nevada. And then my family moved to Florida when I was pretty young. So I grew up in Southwest Florida. And then my mom's a real estate agent and then my dad's a firefighter. And they have done that pretty much all of my life.

Could you talk a little bit more about your parents' and guardians' education?

Yeah. My mom only went to – she graduated high school and then after that just started working. So she worked as a waitress for a while, things like that, before becoming a real estate agent. And then my dad went to college for about a year and then dropped out of college. I think originally planned on maybe going back at some point. But kind of thought it wasn't for him. So he actually became a bartender, and that's how he met my mom. So that's kinda my parents' background.

And I know you touched on their occupations. Could you maybe speak a little bit about the town or the place that you grew up?

The University Archives wants to acknowledge that the interviews conducted with first-generation college students in March 2020 took place just before JHU campuses closed due to a growing, worldwide pandemic (COVID-19). These interviews represent students’ reflections on their time at JHU prior to facing many adjustments, including completing their last semester of college online.
JL: Yeah. Naples is definitely interesting because it has a lot of retirees. But it's also – it's weird. I had a pretty good-sized public high school. But it's very – most of the people I went to school with were definitely middle-class to upper-middle-class white families. Not a lot of diversity going on. Which was kind of interesting, retrospectively. But, yeah, I would say a lot of that. It is interesting because there are some parts of our town that are a bit more diverse. So there's a small immigrant population that does a lot of agricultural work and things like that. So there's definitely an interesting divide created based on high schools too. Because those students went to different high schools and vice versa. So it kind of led to I guess all the high schools being very similar in what their student body looked like. But, yeah, it was great.

Especially with all of the retirees and things like that, there were a lot of resources as far as: I was able to get some local scholarships for coming here. Even when I was in high school, there are local councils that would pay for a one-week Georgetown summer class or things like that, which is kind of how I got exposed to international studies eventually, which is what I study here.

KD: So you have kind of already naturally started talking about high school. Could you talk about any particular high school classes or extracurriculars, things that maybe might've prepared you for Hopkins? You mentioned different opportunities.

JL: I'm trying to think. I was part of Youth in Government in high school. So it's similar to a Model UN (United Nations) but it's a model state legislature. It's run by the Y. So I did that. And I was one of our state officers for it. So I got to meet students from across the state, and it was pretty interesting. And you read a bill on something that was important to the state, get to debate it, research, things like that. So that was probably one of the clubs I was most involved in in high school. And then I also – I'm trying to think. I did Academic WorldQuest, which is – basically it's kind of like a geography/history quiz bowl. So I did that, which was pretty fun. It was with my AP US history teacher, who was one of my favorite teachers in high school. So I did most of the clubs that she sponsored. Just because it was kind of nice to do things that she was involved with. So I really enjoyed that.

And then as far as classes go, ironically with what I study here it doesn't make sense, but I really enjoyed taking AP Environmental Science. So I was involved in our green group on campus. So, that one I think helped in just: I got to lead the club and it was the first
time I took I guess what they would consider a college-level class. And it was interesting to have that experience as opposed to just the regular taking an English class with everyone else that I was taking and things like that.

**KD:** Great. We've talked about your parents a little bit. Could you share maybe what their thoughts were on education and kind of around you getting ready to go to college and what they thought about it?

**JL:** So my parents definitely wanted me to go to school. And they wanted to help in any way they could. But I think even my mom had explicitly said at one point they weren't really sure what helping me meant. Just because my dad kind of went to college for a bit and my mom didn't. So for both of them: they didn't really know much about the higher education realm. So at least I think they probably felt a little bad about that. But, yeah, they both definitely were very encouraging of going to school. I have a lot of cousins my age and all of their parents went to college so they were all definitely college-bound, trying to find somewhere. My parents definitely just kind of knew the basics of: oh, I'll have to do a standardized test at some point. But they didn't necessarily know what scores meant what, and what application processes looked like at different schools. So a lot of that was – I think I just kind of found out a lot of that online on my own and then worked through that process.

**KD:** Great. And how did you decide to attend Hopkins? How did you learn about it, and what was that like?

**JL:** So, I don't know the first time I actually directly learned about it. But there is an admissions officer from here who came to my high school. So some of my friends were planning on going to the info session, and I was like, "I'll tag along to that." And I really enjoyed the admission officer who talked to us. I thought it was an interesting presentation. I literally knew nothing about Hopkins before it. So that was kind of my first interest. And then I applied here regular decision, and a girl from my high school applied early, and she was accepted early decision, and she had always wanted to come here. So it was kind of nice to be able to talk to her about that a little.

And I actually was able to visit all of the schools that I was applying to besides Hopkins. So this is the only school that I didn't visit before I applied to. And then after I got accepted I decided to
come to SOHOP, Spring Open House and Overnight. And I really enjoyed all of the programming that the school did during the day.

KD: So that was SOHOP Spring Overnight –

JL: Spring Open House and Overnight. So it's for admitted students. Admissions does it every year. I think all admitted students can attend. So I came to that. And they had one week where they had – they do this every year, but they'll do a first-gen student lunch during it. So you get to meet other first-gen\(^2\) prospective students, current first-gen students, and then they'll have different faculty members come. So I enjoyed all the programming they did. And it took me forever to make a decision, and I think I made it the day you had to make a deposit to go somewhere. But I was sitting there looking at the Hopkins website – so I'm actually a tour guide here. And it's hard for me to say why Hopkins because there's just something, when I was looking back at my experience, where I was like – I don't know. It just felt right.

KD: Yeah. My next question was: how did you decide? Just a kind of innate feeling?

JL: Yeah. It's really hard. There was no specific program or anything like that that jumped out. I mean, I really kind of liked the international studies panel that I went to here. And I definitely liked some of the things I was hearing about it. I think the – I guess if I had to point to specific things, for me, not having a core curriculum was really nice. I liked having the flexibility of just having to take so many humanities classes, so many social science, all of that. Because having that flexible experience I thought would be nice. Because in going to public schools, it's very prescribed: "You will take this class and then this one." So I wanted to be able to just take classes that I wanted to for as long as I could.

So it was that, and then, yeah, just kind of the feeling when I was here that campus was really nice. Everyone I met was great. The student groups seemed very fun. So even the performing arts groups – I never planned on joining one, but when I saw them I was like: "This just seems fun." Yeah.

KD: Great. And what was your family's reaction when you were accepted to Hopkins? Were they excited? Or had they heard a lot about it before?

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\(^2\) JL refers to “first-gen” which is shorthand for “first generation.”
JL: They were really excited. They definitely hadn't heard a lot about it before. I think they started researching a lot more into it after I got in. I know I got into – I'd already gotten into some state schools before I got into Hopkins so they knew I was going somewhere. So I think pretty quickly after, they were just kind of asking me when I would decide where I wanted to go. So that was nice. I didn't have a lot of pressure from them as to which school I should go to. They really were like, "It's your decision." So, yeah, they were just excited. And I think once I eventually decided to go here, then that's when they started buying bumper stickers and things like that. They definitely got much more excited once I decided on a school.

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KD: Great. You talked about SOHOP. Could you describe the first few weeks of your undergraduate experience and maybe talk about the transition from home to college, or from Florida to Baltimore?

JL: Yeah. I guess I'll start with the second half. So, from Florida to Baltimore, it was interesting. So my mom came up to help me move in. My godfather lives in DC actually. So we stayed with him, went shopping for my dorm, all of that down there, drove up here for move-in day. And I was living in Building A, AMR III, Building A. And it was I think hotter here than it was in Florida that day. And the dorms here obviously don't have amazing A/C. So my mom and I were going up two flights of stairs with all of my stuff for the room and we were both incredibly sweaty, just ready to be done with it. So that was kind of like my first actual day on campus.

And then I think that was the day before orientation actually started. So that day I just met other people in my building. And I think it was definitely kind of like a different feeling. Just because I really didn't know anyone. And especially – the other person from my high school who was coming here – they were moving in the next day, and things like that. So literally knew no one. So it was a very quick adjustment to have to make. And that was not – I don't wanna say stressful, but it was just very, I don't know, not what I expected. because in my head I was like, "Everything's supposed to be super exciting about this now," but that was, if anything, I guess a little bit stressful in that sense.

But then, as far as first few weeks go, I actually – so I'm still friends with my first-year mentor. because he randomly was friends with a bunch of my friends. So I enjoyed my first-year
mentor group. And then I just got to I guess meet people who were both friends with people I had met, and things like that, which is how I found my freshman and sophomore friend group that way. So definitely I would say within the first week, I started to like it a lot more. Especially even starting class, because it kind of gave a nice routine to everything and I could really feel like I was part of campus.

*KD:* You mentioned the first-year mentor. Can you speak a little bit more about that program?

*JL:* Yeah. So it's: all incoming students including transfer students have to go through – it's like a couple-day program that the orientation team provides. So you are arranged into a small group of about ten students, and then you have a first-year mentor in it who's typically a sophomore or a junior. So they at least have some knowledge about campus. At least much more than you do. And then it's a little bit better than just having to sit in a very large group of people. So with that smaller group, we would go to – like we went to the Inner Harbor one day together. We got to go to Hamden on our last day together, and it's all kind of sponsored by the orientation program. So it was nice just to actually get to see Baltimore with just another group of students, not necessarily me and my mom walking around. So that's the first-year mentor.

*KD:* Great. Thank you. Have you met any other first-generation college students at Hopkins? You mentioned coming after you got accepted. So I'm just curious.

*JL:* Yeah. So, one of my friends now is also a first-gen student. We just I think randomly met. So it wasn't through anything structured. So, him. And then, other than that, I think most of my friends aren't first-gen. And then at those first-gen lunches – so I volunteer for admissions. So I've gone back as a current student to them. And I've met a lot of prospective students there. But I don't think I've actually met any other current students who I've – you know, I'm somewhat friends with and been like, "Oh, I didn't realize you're also a first-gen student."

The only other kind of group that I was part of was: my first year here I did MAPP\(^3\), which I don't remember what the acronym stands for, but it's a peer mentor program. And it's typically for underrepresented minority students and first-gen students. So I did MAPP my first year. So then I had a peer mentor who was also a

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\(^3\) JL refers to “MAPP” which stands for Mentoring Assistance Peer Program.
first-gen student. And then there was a couple of us in a small group with her. But I'm not still in touch with anyone from that.

KD: Okay. So it may or may not be something that even comes up among people.

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JL: Exactly. Yeah. I don't think it comes up too often. I mean, I think there might be many reasons for that, but I think it's also: a lot of people – I think most people had family members go to college. So I think there's just kind of an assumption of: that is what it is. You know what I mean? People don't necessarily ask about it just because it's very common.

KD: Do you notice any sort of difference – do you feel sort of different, given those kinds of assumptions, from students who do come from a background like that, where there's kind of this legacy of going? Did you kind of notice that in the culture here?

JL: Honestly, I'm not sure. I would say, especially my first years here, I was almost focused on: "Oh, we're all just students here." Which is why I didn't get super involved in MAPP and some of the other programs. Because I was like, "Just because I'm a first-gen student doesn't mean there's anything different. I can just do this on my own" kind of thing. And I think the longer I've been at Hopkins, the more I guess I wish I was in touch with that group. Because I do realize: certain things, especially now, even having parents that went to college, it is kind of helping in figuring out what major you are, what years it really matters if you have an internship. Kind of things like that where you might just implicitly know from hearing your parents talk about it.

So I would say I don't know if in class it's ever really I guess changed assumptions in discussions or things like that. I think the only I guess maybe somewhat noticeable thing that I would think of is: especially in international studies, typically at least more wealthy families will have traveled more often. Just a stereotype of it. But a lot of them have. Versus when you're coming from, in general, first-gen families or lower middle class, there's a lot less world travel. So it's interesting when you're taking these international studies classes and people have gone to a bunch of countries. And the first time I went to Europe was here on a scholarship. So things like that.
KD: Great. Thank you. We've kind of naturally gone to academics. So could you talk more about your program of study and how you chose it, and what have you found to be valuable about it?

JL: Yeah. So, I chose just to do political science initially. So I really enjoyed – my freshman year I took a wide variety of social science classes. So I took a couple psychology classes. I took macroeconomics in case I did international studies. And then a couple other random classes here and there. And I eventually settled on political science because I enjoyed those classes that I took my first year. And there were some specifically when I was looking at the course catalogue that I really wanted to take my sophomore year, and it just seemed right. Especially there were certain faculty members that I just had friends take classes with them and I heard amazing things about them. So I was looking at the requirements for the major and was just like: "I know exactly what classes I wanna take for the rest of these so I should just do this."

And then my sophomore spring, I applied to the bachelor's/master's five-year program for international studies. And you could be either just political science or just international studies to apply to it. So I applied to it and ended up getting in. And because I got in and would eventually be taking those history classes, econ classes, and all of that for the five-year program, I just decided it made sense to add international studies on as a double major. And that also kind of naturally led me into the minor I added. So I'm a Latin American studies minor.

KD: Oh, cool.

JL: And it was the same thing. When I was looking at what history class I would take for international studies, I was like, "Oh, modern Mexico. I really wanna take this class." And then I, same thing, looked at the requirements for the minor, and I was like: "Coincidentally, three of the classes I'm taking this semester all count for the minor because that's just what I'm interested in." So then I decided to do that. So I'd say I think once I found political science is kind of when I randomly found the other ones to add on later on.

KD: Great. You mentioned hearing about certain faculty members that were well-regarded. Do any particular faculty come to mind that you've really enjoyed working with? Or any really memorable class experiences that stick out to you?
JL: Yeah. One of the first ones I guess I heard something about – so I was in mock trial here, and a lot of my friends took a class with Emily Zackin, who's in the political science department, and she teaches constitutional law.

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And I took both of her con law\(^4\) classes and they were super interesting. Because it was kind of – instead of just case law like a lawyer would learn, it was looking at Supreme Court cases from a more historical ones. So how it fits into broader patterns. She teaches a class which I wish I had been able to take on equality and law. And her teaching style was great because it was just like 20 of us sitting in a room; you only had 10 pages of reading and we would just talk about it for 2 hours. So I really enjoyed that.

And then one of the other professors I loved here who made me wish I took history classes sooner is – she taught Modern Mexico\(^5\). It's Casey Lurtz. So she was a new faculty member last year I believe. So I guess both her and then – there's a whole cohort that they brought in at once for Latin America. So it was her, Christy Thornton, who they brought in in sociology, and Bécquer Seguín in German and Romance Languages. I happened to take a class with each of them one semester, and they all – they're younger faculty members but all super interesting, really unique perspectives on things.

So it was the first time I took a history class, the first time I took a sociology class. And both of them made me wish that, had I taken those my first year, I easily could see that I would've done political science and history or sociology because I just enjoyed those classes so much. They were similar to the con law class, taught in a way where the readings were really manageable, there was a lot of discussion, and they just made the subjects very interesting. So I never thought I would be super into Mexican history but I loved going to the class. There was like a weird sense of attachment by the end with the readings, where it was almost sad to be at current day because you were like, "Oh, I guess we're done with this." So I think they were just amazing at how they teach.

KD: Great. Pivoting from academics and more to sort of campus life, could you talk about your life in the dorms or in the apartments, various campus housing environments that you've been in?

\(^4\) JL refers to “con law” which is shorthand for constitutional law.

\(^5\) JL refers to “Modern Mexico” which is shorthand for a course titled History of Modern Mexico.
Yeah. I lived in Building A my first year. My roommate and I chose each other via Facebook, which a good percentage of my class did I think. So it was fine. Living in the buildings – it was very – not antisocial, but our building – people weren't just hanging out in the hallways like they would in some other buildings, which I kind of preferred because I had my friends in the other buildings so I could just go be social with them, and then when I wanted to go to bed, just go to mine. So it was nice.

I ended up making friends in my building. We were right above the dining hall. Things like that. It was weird having a roommate considering I'm also an only child so I never had to. My half-sister is a lot younger than I am so it was just kind of like: by the time I was 14, I wouldn't be sharing a room. So it was weird having to share a room. Especially my first-year roommate is from a very wealthy family. So it was interesting just kind of seeing what they would just randomly buy and things like that. And I was like "This is so weird."

And then my sophomore year I lived with two of my friends who I'd met I think during orientation week freshman year. So we lived in Bradford, which was a great experience. I loved living with both of them. We haven't remained too closely in touch, just because we all had different activities and different things like that. And our junior year we all lived separately. So my junior year I lived off campus in an apartment. Also with two of my friends who I'd met freshman year.

And that was interesting because it was so much cheaper than living on campus but also I guess just a lot more work, in the sense of having to find somewhere to live, which was a little stressful. Where it was almost so much easier just knowing: "Yeah, my Bradford room isn't gonna be as large as something off campus," or things like that, but I just signed up online one day when everyone else did. Whereas having to be a quote/unquote "real adult" at that point and go and find your own apartment and things like that – a lot more work. Plus we got it unfurnished so we had to get all of that furniture and build it. But it was still great. I loved living there. I felt more like I was part of the community because I was a little bit north of campus. So we had this small coffee shop right near us that I would've never walked from the main part of campus to.
**KD:** Which coffee shop?

**JL:** Sam's Canterbury Café.

**KD:** I've never heard of it.

**JL:** So they actually closed back in November. But before they closed, I would go there every weekend. Because it was pretty cheap. It was local. It was just kind of very relaxing but it was also kinda small. So that's why if I was down on this part of campus I wouldn't walk up to it. But, yeah, that's part of why I loved living there. And then now I also live in an apartment, just with one of my other friends.

**KD:** Great. Could you talk about any clubs or activities you've joined while at Hopkins? Maybe ones you've been in or ones you're currently in.

**JL:** Yeah. I used to do mock trial and then I did – I'm trying to think. I'm still currently in Blue Key, which is admissions volunteers. So I'm a tour guide. I volunteer for events like the Spring Open House and Overnight. Other random things that admissions has. And then I'm part of the Johns Hopkins Model United Nations Conference. So I joined that my first year as just one of the normal staff members. And then I got a leadership position my sophomore year and have stayed in club leadership since. And, honestly, that especially was an amazing experience. Because this year myself and another student were running the organization.

So there were 140 student volunteers there, thousands of high school students, and it was just such a cool experience being able to manage a large budget for something like that, manage the contracts, the staff, and really be able to apply – I'm also an entrepreneurship and management minor here. So kind of apply things that I've learned in my management classes and things like that. I honestly don't think I'll be able to even experience that in an entry-level job for a while. So it was really cool to be able to do that. And met some great friends there.

Other than that, I was part of the Milton S. Eisenhower Symposium series. So it's a symposium series in the fall. So I got to be able to go to – I would go to all of their speakers that we'd bring in. And then I got to go to a dinner with a few of them. So when we had a *New York Times* reporter come, we'd do dinner at Gertrude's right before they would speak. So I got to do that.
KD: Any specific names come to mind?

JL: So, Hasan Minhaj came. So he's a comedian. He came and we ended up moving it over to the medical campus because they have the largest auditorium at Hopkins. So that was really funny. I think he was almost testing out *Patriot Act*, which is his Netflix –

KD: Special.

JL: Yeah. Because, thinking about it retrospectively, they had a lot of very cool graphics going on behind him and things like that, and it was about maybe six months to a year before *Patriot Act* launched. So that was probably one of the more interesting speakers that I go to go to.

KD: Great. It sounds really cool.

JL: Yeah.

KD: Could you talk about internships or jobs that you've had?

JL: Yeah. So, on campus, my first year, I got a job pretty quickly. So my first year I worked for athletics. So I was an assistant athletic trainer. So it paid minimum wage. But I got to go to some of the different games. And then I'd go to practices. So my first semester, I worked with women's soccer a lot. And then my second semester on campus I did a lot of men's lacrosse. So it was fun because I don't think I would've gone to a lot of the games, especially when I was doing the soccer games and things like that. So I did that on campus. And then I became a course assistant for Principles of Management my sophomore year and I stayed there since.

KD: A course assistant?

JL: Yeah. So it's like a TA.

KD: A teaching assistant?

JL: So it's like a teaching assistant. It's just what they call their undergrad version of them. So I did that. And then the summer after my freshman year I got a summer internship at the Department of Justice in DC. And I've also interned there since. So during the school year I would just do four hours a week. And then every summer since I've been full-time. So the last two summers I was there again. I've definitely kind of considered looking at other things but it's just a very kind of cool opportunity and a possible
career there. So I've decided to stay at DOJ. And I'm still there now.

**KD:** Again, you've – my next question is talking about how you spent your summers or breaks. So you mentioned with the DOJ. But did you go home a lot?

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Or how else did you spend your breaks?

**JL:** So, I would say I've progressively spent less time at home over breaks. So my first year, I spent pretty much all of winter break and intersession, which is January term, back at home in Florida. And then over the summer I was there, as soon as classes ended, until my internship started. And then I think I had to move in here immediately after the internship ended. So I spent ten weeks in DC. And then the summer before my junior year I had the ten weeks in DC and then I did a summer abroad program right before that. So I spent about four weeks in Denmark, which was very interesting. So I was barely home that summer. And the intersession of my sophomore year, I took an EMT class here on campus. So I was home for just winter break and then I was back here January 3rd.

And then this past year I moved down to DC in May. So right after classes ended here I just moved to DC, kind of stayed there for May before my internship started, did some traveling, just to see family. So I went home for a week, things like that. But I've definitely spent less and less time at home. And then this intersession I was working here. So I had a job as an EMT. So I was working throughout January and then I was able to get a Monday through Friday off so I went up – I have family in Massachusetts. So I went up to Massachusetts to go see them. But other than that, I've pretty much been in the Baltimore/DC area.

Yeah, it is interesting. because I think about how long I would go home, especially when I first started here, but now it's like: a lotta my friends are here, or my friends who've graduated have jobs in this area. So it's kind of nice to see them, especially since I do go home for winter break, and I'll go home for like a week or two in the summer. And my family will come here when they can.

**KD:** So kind of in relation to that, how has your relationship with your family changed, or how's it been while in college here?
JL: I would say definitely, just because I'm not living with them, I speak with my family a lot less. And I think it's just because I don't – I'm not a big person to randomly call family and things like that. So it's more of like: when I had – especially my first year here, I would call them more frequently. And the longer I've been here, I'm like, "Nothing's really" – I call them to be like, "Oh, there's this cool new thing" or "I'm in this class." And at a certain point I was like, "Oh, that's just class. That's what being at college is like." So it was more I'd call them because I'm really excited about something. And now I guess it's the same thing. Things are just less exciting. So I'd say it's about the same. I mean, it's a lot less of just casually talking to my family about things just because I'm not there.

I'd say I guess sometimes it does feel a little not isolated to be here, but my grandparents will go down to Florida for a month or two, things like that, so all of my family will be down there, and then I'm here. So it's a little different in that sense. Where, especially growing up, I would get to see them for the entire month. And with school, you'd get out of high school at 2:00 PM, so then it would just be like family most of the time. But I think it is pretty – I guess my current relationship is probably similar to a lot of people who are working, where it's just like: you're working out of town. You keep in touch with your family as best as you can and you see them for holidays and things like that.

KD: Definitely. And could you talk a little bit about what kind of support system you built here for yourself while you've been here?

JL: Yeah. So, here I would say a lot of it is just friends. So, just for career advice or advice on classes to take, studying, things like that, I would pretty much just reach out to people who I've had class with or were in my clubs, things like that we'd gotten close. And then, other than that, I would say there's no one faculty member that I got super close with. So there's some, for their class, were super approachable. So I would just go to their office hours pretty frequently, which was nice. But then for other subjects – so I would admit: I don't think I'm very great at econ.

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So I have some friends who I know are great at it. They're econ majors. So I would just reach out to them for help with classes that they'd taken in the past. I've never really used any of the formal
support systems that Hopkins has, as far as – I guess I did PILOT\(^6\), which is a peer-led learning group for certain classes. I did that my first year here.

**KD:** Is that an acronym?

**JL:** It is. But I don't know what the acronym stands for unfortunately.

**KD:** I'll look it up. Thanks.

**JL:** Yeah. At least I think it's an acronym. Anyway, it's a group of five students who work together, and it's led by someone who's gotten an *A* in the class before. So I did that for I think macro econ. And then I haven't done it since. And, other than that, that's kind of how I found my support structure here.

**KD:** This kind of relates to that, but have you felt supported by Hopkins as a first-generation student through formal programs or initiatives? And do you think there's any way the university could increase its support of first-gen students, whether just through various resources or even financially on campus?

**JL:** I think that they are doing better, from what it looks like. But I would say, especially when I first came here – obviously the need-based financial aid does a pretty great job, especially, at least for me, when I was comparing it to other schools. So the financial aid office was pretty good in that sense. I think there was still a disconnect between some departments or some administrators and the needs of first-generation or low-income students. So a lot of the – I guess certain financial aid programs for study abroad, things like that, it was kind of like it was partially need-based but also merit-based in certain circumstances.

So I got funding from international studies to do my summer abroad program but I also did intersession abroad here. And that's when it kind of was interesting in the sense of: when I first applied and I got the summer one, it was fine, great, whatever. Honestly, I'm not sure they do anything as far as reaching out to the actual financial aid office here goes. And then when I was doing the intersession program, I had gotten conflicting answers from people in the department as to what they were looking at, what they prioritize. And part of that, which I never really got a response to, is – I complained. I was like: I really think that they should be

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\(^6\) PILOT is a loose acronym for peer-led-team learning. It is program administered by the Office of Academic Support at Johns Hopkins University.
prioritizing people with financial need for some of those scholarships instead of just looking at where people wanna go and things like that.

And it was the same with – they kind of do that, which is a mix of merit and need-based. And then the study abroad office itself does need-based financial aid. But they're pretty capped with it. So the intersession-abroad programs run $7,000.00 to $8,000.00, and I think they're capped at about $1,500.00. It's pretty low compared to the actual cost of the program, especially when you consider how that relates to the overall cost of attending Hopkins and things like that. So I think there are things like that that I would hope in the future the university could do better. Because it is a great experience. And I know you can do a semester abroad and bring your Hopkins aid with you. But for some students – I guess for me, I really wanted to be on campus during the year so I did just wanna do an intersession or summer abroad. And not really being able to get financial resources for that was a little frustrating.

And then I guess also I really do think that they're doing better. because I've been seeing more e-mails I guess recently about some of the first-gen resources that they have, or a working group kind of thing where they're working with administrators on how to improve things. Because I do think, in some instances, with how certain processes work – so for the Student Leadership and Involvement Office, they oversee all the student groups. In a lot of cases, you'll get reimbursed for things. And the reimbursement process takes over a month sometimes to get cash back.

And it's things like that where, for a good number of students, it really doesn't matter all too much if it takes a month. But for others, it's kinda frustrating when you're waiting and waiting and waiting. And their solution was just to cap how much money you could get in petty cash, which isn't, at least for me, a real solution I think. because I think there are those random expenses that come up in student groups. And it would just be nicer if – so I've had to be reimbursed for my job on campus before. And I'll get reimbursed within 48 hours from them. So it's things like that where I think some departments just don't understand how certain policies will impact different groups differently.

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So hopefully that's something in the future they can maybe educate departments on or do something like that.
**KD:** Yeah. That's a good concrete example of something that people might not be thinking about. You've talked a little bit about the different neighborhoods you've lived in. Do you have anything more to say in general about your life in Baltimore? Any places that you like to go? Any restaurants you like? Or even if there have been any kind of major events in the city, or just nationally that have happened while you've been here, and just speak about living in Baltimore a little bit?

**JL:** So I've loved living in Baltimore. Because I'm doing the five-year program, I'm living in DC right now. And it's weird because when I was living in Baltimore, I don't think I appreciated it as much as I could've. When I was here, I guess a lot of the neighborhoods we'd go to – so I'd go to Hampden pretty often. Especially when it's nice out, it would be nice to walk over to Hampden, get ice cream. Or sometimes I would just go to one of the coffee shops over there and study. So my friends would – I'd go there maybe once a month. And then we'd go to R. House in Remington since that opened. Because I think that opened my freshman year or sophomore year. It hasn't been here for a while. So we'd go to Remington just for that.

And then, honestly, other than freshman year, haven't really gone to the Inner Harbor. Because I think I've slowly realized there are better neighborhoods to go to in my opinion. Because even when my family's here, they're always like, "Oh, we should go to the Inner Harbor." And I'm like, "It's all restaurants that you can get at home. Let's go to Fed Hill or Fell's Point." So I'll go there maybe once a semester. Just because we'll normally Uber there. And I feel like, at least for me, it's hard to convince my friends to go that quote/unquote "far" off campus. Whereas it's so much easier to convince someone to go to Hampden or Remington.

And then we also just go up to the mall near Towson. But other than that, I'm trying to think. I went to the art fest that they have in Baltimore kind of over the summer last year.

**KD:** Artscape?

**JL:** Yeah. Artscape. Thank you. So I went to Artscape last year, which was pretty cool. And then, other than that, I actually haven't been able to go to too many Baltimore events. But it's been nice living – when I was living here, we went to some of the protests that were happening around the inauguration. So some of my friends had just said they were going down. Originally they were just going down to DC to get food and do things down there. And we were sitting
somewhere eating in DC and then a giant I guess line of protesters walked by. So we were like, "Well, we'll just walk behind them and see where they're going." So it's nice for those things where, living here, if you want to go see things in DC, it's easy enough.

I know I got tickets, as a Hopkins student, to go see one of the late-night talk shows go film in DC. I can't remember which one. But I went – I think it was my sophomore year. So a few of my friends and I just took the MARC Train down, got to go see that. So it's nice for that.

And then my sophomore year we went to Made in America, which is a music festival in Philly. And I'd never been to Philly before that. And then I've gotten to go to New York a few times living here, just because it's pretty easy to get around. Especially being from Florida, I felt like I should take advantage of the transportation options. Because, same thing: I think I'd gone to New York once before I came to Hopkins. So it's been nice to feel much more part of the Northeast, not just Baltimore.

**KD:** Yeah. There's great access along the mid-Atlantic. Thank you.

**JL:** Absolutely.

**KD:** So I know you've talked about living in DC and doing a five-year program. So I guess you will be here for a little bit longer. But could you speak about your plans after graduation and just for the future in general?

**JL:** Yeah. So after graduation here I'll have one more year at SAIS, which is the Hopkins school that's down in DC. So I'll have a year there. And I'll finish up my master's. And then I'll probably end up working in government is my plan as of now. So either government or maybe a contractor. So, at least my plan as of now is I'm just gonna try to work at DOJ, so transition from interning there to being a full-time employee. So that's I think more or less been my plan, at least when I was here especially.

**[0:45:00]**

I think now, being in some of the master's classes, there's a lot more people who – a lot of people in my classes have work experience. So it's nice being able to talk to them kind of about the places they work and their opinions on things. Because I think here pretty much no one has any work experience other than internships. So I think it's both good and bad. because originally
here I also was like, "You know, wherever I get a job, it's great. I'll have a job and we'll try it out." And I think now I'm almost more like, "Whatever job I get I have to really enjoy," and things like that. So that's the plan for now. I'm planning on staying in the Baltimore/DC area. I don't see that changing. Yeah, I think that's probably the plan.

**KD:** Cool. Would you recommend Hopkins to other first-generation students? And is there any advice that comes to mind for other first-gen students who might be listening to this years from now?

**JL:** Yeah. I would definitely recommend Hopkins. I had an amazing time here. And I think doing this five-year program and having a little bit of a distance now already – like I'm still here every so often but not living right on campus anymore – it makes me realize how nice campus is. So every time I walk back here, I'm like – the buildings are so pretty and I have all these great memories and these different – in Gilman Hall, even going to class, things like that. And I miss the professors I've had here. I miss the food in Baltimore, honestly. There're just so many random things about Baltimore that I've grown to love. Both about Baltimore and Johns Hopkins.

And then I'd definitely recommend it for other first-gen students. I think there's never been a point where I've really felt different from the other students because I'm first-gen. I think there are definitely different personal challenges that come with it as far as finding those resources or getting advice. because other people can turn to their parents for some of that. Especially when it comes to job search and maybe what offices they should take advantage at Hopkins. But I think, overall, Hopkins does a good job at really trying to get the word out about our different resources. So they are there if you need them. And they are pretty good if you decide to use them. I just didn't.

But overall, honestly, I had an amazing experience at Hopkins, and now especially I'm volunteering for all the admissions events I can because I want other people to come here. Just because I really do love living in Baltimore and having all of these great faculty members.

**KD:** Nice. This one's kind of tough. But it's just kind of: how would you summarize your time at Hopkins? Which is probably a lot to ask.

**JL:** Yeah. Academically expanding? I don't know if that's a good way to phrase it. But I think there are a lot of interests that I have that I
wouldn't have realized otherwise. I think it's made me a lot more curious, going here, as far as really about everything. So I think I'm more curious about different academic fields, curious about learning more in a lot of topics. And I think it's also just been nice to meet so many other students who are similar. And I think that's what Hopkins is great at.

*KD:* Awesome. Those are all of my questions. And thank you so much for talking to me today.

*JL:* Thank you.

*KD:* Is there anything else that maybe we didn't cover that you'd like to add?

*JL:* No. I think that was pretty exhaustive. Thank you so much.

*KD:* No, thank you.

*[End of Audio]*