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## Discourse Community Project

### **Introduction:**

The University of California, Davis provides a range of ways for students to branch out and share the same ideas and beliefs with other students, creating a discourse community among them. The UC Davis Jewish Community at the Hillel, in particular, is one of the many discourse communities at UC Davis. This essay mentions sources that contribute to the general idea of what it means to be a discourse community. In the UCD Jewish community, not only is reading and writing involved, but also self-identity, the coming together of different languages, and the inclusivity of the community letting non-members be part of their events.

The point of this essay is to recognize the importance of reading and writing in this community and explore how broadening your perspective can change your worldview as an individual. This essay was likewise written by a non-member of the discourse community, giving it a distinct perspective. Joining a religious community is a big step towards self-identity: you no longer have your parents forcing you to do it. Participating in a discourse community is entirely voluntary, yet it influences who you are from language to reading and writing.

**Background:**

To better understand this essay, there will be reference to the UC Davis Jewish discourse community. A discourse community simply focuses on a group of people who share the same values or goals towards a subject and come together to express those ideas. As *Dan Melzer* states, "discourse communities can also be transformed by new members who challenge the goals and assumptions and research methods and genre conventions of the community." Although the goals are consistent in the UCD Jewish community, there are evolving ways in which they communicate and share ideas. Discourse communities typically have a medium of communication or places where they meet consistently. In the UCD Jewish discourse community, the app Discord is often used or met on the day of rest often referred to as "shabbat" in this community.

UC Davis offers students the opportunity to meet and learn about Jewish heritage at the Hillel just in downtown Davis, this is typically where the UCD Jewish community meet for shabbat.

The Hillel's major goal is to commemorate religious occasions while also embracing anyone who are interested in learning about Jewish education and raising awareness.

**Methods: Personal Observation & Interviews:**

Through the process of interviews, the purpose of bringing different perspectives gave life to this essay. These interviews consisted of two individuals who are actively part of the UC Davis Jewish community at the Hillel. Although they both contribute to the same community, the approaches to language, reading, and writing differ slightly. One came from a student who has spent their entire life in the Jewish community in general, learning customs and traditions as a

child. Because he is now converting, the second person expressed a distinct point of view, describing the influence on his life of the changes in reading and language development.

Aside from the interviews, there were also personal observations that were made while attending events like shabbat. These observations only contributed to the results from the interviews and enhanced my ability to better understand the UCD Jewish community.

## **Results and Discussion**

### Common Goals as a Community

Being a member of the UCD Jewish community does not mean you have to be an expert in Hebrew, know all the prayers, or know every word in the Torah. Given the fact that this community is welcoming to all outsiders, you must convert to become an official member. The process of becoming an official member is also re-explained by the community members who were interviewed. Emily who's been part of the Jewish community in general stated "But the community at Hillel is accepting of everyone who wants to learn. We are open to anyone seeing our services and joining our shabbat dinners." This statement reflects on the idea of inclusivity for those who would like to be also educated. According to the official *Hillel* website "Hillel Educators have a deep knowledge of Judaism... They recognize that for students, grappling with and exploring different points of view while solidifying their identities is an essential part of the college experience." The discourse community's shared purpose is to become educated in both Jewish history and culture, which attracts those who want to understand more about their background and self-identity.

Due to the observations personally made, shabbat is an area to celebrate the "rest day" and the UCD Jewish community come together and eat dinner. As this dinner is filled with young

adults, activities are incorporated and the point of these activities is to be educated about the history of Judaism. Logan is currently converting to Judaism, states, “we did an Ethiopia theme where we did Ethiopian food and learned about Jewish history there.” The objective of themes centered on history is that they all connect to past events that have shaped Judaism over time. Members of this group come from all over the world, and it's a unique method to learn about yourself and the religion's history. The Jewish community at Hillel takes in consideration the learning of every individual and often hands out articles explaining history, for those who'd like to learn more. This incorporated the common goal of educating others about their history and shaping itself as a discourse community. Written from the perspective of a former Jewish college student *Sara E. Rosenblumn* states, “I left home for college and again as a young adult in New York and Houston. These Jewish communities across the country helped me find a sense of meaning and belonging as I adjusted to new chapters in my life.” The Hillel at UC Davis has the similar objective as the previous quote of not just explaining Judaism, but also what forms it and how one can self-identify with this community.

### Mechanisms of intercommunication and Participatory Methods

Keeping in contact is an essential part of the UCD Discourse community and through the Discord app they communicate and remind each other of days where there are services and shabbat. Aside from celebration, they offer members the opportunity to volunteer mostly to help make the dinner for shabbat.

It is very well known in the UCD community at Hillel that they will always see each other at shabbat Friday evenings which could be considered their method of in person

communication. In my observations, I could conclude that there are many unique customs and prayers said at shabbat and it is also a great opportunity to socialize at shabbat and learn from other students and older experienced individuals who take the opportunity to come and educate the community. The article “Shabbat in the Community” also states “Shabbat may be an opportunity for nuclear families to spend time together, it is also a chance to enjoy the company of extended family and community in a relaxed atmosphere.” This quote incorporates the idea of consistent communication among the UCD Jewish community and adds to sense of belonging you feel within the community. With the idea of belonging, *Rosenblum* states, “relationships formed at the school have helped me associate this experience with deep community connections and a positive Jewish identity.” Shabbat, for example, requires reading or language skills because there are prayers to read or say which only members know about and make an impact in someone's sense of belonging.. Everyone in the community is brought together to interact, but only those who are familiar with prayers and Hebrew terminology will truly comprehend the true meaning.



### Literature and Self-Identity

Literature takes its form in various ways in the UCD Jewish community at Hillel. There is a significance in the Hebrew language in the UCD Jewish community; it takes form in prayers, and certain pieces of literature. It is a continuous legacy. Although learning Hebrew is a fundamental tool, the majority of the UCD Jewish community members don't have the extensive opportunity to fully learn. Emily states in the interview “There is the chance to read the Romanized version

of prayers which still pronounces words in Hebrew but with English words. Some people pray in English but I prefer Hebrew because it makes me feel connected to the community.” It is not just knowing the language that makes Emily prefer reading Hebrew but the bond behind every word. One can view the way reading Hebrew could shape the community as a whole when it comes to feeling a personal connection. It can be seen that preferring Hebrew for Emily was a choice that contributes to her self-identity. An individual making the choice to connect with language that makes her have a much deeper tie with her religion. An article from the *Jerusalem Post* states “Hebrew is a fundamental heirloom that serves as an essential tool to unlock a textual tradition that spans more than three millennia: a linguistic bridge between Jews”. The use of the word “bridge” is a representation of how the majority of the community members interpret the process of learning Hebrew because they are connected with each other.

In the UCD Jewish community having a more than basic understanding of Hebrew is optional, but it contributes with your self-identity. In an interview with Logan, who is converting was asked how his perspective of reading and writing changed through the process. Conversion itself is an extensive process that can take up to years, where knowledge and full commitment is required of an individual to be fully considered part of the commitment. Logan answered “I could say several terms in Hebrew. I am currently converting and taking Hebrew school so it is beginning to be a huge part of my life. I mostly take it to feel a sense of belonging.” Hebrew is beginning to shape Logan’s experience as a converting Jewish member therefore enhancing that connection with the UCD Jewish community. This statement contributes to the idea of finding yourself. According to *NAMI*, “Religion gives people something to believe in, provides a sense of structure and typically offers a group of people to connect with over similar beliefs” This

statement contributes to the idea of finding yourself, and also making that connecting with others in your discourse community.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the UC Davis Jewish Community has an impact on young adult members who are finding themselves as well as those who want to learn more about the religion and culture. Cultural celebrations bring this discourse community together. Their inclusiveness aims to educate and welcome others. Members are shaped in a variety of ways by both spoken and written Hebrew, which allows them to connect with other members and discover who they are. It can be said that Hebrew takes a part in the identity of this discourse community as the article from *Pew Research Center States* "It revived Hebrew as a language of poetry and literature, which reflected the reformers' appreciation of their Jewish religious heritage." The UC Davis Jewish discourse community is a reflection of this quote as reading and writing in Hebrew takes a place in educating themselves of their heritage and religion itself.

### Sources

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