

Interviewee: Professor Damir Kovacevic

Interviewer: Samuel Moran

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Abstract:

Professor Damir Kovacevic was born in Bosnia before coming to the United States. He has lived across the midwest but currently lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Damir works as an assistant professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with a focus on international relations. In this interview, Damir Kovacevic discusses how the pandemic has affected his life, profession, and emotions. Damir provides insight into how the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire has handled the pandemic with testing and closing the college for the remainder of the Fall 2020 semester. Damir also touches on how Eau Claire, the state of Wisconsin, the United States, and foreign countries on the international scale handled the pandemic. He discusses how teaching as a career has changed and adapted to the pandemic. He discusses topics such as the media and misinformation when it comes to healthcare and the virus, but also the general decay in trust.

SM: Hello there, today's date is November 16, 2020. The time is 3:04 PM. I am Samuel Moran, and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. This is an oral history interview to be submitted to the COVID-19 historical archives. Today is November 16th. And in the state of Wisconsin, we currently have 330,000 cases with 2,759 deaths. In the United States, we have 11.1 million cases, and 246,000 deaths. I'm joined today by Professor Damir. Can you please provide some information about yourself such as your name, age, where you live, current occupation, and some background information about yourself?

DK: Sure. So my name is Damir Kovacevic. I am 30 years old. I am a professor of Political, assistant professor of political science at the University Wisconsin Eau Claire, specializing in international relations. I live in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Some things about me. I was, I was born in Bosnia. I grew up mostly in the United States, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, I've lived in, other than that. Yeah, I don't know why I enjoy basketball, tennis. I like to cook. I like crosswords. And, I, Sam approached me about this interview, and I thought it was a good idea. So I'm here to, to, to be a part of the archival history.

SM: All right. So I guess, for the first real question is what is most concerned you about the Covid 19 pandemic?

DK: What has most concerned? I mean, simply put, I just the amount of people that have died in such a short period of time is concerning. It was concerning when it was, you know, when we were in the hundreds and thousands as it should always be. And it's certainly concerning today, because the numbers are staggering. And if this was a case of war, you know, something like when I study with international security, if we're talking about war, and this many people have

died in a period of let's say, nine months, it would be a international crisis as this is, but it would be one that we would want to end and we would want to stop. The difference, I think is, this is more, you can't see it. It, it's silent, referred to it as the silent killer, whereas you can see battle deaths or, you know, massacres of individuals. So that's what's concerning me the most is just simply the amount of people that have died in a short period of time, and, and it's something that we've obviously never experienced, and no one's ever lived through. And it's, and I guess what concerns me the most is it's not at the end of it, and so the number will continue to rise. So that, that certainly is what I think concerns me the most.

SM: Yeah, what have been your feelings towards the pandemic so far as a whole?

DK: Feelings? Well, you know, I'm, it's sad, it's frustrating, it's, I get angry sometimes. Times I do get inconvenienced, but I try not to let that impact my life too much. Originally, I guess my feelings toward it were sort of uncertainty and a little bit of, I mean, mostly uncertainty that sort of maybe went into a little bit of fear. After a while, I guess you come into kind of the realm of acceptance. Unfortunately, where you accept that this is life for a while and, and you try to do your best to kind of adjust and adapt to that life. And I've been trying to do that. And that means having to give up certain things, which for me is fine. I know that it's, it's good for me, and it's good for, for the greater whole. So I'm okay with those certain restrictions on my personal liberty. I know it's temporary. I know, some people have a difficult time thinking about time horizons, but this has been a relatively short period of time. And if things are done correctly, this is not going to be the rest of our lives. And so I'd like to, you know, I want to think five-10-15-25 years later, and if that means making some significant changes now, that's great. Fine. So my feelings have been kind of all over the place. But at this point, it's just more of a acceptance of the reality, trying to do the best that I can as an individual to take care of myself and those around me. And I'm hopeful that we will get out of this eventually. But, yeah, I guess that kind of covers it.

SM: Okay, so you are a professor, Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. So, how has COVID-19 impacted your profession as a teacher?

DK: Yeah, a lot more online, and remote learning. That's the biggest one. I think my job, unlike some jobs, thankfully, has not been impacted, I'm still able to do my job, I'm able to get paid. I have not had to, you know, think about other employment or anything like that. And so I have to remind myself of that when I feel inconvenienced. But, yeah, from the perspective of a teacher, I mean, I work at a university that we have a lot of in person classes, we pride ourselves on that, I would have classes and some instances with 60-70-80-90 students. And this time, it's very different. I've taught online before, but not much. And so it's just been kind of adjusting to that reworking assignments, tests, exams, quizzes, any kind of papers, everything sort of moving online, it's been adjusting to sort of zoom teaching and virtual office hours, which, you know, I've gotten used to, it's not the same as if you were sitting in my office doing this interview, but I can see you, we can we can talk to each other, it's still, you know, it's not, it's an okay alternative. So there's just been a lot of online teaching. And I think that's made me a better online teacher, but I think this time has also made us realize how we shouldn't take in person classes for granted anymore, and, and the value of those and I think I'm looking forward to having my students back and being able to actually come into a classroom and, you know, lecture to, to a regular group of

students. So it's impacted me in that way. But generally, I'm optimistic. And I'm thankful that, you know, I've been able to do my work adjusted a little bit, but that's okay. I know, it's, it's not forever. And we just carry on. So like, as we, you know, you're in my class on Friday. Normally, we probably have 30 kids in that class on a Friday 2pm. Maybe like, five, six don't come that day, because it's a Friday, but, you know, we had three. And that's the reality, and we just have to get used to that, but it's not forever.

SM: So would you say that the changes in your workplace due to the pandemic have been, like, significant or damaging in any way?

DK: Damaging, I wouldn't say damaging, I think, in some ways, they're significant. Because they're very different. So that is significant. I wouldn't I don't think of anything that is too damaging I to think about. I mean, we've only really been only doing this for eight, nine months. Some people would say it seems like a long time but you know, some people's teaching careers are years and years and years and so eight to nine months isn't that much. Mine is six years. So if I took the bag at the last five years, and you know, this hasn't been that long, but it's significant because I can just think of several things like I normally like my office door open and I you know, encourage students to come in, the office door is constantly closed. There. It's like a ghost town on the fourth floor sometimes and Hibbard. I don't see my colleagues very much. That's certainly significant. And I wish it wasn't the case. I don't have students coming in. I leave the office if I have to use the restroom, or, you know, fill up my water bottle mostly it's just sitting here and because this is where I can keep my mask off, at least and work. But, so I mean, those things are obviously significant because we have a pretty cordial workspace. People are always here and we're always, you know, talking to each other and everyone stopping by each other's offices. I always see students coming through here we have a classroom on the fourth floor. And that's been a very different and of course, I already mentioned the previous answer, the online learning has been different, but I don't think anything has been damaging. It's just been an adjustment that you need to get used to and, at times, it's difficult and inconvenient, but it's, you know, something that has to do with and we can do.

SM: Okay, so, has online learning been difficult to adjust to? Like has it been more difficult this semester and last semester compared to your past two years of teaching?

DK: A little bit yes. Because normally, if you're teaching a class online, the expectation going into it is, it's going to be online, and the student students chose that that class to be online. So there's already that expectation last year was this kind of quick, you know, we shut down for several weeks, we moved everything online, it was, it wasn't very organized, it was sort of just do the best you can let's get through the semester. You know, be lenient, be the understanding, let's just finish it. This, going into the fall, I had a little bit of idea of what it would look like, but it was kind of they told me would be this hybrid section in August. So it took a little bit more adjusting and trying to figure out, Okay, how do I make a hybrid section work. And so for me, it was just recording a lot of videos at home, which I thought would be really easy. But when you record like, over 40 of them, you realize how much time you put into it. But again, it's manageable work that is in line with what I do. So it's, it's fine. I think about it from the perspective of my students, though, and I mean. I think some students who are interested in the topic and who are good students will always do well, and they'll find a way to do well, but I've

seen it impact other students who are maybe disinterested or not, as you know, they're not motivated, or they find it harder to concentrate, or some students who have just been completely absent for several weeks, or I've seen it with students that have had in the past, before that were solid students, maybe like, you know, get good grades do well in your classes have kind of fallen off. And that's probably because there isn't that constant reminder in classrooms, and they don't see the professor as much and it's easy to lose track of time, because you're sitting at home and more of it is on managing time. So that's kind of been the most unfortunate aspect of it, because I know what certain students, they would do probably better if this was in person, and part of you wants to say okay, to that student, this is the reality, you have to just accept it and, you know, get your work in, you know, we have to, we can complain only so much. And after that we need to just adapt, and it's, it's you're facing a little bit of adversity, but that's okay. And you need to just do the work. But you also don't know what everyone's going through. At this time, you don't know what people's personal lives are like. So you also want to be understanding of that. So that's been kind of the biggest thing is, is and you feel more disconnected from your students, like I see you in class once a week, which is far more than I've seen some students, I don't even know what some of my students look like, you know, I've never seen them. I just know what their picture is. And, but even seeing you once a week is not the same as if I were to see you three times a week. And that's significant. So that's been kind of the biggest thing I think, from my perspective, and for my students perspective.

SM: So you said that the pandemic has not affected your employment, because you haven't been looking for other employment besides for moving online. But has it has pandemic affected like any friends or family that you know of, like, have they lost their jobs? Or have they, like, endured any trouble with employment?

DK: There are, there are some people that I know who had to sort of pick up extra jobs or who, whose hour shifted, or whose work significantly changed. And they didn't have that kind of clear, easy transition to online like, teaching online, I can teach my material, whether it's like this or in person, it's not that significant of a change, but sort of people's jobs that were never done online having to kind of bend that. So most people in my family or close friends still have their jobs but like, I think of my parents, my parents live, go to work every day, you know, they're, you know, they get tested Now, every day before going to work. They're far more likely to get exposed to it than for instance than I am because they, they have to be in working person they they can't do their job online. My sister is a dietitian in a hospital so she and so since they're so understaffed now she's actually been more and more exposed to actual COVID patient so her job is a lot riskier and more serious than than she thought it would be when, under normal circumstance, a dietitian just visiting a patient's room for a little bit. In some weird ways, it's worked out for some of my friends. I have a friend who just had a A kid he was born on. But after the new year, so this was a several months before this all began here. And his work was nice. And I was, you know, they basically moved online and have said that they will remain online through the end of this year, and probably all of next year. So he's been able to stay at home with his son, and work online completely, which is really cool. I mean, it's basically like an extended paternity leave and, but full employment. But I've had some friends who sort of work in more like the restaurant industry and stuff. And that was a big significant thing, especially early on. So most people that are close to me, I know still are doing their jobs, although it was a little different. And that's good, that's good to know, to hear. And then you're happy about that.

But, you know, you hear other stories of other people. And that's where I have to sort of remind myself to just remain thankful, and be happy that I'm still doing the job I want to do. And if it's a little different than that's okay.

SM: We're going to shift a little here, but, have any of your co-workers or even yourself come in contact with COVID-19?

DK: Can't speak for my coworkers, I don't think so. I imagine if my closest colleagues here in the department did, we would probably get some kind of an email notification letting us know and asking us to quarantine so we haven't. So I don't think so I myself have not from what I know. There I've started to, I've been getting tested here now that they have the rapid testing on campus just as a precaution. So I've been doing that like once a week, just because I think I should. But generally speaking, no. Again, I can't be certain all the time, I still have to go to the grocery store. But I mentioned this maybe to you in class, I've been very cautious. I don't go to restaurants, you're not going to see me in a crowd of people. I have been at home a lot. And I'm I'm I so for me, it's I've been taken very seriously. And simply it's I mean, I know some people say that you could get COVID. And you might not have sometimes it's still COVID, you still don't want to be sick, you still don't want to have that. So thankfully, nothing yet. And nothing for my coworkers that I've heard of.

SM: So what would you say was the biggest challenge that you personally faced during the pandemic, when it came to being a professor? I think you touched on this with going online but if you'd like to elaborate.

DK: The biggest challenge I would say, finding a way to reach my students through this weird void and finding a way and not really knowing how I'm reaching them, because normally I can see their faces in class. And I can tell someone's normally do I can tell if someone's upset, I can tell if someone's having a good day, I can tell if they're even understanding things, I can tell by head nods, I can tell if they're interested. And you build that bond over time with students, some you get to know better than others. And but you feel closer to them. And you feel like, Okay, I'm aware of where my students are, and I see them and, you know, the students that attend the students that Miss and this way, I have no clue, especially with my entry level class where you know, I have majors all over the place. So not being able to have a sense of where my students are at is, is disappointing. And, you know, you try to make yourself as available as possible. But the reality of it is you're not gonna have students asking for virtual office hours all the time. I mean, they're doing their own thing. And so not being able to communicate or get to meet them has been a huge challenge, because I think that's the part of my job that I enjoy the most I this is why I went into what I want to do, I enjoy my research and everything, but I like to be in the classroom in front of my students. And I've had very little of that. And so I would probably go with that.

SM: So we're going to shift now to your personal life. How has COVID-19 affected mostly you, your family?

DK: Let's see. My household, my current household, is me and my partner, so it's me and her and our dog. So when we both work at the university, so we've been pretty fine. We sort of started taking the seriously March we both sort of working online from March to July, she started

going back into work a little bit on kind of a low staffing basis. And then I didn't go back until obviously September, she normally works from home goes in a couple times a week, I go in three times a week mostly work from home. So that's been pretty consistent, pretty good. Like I said, family has been good, they've been tested, no one's been sick that we know of yet. My parents, my sister, one grandmother lives in the United States, she's been fine. She's been staying home. And she's taken seriously, um, my sister is supposed to have a wedding this semester. This semester, oh, my talk, but this year, can't get out of my professor speak, she was supposed to have a wedding, a bigger wedding. And that was up ended. And, and so she sort of waiting to do that still. And, but I've heard of other people that that's happened. So that's kind of been the big impact, because she was planning to have one over the summer. But yeah, otherwise, that's, it's, we've been pretty fortunate. So that's a good thing.

SM: So what has been the biggest challenges that you or your family have had to overcome due to the pandemic?

DK: Not seeing each other, I think are seeing each other. Very, I mean, I've seen my parents just several times, one time was just they just kind of went by and then talk to them from a distance for a while, which, you know, they'll have two hours away wasn't, isn't too hard to go. But, you know, that was weird and not being able to be around them. And I think I've since seen my sister once since March. I mean, that's clearly it. I've seen my grandma kind of outside with a with a mask on a couple times. So that's the biggest challenge. I mean, everyone is healthy, which is a good thing. And you're thankful that and you keep reminding yourself that this is again, still hasn't been that long. I mean, it's still one of those things that we can get through in a couple years. And then, you know, you still have all those other years together. But it's hard, obviously, when Thanksgiving is rolling around, and you know, and people want to be together. So that's been the biggest challenge. And I think a lot of people would probably agree with that.

SM: And the holidays are coming up. So that's going to be a little difficult for some people. So, in general, how would you say that the pandemic has affected the Eau Claire area?

DK: Well, at first, we were really fine. I mean, for a while it was, you know, pretty unaffected, you know, affected here. And I think that changed once sort of restaurants were allowed to open up again, and there was the thing about a Supreme Court rulings, sort of over overruling Governor Evers stay at home order limited capacity, or I'm not sure that there's been several instances where they back and forth and people started going out more and then the cases started coming up and and then they've gone up quite a bit recently, because the state of Wisconsin has been a hotspot and and I think with, you know, the amount of let's say, maybe students coming back into the area that that certainly jumps up. So and I've heard that, you know, hospital beds are at full capacity. So I mean, it's a serious thing. I mean, that you can't ignore it. It's, it's certainly a problem here. It's its significance. I don't know when we, when it gets better, I'm not sure but right now, I would say that, you know, it's probably better being here than maybe in a larger city or you know, there's more people around you but we can't ignore the signs and then the signs are pointing to right now with it's pretty bad and and i don't know what that requires us to do. Clearly. It means wear masks more often. It probably means going out less and limiting what we do. It might mean temporary shutdowns again, but I don't know if that's a realistic option in the country that we live in right now. Because a lot of people don't want that. So yeah, I

don't I guess I, I wish more people did what I did, but I can't tell people what to do with their lives and how to live their lives. That's that's on them. But you know, yeah.

SM: So, just to clarify, so, after Thanksgiving for Thanksgiving break all online, all teaching at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire is being moved online. What is your opinion on this? Do you, Are you surprised, or did you expect it?

DK: I expected it. And I think it's the right decision. I mean, I thought we'd go online earlier in the semester, I wasn't as you, you know, there was kind, of the, the kind of this kind of casual kind of waging bets on when you think it would happen. And we initially had kind of a weird outbreak here in the beginning with the bookstore, and I thought they were gonna shut us down and things got a little better. And then it picked up again, like the Halloween spike. been pretty good here compared to maybe some other universities, I guess it's been okay. But I just expect with thanksgiving, you can't possibly expect people just to remain in town and expect students in dorms to not leave and everything like that. I mean, people will travel and, and you don't know what people are bringing back or what that's going to be like, and the fact that it's just three weeks, and you know, two weeks of instruction in one week of finals. I think we're at a point now where we basically had a, you know, an in person semester, however, that looks like for most people, and I think it'll be fine. And we'll get through it. I mean, it's last semester, we had half a semester online. So three weeks isn't too bad. The real question is, then, you know, what will the spring semester looked like? So I have no idea. I think we intend to be in person. But I don't know what it will look like at that point, or how many cases we'll have. So that's, that's the bigger uncertainty right now.

SM: Yeah, the, basically, it's looking to the future, like will cases go down? or anything like that. In terms of like the actual University administration, do you think they've handled the pandemic? Well on campus?

DK: Generally, yes. I mean, that, you know, they're doing what they can I mean, it's, it's hard for me to say, I mean, I'm not in their shoes. And sometimes I even if I'm not always agreeing with the decision they make, I know that they have to account for all sorts of factors that I'm not always thinking of. So I think of it from my perspective, or my students perspective, I think we clearly should shut down. But I don't know all the variables that are in play and what needs to be considered. And these are very important decisions that I sometimes I'm very glad that I don't have to make myself. So generally, it's been fine. I think the communication has been there. I mean, I do appreciate the dashboard. I think, overall, it's been okay. You're never going to make everyone happy in this situation. If we went completely online, some people would want to go elsewhere, or would say, I'm paying too much for this. This is not right. If you go, you know, completely in person. And you'll have some people say this is dangerous, you're putting people's lives at risk. Right? This could be done online. If you do hybrid, which we kind of did. You make most people happy. But then there's a lot of confusion about how this actually works. No one's ever been, no one's ever dealt with this. I don't think there was like a handbook that you can hand out and say, Oh, wait, let's go find our COVID handbook that in case this happens, it was just happened so quickly. And so I think generally, they've been doing fine with with their decisions. And, you know.

SM: Are you there?

DK: So, I don't know why I booted me out. [Kicked out of zoom call]

SM: That's okay.

DK: Hold on a second, let me come back to this one seconds.

SM: Alright.

DK: Okay.

SM: Yeah, we're, we're back. Just a few technical difficulties. That's okay. That's to be expected.

DK: I got a warning that said you'll be kicked off in five minutes. I don't know what that was. But I'm sorry. I was on my under your I have no clue. But I'm back. My The last thing I was gonna say about the administration was I think it'll take some time, once this is all over to sort of reassess, you know, exactly how decisions were made and what kind of decisions and right but generally, I think the decisions are good. You know, there's a lot to factor in and I think they've done, they'd have done a decent job. There's a lot of different sides to juggle and all of this. And, and so I don't have any strong views for or against that. I think it's been fine. And, you know, we'll see how we get through this. And, you know whether they're the right decisions, I guess, in the future.

SM: So we're going to shift again. So in terms of the government, what I have used and the actions that have been taken so far, in terms of the pandemic, by the state of Wisconsin and the federal government?

DK: Pretty bad, the, the federal government, I think, has completely botched this. If this is supposed to be an honest answer, and then an honest archive, and it's, this could have been done so many different ways and in such a better manner, we should have been notified earlier about this. We know this, because the President knows, he admitted to this and said, You know, I didn't want to panic and worry people, but that is the time we needed to know, we should have moved faster on maybe like temporary shutdowns or lock downs or move a lot faster on the masks, or the message of the administration carries a lot of weight. So if the administration comes out and speaks to us, honestly, and with some compassion, and you know, iterates, how important masks are, that means a lot to how people behave and go about their business. So I think we could have handled it in a way where maybe in the summer, the fall, we're going back to something a little bit more normal, but I think they were invested in it for a little bit. We had the kind of Corona briefings and then it was just dropped. And at the moment, if reporting is correct, the President has an attended a coronavirus, briefing in months, he sort of said, this is going to go away, it's just a matter of time. None of that is true. We know this, it's serious. And it's weird, because I know the incoming administration has a better plan. And I know I trust them more. But this weird transition period is scary for me because of the lack of communication and the amount of you know, they're they're really not working with each other because the current administration doesn't want to. And, you know, it's it's really bad right now. And this is where we need

leadership. And I think, to some degree, the governor in Wisconsin has been has been better about it. But he's sort of been constrained by a by the Supreme Court. And the and, you know, his his, I think his intentions have been good. But I think so much of it has to begin at the federal level and kind of be implemented down because if we can get a cohesive message at the federal level, then I think that's easier for governors and to implement that at the state level. And we just haven't had that at the federal level. And I think it's a there's very little you can say, to me, that will convince me that this was handled correctly or responsibly by the administration, you just have to look at the amount of cases and the amount of deaths and that in itself should be enough. And probably one of probably a good reason why, you know, we now have a new president elect. So again, this was one of those things where I think years from now we look back at it, we are going to be asking questions of how to exactly that this happened, and why did we make the decisions that we did, and people will be sort of baffled? And we'll be looking for answers. But yeah, my that would, I'll leave it at that. I think that's enough.

SM: So you teach international relations and global politics. What have you noticed on the international scale over the course of the pandemic, I suppose?

DK: Well, I have noticed how, in places like New Zealand and Taiwan, they've really controlled it. And I know, these are smaller places and islands, and I get that, but when you consider, you know, in Taiwan, they've had like, less than 600 cases. And we have, I don't know what you said today. 300,000 in Wisconsin, over this time, that's just shocking. You look at how in Europe for some time, they had it under control a little better. And then life looked a little bit more normal for them. And now it's spiking up again. So generally, you see, it's weird because the whole world is going through the same thing. And that's something that is very rare to see that's so immediate, like there's nothing that can connect us in such a way that I can think of that impacts everyone no matter where they live. So in a way, that's pretty interesting to see. But it's also you know, when you look at our situation as the most dominant country in the world, according to us in many ways, and you see the amount of cases that we have when you look to other developed countries, you have to ask, why do we get it so wrong here? And that's the big kind of narrative that I take away from me. And when I look at internationally with other countries that are at the level of the United States, kind of our peers as why have we done it's, you know, so much worse than them. That's been my big noticed, and just just how great Taiwan has been handled. I mean, it's just, I always bring that up in class.

SM: So what do you think the United States could have done differently? In terms of pandemic? I know, you mentioned, maybe increasing like, the mask mandates earlier? Or even making a federal mask mandate. But what do you think? What kind of changes do you think should have been done earlier?

DK: Decisive steps should have been taken. And I think January, early February, prepare the American people for what's going to happen. Yes, that would have caused a little bit of uncertainty and fear and panic, but spoken to people honestly, and let them know like, this is the time to prepare life is going to look different a little bit, that would have helped out because it was just kind of thrown in there. And like mid March, and it happened. Just to be honest with people don't tell people, this is a two week was a two weeks of lockdown, then we'll go back and

everything will be fine. By Easter. I mean, that kind of rhetoric is dangerous, because it gives people false hope. So being very honest, mask mandate would have been important. Maybe a longer, and I know this is difficult, but a longer lockdown on certain things would have probably helped. Opening up and, again, limiting. I mean, do we need to have fans at football games or stuff like that? Is that really necessary? Right? Do we need to have, you know, these kinds of things. So that would have helped more testing. That the research points to the fact that wearing masks and increase the amount of people wearing masks if, if most of us wore masks? A lot less people would have died. So that in itself, I think would have been a really good start. So if we implement one with the vitamin administration, that's good. But that's also almost a year too late, in my opinion.

SM: So you mentioned longer lock downs, like so like businesses or like further restrictions? So I suppose How do you think the government should have handled like job loss or struggling businesses like, the US government, they pass the first stimulus check. Do you think the government should pass the second one? Or further ones after that?

DK: Yeah, I mean, I think so. Make sense. The one stimulus check seems a people got about 1,200 dollars individually, or 2,400 per family, which a lot of cases doesn't cover expenses admin might cover somebody in renters, you know, some things here, here for a month. But when people are out of work, and they're filing for unemployment, and you know, businesses need help. I just I think it makes sense. You think about the the stimulus checks that have been getting, you know, and out in Canada and how those have been continuous and how they've helped people. I think, under the circumstances, it would have been the right thing to do. politically speaking, I think it would have probably helped the President's reelection campaign had he had he done that. I mean, I think that would have probably helped in his favor, because of, you know, the other decisions that he's made around this have been pretty poor. But I think it would have made a lot more sense to do that. There's been a lot of bickering and infighting between Congress they sort of just gave up on many of the stimulus talks. And blame both sides for that, I think is just not wanting to sort of you know, cure on the other side a lot of politicking when you know people's lives are at stake and unfortunately led to this and you know, yeah, so definitely shitted on more maybe they will and moving forward but what what was done in this short period of time it just isn't enough I the response that you have to sort of just tackle this and live with it and then not been afraid of it isn't necessarily the the way that we're going to get through this because I'm not okay with more people dying that should never be like the trade off, so, yeah.

SM: What have your primary sources of information been during the pandemic, such as news or other?

DK: Well, you know, you know, news come from all sorts of places, whether it's the times the post, and I'll see news on the TLC news on TV, CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN, I'll see, I mean, I'll see all of them. Normally, I have been looking to, if you to experts who, like Fauci, like anyone that, you know, who can speak to this, if someone mentions research related to this, I want to find that primary. So I want to see where that comes from. So generally, kind of take my news broadly. And, you know, I already know I mean, I know like, what's crap and what should be listened to, I can decipher that that isn't a problem for me. But I do trust more expert opinions, regardless of

what the source is, because that's who we shouldn't be listening to right now. We shouldn't be listening to scientists. It's so clear. And so evidence. I don't, not, I don't want to hear from people who have anecdotal stories on social media about something or, or how they search, or in their MD on Facebook, and how they're going to tell me everything's like I don't need to know, I don't need to listen to that, you know, this is serious enough. And there's people who are experts on this. And so, and what they're saying is that this is a really dark time, and then we need to take it seriously. But they've been saying that for nine months. And I think the country is basically like 50/50 on those that are taking it seriously, and those that are sort of saying, you know, what can I do? gotta live my life and go about my life, so, yeah.

SM: So, kind of a follow up question about the experts. What do you think of the people that like, denounce the experts or prefer what they term alternative facts?

DM: Well, there's no such thing as alternative facts, but I, This is this isn't just. I mean, this isn't just something that we've seen related to Covid. This is something like the truth decay, right that we've seen get like progressively worse in the last couple of years of people spreading all sorts of messed up conspiracy theories about things that are just cannot be true and, And how we've legitimized just, you know, in the past were like growing up is like being in middle school. High School brings a conspiracy theory is something you kind of laugh at you. Entertainer for a little bit. Then you kind of move on with your life. I mean, it's not. You don't never take it too seriously and people bring up JFK, UFOs, moon landing. Now Tupac Shakur being still alive like things like that, but like you just kind of move on after that. It's not like a serious thing but to you know to have conspiracy spread to the point where people legitimately believe them. It's frustrating. I mean, I guess it's a lot easier for people to be ignorant and to believe what they want because the truth hurts but what, what can you do about it that the truth is the truth? It's sad it doesn't help that again, when the most powerful person in the country is spreading this on their own Twitter account, like the president, it doesn't help because his voice means a lot and he could easily shut a lot of this down if you just didn't say the things that he did. So, It's, it's funny to me because I think about like I think of like the simple thing that I think of is like if you if your arm started hurting or you had like something was wrong and you needed to go to the doctor and you walked it. You know you're like I really need to end up doing something doesn't feel right I, I feel sick, I feel hurt and you walked into doctors off the doctor came to you and said look I'm not really a doctor. I just kind of but have a different way of approaching this. Like I, I thought about it differently and why don't you let me take a crack at that shoulder? I don't think most of us would be like sure. I mean, we always look for experts when it comes to certain things like your car breaks down. You want someone who can actually know something about cars to fix it. Need a haircut. You go to someone who knows how to cut hair. You want an international relations course. You take a course with some of the teachers international missions. You get sick, you know something's wrong with your teeth. You go to a dentist. We always look for the person that knows what they're doing. We live our lives this way, You need a lawyer, you look for a lawyer, right? But for some reason when this comes around, everybody sort of becomes this expert and they think they know more and they started ridiculing these people who have been doing this their entire lives have just committed themselves to the facts into the science and have been calling him, you know, frauds and whatever it may be. And that's just sad. Because that's not how most people live their lives. Because if you look at most of those people lives and when they have a problem they would normally seek out advice from people

that can help them. Who are experts in that, but somehow they've all become experts on Covid and that's interesting I guess.

SM: So, I'm sure you've heard about this, but as of today there are now three supposed vaccines in the process, one is 95% effective, the one in Russia is 92% effective and I believe a third one is 90% effective. Do you think that this will bring, like hope for like the future like, such as like next semester or just at the end of the year like early next year 2021?

DK: Yeah, I think the likelier timeline is end of next year. I don't know how the distribution will go, and we're not at that phase yet. But if we get to that, that's promising. You know how it gets distributed? I assume it goes to maybe doctors or nurses or frontline people, maybe older populations, whatever it may be I know that some people will have to wait awhile. I think next year will look similar to this year. We have to be cautiously optimistic that life can be better. Maybe the fall semester looks a little different, but generally. I would think that if the vaccines are effective and they are distributed, then 2022 should, should bring us back to more normal life. So yeah, I would think for next year the likelier timeline would be towards the end of the year but we'll see I just I have no idea how this distribution phase will work and you know how we're going to get the vaccine and how long we have to wait for it, but it's it's hopeful news. It's, it's good.

SM: Do you think the media has done a good job of covering the pandemic? What is your view on the public health crisis and how should it be handled by the press?

DK: Hmm, I mean I, I guess I mean I, I mean there, there's certainly reporting on it and then like if you if you if you turn on like like an MSNBC or CNN or sometimes you feel like they have like a little tracker there that tells you the amount of cases, and I mean that's good. That's obviously let's people know, hey, this is serious and look what's happening. I think generally they, they have reported on it fine. I think the problem is not too much, not so much how the reporting is done is the kind of pushback from certain segments of the population who don't want to listen or trust the media in any case or who have sort of dismissed this as the problem that is the problem or have sort of said kind of moved on and don't want to hear any of that and so you're really talking to like two different worlds. Sometimes you're talking to a world that understands this and is looking to do the things that they can individually to get us through this. And you're talking to another world that.

Doesn't care for that and is going to go about their lives as they please and.

And there's really nothing to do with how the media covers. I mean, the media can come out tomorrow and say 200,000 people have have died today. It's likely that they could get to that number. It wouldn't change anyone's thinking well already is dismissed this and April or May or June and I don't know if there's anything that the media could change to get those people to listen, right? I think that it's not a, It's not necessarily a media problem alone. Yeah.

SM: Ok, final question. What are some of the important things that you have learned like either about yourself or just in general or that have you seen over the course of the pandemic?

DK: I've learned that, you know, people are probably more resilient than they thought they were that people are able to adapt and adjust and you know, and there are a lot of very compassionate

people and, and that's good. I've also learned that some people are, are the opposite of that and are you know are selfish, more ignorant sort of don't want to hear the truth it seems like times that the actions taken by myself or people who are taking this seriously. They seem overbearing because it seems like you're doing this for the greater good, even though others are doing things that are the opposite of that, and so it's like you're fighting a lost battle because for every good action that's taken, there's kind of a worse action. But, I mean, yeah, I, I mean generally I, I think it's made a lot of people thankful for the things that they have and it's made people realize how insignificant some first world problems that are and how we should complain less about those. I think it should make people, you know? I mean, if you, you have to look at the death count and just say to yourself it's a lot of people that have died and to not get sick and to not, and to not die is something that you should be. You know, you should appreciate that every day and to have to still have your family around and things like that. So I think, I hope it's a good learning experience for people. I hope it's something that we remember moving into the future because It significantly changed life. But you know, it's sometimes just frustrating and, and it's a sad when you know. You see, kind of the opposite of it. You see people pushing back on it and you see someone say, well, you know you test more. You know people are going to get sick no matter what. So what's the big deal? I, I don't know, that it's hard overcome. So you've seen you've seen good and bad during this and it's kind of giving you an insight to how people are, which is it's, it's good to know. Moving forward to kind of remember who are the people that. You know, you know, adhere to the facts and were compassionate during this time and the people that sort of blew this often and went the other direction so yeah, I don't know that's, that's probably all I got for that one at the time.

SM: Ok, well I have no further questions so thank you for your time. I will end the interview.