

Introduction: My name is David Watkins. I graduated in 2017 with a Bachelor's in political science and a minor in music. I'm currently the Program Manager at a startup in Brooklyn, New York. And I also produce music.

Question 1: Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from your Emory graduation to your current role?

Response: I graduated from Emory with, I would say, not a very clear idea of what exactly I wanted to do. I had all these different interests, primarily music. And then my interest in working in the community—social justice—kind of an interest in public service. And so graduating from Emory, I decided, *Alright, let me just try.* I studied politics, that was my major. So I decided, *Let me just try out working in politics.* So I moved to Brooklyn, New York, and just jumped in. Started off on a city council campaign. And then from there, I did a series of campaigns in the city. I worked on a congressional campaign, did some stuff with the governor's race. But I got to the point where I just decided that I wasn't fulfilled by working in politics. So I transitioned. I pivoted. Through a connection that actually I'd made in politics, I started working at a startup called The Gentleman's Factory. It is a community and digital community—now with COVID—and co-working space for men of color. I started to really dive into the music scene in New York. At Emory, I studied jazz drum set, that was my minor—music performance. And played bass, did a bunch of music stuff in college, mostly centered around live performances, playing, had a couple of different bands and started an organization called Rock the Row with some friends. And so I will say, Emory, my music experience is really focused around this kind of live music. But fast forward to living in New York and kind of delving into the music scene, I realized I had a real passion for producing music. And so I would say about two years ago, I started to just focus on producing, working with up and coming singers, songwriters, in bands. I think it's definitely been fulfilling. And I think everything I've done in the past has kind of led me to this point.

Question 2: What does creativity and living a creative life mean to you?

Response: Living a creative life means to me, I think, being willing to explore, being willing to explore those parts of you that are creative, kind of being willing to dive into whatever that, whatever that interest is. Whether it's music or photography or art or writing or whatever. There's an element of, I think, pushing back against what just life and society throws at you. I think it's easy to lose that creativity as you go on. I had so many friends who used to do this, they used to play violin, or they used to draw, they used to write, but now they're in school and they're busy and they can't. They don't have time to do so. And it's hard, I think, in school and especially when you graduate to find time to continue to live creatively. But I think there's an element of pushing back against the busyness of life to find time. I guess I would also say, I think a lot of it is just a mindset of just looking at things a little differently and being willing to, I guess, just challenge conventional approaches, and try to find the beauty in the normalness of life.

The ways that I've created time for creativity in my life has been really just scheduling it into my calendar. It doesn't sound like a creative way to create, but honestly, that's the way I work best. I need to create a time block for it for me. Because otherwise I'll get to the end of the day and I'll be tired, and I just won't feel like doing it. And so for me what helps is literally putting it in my calendar.

Question 3: What were things that were unplanned/unexpected but meaningful to your growth?

Response: Reflecting on my journey from graduation until now, I would say, I didn't expect, I think, the turbulence that I experienced in my first couple years in New York. I think I really thought that politics was my path. And so there's a bit of a surprise in kind of jumping into this field and then deciding, *You know what, I don't think I want to do this, I think I want to pivot out of this.* I think when you're that early in your career, it can be difficult sometimes to decide what else do I want to do when you have so many options. There's so many different things you can do. I think it could be scary sometimes in having to change plans. I think that's something that, in undergrad, I definitely didn't realize that it's completely normal, I think, for people to change fields, change careers, and that it can be even advantageous to do that. In my unexpected shift from politics to music, and working at the startup I'm currently at, what that pivot has given me is a well-roundedness that really helped me in my current role as Program Manager. In terms of events and programming, I have a lot more to pull from, I think, just from my experience working in politics, working with people I think I've had, working in political scene, a lot of conversations around so many different topics, whether it be real estate, or the role of government in developing communities. So I think, kind of having those conversations, has I think helped me think more creatively in my current role. And I think even in music, an unexpected thing that my experience in politics has given me is, I think, more framework for how I even approach music or songwriting. I think songwriting is all about writing stories and kind of the, your experiences directly contribute to like, how rich the story is able to be. I'm grateful for kind of the unexpected ups and downs of those first couple years in New York.

Question 4: What advice do you have for your younger self?

Response: Knowing what I know now, if I could go back and give my college self a couple of pieces of wisdom, I would say two main things. I would say firstly, just do it. Don't try to be perfect. Just create. Often as creatives we can be limited by this drive for perfection. And instead of freely creating, we spend all the time on making the perfect song or the perfect picture or the perfect whatever. And we don't grow. So just do it, just create, and don't worry about being perfect. Don't worry about knowing everything—you'll learn on the way. And then secondly, create consistently. Your art will get better. And I guess that ties into that first point. You only grow, I think, when you're doing something on a consistent basis. Don't get stuck on the perfect day, the perfect whatever. Just, yeah, just create, have fun, get lost in whatever you're doing and do it consistently. I think college is a great time to explore your creative passions. As you may be getting that degree in, I don't know, business or political science or physics, it's also a great time to explore those creative interests, those creative passions, and make use of all the resources that you have.

I was involved in a lot at Emory: student government, and I am a Quest Bridge Scholar so I was involved with our chapter, and a bunch of other things. Some of the things that were most meaningful were the creative interests that I had. I think it was my sophomore year at Emory, I noticed that there was a lack of spaces where musicians—bands, artists, musicians—could perform. There were no regular spaces for people to perform and play. So I started an organization called *Rock the Row* with some friends that put on these monthly concerts at Emory. And that was huge, I think, for me. I also did some stuff in the Atlanta area, which is another thing. Atlanta is such a rich city. There's so much to do in the

art scene there. So I interned at an organization called ATL Collective, which worked with local musicians to cover classic albums to help them put on concerts all around the city of Atlanta and all these different venues. And got to know a lot of local musicians in the Atlanta area who may have been local musicians, but were playing with major artists and were doing these amazing things and coming out with just amazing music. I also did a good amount of stuff in the music department, like with the jazz band. There's a studio—well, really a couple of studios in the music building—and so I was always hanging out there. And so I would say that my involvement on campus and off campus in the city of Atlanta was so important for my growth as a musician, as a producer, and as someone who's striving to be a leader in the arts community and someone who really seeks to elevate other people.