

Decipher: Episode 1

- Shelly Laurenzo: [00:01](#) Hello, and welcome to The Decipher Podcast. This podcast is hosted by William and Mary staff members who are committed to students' success. We all know that this year has been unlike any other, and our hope is that this podcast provides a fresh perspective on the challenges our students are facing.
- Heather Deere: [00:18](#) Navigating college life is no walk in the park, and being a William and Mary student in 2020 is no different. Join experts from around campus as they discuss ways to decipher common college experiences.
- Shelly Laurenzo: [00:38](#) So I think to get started, just everyone taking a turn and sharing who they are and what they do on campus. So my name is Shelly Laurenzo, and I'm the Associate Director in the Office of Academic Advising. And I have the opportunity to support students throughout their academic experience at William and Mary, Jack, do you want to tell us who you are and what you do?
- Jack Armstrong: [01:05](#) My name is Jack Armstrong. I work in the Office of First Year Experience and I get to work with incoming freshmen, and sophomores, transfers and others to help them try and transition easier and to college and work them through any problems they might be having.
- Shelly Laurenzo: [01:23](#) Thanks Jack. Heather, who are you?
- Heather Deere: [01:26](#) Hello. My name is Heather Deere and I am the Assistant Director of Parent and Family Programs at William and Mary. I have the distinct privilege of working with our parents, family members and supporters, as they assist students in, through and out our beloved institution.
- Shelly Laurenzo: [01:45](#) Love it. And last, but certainly not least, Lauren Garrett.
- Lauren Garrett: [01:51](#) Hey everyone. I'm Lauren Garrett. I am with First Year Experience. And in my work, I have the privilege of supporting students as they enter our fine university, figuring out who they are, what they want to be when they grow up, and how we can connect them to resources, not only within the university's walls, but outside in the greater Williamsburg and James City County York communities.
- Shelly Laurenzo: [02:19](#) Awesome. Thanks Lauren. So we figured the best way to introduce ourselves to you all, would be through some kind of basic questions, right? That's kind of part of university life is to do some icebreakers. So I thought it might be helpful if we all

talked a little bit about why William and Mary is important to us.

So for me, one of the reasons William and Mary is really important is it's kind of part of my family. So my grandmother actually attended William and Mary. She was the class of 1928. Back then they offered courses in home economics. So I actually came across her notebook the other day, where she had different measurements and how you could convert them to different measurements. I don't have half the skills that she does, but it's very much part of my family history, this institution. I'm fortunate to have earned my graduate degree here and then to come back and work here.

Who else wants to share why William and Mary is important to them?

- Jack Armstrong: [03:17](#) I can go next. William and Mary is important to me simply because I'm an alum. I came here in 2014, graduated in 2018, also played football here for four and a half years. So a big part of my growing up and a lot of great friends that I've made while I was here. So pretty easy for me to tell why William and Mary's important to me.
- Shelly Laurenzo: [03:43](#) Heather, do you want to share?
- Heather Deere: [03:47](#) I think for me, William and Mary represented a new adventure and the start of my professional career. So that's one reason I know that William and Mary will always be important to me, but I think too, William and Mary is such a storied institution with a long history of innovation and exploring new possibilities. And I love being part of its history. And I think that's important to the students now is learning how to retell the history. And I love being a part of a community that values that so much.
- Lauren Garrett: [04:20](#) That really resonates with me Heather, because I think part of what drew me to William and Mary as a student, yes, I'm also an alum [inaudible 00:04:27], but what drew me to William and Mary as a student was the fact that it was one of the few undergraduate institutions in Virginia at that time that was willing to talk about its past, even way back when. And talk about what had been done right, what had been done wrong, and really look to its students to help build the legacy for the coming years.

And so as an undergraduate, having an opportunity to leave a legacy and now being a staff member who helps student leaders

do something similar, that's something that's going to stick with me no matter how long I stay here or where I go from here, professionally. William and Mary will always be my home. And the fact that it's given me opportunities to learn about myself and others in the process, those just aren't memories or experiences that you can replace or even placed at another institution. So it's just very unique being here.

Shelly Laurenzo: [05:32](#)

I would agree, Lauren, and I think this ties in really well to another question for us to kind of talk through and share with folks listening, is our favorite thing about William and Mary students. And I think for me, one of the things I enjoy most about William and Mary students, is they just have an innate curiosity and we kind of cultivate that to ensure that they're going to be lifelong learners, even after they leave us and go out into the world.

So I really appreciate the fact that we can all be in this community of scholars together. No matter where we sit at the institution, everyone here is curious, and has questions, and wants to learn more and wants to continue to grow. And so that's one of the things I really enjoy about our students, is that they come here with that and we kind of help broaden that and grow that, and they continue to take that with them after they leave us.

Jack Armstrong: [06:26](#)

I think my favorite part about the William and Mary student body that I really appreciated, right when I got here, was just how bright everybody was. I think most William and Mary students at their high schools, were probably far and away some of the smarter kids, but once you get here, you realize just how smart everybody is.

And I think it's really cool to be around those types of students and those types of minds for four years. And it forces you to push yourself and you kind of get a different perspective on academics and how you have to work to kind of compete with all of them. And it was really interesting to me and I think it really helped me and really pushed me while I was here.

Heather Deere: [07:09](#)

I think on that note, sometimes I envy the experience of William and Mary students, because the community is so strong, but also the interests are so incredibly diverse. Some of the student organizations that we have on campus and the causes and the passions of our students, they're kind of all over the place in the best way possible. Which means that everyone feels, I hope, on some level, empowered to delve into the things that they're really passionate about and those things intermixed between

student organizations, events on campus and things that are happening in the classroom. And I think I love that William and Mary students aren't afraid to be who they are and really be authentic to themselves.

Lauren Garrett:

[07:53](#)

I would imagine that a lot of that curiosity is part of what blends into my favorite part of working with William and Mary students, is the fact that they have such an intense interest in ensuring everyone is well, that ensuring their peers are taken care of. They're not afraid to advocate for one another. Sometimes we could always do a little bit better of a job advocating for ourselves, but the general student culture of caring is one of my favorite things, because I think it leads to a much more invested and engaged student population. And I think that, that also has a ripple effect into the academic experience and how they interact with their faculty and the staff across the university.

And that's not just undergraduates. We see that with our graduate students and professional students as well, that there's just a very intense feeling of comradery at the institution that I really enjoy. And if nothing else, I think that 2020 has brought about that sense of community about the little sea, but also that big sea of community to a new and different level.

Shelly Laurenzo:

[09:17](#)

And I think that in some ways, ties back to the name of our podcast, which is a little tongue in cheek, getting that decipher that we use as a symbol here at William and Mary, but also trying to help students decipher what's going on. This is a really weird semester for everyone, obviously most importantly, in our respective roles for our students. And so, we felt it was really important to take time and break down information for students and decipher things for students in a way that would be digestible, also in a way that gets them away from their screens.

I know all of us as employees at William and Mary are suffering from Zoom fatigue to different degrees. And so just the opportunity to step away from a screen, listen to a podcast, take a quick walk. If you're with us here in Williamsburg, take a stroll around the second garden. If you're home, take a walk where you can.

So again, our intention with this podcast is to serve you, the student, to help decipher what's going on, on campus for you, but also give you the opportunity to step away, take a stretch, close your eyes if you're not walking, right? Don't walk with your eyes closed; that could be dangerous. And just give

yourself a little break and hopefully, we can help you kind of navigate this fall semester here at William and Mary.

One last thing I was hoping our little group could talk about, a lot of things with the pandemic and with quarantine have been really hard and challenging. And we recognize that and we acknowledge that for folks and that, that presents itself in different ways. But I think there's also some opportunities to find things that maybe we wouldn't have experienced, or we wouldn't have been able to do without this going on right now.

So something to think about is, what's been one enjoyable part kind of, of living through this? And selfishly for me, my favorite part, I've been working from home since March and I'm a big snacker. I'm a grazer, I don't eat big meals. I like to snack all day. So having constant access to my kitchen is phenomenal. And I don't know if I have a lunch box big enough to support me when I have to go back on campus to work during the day. I really rely on the whole kitchen being available at my disposal whenever I'm hungry.

Heather Deere: [11:35](#) I think something I have really truly enjoyed about quarantine that I've learned about myself in the process has been, I don't need to wear makeup every single day to feel like a professional. And I feel like that's something really interesting that's happened to all of us in the professional community is that, we would business professional or business casual every single day to work, fix our hair, potentially put on makeup. And now we're sitting at home in our dining rooms or our spare bedrooms, and most of us are wearing sweat pants because that's just-

Shelly Laurenzo: [12:08](#) I bet Jack is saving so much money on his cosmetics right now. He-

Heather Deere: [12:12](#) For sure; he has to be, has to be for sure. And so I just think that it's been an interesting transition and one that I've really enjoyed, is that I can show up to work and still really do my job to the best of my ability and people are okay if I don't put on makeup that day. I love that.

Jack Armstrong: [12:31](#) Yeah. I haven't saved a whole lot of money on my cosmetics. I did go for a pretty good long while without a haircut or a beard trim. So I guess that's saving money there, which was nice. But the really nice part for me, was I was actually in between jobs so to say when this whole thing hit.

So when I officially got the job here at William and Mary, I actually didn't quite have anywhere to go. So I was living at home and I actually got to stay there for a while with my parents and it had been a while since I got to be home. So that was really cool just to stay with them for a while, knowing that it probably would be the last time that I ever lived with them. But just getting those couple of months with them was really nice for me.

Shelly Laurenzo: [13:11](#)

I bet they loved that too.

Jack Armstrong: [13:12](#)

Well, maybe in the beginning. I don't know towards the end.

Lauren Garrett: [13:22](#)

Absolutely. I think on a similar vein, the enjoyable part of this whole process, quarantine 2020 pandemic for me, has been getting reacquainted with who I am and what I value. And I know that sounds so William and Mary, and so authentic excellence licensed by Kelly Crace, who's not sponsoring this in any [inaudible 00:13:51]. But very much sort of had to reevaluate, what are my priorities, and what do I want to do with my time?

And so, for me, it was really hard working from home. And so, trying to separate worlds was really difficult and trying to figure out how to bring harmony into my life, when perhaps I wasn't taking good care for myself or for my relationships with others. And so trying to get things as new normal as possible and figuring out what that meant for me and for what it meant in sort of pandemic Williamsburg.

But that's been great, because it's given me an opportunity or an excuse, if you will, to connect with friends from grad school or connect with friends from high school, because everybody's in a similar boat, right? Nobody can really go out, and if you are going out, you sort of feel you can't necessarily give a hug or you don't necessarily want to shake hands or invade people's personal spaces.

And so calls, and texts and FaceTimes and all of those good things, they're now socially acceptable on such large scales like they weren't before. So connecting with others has been an enjoyable piece of this whole process.

Shelly Laurenzo: [15:14](#)

I totally agree. Especially folks that maybe you haven't connected with in a while or something like that. I know something that Heather and I have in common is a lot of time to connect with our four legged fur babies. And so I have a 14-

year-old senior citizen beagle, who I have been able to spend a lot more time with and he's been able to go on more walks probably than he's ever been since we had kids. So I think he's kind of excited about that. And Heather, what kind of dog do you have?

Heather Deere: [15:47](#) I have a nine-month-old golden retriever. And it's funny because sometimes I think of my life in terms of pre-spring break and post spring break, 2020.

Shelly Laurenzo: [15:57](#) I hear you.

Heather Deere: [15:58](#) And the week before spring break, I made the decision to get a puppy. It was very last minute. I just felt like I needed a companion in my life. And so drove to Richmond, got myself a golden retriever puppy. And I was like, "I'm going to work from home for a couple of days to help him adjust." And then spring break happened and then we've been working from home since March. And so-

Shelly Laurenzo: [16:24](#) He doesn't know any different than being home with you.

Heather Deere: [16:27](#) Yeah. So it's going to be interesting when I do have to transition back to going to the office, because he's only known that I'm home with him all day. And at lunchtime, we take long walks and he's able to just kind of chill throughout the day and know that I'm here. So I think it will be very interesting for that transition, but very thankful to have a furry four legged friend to keep me company during these times.

Shelly Laurenzo: [16:49](#) That's a wrap on our first episode. Thank you so much for tuning in. In the coming weeks, we will cover topics ranging from building connections, to registering for classes. To check out our show notes, please visit our website: decipher.blogs.wm.edu. Take care.