

Shelly Laurenzo: [00:01](#) Hello, and welcome to the Decipher Podcast. This podcast is hosted by William & Mary staff members who are committed to student 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 & Mary student in 2020 is no different. Join experts from around campus as they discuss ways to decipher common college experiences.

All right. Welcome back everyone to the Decipher podcast. My name is Heather Deere. I'm the Assistant Director of Parent and Family Programs, and one of your hosts for the Decipher podcast. With me today is Rich Thompson and we're going to talk about voting and the election that's coming up. So Rich, why don't you introduce yourself to our listeners?

Rich Thompson: [00:58](#) Thank you, Heather. Once again, my name is Rich Thompson, as Heather pointed out. I work in the Office of Community Engagement and I'm one of the Associate Directors in that office. And one of the responsibilities that has been tapped me for this year is to promote the concepts of voter engagement, which is basically getting information out on all the key dates and deadlines and all the different ways that you can vote for this election cycle.

Heather Deere: [01:22](#) Wonderful. Thank you so much for being here with us today and talking to, hopefully some students and families who are listening to our podcast. Let's start with some important deadlines, because I know that there are some things coming up that students should probably be aware of, if they're interested in voting.

Rich Thompson: [01:38](#) Right. The most important deadline right now for students to really consider in particular is October 13th. That is when students have to file for voter registration to be able to vote in both the local and the national election. That deadline is coming up fast. So, we encourage people to get with their local registrars, or send in their paperwork with our online tools that we're offering from our office to get registered to vote.

Heather Deere: [02:08](#) And if students are interested in registering here at school, is there anything different that they need to do when they go to register to vote?

Rich Thompson: [02:17](#) Well, the main thing is we've put all the resources on our voter engagement websites, so they can pick the [inaudible 00:02:23] that they need. Particularly for students from Virginia or out of state, there are some differences. So, the website offers great resources and tools to aid our students in particular to get registered to vote in the election, even if they want to vote here in town, or if they want to consider other options like absentee balloting, or voter by mail, or getting things set up where they can vote back in their home towns.

Heather Deere: [02:47](#) So, once we get through the registration process, we're registered to vote, we're excited to vote, what are the options for students in terms of absentee, vote by mail, early, in-person? Sometimes I feel there are so many different options to vote. How do students learn about these different options?

Rich Thompson: [03:06](#) Well, Heather, you're exactly right. There are many more options that probably most people realize. It's like back in the day, and even today, most people say, "On election day, we go vote," but now in the era of COVID, but we also have other opportunities that are presented to ourselves through our, voter registrars have made it a little bit easier for us to access voting. One thing we do have is absentee vote by mail and you have to register for that as well. And the deadline for that is coming up for October 23rd in the state of Virginia. And again they can access our voter engagement website for all those details and instructions. Also, you can vote in person. A lot of our districts here in the surrounding community of Williamsburg, the City of Williamsburg, James City County, Charleston County, York County, New Ken and Gloucester. Actually, you can vote now in person at their municipal buildings or designated sites they've set up.

And again, I keep going back to our information, our website, we've got all that laid out, so students can access that on the website and determine if they want to vote in person, the hours that voting is available. And so they can just go there and vote at their own leisure, where they don't have to feel rushed on election day. And the other beauty about voting early is you're not dealing with the crowds as much. And the other option of course, is absentee balloting and vote by mail. Vote by mail, many of the ballots come with stamped and postage on it. So all you got to do is just fill out your ballot and mail it in. But another option, if you don't feel totally secure with that option, is that we have drop boxes at our various municipal buildings where basically you can fill out your ballot, drive, walk, or bike to that location and put the ballot in that box, which is secured.

And many of them are monitored by people and or video surveillance to make sure there's no tampering going on.

Heather Deere: [04:54](#) I can say I voted earlier this week in person. I'm registered in York County and I was the only person there. I was able to take my time. Everything was sanitized before I touched it. And it was a very painless process, very easy. And I think it's such a privilege that I was able to go in and vote so early in person and it'd be a really comfortable process. So I would encourage students to take advantage of that if they want to have that experience of filling out their ballot in person and seeing it counted and getting that sticker from election day, which I know everyone's going to want to post their sticker on social media, that they voted in this election. I think voting in person, early voting is a wonderful option if that's something students are really interested in this year, for sure.

Shelly Laurenzo: [05:44](#) Yeah, I totally concur. I chose to go with vote by mail, absentee ballot. I was going to actually drop mine in the box, but at James City County, like I say, voting started early. There was decent crowds there so said, "Okay, well I've got a self-address and self [inaudible 00:06:00] envelope, so I'm just going to drop in the mail." So that was my choice. But I agree with you, there is something special about [inaudible 00:06:07] going to the polls and putting that mark in that ballot and put it in the box or handing it to the registrar. But I think in the era we are living with COVID, early voting is a great option and I encourage people to take advantage of that opportunity if, and when they can; they feel this is something they want to do.

Heather Deere: [06:24](#) Definitely. I'm interested to see how COVID influences voting in the future. If we will continue to see strong, early voting and vote by mail and these types of voting in the future. That's something I'm interested to watch and see if it continues for sure. So for students who may be living off campus, where would their voting location be? Because I consider myself to be a Williamsburg resident. However, I am registered in York County because technically I live in York County, even though I tell everyone that I live in Williamsburg. So how will students find out their polling location?

Shelly Laurenzo: [07:03](#) Once again, I'm going to kind of sounded like a repeating recording here in records, that go back to our website provider engagement. And it will tell you specifically where you would vote and help guide you to where you would vote. There're going to be two locations in the city. There're going to be the municipal building, right now for early voting and for voter

drop-off ballots, the United Methodist Church on Jamestown road. And I believe the Stryker building will be the other location on election day. And all of that's going to be precedent, where you live in the city, if you're living off campus. But once again, go to our website or the city of Williamsburg voter registrar's website to find out specifically your designated voting poll location based where you live in the city.

Heather Deere: [07:49](#) One big question that maybe we should cover is, why should students vote in this election?

Shelly Laurenzo: [07:58](#) I think that it's a personal reason. I think each person's going to have their own motivation, why they want to vote, but Williamsburg and William & Mary has a history of promoting better engagement. William & Mary has a high level of student registrations for voting historically. And I think there's a lot of pride associated with that. And also the awareness of the social issues that are going on, the political economic. And I think our students take a lot of pride of being pretty savvy in that regard. And because of that, some of our students in the past have elected to pursue political positions in the city. We've had Scott Foster, Benny Zhang, and now Kayla [inaudible 00:08:41] . All are sitting on city... Have sat or are sitting on city council, which were former William & Mary students. So there's a lot of pride associated with the concept of voting for our students at William & Mary. And that's something that I'm proud to be associated with as an advisor to this project, to help people to create that voter awareness.

Heather Deere: [09:02](#) So speaking of that student engagement piece, can you talk a little bit about the students who you work with, who are doing some really great events and promotion on campus?

Shelly Laurenzo: [09:13](#) Yeah. We've got two student fellows working with us, one Dana Poland and Mary Nduke, who's a graduate student and they're in the process of pushing information out on our website, our social media, contacting other offices, working with other student organizations, putting information in student happenings, developing social media accounts and encouraging other students to create social media accounts, to push information out about the election in a very non-partisan approach. We've also had a group of students work with some faculty, staff, administrators. Basically our student body president or student assembly president, AJ did a presentation with Caleb Rogers, a recent grads, city council member and a gentleman who's our assistant basketball coach on the program called, The Power Of One and talk about the power of one

person's vote in society and what it means for you as a person to vote and to be engaged in the process.

And we set that up as a recording. And once again, you can go back to our website and click on it and review it. We've had [inaudible 00:10:16] also worked with Mary, our other fellow, to set up a program where it was another recording about voting locally in Williamsburg. So that's one other resource working with Caleb Rogers and another student and actually the city of Williamsburg registrar [inaudible 00:10:33] herself. So once again, another resource where [inaudible 00:10:36] read a lot of things, you can just click on the video link and learn how to vote locally. We're in the process of also trying to put together another program, working with some of our other faculty staff and students on the hundred year anniversary of the 19th Amendment, to try to bring some historical context of the right to vote and how people have fought for that right. And I think that's going to be a pretty powerful piece, we pull it together, but we're running out of time in all honesty and the semester is pretty condensed. So we're crossing our fingers that we can make that happen right now.

Heather Deere: [11:10](#)

Well, of all the things you just listed, that's so many things that you and your students are working on to get the word out about voting and encourage folks to watch The Power Of One. I remember distinctly Caleb talking about the history of William & Mary students being involved in local Williamsburg government. And I think it's fascinating to watch and probably inspiring for some students who were like, "Oh, I can. I could do that if that's something that I'm interested in." So those resources are wonderful. And I think it's amazing that we have such dedicated students and staff and faculty, and just generally the William & Mary community who cares about this voter engagement this year and making sure that people know how to vote, if that's something that they're interested in for this election. Are there going to be any events around voting happening on campus? I know most events are virtual these days, but are there going to be any efforts to help people register or help people walk to the polls? If that's something that they're interested in doing

Shelly Laurenzo: [12:10](#)

Actually later this evening, which is today is the seventh. We're going to be doing our virtual couch party, which is going to be organized with Bruce Jacobson, who's married to President Rowe, a very fond association right there. And he has worked very diligently to work with one of our voter advocacy organizations to organize this event. So basically it's getting group of students to text all their friends and in turn, encourage

them to text their friends, to get out and register to vote and vote on election day. So that is our big program, along with our educational pieces and videos that we're putting out there. And the COVID era that we're in, we really can't gather in large mass. One of the things we thought about before we entered this era was like, how do we create more awareness?

Let's bring the voter registrars on campus, allows students to register to vote on campus. Really can't do that, for example. Create big social events maybe around with some bands and some other activities, or do some joint programming, with AMP possibly, that's our student organization group alma mater productions, promote social interaction activities. And because of our numbers, our COVID protocol policies, probably not wise to do that as well. So we're really taking a really strong look about how can we engage through email, listservs, videos, person to person interaction via text and other mediums electronically or like we're doing today trying to take advantage of technology as much as we can. I think from my perspective, the students are pretty savvy in this regard and they're pretty aware about the importance of voting. And I think we're still going to have a good turnout and good registration numbers when they come back in and I'll be curious to see them, but I'm very optimistic.

Heather Deere: [13:58](#)

I would agree. I'm very optimistic about this year's election and especially this age group that we're talking about, that students will get out and vote. Whether that's in person, by mail, early, on election day, I think they're going to do what they can to show up to the polls and whatever that looks like for them is going to be how they show up. I think those are all of my questions for you, but is there anything that you would like to add? Anything that maybe we didn't cover?

Shelly Laurenzo: [14:24](#)

No. And once again, I'd recommend you to check out our voter engagement website. I think I've said it a dozen times throughout the podcast, and I thought I'd put it over the top, the 13. That should give you a lot of information, but more importantly, register to vote, meet the deadlines and vote, please. I mean, this is one of the rights that you have as an American citizen. So please take advantage of it and thank you for your time today, Heather, and help us promote our little program.

Heather Deere: [14:50](#)

Of course, and thank you for joining us and telling us all about voting and hopefully students, if you have any questions, you can reach out to the office of community engagement, but also

This transcript was exported on Oct 26, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

check out that website that was mentioned a few times during our podcast. Thanks for listening everyone. We'll be back next week with a new episode.

Shelly Laurenzo: [15:16](#)

That's a wrap on our third episode. Thank you so much for tuning in. Next week, we'll be discussing making connections with peers. To check out our show notes, please visit our website, decipher.blogs.wm.edu. Take care.