

- Speaker 1: Hello, and welcome to the Decipher podcast. This podcast is hosted by William and 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.
- Speaker 2: 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.
- Lauren Garrett: [00:00:30] Hello everyone. And welcome to our, this is now our fourth podcast under the Decipher heading. I'm Lauren Garrett, I'm with First Year Experience, and with me today are four student leaders here at the university who have a little bit of something in common, and that's that they've all had to make some sort of connections with new or different [00:01:00] people in new or different environments. Before we kick start into our conversation, I want to take a few moments and let them introduce themselves to you, and I'm going to start with the person on my right.
- Andrew: Yes, so hello, my name is Andrew Caietti, I'm a current senior at the college and majoring in applied math. And a little bit about me is that I'm from San Diego, California, so the opposite coast and a fun fact is that I am scuba certified.
- Neel: Hi [00:01:30] everyone. My name's Neel. I am a junior at the college from Vienna, Virginia, majoring in geology. And a fun fact is that I play guitar.
- Courtney: Hello everyone. My name is Courtney, I'm also a current senior here at William and Mary. I'm studying neuroscience on the pre-med track. I'm from Virginia Beach, Virginia, so not too far from Williamsburg. And the fun fact that I always use for every situation is that I've been working at Chick-fil-A [00:02:00] for five years now, so very Chick-fil-A enthusiast.
- Madeleine McLea...: Hi, I'm Madeline McLean. I am a junior studying international relations and middle Eastern studies. I'm from Boise, Idaho, so I think I'm the only Idahoan at William and Mary right now. And a fun fact about myself is I'm gluten free, which I guess isn't very fun, but it's the only thing I can think of off the top of my head.
- Lauren Garrett: Which sometimes means that you can't eat a Chick-fil-A. Chick- [00:02:30] fil-A by in no means sponsors or endorses our podcast, though if Chick-fil-A is listening and you'd like to, perhaps throw a little something our way we'd definitely consider it. So, that may get edited out, we'll see what happens there. So today's topic for our podcast is about making connections with peers. And we know that when you come to college, when you start university, there's always that age old saying that, Oh, [00:03:00] you hear about from all the alumni that they've met their best friends while they're in college? Well, sometimes your best friends start off as connections that perhaps you sat down next to in class, the random person in your hall who then when you were a

junior reconnected with, or maybe it's somebody that you joined a club or organization and met through that activity. So obviously here at the university, we talk a lot about forming relationships and making friends and building connections with [00:03:30] peers, faculty, and staff, but from your vantage points as students, what really is the importance of making connections with other students during your time?

Neel: I think I was going to say, I think the transition to college can be a really eye-opening experience for a lot of students, especially at William and Mary that are coming from straight out of high school, and haven't really had the opportunity to live on their own before and making [00:04:00] connections amongst your peers really gives you that support network that you need to not only survive, but thrive and have that community around you that makes this place special.

Madeleine McLea...: Yeah, for me. because as I mentioned I didn't know anybody when I first came here. I'm the only Idahoan, and so I was coming into a whole new world and I think building connections helped me create a home here. This was my first time in Virginia. I hadn't toured the school or done an official tour before. [00:04:30] So I was really just kind of taking a leap, and getting to know my peers in my hall and then in my classes really cemented why I go to William and Mary and why I love it so much. So it was just like that first step that showed me that I was supposed to be here.

Andrew: Yeah. I think for me building connections is so important, especially like personally, just for having a network of people, because similar to Madeline I'm out of state. Coming here was really difficult because it's trying to understand, not only like, [00:05:00] like what's the newest lingo, like I had to learn what a brick was, which apparently means it's cold or far away. So it's small things like that that you may not think about initially coming, but that kind of surprised me of like, Oh, I kind of don't know what people are saying at lunch right now and I feel like I should.

So I think building connections was not only being comfortable here at William and Mary in a place that I would say was pretty uncomfortable to move to, but it was also being able [00:05:30] to find that support network. So if like my first semester is going a little tough or maybe I'm feeling a little stressed, I had people I could turn to and just kind of chat with whether that be at a more like high level, just like hanging out, talking about what favorite ice cream flavors are or if it's, Hey, like I'm really struggling with my study habits or I've been feeling really stressed lately. Like being able to have that support network as well, I think are two really big pillars for the college experience. Especially [00:06:00] getting that footing in the new college environment.

Courtney: Yeah. I would say for me, I know like looking back now, just like reflecting on this question. I know like a lot of my current peer connections who are my closest friends, I feel like I found them by looking for a support system as well. I know that one of my friends who's graduated now last year, I literally came in, I

thought I was going to be a certain major, and then I was like, you know, let's look at something else here. And talking to that upperclassmen friend who [00:06:30] was a certain major, I was like, you know, that sounds really interesting. So, and then being able to develop a stronger relationship with them afterwards, thinking of them for advice, literally harassing them, texting them, letting them know like, Hey, I have no idea what I'm doing here. Can you help me out?

So finding those mentor relationships as well can turn into those friendships. And that really helped me out a lot. And then via her friendships, creating more friendships. So I feel like it's kind of like an avalanche effect in a way, making that first relationship with somebody and then kind of branching out from there.

I know my current roommate who is [00:07:00] my very best friend on this campus, we met via study group for our intro biology class. I talked to her a little bit here and there before, but I never really had deeper conversations with her. And then we started studying biology together and then we started getting lunch together. And then from there, our relationship kept going. I believe some of the relationships even happened by accident. And that was when I kind of the relationship that you form are kind of the strongest in some senses.

But I think just having connections can kind of get you through [00:07:30] college, helping that, not only being someone who's like a resource to you, but also kind of like a de-stressor in a way. So whether or not you want to go out and get ice cream, because I know me and her go to [Cilums 00:07:40] a lot, because we love ice cream. So going out and getting dessert here now for a little bit of a de-stressor, just having someone to kind of be a sounding board too, like having a conversation with them, writing ideas of what you want to do post-grad or even like during undergrad with them.

So I think they're definitely like a way for me to kind of sit back from academics and kind of look at the bigger picture of life and like my [00:08:00] personal life and kind of reflect back on my own values sometimes as well too, because they kind of get you to think outside of the box too. So honestly just like having that support network and that person who's like kind of there for you for whatever you need some help, I know I love them so much, and that they just been like such a good sounding board for me, for sure.

Madeleine McLea...: Yeah. For me, I think I didn't even realize that the friends I have now are my best friends. I didn't see that relationship developing, and then it was just there. So I met them first day on freshman [00:08:30] year and the next thing I know, they're my closest friends. So it wasn't like a, I have to think about it going through the motions to form those connections, it just kind of happened because I feel like everyone here is pretty easy to talk to and easy to get along with.

Andrew: Yeah, and I think Courtney, you brought up an interesting distinction of like making friends, or making connections, not only with students in your class year, but also students that maybe are above or below your class year, I think is something that I was very conscious of coming into college. And I think it's really important to [00:09:00] sort of have those connections be broad because like you said, the insight that you can get from someone that, you know, that may be a little like a year or so above you in their academic careers is really helpful for those texts of like, Hey, I'm kind of confused, what sort of classes I should be taking or like, I don't really have a place to study right now. Like SWEM seems kind of full. What can I do?

It's sort of questions like that, that you kind of pick up on over time as a student here, but having those connections is really important because you can get insights [00:09:30] in the information. So I think that's something that I as well, just like very much so was conscious of at my time here, it was a little uncomfortable doing this, talking to people who are maybe juniors or seniors, because as a new student, I started as a freshmen and that was kind of intimidating, but I think being able to go through that and make those connections really benefited me in my time at William and Mary.

Madeleine McLea...: Yeah. For me, because I was also a freshmen, but I thought [00:10:00] going into it that there were going to be huge divides between social classes. And so I thought I was only going to interact with freshmen and then the sophomores are going to do their own thing and so on, but it's really not like that. So everyone just kind of mingles and stuff. And I made, I have some very close friends who are a year older and who are also two years older, but they're no longer at school.

Neel: Yeah. I think going off what everyone's just said. The most kind of important part of making connections for me has just been looking for them and being outgoing. A lot [00:10:30] of the people that I call my best friends now, I think I just met in random scenarios and we started to get along for whatever reasons, because we had things in common and I was just kind of, make that jump to be friends and be outgoing and be willing to try to establish that friendship because this school is like truly filled with so many amazing people. And you often find the best people when you're not even looking for them.

Andrew: I think sort of on that vein of [00:11:00] making those connections in the random scenarios, I definitely felt that a lot in my experience, especially in my first year here. One thing I was very conscious of was branching out and being comfortable being a little uncomfortable, but then also keeping an eye on myself. Because I think I definitely have a social battery, so to speak, in that once I've reached that limit, I kind of need to take a step back and do something on my own for a bit to recharge. But for me, in my making connections, it was a lot of just [00:11:30] branching out. For example, I went to this one club that's sort of a music oriented club and I wasn't very like music oriented myself, but I

had someone that I met in my freshman dorm that was, so I went with them and we met new people there.

So that was sort of something I didn't really expect to be doing. But then I met people that I ended up knowing throughout my college career and people affiliated with the radio program here, and the radio club here that I ended up knowing for a good portion of my academic career. And then like [00:12:00] going to interest groups as well was a big point for me because of the house I'm living at now, and my living situation now is off campus and of my housemates, a majority of them I had from my freshman dorm that I met, but then one of my housemates, I didn't even meet until my sophomore year. I didn't really get to know him until my sophomore year. So again like this process of making connections starts your freshman year or whatever year you decide to join William and Mary at, and ends in your final year.

Because it's a constantly [00:12:30] ongoing process and I'm constantly meeting new people even as a senior at the college now. So I think it's really interesting to mention that sort of like random points because those random points never really seem to stop because you keep making connections.

Lauren Garrett:

Well, and I'm just going to jump in there Andrew, and piggyback off of that statement because I found as an alumna, the connections don't even stop as a student. It's amazing the William and Mary network and how meeting students back even in my [00:13:00] hometown builds a stronger connection, not just networking for professional development or career planning, but also thinking about the commonality and the common bond you have around this place.

And again, referencing back to the vocabulary that is sometimes unique to William and Mary, let alone the East coast in Virginia, but to William and Mary itself and how some of those connections that you make as a student resurface, when you're an alum, [00:13:30] when you come back for homecoming and you see someone and you're like, Oh, aren't you? Oh yeah, I was. And you have those really sort of generic conversations, but then they turn into a friendship and I've been fortunate to have a few of those experiences myself, which is nice to know that William and Mary, that home, that Madeline reference, that home piece can really sort of bring you back and ground you no matter where you are, so being open to that.

Now in time of pandemic, [00:14:00] obviously we know that virtual has become the norm. How do you make connections or how would you suggest that students make connections with peers when you're virtual, regardless of freshmen, regardless of transfer, regardless of sort of where you are in your university experience, what do you think are some best practices that we all can engage in when it comes to making connections with others, when perhaps all you see is a video face and you don't necessarily [00:14:30] have an opportunity to engage in a actual physical space?

Courtney: I know for one of my current classes, I'm in organic chemistry two, on the first day of classes via Zoom, someone literally dropped a GroupMe link and was like, Hey everybody, join this GroupMe so we can ask questions and stuff of that nature. So honestly, branching off of that type of thing, like via study groups in general, but then even if you just want to message someone in particular and be like, Hey, do you want to form a study group with me? Because I know it's hard to [00:15:00] be put in uncomfortable situations, especially coming from a shy person, but being able to kind of branch out a little bit and kind of say, Hey, you know, maybe I can start this study group and then I can find a friend from that study group. And then also I know for me, and one of my organizations that I'm involved in, we have like meetings every other week or something.

And then we often go into breakout rooms after like the main meeting session or whatever, but having a conversation like maybe you'll get into a topic, but then you kind of branch off of that topic and talk about something else, [00:15:30] just having those connections as well and being put into like a new club that you never thought that you would enjoy. And then learning something new about somebody else that you never talked to before, just being able to put yourself kind of out there and join those organizations or like hop on a Zoom meeting that you've never been on before, like join a trivia game that you've never done before, they'll put you in a random group. So kind of having those kinds of branching out points that you start off on a baseline level and then you kind of make your way out from there is a good [00:16:00] kind of navigation tool in my opinion.

Madeleine McLea...: And I, yeah, I definitely agree with that. I'm a horribly shy person and so Zoom makes it very, really difficult for me. But what I found is even just in a classroom or in the Zoom classroom, excuse me, just like dropping something in the main chat like, Oh, that's a good point, if we're having a discussion or like linking different articles and stuff I found relating to the topics has kind of spurred a conversation within the classes themselves, which sometimes [00:16:30] progressed into more sometimes don't. And then with clubs and stuff, I think they have done a really good job kind of transitioning to the virtual age with discussions and different things, all virtual granted, but we still have a little bit face to face and a little bit of ability to talk to each other, kind of like what we're doing right now.

Neel: I think I definitely speak for a lot of other people when I say that the pandemic has made me a lot more introverted, and enjoy kind of being by myself a lot [00:17:00] more than I used to. I think a large part of that is because with Zoom and everything, your bedroom and your personal space and time suddenly become your office, your classroom, everywhere for the world to see. And your alone time is like no longer your own alone time. So it sounds kind of counterintuitive to say that the best way to make connections is to spend more time really by yourself.

But I think kind of delegating time to really turn off my computer, not be on Zoom and just prevent that sort of fatigue has [00:17:30] made those fun meetings like Courtney was talking about with clubs and classes and breakout rooms seem a lot more enjoyable. And I feel like I'm a lot more aware there by kind of being able to acknowledge that I need to take time for myself throughout the day. And even though that's something that we talk about so much, it's definitely something that a lot of students can continue to work on.

Andrew:

Yeah. Neel, I definitely agree with you. I think like going back to that social battery idea of like sometimes I think in the [00:18:00] pandemic especially has made me very conscious of that, of kind of limiting my time on Zoom because Zoom in consecutive classes throughout the day can be tiring, very tiring. It's surprising how difficult it can be to sit there and just sort of go through class and take notes and such virtually. So again, like you said Neel, being very conscious of that, I think is a big, big part of making connections at William and Mary, especially over in a virtual format from the pandemic. So I think that's something to really be conscious [00:18:30] of as you're talking and like making connections with people.

I think also one thing that has really helped me that I think translates into the virtual format as well, is the various interest groups around campus, whether that be academic interests or just personal interests, hobbies that you may have, I can guarantee you almost that any interests that you have, you will find other people here with that interest as well and especially clubs, because there are so many clubs on campus.

I think especially if you're a little more shy, [00:19:00] like I know I'm pretty shy as well, I think that's a running motif here, but I think being a little shy going to an interest group like that and having something to talk about, is a really big stepping stone into getting into those conversations. Because similar to what Lauren was mentioning about how you sort of have that initial small talk and that can sort of breed off into a connection or into a friendship, it's very surprising. Or at least I found it very surprising in my own experience as to how often that rang true. So again, just like keeping an eye [00:19:30] out for things that might interest you and organizations that might interest you, but then also being conscious of your own, like how you're doing and how you are maintaining energy throughout the day.

Lauren Garrett:

This has been really terrific. And I'm really glad that you four were able to join me this afternoon to talk through this topic. I think what I've really taken away from our conversation is the importance of knowing yourself and sort of knowing your boundaries, I'm not going to use the word limitations, but [00:20:00] perhaps knowing your boundaries and being sometimes okay with putting yourself out there and being a little bit uncomfortable, perhaps approaching someone saying hello, or sending out an interest email to a club or organization that might be on your bucket list of to do's, but also sort of getting a sense of where do you need to spend some time with yourself versus putting yourself out there to spend

time with others. Especially in this age where I think our brains [00:20:30] are constantly going because of some of that Zoom fatigue, we're hearing a lot about, knowing when to carve out time for Courtney versus spending time with friends is something that we can all do a better job of.

And I think that oftentimes making connections with peers, you get a sounding board as was mentioned earlier to help sometimes shine back the fact that you aren't necessarily taking good care of yourself and perhaps [00:21:00] you're putting others first. So I think connections, it sounds like, are good, not just for you building networks, you building support, but also for you getting to know yourself and learning a little bit more about your interests, your passions, and where you might choose to go, not just here at William and Mary, but as a lifelong learner.

So going to go around the room, give me one word that would summarize, and it can be a hyphenated word. [00:21:30] Give me one word that would summarize sort of why you're glad you've made connections, why you're glad that you have made friendships or you have put yourself out there to get to know people who are perhaps different from you or unlike others that you would have had the chance to get to know had you stayed in Idaho or California or Nova or the Hampton roads area. So sort of one word that epitomizes is [00:22:00] all of that, and we can popcorn.

Madeleine McLea...: For me, I think it would be growth. I changed a lot coming from Idaho to here, I kind of grew up in a bubble. I had the friends I was saying goodbye to my senior summer, were the friends I made in elementary school. And so just getting to experience the new people, new things, getting to meet new people. I think I matured as a person and just like growth. So I think growth would best describe that.

Neel: [00:22:30] I would say resiliency for me. I think in the sense that by having these peer connections, you have this support system that's just so necessary on this campus. And then in another sense that you're able to face any obstacles and know that you'll be able to make similar connections at whatever point you find yourself in life.

Andrew: [00:23:00] I think I would say foundation, because I feel like coming here was something that felt like such an uproot because I'd never not lived within like a five mile radius of my hometown in my home where I grew up. So coming here was definitely a shift for me, but being able to make those connections gave me a foundation that I was very conscious of trying to find, and a little concerned in trying to find, but being able to find that, those friends and being able to find that support network was something [00:23:30] that I think really made my time here so memorable and so valuable.

Courtney: This is a tough one for me. I think I would say the first one that comes to mind is uncomfortable, but like, that's not in a bad sense. I was saying uncomfortable in

a way that my friends pushed me to do things that I definitely wouldn't do, like if it was up to my own decision. So being able to allow me to put myself in situations, I wouldn't be put in otherwise and kind of encouraged me to go after situations or different job achievements or things of that nature [00:24:00] that I would say, you know what, I'm not going to get it, so what's the point? Like they're saying, go for it anyways. So being able to push me to kind of try new things and push me to kind of realize my own interests a little bit more and what I stand for and all that other kind of stuff. So being able to put me in uncomfortable positions that kind of promote my growth and my understanding of things in the future.

Lauren Garrett: Awesome. Awesome. What a great way to wrap up our time together. Thank you so much to those of you who are tuning in to listen to our conversation. Thank you to my [00:24:30] panelists for joining us this afternoon and being willing to share their personal stories with us. And we look forward to having you all join us next week on Decipher when our first topic or I guess part one of winter break planning will be our topic. So, look forward to chatting with some students, staff and faculty then. So until then, be well, take care of yourself, take care of others and go tribe!

Speaker 8: [00:25:00] To check out our show notes, please visit our website. Decipher.blogs.wm.edu, take care.