

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.

Heather Deere: 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.

[00:00:30] Welcome back, everyone, to the Decipher Podcast. The fall semester has really flown by and it's already time for students to start preparing to head home or make plans for their extended winter break. I'm one of your hosts, Heather Deere, and I'm joined today by Lauren Garrett. And we're going to [00:01:00] talk all about logistics related to this extended winter break and things that you might want to go ahead and start planning and prepping for information that you're going to want to know as we enter November. Crazy to think we're already in November. All right, Lauren, I'm going to get started with some questions. We're just going to roll on through and see what we can cover in today's episode. So when are residence halls closing?

Lauren Garrett: Oh, Heather, it's amazing [00:01:30] how quickly time has flown. So all residence halls will be closing on November 25th, which is the Wednesday prior to the Thanksgiving holiday here in the United States. And we ask that all students be out of their spaces by 10:00 AM on that Wednesday morning.

Heather Deere: What should students be thinking about as we prepare for residence halls to close? Any steps they need to take prior to closing?

Lauren Garrett: Definitely. So, think of [00:02:00] moving out for the semester for the winter break similar to how you moved in. You're going to want to think about what will you need during the extended winter break back in your home space or wherever you're spending the next six to eight weeks. So you'll want to think about taking with you clothes, medications, electronics, anything that you might need in order to be successful over the course of your winter break [00:02:30] experience. And you're going to want to think about the shape that you leave your room in as well. So before you head out for the break, it's probably not a bad idea to do a light dusting, maybe sweep the floor, definitely make sure you're taking out your garbage and your recyclables because whatever condition you leave the room is going to be the condition you returned to. And it's nice to return to a space that feels somewhat [00:03:00] clean and ready for the next semester.

When you do leave your room, you're going to want to make sure that you've set your thermostat, if you have an individual one in your space, to 68 degrees. And then, of course, make sure that you've closed and locked the windows and doors to your space. Now, if you currently are in a room by yourself, but have the potential for a roommate, you will want to make sure that the other side of

your room is ready for someone [00:03:30] to move in with you in the spring. We are anticipating students returning to campus or arriving to campus as new first-time in college freshmen and transfer students. We also are anticipating the arrival of exchange students. So if you are lucky to have someone placed with you for the spring semester, we want to make sure that they feel welcomed and prepared to join you in your space.

And the best way you can do that is to make sure that you've tidied up [00:04:00] their side of the room so that they have drawers and a dresser and a bed, and they really feel that their arrival was anticipated or looked forward to. The one thing I do want to make sure I mentioned, prepping items that you're going to want to take with you when you depart, really want to make sure that you take any legal documents or instruments or equipment that perhaps [00:04:30] has value to you, or is valuable. While residence halls will be secured, it is always important to take stock of what needs to be a little bit more secure versus left in the residence halls spaces. So even though you've locked windows and doors, if you have any concern about leaving something behind, it's always better just to take it with you so that you can keep eyes on it.

Heather Deere: Lauren, it's really exciting to hear us talk about new students joining the community. That's [00:05:00] always a really fun time on campus. What about maybe our students who aren't planning to return to their room in the spring, should they be thinking about any processes in place for them to think about as they maybe depart their room?

Lauren Garrett: So if you are not returning to your residence hall space for the spring semester, you're going to want to follow those same basic principles, make sure that you do a light cleaning, take out the garbage and the recyclables. [00:05:30] You'll definitely want to make sure that you empty and clean the refrigerator if there's one in your room. You're going to want to make sure you take all of your belongings with you at the time of your departure. And you're going to want to make sure that you've taken down any posters or pictures or nails or stickers from the walls or furniture, closet doors, et cetera. The one piece that's going to look a little bit different is that the end of your move-out process, you need to make sure that you return your room key [00:06:00] or apartment keys to the duty office of your residential area. There should be express checkout envelopes available just outside of the duty office that you can place your keys inside and then leave in the black drop boxes just outside the doors.

For both students who are returning for the spring and those who are not returning for the spring semesters to their spaces, when you do successfully depart campus in November, [00:06:30] whether that's the first day of final exams or the last day of final exams, we also want you to make sure that you check out in the housing portal. That's going to be really important for our Residential Life staff, because we need to know that you've left campus, so that then Residential Life staff can go into your space, check your room, and make

sure that there's no significant issues inside before we all depart [00:07:00] campus for winter break.

Heather Deere: Thank you for that advice. That's really helpful as students make plans after their final exams, which is something I kind of wanted to touch on. I know there's some ambiguity this year with final exams because some of them are happening online, some of them are happening in-person. So I think students may be wondering, "If all of my exams are online, do I have to stay until that last day that residence halls are open? Or can I [00:07:30] go somewhere else to take my final exams and leave campus a little bit early?" What does that process look like and how can students find out more about their final exam schedule?

Lauren Garrett: This is so important because this is really where we're going to encourage you to know yourself and know in what environment you need to be in, in order to academically thrive. So, first off, I'm going to recommend that students check their syllabus. On their syllabus, there should be a notation [00:08:00] as to the location of the final exam. If you're required to be on a Zoom call, or if you are in an in-person or blended class this semester, there may be some requirements stated there about the location of the exam. If you're in a remote course or you know that you can take that Zoom final wherever you happen to be, as long as your computer's set up, I really want you to think about, is it best to stay in your William and Mary, [00:08:30] Williamsburg academic environment, or is it better for you to go home or to be with friends or family during the course of that process?

And it's going to be a little bit up to you and to your environment and where you want to be and where you're going to feel the most support and perhaps even a stronger sense of certainty or confidence during that academic finals process, [00:09:00] especially if it's your first time around with the final exam period. Now, we're always going to say that the final exam schedule is subject to change, and this is ultimately where you're going to want to defer to your faculty member. But if you have any question as to the exam schedule overall, the university registrar's website has a full listing of the final exam schedule, both by the actual exam date and time, as [00:09:30] well as by class date and time. So it's really structured. It's probably a little bit more structured than you would ever imagine because they are trying to juggle so many different courses and so many different fields, but you're going to want to make sure that you have blocked off those times on your calendar.

And just because they say an exam is going to be held between 12:30 and 3:30, it doesn't necessarily mean that the final exam is going to take that [00:10:00] full block. It just means at some point in time, that is when the exam is slated to occur. Keep in mind that all of these course times or all of the exam times are Eastern. So if you make the decision to head home before your final and you perhaps live on the West Coast, just make sure you're setting your clock accordingly so that you don't miss anything.

Heather Deere: That's really, really great advice. I work often with the parents and families and supporters [00:10:30] of our students. And I also have been encouraging them to ask the question, "Do you think you're going to thrive best during your exams on campus or at home?" And I think that's an important question and really something to think about as we get closer to final exams. Although I'm sure many students are still wishing that final exams were not so close, I still think it's a great idea to take a second and think about what that is really going to look like for them. [00:11:00] I know we talked some about the general policies in terms of Residence Life closing and closing dates and what those protocols look like. Are there any exceptions to that or any of the residence halls that have different protocols?

Lauren Garrett: That's a good point, Heather. Thanks for bringing that up. So students who reside in the graduate complex or Tribe Square are permitted to remain in their current apartments over the course of the winter break. However, students do need to verify with [00:11:30] Residence Life that, that is their plan. And all students need to do is log into the housing portal on the Residence Life web page. This is the same portal that students will use when they check out at the end of their fall semester. And this is also the same housing portal that students will need to access in order to let Residence Life know what their plans are for spring semester. So it's really a one-stop shop. [00:12:00] You log in with your William and Mary credentials, you find the appropriate form. So end of semester plan, winter break staying, winter break departure, and then just make sure that you complete the information as requested, easy peasy.

Heather Deere: Great tidbits of information there. I think those are all of my really logistical questions in regards to the process of leaving campus for winter break. Is there anything else that you think is important for students to know as they make plans?

Lauren Garrett: [00:12:30] The last piece of advice I would provide to students as they're planning their departure from campus is to be mindful of who is helping them move out of their residence hall room, keeping in mind our Healthy Together campus commitment. We do ask that if you were going to have guests join you or helpers join you, to move belongings out of the buildings, that we follow similar protocol or similar processes to the move-in [00:13:00] schedule. So no more than two individuals aged 16 plus to assist with you moving out of your space in the residence hall. We will ask that you do a little bit of a vetting of your helpers. So if your helpers can answer yes to any of the following questions, then you should probably ask them to stay home for the betterment and safety of our entire community. So first, if your helper is currently or has experienced any of [00:13:30] the COVID-like symptoms within the last 14 days, if your helper has a fever greater than 100 degrees, if your helper had difficulty breathing or a persistent cough, then we will ask that you reevaluate your helper situation.

Keep in mind that everybody needs to be wearing a mask during this move-out process and that, that mask enforcement or that mask policy will be both enforced as it's considered mandatory. [00:14:00] And that if you are having folks help you move out of your space, that your room needs to be packed and ready to go. While you don't have to sign up for an appointment, you do need to make sure that you're communicating with your roommate or your suite mate so not everybody is trying to move out of the space at the exact same time, because we do want to avoid having too many people in the room, especially if you have helpers joining you. So a lot of it is just common courtesy, a lot of it's communication, [00:14:30] a lot of it is making sure that we're still following that Healthy Together campus commitment. And we've done a really great job so far. I've been really impressed by how seriously our students have taken the Healthy Together Commitment.

And I'm looking forward to a really great spring semester, welcoming folks back to Williamsburg who chose to be remote for the fall semester. It's going to be really exciting. And then of course, welcoming new students and their families to the William [00:15:00] and Mary community through spring orientation is something we're looking forward to as well. So, winter break, it's going to be a little bit longer than normal, than what we're all used to. So, hopefully, we all use that time to rest, relax, rejuvenate, and to spend time with loved ones as we navigate, hopefully, 2021 and a year that feels perhaps a little bit kinder than 2020.

Heather Deere: Definitely. Thank you, Lauren, for all of your expertise in [00:15:30] the realm of preparing for winter break. We thought it was important to talk about it today, just because I think it's going to sneak up on a lot of our students as it's coming quicker than what we're used to, especially for students who have been here maybe for a year or two. For our new students, I know there's not a lot to compare it to, but for some, it may really sneak up on them and really want to provide this information upfront and allow them time to plan for what the end of the semester looks like for them. So thank you, Lauren. We [00:16:00] are going to be back next week with an episode that talks more about the extended break and how to really maximize that winter break and how it's going to feel similar yet different from winter breaks in the past and things to look out for and ways that you can engage and really rest, and restore, and recuperate from the semester over winter break.

So, we will tackle that conversation next week, but in the meantime, thank you, Lauren, and [00:16:30] please tune into the Decipher Podcast anywhere that podcasts are available. Bye, everyone.

Speaker 1: Thank you so much for tuning in. To check out our show notes, please visit our website decipher.blogs.wm.edu. Take care.