

Shelly Laurenzo: 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.

Speaker 3: 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.

Shelly Laurenzo: [00:00:30] So today on the podcast, we are joined by Dr. Ben Boone, who's the Associate Director for the Center of the Liberal Arts at William & Mary. Ben hi, welcome to the show.

Ben Boone: Hi Shelly. Thanks for having me.

Shelly Laurenzo: So I was thinking maybe you could start off and talk to us a little bit about your experience at William & Mary. You've been here a while.

Ben Boone: Yeah, so this is my 18th year at William & Mary. [00:01:00] I started back in fall 2003 as a freshman, and then here we are. So at least I tell my mom I have picked up three degrees in 18 years. So it hasn't all just been from one. I did my bachelor's degree in Hispanic Studies and then followed that up with a Masters in Higher Education and then worked for about 10 years since I was an undergrad in the Dean of Students office working with transfer students, enrollment support, [00:01:30] care support, and crisis response, and then transitioning over to the Center for the Liberal Arts, which is in Arts and Sciences. And we are responsible for the kind of faculty innovation and implementation of the college or COLL curriculum.

And then last year in May of 2019, I finished my PhD in Higher Education and I write about faculty development and general education issues. I also teach [00:02:00] a COLL 150, one of our freshmen writing seminars for first year students and then I also teach COLL 300 courses as I take students over to Spain and we go for a short little, 200 mile hike across the Spanish countryside. So it's a little bit about what I do here.

Shelly Laurenzo: 200 mile hike it's not a big deal.

Ben Boone: Real quick, real quick, just move the feet.

Shelly Laurenzo: A quick jaunt across the countryside. So I think for a lot of our students, they probably [00:02:30] aren't familiar with the CLA. So do you mind talking a little bit more about the CLA and what do you do with the CLA and how do you all support faculty there which ultimately supports our students?

Ben Boone: Sure. The CLA is the faculty engine behind general education at William & Mary. What makes us unique among all of the other centers and kind of different

outreach around teaching at William & Mary is that we are run by faculty. I'm the only [00:03:00] full-time professional staff in the office. We also have an Administrative Assistant, Sharon who kind of keeps all the trains running and then everybody else that works with the CLA is a faculty fellow or a faculty director who right now is Christine Nemacheck from the Government Department. And this approach centers on faculty to faculty, peer-to-peer coaching, mentoring, and sharing of experiences. So what happens is CLA fellows work with other faculty in Arts and Sciences, Business, Education [00:03:30] to design and teach their COLL courses. And why this is really important is that they are bringing the faculty perspective to their peers.

So it's not somebody who has never been in a college classroom or has never taught or designed a class. But these are faculty who have done that and who are really passionate about the liberal arts and sciences, and really care that our students all have access to a stellar GenEd curriculum. And so that I think is what makes the CLA unique. [00:04:00] We also host a lot of events, including around our COLL 300 in the past, not so much in these pandemic times as folks like to say, but we'll talk a little bit more about that later, but that's a general overview of what the Center for the Liberal Arts tries to accomplish.

Shelly Laurenzo: Awesome. Thank you. I think one of the things when students are looking over the COLL curriculum especially when they're kind of in that our onboarding process, something that can be a point of confusion [00:04:30] for students is understanding the differences between the COLL 100 and the COLL 150. Do you mind talking through a little bit about the 100s and the 150s and some of the differences there?

Ben Boone: Yeah, sure, absolutely. These are some of my favorite courses in the COLL curriculum. Broadly speaking, they both have to do with communication. So COLL 100 touches on non-written communications. So that could be timelines, presentations, these magic [00:05:00] podcasts things like what we're doing now. Whereas COLL 150 focuses on academic writing within the discipline. And that's really the big difference between the two, 150 is focused on writing. 100 is focused on non-written communication. But the reason why they are some of my favorite courses within the COLL curriculum is that faculty who teach these really want to teach these and they bring their like hot topic, their passion into the classroom when it comes [00:05:30] to the topic that they're teaching about for the COLL 100 and the COLL 150. What that means is that a faculty member might have to teach General Chemistry or General Physical Chemistry as part of why they were hired. And that's what they teach every semester and they're passionate about it and they do a great job.

But when they get to teach a COLL 100, they get to bring in their research niche. And so that might look like something like art at the museum, where we have a chemistry professor, Kristin [00:06:00] Wustholz who normally teach us physical chemistry. She gets to teach about using lasers and art conservation and so it's the idea that you can take chemistry and lasers and tie that to art. And that

really connects not just the arts and sciences, but it also connects our students to her passion and they can see what the different possibilities are regardless of the discipline that you are engaged in.

Shelly Laurenzo: Yeah, I think especially when I'm working with new students looking up 100s and 150s [00:06:30] is one of my favorite things. Because I would want to take just about all of them, like the different topics that are out there all sound extremely interesting to me. So I really appreciate the fact that our faculty have opportunities to share these different things that are interesting and fun and just a different approach to what they normally teach. So most of our students take their 100 and their 150s in their first year and also start taking some of those COLL 200 and Knowledge Domains. Do you mind talking a little bit about the COLL 200 [00:07:00] and Knowledge?

Ben Boone: Absolutely. So just like the first year courses focus on communication and there are two different communication courses, COLL 200 also has a common thread that goes through all three different COLL 200 requirements. I like to call that our methodology requirement what that means is COLL 200 teaches students how different disciplines ask questions and how to connect disciplines across knowledge domains [00:07:30] when you're looking at the same subject. So in a COLL 200 that's anchored in ALV and reaching out to NQR you might be learning about art history from a perspective of appreciating the historical aspect, the cultural aspect, all of the value that that brings, but the faculty member is going to pull in the science side. I realized I've talked about art history and science together now twice, there are lots of other examples.

So another one would be a COLL 200 course that's designated [00:08:00] as a CSI course in history, they might be taught about Medieval Iberia and as part of learning about the people, the culture and the history of Medieval Liberia which is firmly rooted in CSI, the faculty member is going to reach out to the sciences to talk about the importance of livestock, migration, disease, all of these different scientific principles that impact the way history is shaped. So it's really cool to look at different topics, figure out how does one discipline really kind of probe [00:08:30] and ask questions about them. And then how might that be approached if you reached out to another discipline, kind of pulled that book off the shelf and to see how they would approach the question.

Shelly Laurenzo: Great, thanks so much for explaining that and I love the examples of the different classes. I know our Faculty Director in the Office of Academic Advising does a course in sociology and based kind of in CSI, but it reaches out to ALV. So when he's talking about the history of [00:09:00] protests, one of the anchors of protests are the different signage that they use and how they come up with symbols and kind of get folks passionate about that. And so kind of bringing in that art, I think piece is really interesting.

Now, when we talk about the COLL 300s, most students generally understand that COLL 300s can be fulfilled through study abroad options. However, as we all

know that may or may not be the case for a lot of our students and kind of the current conditions. [00:09:30] So can you talk a little bit about the on-campus COLL 300s, especially kind of thinking about the fact that that might be the route a lot of our students have to go while we're still not able to travel.

Ben Boone:

Sure. So what we've done this semester with COLL 300, I think is really exciting because what we've done is we have unleashed kind of faculty imagination and potential out into COLL 300 for on campus. What this means is students who sign up for campus COLL 300s might [00:10:00] take a COLL 300 that is focused on bringing in different speakers and visitors from the past that we've invited to campus. It might be that you're in a class where your faculty member has invited their international colleagues or their cross-cultural colleagues to come in and share about their experiences. One story that I love to share about this year is COLL 300 is in March we kind of hit a little panic mode when we realized we need a COLL 300, study abroad wasn't going to happen. We were going to need a lot.

[00:10:30] We sent out a call to all the faculty who had taught COLL 300s in the past and we asked them, "Are you willing to do a COLL 300 again in the fall? You can pick whatever videos or speakers you want to bring in." And we were hoping to kind of get maybe 10 sections, which is our normal and we had 22 sections of COLL 300 this fall because faculty were so excited to bring in their colleagues, their different perspectives, mix and match videos from different semesters that we've provided to them through our previous campus COLL 300 [00:11:00] programs.

And what I think that we found is that students and faculty both have gotten a lot more out of COLL 300 this year than we might've expected during a pandemic year where we couldn't bring visitors from across the globe to campus and where students couldn't travel as they explored study abroad programs. So I'm really excited to see what turns out for the spring. And I know a lot of people are nervous about those COLL 300 seats right now, but I promise we will have enough. They will be going up in time for the early registration window, which I know Shelly will talk about a little [00:11:30] bit at the end of this, but rest assured we are doing what we can to kind of make the best out of the situation. I think this is one of those examples where had we not had the pandemic? We might not have been creative and explored different ways of creating COLL 300 experiences.

Shelly Laurenzo:

I think definitely for all of us we are all being pushed in different ways to be creative, to adjust to how things are operating and what we can do to make sure folks obviously stay safe too. [00:12:00] Now for most students with the COLL 400, most of our students end up taking that within their major, correct?

Ben Boone:

That's correct. I also realized that I didn't talk about the 300 theme, which is we've got kind of communication at the 100, 150 level, methodology and questions at the 200 level. The 300 level is really about reflection and your place

in the world. So I just kind of wanted to toss that in there because I do have a label for each one of those levels and I want to make sure they [00:12:30] get out there whenever I can. So the COLL 400 is really the dissemination. That is where you pull together everything you've done all of the different skills that you've picked up and you somehow create a product usually like you said, within your major, that represents all the skills that you've developed as your time as an undergrad that is then communicable to a general audience. So what this means, my favorite example to use for this is in the physics department.

Every physics major [00:13:00] is required to do senior research, in the past they would write that up and then that would kind of fulfill their major writing requirement. With COLL 400 though that means that I have to be able to understand what a physics major is doing. That is no small feat for them to communicate to this qualitative cultural studies person what they are doing inside a lab with who knows what kind of equipment. And so what that means is that a physics major has to add something to their final product. That means they can share that with a general non-expert audience. [00:13:30] Another example that I love from COLL 400 is in my home program from when I was an undergrad, Hispanic Studies, what they do in their COLL 400 courses is not only complete a research project but they also do mock interviews with an employer. And the questions they have to answer are what skills and what kind of techniques and talents did you develop as a Hispanic Studies major that would contribute to you landing your dream job?

And so students have to take all of the kind [00:14:00] of ideas that they gathered throughout their major and be able to communicate why those were important and how those skills are transferable? And I just think that really highlights the fact that students can major in anything at William & Mary and go on to do any job for the first time out of college. I think that it's great that they can bring together all of their experiences and put them into kind of this nice little box to unpack and share with the rest of the world.

Shelly Laurenzo: Yeah, no, I think that's fantastic and I like the example you give about [00:14:30] physics. I kind of tell students the same thing when I'm explaining the COLL 400s is basically you need to become Carl Sagan and you need to be able to break this down for me in a way that makes sense that my completely non-scientifically geared brain can understand.

Ben Boone: I don't know who that is, but I'm happy for you to give us [crosstalk 00:14:49]

Shelly Laurenzo: So for any students that are studying this, so [inaudible 00:14:57] I know who Carl Sagan is? [inaudible 00:14:57]

Ben Boone: It's like Great Ideas of Physics 105. [crosstalk 00:14:58] [00:15:00] We made ice cream.

Shelly Laurenzo: Ice cream is also very important. So my last question for you, Ben, while we're together today is I want to know what is your favorite part about teaching our undergrads at William & Mary? So about, especially because within the COLL curriculum, some courses to our undergrads. So what's your favorite part about teaching our undergrads?

Ben Boone: Gosh, that is a really hard question. So my favorite part, I have two different favorite things for each [00:15:30] COLL class that I teach. So in my COLL 150 my favorite part is just introducing them to what it means to be a scholar. That doesn't mean and I emphasize with them that does not mean that leaving one semester of COLL 150 is going to make them an expert researcher or the best writer ever. But what I hope my students leave my class with is understanding what goes into being a scholar. I teach about higher education so I teach about faculty. I teach about students and I teach about what that process is to become [00:16:00] a faculty member and how teaching a class is only one part of a faculty member's job.

So when a student leaves my class, they have a better understanding of what faculty do and why. And they also have a better understanding of how they can start exploring different fields and different knowledge domains through research, right? So I always make sure that my students have practiced research through library databases, through the internet, through interviews, to better understand what it means [00:16:30] to be in higher education in the U.S. today. And so I love them discovering what it means to write an annotated bibliography and going through that peer editing process. I love them discovering that just because you get feedback doesn't mean that it was bad. It's just that feedback is meant to help us get better. So in my class, we do a ton of peer revisions and peer feedback, and I give a lot of feedback. So I really want to instill in them this comfort with criticism and the comfort with developing their voice [00:17:00] as a writer.

The other thing that I love is that they have to interview faculty in my course. So they have to go and find their advisor or find a professor that they've had in class and talk to them about their academic journey and what that does in my opinion and they shared that they felt this as well, is that it allows them to see what it takes to be a researcher and to be a faculty member. We know that students thrive when they can see themselves and see potential in the world around them, especially in higher ed. [00:17:30] And so for them to be able to go and learn a journey and see the pathway to get to a position, if they're interested in that, I think is really critical.

Call 300 when I take students to Spain, obviously my favorite part of that is that I get to take students to Spain. Of course I am so passionate about the Camino de Santiago, which is a pilgrimage route that we walk. I am so passionate about students getting to go abroad and do [00:18:00] something, right? So like we are hiking 200 miles, they are meeting people from all across the globe. They are

getting to try food that they would never get to try here, including my favorite boiled octopus. It is the best. It's just-

Shelly Laurenzo: Is it chewy? It sounds chewy.

Ben Boone: Not if it's done right. No, not if it's done right here. You get a little smoked paprika right on top with some boiled potatoes. Golly, I need a moment. Okay, so getting people abroad to try those new foods, to try interacting with people [00:18:30] and to better understand how to slow down. So as part of COLL 300, we have this disorientating goal, right? Like we want to kind of lift students from their comfort zone and from their surroundings, I can think of no better way to lift a student from their kind of comfort zone and surroundings than to put them in the middle of a field where they have to hike for 13, 14 miles a day and there's no cell service until they get to the-

Shelly Laurenzo: That sounds like Survivor.

Ben Boone: Yeah but Survivor with octopus and really good wine and good cheese [00:19:00] and good food like this is-

Shelly Laurenzo: I'm pretty sure the normal Survivor also has an octopus, but yes, the other things aren't there. Carry on.

Ben Boone: So that's what I love about COLL 300 is giving our students the opportunity to experience things that they normally would not have.

Shelly Laurenzo: Yeah, no, I think that's one of the things I like about our offerings around the COLL 300 as well, is really being intentional with students about exposing them to different things [00:19:30] that maybe they haven't been exposed to differently.

Ben Boone: Well, and I think it's really important too, to point out that that happens with the COLL 300 on campus. You don't have to go abroad to experience something that's different and unusual. I'm going to use my friend and colleague Professor Maliniak from Government, this past semester he's teaching or this semester we're in he's teaching a COLL 300. He used a couple of videos, but he also Zoomed in three of his colleagues from Georgia and I'm not talking about Georgia y'all, I'm talking about like Georgia the country that's [00:20:00] like way over yonder by Russia.

Shelly Laurenzo: Thank you for clarifying.

Ben Boone: Yeah just to clarify, so he Zoomed in three of those colleagues that he's developed relationships with over the past 15 years. And it just so happened the week he had them Zooming was the week prior to our election. It also was the day prior to their election for their parliament and their prime minister. So there was this huge dialogue that took place. The class was... The dialogue was

supposed to be 30 minutes. They were on Zoom and students were asking questions for [00:20:30] an hour and a half. And they've got the opportunity through COLL 300 to engage with people none of these students would have ever met. It didn't matter that Dan led a study abroad trip. They still would not have had this kind of interaction with these people in Georgia on the ground, on the eve of their election. So that's the kind of thing that I think COLL 300 allows us to leverage faculty creativity with faculty relationships across the globe to really bring experiences to the students that they would not have under normal circumstances.

Shelly Laurenzo: [00:21:00] Kind of jealous. I would like to sit on some of these sessions.

Ben Boone: Well, it was Zoom. I mean, you might as well just be a Zoom bomber.

Shelly Laurenzo: That's true. That's going to be my new side gig. Well, thank you so much, Ben, for joining us today. Is there anything else you wanted to share about the COLL curriculum as we wrap up?

Ben Boone: Yeah I think the same with the COLL curriculum is experiment. Embrace it for general education. Unfortunately, I hear a lot of students talking about, and even [00:21:30] some faculty talking about like, "Oh, in this major you can knock out like three of COLL requirements, like all in one major." And that's not the point, right? The point is that you're exposed to a lot of different material, a lot of different disciplines just because you don't get your first choice in a COLL class doesn't mean that there's not another COLL class that you're going to thoroughly enjoy. So get out there embrace the unknown. I would quote a certain song from a major motion picture.

Shelly Laurenzo: Is it Frozen 2?

Ben Boone: [00:22:00] Maybe. But go out into the unknown and I'll spare you from me singing that over a podcast, but get out there, experiment with your classes, find new fields of inquiry and just enjoy it for the process of learning because you got to do it anyway.

Shelly Laurenzo: I agree. Well, thank you so much, Ben. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today.

Ben Boone: Well thank you for having me-

Shelly Laurenzo: As you begin to [00:22:30] prepare for spring 2021 registration, please be sure to check Banner for your specific registration windows as well as to see if you have any holds on your account that might delay your ability to register. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your faculty advisor or you're also more than welcome to reach out to the advisors and the Office of Academic Advising links are in our show notes. Thank you so much for tuning in,



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