

- 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.
- Shelly Laurenzo: [00:00:30] So Lauren, it's hard to believe, but this is the end of our first season of the Decipher podcast.
- Lauren Garrett: It really has been quite the adventure.
- Shelly Laurenzo: This has been a lot of fun.
- Lauren Garrett: It has. Well, being that this is my first foray into this world, I always knew that I enjoyed talking, [00:01:00] but I didn't realize how much I enjoyed talking until I had to listen to myself back.
- Shelly Laurenzo: I will say, that's one of the hard parts now of being on a podcast is, I'm not a big fan of listening to myself talk again. So this has really been an effort to listen, because I do all the editing for the podcast and go through and do the editing. But I've learned a lot about voice recordings and editing stuff. So I have enjoyed that little piece. Anytime [inaudible 00:01:30] [00:01:30] learn some more new things I think is always fun.
- Lauren Garrett: I think that's one of the up sides of being in a remote, wonky COVID semester. The fact that we have been able to learn a little bit more, not just about ourselves and not how to better support our students and families, but also how to deliver resources in a different way. [00:02:00] And so I think that that's a silver lining that I've taken away from this whole process. And this whole compressed semester has been, that it's been an opportunity to sort of challenge and push me out of my own comfort zones, which is nice sometimes when that happens organically.
- Shelly Laurenzo: It is, it is. And I think honestly, Lauren, that's a perfect segue to how I thought we could wrap up our first season is to talk a little bit about what we were grateful for this fall semester. [00:02:30] I think for me, in particular, for those of you who are familiar with the Williamsburg paper, the Virginia Gazette, you will know on the last page of the Gazette, there's this section every week called, The Last Word. People submit anonymous pieces of information, I don't know what else to call it. Typically, a couple of sentences, sometimes it's recommendations for services or requests for services. It's all over [00:03:00] the map. Sometimes they're just like little opinion pieces, but this past week, so that would be December 2nd, speaking as to when we're recording now, going back a couple of days. In the December 2nd paper, in The Last Word, there were two

comments in particular, really commending the William and Mary community. And in particular, our students for how well they did this semester in terms [00:03:30] of keeping campus going and keeping us together in Williamsburg.

And so I think what I'm grateful for in particular this semester is I kind of want to echo that. I'm so grateful in particular to our students and all the hard work they had to do in order to keep us here and healthy this semester. That's no easy feat to do that. So I'm grateful for our students this semester. I'm always grateful for our students, but this semester in particular, for their [00:04:00] dedication to our health and safety, I'm really grateful.

Lauren Garrett: What do you tweet?

Shelly Laurenzo: Retweet.

Lauren Garrett: As you were talking, I had a little bit of a flashback to August and thinking about how this is going to happen, how the semester was going to happen, and it shouldn't come as a surprise [00:04:30] to anyone listening, if I disclose that I am a particularly emotional person. I enjoy a good cry and I am not afraid to cry in the-

Shelly Laurenzo: That's a good thing.

Lauren Garrett: Of course, it's a good day. But I get teary thinking about how the conversations that we had with student leaders, especially within campus living and the training processes in August were very much [00:05:00] collaborative in nature. And it was very evident, at that point in time, how seriously they took and still continue to take their roles in helping students have the best William and Mary experience they possibly could, given everything that was happening pandemic, given everything that was happening in terms of academic delivery, and different choices in residency.

Shelly, your [00:05:30] comments really made me think back to how, yes, if our students weren't as dedicated as they were and have been to the safety and health of our community as individuals and as a collective, we definitely would not be in the position that we're in right now. But I am so thankful that our students were engaged with us in the process from day one. It wasn't something [00:06:00] that had to catch on very much. In some cases, coming up with the tough questions that needed to be answered and helping us figure those pieces out and I think that because so much of what happened programmatically, so much of what happened in terms of community building was student driven from whether they were titled or non-leadership titled [00:06:30] positions. I think just speaks to the extraordinary students that we have here.

And we talk about the uniqueness of the William and Mary community. I think we really saw that showcased this semester. I think I'm grateful in a more specific manner. I'm grateful for having colleagues who, in a time where it

would be really easy [00:07:00] for us just to shut down and start dictating, that we engaged in a reflective process ourselves and really thought through how we were doing business and how we could support differently. And we didn't wait and just sort of rest on our laurels of knowing we have an engaged, educated student body or rest on our laurels of someone else will pick that up. I really feel like it was a team effort across the board. [00:07:30] Yeah. And it just made for a very interesting experience, not necessarily one that I would recommend.

Shelly Laurenzo: No, I think we're good. I don't want to do this again.

Lauren Garrett: I don't know that we need a do over. A do over would be nice but maybe not in the same way. At the end of the day, even talking with students since the semester has wrapped, hearing them speak about gratitude and thankfulness, while there were definitely some rough patches for folks, [00:08:00] just sort of shows that community still shone through all of the tough times. That's really amazing.

Shelly Laurenzo: Yeah. You were much more eloquent in saying that, Lauren, than I was.

Lauren Garrett: No. There were a lot of ums, Shelly, and I'm going to have to listen to all those ums.

Shelly Laurenzo: I'll see if I can edit some ums out for you.

Lauren Garrett: Thank you. Because it's my thinking word.

Shelly Laurenzo: Right.

Lauren Garrett: The other thing, not that it's not a good way to be grateful. A lot of our November [00:08:30] initiatives for community connections out of our office were focused on gratitude and thankfulness and gratitude for folks that had supported individuals, but also gratitude or [inaudible 00:08:47] blessings or just identifying privilege. [inaudible 00:08:52] be those community connections that happened in November really brought [00:09:00] us back to the simple things, which is really sort of nice in the sense that students sort of got back to friends and it felt less about stuff and things, and it felt more about relationships, especially when, it's really what they needed. They needed social interaction of a certain point. They needed to know that they had friends and they created connections with others before they headed into break.

Shelly Laurenzo: [00:09:30] Unfortunately, our co-host Heather couldn't join us when Lauren and I met, but she was still able to share what she was grateful for as well.

Heather Deere: I think, something, especially when I think in terms of this podcast and other initiatives that have happened this fall semester, I'm really grateful for the connections that I've made this semester and this year, that wouldn't have happened in a normal, traditional semester or academic year. And I wonder

[00:10:00] too, if those connections happened with our students as well, thinking about the things that needed to happen and technology we needed to use and initiatives that needed to be made, just really grateful that I was able to work with people that I was really not working with before and really establishing connections with folks who I think I am inspired by and enjoy being around and enjoy sharing my work with, [00:10:30] and really learning more about the things that they do in a normal day.

And so I think that's something that I'm really going to hope continues over the next year. And once we enter something that feels more normal or something that we're used to, if those connections remain, and I think that's the beauty, something Lauren mentioned, the beauty of being forced to do things differently is being able to start a podcast with people who you don't normally see every day, or [00:11:00] being able to have meetings and conversations with folks from different time zones and in different places and really being able to make that something that's part of the normal routine. And I'm really, really grateful for that experience.

And again, I just wonder if there was any of that innovation or ingenuity or things that students really did this semester that they wouldn't have done before, and if any of that continues. I know that there were things that happened that will continue. And I just wonder what those shining lights were [00:11:30] for our students of innovation and doing things new and making new connections and how those will continue in the future.

Speaker 1:

Thank you so much for joining us for the first season of the Decipher podcast. Coming up next week, we'll start preparing for spring 2021 and welcoming new students in January. Don't forget to check out our show notes at [decipher.blogs.wm.edu](http://decipher.blogs.wm.edu). Take care.