

Shelly Laurenzo: 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, this is the first episode of season two of the Decipher Podcast. And this episode is focused on welcoming our incoming spring 2021 students. So, today it's going to be me, Shelly Laurenzo, along with Lauren Garrett from STEP. And I apologize, I don't know all of the words that [00:01:00] STEP stands for. So Lauren, you're going to have to update me. And then, Heather Deere from Parent and Family Relations in the Dean of Students office. If you guys want to say hi and welcome as well.

Heather Deere: So, welcome everyone. I'm so happy to be here and really getting my gears turning and thinking about the spring semester and welcoming new students, which is always a really exciting time for us.

Shelly Laurenzo: As part [00:01:30] of this tribe guide checklist and everything we do to help students get on board, our office, the office of academic advising, along with our colleagues and swim library, have an online short course through Blackboard called College Studies. Part two of the course is really focused on information literacy, and making sure students know how to access all of the resources that our library has available to them, while they're a student here. And part one is focused on that academic advising piece, like Lauren said. So we [00:02:00] start really big picture with what does it mean to be at a liberal arts and sciences institution like William and Mary, all the way down to the very specific details around how, exactly, do you register for courses in our system. So we try to cover all of those details. That course will launch for our incoming students on January 4th.

And we have peer advisors who are undergraduate students who volunteer to serve as teaching assistants for that course. So, all of our incoming students will be assigned a [00:02:30] peer advisor. That peer advisor will work with them while they're taking the course and support them specifically in part one, when we talk about that academic advising piece. The other thing to know, too, is a little bit about registration. So, our registration process for incoming students is split up into two parts. So students will register for some of their spring semester courses the week of January 11th, and then they'll register for the rest of their courses [00:03:00] during their orientation weekend. We'll actually have the opportunity to meet with their pre major advisor during orientation, and then finish up their course registration at that point in time. The other thing that I want to highlight that's part of the tribe guide checklist is the new student inventory.

So, this is an inventory that the STEP office sends out to students, and there's a lot of different offices that utilize the information there that you all share with us. And in particular, for academic advising, we ask [00:03:30] you for your top choices for potential majors, and we use that information to match you with one of our faculty members. My favorite fun fact about the matching process is the algorithm we utilize to match students with faculty, was actually written and developed by students in the math department here. So I really like the fact that our algorithm is homegrown at William and Mary. So yes, that's just some things to kind of keep in mind as part of the process for academic advising and registration. [00:04:00] Yes, Lauren.

Lauren Garrett: The other thing I'll throw in real quickly is that the Tribe Guide is a great resource as well for our families, as they're helping to support students go through this transition. It's really important that our parents and family members are aware of the timelines and the complexity that goes into joining a new or a different institution, depending on your prior university [00:04:30] status. And because of that, we actually, with parent family programs, offer a family orientation, because we know that while joining an institution midyear can be challenging in and of itself for students, there's also a whole new learning curve for families as well. Heather, do you think you can share with us a little bit about that, and what families can expect?

Heather Deere: Definitely. And I think you bring up a great point when I think of our transfer students who may be joining our community in [00:05:00] the spring. Their families may be thinking, we've been through the orientation before, we kind of know what this looks like. We've gotten some of those concrete, foundational pieces about being the family or supporter of a college student, but there are going to be some specifics related to William and Mary that families might find helpful as they begin their journey with us. And so, we're going to have a self guided orientation that will happen after students begin their orientation programming, and you can find that information on the STEP website. [00:05:30] But that's going to be a kind of a choose your own adventure, so they can really spend time on the pieces that are most applicable to you and your student.

And then we're going to have a live conversation that following Tuesday. So, some opportunities for some interaction as well, knowing that there will be some questions that won't be answered. And so we really want to give families the space to ask those questions. And something that I was thinking of when you were talking about the checklist, Lauren, is we have the [00:06:00] official Tribe Guide checklist of the things that they should be doing between now and when they join the community. But then too, I was thinking of the unofficial things that they can be doing between now and when they join our community. The first thing that came to my mind, and this just shows me, college was years ago for me, but there are things that are still, I will tell every college student, that they should do.

And before they join the community, I think that they should make sure that they have their William and Mary email [00:06:30] connected to their phone, because so much of their information will come to their William and Mary email. And so getting in the habit of checking that now and having it somewhere accessible for them, whether that's a mobile device of some kind or their desktop or laptop, then I think that is extremely handy because all of this great information that you're sharing with students, it's going to come through to their William and Mary email. And so, while it may not be on the checklist, I think it is a really important [00:07:00] unofficial checklist item. And I'm wondering if you all have other unofficial checklist items that you would add to a Tribe Guide checklist for new students.

Shelly Laurenzo:

That's a really good question, Heather. I mean, I think definitely the email, you're going to hear every office and anyone around the institution talk about the importance of checking your William and Mary email in particular, as you come on board and come into our community and are a member [00:07:30] of our community, emails extremely important. And, it's important enough in normal times, but especially with the way information is shared around the pandemic, and keeping folks healthy, again, email is crucial as part of that, too. So yes, I'm just doubling down on Heather's email suggestion. My other unofficial checklist item for students is, I think when students [00:08:00] first find out that they're accepted, there's a lot of excitement and joy. And then, we move into this, okay, like you're coming on board. Here are things that you need to do. And you have to do them, right?

In order to be successful, the William Mary community, you need to take care of these items. You need to understand these things. You need to learn these things in order to be successful here with us. I also don't want students to lose that initial joy and excitement that they had. Keep that with you, keep that enthusiasm with you during the process, during [00:08:30] your first week with us on campus, or remote, wherever you are during the first week. And also keep a really open mind. You know, I think sometimes people have very specific concrete expectations of how this transition is going to look like and what their William and Mary experience will look like. And so I think the more you can just be open and flexible about what comes your way, the more you will enjoy the experience and be able to maintain that level of joy and excitement that you're hopefully feeling right now, [00:09:00] now that you've just received your acceptance notifications. What about for you, Lauren?

Lauren Garrett:

My unofficial Tribe Guide checklist item would probably be giving yourself a little bit of a break before you start a new semester. There is a tendency amongst our students, as well as our faculty and [00:09:30] staff, to want to accomplish more, to be more, to do more. And I think right now, that unofficial task list item that I would add would be to give yourself a break. To sit and enjoy what you've accomplished, similar to what Shelley just mentioned, but also give yourself a little bit [00:10:00] of breathing room so that you can refocus and

enter our community with pure abandon of learning, and getting ready to accomplish whatever has brought you to our community.

If it's because of a major or a faculty member, or maybe it's just proximity to home or loved ones, whatever's drawn you to William and Mary for your next educational adventure, [00:10:30] I think this is an opportunity to give yourself some down time and to reflect on really, what is it that you want to achieve. So an orientation comes around and the start of classes happens, you have a clear picture in your mind about where you're headed. And also, let's be honest. It's nice to start a new semester feeling a little refreshed and rejuvenated. And we, by no means, want you to come into this new environment feeling [00:11:00] already run down or worn ragged.

All that said, I recognize that folks need to work. That folks will have other obligations. But I just ask that you be kind to yourself and to your schedule, before, especially over these next few weeks, because there's going to be a lot to do. And focus on harmony, focus on sort of trying to make sure that you're attending to yourself in a way that's [00:11:30] very kind, in a way that's also joyful of what's yet to come in your adventure.

Shelly Laurenzo: I like that. I like that, Lauren. One more thing just popped into my head far an unofficial checklist item. For me. When I was accepted into college, I bought my mom a decal for her car, and I got my dad a hat, [00:12:00] and they kept those things, that that meant a lot to them. As my cheerleaders, to be able to show pride in me and where I was going to school. And so whoever those cheerleaders are for you, maybe it's parents, maybe its significant others, siblings, best friends, whomever that is, if you have time or means to just say thank you and acknowledge their support of you [00:12:30] and their cheerleader role, that can oftentimes go a long way. So, unofficial checklist item, be sure to thank your cheerleader in whatever way makes the most sense for them. Anything else as we kind of wrap up this intro/welcome to our new spring students that you all want to share or be sure to mention?

Lauren Garrett: I would just add that I think it's important for us to share that the university is [00:13:00] keeping tabs on sort of the bigger events that are happening community-wide. And so, this is part of why it's so important to be keeping tabs on your William and Mary email, because that's going to be where all of the communications about COVID response or registration announcements and things of that nature will be headed. And so making sure that as you're taking [00:13:30] a look at your email, hopefully once a day once it's set up, that you're also taking time to explore the William and Mary website, because we have a number of resources available there, just talking about how the university and the community and the students, in particular, have really taken ownership of keeping everyone healthy and safe.

And so, if students and families have questions about those processes and requirements and things of that nature, there's a lot to be found on our Path

[00:14:00] Forward website. And, of course, our offices are always open to those conversations. The president will be having another series of community conversations starting up in the new year, and looking forward to having a robust discussion around.

Shelly Laurenzo: The other thing I want to make sure that we share, or that's brought up in this conversation is, of course, our offices [00:14:30] do close for winter break. And so William and Mary offices will be closed starting December 24th. And then we will reopen January 4th. So just something to kind of keep in mind as you're starting this process and going through things. Just knowing if you're trying to reach out to certain offices, what our institutional looks like for the winter break,

Lauren Garrett: Where we see things going, especially now that we know that some places and spaces are starting [00:15:00] to implement vaccinations, and there's still a lot of unknowns out there. So, encourage you to keep in touch and let us know if you have questions. It's better to ask the question than to sort of sit and stew on the what ifs. So, finding out an answer sometimes can help a lot with anxiety and nervousness, and so encourage you to reach out and happy to be of help.

Speaker 4: [00:15:30] Thank you for tuning in to the first episode of season two of the Decipher Podcast. As always, be sure to check out our show notes at [decipher.blogs.wm.edu](http://decipher.blogs.wm.edu). Take care.