

- Speaker 1: 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.
- Heather Deere: 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] Happy New Year, and welcome back to the Decipher Podcast. I'm Shelly Lorenzo. And today, I'm joined by Heather Deere and Lauren Garrett. Happy New Year, Heather.
- Heather Deere: Thank you. Happy New Year to you. I'm excited about the hope that a new year brings. Although we are joining 2021 amidst very similar conditions as we ended 2020, but [00:01:00] I'm really excited to be talking about new students today, because that really brings fresh energy to the institution.
- Lauren Garrett: I would agree. Happy New Year, everyone. I think I am most looking forward to the spring semester because I feel like we've ironed out some of the kinks from the fall, and have a lot of really great opportunities in store for our community. Especially as we start thinking about how this semester can tap into what we've learned [00:01:30] over the past few months.
- Shelly Laurenzo: I agree. I think we learned a lot from the fall, and I think we're in a good position to start the spring semester. And as Heather and Lauren both mentioned, we're really excited for our new incoming students that are joining us for the first time this spring. And so, today, we're going to talk a little bit about what those students and their families can expect as part of the orientation process. So, Lauren, do you want to talk [00:02:00] a little bit about what folks can expect at orientation?
- Lauren Garrett: Sure. So, we are thrilled that orientation will be offered, this spring, in a blended format. We recognize that not all of our students are able to perhaps join us on campus. And so, because we're operating in a blended format in general, it means that we have a lot of flexibility to support our [00:02:30] remote students as well. And so, we have brought on board around 30 orientation aids for the spring program, to make sure that we are delivering the same high touch, high quality offerings for our new students, but things will look a little bit different obviously, based off of COVID precautions and safety and community concerns moving forward. A lot of the sessions [00:03:00] will be held in small groups, small group settings. Either in person or remote group oriented, over Zoom.
- And so, students will still get an opportunity to meet others, beyond their residence hall room. So, folks that are living on campus will be grouped in similar residential areas, to get to know folks that are nearby, so they can

traverse campus together. And folks that will be commuting [00:03:30] will be linked with other students in a similar situation, so that everybody is, sort of, navigating the same or similar paths on a similar schedule, if that makes any sense. The other fun thing about spring is that it's giving us a chance, with this orientation, to try some new things.

And so, there'll be a lot of community connection opportunities, not just with our new to William & Mary students, but also our new [00:04:00] to campus students, because we are very cognizant of the fact that we have quite a few class of 2024 students who studied remote in the fall, who have made the decision to join us in Williamsburg this spring. And so, we're excited because there will be a lot of energy on campus, a lot of fresh eyes, a lot of newness to explore. And we're trying to adjust the schedule, to make sure that everyone [00:04:30] has an opportunity to learn about campus and potential engagement opportunities, regardless of where they were for the fall semester.

Shelly Laurenzo: Nice. Thanks, Lauren. Orientation takes place over a five-day period, leading up to the start of the spring semester. So, I'm almost wondering, maybe we can hit on what are some of the highlights of each day of orientation? Just so folks [00:05:00] can get an idea of what to expect each day. So, Lauren, what's the Friday highlight?

Lauren Garrett: The Friday highlight is essentially getting students here on campus, getting them acclimated to their orientation group. And the end of the day will be kept with a welcome event. That will be a live synchronous event. So, new students, regardless of location, and family members as well, will be able to tune in to that welcome and really experience the kickstart. [00:05:30] Saturday, we'll move into more of the community concerns, community conversations around expectations, values, and really getting students to think about where they want to invest their time and energies, while they're here at the university. And then on Sunday, we start in with academic advising and preparation for course registration, which I know, Shelly, obviously, you and [00:06:00] your colleagues play a large part in that process.

We start thinking a little bit, on Sunday, about study abroad, study away opportunities. We start introducing students to opportunities like the Washington Center, and helping them think a little bit more holistically about what it means for us to be a liberal arts institution, and the experiences that they can gain from our robust curriculum. Monday, in addition to course registration and academic advising, [00:06:30] we're thinking about choices and decision-making, because this is a big day. On Monday, students will complete, in theory, their course registration for the spring semester.

And there are some decisions that students have to make about not just what classes are they going to take, but what does that schedule look like for them moving forward, in terms of, if commuting, how much time do they need to allow to and from campus? If they're studying remote, do they really want

[00:07:00] to take back to back classes? And I know, Shelly, again, you have great tips and tricks for students, around those topics. And then Monday is some more sort of community physical acclimation to campus. So, making sure students know how to get from point A to point B on their own, independently, as we move through the semester, and making sure that students feel comfortable with what this next transitional phase looks like for them. While the students are going through [00:07:30] these, sort of, daily highlights, families will also have an opportunity to go through their own educational journey, in a self-guided way. And Heather, do you have anything, any highlights you want to share with our listeners?

Heather Deere:

For sure. I know Lauren shared that a few of our new students have asked what their family members' or guests' responsibility is, during this time, which I think is a great way to pose that question. So, [00:08:00] our families and guests of our new students and our transfer students are going to have access to a self-paced online parent and family orientation. We're going to talk about what it means to be a part of the William & Mary family, what it means for your student to be getting a liberal arts education and all that, that entails. Some information about dining and other auxiliary services, and some fun things too. For our families who may not be able to join us, or join their student as they start this journey in Williamsburg, [00:08:30] we'll share a video, with a local business who is a William & Mary alum in the community.

We have lantern tour of historic campus that we'll be sharing with our families, and a few other things as well, that we think will really round out the picture of what it means to be a William & Mary student, and why we love William & Mary. So, I'm excited about this. It gives families the opportunity to really engage at this at their own pace, and explore the things that are critical to them and their student. And we're also offering a live [00:09:00] session, so that if there are any unanswered questions, our Dean of students, Marjorie Thomas, and guests, will be able to answer some of those questions and have a conversation as well.

Shelly Laurenzo:

Nice. That lantern tour sounds really interesting. As Lauren mentioned, obviously, academic advising factors into a lot of these pieces of orientation as well. So, for our incoming students, they've been able to participate in the first part of registration, prior [00:09:30] to their arrival on campus. So, part one allows them to register for up to 11 credit hours, and then once they get to campus or to orientation, if they're participating in joining us remotely, they will have the opportunity to meet with their pre major advisor, either Sunday or Monday of orientation, and talk to them about what they've already registered for, what they hope to register for, to round out their schedule and just any other questions or concerns they might have about classes [00:10:00] and preparing for the academic expectations that William & Mary has. On Monday night, January 25th, at 5:30 PM, students will be able to register for up to 16 credit hours. So, students can round out their schedule and officially become full-time students.

And then our add/drop window starts on Tuesday. So, the add/drop window is for all students, new and continuing students, to make changes to their schedule. And the add/drop window goes until the second Friday of the [00:10:30] semester. So, one of the things that I often talk to students and families about is the fact that students have time to complete and finalize their schedule. In an ideal world, students could register for everything they needed, off the bat, and be done with it. But unfortunately, that's not the way things work, and we need to give folks time to make changes, and to make decisions, and play out their schedule that way, and, kind of, see how the dust settles, a little bit. So, we want to make sure folks know that there's still plenty of time for [00:11:00] students to finalize their schedule before that first day of classes starts, on Wednesday.

Lauren Garrett: I think it's important for us to remember that orientation is just the beginning, and not the end all be all of the students' transition process, and even the families' transition process. Both of our offices are committed to supporting new students and families throughout their William & Mary experience. And so, hearing [00:11:30] from us periodically, throughout the course of this semester and subsequent semesters, will not be unusual. And if there are ever concerns or questions, we're both resources to ask those questions of and to talk through concerns. It's definitely different being on campus, on any university campus, during this time of pandemic, [00:12:00] but it's the students that make all the difference. And our students are very much committed to community and building connections. And we are going to do everything that we can to ensure that students, again, have a successful transition and have opportunities to build resources, and build that toolbox that they need for success, without compromising their safety or health over the course of this, sort of, nebulous timeframe.

Heather Deere: [00:12:30] I think something that Lauren mentioned, struck me as important to note, is that we're really committed to our parents and families and the supporters of our students having an enriching experience at William & Mary, just like we hope that their students do. And I know that this period of time, due to the pandemic, sending a student to university or helping them engage in this transition remotely, is a stressful experience. And so, parent [00:13:00] family programs will periodically communicate with families and supporters to keep them in the loop about what's going on. And we always keep them up-to-date on the latest news. So, whether it's an email from our president or an email regarding the latest COVID-19 policies, we're going to make sure that we share that with families and supporters as well, so that they're up to date on what's going on at the institution, and they feel in the loop as well.

Shelly Laurenzo: Anything else folks want to share about the orientation process or managing expectations [00:13:30] for students and their families as they start with us, this spring? I think that's a really good point. It's just to remind folks that there are those of us, all around the institution, that are here to support their students and support their students' success. And so, just knowing, especially for our

families listening in, that we are partners and we are happy to work with them, and help in any way that we can, and that we're, again, ultimately dedicated [00:14:00] to our students' success, especially at the start, when they're transitioning into William & Mary. Anything else before we wrap up for today?

Lauren Garrett: I was just going to say, just make sure people keep listening. So, we have a whole new [inaudible 00:14:13] and I know, Shelly, you're going to talk a little bit about that.

Shelly Laurenzo: Yeah. So, yes. So, definitely... So, hit subscribe, as they say, on whatever podcast listening service that you utilize. Lauren and Heather [00:14:30] and I are really excited for our slate of topics to cover the spring semester. And again, our intention with this podcast, from the beginning, is to support students and their families, their supporters, wherever they are around the world, really. To help keep everyone up to date, especially during these times where seem to be changing rapidly, and just to provide some good discourse about what's going on around that. So, yes, please stay tuned.

Speaker 1: [00:15:00] Thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of the Decipher Podcast. For show notes, please visit our website, decipher.blogs.wm.edu. Take care.