

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.

Speaker 2: 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.

Lauren Garrett: [00:00:30] Hello, everyone, and welcome to this week's episode of the Decipher Podcast. Today's topic is focused on Charter Day, which is the annual celebration of William & Mary's birthday, if you will. Yes, it includes cake. Yes. It includes a rendition of the birthday song. And in typical William & [00:01:00] Mary fashion, nothing is traditional about either of those two activities. I'm joined this week by some of the folks who help make our Charter Day festivities work, and I'm going to ask that they go around and introduce themselves and tell you a little bit about them. So Steve.

Steve Tewksbury: I am Steve Tewkesbury. I'm the executive director of the university events at William & Mary.

Liz Sykes: Hi, I'm Liz Sykes. I'm one of the producers of the adventure race [00:01:30] this year's Charter Day, and also an alum.

Adam Stackhouse: Hi, I'm Adam Stackhouse, also an alum, and also one of the producers of this year's a Charter Day adventure race.

Trici Fredrick: And I'm Trici Fredrick, and I work on campus and student unions and engagement, and we partner pretty annually with university events and the charter committee to create some fun activity as it surround the charter tradition. This year, it is the adventure race and also a comedian that's being hosted by the programming board. And [00:02:00] we're also looping it in with our 20 events in 21 days that we are hosting across campus to help people get back in the swing of things as we come back to campus this year.

Lauren Garrett: Awesome. Thanks all for being with us today. I know that one of the first pieces or one of the logistical pieces that folks seem to have jumped in on is that Charter Day is happening relatively quickly within the course of this spring semester, partially because of our late start, but also because of our staggered [00:02:30] opening. And so this really is, for some of our students, the first tradition that they will be experiencing at William & Mary, which is really exciting given some of the changes that we've had to make overall. Steve, tell us a little bit about how this year's Charter Day ceremony might look a little bit different than what we traditionally experienced.

Steve Tewksbury: Sure. Typically, we have tried to traditionally do the Friday that is closest [00:03:00] to the 8th of February, which is the founding dates of William &

Mary, the charter, February 8th, 1693. So we would typically hold a large gathering in Kaplan Arena with a lot of pomp and circumstance and other things like that. But because of this year and the later start, we decided to push it to a virtual.

And again, because of the COVID issues, we wanted to make sure that we were keeping safe. So we [00:03:30] did a lot of recording in mid January for the virtual ceremony. We brought our honorary doctorates in for a presentation by the president and the rector, who is the chairman of the board of visitors, and we did those recordings in mid January. And we will be putting together a bunch of different pieces. We will have virtual remarks from the student leaders. We will have a virtual [00:04:00] happy birthday mashup from DoubleTake. It's one of our traditions that we've wanted to do. And then of course, we'll have the reading of the charter by eight students. And it's excerpts of the charter, for those of you who are wondering about our four-page mission, it will not go that long. And we'll also sing the Alma Mater by our choir joined by alumni. So it's going to be a great [00:04:30] virtual ceremony that will premiere on Thursday, the 11th of February at 7:00 PM. So please tune in.

Lauren Garrett: That's great. Steve, it sounds like there's a lot of engagement across the university community for the Charter Day ceremony. Is that pretty typical?

Steve Tewksbury: It is. I had to go back in history. I've been at William & Mary, this is my 17th year, so I've been through a couple of these Charter Day meetings. And [00:05:00] back in 2010, that was our last Charter Day at PBK, which used to be held at 10:00 AM on a Saturday. Student involvement was literally nil, impossible to get students out of their beds at 10:00 AM on a February Saturday. So we met for the year 2021. We got together a bunch of students and we wanted to re-imagine Charter Day to make it much more of a celebration and an [00:05:30] opportunity for students to really be front and center in the celebration. There are only two opportunities that William & Mary has to present honorary doctorates, so that had to be part of the ceremony. Both Charter Day and commencement are those particular occasions.

But on top of that, we wanted to have more student involvement. And through that, we have added a bunch of traditions. We try and make it fun. [00:06:00] We try and have keepsakes. We try and have a student sign a charter. We've had pins in the past, and we have moved to stickers in the last two years that they could be more widely dispersed and show up on every popular travelers' mugs or thermoses and also laptops so that folks can show their Charter Day pride throughout the year. In terms of [00:06:30] student activities, I'll let Trici speak to that because we have had a lot of great student activities over the years, certainly since 2011. So we are this year celebrating our 10th year or decade of doing a different kind of Charter Day than a lot of our alumni previous to 2010, remember.

Trici Fredrick: Yeah. It's funny you mentioned that, Steve, because I was just thinking that that means that in 2010, which is right around when I [00:07:00] came back to William & Mary, I'm also an alum of the School of Education, and we had our first ever Charter Day concert and we actually had The Roots come. And before they became Jimmy Fallon's hype band, they were here running the stairs in Kaplan Arena. And so that was a really great first Charter Day concert. Previous to that, we had done Charter Day comedians in PBK because that was a setup that was given and was available. And so we had a little bit smaller event and then we moved to the large concert. And then unfortunately, [00:07:30] February is not a great time to have a concert with a major label artist because of the Grammys. And so recently we had moved away from the Charter Day concert not just because of the most recent happenings in our country and across the world, but also just because that's how it worked out timing-wise. We moved the concert to the spring, and actually we have gone back to a Charter Day comedian again.

So it comes full circle, but we're excited for the new things that we'll be doing this year. And just to your point, Lauren, this [00:08:00] is the first experience that some of our students will have in terms of their traditions. Personally, I think it's pretty cool. We have a lot of pomp and circumstance with the ceremony, but a lot of schools don't actually celebrate their university's birthday. And so as cheesy as it is with cake and singing the happy birthday song, I feel like it's nostalgic and gives you a bright spot of, wow, how long has this university been around? I get to be a part of the tradition moving forward.

Lauren Garrett: It's very true. [00:08:30] 328 years, correct? 328 years old. No two places can claim that. So we'll claim it as ours, first chartered. Not just second oldest, first chartered university. And so Charter Day is pretty special for us. But thinking back to my own undergraduate experience, and I'm going to call out Liz and Adam in this because we were experiencing similar timeframes, [00:09:00] myself being a little bit older, I'll just claim that so that you all can keep your youth.

But Charter Day being at 10:00 AM on Saturday was not a very focused student centered event. And so it's exciting to be on this side of the planning process and to be thinking about how do we get students to be part of the birthday celebration. When I came back to William & Mary, the fact that there was a concert affiliated, that year it was Ludacris, and Andy Grammer opened. That [00:09:30] just blew my mind as an alum to be like, back in my day. And so the grass is always greener. We understand that. But excited to have Liz and Adam who understand the Charter Day from whence it came and are part of the re-imagining moving it forward to think about how can we celebrate William & Mary beyond just this one ceremony and point in time. So listen, Adam, tell us a little bit about this [00:10:00] adventure race that's happening this year.

Liz Sykes: Sure. So the adventure race is an adventure. Surprise! And it entails students in teams of two going around campus, completing challenges and solving puzzles.

And the challenges are all hosted by student organizations and departments. The [00:10:30] challenges are all hosted by different campus organizations and departments. And so part of the intent there is to give participants an opportunity to engage with different campus organizations that maybe they haven't interacted with before and learn a little bit more about the William & Mary community. And so the puzzles will be fun bits of William & Mary history and culture. And because this year some students are opting [00:11:00] for remote learning, we also have an option for them to participate through Zoom. And so they'll still be able to interact with student organizations on Zoom and do some puzzles with some online sleuthing.

Adam Stackhouse: Yeah. And if you're listening to this and you're a current student, sign up right now at the Charter Day website, wm.edu/charterday. You can't miss it. It's right there. If you are part of the extended family, a parent of [00:11:30] a student, an alum, or someone who appreciates William & Mary, thank you for your listening and engagement. This is an event for current students. So please hit up the current students you know and let them know this thing is happening. We're really excited. As Steve said about the old school Charter Days that Liz, Lauren, and I were a part of back in the day, there was that thing that one person is getting up for early on a Saturday morning and it didn't really feel like much. But nowadays, it really feels like a party. [00:12:00] And it feels like a good reason to build a lot of community.

So it's really fun. Speaking on behalf of Liz and I to come in here and produce an event that brings together different elements of the William & Mary community, we have undergrad student organizations, we have grad student organizations, we got students from VIMS involved, and it's just really nice to see depth and breadth of the campus community that's willing to get involved in a celebration that's all about just [00:12:30] being happy to know each other and know this place and learn what each other do and what they're into, what they're passionate about.

So you may end up needing to learn a little dance choreography or answering some trivia questions, or you might have to do some food related thing. I don't know if we have food related things this year. We're still working out the geologies. But the bottom line is we're very much excited to bring this race to campus, to allow current students a new way to engage [00:13:00] with their fellow student organizations and departments at this. It's a good reason to have a party, and we think this is a lot of fun to bring to it. So come on out.

Lauren Garrett: William & Mary doesn't need to have a reason to have a party. Come on now, Adam. It's-

Adam Stackhouse: Right. It's fair. Okay.

Lauren Garrett: ... always a party. No, but there are ways that alums and family and friends of the university can get involved in Charter Day. While the adventure race may

not necessarily be [00:13:30] for you all, you can tag yourselves on social media wishing the university happy birthday. To participate in the upcoming slide show, there's going to be information about that sent out by the university over social media. So stay tuned on how you can participate in the Charter Day festivities from your abode, whether that's near or far. But I want to thank Trici, Adam, Liz, Steve, thanks for being with us this afternoon. [00:14:00] Looking forward to seeing how Charter Day comes together for 2021, and then looking forward to hopefully being together and gathering in person in 2022. So until then, stay well, stay safe, and join us next week for a brand new episode of Decipher.

Speaker 3: Thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of the [00:14:30] Decipher Podcast. For our show notes, please visit our website, decipher.blogs.wm.edu. Take care.