

- Heather Deere: 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.
- Shelly Laurenzo: 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.
- Lauren Garrett: [00:00:30] Happy sunny Tuesday, everyone. This is Lauren and we are back with another episode of The Decipher Podcast. Joining me today are two student leaders who actually served as Spring Orientation aids. I'm going to turn it over to them to introduce themselves and then we're going to talk a little bit about student engagement on campus this Spring [00:01:00] Semester. Who wants to kick us off?
- Jacob Hall: I'd be happy to. My name is Jacob Hall. I use he/him pronouns and I am a Junior this year at William and Mary. I am majoring in Geology and I work at the Studio for Teaching and Learning Innovation at Swem Library, so I get to do a lot of media production for them. In my free time I like to cook and that's usually, that's how I introduce myself.
- Andrea: Howdy y'all, I'm [00:01:30] Andres [foreign language 00:01:30]. I am a Junior this year from good old Culpeper, Virginia. I go by, he/him pronouns. I'm a Computer Science and Applied Mathematics major here and I also work for the IT department as well.
- Lauren Garrett: Interesting. So, things that I didn't know about you both is that you both hold on-campus employment. That is actually not a topic that we have delved into on the podcast, so we might have to bring you back [00:02:00] and talk a little bit about that, or perhaps that plays into our conversation today. Obviously it sounds like you've got very robust schedules between academics, co-curriculars, and your on-campus employment, but talk to us a little bit about what it's like being a student here at William and Mary this semester, when we sort of know what to do with COVID, but yet it still feels somewhat new and an adventure at every turn.
- Jacob Hall: [00:02:30] It's pretty crazy. I will just go out and say it right now, even after a whole semester in the Fall, trying to figure out what COVID restrictions would even feel like as a student, me and everyone else in my life, trying to find new living accommodations that would work during COVID times. I still feel like I'm sort of working out the kinks. I am the general manager at the Meridian, which is a performance space on campus and obviously we can't really have [00:03:00] live performances happening this semester, but it's an ongoing sort of conversation that we're having as to what we can do. A lot of those meetings have been moved on to Zoom and a lot of the conversations we've been having are how do we find new members and other people to reach out to when we

can't just invite them to the concert that we're holding this week or something like that?

Speaker 4: Yeah. Similarly, I didn't have a lot of face to face classes last semester. [00:03:30] I was mostly in blended and in remote classes, even though I was on campus. But even for my blended classes, I stayed remote for most of the time. But this semester really is the semester that I decided to enroll in more face-to-face classes. I'm kind of getting back into what would seem normal, but also at the same time it doesn't seem normal because of COVID restrictions. Just kind of getting back into the gist of things, but this time, you know, mask up and all that good stuff.

Jacob Hall: Yeah, [00:04:00] I would definitely just agree with, what you just said, that it feels like a whole nother adventure with a whole nother set of professors and we started the semester with two weeks of fully online classes. it felt like even just in the last couple of weeks, I've been working out the kinks as to what it feels like to be in-person with these entirely new classes.

Andrea: Yeah. Even just having to walk into the academic buildings again, and then having to make sure to [00:04:30] put on hand sanitizer, walking in and then going into the classroom and having to wipe stuff down, is all completely new to me. It's nothing that I would have thought of doing before COVID but now it's just kind of the routine to walk in and do that stuff upon entering the classroom.

Jacob Hall: I signed up for an all in-person class, which is pretty rare as far as I can tell these days. There's no one on Zoom, we're all in person and it's a seminar discussion so, my professor on the first day was like, yeah, this is usually like all of us sitting in a pretty intimate [00:05:00] circle, like in a classroom and talking through this stuff. But instead of course we're all in this massive lecture hall. It actually works surprisingly well, but we're all sort of craning our necks and trying to yell back to the back of the classroom about how we feel about the politics of language. It's really hilarious.

Andrea: Yeah and one of my math classes, because it is face-to-face as well, we had to do group work this time around and [00:05:30] I forgot what group work felt like in person, but now it's at a distance, so having to talk to your group member and I'm kind of, soft-spoken sometimes, so having to kind of really raise my voice so that we can kind of collaborate and stuff is very different. Cause before you would do group work and you'd be right next to each other, circled up and stuff, but now it's like you have your six foot distance and a lecture hall. It's kind of weird, but it's really nice actually being able to do group work and stuff and a face-to-face class.

Lauren Garrett: [00:06:00] Now, since you both served as Spring Orientation aids and had had the experience of working with orientation in the fall, going through fall semester, I'll be it looking a little bit different, what sort of advice did you give to new students when they were asking about making friends, sort of getting

into the rhythm of campus, becoming acclimated to our culture, or getting to know others in their cohort or in their major? [00:06:30] What sort of pieces resonated with y'all that you felt like were important for them to know?

Jacob Hall: Well, something that I kept saying to my orientation group and they were a group of incoming freshmen, so this is really their first time on campus. Some of them had deferred and some of them had been fully online, going to classes from home, so this is their first time on campus. Something that I kept stressing was that, yes, this is crazy what's happening right now and it probably isn't what your freshman [00:07:00] year would look like otherwise, but it's very normal for people to take a while to find their people in college and to find the organizations that they're really interested in joining or being more of a part of. Just to have that patience with yourself, especially knowing how crazy things are right now, just goes a long way. And to know that a lot of people at William and Mary are still really close to those couple of roommates from their freshmen hall, that's a relationship you're still going to be able to make this [00:07:30] semester, even if it doesn't feel like you can go out partying as much as you might during a normal year or something like that.

Andrea: Yeah. In contrast, I had remote and transfer students for Spring Orientation and I really emphasized community values here and just how nice everyone is. Even if it was remote through Zoom or an in-person class, I always emphasize just be approaching someone. And a lot of people in our community definitely reciprocate with that and they really [00:08:00] enjoy having someone come up to them and saying hi and making friends that way. I know in a normal semester you would just sit next to the people and kind of be familiar with who you're sitting next to. And I know that's a little different through Zoom. However, I told them, you know, even just chatting them or making a group meet with people in your Zoom class and just kind of fostering a community that way, was really important. And everyone's really kind. Everyone wants to kind of, you know, make friends and do that kind of stuff.

Lauren Garrett: Something you both mentioned [00:08:30] is how there's still some normalcy in this atypical semester that we're experiencing. So the idea that it typically takes some time to find the organizations or the group that you feel like really speak to your values and your passion, the fact that you need to have some grace with yourself in terms of figuring out what your next steps might be personally, or even in terms of academic pursuits, [00:09:00] but also the fact in terms of our resiliency and our skill building, like creating GroupMe's, which translate to in-person study groups, right? Thinking about our resources, thinking about what sort of at-our-fingertips to make the semester more manageable. Those are things that won't ever fail us. And sometimes it does ...it is hard to, to outreach when you feel like [00:09:30] you're already in an isolated situation, such as, you know, an all remote class or things of that nature. What are some resources that you would encourage students who maybe are feeling left out or maybe are struggling with, sort of, where they can fit in or look ...still looking for that

engagement across campus? What are some resources that you found that you would encourage them to explore [00:10:00] as well?

Jacob Hall: Okay. Well, this is probably something that most students already know about, but I feel like I rediscover it every single time I go on there, so I'm just going to say it once again. Please, please go on Tribe Link and look through all the different organizations on Tribe Link. Some organizations don't like Tribe Link, cause it's this new, weird thing that they don't want to deal with, but they're all required to be on Tribe Link. And it's kind of awesome. You can go through and read [00:10:30] the description of any student organization. You can ask them about ...you can send them a message or request to join their group. And most groups on campus are required to, to let you in and to talk to you. And most of them actually want new members, anyways. I have never had a bad experience just asking to join a group on Tribe Link, getting the email then, you know, in the next couple of days that they accepted your request and then just reaching out and saying, "Hey, I love cheese. [00:11:00] Can I please like come to the next cheese club event?" Or like, "can I join your GroupMe and let's talk about" ...I joined the fermentation club. I've never fermented anything, but they're really cool people and I, I love their GroupMe so much. Reaching out is so easy on Tribe Link or there's some other lists on the website to look at. And that would be just a really great easy first step to just finding some new groups of people on campus and off campus.

Andrea: I definitely think William and Mary [00:11:30] and a lot of their outreach offices kind of stuff is a really good starting point as well to just, you know, asking someone there and being like, "where can I get started with trying to involve myself?" And I know other offices on campus such as the Center for Student Diversity are also really good resources for students to try to connect with other students that are like them and they're trying to foster that community and not feel so isolated.

Jacob Hall: Another tip that I would give people [00:12:00] is to start with their classmates. Everyone is taking a pretty wide range of classes or, you know, some, some range of classes that include a lot of different people, but likely a lot of people that share common interests with you. As a Geology major, you know, maybe I don't want to only have geology friends, but that's an interest of mine and the people in my geology classes generally share the same interests as I do. Just being active in the GroupMe, in the Zoom chat, some of my classes have like Blackboard discussions. [00:12:30] It depends on like what class you're taking, but there's almost ...there is always a way to reach out to your fellow classmates and just say, "Hey, does anyone want to study together? You know, I live at home right now, but I'd love to just Zoom and do homework together with our ...Mike's muted or something like that". And that's just a really great way to just meet new people and have more casual conversations about what people do outside of class. And I'm pretty sure the majority [00:13:00] of my connections at William and Mary thus far have just been with classmates that ended up becoming longer friendships. And then I joined their club and now I'm

dating one of ...you know what I mean? That's how you meet new people at William and Mary, I would say.

Andrea: Yeah, with that is, you know, when you're talking to your classmates, you know, asking them what clubs they're in and then if you find one that's interesting, you can always ask your classmate to, "oh, can we go to a club meeting together?" Then that way, you know, it's not so isolating having to walk into, you know, a Zoom [00:13:30] meeting with a bunch of new people, you know, just having that classmate with you to kind of incorporate yourself into the club is definitely a good strategy as well.

Lauren Garrett: This has been amazing. Thank you both so much for joining us today and talking through some of these better known and sometimes lesser known opportunities or ways to get engaged on campus. I know that there are so many other resources out there specifically for [00:14:00] distinctive populations like transfer students and remote students. And hopefully students are taking the time to read all of the copious emails that come their way from various outreach offices, like sStep, CSD, OCE, and the acronyms go on and on and on. But I thank you both for being with me today. Look forward to having you back potentially to serve on a panel about student employment. That would be excellent. So we'll, we'll get you on the docket [00:14:30] moving forward. And to those that are listening, if you have questions about getting engaged at William and Mary, whether it's for yourself as a student or for your student as a family member, don't hesitate to reach out to step@stepatwm.edu or parent and family programs at families@wm.edu. We look forward to engaging with you over the coming weeks and months. So until next time, this is Lauren signing off. Thanks for joining us.

Heather Deere: [00:15:00] Thank you so much for tuning into this episode of The Decipher Podcast. For our show notes, please visit our website, decipher.blogs.wm.edu. Take care.