

Speaker 1: Hello, and welcome to the Decipher Podcast. This podcast is hosted by William & Mary staff members who are committed to student success. Join experts from around campus, as they discuss ways to decipher common college experiences.

Lauren Garrett: Hello everyone. This is Lauren Garrett, and you are listening to the Decipher Podcast. Today, I'm joined by my colleagues, Shelly and [00:00:30] Heather, in academic advising and parent and family programs respectively, as we're going to talk a little bit about engagement here at William & Mary.

Right now, we are just kicking off the summer months here in Williamsburg. The heat is definitely starting to enter into the forecast, but we know that for our incoming students and families, Williamsburg has long been on their radar, especially in thinking about what [00:01:00] moves students might want to make in and outside of the academic classroom. Between the new student inventory that was just completed by students within the past few days, and the fact that academics, especially that first round of course registration is forthcoming over the next few weeks, we know that there are a lot of questions about what happens outside of the academic classroom? How do I get connected with people who have [00:01:30] similar interests or how do I even connect with faculty and staff who might be in topical areas I'm interested in majoring with or in? They're just a lot of questions there. And so I want to start that conversation now, so that we're all on the same page moving forward.

Shelly, because you are our resident academic expert here on the Decipher Podcast, what immediately comes to mind when you hear folks [00:02:00] thinking about engagement within, especially within a student's first year.

Shelly Laurenzo: First off, the term academic expert sounds really daunting. Let's clarify. Academic advising expert might be more accurate, but even that sounds a little big. But yes, happy to talk through that.

I think from an academic advising standpoint, when we're talking about a student's first semester at William & Mary, [00:02:30] what we really encourage students to do, there are certain courses that we want students to take in their first semester, in their first year. We also want students to do some exploring, maybe explore some disciplines that they haven't had an opportunity to explore before, but we want students to do all of that with an understanding that the first semester is going to be the hardest. There are so many adjustments going on, not just adjusting to the academic rigor of William & Mary, but adjusting to campus life. This might be the time you've had to share [00:03:00] a room with somebody else. And that is a major upheaval. This might be the first time that you've been away from home. That's also a major upheaval. Making new friends is really challenging.

And so acknowledging all of those factors going into their first semester, that can make it really challenging for students. So our advice for students is to really, we want you to explore, we want you to take some different classes, but

also understand that this semester [00:03:30] is going to be challenging and give yourself a lot of grace during that process. Again, there's lots of different things going on and so just making sure students give themselves a lot of grace and tap into those resources early. We have a writing resources center. We have a tutor zone. We have expert research librarians. So making sure students take advantage of those resources really early to ensure a successful first semester, but be gentle with yourself, give yourself a lot of grace and take advantage of all of these resources to ensure [00:04:00] a successful first semester.

Lauren Garrett:

That's really great advice. I was thinking similarly, when it comes to the co-curricular experience, we often hear similar tones of advisement from our colleagues in student leadership development who work with our clubs and organizations, that students need to take it easy when deciding to join a club or an organization. It's not necessarily how many activities you have listed on [00:04:30] your resume post graduation, but it's more about the intentionality of the activities within each of those organizations that really speaks to the student's level of commitment and transferable skill building.

And I'm really feeling a little bit like a career counselor right now, because so much of what we talk about when we think about engagement is how do you connect what you're doing sometimes inside of the academic [00:05:00] classroom, to what you're doing outside. Often, what folks would say is in their free time, but in reality, William & Mary students tend to treat their co-curricular or extracurricular activities much like a career in and of themselves, which is definitely a shift from some of their high school or even previous university experiences, so something to be mindful [00:05:30] of.

Heather, when you're working with families, especially who are new to this university environment, what are tidbits that you like to share when it comes to students getting involved or becoming engaged within the William & Mary community?

Heather Deere:

I think that's a great question and some of it is going to echo what Shelly said. I think it's important for newer students and as they're joining the William & Mary community for their families to understand that [00:06:00] their William & Mary experience is going to be more than just their grades and their GPA at the end of each semester at the end of each academic year and that oftentimes community is built in those extracurricular experiences. And so, students may get really caught up in academics and the rigor of the institution, the rigor of William & Mary and it's a great idea when you're having conversations with your student to ask them what they've gotten involved in or what they've explored [00:06:30] recently.

And so I think that's a really great first tip, is that oftentimes students may look to you when they're exploring this new chapter in their life of what should I prioritize. And if the questions are always about grades, then students are going to tend to lean really heavily into that. And so I would encourage you to ask

questions about their social life, what clubs and organizations they found interesting, what events did they go to that week to help open the door a little bit wider than just [00:07:00] their academic experience at William & Mary.

And while I know that for families one of the major concerns is, is my student going to graduate? Are they going to get a really great job? Are they going to have to come back home? There are some really big concerns there for families. I think something I want to emphasize is that getting involved really helps students build their professional network and really gives them some of those skills and those abilities that employers are looking for.

So whether it's [00:07:30] managing their student organizations budget, planning a nonprofit 5k for the community and navigating all of those ins and outs, their extracurricular experiences are really, really going to help them in the future. And so I would encourage your student to get involved and to find those things that they're passionate about. I think specifically, when we think about the transition from maybe high school to college, a lot of those experiences were really easy to find for students. They were [00:08:00] built into their high school experience. Maybe they've been playing organized sports for a really long time, and that's just part of the experience and it's easy to get students invested in those things. And finding things, while it won't be difficult, they're going to be an overwhelming amount of choices.

We have so many clubs and organizations, events and activities. And I would just say, if you're student calls and they're like, "I'm a little homesick. I'm just really not finding my people." It's great to ask those open-ended questions [00:08:30] about how they are going about finding those clubs, organizations, and activities and encourage them to get involved. I think that's a great way to make sure that you are supporting their endeavors outside of the classroom as well. Also, your conversations and text messages can go a really long way in supporting them in their involvement.

Lauren Garrett: Absolutely, Heather. I think about all that we leading up to orientation and even [00:09:00] during orientation, we talk about all of the activities and the meetups and the things to be accomplished, but even that can be overwhelming. So one of the things that we encourage new students to do before the end of July is to actually go in to TribeLink, which is the hub for all student clubs and organizations here on campus, and we ask them to update their profile. For some, that's uploading a picture of themselves, or just making sure [00:09:30] that their preferred name is correct, and that their email is correct and they update their settings.

And we encourage students to take a look through the various clubs to see if there's anything that might be of interest, so when the club and org fair is held during orientation, they have an idea of maybe a few things to look forward to, or to look towards. And more often than not, we hear about students who start looking at that laundry list A [00:10:00] to Z of club names, and just become

frozen, because there are almost too many options. How do you choose between joining a club that focuses on gaming in a general fashion versus Magic, the Gathering. Or how do you choose between the infamous cheese club And my favorite, [00:10:30] the salsa club. Hopefully there are chips involved in either of those scenarios.

Shelly Laurenzo: Yes, please.

Lauren Garrett: But all joking aside, I think sometimes we've forgotten that too many choices can be simply too many choices. And instead of picking one thing, we can sometimes shy away from it. And this is where we channel then Dr. Kelly Crace and his authentic excellence spiel [00:11:00] that will be shared with both students and families over the course of the next few semesters you're with us and where we talk about living with intentionality and living with our values in mind. And so you figure out what do you need? People need connection on some level, and you just need, in some cases, to give yourself a little bit of grace in terms of how you find those connections.

And Heather, you made mention [00:11:30] about students feeling homesick or perhaps not necessarily finding their fit right away. And I think that that's really true. We run a student organization and activities fair during orientation, as I've mentioned, but we also run one during the mid-year. It's technically connected to spring orientation for spring new students, it's advertised as the mid-year student organization [00:12:00] and activities fair, and more often than not the students that attend that event are first year students who entered in the fall or second year sophomores who are still looking for that thing. They might have found their friend group, but they're still looking for that organization where they can make their mark and have a little bit of that legacy moment that I think all of our students want to have.

And so it's not necessarily something that happens overnight. [00:12:30] Some students say that it does, but in reality, it doesn't happen that way for 98% of incoming students. I think really great advice from you, Shelly and Heather, about giving yourself time, outreaching to folks so that you can build those connections and those relationships and knowing and understanding where resources may abound in both the academic and co-curricular [00:13:00] setting when it comes to finding your place and your space at William & Mary.

Thanks for being with me here this afternoon. We hope that this was helpful to students and families alike, as you're listening in. And of course, if you have any questions or need further information, feel free to connect with us via our typical office lines.

Speaker 1: Thank [00:13:30] 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.

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