

W&L After Class: The Lifelong Learning Podcast

With Guest James Dick

Episode Transcript

Ruth Candler

Welcome to W&L After Class: The Lifelong Learning Podcast. I'm your host Ruth Candler. Our guest today is James Dick, who is Director of Outdoor Education and Recreation. James holds a master's degree in Parks Recreation and Environmental Education from the University of New Mexico. And he received his bachelor's degree in university studies with a focus in Anthropology and History from there as well. He has been at Washington and Lee since 2002, a long way from New Mexico. At W&L, James oversees the Outing Club and the Campus Recreation Program. He manages the fitness challenge course, instructs physical education classes, coordinates the Appalachian adventurer pre-orientation backpacking trip, and organizes a variety of special programs and trips throughout the year. James, thanks for joining us today.

James Dick

Oh, Ruth, thanks for having me. It's an honor, for sure.

Ruth Candler

So, you've been at W&L now for 21 years and most of those as Director of Outdoor Education and Recreation, what activities does that work include?

James Dick

It's easy for me to answer that question with a kind of a straight, nonacademic, non-athletic, nonparty activity falls under us. Informal recreation, outdoor recreation, team building, all sorts of stuff falls under underneath me; activities that get people outside, heck inside doing recreational activities.

Ruth Candler

So, you and your staff work within the Division of Student Affairs? How do all of these activities advance the mission of Student Affairs?

James Dick

Sure. For a long time now, people have seen student life at a college as important as academic life, right? And what we do enhances the quality of a student's life. And that involves helping them build community, try new things, meet new people, become well, right fitness, and mental health and emotional health. So, all the activities that we do through my department, funnel into that student affairs mission statement of helping students thrive, both here and now in college and then afterwards, right. Sounds official.

Ruth Candler

it does sound official. And fun. Tell us more about the Appalachian Adventure Program. I understand that it's one of the largest pre-orientation programs of its kind in the country. Is that correct?

James Dick

Yes, it's a big one. The number of students who go out on the trail either as leaders or participants is a large number for the size of program and staff that we have. There are larger programs and other colleges where, you know, three to 500 students go out on a backpacking trip, but ours is a large one for the size of our school.

Ruth Candler

Comparatively speaking? So, how many of those students do you know to go back and hike the A.T.?

James Dick

Oh, the whole thing? Actually, a handful. Yeah, you bet. It's probably a dozen now.

Ruth Candler

At least, that must be rewarding, knowing that that program sparked their interest in doing that.

James Dick

Oh, sure. Sure. You know, some of them have, you know, their very first time backpacking was as a first year on our Appalachian adventure trip. And then they became trip leaders, they took a PE class with me, they became a trip leader. And then, you know, [before] they either took spring term, which many people went spring term [which] was six weeks, they would take spring term off and start the A.T. But now it's four weeks. So, you know, they usually do it after graduation. And I've got a 200 mile rule for a former outing club member trip leader, within 200 miles, I'd go get you and take you somewhere bring you some water or Snickers or something like that.

Ruth Candler

But how many have taken you up on that?

James Dick

Several but less than, you know, say 50 miles out something like that. But yeah, they always they're always happy to see us and you know, and they don't really smell that great at that time. That's ok.

Ruth Candler

We're not going to ask you to go into that. Your job description also includes management, maintenance of the back campus trails and the new outdoor recreation facilities. I've been walking those back campus trails since I moved to Lexington 18, almost 19 years ago. They're fabulous when we're was trails first created? And how have they evolved over the years?

James Dick

Sure. Well, most of them are all old farm roads there. That was all pasture and farmlands. None of the trees were there, say before 1970, you know, big tracts of pasture and open land. In the 70s and 80s those roads, those back campus roads, they became the cross country trails and there was the varsity

cross country race course out there and, and coach, John Tucker, he developed and graded them and maintain them. And after his retirement, the outing club picked up, you know, picking up sticks and, you know, doing water drainage issues and, and things like that. So, they have a pretty long history there. A lot of people have used those trails for years and years.

Ruth Candler

Yeah, they're fabulous. They were a lifesaver during the pandemic.

James Dick

Yeah, yeah, we were able to do some repair work on some of the existing trails. And again, the trails that you started walking years ago, were actually our roads and so they don't drain as well as a special, specific trail that we make with drainage in mind and experience in mud. So, we put in a few new trails during the pandemic and tried to connect certain parts of campus and then with the new Warner property where the outing club barn is, you know, all of that land is available. So, we added trails there, we expanded it quite a bit. There's a lot of fun.

Ruth Candler

Let's turn that to the new campus facilities that alumni might not be aware of. Our podcast team had so much fun the other day enjoying climbing the climbing wall and the boulder. So, let's begin there.

James Dick

Well, for the older alumni who are listening, a student activities pavilion, where you may have heard concerts and stood in crowds and bad acoustics, but the pavilion is now the home of the outing club. And, and what's funny is, you know, trying to change the name. You know, where we're going to meet, "we'll meet you at the outing club." Well, the outing club was a house on Washington Street, the outing clubhouse, right. And then it became the outing club barn, which is the red horse barn when W&L bought the Warner property. And now the outing club has this former student activities pavilion. And if you say we'll meet you at the Pavilion, now, students go to the outdoor pavilion by third year housing, and they'll call "Hey, I'm here for the hike at the Pavilion. Where are you," and nine of the ten are with me at the Pavilion. So, we're lucky to have that building for sure.

Ruth Candler

We've made great space of it. So, there were a lot of things in there when we were climbing the wall, I saw a row of bikes and what else do you have there?

James Dick

So, we have over 40 bikes for checkout, we moved our bike shop up on top of the stage. We'll move all of our kayaks and canoes and paddle boards over this winter to be ready for the spring paddling season. We've got backpacks, tents, you name it, we've done quite a bit of renovation on it. It's nice, we have two campfire rings out on the ropes course side, the Alpine tower side towards the baseball field that have seen quite a bit of use.

Ruth Candler

So, students can come and check out that equipment anytime they want to.

James Dick

And employees. Right. So, yeah, it's nice.

Ruth Candler

It's a nice perk.

James Dick

It is, it's free for employees. And it's still is only \$40 to join the outing club and it's for your four years, and it extends into as an alumni. And we actually have people come back, and recently we had an alum from my time here, early in the 2000s. They checked out a tent and sleeping bags, and it was their first camping trip as an alum.

Ruth Candler

At Washington and Lee, a liberal arts education is about educating the whole person or holistic student development. How does work with students correspond with that ideal?

James Dick

Oh, that's a that's a deep question.

Ruth Candler

It is a deep question.

James Dick

I don't know. If I feel that there's so much more to education than that classes that you're signed up for. You're coming to college to get an academic education right, to learn things, develop skills, eventually get to a position or a paying job, right? But education isn't limited to the time inside the classroom. And if you do the math, that's not a whole, there's a lot of time outside the classroom. We can learn from all sorts of employees on campus, right? Facilities Management, dining services, library, you name it, we can learn from those people. And so, a holistic education to me means there are so many opportunities throughout the day, throughout the week, throughout the semester or the term that students can learn a wide variety of skills, nuances, personal, and I mean improvements. I mean, we're learning from each other right now in this interview, how to act, how to answer. And so, a holistic education to me is, is just that it's every day we can learn and we shouldn't discount the learning opportunities that aren't, like fancy and formal. And I'll say stuffy, sometimes.

Ruth Candler

You know what's funny, I've seen you in action quite a few times. And you, embody that ideal, and that it's nice to see. I've heard you refer to the wellness wheel, which I find fascinating. Would you describe this for our listeners and how it applies to your work?

James Dick

I asked one of my daughters, if she learned the wellness wheel growing up in school, I did. And it was a concept when I was a kid, and she didn't know, she had never heard of it. But it's like the Trivial Pursuit

tiles or a pie, right? It's a wheel. And there's slices of the pie. And each of those slices are important. Emotional health, physical health, spiritual health, work, exercise, there's all sorts of things inside the wellness wheel. And if we address individual slices of pie, throughout the day, throughout the week, etc, then hopefully we're going to be a well rounded person, right? If I exercise, and I work really hard, but I don't eat well, my nutrition is poor, or my sleep is bad, then I'm not going to be healthy person. Right? And that concept always made sense to me. And I need to use it with my life. Okay, I need to use it. If, if I don't recreate, which is different than exercise, then I'm not going to be well rounded. Right. So, I don't know if that answers the question.

Ruth Candler

Yes, it does. It does. I just I like stepping back and looking at it that way.

James Dick

Well, it's easy to focus on one thing, typically this time of year, everybody is "I need to get back in shape." Right? It just happens, it's New Year's resolutions, and we ate a lot and we go to bed, you know full and we eat, you know, the holidays, etc. And so, it's focused on that slice of the pie of exercise. Well, it's hard to spread out your energy and attention and we need to you know, our spiritual health, our emotional health, our mental health throughout the pandemic. Boy, there are some highlights on mental health. We learned a lot didn't we? Yeah, and mental health, in order to improve mental health, people realize, "well, why do you go sit outside, go for a walk outside," and it's not a hike. Don't go on an expedition. You don't have to be extreme or outdoorsy. Simply go on a walk, right? And the results are you feel better, right? And that fulfills that slice of pie for the wellness wheel. I'm mixing my metaphors.

Ruth Candler

So, let's write that wellness wheel back a few years. You began your studies in Anthropology and History and then pursued your masters in park recreation and environmental education. What inspired you to make that transition?

James Dick

Oh, yeah. Well, I always wanted to be Indiana Jones to be honest with you, you know, the studying, the academic, the learning, but then the adventure of the jungle or the rivers or, you know, exploration and I still actually do want to be Indiana Jones maybe not stealing the treasures part but finding them and taking pictures of them. But I had parents who encouraged me to try it what you like, find your passion my mom, my dad said "find your passion and pursue your passion and you won't be upset." I was a trip leader in college and I led a canoe trip a whitewater canoe trip as a sophomore in college. I drove the people in the van up to northern New Mexico, and I met the guy, the professional guide service and, and he was a character and he kind of looked me up and down. And, like made a judgment call. He must have been in a pinch. You know, he needed a rescue boater and I had very little rescue boat experience. I developed a friendship with him and I asked him, "wow, you can you do this for a living?" And he said, "Heck yeah." I mean, he used a stronger word than heck, but, you know, "and I make a great living, and I have a wonderful life." And it opened my eyes to the possibility of doing what I like, and bringing other people along. And I have a wonderful job, I've had a wonderful life, and it's not associated with the paycheck.

Ruth Candler

You just share that story of your beginning. And how did you make that move to working with college students?

James Dick

My brother and I opened a small guiding company, I ended up working through college at the Rec services. It was also known as Leisure Services before leisure sounded to old school, right? Now it's recreational services. And so, I led trips throughout college, we opened a guiding company. I ended up working for REI. And so, as surrounded by outdoor equipment, outdoor recreation, and started working at the college as a coordinator at the University of New Mexico. And I really loved the energy of college students and I wasn't that much older than them. And to this day, that's what I like. I mean, now it's hitting me I'm significantly older than that.

Ruth Candler

Yeah, you can't check that recent graduate box anymore.

James Dick

But until recently, though, I guess I was ignoring the fact that I was older than them. And, actually age doesn't matter. Because the guy at the side of the river when I was a sophomore in college, he probably was 60. 65, I don't know how old but he was old. He looked old. But you know, that's probably what current students are seeing me as.

Ruth Candler

I don't think so James, I would be surprised if they think that. In an earlier conversation, we discussed the word recreation as re-creation. Right. And I was immediately intrigued by a new sense of that very familiar word. Let's talk about that for a minute.

James Dick

Sure, sure. And, it's something that, you know, we can get into the semantics of the word and the concept etc. the definitions, but recreation is something separate, and after work. And we can define work as a nine to five job or work is as effort or output, right work. But it's completely separate than work and it's after, it's to refresh. It's to rejuvenate us as humans, right. And it's vital to recreate ourselves. Some people say, well, they read it as recreate as a spiritual. Well, it could be spiritual, it could be emotional, it could be mental, it could be physical, right. But it's intentional, and it's different than work. And it's also different than exercise. And that's where I think a lot of people have either not understood that or they don't grasp the importance of the difference. Yeah, it's fuzzy. It is and so maybe you, you exercise, right? And if you're an indoor exerciser, right? You go to the gym, right? And you're on the treadmill, minimum 30 minutes for three times a day. That's what the doctors say, we need to be physically healthy, right. And that improves cardiovascular health. Right? But well, that is called a workout. Right? That's not called recreation. And it's different it. It provides different chemical release in the body. It's specifically addresses something different than recreation and leisure, right? And so, recreation is a vital component to human health. And it's often overlooked, not just by students, you know, everybody asks about students and student questions, student health, but we're looking at each

other, we need, I need to recreate, you know, you need to recreate. And this distinction that I've tried to show and talk to people about and actually just do, I don't know, sometimes it's, people don't, sometimes people don't want to be convinced that it's important. But when they do the activity, they reap the benefits right. And, recreation provides, specifically, outdoor recreation provides benefits, scientifically proven benefits to the human body.

Ruth Candler

So, you're sharing the difference between recreation and exercise, and between what's happening in the body and what's happening in our minds. Would you share a little more about the physiological responses to these activities and how they're different?

James Dick

The easiest way for me to explain is, I'll use myself as an example, when I exercise the intention, why I'm exercising, the goal is so I can lose weight, or fit my jeans better, or live long, healthy life, right. So that's the intention, I want to get healthier or be healthy or stay healthy, physically healthy. Or I have a goal, I have a race, I have to hike something, I have to ski next ski season, etc. Right. So, the chemicals released in my brain are slightly different than when I canoe at Lake Robertson. Sure, there's physical output. There's strength and endurance, lifting the boat up and off the truck rack. But the chemical mixture in the brain is different, right? Because I'm not canoeing for a specific goal. Other than I want to have fun, right? Now, some people might say, Well, I always feel good after a workout. Well, sure, because there's chemicals released and endorphins, etc. Right? But those are a different mixture than a recreational activity. And the serotonin that's released, right? Proven to lower anxiety, lower depression, make us smile, right? We want to smile, right? It's, it's fun. We probably could go into the fitness center. Say, lunchtime, and ask all the people on the treadmill. Are you having fun? Is this fun? Probably wouldn't. You know, this is work. It's a workout, right? But the people who paddle or hike or rock climb? Heck, I high fived you after a rock climb recently? And was it fun? It looked like you were having fun.

Ruth Candler

Oh my gosh, and the entire podcast team was talking about, I mean, that was when we gathered after we climbed. We were, I mean, you could feel the energy level of the group. And we were happier, we were laughing and we had a great time. I can't remember the last time I had so much fun on a lunch break like that.

James Dick

Right. And that's different than "okay, I'm going to go to the gym." Yeah, and equally as important. And I guess maybe that's my effort over my career is don't poopoo the recreation, don't discount the importance of recreation. Because that fun is vital to a healthy happy human. Every time I ride a bike, I used to ride a bike a ton, I don't ride it as much right now just different activities currently. Try it maybe toward your listeners. Hop on a bike, go for a little tootle around your neighborhood. I guarantee almost all of you will smile and say oh my gosh, I still love to do this, biking is so much fun. We should do this more. That's a common thing I hear that so often on a bike. "Oh, I haven't ridden a bike and so long, man it's so fun. We should you know what, let's what we should do this more."

Ruth Candler

Yes, and you know and that's the challenge, right? I mean, because we did, we love the climbing wall the other day saying we should do this again. And so, what happens, I mean, our life gets busy and you prioritize you know other things over that fun? Oh, I want that feeling again it was addictive.

James Dick

Oh sure, it is. I work in recreation. And I forget or am I lazy or I don't prioritize, pick one of them right. And I don't recreate, which is, which is interesting. I had a conversation recently with somebody about, well, "your job is recreation. You get to do all this stuff. You have the best job." I have the best job I'm going to work hard to keep it.

Ruth Candler

I'm going to fight you on that one.

James Dick

But this applies to you. So, you get to travel all the time, don't you? You know you get to canoe all the time. Oh, isn't it fun just paddling all the time? Well, if we looked at it, you know, real critically, my work is not my recreation, we're going to canoe Lake Robertson, or we're going to go rock climbing. It's my work, right, and I don't get the same chemical release as you do. Oh, you get to climb for fun, you get to work for fun. That's not how it works. And so, as a professional, I need to cut out, make time for me to climb. Because I get a much different benefit. It is an enjoyable job. I love to see the growth and share those experiences and facilitate that fun for you. And it is fun. But it's not the same fun.

Ruth Candler

So, we talked earlier about the mind. And yes, there's been increasing interest in the science behind mindfulness and mindfulness techniques. This relates to the different activity in the brain that you described earlier. How do you include mindfulness in your work? And how do you introduce or expand this concept to students?

James Dick

Sure, several years ago, right before the pandemic, one of the outing clubs, most popular trips, were mindfulness walks. And a key staff, a wonderful key staff, Ally. She had at least twice, once or twice a week, they did mindfulness walks. And it turns out, they just walk to the gazebo or walk along the Chessie and stop and sit, and turn on an app on their phone and follow the instructions. Right, which mindfulness is the focus and the intentional act of being present. And being mindful of the moment. And there's a lot of other things as well. But that's the core concept is being here now. And I tried to incorporate that in my work just by doing that. I'm not a formal person, I typically don't have notes. I, you know, I'm kind of off the cuff, right. But what I try to try to do with groups is model what I would like for them to experience and one is being here right now. I mean, there's nothing more important than being here right now, with you. And this is a moment in time, that will not have again, not to be fatalistic, or anything like that. But I was lucky in life at an earlier age, at a young age to realize we're not here forever. And why not make every moment, as realistically as possible, as positive and fun and rewarding as possible. Right. And I have had a lot of people influence that, you know, thought processing from, you know, in there. I've had a lot of people influence me on that, I guess is best way to

put that. And the being here now, that sunset, that we're seeing matters, that hike up House Mountain to the person who's never hiked up house mountain that's really important. And it's crucial. Nothing else matters. We don't have to think about tomorrow and all the things we have to do. And so, teaching mindfulness to students is an informal process on my end, you bet. Your studies will be there, your laundry, your worry about social life and fitting in and making friends, and where are you going to eat and the list, right? We all have the lists in our head. Put those aside, and focus on this rapid and focus on the heron that we see on the side of the river, because we're here now and you're with a group of people and we'll not do that again.

Ruth Candler

So, James, let's bring this back to the classroom. How do these experiences in mindfulness connect to student experiences in the classroom?

James Dick

Well, the community that is built on these outdoor recreation trips, outing club trips. The challenges overcome, right? The anxiousness of meeting new people and trying something new. They participated in an outing club trip and there are benefits and the benefits relate back to success in the classroom. They're healthier people, they're stronger. They're more resilient. And there's a buzzword that we've heard, right? We have anxious students less resilient, less able to make friendships due to the upbringing they've had with social media, right. So, the outing club trip experiences, result in a student who can handle stress, you know, in the end is by participating in a well-rounded college experience with trying lots of new things and meeting lots of new people and having challenges, right? It's a daunting experience to sign up for a hike. You don't know anybody else who's going, what if they don't like me? What if I can't keep up? I'm not an outdoorsy person. But I'm going to do it. They said I should do these things. And I'm going to try it. And you show up and you go on that hike and you meet somebody who you like and the trip leader, they were funny and they were good. Or, boy, we got lost. And I forgot my jacket. And oh, it was cold and wet. And you know, these challenges, right? With a lowercase c, right? They result in a stronger college student who can handle challenges elsewhere on campus. And that might be in the academic classroom where, you know, they don't know, they can't cut it. They're not the smartest person in the room anymore. There are a bunch of smart people, right? And they get their first C-, right. And it's devastating. Well, you survived a rainstorm without a jacket. You know, a C- is not going to kill you. Right. And so, I hope that, that participating in Outing Club trips have a variety of difficulty and length and style results in a more well rounded college student who adds to the history of this place with the speaking tradition. Heck, you know, I don't let them talk on the phone, or I don't let them use the phone in the van. Like you're sitting next to somebody for 35 minutes, get off your phone and ask them their favorite dessert. Like, it's not just the hike that counts, right? It's the drive to and from and so hopefully, you'll see that person on campus and "oh, hey, how are ya?" Right? And so, that's how I hope that these activities relate back to a classroom, enhancing your classroom.

Ruth Candler

Let's talk some more about teaching leadership. We touched on that earlier, would you tell us about specific techniques that you use with students to build leadership?

James Dick

Student Leadership, to me, is giving students the opportunity to practice a skill that needs practice. And it doesn't have to be huge, and it doesn't have to be formal and structured in an academic sense. There are leadership development classes that are phenomenal. There are books and books and books of good leaders and quality leadership skills. And there's a business surrounding leadership development, and it's wonderful. But in my opinion, giving a college student a chance to be a leader with some parameters and some encouragement and a "You can do it. It's not that hard." That's my take on leadership. And it's vital for W&L student leaders to try and, not to fail, but to have challenges. We got lost. I forgot the stoves. Oh my gosh, we hiked in eight miles, I forgot the stoves. Well, you'll learn from that. And the reality is, the students had a great time still, right.

Ruth Candler

Yes, I mean, it's, I don't want to say it's the opportunity to fail because it's not failure, but it's the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.

James Dick

Sure, and you know, as a developing, learning, growing student, there's this fear of failure. I came into this interview, to be honest with you, I don't want to sound dumb. I don't want to fail. I've lived into your podcasts, they're phenomenal. Your guests, they sound so smart and so intelligent, right and put together, I want to sound like them. So, there's a fear of failure in me. And the reality is, all this the first podcast I've ever done, I'm going to give it a shot. And I'm going to learn from it. And that's what I want to encourage with students in leadership positions of all stages, you know, low stages, there's not a whole lot at risk, you're going to lead a 10-day expedition in Alaska, after graduation.

Ruth Candler

So, it sounds like you are giving them opportunities, smaller opportunities, like the back campus trail leadership to grow into larger opportunities, like leading that Alaska trip. Is it as simple as that where you're just building on previous experiences, and letting them, like a ladder, to bigger trips, or to bigger experiences or more challenging experiences?

James Dick

In a way, yes, it is that simple in my mind, but there's also the need, the desire, and the individual to improve and be okay with that frustration, and be real in our own expectations. There's also articles to read, videos to watch, practice to be done. And it doesn't come naturally. So, there's work to be done. And it's my role here almost, is to give the students the nudge, "you can do it." And we'll give it a shot. Try. If they respond. And they are like leading that trip, I was an app adventure trip leader. They have two other co-leaders. They walk 35 to 45 miles in five days. I don't want to downplay the difficulty of some of the routes, but some of the routes physically, are not really, really challenging. The challenging part is dealing with not six to nine first years who just met and you're one year older than they are, and you're trying to be cool, and not get lost and not burn the quesadilla and get along with your co-leader. So, there's a lot of things that come from these lower leadership experiences that directly translate into leading a team, projecting a goal, planning ahead, dealing with difficult people in difficult situations.

Ruth Candler

You're creating relationships with students that last well beyond graduation. I hope I'm not going to embarrass you here. But I remember being in your office one day and seeing your bulletin board, that was completely covered by messages from students and alumni. What kind of feedback do you hear from alumni about their outdoor recreation experiences at W&L?

James Dick

Oh, wow. I've been privileged to know to have known a lot of really, really neat people. Some would say zany people, right, nice and fun, just great, great interactions. And every time I get a postcard from somebody, I snap a picture and email them and thumbs up. And because it keeps me connected with them. One of the most common comments I hear from alumni was, "oh my gosh, it was so fun. And I wish I could do that. I wish I could do that again." And the reality is you can, right, we can. Alumni you can go hiking today or this weekend. You know you could camp in your backyard this weekend. It doesn't have to be big.

Ruth Candler

Or come back to W&L and rent a tent.

James Dick

You bet right? Do a trip with me. I would love to do a trip with you. Right? And we would talk, we would bring up all those old stories of remember when you spill this or spill that, or you sunk that canoe. I remember that canoe I totally remember it. But the most common thing I hear from students is probably a year out. That's when it hits them. I didn't know how easy it was to access the outdoors and access the equipment and sign up for trips. It's harder, it does get more challenging. They're in a big city, they don't have the equipment room, that club equipment room, they don't have all the packs and the paddle boards and it's not free anymore, right, or \$40 membership but free to use it as many times as they want. And so, they reminisce on how easy it was and what impact it had on their friendships and the place, to be honest with you, with W&L, the place.

Ruth Candler

The surroundings, what a gift we have with being surrounded by this nature.

James Dick

Sure. Within 35 minutes we've got caving, rock climbing, paddling, whitewater, flatwater fishing of all kinds, road biking, mountain biking, trail running, hiking, you name it, we have it.

Ruth Candler

In this beautiful setting here, in Rockbridge County, what do you enjoy most about showing students the natural world that surrounds us?

James Dick

Well, I think it's a combination of the sense of accomplishment that I see within the student after doing the thing, whether it's paddling or rappelling, or hiking. And this will sound sentimental, and maybe it's a little cheesy, but there's a sparkle in their eye. And there's like a little magic and a little you know, "I knew you would like that. I thought you would like this sunset view from this remote little rock cliff off the

parkway that nobody else knows about, then I found it once and you should come check this out with me. It'll be great. You know, we'll bring some cheese and crackers. And I like what I do for both the students who have a ton of outdoor experience. And you know, hiking House Mountain or Devil's Marble Yard or a class one River Run is not, you know, it's not as exciting or challenging for them. I like providing additional challenges for them, right? Harder activities and harder conditions, etc. But I really enjoy somebody who's never seen that view. And they've never like hiked in the woods. And like that's, that's special like, wow, you've never hiked in the woods. It's like me in New York City. Look at those buildings.

Ruth Candler

You once shared a story about walking with international students and pine trees?

James Dick

Oh, yeah, it was just this this fall, right. And it's right over North Mountain at what used to be known as Longdale Recreation Area. Now it's Green Pastures. It's a beautiful little forest service area. And it's somewhat of a smaller hike, I don't know, three miles. But it was incredible. We stopped at almost every rock and every piece of moss and every different tree and, you know, some of them live or come from places that don't have pine trees are a mountain laurel or oak. It's wonderful seeing that hike. We've done a lot in all kinds of weather and seasons through their eyes. This is the first babbling brook they've ever seen in their life. And I've stepped over I don't know how many times right? And it's like, oh, that's, that's why we're here.

Ruth Candler

And it makes you think about it a little differently as well.

James Dick

Oh, sure. And, you know, the challenge for people who work in this type of job is not to skip the babbling brook. And it's, well, we have 42 minutes left, just to get back and it's the next group, or it's the next hike. You know, during the pandemic, I hiked house mountain with groups, often, two or three groups a day. I hiked Taos mountain three times in one week, twice a day. And they don't they didn't know that. They don't care. That's the first time they've ever hiked Taos mountain. And the challenge for me is to make that babbling brook or that really cool pine tree or that overlook special for them. And somehow, I've been able to stay fresh and stay interested. Yeah, this is a great tree. Wait till you see this tree. I think it's still there. Right?

Ruth Candler

You've been responsible for many profound and formative experiences with students. If I had to ask you, some of your top memories, what would those be?

James Dick

There was the time the two students sunk the kayak from B's bottom down to Jordan's point on a Friday afternoon hike or a Friday afternoon paddle right. And they're having such a fun time paddling a tandem kayak. And they're giggling the entire ride. They just met each other; they're giggling in the drive. They're giggling in the paddle. They're giggling after getting the kayak stuck in pinned in low water and

sunk there on the bottom of the river. And laughing and laughing and, you know, finally I had to say, you know, you're going to have to get out of the boat. Like, we have to fix the problem, right? So, there really isn't just the one moment, on our Kilimanjaro trip, once I got out of the tent and the night to use the restroom, and another student had done the same thing. And the Milky Way was huge. And literally, we looked at this starry sky and the Milky Way and looked at each other never said a single word. And to this day, once in a while, we'll text back, you remember that moment, it was a moment, a tangible moment. Hundreds of sunsets, hundreds of campfires, where people feel comfortable sharing, something quiet people in the group, all of a sudden, the next to the second or third night of our camp trip, they start talking and they feel comfortable finally. You know, getting lost, getting wet, getting cold, pulling out a chocolate bar and having people think that's the bee's knees. Like, where did that, y'all this is the best chocolate bar. The times I've heard this is the best mac and cheese is hilarious. All right, you make that mac and cheese at home. It's not good. It's not good at all. And it's incredible on the trail, right? So, it's hard to pick one experience. Sorry.

Ruth Candler

So James, we typically end our show with a few questions about what life is like when you're not working with students. We sometimes call this our lightning round. So just give us a quick answer with what first comes to your mind. So, I know that you are two continents away from having been on expeditions on all seven continents. What has been your favorite journey so far?

James Dick

So hard for me to do a favorite I can give you a rotating top 10 list. That's the running joke.

Ruth Candler

You can give us the rotating top 10, go for it.

James Dick

That's a really hard question for me. And now it doesn't have a specific place. And I believe this with my full heart and soul. It doesn't matter the place. I enjoy the experience and the moment. It doesn't matter the weather. It doesn't matter the season. It matters about the people. And we could go to Africa, we could go to Australia, we could go to Goshen Pass, we can go back to where I'm from, New Mexico, we could I could take another group to the Canyon area in Southern Utah, right the Arizona Strip and in a backcountry Canyon and show them petroglyphs and pictographs. It doesn't matter the place. It has everything to do with the people.

Ruth Candler

On long travel days or slow going on a track. What is your favorite way to pass the time?

James Dick

My immediate reaction is I try to enjoy the moment. And the moment is hot and hungry and tired. You signed up for this you know you put yourself here. Enjoy the moment and not because we're supposed to be mindful none of that. It's just it is what it is. And here we are. So enjoy. Yeah.

Ruth Candler

What is your favorite Rockbridge County view?

James Dick

I'm debating whether to tell the actual location.

Ruth Candler

You don't want anybody else to know about it.

James Dick

My favorite Rockbridge County view, I feel like I want to keep secret. It's a good one. That's fair. It's a good one. Most people know the really, really stellar viewpoints. The top of North Mountain towards Pete's cave is a beautiful view. And seasonally, right. I'll say my favorite view is in Goshen Pass and involves scrambling and climbing up some gullies and a rope for two and a repel, and it's worth it.

Ruth Candler

That's fair. For alumni coming back to campus, what would be your top three recommendations of must-do's?

James Dick

Oh great. Not hike House Mountain, right. Everybody wants to. It's a wonderful iconic view. I'm not downplaying House Mountain it's a fantastic location. But there are others that if you're coming back and you haven't been back to Lexington in a while, I would float the James River. I would rent a kayak; I would float down the James River. It is an incredible view. I would hike our back campus trails, walk, run, or mountain bike them. They're phenomenal. They're easy, they're accessible. You can do that during reunion weekends, you can do that on a lunch hour. They're really, really close and accessible. If you've not been to Goshen Pass in a while, you should go. You should go and sit by the river. You should hike one of the routes, you should at least drive through Goshen Pass. It's one of the prettiest places in the state. People come from all around the region to see Goshen Pass. It's incredible.

Ruth Candler

And now you love exploring the outdoors with your family. What is the best non-W&L adventure that you've been on?

James Dick

Boy, there's a lot. We did a family bike, a bike tour along the Danube River when the girls were old enough to appreciate the place and handle the difficulty of the riding, the mileage each day. The whole family was together. We had great energy. We had some reroutes due to a flood that had happened. There were some challenges and some weather issues and picnics. It was one of the best family trips we had. And we did it really inexpensively. And I remember the smiles on the girl's face and high fiving Julie and it was one of the best ones we've had.

Ruth Candler

That sounds wonderful. So, your professional life is all about health and wellness. What is your guilty pleasure?

James Dick

Oh. Oh, I eat so much sugar. Oh my godness. I sure hope there are people listening this who say “yes he does.” I mean any candy, chocolate – not really. I mean brown sugar; I'll eat brown sugar by the spoonful.

Ruth Candler

Maple sugar?

James Dick

Oh yeah. Gosh, if it wasn't so expensive. I would drink more.

Ruth Candler

Oh my God, I didn't know that about you. That's so funny. All right. So, if you were to be a couch potato for a day, what would that look like? For our listeners, James has a look of shock on his face.

James Dick

Yes. If I was to be a couch potato for a day, I probably would drink some coffee and read a book and – you know what, that's not it.

Ruth Candler

You liar, liar, pants on fire.

James Dick

You know what that's a hard one. I don't know if I could be a couch potato for a whole day because I just have an urge to do something. And I probably would end up tying some flies or whittling or I probably would read a little and then get bored of that. And oh, I need to practice some knots or like show chop some firewood. I don't know

Ruth Candler

All right, James. You're such a great sport. Thanks so much for joining us today.

James Dick

Thanks. This was one of the coolest things I've ever done. Yeah, appreciate it.

Ruth Candler

That says a lot right there. Thank you. Thank you, our listeners for tuning in. We hope you'll visit our website wlu.edu/lifelong where you'll find our show notes as well as a truly great selection of other W&L Lifelong Learning opportunities. Take a look. And until next time let's remain together not unmindful at the future.