

Gab (student guest) ([00:00](#)):

I'm really grateful in these times to have social media, but I think that there's a lot of different ways that you can stay connected with friends. So speaking with them on the phone, there's a lot of pandemic video games that you can play with friends. There's a lot of different group chats that have sprung up. One community that I'm a part of. That's done a really good job of keeping community virtually is the Princeton University band. They've been sending out t-shirts, there's different discord channels that we can hang out in, we're all checking in on each other's mental health and making sure that people are doing well. We're having virtual rehearsal where we're recording with our instruments over Zoom, and that's been a lot of fun.

Vivian (host) ([00:50](#)):

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Meet Princeton, a podcast to introduce prospective students and their families to Princeton University, brought to you from the office of admission at Princeton. My name is Vivian Slee and I'm a senior assistant dean in the office of admission and I'm so happy that you've tuned in to join us to hear from current student voices and others about our community and about what it's like to be a student at Princeton just now.

Vivian (host) ([01:20](#)):

As usual, we'll be joined in a little bit by my co-host Bryant Blount, assistant dean and manager of strategic communications in the office of the dean of undergraduate students, as well as our student guest, who comes from Canada. I won't say what part of Canada just yet, and it's a very big and beautiful country with many regional differences so you'll just have to stay tuned to hear more. In the meantime, we invited Momo Wolapaye director of student life at Whitman College, to tell us a little bit more about his work. Whitman College is one of our six residential colleges on campus. This is what we call dormitories at Princeton, and it's where students sleep, eat, study, and socialize, and each has an amazing network of support made up of really wonderful caring people like Momo, who are there to help students transition to life at Princeton. So I'll let Momo take it from here.

Momo (guest) ([02:21](#)):

Hello, my name is Momo Wolapaye and I serve as director of student life at Whitman College, one of the six residential colleges at Princeton, and I'm in my seventh year in that position. So I am from Monrovia, Liberia, which is in West Africa, where I was born and raised and actually started college there until the civil war and then left. [inaudible 00:02:44] in a small liberal arts college in Iowa called Waldorf College. My major responsibilities as director of student life is to be here as a support system for students on everything that is non-academic. So I work with students on everything from wellbeing issues, programming, and anything else that students may need that is not specifically academic. So I assign students to their rooms when they first get admitted and they are assigned to Whitman College, and also work closely with our student leaders, including our RCAs, who are residential college advisors that work one-on-one with students.

Momo (guest) ([03:23](#)):

Then also Whitman College Council, which is like a programming board for the college. As a director of student life. I also serve as liaison from the residential college to all campus life offices on campus. A lot of the students we have that come to Princeton may be new to an environment like Princeton, so we have to make a considerable effort to try and get them acclimated to the community and also help them become aware of who we are, what sort of support we gave and what resources are available to them.

So we try to spend our time to help first train our RCAs and other student leaders who work with them, first getting to know one another and helping them understand what it means to be a part of the Princeton community, that each member has a responsibility to be themselves and also try to get as much as they can from this experience.

Momo (guest) ([04:24](#)):

And help them to sometimes develop courage to ask questions because these students that come are so accomplished and so independent that most times they find it difficult to ask questions, and they feel like if they ask questions, they are intruding on someone's time or space. Or if they ask for help, that means that they are not what they thought they were, or they don't belong here. So letting them know that the reason why we have all these resources available is because we know that students need them. One of the things that make Princeton unique and it makes the residential college system great for me is the fact that we see it as a community that involves the family.

Momo (guest) ([05:11](#)):

So it's unfortunate that this year we didn't do the elaborate welcome we'd like to do for all our students and their parents, because we do take a lot of pleasure in meeting the parents. I especially like to meet the parents because I know there's usually some concerns or anxieties that parents may have about letting their kids go off to college. Many students have parents who are not able to come to campus, and sometimes it's an international student and other times it's parents who live far away. Those parents, we do have information on the college website about who we are, all their staff members and encourage them to reach out to us with questions. This semester and this year has been hard for me because I'm an extrovert and I get a lot of energy from being around people, being with people. So I'm hoping that the pandemic will be under control soon and we'll be back on campus because it definitely has made it challenging.

Momo (guest) ([06:11](#)):

There are a couple of things I look forward to. I definitely look forward to the first year students engaging with one another through a program we call Clash of the Colleges. So Clash of the Colleges is like a friendly competition that we have during the night before classes start. So all the colleges dress up in their college gear, to be identifiable, and we have various sections in Dillon gym that we set up and there are various competitions. So you have teams from all the colleges that compete in various competitions, and it's very loud in there. We have judges that include the president and a couple of vice presidents that come down, and it's a great one. So that's something I look forward to, welcoming the students in that manner and helping them exhibit such energy and exuberance before classes start.

Vivian (host) ([07:08](#)):

Hey, Bryant, how's it going?

Bryant (co-host) ([07:10](#)):

Vivian, it's going well. Beautiful day outside, beautiful fall day.

Vivian (host) ([07:13](#)):

It is gorgeous out. I hope everybody is getting some time to enjoy the fall weather, wherever you are. I had a few questions for you, Bryant. One of them was for our listeners just to know what is Princeton's school mascot.

Bryant (co-host) ([07:25](#)):

That's a good one, and it's always good to begin with the basics. Princeton, the mascot is the tiger. We are the Princeton Tigers.

Vivian (host) ([07:34](#)):

So we do hear that a lot, right? With our alumni, you talk about being a tiger for life and that kind of thing.

Bryant (co-host) ([07:40](#)):

That's right. The orange and the black is the school colors, the tight-knit pack. I think all these things bond together with the spirit, resilience and power of the tiger, the mighty tiger.

Vivian (host) ([07:52](#)):

Right. So orange and black as in orange you glad we made this podcast? Orange.

Bryant (co-host) ([07:58](#)):

Exactly. Exactly.

Vivian (host) ([08:00](#)):

Okay. I have to give credit to my colleague Alexandra. She submitted that one for the podcast. So thank you, Alexandra. We're going to hear from a really wonderful student today and I'm looking forward to you introducing him and then we'll come back and we'll chat a bit more. So I'll hand it over to you now.

Bryant (co-host) ([08:17](#)):

All right. Thanks, Vivian. It's my pleasure to introduce this week's student guest. Gabriel [Duguay 00:00:08:21], who goes by Gab, is a junior from Truro, Nova Scotia in Canada, pursuing an independent major in indigenous studies. On campus, Gab stays true to his roots and serves as the prime minister of the Canada Club. He's also the founder of the Princeton Indigenous Advocacy Coalition and serves as a member of the Projects Board, of the Priorities Committee, the debate panel and the Princeton University band.

Gab (student guest) ([08:57](#)):

Hi, my name is Gabrielle Duguay. I'm a member of the great class of 2022, so that means I'm in my third year here at Princeton University, and I'm from Truro, Nova Scotia. I'm studying indigenous studies, which is an independent concentration. Nova Scotia is really a tale of two cities in which there is Halifax, which has about half the population of the province and is a pretty urban area. Then there's the rest of the province, which is another about half a million people that it's considered quite rural. It's about a 26 hour drive from Princeton. I know that because we packed into the van and we all drove down to get me sorted freshman year.

Gab (student guest) ([09:47](#)):

So I'm from a pretty small town. The primary industry is that we have a big underwear factory in my town and my options, it seemed, were go to college or spend my life at the underwear factory, and no offense to the underwear factory. So I think high school Gab is really defined by a few things. So I would travel across Canada and also represent Canada and other countries on a debate team. Other things that

I really enjoyed doing were participating in community service and so the group that I really focused on in high school and that I continue to focus on today is Canada's indigenous communities. Right away, myself and many of my peers became involved in service from the moment we set foot on campus with the Community Action Program.

Gab (student guest) ([10:38](#)):

The Community Action Program is a program where students are oriented in small groups, where they have the chance to be mentored by some upperclassmen and make some friends with fellow first years while working in the local community on some issues of importance. That program really resonated with me and gave me a great transition into Princeton. I found myself both serving and learning very quickly, and I had such a good experience actually that I decided to go back and lead that program the next year, which was also one of the most amazing experiences. I think Princeton can be pretty scary when you're going into it, and the one thing I was really grateful for is that Princeton did a really good job of transitioning me into Princeton.

Gab (student guest) ([11:24](#)):

I didn't know a single person in the United States of America really, so it was stressful setting up a bank account, setting up a phone number, getting a social security number. Or all of those things that maybe you might take for granted if you're living in America, I didn't really have. But thankfully the staff at the International Center put on an amazing orientation for international students and helped me get a really situated, and they were really available for me.

Bryant (co-host) ([11:53](#)):

The Davis International Center provides support for international students, staff and faculty, with everything ranging from answering questions about immigration status to providing practical support in the adjustment to the United States.

Gab (student guest) ([12:05](#)):

I think a further worry that I had was probably about academic rigor and writing is something that's traditionally been my weakest point. I was diagnosed when I was 11 with dysgraphia. It's a disability that really affects my writing ability, but thankfully Princeton has a lot of resources that helped me address that, both through the Office of Disability Services, the writing center and the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning.

Bryant (co-host) ([12:31](#)):

The McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning support students by offering resources to help with study skills, course tutoring, and even things like time management and adjusting to the college experience.

Gab (student guest) ([12:41](#)):

Those are all resources that have been really available to both advocate for me and help me succeed at Princeton In spite of that obstacle. Going to college is really tough, leaving your hometown and your friends behind. Every first year is put into something called a Z group. It's an advisee group with other members of their hall in first year, which really acts as a core group of friends. For the first few weeks you travel as a pact and really play a lot of team building games and icebreakers and that sort of thing.

Gab (student guest) ([13:14](#)):

Thankfully, my residential college advisor was really good at facilitating dialogue and conversation, so one activity that we did that I found really impactful right away was that we all brought in some objects that were really special to us, on maybe day two or three of college, and just explained why they were really special to us. Some people talked about a gift that their little sister had given them, or this bracelet that my mom gave me that's really special to me. I think it really allowed me to see everyone in a more human way than I might have otherwise. Very quickly, a lot of those people became great friends.

Gab (student guest) ([14:02](#)):

I was really lucky to get placed in Butler. Butler is a really, really nice residential college. I had hardwood floors, I had laundry without having to go outside. There was a convenience store in my basement. I had beautiful facilities.

Bryant (co-host) ([14:22](#)):

Each of the six residential colleges offers a host of amenities and space. For example, laundry, which is free, common spaces for studying and relaxing, and then across the colleges, a range of spaces such as dance studios, black box theaters, libraries, media labs, and many other things.

Gab (student guest) ([14:40](#)):

I had a big room and I was really fortunate enough to get paired with a roommate that very quickly became one of my best friends ever. One thing that's really nice is most residential colleges have a dining hall assigned to them. You don't need to eat in that dining hall, but a lot of people choose to, especially in the first few weeks. It was really easy to create a sense of community in the dining hall. I think the dining staff are incredibly kind. They work really hard to accommodate everyone's needs. I think that eating dinner and lunch with a variety of really interesting folk day in and day out for the first few months of my freshman year really made that experience one of the most unique experiences that I've had, because I got to know so many really cool people from different backgrounds, and there is no one stereotypical Princeton student. Everyone is very different.

Gab (student guest) ([15:41](#)):

One thing that I really have been doing that is quite different from high school was the marching band. I had maybe played a bit of an instrument beforehand, but participating in marching formations on ESPN just a few months into college was something that I probably never would've seen myself doing. The band has some pretty outrageous outfits as well. If you wanted to look up what the Princeton University band looks like, they're, they're really quite silly, but I think that that was something that was definitely new.

Gab (student guest) ([16:14](#)):

One thing that I've been really involved with at Princeton is I work a lot on indigenous issues on campus, and I've been really lucky to work with the Princeton administration to create more robust course offerings on Native American studies and Native American topics. I've been working closely with some fellow students of mine to do a lot of research on Native Americans in higher education in general. One result of that is that we're going to be putting on a virtual conference in the spring at Princeton, hosted by Princeton, about indigenous advocacy for students. We expect probably we'll get a 100 to 150 Native American college students attending. So that's something that I'm really looking forward to.

Gab (student guest) ([17:04](#)):

I identify as having indigenous heritage. So my dad is Mi'kmaq and something that really opened my eyes was I took a summer class on indigenous issues in food insecurity when I was in high school, and that was something that I think opened my eyes to a lot of the injustices that indigenous communities face. That really made me decide that I would devote a lot of my time and effort to trying to alleviate that problem. I was lucky enough that Princeton actually funded an internship for me last summer that allowed me to work directly on that project, and that Princeton is really a place where if you have an idea and a passion, there's a lot of funds or staff that are really willing to work with you to make that passion happen.

Gab (student guest) ([17:59](#)):

I remember my freshman year I had the opportunity to travel both to the Supreme Court of the United States to hear a case, as well as sit in on a conference in the United Nations through a program I participated in called the James Madison Program, which invites students to think about American ideals and American culture. And being just sitting in the UN at the age of 18 or 19 and being able to be there pretty much my only qualification being was that I was a Princeton student and that I was interested in going just really, I think, cemented the magic for me. Last year while we were on campus, I was really lucky to sit as what's called a university counselor on the student government, and that provided me both a seat on the student government decision-making boards and bodies, as well as what's called the Council of the Princeton University Community, which is a really cool body that deliberates on a lot of the decisions that Princeton has to make.

Gab (student guest) ([19:05](#)):

That includes student representatives, faculty, administrators, and community alumni as well, so there's really a pretty wide range of voices on that body. And because my last name starts with D I actually was sitting right next to President Eisgruber during all of those meetings, because we were sat alphabetically. Princeton really from the Z groups, from the activities that you do, from your academic departments, it's really easy to make different communities. Everyone's just been so tremendously kind and giving of time and energy and so open to conversation that it's been really great to just navigate this community of people that are interested in learning, are interested in bettering the world and are interested, I think, in bettering themselves.

Gab (student guest) ([19:55](#)):

As you're walking to class, especially during one of the rush hours on campus, you really will probably see quite a few people that you know, and it's always great just to be able to see people that you care about and wave. It's a reminder that you should probably get a meal with them. We have an expression at Princeton, "Let's get a meal sometime." The meal is really the cornerstone of the Princeton social life. People are pretty busy at Princeton, but I think most people probably take an hour for lunch and an hour for dinner and they really take the opportunity to make community with friends during that time. I feel like that is not really happening right now and I hope that we're back either in the spring or the fall so that we can make that community happen over dinner and lunch again.

Vivian (host) ([20:53](#)):

I really loved hearing how the many different parts of campus life for Gab have been so meaningful. Bryant, I know that he talked a lot about different student life activities and so on. I'm just wondering whether you could tell us maybe about other campus life areas.

Bryant (co-host) ([21:10](#)):

Of course. I think something important to remember is that Princeton is more than just the classes, right? More than the classroom. It's the people, it's the experience and it's residential and a big piece of that as the residential colleges, right? There are six of them. Gab mentioned Butler, but there are five others, and while he mentioned his cafe in the basement, others have amenities such as libraries, theaters, media lab, ceramics, dance studios. There's a whole host of amenities that are available to students at Princeton and they're open to all.

Vivian (host) ([21:41](#)):

He talked about looking forward to community happening again over mealtime. Does that mean that if you're in one residential college, you have to eat in that particular dining hall?

Bryant (co-host) ([21:53](#)):

No, it's an open system, and while there may be special home college events, theme meals, for example, opportunities to bring the communities back together, generally speaking folks can eat anywhere with anyone. Right? I think another thing that facilitates the development of friendships and, again, the exchange of ideas, experiences and bonds, really, that will last a long, long time.

Vivian (host) ([22:15](#)):

I know that there are a lot of campus-wide traditions that happen every year that are really fun and that students look forward to every year, and Momo spoke about the Clash of the Colleges, I think.

Bryant (co-host) ([22:29](#)):

You're aren't wrong about traditions. Princeton is rich in them, and it's funny, a lot have been started actually in recent years. But the Clash of the Colleges, which Momo spoke about, actually begins when students come. It's part of first year orientation, So from the moment people step onto this campus ... before even, really, as they matriculate, they are brought into the family in a rich and vetting way by educational programs and by social activities. The Clash of the Colleges is really the capstone to that. You can think of it as a pep rally, right? Of an opportunity for students to come together, to build their excitement, to compete against each other in healthy competition. It's really one of the first places people feel, I think, the energy, the magic and the fun of being a Princetonian.

Vivian (host) ([23:14](#)):

That sounds very cool. I'm just curious. Does the university band perform at Clash of the Colleges?

Bryant (co-host) ([23:19](#)):

I would say in the first week that a student's here, the university band performs at darn near everything. But yes, they do show up. The band is there, cheerleaders are there, there's a DJ. First year orientation really helps orient students. It's also really a time where everyone comes back to campus and lawn parties is one of the first times that this occurs. At its center is the all-school concert where people assemble in the backyard of a facility called Quadrangle Club and see a big time performer, typically, put on a concert. An addition to that, it's like a street fair. There's food, there are lawn games and it's really, again, an opportunity where over 5,000 students typically come out to this event. I would say rain or shine, in fact, because they want to see their friends again, they want to connect again. This all happens within the first couple of weeks people returning to campus typically.

Vivian (host) ([24:10](#)):

What do you mean by big time performer?

Bryant (co-host) ([24:12](#)):

Childish Gambino performed here. Churches, another band. Flo Rida we've had in the backyard. Jimmy Fallon's band, The Roots, have performed at lawn parties. So we have a long list of luminaries who have been in that backyard for the past 20 years or more.

Vivian (host) ([24:30](#)):

Oh gosh. That sounds like a lot of fun. What's the activities fair? You hear about that a lot, right, for first year students?

Bryant (co-host) ([24:37](#)):

So another good entry point for students when they come to Princeton is not only the traditions and the big events, but are the organizations and groups that really span all interests. I know gab talked about a group he founded as well as several others he belongs to, and the activities fairs where this smorgasbord is laid out for you. It fills Dillon gym, one of our main gym floors, and students just walk up and down rows of tables, talking to students who engage in these activities, seeing them in some cases perform. Right? The break dancing group is notorious for spinning while these students are trying to walk around and pick up pamphlets or sign up with their email. It's where you can do everything from join a theater performing group to learn when acapella auditions are going to occur or even try your hand at joining one of the literary societies or student publications. I feel bad because I'm probably leaving things out, but there are over 300 student organizations. So if you are interested in something, there's definitely a place to try your hand at it.

Vivian (host) ([25:42](#)):

If I were a first-year student and I was interested in creating a club like a metal detecting club or a cheese tasting club or something like that, how would I do that?

Bryant (co-host) ([25:56](#)):

Well, the first thing I would say is just check to make sure it doesn't already exist because while I haven't seen any beachcombers, I do know that there is a cheese tasting club. There's an enthusiast already there. But if it is, for example, the club that hasn't been founded yet, you would meet with one of my colleagues in the office of dean of undergrad students who would direct you to the Undergraduate Student Government Board, Student Group Recognition Committee, that teaches students how to get students signatures for interest, how to make a presentation about why your club would add interest and then how to propose it for potential approval. So there's a way in which to get your interest on the board. Just takes a little bit of following a process.

Vivian (host) ([26:37](#)):

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for joining us again today, and I always learn so much about what is happening on campus and the way things work on campus and look forward to seeing you next time.

Bryant (co-host) ([26:48](#)):

Always my pleasure. See you soon.

Vivian (host) ([26:53](#)):

Now, let's visit the mailbag. While Meet Princeton hopes to introduce our listeners to Princeton, we also wanted to make sure that we answered your questions about admission and financial aid, for those students, especially, who are considering applying to the university. So with that in mind, we created our mailbag. This week, Trent from Peoria, Illinois, wrote to ask, "How would you describe the typical Princeton student?" Gosh, this is a really good question, Trent, and thank you so much for asking. It's a hard question to answer because really we do have all different kinds of students. Probably not unlike your own high school, where you have peers interested in science and history and art and athletics, in film, math, music and so on.

Vivian (host) ([27:41](#)):

So at Princeton, the difference is that you'll find the same thing, but in our case, students come from all over the country and all over the world. I think most of my colleagues would agree if I told you that our students who come from every different kind of background, and that includes socioeconomic, racial, political, religious, and so on, are really keen to be a part of our community, keen to contribute to it in a meaningful way. So it could be through academic research or making community around food, or by deejaying on WPRB, which is the student radio station. It might be through playing a sport or being a part of student government, singing in an acapella group or directing a theater piece and so on.

Vivian (host) ([28:24](#)):

In terms of community, I can't help, but think of the university's informal motto, which is in the nation service and the service of humanity. I think that students who come to Princeton come knowing that they are going to be a part of something much bigger than themselves, to which they'll contribute, and what they might not realize just yet is that it will last a lifetime. So thank you so much for the question, Trent, really appreciate it. For our episodes to come, we hope that listeners will continue to submit such great questions to our mailbag.

Vivian (host) ([29:03](#)):

We hope you enjoyed hearing about Gab's experiences at Princeton. As I said earlier, this podcast was created with prospective students and their families in mind, and with that, I'd like to direct all of our listeners to our mission website at admission.princeton.edu. There you can watch, read and engage virtually and learn more about Princeton University. Meet Princeton's audio engineer is Nick Denali of Orange Box Pictures. Mary Buckley and I, Vivian Slee, our executive producers. Bryant Blunt is our co-host and consultant and original music was composed by Molly Truman, who is also our master sound designer and engineer from the class of 2024. We'd also like to give a special thanks and shout out to our guests, Momo Wolapaye director of student life at Whitman College, and to Gab Duguay for their great contributions to this episode, and to our listeners for tuning in.

Vivian (host) ([29:55](#)):

We'd like to leave you all now with the Princeton Footnotes, one of our many super fantastic acapella groups on campus, performing an original arrangement of the medley, Who Loves You / December 1963 by the Four Seasons. Thank you so much for listening and we hope you'll join us next time on Meet Princeton.