

# From the Banks of Paradise

## A Beginner's Guide to Adulthood

New podcast aims to help students manage grown-up life

The post-college world of careers, mortgages and building a life can seem so daunting and mysterious to young people that the process has acquired its own tongue-in-cheek verb. "Adulthooding" may sound like a joke, but to Kristina Mereigh, director of wellness programming at Smith, and Ana Devlin Gauthier, senior leadership coordinator in the Wurtele Center for Leadership, the word is a stand-in for some serious anxiety among students and young alumnae.

"Ana and I are both 28," Mereigh said. "We're approached all the time by students looking for advice, and we noticed they are experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety. Usually it's about friendships, academic stress, career stress and finances."

To address some of those issues, the pair created a podcast called *Attempted Adults*, which launched last November with an episode on friendship. In it, they discuss class friends, work friends, hobby friends and soul friends and finding a balance among them. They talk about how to be honest, how to deal with fair-weather friends and how to handle the hurt when a friend "ghosts" you, meaning that with no explanation they stop returning texts or phone calls.

Mereigh and Devlin Gauthier plan to offer a podcast each month,



Kristina Mereigh, left, and Ana Devlin Gauthier record an episode of their podcast, *Attempted Adults*.

# Building a Welcoming Community

College plans range of anti-bias events and policy changes

covering everything from making friends to managing finances and planning meals. “We kind of serve in a big sisterly role and as supposed adults who are still learning,” Mereigh said.

They got the idea for a podcast when they heard students echoing some of the same “adulting” issues they had, such as paying off loans. The Center for Media Production gave them access to a recording booth on campus, and they were off.

In December the podcast addressed how to mitigate stress. “Hyper stress,” Mereigh noted, affects millennials more than it did their parents. Research backs this up: According to a survey conducted last year by the American Psychiatric Association and reported in *Newsweek*, millennials are the most anxious generation, especially those who are women and people of color.

Each offers her own go-tos for managing stress. For Mereigh, these include taking consistent breaks, stretching and watching Netflix cooking shows. Devlin Gauthier likes the endorphins she gets from hiking, biking and going to the gym and also “sharing calm space with someone.” Their homework assignment: 15 minutes of daily self-care, doing such things as “notice five beautiful things in the world” and “take time to move.”

Reviewers on iTunes give the podcast five stars. One writes, “These two are smart, warm and witty! Big fan—and I think we all need this right now.” Another says, “Great tips every episode.”

“We hope our listeners hear that everyone is going through things and that even people who seem to have it all together don’t,” Mereigh said. “That’s the beauty of life. It’s messy and hard.”—RONNI GORDON



Changes in campus policing and employee training, as well as education efforts aimed at promoting a culture change on campus, are all intended to build a campus community with a greater understanding of race, class, gender, disability and privilege, and to reduce the likelihood of bias-related incidents.

Specific changes to campus safety policies were announced in January; they were spurred by an incident last summer involving an employee and a student of color. The event, as President Kathleen McCartney has written, “caused us to reassess and recommit to the work Smith needs to do to be the community we aspire to be.” The campus-safety changes include:

- ensuring that dispatchers gather enough information from callers to make certain a police response is warranted and is based on a person’s behavior and not their appearance
- ensuring that police responses are based on reasonable suspicion that is supported by articulable facts or circumstances
- addressing any aspect that may suggest bias-based profiling
- requiring training to prevent bias-based profiling

Campus policing policies, informed in part by the American Civil Liberties Union, are being coordi-

nated with Mount Holyoke College, which shares Smith’s Campus Police department.

Beyond revising campus safety policies, the college has ramped up employee training. Last fall, more than 80 percent of college employees undertook an online anti-bias training. Many have also received in-person trainings on identity and inclusion, identifying bias and strategies for respectful conversation about race and privilege.

In April, the college will devote an entire day to exploring topics of inclusion, diversity and equity. All regular courses, meetings and events will be canceled on April 10 so that all students, staff and faculty can participate. “This daylong conference will be an important opportunity to focus on what it means to be a genuine community of belonging for all,” McCartney said.

In a separate effort, students, faculty and staff formed a community-building book club to discuss *So You Want to Talk About Race*, Ijeoma Oluo’s 2018 best-seller. Four lunchtime discussion sessions are being held through April, led by facilitators. Oluo gave a Presidential Colloquium lecture at Smith last November titled “The Only Way Out Is Through: Solidarity and Accountability.” The president’s office has funded the book club.