

Messina

Senior Focus Group Findings

Report completed July 24, 2017

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Summary of Focus Group Discussions

This assessment of students in the class of 2017 that were a part of the first one third of students in Messina during their first year at Loyola University Maryland was conducted in May 2017. The project described here is qualitative in nature and the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of what aspects of participating in Messina continued to be relevant to students during their four year experience at Loyola. A quantitative component of this study asked for students to reflect on the extent to which they remember experiencing the Messina learning outcomes during their four year experience.

Additionally, this study also asked students to reflect on components that were helpful or would have been helpful to include during the first year Messina experience. Mary Ellen Wade designed and conducted this focus group experience with the assistance of administrators at Loyola from the offices of Campus Ministry, Messina, Student Engagement, Student Life, and Student Support and Wellness Promotion. Assisting with the quantitative data compilation was a summer undergraduate student office assistant for Messina. The focus group was conducted on May 17, 2017. The complete assessment of data and final report was completed in July 2017.

Key Findings of Focus Group Discussions¹

What follows is a brief summary of the relevant findings from data generated in the focus group interviews. Details about the methodology and an expanded explanation and discussion of the findings of this study can be found in the report, which follows the summary. Examples of the focus group questions and demographics can be found in the appendices.

Beneficial Elements of Messina

The key areas below represent topics that were either covered or what students would have found beneficial to be covered at some point during Messina.

Campus Resources

Students appreciated opportunities to be exposed to different campus resources including The Study, ALANA Services, Career Center, Counseling Center, the Study, and the Writing Center. This happened in a variety of ways- campus tours, having a representative from those offices present at an enrichment session, or doing an activity with a follow up on how that office could be beneficial to students. There was a consensus that even if you did not utilize that resource in your first year, this introduction had a lasting impact in future years at Loyola.

Conversations or Activities Related to Diversity and Identity

During the interviews, focus group participants commented on a desire for more consistent and ongoing incorporation of topics related to diverse perspectives. Some participants spoke about activities on identity exploration being meaningful for them during enrichment but in most cases, this was a onetime conversation. Students would like to see more exploration of intersectionality and identity in both the enrichment session and the Messina class. Three participants talked about having more comprehensive experiences exploring diversity and social justice topics in the context of their student leader trainings²

¹ Subsequent findings are listed alphabetically

² The two student leader trainings described were Resident Assistant and Evergreen training. These trainings are coordinated by the Student Life and Student Engagement offices in the division of Student Development.

which was beneficial, but acknowledged that unless you were in the small group of students who are leaders for these organizations you would typically not have that level of engagement with these topics.

Tied to this area was also a desire for more opportunities to positively engage with the surrounding community. In a few of the groups, some students spoke positively about experiences with being a part of a York Road community walk with their Messina section and in some cases, a follow up experience in participating in a community service activity on the York Road corridor. This led to conversations about the importance of framing conversations not around the idea of saving others but more of taking the time to understand others. Students in the focus group were seeking or appreciated an opportunity to learn more about the surrounding community and opportunities for engagement during Messina.

Discernment in the Context of Course/Major Decisions

Students valued having time for reflective moments, both formal and informal including mediations, reflections, and journaling. Students acknowledged that it was important to provide different experiences for reflection knowing that while some may appreciate a journaling activity, others may have a different way to meaningfully reflect. An area to continue to develop that was beneficial for those students who had the experience was the topic of discernment as it relates to selecting a major and course selection. Additionally, some students commented on how experiencing the Strong Interest Inventory, StrengthsQuest, or another tool like this aided in future professional development including choosing a career path.

Exposure to Baltimore & City Navigation

The excursions into Baltimore were an important part of the Messina experience in the first year as they helped students feel comfortable with exploring the city on their own beyond Messina. An area with this that was appreciated for groups that did it was an additional conversation about how to navigate the city on your own, specifically navigating public transportation and options for getting to Penn Station with conversations about the MARC train. Students appreciated those excursions to restaurants, neighborhoods, and attractions they typically may not get to on their own. Tied with this is a desire for trips that highlight what Baltimore has to offer beyond places like the Inner Harbor.

Life Skills

An area that students did not talk about experiencing within their Messina but in hindsight would have been helpful to experience were practical conversations and activities around life skills, including how to clean, basic cooking tips, doing laundry and other topics related to practical lifetime skills. Tied with this was a desire to have a focus on how to navigate troubling roommate situations and engaging in conversations with a roommate around expectations for living together.

Elements to Further Examine

The key areas below represent themes mentioned by students that further attention should be directed toward. In some instances, there were mixed feelings on a particular topic (ex. reduction of enrichment sessions) and overall students recommended more assessment occur of students currently in the program to see if perspectives have changed over time.

Advising Improvements

Students desired more training of core advisors to better familiarize themselves with how to advise students with intended majors in other academic disciplines. This was a common frustration of students in the focus groups. The specific issue mentioned were core advisors who were unable to offer correct

advising information or have any knowledge of who to best refer the student to for additional assistance in this area. In some cases, this led to students being set back later on in their academic experience here at Loyola.

Course Offerings

An aspect of Messina students indicated as an area for change is to ensure that all Messina classes fulfill core requirements. While most Messina courses do count as core requirements, there are some that fall out of that category and for students taking part in these sections it sometimes led to being restricted on elective selections later on during their academic time at Loyola. Tied with the above area, there was the thought that if every course counted towards the core there may be less of an impact if your advisor was not as helpful for you. Another aspect of this was that there were mixed perspectives about whether or not courses should be in specific major areas (ex. biology or business) or if these types of courses should not be included. Some students were from the perspective that it is helpful to be with other students in your intended major, but for others it would have been helpful to be with students outside of this group.

Reduction of Enrichment Sessions

A number of students indicated a desire for reduced enrichment session offerings in the spring semester. Some of the rationale for this included that the enrichment session time conflicted with a course that they wanted to take and therefore could not, a feeling that enrichment was not as necessary in the spring, or that meetings were too frequent. Those suggesting a reduced or non-existent spring enrichment still saw the value in a two semester Messina course. Other suggestions students had were ensuring that there was a bank of common topics every course had to experience during enrichment sessions or the development of more streamlined spring opportunities that every student takes part in. Students indicated that if there were to be a reduction in the quantity of enrichment sessions, then there should be a focus on using less enrichment sessions as a course continuation. There was a feeling that particularly in the fall semester, enrichment sessions should be a mandatory experience for students.

Working Group Selection

Some students spoke about the need for recruiting faculty, mentors, and Evergreens that want to work within the program and are enthusiastic about the experience. It was clear from the discussion that some students had experiences with faculty who were not excited about Messina and in turn that lack of excitement translating to student experience. The same went for students that had Evergreens who were in their senior year and seemed to check out of the role in the spring semester. Another aspect of this that students picked up on was when a working group seemed to have a divide. This sometimes resulted in a lack of team support of each other in the context of the enrichment session.

Impact of Messina

The key areas below represent aspects of Messina that were of value to students during their experience. In some instances, these were areas of value that students have a desire to have more connections to while participating in Messina.

Community Development Through Participation

A common appreciation of the Messina experience were the relationships that were developed among classes. Several students who attended these focus groups were friends, roommates, and student

leaders together because of the bonds formed in their Messina class or in living with each other in Messina housing during their first year.³ Often times for students struggling in the first year it was nice to have a group of welcome faces on campus.

These relationships were not just limited to student-to-student interactions but also between students and the relationship with the working group members. One way in which this experience had lasting impact beyond the first year was a general consensus that students felt more comfortable seeking out faculty for guidance or questions beyond the first year and that in some cases, they formed connections with their Messina faculty that lasted throughout the next three years on campus.

Core Classes and the Messina Themes

Students spoke about how the courses offered in Messina helped prepare for the academic rigor of the next four years. Additionally, the courses offered in Messina led to an appreciation of Core courses over the next four years. Several students commented that their Messina courses were among some of the favorite courses they took during their time at Loyola and that in some cases the Core courses led to a change in major or the addition of a minor. An area to continue to develop is using Messina to emphasize why the Core is in place and its importance.

Tied with the course experience was the inclusion of Messina themes in all aspects of Messina. The students who were a part of classes that wove the theme into course and enrichment discussions appreciated the experience- particularly in times when there were ongoing connections to the theme. There was a general consensus that there are more opportunities to do that within Messina and that a stronger priority should be made around this for future students.

³ During the 2013-2014 academic year, if you were a student in Messina you lived in Flannery O'Connor Hall ("Messina Housing") unless you specifically requested apartment-style living.

Detailed Findings

Introduction

This study focused on students in the class of 2017 that were a part of the first one third of students in Messina during their first year at Loyola University Maryland. The purpose of conducting these focus groups was threefold: to get a sense from graduating seniors about the topics and experiences that shaped their personal and academic development during their entire time at Loyola, to get a sense of the ways in which Messina may have created a foundation to support student's personal and academic development during their time at Loyola, and to get a sense of ways/areas in which Messina can continue to grow in helping students develop academically and personally.

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

Focus groups were conducted at an event on May 17, 2017. A total of six focus groups were conducted. Groups ranged in size from four to eight participants. Each focus group was homogenous in that it was composed of class of 2017 students. Students represented in the focus groups represented a variety of majors/minors, genders, and participated in different Messina sections during their first year.

Using an open-ended interview protocol to guide discussion, the six administrators facilitated the focus groups. Interview questions (see Appendix A) were designed to cover topics that would provide insight about the influence of Messina beyond the first-year experience. All focus group discussions were tape recorded with the permission of the participants. The anonymity of participants in the focus groups is protected in this report, and in some instances the use of "they" or "their" as the first person singular pronoun has been chosen to further protect the identity of participants.

Prior to the focus groups, the six administrators facilitating the groups were provided with a guide that outlined the plan for the event and guidelines to help in conducting focus group research. The reference section in this document provides information to a guide that was helpful to the facilitators.

Data Analysis

Focus group interview tape recordings went through several phases of analysis. First, all recordings were listened to so that the study coordinator could get a general sense of common themes mentioned by students. Next, a more detailed analysis took place in a second listen in which data was divided into a number of common topic areas. A third analysis took place to refine categories of responses. Something that was discovered in listening to the recordings was that highlights from one student's experience were also the areas another student would like to see further development of or improvement made. Efforts were made in the analysis below to highlight these areas of overlap.

Key Findings

Below are some key highlights pulled from all of the focus group interviews. The section immediately following the findings section provides specific responses to the five questions that were asked to students and may give some more detailed insights including other aspects that make up these findings but are not specifically listed in detail in this section.

Key Finding 1: Beneficial Elements of Messina

The key areas below represent topics that were either covered or what students would have found beneficial to be covered at some point during Messina.

Campus Resources

Students appreciated opportunities to be exposed to different campus resources including The Study, ALANA Services, Career Center, Counseling Center, the Study, and the Writing Center. This happened in a variety of ways- campus tours, having a representative from those offices present at an enrichment session, or doing an activity with a follow up on how that office could be beneficial to students. There was a consensus that even if you did not utilize that resource in your first year, this introduction had a lasting impact in future years at Loyola.

"I didn't use them my first year but it was nice to know about them and then once sophomore year came I was involved in everything and it was nice knowing what was available to me."

Somewhat related to this aspect of introducing resources was also a feeling from students that when classes spent time talking about ways to get involved on campus students should be introduced to more leadership opportunities than just Evergreens and Resident Assistants. While students were aware of opportunities like the activities fair there was a feeling that a stronger emphasis should be given on smaller clubs, or academic opportunities such as National Fellowships, or offices such as the Center for the Humanities that will provide students money towards conference attendance or research projects.

Conversations or Activities Related to Diversity and Identity

During the interviews, focus group participants commented on a desire for more consistent and ongoing incorporation of topics related to diverse perspectives. Some participants spoke about activities on identity exploration being meaningful for them during enrichment but in most cases, this was a onetime conversation. Students would like to see more exploration of intersectionality and identity in both the enrichment session and the Messina class. Three participants talked about having more comprehensive

Conversations about diversity happen by ...looking at diversity in an anachronistic way...it doesn't address modern concerns or anything, so if anything it kind of reinforces any sort of divide when it comes to race and religion...it feels as though you are checking off a box."

experiences exploring diversity and social justice topics in the context of their student leader trainings⁴ which were beneficial but acknowledged that unless you were in the small group of students who are leaders for these organizations you would typically not have that level of engagement with these topics.

Tied to this area was also a desire for more opportunities to positively engage with the surrounding community. In a few of the groups, some students spoke positively about experiences with being a part of a York Road community walk with their Messina section and in some cases, a follow up experience in participating in a community service activity on the York Road corridor. This led to conversations about the importance of framing conversations not around the idea

⁴ The two student leader trainings described were Resident Assistant and Evergreen training. These trainings are coordinated by the Student Life and Student Engagement offices in the division of Student Development.

of saving others but more of taking the time to understand others. Students in the focus group were seeking or appreciated an opportunity to learn more about the surrounding community and opportunities for engagement during Messina.

Discernment in the Context of Course/Major Decisions

Students valued having time for reflective moments, both formal and informal including meditations, reflections, and journaling. Students acknowledged that it was important to provide different experiences for reflection knowing that while some may appreciate a journaling activity, others may have a different way to meaningfully reflect. An area to continue to develop that was beneficial for those students who had the experience was the topic of discernment as it relates to selecting a major and course selection. Additionally, some students commented on how experiencing the Strong Interest Inventory, StrengthsQuest, or another tool like this aided in future professional development including choosing a career path.

“Once we went to the Career Center and took an interest test to see like what profession we probably like...Into my sophomore year I realized, like, I didn’t want to do what I thought I wanted to do and I went back and they still had my results and that is what led me to switch majors.”

Exposure to Baltimore & City Navigation

The excursions into Baltimore were an important part of the Messina experience in the first year as they helped students feel comfortable with exploring the city on their own beyond Messina. An area with this that was appreciated for groups that did this was an additional conversation about how to navigate the city on your own, specifically navigating public transportation and options for getting to Penn Station with conversations about the MARC train. Students appreciated those excursions to restaurants, neighborhoods, and attractions they typically may not get to on their own. Tied with this is a desire for trips that highlight what Baltimore has to offer beyond places like the Inner Harbor.

Life Skills

An area that students did not talk about experiencing within their Messina but in hindsight would have been helpful to experience were practical conversations and activities around life skills, including how to clean, basic cooking tips, doing laundry and other topics related to practical lifetime skills. Tied with this was a desire to have a focus on how to navigate troubling roommate situations and engaging in conversations with a roommate around expectations for living together.

Key Finding 2: Elements to Further Examine

The key areas below represent themes mentioned by students that further attention should be directed towards. In some instances, there were mixed feelings on a particular topic (ex. reduction of enrichment sessions) and overall students recommended more assessment occur of students currently in the program to see if perspectives have changed over time.

Advising Improvements

Students desired more training of core advisors to better familiarize themselves with how to advise students with intended majors in other academic disciplines. This was a common frustration of students in the focus groups. The specific issue mentioned was were core advisors who were unable to offer correct advising information or have knowledge of who to best

refer the student to for additional assistance in this area. In some cases, this led to students being set back later on in their academic experience here at Loyola. From the way students specifically described their experiences, this was not restricted to one particular professor or one particular class. Tied to this was also hope that advising conversations could be connected to the practice of discernment.

“My advising was centered around the courses I was going to take next, and not exactly what was next in my life... I know its early to discern about what you want to do with your life [but]... starting those conversations and those reflection topics would have been a really great help in my life.”

Course Offerings

An aspect of Messina students indicated as an area for change is to ensure that all Messina classes fulfill core requirements. While most Messina courses do count as core requirements, there are some that fall out of that category and for students taking part in these sections it sometimes led to being restricted on elective selections later on during their academic time at Loyola. Tied with the above area, there was the thought that if every course counted towards the core there may be less of an impact if your advisor was not as helpful for you. Another aspect of this that there was mixed perspectives about was whether or not courses should be in specific major areas (ex. biology or business) or if these types of courses should not be included. Some students were from the perspective that it is helpful to be with other students in your intended major but for others it would have been helpful to be with students outside of this group.

Enrichment Sessions

A number of students indicated a desire for reduced enrichment session offerings in the spring semester. Some of the rationale for this included that the enrichment session time conflicted with a course that they wanted to take and therefore could not, a feeling that enrichment was not as necessary

in the spring, or that meetings were too frequent. In the quote listed to the right, part of the burden described by the student in continuing Messina enrichment into the second semester is that this is a time when most students have already built their friendships with others, are applying to leadership opportunities, and are getting more involved on campus. Those suggesting

[Messina] “is a great way to ease a student into college but after the first semester it becomes a burden...it is a great way to get a student’s feet wet but I really think it should be stopped there so a student knows it is time to take their own initiative and shape their own experience.”

a reduced or non-existent spring enrichment still saw the value in a two semester Messina course. Other suggestions students had were ensuring that there was a bank of common topics every course had to experience during enrichment sessions or the development of more streamlined spring opportunities that every student takes part in. Students indicated that if there were to be a reduction in the quantity of enrichment sessions, then there should be a focus on using less enrichment sessions as a course

continuation. There was a feeling that particularly in the fall semester, enrichment sessions should be a mandatory experience for students.

Working Group Selection

Some students spoke about the need for recruiting faculty, mentors, and Evergreens that want to work within the program and are enthusiastic about the experience. It was clear from the discussion that some students had experiences with faculty who were not excited about Messina and in turn that lack of excitement translating to student experience. The same went for students that had Evergreens who were in their senior year and seemed to check out of the role in the spring semester. Another aspect of this that students picked up on was when a working group seemed to have a divide. This sometimes resulted in a lack of team support of each other in the context of the enrichment session.

Key Finding 3: Impact of Messina

The key areas below represent aspects of Messina that were of value to students during their experience. In some instances, these were areas of value that students have a desire to have more connections to while participating in Messina.

Community Development Through Participation

A common appreciation of the Messina experience were the relationships that were developed among classes. Several students who attended these focus groups were friends, roommates, and student leaders together because of the bonds formed in their Messina class or in living with each other in Messina housing during their first year.⁵ Often times for students struggling in the first year it was nice to have a group of welcome faces on campus.

These relationships were not just limited to student-to-student interactions but also between students and the relationship with the working group members. One was in which this experience had lasting impact beyond the first year was a general consensus that students felt more comfortable seeking out faculty for guidance or questions beyond the first year and that in some cases, they formed connections with their Messina faculty that lasted throughout the next three years on campus.

Core Classes and the Messina Themes

Students spoke about how the courses offered in Messina helped prepare for the academic rigor of the next four years. Additionally, the courses offered in Messina led to an appreciation of Core courses over the next four years. Several students commented that their Messina courses were among some of the favorite courses they took during their time at Loyola and that in some cases the Core courses led to a change in major or the addition of a minor. An area to continue to develop is using Messina to emphasize why the Core is in place and its importance.

“The focus on the theme in my class just as a whole was really strong and I think it really helped and guided all of my thinking throughout my first year...I think I approached each of my classes with a good mindset of Self and Other and it kind of helped me prepare me sophomore year to dive into some of the heavier topics like diversity and racial inequality that were happening in Baltimore.”

⁵ During the 2013-2014 academic year, if you were a student in Messina you lived in Flannery O’Connor Hall (“Messina Housing”) unless you specifically requested apartment-style living.

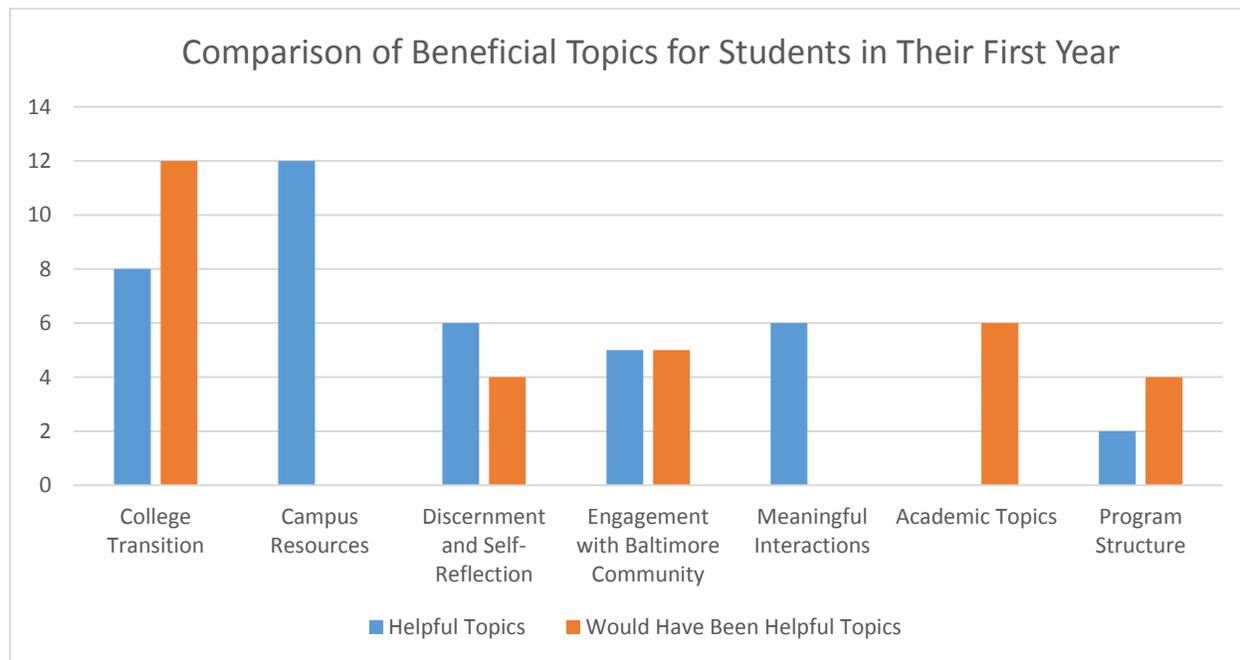
Tied with the course experience was the inclusion of Messina themes in all aspects of Messina. The students who were a part of classes that wove the theme into course and enrichment discussions appreciated the experience- particularly in times when there were ongoing connections to the theme. There was a general consensus that there are more opportunities to do that within Messina and that a stronger priority should be made around this for future students.

Focus Group Questions and Corresponding Collected Data⁶

Question 1

Looking back on your college experience, what topics were helpful or would have been helpful for you to experience during your first year at Loyola?

Student responses in regard to beneficial topics were categorized into six general areas: campus resources, college transition topics, discernment and self-reflection, meaningful interactions, engaging with the Baltimore community, program structure, and academic topics. There were some general overlaps for students in regard to these areas- specifically some topics that were indicated as being beneficial for the students that experienced them were also indicated that they would have been beneficial by other students in the group. The end of this section includes specific descriptions of topic elements that students talked about in the focus groups. The chart below provides a comparison of the beneficial and would have been beneficial areas.



Breakdown of topics that were helpful:

- Campus Resources (12) including:
 - services and locations of ALANA, Counseling Center, and The Study
 - conversations around going through housing selection, course selection, understanding how to use Moodle, and learning more about study abroad

⁶ The numbers in parentheses in this section represent how many students specifically spoke to this area during the focus group conversations.

- College Transition Topics (8) including:
 - stress management, time management
 - examining leadership opportunities and on-campus employment
 - interactions with others; specifically living with roommates, navigating roommate situations, and the perceptions vs. reality of college social life
- Discernment and Self Reflection (6) including:
 - exploring aspects of personal identity
 - personality tests including the Strong Interest Inventory, StrengthsQuest, and the Myers Brigg; specifically how the results aided in future major discernment
 - reflective moments including journaling
- Meaningful Interactions (6) including:
 - conversations and the relationships that were developed between the student and their Messina Faculty, Evergreen, or Mentor
 - how students quickly found and formed lasting relationships with students in their Messina class or in living together in a common residence hall
- Engaging With the Baltimore Community (5) including:
 - service experiences in Baltimore and experiences like the York Road corridor walk
 - getting around Baltimore
- Program Structure (2) including:
 - exposure to classes beyond intended major
 - connections to the Messina theme

Breakdown of topics that would have been helpful:

- College Transition Topics (12) including:
 - adjustment from being away from home
 - managing the financial aspects of Loyola
 - what to expect as a first generation college student
 - sustainability at Loyola
 - getting involved on campus, particularly beyond commonly promoted leadership positions
 - interactions with others; specifically living with roommates, navigating roommate situations
 - Green Dot training as a class
- Academic Topics (6) including:
 - paths after graduation, specifically insight on graduate school applications and considerations
 - exploring why students take the Core and the importance of the Core
 - external fellowships and scholarships, information from the Center for the Humanities
 - Honor Council session
 - incorporating the Messina themes, particularly in the context of the Messina class
- Engaging with the Baltimore Community (5) including:
 - service experiences in Baltimore and experiences like the York Road corridor walk
 - getting around Baltimore
- Discernment and Self Reflection (4) including:

- using the practice of discernment to help inform the course and major selection process
- more reflective moments
- exploring intersectionality of students, including weaving identity-based conversations in different sessions/ topics
- Program Structure (4) including:
 - using less enrichment sessions as a course continuation
 - as student listened to things other classes did in the context of responding to this question, a wish that their class had covered some of these topics

Question 2

In what ways did Messina prepare you for the rest of your college experience at Loyola?

- Meaningful Interactions (17) including:
 - friendships formed in the setting of the Messina class and Messina housing⁷
 - conversations and the relationships that were developed between the student and their Messina Faculty
 - led to more comfort in approaching faculty for the next 3 years
 - having a support network
- Discernment and Self Reflection (4) including:
 - course or conversations led to student changing major- process of being exposed to different topics not previously considered
 - helped with expanding self-confidence
 - enrichment provided time for reflection on the first year experience
- Program Structure (2) including:
 - courses led to an appreciation of the Core
 - both courses fulfilled major requirements
- Engaging with the Baltimore Community (2) including:
 - first time student participated in service
 - understanding the responsibility of now being a member of the community
- College Transition (6) including:
 - course helped to prepare student for academic rigor/ work load expectations for the next four years
 - helped with understanding Loyola's values
 - helped to become involved on campus
 - expanding beyond the Loyola bubble
 - introduction to supportive resources students would use for next 4 years (ex. career center, counseling center)
 - faculty fostered developing self-autonomy and independence
- Broaden Perspectives (4) including:
 - helped with understanding Loyola's values
 - drove cultural curiosity
 - understanding and appreciation of others life experiences

⁷ During the 2013-2014 academic year, if you were a student in Messina you lived in Flannery O'Connor Hall unless you specifically requested apartment-style living.

- strong class discussions with ideas being built on over time

Question 3

In what ways did Messina fall short in preparing you for the rest of your college experience at Loyola?

- Program Structure (26) including:
 - (12) course/ major advising by Messina Core Advisor. A common topic was that students found their advisor was uninformed of courses to recommend beyond their own department and could not refer to the student to a better resource.
 - need for discernment-related advising conversations
 - having all Messina pairings fulfill lower level Core requirements that every student needs so if you switch into a different major you are not behind or have taken a course you don't need
 - adding more course offerings in specific areas:
 - business- particularly a general business course beyond statistics or economics
 - biology or chemistry
 - using less enrichment sessions as a course continuation
 - suggestion to have mentor and Evergreen take primary lead on enrichment session planning
 - having more consistency about the topics each Messina should cover in enrichment sessions
 - more suggestions of what to cover during enrichment should be solicited from the students
 - enrichment sessions were not helpful
 - having set spring semester pairings and enrichments made scheduling classes more difficult
 - possible suggestion is having all enrichment sessions scheduled for the same date and time for every class so every first year is in it at once
- Broaden Perspectives (3) including:
 - more consistent and ongoing incorporation of topics related to diverse perspectives, including diversity and social justice
 - student felt like they were the diversity for their group
- Hindered Meaningful Interactions (1) including:
 - formed inappropriate relationships- ex. comparison of faculty to "mom"
- College Transition (1) including:
 - more discussions about being away from home
- Engaging with the Baltimore Community (2) including:
 - offering a service experience, possibly related to the course or theme
 - the description of York Road- and with this a desire for more activities that promoted an understanding of others rather than saving others
- Discernment and Self Reflection (1) including:
 - consistent forced journaling activities- made it feel like something you did not want to do on your own
- Other (3) including:
 - having a Messina-like experience over the next 4 years. Possible topics may include:

- moving on after doing study abroad
- next steps beyond graduation
- money management
- how to live beyond college
- course (not enrichment) felt like busy work
- more opportunities at Loyola in general to look at diversity beyond an anachronistic way

Question 4

As soon to be Loyola alumni, what are your hopes for how future first year students experience Messina?

- Program Structure (25) including:
 - Making Messina a one semester experience (6)
 - Include more streamlined experiences that everyone take part in
 - Possibly create different options in the spring semester
 - Still keep Messina two academic sections but only fall enrichment
 - It is disappointing when you can't keep your Messina spring class because enrichment conflicts with a non-Messina class you need to take
 - Keep Messina two semesters
 - Make enrichment sessions mandatory to attend
 - Definitely in the spring semester
 - Keep enrichment sessions but reduce amounts of meetings
 - Allow more student choice in choosing which Messina classes to take
 - Losing electives as a result of Messina is tough
 - Ensure that faculty in Messina are enthusiastic about the program (4)
 - Disengaged professors negatively affect the experience
 - Commitment among the faculty, mentor and Evergreen of supporting each other- attending all enrichment sessions together even if not taking the lead on a topic
 - Enrichment topics:
 - Ensuring every group takes a few trips together
 - Particularly to meaningful areas (ex. not the aquarium/Inner Harbor)
 - Guides on how to get around Baltimore
 - Covering sessions on life skills (including cooking, housekeeping, etc.)
 - Common topics that everyone experiences regardless of class
- Meaningful Interactions (19):
 - Your Messina peers will be some of your best friends the next four years
 - Instructors should do more to foster cohesiveness among groups (students in groups that were not connecting)
 - That you will have great Evergreens, Mentors, and Faculty- it made for a great experience
 - Hope you appreciate the people you are meeting through Messina
 - Being open to the experience and opening up within your class
 - Your group will give you people you will recognize on campus
 - The experience and people can provide a distraction from feelings of homesick
 - When you have an Evergreen that is checked out it can negatively impact the group
 - Group dynamics can really be a matter of luck- good to keep in mind

- Other Observations (13):
 - At the time their class was in Messina, it was a program to opt into but now it is mandatory.
 - Hope Messina becomes a cultural thing at Loyola- it is just what you do
 - Messina was the biggest thing student did at Loyola
 - Have something that builds off of the Messina experience into future years
 - It may be great for first years to hear from current seniors what they learned from being a part of Messina to show the impact (similar to alumni realizing after they leave Loyola how the Core was a benefit to them)
 - Some students are more independent and don't need Messina, maybe make it an optional experience
 - Provide an accurate description of what to expect out of Messina at Admission events- the description was different than the reality
- Advice (6):
 - Experience all of Loyola- the paths where you find your fit in the first year impact you as a student and human
 - Balance your experience with both a focus on building a sense of community and your academics
 - You are not alone here
 - Messina helped to calm fear of coming to college
 - The classes are difficult but you can form great study groups
 - As a college student you should take on the responsibility of taking a mature approach to things, seeking answers on your own
- Discernment or Self Reflection (1):
 - You will grow as a person in Messina

Question 5

Are there any final thoughts you would like to share about Messina?

- Full year being in Messina was good in that you are with a group of the same peers for the entire year
- The trips into Baltimore built into Messina led to personal comfort in exploring the city on own beyond the first year
- Peers in Messina class were an incredibly diverse group which helped in student's first year but has gone onto work with a group with more similarities and they connected as well
- Possibly consider Messina excursions around things/topics that students are excited about
- It is important that all Messina pairings have both classes as Core classes
 - Helpful for students to take classes that aren't connected to their intended major
 - There is a disadvantage when students take their Messina class is a major course- you don't expand your perspectives
- It is important to emphasize and explain Messina at orientation- possibly including a panel of faculty/ mentors/ Evergreens
- It is important to allow for time to have conversations about the world and being present to each other

- Continue to host events like this or collect other assessment data from current students to see what is working and what is not within Messina
- Good experience
- Messina housing was great- particularly the conversations that occurred in the hall
- Would be good to incorporate the themes more into the course pairings

Experiencing the Messina Learning Outcomes

A final part of this study was to understand the extent to which students experienced the Messina Learning Outcomes in their first year. Given that Messina Learning Outcomes are tied directly to the undergraduate learning aims, students were also provided the opportunity to indicate which year of their undergraduate experience they felt as though they also strongly experienced this learning outcome. Please see Appendix B for the chart with their complete results.

Outcomes related to Critical Understanding, Connections to the Loyola Community, and Integrated Learning were ranked as being experienced the most in the first year, while Jesuit Mission and Values was an area experienced the least in the first year.

Junior year was reported as a time when students were more strongly experiencing a connection to Jesuit Mission and Values and Connection to Loyola Community.

The coordinator recognizes that a limitation of this activity was that individual student responses were not collected- specifically, we cannot identify the top 3 learning outcomes a particular person experienced the most in their first year and when they specifically would have experienced those learning outcomes. This is why that although this information is presented here it should be taken only as a possible starting point for developing a different set of focus group questions to run with seniors in future years and not as a standalone data set.

Future Recommendations

Having seniors reflect back on their first year experience provided valuable insights into those aspects of Messina and the first year experience, both positive and negative, that have stuck with them over the course of their four years at Loyola. In some instances, areas described by students cover things that have already been changed since they were a part of the program, i.e. how Messina is marketed to incoming first years. Seniors seemed to recognize some of the challenges that a universal experience may pose, i.e. having students a part of the program that don't want to be there, but agree that the experience, particularly in the first semester, is beneficial to all first-year students.

Given that the Class of 2018 would have been the 2/3 of first year students enrolled in Messina it would be helpful to conduct a similar focus group activity next year and the following year with seniors. Aspects such as the relationships formed in Messina were consistent with the survey the class of 2017 completed at the end of their first year within Messina. However, aspects that delved into an appreciation and desire for more conversations related to identity, diversity, the Messina themes, and the benefit of the core were new perspectives that seemed to have developed over time.

This compilation of focus group data should be used to inform future Messina trainings, conversations with other offices, and can be used to spur future collaborative efforts. It would be helpful to share this

report with offices such as Student Life or Student Activities as it may help to provide a good starting point on generating possible programs or initiatives when programming for first-year students.

References

Eliot and Associates. (2005). Guidelines for Conducting a Focus Group. Retrieved May 14, 2017, from https://assessment.trinity.duke.edu/documents/How_to_Conduct_a_Focus_Group.pdf

Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Looking back on your college experience, what topics were helpful or would have been helpful for you to experience during your first year at Loyola?
2. In what ways did Messina prepare you for the rest of your college experience at Loyola?
3. In what ways did Messina fall short in preparing you for the rest of your college experience at Loyola?
4. As soon to be Loyola alumni, what are your hopes for how future first year students experience Messina?
5. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share about Messina?

Appendix B: Learning Outcomes Poster Assessment

Directions: This sheet lists the Learning Outcomes for Messina. Read through each Learning Outcome, and then do the following:

- Put a red, pink, or yellow sticker to the right of up to 3 outcomes you think you experienced the most in Messina as a first year
- Put a blue or green sticker to the right of the 2 outcomes you think you experienced the least or did not experience by participating in Messina during your first year
- If you experienced this value at a different point during your four years, write the year it happened: **FY** for first year, **2Y** for sophomore year, **J** for junior year, **SY** for senior year

Learning Outcome Area	Learning Outcome	Experienced the Most	Experienced the Least	Year: FY, 2Y, J, or SY
<i>Jesuit Mission and Values</i>	Develop habits of discernment and reflection in the Ignatian tradition.	8	13	FY: 7 2Y: 5 J: 5 SY: 3
<i>Jesuit Mission and Values</i>	Explore and articulate values and principles involved in their personal decision-making.	5	13	FY: 4 2Y: 4 J: 7 SY: 2
<i>Critical Understanding</i>	Develop habits of reading, writing and intellectual conversation that support academic excellence and engagement.	17	1	FY: 5 2Y: 4 J: 4 SY: 5
<i>Critical Understanding</i>	Demonstrate increased knowledge and use of campus resources that aid critical thinking.	10	7	FY: 4 2Y: 6 J: 5 SY: 5
<i>Connections to Loyola Community</i>	Establish healthy, mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with others including faculty, administrators, staff and peers.	19	5	FY: 5 2Y: 5 J: 7 SY: 5
<i>Connections to Loyola Community</i>	Demonstrate a sense of belonging to the community at Loyola University both in and out of the classroom.	16	6	FY: 4 2Y: 7 J: 7 SY: 6
<i>Integrated Learning</i>	Integrate multiple sources of knowledge gained through various disciplinary lenses, texts, instruction, out of class experiences and personal reflection to offer a perspective on the interdisciplinary theme of the community.	15	5	FY: 4 2Y: 5 J: 6 SY: 5

Appendix C: Messina 2013 to Now

Since the 2012-2013 academic year⁸, there have been a number of changes that have occurred within Messina that are important to acknowledge. Below is a list of these changes. Please contact [Messina](#) for more information about any of these elements.

- More robust [Module](#) offerings
- Development of a full year of [Common Text events/ programs](#)
- Increased partnerships with campus partners in supporting campus events and initiatives
- [Class Dean](#) model
- Increased recommendations of appropriate topics to cover connected to the first year transition to college and resources to help with facilitating these areas
- Stronger connections between Evergreens and Resident Assistants working with first-year students
- Increased collection of data to understand how our learning outcomes are being achieved

⁸ 2012-2013 was the year of the Messina Honors pilot, one year before the first 1/3 of first-year students were a part of Messina.