
■ **2006-2007 Collegium Student Focus Group
and Faculty Feedback Report**

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LOYOLA
COLLEGE IN MARYLAND

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This report prepared by The Office of First-Year Research
using data collected in student focus groups and from faculty written feedback.

2006-2007 Collegium Student Focus Group and Faculty Feedback Report

Introduction

The Collegium Program is an optional living-learning community for first-year students at Loyola College. Students enrolled in the program live with each other on the same floor of Campion Tower. In their first semester, groups of students on the floor are co-enrolled in two academic classes and a First-Year Experience (FE 100) course. In 2006-2007 there were three Collegium course pairings available to students: a Biology/Chemistry pairing, a Philosophy/Music pairing, and a Philosophy/History pairing. The goal of the Collegium Program is to build a social and academic community for students allowing them to feel "at home" quickly when they arrive at Loyola.

In 2006-2007, there were 63 students (7% of the incoming class) who participated in Collegium and six faculty who taught the Collegium courses. Overall, 60% of the first-year students participated in one of Loyola's four first-year programs.

In order to assess how well the first-year programs are functioning and what improvements could be made, focus group discussions were conducted with students in each of the programs. In addition, faculty and instructors teaching in the programs were emailed a set of questions about their experiences in the programs and asked for written feedback. This report provides results from the study on Collegium students and faculty only. Results from the Alpha, FE 100, and Honors studies can be found in separate reports available from the Office of First-Year Research.

Methodology

The feedback from the Collegium students was collected by holding a discussion group towards the end of the first semester. The goal was to have between 8 and 10 participants. To achieve this objective, 40 individuals were invited via email (See Appendix A for a sample invitation). Invitees were selected randomly from all Class of 2010 Collegium students.

The focus group was planned for December 4th from 5:00 to 6:30. Invitees were notified that dinner and two movie tickets would be provided to all participants. Eleven students indicated that they would participate but only seven students attended the discussion. The focus group was facilitated by Jennifer Duffy Annulis, Coordinator of First-Year Research and Chinara Brown, Administrative Assistant. When students arrived at the focus group, they helped themselves to dinner and introductions were made. It was explained that there were no right or wrong answers and that students should feel free to voice their opinions. It was explained that the discussion would be taped for purposes of writing the report only; all comments would remain anonymous and no one else would listen to the tape. (See Appendix B for the discussion guide.)

Faculty feedback about the Collegium program was collected via email. It was decided that trying to hold a discussion group for faculty was too difficult due to the small number in the group and past history of scheduling difficulties. Faculty were sent an invitation from Dr. Ilona McGuinness, Dean of First-Year Students and Academic Services, and Jennifer Duffy Annulis, asking them to send in their responses to a select number of questions about their experience in the program (see Appendix C). They were given nine days to respond. Faculty were assured that their written comments would be kept confidential. They had the option to mail in their comments anonymously if they did not

feel comfortable using email to submit their replies. Four of the six Collegium faculty provided feedback.

Executive Summary

Expectations and Outcomes

- ◆ Overall, students feel that Collegium provides an atmosphere that allows them to meet people and study in a cooperative environment.
- ◆ Faculty feel that Collegium is successful at creating a sense of cohesiveness for first-year students; however, it comes at a price. Students are sometimes more interested in one another than the course material and they may not demonstrate independent thinking.

Characteristics of the Collegium students

- ◆ Faculty described their students in various ways: less mature and more prone to a “groupthink” mentality, but also less anxious in the classroom.

FE 100 and Collegium

- ◆ The FE 100 component is effective in introducing campus resources and getting students off campus. Students did, however, indicate that they would like to take FE with a group other than those in their Collegium course pairing.

The Jesuit Tradition

- ◆ Students expressed mixed experiences and ideas when discussing the Jesuit tradition at Loyola and in the Collegium program. Some students simply equated religion and priests with “Jesuit-ness,” while others saw Jesuit ideals reflected in the Core and in classes which require critical thinking.

Advising

- ◆ Some students described good relationships with their Collegium professors/advisors and others did not. The quality of the relationship seems to depend on the individual person more than the fact that the professor is involved in Collegium.
- ◆ Being the advisor to their students was generally described in a positive way by faculty, with one professor not really understanding his role as a Collegium advisor.

Activities and Social Experiences

- ◆ Students noted that most Collegium activities are floor-based, not classroom-based. At the same time, they indicated that there were no joint programs with Collegium professors and the Collegium R.A.s.
- ◆ Opinions were mixed as to whether Collegium helped students in their transition to college life. While most agreed that it did help them meet people on their floor, it didn't help them meet people from other parts of campus. They did, however, acknowledge that FE 100 contributed to helping them feel connected.
- ◆ Speaking about Loyola College in general, students wish there were more convenient/less expensive ways to get off campus.

New Ideas

- ◆ Students thought that requiring a first-year program would be acceptable, but that there should be a variety of programs for students to choose from.

Detailed Findings

Expectations and Outcomes

Participants associated Collegium with a broad range of people, nicer dorms, and ease of getting together with others due to the living and learning components. One person said it's almost "like a club or organization." Another student said it is a good program for first-year students to join because it helps them meet people and study more because there are simply "lots of people to study with."

For the most part, students seemed to agree that the program met their expectations. It did help them meet new people and it gave them a cooperative rather than a competitive atmosphere in which to learn. Two of the four professors who responded indicated that the program is meeting expectations as far as the students having a sense of community and cohesiveness. But they noted some unintended consequences with this. One said, "...it seems that the students' focus is on their lives *outside* of class, as opposed to the subject *of* the class." Another said, "...in my view the 'cohesion' was bought at the price of academic independence and thought."

The reasons for choosing the Collegium program were varied. One person thought that the program was a requirement. Another joined because her mother thought she'd need help in Chemistry because she had struggled with it in high school. Others signed up for social reasons.

Students were asked if there were academic benefits to being in the program. Some students felt the living space was conducive to learning; they believed that apartment living was more conducive to studying than traditional dorms. One student said the nice dorm atmosphere helped lessen stress so the students can perform well academically. Others said studying in groups on the floor was helpful. When studying together they teach each other. They feel they experience a more cooperative atmosphere than students in other programs like Honors probably experience.

Characteristics of the Collegium Students

In speaking about their Collegium students, three of the professors saw either no difference from other first-year students or a somewhat negative difference. One observed that "the Collegium students seem much less mature" and that "...there is a tendency for them to 'perform' for one another." Another spoke of the 'groupthink' mentality that the students have, and yet another observed no difference. On the other hand, one professor observed that the level of comfort students in Collegium have with one another made them less anxious in the classroom and more likely to ask questions.

FE 100 and Collegium

Students discussed their experience with the FE 100 component of Collegium. They spoke positively about their instructors and the class outings. One student said he really liked the course because it provided all the information one needs when new to the campus. It was suggested by several students, however, that it would have been nice to be in an FE 100 class with students other than the ones from the Collegium floor or at least with Collegium students in other class pairings instead of their own. Two students mentioned a particular incident in which a heated discussion in their FE 100 class was brought back to their apartment because three floor mates were in the class together. It seems that sometimes being in class with people on the floor can make one more open, but on other occasions it can hinder a person from saying the things he/she wants to. For example, one of the FE topics is roommate problems. A student commented that it's

quite difficult to talk about this openly when roommates are in the class together. A few students wished FE 100 would continue into the spring.

The Jesuit Tradition

A discussion about how the Jesuit tradition was woven into their Collegium/FE 100 experience or into their experience at Loyola in general revealed mixed experiences and ideas. Some of the students seemed to equate “Jesuit” with “religion.” One student said she had never really been around religion before, but it’s really “not that much” at Loyola so she feels comfortable here. Students also focused on the Jesuits on campus, talking about having taken a tour of the Jesuit residence and hearing a presentation about the Jesuits in FE 100. A couple of students recognized the Jesuit tradition through the Core and through critical thinking in their classes. One student in particular mentioned he had gone to a Jesuit high school, so he knew what he wanted in a college and that’s what he’s gotten so far at Loyola. He mentioned one Collegium professor in particular who has really challenged him to think and grow.

Advising

The students in Collegium have either one of their Collegium professors or their faculty FE instructor as their advisor. Overall, students feel it’s good to have one’s professor as one’s advisor because of accessibility. It guarantees a person will see the advisor every week. About half the students said they loved their advisors and that they were helpful and knowledgeable. Two of the four professors who responded said that the advising relationship with the Collegium students was generally a positive thing. They said they got to know their students better or felt more personally invested and interested in their college success.

One student pointed out that being comfortable with one’s classmates (as Collegium students are) helps a person to feel comfortable with his/her professor as well. Another student indicated that having his FE instructor as his advisor worked well because the class grade doesn’t get in the way of the relationship.

A few students, however, did not have a good an experience with their advisor. They were quick to say that they felt their experience had more to do with the faculty member as a person than it had to do with their Collegium affiliation. Overall, when asked if their relationship is different with their Collegium professors than their other professors, everyone said it depends on the professor. One student pointed out that, “I don’t even think they [the Collegium professors] know if we’re in Collegium or we’re just in that class.” One faculty member made a similar comment saying that he/she “never totally understood my specific role and function as a core advisor for Collegium students.” Another professor indicated that while the advising is a blessing, he/she sometimes gets to know non-Collegium students better as their conversations spring from common interests and not from necessity.

Activities and Social Experiences

A common theme that emerged was that students experience Collegium as a “floor-based” not a “class-based” program. One person said, “Collegium is the floor.” Without the living component, you wouldn’t really have a Collegium program. One challenge pointed out by a faculty member was the difficulty of having any in-class Collegium activities because of the large number of non-Collegium students in the same class.

Every activity that was mentioned, with the exception of one, was organized by a Collegium Resident Assistant (R.A.), rather than a Collegium professor. Activities with the floor that were mentioned were a “cheese and sparkling grape juice party” on the roof, a breakfast, a movie, and a survey with the Career Center. Students said attendance varies as scheduling allows. One student mentioned that his professor invited everyone in the class (even the non-Collegium students) to go to dinner. He got the impression from this professor that communication with the Collegium professors and R.A.s might not be happening the way it has in the past.

When talking about activities, many of the students noted how difficult and expensive it is to get off campus. They spoke of their experiences with cabs, the Colleetown shuttle, and other forms of public transportation. None were all that positive. One student said that the difficulty for first-year students to get off campus is all the more reason for FE 100 instructors to make sure they set up off-campus outings for the students. One student, however, said she never has a problem finding things to do, and she pointed out that Student Activities always has something going on for students.

Students were asked whether being a part of Collegium helped them to feel connected at Loyola. Responses were mixed. A few thought Collegium was great for meeting people on the floor. They pointed out that other programs like Alpha have so many sections and the students don’t all live together so they aren’t as close. Still, students felt that Collegium was not so great for meeting people from different parts of campus. A couple of students pointed out that there is a physical and social division between the East and West sides of campus that they wish did not exist. Another student said it’s a shame that Loyola doesn’t have one central area, like a student union, where everyone meets. He noted that there are lots of smaller places to meet; everything is just so very spread out. One student said she actually felt more connected to Loyola as a whole when she was in her non-Collegium classes.

They were asked about whether FE 100 helped them feel connected. For the most part responses were positive. One student said “If there was an FE 100 club, I’d join it.” They felt it was very convenient for getting all the campus information one would need to adjust. A couple of students mentioned that they had done community service through FE 100, but no one mentioned any kind of community service through Collegium.

New Ideas

The group discussed whether a first-year program should be mandatory for Loyola students. Most agreed that since there are so many first-year programs available to choose from, making one mandatory would be acceptable. A few students mentioned that they had friends who wished they had selected a first-year program. It was pointed out, though, that it is not desirable to have students in one’s class who don’t want to be there.

One faculty member suggested having smaller groups of Collegium students (about 8) integrated into regular core classes. He/she felt this would prevent the community from dominating the class and it would allow participants to observe upper-class students’ approach to college-level learning.

Summary

When asked for the best aspects of participating in the Collegium program all the students in the discussion group mentioned the living community. Most people indicated that having classes with and/or studying with the people on the floor is a positive aspect

of the program. Another commonly cited benefit to participating in Collegium was going on outings with the FE 100 class.

One of the most commonly cited negative aspects of the program was seeing too much of the same people. In many cases, students specifically indicated that it would be better to be in their FE 100 classes with a different group of students. One student explicitly said, "You are exposed to the very same people in 3 out of 6 classes. At least mix up the FE class rosters."

It seems clear that faculty have mixed feelings about Collegium. While it may be a good program for student cohesiveness, it might not be ideal when it comes to academics. As one faculty observed, the class is "secondary" to the sense of community.

Faculty also had varying opinions about their relationships with the students. While some had positive things to say about being an advisor, one didn't understand his/her role as advisor, and another thought he/she sometimes forms better relationships with other students.

Appendix A: Collegium Focus Group Invitation

Dear Name,

The College is interested in what students think about their experiences in the Collegium program. As your first semester comes to a close, we are hoping that you will help us by sharing your views of the program.

The Office of First-Year Research is holding a discussion group from 5:00 to 6:30 on Monday, December 4th in Champion Tower 115. You've been selected as one of only a small group of students who are being asked to attend.

We are giving a gift of two free movie tickets to each student who participates, and we will also provide pizza and refreshments during the discussion.

This is an excellent chance to let your voice be heard at Loyola. Feedback about your experiences as a Collegium student will help the College know how to improve the program for future students. Please join us. Space in the group is limited to 10 students, so please reserve your space quickly. You can reserve your space in the group by replying to this email.

Thank you. We look forward to seeing you on the 4th.

Appendix B: Collegium Student Focus Group Discussion Guide

- I. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME (5 min)
 - a. Who we are
 - b. Why we asked you here tonight
 - i. Focus on Collegium program
 - c. What is a focus group and ground rules
 - i. Enjoy the food
 - ii. Opinions, no right/wrong answers
 - iii. Tape recording (no full names used)

- II. SELF-INTRODUCTIONS (3 min)
 - a. Which Collegium classes they are in
 - b. Where they're from

- III. EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES (20 min)
 - a. We're new to Loyola. What would you want to tell us about the Collegium program? How has the Program been this semester?
 - b. What were your expectations of the Collegium Program?
 - i. Did the Program meet those expectations?
 - ii. Has participating in the Collegium Program helped you with other courses? How?
 - iii. Describe the influence Collegium had on your academic performance this semester. Writing? Critical thinking/analytical skills? Discussion skills?
 - c. Why did you decide to register for the Collegium Program? Why Collegium and not one of the other first-year programs?
 - d. Do you feel like the Jesuit tradition was woven into your Collegium experience? How about your experience at Loyola in general?
 - e. Ask follow-up questions about FE 100

- IV. FACULTY/ADVISORS (15 min)
 - a. Let's talk about your Collegium professors for a few minutes. How would you describe your relationship with your Collegium professors?
 - i. Compare this relationship to your relationships with non-Collegium professors. Do you think the relationship was different than your non-Collegium friends' relationships with their professors?
 - b. Tell us about your advising experience.
 - c. Tell us about your relationship with your FE 100 instructors.

- V. ACTIVITIES/SOCIAL (15 min)
 - a. What types of Collegium activities did you participate in outside of the classroom? Which were the most meaningful? Which were not so meaningful? Why?
 - i. Community service (if not already mentioned)
 - b. Did Collegium influence your transition to college life here? Do you think this transition would have been different if you hadn't been in Collegium?
 - i. Did the Collegium program help you feel "connected" at Loyola? Did it help you make connections with friends, the college, the larger community, etc.?
 - c. Are there benefits to living on the Collegium floor? What are they?
 - i. Has living on the same floor contributed to your academic experience?
 - d. Tell us about FE 100's influence on your transition to college life.

VI. CLOSING (15 min)

- a. What are your thoughts about making a first-year program required for all first-year students?
- b. When you talk with friends or relatives who are at other schools, what do you hear about that you would like to see at Loyola College?
- c. Now, before you leave, I want you to do one last thing. Write down for me the best and worst aspects of the Collegium program. Imagine you could let those involved in the program know what should be kept as is and what should be changed and write those things down.

Appendix C: Collegium Faculty Questions

Dear Collegium Faculty Name,

As a faculty member teaching a Collegium course, your feedback is important as we plan for a new cohort of Collegium students next year. In the past we've attempted to gather faculty together for group discussions about the program but we found that, because of challenges with scheduling and availability, we were only hearing from a small segment of the faculty. This year, in an effort to hear from all of the Collegium faculty, we'd like to get your written feedback on a few focused questions. You can simply reply to this email with your comments. Responses will remain confidential and no responses will be linked with any names. If you would prefer to submit your feedback anonymously, you can print your responses and send them via campus mail to Jen Annulis, Coordinator of First-Year Research, in Xavier Hall 105a.

Your comments to the following questions will be combined with the feedback that we have received from Collegium students during focus groups and will be used for program planning to ensure that the Collegium program is a distinctive high-quality, first-year experience for Loyola students. Thus, your participation is extremely important to us.

1. In what ways is the Collegium program meeting or not meeting the expectations that you have as a faculty member teaching in the program?
2. How would you describe the Collegium students in your class relative to non-Collegium first-year students you may know? Do you notice a different level of intellectual growth in your Collegium students as compared to students you teach in other first-year courses?
3. In what ways, if any, is your relationship with the Collegium students you teach and advise different from your relationships with other first-year students?
4. In your conversations with colleagues at other institutions, have you learned about aspects of their first-year programs that Loyola should consider adopting?

Please submit your responses no later than Friday, March 23rd.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either one of us.

Sincerely,

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