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■ **2008-2009 FE 100 Student Focus Group  
and Instructor Feedback Report**

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**LOYOLA**  
COLLEGE IN MARYLAND

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This report was prepared by the Office of First-Year Research, in the Office of Institutional Research, using data collected in two student focus groups and from faculty written feedback.

## 2008-2009 FE 100 Student Focus Group and Instructor Feedback Report

### Introduction

The FE 100 course at Loyola College is designed as an extended orientation course to help students transition to college. Students elect to participate in this one-credit course. The course meets once a week and involves off-campus outings, in-class discussions, guest speakers, and workshops. Course topics touch upon student leadership, time management, diversity, Jesuit spirituality and education, and choosing a major among others. The course is taught by a three-person instructor team: one faculty member, one administrator, and one upper-class student instructor. While there are usually a few short writing assignments required over the semester, grades are not assigned; the course is designed as a pass/fail course.

In 2008, there were 171 students (16% of the incoming class) who participated in the FE 100 program; this does not include the 65 students who engaged in Collegium. Of the 171 students who engaged in FE 100 only, 29 of these students were in the Leadership Experience living-learning community.<sup>1</sup> Seventeen sections of FE 100 were offered in fall 2008.

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 to a group of students who did not participate in one of the four programs and pursued the general academic program. In addition, faculty and instructors teaching in the programs were e-mailed a set of questions about their experiences in the programs and asked for written feedback. This report provides results from the study on FE 100 students and instructors only. Results from the Alpha, Collegium, Honors, and General studies can be found in separate reports available from the Office of First-Year Research, part of the Office of Institutional Research.<sup>2</sup>

### Methodology

Beginning of fall 2008, students had the option of to participate in a living-learning community known as FE 100 Leadership Experience. An intended goal of the FE 100 Leadership Experience is to “identify, develop, and encourage leadership among members of the first year class while living together in community.”<sup>3</sup> Students reside together on the third floor of Flannery O’Connor Hall and enroll in an FE 100 course that has a focus on leadership in its curriculum. Additionally, students engage in activities outside of class that are developed and facilitated by their FE instructors and the resident assistant (R.A.) assigned to the community.<sup>3</sup>

FE 100 students can have two different experiences by nature of engaging in the living-learning community or not, therefore two discussion groups were formed. The fall focus group comprised students who were engaged only in FE 100 whereas the spring focus group comprised students who took FE 100 in the fall and were engaged in the Leadership Experience living-learning community too. The goal was to have between 8 and 10 participants at each meeting. For the FE 100 discussion group, four sets of 25 students were randomly selected from the pool of eligible students and invited via e-mail

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<sup>1</sup> There are 11 students who are not in FE 100 who are members of the Leadership Experience living-learning community. These students were not included in the population from which we sampled since we were interested in those students who engaged in both FE 100 and the living-learning community.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.loyola.edu/IR/Students/First-Year%20Research/First-Year%20Research%20Tools>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.loyola.edu/fyp/fe100\\_moreinfo.html](http://www.loyola.edu/fyp/fe100_moreinfo.html) Accessed May 7, 2008

to the session. For the FE 100 Leadership Experience discussion group, one group of 25 students was randomly selected and invited (See Appendix A for a sample invitation). Invitees were selected randomly from all Class of 2012 FE 100 students who were not participating in the Educational Intentionality Study that began fall 2008.<sup>1</sup>

The focus groups were held on December 8<sup>th</sup> (FE 100 only) and February 18<sup>th</sup> (FE 100 Leadership Experience) from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. in the fourth floor conference room of Flannery O'Connor Hall. Invitees were notified that dinner and two movie tickets would be provided to all participants. For the FE 100 focus group, the six students who responded to the invitation attended the discussion. For the FE 100 Leadership Experience, 15 accepted the invitation and seven attended the discussion. The focus groups were facilitated by Shannon Tinney, Associate Director and Coordinator of First-Year and Retention Studies in the Office of Institutional Research. Students were greeted upon arrival, offered to help themselves to dinner, and invited to get comfortable. Introductions were made. The facilitator explained the role of the Office of Institutional Research, as well as the nature of a focus group. 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 digitally recorded for purposes of writing the report only and that first names should be used during the discussion. Students were informed that all comments would remain anonymous by using fictitious names in the reports and that no one besides the primary investigators would listen to the recording. (See Appendix B and Appendix C for discussion guides.)

The FE 100 group comprised all women with four out of the six participants enrolled in a section of FE 100 reserved for STEM scholarship recipients.<sup>2</sup> The group represented three different FE 100 sections. One of the six participants was a commuting student. This group will be referred to as the "FE 100" group in this report. The FE 100 Leadership Experience discussion group included four women and three men, and represented three different FE 100 sections. This group will be referred to as the "FE 100 Leadership" group in this report.

Instructor feedback about the FE 100 program was collected through an e-mailed questionnaire. Instructors were sent an invitation from Dr. Ilona McGuinness, Dean of First-Year Students and Academic Services, and Shannon Tinney, asking them to send in their responses to a select number of questions about their experience in the program (see Appendix D). Student instructors were offered an incentive of two free movie tickets for their participation. All instructors were e-mailed the questionnaire before winter break on December 22, 2008. Three reminders were sent to faculty members to encourage participation.<sup>3</sup> All instructors were given a month to respond (January 23, 2009), and they 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 e-mail to submit their replies. Twelve faculty members (71%), eight administrators (47%), and 13 student instructors provided feedback (76%).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Students participating in the panel study on Educational Intentionality at Loyola College were excluded because they are being asked similar types of questions during their interviews. Also, we desired as diverse a group of respondents as possible without overlap between the two research efforts.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.loyola.edu/STEMscholarships/> Accessed March 30, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Reminders were sent on January 7<sup>th</sup>, January 13<sup>th</sup>, and January 20<sup>th</sup> of 2009.

<sup>4</sup> The percentages represent response rates for each instructor type.

## Executive Summary

### *Motivations and Intentions*

- ◆ Students chose FE because of its non-academic, “laid back” nature and thought it would help them adjust to a new environment by meeting people, getting oriented to the campus, and helping them to explore Baltimore.
- ◆ FE 100 was desirable to students who wanted to continue engaging in community service since it is part of the curriculum.

### *FE 100 Leadership Experience*

- ◆ Participants engaged in this community because they wanted to live with others who had similar interests and who would take initiative to get involved on campus.
- ◆ The group described their floor as a tight-knit community and as a family. Participants studied together and supported each other as they sought out opportunities to get involved on campus and apply for leadership positions.
- ◆ Regarding the programmatic components attached to the Leadership Experience floor, participants described how it started off on shaky footing but were hopeful that it was on the right track. They looked forward to the upcoming opportunities to learn about leadership.

### *Expectations and Outcomes*

- ◆ Participants expected FE 100 to help them get comfortable with the college and assist in academic and social transitions.
- ◆ Participants affiliated with the STEM scholars program and the FE 100 Leadership Experience living-learning community expected to meet like-minded students who shared their interests.
- ◆ Exercises and other classroom discussions demonstrated to students that they were going through similar ups and downs—this was reassuring to them.
- ◆ While not an expectation of all, participants liked that resources “came to them” and, in some cases, this introduction made it easier to take advantage of services later on.
- ◆ Participants had mixed sentiments about the efficacy of time management sessions. Some found the information a reiteration of what they already knew, while others used lessons learned to inform their schedules and balance schoolwork and activities.
- ◆ FE 100 participants from both groups learned how to engage with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom, whether it was feeling more confident about speaking up in class or feeling better prepared to address faculty with their concerns.

### *Characteristics of the FE 100 Students*

- ◆ Instructors’ descriptions of their FE 100 classes demonstrated that students were interested in getting to know each other and that grew over time.
- ◆ Several instructors perceived students becoming more intellectually and socially mature over time with regards to being more informed about issues, being more willing to engage in discussion, and being more adept at offering arguments in class debates.

- ◆ Instructors noted areas where students needed to improve, including being more respectful and engaged in discussions with invited speakers, and learning to think for themselves and being confident to voice their opinions instead of engaging in groupthink behavior.

#### *FE 100 Topics – Instructor Comments*

- ◆ There was a tension between recognizing that while additional topics could be useful to students, there are time constraints. There was a concern about trade-offs between breadth and depth of the curriculum.
- ◆ One instructor suggested that having consistent curriculum across sections would enable students to have a similar experience.
- ◆ A set of topics emerged around campus climate and community issues, including what it means to live in a community and what constitutes a good community member; conflict resolution & mediation skills in the classroom and residence halls; diversity and social justice issues; and what it means to have “civil” communications, both face-to-face and online.

#### *The Jesuit Tradition*

- ◆ Participants shared that the FE curriculum embodies the Jesuit tradition of holistic education and the development of a well-rounded individual by exposing students to various facets of student life at the college.
- ◆ The Jesuit tradition was woven into the FE 100 experience beyond community service through conversations with Jesuits on campus, where students learned about them, the Jesuit tradition and values, St. Ignatius, and Loyola’s history.

#### *Advising and Student-Instructor Relationships*

- ◆ One of the most beneficial aspects of the FE 100 program is that one’s advisor is one of her/his instructors. Advisors were very accessible, helped prepare students for the registration process by requiring them to develop schedules and back-up plans, and were willing to contact colleagues in order to answer questions and assist students in making informed decisions.
- ◆ Student instructors were considered mentors with some students commenting that their student instructor was like a sibling to them because they were so accessible and willing to listen to them and offer advice.

#### *Activities and Social Experiences*

- ◆ Students expressed that their most meaningful experiences were ones where they had an opportunity to develop relationships with their peers and instructors.

#### *Instructor Team Relationship*

- ◆ Four out of five instructors had a positive team teaching experience.
- ◆ Positive team teaching experiences were characterized as having the following elements: a shared vision for the class, good collaboration by nature of relying upon each others’ strengths, perception of an equitable distribution of the workload, and a team member with prior FE experience.
- ◆ Areas for improvement with regard to team teaching included: student instructors should be cautioned not to be perceived as patronizing to first-year students and should be mindful of not taking on too much of the workload; each team should have at least one experienced FE member; team-building exercises should be included in training sessions; a dedicated summer session should be scheduled

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for planning; and administrators and student instructors should be included in the Core advising workshops to provide consistent guidance for students.

*New Ideas*

- ◆ Concerns about managing expenses and finances were discussed in terms of transportation and food. Students wanted a greater variety of food options that were a good value for the price. They desired reliable and affordable public transportation too.
- ◆ Instructors offered suggestions for ways to change the organizational structure, leadership, management, and curriculum of the FE program to resemble other models in higher education.

## Detailed Findings

### ***Motivations and Intentions***

Participants from both groups described the FE 100 program as a non-academic, one-credit course that students elect to take their first semester to help them acclimate to college life. One participant stated, “it’s kind of like a big orientation combined into a class” such that students were provided with a one-stop shop where they learned early on about many of the programs and resources that Loyola offers, like study abroad, the Career Center, and the Center for Community Service and Social Justice, just to name a few. Because it was a non-academic course, participants could focus on the transition process by getting to know their peers, Loyola, and the Baltimore area. Students also engaged in service projects, as that is one of the curriculum components of FE 100.

As a requirement of the STEM scholars program, students enrolled in a reserved section of FE 100. One STEM scholar expressed that the Alpha program was her first choice and perceived the FE 100 class as “a joke” when she read about it because “...you go on field trips. Like, why would I waste time doing that when I could do Alpha... [and earn more credits]?” However, through her experience in the FE program she has had a change of heart. She explains:

FE, actually, is a good experience because it’s nice to have that one class that isn’t so like school. I mean, you have a time where you talk to people and get to know your advisors so well which is really important because they’re gonna help you make decisions about your classes....It’s definitely a good experience. It’s nice to get outside—they take us on field trips with people from school...which is nice that you can still do that and college.

Between the two groups, several students chose FE 100 because of its non-academic, “laid back” nature. In fact, this is why another student did not choose Alpha because she viewed it as more intense and was not interested in any of the special topics offered. Many students chose FE because it would help them adjust to a new environment by meeting people, getting oriented to the campus, and helping them to explore Baltimore. One student did not choose Collegium because she didn’t want to live with the same people with whom she took classes, as it would limit the number of people she got to know. For a couple of students FE 100 was desirable because they wanted to continue engaging in community service and by choosing FE 100 they would be able to do so their first semester in college.

### ***FE 100 Leadership Experience***

Participants engaged in the FE 100 Leadership Experience community because they had been involved in leadership activities or roles in high school, and wanted to live with others who had similar interests and who would also take initiative to get involved on campus and learn how best to serve Loyola with those skills and abilities. By engaging in this aspect of FE 100 they hoped to learn more about what makes a good leader and to hone those skills. By being around like-minded peers, one participant thought that he could learn about his strengths and weaknesses. Another student noted she hoped to be motivated by being around like-minded peers and hoped collaborations would blossom.

There was confusion among participants when asked to describe the Leadership Experience living-learning community and what it means to live on that floor. A couple of participants said that it was “non-existent”. A couple of other participants thought that the college placed them on the floor together because they were recognized leaders in high school, and by nature of living together they constituted the Leadership Experience community. At one point, among the cacophony of responses, one student spoke up to clarify to the facilitator why there was so much confusion, “I think that’s where the ambiguity lies because no one really knows what it is.” Further discussion revealed that there have been some administrative challenges to implementing the program. The student designated as the original R.A. could not do it so an alternate R.A. took his/her place at the beginning of the fall semester. There were only two activities organized during the fall semester—an inauguration party and a Christmas event. There were plans to do leadership activities with the floor but those plans never materialized. In the fall, the R.A. resigned and a new one came on for the spring semester.

Students were very positive about the new R.A. They commented that the new R.A. is more organized and had a plan to organize and direct students on the floor. Recently, participants took the StrengthQuest inventory in preparation for a weekend leadership retreat in Washington, D.C. Other activities they mentioned that their RA had helped to organize were community service opportunities to help at Beans and Bread and the Mount Washington Children’s Hospital. While the first year implementation of this living-learning community had a tenuous beginning, participants were hopeful that it was on the right track and they looked forward to the upcoming opportunities to learn about leadership.

### ***Expectations and Outcomes***

While some participants confessed that they had very limited expectations for FE 100, participants from both discussion groups had thought that it would help them get comfortable with the college and assist them in academic and social transitions. Also, they expected to get to know Baltimore and travel outside the city too. By nature of program affiliation, both Leadership Experience participants and STEM scholars anticipated they would get to know a lot of people and become better connected to a group of students with similar interests.

Participants voiced the many ways in which engaging in FE 100 contributed to their academic performance and helped them with their classes. One student described an exercise she engaged in, called “check-in dates,” where peers would interview each other to see how things were going throughout the semester. This exercise and other classroom discussions demonstrated to students that they were going through similar ups and downs, which was reassuring to them. A participant from the leadership floor said FE helped prepare one for how challenging college might be.

Participants pointed out all of the different types of campus resources that “came to them” by nature of the course. A number of members from the FE 100 discussion group hadn’t expected this, but being introduced to all of these resources made seeking them out easier later on. For example, one FE 100 participant was hesitant to go to CCJS but after a session with senior student leaders, where she learned more about it, she was less inhibited and looked into it. Sessions regarding study skills and campus resources for academic help were useful because participants were introduced to the Writing Center and tutors in The Study, located in Jenkins Hall. A couple of students in the FE 100 discussion group sought out tutors because of the resources they had learned about in FE 100. Similarly, a STEM scholar expressed that she was struggling in Computer Science and was nervous about attending a tutoring session. Luckily, her FE 100 student instructor was a tutor, coaxed her to go, and this encouragement made the experience less intimidating to her. For the FE 100 Leadership group, they learned about

what activities, clubs, and organizations they wanted commit to, while keeping in mind not to overload themselves with activities so that they would not follow through with their commitments.

There were mixed sentiments about the efficacy of sessions devoted to time management. The FE 100 discussion group noted that discussions pertaining to time management issues were helpful to them in terms of thinking about their schedules, homework, and planning days. Participants in the FE 100 Leadership group had differing opinions on the usefulness of time management sessions. For example, one participant did not get much out of what was offered in FE 100 because time management was over-emphasized in high school. Contrarily, another FE 100 Leadership student mentioned the time management discussions helped with balancing schoolwork and activities. Two students had differing opinions about viewing Randy Pausch's lesson on time management from *The Last Lecture*—for one it helped him in thinking about tools and resources while the other student used that time to get work done.

FE 100 participants from both groups learned how to engage with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom. One participant noted that engaging in FE helped her become more confident about speaking up in her classes, whether she was contributing to the discussion or asking questions because she didn't understand something being discussed. STEM scholars found the session very helpful where they were introduced to STEM department chairpersons and departmental representatives, educated about major and minor requirements, and introduced to careers in the sciences. Participants were very positive about the student-Core advisor relationship too. Advisors were able to provide guidance to students in terms of how to approach faculty when an issue arose. For example, one student shared with her advisor that she was having trouble in her math class and asked for advice with regards to approaching the professor. This student's advisor e-mailed her seven steps that she could take to address the issue.

The FE 100 Leadership group discussed how they have a tight-knit community and feel like one big family. They order food together, watch movies together, and because they respect each other's property, they will leave belongings in the common area so that others may use them. For example, the group talked about how one of their floor mates leaves his Nintendo in the common area for everyone to enjoy. The group noted how this tight-knit community and sense of family has contributed to their transition beyond social aspects too. One participant expressed that they support and encourage each other as they seek out opportunities to get involved on campus and apply for leadership positions. Also, participants study together and offer guidance to peers about classes—what to take or not to take based upon their experience.

### ***Characteristics of the FE 100 Students***

Instructors perceived to have formed good relationships with students that were facilitated by the amount of time spent with them, particularly during out-of-class excursions. This had a positive impact during the semester, as one instructor noted that students would come to the office to discuss issues. After the semester, this instructor noted that some students still came by and interacted with him/her. Another instructor felt that his/her FE group was interested in learning about each other and over the semester s/he saw a tight-knit group form.

Instructors also commented on the changes they saw in students over the course of the semester. Aligning with comments from the student focus groups, one instructor noted, "I think they enjoy[ed] having a cohort of students who share their concerns and they enjoyed having their advisor and [an] upper class student to bounce ideas off of and to find their way." The instructor qualified this as the normal progression of most first-year students on campus.

Several instructors noted that they perceived students becoming more intellectually and socially mature over time in terms of their willingness to be: more informed about issues, more engaged in discussion, and more proficient at offering arguments in debates that arose in the class. One instructor shared, “[M]any [students] gain[ed] confidence through the course, and are doing BIG THINGS on campus” such that some students are engaged in leadership positions on campus by the beginning of their sophomore year.

Finally, instructors noted areas where they thought students needed to improve. First, one instructor noted that students were not as respectful and engaged as they could have been with regards to invited guests and speakers. An unintended consequence of creating an informal and comfortable classroom environment was “that the students can be too relaxed when they should be more respectful of guest speakers -- showing their attention, not talking excessively, etc.” Second, students didn’t want feedback on their reflection papers; this may be a consequence of the FE component not being graded. Third, one instructor perceived that “[M]y relationships with the students were somewhat challenged by the lack of diversity amongst the group. Many of them appeared to come from homogenous backgrounds and were not accustomed to having a non-white instructor.” Along the same vein, another instructor commented:

[W]e did notice that during a heated class on diversity that our students had a great deal of group think. I know that there were students in class who felt differently from the vocal students, however they all shared the exact same close minded [sic] thoughts. I like that they all live and learn together but if there is an outsider on the floor they are also an outsider in the classroom.

Administrators, faculty, and student instructors, alike, advocated for more sessions regarding diversity, understanding what it means to be a good community member, and ways to build community on campus.

### ***Activities and Social Experiences***

Participants were positive about the variety of out-of-class and cultural excursions they participated in, noting that some were better than others. Most evident was that students focused on experiences where they had an opportunity to develop relationships with their peers and instructors; they found these experiences the most meaningful. For example, one student mentioned that the trip to Harper’s Ferry allowed him to get to know his peers on a leisurely hike. FE 100 Leadership participants’ restaurant excursions were particularly fun as they bonded over food and connected with peers and professors outside of the classroom. One of the FE 100 participants described a trip to D.C. where each instructor—faculty member, administrator, and student—drove a carload of students down to the Capital to have dinner, explore the monuments and get to know classmates. For the STEM scholars, the most meaningful experience was the Bay trip that their instructor organized where she led them around to a number of museums and then invited them back to her house to meet her family, have crab cakes for dinner, and enjoy a boat ride.

### ***FE 100 Topics—Instructors’ Comments***

Instructors provided feedback regarding potential topics to be incorporated into the curriculum. Among some of these responses and across all instructor types, there was a tension between recognizing that while additional topics could be useful to students, there are time constraints. There was a concern about trade-offs between breadth and

depth of curriculum coverage too. Further, a handful of instructors offered suggestions on how to organize the curriculum. For instance, one instructor suggested that having consistent curriculum across FE 100 sections would enable students to have the same experience. Another instructor perceived that many instructor teams organized the course around the undergraduate learning aims and used those aims to help organize activities and reflections; this may be a good way to organize the curriculum.

Instructors offered a plethora of ideas regarding what should be emphasized or even added to the curriculum. There was overlap in suggested topics among faculty, administrators, and student instructors. One faculty member was concerned that students are as well-educated as they should be about what constitutes plagiarism, given the number of incidents this year. A lesson on what constitutes plagiarism would be beneficial. Related, a student instructor thought a session on the Honor Code and Jesuit values may be worthwhile. Administrators more so than faculty members suggested that there should be alcohol and drug education, with a faculty member suggesting incorporating the social norms data from summer orientation. Administrators, faculty, and student instructors noted that more should be done to address student leadership and involvement. A student instructor whose team incorporated a student panel into their FE course this year noted, "It helped the FE 100 students hear from upper classmen [sic] about how students get involved [sic] on campus here at Loyola. Plus it enabled the Fe 100 [sic] students to ask any other questions they had for other Loyola students." While administrators and faculty members did not mention it, a couple of student instructors perceived that their students needed more guidance regarding course planning, registration, and considerations in selecting majors and minors. Other skills that instructors thought would be useful were: stress management, career development, critical thinking skills, spiritual development, and emotional intelligence.

Another set of topics emerged from instructor feedback that focused around campus climate and community issues. Topics offered as suggestions included: "what does 'community' mean and what does it mean to be a good member of the community"; conflict resolution & mediation skills in the classroom and residence halls; diversity and social justice issues; and learning what it means to have "civil" face-to-face and online communications.

### ***The Jesuit Tradition***

Participants from both discussion groups noted various ways in which the Jesuit tradition was woven into their FE 100 experience beyond community service. Participants from both groups shared discussions they had in their FE classes about the idea of *cura personalis* and how the FE curriculum embodies the Jesuit tradition of holistic education and the development of a well-rounded individual by exposing students to various facets of student life at the college.

Both groups provided examples of ways they engaged with the Jesuits. A student from the FE 100 group described a two-session discussion conducted by Father Chuck on the Jesuit tradition and values in which they went to the chapel, participated in an Examen exercise, and learned about St. Ignatius and Loyola's history. During this session, students were encouraged to reflect on how they can embody the Jesuit tradition outside of campus beyond community service. Participants from the Leadership Experience community described a brunch they had with two Jesuits. From this experience, a participant noted that she feels more comfortable talking to them. Another student mentioned that when his group went to his FE instructor's house, father Jack joined them and they all engaged in a discussion about the Jesuits.

## ***Advising and Student-Instructor Relationships***

Participants from both groups shared that one of the most beneficial aspects of the FE program was that their advisor was one of their FE instructors, which enabled them to form a comfortable bond with their advisor. In comparing their experiences with the advisors at orientation and their Core advisors, participants from the FE 100 group noted that they felt better about the registration process this time around, in part because of that student-advisor relationship. Students commented that their advisors were very accessible, helped prepare students for the registration process by requiring them to develop schedules and back-up plans, and were willing to make calls and contact colleagues in order to answer questions to enable students to make informed decisions.

Beyond the student-advisor relationship, participants from both groups expressed their appreciation for the FE 100 student instructors. They shared stories about their student instructors that could be characterized as mentor-mentee relationships, with some participants even commenting that their student instructor was like a sibling to them because they were so accessible and willing to listen to them and offer advice. For example, one FE 100 Leadership participant described how her student instructor would schedule one-on-one meetings with students and offer to do so off campus; this contributed to students feeling they had a comfort zone to go to. A participant from the FE 100 group noted that her student instructor was good at taking shy students under his wing to help them along. For the most part, participants viewed their student instructors as good sources of information and adept at social networking. For instance, an FE 100 Leadership participant discussed how her student instructor helped first-year students understand what might be good for them to get involved in, and even contacted peers s/he knew in a particular club or organization that the first-year student was interested in exploring. Finally, student instructors provided tricks of the trade to newcomers by offering advice on who to “look out for” in terms of professors and what classes to take now versus later.

### ***Instructor Team Relationship***

Generally, administrators, faculty, and student instructors conveyed a positive team teaching experience with four out of five respondents doing so. Instructors provided key ingredients to a good working relationship with their co-instructors. First, the team needed to have a similar vision for how they wanted to approach the course and work together, and a number of instructors noted that their group met early on to establish this. A number of instructors noted that a successful team had good collaboration by nature of relying upon each others' strengths to coordinate and divide up tasks to prepare for and plan the class sessions. To that point, instructors needed to perceive an equitable distribution of the workload. Finally, having a team with at least one person who had prior FE experience was preferable.

Ways to improve the instructor team relationship were offered too. In terms of student instructors, their co-instructors warned that they should not talk down to first-year students and be mindful about taking on too much of the workload. One faculty member indicated that her/his group was new to FE 100. S/he suggested, “...that you pair experienced and not-so-experienced team members [the] next time, rather than start with a team of rookies.” A student instructor suggested that team-building exercises may be beneficial to the instructor teams too. Another faculty member thought that including the administrators and student instructors into the Core advising workshops would help in providing first-year students with consistent advisement and guidance.

There were a few criticisms of the three-instructor model. One administrator thought a two-person model may be preferable, with faculty coming in to present on relevant substantive topics when necessary. Logistically, trying to coordinate three schedules could be a challenge during the summer prior and the fall semester too. In particular

there were a handful of comments from student instructors who saw boundaries to summer planning. To mitigate this, one student instructor suggested having a summer session where everyone could meet.

### ***New Ideas***

Focus group attendees were asked what they would like to see at Loyola that they have heard of at other schools. Both groups expressed they had so many opportunities at Loyola that peers at other institutions did not have as first-year students. For the sophomore year, students thought having something like FE 100 would be good. Later, focus group attendees were e-mailed by the facilitator directing them to the Office of Sophomore Initiatives so that they may explore programs for next year.

There was a discussion around what was perceived as a lack of school spirit; both groups suggested the school forming a football team.

Concerns about managing expenses and finances were discussed in terms of transportation and food. The FE 100 group was negatively critical of transportation on campus. They noted that the Loyola shuttles are not as prompt as they could be. Students liked the idea of the College Network but often found this service to be unreliable, as it was notorious for being tardy. Participants liked the new EnviroRide program; at times it was unreliable or unavailable such that one needed to call back for service. A participant suggested expanding the EnviroRide program as it was preferable to taxi cab services. In terms of food, there was a desire for a greater variety of food options on campus and a Jazzman's café in the library. Having a café in the library would enable students to take a break, grab some coffee, and refuel for late night studying and work sessions.

Instructors were asked to consider conversations with colleagues at other schools, and asked to offer suggestions for what Loyola could adopt and/or integrate into its first-year programs. One suggestion was offered with regards to the organizational structure, leadership, and management of the FE program, with two institutional models offered as references. The administrator stated:

I think we really need to step back and take a comprehensive look at the entire First Year Experience. In my mind the Office of First Year Experience would be headed by an Academic Director and Student Affairs Director cooperatively. It would focus on the work we do with students before they arrive and follow through the entire year. I find it to be a very strange aspect of our institutional culture that the Office of New Student Programs has no involvement in FE 100. University of South Carolina and Ohio State have great programs to look at for direction.

Another faculty member suggested by structuring FE groups around "particular ideas/themes/disciplines of special interest to the instructor teams, and geared toward the interests of potential majors in those areas or other special interests.... might make the FE program resemble first-year seminar programs at other universities." Finally, an administrator recently learned of diversity curriculum developed specifically for a first-

year program and offered to research it further if Loyola's academic administration was interested.

## Summary

Students chose FE because they desired a non-academic first-year experience course that was more "laid back" and allowed them to adjust to a new environment by meeting people, getting oriented to the campus and academics, and helping them to explore Baltimore. Participants affiliated with the STEM scholars program and FE 100 Leadership Experience living-learning community expected to meet like-minded students who shared similar interests. Overall, students' expectations were met and, at times, exceeded; campus resources came to them, which helped students to overcome inhibitions about accessing these resources. Participants appreciated the relationships they formed through FE 100, whether it was with classmates, floor mates, or faculty advisors. Likewise, instructors appreciated the relationships they formed with students and perceived them to mature both intellectually and socially over the course of the semester. Still, there is room for improvement in terms of more clearly establishing classroom boundaries to teach students how to behave in various settings with peers, faculty, staff and administration.

From the instructors' perspectives, the team-teaching approach works for the majority of them. Still, there is room for improvement. Suggestions included having teams with at least one experienced FE member, teaching teams how to effectively communicate and collaborate, and teaching non-advising instructors about the registration and advising processes so that the entire team can provide consistent guidance to students. Instructors also provided feedback with regards to areas of the curriculum that should be added or emphasized more. Issues that arose on campus in terms of plagiarism and substance misuse and abuse prompted instructors to highlight the need for more education around these topics. Another set of topics emerged that focused around campus climate and community issues, including diversity and social justice topics. In the end, instructors offered suggestions for ways to change the organizational structure, leadership, management, and curriculum of the FE program to resemble other models in higher education, like the FIG model (first-year interest groups).

## **Appendix A: FE 100 Focus Group Invitation**

Subject Line: An FE100 Program Special Invitation from Dean McGuiness

The College is interested in what students think about their experiences in the FE100 Program. As your first semester comes to a close, we are hoping that you will help us by sharing your opinions about the program.

The Office of Institutional Research is holding a discussion group from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. on Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup> in the 4<sup>th</sup> floor conference room of Flannery O'Connor Hall.

**You've been selected as one of only a small group of students invited to attend!**

Students who participate will be given a gift of two free movie tickets. Pizza and refreshments will also be provided for dinner during the discussion.

This is an excellent opportunity for your voice to be heard at Loyola! Feedback about your experiences as an FE100 student will help the College know how to improve the program for future students.

**Space in the group is limited to 10 students, so you must R.S.V.P. quickly!**

**You may contact Shannon Tinney, Associate Director and Coordinator of First-Year and Retention Studies in the Office of Institutional Research, by e-mail ([smtinney@loyola.edu](mailto:smtinney@loyola.edu) or [ir@loyola.edu](mailto:ir@loyola.edu)) or by phone (410-617-2680) by *Tuesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>* to be a member of the discussion group.**

Please join us! We look forward to seeing you on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ilona McGuiness  
Dean of First-Year Students and Academic Services

Shannon M. Tinney  
Associate Director and Coordinator of First-Year and Retention Studies in the  
Office of Institutional Research

Note: Reminder communications were modified slightly for the spring focus group of FE 100 Leadership Experience students.

## **Appendix B: FE 100 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 FE 100 program
  - c. What is a focus group and ground rules
    - i. Enjoy the food
    - ii. Opinions, no right/wrong answers
    - iii. Digitally recorded (no full names used)
- II. SELF-INTRODUCTIONS (3 min)
  - a. Name
  - b. Which FE 100 section they are in
  - c. Which dorm they live in
- III. EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES (10 min)
  - a. We're new to Loyola, describe FE 100 to us. How has the Program been this semester?
  - b. Why did you register for the FE 100 Program? Why FE 100 and not one of the other first-year programs?
  - c. What were your expectations for the FE 100 Program? (What did you hope to get out of it?) How has the program met those expectations?
  - d. Which FE 100 topics were most helpful? Least helpful? Why?
- IV. OUTCOMES (10 min)
  - a. How has participating in the FE 100 Program helped you with other courses?
  - b. Describe the influence FE 100 has had on your academic performance this semester. Time management? Study skills? Discussion skills?
  - c. How was the Jesuit tradition woven into your FE 100 class? How about your experience at Loyola in general?
- V. INSTRUCTORS/ADVISORS (15 min)
  - a. Let's talk about your FE 100 instructors for a few minutes. How would you describe your relationship with your FE 100 instructors?
    - i. Tell us about your relationship with your student instructor. Was this person a good resource for information? In what ways?
    - ii. Compare relationship with your FE 100 professor to relationships with non-FE 100 professors. Compare it to your non-FE 100 friends' relationships with their professors.
  - b. Was your FE 100 professor your advisor? Tell us about your advising experience. (Probe: How have you worked with your advisor?)
- VI. ACTIVITIES/SOCIAL (15 min)
  - a. What types of activities did you participate in outside of the classroom? Which were the most meaningful? Which were not so meaningful? Why? (Probe: Community service)
  - b. How did FE 100 influence your transition to college life here? Do you think this transition was different than what your non-FE 100 friends experienced? How so? (Probe: Did it help you make connections with friends, the college, the larger community, etc.?)

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**VII. CLOSING (15 min)**

- a. 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? (Probe: Specifics for first-year students.)
- b. Now, before you leave, I want you to do one last thing. We're going to do a one-minute paper. You don't need to put your names on it. I'm going to pose a question, I want to you take a moment to think about it, and then you're going to write for one minute on that topic. Think back over your first semester. What have you learned about yourself and your academic interests? What are your educational goals?

## **Appendix C: FE 100 Leadership Experience 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 FE 100 program and Leadership Experience
  - c. What is a focus group and ground rules
    - i. Enjoy the food
    - ii. Opinions, no right/wrong answers
    - iii. Digitally recorded (no full names used)
  
- II. SELF-INTRODUCTIONS (3 min)
  - a. Name
  - b. Where they are from
  - c. Which FE 100 section they are in
  
- III. EXPECTATIONS—FE 100 (10 min)
  - a. We're new to Loyola, describe FE 100 to us. How has the Program been this semester?
  - b. Why did you register for the FE 100 Program? Why FE 100 and not one of the other first-year programs?
  - c. What were your expectations for the FE 100 Program? (What did you hope to get out of it?) How has the program met those expectations?
  - d. Which FE 100 topics were most helpful? Least helpful? Why?
  
- IV. OUTCOMES (10 min)
  - a. How has participating in the FE 100 Program helped you with other courses?
  - b. Describe the influence FE 100 has had on your academic performance this semester. Time management? Study skills? Communication skills?
  - c. How was the Jesuit tradition woven into your FE 100 class? How about your experience at Loyola in general?
  
- V. INSTRUCTORS/ADVISORS (15 min)
  - a. Let's talk about your FE 100 instructors for a few minutes. How would you describe your relationship with your FE 100 instructors?
    - i. Tell us about your relationship with your student instructor. Was this person a good resource for information? In what ways?
    - ii. Compare relationship with your FE 100 professor to relationships with non-FE 100 professors. Compare it to your non-FE 100 friends' relationships with their professors.
  - b. Was your FE 100 professor your advisor? Tell us about your advising experience. (Probe: How have you worked with your advisor?)
  
- VI. ACTIVITIES/SOCIAL (10 min)
  - a. What types of activities did you participate in outside of the classroom? Which were the most meaningful? Which were not so meaningful? Why? (Probe: Community service)
  - b. How did FE 100 influence your transition to college life here? Do you think this transition was different than what your non-FE 100 friends experienced? How so? (Probe: Did it help you make connections with friends, the college, the larger community, etc.?)

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**VII. Leadership Experience (15 min)**

- a. Let's switch gears and talk about the Leadership Experience program that you're involved in. Describe this program to us.
- b. Why did you choose to be a part of this? What do you expect to get out of (or learn from) this experience?
- c. What does "leadership" mean to you? What are the qualities of "good" or "effective" leaders? (Probe: Think about someone you think is a good leader. What qualities do they possess that demonstrate this?)
- d. What kind of activities did you participate in as part of the Leadership Experience? Which ones have been the most meaningful? Which ones were not so meaningful? Why?
- e. What has your experience been like living on the Leadership Experience floor? What are the pros/cons of living on the floor?
- f. What have you learned about yourself by participating in this program?

**VIII. CLOSING (10 min)**

- a. 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? (Probe: Specifics for first-year students.)
- b. Now, before you leave, I want you to do one last thing. We're going to do a one-minute paper. You don't need to put your names on it. I'm going to pose a question, I want to you take a moment to think about it, and then you're going to write for one minute on that topic. Think back over your first semester. What have you learned about yourself and your academic interests? What are your educational goals?

## Appendix D: FE 100 Faculty Questions

Subject Line: An important message from Dean Ilona McGuiness

Dear FE 100 Instructor,

As an instructor teaching an FE 100 course, your feedback is important as we plan for a new cohort of FE 100 students next year. In an effort to hear from all FE 100 instructors, we'd like to get your written responses to a few focused questions. You can simply reply to this e-mail with your comments. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Responses will remain confidential and no responses will be linked to any names. If you would prefer to submit your feedback anonymously, you can print your responses and send them via campus mail to Shannon M. Tinney, Associate Director and Coordinator of First-Year and Retention Studies in the Office of Institutional Research, Xavier Hall 109.

Your comments to the following questions will be combined with the feedback that we have received from FE 100 students during focus groups and will be used for program planning to ensure that the FE 100 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 FE 100 program meeting or not meeting the expectations that you have as an instructor teaching in the program?
2. Are there topics that you think should be considered for inclusion in the curriculum from which students would benefit?
3. How would you describe your FE 100 students and your relationship with them? As the semester progressed, what changes, if any, did you notice in the students (intellectual, social, emotional)?
4. How would you describe the collaboration with the other two instructors? Are there ways to improve the instructor team relationship?
5. 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, January 23, 2009.

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

Sincerely,

Dr. Ilona McGuiness  
Dean of First-Year Students and Academic Services  
[imcguiness@loyola.edu](mailto:imcguiness@loyola.edu)  
x 5547

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