Loyola University Maryland

2012 – 2013 First-Year Experience Focus Group Feedback Report

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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 student focus groups.

2012 – 2013 First-Year Experience Focus Group Feedback Report

Introduction

A key initiative outlined in Loyola's 2008 – 2015 Strategic Plan is to establish living-learning communities for all first-year students. This initiative, named Messina, will be phased in over a three-year period, starting with the Class of 2017, and will replace the current collection of first-year programs (Alpha, Collegium, and FE100). In fall 2012, first-year students from the Honors program participated in a living-learning community that served as a pilot for the Messina program while all other first-year students participated in one of the existing first-year programs, or none at all (i.e., "General" students).

In spring 2013, six focus groups of first-year students were conducted to establish baseline data on the first-year experience to understand how it evolves with the phased-in implementation of Messina. The discussion guide was developed to align with the learning outcomes of the Messina program (see Appendix A). This report provides results from the five focus groups of students who engaged in Alpha, Collegium, FE100, or the General academic program.² Main themes are synthesized from across these discussion groups and, when appropriate, differences by first-year program are highlighted. Results from the Honors Messina pilot can be found in a separate report available from the Office of First-Year Research, part of the Office of Institutional Research.

Methodology

The feedback from the first-year students in this report was collected by holding five focus groups in the spring of 2013. The goal was to have between eight to 10 participants in each group. To achieve this objective, students were randomly selected by first-year program from the pool of eligible students and invited via e-mail to the session (See Appendix B for a sample invitation).³

With the exception of the Collegium focus group that was held in Campion 115, focus groups were held in a College Center conference room or in a second floor conference room of Flannery O'Connor Hall. All groups were held between late March and mid-April during the evenings (5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.). Invitees were notified that dinner and a \$15 gift card to local area restaurants would be provided to all participants. Of the 428 students contacted, 56 indicated that they would participate in a focus group; ultimately, 41 students attended the five discussion sessions.⁴ Focus groups were facilitated by

¹ The goal is to maintain the current participation rate in first-year programs as Messina is implemented incrementally with one-third of the incoming class each year. About two-thirds of each cohort of first-time, full-time students engage in a first-year program. To maintain this, Loyola 101 will be offered to one-third of the incoming cohorts over the next two years. Loyola 101 is a one-credit, extended orientation first-year program which will have similar learning outcomes as Messina.

² Two focus groups were conducted with students engaged in the General academic program. Due to a data coding error, two Alpha students were part of the second General focus group.

³ Students were randomly selected in small batches and e-mailed invitations. For instance, three batches of 20 students were randomly selected for the Alpha focus group in order to get the desired number of acceptances to yield a discussion group of eight to 10 participants. Though the number of students e-mailed varied, a similar method was employed to recruit for all focus groups.

⁴ The Alpha focus group was held on March 25th in Flannery O'Connor, room 230. Sixty students were invited to attend, 14 indicated they would participate and 10 attended the discussion session. The Collegium focus group was held on March 26th in Campion 115. Thirty-five students were invited to attend, seven indicated they would participate, and six students attended. There was one student—a fellow Collegium

Shannon Tinney Lichtinger, Associate Director and Coordinator of First-Year Research and Retention Studies in the Office of Institutional Research, and notes were taken by Katelin Santhin, Program Coordinator for Messina, or Nicole Simone, Research Associate 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 and the facilitator explained the role of the Office of Institutional Research on college campuses, 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. Students were informed that the discussion would be digitally recorded and notes taken for purposes of writing the report. Students were asked to use only each other's first names during the discussion. They were informed that all comments would remain anonymous by using fictitious names in the report and only the primary investigators would listen to the recording. See Appendix C for the discussion guide.

Of the 41 first-year students who participated in the five focus groups, 32 were women and 12 were students of color. Participants' intended majors fell across the spectrum of discipline areas. There were 12 students majoring in the STEM areas, including 3 interdisciplinary Biology majors; 13 students majoring in Business fields; nine students majoring in the Social Sciences; and seven students majoring in the Arts and Humanities.

member—who stopped by and joined the discussion group, too, for a total of seven participants. The focus groups of General students were held on March 21st and April 11th and both were held in College Center, room 107. For the March 21st focus group, 165 students were invited, 10 accepted the invitation, and nine attended the discussion session. For the April 11th focus group, 100 students were invited, 10 accepted the invitation, and five attended. The FE100 focus group was held on April 15th in Flannery O'Connor, room 230. Sixty-eight students were invited to attend, 15 accepted the invitation, and 10 attended the discussion session. Of note, it was a challenge to recruit men into the last two sessions (General and FE100). Men were oversampled for these discussion sessions; still, women were more likely to be attendees.

Executive Summary

Reasons for Pursuing a Degree and Expectations for Loyola

- Most participants were career-minded in their pursuit of a college degree; college was a sociocultural expectation too. Participants pursued college to develop life skills, to learn about one's own self and grow, and to gain independence.
- Participants chose Loyola for many reasons, including its size, location and proximity to home, its friendly atmosphere, and the opportunity for a "well-rounded" education.
 Particularly, Alpha participants chose Loyola because of its Core values and Jesuit mission.
- Participants were most excited about getting involved on campus, meeting new people, exploring their major and Core coursework, engaging in experiential learning opportunities to support major coursework, and studying abroad while at Loyola.

Jesuit Mission and Values

- First-year program participants saw the Jesuit tradition woven into their lives through taking the Core curriculum and becoming a "well-rounded" person. General participants tended to focus on religious-based activities when discussing how the Jesuit tradition was woven into their first year.
- ♦ In addition to retreats, service opportunities, and pre-orientation programs, some participants noted that their first-year program introduced them to the practice of reflection and helped them to incorporate it into their lives. General participants struggled to answer how they integrated reflection into their lives the first year.
- Participants in all groups had a difficult time articulating examples of how their values, attitudes, and beliefs influenced their decision-making. Participants' responses demonstrated that they recognized instances when their values, beliefs, and opinions differed from others and the importance of staying true to one's own self.

Critical Understanding

- Participants readily identified habits that facilitated success, including developing time management skills; maintaining one's health with good eating, sleeping and exercise habits; keeping up with one's workload and being mindful of deadlines; getting involved in campus clubs and organizations; learning to be flexible and to be open-minded with new people and in new experiences; developing friendships, including ones with upper-class students because they are good resources; educating oneself about all of the resources available; learning to ask for help; learning to budget money; and getting to know one's professors.
- Participants said new students should access these resources in order to be successful: professors during office hours, upper-class students for guidance and advice, the Writing Center, The Study (including tutoring services), the library, the Fitness and Aquatic Center (FAC), the Career Center, the Counseling Center, and ALANA Services.
- Participants engaged with course material in meaningful ways when their instructors: encouraged class discussions, expressed genuine enthusiasm for what they taught

and used humor to enliven the class, related material to current events and showed real-world application, and supported students to succeed.

Connections to the Loyola Community

- Alpha, Collegium, and FE100 participants all shared that their first-year program helped them to find community as new students at Loyola.
- New students found community at Loyola by: participating in pre-orientation programs, engaging with others in their residence halls, getting involved in activities and organizations (including service opportunities), engaging with others in their classes and major, playing sports, and participating in programs through ALANA Services.
- A greater sense of community could be fostered earlier on by grouping new students based upon common traits like their first-year program or residence hall during orientation, having events that brought first-year students together who lived on opposite sides of campus, and having Facebook or Twitter alerts about campus events.

Advising

- For both Alpha and Collegium participants, having one's instructor as an advisor helped them to form a comfortable relationship which fostered productive discussions about one's academic plans. General participants would have preferred an advisor that they interacted with in class.
- Suggestions for improvement to the current advising system included having an advisor in one's major and being able to switch to a major advisor as early as one wished.

Integrated Learning

- Having a common text in courses was one way Alpha, FE100, and Collegium participants could make connections among what they were studying in their courses. Participants in the FE100 and General groups shared making connections between their Writing courses and other courses; the Writing course helped them prepare papers for other courses like English, Engineering, and History.
- Participants made connections between coursework and out-of-class experiences by: having course assignments that required engaging in cultural events or courserelated excursions, thinking critically about and analyzing everyday events, and applying what they learned in class to current events.

Cura Personalis

Participants perceived having engaged with the Core value of cura personalis their first year. A variety of experiences and offices contributed to this: taking coursework, engaging in campus clubs and activities, engaging with Campus Ministry, using the FAC, interacting with peers and forming friendships, working with Core advisors, and the availability of campus resources.

Detailed Findings

Reasons for Pursuing a Degree and Expectations for Loyola

Participants were career-minded in their pursuit of a college degree. Some participants qualified that they wanted to pursue career interests that would require a degree, or that an undergraduate degree was a stepping stone to the graduate or professional education necessary for their intended career field. For a small subset of students, a college degree was necessary in order to be competitive in the current job market. Lucas in the Collegium group explained:

"...[b]asically you need an education now, especially in this...economy...I know my brother is having a difficult time finding a job and he has a college education. But it just shows you that on top of the college education, there's a lot more that you still need...you have to have experience, like, internships are really important...and being involved on campus and just having a unique experience so you can really market yourself when you go to an interview."

Lucas' response demonstrates his purposefulness in pursuing his goals and in understanding the ways he can effectively do so to be successful.

Pursuing a college degree was a sociocultural expectation too. Vanessa from Collegium shared, "My parents made me. It wasn't an option not to go...after high school you go to college." Participants across the groups shared that going to college would help them develop life skills, provide opportunities to learn about themselves and grow, and help them gain independence. Participants were most excited about getting involved on campus, meeting new people, exploring their coursework and major, engaging in experiential learning opportunities to support major coursework, and studying abroad while at Loyola.

Participants offered a variety of reasons for choosing Loyola, including its size, location and proximity to home, and its friendly atmosphere. Specifically, participants were attracted to Loyola by the small class sizes because they could get to know their professors. Participants were excited about living in a city and thought living in Baltimore would afford them access to internships and job opportunities.

Participants in every discussion group shared that Loyola's liberal arts tradition was appealing too; the Core curriculum allowed students to explore their interests while becoming "well-rounded". In particular, some Alpha participants shared they chose Loyola because of its Core values and Jesuit mission. For example, Natalie had not considered Loyola until she received a marketing piece that appealed to her. She shared, "...it had to do with cura personalis, and the service aspect of [Loyola] and also, um, the Core values...The well-rounded person [that Loyola aims to develop] is something that...really attracted me." Bridget followed with, "I also came from a Jesuit high school and it was something I wanted to continue...." Participants were also drawn to Loyola because of its well-respected schools, like The Sellinger School of Business and Management. Ultimately, participants are career-focused in their pursuit of a college education; still, they want an education that will help them grow and develop into a well-

rounded graduate who is prepared for the world. This was similar to the Messina Honors focus group.

Jesuit Mission and Values

Participants were invited to consider how they perceived the Jesuit tradition was woven into their first year at Loyola. Participants in the Alpha, Collegium, and FE100 groups saw the Jesuit tradition woven into their experiences by taking the Core curriculum because it helped them to become well-rounded. In particular, Alpha participants were able to "live out" some of the Core values through volunteer experiences too. General participants saw the Jesuit tradition woven into their experiences at Loyola through interactions with the Jesuits, engaging in community service and Campus Ministry, and coming together as a community when tragedies occurred, like at religious services.

At least one participant from each Alpha, Collegium, and FE100 groups noted that they were introduced to the practice of reflection through their first-year program and those experiences helped them to integrate reflection into their lives. Margaret from FE100 shared, "

"...I, first, learned about the idea [of reflection] in our first-year program, which was FE, and we did it twice...in class...It was soothing and kind of like nothing I had ever done before, so I think it was a good thing to learn to relax...realize what you have and how you can better yourself."

Another student was encouraged to journal by her FE100 instructor and she continued to do so throughout her first year. Alpha and Collegium participants shared examples of reflection exercises their instructors taught them and how they continued such practices throughout the first year.

Across all five focus groups, students noted how engaging in retreats, service opportunities, and pre-orientation programs offered opportunities to practice reflection and incorporate it into their lives to varying degrees. General participants struggled to answer how they integrated reflection into their lives the first year. The few participants who responded remarked that going to Mass, spending quiet time alone, and engaging with Campus Ministry helped them to do so.

Overall, it was difficult for students in these focus groups to provide concrete examples regarding how they had examined their own values, attitudes, and beliefs to understand how that influenced their decision-making. Participants' responses demonstrated that it was important to be mindful of one's values in order to be true to one's own self, to maintain integrity, and to not be influenced by others who espoused values incongruent with one's own. Also, understanding one's own values made some participants more aware of the differences between their own and others' beliefs. Overall, participants did not feel others were placing value judgments on them when differences arose.

Critical Understanding

Participants across all groups readily identified habits that facilitated success. It is critical for new students to develop time management skills, including learning how to manage multiple spheres while setting aside time for one's own self. Participants encouraged new students to find strategies to prevent procrastination and to promote keeping up with one's workload. Discussants noted additional habits that were important to be

successful: getting involved in campus clubs and organizations; learning to be flexible and to be open-minded with new people and in new experiences; developing friendships, including ones with upper-class students because they are good resources; educating oneself about all of the resources available to support student success at Loyola; learning to ask for help; learning to budget money; and getting to know one's professors.

All discussants quickly shared resources they would encourage new students to access in order to be successful: professors during office hours; upper-class students for guidance and advice; the Writing Center, The Study (including tutoring services); the library; the Fitness and Aquatic Center (FAC); the Career Center; the Counseling Center; and ALANA Services. Participants would encourage new students to enroll in a pre-orientation program because one could move in early and meet others with similar interests before the semester started. Of note, Collegium discussants recommended new students access their Resident Assistant for advice and guidance. Cheryl shared:

"We have, like, a great RA...I speak for everyone, we feel...comfortable going to him for...anything....he's very involved with us, like, knows all of us personally...that's probably my first go to...If I need to go to the Health Center on a Sunday...or need something to do...I go to him and I'm like, 'Paul, what do I do?'"

These students had a strong bond with their Resident Assistant who was well-trusted and to whom they went to for almost everything.

Participants offered numerous ways in which instructors helped them to engage with course material in meaningful ways. A professor who simply encouraged class discussion and asked questions effectively engaged students. Participants were engaged in class when professors were genuinely enthusiastic about the course material and used humor to enliven the class. Also, professors were effective when they demonstrated the real-world applicability of what they taught. For instance, participants across most groups shared that relating course material to current events was effective. Further, participants were able to see the real-world applicability of course material when professors shared their own professional experiences with them. Jenna from the General focus group explained, "My...teacher does that...he has a...really cool job so he'll always tell real stories that apply to...whatever we're doing so that helps a lot because then I get it." Professors who conducted demonstrations where students could connect the material to an example and give it a "physical property" in their minds was useful. Many of the aforementioned techniques helped students recall what they learned and find greater meaning in the material. Alpha participants noted that providing students with PowerPoint presentations on Moodle to integrate with their notes and providing reading guides to help students navigate "dense text" were effective ways instructors helped them to engage the course material too. Finally, a Collegium participant shared how feeling supported to succeed was important. Lucas shared:

"...My...teacher last semester, Dr. X, he really...loves what he does and on top of it he makes sure that you understand, and the last thing he wants to do is [to] see you fail so if you are doing bad he'll help you out...he was my teacher and he

is my advisor...so I can honestly go to him for anything and he's just a really great guy."

Lucas' experience highlights the benefits that some first-year program participants experienced by nature of having their professor as their advisor and the good working relationships that formed to support students' success.

Connections to the Loyola Community

There was consensus in the Alpha, Collegium, and FE100 groups that engaging in a first-year program helped participants find community as new students at Loyola. Specifically, Alpha participants agreed that the program helped them to form friendships and to feel part of a community because of the small class size and shared experiences. Collegium participants found community by living on a residence hall floor with the same people that they took courses with through that living-learning program. Collegium participants had an "open door policy" whereby everyone left their doors open to their apartments, which made it easy to meet neighbors. For FE100 participants, being part of that program helped them to meet new people, not necessarily in their own residence halls, and those friendships helped them to "branch out" at Loyola.

Regardless of being affiliated with a first-year program, participants connected with others in the residence halls. Participants shared how they congregated in the "nooks" of Hammerman and Butler halls, and how they had "family dinners" in Campion. Although Collegium participants had a good residential experience, they favored current plans for Messina participants being housed in Flannery O'Connor Hall and for classes to be held in that residence hall too. This arrangement would encourage students to visit different floors and encourage more interaction among hall residents. A number of Collegium participants shared that housing new students in Flannery O'Connor was preferred to Campion since apartment-style living is "self-contained"; for example, one does not need to leave one's room for meals. The doubles-style configuration of Flannery O'Connor Hall encourages students to leave their residence hall and engage with the larger Loyola community.

Participants across all focus groups shared other ways in which they found community: engaging in pre-orientation programs; taking classes; getting involved in one's major (e.g. women in Engineering), in community service through the Center for Community Service and Justice (C.C.S.J.), and in other clubs and organizations; playing sports; and engaging in programs with ALANA services. The Activities Fair at the beginning of the year was a way new students could find groups of students with common interests and get involved too.

In general, participants felt there was a good sense of community at Loyola; still they offered ideas for improvement. Several Alpha participants noted a greater sense of community could be fostered earlier on by grouping new students based upon common traits like their first-year program or residence hall during orientation. Several Collegium participants noted that having events that brought first-year students together who lived on opposite sides of campus would enhance a sense of community on campus. General participants suggested Facebook or Twitter notifications to keep the community up-to-date about campus events.

Advising

For both Alpha and Collegium discussants, having one's instructor as an advisor helped them to form a comfortable relationship which fostered productive academic planning discussions. General discussants would have preferred an advisor that they interacted

with in class. With the exception of Collegium, many participants would have preferred an advisor from the department of their intended major because that helped them plan their curriculum with long-term goals in mind, e.g. study abroad. For General and FE100, most participants would have preferred being able to switch to a major advisor as early as one wished. Students provided examples regarding how they submitted their declaration of major form and were advised they would be assigned a major advisor at a later date, not immediately as they assumed.

Integrated Learning

Participants shared how they were making connections across what they were learning in their courses. Having a common text in courses was one way Alpha, FE100, and Collegium participants could make connections among what they were studying in their courses; they could approach the material from different perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of it. Specifically, the Humanities Symposium helped some participants do this through the interdisciplinary exploration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail". Patty, from FE100, shared her experience:

"I got to read it ["Letter from Birmingham Jail"] in Theology, and my upper-level Writing, and my regular Effective Writing and then English class, and looking at it from all of those different aspects...it was cool...we analyzed different parts of it and I feel like, now, I could talk about that text inside and out...It made me realize how many ways you could look at things."

FE100 and General shared how their Writing course helped them prepare papers for other courses like English, Engineering, and History. Macy from one of the General focus groups shared:

"...I took Writing last semester as part of my Core and then History this semester and some of the things, like, I was able to learn in my Writing class helped me to attempt to the write the papers that I [had] to write for History class...it helped me to get a general idea of where to start."

Participants provided numerous examples about how they were making connections between coursework and out-of-class experiences. Many participants indicated that having course assignments requiring them to engage in cultural events, or course-related excursions, helped them to apply what they were learning. For example one Collegium participant found a new appreciation for art through a course-related visit to the Walters Art Museum. This student was able to apply what he learned in class to analyze paintings in ways he had never thought to before. It was also common for participants to critically analyze and evaluate all types of information encountered on a daily basis, and to apply what they learned in class to current events. One FE100 participant shared:

"At home...my parents watch the news every single night, and sometimes I sit [sic] there like "Eh, whatever. I don't care about this because I'm young and I

don't have to worry about it right now,' but in [course name]...we were talking about the stuff that's being put on the news right now, and I have such a better understanding about it....now I go online and...read the news every night now...I'm interested in that stuff...I can talk about [it]...with my dad that I wasn't able to before because I wasn't informed about it."

The knowledge that this student gained from her course helped her to place current events into context and apply what she was learning in class to everyday life.

Cura Personalis

To close the discussion group, students were asked to reflect on a question to then write for a minute on that topic. Participants were prompted with: "At Loyola we talk about educating the whole person—the mind, body, and spirit. How have you found this come together for you the first year? What experiences have contributed to this?

The 41 responses to these questions were content analyzed and categorized based upon the types of experiences that contributed to students' engagement with the Core value of *cura personalis*. Generally, the responses demonstrated that participants perceived having engaged with this Core value their first year and a variety of experiences contributed to this; these are listed from most prevalent to least prevalent below.

- Coursework (n = 27)
 - First-year Program (n = 4)
- Campus activities and clubs (including service opportunities) (n = 21)
- Campus Ministry (n = 15)
- Fitness and Aquatic Center/athletics (n = 15)
- Developing friendships and connecting with peers (n = 13)
- Core advisor (n = 1)
- Availability of campus resources (n = 1)

Summary

The primary purpose of conducting first-year focus groups is to establish baseline data on the first-year experience to understand how it evolves, and what that means for students' learning and development, once Messina has been universally implemented with the fall 2015 cohort. This is in light of the Messina learning outcomes.

Though students across all focus groups could share how the Jesuit tradition was woven into their first year, responses from first-year program participants demonstrated the universal applicability of these values more so than General participants' responses. Additionally, first-year program participants shared how their involvement in those programs helped them practice reflection and incorporate it into their lives; this was not the case for General participants. Overall, participants' responses highlight a lack of self-awareness about how their values, attitudes, and beliefs influence, or shape, their decision-making.

Participants demonstrated a critical understanding of the habits and resources necessary to be successful, and they identified many ways which professors helped them to meaningfully engage the course material. Participants' responses demonstrate that engaging in a first-year program facilitated students' academic and social integration by having one's professor as an advisor and being able to form relationships and friendships through common experiences both in and outside of the classroom.

Finally, participants' responses provide evidence that they can integrate multiple sources of knowledge gained through various disciplinary lenses, types of instruction, and out-of-class experiences.

There is an opportunity to understand how Messina, Loyola 101, and General participants may experience Loyola differently as Messina is phased in to demonstrate the relative benefits of this initiative and areas for improvement. Therefore, it will be useful to couch the discussion guide questions in terms of how Messina and Loyola 101 are contributing to students' learning and development to provide more direct evidence as the institutional-level assessment of this initiative evolves.

Appendix A: Messina Learning Outcomes¹

Messina is designed to instill the intellectual curiosity and self-knowledge necessary for a first-year student's successful start to his or her Loyola education, whose commitment to personal and social responsibility reflects the Jesuit, Catholic academic and faith traditions. As a result of participation in Messina, first-year students will show progress to a deeper and fuller understanding of the interconnections unique and essential to a Jesuit Education in a contemporary world. Successful attainment of the following outcomes is not only the aim of the First-Year Seminars but it is the shared responsibility of all – faculty, administrators, peer leaders, and students.

Jesuit Mission and Values

- Develop habits of discernment and reflection in the Ignatian tradition.
- Explore and articulate values and principles involved in their personal decisionmaking.

Critical Understanding

- Develop habits of reading, writing and intellectual conversation that support academic excellence and engagement.
- Demonstrate increased knowledge and use of campus resources that aid critical thinking.

Connections to Loyola Community

- Establish healthy, mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with others including faculty, administrators, staff and peers.
- Demonstrate a sense of belonging to the community at Loyola University both in and out of the classroom.

Integrated Learning

 Integrate multiple sources of knowledge gained through various disciplinary lenses, texts, instruction, out of class experiences and personal reflection to offer a perspective in the interdisciplinary theme of the community.

Office of Institutional Research

¹ Taken directly from http://www.loyola.edu/department/fyp/messina/about/learningoutcomes.aspx (Accessed 04/29/2013).

Appendix B: Focus Group Invitation

Subject Line: A Special Invitation from Dean McGuiness

The University is interested in what students think about their experience as a new student. We would truly value you sharing your insights and opinions with us!

The Office of Institutional Research is holding a discussion group from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. on Monday, April 8th in Flannery O'Connor, room 230.

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

Students who participate will be given a \$15 gift card that can be used at Miss Shirley's, S'ghetti Eddie's, and Roland Park Bagel Company. Dinner will also be provided during the discussion.

This is an excellent opportunity for your voice to be heard at Loyola! Feedback about your experiences as a new student will help the University understand how to improve the educational experience 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 Lichtinger, Associate Director and Coordinator of First-Year Research & Retention Studies in the Office of Institutional Research, by e-mail (smtinney@loyola.edu or ir@loyola.edu) or by phone (410-617-2680) by Monday, March 18th to be a member of the discussion group.

Please join us! We look forward to seeing you on Monday, April 8th.

Sincerely,

*Ilona McGuiness, Ph.D.*Dean of First-Year Students and Academic Services

Shannon Tinney Lichtinger

Associate Director and Coordinator of First-Year Research & Retention Studies in the Office of Institutional Research

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction and Welcome (5 min)

- Introduce facilitators
- Why we asked you here tonight: tell us about your first-year experience
- Ground rules:
 - Enjoy the food
 - o Opinions, no right/wrong answer
 - State purpose of taking notes and digitally recording it (no full names used); everything is confidential
 - o EVERYONE participates. Be candid, but be respectful of facilitators and peers.

Self-introductions (3 min)

- Name
- Where you are from

Reasons for Pursuing a Degree/Expectations for Loyola (10 min)

- Why did you decide to pursue a college degree? What do you want to get out of it?
- Why did you choose to pursue your degree at Loyola? [PROBE: What makes a Loyola education unique?]
- What are you most excited to learn and/or to do during your time at Loyola?

Jesuit Mission and Values (15 min)

- How has the Jesuit tradition been woven into your experience this first year?
- How have you integrated reflection into your life the first year at Loyola? How has that come about for you?
- In what ways have you examined your own values, attitudes, and beliefs to understand how they influence your decision-making?

Critical Understanding (15 min)

- What habits would you encourage new students to develop to help them be successful their first year?
- What resources would you encourage new students to access to be successful?
- What kinds of things have instructors done in your courses that you found helped you to engage with the subject matter in meaningful ways?

Connections to the Loyola Community (15 min)

- In what ways have you found community your first year at Loyola? (Classes, residence halls, clubs/organizations, campus events, etc.)
- In what ways can we help new students find community?
- In what ways do we need to improve so there is a greater sense of community (i.e., intellectual, residential, social, etc.)?

Faculty/Advisors (10 min)

- Tell us about your advising experience. (Probe: How have you worked with your advisor?)
- Describe your relationship with your Core advisor.
- If you could change anything about the first-year advising system, what would it be?

Integrated Learning (10 min)

- How do you see what you are learning in your courses integrating with each other?
 What connections are you making?
- How do you see what you are learning in your courses integrating with experiences outside of class?

One-minute Paper—Cura Personalis (2 min)

Now, before you leave, we're going to do a one-minute paper. You DON'T need to put your name on it. I'm going to pose a couple of questions, and I want to you take a moment to think about it, and then you're going to write for one minute on that topic.

 At Loyola we talk about educating the whole person—the mind, body, and spirit. How have you found this come together for you the first year? What experiences have contributed to this?

Reflection and Follow-Up (5 min)

Now, you're welcome to take some more time—no more than five minutes—to make any other comments you were unable to share, or that now come to mind, about the topics we discussed today. Use the back of the paper for this. When you're finished you may return it to me and leave. Thank you for your participation!