
■ **2008-2009 Honors Student Focus Group
and Faculty Feedback Report**

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May 2009



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 a student focus group and from faculty written feedback.

2008-2009 Honors Student Focus Group and Faculty Feedback Report

Introduction

The Honors Program at Loyola College is an academically selective four-year program. Student application to the program is by invitation only. Students accepted into the Honors Program take twelve courses at the Honors level during their time at Loyola; eight of the 12 courses are Honors seminars. The remaining four courses are “upper-division disciplinary courses, through which Honors students fulfill their second core requirement in [the traditional humanities disciplines of] English, Fine Arts, History, Philosophy, and Theology.”¹ After completing their sophomore year of the Honors seminar sequence, students select which of these upper-division courses they wish to take. Overall, 11 of the 12 courses can fulfill core requirements in the aforementioned traditional humanities disciplines. Honors classes are small and most are conducted as seminars emphasizing effective reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, and analytical skills. In their first semester at Loyola, the Honors students take an introductory writing class (HN 200 Freshman Seminar) that fulfills the core writing requirement, and the first of four interdisciplinary seminars which examine the major historical periods of our time (HN 220 The Ancient World).

To complement the rigorous academic component of the program, students are required to enroll in a non-credit extracurricular component, known as HN100: The Honors Experience. This provides students with opportunities to participate in cultural activities on and off campus, and in and outside of the Baltimore area. In fall 2008, students visited the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, saw plays at Center Stage, and traveled to New York City to tour the Ancient- and Renaissance-related rooms and galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

In 2008, there were 53 students (5% of the incoming class) who entered the Honors program as first-year students and six faculty members who taught first-year Honors students.

Though the Honors Program is not viewed as a traditional “first-year program” at Loyola, it is often included in assessments of Loyola’s first-year programs. Like the other first-year programs, however, Honors provides academic enrichment and a social component for new students as they adjust to college life during their first semester. Students who participate in Honors are ineligible to participate in any of Loyola’s other first-year programs.

In order to assess how well the first-year programs are functioning and what improvements could be made, focus group discussions were conducted with students in each of the programs in addition 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 first-year Honors students and faculty only. Results from the Alpha, Collegium, FE 100, and General studies can be found in separate reports available from the Office of First-Year Research, part of the Office of Institutional Research.²

¹ <http://www.loyola.edu/honorsprogram/curriculum.html>

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

Methodology

The feedback from the first-year Honors students was collected by holding a focus group early in the spring 2009 semester. The goal was to have between eight and ten participants. To achieve this objective, two sets of 25 students were randomly selected from the pool of eligible students and invited via e-mail to the session (See Appendix A for a sample invitation). Invitees were selected from all Class of 2012 Honors students who were not participating in the Educational Intentionality Study that began fall 2008.¹

The focus group was held on February 16th from 5:00 to 6:30 in the second floor conference room of Flannery O'Connor Hall. Invitees were notified that dinner and two movie tickets would be provided to all participants. Seventeen students indicated that they would participate in the focus group; ultimately, 13 students attended the discussion. The focus group was 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 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 for purposes of writing the report only and that only first names should be used during the discussion. Students were informed that all comments would remain anonymous by using fictitious names in the report and that no one besides the primary investigators would listen to the recording. (See Appendix B for the discussion guide.)

There was a balanced ratio of women to men in the focus group, with seven women and six men. Participants' intended majors fell across the spectrum of discipline areas. There were three students majoring in the STEM areas, two students majoring in Business, one student majoring in the Social Sciences, four students majoring in the Arts and Humanities, and three students who were undeclared. With the exception of two students, all other participants lived in the Phil-o-Lodge located on the fourth floor of Flannery O'Connor Hall.

Faculty feedback about their experiences with the Honors Program in the fall 2008 semester was collected with a survey distributed via e-mail. Prior to winter break (December 22, 2008), faculty 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 C). Three reminders were sent to faculty members to encourage participation.² 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. Two of the six faculty members who teach first-year Honors students provided feedback.

¹ 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 institutional research efforts.

² Reminders were sent on January 7th, January 13, and January 20th of 2009.

Executive Summary

Motivations and Intentions

- ◆ Students applied to the Honors Program for varied reasons: they desired the Humanities-based curriculum, they wanted to be part of a core group that would carry over all four years at Loyola, they were encouraged by a parent or guidance counselor, and/or they were attracted to the out-of-class experiences.
- ◆ For some students, the Honors Program elevated the perceived academic reputation of Loyola College to a level comparable to other institutions in the students' choice sets.
- ◆ Some students did not fully understand the nature of the program and its requirements. The time-consuming and difficult nature of the first semester coursework and better understanding of second core requirements made some students reflect on whether or not the program was a good fit.

Characteristics of the Honors Students

- ◆ Participants agreed that students in their Honors classes were more engaged than students in non-Honors classes; non-Honors students were less likely to contribute to class discussions and more likely to be unprepared for class.
- ◆ Both faculty members who replied expressed similar sentiments when asked to compare Honors and non-Honors students they teach. Honors students were perceived to have a higher level of ability and were more motivated than the non-Honors students.

Expectations and Outcomes

- ◆ There was a degree of misalignment between students' expectations for the program and what they experienced with regards to the text-based nature of the courses and upper-level second core requirements.
- ◆ Several students expressed that a more in-depth treatment of fewer primary texts is preferred, and one faculty member's feedback reaffirmed this sentiment among students.
- ◆ Honors coursework helped students with writing research papers and properly citing resources, adjusting to heavy reading loads, improving critical reading and analytical skills, improving note-taking skills, and learning different time management techniques.
- ◆ Participants liked having the same people in their classes and on their floor. This familiarity led to the development of strong social ties among Honors students; most confessed they did not know many people outside of the program.

The Jesuit Tradition

- ◆ With the exception of the pursuit of academic excellence, most participants did not feel that the Jesuit ideals were *explicitly* communicated in their Honors classes.
- ◆ Two different themes emerged with regards to how students perceived the Jesuit tradition woven into their Loyola experience. Several students thought that unless you attend mass, formed relationships with the Jesuits, or performed community service you probably wouldn't experience the Jesuit tradition. Conversely, one

student thought the Jesuit tradition was more implicitly woven into students' experiences.

- ◆ A couple of students who attended Jesuit high schools were disappointed that the Jesuit tradition was not more explicitly woven into the curriculum at Loyola.

Advising

- ◆ Core advisors were very accessible. The student-Core advisor relationship was described as personable, close, and embodying a genuine care for the student and his/her interests.
- ◆ Core advisors were viewed as being very helpful in planning schedules, they were good sources of information, they were very responsive by answering questions or finding information for students to help aide them in making decisions and resolving problems.

Activities and Social Experiences

- ◆ Out-of-class and cultural excursions helped students form relationships with faculty and peers.
- ◆ Of the 13 participants, only two were not a part of the Phil-o-Lodge living-learning community located on the fourth floor of Flannery O'Connor Hall. The primary drawback to living on the floor was that students did not know many others outside of the Honors Program.

New Ideas

- ◆ Some students perceived no extrinsic rewards for participating in the Honors Program, like Honors courses being weighted differently in calculating GPA to reflect their hard work in rigorous classes.
- ◆ Students wanted more flexibility in the classes from which they can choose to satisfy Honors requirements.

Detailed Findings

Motivations and Intentions

Participants' discussion of why they applied to the Honors Program highlighted the diversity of motivations and intentions for doing so. A few students noted the influential role that parents and counselors had in the decision-making process. For example, one student jokingly remarked, "My mom made me," while another young man noted that his high school counselor, "Thought it would be a good challenge for me." Other students decided to apply to the Honors Program because they perceived Loyola as being lower in terms of academic reputation compared to the other schools to which they had applied. By applying to the Honors Program, Loyola was viewed on par with the other schools. Additionally, there were academic and social reasons for applying to the program. Two students expressed that they were interested in the Humanities-based curriculum, one because his intended major was English and another because she wanted a similar experience as she had in high school and thought the Honors Program would provide the balance she sought in coursework as an intended Business major. For many, getting to know a core group of people over four years and the cultural experiences woven into the Honors curriculum were attractive components too.

Participants' comments demonstrated they did not fully understand the nature of the program and its requirements. For some, they expressed that the first semester coursework was very time-consuming and challenging. Further, having a better understanding of second core requirements made them reflect on whether or not the program was a good fit. For example, one student commented:

I applied thinking it was going to be different. I didn't think it was going to be anything like this ... I applied just because I thought it was going [to] actually, um, look, like, look really good on a resume for a graduate school application but, for me, it's just not worth it.

When asked if the student thought that some of the skills learned through Honors coursework would carry through to graduate school, like learning how to scan text, how to read for content, and how to discuss material in classes, the student responded, "Not really because.... I'm a Physics major so....grad schools won't really care how I do in the Humanity-based [sic] subjects." It seemed that, for some, it was difficult to understand how engaging in academically rigorous coursework, like in the Honors Program, contributes to developing transferrable skills that transcend discipline area content. When critiquing the program most of the negative comments concerned devoting so much time to classes that were not related to one's major area of interest. This was particularly consistent among intended STEM majors.

Characteristics of the Honors Students

Participants spoke to the quality and level of learning in Honors and non-Honors courses by making distinctions between Honors and non-Honors students' classroom behavior. Participants agreed that students in their Honors classes were more engaged than students in non-Honors classes because students in the latter are less likely to talk in class, they are more likely to be unprepared, they seem to "just want to get by," and it is easier to fade into the background by nature of non-Honors class sizes. While there was much lively discussion in their Honors seminars, students indicated that they may have

actually learned more in their non-Honors classes. In part, this was explained by students who commented that the Honors seminars were generally discussion-based while non-Honors courses were a lecture style format, and many of their non-Honors classes were in subjects to which they had not been exposed.

Both faculty members who replied to the survey expressed similar sentiments when asked to compare Honors students to the non-Honors students they teach. Honors students were perceived to have a higher level of ability and were more motivated than the non-Honors students. As one respondent noted, "Perhaps the most obvious difference is in their willingness and ability to do readings for classes and to speak up creatively and thoughtfully in discussion." Indeed, focus group participants commented that they had good professors (for Ancient World) and interesting in-class discussions. However, when asked if these conversations continued outside the classroom there was a resounding "No" among focus group participants.

Expectations and Outcomes

Although students expressed that they had positive experiences in the Honors Program, there was a degree of misalignment between students' expectations for the program and what they experienced. Participants described the program as difficult and time-consuming. In particular, some students were negatively critical of the text-based Ancient World course where eleven primary texts were covered during the semester. Students expressed frustration about having to cover that amount of material in just one semester. One student remarked:

We read a lot but I don't feel like we get everything out of everything that we read. Like, we kind of read everything there is to read, well not everything, but a lot about a certain area and then we, like, talk about it for one class and then move on.

To illustrate this point another student provided this example:

Well, like in Ancient World, I think we did Rome in what, like, four days, or something like that?...Two days maybe?...And we probably read, like, five, well, at least large excerpts from like four or five books about Rome and then we spent, like, three days on Rome. So, basically, we glossed through some odd [sic] 300 years of history in three days . . .

Some students expressed difficulty in making connections among the texts for which they were responsible given scant in-class treatments of them. In part, their reactions are based on a structure they were accustomed to in high school. When asked if the Ancient World class format resembled what they experienced in high school, there was a resounding, "No!" In high school, courses were structured around a textbook, or if it was structured around a number of primary texts then there were fewer of them so that more time was spent on each in a slower-paced class where students perceived a more in-depth coverage of the material.

Though only two faculty members responded to the survey, one professor affirmed students' responses regarding the structure of the four-course interdisciplinary sequence by stating:

In my opinion--an opinion that is buttressed by responses I hear quite frequently from the Honors students--the biggest failure of the current structure of the four-course sequence curriculum, devoted as it is to broad survey treatments of historical periods, is that it's a mile wide and an inch deep. Even if some survey-styled format is retained (and there are obviously some good reasons to retain it) I suspect that the students would benefit from more in-depth examination of texts.

There is some evidence based upon students' comments and one faculty member's feedback that a more in-depth treatment of fewer primary texts is preferred.

One student was unaware that the second set of core requirements was at a higher level than what is required of non-Honors students.¹ Even though this information is in the Undergraduate Catalogue and on the Honors Program Web site, the student didn't feel this information was as visible as it could have been when he said, "They didn't tell us about that [second set of core requirements] up front!" Although the Honors Program literature states that students can begin taking these upper-level courses after completing the four-course Honors seminar sequence in the sophomore year, there were three first-year students taking a 400-level History course this spring semester. These students were frustrated about the requirement as evidenced by the following remarks.

Student #1:

...I find it a little absurd that we have to try and learn that much and go to a class that specific where the teacher doesn't even know she has a freshman in the class which is kind of my class right now.

Student #2:

It's kind of ridiculous 'cause I'm taking a senior-level course as a freshman just because I'm required to do it.

Student #3:

I'm in the class too and, um, I had to take it because I had no other, like, choice in what to take because of, like, the way my AP credits fell, like, I didn't have to

¹ Instead of the English, Philosophy and Theology 200-level requirements, Honors students are required to take an English course at the 300-level and Philosophy and Theology courses above the 320-level. For History, Honors students skip the 300-level requirement and must take a special topics course or a seminar at or above the 400-level (*Loyola College in Maryland Undergraduate Catalogue*, 2008-2009, p. 197).

take a Math or whatever so I had four classes and need a fifth and I didn't want to waste an elective because I'm a Business major and I need those later. And so I am taking a class in with History majors and I hate History so it doesn't make sense.

During this conversation, students were asked if they were advised to do this, and asked for an alternative to taking a 400-level course as a first-year student. Based upon the comments above and other discussion it is unclear if students were directly advised to do this. For instance, one student commented, "The alternative would have been to wait but I don't understand why I'd have to take a senior-level History course ever if I don't want to!" Indeed, these three students were frustrated not only because they were taking a senior-level course as a first-year student, but also because they had little interest in ever taking such a course.

Participants discussed the benefits and drawbacks of participation in the Honors Program with regards to their other courses and overall academic performance. In general, participating in Honors contributed to students becoming savvy about time management; they indicated that they learned how to prioritize their course workloads in light of individual professor's expectations and time constraints, what to focus in on, what to skim, and what to forego. Most agreed that their Honors coursework made their other courses look easy even if they were challenging. Additionally, students felt their Honors coursework helped them adjust to heavy reading loads, improve their critical reading and analytical skills, and improve note-taking skills. A number of students noted that their Honors coursework helped them with writing research papers and knowing how to properly cite sources. Generally, students tended to attribute improvements in writing to their Ancient World class more so than to their writing seminar. At the same time, several students expressed dissatisfaction with what they felt were vague faculty expectations, unhelpful feedback, and not having a sense of how they performed by the end of the semester.

Students were positive about the social aspects of the program. They felt it was a good way to meet people. Participants liked having the same people in their classes as well as on their floor. To an outsider, it was evident there was a strong social bond among these students. There are costs and benefits of such strong social ties. On the one hand, students have a shared sense of community and a social support group. On the other hand, most of the participants said they didn't know many, if any, students outside of the program. In part, this is due to the fact that many Honors students live on the Phil-o-Lodge floor together too.

Participants were very positive about getting to know their Ancient World professors through off-campus activities and the bonds formed there. They appreciated being invited to professors' houses for dinner and getting to know them outside of class and on a more personal level. Participants also liked having their professor as their advisor and discussed the benefits of this aspect of Loyola's advising system.

The Jesuit Tradition

Generally, participants did not feel that the Jesuit ideals, with the exception of the pursuit of academic excellence, were explicitly communicated in their Honors classes. However, when encouraged to think about the foundations of the Jesuit tradition, as embodied in the Core values and *cura personalis*, and not necessarily in terms of religious doctrine, students began to think more broadly. While one student mentioned that it is "difficult to

organically fit [it] in”, he noted “...there [were] a lot of interesting...moral questions that came up in class, like last semester the question of justice versus expediency and all that, but the terminology is not really, really Jesuit, you know, it’s more general than that.”

Students were invited to consider how they perceived the Jesuit ideals were woven into their Loyola experience in general. There were two different themes that emerged in students’ responses. There were several students who believed that unless it is purposefully and explicitly woven into one’s in-class and out-of-class experiences then one would not be able to recognize the Jesuit tradition in one’s Loyola experience. For instance, a couple of students who attended Jesuit high schools expressed how different their Loyola experience was from their high school experience because the Jesuit ideals were explicitly integrated into their high school curriculum. One of these students went so far as to say that Loyola did not feel like a Jesuit school to him when compared to his high school experience. Another thought that this difference was “disappointing.” Similarly, two other students added that unless one makes an effort to get involved in service, form personal relationships with the Jesuits on campus, or go to mass then one probably wouldn’t experience the Jesuit tradition, and the values and ideals it embodies. To the contrary, one student indicated that just because students may not be cognizant of the Jesuit ideals within the curriculum, it does not mean that they are not implicitly woven into one’s experiences here. The student articulated this when stating:

I kind of disagree because even though I don’t necessarily know what exactly they are, I don’t think you need to be hearing about them to be receiving them.

Like, I know, one of the big things they emphasized at Orientation was the Core and, like, um, varying fields of education and striving for more. Those are all things that Loyola is based upon and you don’t even really think about it just because you’re here. So, I wouldn’t say it’s not here unless you make it here, I think it’s here but you just don’t think about it. No one talks about it. I definitely agree with that. I’ve had two teachers say, ‘Ah, this is the Magis. Ha ha!’ and then move on....The teachers do not make the connections to Jesuit ideals in our everyday classes....You have to do it for yourself, but I do think it is still there.

Clearly, students had differing opinions about the extent to which and the ways in which they are exposed to the Jesuit tradition in their courses and, generally, in their experiences at Loyola.

Advising

Students spoke positively about relationships with their Ancient World professors who also serve as their Core advisors. They noted that their Core advisors were very accessible and that the relationship could be described as personable, close, and embodying a genuine care for the student and her/his interests. Common responses about their advising experience were: their Core advisors were very helpful in planning their schedule, they were good sources of information, and they were very responsive by

answering questions or finding information to aide in decision-making and problem resolution.

Activities and Social Experiences

Participants mentioned a variety of out-of-class and cultural excursions they engaged in with their fellow classmates and professors, including a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, visiting the Walters Art Gallery and attending a performance of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (BSO). During the discussion, students focused on experiences where they had an opportunity to get acquainted with their professor beyond the classroom. For instance when going to the Walters or the BSO, students often mentioned going to dinner afterwards at a restaurant or at a professor's house. It was meaningful to them to make a connection with faculty. Beyond this, one student articulated that she enjoyed planning for and attending such easily accessible events with like-minded students.

Of the 13 participants, only two were not a part of the Phil-o-Lodge living-learning community located on the fourth floor of Flannery O'Connor Hall. They chose not to live there because they wanted to meet and get to know others outside of the Honors Program. Of those living in Phil-o-Lodge, most students said they chose to live in the there because they wanted to live in Flannery O'Connor Hall. Further, participants wanted to be around others who were as academically focused as they were and thought the floor would be conducive to studying; however, there was jovial debate as if this was truly the case. While students expressed that a benefit of living on the floor was that everyone on that floor shared common classes which, in turn, was related to students working and studying together, there were some drawbacks to living on the floor. The primary detriment to living on the floor was that students did not know many students outside of the Honors Program. Moreover, the insular and interconnected nature of the group meant that when disagreements or drama arose everyone knew about it. Finally, one student noted that because everyone was in the same program and lived together, productive work time could be compromised by complaining about it instead of doing it.

New Ideas

Participants were asked what they hear about from friends and relatives at other schools that they'd like to see at Loyola. Participants' responses were focused solely on the Honors Program. A prevalent theme during this discussion was that some students did not feel they were extrinsically rewarded for participating in the program. One student noted that another Honors Program to which s/he applied offered participants many perks, including: a scholarship, first choice of classes, an opportunity to move in early during the summer, first on the list for being chosen for any money in addition to professors' research projects. S/he commented, "From what I can tell...the people who live across the hall go out four nights a week. We do a lot more work than they do but we're not getting anything out of it except Honors, Honors on our diploma." In the end, several of the participants openly suggested that Honors coursework should be weighted more heavily in the calculation of a GPA than non-Honors coursework to reflect its rigor and their efforts.

A second theme emerged with regards to students wanting more flexibility in the classes from which they can choose to satisfy Honors requirements. One student mentioned s/he felt as if they are, "locked into [their] Honors classes" and that their classes are chosen for them. Two other students noted they wished there was a broader range of courses they could choose from to meet their requirements. For instance, one student commented s/he wished there were more options for the electives one could take during

the sophomore year. Typically, the choice set consists of HN290 Honors: Art History, HN291 Honors: Music, or HN292 Honors: Theater. Suggestions offered included additional art courses like drawing and photography.

Finally, one intended STEM major expressed feeling excluded because the Honors curriculum was organized around the four Humanities disciplines. This student provided an example of how her/his sibling's Honors experience was organized at the school they attended. S/he explained:

...[W]here my brother and sister both went to college as undergrads, they were in their Honors Program and, like, that wasn't just centralized about [sic] the Humanities. Like, my brother was a Finance major and my sister, Chemistry, and they both had to write their own respective theses of their own choice and it encompassed no matter what field you would study. And, here, I feel like if you aren't one of the four fields that the rotation covers then you're kind of excluded.

This student offers an alternative to the way the current program is organized that s/he perceived would support a more inclusive culture. This alternative seeming had a broader range of discipline areas included in the curriculum as well as a culminating senior experience where students could write a thesis that coincided with their academic interests.

Summary

The Honors Program invites some of the most academically talented students to enroll in an academically rigorous and socially stimulating four-year experience. A key attribute of the Honors experience is the close-knit relationships that students form by nature of cohort-based classes and living together. While not all students decided to live on the Phil-o-Lodge floor, they developed these bonds with peers through their academic experiences. The drawback to the development of such a strong social bond is that it creates an insulated group that may detract from developing a larger sense of community among students; indeed, most participants noted they did not know many students outside of the Honors Program. Besides forming close relationships with peers, participants duly noted that the relationships they formed with their Ancient World professors/Core advisors through in-class and out-of-class experiences facilitated a comfortable, personable, and collegial advising relationship that students appreciated.

Participants expressed challenges associated with the amount of academic work within the Honors curriculum while at the same time indicating that they did not feel they were getting the depth of engagement with the course material that they expected. Still, students noted the contributions their Honors classes made to their intellectual and social development that carried over to their other courses. While students recognized these benefits of participating in the Honors Program, many perceived a lack of extrinsic rewards for engaging in the program. There is room for improvement with regards to more clearly articulating the nature, requirements, and benefits of the program in ways that are accessible and meaningful to students as they make their initial enrollment decisions, progress through the program, and transition from Loyola to their next endeavor.

Appendix A: Honors Focus Group Invitation

The College is interested in what students think about their experiences in the Honors Program. Having completed your first semester, we hope you'll share 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, February 16th in the 2nd 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 Honors 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 or ir@loyola.edu) or by phone (410-617-2680) by *Monday, January 26th* to be a member of the discussion group.

Please join us! We look forward to seeing you on February 16th.

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

Appendix B: Honors 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 Honors 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. Where they're from
 - b. Which dorm they live in

- III. EXPECTATIONS (20 min)
 - a. We're new to Loyola. Describe the Honors Program to us. How has the program been this semester?
 - b. Why did you decide to apply for the Honors Program? If you hadn't applied to or didn't get in to the Honors Program, was there another first-year program you would have been interested in? (Inquire: What is it about "x" that piqued your interest?)
 - c. What were your expectations for the Honors Program? (What do you hope to get out of it?) How has the program met those expectations?

- IV. OUTCOMES (10 min)
 - a. How has participating in the Honors Program helped you with other courses?
 - b. How would you describe the quality and level of learning in your Honors courses in comparison with other classes at Loyola?
 - c. Describe the influence Honors had on your academic performance this semester. Writing? Critical thinking/analytical skills? Discussion skills?
 - d. How was the Jesuit tradition woven into your Honors courses? How about your experience at Loyola in general?

- V. FACULTY/ADVISORS (15 min)
 - a. Let's talk about your Honors professors for a few minutes. How would you describe your relationship with your Honors professors?
 - i. Compare this relationship to your relationships with non-Honors professors.
 - ii. Do you think the relationship was different than your non-Honors friends' relationships with their professors/advisors?
 - b. Tell us about your advising experience. (Probe: How have you worked with your advisor?)

VI. ACTIVITIES/SOCIAL (15 min)

- a. What types of Honors 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 being in the Honors Program influence your transition to college life? Do you think this transition would have been different if you hadn't been in Honors? How so? (Probe: Did it help you make connections with friends, the college, the larger community, etc.?)
- c. Do you live in the Phil-o-Lodge? If not, why did you opt not to live in it?
 - i. What has your experience been like living on that floor? What are the pros/cons of living on the floor?
 - ii. How has living on the Phil-o-Lodge floor contributed to your academic experience?

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 you to 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: Honors Faculty Questions

Dear Honors Faculty Member,

As a faculty member teaching a first-year Honors course, your feedback is important as we plan for a new cohort of Honors students next year. In an effort to hear from the entire Honors faculty, 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 first-year Honors students during focus groups and will be used for program planning to ensure that the Honors Program is a distinctive high-quality, experience for first-year students at Loyola. Thus, your participation is extremely important to us.

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