

Messina

Senior Focus Group Findings

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Summary of Focus Group Discussions

This is an assessment of students in the class of 2018 that were a part of the two third of students in Messina during their first year at Loyola University Maryland. The project described here is qualitative in nature and the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of what aspects of participating in Messina continued to be relevant to students during their four year experience at Loyola.

Additionally, this study also asked students to reflect on components that were helpful or would have been helpful to include during the Messina experience. Mary Ellen Wade designed and conducted these focus groups with the assistance of administrators at Loyola from the offices of Academic Affairs, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Student Engagement, Student Life, and Student Support and Wellness Promotion. The focus group was conducted on May 16, 2018. The complete assessment of data and final report was completed in June 2018.

Key Findings of Focus Group Discussions¹

What follows is a brief summary of relevant findings from data collected through the focus groups. Details about the methodology and an expanded explanation and discussion of the findings of this study can be found in the report, after this summary. Focus group questions can be found in Appendix A.

Beneficial Elements of Messina

The areas below represent aspects of Messina that were beneficial to students.

Community Developed Through Participation

Students valued relationships developed with peers through Messina. The participatory nature of the Messina class and enrichment forced students to interact with others which students found helped them in forming relationships with other students beyond their Messina experience. Several students commented on the friendships formed with peers in their Messina class that continued throughout their time at Loyola. Additionally, students indicated appreciation that relationships with working group members (faculty, mentor (administrator), and Evergreen) continued beyond the first year and feeling that these individuals genuinely cared for the student's success at Loyola.

Enrichment Sessions

Students found value in time spent in enrichment on topics related to the transition to college. Sessions of note included those on housing, time management, handling course load, and study abroad. Students saw the spring semester as being an opportunity to engage in deeper conversations given the rapport developed in the fall semester.

Exposure to Baltimore & City Navigation

For the second year², excursions into Baltimore were an important part of the Messina experience in the first year as they helped students feel comfortable with exploring the city on their own beyond Messina. An area with this that was appreciated for groups that did it was an additional conversation about how to navigate the city on your own, specifically navigating public transportation and suggested trips and restaurant recommendations from members of the working group. Students appreciated those excursions to restaurants, neighborhoods, and attractions they typically may not get to on their own.

¹ Subsequent findings are listed alphabetically

² This was the second year Messina conducted focus groups with seniors

Living in Proximity to Other Messina Students

Students described appreciation in having lived in the same building as their Messina classmates. When this didn't occur there was a feeling that this should be something that happens as much as possible. Students commented on class conversations occurring back in the residence hall, ease of developing study groups, and building more meaningful relationships with others through living in community.

Elements to Further Examine

The areas below represent areas mentioned by students where further improvements can be made in relation to Messina.

Advising Improvements

For the second year, students desired more improvements to the core advising model. Students indicated a need for core advisors to better familiarize themselves with how to advise students with intended majors in other academic disciplines. This was a common frustration of students in all focus groups. Two specific themes came from student responses- core advisors who were unable to offer correct advising information or have any knowledge of who to best refer the student to for additional assistance in this area and undue pressure from core advisors to get students to major or minor in their academic discipline.

Course Offerings

Similar to last year's focus groups, students desire that all Messina classes fulfill core or diversity requirements. While most Messina courses do fulfill these areas, some that don't meet that category which sometimes led to students being more restricted on future options for electives. Tied with the above area, there was the thought that if every course counted towards the core there may be less of an impact if your advisor gave you incorrect guidance. Another aspect of this was the perspective that removing major classes from Messina may help students to avoid needing to switch sections mid-year. Students that had to switch found this to be a disappointing experience.

Enrichment Sessions: Topics and Structure

Students valued their enrichment session experience but had suggestions for other topics to consider that would be beneficial. These topics including conversations on privilege, navigating relationships (both intimate and friendships), and mental health. Students saw the spring semester providing an opportunity to dive deeper into conversations given the rapport developed in the fall semester. Similar to last year, there was a sense from students that less enrichment sessions should be used as a course continuation. This was emphasized by students who indicated all of their enrichment sessions were structured in this way for one semester.

Impact of Messina

The areas below represent aspects of Messina that influenced students beyond their first year.

Confidence Developed Through Support

Messina's support and structure was beneficial later on as students took part in research seminars and other academic experiences at Loyola. Students talked about developing the confidence to communicate with others and take an active role in their academic pursuits. One student described this support as being a draw for prospective students and their families in choosing Loyola. Students felt that the support was not limited to the first year but carried beyond Messina due to the faculty, administrators, and student leaders they interacted with in the program.

Networking

Students viewed Messina as an opportunity to network with others they may not have typically connected with on their own. This included students who they would later work with in leadership roles, clubs, and organizations. This also included faculty and administrators who became mentors during their Loyola experience. There was a belief that emphasizing this aspect of Messina others may have different impressions of the value of the program.

Recommendations

The research proposes the following recommendations based off of information collected in this study. These recommendations are explained in greater detail on page 10 of the report.

- A closer examination of the training and expectations of core advisors
- Finding ways to change student attitudes toward the Core in Messina conversations
- Sharing data with both Academic Affairs and Student Development
- Using this data to inform future Messina trainings and workshops
- Conducting a similar focus group with the class of 2019

Detailed Findings

Introduction

This study focused on students in the class of 2018 that were the two third of students³ who participated in Messina during their first year at Loyola University Maryland. The purpose of conducting these focus groups was threefold: to get a sense from graduating seniors about the topics and experiences that shaped their personal and academic development during their entire time at Loyola, to get a sense of the ways in which Messina may have created a foundation to support student's personal and academic development during their time at Loyola, and to get a sense of ways/areas in which Messina can continue to grow in helping students develop academically and personally.

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

Focus groups were conducted at an event on May 16, 2018. A total of three focus groups were conducted. Groups ranged in size from nine to ten participants. Each focus group was homogenous in that it was composed of class of 2018 students. Students represented in the focus groups represented a variety of majors/minors, genders, and participated in different Messina sections during their first year.

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

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

Data Analysis

Focus group interview audio recordings went through several phases of analysis. First, all recordings were listened to so that the research coordinator could get a general sense of common themes mentioned by students. Next, a more detailed analysis took place in a second listen in which data was divided into a number of common topic areas. A third analysis took place to refine categories of responses. Occasionally a highlight from one student's experience was an area another student thought was something could be improved. Efforts were made in the analysis to highlight these areas of overlap.

Key Findings

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

³ The remaining one third of students participated in Loyola 101- a one semester, pass/fail course

Key Finding 1: Beneficial Elements of Messina

The areas below represent aspects of Messina that were beneficial to students.

Community Developed Through Participation

The structure of Messina helped students form a community with their peers and leaders throughout the first year and beyond. A specific element that supported development of community included being in a course with students coming from different backgrounds and experiences. Students indicated that

“It was great having that core group you were coming back to...particularly in the first couple weeks of campus...It was a helpful way to get me to feel comfortable in meeting others on campus.”

as you begin to work toward your major, your interactions with others from different academic disciplines becomes limited which is why this was something that was important to them as they reflected back on their first year. Additionally, being in a course where you were expected to be an active participant in a discussion fostered an

environment where students moved from surface level conversations and interactions to more meaningful relationships. In some cases, working groups built in icebreakers and other mandatory interactive components which forced students to engage more with each other and the course content.

This community was a positive experience for students but in some cases more could be done to help students navigate change in the community. One student described being in a Messina section where their entire friend group from that section left Loyola. This complicated that student's experience as many first years find their roommate groups through Messina relationships. How to navigate those changes is an area of possible growth. Tied with this were circumstances where a student did not find a strong peer connection in their Messina class. It may be helpful for the working group to promote developing relationships beyond the immediate Messina section. In this instance, the student still found community through the support and guidance of their Messina faculty member- a bond that continued through the duration of their time at Loyola.

Enrichment Sessions

Students found value in time spent in enrichment on topics related to the transition to college. Sessions of note included those on housing, time management, handling your course load, and study abroad. Students felt that Messina prepared them for the work expected of them beyond the first year.

Something mentioned by students tied to this area was the idea that your attitude defines your experience in Messina. This presented itself in two ways. The first was having patience with the program and components of enrichment. Students described feeling that there were times in enrichment they did not want to be there, and feeling that there were other things they could be doing with their time. Looking back, some of those topics being presented shaped future experiences beyond the first year. There was a sense of appreciation for having done Messina over Loyola 101.

“You may get frustrated from it, [enrichment sessions] but you will learn from it.”

The second was having enthusiasm during enrichment sessions and outside excursions. Students described that being open to the experience, having a positive attitude, and participating in

conversations not just shaped your own time in Messina but that of your peers. This was an element they thought would be beneficial to share with future Messina students.

Exposure to Baltimore & City Navigation

Excursions into Baltimore continued to be an important part of the Messina experience in the first year as they helped students feel comfortable with exploring the city on their own beyond Messina. Students emphasized having a session that reviewed different public transportation options (Charm City Circulator, Collegetown Shuttle, etc.) as being beneficial given that first year students do not have cars on campus and as an alternative to Uber. One student mentioned finding it helpful when their group leaders offered their personal tips for navigating the city such as recommending a particular neighborhood, event, or dining establishment and how to get there. Connected to actual excursions into Baltimore was an appreciation for enrichment sessions that provided an overview of Baltimore's history and culture.

"I actually explored the city a lot freshman year... I feel that you see more of the city using public transportation."

One consideration suggested by students was that working groups could solicit more input from students on the planning of the trip. This was in regard to students having outside work commitments and responsibilities, particularly in the spring semester when they are more involved on campus or may have jobs at Loyola events such as the spring open house sessions. For some students, these trips seemed like an extra thing they had to do, but other students countered that this was a chance to get to know their faculty and peers on a more meaningful level and should be continued. Overall, there was an appreciation that these were a part of the program and that the Baltimore excursions add value to the experience.

Living in Proximity to Other Messina Students

Students described the value of taking part in a living-learning community and a desire that future students would be able to have a similar experience. One aspect of this was an appreciation of being

"It was pretty interesting to go home and bring what you learned in class it was like just a way to get closer to each other. I really like the living learning aspect of Messina."

able to live in the same building as their Messina classmates. Students talked about knowing that in some ways this has changed since their first year in that your classmates may be scattered among the first year residential areas. This was something they advised against because they found that the random interactions with their classmates

while doing laundry, the ease of being able to form a study group together, and knowing if you needed help you could seek out someone from your Messina class in your residential building was important to them in their first year. Students believed that these elements should be mentioned to incoming first-year students during summer orientation as those reasons to consider avoiding selecting a specific roommate to live with in the first year.

Key Finding 2: Elements to Further Examine

The areas below represent areas mentioned by students where further improvements can be made in relation to Messina.

Advising Improvements

Academic advising by the Messina faculty member continued to be a source of contention in this year's focus groups. Students were looking for more informed guidance from faculty as they were contemplating a major/minor. Students wanted their core advisor to have a broader level of knowledge or a better way to direct students when they didn't know a particular answer. Students suggested having core advisors do more to promote the Academic Advising office as a resource since this is the sole focus of their office.

Another area concerning to students was when they had experiences where their core advisor tried to steer students in majoring in their academic discipline during advising conversations. This came up in different focus groups and was not limited to one student's concern. This effort came across as pushy and off-putting for students who experienced this. Specifically students mentioned, two humanities departments and one social science department.

Students feel that there should be consistently good, informed, and unbiased advising experience regardless of which Messina section you are placed in. Students were frustrated that advisors could not provide accurate advice on what core classes to take at different parts of their experience. This impacted other academic experiences beyond Messina- including the ability to take part in a Study Abroad experience or the locations they may be limited to pursuing for a semester abroad given courses they had already taken at Loyola. Students acknowledged that a humanities faculty member may not be able to provide accurate advising to a science major but that more could be done to ensure that core advisors are able to provide correct information. One student mentioned having to take two summer courses to stay on track for graduation after being provided inaccurate advice.

"As a freshman you don't realize how dense [the core] it is"

Students acknowledged that there are some core advisors that offered reliable guidance and that these advisors could be a resource for other faculty in this role. In one case, a student had the reverse situation in that their core advisor directed the student to appropriate resources (ex. course catalogue, AASC, and the major worksheets) so when they had a less involved major advisor they could navigate what they needed to take in order to be able to graduate.

Course Offerings

Similar to last year's focus groups, an aspect of Messina students indicated as an area for change is to ensure that all Messina classes fulfill core or diversity requirements. While most Messina courses do fulfill these areas, there are some that don't meet that category which sometimes led to students being

[In Messina] "I took a law course and it piqued my curiosity."

more restricted on future options for electives. Tied with the above area, there was the thought that if every course counted towards the core there may be less of an impact if your advisor was not as helpful. The student quoted to the left was someone who had a bit of leeway in their major requirements so the nature of them taking a course that didn't fulfill a major or core requirement wasn't an issue. They still found

the class content and conversation interesting and were more open to this experience. However, they acknowledged that friends in more restrictive disciplines were burdened when they took a Messina course that didn't advance them in meeting a core or diversity requirement.

Another thing mentioned connected to this idea of considering what courses are offered in Messina was the thought of removing major classes from Messina to avoid students needing to switch sections mid-year when they decided this was not a major they planned to pursue because switching sections was a negative experience. One student who had to switch Messina sections struggled adapting to their new course, describing it as "You are like that person who jumps in at mile 12 of a marathon." They found trying to establish relationships with their peers who had already had a semester together seemed forced and difficult to navigate which made the rest of their Messina experience not as meaningful.

Enrichment Sessions: Topics and Structure

While enrichment sessions were mentioned last year as areas to continue to examine, something noticeably different this year was the lack of students suggesting that the spring semester enrichment schedule be reduced. This year students indicated valuing their enrichment sessions throughout the year with possible changes on what could be covered during the fall versus spring semesters.

Students viewed the spring semester as an opportunity to have deeper conversations on topics such as what privilege is and how your privilege may influence how you see the world. A student thought this may be a way of breaking down the "bubbles" students find themselves being a part at Loyola of based off of their backgrounds and identity. Navigating relationships (both intimate and friendships) was another topic that could be explored more. One student shared that their Messina began talking about navigating toxic roommate situations after another student in the course shared a personal experience they were encountering in this area. Given that this is not something limited to the first year there was a belief that talking through this could be beneficial regardless of whether or not you were personally experiencing this at that time. Mental health was another topic mentioned as being an area of growth. On the topic of needing more conversations on mental health, there was an acknowledgement of sessions already done on stress management but needing to have more time to talk about suicide and depression in college students and taking the time to encourage students to seek out the Counseling Center on campus. One student commented "If you want to build a community relationship you need to look out for your community members."

One element that stayed similar to last year in regard to enrichment sessions was agreement that fewer enrichment sessions should be used as a course continuation. This was particularly prevalent for students who indicated all of their enrichment sessions ended up being course continuation with one of their Messina professors. There was an interest of having a balance of engaging in topics related to the transition to college along with those times when a class may explore content connected back to the course. One successful example provided was a theology professor who had their students do a tour of local places of worship that helped students understand different faith traditions while learning more about that congregation in the Baltimore community.

Key Finding 3: Impact of Messina

The areas below represent aspects of Messina that influenced students beyond their first year.

Confidence Developed Through Support and Networking Opportunities

One student described coming into Loyola shy and apprehensive. The support and structure of Messina was beneficial later to them later on when they took part in a senior research seminar because they were a more confident student. This was contributed to the ways in which their Messina working group prepared them to have conversations, interact with others students, and maintain eye contact. Messina was described as the way you made friends and transitioned to Loyola in the first year.

The quote to the right was stated by a student who works with Admission. This was a comment other students in this focus group endorsed. A caveat students mentioned is when there is conflict among working group members. Students are not oblivious to it- which is why it has the power to negatively impact the student experience and should be remedied as soon as possible.

“The amount of parents and students that are actually genuinely interested in Loyola first and foremost because of Messina is actually really crazy...Messina does provide this very comforting and welcoming environment to something that is initially very frightening.”

Something new that students talked about was viewing Messina as a “networking opportunity.” The reasons for them making this assertion were not necessarily new; examples given were meeting students that they would later be leaders with on campus or having Messina faculty and administrators become mentors to them during their Loyola experience. What was different is this idea of using this concept as a way to market Messina to prospective students and current students in the program. There was a belief that in emphasizing this aspect of Messina, others may have different impressions of the value of the program. Overall, the students in these focus groups saw the benefit of this living-learning program and a desire that other students may have similar experiences in future years.

Future Recommendations

Having seniors reflect back on their first year experience provided valuable insights into those aspects of Messina and the first year experience, both positive and negative, that have stuck with them over the course of their four years at Loyola. This researcher finds it promising that students are seeing how Messina benefitted them beyond the first year.

Students encountering negative core advising experiences was a theme prevalent across all of the focus groups and needs to be addressed through training and resources provided to core advisors, ensuring that this information is disseminated to all who fulfill this role. This researcher acknowledges that in listening to the audio from these groups it is evident that students view the core curriculum as an obligation- something students are doing to check off a box- in this case, to graduate. This is different than if they viewed the core as something that had inherent value to their academic experience.

Student responses suggest that this could be because of the large amount of elements needed to complete in the core, particularly for those students in majors that do not permit much flexibility on electives. Students in these group did seem interested in possibilities that exist at Loyola in regard to

pursuing minors and study abroad opportunities- this researcher observed that students do have experiences where a core course fosters an interest in another discipline or leads students to discover connections between their major and another area. However, future conversations on the structure of the core should take into consideration that more flexibility extended to students may foster a greater appreciation of non-discipline specific courses among students. Something else that could change this attitude toward the core is by doing a better job in explaining the history behind the core and how students should approach the opportunity to take courses beyond their major.

One element that was different in comparison to last year's data was a lack of mention by students in reducing the amount of spring semester enrichment sessions. The researcher observed that this is an aspect of Messina mentioned by working group members since Messina has been in place. Additionally, last year's focus groups included a greater number of students that were in leadership roles connected to Messina, specifically Evergreens and Resident Assistants. An area to possibly explore beyond this project is if this assertion for a reduction in spring semester enrichment sessions is driven by Messina faculty, mentors, and Evergreens or actual students.

Similar to last year, this compilation of focus group data should be used to inform future Messina trainings, conversations with other offices, and used to spur future collaborative efforts. Responses could be valuable to both Student Development and Academic Affairs as efforts are made to continue to refine the student experience at Loyola. Finally, it is recommended that these focus groups happen with the Class of 2019- the first class when Messina became a universal first-year experience. This would provide a more robust insight to the ways in which components of Messina continue to impact students beyond the first year.

Focus Group Questions and Corresponding Collected Data⁴

Question 1

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

Student responses in regard to beneficial topics were categorized into six general areas:

Breakdown of topics that were helpful:

- Enrichment session topics (5)
 - Time management/ managing your course load (2)
 - Knowing More About and Exploring Baltimore (5)
 - Learning about public transportation in Baltimore
 - Helpful when the working group shares their own tips about exploring Baltimore (ex. favorite locations, places to eat, things to do)
 - In one Messina section, trips and conversations fostered students learning about new religions, understanding different cultures in Baltimore, and exposure to new foods
 - One way this occurred was a York Road walk and conversation and trips to local museum trips
- Study Abroad (1)
 - Some classes covered this but mixed feelings of if this should be covered in the first year or not. It is helpful to expose students to this possibility at some point during their time at Loyola.

Breakdown of topics that would have been helpful:

- Clarification of course requirements for majors/potential majors (7)
 - In some majors you have to take a specific course (ex. if there are two options for a social science, your major may require you to take one of these, not the other)
 - If you declare in second semester of your sophomore year you may find that everything you took up to that point now only fulfills electives and not major requirements
 - Students commented on knowing of others who could not study abroad because they had used up all of their core courses
 - Better advising in relation to major/minor
 - How to divide things for each year- some majors allow for more flexibility but others are very restrictive
 - When you are adding on a minor more conversations are needed with an advisor on which courses will fulfill this versus courses that will not help toward your major/minor
 - Can be tricky to figure out on your own
- Introducing Study Abroad earlier, particularly in regard to majors/minors and where you can go/ what courses you will need to take while abroad (4)

⁴ The numbers in parentheses in this section represent how many students specifically spoke to this area during the focus group conversations. In some cases, students verbally agreed with an idea being shared which is why there may be instances where there are more numbers than comments.

- When your Evergreen didn't go abroad they didn't promote it as much/ weren't as enthusiastic about it.
 - Broader perspectives could be important (i.e. someone who went abroad and someone who didn't)
- Pressures in the First Year (2)
 - Being Involved/ Getting Involved: When you are around other students that are highly involved on campus there is a sense of negative pressure if you aren't doing the same thing.
 - Selecting a major: Thought about this a lot during the first year but in retrospect it didn't need to happen daily/weekly. This was a self-imposed pressure.
 - Being around upperclassmen increased this pressure because this question often came up in conversation.

Question 2

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

- Community (9)
 - Messina provided a group of people to fall back on and exposed students to people they would not have necessarily gotten to know on their own- there is a networking piece to Messina
 - Having courses that are discussion based helped students get to know people in the class beyond just their name
 - Living in proximity to Messina classmates was beneficial (3)
 - Seeing classmates around your building helped students to get close to people. If a student was struggling in the course it was nice to know they had peers living in the building where they could get help
 - Living together provided opportunities for the class conversation to continue in the residence hall
 - Working group members provided support and mentorship
- Enrichment Sessions (4 plus some head nods)⁵
 - No one would have told you how to navigate different processes (ex. study abroad, housing) and these sessions were important
 - Helped students to learn how college worked- particularly in how to manage core and major classes.
 - In one circumstance the student's major advisor was someone who would sign off on items without talking through them. Messina prepared the student for what they needed to do and the resources they should look at when planning their course schedule.
 - Sessions on time management were helpful
- Switching Messina Sections in Between Fall and Spring Semester is Not Ideal (2)⁶

⁵ If a facilitator observed that multiple students were nodding in agreement to something being shared, they noted this audibly for the recorder.

⁶ This was not a way that Messina prepared the student, however, a student brought this up while they were responding to this question which is why it is listed here. Another student agreed with the other student's statement.

- The Messina Course (1)
 - Took a statistics course that helped later on in major- had a solid foundation through that course
- Developing Confidence (1)
 - The structure of Messina courses and enrichment sessions forced the student to participate and interact with others which shaped student's academic experience beyond the first year

Question 3

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

- Core Advisors (10)
 - For an undecided student, the advisor did not help in providing guidance in trying to help the student decide on next steps
 - Belief that it could help if there was a separate person (not the Messina faculty member) to advise first-year students
 - Found the Messina faculty member to be a good person to talk to, but thought it would be helpful to connect with someone who just did advising who would know more specific details in this area
 - Belief that advisors seemed to have a limited focus on their academic discipline
 - Students felt pressured to major or minor in the academic discipline of their core advisor given their influence
 - Students found that some professors tried to use this role as opportunity to convert students to their major. Specific disciplines mentioned were history, sociology, and fine arts.
 - Students believe that advising should be structured on a set direction, not used as a recruiting tactic.
 - Students found their advisor could not speak on requirements or major/minor paths in other disciplines or colleges (ex. Humanities faculty advising someone planning to pursue a science major)
 - A possible opportunity could be having senior Evergreens share what major they declared, how they came to be that major, and the courses they took
 - Students feel that advisors should be well versed in the core to be able to talk about it or give information of who to contact when they don't know a specific answer (general agreement among the group)
 - Need better advice on how to navigate the core and how to integrate that into what you are majoring in
 - A possible opportunity that exists could be doing more to promote the AASC office within Messina as a resource
 - Students felt that overall, core advising needs to be more consistent regardless of who your advisor is
- Other topics to cover in Messina (6)

- Students believe that Sex Ed should be a topic- particularly about going around sex in a healthy way. This goes beyond conversations around consent, and cover things like STDs and getting tested.
- Conversations around healthy relationships
 - This topic only came up in an enrichment when a student mentioned this in the context of a bad roommate situation. When this conversation occurred in enrichments, students found it helpful to talk through this.
- Discussing privilege
 - Students acknowledged that Loyola is composed of bubbles in regard to diversity issues, race, and economic status and that it is hard to break through these. There is a feeling that Messina courses and enrichment sessions become such an intimate space that it would be easier to break down the bubbles of privilege, particularly in the second semester.
- Mental health
 - Beyond sessions on stress management it would be helpful to talk about suicide and the rise of depression among college students. Tied with this would be encouraging students to seek out resources such as the Counseling Center.
- Messina Course Offerings (1)
 - If you have a Messina class that doesn't count toward core or major, it can hinder your progress if you want to add a minor

Question 4

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

- Messina Course Offerings (7)
 - Given the restrictiveness of some majors in regard to the amount of available electives, it would be more beneficial for all Messina courses to fulfill core and diversity requirements
 - The communications course was beneficial for a journalism major but not as helpful for other peers
 - Students talked about their peers not completing their diversity class prior to their senior year and had issues in trying to ensure they would fulfill it for graduation requirements. There was a feeling that your diversity requirement should be completed within Messina.
 - One perspective was in some Messina classes, you discover what you want to major in which is a positive thing but this may also mean you realize your spring semester course will not benefit you and you need to switch course when it is a course that does not fulfill the core or diversity requirement. Given this, it would be better to have Messina classes be core classes that everyone needs to take so you are not missing anything.
 - Possibly look to expand major offerings in Messina
 - There are pros/cons to this: ex. if you are a speech major in the speech pairing and decide you don't want to do speech you have used up two electives in Messina for this

- Sometimes the Messina course is of interest to a student even if it is different than their major. Students in majors that have more leeway in terms of electives are more open to embracing this opportunity.
- Opportunity to Market Messina in a Different Way (6)
 - Messina is a networking experience- students will have conversations with mentors/ advisors who may connect you to different opportunities at Loyola. Students believe that if you capitalize on this idea of networking in Messina marketing, students may have a different connotation of Messina.
 - It could be helpful in promoting Messina as an opportunity to know other students beyond those in the same major/discipline as you. Opportunities to continue to do this are valued.
 - A student who works with admission described incoming students and their parents as being interested in coming to Loyola because of Messina in regard to the support they know they will get from the entire working group.
- Enrichment Sessions (5)
 - Should not just be course continuation
 - Students have a desire for reflection- Messina provides an opportunity for students to give updates on how and what they are doing
 - Disappointment in some faculty that were just focused on their curriculum and not other opportunities to integrate their students into Loyola
 - Messina Events (3)
 - Opportunity to consider having multiple groups go to a particular event/ activity together to continue to encourage students to branch out and meet others
 - Students had an appreciation for the opportunities provided in Messina, particularly the trips around Baltimore and DC, dinner at a professor's house, etc.
- Working Group Dynamics (4)
 - Students can tell when a working group is experiencing conflict
 - Messina provided an opportunity not just to get to know other students but faculty and seeing them as real people. This occurred when a faculty member had the class over for dinner.
 - There was an appreciation that beyond the first year working group members still checked in with students to see how they were doing when they saw them on campus.
- Advice to First-Year Students: Your Attitude Shapes Your Messina Experience (2)
 - Students need patience- there will be aspects of Messina that may seem frustrating in the moment but will benefit you in the long run.
 - Coming into Messina (courses, enrichment sessions, class events, etc.) with enthusiasm shapes your own experience and that of your peers.
- Important to Not Allow Students to Switch Messina Classes (2)
 - You are a new person in an already established group of friends and it is a difficult move- it should be avoided or not permitted
- Advising Improvements (1)
 - One advisor during summer orientation did not know what an engineering student needed to take and encouraged the student to register for all Computer Science

courses. This was remedied by someone else through a Pre-Fall program but did require patience.

- Changes to the Core (1)
 - If there are changes to the core, Messina will likely change. Given this, if the core is lessened, it would be good for Messina to adapt with the changes and fill in the gaps: particularly in broadening students' horizons and providing opportunities to interact with others in different majors.

Question 5

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

- Enrichment Sessions (7)
 - Second semester was more beneficial for one student because each session provided an explicitly direct way of benefiting their life as opposed to course continuation that took place during their fall enrichment
 - Students believe that Messina doesn't need to do everything for everyone- in some cases it is okay for Messina to point students to the resource on campus that would be beneficial to them
 - One student described that at times, Messina could feel like it was "hand holding" students in their first-year. This could be changed by pulling back on what outside events are required of students.
 - This perspective was dependent on the course you had- another student did not feel this was an issue and saw the trips as being something interesting to do to connect with others.
 - With trips, it could help to do a better job considering student schedules. Sometimes it felt like these were built around the working group as opposed to taking the students time/ ideas in mind.
 - Consider doing a better job of engaging students in the discussion of when things could occur.
 - When there were things you didn't want to do it felt like an obligation/ forced (some of the lectures).
 - More Opportunities to Discuss Relationships (1)
 - Messina is the way you got to know others in the first-year. Given this, it would be helpful to talk about how to deal with changing friendships. One student described half of their Messina group no longer attends Loyola. When this happens, a topic to cover is how can students form other relationships. Part of the need for this type of session is knowing that other students have remained close to their Messina group during the duration of their time at Loyola.
- Living in Proximity to Each Other (5)
 - Living in the same building was a benefit to Messina- if you weren't in the same building, it was not as great
 - This residential situation helped with study groups, having a familiar face, and was a community builder
 - Students don't know the value of a living learning community

- Would be good to do more at accepted student days, orientation, etc. on talking about the value of living in proximity versus wanting a particular roommate
- Positive Experience (3)
 - Messina helped with adapting to the college environment, particularly in managing course load/ amount of work
 - The faculty genuinely care for students
 - It was more beneficial to participate in Messina instead of Loyola 101⁷
- Feedback on Messina Structure (2 plus nodding by group)
 - A student described the common text as being an excessive requirement and that the way it is described to students (everyone is reading it, you will do more with it throughout the year) is not what actually occurs.
 - An alternative idea offered by a student was doing more to have first-year students learn and talk about the Jesuit Ideals.
- Community Developed Through Messina Participation (2)
 - Students had a core group of peers to come back to each week as they navigated their first year
- The individualized attention of the working groups helped with adapting to Loyola Advising can be improved (2)
 - However, there are some advisors that understand the core which is good
- Your attitude defines your experience (2)
 - Students having enthusiasm or being open to Messina is important
 - Looking back it was way better to have been a part of Messina even if at the time there were things you wanted to do instead of going to enrichment
- Opportunity for Growth: Messina Staff Trainings (1)
 - A student acknowledged that there are some working groups that do a great job with first-year students. Given this, these groups should talk about what they do at future trainings to provide ideas for others.
- Switching Messina sections between fall and spring semester wasn't a great idea (1)

⁷ Loyola 101 was a first year program that the one third of first year students not in Messina completed during Fall 2014. It was phased out when Messina became universal in Fall 2015.

References

Omni Institute. (n.d.). Information Gathering Toolkit: Basic Tools for Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection. Retrieved May 14, 2018, from <https://www.omni.org/Media/Default/Documents/Information%20Gathering%20Toolkit.pdf>

Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

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

Appendix B: Messina 2013 to Now

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

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

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