

The Value of Service

At the beginning of my time at Loyola, the opportunity to volunteer at the local Tunbridge Public Charter School arose through my Messina class. I knew that I wanted to get involved in the community early on in my college career, so I decided that I would do it. To be honest, I was also really intrigued by the idea of assisting there because I thought it would be like something out of *The Wire*, and that I would make these great bonds with the kids and become a beloved mentor to them. In the end, however, I believe I learned more from them than they learned from me. Through my time at Tunbridge I truly have felt the presence of three of Loyola's core values: discernment, academic excellence, and community.

During my time at Tunbridge I was given the opportunity to practice discernment. When talking about discernment, Loyola's website states: "Loyola's commitment to carry on the tradition of discernment includes encouraging the practice of regular reflection and self-examination which foster awareness of personal freedom (or lack thereof), a sense of personal responsibility for choices and actions, and a balance between enlightened self-interest and promotion of the common ("greater") good ("History and Mission"). One of my responsibilities while volunteering was to make copies and grade tests for the teacher I was helping out. I would do this in a little room, and it was usually just me in there. This silence and isolation gave me the time to be at peace. It was almost as if I was in rehab, working with pottery, healing from the stress that can come with college life. I shifted my focus from the past to the present. After finishing my task, I was ready to move on from the week and focus on taking on whatever challenges I have ahead of me.

By Austin Brand

While I wasn't able to spend as much time with the kids as I had hoped, the time I did spend I found to be extremely valuable. I worked with one kid with reading. All I did was sit next to him while he was reading, and if he came across any words he was struggling with I would help him out. While this may seem like nothing, it helped me reflect and act upon Loyola's idea of academic excellence.

At Loyola, the pursuit of academic excellence includes promoting a love for learning, discovery, and integration across a wide range of disciplines and interests. The ideal of integration, in particular, represents one expression of Loyola's Catholic character; the University seeks that "higher synthesis of knowledge, in which alone lies the possibility of satisfying that thirst for truth which is profoundly inscribed on the heart of the human person" ("History and Mission"). At times, I had become too worried about the "material" aspects of my college education, my GPA. Becoming too obsessive over your GPA can lead to just focusing on things that you think will be on the next test. This leads to detrimental study habits that result in completely forgetting what you learned. I experienced this in my history class. I was so focused about learning the exact definition of the Newtonian Mechanistic Paradigm, that I wasn't even thinking about what it meant in the big picture of the world we live in. I just wanted to remember so I could identify it specifically on that test. Seeing a kid wanting to get better at reading for his pure interest in it, along with his love of discovery, was refreshing. This experience ignited my curiosity and quest for understanding. After this, I began to delve into the impact of the Newtonian Mechanistic Paradigm, and I was able to see the roots of our capitalistic society and how it came to be. My time reading with this Tunbridge student helped me realize what I wanted to gain out of college—my love for discovery and greater understanding—which aligns



tunbridge public charter school

with Loyola's idea of academic excellence.

I experienced community at Tunbridge through my walks there, and in the school itself. When talking about community the Loyola website says: "The University joins here with other Catholic institutions of learning in encouraging community 'animated by a spirit of freedom and charity... [and] characterized by mutual respect, sincere dialogue, and protection of the rights of individuals'" ("History and Mission"). On my walks down York Rd. I felt a sense of belonging as almost everyone that I encountered would smile or say "hi" to me. One time, I encountered a stranger and we struck up a conversation with each other. I asked him what his favorite part about the community was. His answer was this: "The best way to explain my relationship with this community is through the Langston Hughes quotes 'My soul has grown deep like rivers.'" He could tell that I didn't really know what he meant, so he elaborated, "Just like rivers grow, I am constantly meeting new, great, and nice people every day who become a part of my life." Through this chance meeting, seeing the various businesses of Baltimore, and witnessing plenty of animated conversations, my walks to Tunbridge have opened me up to Loyola's ideas of community.

My time volunteering at Tunbridge opened me up to and really brought some of the core values of Loyola into focus. Since volunteering I have seen these values come into fruition in my life, whether it is my self-reflection that came about while making copies, my newfound love and appreciation of learning, or the sense of community that I feel around Baltimore.

"History and Mission." Loyola University Maryland. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.loyola.edu/about/history-mission>>.