

## Having Knowledge about York Road

By Sabrina Mitchell

In life, first impressions can make or break my perspective of anything – especially when it comes to choosing which college to attend and its surroundings. As a college student at Loyola University Maryland, I have learned that making thorough decisions is key when choosing where you will be for the next four years in an undergraduate career. When I was choosing amongst schools, I not only went to visit the schools' campuses and looked at what they had to offer, but I also went to visit some of their surrounding neighborhoods. My first impression of Loyola University Maryland was that it is a beautiful campus even though it is a bit on the petite side. As for Baltimore, I remember thinking that it is a wonderful city while exploring the Inner Harbor and Federal Hill. But what I didn't know about Baltimore at the time was that there was so much more to Baltimore than the Inner Harbor and Federal Hill. When touring Loyola, they told us about what you can do in the nicer parts of Baltimore, but they did not share about the neighboring road to the school — York Road.

Last year as a prospective student, in a way, I am thankful that Loyola University Maryland did not tell me about the surroundings of York Road because along with the learning

process of being a college freshman, I've gained the knowledge on how to look at moderately impoverished neighborhoods in a positive way rather than a negative way. This suggests that all prospective college students of Loyola University Maryland need to be open-minded of not only what is to come as for being a college freshman, but to also be aware of how you choose to perceive your surroundings and how you can make a difference.

As I stepped foot onto Loyola's alluring campus, I knew great things were going to be presented to me in my future: new friends, memories, surroundings, education, and eventually— a career. Not too long after this moment of optimism, an upper classman told me about the dangers of York Road and how I should try to stay away as far as possible. In that moment, I pondered on this statement debating whether or not this could possibly be true. So, I decided I needed to find out for myself.

Instantly, I texted my friends and asked them if they wanted to grab lunch at a market called Belvedere Square, which is right off the corner of York Road — and, of course, they said yes. Once we squeezed into the back of an Uber and started driving, we witnessed what York Road looked like: scattered people, homeless people sleeping on curbs, poverty, and cop cars.

My friends and I were astonished. How can one road end up like this? We couldn't help wondering what we could do to help the new community we live in. We also wanted to look at this community without being ethnocentric.

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Once my friends and I researched what we could do on York Road to not look at it as a disadvantage to the university's location, we learned that there are plenty of activities and opportunities in this community. First, we looked up restaurants on York Road that we could go to. As we searched online, we discovered this place called "Clark Burger." Clark Burger is known for their "variety of burgers, fries and dipping sauces, as well as several poutine options. Poutine is a popular dish in Canada and Clark Burger incorporates the Canadian leaf in its logo." (Gordon). Getting distracted from the stereotypes of York Road by looking at a variety of restaurants can make your perception of York Road become more positive, since it will have the new connection of having a good meal that will satisfy your taste buds.

As for making a difference in the community as a Loyola student, there are a variety of ways your action can make a chain reaction. For

example, Loyola University Maryland has a specific program where the students of Loyola get to work at a charter school and spend time with the kids who go to school there. One student, Jess, writes, "Volunteering at Tunbridge changed the way I look at life and taught me more than I ever expected" (Ludwig). Even if some students do not get the chance to volunteer their time with the school system, they are able to learn about the culture through a different point of view in the classroom, "Service-learning students are paired with a specific teacher and will work with students and their teachers in the classroom, grading and filing papers, prepping materials for teachers, tutoring students with teacher prepared assignments, and supporting in the computer lab, gym, art, or after-school programs." ("Center"). Choosing service-learning in a class, in my opinion, couldn't be any more helpful to learn about our community. Having a service-learning class teaches you the value of your surroundings and makes you think twice about being ethnocentric. Jess wrote about this, too: "I gained so

much knowledge beyond Loyola; I learned about Baltimore's real community and all the wonderful people who live here. Any community service through Loyola helps many lives, including your own" (Ludwig).

The experience of taking a service-learning class makes me come to the realization upon how thankful I am for the life I live. In my service-learning classes, I've learned what goes on on York Road is not all that bad as long as you remain optimistic and learn about your surroundings first before making a crude judgment. Looking back from when I was a prospective student at Loyola University, I'm truly glad the students and faculty did not make me more aware of York Road because I eventually learned what it truly stands for – potential. York Road reminds me of not only the potential for that road not to have a bad reputation, but it also reminds me of the potential I have for myself. I have the ability to make a difference in the community, while staying open-minded. My learning experience from being a Loyola freshman has taught me many things, but the one that truly sticks is to try to turn negatives into positives.