



Surrendering

By Kelly Terjesen

One of the hardest challenges for me has been to ask someone for help. Ever since I was a little girl, I have struggled to talk to anyone about my problems. Having to deal with problems and fears on my own had negatively affected me both physically and emotionally, but I neglected to deal with it until my freshman year at Loyola.

While preparing for my freshman year at Loyola this past summer, I convinced myself that I knew the type of school I was attending and that it aligned properly with my goals and desires. I thought it was a tight-knit community of students who had common backgrounds and experiences like mine. I was confident that I would make friends easily. When I left high school, I had multiple friends from many different friend groups. I had friends who were athletes, some were dancers, others musicians. But here I struggled the first semester at Loyola to make more than a handful of friends. My parents encouraged me to go to the Counseling Center or any of the offered support on campus. They insisted that the majority of freshman were dealing with the same problem I had been trying to cope with. At the summer orientation, the faculty at Loyola emphasized many times the number of counseling opportunities that were available on campus. I could find support at the Writing Center, or the Counseling Center, or even Student Services. I refused to listen to them because I am stubborn and unwilling to ask for help even when I desperately need it. It took me the whole first semester and three weeks of the second to finally overcome my fears and behavioral patterns. I finally took a leap of faith and called the Counseling Center make an appointment. That was the most difficult and yet the most beneficial decision for me.

The Counseling Center is in the Humanities Building on campus. When I first arrived, the lady at the front desk asked me to fill out an intake form so the counselor understood why I decided to make an appointment. The answers to the questions are kept in strict confidence. I felt very comfortable with answering the questions because I knew it would help the therapist get a better understanding of who I am and how I was feeling. When I walked into the therapist's office, she greeted me with a friendly, kind demeanor. I immediately felt very comfortable and safe and opened up to her about the hardships and struggles I was experiencing through the first semester. After a few sessions, I started feeling more confident, happy and so relieved. I learned that one of the most effective ways to deal with my new stresses was to use the therapist's office often. So now I have a weekly appointment.

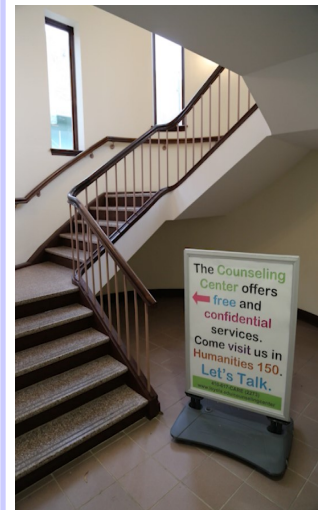


Through this experience, I have learned that the school's Counseling Center is able to accommodate every student with their problems regardless of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, background, etc. People deal with a lot of problems every day and there are many ways to cope with them. The counselors are trained professionals who make students feel safe and supported when talking about their problems. Every counselor I had an encounter with was compassionate, understanding, helpful and, most importantly, had no judgment. Some may say that you only need counseling if you are having a life-threatening problem or are emotionally unstable. I believe this is a false opinion. From my experience, the counselors are open to discussing a variety of topics such as family conflicts, homesickness, relationships with your peers, adjusting to college, academic struggles and so forth. They are genuine people who want students to succeed by giving practical advice and guidance.

In class, I asked a fellow comrade, Grace Soguero, about her time at the Counseling Center; she said, "The guidance office was very helpful to me. During midterm week my advisor gave me advice on how to balance out work so I didn't get too stressed." The counselors invoke effective time management skills for students who are having difficulty balancing their time. Charlotte Longworth, another first-year, said, "I was able to go to my guidance counselor when I needed help dropping a class. What I thought was going to be a stressful process was made easier because of my guidance counselor." "The guidance office helped me through a tough time when I had no one to turn to. They made me feel like I was in a safe environment and that everything I was going through would be alright," said Marcus McKenzie, a sophomore at Loyola. Even though Marcus is a sophomore, he is still aware of how effective the Counseling Center is and encourages others to take advantage of it.

The Counseling Center is for every student at Loyola. It is evident from my own experience and others that I spoke with that the counselors offer meaningful advice and support to Loyola students. The Loyola University Maryland Counseling Center's mission statement is to promote a healthy and inclusive community through relationship-building, education, crisis intervention and support. The counselors do this effectively by being friendly, professional and confidential genuinely supporting Loyola students in the best way they can.

My freshman year at Loyola has taught me a lot about myself and about the power of sharing my problems with a counselor, a family member or a friend. I have learned that asking for help isn't a symbol of weakness or defeat; it shows strength to want to improve yourself to be the person you are destined to become. I am eternally grateful for this experience. I am confident that the lessons I have learned will help me succeed in future college goals, as well as in my career and life.



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