

You Never Know By Michael Watkins

I was constantly busy in high school with clubs, organizations, teams, and events. As a tour guide, ambassador, and Dean's team member, I was entrusted with much to do with little time. At times, that pressure became stressful and by the end of senior year, I was exhausted and ready for a break. I decided that in college I would find my interests and limit my activities and participation around campus. As I end my first year at Loyola, not only do I think that was a terrible idea, I realize that never would have been possible.

At the Activities Fair last semester, I signed up for several clubs—a few of which did not fit into my schedule. The Robotics club, the Skate Club, and the Cinema Club were three organizations that either took place during class or I did not have nearly enough time to attend. Also, I am not necessarily interested in robotics or movies. To be completely honest, I did not attend any meetings for any of their events, yet I somehow made connections. Alex Strubec, the senior who signed me up for Robotics, now says hello to me and asks how I am doing every time I see him, despite the fact that I did not show up to any meetings. Simon, a senior in the Skateboarding Club, is always around to talk to me a bit when we cross paths. I first talked to him about skateboarding. It was a brief conversation, yet that led to a million more and I learned more about him.

Those connections. Those small experiences that you thought would lead to nowhere, but later you find out you were wrong. In Summer Orientation in 2022, I was paired with a classmate named Ryan. He told me he lived right outside of New York City, so we connected on our experiences of the city. Three months later, Ryan happened to be living in my dorm. We became great friends along with other neighbors in the dorm, which has created a roommate group for my sophomore year (pictured to the left). A friendship grew from a small connection in an interaction that lasted roughly five minutes.



Me, pictured with my three future roommates in front of the White House in Washington D.C.

"Small connections take you places," says Shannon Hening, an involved first-year at Loyola. She is an active member of the Baking Club, Irish Dance Team, and Love for Our Elders Club. She is currently working on a research grant proposal for Loyola, and she also works for the Alumni House as well as being a physician's research assistant off campus. Shannon says, "You get to know incredible people and networking helps you gain experience and relationships that will help you in the future. Life is networking, and you never know where those connections will lead you." As a first-year student, she finds herself busy on top of adjusting to a new lifestyle. Shannon believes that being active in a new community is crucial to creating strong relationships and enjoying time in that unfamiliar environment.

Maiah Lester, a senior here at Loyola, says that she originally got involved for her resume, but that outlook changed quickly. She works at the Fitness and Aquatic Center (FAC), and she works as an AMP mentor, a Resident Assistant (RA), a Study Abroad Ambassador, and a member of the Dance Company. She believes that "getting to know different people is necessary for personal growth." We grow by creating new experiences and learning more about what is around us. That personal growth is important because it creates a well-rounded character and adds unmatched experience for future careers, rela-

tionships, and connections. Maiah also says, "You never know what you will be interested in until you try it. Joining groups and trying things is a way to grow and do something you would have never done alone."

By learning from those around us, we can learn about ourselves. For example, I learned about some new activities I enjoy from trying new things and meeting new people here at Loyola. Creating diverse relationships helps provide new insight on your own values. Creating new friendships has taught me some of my values that I grew up with but never realized—and even my social strengths and weaknesses. Growing socially is vital for the chapter after college: finding the right career, place to live, or even grad school. We use the skills we develop here at Loyola and explore the world with them. These are life skills that can't be taught in a classroom, but only in a community that is so engaged as Loyola.

I have a few personal examples of trying new things. About three weeks into my first semester, I tried rock climbing, a sport that was never accessible to me back home in my small town. I found that I really enjoy the sport and the community, and I now intend to work as an advisor on the wall staff this upcoming semester. Since coming to school here, I have also tried Ju Jitsu and volleyball. Although I am happy I tried Ju Jitsu, I don't believe that it was an activity for me. Nonetheless, I made great connections and now have two great friends from those four weeks of practices. I found that I love volleyball, and I now wish that my high school had a team—because it is one of my new favorite sports. I have played two semesters of intramural, and I intend to keep playing every semester.

One friendship I made through climbing and volleyball was with Grace Dittmer, a sophomore here, who works on the rock-climbing staff. On top of being enrolled in the honors program, Grace is an Intramural Sports Supervisor and Ref, and a member of the Rock Wall staff. She also attends dozens of campus events, and when looking for her, you can almost always find her busy at the FAC. When asked why she believes involvement is important at Loyola, she said, "Being an active part of the community is a great way to build lasting, meaningful relationships with people you otherwise wouldn't know. It's also a great way to motivate yourself and others—come to the rock wall on any busy day and you'll see nothing pushes you more than your friends. Mostly, though, I think it's fun to try new things and meet new people." Grace has helped me with climbing and route techniques, but she has also given me a number of volleyball pointers when spiking the ball. Fun Fact: little did she know that those pointers would help me beat her team in the intramural playoffs.



John Driska, class of 2026, climbs a new route on the Rockwall at Loyola's FAC.



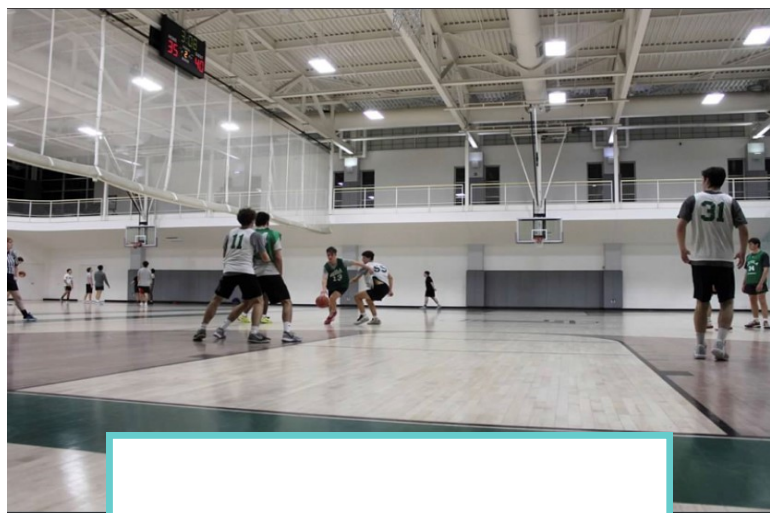
Team Oozma Kappa competes in Loyola Intramural Volleyball playoffs.

I was also fortunate enough to have a friendly and accessible Evergreen in my Messina, who often acts as a mentor to me. Ryan Cunningham '23 is always around to answer my texts and random calls about class decisions or even to give random advice. When thinking of "involved" students here at Loyola, I immediately think of him. Ryan told me that "In addition to being an Evergreen, I have started Loyola Film Society, joined the executive board of Omicron Delta Kappa, Loyola's Leadership Honor Society, and trained as a Writing Center tutor. Campus involvement and engagement has become especially important to me over the years, and I believe it is the best way to get the most out of one's 'Loyola Experience' while developing themselves further as a leader and a member of a community. While it sometimes gets busy, I don't regret any of my involvement and value everything it has given me here."

What exactly is that "Loyola Experience" that Ryan mentioned? The Loyola Experience is four years of engagement that we, as Loyola students, are fortunate enough to experience. It's a time for us to learn, connect with our community, build on new and existing skills, and create relationships with others around us. We connect with those we share similarities with but also differences. Sharing differences creates diversity and a well-rounded student, meaning you can succeed in many different environments. A well-rounded student is an objective of traditional Jesuit values, which is a powerful theme at Loyola. Having the four-year experience guarantees to make a student here capable of adapting to different scenarios, all because of creating relationships with different people around you. We as first-years can get a glimpse at what the Loyola Experience is, but it is something you can only feel once you have experienced it.

I found it fitting to receive input from seniors because their time at Loyola is near the end, and now they can evaluate their time with the appropriate attitude of reflection. They have lived the Loyola Experience. Seniors have

experienced much more than a first-year such as myself, which is why I believe it is important to learn from them while they are here on campus. Ryan put into perspective the importance of involvement beyond campus community: the impact it has on the rest of your life. Every student is offered plenty of service opportunities, local and remote weekend trips, abroad study tours and trips, and tickets to events to support the city of Baltimore. We take this ability of making connections and creating relationships—and we explore unfamiliar places and careers with the skill that will cradle our social life—communication.



Joe Baranowski drives past Dermot