



**My own Messina working together at the library!**

***“My anxieties were far from accurate: weeks later, I shared a chuckle during our Messina enrichment hour that ‘Messina is family.’”***

## Messina Is Family

**By Kate McLaughlin**

I heard one thing over and over as my senior summer—a highly coveted event—came to a close. My whole family and friends kept telling me, “you were built for college.” I was not sure exactly what this meant; it was usually followed up with compliments of independence that I have had as a kid. Do not get me wrong—it was mostly comforting—but left me slightly perplexed at times. But more than feeling a little confused, I began to feel slightly invalidated for the regular nerves and worries that a freshly high school-graduate would have.

*Why am I so nervous?*

*What if it is too hard and I let everyone down?*

*What if I am not “built for college” like everyone thinks I am?*

*What does being built for college even mean?*

Despite the appearance of preparedness I held, I will transparently tell you now that I felt wildly nervous. I was leaving the people who always saw the best in me and understood me. How lucky was I to have found these people already? It seemed impossible to recreate the community feel that my small town in the suburbs of Boston was known for. Then, I got a text.

**“Yo!”**

I rarely greet someone with “Yo,” so I was intriguingly skeptical. The

text went on. As I read, I learned the message was from my Evergreen. At this point, I did not even fully understand what an Evergreen is. This mysterious senior named Ryan Cunningham explained that my Messina would meet for the first time at 9pm the day I moved in. Now I understand an Evergreen is an integral part of Loyola, contributing to what makes our University so unique. Ryan, a student leader, had such a great experience at Loyola with his own Messina that he decided to go through an extensive application process for a volunteer program—all because Messina was so impactful to him. A pretty solid introduction, if you ask me.

A group of 15 first-years met outside on the quad outside Jenkins and the Fernandez Center. I know now that may sound useless as I spent my first week convinced I would never know the buildings, but you will learn as I did. We went around, sharing awkward exchanges as we all tried to pretend we knew what we were doing. Welcome to your Messina! Everyone introduced themselves; I remember thinking for a moment, *how am I possibly going to remember all these names?* My anxieties were far from accurate: weeks later, I shared a chuckle during our Messina enrichment hour that “Messina is family.”

# Messina

I truly meant it, as did my peers, professor, and mentor. Ryan shared with me that he loved the program because it was like “forced friends.” I laughed at the time, not understanding what he meant. But— he was right. Wouldn’t you know it? Somebody older, wiser, and more experienced than an 18-year-old (who definitely knows everything), was right about something!

The first weekend, also known as Welcome Weekend, felt a little bit like a summer camp. We woke up early, walked around in a pack, and even wore matching t-shirts. There is next to no free time for the first three days you arrive at Loyola—and it’s awesome. There was no time for me to feel homesick. There was no time for me to feel anxious. I only felt supported and ready. Spending so much time together seemingly the minute you unpack your clothes in your new dorm really does make you feel like family. You get to know each other fast, eating your meals together and asking each other if anyone knows “what people will be doing” that night. By the end of the weekend spent alongside my Messina, I felt I already had people in my back pocket for when I needed them.

Messina is just that: a support system. Yes, it includes fun field trips and useful lessons, such as trying delicious restau-

rants near campus and tips for living in a city, but it is more so your family away from family. Freshman Sophia Graney explained to me that our Messina “provided friendships and connections that [she does not] think [she] would have been able to make on [her] own.” She goes on to say, “Messina has helped so much— especially in the first semester—on what to do and just how to be a student at Loyola.” This is exactly what Loyola’s mission was in its creation. Messina celebrates you in the ways you want to be celebrated. Messina uplifts you when you need it most. Because of Messina I felt prepared to take on this new challenge with confidence.

I would like to share an email from my first Messina professor last semester. At this time, I was very sick with the flu and was very overwhelmed with classes, stressed about getting my roommate sick, and homesick. Professor Guise-Gerrity emailed me this:

“Please know that I would take you to the doctor, take you to the pharmacy, or even just do a Target run if you needed treats when you’re finally feeling better. Having you and your classmates acclimate to Loyola is of [paramount] importance to you, your parents, and me. I look forward to seeing you in class



**A group of different Messinas taking a field trip to Belvedere Square, a local food mar**

**“Messina is like  
going to a class  
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on Friday!"

Can a professor get much better than that? At Loyola, this is the kind of care and relationship you develop through Messina. And by the way...a bag of fresh clementines from a local farmer's market, chocolate covered fruit, and tea was delivered to me from Professor Guise-Gerrity. Thank you!

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I may have chuckled the first time I said "Messina is family," and while it is a joke we have between the 15 of us, the sentiment rings true. There are few people lucky enough to go into college *knowing* they will have friends alongside them immediately. Yes, I heard President Sawyer and other speakers discuss Messina and the benefits of it for what felt like years on end, yet it far exceeded my expectations. It is rare that something is crafted like this and executed in the success that Loyola's Messina program has found.

Mike Watkins, a freshman in my own Messina (and one of my best friends: thank you Messina), described Messina as "going to a class in high school that all your friends are in— even though you just met." His reflection on Messina is precise. A harsh reality I came to terms with in the beginning of college experience was that most college classes are not necessarily as fun as high school. You may know your professor a little less than you knew your teachers, and you are no longer in classes with friends from growing up. This is not

to say that these classes are un-enjoyable at all— just different. But the same way you developed closeness and relationships in your hometown, you will in college. You will come to experience the familiarity— but as that is developing, Messina fills in that space so you feel it right away.

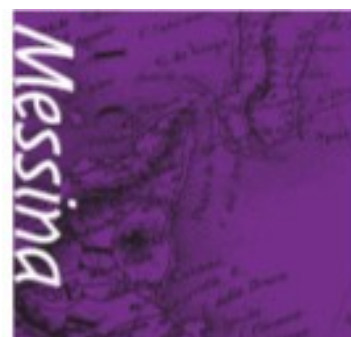
Messina, however, is like the perfect transition between college and high school. You develop a class chemistry that is incomparable to any other classes I have taken before. Having the ability to see and experience a group of young adults come into themselves and grow into Greyhounds who are proud to be around one another has been a true privilege. Do not take for granted the gift that is Messina. Your learning will exceed the four walls of a classroom, as will your relationships. I am thankful every day for Messina: it tied the bow on top of freshman year.

Thank you Professor Guise-Gerrity, Dr. Leary, Bryan Haunert, Tyler Zorn, Ryan Cunningham, and my Messina for making my freshman year!



**Ella Dafeldecker, a friend I met through Messina!**

***"Your learning will exceed the four walls of a classroom, as will your relationships."***



**The Messina logo, a purple map**