



**My Messina group
after first-semester
training**

***"Messina
feels like
family"***

Kate Callahan
2026

Messina Means Family By Sarah Hinteman

You're probably wondering: What in the world is Messina? Don't worry, we all wondered that when we got here. Messina is unique to Loyola. According to Kate Collins, a member of the class of 2024, Loyola is the "only place [she] had heard of the word Messina." When Patrick Murnane, the Assistant Director of Messina, was asked what Messina means, he summed up the program perfectly: "It is a first-year experience program that brings all our first-year students together. Whether they live on campus, commute, are from Maryland, Massachusetts, or Hawaii, all the first-year and transfer students will receive a similar supportive experience."

Logistics

In the least technical terms, [Messina](#) is a program that allows students to take two classes (one in the fall and one in the spring) with the same group of students. These students will also be supported by two faculty members, a staff mentor, and an Evergreen. Both your mentor and Evergreen are with your class all year long, too, which is nice since you have familiar faces through the semester transition. Also, because an Evergreen is a current undergraduate student here at Loyola, they can often relate to students and what they may experience in their first year of college. The options for the [course pairings](#) can be almost anything here at Loyola. My pairing was an education-based Messina, meaning at least one of the courses satisfied a major requirement for Elementary Education majors. This, however, is not the only option. Many students take two core classes, so it does not matter what major you decide to do. This also provides a space for anyone who is undecided, so they do not feel pressured to make a decision their first year. What is unique about this program is how flexible the course pairings can be and the community it creates.



**My Messina group's
first outing to R House**

Messina has been a guide for me starting my first year. My Messina pairing was "Process and Acquisitions Literacy" in the fall and then "Effective Writing" in the spring. Now I'm sure you are wondering: What does "Process and Acquisitions Literacy" even mean? It is a class that teaches students about the basics of reading and writing and how these can be used to teach future students. Only half of my class were education majors and, therefore, some of them would take this class as an elective. The content could be challenging at times, but having my Messina group go through it with me was the best-case scenario. No matter how hard or confusing the class became, our group chat would support one another with questions, homework/project reminders, and study groups. There was always an infinite amount of support despite being a small class of only 13 students.

Connections and Community

Now before you get bored reading all the factual information, I want to focus on how Messina creates connections. While I believe we all have family connected through blood, there are other ways to create an original, new family of friends through community. One of my first worries when I got to Loyola was about making friends. Everyone always told me you will feel it when you find your people, but I am not the kind of person who uses my gut to make decisions; I prefer to use my head. I made friends with some of the first people I met, and I gave things up that were important to me, so I could maintain a friendship that I thought I had to rely on. While I spent time with that group, I felt forced to become someone else. However, I slowly realized that I already had a group I did not need to change who I was just to fit in with: my Messina class. They became a core group I could rely on when I decided to distance myself from the friend group. They always supported me and made me feel welcomed, loved, and refreshed.

The Messina program creates a community that is difficult to find or create anywhere else. Isabella DiFoggio, a first-year here at Loyola, says it best: “you are forced to be friends with the other people, but because everyone was being forced to be friends with everyone, it made it more comfortable.” Knowing that everyone was forced to be friends was both relaxing and stressful at the same time. Gabby Granillo, a first-year at Loyola, talked about how Fall Welcome Weekend was a better experience because she went through it with Messina. It was the “first group of people we were exposed to on campus other than the dorms and it is almost like a blind date. You really have no idea who you are going to be exposed to” but it works out to create an amazing community. Without my Messina, I would not have met my future roommate or any of the friends I have made who support my interests and who I am as a person. The idea of not allowing individuals the decision as to whether they will like their group initially may sound superficial, but the connection that develops allows these forced friendships to turn into some of your best friends.

This connection may not be immediate and may need some time to develop. My Messina took time to become the “close-knit community” (Kate Callahan 2026) we are now. We embraced how we are all unique, funny, and caring, and when we are all put together, we create an environment in which everyone feels as though they can be themselves. There was “no judgement” (Kate Collins 2024) and “it is a group of friends” (Francesca Michener 2026). This process helped to limit the awkwardness and forced us to focus on working to create a supportive system for one another.



My Messina group meeting before enrichment

“It feels like we have been friends for years”

Francesca Michener 2026



My Messina group on the quad during Fall Welcome Weekend



My Messina group's outing to roller skating

“We put in the effort we wanted to get out”

Kate Callahan
2026

Messina Outings and Activities

An added benefit to the Messina program at Loyola is the outings/field trips we go on throughout the year. My first year, over the course of the year, we went to a restaurant, roller skating, and we were supposed to go apple picking too, but it rained. Talking to mentors, Evergreens, and students here at Loyola, every single person has a favorite memory that came from Messina. It ranges from something as simple as destressing with coloring books in Starbucks (Patrick Murnane) to roller skating with your class and professor (Francesca Michener 2026). The one thing that every memory about Messina has in common is building and being surrounded by the outstanding community. With this program you never have to worry about spending time on your own or not knowing what to do with yourself. My group chat has always been there for me through the laughs and the hard times. And just like I am sure you are feeling now, I was very anxious about the program, but, when I got here, I found some truly amazing friends who I will take with me throughout college.

Community Creates Family

I am a strong believer in the idea that community can create a family, which is key to adjusting to a life that may be far from the rest of your family. They are here to make you feel safe, connected, welcome, relaxed, and serene in an environment you may be unsure of. There will always be someone in your Messina who will support you whether it's your teachers, mentor, Evergreen, or classmates. Messina is just one of the ways Loyola creates a supportive and unique community to aid students through the transition to college. It creates friendships and connections that will last a lifetime.



My Messina Group after our trip to R House (our first social outing)