



Center for Community, Service, and Justice (CCSJ) cozy office—where reflections happen during Experience Baltimore.

## A Sneak Peek into Your New Home

By Emerson Cozine

I'm not lying when I say that in just a matter of six hours, I went from moving everything I could fit into a dormant, barren room to sitting on a carpet eating Indian food—for the first time—surrounded by thirty-nine strangers. Yes, I know, not your typical college drop-off. You could say I signed myself up for this, but you would be sorely wrong. I had my gracious mother to thank for enrolling me into a program that butchered the last three days of my summer. Instead of letting me tan, hang out with friends, and go to the beach, she thought it would be an incredible experience for me to immerse myself in the city I'd be calling home for the next four years. Obviously, I did not want to go at first, but money had already been paid and there was no backing out at that point; I would be embarking on my first journey at Loyola University Maryland through the Pre-Fall Program, Experience Baltimore.

**“Experience  
Baltimore  
welcomes  
you to your  
home away  
from  
home!”**

At Loyola University Maryland, you will find an immense number of activities that you can become involved in once the school year commences. But most are unaware that Loyola goes above and beyond to extend programs beforehand. Pre-Fall Programs help students to filter into their Loyola community as well as the surrounding communities right outside campus. Specifically, Experience Baltimore is run through an organization at Loyola called [CCSJ](#) (Center for Community, Service, and Justice). CCSJ plays an integral role on campus by broadening students' perspectives and narratives on the local community encapsulating Loyola. Being at a Jesuit institution means taking pride in backing up the community as service is grounded in love and support; our spirits must be cultivated in the community if we want unison and cohesion at Loyola.



Trip to local soup kitchen to serve the community breakfast.

Through Ignatius-style teaching, a method where active learning is crucial to a deeper self-reflection, CCSJ runs this program to truly help incoming freshmen experience the real Baltimore: not the made-up, preconceived one created by stereotypes. Over three days, students interact with neighboring communities and learn about the hardships oppressing their quality of life. Although students often underestimate the impact community has in our lives, it's evidently displayed through Loyola's programs, like Experience Baltimore, that community is an

essential catalyst for students to achieve above and beyond at Loyola. Instead of simply helping the communities, you will serve them. In “Helping, Fixing, or Serving?” Rachel Remen notes that “Helping, fixing and serving represent three different ways of seeing life. When you help, you see life as weak. When you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. Fixing and helping may be the work of the ego, and service the work of the soul.”

Each day of the program contains an element or activity that enables participants to vigorously engage themselves in service. Because Baltimore has over 200 neighborhoods—I know, it's absolutely crazy—each freshman ventures off in groups with an upperclassman volunteer to different sections of the city. One activity I had the opportunity to play a role in was farming. Yes, you read that right—*farming*. To some, this might sound like a normal act of service. However, I was completely shocked; back in my hometown community, this was never an option. In Baltimore, I learned there is limited access to fresh produce since farms, like the one I worked on, are scarcely scattered. Additionally, there isn't funding to pay the people who work the farms; they are mostly all volunteers who aspire for their communities to have nutritious food. Using a hoe, planting seeds, and pulling out weeds taught me a valuable lesson I wouldn't have known otherwise—I'm extremely fortunate to be supplied endlessly with fresh produce and healthy food. Submerging myself in service where impoverished communities gain essential materials empowered me knowing I had contributed to helping a detrimental issue. The reward our local communities gave us freshmen transpired into a beneficial self-reflection that expanded a once narrow view of issues Baltimore encounters and revealed service is the answer to change.

In a large city, numerous factors contribute to difficult challenges that Experience Baltimore tackles through service. Unfortunately, the reason these complications fester and contribute to poverty and crime is largely due to injustice. The history of Baltimore was founded on racism through strategies like redlining—white people exponentially increasing the prices of homes so black families couldn't afford them—and, consequently, it has melded its way into the foundation of Baltimore. Experience Baltimore illuminates and unveils the truth of the root causes connecting the past to present.

Even though Experience Baltimore is one of the best ways to introduce an enormous city, Loyola works alongside community programs making it easy for students to involve themselves in Baltimore. In Experience



In West Baltimore, homes like these make packages containing necessities for those who are less fortunate.

**“Serve not  
only for  
yourself, but  
for your  
community!”**



**“Don’t  
fear the  
unknown,  
explore it!”**

Baltimore, you get first-hand experience with this, for example, by listening to advocates on the [York Road Initiative](#) (YRI). My group learned through advocates of YRI that a crematory was going to be built less than half a mile from campus, harming us and the surrounding community; “devastating” was the only word to describe the effects on them. But, even though it is difficult to eradicate this problem on your own, the community is welcoming to anyone willing to support their cause. After bringing issues up like the crematory, something sparked inside me, igniting a passion to be a helping voice and stand by their side. Interacting and serving with these organizations will empower you and show the community you care. With the resilience we all have in ourselves, we have enough power to dismantle any problem.



The Senator, located on York Road, is an old, classic movie theater where we watched *Barbie*!

Of course, because this experience takes just three days and a lot of work, it can feel overwhelming. While the journey seems daunting, an incredible team has your back and makes this experience enjoyable. Alexander Valencia, a current junior at Loyola, provided a great support system as my group leader and often gave us positive messages. His encouragement was necessary to keep our group's morale up while also making sure we could look forward to fun outside activities—like going to The Senator Theater to watch *Barbie*!

Another raving element Experience Baltimore introduces to incoming freshmen is the food. As someone whose favorite meal is chicken nuggets and French fries, I had to step outside my comfort zone during this program and that frightened me. However, after eating Indian food the first night, my fears dissipated; I learned how other cultures' foods are just as incredible as the foods I love. Over the three days, I tried jackfruit, ramen, poke bowls, and radishes—all foods I've never had before. By immersing myself in the foods of different cultures and neighborhoods, I felt a special connection that made me more open to understanding their community.



This bowl was one of my favorites and had radishes and jackfruit, which I'd never eaten before.

Experience Baltimore teaches new, valuable lessons about the Baltimore community, while also being a magnificent source for making new friends. I still see multiple people from this program daily and we always catch up with one another; during this experience, we became a little family. The atmosphere every day was uplifting and inspiring, helping us to prevail past the sappy thoughts after loved ones dropped us off. I luckily get to call

them close friends, one being Isabella Passalacqua, who adamantly declared, “The program was a great way to start the year because when everyone finally moved in, I had already seen familiar faces and was excited to show my new friends around Baltimore.” Experience Baltimore secretly gave me a cushion to help brave the impact of anxiously meeting hundreds of new people during my first semester—I'm forever grateful for it.

Experience Baltimore broadens countless horizons and will leave you with a new perspective on Baltimore. College is an intricate labyrinth compiled by thousands of fun activities, new people, and places. But most importantly, you will be gifted with a new community. At Loyola, our community is extremely crucial for students to become better people and transform into individuals full of compassion and love. Essentially, we grow with our community and support each other—flourishing as one. So, let me tell you a little secret that will change your future here at Loyola: Experience Baltimore is the biggest and best sneak peek into your new home!



A panoramic view of Baltimore City.

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