



My Messina group painting pumpkins

***“Messina is your launching pad into academic and social success at Loyola, and as you move on in your life.”***

## Jumpstarting Into Action By Cassie Gabriel

You did it! You're all moved in, you've registered for classes, and you've taken all your placement tests. You're ready for school, right?

...right?

I know. It's already hard enough wandering in the seemingly daunting and foreign campus, but it must have hit even harder leaving your family and friends. You probably feel alone walking through a place where everyone already knows everyone – like a stranger to a family function.

It's pretty isolating when you put it that way.

I remember I came to Loyola a little bit later than everyone else because I was out of the country for a bit, and I felt like I was missing out on everything. Even more so because I'm a commuter and I'm just at home after my classes. People found friends left and right, and I was struggling to find Knott Hall. I nervously sauntered into my first class of the day, my face turning bright red and heating up. My knees buckled and I felt everyone's eyes on me. I remember just sitting in my seat quietly, afraid to even say anything, or even to look anyone in the eye.

Again, it's like crashing a party.

My Evergreen wanted to play Kahoot with us, and as I played the game, the girl next to me asked me for the answer to this one question, and from there, we didn't stop talking. As I talked with her and played Kahoot (though I lost by a landslide), I felt at ease. My face cooled down some, and I saw another girl next to me, and said “hi” to her. Who knew that that one word could spark a conversation? This was my first experience with a Messina group – inviting, yet still new to me.

Still having trouble navigating Loyola socially and around campus? I'll let you in on a little secret. Come a little closer so I can whisper it in your ear: *Messina is your launching pad into academic and social success at Loyola, and as you move on in your life.*

### 1. Academic Success

Messina is a program geared to ease first-years into life at Loyola. Freshman Andrew Heerman shared that “Messina has acted as a very informative and well-thought out guide that has helped me figure out a few more tips and tricks for making it through my first year of college.”

My Messina group often has discussions about resources on campus – one of the first Messina meetings was about [The Study](#) and the [Writing Center](#), both designed as “coaching” for any of your classes and for any writing assignments. After trying both services, I felt more confident about a class or a pa-

per (and it totally beats cramming and rushing at 3 AM, am I right?). And I think a week ago, we learned a few tips on class registration (I'll give you one: you want to have back-up plans for your back-up plans because seats fill up FAST, so you better go, go, go!).

A few more tips on academic advising: you meet with your academic adviser in the summer to plan for the fall semester, and in the fall to plan for the spring semester. If you do know what your major is, great! If you don't, it's totally fine! It's not something that's expected of you right off the bat. Your adviser will help you plan your courses or get you thinking about what courses would be best for you if you still don't know what your major is.

What's great about learning about these resources is that you're never actually "left to your own devices" – there's always someone willing to help you succeed, because here at Loyola, you will always have a support system!

## 2. Social Navigation

Messina is also a great way to start branching out! They are one of the first groups of people you'll meet on campus, and you will be spending a lot of time with them, so why not make it worthwhile? I remember going on a trip to Belvedere Square and having dinner with my Messina group (I remember three of us bought the same Mexican soda) and watched this documentary called *Charm City* in [The Senator Theatre](#). It was an awesome opportunity to explore Baltimore with a cool group of people, and even more so in a cozy, classical-style theater off campus.

Another time I could think of with my Messina group was when we watched another documentary titled *Becoming Bulletproof* – I remember we had to write to our teachers and convince them to convince the rest of the class to come and see the documentary. I'll admit, I don't remember too much of the documentary – rather, most of my memories that night were me just getting to know people in my Messina group more, and the conversations we had. I helped someone in my Messina group hand out flyers, and we ended up having the best time talking about current events, what's going on in our lives, and how we were going to hand out all the flyers in the pile. If I remember correctly, there wasn't a time where I was *not* smiling — I felt a little more connected with my Messina group now that I had that time with them, and there was never a dull moment. Freshman Leif Labianca can back me on this, as he says, "I don't feel ostracized in the slightest, and I consistently have a good time with [them]."

Exactly what Messina (and Loyola) stands for — they want you to feel like you're with friends, rather, you're with family. A family away from home, and something you will remember for the rest of your life. I've become very comfortable talking with my Messina group, and that somehow helped me to be at ease talking to new people.



Me (front row, all the way to the left) and my Messina group showing off our beautiful Pumpkins!

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**- Leif Labianca**



Panoramic views of the sun setting behind the Senator Theatre!

Another great thing about Messina is that it transforms you. Sophomore Aliyah Allones shared that “Messina... [got] me out of my comfort zone. Being an introvert, I felt it was more difficult for me to branch out to others in my [grade], but I’m glad I stepped out of my bubble because [from there], I was able to join the Greyhounds and the Asian Cultural Alliance.” Messina pushes you towards self-improvement — in Aliyah’s case, pushes her to talk to new people, and who knows, you could even discover more about yourself this way.



Morning walks on campus!

### 3. Intellectual Development

Messina wants you to get fully into what you’re learning when it comes to reading and expressing yourself in art forms like reading and writing — educating the whole person (sound familiar to you?). Freshman Leif Labianca shared with me that in his case, “[His] Messina theme was ‘The Good Life’, and the photography class... literally changes the way we look at the world, and puts the mindset of a photographer in your back catalog.”

On the topic of cameras, Messina changes your lens. Maybe it adds a filter to change how you see things for the better! But seriously, it forces you to change your perspective on what you’re learning to see the whole picture — background and all — so you truly understand and appreciate what you’re looking at.

While Messina does offer these things, it’s not the only resource you’ll ever have — it *springboards* you into what you can expect during your time at Loyola, and throughout your life. Start by making connections with one or two people in a group. And then maybe three people in your social circle. And four. And then more! You’re going to hear differing perspectives and ideas, and you’ll have a chance to safely express your ideas and opinions, cultivating your mind as you go.

Another way Messina cultivates your mind and emphasizes community is through service. Dr. Andrea Leary, a writing professor, shared with me that she “tries to plan enrichment sessions and off-campus hangouts to get people to talk to each other about the hangout. Acts of service are also great for the Messina group because we feel more connected to each other when doing a common act of service for another person.” I currently have a pen pal in second grade, and will write a letter to an 8th grader with high school advice. It’s great knowing that I could make someone else smile, and even more so when I’m doing it with a like-minded group of people.

Having Messina as a starting point helps to build a foundation of where you stand socially and intellectually. Although I came in a little later than everyone else, that didn’t affect my ability to connect with new people in my Messina group. In a weird way, my comfort with them helped me to be more comfortable talking to new people. Already, I’ve made at least one good friend, and I’m challenging myself to talk to at least one new person every day.

What about you? What will Messina do for you?

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Pumpkin painting!