

Need a Friend? There's Plenty of Fish in the Sea in Loyola's Club Community!

By Nora Sharkey

Entering college as a first-year student can be an extremely stressful process, whether it's navigating to unfamiliar places on campus, managing your time efficiently, or overcoming homesickness. For me and for several other people, making friends ranks high as one of the primary concerns about college. The saying "it's not the place that matters, but the people you're with" applies itself at college to a great extent. Having friends at college makes the experience ten times more enjoyable and creates great memories when you're all together. One of the many resources Loyola offers to all of us is [clubs](#), which remains one of the best outlets to meet new people and make friends.



As an incoming first-year student at Loyola Maryland, I was beyond stressed by the idea of making new friends. I struggled to make friends because I hated boring small talk like "What is your major? Where are you from? Why did you choose Loyola?" The process was monotonous, and I felt like I was not making any strong connections with my peers. Until I joined a few clubs at Loyola that sparked my interest. I joined women's club volleyball, hiking club, and Irish step dancing club. Not only did I feel more involved with the community, but I created new friendships. I felt that once I joined clubs that spoke to my interests, making friends became lightwork. Conversation with other members of the club felt natural because we had similar interests. Joining clubs, especially club volleyball, was the best decision I ever made. I went from having no friends, to being inseparable from my teammates. Without volleyball, I would be lost because it doesn't just offer the opportunity to play the sport I love, but the people who come along with it.



After conducting research, I learned that most people in college struggle to make friends. Brianna Puschendorf, a sophomore at Loyola University Maryland, attests to the challenges she faced as a freshman in making new friends. She told me, "When I got to college, I was in my tiny little bubble and was so scared to put myself out there." Brianna was not the only person who felt this way during their first weeks as a first-year student. Caitlin Carey, a student from the class of 2028, confides that "I was really scared and nervous and I didn't know if I'd find anyone who...would...click." Both experienced a sense of discomfort because they were afraid that socializing with other students in their grade would not go the way they expected. However, these feelings of discomfort are completely normal at the beginning of your first few weeks at Loyola. It may seem impossible that things will start looking up but believe me when I say—trust the process—because after the first three weeks, it does get better. At least for Brianna, Caitlin, and I, life at Loyola became easier once we started joining clubs.

Most incoming first-year students, including myself, did not know how to join any clubs. But you have nothing to fear, for Loyola strategical-



ly plans events, specifically for first-year students, where they introduce clubs. My first week of orientation as a first-year, Loyola planned many events that introduced me and my fellow classmates to countless different clubs. FAC Attack at the Fitness and Aquatic Center introduced all the club and intramural sports teams to first-years who wanted to be involved athletically. They had tables with all the teams and every person running their table could not have been nicer. Orientation week also had first-years come to the quad in the middle of campus and attend the Activities Fair. This Fair had tables

of all the clubs at Loyola for first-year students to investigate and sign up for clubs that interested them. And if you were unable to attend either of those events, Loyola has The Bridge. The Bridge is an app through Loyola that allows all students to find every kind of club the school offers. So, if you missed an event in person to sign up for a club, [The Bridge](#) is the perfect place to visit and sign up virtually. Not only can you sign up for clubs through the Bridge, but you can register for club events there like movie nights, bake-off competitions, and so much more!

The people of the Loyola community, specifically those who are running the tables at the club fairs like FAC Attack and the Fair on the quad, understand the emotions you are feeling because they went through the same thing. They know how it feels to be lost, unsure of why they thought they could be independent by themselves, and fear they will never make friends, or, the biggest fear of all, feeling that they made a mistake and do not belong here. They want to reassure you that those feelings are not true—you do belong here and they are here to help you. Joining a club (or more than one) will allow you to branch out and find something you find joy in. Finding something you love also offers an opportunity to find new people, too. Loyola wants you to feel like



you belong, and joining a club is one step closer to that heart-warming sensation of being surrounded by people you love.



In our conversation, Brianna said “one of my best friends that [I] now live with and is an evergreen with me, I met in dance crew because she made a joke and made me laugh...and we were inseparable since and I cannot imagine life without her.” That one tiny joke then led to a series of events where they made a strong friendship and are

now roommates. If Brianna had never decided to join the dance team, she never would have met her best friend, and her year as a freshman would have altered completely.

As you saw with Brianna, clubs do bring people together and create strong friendships. Freshman Lia Ilagan has also declared that she has joined many clubs during her first year as a freshman. She enjoys being a part of the club community because "It's easier for me to make friends...and now I'm able to see familiar people all over campus from the different clubs and teams that I've joined" (Ilagan). While you are not obligated to befriend every single person you meet, it is always nice to see a familiar face on campus like Lia voiced.

Hannah Roche, the supervisor for intramural sports at Loyola's Fitness and Aquatic Center, shares her viewpoint of club sports from a staff member's perspective: "I strongly believe that club sports are an incredible opportunity for first-years. Once you are on a team you are a part of an immediate community... club sports is a support system of people...that can provide guidance when applicable, support and understanding." Like Hannah mentioned, the club environment gives support to their members because they care about their well-being. When you join a club, you are not just a student anymore, you are a member of the club's family. And family will do anything and everything to make you feel like you belong.



Loyola offers so much to first-year students. While it may feel like you are alone and having to deal with the anxiety of starting a new chapter of your life by yourself, that's not true. Members of the Loyola club community are here to help and support you through your college experience. More importantly, they want to make you feel like a member of the Greyhound family. Considering my first semester of freshman year is coming to a close, I must admit I feel included at Loyola. Every time I am on campus walking to class, I always have someone wave or smile at me. Even with my club teammates, we take pictures of each other when we see them on campus and send them to our group chat thinking we are the funniest people alive. But that is how Loyola is: a community where everyone is friendly and kind towards others. So, get out there! Have fun making new friends. I know it may be scary, but just be aware that you are not the only one experiencing this feeling. Plenty of people at Loyola have found their people. Something as simple as joining a club could be your answer to finding yours!

