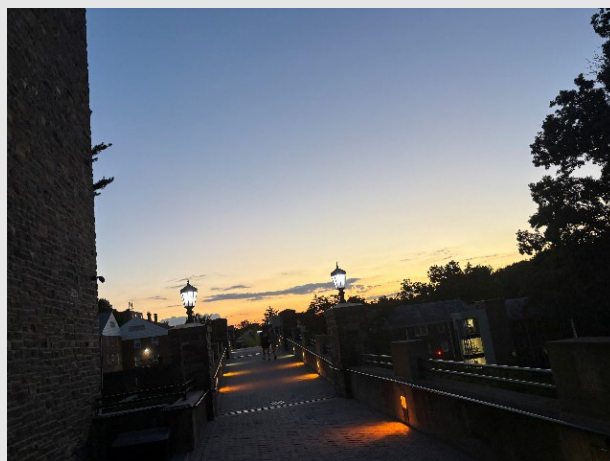


How LOYOLA BECOMES A HOME

By Declan Ames

An Introduction to College Life

The mere mention of college throughout my childhood caused anxiety. Of course, I couldn't wait for a chance to flip to a new page, start a chapter. I had just grown used to the familiarity in life, which makes sense. Your whole life, you fall into this routine of familiarity, of places and people you recognize. You go to school, you play sports or participate in extracurricular activities, and then you go home. Home exists as the place where you can be yourself, where you grow and learn, and where your family supports you. Then all a sudden, your home removes itself from your daily routine. You shut the door to the place you have such fond memories of and now a new school, a new home, becomes the routine you have to become familiar with. Some people are glad to leave home and aren't that homesick, which is completely understandable. However, I felt so homesick during my first few weeks of college, and the feeling can take a while to go away. A lot of people feel nervous about leaving home and [Sana Muneer](#), a student at Boston University, writes in her school newspaper that "Homesickness and anxiety in college are normal experiences for college freshmen and sophomores, juniors and seniors—to have. Feeling uncomfortable, anxious and uncertain in a new place is natural, and all transitions will have bumps in the road." Yet, Loyola has many ways that helped ease my homesickness. I've found that the Messina program, a new chance at independence, clubs, and alone time all help tide the feelings of homesickness until you can rest in the comfort of your home again.



The Gifts of Messina

The [Messina](#) Program exists as a freshman-year only experience which allows you to fall into a sense of familiarity. You are grouped with other students, sometimes the same major as you, along with a professor, an administrator or staff member, and an Evergreen. An Evergreen is basically your student leader, a guide you can go to whenever you need advice or have any questions. We have a class with everyone in our Messina along with enrichment, which is an extra hour of class where we learned more about the campus as well as each other. This includes course registration, what



you can do around Baltimore, as well as clubs and community to be a part of.

Nonetheless, the first few weeks of freshman year were a rough time for me. I was couped in my dorm a majority of the time I wasn't in class; I hated going to the dining hall; I felt so alone. Yet there was one place I slowly found myself building connections: my Messina. Over time, a sense of community started to form over getting to know each other on a more personal level. Every one of us focused on studying education and most of my other classes had at least one of my friends from my Messina in it. I felt comforted to know that I'd see these people on a regular basis and I would have people to share this experience with, a bit more than others because we spent class and enrichment together. Suddenly, I felt belonging. Suddenly, I was not so alone anymore.

When I asked junior at Loyola and my Evergreen, Brianna Puschendorf, about how she dealt homesickness, she said that "I tried my best to not be alone. I tried my best to get dinner with people I met. My first friend was in my Messina, so we started getting dinner together." It's about the small, meaningful steps you must take in order to feel at home. I always wave to everyone in my Messina whenever I see them on campus, and during the first semester, I went out of my way to have conversations with them. Now, they are some of my best friends here. Even if you don't become best friends with them, that's okay too! My friend in my Messina, Maeve Powers, talks about how the people in our Messina have influenced her, mentioning that "As someone who's more quiet, I feel like I've been introduced to more outgoing people in our Messina, and I feel like it helped me become more confident as a result." Messina is a place where people around you can change your perspective and help you branch out. Ellie Formont, a freshman, explains that "I love Messina. It actually works. You'll meet people and you don't even have to ... meet your best friend in Messina, but it's nice to have people you know here." Like Ellie says, it's a gateway to further connections and brings a comfort of knowing that you are not alone. You receive an amazing opportunity during Welcome Weekend to make some new friends right off the bat, so don't be afraid to take a leap of faith and start the conversation!



The Freedoms of Independence

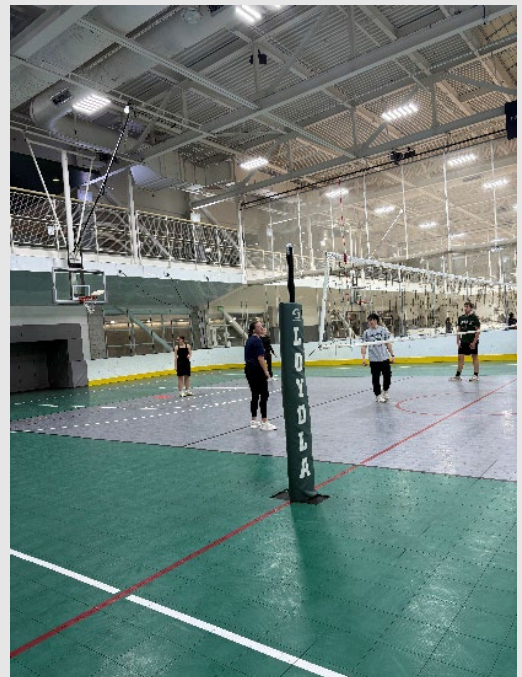
The independence that I'd been given here at Loyola is yet another crucial piece that made me feel a little more at home on this campus. Most of us realize something when we first arrive on campus: we really have to rely on ourselves for the first time. At home, you have your parents to do laundry for you, cook your meals, and remind you to do your homework, but at college, it's all up to you. Take the opportunity and live your life how you want to live it! No one is telling you who you have to become or where you must be in life! Everything's up to you!

I relished planning my own schedule at my fingertips. Dr. Jessica Enos, a professor in the Education Department at Loyola, remarks that "It's hard to see the change in students because I'm usually only with my students for a semester, not a full academic year but even with advising, I can see what changes. I see students walk into advising meetings with much more confidence, whether that's pragmatics with knowing how to navigate what classes to take or something else." Planning my schedule and choosing what I was interested in, along with what professor I thought would best suit my needs, made me feel like I was really taking care of myself and finally living my own

life. In high school, you didn't control who taught you and you can often get the short end of the stick, yet here it's so different. College leads to confidence in your own choices, whether choosing your own classes, prioritizing fitness at the gym over lying in bed doing nothing, and more. When talking about independence and advice she would give to incoming freshmen, Brianna Puschendorf advises that "It's at your pace and you get to choose how to be independent. You're showing up for yourself." Staying at home and relying on my parents would have made me feel like I was still that kid who needed to be taken care of. By living on my own and crafting my life as I please, I now feel like I'm holding the reins instead of being steered by my parents if I let my homesickness control and stay at home. Life is in the palm of your hands. Not your parents'; not your teachers'; just yours. Relish the opportunity set out before you. It's a preview of your future as an adult, so think of it as a trial run for the rest of your life. You'll always have home to go back to after but know that a chance for a taste of adulthood is at your fingertips.

Community with Clubs and Extracurriculars

Joining clubs and any kind of extracurricular definitely provide a cure for the ache in your chest relating to home. Mia Cucuzzella, a sophomore at Loyola and my friend since we were kids, explains that "Extracurriculars helped me a lot because I was always so busy. I even joined The Study because I enjoyed helping people out and I knew it would take my mind off of thinking about my home." What's important is to live in the moment. Don't let the fact that you miss home prevent you from missing the opportunities around you. This semester, I joined a co-ed intramural volleyball team with my friends. We didn't care if we were bad, intermural volleyball was just something fun to do twice a week whenever we played games. Dr. Enos talked about how she did gymnastics in college, remarking, "I was really glad I did that. I leaned into athletics for that community. Kind of like your Messina. So, I formed a community from that." Joining clubs and activities gives you time to meet people with similar interests and form friendships. Friendships and companionship make the urge for home a little less bad. I've found that I feel like I'm forming a second family here through all the steps I've taken. So, not only do you have your family at home to rely on through texts, phone calls, and visits, but you also have the family you are forming here to rely on too.



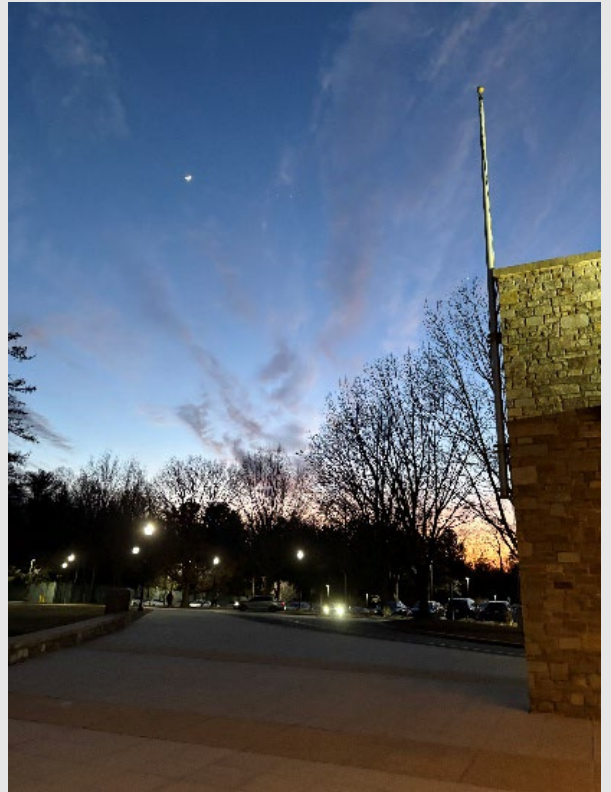
Normalize Being Alone

While joining clubs and extracurriculars provides a great outlet to find community, it's also necessary to take a step back and have nights to yourself. When I asked for her advice, Mia Cucuzzella advises to "Make time for yourself and prioritize self-care. It's okay to feel lonely as the semester starts, it's part of the process." Like she said, you are going to miss home at the beginning. That's perfectly reasonable. But even as time goes on and you start making friends and joining clubs, it's important not to overwhelm yourself. I love my friends, but I also love unwinding

after my classes by watching a movie or tv show, reading a book, and even just curling up under my covers. Being alone does not necessarily mean that you're lonely or homesick because you are resting and relaxing. You are allowed to love the quiet. It's necessary to have this time yourself so you can decompress. Piling up and committing too much in college will make you exhausted and overwhelmed. Prioritizing your needs, which could mean a night in bed or even going to the gym, is important for your mental health at college. Don't overcommit to the point that you don't properly let out your emotions. It's okay to miss home. Don't ignore what you feel. Just try to have a healthy balance between having alone time and spending time with others.

Always Remember

Homesickness might always be there, even after freshman year is over. But that's healthy and normal. You have spent your whole life in this constant routine; it's not like you're going to get over it in just a few weeks. What's crucial is to not close yourself off to the next step in the rest of your life. Messina, independence, extracurriculars, and alone time are all great tools that make Loyola feel less like something temporary and more like a home you can always rely on.



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