

Engineering in a First Year Seminar and Student Development Program

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A new first year program for all incoming traditional students, entitled Messina, is being implemented in the 2015-2016 academic year. Prior to this Loyola University Maryland had a first year program, Alpha, that was both voluntary (opt-in) by the students and involved a single course for a single, usually fall, semester. The Messina program links two courses and groups course pairings by themes. A cohort of 16 students have one course in the fall and the second in the spring (A/B), while a second cohort of 16 students will have the reverse pairing of courses (B/A).

In this presentation I will focus on an Introduction to Engineering course which has been paired with a required Theology course. One such pairing was in the 2013-2014 academic year and the second will be in the 2015-2016 year. In the first experience with the Messina program, Engineering and Theology were connected by Civil Engineering and Architecture. The theological underpinnings of the great cathedrals and the organization of their space were integrated with basic information about medieval building. There was also content about the arch shape and its importance symbolically and scientifically. The optimal nature of certain geometric forms is considered. The Sagrada Familia basilica by Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926) in Barcelona, Spain (Catalonia) was highlighted. Construction started in 1882, when the first stone was laid, and continues to this day.

In the second experience, which is ongoing, the connection between Theology and Engineering was made around questions of technology and time, consumption and creation. Students from both sections will get together for some joint activities and there will be readings and discussions of critiques of the speed and constantly “plugged in” nature of current technology. Some of this discussion will also be used to promote student development work around one’s digital persona and how to keep in control of one’s online presence and privacy.