Loyola retention rate higher than DePaul and Columbia, lower than Northwestern

By Brandon Kik
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After the long process of deciding on a college, students usually expect to complete their degree at that institution. Sometimes, however, circumstances cause students to transfer schools or drop out completely.

Schools have varying levels of difficulty when it comes to retaining their students, and Loyola is no exception. According to Inside Loyola, the university’s online news source, the Rev. Michael J. Garanzini S.J. stated in his State of the University address last spring that the freshman retention rate was 87.3 percent, which translates to about 1,252 students leaving the university last year, an improvement from the 2010 retention rate, which was about 84 percent.

Retention rate is the number or percentage of students who return to the same school the following year.

Similar to Loyola, DePaul University’s freshman retention rate stands just less than 87 percent, according to their website. Schools such as Northwestern University and University of Chicago have freshman retention rates near 97 percent, according to U.S. News and World Report.

The university is making strides to retain students, according to Stephanie Stewart, Faculty Director of Achieving College Excellence (ACE).

ACE is just one of the services Loyola has in place to help students and student retention. Others include the Office of First Year Experience, the Office of Second Year Experience, and the Division of Student Development.

“There have been a lot of collaborative efforts, multiple departments have worked together toward this goal and I think that’s why we’ve seen the improvement,” Stewart said.

These departments work to make students feel more comfortable at the university and to combat the “three primary concerns,” which Fr. Justin Daffron S.J., Associate Provost for Academic Services, says cause students to leave.

“Students leave because of financial concerns, academic concerns and social concerns,” Daffron said.

Daffron said students sometimes decide to pursue their education at more affordable colleges, institutions that are less rigorous or campuses outside of an urban environment.
Yana Cheatham, a junior pre-physical therapy major, recently transferred out of Loyola into Azusa Pacific University in southern California for a change of scenery.

“[At Loyola] I made a lot of close friends but on my own I wasn’t happy, I felt that I was relying on my friends.”

Although Cheatham said she did not prefer Chicago to her home back in California, she added, “I do miss the city every once in a while.”

For some students, Loyola’s campus atmosphere leaves something to be desired. Eleanor Tapp, a junior at the University of North Dakota majoring in social work, left Loyola because of the atmosphere on campus.

“I love Chicago, but I guess what was more of a factor was that Loyola lacked a campus feel,” she said. “I felt like I was going to college in the city, not going to college at Loyola. I wanted to experience something different from Loyola; I wanted to experience a college town.”

Many times, students leave due to financial reasons. Ninety-five percent of students at Loyola receive financial aid in some form, according to Loyola’s website. Still, sometimes aid is not enough and students prefer to attend a more affordable university rather than take out a large student loan.

This was another factor for Tapp, who said she left “wanting to save some money,” and said she got that at her new school.

“[University of North Dakota] is a drastic difference in [price of] tuition and living expenses,” Tapp said.

On the other hand, there are students who choose to transfer out of other schools to come to Loyola.

According to Daffron, “about 550 [transfer students come] each year … This year, we had growth upwards of 700 students.”

Elizabeth McCann, a senior, transferred from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa after her freshman year.

“I really like living downtown; there are more people, more options [for things to do],” McCann said. “I wanted a better degree. I feel like I’m getting a more rounded education here.”

Senior Becca Shatz, 22, transferred after her sophomore year from Ripon College in Ripon, Wis.

“I really like the downtown campus; [Loyola has] a huge variety of classes, involvement and ways to meet people,” said the sport management major.