Rome Start program offers students many opportunities

By Nicole Ransom
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Loyola’s Rome Start Program, created in fall 2011, allows a select number of first-year students to experience life at the John Felice Rome Center (JFRC) before attending school at Loyola’s Chicago campus. They arrive in August and spend their entire freshman year at the Rome Center.

The program aims to help students who have lived internationally transition into college life by offering a Loyola experience abroad.

Besides introducing students to a Loyola atmosphere, the program allows participants to gain a close-knit group of friends before coming to the Chicago campus, according to Anna Carlson, assistant director of international recruitment specifying on the Rome Start Program.

Currently, the program is only open to international students or students graduating from schools outside the U.S.

“It is intended for international students and U.S. high school students that have previous international experience or interest,” Carlson said.

However, next year the university is opening the application process to students from U.S. high schools as long as they “demonstrate international experience or interest through their application essay and through an interview,” Carlson said.

Senior high school students can apply to the program on a rolling basis.

Students who participate in the year-long program are called “Rome Starters.” This year’s Rome Starters traveled to Loyola’s Chicago campus for an orientation and a preview of life for their sophomore year during fall break on Oct. 17-20.

“I am definitely looking forward to Chicago, especially after the trip that all of us Rome Starters took to get a feel of the campus and the city,” said freshman Shanele Changoo, 18, an undecided major enrolled as a Rome Starter. “In my opinion, it gave us a better idea of what to expect when we move to Chicago instead of being overwhelmed our second year from such a transition.”

The Rome Start Program was created “to increase the international student presence at the John Felice Rome Center and to open up our campus services to the community that hosts us here in Italy and Europe,” Carlson said.

Rome Starters take mainly core curriculum classes while in Rome, allowing them to take more classes focused on their major when they arrive on campus in Chicago.
Sophomore Gabriela Bacon, 19, who was part of the first Rome Start class last year, said the classes were nice, but many Rome Start students focus on the experience in Rome just as much as the curriculum.

“The learning experience was as much the place, the culture, the context and the travel, as it was the actual course content,” said the social work major. She added that the Rome Start Program helped her better transition into life at Loyola’s Chicago campus.

“It was nice to come to Chicago with a ready-made set of friends with whom I had been able to bond,” Bacon said. “Honestly, I am still getting used to the size of this place, and that makes me even more grateful for my Rome Start friends.”

Freshman David Roberts, 18, a current Rome Start student, agreed. “There’s a very strong sense of community here,” said the economics major.

The Rome Start Program offers a more personal experience for Loyolans due to the smaller student body, according to Carlson. “[Students find it] much easier to build relationships with faculty, considering the small class sizes and faculty involvement in student activities and study trips,” she said.

Many Rome Starters come from a variety of backgrounds and have previously experienced living internationally.

“I was born and raised in a Latino neighborhood in San Francisco, and made frequent trips to Guatemala, eventually moving there for high school, after spending my sophomore year of high school in Rome,” Bacon said.

“Now, I’m here [in Rome] and just grateful that Loyola created the Rome Start Program for confused global nomads like me,” she said.

Similarly, Roberts is originally from Sacramento, Calif., but moved to London in high school which is when he applied for the Rome Start Program. Changoo is originally from the Caribbean, but moved to Shanghai in high school and is now part of the Rome Start Program.

Freshman Daniela Arguello, 19, who is currently a Rome Starter, said she loves her experience in Rome so far.

“It’s only been a couple months, but I would not change this for anything,” said the ad/PR major, who is originally from Nicaragua.

However, one student said she thinks Rome Starters miss out on a freshman experience at Loyola and would have a hard time meeting people in their own grade.

“I do not think it is a good idea since freshman year is the year to set the foundation for your college experience,” said sophomore Elizabeth Miller, 19, Ad/PR major. “It is where you meet your friends and other students your age which I do not think happens when you come in as a sophomore.”