Perspectives on the Odyssey Program

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Last year, as I nervously moved into Han Blanch to start my freshman year, I met a very sincere, articulate person who amazingly was not at all nervous on the first day of college. He invited my family and me to check out his room layout and pointed out the key locations on campus before excusing himself because he had to run to a meeting.

I was a bit perplexed about how a freshman already could be involved with an on-campus organization. Only later did I learn that he was a participant in the Odyssey Program, an extension orientation for ALANA Students.

Later that week, when House Council Elections were held, minority students won a majority of the positions. This was both surprising and refreshing since everyone had talked to me before matriculating at Holy Cross did not exactly view the college as a haven for diversity in any sense of the word. There was a definite advantage to the networking and relationships built during Odyssey.

As I come from a high school in which I could count the minority students on one hand, it was nice to have the opportunity to meet and befriended students who came from different areas, cultures, and histories. I also felt very uncomfortable, however, approaching and talking to minority students because I had such limited life experience socializing with people who were “different” than me.

The friendships that were created in Odyssey appeared to be quite strong during our first week on campus. My ethnically insular background, coupled with usually seeing minority students together without majority students, almost scared me away from getting to know some great people. It was not until mid-semester that I felt comfortable getting to know two awesome Jamaican students, whose beds were merely 20 feet from mine.

Nevertheless, I believe that an unanticipated product of the current structure and philosophy of Odyssey Program, which appears to emphasize cliquish group cohesiveness, is further isolation of minority students on campus.

The Odyssey Program is a wonderful idea in theory, because let’s face it, Holy Cross is culture shock for any student who is from a socio-economically diverse area. It is very easy to “stick out” here and these factors definitely can create much discomfort for any student who looks, dresses, or even behaves differently than the stereotypical Holy Cross Student. However, the problem with Odyssey is, in actuality, its strength. As a credit to the program, students come truly to know each other well during the two weeks.

They form what appear to be genuine and trusted relationships. Once people have created a core group of friends that they can trust and enjoy being with, there is less of an urgency to get out and meet new people and forge new friendships. When I, along with the rest of the “majority” freshmen, arrived here at Holy Cross, these friendships already had been formed among the Odyssey group.

This was honestly a bit intimidating to the rest of the class. I can remember my roommate saying something to the effect of “They’re not going to go meet those guys. They already have their friends.” I believe that the problem with Odyssey is that, while attempting to create a comfort zone and support network of peers for minority students who are more than likely to face unique problems at Holy Cross, it perpetuates the “us versus them” mentality, making it very difficult for us to get to know, understand, and love each other.

Two additions to the Odyssey Program could aid in remedying this problem. Representatives from campus clubs, sports teams, and my life that they were excluded or incorporated into the program so that students’ Odyssey experience would not be exclusive to its members only.

Instead, it could be a springboard to early leadership on campus for many of its participants. Furthermore, the inclusion of a small sampling of the rest of the freshman class, possibly selected based on geographic location or homogeneity of home community, could enrich the diversity of the group.

Finally, all students should be aware of Odyssey and informed about what the program entails, why it exists and what its goals are. There is no reason for the rest of the freshman class to arrive at school without knowing why some of their fellow classmates have already been at Holy Cross for two weeks.

By eliminating some of the mysteries surrounding the program, the entire Holy Cross community is less likely to question the importance of or resent Odyssey. Instead, it could be a springboard to promote a holistic understanding of the entire Holy Cross community.

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Holy Cross football. I spent many happy Saturdays cheering on the Crusaders with him when I was a student on campus. Since then, we have enjoyed many homecoming games together.

My father, Hank Lemire ’54, was captain of the Holy Cross football team during his senior year. He played both offensive and defensive end. He was named All New England, All East, All Catholic, All American, and played in the East West Shrine game.

He was elected to the Holy Cross Athletic Hall of Fame in 1975.

To say dad loved Holy Cross is an understatement. He was a true Crusader, enjoyed volunteering his time for college, and was awarded the In Hoc Signo Award in 1994.

I want to thank all the Crusader football team last year. Sometimes we just go about our business, but we have to do, and we don’t always realize how we touch others’ lives. You were part of God’s miracle in my life that day, a day I’ll always cherish.

Mary Lemire-Campion  
Class of 1980

Letter to the Editors

To the Editors:

October 7, 2000, I was in the stands at Fitton Field with my father, watching Holy Cross play Pennsylvania. It was the last game we would watch together. He died on April 8, Palm Sunday.

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