

# **Notre Dame of Maryland University welcomes biggest freshman class ever**

Seven people crammed into a first-floor dormitory in Notre Dame of Maryland University's Meletia Hall Aug. 23.

Leslie Hernandez, a nursing major, traveled from Silver Spring with her parents, Teresa and Jose, and her older sister, Kimberly. Jaya Green, accompanied by her parents, Lyn and Jay, moved in as a sophomore transfer.

Hernandez is among the approximately 220 freshmen enrolled at NDMU, the largest incoming class to enter the university in its 124-year history.

Hernandez, like more than half her class, is a first-generation college student.

"It's exciting," said Hernandez, whose parents are immigrants from El Salvador. "It's setting the bar for many generations to come in my family."

Entering Maryland's only all-female college is "empowering," she said, but not what initially led her to the university.

"I wasn't looking for that," she said, adding that she was initially drawn to Notre Dame after learning of nursing students' post-graduation success. "I was looking for the best program for me and my future."

## **Welcoming**

Faculty, staff and students wearing tie-dye shirts in the school's blue and green colors greeted incoming students and aided in the moving process.

It was the second year volunteering for Don'she Cloude, a junior digital media arts major.

"I want to give these girls the same feeling that I got," Cloude said. "If they don't

meet anyone else today, I want them to feel comfortable with (me)."

Cloude loves that the university has a "close-knit" community.

"When I first toured here, I immediately loved the community environment," Cloude said. "It made me feel like I was becoming a part of something bigger than myself. You don't always get that at larger institutions."

Even beyond the university's northern Baltimore campus, Cloude and her family speak highly of Notre Dame. Her mother is friends with Tiffany Torbit, whose daughter, Taigan Jones, is entering as a freshman.

Jones was awarded a Presidential Scholarship. Cloude's mother is the one who shared the good news over a phone call with Torbit while Jones was making her decision.

"I told her to take her time and God will lead her in the right direction," Torbit said, adding that she told her daughter that the scholarship was the chance of a lifetime. "It all fell into place, like she was supposed to be here."

Jones' move-in crew included her brother, her mother's friend and two grandmothers. All wore matching shirts with Notre Dame's logo on the front and "Taigan - Class of 2022" on the back.

Being in an all-female institution does not bother Jones at all.

"I'm all about girl empowerment," Jones said.

## **Growing**

Founded in 1895 by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the college became the first in the United States to offer women the four-year baccalaureate degree.

Including its graduate and online programs, NDMU's enrollment is more than 2,500.

During the 2017-18 academic year, opening undergraduate enrollment to males was among the dozens of proposals suggested by a committee exploring additional

revenue streams, acknowledged Dr. Marylou Yam, president of NDMU. The idea was rejected.

“You are referring to an idea proposed by an innovative revenue committee during the fall of last year,” Yam said. “The committee included the idea of introducing co-education on the traditional undergraduate level here at NDMU as part of a list of more than 40 other creative revenue generating ideas for the university. The committee passed the ideas onto the board of trustees, and the board chose not to pursue (it) and rejected the idea.”

The school’s mission is to “educate leaders to transform the world,” and nearly half of its undergraduate students identify as ethnic minorities.

In recent years, the university has dedicated itself to marketing by reaching out to students and aiding them in the pre-enrollment process. Most of the students are from Maryland, but the university is looking to expand its reach in coming years.

“Our mission and the value of a women’s college is resonating with our students,” Yam said. “Our goal is to really give (the students) a great on-campus experience.”

Now welcoming a class 40 percent larger than its predecessor, Yam is excited for the future.

“We’re thrilled,” said Yam, who visits residence halls on move-in day to welcome the students and their families. “This is a historic moment for Notre Dame.”

*Email Emily Rosenthal at [erosenthal@CatholicReview.org](mailto:erosenthal@CatholicReview.org)*