A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Alumni, Parents, and Friends:

Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a great holiday season. I want to thank you for signing up to receive LEVEL's first newsletter - your consistent investment and support in this organization is what facilitates such a lively, successful experience for so many students on campus through all that we provide.

This newsletter will provide a look at what our group has done over the past semester and offer student perspectives from the various events. We had a busy semester as we continue to grow in student involvement and in the range of opportunities we offer. In the following pages, you can also become witness to this growth, whatever role you have in the organization now. We continue with events such as our retreat at Camp Ockanickon and our semi-annual banquet, while introducing new experiences such as our collaboration with Campus Ministry in Sidelined and our participation in the DreamWalk Fashion Show. Continue reading to gain different student perspectives on the events, as well as gaining a greater understanding of ways in which you can stay connected with LEVEL in the upcoming semester.

We are incredibly grateful and humbled by how far your support has allowed us to come.

Rachel Heckler
Senior & President of LEVEL
THE SEMESTER IN REVIEW

SEPTEMBER

Students served at the St. Thomas the Apostle School in Philadelphia for Day of Service.

LEVEL earned over $6000 through 1842 day.

Mike Luaino spoke about his experience of living as a quadriplegic.

LEVEL, VUnited, and Special Olympics presented the Disability Panel.

Students attended the Phillies’ game against the Atlanta Braves.

OCTOBER

LEVEL and Special Olympics screened the movie Defiant Lives in the cinema.

LEVEL attended Terror Behind the Walls at Eastern State Penitentiary to experience their haunted house.

Students interacted with recruiters from companies like EY, BNY Mellon, and CHOP in a casual setting at the second annual Network Capability Event.

LEVEL hosted their sixth annual retreat at YMCA Camp Ockanickon.

NOVEMBER

Students made waffles for athletes and volunteers at Villanova’s Special Olympics Fall Fest.

Founders of the DreamWalk Fashion Show Alyse and Lexi Scaffidi invited LEVEL members to walk in their annual inclusive fashion show at 2300 Arena.

Athletes and students speak of their experience with injury and disability at Sidelined with LEVEL and Campus Ministry.

DECEMBER

LEVEL members completed their first semester in collaboration with Holy Family and their new group IDEA by attending their movie screening of Wonder.

Students dined and danced at LEVEL’s 3rd annual banquet at the Llanerch Country Club.
**CAPABILITY NETWORKING EVENT**

LEVEL gives me many opportunities to meet people with similar capabilities and backgrounds. The networking event was particularly helpful for me because it gave me the chance to meet and talk with people in several industries who work in the company of people with disabilities. It is encouraging to know that despite my current, yet temporary situation, there are still many different business opportunities where I can work and be successful. I also really appreciated the variety of businesses that were represented at the event so we could get different perspectives.

**Sean Esmond**, Sophomore

**ABILITIES BARBECUE**

LEVEL co-hosted the second annual abilities barbecue this year, and it was a blast to attend! Basically, students involved with LEVEL, as well as VUnited, Special Olympics, and Villanova Buddies, held a large barbecue on South Campus to try and spread awareness about their amazing clubs to the new freshmen. It was very fun to spend the afternoon meeting new people, hanging out with old friends, and spreading the message of inclusivity to the next group of future leaders on campus.

**Brandon McNabb**, Junior

**DISABILITIES PANEL**

The Disabilities Panel was a successful event. Each of us panelists came together and highlighted the struggles and obstacles we’ve faced and how our unique identities make us proud. We also expressed gratitude for the opportunities we have been given. For me, I am thankful that I am attending Villanova. What I liked about this event was that we, the panelists, were able to share our personal stories and bring attention to what experiences on and off campus are like for people with various disabilities and differences like us. Also, I mentioned how I think Villanova should be a better and more inclusive environment for people with disabilities, and my fellow panelists agreed, which I felt was one of the most important points I made.

**Carter Young**, Senior
"After retreat, I truly felt like a part of the LEVEL community."

I lived a pretty sheltered life. I never really went outside or played with other kids when I was little. I was always satisfied by just sitting in the house, alone, and playing video games all day. But ever since I moved to college I have been more open and exposed to socializing and having fun with others and I have been looking for opportunities to do so.

I heard that retreats are a lot of fun so a few weeks ago I decided to go on a retreat with this group I joined called LEVEL. I joined LEVEL in the first place because I recently found out that I am on the Autism spectrum and I wanted to join a group that understands and accepts disability.

As with every new experience, I came into it apprehensively. I wasn't very happy that I had to wake up at 6:30AM and lug a laundry bag filled with clothes through the rain for 15 minutes. When the alarm woke me up that morning I asked myself the same questions I do whenever I am about to do something fun that’s out of my comfort zone: Is going to this even worth it? Am I really going to have fun?

These questions prevented me from having so much fun in the past but luckily this time I ignored my pessimism and I decided that I was going to have a great time despite the difficult first morning and poor weather.

The retreat took place at camp Ockinickion in Medford Lakes, New Jersey from Saturday morning to Sunday night. This retreat was supposed to be mostly outdoors based but it was raining to start off Saturday so we started the retreat playing ice breaker games.

I always found games like these awkward and embarrassing but after a few minutes I became more involved and I started to enjoy them. I stopped caring if I looked stupid because initially I was the stupid one for not letting myself enjoy the experience like everyone else was.
The icebreaker games were cute and a good alternative to our planned outdoor activities. I most enjoyed the one where we all take our shoes off and someone stands in the middle and says "I share common ground with..." and everyone who shares this in common with the person in the middle had to run into the circle, shake 3 peoples hands, and find a different pair of shoes to stand by.

Later on, the weather started to clear up and we were going to do our outdoor activities. We did archery and we went canoeing. Archery was interesting because I never did it before and it was taught to us well. I always wanted to shoot an arrow. Canoeing was very relaxing except when I almost fell in the water. But overall it was a lot of fun I enjoyed learning something new and spending time on the water.

The next day we spent most of the time outside. There was a large swing, a rock wall, and a 30 foot log where we were fighting with pool noodles. I don't really enjoy heights too much so I did the swing which was a lot of fun and I tried the other things but I got scared. However, everyone was very supportive of me and they pushed me out of my comfort zone and if it wasn't for that I wouldn't have tried anything.

However, what made the retreat so fun wasn't the activities we did, but the socializing and connecting with other people. This was largely due to the meals spent together. For each meal we had assigned seats with different people. I really liked this because we all had the opportunity to talk to different people each time and if the seats weren't assigned I probably would've sat by myself. I had a lot of fun and interesting conversations with new people and I laughed a lot.

After going on this retreat, I truly felt like a part of the level community. I am so happy that I was able to make new friends and try new things. This retreat was definitely worth it and I will go again next year.
DREAMWALK FASHION SHOW

LEVEL participated in an inclusive fashion show in Center City Philadelphia November 4th through the DreamWalk Fashion Show. Ryan and I worked the runway decked out in all gold outfits as we walked out together to finish off the show. It was such an amazing experience to see so many inclusive and supportive individuals at one event to promote self-love and beauty.

PJ D'Amico, Freshman

SIDELINED

On Tuesday, November 27th, I was given the opportunity to speak with Kristopher Elmer, Jannah Tucker, and Darryl Reynolds. We spoke about our individual experiences being injured and the hardships we had to endure and are currently facing that impede our ability to perform at our physical best. In addition, we discussed the methods we utilize to confront our difficulties. Discussing how to face problems is important as everyone gets through complications differently. The important takeaway is athletes who are sidelined due to injury are impacted not only physically, but mentally as well. Maintaining a positive attitude is essential for recovery. No matter what your struggles are, having an optimistic outlook helps get you through difficult times.

Ryan Vaughn, Graduate Student

LEVEL BANQUET

Through LEVEL Hours, I saw the academic side of LEVEL, but at the banquet I was able to see a whole new side to each member. It gave me the opportunity to spend time uniting with others through a greatly shared love of music and dancing.

Allie Palmeri, Sophomore
KEEP UP WITH US.

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OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES/LEVEL

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COMING UP

April 1 Casino Night
February 5-7 NovAbility Week