

The Second Messenger

ST. OLAF BIOLOGY ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Featured
Biology Alumni Articles

Updates from the
Biology Department

Updates from YOU!



Annual Fund

Thank you, Biology Alumni, for your gifts to the St. Olaf Annual Fund! Many of you have designated your donation to specifically support the Biology Department. We are so grateful! Every year, your generous donations enable the Biology Department to provide for extra things like student travel to conferences and the annual Senior Picnic - including puzzles of the image on the cover of this newsletter as prizes for the "Guess the Faculty" game! If you are already considering making a contribution, please consider designating your gift to the Biology Department. If you are celebrating a reunion this year, your gift will be counted in your class gift as well.

Thank you for your consideration!

Rooted in Curiosity, Guided by Purpose

By Danielle (Stoermer) Niedermaier ('08)



Photo: Danielle Niedermaier

Danielle ('08) & Alec ('08-French) Niedermaier with children Arthur, Marie & Konrad, 2026

When I arrived at St. Olaf, I knew I loved biology and the natural world. What I did not yet know was that my path would lead through farms in Senegal, food security programs across several continents, and eventually into corporate strategy at Land O'Lakes, Inc. That path began to take shape in my biology and environmental studies classes. I was drawn to the places where science meets people: how soil health affects nutrition, how climate and water shape livelihoods, and how agriculture sits at the center of food, environment, and economic opportunity. A liberal arts education gave me permission to hold those questions together instead of choosing only one lens. At St. Olaf, I learned to think across disciplines, communicate clearly, and stay curious when the problem was bigger than any single field.

Rooted in Curiosity, Guided by Purpose

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After graduation, I followed that curiosity to Cornell for a master's program in international agriculture and rural development, paired with Peace Corps service. I spent five years in Senegal, first as a sustainable agriculture volunteer and later supporting the expansion of food security work. I worked with farmers, local leaders, and organizations trying to increase productivity, diversify crops, and strengthen rural economies. It was practical, humbling work, and it gave me a deep appreciation for the knowledge farmers already hold and the importance of partnerships built on trust.



Photo: Craig Stoermer

(L-R) My twin sister Kristina (Stoermer) Burrack ('08), Jean Stoermer (our mom), and me in Senegal, 2011

That experience led me to Washington, D.C., where I supported monitoring and evaluation for Peace Corps food security programs connected to Feed the Future, the U.S. government's global hunger and poverty initiative. Later, I joined Land O'Lakes Venture37, the international development affiliate of Land O'Lakes. There, I worked on agricultural development projects funded by organizations such as USAID, USDA, and philanthropic partners. The work varied by country and project, but the goal was consistent: help farmers and agribusinesses become more resilient, productive, and connected to markets.

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4 young "Talibe" of the local Muslim Maribout



Village kids help carry vegetable seedlings



Awa, a leader in the local women's group garden

Photos: Danielle Niedermaier

1985 Choir Tour Romance 40+ years strong!

PHIL ('86) & ROSELYN (HANSON) ('86) WEBER



Photo: Phil Weber

Phil & Roselyn Weber. 2026

Yes, we were a “TR” —tour romance during our St. Olaf Choir tour in '85). That tour marked the choir's 74th annual tour of the U.S. with concerts at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Carnegie Hall in NYC, with final performance at the Ordway Theater in St. Paul under the direction of maestro Kenneth Jennings. Most important, I had the good fortune to sit next to a beautiful young soprano on the bus much of the tour after dancing with her in the wee hours of the night (still within choir curfew time) on the floor of the NYC Marriott

Hotel where the choir was staying. She thereafter sent magic into my life, and for this I am eternally grateful. We married a year after graduation and were blessed with 3 children - one of whom an Ole ('19) and Rand Scholar - and raised them for several years in Norway. We returned to Minnesota in 2012.

Following graduation from St. Olaf, Roselyn went on to pursue masters and doctoral degrees in choral conducting at the University of Texas -Austin and Yale University / Institute of Sacred Music. In 2024, Roselyn was invited to return to Norway to serve as Cantor for two churches on Tromøy Island located across Arendal's mainland in the south of Norway and we moved there in the summer of 2025 with our youngest daughter, Annaliv - incoming St. Olaf freshman and class of '30. I went on to pursue medicine (Yale Physician Associate program) and an MPH/policy degree (Yale Public Health School) and have pursued clinical cardiology practice as well as various global health roles since graduation from St. Olaf.



Photo: Phil Weber

Annaliv's folkehøgskole graduation, Telemark, Norway



SPOTLIGHT

E Richard Ensrud ('48)

I recently celebrated my 100th birthday...still vertical! I am pictured here with my children (L-R) Erik Ensrud, MD (Biology, '86), Janet Ensrud Whitney (Biology, '82), Susan E Deming, and Kristi Ensrud, MD.

Trevor Keyler ('07) & Britta (Aadland) Keylor ('07)

It's been a long time, so I thought I'd share an update. We welcomed our daughter, Solveig, this past fall. She was born September 8th and her name honors Britta's grandpa's cousin she met in Stavanger, Norway back in college as well as my grandma, who passed away on the same day 33 years ago. Our other kids are Everett (9) and Linden (5).

I'm still teaching at the College of Saint Benedict & Saint John's University as an assistant professor of biology and will be up for tenure in the fall. I've been trying to crank out papers as much as possible (just had a few come out looking at how sounds affects fish foraging, how fish interact at the bottom of Lake Superior, and what colors walleye see (and to what depth).

I just received a grant from Minnesota Sea Grant to investigate how both light and sound affect bullhead catfish. So that is what I'll be working on this upcoming summer. Britta, who was nursing at Olaf, went back to school and got her DNP, and now is working as a nurse midwife with the Oakdale OBGYN group.



Photo: Trevor Keyler

Keyler Family, 2026

SPOTLIGHT

Autumn Pozniak ('24)

Since graduating from St.Olaf in 2024, I served as a climate impact coordinator through Americorps with River Bend Nature Center before accepting a graduate assistantship in ecology and environmental sciences (EES) at the University of Maine in Fall of 2025. As part of a collaborative interdisciplinary project with the University of Oregon, my master's thesis focuses on natural resource workforce development for rural communities through a trauma-informed lens, exploring interconnections between youth aspirations, local economic development, and building resiliency at the individual and community level. I currently reside in Orono, Maine, with my partner and fellow former Ole, Kieran Sheridan ('25).



Photo: Autumn Pozniak

Autumn and Kieran

Student Naturalist to Natural Lands Manager

Wes Braker ('18)

Prairie is a well-known biome, characterized by large expanses of treeless open grassland, mottled with bison, sung to by meadowlarks, and inundated with insects. Such a landscape once covered 18 million acres (35%) of Minnesota, but now has been divided and reduced by modern land use changes to less than 0.03% of its original splendor. A common practice for land managers in Minnesota is to conduct habitat restoration initiatives, returning fallow agricultural fields to native habitat through seeding, invasive species management, and replicating natural disturbance regimes. A major question that land managers face is how they can best source seeds to ensure that plant populations persist into the future.

In my graduate research, I investigated genetic interactions between naturally occurring populations of the native grass little bluestem. A driving question in this work was how does reproductive fitness in the species vary geographically across remnant populations in Minnesota? Over the course of 10 years, my colleagues and I monitored translocated populations of little bluestem for reproductive output, counting how flower numbers changed depending on where a particular population was moved to within the state. We found that each of the populations were measurably distinct in their reproduction, suggesting that all populations were reacting to small differences in their host location compared to their home location that improved or declined their reproductive abilities.

As student naturalists, we would periodically invite fellow Oles to join us in collecting seeds in the Natural Lands. Now as the Natural Lands Manager working with students in the Natural Lands, we are still constantly collecting seeds! We collect seed to improve upon our current restorations with novel species, to increase competition on invasive species, to fill in where a rogue mower gouged a corner. In this work, we are constantly thinking about the origins of the seed we are using and are fortunate to have local partners with access to relatively abundant local seed. I feel uniquely situated (and perhaps notably biased) to be able to steer our seed collection work towards populations that are most appropriate for the Natural Lands. More importantly, however, I have the opportunity to impress upon our students a cognizance for the complexities of the natural world right outside. Students are the backbone of this work. They learn how to identify native plants, how to 'read' a landscape for land use history clues, and gain a broader understanding of modern conservation practices. Most importantly, they carry this understanding into the future as the next generation of land stewards caring for the land we have available to us.



Wes and spouse, Annika Fredrickson ('18), as student naturalists at a prescribed prairie burn on the Natural Lands



Photos: Wes Braker

Hal Halvorson ('11)

I am now an Associate Professor in the Biology Department at the University of Central Arkansas. This spring (2026) I received the university's award for Faculty Excellence in Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity. My research laboratory studies freshwater ecosystems with an emphasis on how they function and respond to environmental change. I am particularly excited to spend the spring of 2027 on a sabbatical focusing on the ecology of freshwater fungi.



Hal receiving award from University of Central Arkansas president Houston Davis

Photo: Hal Halvorson

SPOTLIGHT

Biology Alumni in the St. Olaf News



Photo: Steven Garcia ('20)

Biology Alum **Branden Moriarity's ('07)** lab pioneered a new cancer treatment: "It is so incredible to say that you participated in literally curing someone of a disease — it's beyond fulfilling," he says. Read the full article [HERE](#).

Biology alumni **Miles Greenberg ('26), Ashtyn Bollinger ('25) and Jane Spading ('25)** along with fellow Ole Anthony Rink ('26-Chemistry), participated in piloting the St. Olaf Rural Health Initiative, "creating opportunities for students to make a difference in the rural community surrounding the college while gaining meaningful experience to prepare for careers in health care." Read the full St. Olaf News article [HERE](#). Read the MPR article [HERE](#).



Photo: Dominic Presa '25

L-R: Miles Greenberg, Anothy Rink, Jane Spading



Photo: Courtesy of St. Olaf News

An Alumni Achievement Award was presented by president Singer to Biology Alum **Sarah Hutto ('01)**, a University of Minnesota physician and professor specializing in women's health. Read more in the full article [HERE](#).

Rooted in Curiosity, Guided by Purpose

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For many years, USAID was an important partner in that work. When its funding and programs were abruptly disrupted, many of us in international development found ourselves facing an unexpected career transition. I lost work I cared deeply about, and I watched talented colleagues navigate the same uncertainty. It was disorienting, but it also became a moment to practice the adaptability that St. Olaf had helped build in me. I leaned on relationships, asked a lot of questions, and learned quickly. I used new tools, including AI, to translate my experience into private-sector language, prepare for interviews, and understand roles that initially felt far outside my comfort zone. Eventually, I joined the Corporate Strategy team at Land O'Lakes, where I now support growth and cost-savings initiatives across the cooperative.

At first, the transition felt like learning a new language. The acronyms were different, the pace was different, and the connection to purpose was less obvious to me than it had been in global development. Over time, though, I began to see the continuity. Land O'Lakes is a farmer-owned cooperative with deep roots in U.S. agriculture and connections beyond it. My work still centers on agriculture, efficiency, resilience, and partnership—just from within a large enterprise rather than from a development project. That realization has been encouraging.

“Careers rarely unfold in straight lines, and this past year reminded me that our training matters most when the map changes. My St. Olaf education did not prepare me for one specific job; it prepared me to keep learning, connect ideas, and bring purpose into new settings.”

I still hope to return more directly to global agricultural development, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, perhaps from the commercial side and in partnership with companies committed to ethical, sustainable growth. For now, I am grateful to be doing meaningful agricultural work, to keep stretching in a new field, and to remain connected to the questions that first took root in St. Olaf science classrooms: How do we care for people, land, and communities in a changing world?

Biology Faculty in the News



Check out the article on **Sean Peterson and Lynn Schofield** as they share their expertise on [Minnesota birds and their connection to local habitats](#). Photo courtesy of St. Olaf News.

Diane Angell shares her expertise on the [World of bees](#) including the federally endangered rusty patched bumble bee (pictured to the right). Photo by Diane Angell courtesy of St. Olaf News.



Norman Lee will be mentoring an inaugural [Beckman scholar](#), Adrian Kakehashi ('28), in the Lee Lab of Neural Systems and Behavior. Photo by Samuel Gwin ('25) courtesy of St. Olaf News.

SPOTLIGHT

A Farewell and a New Beginning

Dear Biology Alumni,

It has been such an honor to get to know many of you over the years while putting together this newsletter. So it is with mixed feelings that I share with you that as of August 21st, I will be retired from St. Olaf. Thank you for continuing to connect with St. Olaf Biology the way you do...it is one of the highlights of the year, for sure! If for any reason you would like to connect with me after August 21st, I invite you to do so at kathie.towler@gmail.com.

And there's great news! I am delighted to introduce to you Rachel Czarnecki, the new AAA in the Biology Department. While I am handing off the baton and a new lap begins, the race is far from over. Please join me in warmly welcoming Rachel to the hill!

Blessing to each and every one of you! Kathie



L-R: Rachel Czarnecki and Kathie
outside Regents Hall

CORRESPONDENCE



JAIME WEESE ('06)

Jaime Weese class of 2006 here! I just graduated with my Masters in Teaching and k-6 teaching license from Concordia St. Paul.

I'll be teaching first grade this fall.



HANNAH SWANSON ('24)

I am incredibly grateful to be spending my second field season (May-Aug) in Kruger National Park, studying anthrax disease dynamics in African buffalo with a laboratory team from Oregon State University.

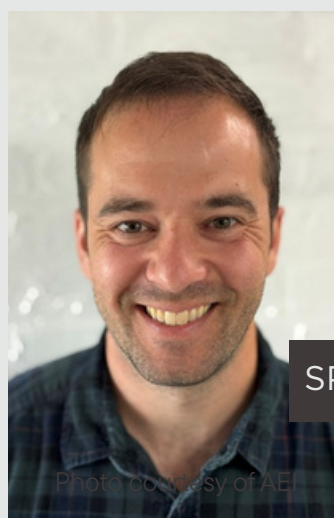
I have just completed my second year of veterinary school at U of MN, and am looking forward to pursuing a veterinary career in sub-saharan Africa (eventually) after graduation.



LISSA FLEMMING ('91)

Lissa Flemming joined her niece graduating with a degree in Environmental Studies. Pictured with Lissa (center, holding hat) are her nephew, dad, sister, brother-in-law and niece's grandparents.

Prof. Diane Angell caught up with Spencer when she came across [this article](#) featuring the work of Dr. Karen Holl of the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). Spencer worked with Dr. Holl as a postdoctoral fellow from 2023-26. He is now the senior ecologist



at Applied Ecological Institute (AEI) driving a research program that aspires to directly inform and improve future restoration and monitoring efforts.

SPENCER SCHUBERT ('13)

Congratulations to our newest Alumni: Biology Class of 2026!

Photos (L-R, Top-Bottom): Cierra Lizer w/Prof. Jake Grossman; Aria Whalen; Megan Timmerman; Emma Smith and twin brother; Evgenia Roth; Gracia Wallace w/twin brother Samuel; Paige Christophersen (center) and friends; Jessica Schmidt; Zach Thomson w/ parents Brian '98 & Heather '98 and sister Izzy '28; James Le; Robert Buzakovic; Josie Johnson

