

During the past 19 years, hundreds of Oles have participated in Psychology Professor Chuck Huff's classes in social psychology, the psychology of good and evil, the psychology of religion, research methods, and ethical issues in software design. Huff has published research on social issues in computing and on moral reasoning, and was recently in residence at Demontfort University in Leicester, UK, doing a National Science Foundation-funded research project on the life stories of moral exemplars in computer science in the UK and Scandinavia. Come fall, he will lead St. Olaf students on Term in the Middle East.

How would you describe yourself?

I am an alien in three respects at this northern, Lutheran, liberal arts college of the church. I'm from the south, and my ancestors fought on the losing side in the American Civil War. A generous description of my religious affiliation might be "metho-bap-terian." I was raised and baptized in the Presbyterian church, educated in the Methodist church and revived — and re-baptized, twice — in various Baptist churches. My educational history is about as checkered as my religious past. Until high school, I was a product of the Florida education system, whose administrators thank God every day that Mississippi exists to take up the rear.

You've been a professor at St. Olaf College for 19 years. In what way have you changed most significantly?

Over the years I've learned to take more advantage of the richness of the intellectual and spiritual life here at St. Olaf. In the course of a week I am likely to have a conversation in the Cage with a church historian about creeds, a short interchange in the hallway about Milton, an Early Music concert in the afternoon, a session drawing graphs on a white-board with a statistician, a conversation about leading Term in the Middle East — and teaching about water resources in the Middle East — with a biology professor while we both run in the Skoglund gym, and a drink in the evening with an Old Testament scholar.

Is there a student who has impacted your life or teaching?

One of my most memorable students became a Buddhist while here. He taught me that today is more important than the future.



"At St. Olaf, I can think about psychology and religion in the same mental breath." — CHUCK HUFF

What do you find exciting about St. Olaf?

The amount and quality of student-faculty collaborative scientific research. When I came here in 1988 it was good. Now it is astonishing.

The skepticism of science and philosophy is useful leaven for matters of faith. The commitments of a life of faith are leaven for easy scientific materialism.



What do you most look forward to each day?

Chapel. Even on those days when I cannot attend, it is good to know that other members of the community are gathering to worship and pray.

If you had a semester in which to conduct research, what area would you explore?

Right now, I need to write. I have some fascinating data from interviews with moral exemplars in the field of computing — for instance, people who design software for the handicapped, or who campaign for privacy in databases, or who work on software safety. When it is time to collect data again, I want to track the careers of people like this across the lifespan. We have a lot to learn about how ethical commitment and skill are learned early in the career and sustained across it.

What is your favorite St. Olaf tradition?

I enjoy the changing of the artwork in the Buntrock Commons corridor between the Cage and the library.

If you had an unexpected day off, what would you do with it?

I would take a long run, 10 miles or so, beginning early in the morning when the birds just begin to sing.

The psychology department will move into the new Science Complex when it's completed in 2008. What impact will this have on your students?

It will increase interdisciplinary connections among the sciences and make collaborative work with faculty across disciplinary lines an everyday occurrence. Plus, it will make the southeast end of campus a really cool place to be.

What is your favorite place on campus?

The hill just outside the old entrance to the library. From there you can look out across the valley. I have often sat on these steps with my feet in the grass and smiled. 🐣

What is one overarching lesson that you hope students take away from your classes?

That they can care deeply about both matters of faith and matters of the intellect.

SARAH MEYER '08, who is majoring in religion and economics, will participate in Term in the Middle East next fall.