

FALL 2025

ST. OLAF

M A G A Z I N E



ON THE COVER

An unseasonably warm fall on the Hill has meant that students, faculty, and staff have enjoyed especially vibrant colors in the beautiful gardens cultivated by groundskeeper DeAnna Walker. Students have had fun this semester sharing photos on social media sites similar to this image of the stunning fall flowers near Holland Hall.

PHOTO BY VICTORIA CAMPBELL

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His Royal Highness Crown Prince Haakon Magnus of Norway greeted students and other well-wishers while walking across campus alongside President Susan Rundell Singer on October 8 (story on page 35).

PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20



Olivia Schmidt recently joined the Marketing and Communications team at St. Olaf as a staff writer and editor. She previously worked as the editor of the *Caledonia Argus* and at NPR affiliate KFSK in Petersburg, Alaska, where she hosted the morning news show and produced feature stories about environmental concerns and community affairs, as well as personal profiles. She earned her master's degree from the Columbia Journalism School and her bachelor's degree from Luther College. While she herself is a Luther alum, both of her parents are Oles (Stephen Schmidt '93 and Kendra Dungan Schmidt '93).



Assistant Professor of Music Henry L. Dorn conducts the St. Olaf Band during the ensemble's Homecoming and Family Weekend Concert on October 11. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19



Oles pose for a photo on the iconic giant Adirondack chair during Homecoming and Family Weekend.
PHOTO BY VICTORIA CAMPBELL

ST. OLAF

M A G A Z I N E

FALL 2025

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Dear Oles,

With the start of each new academic year, I'm reminded anew of the talent and enthusiasm that our students, faculty, and staff bring to the Hill. From the incredible music that wafts out of our performance spaces to the innovative ideas emerging from our labs and classrooms, it's clear that St. Olaf is a college with many strengths. And if we need a reminder of those strengths, they're certainly easy to find. *U.S. News & World Report* once again ranked St. Olaf among the Top 50 national liberal arts colleges, and listed the college at No. 9 for best value. The publication also gave St. Olaf high marks for its study-abroad programs, undergraduate teaching, and innovation. *The Princeton Review's* newest rankings list St. Olaf in the Top 10 for best classroom experience and science lab facilities, and *Forbes* included St. Olaf on its list of Top 50 Small Colleges. Even more to the point, St. Olaf is one of 75 colleges from across the nation highlighted in the new book *Dream School: Finding the College That's Right for You* by journalist and bestselling author Jeff Selinger. His book highlights colleges "where students thrive, where they build confidence, find belonging, and launch into meaningful work and life."

It's an honor to be included in these publications — but what is truly meaningful is that they mirror back the excellence we work so hard to achieve. Last year we launched a strategic plan that outlines goals for providing every Ole with a holistic, intentional, integrated experience so that they can become innovative thinkers; a prepared, engaged citizen; a culturally competent global explorer; an experiential learner; and a leader of character. Thanks to many in our community, we have made significant progress in advancing the three core goals of the strategic plan. A few highlights:

To Elevate Vocation:

- The Institute for Freedom and Community is launching the new Svoboda Center for Civic Engagement this fall, which you can read more about on page 3.
- With the support of a \$630,000 grant from the Educating Character Initiative (ECI) at Wake Forest University, St. Olaf will launch a "Character in Community" project to help students engage in intentional character and leadership development. Associate Professor of Religion Anthony Bateza will lead the project.
- St. Olaf will host an expanded Sophomore Symposium that will focus on vocation and career preparation, well-being, and belonging.

To Expand Innovation:

- We are developing innovation programs where students can tackle real-world challenges through hackathons, entrepreneurial competitions, and collaborative problem-solving sessions. With the evolving technology and impact of AI, we need to prepare our students for next-level jobs and jobs that do not currently exist. Read about Oles who are already working in this space — and how their liberal arts education prepared them — on page 18.
- As we develop these programs, we are also creating an innovation/design/entrepreneurial space in Rølvaag Memorial Library where faculty, staff, and students can come together to share ideas and build new skills. It's exactly the type of space we need to support Oles like codebreaker Jessica Schmidt '26 — read her story on page 10.
- We are building partnerships with companies and organizations that need the talents and skills of our students to solve real-world problems. One example of this is the Rural Health Initiative featured on page 4.

To Sustain Our Community:

- We are expanding initiatives to support community and belonging on the Hill, including opening two new spaces in Boe Memorial Chapel focused on meditation and faith-related incense and smudging — a practice involving the burning of herbs like sage that has roots in various faith and cultural traditions, including many Indigenous cultures.
- We are developing a campaign to sustain our financial health to ensure that future generations of students will have the ability to access the St. Olaf experience.

St. Olaf is moving forward with a strong foundation and aspirations for an even brighter future. We are extremely grateful for all the efforts each of you have made to support our students.

Sincerely,

Susan Rundell Singer



UMI YAH! YAH!

Institute for Freedom and Community Launches New Svoboda Center for Civic Engagement

The new center at St. Olaf College deepens service and learning in community.

By Dan Riehle-Merrill

The St. Olaf College Institute for Freedom and Community launched a new center for civic engagement on campus this fall. Made possible by an initial \$1.7 million gift from Paul Svoboda '81, it will nurture students' passions for public service and build their capacity to engage responsibly and ethically in their communities.

The Svoboda Center for Civic Engagement expands St. Olaf's Academic Civic Engagement team and adds new resources for course development, community partnerships, and project implementation. It will also include a new civic leadership and credentialing program for St. Olaf's community-based work-study students, volunteers, and fellows. Svoboda's gift is being matched by the Buntrock Foundation for Leadership, doubling its impact.

"Oles are solution seekers who look to understand others and contribute to the flourishing of their communities," says President Susan Rundell Singer. "I'm grateful for Paul Svoboda's generosity, which creates more opportunities for civic engagement. Our students give me confidence in a bright future and, with the Svoboda gift, that future just became even brighter."

Civic engagement, service learning, and community-based learning are high-impact educational practices that reinforce knowledge as well as student retention and graduation rates.

Academic civic engagement courses combine classroom learning with community-based experiences to strengthen both students' practical knowledge and communities through their work together.

Approximately 600 St. Olaf students take courses with a civic engagement component each year; 60 percent of Oles do so before graduation. Additionally, 50 students complete community-based work-study in Northfield and surrounding communities each year. Many other students volunteer in local programs. Creating a dedicated hub for this work at St. Olaf will provide Oles with consistent civic networks to gain practical experience in coalition building, public service, and the community-based issues that form public discourse and response. Community partners will gain stronger connections and engagement.

"One of the highest purposes of a college education is preparing students for active participation in civic life. The public value of higher education becomes visible when our community steps away from campus and fully engages with the broader community, and when we welcome others to campus with intent, purpose, and co-created opportunities. The Svoboda Center will support this meaningful and impactful work."

— PRESIDENT SUSAN RUNDELL SINGER

"In a society where politics is more divisive than ever, the Svoboda Center for Civic Engagement will provide students with critical opportunities to take part in public life and service and understand how the issues we explore arise from those of our broader community," says Chris Chapp, the Morrison Family Director of the Institute for Freedom and Community.

A tax and corporate lawyer, Svoboda has supported several philanthropic and community projects through pro bono work, board service, and other roles. At St. Olaf, he initiated the Svoboda Legal Scholars Program that similarly provides Oles with experiential learning opportunities each summer. Svoboda Legal Scholars conduct intensive legal research and support public interest law clinics at five law schools across the Upper Midwest, serving marginalized communities.

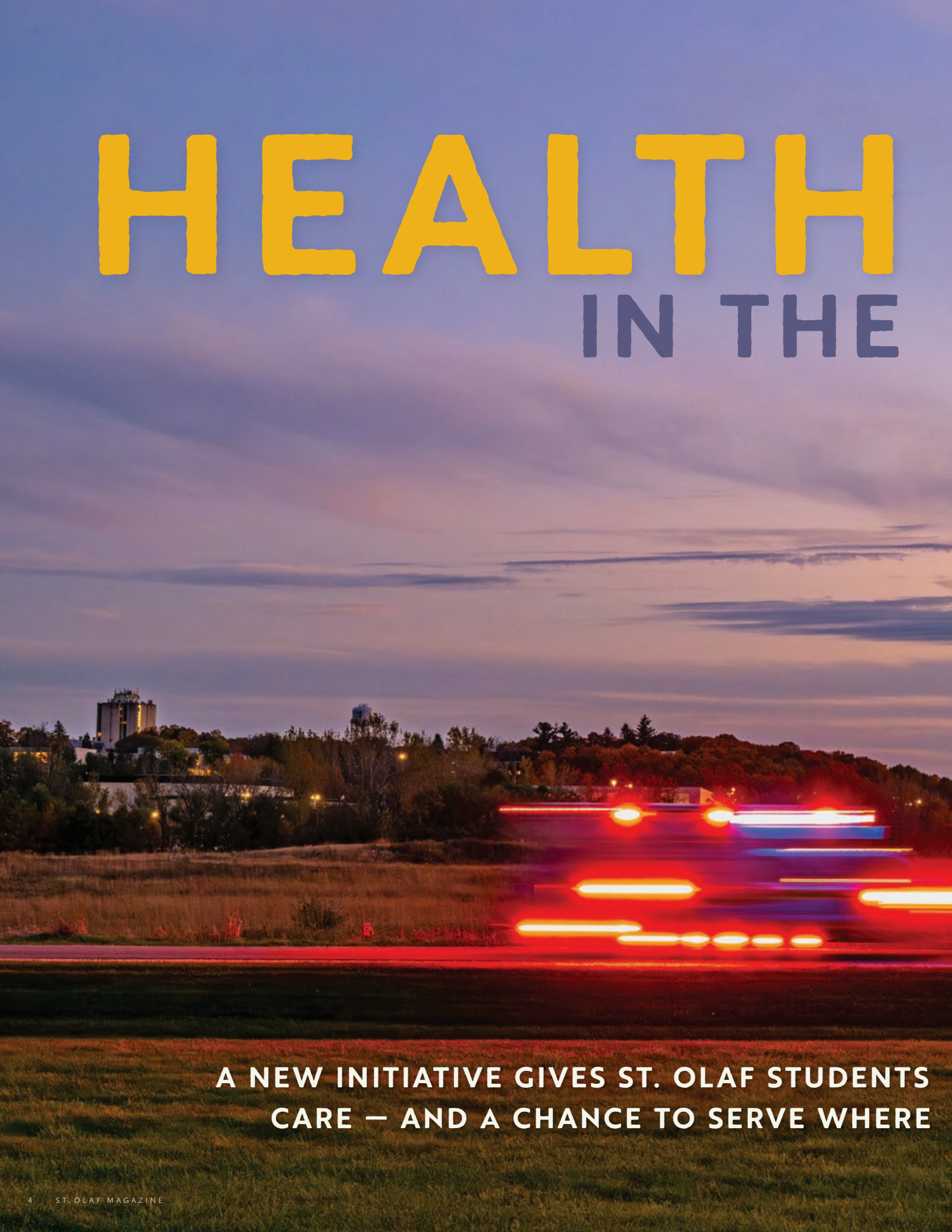
"Community involvement and civic engagement have always been encouraged and valued in my family," Svoboda says. "Knowing many Oles share these interests, I hope the new center and its programs will promote and support students' current and long-term civic involvement in whatever ways they may choose."

The Svoboda Center for Civic Engagement is a key part of St. Olaf's new strategic plan that outlines how the college will integrate opportunities for vocational discernment, civic preparedness, and civic engagement with curricular programs. These efforts will prepare students to be people of character who lead meaningful lives as contributing citizens of the world. 🦋

Paul Svoboda '81, pictured here at his office in Chicago, has provided a \$1.7 million gift to support a new center for civic engagement at St. Olaf.



HEALTH IN THE

A scenic view of a town at dusk. In the foreground, a road with a grassy shoulder shows light trails from a car, with red and white streaks indicating motion. The middle ground features a line of trees and a few buildings, including a prominent white tower. The background is a sky with soft, horizontal clouds in shades of blue and purple.

**A NEW INITIATIVE GIVES ST. OLAF STUDENTS
CARE — AND A CHANCE TO SERVE WHERE**

CARE HEARTLAND

An ambulance travels the rural road that separates the Northfield Hospital + Clinics campus from the St. Olaf Natural Lands.

PHOTO: STEVEN GARCIA '20
AND FERNANDO SEVILLA

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE IN RURAL HEALTH
THEY'RE NEEDED MOST. **By Kiera O'Higgins '25**

Miles Greenberg '26 knows the importance of gaining hands-on experience as he prepares for a career in emergency medicine.

He also knows the need that many rural clinics have for health care providers.

"All of these Oles need experience, and all of these clinics need care providers," Greenberg says. "All we need to do as a college is to be a bridge between the two."

So as a sophomore, he pitched his idea to St. Olaf College President Susan Rundell Singer, who is a national leader in advancing undergraduate STEM education and deeply committed to hands-on learning opportunities for students.

The St. Olaf Rural Health Initiative, piloted last year, was the result of this conversation. The program creates 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.

The origins of the project trace back to when Rundell Singer attended a St. Olaf Emergency Medical Technician (SOEMT) executive meeting in the spring of 2024.

"During our discussion, she asked us what we wanted to do in the future," says Greenberg. "I mentioned emergency care and rural health, and on her way out she said to me 'Miles, you should come talk to me and see what we can do about finding solutions for rural health care.'"

Greenberg's passion for rural medicine began the summer before his sophomore year. While completing a wilderness EMT course in Wyoming, he saw firsthand the shortage of care in remote areas. This experience opened his eyes to the need in rural Minnesota, and he realized the potential to make a difference by connecting Oles who wanted more hands-on experience with the local demand for personnel.

When Greenberg and Rundell Singer met, he explained his objective, and the Rural Health Initiative developed from there. The program has multiple components, including supporting students in obtaining a Certified Nursing Associate (CNA) certification, hands-on work experience, and a semester-long, credit-bearing reflection seminar.

Top: Anthony Rink '26 (left) and Miles Greenberg '26 (right) provide care in an ambulance during their work as EMTs in Cannon Falls. Bottom: Jane Spading '25 (left) works in a Cannon Falls ambulance alongside Anthony Rink '26 as they practice providing care to a fellow paramedic student. PHOTOGRAPHED BY DOMINIC PRESA '25





Ashtyn Bollinger '25 earned her CNA certification through the Rural Health Initiative this past January Term. She plans to pursue a Physician's Assistant (PA) graduate program, but in order to apply she needs many clinical hours. Working as a CNA will help her reach that goal while also providing her with valuable patient care experience.

"I definitely feel more confident going into my gap year because of this program," she says. "It will be really beneficial for me as a PA to be able to see health care from a CNA perspective, and I've already gained a lot of experience and knowledge about interacting with patients."

CNAs like Bollinger join students who are already certified as Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or EMT practitioners as they all work off-campus in rural clinics and hospitals. SOEMTs also contribute to the Rural Health Initiative by offering CPR instructional courses to rural first responders at no cost.

"All of these Oles need experience, and all of these clinics need care providers. All we need to do as a college is to be a bridge between the two."

— MILES GREENBERG '26

Professor of Biology and Director of the Health Professions Committee Kevin Crisp points out that while students learn a lot about inequities in health care during college, the focus is more often on urban than rural communities. He says the experiences that this program offers are eye-opening for the students.

"Need in rural communities is different from urban environments. Some of it has to do with poverty, but some of it also has to do with health literacy, farm accidents, rural highways, and not having neighbors nearby," he says. "It's a whole different world."

Greenberg, who's been working as an EMT for Cannon Falls — a rural community 30 minutes from campus — says the experience has reinforced for him that caring for patients is what he wants to do. Plus, he adds, the work is meaningful.

"The community is very tight-knit. There is an extra emotional impact to working in this area, because every time we get a call it is an emergency within *our* community," he says.

During spring semester, all of these students form a cohort and participate in reflection sessions to share their experiences and draw connections between theory and practice. By participating in these sessions and working at least 10 hours per week, students receive academic credit.

Students in the cohort also have lectures from visiting professionals, such as the director of Northfield Hospital + Clinics Emergency Medical Services — who also serves as the medical director of the SOEMTs — and the senior paramedic from the Cannon Falls EMT. They also participated in a book discussion hosted by the St. Olaf Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community on *Canary in the Coal Mine*, which focuses on rural health care.

“I’m here because my major interest is in teaching and training, and this is a big opportunity to teach, train, and show that there are opportunities for rewarding, meaningful work that isn’t necessarily within the boundaries of Minneapolis and St. Paul,” says Crisp, who leads the sessions.

St. Olaf is uniquely located to offer rotations for nursing students in both urban and rural health care, situated in a rural community almost exactly in between the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul and Rochester, home to the world-renowned Mayo Clinic. Crisp sees this program as another way to tap into the opportunity this location provides.

A product of collaboration between the Piper Center for Vocation and Career, both the Biology and Nursing departments, and multiple external partners, the Rural Health Initiative also supports Rundell Singer’s new strategic plan for the college on multiple levels.

“Need in rural communities is different from urban environments. Some of it has to do with poverty, but some of it also has to do with health literacy, farm accidents, rural highways, and not having neighbors nearby. It’s a whole different world.”

— KEVIN CRISP

The plan calls for more certifications that are part of both the academic and co-curricular programs at the college — exactly like the CNA certification offered as part of the Rural Health Initiative. This certification, like others already offered through the Piper Center’s Ole Career Launcher Program, is the perfect example of one of the ways St. Olaf will continue to support and elevate vocational discernment.

Open to all class years, this CNA training is the first of its kind to happen at St. Olaf. It was made possible through a collaboration with the organization HeartCert, which provides on-site instruction to students during J-Term. St. Olaf Nursing Department facilities are used for the hands-on training aspects of the course, alongside classroom instruction and an online module.

Typically students would have to drive to an off-campus training facility to earn this certification, and pay for it out of their own pocket.

“The opportunity to complete our training on campus and have it fully funded was so helpful,” says Bollinger, who doesn’t have a car and would have otherwise struggled with the logistics.

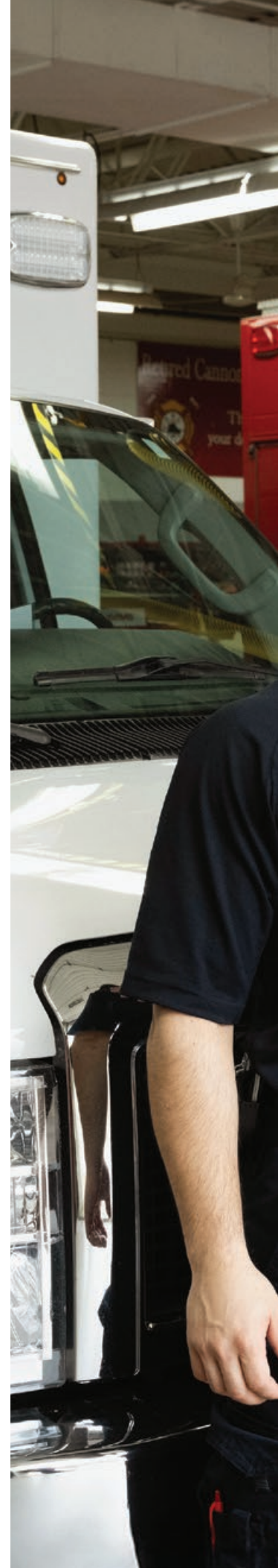
Piper Center Associate Director Meghan Anderson, who leads the Ole Career Launcher, emphasizes that the skills students develop and the exposure they gain strengthens their graduate school applications.

“It’s an incredible opportunity to develop skills, get exposure, and test the waters to see if this is what you really want to do,” says Anderson. “It’s extremely well-supported from the Piper Center, from Professor Crisp, and from others within the community.”

As they concluded the academic side of their experience in the Rural Health Initiative, the students presented their work at a poster session during Honors Day last May. Several students are continuing to work at their respective clinics, highlighting their ongoing commitment to, and sustained engagement with, communities beyond the confines of the program.

All of this is possible, Anderson notes, thanks to the strong support the program has received from a wide range of partners.

“It’s really powerful to see the magic that can happen when collaboration and partnerships work — especially in this case, since there are so many parties involved,” she says. 🐣





St. Olaf students (from left) Miles Greenberg '26, Anthony Rink '26, and Jane Spading '25 at the Cannon Falls Ambulance Service headquarters, where they gained hands-on experience as part of the St. Olaf Rural Health Initiative. PHOTO BY DOMINIC PRESA '25

JESSICA SCHMIDT '26 IS BREAKING CODES
(AND EXPECTATIONS) AT ST. OLAF COLLEGE.



THE CIPHER PROTOCOL

BY OLIVIA SCHMIDT

JESSICA SCHMIDT '26 is probably not a spy. The St. Olaf College senior seems altogether too friendly for that line of work. But one element in her life might give a person pause.

Her "cover story" for operations on campus includes a double major in math and biology, with concentrations in statistics and data science, and mathematical biology. She enjoys participating in Collegiate Chorale and Valhalla Handbell Choir, is the secretary for the Video Game Club, and serves as president of the St. Olaf chapter of the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics.

However, Schmidt's real passion is puzzles — just not of the jigsaw variety.

As of April 14, 2025, Schmidt is a master codebreaker. She earned the title after placing first in the individual category and second overall in the international Kryptos cryptography competition hosted by Central Washington University. The event saw Schmidt beat out 151 other students for the win, and as an individual she outranked all but one of the three-person teams.

...

“I was just so excited about this competition, because I love cryptography so much,” Schmidt says. “Code breaking is such a fun hobby to have. It’s like an escape room, but nerdier somehow.”

Schmidt’s interest in cryptography — the art of writing and/or solving codes — began in her hometown of Glenview, Illinois, when she joined her high school Science Olympiad team and competed in the “Codebusters” event. It was during this time that Schmidt learned dozens of different cipher varieties, and the techniques used to decrypt them.

“I read some books on it, and I have a little notebook with a bunch of different codes that I keep in my pocket when I want to do fun stuff like secret communications,” Schmidt says — despite how suspicious such intel may be. “My favorite cipher is the Baconian Cipher. I think it’s the most fun [code] to break, because the message is in binary, and then the binary is encrypted as something else, so you have a fake message that is nonsense or meaningless, and then it’s secretly another thing.”

Her affinity for this particular cipher type was a major asset on April 10, when the three problems of the Kryptos competition were released. Schmidt was on a bus en route to Junior Night Out at Sky Zone Trampoline Park when she opened the first clue.

“I looked at it, and I was like, ‘Oh my God, it’s the Baconian Cipher, this is fantastic!’” Schmidt recalls. “I was on the bus when the challenges dropped, so I had the problem on my phone and I was using a friend’s phone to break it. I cracked it within an hour, and the competition admins sent me an email saying I was the first one in the whole competition to break that problem.”

She couldn’t immediately move on to the next mission though.

“I stopped because we’d arrived at the trampoline park, and my friends and I had to jump.”

Over the next few days, Schmidt tackled the remaining two assignments in her free time. She finished one between classes on Friday, April 11, but the final enigma came down to the wire.

“The third one drove me a little mad, because the other two I managed to get in a couple hours, but I kept on putting that one off because I would work on it and just not get it — and I thought the competition might end that way, I just wouldn’t get it,” Schmidt says. “I figured a bunch of people had solved it ahead of me. And then the admins sent out an email with eight hours left in the competition to say that nobody had solved it yet. So I thought, ‘Okay, I still have a chance.’”



With a chalkboard, paper cutouts, and some impressive computation, Schmidt was able to crack the code before the 6 p.m. deadline — just behind the first place team, a trio from Eastern Mennonite University. Besides Schmidt, only two other teams of three solved all of the problems, and only one other individual managed to solve a single challenge.

For her efforts, the Kryptos admins sent Schmidt a book of codes and their methodology, and a commemorative mug.

“It is very satisfying to win a math competition; I was just pumped about it,” Schmidt says. “The fact that not only did I get first individual, I placed so high overall, I was just so happy — and my cryptography professor was excited because she has a friend who teaches cryptography at another school who had a couple teams in the competition, and I destroyed them.”



JESSICA SCHMIDT '26,
Photographed in July
at Harvard University
by Rick Friedman.

TOP SECRET

Do you think you can crack codes as well as Jessica Schmidt '26? She'd like to see you try — so she developed three St. Olaf-themed ciphers that we've included in the next three pages. Give them a try, and then check your answers against the puzzle solutions on page 39. Do you accept the mission?

PUZZLE 1: PIGPEN CIPHER

The pigpen cipher is a simple geometric substitution cipher that exchanges letters for symbols, which are sections of a grid. Due to its simplicity, this cipher is often included in children's books on secret codes and ciphers.

Message 1:

⌌⌌⌌⌌ ⌌⌌⌌
⌌⌌⌌⌌ ⌌⌌⌌⌌

Message 2:

⌌⌌⌌⌌⌌⌌
⌌⌌ ⌌⌌⌌
⌌⌌⌌⌌

PIGPEN CIPHER DECODING KEY

A	B	C	J	K	L
D	E	F	M	N	O
G	H	I	P	Q	R
S T U V			W X Y Z		

Each letter in the cipher is represented by a symbol that matches the shape of the grid section it occupies in the key. To decode, match the symbols in the coded messages to the corresponding letters in the key.

PUZZLE 2: SUBSTITUTION CIPHER

This is a common cipher in which letters are switched based on the key at the bottom. Use the hint to get you started. It's pretty simple for people who are into cryptography, but it should still be easy to understand even for those who aren't.

VJ ILBJ AMLB WR LUYA VJ WNMJ
 YMJ RTJ MJYU WRNAA LNM RJYB KW
 RTJ IMJYB LA RTJ ILUJZJW ZMJYR
 VJ AKZTR AYWR YXS ANMKLNW LNM
 RJYB KW KXCNMKNW RLXKZTR IYMUJRLX
 ILUJZJ VKUU WNMJ BJJR KRW AYRJ

Hint: UM YAH YAH
 NB PYT PYT

Cipher													
Actual	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M

Cipher													
Actual	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

Like any good agent would, Schmidt buried the source of her operative orders — probably to give this article a proper spy thriller twist. But it is true that in the spring semester of 2025, St. Olaf offered a cryptography seminar. Taught by Professor of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science and Collaborative Undergraduate Research and Inquiry (CURI) Director (and potential spymaster) Jill Dietz, the course is meant to train students how to use the mathematical language for encryption and decryption purposes.

“Cryptography is the underpinnings of information security,” Dietz says. “It’s a really interesting topic that everybody encounters in some form every day, without even knowing it.”

Dietz notes that it had been almost a decade since the

course was offered, when it was then taught by Associate Professor Emerita of Mathematics Kay Smith. After deciding to re-launch the seminar, Dietz was surprised by the number of Oles who were interested.

“It was very popular,” Dietz says. “It was a class of 22 students with a robust waitlist. I think the math majors appreciated the fun in this special topic, and computer science majors, they’re the ones who have to code things up, so I think they enjoyed that. It was well received all around, and it’s not going to go away. The field keeps evolving as any scientific discipline does, and people will stay interested.”

One of those very interested students was Schmidt, who was initially on the waitlist.

“I came to know [Schmidt] because she desperately wanted into my cryptography class,” Dietz says. “She was so enthusiastic that I let her into the class

even though it was closed. She’s very bright, and she easily handled all the mathematics in it, but also really challenged herself to work on the computer coding aspect of the course as well. The thing that really struck me though is just that she was constantly having fun.”

It was Dietz who first introduced Schmidt and her fellow students to the Kryptos competition, pitching it as a way for them to test their skills outside of the classroom. Schmidt was the only one to take her up on it.

“I offered course credit, but she didn’t want it,” Dietz says. “She didn’t care about the recognition or any potential supplementary points — she just took on the challenge because she thought it would be fun, and blew everybody away. I think it is just truly outstanding.”

PUZZLE 3: JESSICA'S CHALLENGE

This is the hardest puzzle yet. You have been given a long stream of digits, from which you will decipher an initial message. Your first step will be to transform each of the groups of numbers into five letters (odd numbers=A, even numbers=B). Next, use Schmidt's "favorite cipher" to derive the first message. This message will tell you the type of cipher you will use to transform the initial number list into a code. You will then use that code to decipher the final message.

Review these hints once you decipher the first message: **Hint 1:** 1 · 2 – 3 x 4 · 5 – 6 x 7 · 8 – 9 x **Hint 2:** xx=space

Numbers	36445	76454	94565	56347	21342	49456
Jessica's Favorite Cipher						
Message One						
Cipher Code 2						
Final Message						

Numbers	52638	72615	19473	17768	98294	65765
Jessica's Favorite Cipher						
Message One						
Cipher Code 2						
Final Message						

Numbers	49921	83451	92256	11764	77955	61354	95466
Jessica's Favorite Cipher							
Message One							
Cipher Code 2							
Final Message							

Numbers	41165	33228	61571	97837	15493	47492
Jessica's Favorite Cipher						
Message One						
Cipher Code 2						
Final Message						

Numbers	67535	15893	74465	91813	55535	49521
Jessica's Favorite Cipher						
Message One						
Cipher Code 2						
Final Message						

SOLVING THIS PUZZLE DESERVES A REWARD! Do you think you've cracked the code? You won't find the answer for this one in the back of the magazine. Instead, submit your answer via an email to magazine@stolaf.edu. If you're right, we'll send you a St. Olaf-themed prize!

As for any other St. Olaf students interested in becoming a codebreaker, they can keep an eye out for the next cryptography seminar, which Dietz hopes to offer again soon. Schmidt advises getting a head start.

“There are plenty of resources online to find logic puzzle generators, and there’s a lot of really good books out there that can give you an introduction to cryptography,” Schmidt says. “I also recommend just doing math, because it is so relevant to cryptography. What at first looks like fun puzzles is actually just frequency analysis, and then the thing is solved. There are math competitions you can enter as well — I actually spent my birthday this year at one over at Carleton — but either way, just try it out.”

Schmidt is probably not a spy. She’s a self-proclaimed math nerd with a penchant for puzzles. Outside of class, she enjoys a variety of extracurriculars and spending time with her friends. This summer, she had a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) position at Harvard University, studying the genetics of regeneration in worms — perhaps more mad science than spy thriller after all.

But Schmidt hasn’t entirely ruled it out for the future.

“In World War II, they used to recruit for codebreaking work at colleges,” Schmidt says. “They’d ask math professors

“Cryptography is the underpinnings of information security. It’s a really interesting topic that everybody encounters in some form every day, without even knowing it.”

— JILL DIETZ, St. Olaf Professor of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science

which students enjoyed crosswords and number puzzles, and then they would receive a shady letter in the mail, and those people would go on to break Enigma-like codes. By God, if I was alive then, I would have had a great time doing that, but will I, in 2025, make a career directly in cryptography? Probably not — unless the CIA comes knocking.” 🦹



JESSICA SCHMIDT '26 is majoring in math and biology, with concentrations in statistics and data science, and mathematical biology. PHOTO BY RICK FRIEDMAN.

'Everyone Can Benefit From Studying MATHEMATICS'

By Olivia Schmidt

THE MATHEMATICS, STATISTICS, AND COMPUTER SCIENCE (MSCS) DEPARTMENT at St. Olaf College blends rigorous theory and applied learning with an inclusive, student-centered approach. Working within one of the largest math programs of any undergraduate college in the nation, MSCS faculty foster what they call a “big-tent” philosophy, welcoming students with varied backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations — whether or not they excelled in math before college.

“We really have the attitude that everyone can benefit from studying mathematics at a higher level,” says Associate Professor of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science Matthew Wright. “It doesn’t matter if they excelled in math in high school or hated it — here, they have the resources and tools they need to explore it more holistically and find ways to accomplish their goals with it.”

Faculty take pride in encouraging MSCS majors to extend their skills beyond the classroom, whether through summer undergraduate research, internships, or interdisciplinary projects.

“We really strive to support and prepare our students for success,” says Associate Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and Professor of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science Kristina Garrett. “In our Center for Interdisciplinary Research, students get hands-on experience working with faculty and thinking about ways they can apply data to real-world problems, so they already have that familiarity with the process when they enter the workforce or go on to other research-based opportunities and post-grad study.”

The MSCS Department emphasizes curiosity, persistence, and precise communication, pairing technical expertise with the broad perspective of a liberal arts education. More than half of all math majors combine their studies with disciplines like biology, economics, or the humanities, enhancing their academic experience and building on career interests.

“Mathematics is really about patterns and abstraction. It’s about taking questions that we don’t know the answer to and applying different types of analysis and creative problem-solving strategies to make headway on complex

problems, to identify patterns, to make generalizations, to figure out what are good questions to ask. All of that involves creativity,” adds Wright.

Recent years have seen growth in applied and computational offerings, including courses like *Mathematical Biology*, *Algorithms for Decision Making*, and *Modern Computational Mathematics*. Cross-curricular classes, international study opportunities, and upper-level seminars deepen students’ skills and perspectives.

“Most of our students are more interested in taking our applied math courses, and pairing mathematics with statistics and data science,” Garrett says. “The experiences and technical skills they learn by dealing with data and computation help them to be successful in fields such as business, finance, medicine, health sciences, technology, and education.”

“Businesses and industries want people who can analyze data and solve quantitative problems, and our graduates are some of the best at doing that.”

— MATTHEW WRIGHT

Graduates are well-prepared for diverse futures. In the Class of 2025 alone, 72 Oles left the Hill with degrees in mathematics, a third of whom went on to graduate programs — with 13 having been accepted into Ph.D. programs in areas including mathematics, biostatistics, engineering, chemistry, and neuroscience. Others have begun work in the financial and tech sectors, with a small percentage entering positions in teaching and nonprofit spaces.

Behind these disparate post-graduate paths is a shared foundation in the values of the St. Olaf MSCS Department.

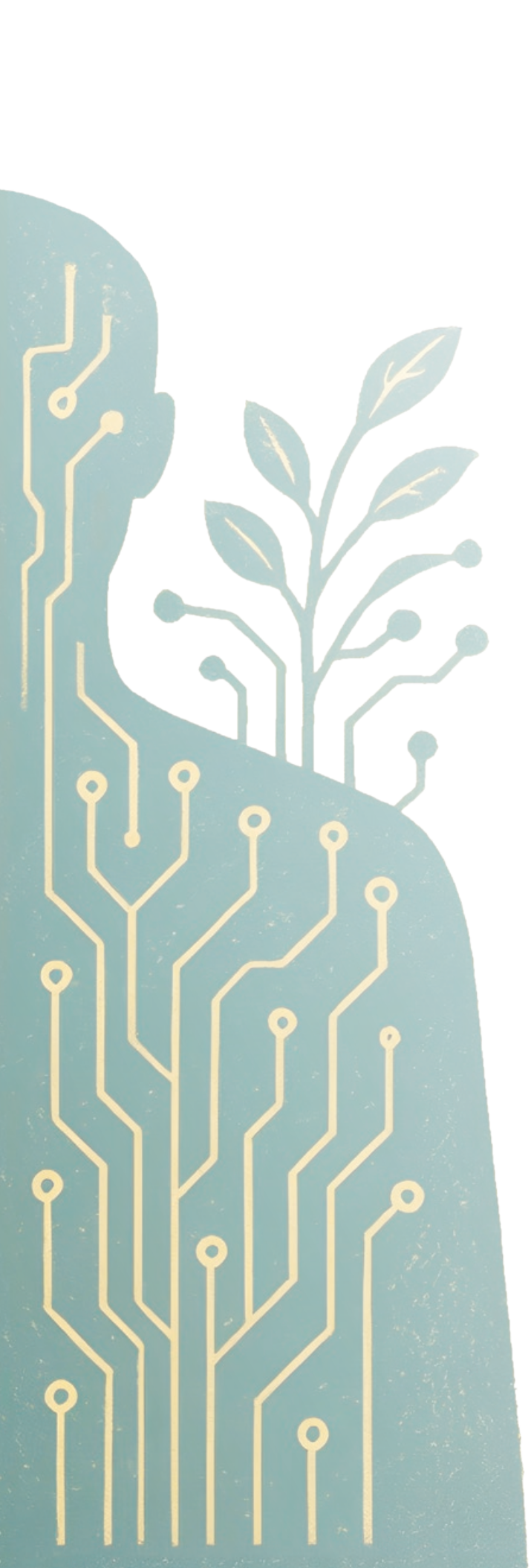
“I think our program teaches students to work collaboratively, to think linearly about how to make arguments and use evidence to back it up, and to write and speak very precisely and clearly about their process and outcomes,” Garrett says. “That is what I hear from students after graduation — that their ability to communicate effectively helps them the most in their work life.” 🦁

THE HUMAN TOUCH TO TECH

In a world increasingly influenced by algorithms and automation, three St. Olaf College alumni working at companies on the forefront of the AI revolution share why critical thought is more important than ever.

BY OLIVIA SCHMIDT





ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

is reshaping how people think, work, and connect. From generative chatbots to immersive virtual realities, new tools are arriving at a pace that, at times, feels faster than we can keep up with — and raising as many questions as they answer. For three Oles working in the tech industry, the future of AI isn't an amorphous eventuality, but something they build, test, and grapple with every day.

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Cianna Bedford-Petersen '14 is a user experience researcher at Meta, where she supports the development of the Metaverse across virtual reality and mobile settings. Her work, rooted in growing social connections across the world by helping people express their unique identity through virtual avatars and pets, reflects her long-standing interest in how humans present themselves in digital spaces.

That interest began at St. Olaf, in an 8 a.m. psychology class taught by Professor of Psychology Donna McMillan.

"I discovered I enjoyed exploring a side of psychology relating to who we are as people, and how we express ourselves in different environments," she says.

That interest deepened as she found a passion for research working in Associate Professor of Psychology Shelly Dickinson's lab, which eventually led her to graduate school.

After earning a Ph.D. in personality psychology at the University of Oregon, Bedford-Petersen now works on research that explores the role AI plays in user experience,



“My job often involves researching ideas or needs of people for a product that doesn’t even exist tangibly yet.” – CIANNA BEDFORD-PETERSEN ’14

including generative tools that allow users to customize their digital avatars.

“AI is playing a big role in the product we’re developing,” Bedford-Petersen says. “We’re utilizing it a lot to make creating new items within the Metaverse accessible to more than just very technically focused developers. For example, we’ve recently introduced a generative AI-based tool that helps people create different clothing items for your avatar. We provide the shape of the clothing, and people can go in and describe colors and patterns that they’d like to see on that item, and GenAI helps bring that vision to life. It’s been a hit so far, and is a great way to help foster creativity.”

But AI doesn’t just enhance products — it’s changing how research itself is conducted.

“AI automates some of the more repetitive tasks, expands our analysis capabilities, and increases the

audiences we can reach,” Bedford-Petersen says. “The ethics of the technology we’re building is another extremely important role of a researcher in a tech environment. Technology is growing at such a rapid rate that legislation cannot always keep up. Researchers take their role very seriously as an advocate for the experiences of the public — we are often the line of defense that understands and advises on best practices for creating safe and healthy online environments.”

That ethical responsibility goes hand in hand with the experimental, future-facing nature of her work.

“I work on the very theoretical end of tech, so my job often involves researching ideas or needs of people for a product that doesn’t even exist tangibly yet,” Bedford-Petersen says. “That can feel very ambiguous and challenging in the beginning, but over time when those ideas become an actual product I see people using — it’s a wild feeling.”

“What keeps me going is my ultimate goal of understanding and advancing AI’s societal benefits, particularly through building initiatives that help marginalized populations who have limited access to education.” – SOMANG HAN ’18

As a data scientist at Amazon, Somang Han ’18 builds machine learning and AI-powered tools to solve complex business problems, from debugging code to data collection. She is currently working on developing data-driven Amazon Web Services customer prioritization with AI and machine-learning models.

Han credits her time at St. Olaf — and particularly the course *Algorithms for Decision Making* with Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science Matthew Richey — with providing her a strong foundation in critical thinking, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

“The liberal arts environment encourages curiosity and adaptability, which are essential qualities in a rapidly evolving field like data science, where we’re expected to work with different parts of an organization,” Han says.

That velocity can be both exhilarating and exhausting.

“It has certainly been challenging to keep up, but I try to remain dedicated to lifelong learning,” Han says. “To stay informed about current industry research and developments, I attend conferences, read scientific publications, and follow industry news and podcasts. While the rapid pace of advancement can be overwhelming at times, it also provides continuous opportunities for growth, and keeps the work exciting.”

Han is intrigued by advances in multimodal AI systems, which can perform physical tasks through better environmental understanding, and neuromorphic computing, which creates computer architectures that mimic biological neural networks and could enable more sophisticated edge AI applications. However, she is wary of potential misuse of the technology.

“A compelling analogy I heard from a podcast compares this to the early days of automobiles,

when cars were introduced to the market without proper safety regulations and standards,” Han says. “Similarly, AI technology raises serious concerns, particularly around automated disinformation campaigns and information authenticity verification. Additionally, there are valid concerns about potential surveillance and social control, depending on who controls and implements these AI systems. Just as the automotive industry eventually developed comprehensive safety standards, we need to establish robust regulatory frameworks for AI development and deployment to ensure its responsible and ethical use.”

Despite the challenges, she stays grounded by a broader mission.

“Although there are ups and downs throughout my working days, what keeps me going is my ultimate goal of understanding and advancing AI’s societal benefits, particularly through building initiatives that help marginalized populations who have limited access to education,” Han says. “With the development of AI tools, motivated individuals now have greater access to information — but proper guidance and support systems are still essential.”



FERNANDO SEVILLA



**“I think AI is going to change tech jobs
— in the same way that most major
developments in the field have.”**

— CHARLES FYFE '09

Charles (McEachern) Fyfe '09 is a software engineer on the messaging infrastructure team at Meta currently working on projects unifying data systems between Facebook and Instagram, and is also a visiting professor of physics who teaches a hardware design course at St. Olaf. His focus isn't on building new features, but on optimizing what's already there.

“I'm now running a job that is deleting 400 terabytes of data, which consumes about half a million dollars in electricity a year. This frees up all that electricity and storage for use elsewhere,” Fyfe says. “My focus is really on infrastructure cleanup, data migration, the bookkeeping stuff, and AI is something that's just becoming increasingly prevalent.”

AI is woven into the tools he uses daily, and he has an appreciation for the ways it can support his work — as well as a skepticism of its limits.

“Complex systems like this can fail, and when they fail, they don't fail like a human — they fail in really bizarre ways,

and we don't always understand why,” Fyfe says. “You can take a machine learning algorithm, and you can show it a picture of a panda, and it'll say ‘I'm 80 percent sure that's a panda.’ If you go in and you tweak the pixels just a tiny bit — it still looks like a panda to a person — you can do that in such a way that the machine learning algorithm would say, ‘I'm 99 percent sure that this is a goldfish.’ So just because you've got the numbers to line up just wrong, you get these weird failure modes that just don't make any sense to a person. It's a reminder that these tools need constant scrutiny.”

Still, Fyfe sees AI's potential as an interface — not a replacement.

“I think AI is going to change tech jobs, in the same way that most major developments in the field have,” Fyfe says. “Fifty years ago when people wrote software, they were writing in Assembly, which is incredibly tedious, horrible, and

error prone. And then we developed a language called C, which lets you write words, and then under the hood the computer turns it into Assembly. And then later we developed a language called Python, which is nicer to work with, and under the hood it turns into C, and under the hood that turns into Assembly. I think AI might end up being another kind of layer like that, where it's just a nicer way to interface with the computer.”

He's also attuned to how AI may reshape education, both from the perspective of the educator and the pupil.

“I think that this is maybe comparable to the development of the pocket calculator,” Fyfe says. “Before the pocket calculator, math class was learning how to multiply big numbers, and after, that's just not a skill that people need anymore. We're going to see that again for writing code and papers, reading and digesting text — there's going to have to be a lot of thinking and trial and error to figure out what we want to teach, and what are young people going to want to learn.”

But he's convinced Oles are uniquely positioned to meet the challenges ahead.

“I feel a strength of our campus right now is that we have a really diverse student body, both in terms of backgrounds and interests,” he says. “Students are coming to the classroom with multifaceted identities, wanting to cultivate varied areas of expertise.”

HOW A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION POWERS THE FUTURE



As the industry evolves, so does the way people interact with AI. “With AI usage, the primary difference I’ve noticed is how different age groups approach AI as an evolved search engine versus a thought or skill partner,” says Bedford-Petersen.

Older users, she says, tend to treat AI like an advanced search engine, asking straightforward, factual questions. Middle generations often use it as a brainstorming tool to jump-start big projects.

“I see even younger generations adopting AI as a partner that fully supplements a skillset. An emerging example of this is ‘vibe coding,’ which is a programming approach where a person interacts with AI to describe a feature or product they’d like to build and AI takes the lead on writing the code. If you haven’t found an app that works the way you want, you turn to AI to supplement coding skills to build just the app you envisioned,” she says.

values and societal needs. Regular ethical audits and staying engaged with evolving ethical frameworks in the field is key.”

Bedford-Petersen says she tries to remain open-minded, breaking down new technologies into their parts rather than judging them as a whole.

“Tech doesn’t always get new developments right on the first try, but they might be a stepping stone to building something that will really change or influence the way we interact with the world around us,” she says. “I’ve tried to be really discerning in both my career and day-to-day life about what tech can enhance our lives versus what might do more harm than good.”

Fyfe is blunter about the risks. He notes that AI is trained on massive internet databases, often containing personal or uncredited material, and that its complexity makes it difficult to explain why it works the way it does. Still, he rejects alarmist predictions.

“To walk us back a bit from the precipice of doom, I don’t believe AI is going to replace all human jobs —

“The ethics of the technology we’re building is another extremely important role of a researcher in a tech environment. Technology is growing at such a rapid rate that legislation cannot always keep up. Researchers take their role very seriously as an advocate for the experiences of the public — we are often the line of defense that understands and advises on best practices for creating safe and healthy online environments.” — CIANNA BEDFORD-PETERSEN ’14

Even with the new tools and creative applications, the Oles are quick to point out that AI is far from flawless. Han warns against treating AI as a shortcut.

“Effectively deploying AI solutions requires a thoughtful approach and significant time investment,” she says. “It’s not just about implementing the technology; we need to carefully consider the specific use case, anticipated adoption rate, and potential business impact. We don’t want to apply a ‘big shovel’ to a ‘small problem.’”

She advocates for proactive ethics — testing systems for fairness, improving energy efficiency, and keeping human oversight at the center.

“I view AI as a tool to augment, rather than replace, human capabilities,” Han says. “It’s essential to maintain human oversight and ensure AI systems align with human

we’re not all going to be broke and have no purpose or function — but imagine if you can figure out a way to give AI some elements of a person’s job and maybe put us back to a 32 hour work week? I think logistically and culturally, we’ve got some obstacles before that happens, but I do like to hope that we are in a *Star Trek* optimistic future, rather than a *Star Wars* pessimistic future.”

In the end, what stands out about these Oles is not the role they’re playing in tech now, but how they arrived in the field in the first place. For Bedford-Petersen, one of the biggest misconceptions about the tech industry today is that it’s made up entirely of software engineers. In reality, she says, these companies function like any other business, drawing on a wide range of expertise — from researchers and product managers to designers, lawyers, and marketing specialists.

“These companies are still full businesses that require a ton of different backgrounds and skillsets to function,” Bedford-Petersen says. “Many people who work in tech took really circuitous routes that help them bring a unique perspective to our work.”

With some tech leaders suggesting AI could replace entry-level engineers and coders, Fyfe says having a wide range of skills will be even more important to support the pipeline of employees the industry will need in the future.

“If you want senior engineers, you have to hire and train junior engineers,” Fyfe says. “So if you’re interested in computer science and technology, pursue what you love,

but prepare for a reality where that isn’t enough — you need to have other skills besides being able to code.”

In Bedford-Petersen’s opinion, St. Olaf cultivated the versatility to keep up with such shifts.

“I am a big believer that a liberal arts education teaches you how to learn, and gives you the flexibility to tackle new challenges,” Bedford-Petersen says. “This is critical in a fast-paced industry like tech, where unexplored research questions are continually popping up. I lean on that liberal arts background to say, ‘I may not know everything about this topic yet, but I feel confident in my ability to learn about it and make connections to things I’ve done before.’” 🍂

AI-Generated Imagery

AI image generation uses complex algorithms to create new images from text prompts. To develop the image used in the opening spread on page 19, *St. Olaf Magazine* Creative Director Fernando Sevilla wanted to use a process that mirrored this article’s central question: How do we shape technology, and how does it, in turn, shape us? He set out to do this through an intentional collaboration between human creativity and AI. After feeding the article’s text into ChatGPT, he worked through a creative conversation to develop and update illustration prompts that captured its spirit. Those prompts were then used across several image-generation tools (ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Adobe Firefly), allowing the technology to interpret and reimagine the ideas visually. The human touch was intentional, critical, and, yes ... unnerving.

AI-Generated Prompt: A vertical illustration in the style of a hand-painted woodcut or modern surrealist collage. A human figure stands at the center, their silhouette filled with flowing lines of code, books, and abstract patterns symbolizing knowledge. Around them, ghostly AI forms emerge — shifting between gears, digital avatars, and glowing neural networks — blending into organic elements like trees, hands, and faces. The composition should feel contemplative rather than futuristic, balancing technology with humanity. Rich textures, muted yet vibrant colors, and a timeless, almost allegorical tone, as if this were a 19th-century illustration updated to represent the modern spirit of artificial intelligence.

Updated Prompt: A vertical minimalist illustration with a clean, symbolic approach. At the center, a human silhouette is split in half: one side organic, with books, leaves, and warm textures; the other side digital, with circuits, glowing lines, and neural nodes. Above them, a simple sun-like halo radiates both natural rays and binary code. The color palette should be limited — deep indigo, gold, and ivory — evoking the restraint of printmaking while still representing the tension and harmony between humanity and AI.

Final Prompt: A vertical surrealist collage-style illustration using hand-painted textures and paper-cut layers. A human silhouette acts as a window, filled with fragments: binary numbers, avatars, gears, books, and leaves. Around them, AI forms morph playfully — a typewriter turning into a neural network, or a tree sprouting circuit branches. The palette is limited to indigo, ochre, forest green, and ivory, with a tactile, crafted feel that balances whimsy and depth.

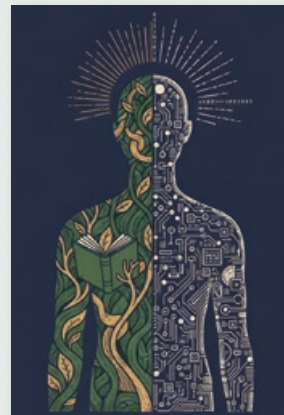
CHATGPT



GOOGLE GEMINI



ADOBE FIREFLY



A full-page background photograph of a rugged mountain landscape. In the foreground, a rocky slope is covered with low-lying vegetation in shades of yellow and green. A small stream flows through the rocks. In the middle ground, a calm, greyish-blue glacial lake is nestled between the rocky slopes. The background features steep, rocky mountains with patches of snow or ice clinging to their upper ridges and crevices. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

THE 42ND ANNUAL

GIMSE GLOBAL

"As we hiked along a set of glacial lakes and rivers toward the base of Mount Cook, we encountered rusty-colored foliage. The flow of people along the bridge displays how humans interact within the environment. We are small beings, parts of something greater. The mountains of Aoraki — about 10 million years in the making — are of the utmost cultural and ecological importance. Along with all creatures and places, they deserve gratitude and respect."

— Evgenia Roth '26

A wide-angle landscape photograph showing a rugged mountain valley. In the foreground, a dirt path leads to a suspension bridge crossing a river. The river is filled with white water rapids and large rocks. The valley floor is covered in green and yellow vegetation, with large grey rocks scattered throughout. In the background, steep, rocky mountains rise, some with patches of snow or ice. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

ENGAGEMENT

PHOTO CONTEST

TOP AWARD

RUST AND RIVERS | Evgenia Roth '26
Environmental Science in Australia and New Zealand
Aoraki Mt. Cook National Park, New Zealand

FOR MORE THAN A HALF CENTURY, St. Olaf students have learned around the world as part of the college's renowned study abroad and study away programs. And for nearly that entire time, they have shared the stunning images they've captured during their travels as part of the annual Gimse Global Engagement Photo Contest.

The photo contest is named in honor of Professor Emeritus of Art A. Malcolm (Mac) Gimse '58 and his wife, Jackie. Together they planned, led, and taught more than 45 study-abroad programs, helping generations of Oles develop an informed global perspective. Gimse chronicled their international travel through photography, and he encouraged students to do the same.

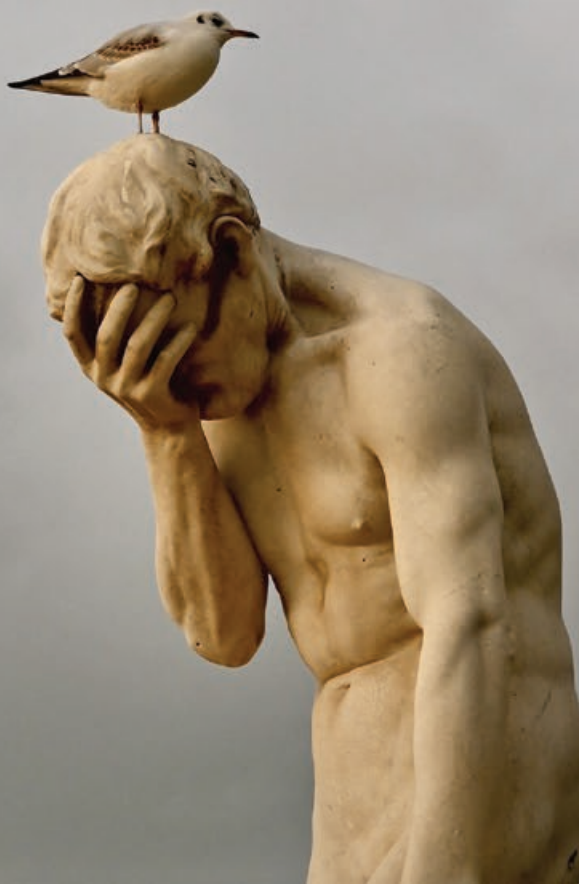
Advisors in what is now the Smith Center for Global Engagement at St. Olaf launched the photo contest in 1983 to encourage students to share a glimpse of their travels with the broader community. Each year students submit hundreds of photos to the contest.

At St. Olaf, the options for studying abroad and away are robust. The college offers programs in more than 40 countries around the world, including faculty-led semester programs like Global Semester, a wide range of January Term programs, and institutional partnerships around the world. It's an opportunity that most St. Olaf students take advantage of, with 70 percent of the Class of 2025 participating in at least one study abroad/away program.

See their experiences through their eyes in these photos from the 42nd Annual Gimse Global Engagement Photo Contest.

"This bird perches on the head of a sculpture depicting Cain after killing his brother, Abel. Throughout my month in Paris, this was a common image: a bird perching on a statue or sculpture under the backdrop of a rainy sky."

— Grace Kamarad '27



TOP AWARD

WINGS OVER THOUGHT, TUILERIES

Grace Kamarad '27

Interdisciplinary French Studies in Paris

Jardin des Tuileries · Paris, France



TOP AWARD
**SURFING UNDER THE
 SOUTHERN LIGHTS**

Graham Barwick '25
 University of Otago
 Dunedin, New Zealand

"After seeing a forecast, my friend and I decided to attempt to surf under the southern lights. As we paddled out, the lights intensified, and a wall of pink and green came toward us. We stayed out catching a few waves, but mostly, we enjoyed the view and the novelty of surfing under the lights. As we came in, we saw our other friends on the beach and set up the camera to take this photo, which captured one of the most magical experiences of my life."

— Graham Barwick '25

HONORABLE MENTION

FIELD TRIP | Samuel Gwin '25
 DIS Copenhagen | Copenhagen, Denmark

"Like Curious George, I have long been passionate about climbing, art, and new perspectives — so finding a skylight in my Danish Architecture Studio was like finding the Pearly Gates themselves. With a few brave friends, we transported ourselves up to the Copenhagen skyline and were in awe of its breadth. Most buildings in Copenhagen have a height limit and are packed snugly together, so standing atop our Architecture Studio, we experienced a new and exciting kind of sidewalk that none of the aggressive bikers below could reach: roofing. We could see the whole city from where we stood, and the only thing interrupting our gaze was the occasional copper dome or spire splintering up from the cobblestone streets below. This is exactly the kind of creative exploration and delight my study-abroad experience fostered."



"South Africa is a dream country that I always had on my bucket list to visit. Even though it was lightly raining when we got to the Mandela Statue in Pretoria, I couldn't help but run over there and capture a picture next to this gigantic statue to show to my kids one day!"

— Sarah Balekage '25



HONORABLE MENTION

▲ **MANDELA MONUMENT AT THE UNION BUILDING IN PRETORIA**

Sarah Balekage '25 | Social Issues in South Africa

Nelson Mandela Statue · Union Buildings, Pretoria, South Africa



HONORABLE MENTION

▲ **SMØRREBRØD**

Thea Larsson '26

DIS Copenhagen

Copenhagen, Denmark

"A taste of Denmark, made during our very first gathering! In the DIS Culinary Living Learning Community, we learned the art of *smørrebrød* — bright, fresh, and bursting with flavor. This shared experience marked the beginning of new friendships and unforgettable memories."

— Thea Larsson '26



"After following winding paths carved into the mountainside, we reached a lookout that revealed a stunning view of the Meteora Monasteries. Perched high on towering rock pillars, the monasteries seemed to float above the valley, blending history and nature in a truly unforgettable scene." — Aiden Yung '26

HONORABLE MENTION

▲ **MONASTERY MOMENT**

Aiden Yung '26

Classical Studies

in Greece

Meteora Monasteries

Meteora, Greece

See more images from the Gimse Global Engagement Photo Contest — and get additional perspective from the Oles who took them — by scanning this QR code or by visiting stolaf.edu/magazine.



HONORABLE MENTION

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Cole Kehrberg '26 | Global Semester
La Selva Biological Station
Heredia Province, Sarapiquí, Costa Rica

"We crossed the bridge in La Selva Research Station alongside the rainforest researchers of Costa Rica every day we studied there. On September 8, a family of howler monkeys decided to join us."

HONORABLE MENTION

PETE! | **Emma Coen-Pesch '26**

University of Galway | Diamond Hill, Connemara National Park · County Galway, Ireland

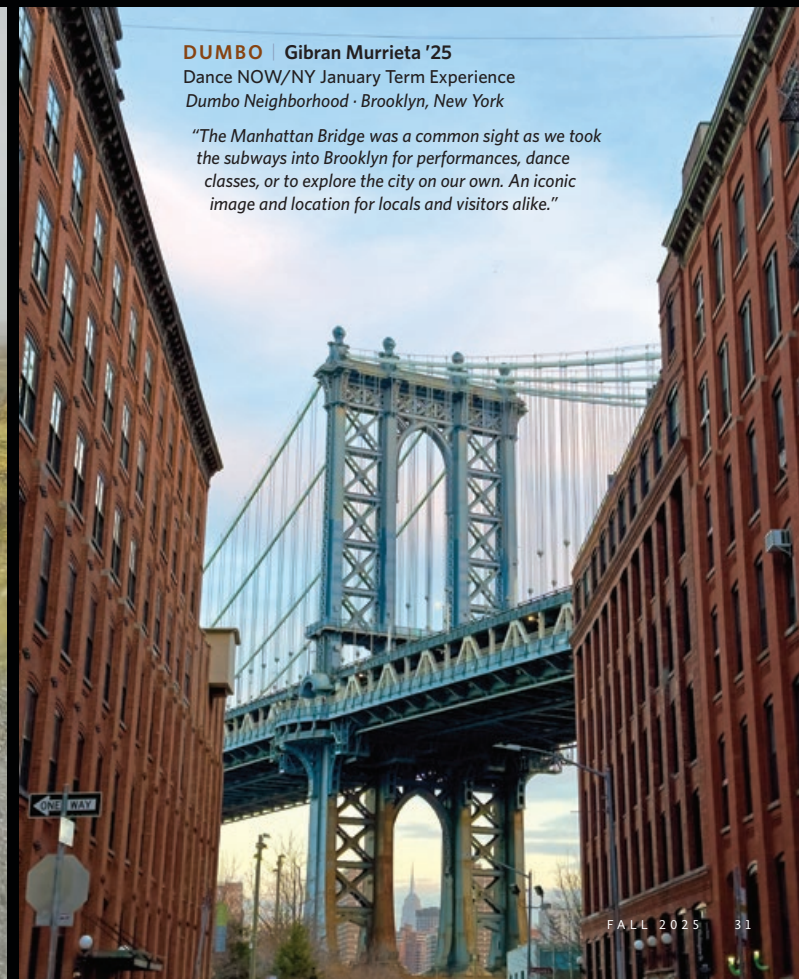
"During a Christmas Eve hike up Diamond Hill, I was really excited to have my photo taken next to this peat. Peat is a very cool type of soil that is extremely rich in organic matter and stores twice as much carbon as all the world's forests. Throughout the hike I kept shouting 'Peat!' in excitement. My friend Julia, unfamiliar with the soil type's name, thought that I had named it 'Pete' and was calling out to it because I had grown so attached."



DUMBO | **Gibran Murrieta '25**

Dance NOW/NY January Term Experience
Dumbo Neighborhood · Brooklyn, New York

"The Manhattan Bridge was a common sight as we took the subways into Brooklyn for performances, dance classes, or to explore the city on our own. An iconic image and location for locals and visitors alike."



On a Mission

New Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Tarshia Stanley champions the power of the liberal arts to prepare students to make a difference in a rapidly changing world.

By Kari VanDerVeen | Photographed by Fernando Sevilla

AS AN ENGLISH PROFESSOR, Tarshia Stanley often provided her students with a simple instruction: “Take me back to the text.”

In other words: make sure your work is grounded in the lessons and meaning found within the written piece in front of you.

In her professional life, she’s followed that very same advice.

“I’m a very mission statement–oriented, mission-driven person,” she says. “I choose institutions that are dedicated to students, that have a sense of what it means to be a global citizen, and that are interested in turning out not just a person who can get a job, but a person who can make a difference in the world.”

That, she says, is what drew her to St. Olaf. This summer she became the college’s new provost and vice president for academic affairs. In this role, she oversees all faculty, staff, and programming within the Academic Affairs Division, directly shaping the liberal arts education that each St. Olaf student receives.

“It’s really important to have the multi-directional thinking that a liberal arts education can deliver. We’re not going to be able to move in the directions that we need to and become who we need to be as human beings unless we give more attention to that kind of thinking.”

Stanley brings deep expertise to this work. She comes to St. Olaf from Wagner College, where she served as the special assistant to the president for academic affairs and previously served as provost and vice president for academic affairs. Prior to that, she served as dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Sciences at St. Catherine University, where she launched an integrated learning series and a Career Readiness in Undergraduate Majors program, and co-founded a BIPOC Women’s Professional Leadership Cohort.

All of this leadership work, Stanley notes, is built on the foundation that she developed while beginning her career at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. There she was tenured in the English Department and built the film and

visual culture program. She served as coordinator for the Spelman Walmart Initiative for First-Generation College Student Scholars and as a Career Pathways Initiative advisor, mentoring faculty developing new career-preparation courses. She was also appointed by the Spelman provost to implement a new advising and retention model, before being appointed director of the honors program.

“It’s where I like to say I cut my teeth, because you had to do absolutely everything,” Stanley says. “I learned from folks who were so deeply committed to students and always putting students first, and I’ve carried that with me throughout my career.”

As her work at St. Olaf gets underway, Stanley sat down to discuss the future of the liberal arts, how Ole alumni can support academic programs on campus, and why Star Trek might just show us how to be the best versions of ourselves.

What do you believe is the biggest strength of a liberal arts education in today’s world?

When I think of what a liberal arts institution offers, I like to use the analogy of weaving. In weaving you have the warp, which are the lengthwise threads that provide the foundation. And then you have the weft, which is the yarn that is woven over and under the warp horizontally to create the weave. The liberal arts does that with disciplines — it’s about science, it’s about math, it’s about examining what artificial intelligence brings us. But it’s also layered with the humanities, the social sciences, fine arts. It’s all of those things woven together. It’s both the horizontal and the vertical. It’s about the depth and it’s about the breadth. It creates a kind of thinking that we need in today’s world: people who have a 360-degree ability to problem solve. And that is what a liberal arts education delivers: people who are multidimensional thinkers.

Part of the problem that we see today is that we have people who can only deliver one way of thinking, and they flatten out problems to make things either black or white. They cannot see what is in between — which is where the true kinds of problems that we have to solve in the 21st century are. And so it’s really important to have that multi-directional thinking that a liberal arts education can deliver. We’re not going to be able to move in the directions that we need to and become who we need to be as human beings unless we give more attention to that kind of thinking.



How do you balance tradition and innovation at a 150-year-old institution like St. Olaf?

In the South we say ‘You eat the fish and you leave the bones.’ So you figure out those things that continue to have meaning, that continue to move you forward, and you keep doing those things. There will always be traditions, there will always be ways of doing things that continue to enrich us and bring us together. But there’ll also be things that no longer work for us — and we have to be willing to let those things go. We have to be willing to move things off the plate and bring new things on, because those things keep us alive and moving forward. It’s a balancing act. We can’t do everything. We can’t keep everything. That can be painful, but it also can be rewarding, because it enables us to continue to grow and thrive. I think that there’s just as much honor in letting go of a thing as there was in creating it.

What role do you see Ole alumni playing in the evolution of the college’s academic programs?

We really need to have our students in close proximity to alumni and other folks in a wide range of career roles so that our students in the classroom are practicing the kinds of skills and challenges that they will actually face on the job. We already have a tradition of doing that here at St. Olaf — we just need more of it. So I would invite folks who are in hospital settings and corporate settings and nonprofits — whatever your business is, whatever you do for a living — to host Oles in your workspace and give our students hands-on practice.

What’s a book, film, or piece of art that’s made a lasting impact on you?

When I was in graduate school, I had just finished my master’s degree in literature and I saw a film called *Daughters of the Dust*. I remember watching this film and thinking ‘These images are transformative, and I really need to know why.’ Literature has always been that for me — I would travel while reading, be in another world — and this one film made me understand that images do this, too. It had such an effect on me that I ended up doing the rest of my Ph.D. work in film. It was the first time I realized the impact that visual images could have. I realized I needed to be able to read not just a literary text, but I needed to be able to read a visual text as well — and that I needed to be in the business of teaching people how to read anything. That served me well, and my first job at Spelman was to develop the film and media studies minor in the English Department.

Many people on campus already know that you’re a huge *Star Trek* and science fiction fan. Why should science fiction matter to the liberal arts?

As a professor of English, I never concentrated on speculative fiction or science fiction in my career until recently, because I was so busy building other things that were needed. Science fiction was something I read and watched for pleasure, where I went to escape. I didn’t want to think about work when I was watching *Star Trek* — but then one day I realized that my love of science

fiction had given me the ability to practice reality. I would read science fiction or watch *Star Trek*, and I would see that we did not blow ourselves up. We did figure out a way to get along. We didn’t have to start all over again. We figured a way out of it, even though there were difficult times. We figured out the best of who we were, and we went forward — and exploration became the thing that was so important to us learning. That’s why it resonated so much with me. And I started developing courses for students in speculative fiction and science fiction because I wanted them to understand that this kind of reading and watching allows us to imagine the absolute best of what we can be, not just the worst. You get to practice your very best in those spaces — and once you get good at it, you can’t help but bring it into reality.

You have a keen interest in AI in the academy, and you’ve invited faculty and staff to join you in reading a book called *AI Snake Oil*. What do you see as the challenges and opportunities of AI in higher education?

As educators, we have to take the lead with AI. Right now corporations are taking the lead, and that is okay, but there has to be a balance that comes from higher education. I hear lots of conversations about all of the difficulties and challenges around AI, which are perfectly true — but that’s also perfectly true about every new system. This is the opportunity for us now to get involved at the ground level of this system and try to bring it into a place in which we can get the benefits from it without it turning into something that depletes us. I’m interested in how we teach this to students because it will affect how they enter into the world, which is going to expect them to be proficient at using generative AI. We have to get there before their bosses do, and the corporations do, and say, ‘You have to have an ethical understanding of what it is that you’re doing, and you have to move forward with excellence. And how do you do that? How do you use that? You cannot let it substitute for your own thinking. You can’t let it do for you what you would do for yourself.’

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve received?

To leave the place better than I found it. Whatever place that is, wherever you go, make sure it’s better when you leave.

Who gave you that advice?

My grandma.

Speaking of places, what’s your favorite spot on campus (so far)?

I like to go down to the green space where you can see the Big Ole wind turbine. I like that space because when I look at the wind turbine, I feel really small — and that sensation is both reassuring and frightening. 🍁

Interested in further insight from Tarshia Stanley? Director of Creative Services Fernando Sevilla joins her for a video conversation that you can watch at stolaf.edu/magazine or by scanning this QR code.





A Royal Celebration of Global Connections

By Olivia Schmidt • Photographed by Victoria Campbell and Steven Garcia '20

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Haakon Magnus of Norway visited St. Olaf College on October 8 as part of a weeklong trip to the United States to commemorate the 200th anniversary of organized Norwegian migration to North America.

“This milestone is particularly noteworthy for our campus community because some of those intrepid Norwegian immigrants went on to found St. Olaf College in 1874,” President Susan Rundell Singer noted in welcoming the Crown Prince to campus.

The Crown Prince’s first official stop was the Rølvaag Memorial Library Reference Room, where King Olav V Chair in Scandinavian-American Studies and Director of Nordic Studies Kari Lie Dorer guided him through various presentations, including select student research showcases on Norwegian-American life.

This was followed by a special convocation in Boe Memorial Chapel, which featured music by the St. Olaf Choir and St. Olaf Orchestra as well as remarks by the Crown Prince to the wider campus community.

“I think a key to [St. Olaf’s] success is the way you have lifted the Norwegian American experience into a global context, welcoming students and guests from all backgrounds,” the Crown Prince told the hundreds of students, faculty, and staff members who gathered for the celebration. “I would like to thank St. Olaf for its major and lasting contribution to keeping our common history and legacy alive — not just as dusty memories fixed in time, but as a living bond that keeps evolving.”

To conclude the convocation, the Crown Prince held a panel discussion with St. Olaf students Parker Chelikowsky ’27, Odin Milbury ’27, Maren Miller ’27, and Madi Tally ’26. Tally, who has studied abroad in Oslo and Copenhagen, asked the Crown Prince about the value of an international education.

“I think it’s interesting to meet people who see things completely different than you do, and who do not care so much about the things you care a lot about, and who care a lot about other things that you don’t really know anything about — the world is big, and there is a lot out there,” the Crown Prince replied. “I think it is important to listen, to learn from the people around you, and to have a little bit of humility when we engage with other people.”

Crown Prince Haakon’s visit continues a long tradition of royal family engagements at St. Olaf: he himself last visited in 2005, Her Majesty Queen Sonja of Norway visited in the fall of 2022, and earlier visits from King Harald V, Princess Astrid, Princess Märtha Louise, and King Olav V have marked the college’s history. 🇳🇴

Read more about the visit and watch the convocation by visiting stolaf.edu/magazine or scanning this QR code.



Top: The Crown Prince greeted students and briefly chatted with them as he walked through campus. *Middle:* In Rølvaag Memorial Library, the Crown Prince and Kari Lie Dorer speak with Otelia Lighthill ’27 about her research on Norwegian-American life. *Bottom:* Dorer and the Crown Prince held a panel discussion with St. Olaf students Parker Chelikowsky ’27, Maren Miller ’27, Madi Tally ’26, and Odin Milbury ’27.





A Memorable Performance in a Magical Space

This summer the St. Olaf Orchestra toured Norway in celebration of two historic milestones: the 150th anniversary of the founding of St. Olaf College and the 200th anniversary of the first organized migration from Norway to North America. The ensemble performed six concerts across the country, including three alongside the award-winning Oslo Chamber Choir. St. Olaf Orchestra Conductor Chung Park reflects on one of those moments — and what made it so meaningful.

By Chung Park

The St. Olaf Orchestra performed in the Glass Cathedral (Domkirkeodden) in Hamar this past May during our tour of Norway. This magical space, located on the shore of Lake Mjøsa, was the setting for our third and final concert in collaboration with the Oslo Chamber Choir.

The Glass Cathedral is essentially an enormous glass tent built over the ruins of a medieval cathedral. The remnants of the church's floor and columns were our stage, lending a sense of timelessness to the event. History was literally at our feet.

In the spirit of many buildings in this part of the world, the Glass Cathedral blurs the barrier between indoor and outdoor, people and nature. There were birds flying around in the church, adding their own musical contributions, and the far northern latitude meant the sun was streaming in right at the viola, cello, and bass sections during our evening concert.

Our collaboration with the Oslo Chamber Choir (OCC) was deeply satisfying, both artistically and personally. The OCC blends incredible artistry with an authenticity that comes from its grounding in the Norwegian folk tradition. While this pairing of a small, folk-inspired chamber choir and a full symphonic orchestra might seem a bit odd, the friendships that we forged in our short time together cleared the path for our music-making.

St. Olaf Orchestra Conductor Chung Park leads the ensemble during a performance in the Glass Cathedral (Domkirkeodden) in Hamar, Norway. The Domkirkeodden was built nearly three decades ago to protect the ruins of the Hamar Cathedral, which was constructed in 1152. In addition to preserving the medieval ruins, the steel and glass structure has astonishing acoustics. The orchestra's tour of Norway was completely cost-free for St. Olaf musicians thanks to an endowment established in 2019 by Louis and Mary Kay Smith to support student travel costs for international music ensemble tours. PHOTO BY MATHILDE BERGERSEN

A colleague joked (possibly out of exasperation) that their conductor, Håkon Nystedt, and I were kindred spirits due to our penchant for wearing our hearts on our sleeves and a shared eagerness for connection and experimentation. This melded nicely with the way our ensembles like to work. The St. Olaf Orchestra leads with community, and we found a kindred ensemble in the OCC. There was incredibly nuanced, flexible, and empathetic communication between our two groups, each responding in kind to any cues given through body language, eye contact, a change in timbre, or the acoustics.

The Domkirkeodden concert was the setting of one of my two favorite memories from this tour. The sun was finally starting to change to a dusky color after the concert at about 9 p.m. when I walked out of the cathedral, drawn by the

lushest, greenest meadow you have ever seen, at the bottom of a small hill. This is where cows must go when they die.

As I started down the hill, I heard gleeful laughter and saw the silhouetted figures of our college students — fully grown people — chasing each other around like small children. This moment of childlike abandon, a relinquishing of cares, and a total lack of self-consciousness (the great plague of our time) is a memory that I will remember and relive for the rest of my life.

Our Orchies are beautiful people. They showed it when they played, by the way they interacted within and outside of the orchestra, and at that moment, by letting the child inside come out to play for a few memorable moments. 🐼



▲ The sun streams in during the St. Olaf Orchestra's concert at the Domkirkeodden, and birds fly both outside and inside of the space as the ensemble performs under the direction of Conductor Chung Park. PHOTOS BY MATHILDE BERGERSEN



In the lush meadow, just outside the Domkirkeodden, Orchies frolicked in the green grass and enjoyed a moment of childlike abandon following their concert. Their joy "is a memory that I will remember and relive for the rest of my life," Conductor Chung Park says. PHOTO BY CHUNG PARK

THE CIPHER PROTOCOL



Did you crack the codes on pages 13-14?
Flip the page upside down and check
the answer keys below to find out.

VKUU WMNJ BJCR KRW AYRJ
WILL SURE MEET ITS FATE
RLKXZTR IYMUJRLX ILUJZZ
TONIGHT CARLETON COLLEGE

LNM RJYB KM KXCNMKLN
OUR TEAM IS INJURIOUS
VJ AKZTR AYWR YXS ANMKLN
WE FIGHT FAST AND FURIOUS

LA RTJ ILUJZZW ZMYR
OF THE COLLEGES GREAT

LNM RJYB KM RTJ IMYB
OUR TEAM IS THE CREAM

VJ WMNJ YMJ RTJ MJYU WRNAA
WE SURE ARE THE REAL STUFF

VJ ILBJ AMLB WR LUYA
WE COME FROM ST OLAF

Message:

YHISJAZKQUBXLOFMWRNDVPE
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPOQRSTUVWXYZ

Substitution Cipher:

PUZZLE 2: SOLUTION

WELCOME TO THE HILL
WOLLEO > E > O > U > L

Message 2:

OLES CAN OLES WILL
LEVO LQOV WLEA

Message 1:

PUZZLE 1: SOLUTION



ALUMNI & FAMILY TRAVEL

St. Olaf Alumni and Family Travel helps you be a culturally competent, global learner through adventures alongside like-minded travelers. A few upcoming programs are listed below.

PEDALS, PIPES, AND PASTRIES: STORGANISTS IN PARIS

May 25–June 7, 2026

Led by Karen and Gary Wilkerson

MAJESTIC CAPITALS: PRAGUE, VIENNA, AND BUDAPEST | June 12–27, 2026

Led by Juliet Patterson and Rachel Moritz

JAPAN: FOLK ART AND NATURE

July 11–23, 2026 | Led by Jon Naito and Mina Kinukawa

PATAGONIA: AN ACTIVE ADVENTURE IN LANDSCAPES AND CULTURES | October 16–31, 2026

Led by Wesley Braker '18 and Annika Fredrickson '18

GERMANY: MARKETS, MUSIC, AND MERRIMENT | Nov. 24–Dec. 4, 2026

Led by Jerry and Teresa Elsbernd

LAOS PAST AND PRESENT: A HMONG HERITAGE TOUR

December 9–22, 2026 | Hosted by Joshua Lee

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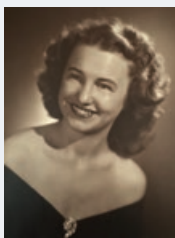
It's easier than ever to share your latest news, photos, and updated contact information! Questions? Email alum-office@stolaf.edu or call 507-786-3028 or 888-865-6537.

1940s

Ilmae Vinje Warnes Lund '49 released her fourth and final book, *The Spoon Holder*, this last year. At age 98, Lund's book is a collection of 15 stories from her life. In an interview with the *Saint Albans Messenger* prior to her book signing at the local bookstore, she said, "I think of them as stories by the spoonful. ❶ My tales are unembellished and real, straight from my heart. ... I feel so blessed to have had these stories beautifully illustrated by Vermont artist and dear friend Harald Aksdal, who worked with me on this labor of love." Read more about Lund at her blog, ilmaelund.wordpress.com.

Winnifred Greene Alberg '48, a talented soprano whose singing was broadcast on radio programs across the country, passed away on June 10, 2024, at the age of 101.

Alberg came to St. Olaf in the fall of 1941 to study music. A year later, she returned to Montana to teach at a one-room country school during World War II. When the war ended, Paul Christiansen traveled 1,000 miles to encourage her to come to Concordia College to join his choir — but she returned to St. Olaf, where she sang with the St. Olaf Choir under Olaf Christiansen and drew large audiences to her recitals. She was the soloist for the choir's joint concert with the Minneapolis Symphony in 1947, and a recording of the concert was sent to 50 radio stations across the country.



In 1948 Alberg had a weekly show on WCAL, and she was the soloist at the St. Olaf Choir's performance at Carnegie Hall. She auditioned on the WCCO radio program *Stairway to Stardom*, winning both the applause-meter and Bob DeHaven prizes, and she went on to the next round of the competition. The Minneapolis Auditorium was filled to its 11,000-person capacity for the event, which featured guest stars U.S. Vice President Alben Barkley, comedian Bob Hope, and radio personality Arthur Godfrey.

Alberg went on to serve as a voice instructor at Augustana College — where at a faculty recital, WWII veteran and St. Olaf classmate Alan Alberg proposed. The two moved back to Northfield, where Alan finished his degree at St. Olaf and Winnifred joined the Music Department faculty. She continued performing across the nation, as well as in concerts on campus. Read more about her incredible accomplishments at winnifredalberg.com.

She is survived by her husband, **Alan Alberg '50**; children, **Penelope Alberg '76** (Hugh Lydiard), **Timothy Alberg** (Christine Henderson Alberg), **Kari Alberg '81** (Dave Machacek), and **Jon Alberg** (**Lisa Hartwig '83**); grandchildren, Ethan and Claire; godson, Thomas Rasmussen; nieces, nephews, and cousins throughout the U.S. and Denmark; dear friends; and the children of friends she adopted as aunt and grandmother.



1950s

Louise Hammer Quam '56 was honored by the University of Minnesota in February for 75 years of being a Minnesota Gopher men's basketball season ticket holder! ❷ During a timeout in the game on that day, she was led onto the basketball court — where she received a standing ovation and was given a customized Gopher basketball jersey. And in April, Minneapolis CBS affiliate WCCO TV interviewed Quam on its evening news program, highlighting this special recognition and her Gopher fandom.

1970s

Karen Bloomquist '70, who was ordained in 1974, has served as a pastor in Oakland, Calif., New York City, and Washington; directed theological units in the ELCA and Lutheran World Federation; and has taught at seminaries in Chicago, Dubuque, Seattle, Philadelphia, and India. She has published many articles and books, most recently *Moving Beyond*:

Toward Transformative Theologizing, and currently lives in Oakland. ■ **Joanne Schneider '71** was awarded emeritus status by Rhode Island College after 34 years of teaching history and serving as director of women's studies and chair of the History Department. ❸ She continues as the college's director of study abroad and remains active in public history by doing tours of the 250-year-old First Baptist Meeting House in Providence. ■

Susan Myhre Hayes '71 writes, "I've written my first novel, and as an English major, I always dreamed I would! *Kirkus Reviews* notes: 'A dying mother reveals to her daughter her family's long history of trauma in the hope she can break free of it. ... It is inspiring — the past can never be escaped, but that does not mean it must serve as destiny. ... A captivating novel, intellectually stimulating and engrossing.' My profs would be proud of *Making Up Stories: A Novel*." ■ **Dan Bergeson '74** received the 2024 Good Neighbor award from the Northfield, Minn., Rotary Club. ■ **Jeffrey Adams '76** writes, "In July there was a reunion of some of the 1975 *Christian*



Patricia "Patty" Grotts Kelly '77 passed away on Aug. 9, 2025. An English major at St. Olaf and a professional writer who contributed to numerous publications, she wrote more than a dozen award-winning *St. Olaf Magazine* stories. In her varied work for *St. Olaf Magazine*, she showed an affection for — and understanding of — the college, its programs, professors, students, and alumni. She also was the author of one book for children: *Budge*, about the adventures of a parakeet — a story privately published just this year, 40 years after she wrote it.

Her family notes in their remembrance that "Patty didn't win nearly as many awards as she deserved, but one meant the most to her and said the most about her. Some years after she was diagnosed, in 2007, with follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma — and after having raised many thousands of dollars for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS), competing in triathlons and half-marathons and 10Ks — she signed up for the Team in Training cross-country ski team. She was not, to put it gently, a natural skier. She returned from frigid practices at Elm Creek with tales of icy tumbles whenever she came to a downhill corner, which was often. But she stuck with it — and at the end of the season, her teammates honored her with the 'Gets Back Up' award. She treasured it."

She is survived by her husband of 38 years, Dan Kelly; children, Laura Kelly Johnston (Matt Johnston) and Rose Kelly; grandchildren, Margaret Rose, Scott David, and Alice Patricia Johnston; and brothers Jim Grotts and Bob Grotts.

Tradition in Rome Interim attendees at the home of **Scott Vergin '76**. This January Term was special, as it occurred during a once-in-every-25-years Holy Year celebration by the Catholic Church. It included a private visit to the Vatican Museum, a concert by the St. Olaf Choir in the Sistine Chapel, and a Papal audience. This was the first time a protestant choir had sung in the Sistine Chapel. A great time was had by all!" 4 Pictured (L-R): **Jeff Adams '76, Anne Frank Jones '76, Betsy Tudor Nelson '77, Scott Vergin '76, Margaret Strutzel '77, Sally Stolen Grossman '77, Julie Anderson Johnson '77, and Christopher Moertel '76.** ■ **Donald Garvey '79** writes, "I completed the 265-kilometer St. Olav Way pilgrimage from Dovre to Trondheim. The 13-day trip included four days over the Dovre Fjell mountains and an overnight in a pilgrim refuge (a repurposed cow barn) with 11 other travelers from eight different countries. The pilgrimage ended at the Nidaros Cathedral and the grave of St. Olaf founder B. J. Muus."

1980s

Kathy Sweeney '81 writes that recently there was "a gathering of some St. Olaf swimmers to catch up on life and recall memories!" 5 Pictured: **Kathy Malm Sweeney '81, Coach Nancy Droen Moe '73, Susan Wasowicz Lee '81, Gretchen Scheuer Bensen '81, Mary Vertin '83, Jan Wasowicz '82, Sarah Sweeny Dudas '84, and Vicky Skala Cherne '84.** ■ **Susan Miley Hibbs '82** writes that in February there was a gathering of Ole nurses and Ole friends. 6 Pictured L-R: (front row) **Mary Preston Benson '80, Sandra Scheffler**



Billi Stromseth Faillettaz '80 passed away on April 4, 2025, at age 94. She earned her RN professional degree from Fairview Hospital School of Nursing in Minneapolis in 1953. The Fairview nurses dated the Luther seminarians, and in this famed pairing she met Vernon Faillettaz, whom she married in 1954. They immediately began their life together at Vern's first call to serve at Bethel Lutheran Church in Chicago, then as a graduate student family at the University of Chicago. Alongside her work as spouse and mother, she took art and history classes and later worked at the Argonne Cancer Research Hospital at the University of Chicago, which shaped her commitment to care for others.

In 1961, Billi and Vern moved to Northfield with their three children; Vern joined the Religion Department faculty at St. Olaf in 1962. While raising their children, she worked at Northfield Hospital, the Wilson Center in Faribault (a residential treatment facility), and served on a county mental health board. To grow her nursing career, she earned her B.S.N. from St. Olaf in 1980. And while working at an adult psychiatric unit at the University of Minnesota hospital, she received her M.S. in psychiatric mental health nursing in 1983, with a focus on women and depression. She spent 12 years as a member of the St. Olaf counseling staff, helped launch the student wellness program and the Sexual Assault Resource Network (SARN), and presented in many mental health workshops. In retirement, she continued to care for people through her work on a mental health stress team for the Minnesota Red Cross.

Together with Vern, she co-led a semester abroad in Jerusalem and various Interims abroad, and co-led Northfield Elder Collegium learning trips. After Vern retired in 1996, they established the Billi and Vern Faillettaz Endowed Scholarship Fund for St. Olaf students interested in service or international studies.

She is survived by her children: **Pierre Faillettaz '77**, Lise Faillettaz, **Marc Faillettaz '89**, and grandson **James Faillettaz '19**; and preceded in death by her husband Vern in 2020; and her son-in-law Kurt Peters.

Littlejohn '82, Jane Foote '82, Amy Vigen Hemstad '82; (back row) **Karen Maland Dohmen '81, Nancy Clark Carlson '82, Meg Poker Brown '82, Phil Brown '80, Sheri Motz Peterson '81, Susan Miley Hibbs '82, Lori Lynner Skrien '82, and Heidi Novak '82.** She adds, "If you're an Ole nurse or know these friends and would like to be invited to the next gathering, email mileyhibbs60@gmail.com!" ■ **Sandra Scheffler Littlejohn '82** received Emplify Health's 2025 Excellence in Nursing

Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of her 34 years of nursing leadership at the organization, where she currently is clinical operations director of the Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders. A member of the Lower Sioux Mdewakanton Dakota Community of Minnesota, Littlejohn has contributed at the national nursing level for many years and is past-president of the National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association and past board officer of the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nursing Associations. ■ **Randy Cirkseena Jr. '83** has been appointed to Duke University's Divinity School National Alumni Council. His three-year term is from 2025 to 2028. Cirkseena holds M.Div. and Th.M. degrees from Duke University, and a D.Min. degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. ■ **Kristin Reynolds Skare '89** writes, "I received and accepted a new call to serve as pastor of community engagement at St. Andrew Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Eden Prairie, Minn., beginning in March 2025."

1990s

Kimberly Meinecke '92, a Lutheran pastor who also volunteers with Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW) as part of her ministry in the Spokane, Wash., community, is featured in the LCSNW Behavioral Health Annual Report (lcsnw-annualreport2025.org/behavioral-health). Since beginning her service with LCSNW in September 2020, she is recognized for having made a profound impact as a crisis response advocate. The report notes that for Meinecke, "this volunteer role means showing up — with compassion, belief, and a fierce commitment to supporting survivors of physical, emotional, and spiritual assault. Her journey to this work was fueled by knowing people who are survivors and by her deep anger at injustice and cruelty. Rather than sitting with that anger, she turned it into healing action — one conversation, moment of care, and relationship at a time." ■ **Ryan French '94** has been named the new managing director of the Children's Theatre Company (CTC) in Minneapolis. French joined



On the Shelf



BOOKS BY ST. OLAF COLLEGE ALUMNI, FACULTY, AND STAFF

Family Conscience: A Memoir of Four Generations (Wipf and Stock, 2025), by St. Olaf Professor Emeritus of Religion **John D. Barbour**

The Snake Handler's Wife, a Vega and Middleton Novel (Literary Wanderlust, 2025), by **Sue Hinkin '71**

Making Up Stories: A Novel (Universum Press, Aug. 2024), by **Susan Myhre Hayes '71**

Pigeon Falls (Waters Edge Press, July 2025), by **Jeff Elzinga '73**

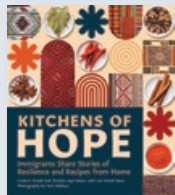
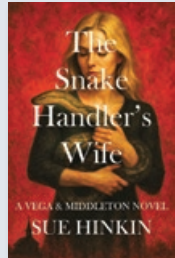
Risk-Giving Leadership: Equipping Employees to Transform Toxic Workplaces (Consultative Publishing, 2025), by **Rolf Foster-Jorgensen '73**

Building a Moral Economy: Pathways for People of Courage (Fortress, Nov. 2024), by **Cynthia Moe-Lobeda '76**

Kitchens of Hope: Immigrants Share Stories of Resilience and Recipes From Home (University of Minnesota Press, 2025), by **Linda Svitak '77** and **Christin Jaye Eaton**, with **Lee Svitak Dean**

The Inspired Retirement: Purpose and Passion in Your Next Adventure (Beaver's Pond Press, 2025), by **Nathalie Martin '83**

Demystifying Misophonia: A Holistic Approach to Finding Freedom (Beaver's Pond Press, 2025), by **Sara Barrick '03**



CTC in 2022 as its chief operating officer and then served as deputy managing director prior to his new appointment. "We're thrilled to have Ryan's leadership at this time. He brings a diverse set of skills and experience plus strategic insight necessary as CTC continues to advance as the nation's leading children's theatre," says Mary Loeffelholz, chair of the Children's Theatre Company Board of Directors. French will oversee all administrative functions for CTC, including development, marketing and communications, audience services, education, finance, human resources, community partnerships, facilities, and legal affairs. ■ **Geoff Seper '94** writes, "After more than 25 years in the retail insights space, developing, using, and selling solutions, I felt it was time for a new direction. With the support of friends and family and some deep reflection, I made the decision to pursue work that aligns more closely with my values and desire to give back. That path led me to an incredible opportunity and a childhood hero. I'm honored to share that I've joined The Steger Center as executive director. Founded by legendary explorer Will Steger, the center is dedicated to empowering leaders to drive innovation and bold discovery. I'm thrilled to be part of this mission and excited for what lies ahead!" ■ **Kari Kiser Chinn '95** has stepped into an exciting new role as deputy public

information officer for the City of San José, Calif. In this critical public service role, she's helping deliver timely and engaging information to inform one of the most diverse and dynamic cities in the country. ■ **Becky Lowe-Weyand '96** writes, "I am over the moon to announce that I recently started working as development associate at the local listener-supported classical radio station in Omaha, 90.7 KVNO, a community outreach of the University of Nebraska, Omaha. It feels like coming home, since I worked at 89.3 WCAL-FM while I was a student at St. Olaf." ■ In May, **Siri Hansen Kabrick '97** earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree from the University of Minnesota School of Nursing. ■ **Shawn Groth '99** is the David J. Sugarbaker Professor of Thoracic Surgery and Chief of the Division of Thoracic Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine. ■ **Lars-Erik Leafblad '99** was invited to serve as a new trustee of the American Swedish Institute in May 2025. Leafblad is co-founder of executive search firm Ballinger Leafblad, and has served in leadership roles at the Bush Foundation and the University of Minnesota. He also founded Pollen Midwest and is a passionate advocate for civic leadership and connection.

2000S

Jen Smith Shaffer '01, a genealogy researcher and collaborator, was featured in the BBC America/Acorn TV series *Relative Secrets*, hosted by Jane Seymour. The series, part true crime and part genealogy, aired in June 2025 and explored the secrets hiding in the lineage of four different families. ■ **Brooke Adamus Hoffman '03** earned a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

2010S

Amy Kasch-Vanek '10, a 10-year veteran of Reading Corps, Math Corps, and Early Learning Corps, recently was promoted to executive director of California Programs. She previously was director of the state's programs, helping get high-impact tutoring into local schools. Kasch-Vanek began her career in Minnesota as a program manager before transitioning to the leadership role in California. Having spent five years as a director building a solid team, Kasch-Vanek is positioned well to expand her impact in this new role. ■ **Charlotte Sivanich '12** writes that members of the 2010 Global Semester gathered in the Dominican Republic for a 15-year

reunion. ② (L-R): **Charlotte Sivanich '12**, **Luke Obermann '12**, **Lindsey Hickman Johnson '11**, **Christina Huntzinger '12**, **Morgan Smith '12**, **Chase Liaboe '12**, **Sara Johnson Robinson '12**, **Annemarie Smith-Morris '12**, **Erik Hemstad '12**, **Libby Arnosti**, **Fritz Hemstad**, and **Clare Dickey Fredriksson '12**. ■ **Amanda McShane Mattson '13** has joined the Morristown (N.J.) office of Ogletree Deakins as counsel. Her practice focuses on federal immigration law.

■ **Justina Stern '14** ③ graduated with a master of science degree in communication disorders and sciences from the University of Oregon. She is beginning her career as a speech-language pathologist at a private pediatric clinic in Eugene, Ore. ■ **Rosanna Egge '15**, ④ now Sister Regina Therese of the Transfiguration, made her profession of solemn vows as a nun of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) on May 3, 2025, at St. Dominic's Monastery in Linden, Va. ■ **Henry Burt '16** was ordained as an ELCA pastor in February at Boe Memorial Chapel.

⑤ In May he graduated with his Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. He now serves as associate pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Albert Lea, Minn., as he also undertakes a postdoc. ■ **Emily Belding '16**, a 2025 graduate of Carver College of Medicine at the University of Iowa, ⑥ will be doing her otolaryngology residency at Boston Medical Center. ■ **Haley Olson '16** writes, "In the spring, I graduated with my doctor of musical arts degree in composition from the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theatre, and Dance. ⑦ It was wonderful to connect with so many Oles while living in Ann Arbor! My dissertation, a chamber orchestra composition inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, will premiere next year in Michigan." ■ **Samantha Freres '18** and Sarah Pellicci Salveson have launched Wishing Well, ⑧ a non-toxic laundry detergent "designed to transform laundry day into an act of self-care." ■ **Megan Gehle '18** recently graduated with high honors from Winona State University, ⑨ where she earned a doctor of nursing practice degree and will begin her career as a Family Nurse Practitioner. ■ **Sam Brunclik '19** completed a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Kansas and received an NIH Fellowship for a short postdoctoral appointment studying computational biology before accepting a tenure-track position as assistant professor of chemistry at the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University. He is also involved with the American Chemical Society, and is chair of the ACS Pride subdivision. He is excited to be returning to Minnesota, re-connecting with friends, and beginning work in his new research lab.

⑩

2020S

Sandy Faure '20 was selected as a Chinese Language Fellow by the National Bureau of Asian Research. 🍁



Ron Hunter '70 at his 55th St. Olaf reunion in June. Below: Ron as an all-conference player in 1969.

Ron Hunter '70 brings the G.O.A.T. to campus

WHEN RON HUNTER ARRIVED ON CAMPUS IN 1966, the Goat Trophy was already a well-worn symbol of rivalry and pride. Each year, the winner of the Ole-Carl(eton) football game would "get their goat," while the losing team reluctantly handed it over. For Hunter, an all-conference player, and his 1969 Midwest Conference championship team, the goat became more than a prize — it was a marker of grit, camaraderie, and three undefeated seasons against Carleton College. To celebrate that feat, Coach Tom Porter '51 commissioned personal miniature Goat Trophies to be awarded to each of his senior players.

"The winning scores are written on the back of the trophies, ranging from a 3-0 squeaker to a 62-38 scoring frenzy," Hunter says. "The mini trophy was a great and much-appreciated gesture on the part of Coach Porter, and I've held on to it and my 58-year-old letter jacket all these years."



This summer, at his 55th reunion, Hunter brought both mementos back to campus. The decision sparked laughter, curiosity, and admiration from some classmates.

"I figured one of the few places anyone would understand and appreciate that old trophy would be at an event on the Hill, and the classmates I reconnected with ranged from some I had seen just a few months ago to one football teammate I hadn't seen in 55 years," he says. "It all reinforced my long-held belief that Oles are indeed a special set of people."

Hunter still keeps in touch with many of his teammates, and the lessons he learned on the Hill remain deeply woven into his life: teamwork, discipline, and balance. His student experience has gone on to inform his ongoing contributions to St. Olaf, which include serving on the Alumni Board and the Board of Regents from 2005 to 2017 and establishing an endowed scholarship to support current students.

"I come from a big family, and my single-dad parent told me he could not help me with 'that expensive private school,'" Hunter says. "Because of money, I felt I probably missed 20 percent of the learning opportunities at the college. So, I've done what I can over the years to help family, friends, and Oles deal with financing their education."

That commitment can be seen in his creation of an endowed scholarship at St. Olaf that supports Oles who are members of the Cultural Union for Black Expression (CUBE).

"The value of my liberal arts education was tremendous — it enabled me to adjust and learn, think critically, and envision a future," Hunter says. "I also made fantastic lifelong friends due in large part to the college's residential setting and a great football team. CUBE can enhance that experience and help develop students who are going to help us keep getting better down the road. For me, CUBE's mission and helping students access a college education are important."

Just as the Goat Trophy remains a legacy of past victories on the field, Hunter's endowed scholarship will stand as a testament to future Ole's personal triumphs — together reflecting how tradition and generosity continue to shape St. Olaf's story. 🍁



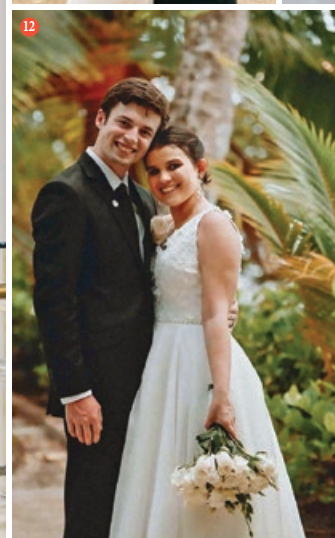
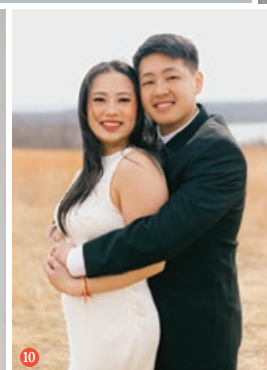
Future Oles

Paul Pearson '01 and Alyssa Cheadle, a daughter, Sigrid
 Kjersten Johnson Hewes '04 and Josh Hewes, a daughter, Sofia ¹
 Christine Hinrichs Garrison '06 and Ollie Garrison '06, a daughter, Lea ²
 Sarah Rasmusson '06 and Eric Schapp, a daughter, Synneva ³
 Erin VanBurkleo '08 and Matt Haar '10, a son, Ari ⁴
 Greta Fure '09 and Charlie Werdin, a daughter, Annika
 Christina Hodge '10 and Andreas Andreadis, twins, Lena and Vera ⁵
 Danial Davis '11 and Nora Davis, a son, Robin ⁶
 Anna Schattauer Paille '11 and Joseph Schattauer Paille '11, a daughter, Mina
 Alexi Garrett '12 and Geoff Skelley, a son, Vaden ⁷
 Lauren Behr Wadzinski '12 and Patrick Wadzinski '09, a son, Maddox ⁸
 Kate Anderson Graham '13 and Ben Graham, a daughter, Quinn ⁹
 Kelsey Hall Powell '13 and Dan Powell, a daughter, Norah ¹⁰
 Claire Drevets Duckett '14 and Sam Duckett, a daughter, Hannah
 Callyssa Ozzello White '14 and Andrew White, a daughter, Reagan ¹¹
 Tea Dejanovic Berg '15 and Paul Berg '14, a daughter, Bobbie ¹²
 Nora Beierwaltes Henle '15 and Derek Henle '14, a daughter, Florence ¹³
 David Kirkhoff '15 and Gretchen Osdoba, a daughter, Ella
 Michaela Liesenberg '15 and Alec Holen, a daughter, Eva
 Reilly Quirk Orner '15 and Joe Orner, a son, Cameron ¹⁴
 Emma Youngquist '15 and Brandon Berger '15, a daughter, Ophelia ¹⁵
 Stephanie Kisch Anderson '16 and Brent Anderson, a daughter, Beatrice ¹⁶
 Erin Engelhardt Flicek '17 and Chris Flicek '17, a son, Charlie ¹⁷
 Lexie Read-Weber '17 and Henrik Weber '17, a son, Bergen
 Julia Walter Lalor '21 and Justin Lalor, a daughter, Lucy ¹⁸



Weddings

- Mark Moline '86 and Karen Moline, Sept. 28, 2024 ¹
- Lauren Kramer '13 and Jared Walhowe, Aug. 23, 2025
- Gregory Hilleren '14 and Brennen Thomas, June 12, 2025 ²
- Megan Boos Varnado '14 and Alan Varnado, April 12, 2025 ³
- Anna Brown-Grimes '15 and Brittney Brown-Grimes, Sept. 28, 2024 ⁴
- Emily Patterson '15 and Ryan Wermerskirchen '14, July 19, 2025
- Caitlin Nelson King '16 and Mason King, Jan. 11, 2025 ⁵
- Isaac Maier '16 and Ashley Hays, Aug. 2, 2025
- Rebecca Kunau '17 and Ben Withbroe, May 31, 2025
- Megan Grimes Jones '19 and Jaylen Jones '16, June 30, 2024 ⁶
- Maisy Martin Clay '20 and Emerson Clay '20, May 25, 2025 ⁷
- Lauren Rewers '20 and Michael Tiede '20, Nov. 2, 2024 ⁸
- Hannah Wangenstein '20 and Spencer Eanes '20, May 28, 2023 ⁹
- Leslie Xiong '21 and Bryan Thaoxaochay '20, May 24, 2025 ¹⁰
- Emily Ziegler Efimova '22 and Maxim Efimov '21, Feb. 19, 2024 ¹¹
- Jimena Fernandez Chaves '22 and Brian Bettles '20, Feb. 15, 2025 ¹²
- Beatrice Hammel '22 and Peter Grund, July 12, 2025 ¹³



Deaths

- Ruth Maurer Barth '46, Monroe, Wis., Aug. 4, 2025
 Esther Stryzewski Halverson '46, Carroll, Iowa, April 8, 2025
 Helen "Arlene" Twito Nelson '48, Lake Mills, Iowa, June 26, 2025
 Mary Lou Sampson Christiansen '50, St. Paul, Minn., Dec. 14, 2024
 Irene Hougum Kringle '50, Madison, Wis., May 31, 2025
 Jeanne Foxvog Lageson '50, Apple Valley, Minn., July 17, 2025
 *Oliver Olson '50, Northfield, Minn., Aug. 5, 2025
 *Douglas Stillwell '50, Elk River, Minn., March 30, 2025
 Lenore Johnson Dean '51, Wheaton, Ill., April 24, 2025
 Arlene Bakke Hall '51, Viroqua, Wis., June 7, 2025
 Mary Ann Christensen Johnson '51, Mound, Minn., June 10, 2025
 Joan Holmquist Stenback '51, St. Paul, Minn., July 13, 2025
 Verneil Anderson Branstad '52, St. Anthony, Minn., March 14, 2025
 Ruth Finneman Christenson '52, Minneapolis, Aug. 12, 2025
 Janet Alstrup Larson Lueddemann '52, Portland, Ore., April 17, 2025
 *Richard "Dick" Nelson '52, Bloomington, Minn., April 12, 2025
 Vivian Lager Neseth '52, Stillwater, Minn., April 27, 2025
 Robert Stein '52, Tonawanda, N.Y., Oct. 1, 2024
 Joann Thompson Youngstrom '52, St. Paul, Minn., March 27, 2025
 Valeria Stortroen Daehlin '53, Northfield, Minn., Feb. 17, 2025
 *Andrew "Andy" Holum '53, Houston, July 12, 2025
 Robert "Bob" Engelstad '54, Wayzata, Minn., March 19, 2025
 Carol Halsor Hembre '54, Highlands Ranch, Colo., Dec. 27, 2024
 Charles "Chuck" Houge '54, Northfield, Minn., March 8, 2025
 Barbara Saed Johnson '54, St. Cloud, Minn., April 28, 2025
 Nelda "Marlene" Simonson Lundsgaard '54, Cherokee, Iowa, Feb. 22, 2025
 *Philip "Phil" Overby '54, Edina, Minn., May 11, 2025
 Joyce Revne Stofft '54, Northfield, Minn., Nov. 11, 2024
 Joan Horvick Burd '55, Plymouth, Minn., March 8, 2025
 Diane Hartman Firari '55, Madison, Wis., July 30, 2025
 Paul Gensmer '55, Caledonia, Minn., Aug. 2, 2025
 *William Olson '55, Charlotte, N.C., July 9, 2025
 James Sjolie '55, St. Paul, Minn., May 12, 2025
 Martha Glesne Thompson '55, Salinas, Calif., March 26, 2025
 *Wayne Thoreson '55, Scottsdale, Ariz., March 5, 2025
 Shirley Chelberg Uricho '55, Amery, Wis., April 11, 2025
 Solveig Maakestad Beckmen '56, Brandon, S.D., July 8, 2025
 Marlys Hyland Ensrud '56, Bloomington, Minn., April 6, 2025
 Evelyn Iverson Fristedt '56, New Ulm, Minn., June 30, 2025
 *Ralph Hagberg '56, Kenyon, Minn., July 16, 2025
 Ethel Holstad Hansen '56, Claremont, Calif., April 15, 2025
 *Charles "Chuck" Lehman '56, Spokane Valley, Wash., Aug. 4, 2025
 Doris Lund Moxness '56, Lake Elmo, Minn., July 20, 2025
 *William "Bill" Weitkamp '56, Seattle, July 16, 2025
 William Devendorf '57, Minneapolis, Aug. 31, 2024
 *Gordon Hagen '57, Thurmont, Md., Feb. 6, 2025
 James "Jim" Jenson '58, St. Paul, Minn., May 17, 2025
 *Emil "Bud" Kark '58, La Crosse, Wis., May 21, 2025
 James "Jim" Rasmussen '58, Frederick, Md., May 10, 2025
 Warren Salveson '58, Minneapolis, May 9, 2025
 Clair Baum '59, Milwaukee, March 2, 2025
 Joanne Landers Dalin '59, Rochester, Minn., March 3, 2025
 John Glesne '59, Fort Dodge, Iowa, April 20, 2025
 John Henning '59, River Falls, Wis., April 7, 2025
 Carolyn Schweigert Husemoller '59, Barrington, Ill., May 23, 2025
 Helen Gunderson Mikkelsen '59, Minneapolis, Aug. 16, 2025
 Jean Anderson Nystuen '59, Northfield, Minn., May 25, 2025
 Curtiss "Curt" Quist '59, Great Falls, Mont., April 23, 2025
 Sharon Roslien '59, Minnetonka, Minn., April 4, 2025
 *Orville "Orv" Swenson '59, Cloquet, Minn., April 9, 2025
 Dale Teubert '59, Sierra City, Calif., June 11, 2025
 Solveig Mason Kjeseth '60, Denver, March 3, 2025
 Ronald "Ron" Leslie '60, Shoreview, Minn., Aug. 9, 2025
 Carol Meyer '60, New York, June 30, 2025
 Willamae Campbell Swenson '60, White Bear Lake, Minn., April 15, 2025
 Marie Straub McMahon '61, Bellevue, Wash., June 5, 2025
 Robert "Bob" Nettelund '61, Urbandale, Iowa, May 25, 2025
 Sandra "Sandy" Lysen Stai '61, Northfield, Minn., Aug. 9, 2025
 Anne Loken Borgen '62, Minnetonka, Minn., March 10, 2025
 Raymond Hathaway '62, St. Paul, Minn., Jan. 10, 2025
 Marilyn Vangen Nelson '62, Lake Barrington, Ill., March 21, 2025
 Roger Sween '62, St. Paul, Minn., Aug. 24, 2025
 Phyllis Midtbo Zingelman '62, Twin Lakes, Wis., April 26, 2025
 Shirley Anderson Mills '63, De Witt, N.Y., July 16, 2025
 Linda Grundahl Stauffacher '63, Sun Prairie, Wis., July 5, 2025
 Sharon Moe Miranda '64, Sunnyside, N.Y., June 1, 2025
 Cynthia "Cindy" Hyatt Walker '64, Bryn Athyn, Pa., Feb. 17, 2025
 *James "Jim" Warren '64, Glenwood, Minn., May 4, 2025
 Violet "Vickie" Boereboom Folias '65, Salt Lake City, July 3, 2025
 Carol Peterson Musselman '65, Pequot Lakes, Minn., April 20, 2025
 Vera Ryen Gregg '65, Belmont, Mass., March 26, 2025
 Jeanne Olson Tschurwald '65, Iola, Wis., April 4, 2025
 Gary Culbert '66, Seattle, April 23, 2024
 *John Schumm '66, The Villages, Fla., May 16, 2024
 James "Jim" Pugh '67, Langley, Wash., May 24, 2025
 Robert "Bob" Aarstad '68, Shreveport, La., May 12, 2025
 Betty Larson Kolanczyk '68, Hillsboro, N.D., Feb. 27, 2025
 Valerie Neiman Nielsen '68, Plymouth, Minn., Feb. 17, 2025
 Sharon Rusch Thomas '68, Brown Deer, Wis., April 27, 2025
 William "Bill" Anderson '69, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, June 11, 2025
 Jeffery "Jeff" Knapp '69, Edina, Minn., Aug. 5, 2025
 *John Sorensen '69, Excelsior, Minn., July 2, 2025
 Sandra "Sandy" Munyon Webber '69, Wake Forest, N.C., April 14, 2025
 Kathy Nienow Bode '70, Faribault, Minn., March 27, 2025
 *Paul Gronseth '70, Claremont, Calif., July 27, 2025
 Arden Mahlberg '70, Dexter, Mich., June 4, 2024
 Kathleen "Kathy" Coplien Szelag '70, Durango, Colo., Oct. 25, 2024
 Nellis "Paddy" Engen '71, Maplewood, Minn., Aug. 5, 2025
 Richard "Rick" Huskey '71, Trevorton, Pa., June 15, 2025
 *Stanley "Stan" Wendland '71, Chanhassen, Minn., March 16, 2025
 Kurt Schumann '72, Minneapolis, April 21, 2025
 Stephen "Steve" Schwarten '72, Stanchfield, Minn., April 5, 2025
 Nancy Nielsen '73, Minneapolis, March 5, 2025
 Dewitt Smith '73, Sacramento, Calif., Feb. 13, 2025
 Charles "Chuck" Strand '73, La Quinta, Calif., Jan. 25, 2025
 Gregory "Greg" Gillette '74, Chelsea, Mich., March 22, 2025
 Henry "Hans" Buslee '76, Minneapolis, Aug. 25, 2024
 Richard "Rick" Reuter '76, Port Angeles, Wash., April 25, 2025
 Peter Dion-Kindem '77, Agoura Hills, Calif., March 23, 2025
 Patricia "Patty" Grotts Kelly '77, Hopkins, Minn., Aug. 9, 2025
 Edward "Ed" Nelson '78, Seattle, May 5, 2025
 Stephen "Steve" Dirks '79, Bradenton, Fla., Jan. 14, 2025
 Mitchell "Mitch" Frederick '79, Rochester, Minn., July 24, 2025
 Beulah "Billi" Stromseth Faillettaz '80, Northfield, Minn., April 4, 2025
 Carolyn Ramstad '80, Moorhead, Minn., June 2, 2024
 Karen Hillman Hemstad '81, Blaine, Minn., April 3, 2025
 Mark Buckman '83, Red Wing, Minn., July 14, 2025
 Charles "Chip" House '88, Minneapolis, Jan. 18, 2025
 Matthew Gress '91, Minneapolis, April 19, 2025
 Kirsten Russler '91, Maplewood, N.J., April 7, 2025
 Bartholomew "Bart" Casperson '92, Eagan, Minn., July 12, 2025
 David "Dave" Kalinoff '96, Woodbury, Minn., May 15, 2025
 Ted Koshiol '06, Golden Valley, Minn., June 26, 2025
 Grace Robia '12, Raleigh, N.C., July 16, 2025

*VETERAN

Remembering Matthew Lee '27

Matthew Lee '27 passed away on September 12, 2025, at age 20. His life was tragically cut short by gun violence, leaving an unfillable void in the hearts of his family and friends. A 2023 graduate of South St. Paul High School, Lee was a junior at St. Olaf, where he built close friendships and embraced new opportunities. He was a member of the St. Olaf football team, and his passion for the game and his teammates was evident to everyone who knew him. Football was more than a sport to him; it was a place where he built friendships, created memories, and expressed his love for competition. Lee's family shares that his life, though far too brief, was rich in love, friendship, and purpose — and his legacy will not be measured in years, but in the countless lives he touched in just two decades.

Lee is survived by his mother, Jody Clark; his siblings, Janessa Lee and Jamison Lee; and grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. He was preceded in death by his father, Rodney Lee.



Remembering Jack Schwandt



Professor Emeritus of Political Science Jack Schwandt passed away on June 3, 2025, at age 94. Schwandt attended Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, where he was inspired by a number of influential professors — including Sidney Rand, who went on to become president of St. Olaf — and his lifelong interest in Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was ignited. Schwandt continued his education at the University of Minnesota, where he obtained his

M.A. and Ph.D. in political science. His graduate work was interrupted by two years of service in the United States Army from 1956–58.

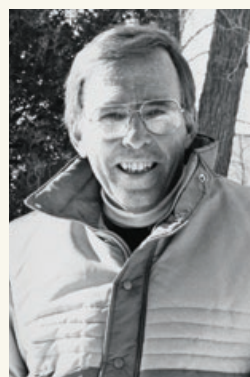
Schwandt first taught political science and political philosophy at Oklahoma State University from 1959 to 1961. He joined the St. Olaf faculty in 1963, where he met Pamela Poynter, a faculty member in the English Department. They were married in 1965. For four years they lived in an apartment in the house of Howard and Edna Hong, who became close friends and mentors, and whose work on Kierkegaard they admired immensely. Later the Schwandts moved to Wheatledge, a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired house at 811 Greenvale Avenue.

Schwandt taught in the Political Science Department until his retirement in 1996, contributing to the education of countless students. His courses in political philosophy were truly interdisciplinary and encouraged learning about politics in the broadest sense. He held office hours in the student coffee shop, and he was always open to conversation about a variety of subjects from politics to literature, to religion, to life. He imbued his students with his own finely nuanced sense of Christian vocation. Some of them became lifelong friends. Some of them followed him into academic life. Many of them made significant contributions to their respective fields.

After his retirement in 1996, Schwandt continued to pursue his academic interests and his writing about friendships, literature, and books. In 2011 he published *The Hong Kierkegaard Library: A Crown Jewel of St. Olaf College*. After his wife died in 2018, he wrote a set of essays in memory of her.

Schwandt is survived by Pamela's sisters, Karen Hillger and Susan Chenoweth; his son-in-law, Patrick Marsh; and Pamela's grandchildren, Mercedes, Benjamin, Katie, and Sofia Marsh.

Remembering Ted Vessey



Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science Ted Vessey, who helped shape the St. Olaf Math Department into one of the strongest in the country over the course of his 35-year career on the Hill, passed away on August 28, 2025, at age 87.

Vessey won a scholarship to Wesleyan University in Connecticut, but heard the call of the Midwest and returned to attend the University of Minnesota in his sophomore year. In 1960 he graduated with majors in math and physics and was immediately offered a teaching assistant position, which he accepted.

Vessey married Marguerite Edith Thorpe on January 9, 1965, at Calvary Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. In 1966 Vessey completed his Ph.D. and the family moved to Milwaukee, where he taught at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In 1970 they returned to Minnesota when Vessey took a position with St. Olaf College as a professor of mathematics, statistics and computer science. For much of his time at St. Olaf, he served as the chair of the Mathematics Department. Vessey had a deep love for teaching, and it was important to him to show the relevance and the beauty of mathematics. He earned the Mathematical Association of America's prestigious North Central Section Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics. He held visiting appointments at the Naval Postgraduate School, Stanford University, the University of Lund (Sweden), East China Normal University (Shanghai), the University of Virginia, the University of Massachusetts, and Chiang Mai University (Thailand). Vessey also coached the college's alpine ski team for 12 years, led the college's Term in Asia program in 1993, and co-founded the Northfield Soccer Association in 1981. After retiring from St. Olaf in 2005, he taught part-time at Carleton College for the next six years.

Survivors include his wife of 60 years, Margie; his sons **David Vessey '89 (Mara Naselli '94)** of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and **James Vessey '92 (Saranya)** of Northfield; grandchildren **Ike Vessey '27**, Gabriel, Benno, and Maya; other family members; and friends. He was preceded in death by his brother Ralph.

Remembering Stephen Blake



Associate Professor Emeritus of History Stephen Blake passed away on August 7, 2025, at age 83.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College, Blake spent two years in the Peace Corps in India. He subsequently earned a Ph.D. in Indian history from the University of Chicago, and taught at St. Olaf from 1986 to 2003. A prolific author, he wrote five books focusing on the early modern city-states of the Islamic world. A passionate educator and warm-hearted friend, Blake enjoyed opera, traveling, reading, and watching Minnesota sports teams. He cherished his summer community at his cabin on Star Island and loved hosting friends and family in Key West during the winter.

Celebrating a New Chapter for the Church

DURING THE FIRST WEEKEND in October, the Rev. Yehiel Curry was installed as the new presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) during a service at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.

St. Olaf Associate Professor of Music James Bobb was the organist for the service, which included four of his arrangements for organ, brass, and percussion. He performed alongside Professor of Music Marty Hodel and student musicians Ian DiMundo '26, trumpet; Kyan Carlson '28, horn; Leo Barks '27, trombone; Sage Kiritschenko '29, tuba; and Alex McGohan '28 and AJ Veninga '25, percussion.

"I have never been at a Lutheran gathering that was so diverse and where the corporate prayer and music making were so unified in purpose," Bobb says. "For me, the most moving aspect of the experience was sharing the hope and fervor of the day with long-time Lutherans, yes, but especially with our students."

St. Olaf President Susan Rundell Singer served as a communion assistant, an homage to the way the college has been nourished by the Lutheran tradition since its founding.

Rundell Singer notes that she was honored to participate in the installation, and is inspired by the future of the church. "The first Black presiding bishop of the ELCA, Bishop Curry offers a vision for the ELCA that encourages us to reflect on how contemporary Lutheran thought influences and strengthens our community," she says. "The installation filled me with joy, optimism, and hope for global humanity and elevating the best in each of us."

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with 2.7 million members in more than 8,400 worshipping communities across every state. One of those worshipping communities is St. Olaf, which is a college of the ELCA that hosts daily chapel and worship on Sundays. The services often feature music played or planned by Bobb, who is the Elliot M. and Klara Stockdal Johnson Chair in Organ and Church Music. 🐾

Above: President Susan Rundell Singer serves communion at the installation of the new presiding bishop of the ELCA, the Rev. Yehiel Curry (center). Standing between them is his predecessor, the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, who was the first woman to serve as presiding bishop of the ELCA. Below: James Bobb plays the organ at the installation of Bishop Curry. Following the Lutheran cantorial tradition, Bobb regularly composes or improvises music for weekly worship at St. Olaf and conducts the St. Olaf Cantorei.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRETT NELSON P'24



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PARTING SHOT



A SELFIE TO START THE YEAR | As faculty members lined up to process into Boe Memorial Chapel for this year's Opening Convocation — a beloved St. Olaf tradition that features professors in academic regalia — Assistant Professor of Nursing Emily Carroll took a selfie with Associate Professor of Nursing and Department Chair Susan Huehn, Visiting Instructor of Nursing Nancy Pelegano, and other colleagues. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20