

STOLLAFF

C O L L E G E



THE PIPER CENTER
FOR VOCATION AND CAREER

CAREER CACHET

MORE ST. OLAF STUDENTS THAN EVER ARE TURNING TO THE PIPER CENTER FOR VOCATION AND CAREER — ONE OF THE LEADING CENTERS OF ITS KIND — WHERE CAREER COACHES AND PEER ADVISORS, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES HELP THEM NAVIGATE THE PATH BETWEEN THEIR LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION AND MEANINGFUL WORK, SERVICE, AND POST-GRADUATE STUDIES.

BY MARLA HILL HOLT '88

THE PIPER CENTER for Vocation and Career — named in 2012 in recognition of the Piper family's gift in memory of H.C. "Bobby" Piper, longtime chair and chief executive officer of the Piper Jaffray Companies — offers a broad array of experiential opportunities to help students connect their liberal arts education to a meaningful career.

"My father believed that each of us is called to use our gifts and talents for the good of the world, and he challenged those around him to discern how their working lives could fulfill that call," says St. Olaf Senior Regent Addison "Tad" Piper.

Today, the generosity of St. Olaf's large network of alumni, parents, and friends continues to sustain the Piper Center's many programs and resources. Students benefit from top-notch guidance in vocational and career discernment throughout their time on the Hill, and Oles at every stage of their life, from prospective students to first-year students to graduating seniors to alumni of any age, can use the center's services.

"The Piper Center supports students in identifying their values, interests, gifts, and skills to enable them to take a vocational journey and find meaningful work, service, or post-graduate study," says Director Leslie Moore '77. A newly launched program, led by Associate Director of Alumni Career Services Jenele Grassle, offers the same coaching and services to alumni. While those participating in the program tend to be alumni within the first 10 years of graduation, coaching is available for alumni of all ages. The program is part of a collaborative effort between the Piper Center and the Office of Alumni and Parent Relations to offer comprehensive career services to alumni.

Because students will go on to work in ways that we can't yet fathom, and in an employment environment that requires them to be nimble and open to change, the Piper Center isn't just focused on helping students find jobs. The inclusion of the word *vocation* in the center's title is intentional. It comes from the Latin word *vocare*, or "to call," and points toward the center's mission of considering life after college as a holistic journey that goes beyond a first job.

"The concept of vocation is important to Lutheran theology and education," Moore says. "It's a powerful way of listening to the world around you, to the opportunities in your path, and to your neighbors and community so that you can find your place and match your gifts to the world's needs."

Moore says that students are understandably focused on determining the next step, such as "What classes should I register for? What should I major in? Should I study abroad? What fellowship or internship should I apply for?"

D.C. CONNECTIONS

Row one, L-R: Caroline Pippert '19, Hannah Read '20, Zipi Diamond '20, Ling O'Donoghue '21, Abby Wollam '20, Grace Reynders '20. Row two: Thando Kunene '13 (Piper Center), Kristi Kehrwald Adair (Piper Center), Maddie Etienne '20, Lulu Regules Verduzco '21, Hannah Liu '21, Isabel Wallace '20, Kara Anderson '21, Ezra Garcia '19, Jenele Grassle (Piper Center), Leslie Moore '77 (Piper Center). Row three: Kris Estenson (Piper Center), Lauren Peterson '19, Lydia Wehrley '19, Roland Buaben '19, Sumner Pitt '19, Andrea Salas '19, Eleanor Morse '19, Beth Anne Thompson '88 (APR). Row four: Alex Screamon '19, Zach McCarty '21, Sam Bailey '21.

PHOTOGRAPHED OUTSIDE THE U.S. CAPITOL IN MARCH 2019 BY ERIN SCOTT/POLARIS

“We have a very engaged body of alumni, parents, and friends who help guide our students in vocational and career discernment.”

— LESLIE MOORE '77

“Students are focused on the now, which is fantastic because that’s where they need to be,” she says. “We help them understand that there’ll be a whole series of next steps going forward, and that decisions they make now aren’t shutting off all future possibilities. They can major in philosophy and still go into nursing later, for example. It’s about contextualizing their decisions and helping them articulate a liberal arts education.”

The Piper Center’s strength is in meeting students where they are and then ascertaining how the next step may fit into an overall journey. The center provides support in the form of Class Year Guides that help students engage in specific activities during each year of college, from choosing a major to pursuing on-campus and summer work to meeting with a career coach to finding an internship, fellowship, or research opportunity. Students also can get help with concrete tasks — like writing a résumé or creating a LinkedIn profile — and attend networking events with alumni in law and policy, business, health, social justice, the arts, STEM, and entrepreneurship.

“Our aim is to connect students with the people who, or opportunities that, would be most meaningful for them,” Moore says.

Many of the resources the Piper Center offers, as well as its success in engaging nearly three-quarters of the student body annually in using its services, are made possible by generous financial backing from supporters of the college.

“We operate from a position of gratitude for the tremendous support we receive in funding our programming,” Moore says. “We also have a very engaged body of alumni, parents, and friends who help guide our students in vocational and career discernment. The depth and strength of these connections are outstanding, which enables us to provide a lot of individual support and coaching.”

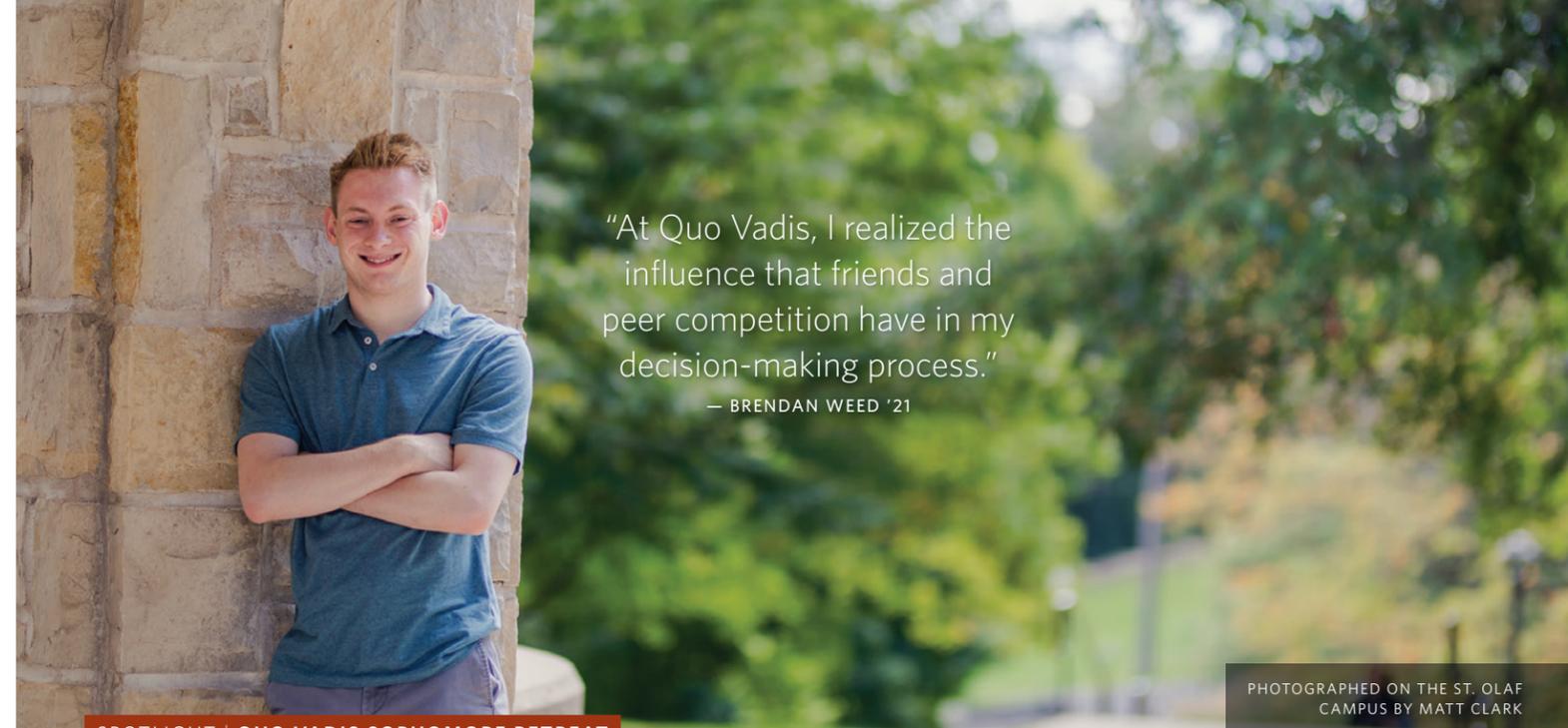
For a better understanding of the Piper Center’s impact, we’ve highlighted four of the center’s signature programs and services: Quo Vadis Sophomore Retreat, Connections, Peer Advisors, and Entrepreneurship.



THE PIPER CENTER TEAM

Row one, L-R: Jenele Grassle, Leslie Moore '77, Thando Kunene '13, Paul Edwards. Row two: Marietta Ruppe, Kristi Kehrwald-Adair, Kris Estenson, Paul Kim, Kirsten Cahoon '98. Row three: Katie Hughes, Nate Jacobi, Bryan Shealer, Margaret Bransford

PHOTOGRAPHED IN TOMSON HALL BY MATT CLARK



“At Quo Vadis, I realized the influence that friends and peer competition have in my decision-making process.”

— BRENDAN WEED '21

PHOTOGRAPHED ON THE ST. OLAF CAMPUS BY MATT CLARK

SPOTLIGHT | QUO VADIS SOPHOMORE RETREAT

THE SOPHOMORE YEAR OF COLLEGE can be a tough one for many students. They’re no longer transitioning to college as first-year students, and they haven’t yet delved into upper level coursework, mentored research, internships, and off-campus study. Some second-year students struggle with what’s known as the “sophomore slump,” or a decline in academic performance, and most are laser focused on the next step of choosing a major.

To help sophomores navigate the murky waters of that second year, St. Olaf developed the annual Quo Vadis — Latin for “Where are you going?” — Retreat in 2011 as a 24-hour, off-campus experience at Camp Ihduhapi in Loretto, Minnesota. The 85 or so students who attend each year interact with upper-class students, faculty and staff members, and young alumni who share their vocational journeys and offer ideas for living an engaged and purposeful life.

“The second year is so important for making decisions about your major field of study, for starting to identify a career path, and for defining how you’re going to make the best use of your time at St. Olaf,” says Nate Jacobi, associate director of career development, data, and operations at the Piper Center. “This event is just for sophomores. It focuses on vocational discernment and asks the foundational questions of ‘Who am I?’ ‘Where am I going?’ ‘What’s important to me?’ and ‘How do I get where I want to be?’ ”

The retreat helps students think along those lines through discussion and reflection. St. Olaf College Pastor Matthew Marohl opens the event by speaking on vocational discernment — the process of discovering how your skills and interests meet the needs of the world, which is often a new concept to sophomores. Juniors and seniors — mostly past Quo Vadis attendees — lead small group discussions, faculty and staff members share “crossroad” events that altered or shaped their lives, and young alumni provide insight into their career paths, sharing both their stumbles and their successes.

“The students map out their interests, experiences, and influences, and then reflect on where those are leading them,” Jacobi says. “We talk about taking ownership of your own definition of success and not one that’s been projected onto you.”

The Quo Vadis Retreat also serves as an introduction to the Piper Center’s other programs, as well as additional campus resources students can take advantage of as they begin to explore and develop their paths through college and beyond.

“Quo Vadis is a mix of discernment, leadership and personal development, social connections, and networking,” Jacobi says. “It’s about a space for sophomores to step away and reflect on where they want to go.”

REFLECTION

Brendan Weed '21 · Eden Prairie, Minnesota
Psychology major, Neuroscience concentration

Brendan Weed initially thought the Quo Vadis Sophomore Retreat sounded kind of corny. “I thought it would be a lot of the ‘here is your major; here are your job options,’ sort of thing,” he says. But an older friend and past attendee talked him in to signing up, and he found the retreat “so much more meaningful than basic career exploration.”

Heading into the retreat, Weed was feeling a lot of peer pressure to attend medical school. He’d always been interested in the idea of clinical psychology, but “I was worried about medical school,” he says, “and feeling some indirect competition with others about who was going to attend the most prestigious school. At Quo Vadis, I learned to realize the influence of friends and peer competition in my decision-making process.”

Weed says talking in small groups and having the opportunity to relax and reflect at the retreat helped him to “collect his thoughts” and learn to let his interests, not those of others, lead him where he needed to be. He now plans to attend graduate school to become a neuropsychologist, working with those with epilepsy, Alzheimer’s, and other forms of brain-related diseases. This summer, he’s interning at HealthPartners Neuroscience Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, conducting cognitive assessments with elderly patients. He found the internship after learning at Quo Vadis about the Piper Center’s many tools and resources that help students shape their futures.

“I’d recommend the retreat to all sophomores,” Weed says. “It gave me the ability to think about what I want out of life, including my career, and my personal, spiritual, and social goals. It was in the perfect outdoor environment and was very refreshing.”

THE CONNECTIONS PROGRAM, WHICH connects sophomores, juniors, and seniors with alumni, parents, and friends of the college in various U.S. cities, has two main goals: give students an opportunity to explore a variety of career possibilities and introduce them to a particular city or region.

“Connections students build a network of support while getting a firsthand look at Oles who are using their liberal arts education to pursue meaningful employment across many different industries,” says Kristine Estenson, associate director of alumni engagement at the Piper Center, who has led more than 650 students on 27 Connections trips since the program began in 2011. “Students also have a chance to envision themselves working and living in what might be a new city for them.”

St. Olaf offers four to five Connections trips every year during fall break, Interim, and spring break. Groups of 10 to 35 students attend each one, depending on the program, in cities like New York, Denver, Boston, Chicago, Madison, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, Washington, D.C., and the Twin Cities. Each program is focused on a handful of industries, running the gamut from finance, journalism, and technology to the performing arts, social impact, health care, and government. The cost to students is \$300 to \$350 per trip, and scholarships are available to those with demonstrated need.

Connections trips run from Sunday morning to Tuesday evening, beginning with small groups of two or three students exploring a city with a young alum.

“This exploration has been a valuable piece of the program,” Estenson says. “The students know the alum’s neighborhood and have to figure out public transportation to get there. They see where alums live, learn about the search for housing, and ask all sorts of questions about neighborhoods, transportation, social life, et cetera. It’s a good reality check.”

Monday and Tuesday are filled with site visits to companies and organizations for roundtable discussions with alums and their colleagues. Again, the students divide into small groups according to the industry they’re most interested in. Evenings include larger alumni and parent gatherings for networking and socializing.

Estenson notes that the Connections Program wouldn’t be as successful as it is without the engagement of alumni. “My job is so enjoyable because of the support of Oles who are eager to meet with students,” she says. “Connections only works when you have engaged alumni you can rely on, and that’s something St. Olaf is blessed to have.”



SAN FRANCISCO CONNECTIONS

Front row, L-R: Khanh Quang Ngo '21, Anderson Chen '20, Arbind Shrestha '19, Cuong Quoc Nguyen '19, Thong Hein Vo '21, William Cheek '19, Mikhail Lysiuk '20, Rustam Kosherbay '19, Danica Meier '20, Nancy Rutoh '20, Panha Son '21. Back row: Stacey Longwisch (Piper Center), Kris Estenson (Piper Center), Nikesh Yadav '19, Bidit Sharma '19, Alexander Currey '19, Rob Berger '21

PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE SAN FRANCISCO FERRY BUILDING IN FEBRUARY 2019 BY FRÉDÉRIC NEEMA/POLARIS

REFLECTION

Ramsey Walker '14 | Program Manager, Newman Center for the Performing Arts, University of Denver

Ramsey Walker's career path has benefited from a bit of serendipity. Nervous about his prospects after graduation, he applied "on a whim" for the Denver Connections trip — focused on health care, environment and sustainability, and marketing — during spring break of his senior year. About to hold a B.A. degree in music, he was curious about corporate marketing opportunities versus working in nonprofit arts administration. He also was mildly interested in the idea of moving to Colorado, and Connections let him explore Denver as a potential residence. While there, Walker met arts administrator Sarah Johnson Whitnah '08 at an alumni picnic at Red Rocks Amphitheatre, a connection that would come in handy about a year later.

"Connections was great at forcing me to think critically about what I actually wanted to do," Walker says. Visits to various companies helped him discern differences between working for large corporate marketing firms versus smaller, niche organizations. "It was interesting to learn about the kind of work that was open to me," Walker says.

After graduation, Walker worked in tour marketing and logistics for the St. Olaf Band and the St. Olaf Orchestra as a fifth-year intern in St. Olaf's Office of Music Organizations. He helped plan the band's tour appearance at the University of Denver's Newman Center for the Performing Arts, an assignment that reconnected him with Whitnah, who was on staff there.

By the time his internship ended, Walker had set his sights on moving to Denver. "The Connections trip helped me realize I wanted to live here," he says. In spring 2015, he landed a job as event coordinator at the Newman Center, thanks in part to Whitnah's influence and support.

"Sarah put a good word in for me and got my résumé in front of the hiring manager," says Walker, who in 2017 became the center's program manager. He now books touring ensembles and guest artists and develops community and educational partnerships.

"Connections had a direct line to what I'm doing now," Walker says. "Without my connection to Sarah, I wouldn't be where I am." He's giving back to Oles now, too, by attending Denver Connections events as an alumnus. "It's such a great program for helping students leverage St. Olaf's dedicated and well-connected alumni network."

"The Connections trip helped me realize I wanted to live here, and had a direct line to what I'm doing now."

— RAMSEY WALKER '14



PHOTOGRAPHED AT RED ROCKS PARK, COLORADO, BY ELLEN JASKOL/POLARIS

REFLECTION

Elijah Verdoorn '18 | Software Engineer, Pandora Media · Oakland, California

Elijah Verdoorn got his first glimpse of the Bay Area on the San Francisco Connections trip — focused on biotech, entrepreneurship, and technology — during Interim of his junior year. As a computer science and mathematics double major, Verdoorn already knew that Silicon Valley was the place to be if he wanted to work at the forefront of technological development, with companies like Google, Facebook, and Apple headquartered in the area.

"Throughout college, I increasingly realized that coming out here to live and work would give me opportunities beyond what I might find in the Midwest," Verdoorn says. "What drove me to Connections was that I needed to see what might eventually be my future."

While the site visits to companies and networking opportunities with alumni in the technology field were important to him, Verdoorn says that the chance to physically set foot in California had the biggest impact.

"Walking around, I wondered, 'Do I fit in?' 'Do I feel comfortable?' " he recalls. While two days isn't a lot of time to answer those questions, the opportunity to get a feel for the Bay Area while assessing companies' cultures and work environments allowed him to determine that, yes, working in technology in the area was within his reach.

"The Oles I met encouraged me to continue applying for internships," he says. "It was great to see myself in these alums. They were driven and intelligent, and they had the technical acumen that I wanted to learn from. They also helped me see that working and living here was achievable."

Verdoorn interned as a software engineer at Pandora Media, an Internet radio company, in the summer of 2017, an opportunity he doesn't think he would have accepted — 1,500 miles from home — sight unseen. "Connections let me have the experience of testing the area out," he says. At the end of the internship, Verdoorn was offered a full-time job with Pandora and, after graduating early from St. Olaf in December 2017, he returned to California permanently to start work as a software engineer for the company. He currently builds algorithms that utilize Pandora's database of millions of hand-analyzed songs to improve a music listener's experience.

"It's truly exciting work using cutting-edge technology and machine learning with something as cool as music," Verdoorn says. He continues to be an advocate for the Connections Program, hosting current Oles at Pandora during the most recent Connections trip to the Bay Area. "I enjoyed seeing myself in them from the other side of the experience," he says.

"What drove me to Connections was that I needed to see what might eventually be my future."

— ELIJAH VERDOORN '18



PHOTOGRAPHED AT PANDORA, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, BY FREDERIC NEEMA/POLARIS

OFTEN THE FIRST PERSON a student sees when entering the Piper Center is another student. Known as peer advisors, these 20 to 25 juniors and seniors help their peers on such concrete tasks as writing résumés and cover letters, searching for an internship or job, and creating a LinkedIn profile. They also are trained in the less straightforward task of helping their peers with career exploration and discernment.

“Our peer advisors are the initial contact for many students,” says Thando Kunene '13, an assistant director in the Piper Center who oversees the Peer Advisor program. “Some students feel a bit intimidated about visiting our office, and so we’ve found that having approachable, accessible peers as the face of the Piper Center is key to making all students comfortable.” To that end, Kunene selects 12 peer advisors each year, from about 80 applicants, who represent a broad range of majors, career interests, hometowns,

and identities. “Representation is important because we want students to be able to see themselves reflected in who works in the Piper Center so that they can envision being comfortable using our resources.”

Peer advisors receive 30 hours of training prior to each academic year and participate in ongoing training and team-building exercises during the school year. They’re available for walk-ins or appointments from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. In 2018–19, they held 1,283 appointments with their peers. In addition to their advising roles, they work as project assistants with a Piper Center staff member, helping to support events, compile data, conduct research, develop resources, and greet visiting employers for the center’s industry events. They’ll often choose to assist a staff member who aligns with their interests, such as the center’s pre-health coach, who partners with peer advisors who are interested in careers in the health professions.

A former peer advisor herself, Kunene has firsthand knowledge of the important role that peer advisors play in the Piper Center’s success in reaching students. “A lot of our services are advertised word-of-mouth, and our positive reputation is upheld through what our peer advisors say about us,” she says. “They’re great ambassadors for our events and programs.”

Peer advisors also benefit from the skills they develop in their work at the Piper Center. Working on the front lines of vocational discernment, they have a leg up when it comes to navigating their own career path. In helping their peers, they have to be adept at articulating complex concepts, writing well, and assessing needs and then matching those needs to the appropriate resources or services. “No matter what field our peer advisors go into, these communication skills will serve them well throughout their careers,” Kunene says.

REFLECTION

Maya Lehmann '18 | Refugee Resettlement Case Manager, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota · Minneapolis

Many of the skills Maya Lehmann uses in her work as a refugee resettlement case manager for Lutheran Social Service, like empathy and working one-on-one with people, she developed as a peer advisor in the Piper Center.

“As a peer advisor, I hoped to be as welcoming as possible,” Lehmann says. “To listen to my peers, to understand their vulnerability in coming to us for help, and to reassure them that they weren’t alone. We’d connect them to resources that helped them meet their goals.”

Lehmann’s studies and interests at St. Olaf offered multiple ways in which her peers could connect with her. She earned a triple major in music, religion, and race and ethnic studies. She also was a four-year member of the St. Olaf Orchestra; co-director of Reaching Our Goals, a mentoring program matching Oles with middle school students; and a member of the Filipino Club.

Lehmann helped the Piper Center’s Thando Kunene plan Ole Social Impact, a networking event connecting students with alumni working in the social justice sector. She also participated in the Social Entrepreneurship Scholars program, interning at Daily Work, a nonprofit that guides and mentors job seekers.

“The Piper Center had an atmosphere of inspired energy and innovation,” she says. “I appreciated that the staff was always open to new ideas and students’ perspectives.”

As a case manager for refugees newly arrived in the United States, Lehmann helps her clients with everything from housing and employment to schooling and health care. “I connect them with resources and help them integrate into the community,” she says. “The best moments for me are when they don’t need me anymore.”

The job, like her peer advisor role, requires Lehmann to be empathetic to other people’s vulnerabilities and struggles. “Obviously, the stressors on refugees are very different from those affecting the students I worked with at the Piper Center, but I see parallels in how I can be welcoming and kind and can help to calm their anxieties,” she says. Eventually, she hopes to parlay her experiences in refugee support into clinical social work focused on clients dealing with mental health issues.



PIPER CENTER PEER ADVISORS

Row one, L-R: Skye Nguyen '21, Ivet Reyes '21, Gretchen Ohlmacher '21, Alana Barnhart '20, Kgomotso Magagula '21, Juan Romo '20, Amy Requa '21, Lauren Markowski '21, Thando Kunene '13. Row two: Mara Tostengard '21, Sydney Wagner '21, Evelyn Aguilar '20, Megan Hussey '20, Joanna Hancock '20, Elle Wilson '20, Maggie Wilson '21. Row three: Henry Henson '20, Arjun Ramachandran '20, Amy Imdieke '21, Soren Schwendeman '20, Lindsey Jansen '21, Charles Hamer '20. Row four: Karim Khalid '20, Logan Luiz '20, Heri Lopez '21, Arden Sasak '22, Ben Christiason '20, Katie Anderson '20, Erik Lepisto '20

PHOTOGRAPHED AT HOLLAND HALL BY TOM ROSTER



“As a peer advisor, I hoped to be as welcoming as possible to my peers, while connecting them to resources that helped them meet their goals.”

— MAYA LEHMANN '18

PHOTOGRAPHED AT LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICE IN MINNEAPOLIS BY TOM ROSTER

ENTREPRENEURIAL, INNOVATIVE, AND CREATIVE students got a boost in May 2018 with the opening of the Makerspace, St. Olaf's new hub for students in search of creative, hands-on solutions to tricky problems. Located on the second floor of Rølvaag Library overlooking the circulation desk, the Makerspace is a collaborative effort between St. Olaf's Digital Scholarship Center (DiSCO), the library, and the Piper Center to help students develop and engage in design-thinking skills.

"The Makerspace is dedicated to the hands-on making of something, whether it's a digital product or a physical product," says Ezra Plemons, instructional technologist for digital media. "It's part of a national movement in makers' culture, like craft beer and handbound books, as pushback against the Internet age when people are missing a physical connection with things."

Students can access mechanical and hand fabrication tools — such as Dremel rotary tools and sewing machines — and modeling materials, robotics equipment, and supplies like fabric, paper, beads, and wire, all of the tactile materials that students need to build a prototype or simply to brainstorm an idea. The DiSCO, located next to the Makerspace, offers the digital resources needed for coding, design, 3-D and large format printing, and audio/video work.

In its first full year, the Makerspace saw an influx of students working on a broad range of projects. Students in an Asian studies course used the space to create maps that visualized villages and geographical movements, and environmental studies students built machines that illustrated the chain reactions of environmental policy. Student entrepreneurs in the Glacier Rescue Project, a group raising awareness about glacial melt and climate change, used the space to create logo patches for refurbished clothing they sold to raise money for environmental organizations.

By the Numbers

RECENT DATA GIVE A GLIMPSE INTO THE PIPER CENTER'S IMPACT.

In 2018-19, **72** percent of students attended an appointment or event at the Piper Center (it's not just seniors, either; attendance is nearly level across class years).

Career coaches and peer advisors fulfilled **6,679** appointments with students during the 2018-19 academic year.

71 percent of students in the Class of 2019 participated in an internship.

89 percent of students in the Class of 2019 participated in an experiential learning opportunity, including an internship, mentored research, field experience, academic civic engagement, and long-term shadowing.

St. Olaf awarded **\$580,000** in funding to support student participation in internships and other career-enhancing experiences.

More than **650** students have participated in a Connections program since its inception in 2011.

in 2018-19, **85** students attended the Quo Vadis sophomore retreat, and **1,011** students have attended since the first retreat in 2011.

96 percent of graduates in the Class of 2018 were working, engaged in a full-time service program, or pursuing further education within nine months of graduation.



The Makerspace is part of St. Olaf's concerted effort to sustain a burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit among students. A generous gift from Steve Moksnes '61 and Billie Slethaug Moksnes '61 to expand resources for entrepreneurial learning included funding supplies for the Makerspace, the hiring of Margaret Bransford as the Piper Center's associate director of entrepreneurship and outreach, and the establishment of the Entrepreneurial Scholars program. That program provides paid internship opportunities for a cohort of 10 students at start-up companies or in other entrepreneurial environments.

Bransford is responsible for overseeing an array of support for students interested in entrepreneurship, from managing the long-running Finstad Entrepreneurial Grant program, which awards funds to students who want to test out an entrepreneurial idea, to coaching students in the Ole Cup, an annual pitch competition that helps students turn business ideas into reality.

She's also tasked with strategizing new ways of encouraging design-thinking and creative problem-solving skills in students by developing co-curricular programs that leverage and complement existing faculty expertise to assist all students in entrepreneurial ventures, regardless of major.

"The liberal arts are very conducive to the entrepreneurial mindset, and Oles in particular seem to have a natural aptitude for the field," Bransford says. "Entrepreneurship can be about more than just scaling a business. It can be about learning how to support yourself in something you're passionate about, for example, as a solopreneur musician, artist, or consultant." She notes the importance of entrepreneurial education amidst a national trend toward a gig economy.

"Regardless of whether students go on to start a venture, St. Olaf is well-positioned to be a leader in teaching them to be flexible, to work under ambiguity, and to be creative problem solvers," she says. 🦄

MARLA HILL HOLT '88 is a freelance writer and regular contributor to *St. Olaf Magazine*.

REFLECTION

Harry Skalski '20 | Northfield, Minnesota · Computer Science Major

Growing up outside Northfield, Minnesota, Harry Skalski often used his family's woodworking and welding shop to make things. So it's no surprise that he's a regular user of St. Olaf's new Makerspace, whether it's for coursework or for personal projects, such as 3-D printing new game pieces to replace missing ones from board games.

"The space is always busy, with students working on class projects or personal stuff, like making clothes or posters," he says. "The 3-D printer is very popular for making prototypes or objects needed for projects."

Skalski took the *Introduction to the Engineering Process* course during Interim 2019 with Physics Professor Alden Adolph. Skalski's small group designed and engineered a cup holder that attaches to a dinner plate, with the hope of eliminating the need for a cafeteria tray, thus reducing food waste and the use of plastics in the making of trays. Their prototype, which they tested in Stav Hall, was printed in the Makerspace.

"Through a small focus group, we discovered that our product needs a few design tweaks to move forward," Skalski says. "The mechanism holding the cup to the plate felt flimsy, and students wanted it to be sleeker and sturdier."

Skalski also has used the Makerspace for a physics course that required students to make a 3-D model of a particular physics problem. "My group considered how fast the comic book character the Flash would have to run to stop Earth from spinning," Skalski says. They created a poster and a 3-D model of Earth with a Flash figurine to illustrate the physics principles used in solving the problem.

"The Makerspace is an important creative outlet for students," Skalski says. "It helps us think through problems and come up with solutions that are innovative and hands-on."

"The Makerspace helps us come up with solutions that are innovative and hands-on."

— HARRY SKALSKI '20



PHOTOGRAPHED OUTSIDE THE MAKERSPACE BY MATT CLARK

THE IMPORTANCE OF Internships

Internships, now seen as an essential first step toward full-time work, allow St. Olaf students to test drive careers while sharpening their skills, defining their interests, and applying classroom knowledge to the real world.

By Marla Hill Holt '88

When Stephen Sponsel '82, P'12, P'09 graduated from St. Olaf with a B.A. degree in art and significant coursework in economics, he thought his career options were limited to advertising and marketing in the for-profit business sector. He had no idea he'd spend his career as an administrator at Mayo Clinic, one of the world's leading health care organizations "with a mission you just can't fail to be engaged with," Sponsel says. He is a director in Mayo's Media Support Services, which manages all aspects of media at the clinic, from video conferencing to print and online media to medical photography and surgical video.

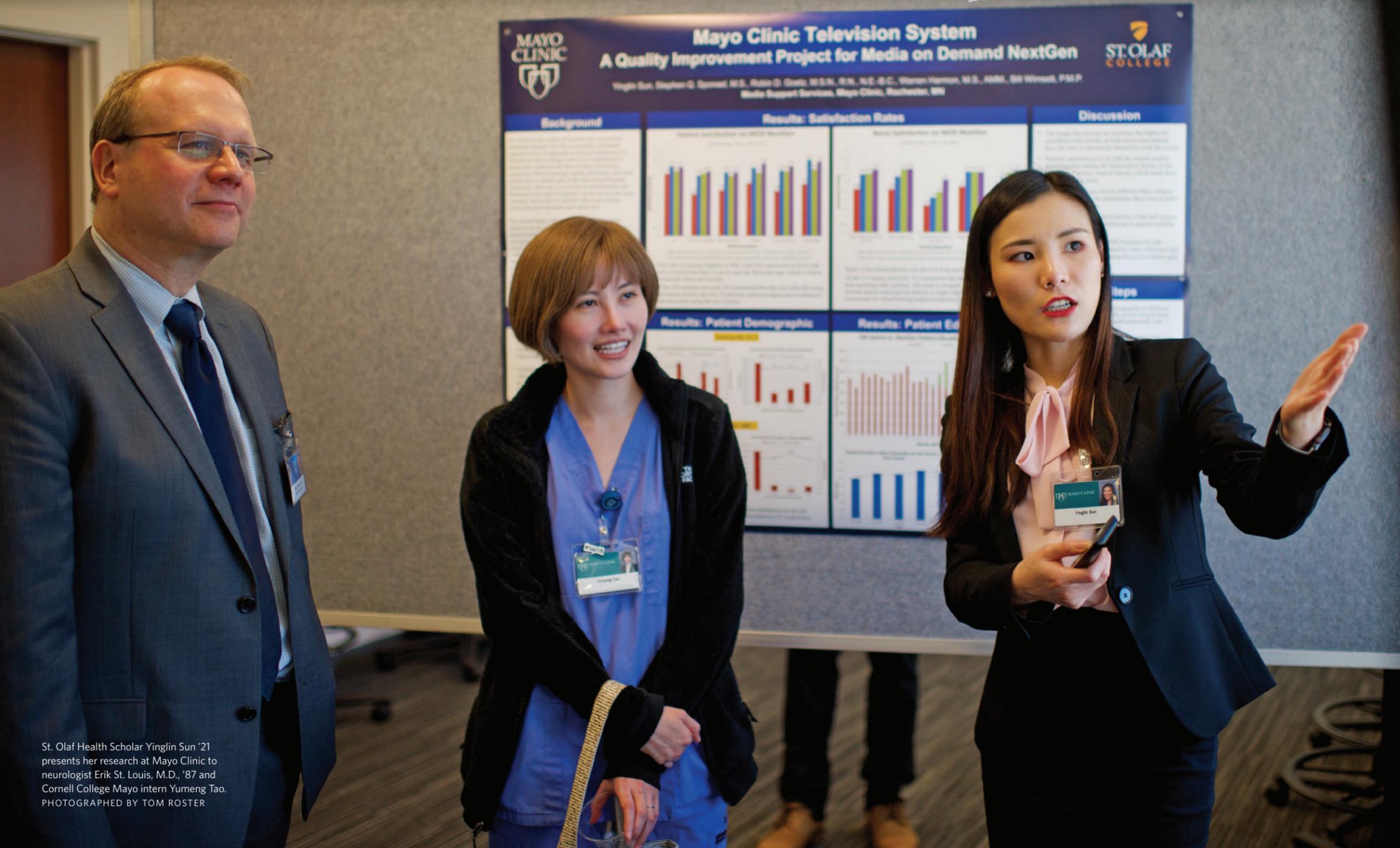
"Everybody knows about doctors and nurses and other medical professionals at Mayo," he says. "But in an organization this large and this specialized, the number of administrative opportunities related to health care is enormous."

It was precisely those hidden administrative positions that Sponsel wanted to illuminate for St. Olaf students when he signed on three years ago to sponsor an intern in the Media Support Services Project, part of St. Olaf's Health Scholars at the Mayo Clinic program. The program supports eight interns each summer in various roles at the clinic.

"Our administrative internship allows students to see the variety of job roles that have great clinical impact," Sponsel says. "They see multiple dimensions of the subject matter they're interested in."

Sponsel created the Media Support Services internship around a long-term development project: building the next generation of Mayo Clinic TV, an interactive TV system that provides patient education, movies, and network programs for patients. Three St. Olaf interns have worked on measuring, reporting, and analyzing patients' and nurses' satisfaction with the new system, including this summer's intern, nursing student Yinglin Sun '21.

"Yinglin is getting a unique perspective on the nursing role from the administrative side," Sponsel says. "The TV system is a non-nursing technology that has a substantial impact on the nurses' day because they're pulled into helping patients use it."



St. Olaf Health Scholar Yinglin Sun '21 presents her research at Mayo Clinic to neurologist Erik St. Louis, M.D., '87 and Cornell College Mayo intern Yumeng Tao. PHOTOGRAPHED BY TOM ROSTER

Yinglin has been a part of helping us figure out how to improve the system's usability so that nurses can go about their more critical duties."

Sponsel's mentorship of St. Olaf interns is just one example of Oles helping current students explore career possibilities through experience in the workplace. This summer, students are interning for companies and organizations across many sectors, from the arts to business to technology.

The investment of alumni, parents, and friends of the college in the Piper Center for Vocation and Career has been instrumental in creating myriad internship opportunities for students, says Kirsten Cahoon '98, senior associate director of employer and alumni relations at the Piper Center for Vocation and Career.

"We love to work with alumni, parents, and other supporters who have a genuine interest in mentoring and helping to develop our students," Cahoon says, noting that such support creates a wider variety of internship opportunities for students to pursue. Each career coach in the Piper Center is an industry specialist who maintains relationships with alumni, parents, and employers to leverage connections for the benefit of students. The center also manages a database of internships recently held by Oles to further assist students in finding the right fit.

For students who may have financial concerns about applying for internships and other pre-professional activities, the center offers up to \$2,000 in funding for unpaid or underpaid internships. St. Olaf's Johnson Family Opportunity Fund helps high-need students cover the cost not only of living expenses connected with internships but also of other expenses, from purchasing workplace attire to flying to an interview to paying application fees for graduate and professional school.

"Students who have completed internships graduate not only with a world-class liberal arts education but also with demonstrable skills and experiences that help propel them forward."

— KIRSTEN CAHOON '98

Support from alumni, parents, and friends of the college has also helped St. Olaf distinguish itself in the internship realm with its summer and Interim cohort programs. These programs — including Rockswold Health Scholars, Health Scholars at the Mayo Clinic, Social Entrepreneurship Scholars, Svoboda Legal Scholars, Mayo Innovation Scholars, St. Olaf Entrepreneurial Scholars, and Norway Innovation Scholars — support small groups of four to ten students interning in specific fields. Students receive a stipend, benefit from shared experiences, and sometimes live together.

Another distinguishing feature of St. Olaf's internship program is its array of experiential opportunities for students interested in careers in the health professions. Along with the two Health Scholars programs, St. Olaf supports a clinical and research



Health Scholar Intern Abubakarr "Sid" (Sidique) Konneh '21 presented "The Safety and Efficacy of Contemporary Induction of Chemoradiation for Locally Advanced Esophageal Cancer" at Mayo Clinic in July. Earlier this year, Konneh won the Ole Cup for his social venture AION, Inc., which seeks to eradicate maternal and infant mortality in Sierra Leone using drones to deliver maternal delivery kits.

internship at the University of Minnesota's Blood and Marrow Transplant Center and a biomedical ethics research internship at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri. Other students intern with Consultative Health and Medicine in the Twin Cities to gain a broader understanding of a collaborative model of health care for senior citizens. In addition, students routinely intern at the Center for Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation in Northfield, Wieber Physical Therapy in Faribault, and TRIA Orthopedic in the Twin Cities. The Piper Center also offers the Pathways to Healthcare internship program in collaboration with the Northfield Retirement Center and Three Links, which provides assisted living, nursing home care, and senior living.

Many of the cohort internship programs offer experiences that wouldn't necessarily be available to students without Ole connections. For example, Svoboda Legal Scholars have performed legal and research assistance in clinics at law schools, in areas such as child advocacy and immigration law, alongside attorneys and law professors across the Upper Midwest.

"It's one of only two programs in the nation that have these sorts of opportunities open to undergraduates," Cahoon says.

The cohort internship model as a holistic experience illustrates a key principle of the Piper Center's approach to career coaching.

"There's greater acknowledgment today that the whole person matters, and with that comes an increased blending of work and life outside of work," Cahoon says. "Students today want to be fulfilled. They want to do something that is highly valued and to be able to see how that work fits into a greater whole." One of the Piper Center's goals, according to Cahoon, is to be dynamic and responsive to the needs of students in defining what type of work best matches their interests and skills and will lead to a meaningful life after college.

An experience like an internship is vital in that it serves many functions, including helping students explore and test out their interests, building their skills and applying their academic learning, making professional contacts who can be mentors and guides, and even securing a full-time job after graduation. It's not uncommon for students to have an internship after both their second and third years at St. Olaf.

"The most important thing is skill building," Cahoon says. "Students who've completed internships graduate not only with a world-class liberal arts education, but also with demonstrable skills and experiences that help propel them forward."

The first goal of St. Olaf's current strategic plan is to enhance student participation in, and experience of, high-impact educational practices, which include experiential learning opportunities like internships, mentored research, and practicums. To meet that goal, St. Olaf is committed to maintaining the percentage of graduating seniors who engage in such practices at 85 percent or higher. According to the results of the First Destination Survey (administered to all graduating seniors), student participation in high-impact educational practices has been rising, from 79.5 percent of the Class of 2016 to 89 percent of the Class of 2019.

"The most interesting thing we uncovered from this year's First Destination Survey is that students' strongest predictor of high confidence about the future was having completed an internship," Cahoon says. "Students of all demographics — first generation, low-income, all majors — said an internship was the co-curricular activity that had the most impact in giving them confidence as they move out into the workplace."

St. Olaf students interned at a variety of companies and organizations this summer. We've highlighted a few on the following pages to give you an idea of the range of internship opportunities Oles pursues.

INTERN SPOTLIGHT Bronwyn Redvers-Lee '20

Music major, Media Studies concentration
Marketing Intern, Smithsonian Folkways
Recordings · Washington, D.C.

Without the financial support of the Piper Center, Bronwyn Redvers-Lee likely would be spending the summer working at the daycare where she'd been employed during the previous two summers. That's because her internship at Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is unpaid and, like many students wanting the experience of an internship but also needing to earn money during school break, she thought it wasn't feasible.

"I'm living at home [in Takoma Park, Maryland], but commuting to Washington, D.C., isn't cheap," Redvers-Lee says. "The funding from the Piper Center is really helpful and generous." The stipend she receives is supporting her work as a marketing intern at the Smithsonian Institution's nonprofit record label, which is a part of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

"I grew up around the music business. My dad started a blues record label in Mississippi in the '90s, and he influenced my music tastes and encouraged me to study music," Redvers-Lee says. In work separate from her internship, Redvers-Lee and her father are reviving his record label by co-producing two unreleased albums of blues music recorded in the late '90s. She is mixing the tracks at Tonal Park studio in Takoma Park and determining what might need to be added, like additional instruments.

"It's another project I wouldn't have time for if I were working at the daycare," she says.

Redvers-Lee also enjoys filming and editing videos, and her work-study job on campus involves recording and livestreaming recitals and concerts. "Media studies is a broad and quickly developing field, and so I've been trying to have outside-the-classroom experiences to dip my toe in and figure out what I enjoy doing, which is what my internship is about," she says.

At Folkways Recordings — which records all genres of music, from folk to jazz to hip hop — Redvers-Lee has been editing liner notes of re-released albums, as well as promoting new releases in the press and uploading them to streaming platforms. "Working with streaming is new to me as someone who's creating content, not just listening to it," she says. "I'm curating playlists that say something about Folkways' mission and contemporary life."

The internship has been the perfect blend of her interests in music and media studies, Redvers-Lee says, enabling her to apply knowledge from courses in musicology, arts management, and St. Olaf's American Conversations program, such as understanding the role music played during the civil rights movement. She's also using some of the same skills she deploys in her work-study job.

"I want to go into something in media studies that's informed by music, and this internship is helping me learn how the two are connected," she says. "I've observed all aspects of the label, from producing and editing to publicity to digital platforms. It's given me the confidence to apply for jobs across a broad spectrum."



PHOTOGRAPHED AT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS, WASHINGTON, D.C., BY ERIN SCOTT/POLARIS

INTERN SPOTLIGHT

Sydney Wagner '21 | Economics major
Matt Whear '20 | Mathematics major,
Statistics and Management Studies concentrations
Venture Capital Analyst Interns, Capita3
Minneapolis, Minnesota

When looking for an internship that would help them learn the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the venture capital space, Sydney Wagner and Matt Whear were both drawn to Capita3. It is a small, early-stage venture capital fund that invests in women-led startups in the health care sector, particularly in the Midwest, an area that doesn't see a lot of venture capital investment. The company supports women innovators in building their companies and hosts programs that help women grow their skills in leadership.

"There's a huge inequity between the amount of funding that women as opposed to men receive, and Capita3 is trying to bridge that gap," Wagner says. "What really stood out to me is that Capita3 isn't just giving money to women entrepreneurs. They're also focused on developing women as leaders. I find that mission really inspiring."

While Whear and Wagner are both venture capital analyst interns, each is performing different duties. Wagner has primarily been researching industry and sector trends in the health care space. "I'm looking at where venture capital firms are investing their money and asking questions like 'Does a women's health care company have to have an app to be competitive?'" she says.

Whear has been studying deal syndication, researching other VC firms with similar

missions to Capita3 that might become investment partners. He has been working on getting Capita3's name in front of accelerators and incubators, as well as conducting some fund modeling. "I've been helping make a tool that models different fund allocation scenarios and have also created equity models for various investment opportunities," he says.

Both students assist the firm with its "deal flow," which helps venture capitalists track available investment opportunities so that they can find the most attractive ones, both in terms of risk and potential. The interns also had the opportunity to sit in on pitch meetings, listening to entrepreneurs and asking them questions about such things as marketing strategies and how they hope to outcompete other businesses.

"That was a great experience, and not an opportunity that most interns get," Whear says.

As members of the cohort of St. Olaf's Entrepreneurial Scholars program, Whear and Wagner benefit from being in a group of 10 students interning at startups and entrepreneurial ventures. Students in the program — established by a generous gift from Steve Moksnes '61 and Billie Slethaug Moksnes '61 to expand resources for entrepreneurial learning — receive funding from the Piper Center. They gather twice over the summer with the center's Kirsten Cahoon, senior associate director of employer and alumni relations, and Margaret Bransford, associate director of entrepreneurship, to discuss their experiences and learn from each other's successes and challenges.

Wagner has found that the skills she has developed in St. Olaf's liberal arts environment have come in handy at Capita3. "While my accounting classes help with understanding cash flow and the different aspects of a financial statement, it's the strong writing skills and critical and analytical thinking that I've developed at St. Olaf that have been most helpful," she says, noting that Oles are comfortable wearing many different hats.

Whear says the work he did at Capita3 — combined with a previous internship at Traveler's Insurance — has broadened his experience in combining his interests in math, statistics, and management, allowing him to apply what he has learned in the classroom in a hands-on setting.

"There's so much to learn in an internship, from the real-world experience to figuring out if that particular work is really what you want to pursue," says Whear. "This internship at Capita3 has been a good experience of mixing my interest in overall business with the more analytical side of finance."

INTERN SPOTLIGHT

Yinglin Sun '21 | Women and Gender Studies
and Nursing majors, Family Studies concentration
Research Intern, Mayo Clinic Media Support
Services · Rochester, Minnesota

Mayo Clinic recently moved away from the traditional cable-based TV system in each patient's room to a Netflix-like streaming service called Mayo Clinic TV (MCTV), which offers on-demand shows and movies, educational videos, and relaxation/music content. The change created a long-term project for the clinic's Media Support Services, which is evaluating the effectiveness of the streaming platform in satisfying patients' entertainment and educational needs.

Yinglin Su had a hand in helping out with the project this summer as a research intern. The internship opened her eyes to how something as seemingly simple as TV viewing can affect patient outcomes.

"Mayo's television system plays a significant role in a patient's experience," Sun says. "The entertainment content can distract patients from pain, boredom, and worry, and provide some normalcy to their routine, which has been disrupted by admission to the hospital. The education content empowers patients to participate in their care, which leads to significantly better health outcomes."

As a member of the clinic's Media Support Services team, Sun helped research ways to improve MCTV to make it more user-friendly, particularly for older patients. She compiled and analyzed the results of nursing and patient satisfaction surveys and then presented her findings to the project's executive team. The work required strong communication skills, as Sun found herself working with a variety of Mayo constituents, from patients and nursing managers to staff members in the Office of Patient Education.

Though an internship in media support services might seem like an odd match for a nursing student, Sun says that's not the case.

"At St. Olaf, we're taught to look into the social, environmental, and mental factors that contribute to a patient's health. We're taught to be analysts, to ease patients' concerns and illnesses in ways beyond pharmaceutical treatments," she says. "I think a patient's experience is just as important as getting their illness treated, and oftentimes a comfortable hospital environment can improve both the patient's physical and mental health. This was why I chose this specific project and why I chose nursing — to build personal connections with my patients and critically address their needs to provide them quality holistic care."



PHOTOGRAPHED AT MAYO CLINIC BY TOM ROSTER

Sun was mentored at Mayo Clinic by Stephen Sponsel '82, P'12, P'09, a director in Media Support Services. She is part of St. Olaf's alumni-supported Health Scholars at the Mayo Clinic program, a cohort of eight interns who receive stipends from the college and live together in Rochester, Minnesota, while pursuing internships at Mayo.

Sun plans to become a public health nurse, working to eliminate health disparities by addressing the linguistic and cultural barriers that face many minority communities. She says interning at Mayo helped her realize that public health implies solving problems for all kinds of patients.

"Improving the MCTV system's usability required asking questions like 'How do we improve it to meet the needs of hearing impaired patients?' 'How could the TV remote be modified to reduce bacteria harboring in the cracks?' These are public health concerns, and I am learning to think in multiple dimensions to ensure patient satisfaction. The skills I've learned here will certainly be applicable as a public health nurse." 🦋

MARLA HILL HOLT '88 is a regular contributor to *St. Olaf Magazine*.

PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE MINNEAPOLIS
GRAIN EXCHANGE BY TOM ROSTER



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