Main Street Initiative Steering Committee
Final Report of Programming Options
April 26, 2011

The Main Street Initiative Steering Committee is pleased to present its final report, the first step in the ambitious, ongoing Main Street Initiative. The ideas listed here are offered up for the consideration of the St. Olaf Community; the Steering Committee is not formally recommending the implementation of every idea that appears in this report. Rather, it is the hope of the committee that discussion of these potential initiatives among all members of the St. Olaf community, both on-campus and off-campus, will help clarify priorities for implementation and also generate ideas and proposals beyond those presented here. The principal purpose of this report is to help define broad charges for those who will be responsible for eventual implementation of specific ideas.

The project descriptions in this report are quite short, conveying in summary fashion the breadth of potential programming proposals. The ordering of proposals within each section is not meant to convey any sense of priority or relative importance. Background and reference information on these potential projects can be found in a companion document available through the Main Street Initiative section of the President’s home page: http://www.stolaf.edu/president/mainstreet. This Resources and Reference document allows those with special interest in particular proposals to delve into supporting materials in more detail.

Main Street initiative goal

The overarching goal of the Main Street Initiative is to help students develop and articulate a realistic, achievable plan for their vocation and career, a plan that grows from students’ discernment of their gifts and talents, that has clear initial steps, and that includes strategies for continued assessment and development.

Intended outcomes for student learning and development

1. **Self-awareness:** “I can name my skills and provide evidence that I have them.”
   Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate and document effectively their intellectual and personal proficiencies as liberally-educated adults.

2. **Alignment-awareness:** “I understand how my skills are useful.”
   Students will demonstrate understanding of the relevance of their liberal education proficiencies to professional work and other life roles.

3. **Opportunity-awareness:** “I know where and how my skills could be used.”
   Students will demonstrate knowledge of a wide range of post-graduation opportunities that would align with and draw on their capabilities as liberally educated students and help them advance their vocational vision.

4. **Vocational vision:** “I know where I want to go and why.”
   Students will demonstrate an explicit and articulate longer-term vision of a life of worth and service that integrates self-awareness and opportunity-awareness with an understanding of societal needs.
5. **Informed planning**: “I have a plan for getting there.”

Students will prepare an informed, realistic, and flexible plan for the first few years after graduation that advances their vocational vision.

**Main Street Initiative program options**

The options summarized below for achieving the program goal and outcomes embrace three different domains of institutional life:

1. **Curriculum and pedagogy**;

2. **Co-curricular programs and services**, provided principally by St. Olaf faculty and staff; and

3. **Community connections**, engaging alumni, parents, employers, and other members of the community beyond St. Olaf.

Some options involve enhancing or expanding existing programs, services, or activities, while others involve initiating something new. Within each category of options, initiatives that would be required of, or available to, all students are listed first, and initiatives with a narrower target audience are listed second.

**I. Curriculum and pedagogy**

**A. Existing program enhancements**

1. **Enhance reflection across courses and programs**. Academic courses, and department/program activities designed for majors or concentrators, often foster reflection on vocation. Ask departments and programs what they do and/or could do to deliberately incorporate and encourage reflection in their work with and for our students.

2. **Build linkages between CURI and CEL**. In order to support CURI in its efforts to brand itself and establish itself as the undergraduate research hub for the College, staff time and financial resources are required. A CURI/CEL collaboration will include everything from student work devoted to web-space and content development to identifying scholarship dollars which could support students in their individual or collective efforts to pursue research-related internships.

3. **Enhance reflection in off-campus programs**. Incorporate a more formalized requirement that students maintain a journal of guided reflection in their time away. In addition, require a written reflection for consideration within first month of return to campus.

4. **Introduce reflection on “big questions” into First Year Writing**. Incorporate an assignment into the current First Year Writing requirement asking students to consider first big questions (i.e., who am I, why am I here, what do I value, what are my aims in this place).

5. **Continue and amplify reflection on “big questions” in Ethical Issues courses**. The current EIN academic requirement also provides an opportunity for more formal consideration of big questions/reflection as students consider and arrive at the end of their time at St. Olaf College.

6. **Provide more discipline-specific mini-internship/academic civic engagement courses**. Encourage more departments to offer courses similar to Community Applications in Psychology (Interim 2011) or other capstone courses (Social Work, Environmental Studies,
etc.) that include experiential learning and vocational/career exploration in the context of the discipline.

B. New initiatives

1. **Require all students to complete a Curriculum-to-Career academic concentration.** Designed to help students link their liberal arts education with their career goals, this four-credit concentration would include three academic courses; an internship, research project, or summer job; a pre-experience and post-experience course; and a public presentation.

2. **Institute internship pre- and post-seminars.** A seminar with 0.25 academic credit would cover everything from professionalism in the workplace and education about work structures and organizational behavior to personal reflection on vocational goals.

3. **Institute a new Civic Fellows/Civic Scholars/Social Ventures summer internship program with academic credit.** Students would arrange summer public interest, non-profit, or social ventures internships anywhere in the world, receive a stipend and orientation, engage in online reflection, and prepare a final paper/presentation. Faculty provide academic supervision; alumni may be involved as field supervisors or mentors.

4. **Initiate a new Sophomore Interim Seminar.** In selected interdisciplinary interim seminars, students will 1) gain a heightened understanding of the rich, inclusive notion of vocation and the challenges they face in developing their own sense of meaning and purpose in life, and 2) become equipped with tools/strategies and knowledge of available resources to support them in their exploration of vocation throughout their St. Olaf experience and beyond. The seminar will include (1) experiential learning opportunities, (2) an on-line portfolio, and (3) mentoring involving alumni, parents, community partners, and on-campus mentors.

II. Co-curricular programs and services

A. Existing program enhancements

1. **Enhance reflection across the co-curriculum.** Ask existing co-curricular programs what they do and/or could do to deliberately incorporate and encourage reflection on vocation and the liberal arts in their ongoing work with and for our students.

2. **Provide transportation for internships, volunteering, community-based work study, etc.** Many students find that lack of reliable and flexible transportation is a barrier to pursuing internship opportunities, especially those in Faribault, Owatonna, Rochester, and the Twin Cities.

3. **Enhance student work positions as opportunities for career exploration.** Many on-campus student work positions have the potential to provide students with professional experience that endows them with skills and perspectives that can be extremely important in their lives after college. By working with supervisors and the student work programs, we can create more of these opportunities and discover practices that enhance the opportunities that already exist.

4. **Increase opportunities for acquisition of practical life skills.** Provide workshops and other non-credit bearing activities to help students with practical life skills such as managing bank accounts; living within one's means; the importance of saving for emergencies, retirement, and big ticket purchases; understanding credit and debit cards; learning the types and
characteristics of consumer loans; appreciating the nature and importance of workplace etiquette; and professional behavior in academic, business, and civic venues.

5. **Focus Week One for first-years.** Integrate faculty-guided reflection on the purpose of a liberal arts education into the Week One experience; this might include a keynote address to all students, faculty/staff/alumni visits to residence halls for conversation, and/or incorporation of the topic into the “first class.”

6. **Enhance and extend the Sophomore Leadership Development and Vocational Exploration program.** The existing Sophomore Leadership Institute could be integrated with the St. Olaf Community Scholars program to create a more robust leadership program that could be extended to include first-years as well as sophomores. The program could include some or all of the following: regular community service, vocational exploration and reflection, alumni connections, job shadowing/externships, retreat(s), and other leadership development activities.

7. **Provide more support for graduate/professional school applications and scholarships.** Expand and enhance student applications to graduate and professional schools, and help more students to secure post-graduate scholarships and fellowships available in all fields.

B. **New initiatives**

1. **Require all students to maintain an on-line Academic Activities Journal.** Students would use this integrative journal to (1) identify courses, co-curricular experiences, employment experiences, and other activities that help them develop the essential learning outcomes of a college education, such as critical thinking, team work, leadership, effective writing, quantitative literacy, problem solving, cultural sensitivity, and oral communication; and (2) articulate term-by-term goals for both the next semester and longer term objectives. The journal would inform students’ discussions with their faculty advisors and advisors in other offices (CEL, IOS, etc.), course selection, applications for off-campus study, applications for graduate school or employment, and life planning.

2. **Create more formal faculty connection to residence halls and honor houses.** Several examples of academic/residential programs on various campuses provide useful models.

3. **Develop online Career Planning modules for faculty as well as student use.** An on-line program that walks students through a process of career exploration, tailored to St. Olaf resources, opportunities and culture, the modules would include information for faculty to assist them with advising in a career or vocational context, and materials for use in courses.

4. **Offer a Charting Your Career Path colloquium.** This six-session non-credit colloquium would focus on self-exploration, vocational discernment, and goal setting, helping students articulate their skills, values, interest, personality, and decision-making style.

5. **Institute an Internship Boot Camp.** This half-day (weekend) intensive workshop would focus on practical strategies in searching and applying for internships. At the workshop, which would be held in a computer lab, students would construct a cover letter or letter of inquiry and tailor their resumes to specific opportunities, companies, and/or organizations.

6. **Initiate “Exploration Events” for all majors.** Provide funds to enable exploration programs for all majors modeled on the “Economic Summit” for economics majors and the “Making it
in the Arts” program for fine and performing arts majors. These gatherings would bring parents and alumni to campus to talk about their careers and how to get into them.

7. Develop Week One experiences for sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The Week One activities for each class year will be part of an ongoing developmentally-based series in which students will have an opportunity to grow in their awareness of available resources to explore vocational goals and develop career skills in each of their years at St. Olaf.

8. Institute a sophomore “Quo Vadis” retreat. The purpose of the retreat is reflection on the first semesters of college and consideration of what will come next, both for the remaining semesters of college and for the first few years after college.

9. Publish a Senior Survival Guide. Provide a resource booklet to every senior with brief information on career and vocational exploration, grad school application preparation and searching, job and internship searching, post-graduate service opportunities, resumes, cover letters, interviewing, networking, applying to abroad opportunities, and how to stay involved with the College as alumnæ.

10. Establish a CEL Senior Appointment program. One-on-one appointments of a CEL professional staff member with each senior student would be scheduled at the beginning of fall semester. Discussion would include students’ thoughts/ideas/plans for after graduation, brief reflection on what they have done in the past and where they are in preparing for the future, and an overview of CEL services/resources/programs.

III. Community connections

A. Existing program enhancements

1. Strengthen on-line connections with alumni. Expand and enhance the Alumni Directory, including upgraded search tools, training for students in using the directory effectively, and incorporation of features recommended by current students and alumni. In addition, expand and enhance St. Olaf’s presence in social media, and our capacity for electronic connection with alumni via Skype and other video-conferencing services.

2. Make vocation and career services available to alumni. Offer these services immediately to recent graduates (previous four class years), and provide them to all alumni when resources to support this are available.

B. New initiatives

1. Develop and pilot a Mentor Network for Oles. Alumni and parents of current and former St. Olaf students will be recruited to serve as volunteer mentors of current students, who will participate in the program on a voluntary basis. Interacting in person or electronically, the mentor and mentee will engage in reflection, vocational discernment, career exploration and life planning. “Early mentoring” will be provided during the sophomore year, possibly as a component of the interim sophomore seminar proposed above, and focus on more general life goals and visioning. “Later mentoring” with a stronger focus on career development will be provided during the junior and senior years.

2. Cultivate Intentional Relationships with Top Employers. Identify those companies, agencies and groups that are top employers of St. Olaf graduates and “smother” them with attention. Bring our students and graduates to them, bring them to campus for
special events, and encourage them to send their recruiters to on-campus job fairs and similar undertakings.

3. **Create an external advisory board for the CEL.** The worlds of graduate and professional school, non-profit and for-profit corporations, and government agencies are changing very quickly and dramatically. The CEL is a primary gateway to all of them. An advisory board consisting of committed professionals from all these areas, and perhaps others, will support the CEL’s mission in ways that cannot be achieved using purely internal expertise.

4. **Initiate on-line Networking Guilds.** Guilds convene students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the College around common professional interests on the professional networking platform called LinkedIn. Alumni and other “masters” offer to student “apprentices” on-line and in-person mentoring, job-search or grad school application tips, externship and internship opportunities in their organizations, and connections to professional networks and entry-level positions.

5. **Create “centers of gravity” with a significant St. Olaf presence in defined geographic areas.** A “center of gravity” would be defined by area-specific career development and job procurement resources; robust relationships with local businesses, organizations, graduate schools, agencies, etc.; internship, externship, and job-shadowing opportunities (including housing); a variety of alumni events; and alumni support for new graduates moving into the area.

6. **Launch coordinated externship programs in geographic “centers of gravity.”** Groups of students would participate in five-day externships during Fall/Winter/Spring Break in cities with a large alumni population. Supported by preparatory academic seminars and reflection sessions, they shadow alumni in their preferred area of study, participate in community service, and network with alumni living in the area.

7. **Establish a ShadOle sophomores externship program with alumni professionals.** These externships are one or two-day shadowing experiences—typically offered over Fall Break, Interim Break, and Spring Break—that give sophomores exposure to a particular career field, valuable contact with Ole alums, and a foundation for a subsequent internship. Activities may include observing a professional or participating in a specific project.

8. **Create a Student Ambassadors Engagement program.** Students would be trained to interview key alumni with the goal of fostering engagement to support Main Street Initiative programs, particularly the Centers of Gravity.

9. **Establish a program of Alumni Angel Investors.** Students pitch their ideas to a team of alumni investors who determine which proposal(s) they would like to fund. Alumni then serve as advisors to the student entrepreneurs.

10. **Create and disseminate an annual Alumni Honor Roll.** The Honor Roll would recognize all contributions that alumni make to St. Olaf and its students, including monetary gifts and volunteering in CEL programs, alumni programs, department programs, classroom activities, and other on- and off-campus initiatives. It would be disseminated both in print and electronically.
Information, infrastructure, and resources

Depending on the mix of options the College decides to pursue, implementation of Main Street Initiative programs may require the College to:

1. Strengthen and broaden student advising. Review, evaluate, and enhance all existing St. Olaf advising programs, including not only academic advising provided by faculty, but other advising relationships in the Office of the Registrar, the Center for Experiential Learning, the Academic Support Center, Student Life, and other offices. In addition, explore potential new roles for alumni and parents, strengthen professional development for all campus advisors, and undertake ongoing evaluation of advising effectiveness.

2. Revise our Survey of Recent Graduates. Review exemplar surveys conducted by peer institutions and address the outcomes established for Main Street Initiative programming.

3. Establish an organizational Link between the Center for Experiential Learning and the Advancement Office. Examine how other colleges and universities create organizational links to support their vocation and career programming, and consider what might work at St. Olaf.

4. Create faculty and staff development programs to support participation in Main Street Initiative programs. Provide funds to support the programs and reward participation.

5. Provide for new faculty/staff FTE as needed. Resources may be needed for new staff and new offices.

Research and resources consulted

The Main Street Initiative Steering Committee considered information and evidence drawn from a wide variety of sources (see Appendix) in developing options for further consideration, including:

1. An environmental scan of current programs, services, and activities already available to St. Olaf students;

2. Existing assessment evidence related to Main Street goals and intended outcomes;

3. New survey research conducted by sociology/anthropology research methods students; and

4. Peer institutions with exemplary programs and practices.

Respectfully submitted,

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