



Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal

Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative Proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

June 1, 2020

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor

Date

David R. Anderson, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

St. Olaf College

Name of Institution

Northfield, MN

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative Proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words. The institution may choose to submit a brief implementation plan or supplemental charts or graphs as appendices to the template. The Quality Initiative Proposal will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5. It is due no later than June 1 of Year 7.

Submit the proposal as a PDF file to hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiative" from the list of submission options to ensure the institution's materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. Submission file names should utilize the following format: QIProposal[InstitutionName][State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

Equity and Inclusion at St. Olaf College: Assessing, Enhancing, and Sustaining the Vision

Since its founding as a coeducational school for Norwegian immigrants, St. Olaf College has valued equity and inclusion within and beyond the campus community. In the past decade, the college has lifted up its commitment to those values in a variety of key initiatives, such as its strategic planning process, its 2016 update to the college mission statement, and several initiatives centered on various aspects of equity and inclusion. St. Olaf's student body has urged the college forward on this journey and has reminded us of the amount of work we have ahead if we are to be more fully the community we claim to be. During spring 2017, a campus-wide protest and sit-in in response to a series of racist incidents disrupted spring academic routines on campus. At the protest, students shared their outrage, fears, anger and frustration, illuminating experiences of individual and institutional racism at St. Olaf. Many students, faculty and staff on our campus expressed feeling unwelcome - a situation that urgently needed to be remedied. A faculty-led Task Force on Institutional Racism was formed that summer, and upon its recommendation a larger Working Group on Equity and Inclusion was convened that fall. On May 1, 2018 the Working Group submitted its final report to the college leadership and Board of Regents. Among its many recommendations was the creation of a standing Council on Equity and Inclusion, to develop and oversee the implementation of a comprehensive equity and inclusion plan for the entirety of the college community, and to sustain the work surrounding these initiatives.

On August 27, 2018, Board of Regents Chair Larry Stranghoener and President David Anderson established the Council on Equity and Inclusion. They charged the Council to assist in the development and monitoring of the college's strategic equity and inclusion plans and metrics; advise college leadership on the implementation of the recommendations in the report of the Working Group on Equity and Inclusion connect disparate efforts across campus; and serve as a resource for academic and administrative departments. Led by the Provost and Dean of the College, the Council includes two faculty members, two staff, two students, one alum, and one additional member of the President's Leadership Team. This group quickly established a set of [guiding principles and a pledge to the community](#), as well as a [Vision for Equity and Inclusion at St. Olaf](#). By fall 2019, it had established its inaugural plan, and had begun gathering written information from each division of the college describing the action steps each office or department would take in implementing the plan.

In order to determine whether and where the college is making progress and where we face ongoing challenges, the Council set as the fifth and final goal of the plan, "Hold ourselves accountable for the success of the plan through assessment, reporting, action, and celebration." To accomplish this, we need to clearly define measurable outcomes, assess progress towards these goals, communicate the status of the goals, and take appropriate action for correction or continuation of initiatives that are working towards these goals. This fifth goal of our Equity and Inclusion plan is the focus of our Quality Initiative. We aim to "achieve a key milestone" in our equity and inclusion work by:

- Fully implementing Goal 5 from the [2019 Plan for Equity and Inclusion at St. Olaf](#), and
- Developing a plan for an infrastructure to sustain the accountability component of the 2019 plan, moving toward a more equitable and inclusive St. Olaf, incorporating both newer initiatives and existing/ongoing work.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

The College's [Mission in Practice](#) states that being an inclusive community "...is possible only when people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ideas come together in a spirit of mutual respect and inclusion. [That]...impels us to advance the ideal of a community where people of all backgrounds and identities belong." The *Mission in Practice* statement continues that, as an institution nourished by Lutheran tradition, we are called to live in community with all people. Further, the preamble to the [October 2019 update to the college's Strategic Plan](#) states we will "sustain our practices in publicly documenting the outcomes of our current students and recent graduates." These two principles (inclusive community and documentation of outcomes), together with the *Vision for Equity and Inclusion* and *Plan for Equity and Inclusion* (E&I) at St. Olaf, compel us to define, assess, document, refine, and sustain desired outcomes for the E&I Vision. These efforts will be significant, not only for the college as a whole, but also for a number of newer initiatives and grant-funded projects that support E&I, such as:

- Founded in 2015, the [Institute for Freedom and Community](#) educates students with a passion for public affairs and a commitment to free inquiry and the search for truth. Exploring diverse ideas about politics, markets, and society, The Institute seeks to challenge presuppositions, question easy answers, and foster constructive dialogue
- Launched in 2018, [To Include is To Excel](#) is a four-year initiative with funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to stimulate faculty development and support curricular transformation to serve new generations of students. The project reflects St. Olaf's conviction that inclusion, equity and excellence are inextricably intertwined. Work on this grant helped inform *OLE Core*, the new general education curriculum approved by the faculty in 2019 with updated and expanded attention to learning outcomes related to equity and inclusion.
- Founded in Spring 2019, the [Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion](#) fosters a welcoming and inclusive community for students at St. Olaf by providing resources and programs that support student success, engagement, leadership and intercultural understanding. This Center brought together and revitalized ongoing support the college has had for multicultural and international students for decades, since the Cultural Union for Black Expression (CUBE) formed on campus over 50 years ago, and a multicultural center was established in the 1970's.
- Founded in Fall 2019, and rooted in Lutheran tradition while engaging all traditions, the [Lutheran Center for Faith, Values and Community](#) brings together people of different faiths and worldviews to enrich spiritual inquiry, foster love of neighbor, and deepen a sense of vocation in all.

Each of these initiatives has its own mission, vision, and goals, but all include elements of equity and inclusion in their core purposes. Sustaining the E&I Vision will require intentionally tying these newer initiatives to existing and ongoing work on the strategic plan goals, the work of the [TRIO programs](#), and many other efforts on campus, all within the context of current and projected demographic and cultural change at St. Olaf and in higher education more generally. Doing so is also consistent with the component of the charge to the Council on Equity and Inclusion to "connect disparate efforts across campus." Also, several of these new initiatives are still discerning metrics to measure progress towards their goals, so to the extent we have some common outcomes and metrics across different programs and initiatives, we can advance the work of those programs and initiatives as well.

The 2018 final report of the Working Group on Equity and Inclusion pointed to the compartmentalized nature of many of the St. Olaf programs and initiatives as a limiting factor in the programs' effectiveness. Appendix C of the Working Group's report listed over two dozen efforts at St. Olaf to improve equity and inclusion, even before the two newest Centers - the Taylor Center and the Lutheran Center - were launched. The Council's work to gather action steps from offices and programs has yielded dozens more. Finding a way to assess the impact, success, and sustainability of these efforts is both salient and significant for the institution, as it continuously considers its resource allocation. The community overall benefits from transparency, and from the knowledge that we're honestly trying to assess our progress and act on what we learn. Developing a plan for an infrastructure to build communication and synergies among these programs will not only strengthen these efforts, but also provide a more equitable and inclusive community for learning and working at St. Olaf.

3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

Our Quality Initiative is intended to move the institution closer to realizing the vision set forth by our Equity and Inclusion Council, that St. Olaf will be an inclusive community in which all can thrive, find meaningful belonging, be neighbor to all, and work toward a common good. Such a community is characterized by:

- A learning, residential and working environment in which all individuals are included, respected, valued and supported, and are fully able to achieve and contribute;
- A campus community that embraces the diversity of perspectives, faiths, political outlooks, identities and backgrounds essential to rigorous learning and the development of the whole person;
- A commitment to justice and equity of opportunity so that St. Olaf students and faculty and staff members are empowered to be their complete and authentic selves;
- Removal of barriers to education, work, and engagement; and
- A principle of accountability, knowing that we can only make an inclusive and equitable community through common purpose and shared action.

This Quality Initiative will ensure the institution takes a major step forward in measuring community climate, has begun to take action on identified issues, and has a plan in place for sustaining this inclusive community. That this will have a positive impact on academic quality at St. Olaf is at the core of the *To Include is to Excel* grant. In the grant proposal, the first articulated goal was to develop and build upon a deep knowledge of *all of our students'* learning experiences and outcomes. Simply acknowledging that our demographics are changing is not enough to enhance the quality of learning for all students; we need to apply what we learn about the student learning experience and innovate with curriculum reform at the program level. In turn, these curricular and pedagogical changes will be monitored for quality of outcomes for all students. In the words of Danielle Allen, professor of Government at Harvard, while "diversity may be a fact in a given institution . . . positive outcomes don't flow automatically from the fact of diversity itself." There are "interactional habits that are necessary to leverage diversity so as to achieve excellence, equity and inclusion" (from "Toward a Connected Society" in *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, p. 87). By embedding these "interactional habits" into our standard ways of thinking and doing, utilizing the assessment cycle and holding ourselves accountable, we intend to improve academic quality for all students.

Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

The purpose of this Quality Initiative is to support the work of the Council on Equity and Inclusion to document and share the progress of the plans, and to reinforce the institutional framework and sustainability of the vision. Part of the charge to the Council is “to assist in the development and monitoring of the College’s strategic equity and inclusion plans and metrics.” As noted above in item 1, this Initiative will focus on Goal 5 of the Council’s plan, to hold ourselves accountable for the success of the plan through assessment, reporting, action, and celebration. More specifically, this Quality Initiative will:

- Inventory existing and anticipated practices, actions, and initiatives across campus that support equity and inclusion
- Establish broad metrics for monitoring campus climate, student success, and outcomes for all community populations
- Share these regularly-updated metrics with the community
- Connect assessment of particular actions and initiatives with strategies for continuing improvement or sustaining success
- Inform decisions to sustain appropriate practices and innovations, particularly those initiated with grant-funding

The work of this Initiative will ensure that the institution is providing the leadership, commitment, and resources required to build and sustain its vision of a community where all can thrive and find meaningful belonging, as part of a diverse and beloved community.

5. Select up to three main topics that will be addressed by the initiative.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Retention |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assessment | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Learning Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence and Completion | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Success |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching/Pedagogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Underserved Populations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Evaluation | <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First-Year Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality Improvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Education | | |

6. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments and determine what has been accomplished.

The *2019 Plan for Equity and Inclusion at St. Olaf* states that the Council on Equity and Inclusion will “review and revise the plan annually.” The first of those annual reviews will occur in Fall 2020 (see response in item 10 below). The Quality Initiative project oversight team (see response in item 8 below) will assess that review, with a particular focus on the goals of this Initiative, as stated in item 4 above. As the Council is affirming and revising its plan, this oversight team will work with the implementation team (see response in item 8 below) to determine what steps in particular will need to be taken to make adjustments to ensure progress. The oversight team will check in quarterly with the Council until the following E&I annual report, in fall 2021. In preparation for writing the final Quality Initiative report in spring 2022, the oversight team will scale its check-ins as needed for determining progress and what has been accomplished.

Evidence of progress will include:

- Regularly gathering, reviewing, and evaluating information from the community about the campus climate, through surveys and embedding information about equity and inclusion into data collection we already do, such as through course evaluations, faculty reviews, new employee application and interview questions.
- Routinely connecting assessment of actions and initiatives with strategies for continuing improvement or sustaining success, in particular for initiatives and strategies that impact diverse or under-represented populations. This will include embedding issues of equity and inclusion into all aspects of community life, including learning, student life and worship, community organizations and events, and work at St. Olaf, through assessments, evaluations, program reviews, and regular appraisals of policies and procedures.
- Regularly reporting to the college community on progress toward achieving the goals of the *Plan for Equity and Inclusion*, at a minimum through an Equity & Inclusion Dashboard website and annual report to the community.
- Routine distribution of data and information that incorporates subgroup distinctions and analysis, when appropriate.
- Celebrating the contributions of alumni, faculty, staff, and students who enhance equity and inclusion at the college, through events, publications, and other forms of public recognition.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

7. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

The work on equity and inclusion at the college overall has strong support from senior leadership and the rest of the college community. Both the Working Group on E&I and the Council on E&I were established by the Board of Regents and the President’s Leadership Team (PLT). The Working Group was co-chaired by two Regents and the Council is headed by the Provost and Dean of the College. Both teams’ members include a diverse group of faculty, staff, students and alumni from a broad cross-section of the college. Input into both the final report from the Working Group and now the ongoing work of the Council has been sought through various channels, such as focus groups, surveys, electronic “suggestions boxes,” and informal “office hours” held by members of the Council. Plan implementation “tactics” have been collected from all units of the college.

Data-informed decision making has long enjoyed strong support at St. Olaf. The Board and PLT seek data and information about any topic being explored, and routinely use data reports and analyses from staff for ongoing decision-making. For example, the Academic Affairs, Community Life, Audit, Finance, and Investment committees of the Board all have regular metrics examined at each board meeting, which are provided by the appropriate staff. While program- or area-specific metrics are generated by the appropriate office, much of the broader or institutional-wide data is provided by the IE&A staff. This staff has decades of experience collaborating with all areas of the college to bring together various data sources, as well as collecting new data sources such as campus-wide surveys, to distill information into useful and informative reports and data visualizations that are utilized by decision-makers to ensure they are well-informed.

The work for this Initiative will be strengthened by the above-described support. The college has also already demonstrated strong support for Goal 5 of the Council's E&I plan, which is more specific to this Initiative. When the Council requested all offices and programs to submit a list of tactics that each area has begun or intends to begin in support of Goal 5, they received information about over 260 specific actions being taken, from all areas of the college. Each of the newer initiatives and grant-funded projects cited in item 2 above has committed to regular evaluation and assessment reports of their work, as required by their funders and endowment donors, which will also inform the goals of this Initiative. And finally, the engagement of and commitment from Marketing & Communication staff in disseminating and "celebrating" progress and outcomes clearly demonstrate support for this Initiative.

8. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

Quality Initiative Project Oversight Team:

- Jo Beld, Vice President for Mission and Accreditation Liaison Officer
- Bruce King, Assistant to the President for Institutional Diversity
- Susan Canon, Director, Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IE&A)
- Mary Carlsen, Professor of Social Work & Family Studies and Director, *To Include is to Excel*

Quality Initiative Implementation Team:

- Equity & Inclusion Council members
 - Chair: Marci Sortor, Provost and Dean of the College; Professor of History
 - Faculty: Anton Armstrong, Tosdal Professor of Music - Voice; Conductor, St. Olaf Choir and Jeremy Loebach, Associate Professor of Psychology
 - President's Leadership Team: Bruce King, Assistant to the President for Institutional Diversity (also listed above) and Hassel Morrison, Vice President for Student Life
 - Staff: Norma Charlton, Program Coordinator for Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion and Thando Kunene, Assistant Director, Career Development and Coaching
 - Students: Tashonna Douglas '21 and Tahir Ahsan '20 (who will be replaced in the fall with a current student)
 - Alumna: Melissa Wright '90
- IE&A staff
 - Kelsey Thompson, Assistant Director of Assessment

- Lauren Feiler, Assistant Director of Institutional Research and Student Success
- Marina Edlund, Administrative Assistant for IE&A and *To Include is To Excel*
- Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion staff
 - María Pabón Gautier, Director
- Marketing & Communication staff
 - Katie Warren, Chief Marketing Officer
 - Daniel Hollerung, Digital Marketing Specialist

9. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

The primary resource required for this initiative is human resources, or staff time. Arguably it is within the job descriptions for all of the staff listed in item 8 to spend time gathering, analyzing, writing about, and communicating results of metrics and assessment, as well as strategizing about how to improve and sustain programs and initiatives. In appointing an Equity and Inclusion Council, the institution has made it clear that work on this topic in particular is a priority, and the Council members as well as the staff listed in item 8 will assume this responsibility as part of their ongoing work. The half-time administrative assistant for *To Include is To Excel* is grant-funded, and it will be part of the work of this initiative to inform the decision as to whether to continue dedicated staff time in some form to the ongoing work of equity and inclusion after the grant period ends in 2021.

In the summer of 2019, St. Olaf's Marketing and Communication team purchased an initial Tableau license, in part to support data visualizations for the E&I Council dashboard metrics website. This required some technical support, as our Information Security Officer reviewed and approved the Tableau data security application. Three of the user licenses have been distributed to IE&A and to Piper Center for Vocation & Career staff, with the annual cost also being distributed. While Tableau will enhance data analysis and visualization capabilities for other functions as well, the ability to more easily share dynamic data, allowing users to explore results and impacts for different subgroups of our diverse population, will help keep the issues of equity and inclusion in the forefront. An example of this use of Tableau was demonstrated in May 2020, when IE&A staff enabled ready examination of potential differences in student experiences during the first semester of the COVID-19 pandemic, by presenting student responses to a number of closed-ended survey questions such that viewers could filter results by variables such as race/ethnicity and first-generation status.

As the work of the Council and this Quality Initiative moves forward, St. Olaf may find the need to adopt one or more new assessment instruments to administer on a regular basis, and the college is prepared to provide the resources required to do so, which would also require staff time and financial resources.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

(The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

10. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

Initiative Goal	Summer 2020	2020-21: reflection and planning year	Summer 2020	2021-22: action year
Inventory existing practices, actions, and initiatives across campus that support equity and inclusion	Ongoing: While the initial inventory has essentially been completed, it will need to be kept current			
Establish broad metrics for monitoring campus climate, student success, and outcomes for all community populations	<p>finalize choice of E&I Plan dashboard metrics for website publication</p> <p>finalize choices for a longer list of E&I internal metrics for report to the college community on progress toward achieving the goals of the Plan for E&I</p>	Ongoing: Work with departments, programs, and offices to establish/refine/affirm metrics for their own internal monitoring		
Disseminate these regularly updated metrics with the community	<p>Finalize data visualization of dashboard metrics; post on E&I website for public</p> <p>Finalize summary data and data visualization of internal metrics for E&I report; decide how/to whom to disseminate</p>	Ongoing: Maintain above metrics and keep dissemination current, as appropriate, including those from departments, programs, or offices		
Connect assessment of particular actions and initiatives with strategies	Review and revise the E&I plan (as written in Goal 5, subgoal e)	<p>Determine which metrics show areas needing improvement</p> <p>Plan work or initiatives to improve those metrics</p> <p>Reflect upon and plan how E&I goals can be embedded in regular program assessments and reviews</p>	Review and revise the E&I plan (as written in Goal 5, subgoal e)	Implement new work or initiatives, or enhancements to existing work or initiatives, as discerned through the reflection and planning process

Initiative Goal	Summer 2020	2020-21: reflection and planning year	Summer 2020	2021-22: action year
Inform decisions to sustain appropriate practices and innovations, particularly those initiated with grant-funding		Determine which metrics show areas of success Celebrate those success Consider what resources are needed to continue such success, particularly those initiated with grant-funding		Continue existing successful work or initiatives, as discerned through the reflection and planning process Secure additional resources, as needed

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

Name and Title: Jo Beld, Vice President for Mission

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