

Provost's Report March 2024 Faculty Meeting

A glance at the list of upcoming events at the end of this report provides a sampling of this spring's exciting events and the many ways in which we celebrate each other's achievements—from the declaration of the major, to the Social Justice Award, to Honors Day. So much activity can sometimes feel overwhelming, too. I encourage you to reflect on what gives you good energy and find opportunities to tap into that. For me, the lengthening of the hours of sunlight gives a boost as we head into the busiest time of the academic year, when so much comes to fruition. Plus, so many accomplishments to be celebrated reaffirms that we do good, powerful work at St. Olaf College.

Some of the holiest days in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious calendars take place in March and April. Muslims observe Ramadan from March 11-April 10 by fasting from dawn to sunset, something to keep in mind if you are scheduling an event involving food at this time. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter are observed March 28-31. Passover is celebrated April 22-30. The Lutheran Center for Faith, Values and Community provides an [interfaith calendar](#) with descriptions of the holy days of many of the faiths practiced among the members of our campus community.

First-year Student Retention, Fall Semester to Spring

98.5% of first-year students returned to campus for the spring semester. This marks a 5-year high and continues an improvement that we saw last year. Thank you for your many contributions as advisors, mentors and teachers. I also would like to thank those working with Louis Epstein to develop and test course-based interventions this spring. Nearly every department is represented in this project!

There are a number of reasons for this year's fall-to-spring retention rate. Last year, we took the first big step in assigning first-year students to advisors who also teach one of their fall semester courses and expanded it to nearly all first-year students in 2023/24. Feedback from first-year students, which I've shared with you previously, shows an increasing proportion feeling as though their academic advisor knows them and cares about their progress. Many of you are applying strategies such as "appreciative advising" and collaborating with the Success Coaches. Many of those teaching the First Year Seminar or Writing and Rhetoric are building on the topics covered in SOAR sessions. These things matter.

Why the focus on retention? Because it is an indicator of whether students are thriving. Each term, our students have a choice to return to St. Olaf. They choose based on whether they think that this is a good place to live, learn and develop. When a student does not return, we need to reflect on whether there were ways in which we could have intervened to help them find a meaningful connection or identify an essential resource. Furthermore, we can't graduate the students who do not retain. First-to-second year retention marks the upward bound on graduation rates, which are the final measure of student academic success and thriving on campus.

New Staff Colleagues and New Roles

Please join me in welcoming new staff colleagues and congratulating those taking on new roles:

- Claudia Gonzalez-George, Provost's Office: Claudia has a BA in Sociology from UC Santa Barbara and Teaching Certificate from Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Chair of the Northfield School Board, she is currently a member of the St. Olaf Admissions team and supports CILA. Claudia will take up the role of Executive Assistant to the Provost mid-March.
- Anne Keasling, Academic Success Center: Coaching and Student Success (starting March 12). Graduating from St. Olaf with a degree in English literature in 2003, Anne earned a Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of St. Thomas and taught middle and high school students in Rosemount, Irondale, and St. Louis Park. Anne was a PTA president and is club director for her local chapter of the Minnesota Youth Ski League.
- Diane LeBlanc, English and Director of Writing: Associate Dean of First Year Experience and Sophomore Thriving. Please see my February 29 message about this position, which will begin July 1.

Progress Reports for At-risk Students

Upon the recommendation of the Retention Committee, the Academic Success Center is reaching out to faculty members with a request for a brief progress report on students on academic probation or participating in the Engage program. This feedback will be important for advisors and others who guide these students. This check-in will complement, and not replace, Early Alerts.

Early Alerts

Over 39% of students who ended last semester with a D, an F, a withdrawal, or an incomplete never had an early alert submitted by a faculty member. Knowing this, now is the time to think about whether you see any red flags among your students. If a student

- has missed three hours of class for reasons excused or unexcused
- has missed any assignment
- has received a failing grade on a major assignment or exam
- had been making good progress but suddenly seems to be experiencing hardship,

then it is time to submit an [Early Alert notice](#).

Oracle and SIS

We have begun work on the design of Oracle Student, the new student information system. The Registrar's Office will be deeply involved in this work, which means that from time to time, they will need your kindness and patience as they juggle the usual demands for information with attending Oracle work sessions.

Listserv Management

The college is launching a more robust structure for how we communicate through our campuswide email lists based on higher ed industry best practices. Our email practices need to change to ensure that email remains an effective tool for sharing and receiving important information about college business and to make our community's culture more welcoming and equitable in compliance with Title VI (part of the Civil Rights Act, Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, faith, or national origin, including harassment based on a person's shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics). The all-faculty and staff aliases will have approved senders who will communicate messages focused on college business. These approved

senders include the President's Office, the Provost's Office, the Associate Deans, Faculty Committee Chairs, the Registrar, Public Safety, Facilities, Human Resources, College Ministry, IT, Academic Success Center, and Admissions.

The college has several other vehicles for sharing information campuswide, including the weekly employee e-newsletter (This Week), the weekly events digest, and the stolaf-extra email list serve.

Faculty and Staff Accomplishments

With major publications, performances and exhibitions, grants and honors are:

- Elaiwu Ameh, Theater: National Humanities Center 2022 Summer Residency supporting work on his monograph *Performing Black Fatherhood: Fabrication, Silence, Repair*
- Emmanuel Cudjoe, Dance: *The Embodiment and Transmission of Ghanaian Kete Royal Dance: From Palace to Academy* (Anthem Press)
- Henry Dorn, Music: Atlantic Symphony Orchestra performances of his composition, *Transitions* (conducted by Osmo Vanska).
- Peter Hansen, Theater: Appearances in—and in one case producing—recent productions at the Guthrie and Gremlin Theaters
- Courtney Leonard, Art/Art History:
 - *Okize (To Heal)* at the American Swedish Institute
 - *Breach: Logbook 24 Staccato* at the University Museum of Contemporary Art (UMass)
- Kristina Medina-Vilariño, Romance Languages: upcoming Boldt Chair of the Humanities. Kristina's project will be "The Race for Humanity: Community Impact and Public Scholarship in Practice"
- Sara Pillatzki-Warzeha, Theater:
 - Minnesota State Arts Board Individual Grant
 - Writing fellowship from Theatre Research in Canada (TRIC)
- Tim Rainey, Religion: Princeton University grant supporting "Crossroads Project Fellowship: Breathe: A Story of Race, Religion, and Justice in South Minneapolis Told Through Black Church Archives"
- John Saurer, Art/Art History: "Tender Land" and branded Mulberry drawings "Monuments" will be featured in the new [Montage Hotel](#) in Big Sky, Montana.

At its February meeting, the Board of Regents conferred this year's Melvin George Awards on

- Ibtesam Al Atiyat, Sociology and Anthropology
- Amanda Randall, German; and
- Michon Weeks, Art/Art History.

This is a cash award recognizing individuals who have, over their careers, demonstrated "superb teaching, sound scholarship, and commitment to the mission and religious nature of the college."

Coming Up

- Mar. 5-May 6 IFC Series on "Food Policy and Food Politics"
- Mar. 7 Celebration of Major Declaration
- Mar. 12 IFC Event: "Fearless Conversations in Divided Times"

Mar.	14	Faculty Meeting
Mar.	21	Academic Leadership
Mar.	23-31	Spring Break!
Apr.	2	Inclusive Excellence Symposium (register by March 15)
Apr.	8-12	Quiet Week for Advising (please refrain from scheduling events and meetings during this time, apart from meeting with advisees)
Apr.	12	Last day to drop a class
Apr.	16	Social Justice Award lecture (Rehanna Kheshgi)
Apr.	18	Faculty Meeting
Apr.	25	Academic Leadership
May	2	Teaching & Learning Showcase (3:00 - 5:00 pm) Sun and Gold ballrooms
May	3	Honors Day