

The Norwegian Ethnic Expression at St. Olaf College

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Abstract

Not every college associates itself with an ethnic identity, however, St. Olaf College, is an exception, as it strongly celebrates its Norwegian-immigrant foundation. While the student body and faculty include people who identify as Norwegian-Americans, the primary reason the Norwegian-American ethnic traditions continue is due to the deliberate efforts by the college's administration. These administrating powers determine what Norwegian-American/Norwegian events will be held, and have obtained great support from the Norwegian department in executing such events. While the school continues to diversify in ethnic makeup, the unique Norwegian-American/Norwegian ethnic expressions continue to be supported through long-established Norwegian-American ethnic symbols, including, religion, language and food. This ethnographic report further explores evolving ways in which these ethnic expressions are supported, as well as why the college is interested in maintaining such associations.

Key Points

- The Norwegian-American ethnic expression at St. Olaf is supported through feelings the nation-wide Norwegian-American community possess, including, pride in Norwegian history, a politically based inferiority complex and an importance in maintaining genealogical records.
- On-campus ethnic expression is influenced by the Mid-Western Norwegian-American community.

- Alumni relations, including gift giving relationships, are strengthened through Norwegian-American ethnic expressions.
- The Norwegian-American ethnic expression creates a “uniqueness” which the college values.
- The college administration is responsible for propagating the on-campus Norwegian-American/Norwegian ethnic expressions.
- The St. Olaf Norwegian department aids the college in executing ethnic traditions.
- The types of students attracted to the Norwegian department is changing, however, these students still take part in supporting the college’s ethnic association.
- Norwegian-American religious practices, language and food are three ethnic symbols which help maintain ethnic expression at St. Olaf College.

Setting

St. Olaf College is a small, liberal arts college, located in Northfield, MN, 53 miles south of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Ninety six percent of St. Olaf's 3033 residents live on campus in one of the 11 residence halls, 10 service and honor houses, diversity house or language houses. The student-faculty ratio of 12.8:1 intentionally encourages students to form a tight-knit community among students that come from 50 states and 30 countries. (St. Olaf, 2010) Although the college wishes to expand in racial and ethnic diversity, St. Olaf College appears homogeneously white. The minority makeup of the college is constructed of 6 American Indian or Alaskan Natives, Asian or Pacific Islanders, 53 Blacks (Non Hispanic), 146 Asian or Pacific Islanders, and 62 Hispanics. (St. Olaf, 2010)

The college is positioned on top of a hill, overlooking historic downtown Northfield and nearby College, Carleton College. The city's downtown is positioned along the Canon River. From a glimpse of the downtown, the city looks as racially homogenous as the two colleges; however, Northfield has expanded in the past 15 years to include a sprawl of suburban housing, and low-income housing which primarily serves Northfield's Latin American immigrant community. The number of immigrants in Northfield has significantly increased over the past ten years, going from 5.7% of the population in 2000 to around 15% in 2010. (City of Northfield, 2010)

As the name of the college alludes, St. Olaf was founded by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants in 1874. The college prides itself on its strong Norwegian heritage, and its commitment to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Although the college

remains rich in traditions of the Lutheran church and Norwegian heritage, there is an equally strong emphasis on academic and environmental innovation. Students can choose from 43 majors, 15 teaching certificates, 19 concentrations and 17-pre-professional fields. (St. Olaf, 2010) The college is proud of its latest architectural addition, Regents Hall, an expansive science center. This addition is just one piece of evidence that the school has growing academic support in the natural sciences. In addition to the long established "hard" sciences, the college has a rapidly increasing interest in environmental studies. The academic interest has flowed into the student body's popular culture, including food waste awareness campaigns and sustainable living displays.

Just as signs of the college's organic farm and environmentally friendly displays show a current important identity of the college, the college's Norwegian-American heritage is apparent in the Norwegian named dormitories, buildings, cafeteria, chapel and event rooms. Residence halls such as Ytterboe, Thorson, Mohn, Kittlesby and Hillboe greet first time visitors with tongue-twisting Norwegian pronunciations.

If one was not able to identify the names of the college, the interiors of the buildings are adorned with wall posters highlighting Norwegian born authors, and artists, such as Edvard Grieg. Similarly, the reference room in the student library is a curio filled with past Norwegian presidents and a memorabilia case which describes each of the founders of the school, what part of Norway they came from, and their contributions to the college.

Apart from the associations with important Norwegian donors or past presidents, the college is home to the fully staffed Kierkegaard library, the Norwegian American

Historical Association (Norwegian, 2005) and the North American office of the University of Oslo Summer School. Furthermore, Rolvaag library maintains the largest collection of Norwegian-American immigrant genealogy records in the nation.

Methodology

After deciding to center my study on the Norwegian-American ethnic expression at St. Olaf College, I constructed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application. Because my research project did not pose greater than minimal risk to participants, I was able to obtain an intermediate level of review from my project advisor, Sociology/Anthropology department professor, Chris Chiappari.

In order to gather an eclectic view of the Norwegian identity on St. Olaf College's campus, I decided to make a list of possible interviewees that would give me perspectives from varying vantage points. I sought people to interview based on age, longevity of contact with the St. Olaf campus, year in school, participation levels in the Norwegian department and citizenship status.

I used purposeful sampling to select participants. I used "my special knowledge about [the] group to select subjects who represented the population."(Berg, 1989:34) I approached eleven people whom I have had varying levels of personal contact with, ranging from acquaintances, to people that I have had personal relationships with.

Before interviewing each participant, I described the nature of my study, explaining the interview method I was using, and the confidentiality of the study. This explanation ended in a verbal consent to continue and record the interview. One study took place

through, *skype*, with an interviewee in Trondheim, Norway, and the remaining interviews took place on the St. Olaf campus. I conducted two interviews during the Norwegian homework help hours in the basement of Rolvaag library, five interviews in the St. Olaf College cafe, "The Cage," one interview in Holland Hall, one interview in Old Main, in the Norwegian department, and one interview in my social science class room. Each interview lasted from thirty minutes to one hour.

I used a semi-formal interview technique, encouraging participants to answer each question fully and expand on any questions at their leisure. I also periodically asked the interviewees to further explain answers, and allowed them to ask me for clarifications if necessary. With the freedom to digress, interviewees went into detail with opinions and anecdotes that were insightful to me.

Essential questions of Norwegian-American identity and ethnic expression were asked to each participant; however, I constructed extra questions and probing questions based on what position the interviewee held. For example, I had a set of questions for Norwegian professors, Norwegian students and Native Norwegians. I also developed a specific set of questions for a Norwegian-American historian and a Norwegian anthropology student. Due to my decision to choose subjects based on their varying interactions with St. Olaf College, it was necessary to tailor my questions accordingly.

I was fortunate to interview professionals on Norwegian-American ethnicity, history and the Norwegian language. It was extremely helpful for me to read publications by historian, Odd Lovoll, including, *Norwegians on the Prairie: ethnicity and development of the Country Town*, and to follow-up my reading by interviewing Lovoll, a

professor emeritus of St. Olaf College and current professor at Oslo University, Oslo Norway. Many of my questions regarding ethnic expressions at St. Olaf were addressed by Lovoll, and I was able to probe him about the similarities between St. Olaf and many of the traditional, Mid-Western, small-town traditions he included in his publications.

An additional strength to my study was the access I possessed in order to interview a Native Norwegian social anthropology student, who studied Norwegian-Americans at St. Olaf College during the 2008-2009 academic years. The information I obtained from this interview was consistent with many of the points, Odd Lovoll, made about Norwegian-American ethnicity, and expanded upon many of the ideas I was introduced to during my literature review. I also benefited from obtaining the perspective of new students entering the Norwegian department, uninterested in the Norwegian Major, as well as an upper level senior student in the Norwegian department. I feel that the overall range in age, academic level, citizenship and Norwegian department affiliation that my interviewees held, added to the validity of my study.

Negative aspects of my study include, my inability, due to time constraints, to have more representative interviews of each category of persons I chose to interview. With more time, I would have interviewed more Norwegian professors to allow me to compare their viewpoints, rather than taking one professors' voice as a representative of the entire staff. I would have also included interviews from more students unaffiliated with the Norwegian department, as I only have one representative in this category. If I were to repeat this study, I would also seek the perspective of residents in the town of Northfield,

Minnesota, as they might provide a comprehensive view of how the college's ethnic expressions are perceived from the periphery of the St. Olaf community.

Problem

I initially began my project by asking how the Norwegian Department serves to maintain the Norwegian-American identity on the St. Olaf campus. As a first year student of the Norwegian department during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semesters, I have been a participant in many events that are open to the wider St. Olaf community, as well as the Northfield community. These events, such as the Norwegian Christmas service, and the 17th of May Norwegian Independence Day breakfast, show support from a large number of faculty and students outside the department. Correlating the Norwegian academic departments' involvement in developing these programs, to the faculty/staff and student attendance, I first hypothesized that the Norwegian department was the primary source promoting and upholding the heritage that I felt strongly present at St. Olaf.

After completing background research on the history of the St. Olaf community, early Scandinavian immigrants in the Mid-Western region of the United States, and the topic of ethnicity, I recognized that the support that St. Olaf College has for upholding its Scandinavian traditions and identity is heavily rooted in the geographic location of the college. With this background research, I reconstructed my research questions so that I would not be limited to only studying the Norwegian department's interaction with the school's ethnic/historical recognitions. I formulated questions that would also address interviewee's interactions with the Norwegian-American ethnic-expression outside the St.

Olaf environment, allowing me to evaluate how the college's ethnic identity interacts with already established individual identities.

The key questions that formed the base of my interview questions:

- 1.) How strong is the Norwegian-American ethnic identity on the St. Olaf campus?
- 2.) Who/What institution is responsible for maintaining this ethnic expression?
- 3.) How does the greater population of St. Olaf perceive the Norwegian-American ethnic expressions at St. Olaf College?

Description of Interviewee Subjects:

1. Professor Emeritus, King Olav Scholar
2. Norwegian professor at St. Olaf College
3. Visiting anthropology student from the University of Trondheim 2008-2009
4. Norwegian/American citizen-student
5. First year Norwegian student
6. Senior Nordic Studies concentrator, Norwegian house occupant
7. Native Norwegian Exchange student
8. Native Norwegian four-year enrolled student
9. Ethnographic Theory Classmate
10. Former Norwegian Language Student and Norwegian house resident
11. Luther Graduate, Northfield Resident, Prior work at St. Olaf

St. Olaf College was founded by Norwegian immigrants in the late 1874, and based on my perceptions of the strength in Norwegian-American celebrations; the

college's initial ethnic expression has not weakened over time. As a first year student in Norwegian language courses, I was introduced to many of the college's Norwegian-American/Norwegian ethnic expressions, and became curious about why these expressions are still strongly celebrated at St. Olaf College. Not every college celebrates its' founders ethnic origins to this extent...so why St. Olaf?

I initially began this ethnographic study solely focusing on the Norwegian-American ethnic expression today; however, after preliminary research, I found that in order to understand why this is an important part of St. Olaf's present identity, I would first have to understand the historical basis of this identification.

Because a large part of how we define ourselves is in the context of others, I began by exploring how early Scandinavian settlers lived in America, believing this would give me insight into the influences of ethnic expression on St. Olaf's founders. With a preliminary background on how this ethnic expression evolved at St. Olaf, I was able to begin my primary research of the Norwegian-American/Norwegian ethnic expression at the present-day St. Olaf College.

a. St. Olaf's founding Norwegian-American identity, and aspects of early Scandinavian settler life in the Mid-West.

Early Scandinavian settlers were unique among other immigrant groups. "Norwegian immigrants and their descendants appear to have possessed a special bond with the small town and country life," (Lovoll, 2006:4) as this life style mirrored the agricultural communities of Norway. According to the federal census," In 1900, 49.5

percent of all Norwegian-born 'heads of household' were engaged in agriculture...54.3 percent of the immigrant's children were farmers...No other nationality even came close.”(Lovoll, 1996:4) Thus, Norwegian immigrants had more time to assimilate to American culture, as they did not have to drop all remnants of ethnic identity in order to blend into large city life.

After reviewing, Joseph Shaw's, *History of St. Olaf College*, I found that the establishing community of St. Olaf College shared, to some extent, the wider Scandinavian-American practice of slow integration into popular American cultural practices. The founders were both highly aware of the importance of providing students with an “American” skill-set that would make them marketable to the wider American community, yet also unwilling to forget their heritage ties to Norway. In 1875, president Mohn's pointed use of English during a January dedication ceremony, “put Norwegian[language] in a secondary but respected position...Judicious loyalty to the Norwegian heritage balanced with the commitment to an educational mission in America was the ideal sought by Muus, Mohn, and their colleagues[founders of St. Olaf].”(Shaw, 1974:20)

Unlike many immigrant communities of the same time period, Norwegian-Americans were adamant about not forgetting their ethnic roots. St. Olaf's second teacher, Lars S. Reque, addressed the school with this sentiment, saying:

The hasty doffing of one's old world identity was mistaken because a person's individuality consists of all that he has seen, heard, felt, and suffered...not that national characteristics must be preserved at all costs; one keeps what is valuable and roots out the worthless. Similarly, one uses discretion in adopting what America offers. (Shaw, 1974:20)

The Christian church played, and continues to play, a large role in maintaining ethnic expression. The church was seen as the primary avenue in which schools, such as St. Olaf College, were able to be established. "Churches were ultimately the only groups strong enough to sustain long-lasting educational institutions."(Anderson,1995:11) One of the first examples of the Scandinavian Lutheran church supporting ethnic expression is seen in the summer schools the church arranged. "Scandinavian-American denominations arranged schools (popularly called 'Swede school,' for example) where the main subjects of instruction were Christianity and the respective Scandinavian language. In the summer of 1903, the Augustana Synod enrolled over 22,000 Swedish-American students."(Anderson 1995:13)

The before-mentioned information is particularly relevant to my research on the St. Olaf Campus because the college was founded through the Lutheran church, and still maintains the title, "college of the church," specifically associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. I found it fascinating that two of the three scholars I interviewed [we will meet later] relayed information surrounding the role the Lutheran church still plays in supporting the Norwegian-American ethnic identity.

b. The Evolution of the modern-day Ethnic Expression in America

After gaining a thorough understanding of early Scandinavian immigrant practices, I sought to understand the evolution of modern-day Norwegian-American practices. I began by reviewing literature on all ethnic identities in the United States.

Throughout United States history, the American association with ethnic identity has gone through varying strengths. One drastic turning point in America, however, began in the late 1970s, with the initiation of a cultural revolution. "Multiculturalism grew rapidly in the 1980s and early 1990s by directing itself in simple terms against the narrowness of the prevailing culture of the United States."(Hollinger, 1995:2) According to David Hollinger, a scholar of American history, the concept of "universalism" was introduced directly after WWII "to mask a cultural imperialism by which the NATO powers spread through an attempt to promote universalism."(Hollinger, 1995:58)

This historical explanation of the growth in ethnic expression aided my understanding of how all American ethnic communities, like the Norwegian-Americans, recently came to develop more exuberant ethnic expressions, while at the same time, making the barriers between ethnic groups more permeable. "By the end of the 1980s...it would be fine to try to extend out a sense of 'we' to people whom we had previously thought of as 'they'...an even larger and more variegated ethnos, for a crucial feature of our ethnos is, after all, its traditional distrust of ethnocentrism."(Hollinger, 1995, 74)

Findings

A. St. Olaf ethnic expression in the context of the wider Scandinavian community

In order for me to understand the influences of the St. Olaf institution on ethnic practices, it was important to first understand what influences came from the nation-wide Norwegian-American community.

1. Pride in Norwegian History

Interviewees expressed strong correlations between the strength in a particular ethnic identification, and the history of its' associated country of origin. One retired St. Olaf Norwegian professor gave the example that "many times Germans are ashamed of being German... before WWII, German was the most prominent ethnic heritage, and many German-American schools were established in Minnesota. After WWII, however, not a single German school was left." Furthermore, the professor recounted his experience instructing two twins taking part in Norwegian language courses in the 1980s, saying, "Although they were half-Norwegian, and half-German, due to Germany's history, the brothers did not wish to identify themselves as German. Furthermore, in response to my first question, asking if the Norwegian-American identity was present, one St. Olaf native Norwegian foreign exchange student noted that, "Norwegians are proud of their heritage; look at us in comparison to German celebrations; the Germans are not as proud of their history as Norwegians."

2. Inferiority Complex

Norway's political position in history as an "underdog" allows Norwegians to take pride in the independence they gained after 400 years under Danish rule, and later under Swedish governance. (Lovoll, 2006:35) I spoke with a Norwegian graduate student of

social anthropology, who spent the 2009-2010 year studying Norwegian-Americans at St. Olaf College, who commented that "The Norwegian underdog status has always been a uniting force among Norwegians." She further noted that Norwegians gain pride from freeing themselves, but also because of this, "We unify under the Viking era, and you can see this in Minnesota, for example, the "Vikings" as an athletic symbol."

This underdog theme surfaced again, in my interview with, Lovoll, as he explained, "This sense of inferiority allows them to cultivate ethnic expression more than any other group, with the exception to Finland...In the 19th century, Norwegians left and carried their love for their homeland with them." In addition, Lovoll made an analogy, suggesting that just as "Americans create an identity opposite our South American neighbors, Norwegian-Americans form a stronger ethnic identity through their opposition to the Swedish-American identity.

3. Preservation of Genealogy

Every interviewee I spoke with who expressed having a Norwegian ethnicity, knew roughly, if not precisely, details of their Norwegian ancestry. I found this information significant because while many interviewees knew about their Norwegian ancestry, none had as extensive of knowledge about other portions of their ethnic makeup. One second-semester Norwegian language student expressed, "I'm probably 7/8 Norwegian, pretty Norwegian...the reason I took Norwegian right away is that both of my grandfathers are Norwegian...the cool thing is that my grandma is really into that. She made a cookbook which has an entire family lineage in the back...whose kids did what and so on." Another senior student, concentrating in Norwegian Studies, recounted, "I am

1/4 Norwegian, my Dad's Mom's Dad, my great-grandfather, came over on a boat; my grandfather's one hundred percent Norwegian."

Similarly, I personally related to the interviewees knowledge of ancestry, as I have an extensive amount of knowledge about my own Norwegian ancestral past. The Norwegian ancestry I possess is meticulously documented, including accounts of each immigrant family member, their lives and relationships in America, as well as an extensive family tree dating back to 1160 A.D. Also, similar to my interviewees, I have no information about ancestors from my 1/2 Greek, 1/4 Welsh ethnic makeup. As further evidence to the seriousness to which Norwegians document family lineage, I found that St. Olaf is home to the largest collection of Norwegian immigrant genealogical records, preserved in the St. Olaf Rolvaag Library. After learning this, I found records of my own family, documenting, in the Nynorsk Norwegian language, where my ancestors immigrated from, deaths, occupations, births and divorces.

Furthermore, St. Olaf College is home to the, Norwegian-American Historical Association, which was "Organized October 6, 1925, by a group of far-sighted Norwegian Americans who sought to establish a national center for the collection and preservation of historical material."(Norwegian, 2005)

Based upon these extensive genealogical encounters, I have concluded that the preserved family histories allow Americans to have tangible evidence to reflect and identify with. Because there are names and dates documented, the past becomes more personalized, and therefore, significant to descendants.

4. Influences of the Mid-Western geographical region that support the Norwegian-American identity

Another supporting factor of the Norwegian-American identity at St. Olaf College is the college's setting in the Mid-Western region of the United States. I found a common theme in interviewees who noted that the Mid-West recognizes the Scandinavian-American culture through the highly visible Scandinavian-American community, including many organizations that are in close relationship with the college. As I have observed through my own participation in the Norwegian department, and among the greater St. Olaf Campus, many of these organizations, such as, Sons of Norway, Lakselaget (Nordic Women's Group) and Torskeklubben, (Norwegian Men's Luncheon Club) are in close relationship with the college due to their headquarters in Minneapolis/St. Paul, about 45 minutes from the St. Olaf campus. Over the course of my interviewing, interviewees expressed a clear opinion that much of the Scandinavian culture on campus is a byproduct of the Minnesotan culture valuing this identity. One professor emeritus of, St. Olaf, noted that "Presidents of Norwegian affiliated colleges become honorary members of clubs, including, Sons of Norway and Torkseklubben. In fact, I've seen President Anderson [the St. Olaf President] at the Torksklubben meetings."

Students of the St. Olaf community also provided evidence that the ethnic recognition by Minnesotans had a large influence on identities honored on the St. Olaf Campus. For example, one international student, identifying himself as, half-Norwegian, identifies more with his Norwegian heritage when in Minnesota, and especially at St.

Olaf. "Part of the thing is, in Minnesota there is a lot of Scandinavian heritage, people are aware of it and they chose to honor it. St. Olaf is one of the few schools that have a Norwegian department, and although Chinese and Japanese would be more applicable to world relations, Norwegian has a much bigger draw than Chinese or Japanese."

Another informant noted that the Minnesota college, Concordia College, influenced her in knowing about her own Norwegian heritage, which later led her to choose St. Olaf based on the college fulfilling her desire to continue studying the Norwegian language. "I didn't find out until right before I went to Skogfjorden [Concordia College's Norwegian language camp] that my grandfather is one hundred percent Norwegian; actually, I was 13, and it was the people at the camp that got me interested."

B. Why does the college want to celebrate its Norwegian-American heritage?

Before beginning the interview process, I read accounts from the book, *Norwegians on the Prairie*, by Odd Lovoll, which introduced me to the idea that many small towns in the Mid-West use their Scandinavian heritage and traditions to attract visitors. Titles such as, *Lutefisk capital of the world*, and advertisements for the worlds' *largest leftse*, were mentioned as part of the small-town, Mid-Western culture. (Lovoll 2006: 34) Similarly, at St. Olaf College, both of the non-international students I interviewed mentioned St. Olaf promoting the Norwegian-ethnic identification for monetary benefits. According to the senior Norwegian-studies concentrator, "It's hard to get rid of the identity; it's what

the school was founded on. There are a lot of alumni and donors supporting the school monetarily." One former Norwegian language house student also mentioned that "they really can't have a small department if they have so many endowments from Norwegian identifying alumni...but I'm just speculating."

As a researcher, I have noticed that Norwegian anecdotes are present in some of the school's most prideful, and lucrative, happenings. For example, the Christmas festival, a St. Olaf choral Christmas service, which hosts many of the St. Olaf alumni, carries the tradition of wearing a "Norwegian sweater." One native-Norwegian choral student also noted that one song, "Beautiful Savior," sung every year at Christmas fest, is "even bigger in Norway; "everyone sings this song in Norwegian around Christmas time," says the interviewee.

Another glimpse of monetary support by Norwegian-Americans is seen in the current naming of the recently renovated "Old Science Center" on campus. The news article published on the St. Olaf webpage spreads the word that the "Newly renovated "Old Science Center" will be named in honor of O. Jay Tomson '58, chair of the board of regents, and his wife, Patricia McCarthy Tomson '59." The article further mentions that as "A past board member for the Norwegian-American Historical Association headquartered at St. Olaf, Tomson received the prestigious St. Olav Medal from King Harald of Norway in 2006 for "strengthening the bonds between expatriate Norwegians and their home country".(St. Olaf)

The second reason I found for St. Olaf wanting to maintain the Norwegian-American Identity, is the "uniqueness" the association brings to the school. As I was participating in

the Norwegian Constitution Day chapel service, one St. Olaf Pastor noted that “St. Olaf is not an ordinary college...and if we were an ordinary college, we would be getting tired of celebrating the college itself; instead, we choose to honor our Norwegian founders and celebrate our association with Norway.”

In addition, the second paragraph of St. Olaf's "About the College," section on the St. Olaf webpage, states, "Founded in 1874 by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants, St. Olaf is a nationally ranked liberal arts college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." (St. Olaf) The positioning of this information, placed in the first sentence of the 2nd of eleven paragraphs, used to show an overview of St. Olaf College, clearly expresses that the ethnic identity of the college is a unique and honored feature. One Norwegian international student explained that "On the outside, they [St. Olaf College] are promoting it [identity] a lot, 'We are a Lutheran college founded by Norwegians.'" Another Norwegian international student explains that "It is the Norwegian department that makes St. Olaf unique. We are one of like three other schools that offer Norwegian... My great uncle was an honorary professor of Norwegian here. Working in Old Main, I met several judges and lawyers...they mentioned meeting my uncle while taking Norwegian at St. Olaf. Any other department doesn't have that kind of recognition.

C. Who is responsible for maintaining this identity?

As a student of the St. Olaf Norwegian language department, I was extremely curious to find out, who, beyond the geographical influences of the college, has been responsible for the strength in survival of the Norwegian-American/Norwegian ethnic expression. Was it the students, the faculty of the Norwegian department, or the

administrative powers of the college? After asking each interviewee a question identifying, "what," at St. Olaf maintains the Norwegian-American ethnicity, all identified the St. Olaf administration as responsible for fostering the expressions. "I came to St. Olaf in 1971, says one St. Olaf professor of Norwegian and history," Yes, there was an awakening [of ethnic expression] at St. Olaf College at that time... No doubt about that. Because we do have the Norwegian department, the amount of expression is directly related to the people representing the St. Olaf Norwegian department at the time, and their relationship with the current administration."

Furthermore, one student interviewee noted that "The identity is more for the 'college' than on-campus. The campus has a small faction of very Norwegian-American students." In agreement, one current Norwegian exchange student noted, "It's not so much the Norwegian department, it's more the administrative powers. It's the people that are working at St. Olaf that choose. You have Christmas fest, meals over the weekend... they try to make it parallel to the actual Norwegian customs. It's the attempt that has made it last so long. The college makes a point to preserve the heritage." Similarly, another native-Norwegian expressed, "It's not as much in the student body, it's in the faculty and institution....they're the ones that arrange Lutefest [on-campus music festival] among other events."

Although the Norwegian ethnic celebrations are advocated for by the college's administration, interviewees often said that the Norwegian department was primarily responsible for the execution of such events. "If St. Olaf didn't have the Norwegian

department, they wouldn't have the promotion institutionalized," says one native Norwegian student, a statement which is also agreed upon by faculty of the college. "The ethnic expression would not be lost... [If there were no Norwegian department] no, it would not be lost, but it would not be celebrated as much. The 17th of May, [Norway's constitution day] breakfast, for example... because we have a Norwegian department, it's more genuine. You have visitors... the king comes, and the princess sells her books in the bookstore" says one professor emeritus. One professor of Norwegian is also in agreement with the department's role in organizing events, saying, "we are responsible for administrating events, but in a positive way. The 17th of May, for example, becomes bigger than just the Norwegian department. People come from town, and it's a college-wide celebration." Another example is the Norwegian Christmas service, "I was responsible for the Norwegian Christmas service. At that time, we invited in the whole community[of Northfield] and the fact was, they came in large numbers. It was a Sunday service conducted in Norwegian," says a professor emeritus of the Norwegian department.

While the Norwegian department plays a primary role in executing the institutions' desire for public celebrations of the Norwegian-American identity, I later learned that the department continually draws an increasing number of students from across the academic curriculum, not those solely interested in the Norwegian language and culture. The Norwegian department's primary role is rooted in academia as there is a push within the Norwegian department to educate St. Olaf students about modern Norway, particularly the progression surrounding gender equality, conflict and peace studies and environmental studies.

We have a little bit of an internal conflict. On one hand we want to maintain traditions, but we also want to teach about contemporary Norway. I believe that especially in, America, we aren't always good at preserving history while being modern... Sometimes people don't want us to be, they want us to focus only on the traditions. At times people come to events and expect a certain image. We want to be looking forward, seeing how traditions are changing and maintaining."
(Norwegian language professor)

With an emphasis on the innovative aspects of Norwegian culture, the Norwegian department is growing and diversifying. The department is attracting students that need an introduction to Norway as a stepping stone into studying a subject modern Norway is excelling in. " A good number of students go abroad after studying Norwegian; they enter into programs such as *Hecua's* study abroad program, SUST[political studies and more], or take courses at the International Summer School in Oslo. People see that they can go to Norway to study other things. A lot of masters programs are in English, and a lot of science students go to Norway getting 'Fulbrights,'" states one Norwegian professor.

Another emphasis of the Norwegian department is to encourage students to think about "diversity" in context with lifestyle and societal ethics, going outside the term's common association with "race."

When people take Norwegian, it introduces them to a culture that is like ours [American], but different in social policy. It is interesting for people to see that other people balance and have support for free time and family. In our country we do not support families financially very much. In Norway they put a lot of money into family support. Maternal leave, universal healthcare, free tuition at national level... In other countries, the public good is something supported by everyone. In America, there is a contrast, we are individualistic. I think the students in Norway, they are affected. When I'm in Norway I get a really good balance between work and private life. When your here, [in America] after a while you get back into the routine. (Norwegian professor)

The Norwegian department views the changes that are occurring in their department as similar to the changes St. Olaf and Norway are experiencing, as both become more diverse. "Norway as a culture is becoming more diverse, and we [St. Olaf Norwegian Department] have a parallel, changing in faculty and students...It's challenging for institutions to change, challenging for Norway. I think we share these challenges," says one Norwegian language professor.

Although the gap between the body of students attracted to the study of "Norway," and those in observance of Norwegian-American traditions is widening, the sheer number of students involved in the Norwegian department supports the St. Olaf Norwegian-American ethnic celebrations.. If a student decides to take the Norwegian language in preparation of a Fulbright, study scholarship to Norway, the student is still required to attend a number of cultural events established by the Norwegian department. For example, one requirement for students of Norwegian is to attend the 17th of May breakfast celebration the Norwegian department organizes to honor Norway's constitution day. Although these events celebrate Norway, many of the expressions are Norwegian-American.

Reversely, products of the school's Norwegian Identity, such as Norwegian-focused academic programs, have an influence on supporting the ethnic expressions of the school. If St. Olaf College did not recognize its heritage to such a high degree, certain academic programs students are, or become, interested in, would not be in existence. St. Olaf offers programs, "such as an Edvard Grieg independent study in the music department," says one music student. More specifically, one student notes that she was

led into taking the Norwegian language when she was introduced to Norway's progressive gender ideologies while taking a Scandinavian film course. "I do not personally have any Norwegian heritage, but I got interested when I took a Scandinavian film policy course. I was interested in the progressive qualities of Norway." The student continues by saying that "at first, there was an idolization, or curiosity surrounding Norway, but now that I have studied abroad [after having taken the first three levels of Norwegian language], I can self identify because I've been immersed in the society." When prompted to list the top five associations with Norway, the student listed, "gender neutrality, peacefulness, study, and work ethic, dry sense of humor and healthy socialism."

Just as the Norwegian faculty previously noted, the before-mentioned student used the Norwegian department as an avenue into studying some of the progressive aspects of Norwegian society. Also, as the student further detailed, upon arriving back on the St. Olaf campus, she was inspired to live in the St. Olaf Norwegian, on-campus, language house. Thus, indirectly, the student was encouraged to actively participate in the cultural activities of the campus. She expresses enjoyment in the events, saying, "I would not have been involved with them, were I not introduced to them through the department...I wouldn't have cared about Norwegian royalty coming to campus, I would not have gotten to know, Karoline,[a visiting scholar and friend] and I would not have gone to the Oslo Chamber Choir concert."

D. What are the less visible practices of the college that sustain an Ethnic Identity?

According to, Odd Lovoll, author of, *Norwegian's on the Prairie*, language, religion and food are the three identifying symbols of ethnic expression, all of which are included at St. Olaf College. "The first thing that goes in any ethnic group is language, second is religion, the last thing is the food. Food is the most persistent identifying symbol. When it's Christmas we must have lutefisk. I love lutefisk," says Lovoll.

In support of these three symbols, one Norwegian, first year, language student says, " I tried to email my grandmother [in Norwegian], but she lost the language, she made casseroles though, a characteristic that is still there from being raised in a Norwegian-culture." Relating this example to an on-campus tradition, "The only real event I would classify as overt would be Christmas fest, when students are forced to change their eating habits and eat meatballs for a week," says one native Norwegian student.

Many interviewees commented that learning the Norwegian language primarily serves to maintain ethnic tradition because learning the language is not particularly helpful for visitors to Norway. "English is like the second language of Norway," describes one native Norwegian. Because it is not a main language, "to learn it as a second language, you really have to have a strong connection," says one upper level Norwegian student. "It's more for learning the culture, than the language. Because we speak English so fluently here, learning the language is to experience Norway, to connect with roots there. Language is a bonus," says a Norwegian masters student of social anthropology. Similarly, from the perspective of one St. Olaf Norwegian professor, "There is something about learning the language that helps you to learn the culture. It's

only by knowing the language that you can look out on the culture. Once you learn the language you become an insider instead."

When I interviewed students, there was evidence that through the study of language, students felt more like an insider of the culture, whether it was the, Norwegian, or Norwegian-American culture. Even with limited Norwegian vocabulary, one first year student said, "I feel different in a way. I feel when I'm trying to speak Norwegian...I do feel different, and even though I am not fluent, I still feel different." Furthermore, the student said that in context with his family, " Now I'm Mr. Ancestry, translator and everything...My grandparents think it's such a big deal...it must come with age."

The last ethnic symbol, religion, one of the reasons for the founding of St. Olaf College, is still practiced daily by students and faculty. One of the strongest identities of the college is it's the Lutheran church affiliation, the same church the Norwegian-immigrant founders established. "The Norwegian culture is not restricted to the department, for example, *the Lutheran church*, memorabilia and the Edvard Monk room," says a past student of the Norwegian language department. Similarly, one professor emeritus states, "there are issues historians are concerned with...ethnic groups of the church prevented the 'Americanization' movement because it is extremely difficult to deny ethnic identity within the church."

St. Olaf College also has, what I term, "limited-access symbols." These Norwegian-American/Norwegian symbols are only accessible through certain on-campus academic departments. While one piece of music, "the Um Ya Ya fight song, is one way

for every individual to experience Norwegian sounds,” says one Norwegian student, another student notes that:

Certain groups of students are more aware of Norwegian foundations than others. People in the music department absolutely know that the reason the music department was started was due to a small group of father/son-type Norwegians...anytime the department had a particular tie to the Norwegian department, you would know about it. If the Sociology/Anthropology department was started by a Norwegian, or had a Norwegian publication, you'd know.

More specifically, one student of the St. Olaf Choir questions, "How many music departments host an Edvard Grieg independent study? One of my friends is studying under a professor by means of the Rand Scholarship. [A Scholarship given to a St. Olaf student by the college in hopes of studying one aspect of Norwegian Culture]"

Conclusions

Through my research on the ethnic expressions at St. Olaf, I have highlighted ways in which St. Olaf College has successfully maintained a positive association with a specific ethnicity. I believe that it is valuable for communities to recognize how one ethnicity is able to be celebrated among an array of diverse people. It is my hope that these findings will be applicable to environments in which a particular ethnicity is not being valued, and would benefit the community if it were. As seen through my research, ethnic expression has the ability to draw people of varying ethnicities together, creating cooperation through shared experiences.

Appendix:

Outline of Findings

A. Apart from geographical location/ or the agency of the college, I first looked at how the Norwegian-American ethnic identities became established in America.

1. Pride in Norwegian History: The Norwegians are not ashamed of their history

Ex. two twins taking part in Norwegian language classes in the 1980s, saying, " Although they were half-Norwegian, half-German, due to Germany's history, the brothers did not wish to identify themselves as German.

Ex. Norwegian foreign exchange student currently at St. Olaf noted: "Norwegians are proud of their heritage; look at us in comparison to German celebrations; the Germans are not as proud of their history as Norwegians."

2. Inferiority Complex: Norway's position an underdog has always been a uniting force: (Student of Cultural Anthropology who studied Norwegian Americans at St. Olaf College)

Ex: Norway's political position in history as an underdog allows Norwegians to take pride in the independence they gained after 400 years under Danish rule, and later under Swedish governance.

3. Genealogy: Norwegians have a history of taking meticulous track of genealogical records, therefore, they can identify with the evidence of being "Norwegian-American."

Ex. Every interviewee I spoke with, that expressed having a Norwegian ethnicity, knew roughly, if not precisely, details of their Norwegian ancestry.

Ex. I found my own ancestry, and have a detailed family tree. These findings compare with the absence of knowledge I have of my other ethnic identities.

Ex. Norwegian American Historical Association

Ex. St. Olaf Genealogical

B. What influences of the Minnesota geographical region support the Norwegian-American identity at St. Olaf College?

1. The Mid-West recognizes the Scandinavian-American culture through the establishment of a highly visible Scandinavian American community, including many organizations that are in close relationship with the college.

-Sons of Norway, Torkseklubben (one interviewee noted seeing President Anderson at a club meeting), Lakselaget, and Concordia Language Villages: Skogfjorden (Influenced one interviewee to come to St. Olaf)

C. Why does the college want to celebrate its Norwegian-American heritage?

1. Alumni relations: many alumni associate with the Norwegian-American identity. Thus, the alumni network is a vital part of keeping St. Olaf running. Alumni are often respected donors who provide support to the college. Many interviewees noted the alumni support.

2. Ethnicity that adds to the uniqueness associated with the college. The second paragraph of St. Olaf's "about the college" states that St. Olaf was "Founded in 1874 by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants, St. Olaf is a nationally ranked liberal arts college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

Ex: "On the outside, they are promoting it[identity] a lot, 'We are a Lutheran college founded by Norwegians.'" (One Norwegian international student)

D. Who is responsible for maintaining this identity? Is it the faculty, students or institution? -Administration

1. Administration: decides to hold festivals...

ex. "It's not so much the Norwegian department, it's more the administrative powers." (Norwegian foreign exchange student)

ex. "Majority of students do not identify strongly with Norwegian ethnic expression" (student from Norwegian house)

ex. "I came to St. Olaf in 1971, says one St. Olaf professor of Norwegian and History,"
Because we do have the Norwegian department, the amount of expression is directly related to the people representing the St. Olaf Norwegian department at the time, and their relationship with the current administration."

E: The execution of such events is often in combination with the Norwegian department.

Ex. "Because we have a Norwegian department it's more genuine. You have visitors... the king comes, and the princess sells her books in the bookstore," says one professor emeritus

-17th of Mai, Christmas Service

1. The St. Olaf Norwegian Department

a. The department takes pride in its' evolving makeup, drawing students from across the academic curriculum, not those solely interested in the Norwegian language and culture.

b. Dept. is stepping stone to studying strong academic subjects Norway offers: Conflict and Peace studies, Environmental Science...

c. Fulbrights/Hecua SUST

2. Educate students of a concept of diversity that is not associated with race, but rather ethics and lifestyle.

F. How academia and ethnic expression support one another on the St. Olaf Campus.

1. The increasing number of students interested in "Norway" helps support the "Norwegian-American" expression/identity on campus.

Ex. must attend 17th of Mai breakfast: Norwegian-American expression.

2. The Rand Scholarship: Supporting independent music study of Edvard Grieg

3. Courses surrounding Norway.

Ex. Student becomes interested in taking the language course based on a Scandinavian film policies course.

- ended up traveling to Norway, and living in the Norwegian home, thus supporting the Norwegian-American ethnic expressions of the college.

G. What are the covert practices of the college that sustain an Ethnic Identity?

1. The three identifying symbols of ethnic expression according to, Odd Lovoll, author of "Norwegian's On the Prairie,":

language: "English is like the second language of Norway," describes one native Norwegian

religion : ethnic groups of the church prevented the 'Americanization' movement because it is extremely difficult to deny ethnic identity within the church," says author, Odd Lovoll.

food: The only real event I would classify as overt would be Christmas fest, when students are forced to change their eating habits and eat meatballs for a week," says one native Norwegian student.

ex. Interviewees all noted these expressions on campus; I found common themes within these categories.

H. Future Research: Interview students from other ethnically associated colleges.

Interview more St. Olaf students that are not affiliated with the Norwegian language department.

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