

Being Muslim at St Olaf

Heru Setiawan

Anthropology 373

Professor Anderson

May 21, 2005

## Abstract

The goal of my research was to capture Muslim life and behavior at St Olaf College. The goal of my research was to help know more about Muslim students. To do this research I spent considerable time in the mosque and hanging out with Muslim students. I am so glad that I am finally able to know them deeper. For this research, I asked some questions which address the issue of culture, diversity and religion. Exploring these issues shows the positive and negative impacts that Muslim Students have to deal with on this campus. Muslims in St Olaf face a variety of challenges. Many of them are similar to those faced and other communities here. However Muslims also face challenges and opportunities that are tied to the character of Islam. The Islamic faith and its practice involve special obligations and responsibilities that shape the way Muslims as individual and groups respond to the condition of American society. Often people who become involved in the issues faced by distinctive and minority communities here forget that the special characteristics of the community are also important. Significant Islamic issues are involved in the life of Muslim students in St Olaf. Hopefully by doing this research I could help Muslim students to improve their relationship with other religious organization at St Olaf College.

## **Setting/Community**

In order to understand the awareness of St Olaf College body, especially the resident life and the community, it is really important to learn about student behavior, environment, student governments and others religious organization, and how they can interact with each others who have different faith. St Olaf College is a private institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The St Olaf population is almost 3000 students that come from 49 states and twenty five countries. Most of the students identify as Christian and three percents of students identify as non-Christian. Less than one percent of the student body identify as Muslim. Islam is quite growing a religion at St Olaf College. The first Muslim student came to St Olaf College in 1999. Since 1999, St Olaf College is more accepting of Muslims student. There are fourteen Muslim students on this campus. St. Olaf is trying to increase its percentage of minority students as well, but currently only 9.8 percent of the students are identified as a minority. St Olaf is a dry campus, this means that St Olaf does not allow the consumption of any alcohol. It is perfect environment for Muslim students because Muslims are not allowed to consume or even touch the prohibited stuff.

St Olaf College has a the perfect location. It is about forty five minutes south of the Twin Cities and thirty minutes away from the International Airport. It is the perfect location for students who came from different states and countries. St Olaf College and Carleton College have a join co-bus to the city areas. It makes it so much easier for students who come from outsides the states. This bus runs only during the weekend. Beside the co-bus, there is a love bus which runs to a town. Many students found out that this bus is really

convenient for students who take classes at Carleton College because it runs every half hour. The town is about a mile away from the campus. The town is really a beautiful place. It offers coffee shops, grocery stores, few bars, and some unique restaurants. Most of the students go to town during the weekends.

At St Olaf College, there are eleven resident halls and eighteen honor houses available for students. Most of the honor houses are available for upper class students. These houses provide students with alternative opportunities to explore and develop their interests and personal relationships with St Olaf community and outside the community.

### **Muslim Student Association (MSA)**

The MSA dedicates its efforts to create a strong Muslim community on campus, helping Muslims strengthen their faith, gain knowledge about their religion, build Islamic character and interact with other Muslims. In addition to being a religious and social group, the MSA tries to provide a forum for the discussion of issues that are of interest to Muslims in particular. We also seek to promote a better understanding of Islam to the whole community. MSA events organize events and invite guest speakers so that hopefully the St. Olaf community will understand more about Islam. MSA also provides services for all of St Olaf community and gives them ideas about Islam so they will not misunderstand religion of Islam. Also MSA offers a class for non-Muslim students who want to learn Arabic. Many students are really interested in learning about Islam, and it helps to improve Muslims relationship with other religious communities.

Since MSA was established, Muslim students are beginning to be active in the student government, even though it is not big role yet in the student government. It is a big move for Muslim students to get involved with the community, get a name in the St Olaf student activities and get a role on campus. MSA wants to get active with other religious organization such as FCA and Bible study. Some of MSA's members join FCA's soccer team and volleyball team so both organizations could share their experience.

MSA also wants to be active with other MSA's in North America so MSA has a connection with other Muslim organization. MSA always invites the Muslim Student Association from Carleton College to pray together. Both colleges always share and exchange thought and experience. Both of these organizations are really active in the communities inside and outside campus.

## **Methodology**

In this study, I wanted to hear from all Muslim Students at St Olaf College and compare them with my own experience. It was really interesting to hear from them about their issues in relation to Islam. I interviewed all of the Muslim students who have joined and have not yet joined the Muslim Student Association at St Olaf College. From both sides, I found many interesting experiences from them in both negative and positive ways. Most of the Muslim students who have not joined the only Muslim organization on this campus, they did not join because they were afraid to tell other non-Muslim student because of their personal safety. They felt that they did not belong here, and they felt that the community hates them. They would rather not tell the whole community that they are Muslim. They would love to tell their friends and their

roommate. However, those in the Muslim community who join the Muslim Student Association are so happy to tell their fellow non-Muslim students that they are Muslim. These people usually are more active in the community. They educated their fellow community members so they understand about Islam in general. They are active to bring speakers so that students at St Olaf College can learn more about Islam. Also they organize the Friday prayer, meetings, and conferences among other Muslim student organization from different colleges. MSA at St Olaf College always invites Muslim students from Carleton College to pray together. Because of this meeting with other Muslim student association from different college, we are able to share our experience and talk about it. I found out that it was interesting to compare. Most of the issues were really the same problems that we were face at both colleges. Muslims try to work them out together and find the best solution to solve these issues.

I felt Muslim students would be the most articulate about their experiences as a Muslim community at a Lutheran college. I decided to interview the Muslim community, thinking hopefully I could discover untold stories, experiences, complaints, problems and thoughts that they face in this community/environment and from being at a Lutheran College. I am really interested and serious about the Muslim community here, how Muslim students worship, communicate with each other, and how they affected by the greater community where most of the other communities are non-Muslim.

I contacted most of my subjects by emails and face to face. I asked the president of the Muslim Student Association and how many Muslim students on this campus have joined and have not joined the organization yet. He told

me that there are around nine Muslim students on campus who have joined the MSA, but he believes that there are a few Muslim students who have not joined the organization on this campus yet. I know a couple of Muslim students who have not joined because they don't want to get involved with a religious organization in college. I contacted all of them to see if they would be willing to participate in a research study on the Muslim community in the St Olaf College, and to set up a convenient time for my interview.

From March 14 until April 24, I developed some questions and started to interview. I conducted fourteen interviews with Muslim students and a few faculty. Most of my interviews took almost an hour in length. The majority of these took place in the Cage, office, Fireside, mosque and their own room. I decided to focus mainly on gathering information through a semi-structured interview format, based on my own experience as a Muslim and related to their own experiences. I also drew on a base set of questions and each interview followed the same general procedure. Most information stemmed in large part from their responses because most of them have different experiences since they have been on this campus. I tried to allow the participants to guide the interview and I was so please that the student gave me different responses. Most of the participants were so happy that some one was willing to listen their problems and I would love to share her/his experience with other Muslim students, especially my own.

I faced several challenges while conducting this research. A major difficulty was creating contact with possible interviewees, especially with students who did not join the MSA. This might be because those students were afraid to tell that they are Muslim for special reasons, such as their personal

safety, discrimination, and hate crimes. These students did not want the community to turn them away from this school, and the community might not receive and respect them because of their religion background. On other hand since I am Muslim on this campus, I have a connection with the Muslim community and it was easier for me to gather the information from them. I had to convince them that this interview was very confidential. It was very difficult to collect responses and sometimes I called their room to make an appointment with me. I also had to tell them that this paper was really important for the Muslim community to develop and be involved with the larges St Olaf community, and also so that St Olaf College could understand more about Islam because right now many in the non-Muslim community think that Islam is terrorist. Hopefully by doing this paper, we can open their hearts and educate them about Islam and its teachings.

Another difficulty in this study was preserving the individuals' confidentiality without compromising their identities. Only a few Muslim communities exist on this campus. They don't want me to tell about their backgrounds and some Muslims were concerned about their confidentiality. I knew it would be so easy to find out if I would include their country because I believe most St Olaf students would know all of Muslim students from their country. They told me to not include their country because they do not want people to change their behavior toward to them after they read this paper. They know that this paper might be put online. I totally understand their perspective on these issues. I felt that due to the small Muslim community on campus that I should promise to use different names in my paper. I tried very hard to keep the confidentiality to protect the interviewees.

## **Prayer times in college**

Many devout Muslim students at St. Olaf College have to make compromises and choices between classes and prayer. These students have found that they often have conflicts with their classes meeting during their prayer times. Muslim students face particular challenges trying to create a balance between class schedules and prayer, especially during the noon and evening prayers. For example, Muslims cannot delay the Friday prayer because it must be said at a very specific time. It is so hard for Muslim students to say this prayer when they have class during that time. They are not able to miss the class because many professors take attendance. In some classes, you are prohibited to miss more than twice without your grade being lowered. Some classes are stricter than others. "My class does not allow me to miss more than six times per semester, or I will automatically get an F in my class if I miss more than six times," says Andy, a St Olaf freshman. There are twelve Fridays per semester, and if students miss half of them, they will fail their class, and Friday prayer usually takes an hour. This always creates problems for many Muslim students because they can not leave their class because of these issues. It is a hard decision for many Muslim students to choose between class and prayer. Some Muslim students thought that Friday is a time when skipping a class is not luxury but a necessity because every male Muslim has to do Friday prayers.

There are not many options for Muslim students to avoid having a 12:55 class because not many classes offer more than one section, especially for the upper levels where they are only offered at one time. The department should offer only more than one section or they should not offer a class between one and two to respect and give a chance for Muslims to pray on Friday, especially

if you have to take this class as part of a major requirement. “I always avoided taking classes between 1 and 2 P.M on Fridays,” says Trimo, a freshman, “On a few occasions I would leave early so I could attend the Friday prayer. My professor knows that I have to leave early or come late to class. Not all of the Professors have any problems with this. They seem to really support my Friday prayers. However, I have to let them know on the first day of class that I have to leave early or come late on Friday so I can practice my religion.”

Also the Muslims find it difficult to pray in their own rooms as well. Nurul is one of two female Muslim students at St. Olaf College. She was born in the Middle East says her roommate is not happy when she is praying in her room. It makes her roommate uncomfortable to see someone of another religion praying while her roommate is studying, especially when she is wearing all white to cover all of her body, except her face. She has to find out when her roommate will not be in the room so she can pray five times daily. Even when her roommate said she could pray, Nurul still felt like her roommate was uncomfortable and judged.

Before I made my decision to come to St. Olaf, I called the admission office and asked them if they would allow me to practice my religion there because I knew St Olaf is a Lutheran college. I was kind of worried about it. Also I requested to have a roommate who did not mind living with a Muslim; I believe the admissions office really worked hard to find somebody who was willing to room with me. I still remember when I asked him permission to pray in the room. He laughed at me and said “You don’t have to ask me if you want to pray.” My roommate was willing to leave the room when I was going to

pray but I say to him, “You do not have to leave the room, but I will need it quiet for about ten minutes.”

Benny says “My roommate never asked me to leave so that he could pray because my roommate never prayed five times a day. But if he had I would have been perfectly ok with doing so. I would try to respect his religion. I am especially aware of what it is like to be in a minority group, being a homosexual myself. I always try to be respectful of other people’s traditions and lifestyles, and not try to impose my views on them”

My Non-Muslim friends know when I have to pray, and some asked me if they could watch me pray because they have not had much exposure to other religions, especially Islam, and Islamic prayer. After I had finished praying, I explained to them why I was doing things a certain way. They say it is not the way they originally thought, and that it is so much different than Christian prayers. Sukry says, “My roommate always gives me time to pray.” His roommate is so happy to have a roommate who has a different religion than him because he can learn other religions by observing other religion prayer,” he said. One of my best friends, said to me that my worship is neat and it was kind of funny and really interesting that I choose to pray in my closet because it is such a small space for prayer.

Although Nurul does not wear a scarf, she considers herself a Muslim. “It is a beautiful thing when you can be a part of a prayer where all of the community is welcome, and nobody questions your faith.” However, she finds it difficult to be public about being Muslim. “Some people are not welcoming or are unhappy to see Muslims on this campus,” she says. “I can see from their eyes that they do not like us being here. Even though it was indirectly to show

me but I can see from his/her altitude toward me,” says Mahamadu, a sophomore from the North Africa.

### **St Olaf Communities**

St Olaf College dedicated a space for Muslim prayers last year. This space gives Muslims a place to pray and gather as a Muslim community. Sukinam, freshman says “I did not care where I went to school; what I did care about was that the school allowed me to practice my religion. Most students are so welcoming here, and I feel likes I am at home.” Most of the students are so nice: they love to talk and share their experiences about being of different faiths. Many students ask questions related to Islam. St Olaf students seem really interested in learning about Islam. Mike says, “I am so glad that St Olaf College accepts Muslim students, and I can learn about other religions from these students. When I had a problem with an Islamic religion class, I went to a Muslim student to ask questions. All Muslim students are really nice, and they really love to help me with my problems. Also they are willing to give me a lesson about Islam. They are so humble and polite, and Islam was so much different than I thought before. I had heard that most Muslims love to fight that they are so violent or in other words Muslims are terrorist. However most of them at St Olaf College are so nice and wonderful people.”

Other hand, some students do not like Muslim students being at St Olaf College. They do not show respect and support for Muslim students. They do not care about the Muslim community. Muslim students found at St Olaf that some of the students who do not like their religion, perhaps because of the distortion of the image of Islam. When Muslim students tell others, “I am

Muslim,” right away some people think that Muslims are primitive or savages and also they always accuse Muslims of being terrorists. We Muslim students at St Olaf have to explain to non-Muslim student about these issues. Muslims have to explain that not every Muslim is part of a terrorist group. There are good Muslims in this country and Muslims know that there are bad Muslims as well. For example, after the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, most of Americans thought that it was by a Muslim; however it was by an American man. He was not Muslim. It is same as with Christians. There are bad and good Christians, but we cannot blame all of them because one did it. We should not think that all Muslims or Christians are bad because we can not make generalizations about these issues. However, the image of Muslims in this country has already fallen, and many Americans think that all Muslims are terrorists because of the image of September 11 and the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East.

Most of the Muslim students wish that the St Olaf College community understood Islam a little bit better. “Non-Muslim students should not judge Muslims according to the news on the TV. They should come to us as Muslim students as resources. We would so happy if they came to us if they had questions which related to Islam. We would be so happy to answer their questions if we did not know the question or we would be so happy to ask a Muslim scholar for them. They might know the answer.” Adulhap said a junior. The St Olaf community should understand us as normal human beings. All religions are the same in that each religion has different ways of worship, but we still worship the same God. The difference is that Judaism was first, Christiania was second and Islam was last but all of them come from same God. Many things are very common to them. Non-Muslim students should try

to understand us more than they do and to understand that the religion of Islam can bring extremely beneficial things to St Olaf's society.

“Muslims have a lot of regard for life, great regard for human life and even animal life; we are not supposed to harm any person, any living creature, without a good reason” (Mallon 67). Muslim students try so hard to tell their friends, who are non-Muslims that Islam has a basic code in regard to the education of human beings. Knowledge and common sense is very high in Muslim religion. Also Islam teaches us to love our neighbors to live peacefully, respect liberty, and have love and respect for each other. We Muslims love to educate about these things.

The Muslim community at St Olaf wishes that the media would be fair and not always blame Muslims for terrorism. The media should do a lot to spread good things about Islam. However, right now the media has spread a lot of confusion and negative images about us, Islam. It is time that the media should give Americans some truth about Islam. It is our job as Muslim student at St Olaf College to tell the truth about our religion.

## **Cafeteria**

It is so hard for Muslim students to practice their religion if the cafeteria does not support the Muslim community at St Olaf College, especially during the Holy Month of Ramadan. The cafeteria opens for breakfast at 7 am every day. Muslim students have to eat the opening meal before the sunrise. I still remember my first day of Ramadan. I asked the cafeteria staff if I could have my money back because I was not able to eat lunch and breakfast. They said

no. It is their policy that Bon Appetit is not allowed to refund money for the student. Muslim students should have a bag lunch for their opening meal at four in the morning. Tikimin says sarcastically, “They don’t understand how wonderful a bag lunch is, especially when you will eat it at 4:30 in the morning. It was very delicious; perhaps the Bon Appetit should try themselves to eat bag lunch early in the morning, so they will understand how bad the bag lunch is. Mukimin says, I wish they gave us our money back, so we can have our special food for opening. I think it is a good idea since we know what we want and we can have special food for Muslim. It will not hurt Bon Appetit since we are only fourteen Muslim students on this campus. I believe that my schoolmates will understand about it because some of them say, it is not fair for Muslim students because they cannot eat during the day. Honestly the Café should give their money back, or they should open at 4:30 for them if they are not willing to give money back to Muslim students.”

St Olaf College should build a separate cafeteria for us, because Muslims are really concerned about the foods that we consume every day. Sometimes the Cafeteria workers, especially the student workers, do not know what kind of food they serve. Most of them just guess every time I ask, sometime they are not sure what kind of meat that they serve. We have to be careful because we, Muslim students are not allowed to consume pork products. I wish that there were special food for Muslims which does not use any pork product. I think it is a good idea since Muslim and Jews are united by their similar dietary restrictions. Also Christians can try to eat meals that the cafeteria offers for Muslims.

## **Muslim Students at St Olaf View of conflict**

Muslim students at St Olaf consider Islam to be the source of their value system. Most of them say “my religion is important to me, because religion gives me a light of happiness.” On the other hand, there is one Muslim student at St Olaf College who said he is not really a religious person. This person is away from the Muslim community. He did not want to get involved with other fellow Muslims and he does not have many Muslim friends here. Especially for Muslim students who are freshmen in college, it is so hard to get involved with other fellow students and it is so hard to share their life together at a Lutheran college. Muslim students wish there were more Muslim togetherness activities on campus.

Relating religious values to their living pattern, they follow their parents’ teaching about the religion that they worship. Also their environment helps them to become more religious people. Most of them got influence from their friends. Both of my parents are non-Muslim, so I was influenced by my friends and other family members who are Muslim. I learned a lot from them. They taught me the laws of Islam. For example, there are specific guidelines for behavior and manner. “The prohibitions of the consumption pork, alcohol and drugs as well as restriction on dating practice were mentioned as being adhered to as part of the value structure” (Waugh and Abu-Laban 202). Before I came to this country, I really wanted to marry a Muslim woman because I could see that it was so much easier to live together with somebody who is of the same religion as mine. However my parents did not like this idea, perhaps because both of them are non-Muslim. They said that all religions are the same; they simply have different ways to worship.

Value conflicts are seen to arise in school both in and out of the classroom. For many students, their conflicts are with the school and society at large. Even though St Olaf College is a dry campus, many Muslim students find that there are a lot of students who consume alcohol, especially during the weekends. "I came to St Olaf because I wanted to find a college which banned alcohol, but I still see that many students consume alcohol on this campus" Adul a freshman, says some of their non-Muslim friends understand when Muslim students tell them their values and the discipline of their religion. "Fitting into the larger society is a battle because they drink." (Waugh and Abu-Laban 202) Most St Olaf students know that a Muslim is not allowed to consume alcohol. Usually many Muslims stay away from drinking parties, but it is so hard for Muslims because most of the first year students are drinking alcohol, and first-year Muslim do not know anybody yet to hang out with, and St Olaf College does not have social activities for them. When Muslim students go out with their non-Muslim friends and their friends want to have a drink, Muslim students will leave the room in order to stay away from the alcohol. Most of them understand that Muslims are really against alcohol and Muslims student try to stay away from it. "I told them that Islam really prohibited consuming alcohol." Bill says. However, I do not bother to leave when my friends drink, sometimes I join them to be social even, but I still do not eat any pork products.

## **Mosque**

St Olaf College gave Muslim students a place to pray at the beginning of the school year of 2003-2004. Muslim students are so glad that finally St

Olaf College is willing to give a minority religion a place to worship. Before St Olaf College gave us a place to pray, many Muslim Students had many problems. Muslim Students were not able to worship during Friday's prayer, and it was so hard to be involved with the community. Muslim students tried to avoid the 11:30 to 3 o'clock classes because they wanted to have Friday prayer. Usually they used to go to Rochester or the Twins Cities around noon. Now since we have a mosque, Muslim students do not have to go to Rochester or Twins City to have Friday's prayer and Muslim students have a big role in the community to educate non-Muslim students. They don't have conflicts with their classes because they avoid only one class which is during the Friday prayer. Many non-Muslim students, who are willing to learn Islam and Arabic, do not have to go to the Twin Cities. They come to the mosque if they have questions. Every day one of the Muslim students is always in the mosque, in case if there are non-Muslims student who visits. Muslim students always welcome to non Muslim students who want to visit the mosque. It belongs to everybody. Also the mosque is used for weekly prayer although some worshipers have found it necessary to hold the Friday noon prayers at night or even on Sunday. Other uses include the observance of religious holiday, such as the two feasts, the birthday of the Prophet, the Isra and Mi'raj, and the holy months of Ramadan. Lectures are also scheduled in this mosque in every Friday.

## **Interviews**

***How is your being a Muslim student affected by living in St Olaf College?  
How would life as a Muslim student here be different than from your own country?***

Mustakim does not see any difference, except that all of the people are Muslims in his country, and he sees the activities of prayer. All activities were shut down during the prayer, everybody goes to the mosque to pray. At St Olaf, we can not see that. Most of Muslims student have class during their prayer, it is hard to balance between class schedule and prayer time. Even though St Olaf College is a very religious college, he is so glad that St Olaf lets him to pray according to his religion. He does not see any difference between his country and St Olaf. At St Olaf, he has freedom to pray, as do most of the people in his country too, But in his country most of the population is Muslim so he is not really surprised about that. It was so much easier to pray if the environment supports it. If we did not do the prayer, we would be really embarrassed with other people because his country is Muslim country. It would be against the law if you were not doing the five times daily prayer.

At St Olaf College, he can pray anywhere, in his room, class room, or mosque. He just needs a small place and he does not want to pray in a public place where people can see him. He is so glad that St Olaf finally gave Muslim students a place to pray. It is so much different now that there is a mosque on this campus. He believes it would be a different story if St Olaf College did not have a mosque. For example, Chinese do not have freedom of religion, and Muslims are not allowed to go to the mosque. In St Olaf, we have freedom. St Olaf really supports Muslim students. However there is one fundamental different between St Olaf and his country. In St Olaf, there are many students

who consume alcohol which is really forbidden in Islam. Here, it is so much greater. He does not say that his country is free of alcohol but in America it is easier to get access to alcohol. One is more exposed to things like that here that are forbidden and that one must stay away from. We know that there are many forbidden behaviors according to Islamic law at St Olaf College, but we live in a different culture, so we have to adapt to the environment. The music, the drugs, the fashions of the girls who wearing bikinis, mini skirts and you can easily see students kissing in public places. These are kinds of problem that Muslim students face every day at St Olaf College.

***Is there any stereotype at St Olaf about Muslims communities that you have had to deal with?***

There are so many stereotypes in St Olaf community. Teguh says that he sees it all the time. St Olaf respects other religions, especially Islam and most of students are very educated about these issues, even though only a few students do not except other religions for being on this campus. Here there are so many different people. It is really an admirable society. “Most of the students that I know are very welcome and happy to see me. St Olaf College consciously sees itself as a multicultural society. There are white, black, Asian and Latino but all of us are Oles. We can see that there are so many religious backgrounds that come to St Olaf, such as Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhism and Hindu. We can learn each of us by coming to religious meetings and discussions. However often on the TV and in newspapers, there are stories that are very vicious against Islam. By having MSA, we can educate our non-Muslim’s friends about Islam here. We show that Islam is not a religion for terrorists but a religion for people who love peace and freedom. On the other

hand, there are many issues at out St Olaf College. “You see the films, the movies, and the media, all of the coverage. Everybody expects an Arab and a dagger and multiple wives behind them. What the cinema has done for the Muslim world is a great disservice. Muslims are people trying to live life and raise their children and survive and be self-sufficient and there’s really no big difference between Muslims and others.”

( Mallon 57).

***How long have you been at St Olaf? What do you wish the St Olaf community understood about your religion?***

Mukinan came to St Olaf two year ago. He is going to be a junior next year. He wishes that St Olaf students would not relate Islam and the Middle East. He knows that Islam came from Arab countries however most of the religion came from the Middle East. He argues that Islam, Christianity and Judaism are very similar and he does not see the differences. Actually Islam is a religion of freedom. We do not discriminate between one culture on another, one color and another. At St. Olaf there are white student converts to Islam. We as Muslim students are so happy that finally there are people at St Olaf College who want to study Islam and join us for prayer.

Most of Muslim Students at St Olaf College are from Africa. Muslim students are here always looking for a good community have among other Muslim students or non-Muslim students so we can live happier and more peacefully at St Olaf. Also we want to get them together to strengthen our ties. A student who converts to Islam said, “Since it does not discriminate in skin color, would be a kind of asylum to Muslims. I really think many of them feel

happy when Muslims come to prayer shoulder to shoulder with all different kinds of people. I've felt that kind of joy among them. Especially after Friday prayer, they always shake my hand and wish me "God Bless you and May God accept your prayer my brother," He always hears this word every time he joins Muslim prayer at the mosque. He feels that Muslim students want to get you closer but they don't know how," Steven says. He wished that all of St Olaf community was like that. The Muslim community shows high respect to others. He still does not understand why some people use Islam in different path. Such as killing other religion members because these Muslim thought it was God willing. These Muslims are misunderstanding about the meaning of the Jihad. Long times ago, Muslims used to Jihad to fight against people who worship to animal, big threes and statues. However, right now Muslim do not used Jihad to kill other religion, but only terrorist use "Jihad" because they wanted to get sympathy from other Muslim communities. We are doing Jihad right now at St Olaf College because we live in different country which most of people are non-Muslim, and we are teaching and educated other people about Islam. Also Jihad can mean that you can study in other countries and shore your knowledge to other people. Jihad is really abroad meaning. Many people used it differently. They should not show to other religions that Islam is primitive or violent religion but they should show other religion that Islam is against any type of violate and Islam does not support any war.

Sakir Mukiman is a senior student who came from Africa. He says, "I think the first thing is education. We should not believe things through hearsay. We should learn from the source and see if something that has been said is truth or not. I am so glad that I was able to study other religions at St Olaf." He learned a lot and he has a better perception of Christianity and Judaism. He

does not depend upon what anyone tells him about other religions because all religions are the same. He learned a lot about holy bible, and he compared it with his religion. He said that Holy Al-Quran and the Bible are very similar. He also wants other students know that Islam is submission to the will of Allah. All of us come from him and we will go back to him. It is so simple but people do not realize that. All religions give guidance for what we must do and what we must not do. None of the religions' guidance tells us to kill other religion.

Zukirman is junior with majoring in Math. He is from East Africa. He wishes that St Olaf College understood about Muslim students by coming to Muslim meetings and knowing Muslim students better. He said that he would be happy if non-Muslim friends would come to him, and he would love to become their friends and share our life together at St Olaf. We can learn and exchange our cultures by knowing each other a little bit deeper. All human beings are just like the rest, and all of the students have the same desires and wants. Muslims believe that all human beings on this earth are born as Muslims because people who believe in only one God are Muslims. He wishes to live in peace with people who worship God. We should fight together against people who use religion for indifferent purposes. He believes that all religions prohibit killing, harming and abusing other religions, but all religions have the same purpose to love, respect and live peacefully with each other.

Muslim students really want to be a part of the St Olaf community. Muslims are getting more active in the organizations, athletics, and with in the communities. Muslim students want other students, especially non-Muslim students to know that Muslims are not trying to force and convert non-Muslim students to Islam, but we want other students to understand about Islam. At St

Olaf College, we have to take Bible class, but we still follow our religion and we did not change the way we are. We just want our friends to know that Islam is not the house of terrorists or ogres. We believe that all of us know about this issue. Andy said “I mean there are things we do not like about what people do and how they do it, and we say so. But we still can work together to improve our relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim students.”

*In term of your life at St Olaf College, your classes, and you are one of the best soccer player. How is your identity as a Muslim expressed?*

What the most impresses Muhamadin there was this, when the soccer team had to play away, of course he always tells his coach about the foods, where are they going to eat? Because sometimes they will order pizza with ham on it, and he does not like pizza because sometimes the pizza man would uses a knife used to cut a pork product, so he would prefer to eat other food which 100 % free of pork. Sometimes his coach orders him steak or chicken fingers and it makes every body jealous about it. His team mates thought that their coach is not fair to them. Muslims felt that their coach made them special and their teammates thought because of they are the best soccer player in the team so they would have everything they want. Only three players have special food but the others have to eat pizza. His teammate will ask him what the reason he has to eat special food. He has to explain his teammate that he is Muslim. A Muslim is not allowed to eat any pork products. He is so proud of it. He did not have any feeling of fear when he told their team mate about his religion. He thought that it would make me them uncomfortable, but he found that most of his teammates were very respectful and understanding about his situation for being good Muslim. Most of his teammates have never had a friend who is

Muslim, so they will ask him many questions about his religion. He would tell him everything. They really paid attention and were willing to listen about his religion. He still remembers until now when his teammate said to him that he really respects him very much because of this. His teammates love him because of his attitude and his behavior toward other people.

He tries to be polite with all his teammate and with other students. St Olaf College is like home for him, and everybody is so nice to him. Perhaps he shows by his attitude that he is Muslim. He loves everybody here, feels that St Olaf is a safe place to get his future, and continues to get his education. He always speaks with manners. He speaks about his truth of his religion so his school mate will not misunderstand about his religion. He felt very comfortable and he found out that in this country and at St Olaf College, there are freedom of religion even though St Olaf College is Lutheran College. We could meet with other people and share our life together here. At St Olaf College, there are not restrictions about other religions worshipping according to their faith. He really likes and respects this very much. Especially since St Olaf College supports other religions and give us a place to pray.

*I know that you converted to Islam at beginning of this school year. Can you tell why you became Muslim? Did your Muslim friends force you to join them?*

“My path is not just due to my emotional involvement with my Muslim friends. I know that Islam is a pure religion which came from the same God of Jesus, however many Christians can not see it. Many people see that Islam is primitive religion and a religion which loves to war but they are wrong. They just misunderstand about Islam. They should meet with the Muslim community

here and then they can judge it. All of the Muslim students are so nice, humble, and respect each other. They have good manners and always smile to other non-Muslim students. They are so polite and so friendly to other people.”

Steven says. He really wants to have a manner like that and learn about their religion as well. Muslim students are very spiritual men and feel their religion very strongly. He studied Christianity when he was in high school but it did not do anything for him. He felt that he did not belong to Christianity so he was still looking until he found Muslim’s friends at St Olaf.

The more he read books about Islam, the more he felt that Islam seemed be drawing him. He felt that God gives him enlightenment and peace. When he decided to become Muslim, all of his family did not support him. They thought that his Muslim friends forced him to join them. He told his parents that his Muslim friends never forced him to join them, but in fact that one of Muslim student told him to rethink twice before he would converted to Islam. He must confess that the day he made the decision and made his declaration was a great day because he really felt God gave him enlightenment, liberty and peace. He will not regret it in the rest of his life because Islam is a pure religion and a religion of freedom.

*What the biggest fear for you as being Muslim student after September 11 at here?*

The September 11 was a turning point for all of Muslim students here and outside the St Olaf community. Afduljalín was so glad that He was here when that happened. He does not know what would have happened if He was still in high school, because he heard that there were hate crimes elsewhere, especially in public school. Many Muslim students were afraid to go to school.

Their parents would not allow their kids to play outside with other kids. However at St. Olaf College, it was safer than other colleges. He did not feel that other students discriminated against Muslims. He was so happy when the dean of students and the pastor asked to see them. They said that this campus is safe for you that they would try the best that they could to protect Muslims. Both the dean of student and the pastor were really concerned about behavior toward Muslims after the September 11. They said that Muslims do not have to be afraid about these issues and they also said that Muslim should be more open to other students. The pastor and the dean of student were willing to listen and talk. If one of the Muslim students heard something impolite or unpleasant from other students, the dean said that Muslim students should let them know as soon as possible and call them and public safety. I think it was really nice that they are really concerned about us; they gave us moral support so we could focus on our academic and our worship.

Since September 11, Jatingbai did not find any discrimination against me on this campus. Perhaps people who are willing to be friends with him are really liberal and he is not close to students who are very religious. Most of my friends do not go to church. Perhaps it would be so much different if his entire circles of friends who are close to him were really religious persons. Maybe he would find them uncomfortable around him. He knows they are nice in front of him but he does not if religious Christian would say something unpleasant to hear behind his back because he can see from their attitude that some of them don't like us for being here. The way they act toward us is so much different after the September 11. We can easily tell that some of them are uncomfortable around Muslim students.

## **Non-Muslim friend's view about Muslim community**

One of Muslims student's roommates say, Christine feels like I've learned a lot from her Muslim friend. He has though her a lot about his religion, culture, and overall values. "I think it is great to have a diverse group of friends and I have found interesting learning about his religion and culture." Benny says. She feels grateful that she has someone to teach her about a life that is different from her own. She can go to him with any questions and he is always more than happy to tell her what she wants to know. She knows the trials faces being a Muslim man of color in this country, and she really admire his strength.

Benny says, "I think the Muslim community here is pretty disappointing. To say that St. Olaf is a diverse community is an absolute joke. There is hardly any diversity here on campus, especially when it comes to having students with faiths other than Christianity. I would love to see more Muslim students on campus in the years to come." He would definitely support more Muslim students coming here because he thinks the other "Christian" students could learn a lot from them about tolerance and acceptance.

Christine is more aware of the Muslim community because she has a Muslim friend. Sadly, if you did not have a Muslim friend, she would probably not be as aware of the community as she is. She feels the St Olaf community at large barely acknowledges the Muslim community. It took too long for them to finally get an area to pray and until Bon Appetit is willing to work with the Muslim student during Ramadan ( after all they don't serve Any red meat on

Fridays during Lent) St Olaf will still be selling these students short. She has talked with the dean student on the Bon Appetit issue, and the dean of students claims that the current plan for Muslim students is adequate. "If Bon Appetit will make concessions for Christian students, why will it not for Muslim students? Bag lunches are atrocious, and I would not want to eat one at 4 am. In short, having a Muslim friend has showed me the hierocracy. The Muslim community must face and the hardship, by being a minority on the St Olaf campus.

## **Conclusion**

Through my research, I discovered many challenging that Muslim student have to face every day on this campus. There are many problems concerning the Muslim student population that the St Olaf community did not notice, or simply chose to ignore. They were able to do this because of the very small percentage of the student body that is Muslim compared to other religious affiliations.

Exploring these issues shows variety of challenges Muslims at St Olaf face. Many of these challenges are similar to those faced and other communities here, and I have developed a few suggestions for how these situations could be ameliorated. We, St Olaf College students, should help minority student to get involved with other religious organizations. Also St Olaf should accept more minority students because right now they account for less than ten percent of the school population.

This project hopefully will help St Olaf College to understand more about the Muslim faith and Muslim culture. The information presented in this

paper may help the St Olaf community to better understand the Muslim community and then lead administrators, staff, and students to make more effective solutions and structures to promote adjustment and integration of the Muslim Student organization in this campus.

## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. Are you religious person? How committed are you to your religion?
2. What have been your biggest fears related to being Muslim at St. Olaf, especially after September 11?
3. What kinds of discrimination have you experienced as a Muslim in here?
4. In what ways do various St. Olaf communities support your religion?
5. What problems do you have being Muslim in St Olaf College?
  - Can you tell me little bit more about it?
6. Why did you choose St Olaf College, and knowing that it is not a Muslim school?
7. What do you say about Caf during holy months?
  - Did they support you?
  - How about St Olaf community?



16. How do you feel about teaching Islam in this community?
17. How did the Dean of students respond to ideas about creating a mosque on campus?
18. How is the Mosque working?
19. What kinds of activities do Muslim students do together?
20. What would you say your sense of community is like?
21. Are there any supports from your friend to practice for your religion?
22. What do you wish St Olaf community understood about Islam and your non-Muslim friends and colleagues understood about your religion from knowing you?
23. Is there any stereotype at St Olaf about Muslims communities that you have had to deal with?
24. How is your being a Muslim student affected by living in St Olaf College? How would life as a Muslim student here be different than from your own country?

25. In terms of your life, athletic and everything else here in St Olaf. How is your identity as a Muslim expressed?

26. In your everyday life today how you express your identity as a Muslim

## Appendix B

### Verbal project information protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in my project for a research methods course required for my major in sociology/ anthropology taught by Professor Carolyn Anderson, who is supervising my project. My project is about being Muslim students at St. Olaf College, and I will be interviewing Muslim students in here. I will be asking you a number of questions about what your experience as Muslim student at Lutheran College is, and the interview will take about an hour. I will write a paper that will be available on the sociology/ anthropology department web site, and I may present a summary of my findings at a professional sociology or anthropology conference.

I will protect your identity and the confidentiality of the information you give me to the extent I can due to the fact that there are so few Muslim students here. This means that I will not disclose your participation in this project to anyone else or include information in any papers, presentations, or discussions about my project that would allow someone else to identify you.

I hope the results of my study will contribute to a campus awareness and discussion of the Muslim community and social interaction at St Olaf College. It will benefit for all of us, and hopefully it will help Muslim students at St Olaf to develop their community, and also it will help to increase relationship between Muslim Students and non-Muslim students. Also it will help non-Muslim student to understand more about Islam and Muslims' culture.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline to respond to specific questions, or you can stop the interview at any point. If you change your mind about allowing me to use your information after the interview, please let me know by April 30, 2004.

Do you have any questions? Thanks again for agreeing to be interviewed. I am anxious to hear your responses to my questions.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

Interviewer: Heru Setiawan  
Address: 1500 St Olaf College  
Northfield, MN 55057  
Telephone number: (507) 646-2644  
E-mail address: setiawan@stolaf.edu

Project supervisor  
Professor Carolyn R. Anderson  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
St. Olaf College  
1520 St. Olaf Avenue  
Northfield, MN 55057  
Telephone number: (507) 646-3133

E-mail address: [anderscr@stolaf.edu](mailto:anderscr@stolaf.edu)

Carolyn R. Anderson  
Sociology/Anthropology Department  
St. Olaf College  
1520 St. Olaf Avenue  
Northfield, MN 55057-1098  
507/646-3133  
FAX 507/646-3933

## Works Cited

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, ed.

1991 *The Muslims of America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hasan, Asma Gull

2000 *American Muslims: The New Generation*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.

Mallon, Elias

1989 *Neighbors: Muslims in North America*. Cincinnati: Friendship Press.

Waugh, Earle H., Baha Abu-Laban, and Regula B. Qureshi

1987 *The Muslim Community in North America*. Alberta: The University of Alberta Press.