

## Language Houses: Promoting a Multicultural Campus?

### Abstract:

The researchers Stuart Butcher and Ryan Smart study the language houses on St. Olaf Campus to determine what role they have on multicultural awareness. To do this they interviewed eight residents from the six perspective language houses to understand the resident's view of how the language house system is supposed to work. Using a structural-functionalist approach and incorporating Weber's ideas of rational bureaucracy to look at the macro-level, and using symbolic-interactionism to study micro-level situations within the houses, the researchers completely analyze the language house system to successfully understand what the houses' roles are on campus.

### Intro:

Does being a resident of a language house increase one's sense and understanding of the culture the house is associated with? Does this understanding transfer to the campus? How do language houses fit into the macro-level and micro-level constructs of society? What is multiculturalism, a word that is thrown around quite often while discussing modernity? Is St. Olaf a multicultural campus?

As we the researchers looked at our lives as residents of a language house, they sought to answer these questions. The hypotheses that we came up with are that the language houses do increase residents' understanding of the culture being studied. It is hard not to learn about a culture while learning the language since so much of language is based in a cultural context. The understanding one gains will transfer, but to what extent? At the micro-level, the language houses give students opportunities that are not available in the dorms. At the macro-level, the language houses are used by the administration and the language departments as devices to spread knowledge about certain cultures. Also, especially in the administration, the language houses function as an indicator of multicultural awareness. It is easier to claim that one is a multicultural campus if one has housing aimed specifically at immersion in a language and culture. Multiculturalism is very hard to define. This question is one of the main reasons for the study. And, based on the definition of multicultural, we, the researchers will look at the language house's role in the multicultural side of the St. Olaf campus.

St. Olaf College puts a lot of stake in their community life. If you read the mission statement, or any of the statements from the Office of Community Life

and Diversity, the word community is thrown around quite a bit. Along with community, St. Olaf says that it is a multicultural campus, and that multicultural learning is key in developing into a well-rounded citizen who understands the changing world due to globalization and modernity.

One way St. Olaf chose to increase awareness about different cultures is to develop a situation where there are ambassador-like students on campus who can accurately and readily represent the various cultures. The language house program was developed with the idea that as students of a language and culture, language and area studies majors can enhance the multiculturalism on campus. This, however, also has its pros and cons – debating whether it is the house's job to promote culture on campus, or to only be used by current students of the language program and whether the houses should focus on language or culture, pointing toward the popular debate that one cannot be taught without the other.

Living in a language house, the researchers have observed how their house and the other language houses has impacted campus life and how it has impacted the students in the houses. However, by studying language houses and their affect on multiculturalism on the St. Olaf community, the researchers are trying to better understand the situation they and other students are in and the effect the campus is feeling.

We hypothesize that the opportunities for language development and practice are the main reason for living in a language house. Also, the main reason the school developed language houses is to bring awareness to various cultures and allow opportunities for other students to take advantage of the knowledge that language house residents have of language and culture through their studies at St. Olaf and abroad.

Of all the questions asked during interviews, the researchers anticipate the one that will make the interviewee think is "what is the dominant culture at St. Olaf?" The object of asking this question was not to change the interviewee's opinions, but simply to see if there is one dominant group on campus, or if there are more than one. We hope to find if the idea of a dominant culture interferes with the goal of being multicultural, or if it is possible to be open to different cultures while still holding on to a dominant cultural beliefs.

#### Literature Review:

It should be mentioned first that we intended this study only to look at the relationship between students living in language houses, and the houses' effects on multiculturalism on the St. Olaf Campus. As soon as we began interviews it became obvious that there were many facets that we had not foreseen from looking at the literature. First, there was the problem of the houses as: A) a

form of residence for students, or B) a place of learning for students. These separations then brought about other questions, which led our library research in several different directions. If we looked at the language houses as a form of residence (which they definitely are) do we look at them from a macro structural-functional view, or do we look at them from a micro-level standpoint as individuals who combine within the house to form friendship and learning networks? Also, do we look at the learning aspect from the macro or micro level, and what aspects of the learning process are most important? When focusing on learning, we also had to distinguish the difference between language and cultural immersion, or whether immersion is really possible under the given circumstances. With these questions in mind, we have gathered a range base of literature that we hope will help us analyze these questions.

### 1) The Language House as a Residence:

Different living arrangements have been under study for many years. The most important and ground-breaking research was conducted within the last twenty years. Several surveys were drawn up in the late 70's to evaluate students' living environments and their academic performance. These studies contain valuable information involving different experiments involving different options in residence options. Wolf states:

“Since the end of World War II, colleges and universities in the United States have created language houses or language floors in student dormitories to give students an opportunity to speak a foreign language and improve their general linguistic skills. These houses or floors often have five to ten residents who agree to speak the foreign language, say German, but we all know the normal results: although a German exchange student may live in the house or on the floor and ostensibly help students speak German, most of the students still speak English most of the time. Despite good intentions by a language professor or department, the language house devolves into nothing more than a dormitory where students could, but usually do not, speak the target language. By emphasizing speaking a foreign language, language houses and floors appeal primarily to language majors as residents. However, as the number of majors in languages such as German, French, and Russian falls, the future of these houses becomes questionable. The plight of the language houses is further damaged by student perceptions that the house is for language majors only and by a general isolation from the rest of campus and dormitory life.”(Wolf 2002: 81)

Wolf also proposes that language houses should be used as “cultural centers”

on campus, and not be continually isolated from the rest of the student population. Learning language is a goal of the people in the house, but to most people on campus, it is not.

Most studies of residence information also included information on graduate students as well, which slightly skewed their results. One study used a mean GPA to rank different living arrangements:

“The mean GPAs by housing group were as follows: 2.8 for the residence hall group, 2.75 for the on-campus apartment dwellers, 2.95 for those living off-campus as singles, 3.25 for married students living off campus, and 3.0 for those living with parents. Married student living off campus reported significantly higher GOAs than those in any other living arrangement.” (Clodfelter 1984: 19)

The real question here is “why?” Why do these students achieve higher GPAs than other students, and is it possible at all to achieve a high GPA while living on campus? Unfortunately, the article does not do so much as speculate, and does not help our research very much. A follow-up study reinforced the findings saying only that “overall, the studies show that commuters are performing better academically than residents.” (Clodfelter 1984:23) From the point of view of language houses as a residence this really shows how hard it is to find relevant information. We are forced to look at these past studies which have identified many different types of living arrangements and try to match language houses to an already defined category.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to say which category language houses would fall under. They are certainly not commuter residences. However, in the case of St. Olaf, they are on campus, although slightly detached from the main center of campus life. Do these compare better with Clodfelter and Wachowiak’s analysis of “on-campus apartments”? With the limited information available, and since the methods section of their analysis is fairly vague, it is virtually impossible to come to an agreement, and apply the findings from the literature to St. Olaf College specifically.

This section becomes more important as our personal interviews are coded and studied.

## 2) Language House as Educational Facility

Educational facilities’ international studies departments exploded around the time of the Cold War, specifically about the time of the Sputnik satellite. There was a general feeling of isolation during this point in history, and people realized that things happening outside of the United States could play an

extremely important role in many spheres at home. Thus, most of the material about developing international studies programs is severely dated, to the point where most of it is completely unusable. Fortunately, some of the material gathered is still valuable to look at with respect to why these programs were created in the first place, thus explaining how the language departments are meant to function in the spirit of internationalization. A particular study involved a “survey of recipients of small (\$30,000 – 40,000) undergraduate grants from the (then) U.S. Office of Education asked questions regarding the needs on their campuses which led to a grant application and their sense of the successes and failures associated with implementing the grant. Typically, the grantees used program funds to revise and update courses and curricula.... The essential product was the new or revised course.”( Harf 1985: 4) This brings about the idea of greater institution’s interest in the language programs. Although this program is older than is relevant, it does bring one to wonder if departments can still be influenced by other factors outside of the actual college.

Another topic to discuss is the difference between cultural and language immersion. One question should be asked in this field: Does language immersion necessitate cultural study as well, and vice versa? The question asked by Berman is an important one:

“Languages are embedded in culture and are born in culture, but the critical discourse of cultural studies has paid scant attention to the intersection of language and culture. Surprisingly perhaps, it appears that much of the cultural studies movement ignores linguistic multiplicity. This may either reflect a theoretical blind spot, that is, an assumption of language as fundamentally transparent, or a disciplinary predisposition to select primarily anglophone material. Is cultural studies ultimately as much an English-only project as American Studies always has been?”(Burman 2002: 5)

Berman obviously disagrees with the fact that most international studies programs are conducted in English, where he thinks that language is intrinsically tied to culture – i.e., to fully understand one, you need to understand the other. So, in the case of language houses, is it possible for all of the students involved in the house not to be fluent in the language, or do they just need to be in the learning stages? Is it the department’s job to plan and sponsor multicultural events at the houses to ensure that someone who fully understands the language and culture from all perspectives is involved? There is certainly a barrier within the house considering the fact the residents are all students, and they are students for a reason – they are learning about the culture and language, and do not yet have a full grasp on the finer working of the institution, language, or culture.

“Teaching foreign language implies a direct and special engagement with the material of the other culture – its language – which indicated how close the foreign language field is tied de facto to the project of cultural studies”(Burman 2002: 6) It would seem that the language houses at St. Olaf are indeed St. Olaf’s answer to the problem of cultural studies within language. But how much cultural attention can students give to this cause, based on how much they know. Certainly, international students are invaluable for cultural study, but then, what role do American students play? Do language houses benefit the campus as a whole, or do they only benefit the students living in these houses?

To further define this in terms of “multiculturalism”, which is admittedly difficult to define, does a language house fulfill its duty of multicultural awareness if they only speak the language, or do cultural events do more to promote multiculturalism? According to Wolf, language and culture are tied together – leading us to believe that unless there is fluent language skill present in the house, presumably in the form of a native speaker, culture cannot be fully understood or taught. The best way to getting both culture and language is a native speaker.

Wolf examines the language house as a classroom, and as a “cultural curriculum”. Although he admits that there are some faults in the fact that some students’ language capabilities are not at the same level as others living in the house, he says that it should be better for all students to help teach the less competent students, and learn from their experiences as well. On the other hand, he criticizes departments that appear to be “compartmentalized, distinct, or autonomous”(Wolf 2002: 82)for their detachment from the rest of the departments within a certain educational facility. In agreement with Berman, he states that departments have much to learn from each other. In Wolf’s experience he gives an example of once a week seminars given in English at the German house under his direction. Although the students are encouraged to speak German at all times, he does not deny the fact that this probably does not happen, but says that cultural study in English can be beneficial to students outside the language department, as well as for students living in the house. Based on the different levels of study in the student composition of the language house, it is difficult to expect 100% language study, but it is reasonable to expect genuine interest in learning, whether it be language, culture, or related fields.

Also among Wolf’s concerns for the language house he mentions the “5 ‘commonsensical’ goals of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. Due to first hand knowledge of researcher Stuart Butcher as Russian House president it has been mentioned that St. Olaf has an interest in the campus community - bringing up the idea of a “language corridor” on St. Olaf Avenue to promote

multicultural awareness on the St. Olaf campus. The idea of a “language corridor” came from president meetings in the previous year with the Assistant Director of Residence Life. This is an important goal for St. Olaf, and something that would be very beneficial to multicultural studies in the future.

The last section of Wolf’s essay is called “Advocacy, Articulation, and Community Outreach”. This brings the language house on a level with local schools and puts students in a position of teaching and advocating international understanding with children in the surrounding area. Also, this brings up another interesting article “Volunteering and Values: An Analysis of Students’ Participation in Community Service”. It is proven in this article that students who are involved in community service achieve higher grades and develop valuable skills for after graduation. The language houses at St. Olaf are not required to do any sort of work outside of the St. Olaf campus and do not work outside the department. Community service in this sense could also refer to the St. Olaf campus community, rather than the Northfield community, in which sense most language houses are also not serving the campus community as a whole, but only the community of department majors, or select individuals in the department. Volunteering, in the sense of this article, also promoted self-motivation to work toward a common goal of the community – in the case of St. Olaf, multiculturalism. In some cases however, language departments are overshadowing this individuality by instituting curriculum for the houses to follow and setting up requirements for the house residents, for which they receive no special bonuses. We will discuss this in a later section.

St. Olaf’s mission statement also mentions that “St. Olaf College strives to be an inclusive community, respecting those of differing backgrounds and beliefs.” This statement, which was approved by the St. Olaf faculty in 1987, leads students to believe that there are many different cultures represented on the St. Olaf campus. The Community Life and Diversity webpage states that: “Diversity at St. Olaf is lived out in community. As we work together to learn about and understand our differences, we continuously strive to be a welcoming and accepting community. Community Life at St. Olaf means that we can transcend differences while sharing common values, goals, and aspirations.”

After this statement it goes on to boast that:

“The office plays an important role in bringing the St. Olaf Mission to life by collaborating with and engaging the entire college community in respectful dialogue, activities that embrace our differences, and hands-on workshops and seminars. All activities are designed to heighten awareness while generating understanding, respect and appreciation of community issues.”

However, how do the language houses play into this role? Are they utilized at

all to foster cultural and multicultural awareness? It seems that, with the many international students, and with other residents that are very knowledgeable in culture and customs, the language houses would be a natural place to develop and strengthen awareness about specific cultures on campus.

Language houses are complicated institutions, where people gather to learn, and also where people live. This relationship can be looked at in either a macro or micro level, but at the same time it should be kept in mind that language houses are important for any number of reasons including language learning, cultural immersion, interdepartmental programs, and overall, international and multicultural awareness.

### Methods:

The sample population was derived from students living in language houses at the time of the study. The eight students who were interviewed were sophomores, juniors, or seniors; freshmen are required to live in dormitories on campus and therefore are not allowed to live in the language houses. Due to the year in school of the participants, they are in the upper level language courses.

Both researchers live in language houses, and one (Stuart Butcher) is president of the Russian House. Because of this, Butcher had a list of other language house presidents. After initially contacting the presidents of the houses and asking for a list of names of residents who would be willing to participate in the study, the researchers contacted the students via email. The researchers allowed a week for responses and received only two. A follow-up email was sent to those who had not responded, with several students responding, but in spite of phone calls and other emails, the researchers were unable to get in contact with these students. Phone calls seemed to be the best way to set up interview times, since prospective interviewees responded positively when asked for interviews over the phone. The exception is the prospective interviewee who was asked in person after a happenstance meeting on campus. In general, the process of finding students who would be willing to be interviewed was more difficult than expected, and set the research schedule back. We decided not to pursue interviewees who had not responded for fear of harassing prospective interviewees with too many emails and phone calls.

We met with the interviewees at their houses in all cases except for one. The interviews were conducted by both researchers to cut down on "dead time". "Dead time" is a term used by the researchers to describe the silence when the interviewer was writing notes and the interviewee had stopped talking. This resulted in a smoother interview and made the interviewee more comfortable. Also, we chose to use a location chosen by the interviewee for the interviews in order to increase the comfort level of the participant. This led to a smoother

interview with the participant willing to share information freely. Before each interview, we explained what our project was and how the interview would help in the research. All questions that arose from this dialogue were answered to the best of our ability. The interviews lasted from twenty minutes to an hour with the average duration of forty-five minutes.

While looking at language houses, we turned to two theories to best understand the dynamics of the language house situation in the broader macro-level context of the St. Olaf College campus. These theories are Weber's ideas about rationalization and Parson's AGIL scheme of structural-functionalism. At the time Weber was developing his thoughts on rationalization, the general population was progressively losing its ability to express human emotion, therefore becoming a "cog" in the machine. However, Weber saw the both the good and bad sides of rationalization. His discussion of the development of formal rationality illuminates certain aspects of the language house situation, especially the bureaucratic structures of the language departments and other official departments. Bureaucracy, under the definition of Weber, is a highly rational system that is characterized by an elaborate hierarchical division of labor directed by explicit rules that are impersonally implied. Nothing could describe the situation better, except for the fact that there are two competing bureaucratic structures governing the functioning of the language houses – Residence Life, and the language department. As a micro-level analysis, rationality can also be applied to the house itself, where a somewhat formal bureaucratic system is set up to govern the everyday functioning of the house. If you count the house's own system, you have three bureaucratic structures governing the house, with two of the structures (Res. Life and the language department) directly guiding certain aspects of the house's internal bureaucratic system.

To look at the situation from a macro-level standpoint, structural-functionalism is a natural choice. We used Parson's AGIL scheme, which is simply:

- 1) Adaptation: a system must cope with external situational exigencies. It must adapt to its environment and adapt the environment to its needs.
- 2) Goal attainment: A system must define and achieve its primary goals.
- 3) Integration: A system must regulate the interrelationship of its component parts. It also must manage the relationship among the other three functional imperatives (A,G,L).
- 4) Latency (pattern maintenance): A system must furnish, maintain, and renew both the motivation of individuals and the cultural patterns that create and sustain the motivation.

(Ritzer, 97)

Combining this approach with Weber's ideas of rational bureaucracy, one can

see the pieces fitting together. One of the major problems with this point, however, is the failure to define concrete goals for the language houses, thus not fitting into the scheme of structural-functionalism - they are not considered “honor houses” and they have no official literature backing up their functional aspects. They do adapt within the house and within the scope of the language department, and they attempt to integrate all the people in the house to achieve their goal, and if the house is deemed successful at the end of the year, it is renewed – thus maintaining the house for the next year.

However, to understand the more generalized micro-level relationships among the residents of the language houses, the researchers used the perspective of symbolic interactionism. More specifically, we feel Blumer’s idea that society is made up of groupings of macro structures that are controlled and created by the actors in society depending on their social acts.(Ritzer 2000: 234) The interactions of the actors help bring about changes in the departments controlling the house, but they cannot change the overall system of the language houses. This theory focuses the attention on the language and cultural knowledge the residents bring to the house, as well as their own personal problems, ideals, and beliefs. These different characteristics can bring about how the students in the house (social actors in this situation) come together to create joint actions.

These joint actions of the students are the basis of the language house structure inside the house, apart from Residence Life and the language department. Most students living on campus would see this view of the language houses as well, considering that most students would not see the houses through the eyes of Residence Life or the language department. It should be noted that the departments play a role in the actions of the students, so they are not always acting on their own intuition or for their own interests. This gives rise to several different arguments that we have phased out because of this perspective, including resistance theory, and conflict theory.

Resistance theory and conflict theory did not give enough room for the autonomy of the students. Although they are free social actors, it has to be mentioned that they are under supervision of a greater structure, and do not always act as autonomous actors. It should also be mentioned that since the houses are farther from campus than the normal student residencies, there seems to be less control by the higher authorities about what happens at the house. In this respect, the actors within the house tend to have greater autonomy than their counterparts on campus.

Findings:

Reasons for residence:

Most people interviewed mentioned a desire to become more independent

within the language and to maintain their language ability. Some people were not language majors, and were not currently enrolled in a language class. Their majors included other areas within the department, for example: Hispanic studies, or Russian studies. Students who were not part of a language department, per say, did not exhibit statements within their interviews that led us to believe that they were not as valuable in the functioning of the house as other residents might be. Strong friendship bonds were obviously made within the houses, even though most people didn't have the choice of who they were living with in the house, or as roommates.

Native speakers, or international students, had much different reasons for living in the houses. Some receive scholarships to live in the houses, or to work for the department or residence life as Residence Assistants (RAs). There was some bitterness from some house presidents who saw that some people were getting benefits from Residence Life to be Residence Assistants within the house, and the presidents were getting basically nothing. In the case of these students who showed disappointment with the lack of financial reimbursement - one an international student and one the house president - there were several people in the house that received work-study to live in the house. While they agreed that this did not change the friendship networks, or alter their friendships within the house in any way, it did make them wonder why they were not also entitled to similar benefits from Residence Life, or from the language department itself.

One important aspect of the students' residence is how the students are selected to live in the house. There were several main ways this was accomplished, with each department going about it in their own way. One department chooses each student based on merit and asks them individually if they would like to live in the house. They also recruit international students for the house by offering scholarships and additional bonuses for their knowledge of the language. It is interesting that this house is almost completely controlled by the department in structure and function. The students have almost no control over the programs they host or who lives in the house. Students interviewed at this house mentioned a genuine interest in the functioning of honor houses, and in how people in honor houses are much more likely to have similar personal values and be more cooperative in the function of their house.

Events are also an important part of living in a language house. Most houses get to pick their own events to host for the language department, but some houses are under stricter control from the language department. According to one interviewee in the house strongly controlled by the language department: The department organized all of the people in the house, and gives the house a list of things to do. Stuff like movie nights, parties, [language omitted] table. Basically they say "here's an event, plan it."

This is not necessarily a bad thing, as their productivity as a house is extremely high. On the other hand, students seem to prefer planning their own events, as in most other houses. These houses seem to help the language department out rather than being an ideological extension of the department. One student stated:

[Language houses] are probably a really good tool for people in the houses. We help the department individually... However, we are less involved on campus. The houses only seem to benefit people that live in the house.

Because the houses' events are usually passed through the department, news of the events at the house generally circulate through department channels. Unless a student is enrolled in a class within the department, or has some sort of extracurricular interest in that area of study, it is almost impossible to find out about house-related events. Therefore involvement on campus can be hindered by the macro-level structures of the language departments.

Students also mentioned that they were worried they would not see their friends as much as they did when they lived on campus. This is a difficult comparison to dormitory life, which is what most literature mentions. Of course, as stated before, it is extremely difficult to make a connection between language houses and other existing residence areas. Language houses are not differentiated from other similar residence halls in most studies, so it was necessary to make a connection to the form of housing that was most similar. The best comparison is to "on-campus apartments" and to the article on community service. However, besides the fact that students were worried about contact with old friends or missing out on normal campus life, they also demonstrated a genuine desire to help raise cultural awareness on campus for their respective language departments.

Sometimes students' visions of the houses' function contain both educational and residential expectations. Most people interviewed mentioned that they wanted to improve their language skills, but they also wanted to have a chance to help other people learn the skills that they already knew. As a "multicultural" campus it seems that language houses would have an invaluable role in determining certain programs and events around campus for the entire student body to enjoy. Interviewed students did mention that they were playing a role in making St. Olaf more culturally aware, but we were very surprised to find out that some departments might not think that way. When interviewing a major representative of the Residence Life office, it was mentioned that some departments prefer events and houses to be used only by students currently enrolled in classes offered by the department. It was said that, "[houses would] provide cultural [immersion] benefit for students enrolled in classes."

### Role as Educational Institution:

The language house has one basic function: to do what the language department tells it to do. There is no literature from the Residence Life offices about the actual function of the language houses and how they work specifically, but we were able to understand a few basic things about the relationship between Residence Life and the respective language department. Residence Life has basic control over the functioning of the house between roommates and housemates. It controls the basic functioning of the house as a residence for students including repairs, student feuds, and basic student needs. On the other hand, the language department itself determines the main group function of the house. That is, it is the department's responsibility to keep the houses at capacity, and to regulate and make sure the house is doing programs for the department. While Residence Life has control over monitoring programs for honor houses, it has little to do with language houses in this area. There are academic programs on campus which reflect this sort of academic/nonacademic tension, such as Great Conversation, and American Conversation. Students enrolled in these programs live together in the same dorms, but they are not required to do projects for the entire department – for example, the American Con. Students doing being available to arrange events and programs for American Studies majors.

One thing to notice is that the basic function of language houses is to provide language immersion for the students living in the house, and for people enrolled in class who wish to learn outside of class. The department ultimately makes all rules for the house, making the house president easily overruled and the position trivial at best. But what exactly is language immersion, and how does it compare to cultural immersion? Language and culture go hand in hand as we have stated before; however, is it really possible for language houses to live up to department's expectations in this area? And is providing a cultural and language center for the department contrary to St. Olaf's mission statement in providing an "inclusive community"?

Questions of this nature are difficult to answer, and even more difficult for interviewed students to answer on the spot. One simple question we decided to ask students was "What is your definition of multicultural?" After receiving mixed answers, we decided to split the project into two spheres – macro and micro spheres. Some students talked specifically about a person being multicultural, that is, "offering themselves [students] for other people to study and learn about" or multicultural as a community. Some discussion was brought up that perhaps a community of multicultural individuals would not necessarily make a multicultural community unless the people were open to dialogue among different individuals. It was also mentioned that there is no

need to be from a different country to be considered multicultural, you could just as easily come from a different background – one parent family, lower middle class, adopted, only child. Really, multicultural is your own unique perspective on the world, at least in the micro sphere.

The definition of multicultural, as given by the American Heritage Dictionary is “Of or relating to a social or educational theory that encourages interest in many cultures within a society rather than in only a mainstream culture.” This definition seems to look at the macro-level of the definition, dealing with society as a whole. However, it is more difficult to find a definition relating to people as “multicultural individuals”. Also, this definition seems to be parallel with the definition of “diversity” which seems to point toward cooperation and respect of different cultures and backgrounds, rather than genuine interest in another culture.

The question of St. Olaf as a multicultural community brought about several mixed reactions as well. Most people were generally very agreeable with St. Olaf being a very positive place for promoting multiculturalism and international awareness. However, there were people who stated that “[St. Olaf is] not diversified at all, very homogeneous, and a place for rich kids. Everyone fits in, lots of small talk, and no interest in genuine issues.” This was not after acknowledging that there are attempts by the student body and the administration, but overall the massive majority of the student population rejects these attempts. There would be greater knowledge of events on campus, if there were interest cultivated within certain student groups – namely, the language houses. They do, however, require the support of the department to do anything because without the support of the department, it is impossible to get these cultural centers known among students on campus, if the department wants the house at all involved in issues outside of the classroom. As a general sense, residents of language houses were very pleased with their colleagues living in the house, but dissatisfied with the ways departments were conducting the houses. This did not apply to every house, but in some houses it was very apparent.

Spheres of personal relationships and work relationships should be mentioned as well. Some people saw themselves as members of the St. Olaf community, but at the same time members that held important places within the structure of the St. Olaf community – as residents of the language houses, representatives of their department, and representatives for the cultures they were learning about. Other people had vastly different views of relationships within the house. For example, some students mentioned that honor houses have a better chance of matching up similar people together, since they are all working on a very specific project within the community. Random people can easily end up living together in a language house, whereas in honor houses it is

much easier for friends to end up living together, and if not friends, people who at least share common values who will cooperate and work toward a common goal.

Language houses do have a function, but it does seem to be ambiguous, and at times the department has suppressed student wishes to do community service projects. Apparently some language houses are not expected or desired to play a role in the “inclusive community” of St. Olaf College.

## Results

The language house system can draw parallels with the structural functionalist AGIL scheme. In all the language houses, except the Russian House, the students apply to the department, and then are placed in the houses. As one interviewee said, "It's interesting being put with people you're not compatible with." However, the students manage to adapt to their situation. One student commented that one of the advantages to living in a language house was getting to know the others who will be living there. The goal of the language house is to give students a place where they can use the language and learn about the culture, which can also be utilized by students on campus – for help or extracurricular learning. This is one of the main reasons the researchers found that students chose to live in the language houses. However, the departments regulate the interrelationships of the students by setting rules and mandating certain events. All residents mentioned that they are required to hold study sessions and are expected to attend the other events of the language department. Even though the language house program is relatively new, based on the fact that the students had to apply to the department, the researchers have deduced that either the department or the language houses themselves motivate students to live there. The houses could motivate the student to live there by the prestige attributed to living in a language house, as one interviewee commented on, or by the fact that don't have to live on campus. Also, in the fact that language houses are co-ed, giving them different opportunities than the dormitories. As a female interviewee stated, "The dorms aren't co-ed, and I'm not really a girl person."

The majority of residents of language houses were language majors. The researchers found that the pressure put on the residents from the respective departments emphasized their role as leaders in the language community on campus. An interviewee said that the houses create a core group of people who you can go to for help, which helps to create this idea of “leaders in the language community”. Also, in most instances, since the department chooses who lives in the house, those with better language skills are generally chosen. This might seem like a moot point, since the houses are language houses, but, as mentioned earlier, the majority of language is based in cultural context.

Without knowing the culture, one cannot truly know the language. Therefore, it is expected that cultural knowledge would be just as important as language skills. Yet, interestingly enough, none of the interviews mentioned the language house as teaching language through culture. Most residents said they teach language and culture. In the context of cultural immersion it can be argued that as long as culture is being taught, then the students will receive what they need to know. However, one needs a good, if not strong, understanding of the culture to achieve higher levels of language ability. If culture is seen as separate from language, then the understanding of culture will take a subordinate role to understanding of language.

This subordination of culture has led to the area studies majors taking on subordinate roles and viewing themselves as less valuable to the department than the language majors in the same house. The events held by the language houses are geared towards language learning. One area studies major said that the language houses specialize in language and immersion, yet many of the events at that house are cultural events. The same area studies major went on to say that she feels that living in a house has brought her language level up, yet did not say anything about helping to raise the knowledge of the culture in her fellow housemates. Whereas many of the language majors said that, when it came to language, they felt they could be helped and help others living in the house. The language majors felt they brought more to the house than the area studies majors, who felt they could only help those who were in lower classes of language study.

How does this affect the friendship bonds of the residents? From the interviews, it seems that the area studies majors are unaware of how the pressure from the department has affected their behavior. The friendship bonds that formed between the residents of the language houses were based on a common interest in the respective language and culture and the need to seem like a friendly, welcoming place for those who need help. The common interest gives residents the initial conversation starter needed to get to know the others in their house. However, as one astute interviewee pointed out, "the study of the language can be the only thing in common. A project [at an Honor House] can mean that you share similar ideals and values." The researchers found that this proved to be true. In some of the houses, problems arose between housemates due to "being put with people you're not compatible with", as one language house resident said. However, this non-compatibility issue was the only problem mentioned during the interviews. This problem is attributed to the department choosing who is going to live in the language house, and expecting those students to live together, even room together.

Since the department has set the language houses as places for help sessions and other departmental events, the residents are expected to be inviting to those

who want to come down to the house. As one interviewee said, "we are expected to... have our doors open to people in the department." If the house is seen as a place where there is lots of fighting, students are less likely to come to the help sessions, and this reflects poorly on the house. However, too much comradely is seen as a negative. In one instance, the residents of one particular house are good friends and talk and joke around during the study sessions, which keeps people from concentrating on their studies, and therefore they do not come to the study sessions. None the less, this necessity to hold study sessions and have the doors open is yet another pressure from the department acting on the residents. This time, it promotes friendship and encourages those in the house to work through their differences.

The AGIL scheme applies to language houses through the associated departments and through Residence Life. The department adapts the houses' events based on the abilities of the students living there. For the most part, since each year there are different people in the houses, the knowledge of the language and culture varies from year to year. Therefore, the events need to be changed to reflect and take advantage of the abilities of the residents.

Residence life adapts the environment of the house to fit the students living there by arranging, and rearranging, roommates. When it comes to a new house or to permits and building codes, additions need to be made or house assignments need to be changed to accommodate the students. Residence life also helps solve conflict within the house between residents. As one interviewee said, "It's interesting being put with people you're not compatible with." This caused clashes between several residents in almost all the houses. However, the office of Residence Life was able to step in and teach the students to deal with the problems (i.e. Res. Life adapted the thinking of the students so that they could live with each other, and someone would not have to be removed from the house).

There are several goals, which the department strives to achieve with the language houses. The department has events that it wants the house to host. In all cases this included study sessions and, in most cases, movie nights and hosting language tables at dinner. These are consistent with past events that the departments expected of the houses. Immersion, as much as possible, in the language and the culture is another goal of the departments. Immersion was one of the main reasons mentioned for living in the language houses, implying that this goal is achieved. Plus, in a couple instances, after or during the interview, the interviewee would briefly talk to another resident in the language of the house. This led us to believe that, since they were not speaking English, the preferred language of the residents is the language they are studying.

The goal of Residence Life is simple, to have a successful housing situation. This includes keeping the problems within the house to a minimum by helping

the students to get along, which is accomplished through adaptation, and to make sure the students follow the rules of the college. This goal is achieved, in most houses, by student workers who are the equivalent to the RAs in the dorms (they are paid to ensure the rules are followed and to settle any small quarrels). Also, like the residents of the dormitories, the residents of the language houses are expected to adhere to St. Olaf's honor code. Basically, this code says that the college trusts that the student will not break the rules. Most students on campus do not want to lose the feeling of freedom the code, and the trust, gives them so they do not break the majority of the rules.

Integration of the language houses involves regulation of the interrelationships of the residents. For most of the houses, the departments choose who will live there, creating the character of the house. This regulates the relationships between the students because it regulates who is available to have a relationship with. Also, the departments have the authority to remove a student from the respected house. This creates pressure on the residents to cooperate with each other since it is easy to remove a person if they are causing a problem with the others, or not participating in house activities. This pressure results in the residents putting on a front when they are hosting events or there are non-residents at the house. One interviewee mentioned that at their house, they are required to seem happy while hosting events so other students in the department feel that the house is a welcoming place and will attend more events.

For Residence Life, integration involves dealing with the problems of the residents have as they interact with each other. Also, Residents Life creates a hierarchy by placing one student in charge. This implies that one student is somehow more trustworthy or more suited to fill the role of the authority figure in the house and therefore more deserving of respect.

The latency of the language house system is preserved by the departments through the prestige from professors, and the department that is assigned to living in a language house. Living in a language house gives the impression that you are talented and smart enough to be picked to live in a house. Also, as was mentioned before, due to the nature of the house as an immersion program, the department offers the opportunity to speak and develop language skills and to increase your knowledge of the culture. By ensuring that there is a base level of knowledge among the students in the house, the departments maintain the pattern of dependability of the knowledge of the students by making requirements to live in the language houses.

The office of Residence Life motivates the departments to maintain a certain number of residents in the language house each year by requiring that the houses be at full capacity. If the house is not at full capacity, it can be taken away and given to another group. Residence Life motivates the students to live

in the language houses because the houses are the only coed housing on campus. This affords for new opportunities and makes it easier to make friends outside of your own gender, which in turn encourages students to want to live in language houses.

Weber's ideas of rationalization apply to a broader, macro sense of the bureaucratic, rational structures within society. To tailor his theories to our needs, it was necessary to look also into basic structural-functionalism, which looks at structures from a very macro level view. Major structures that can be identified within our topic area included: the Residence Life Offices, language departments, and finally the language houses themselves. The language houses operate under both bureaucratic structures, and abide by instructions set by both structures. Although the relationship between these structures is difficult to describe entirely, they do seem to abide by Parson's AGIL scheme of basic structural-functionalism.

Formal Rationalization is stated in the textbook by Ritzer as: "...a concern for the actor making choices of means and ends. However, in this case, that choice is made in reference to universally applied rules, regulations, and laws. These, in turn, are derived from various large-scale structures, especially bureaucracies and the economy.... he sought to delineate the factors that helped bring about or impede the development of rationalization."(Ritzer 2000: 30)

This simple explanation of Weber's idea of rationalization can be interpreted in several different ways. First of all, language houses are defined under rules, regulations, and laws that are derived from various large-scale (or larger-scale, as it is only relative) structures, especially bureaucracies. We have already determined that the different offices that control the language houses in their own distinct spheres act bureaucratically, which would lead to the next question – are they rational bureaucracies? It would seem so, at least from the interview with Residence Life. Goals were clearly defined between the two departments, and it seems that Residence Life does not infringe on the roles of the language department. It does seem that they are rational.

The most interesting part of this definition of rationalization is its connection with symbolic-interactionism. This definition clearly combines the micro-level with the macro-level. The only difference is that the macro-level clearly controls the micro-level, rather than the other way around. Symbolic-interactionism does not cover this explanation, nor does Weber or structural-functionalism. Although it seems that the house as a whole can plan its own events and function on its own, the fact remains that it would not exist without the language department or without the Department of Residence Life. So, the language houses are legitimate structures, but it is the department, as well as

Residence Life that makes them legitimate structures.

#### Conclusion:

There are several qualities that define language houses and their functions:

- 1) They are occupied by students who wish to be immersed in the language and culture they are studying.
- 2) The houses are meant for academic reasons – to be used as a resource for students studying within the respective language department.
- 3) The language departments pick students for the positions within the house and control all official functions of the language house.
- 4) The language department shares responsibility for the house with the Department of Residence Life.
- 5) Language houses do not have autonomy outside of the language department, largely due to the limiting actions of the department.
- 6) Student productivity and creativity suffer due to the lack of initiative for collective goal attainment – departmental goals take precedence over individual goals, and language goals take precedence over all other immersion goals (such as area studies majors).
- 7) Language houses do not play a role in multicultural awareness on the St. Olaf Campus. Their only defined role is within the department.

While some of these conclusions seem harsh, it is easy to see how they fit into the scope of language houses on the St. Olaf Campus. The language department has to look at the larger picture – to all of its students, rather than the students living and working for the department in the language houses. Also, some departments have to limit their activities to only students within the department, as serving the entire campus would be impractical.

Students choose to live in the houses for their own academic reasons and also to help other people, but generally they become disenchanted and fall into their role as a tool of the language department. The students lack the autonomy to act on their own, and some departments even limit projects or events that are planned independently from the departments. The language houses also lack a sense of collective action within the students living in the house, because most students do not have much in common with other students in the house. Unlike honor houses, there is no uniting cause to bring all of the students together in collective action – the department takes this role in setting rules and artificial goals to mobilize the students.

Several internal debates still surface – what is the definition of multicultural, and what can we do to achieve multicultural awareness? “Diversity” and “multicultural” seem to be used interchangeably, which could be a reason that

our question about multicultural awareness was so difficult for subjects to answer. On the other hand diversity seems to imply actual diversity in people, whereas multicultural seems to imply a state of mind and awareness about other cultures. However, it is still uncertain whether it is the language houses' duty to increase multicultural awareness on campus. Language houses do seem like they would be a very easy and already available resource to use to increase multiculturalism on campus.

One of the major obstacles in the creation of an atmosphere of collective action is the fact that students do not work together for a common cause, like in honor houses. Language houses would easily be more productive if they had a goal in common rather than their individual language achievement (or area studies) goals. It is difficult to create this atmosphere, so language departments do their best to motivate the house members as a whole. It also seemed that houses with a smaller number of members had an easier time communicating with each other, as well as with students who knew each other well before they chose to live in the house.

In the future it would be beneficial to look at international students' role in bringing multicultural awareness to campus, to look at language majors' views of the houses, and to look at the bureaucracy in greater detail. It would also be beneficial to look at students who live on campus and their views of the language houses. We believe that the issue of multiculturalism on the St. Olaf Campus is an important goal for St. Olaf in the present time, and also for the future. The resources are available already to create greater multicultural awareness, they just need to be utilized.

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