



Perceptions and Perspectives of Diversity

At St. Olaf College

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ABSTRACT

Many institutions across the country often face difficulties in ways of approaching, recruiting, and maintaining a diverse student population. St. Olaf, like many of these colleges, struggles to appeal to students of color. The result of this issue is seen in the lack of diversity within the faculty and staff. Although the college makes strong efforts in trying to increase the rates of diversity there still exists a clear and persistent lack of diversity. Through participation of subjects in focus groups, participant- observation and interviews, we collected data that reflects views and opinions on the meshing of cultures and the purpose of racial/ethnic diversity on the St. Olaf campus. Our data includes input from faculty, students, staff and administration (specifically admissions). The goal of the study was to take the opportunity to reflect on important topics relevant to diversity and the campus climate at St. Olaf College. Until recently, there has been no common framework to understanding the campus racial climate in a way that helps develop policies and practices that can be used to enhance the campus climate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Many institutions across the country often face difficulties in ways of approaching, recruiting, and maintaining a diverse student population. St. Olaf, like many of these colleges, struggles to appeal to students of color. The result of this issue is seen in the lack of diversity within the faculty and staff. Although the college makes strong efforts in trying to increase the rates of diversity there still exists a clear and persistent lack of diversity. Through participation of subjects in focus groups, participant- observation and interviews, we collected data that reflects views and opinions on the meshing of cultures and the purpose of racial/ethnic diversity on the St. Olaf campus. Our data includes input from faculty, students, staff and administration (specifically admissions). The goal of the study was to take the opportunity to reflect on important topics relevant to diversity and the campus climate at St. Olaf College. Until recently, there has been no common framework to understanding the campus racial climate in a way that helps develop policies and practices that can be used to enhance the campus climate.

Main Points:

- St. Olaf lacks racial diversity, but is actively taking steps toward increasing diversity, especially within multicultural groups, associations and clubs and among faculty.
- Students of color experience St. Olaf differently from white students because of their race in terms of social life and academic life.
- St. Olaf reflects a similar situation regarding racial diversity of the larger society.
- Racial diversity plays a crucial role in the overall experience at St. Olaf.
- Contradictions
 - Diversity vs. Difference
 - Heritage and tradition vs. Future

SETTING AND COMMUNITY

St. Olaf College is a national liberal arts college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is located in Northfield, Minnesota, approximately thirty-five miles south of the Twin Cities, atop the charming hillside of Manitou Heights. Northfield is a town of about 18,000 residents, including the populations of both St. Olaf and Carleton Colleges. With a cherished Norwegian heritage, 8% of the approximate 3,000 students at St. Olaf are racial/ethnic minorities. The college focuses on a global education and commitment to environmental sustainability, with a mission that promotes liberal arts education rooted in the Christian gospel. St. Olaf students become part of a community that takes pride in its traditions (St. Olaf By the Numbers).

A sense of community is strongly emphasized through St. Olaf's campus life. Nearly all students live on campus in either residence halls or honor houses. As stated on the website, "St. Olaf fosters the development of community within its residence halls, honor houses and across campus. As a strongly residential college, we require that all full-time students reside in college-owned housing as far as accommodations permit." Ninety-six percent of students live in one of the college's 11 residence halls, 10 service and honor houses, 6 academic language houses and one diversity house (Residence Life).

Also contributing to the community feel on campus is the dining services. The majority of students are equipped with full meal plans in the cafeteria, eating every meal of the day with their peers and friends. The campus layout and connection of major building, such as the library and food service, creates an even stronger sense of St. Olaf being its own tight knit community.

With chapel service as well as community time being offered every day, students are encouraged to take time out of their day to get to know one another better, without lectures and classes to distract them. This free time also allows students to meet with possible extracurricular groups, class meetings, and other forms of branching out to become closer with one's surroundings.

The expectations for admittance into St. Olaf are seemingly rising every year. The comprehensive fee for 2007-2008 is \$38,500, with average test scores rising. For the Class of 2011, the median ACT Composite is 29 and the median combined SAT is 1320, their average high school GPA was 3.65, 54% of them graduated in the top 10% of their high school class, and 38% of the class has a legacy connection to the college (About St. Olaf). These numbers suggest that future St. Olaf students will fit an even more stringent demographic, seemingly perpetuating the current demographic of the school.

St. Olaf as an academic institution has very defined expectations of what type of students attend the school. The sense of community on campus seems to be grounded in the Christian gospel and Norwegian heritage. St. Olaf College's mission statement declares, "St. Olaf College remains dedicated to the high standards set by its Norwegian immigrant founders. In the spirit of free inquiry and free expression, it offers a distinctive environment that integrates teaching, scholarship, creative activity, and opportunities for encounter with the Christian Gospel and God's call to faith..." (St. Olaf Mission Statement). The paragraph following this excerpt in the mission statement starts discussing an inclusive community, respecting those of differing backgrounds and beliefs. It seems as if St. Olaf is aware and including both aspects of community and cohesiveness, as well as diversity, yet they remain as two separate issues. There do seem to be initiatives taken to increase racial diversity, while establishing a community life for minority students. Whether or not this community is part of the larger whole is questionable.

PROBLEM

"Each year, dozens of students from countries across the world join the St. Olaf community, and enliven it with new accents and perspectives. But a college of Norwegian-Lutheran origins located in Northfield isn't yet an obvious choice (or a first choice) for many African-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, or Asian Americans. It's a continuing challenge to everybody at St. Olaf to consider how we can be good for an increasingly multicultural America" (Campus Culture: The Practice of Community). "As a social force in society, diversity has the potential to alter the complexion of a population and require change in societal institutions" (Aguirre & Martinez 1). At St. Olaf College, racial and ethnic minorities represent eight percent of the entire student population. A study done with St. Olaf's class of 2004 found that a little more than fifty-four percent of the students were generally or very dissatisfied with ethnic/racial diversity on campus (Fight or Flight). What does this say for St. Olaf?

First and foremost, it must be acknowledged that the issue of diversity is widespread in our society, not strictly contained within institutions of higher education. Also, "it is important to recognize racial dynamics in higher education are generally moving in more positive directions" (Chang 153).

That being said, there are some major contradictions one encounters when investigating St. Olaf College and its diversity discourse. The tensions are evident when considering admissions quotas versus equal access, forcing diversity versus encouraging diversity, wanting to maintain tradition while trying to appeal to a diverse population, and wanting diversity but not really wanting difference.

Contradictions

Much of the talk surrounding diversity at St. Olaf often comes back to the fear of losing the heritage that gives St. Olaf its character. This doesn't mean we can shy away from the fact that the institution needs to address the changing demographics within the United States. "Demographic shifts in the student population will place even more pressure on institutions to transform themselves without losing their sense of stability, purpose, or identity" (Chang 157). St. Olaf also cannot use this argument to ignore the college's need for racial diversity. "The organizational culture in higher education, however, often resists change because it perceives it as a threat to existing values and beliefs" (Aguirre & Martinez 5).

When asked about this issue, the former Dean of Community Life and Diversity, Eida Berrio, stated, "Here at St. Olaf, I often see or perceive a fear of 'losing our tradition and heritage.' I saw that at Princeton as well. That is not going to happen. What I think would happen is that we would be richer and stronger. All who come here do so because we appreciate the traditions, heritage and values of the college. But we also expect that the traditions and heritage we bring will be appreciated" (The St. Olaf Interview).

Furthermore, President Anderson addressed the reality that neither "Norwegian" nor "Lutheran" mean close-minded or exclusive. "One of the cool things about being Lutheran is Martin Luther's mission...we should be the best college there is to help people figure out what they're meant to do and help them do it. Then I say we're Lutheran" (Anderson). Addressing the idea that our strong Norwegian identity excludes minorities, the St. Olaf website states, "In the beginning, St. Olaf College was purposefully multicultural, as it worked at adapting Norwegians to American life, and vice versa."

Created with the intention of helping an "othered" population, St. Olaf cannot rightfully be accused of excluding racial minorities. It may seem as though increasing racial diversity would be simple if it were prioritized. However, one must acknowledge the laws surrounding diversity initiatives and determine where we draw the line between encouraging diversity and forcing diversity. "The Supreme Court outlawed racial quotas in higher education but condoned the use of race as a selective factor for promoting institutional diversity" (Aguirre & Martinez 5). When asked if administration attempts to enhance or recruit diverse students for the right reasons, a student replied, "I think they're attempting to do it right but that process is never going to look fair because they're using inequality to create equality." As Chang notes in this regard, "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way...in order to treat persons equally, we must treat them differently" (163).

This brings us to the last topic of contradiction – diversity, not difference. As President Anderson puts it, "I think we want diversity but we don't necessarily want difference." In this context, President Anderson is addressing the sentiments of the St. Olaf community as a whole. St. Olaf wants the idealistic sense of diversity but is hesitant toward the real challenges diversity brings. If we aren't used to seeing people that look or act differently than us, we will only continue to form friendships with those who don't exhibit characteristics of difference; in other words, those who are the same as us. When diversity is understood to mean vast difference, suddenly people become uncomfortable and revert back to the familiar.

METHODOLOGY

This study used strictly qualitative methods including: participant-observation, focus group and individual interviews to gather data. There were 18 one-on-one interviews and two focus groups conducted among the four research group members. The participants included St. Olaf students (first through fourth year), and members of St. Olaf staff, faculty and administration.

We interviewed 26 members of the St. Olaf community. There were 20 students, 4 faculty members and 2 administration members, including the current President of St. Olaf College, David Anderson. Among students, there were three freshmen, three sophomores, four juniors and ten senior informants. Also, one group member attended a Diversity Panel reflecting views from students and faculty. Choosing participants for individual interviews was subjective in that each member of the group asked friends/acquaintances/professors, usually with whom they had a previous history. The participants for focus groups were contacted through e-mail aliases and word-of-mouth. Also, we

studied the St. Olaf website photographs to gather data in terms of the representation of diversity online. Lastly, we reviewed statistics and data available on the website regarding diversity and multiculturalism on campus.

Participant-observation was particularly useful throughout the project, as each member was conscious of the topic on a daily basis. As described in Family Health International, "Participant observation is useful for gaining an understanding of the physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants live; the relationships among and between people, contexts, ideas, norms, and events; and people's behaviors and activities – what they do, how frequently, and with whom" (Mack 3). For the purposes of this project, participant-observation occurred in various public spaces around the St. Olaf campus including, but not limited to, Buntrock Commons, the Cage, the Pause, Stav Hall, Fireside, Crossroads, academic classroom settings, Tostrud athletic center, and housing areas – dorms and honor houses. Also, special attention was given to multicultural-specific groups on campus such as Multicultural Affairs and Community Outreach Office (MACO), Diversity Celebrations Committee (DCC), and Cultural Union for Black Expression (CUBE).

Within the study, subjects' names are kept anonymous for confidentiality reasons. However, race, ethnicity, gender or title may be specified because often the quote or context pertains to race, ethnicity gender or the informant's specific role at St. Olaf. In order to contextualize personal quotes within the context of our study, the subject's race/ethnicity is often useful.

FINDINGS

The findings are categorized according to certain aspects of college life and experiences. They include: current diversity initiatives, pre-St. Olaf perspectives, academic life, social life, faculty views, administration views and reflection on St. Olaf's position in the larger society. Lastly, we discuss possibilities for the future.

Current Diversity Initiatives

While St. Olaf has an obvious lack of racial diversity within its student body, it is not necessarily due to a lack of initiative. The mission of the College is not only to be a close community, but also one of inclusiveness and respect for those with diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Informed by the St. Olaf website, the following demonstrates the initiatives the college is taking to strengthen diversity on campus. St. Olaf sponsors a number of programs that strive to enhance educational opportunities for traditionally underrepresented students, not only for current St. Olaf students, but for prospective students as well.

Upward Bound is one organization aimed at pre-collegiate students, preparing individuals for higher education through instruction in literature, mathematics and science. GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) works with teachers, community members and families to increase the number of students prepared to enter higher learning institutions. ETS (Educational Talent Search) works to inform young students about college admission requirements, scholarships and student financial aid programs, as well as providing counseling. Lastly, the SSS Summer Bridge Program brings high school students to visit St. Olaf campus and participate in an intensive college prep program.

New grants have contributed to increasing the diversity efforts for incoming classes as well. Aimed at first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students, these grants are attempting to open new career paths. The McNair Scholars Program is a federally funded national program that encourages these minority students to pursue doctoral study and consider careers in higher

education. These new grants are just the start of initiatives that will help to make St. Olaf attractive to a larger and more diverse pool of prospective students.

Scholarships are another form of diversity initiative. TRiO Scholarships are offered through the Office of Financial Aid, and are intended to help students overcome class, social and cultural barriers. Other Scholarship support programs such as ECMS (Encouraging Careers in Mathematical Sciences) and Biologists for the Future target first-generation and low-income students, and provide academic mentoring, career guidance, and activities focused on professional development.

Once minority students are part of the student body, there are more academic and career support programs. SSS (Student Support Services) is a student retention program designed to help solidify academic success. The [Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program](#) is a federally funded national program aiding minority students through career-oriented internships and faculty mentors. The [Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation/North Star Alliance](#) is a group of Minnesota schools that hopes to double the number of baccalaureate degrees earned by groups that are historically underrepresented (Expanding Horizons, Expanding Opportunities 2008). For current St. Olaf students, DCC (Diversity Celebrations Committee) is an establishment at the forefront of diversity issues on campus. The committee coordinates speakers and encourages education and awareness with activities throughout the year. DCC works towards the potential to be a diverse yet unified campus community. There is a long list of student organizations that work toward this same goal of increasing awareness through student activities. Some of these groups include the [Asian Cultures Association \(ACA\)](#), [Chinese Culture Club](#), [Cultural Union for Black Expression \(CUBE\)](#), and [International Students Organization \(ISO\)](#).

MACO (Multicultural Affairs and Community Outreach) is another organization that plays a strong role in diversity events on campus; working with the entire campus community to achieve greater awareness and appreciation of cultural, social and ethnic differences. Not only does MACO recognize and support those students from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds who may experience a sense of isolation, it also works to utilize and embrace this portion of the student body.

President Anderson summarizes the most recent diversity initiatives as "Making diversity a priority." President Anderson discusses how St. Olaf is "embracing national recruitment strategies," and is planning to create a position within admissions specializing in coordinating multicultural recruitment. "The 2007-2008 school year is the first in the history of the school with less than 50% of the incoming class from Minnesota." Lastly President Anderson points out that 6 out of 6 newly hired faculty members exhibiting "traits of difference" (Anderson).

As shown above, St. Olaf has taken many steps to emphasize awareness of multicultural issues, as well as strengthening the multicultural community on campus. Pre-collegiate students and minority and majority students who currently attend St. Olaf are the focus.

Pre-St. Olaf Perspective

When thinking about St. Olaf College, most students have a common perception on what to expect. To quote a student, "we are a private, expensive, Lutheran, Norwegian school. We are pretty specific." Most first year students come to college with a set of expectations and desires. Many of these expectations arise from the various media sources provided by the colleges, such as college brochures, flyers, TV commercials and other forms of public relations and advertising. St. Olaf College, like most institutions, tries to attract students from all backgrounds and disciplines. They accomplish this by providing prospective students with facts about the college, pictures of college social life and tours displaying the campus community. However, we discovered a difference of opinion about diversity after students arrived.

For many pre-collegiate students the time before they start their college career is a time filled with anticipation, and for some, great anxiety. Many students have a mental picture of what to expect: they have ideas on who they will meet, the organizations they'll join and the parties they'll go to, but some have other issues on their mind, such as, "What challenges will I face being a student of color?"

Many students of color come to St. Olaf College expecting a place with little diversity: "Being a minority is a challenge but I came in knowing that." After talking to various students of color, many expressed a similar attitude: they were aware of the lack of diversity, but were informed of the strong sense of community that St. Olaf had, which left some feeling content with the shortage of racially diverse students and faculty. The problem many prospective students encountered was the College's interpretation of community compared to their own interpretation. "While there is nearly universal agreement within higher education that 'community' is desirable, there is less agreement about what constitutes community and ways to attain it" (Magolda 35). Several students found that the multicultural community was congregated in one area of the college and in some sense formed its own community on campus apart from the overall campus community.

Many of the students of color reflected on their experiences at St. Olaf College before becoming students. One student said, "They made it a point to take me to the MACO and SSS offices; it was almost like they wanted me to know where my place was." As a St. Olaf tour guide, it is constantly stressed to us that when we have students of color we need to take them to MACO and SSS offices. By doing this, the prospective students can see that St. Olaf does indeed have diversity and a community of which they can be a part.

The problem with this strategy is that the prospective student perceives something that really is not the case for the majority of the college. The thing we discovered is that the College's tactics do not fool many of these students. As a first year African-American female said, "Be honest with prospective students; it's not like minority students won't notice the lack of diversity once they get here. They should instead explain what it's like being a student of color at St. Olaf."

After talking to many students about their pre-St. Olaf perceptions and how they came to get those ideas, many reflected back on their recruitment experiences. One thing the students noticed is the way admissions recruits students. Many of the students of color who came from inner-city school or areas such as Chicago, where students of color are abundant, remember a person of color coming to their schools and recruiting them. On the other hand, most Caucasians who came from the small rural areas or suburbs often had white counselors come to their schools.

Social Life

In terms of social life, our primary focus was on questions regarding segregation, obligation to engage because of race, involvement in diversity groups on campus such as MACO or DCC, sense of belonging and acceptance, and experiential learning through interaction within a diverse student body.

Segregation

A quick visual analysis of interracial relationships on campus reveals the obvious segregation among students. Some opinions in response to this truth were shared in interviews:

"We shouldn't have to branch out to give white people a 'minority experience.'"

"The lack of diversity at Olaf brings the minorities who are here closer. We do more things together because we relate. It's not a coincidence that we enjoy doing the same things."

"I think about diversity in the caf when you see how separated people really are."

"They stay together in groups. There's not a lot of mixing."

"It would be nice if people would realize that multicultural students are just people too."

The segregation may be a result of discomfort, but regardless, it seems to be intentional. As one author wrote, "The chosen segregation or cliques formed by Black students function to provide these students with an ethnic community within the broader institutional setting" (Fisher 131). A former St. Olaf administration employee stated, "Often I hear that the people of one race stick together at St. Olaf; they sit together at a meal. Well, why do all the women stick together? Why do faculty from a certain department stick together — or the kids from a certain sport or a certain major? They have some common denominator. People seek that."

Questioning/assumptions

Segregation may in part be caused by minorities who sense judgment from the stereotypical wealthy, white, Norwegian, Lutheran St. Olaf students. A couple students spoke to this point:

"They think we got here through Affirmative Action, that we always get to class late or don't show up to class...or that we're here on scholarships."

"I wish people would appreciate the fact that we're here. I feel like I appreciate the opportunity to be here, but no one appreciates me being here."

"The diversity that does exist is still segregated. Students of a specific race tend to be friends with other students of that race. I think if there were a higher percentage of minority students, it would tip the scale and there would be more intermingling."

A study conducted at a predominately white university (not St. Olaf) found that, "the overall sentiment...is that minority students will feel intimidated, unwelcome and unwanted in predominantly White organizations and activities" (Fisher 123).

Experiential education through interracial relations

The most common explanation of why diversity is important at St. Olaf is that a diverse college population enhances learning and fosters essential skills for prospering in our multicultural society post-college. As one student put it, "You can only learn so much about a culture from a book. You can relate to a certain person rather than a paragraph in a book." The idea of education through diverse peer relations continually came up in interviews and focus groups:

"The key thing is we're a residential campus. You learn as much from your peers as you do anywhere else."

"You can't just study. You have to come in contact with different cultures. Merely interacting on a day to day basis, small issues come up that give windows into each other's cultural background."

"College is about meeting and exploring new people and you can learn more from people who are different from you."

Research has also supported this concept. One researcher found, "...some of the most selective institutions may simply not have the student racial composition necessary to engage in meaningful and constructive cross-racial experiences and dialogue, which denies students important learning opportunities to succeed in a diverse society and can potentially deepen our nation's racial divide" (Chang 163).

Diversity as criterion for rankings

Interracial conversation also helps increase the prestige of St. Olaf as a college existing in a multicultural United States. Thus, lack of diversity serves as a potential hindrance to the college's aim for high rankings. President Anderson addressed this issue with certainty, stating:

"If we're not diverse, we're providing less than the best education...if we haven't prepared you to function in a multicultural society; we're sending you out with a handicap... Very soon, one of the definitions of an excellent college will be – is it diverse... We can't sit here in Minnesota saying we're the white college or we'll end up being second tier."

Faculty and students agree with this view. "Almost two-thirds of the American public believes that colleges and universities are not doing their job if graduates cannot get along in a diverse population" (Aguirre & Martinez 11). According to a statement on the St. Olaf website, "St. Olaf's campus life is guided by the college, but ultimately it is determined by the students, who each year teach each other--in hundreds of different ways--how to be Oles and responsible adults. This coming of age in community is an essential aim of St. Olaf College" (Campus Culture: The Practice of Community).

Involvement in diversity groups

Serving as a source of support and education, the diversity-focused groups on campus have the tendency to increase segregation but also present an opportunity for interracial communication. Evidence of these possibilities came through in the interviews:

"Racially specific organizations provide students opportunity to explore and feel comfortable, yet essentially the football team does the same thing. It uses a different similarity, yet creates mingling between races."

"When I walk into the MACO office, I know I can say whatever I need to say and people will understand... I will wait all day to share things until I go in there."

"There are certain times of day when I feel like I can act multicultural. When I'm in MACO, I can be multicultural."

"St. Olaf student lifestyle is so busy, students look to clubs and extracurricular activities to be easy, and comfortable. Racially specific clubs are more challenging, and students often don't have the energy for it."

These findings establish that the diversity-related organizations are of value to some people on the St. Olaf campus, but it seems that rather than assisting the majority, who need to be educated on diversity, the organizations are primarily serving the minority students who compose just eight percent of St. Olaf's student body (About St. Olaf).

Obligation to engage

No student is required to be a member of any organization on campus, but the lack of diversity at St. Olaf has the potential to lead minorities to believe they have to engage in specific organizations in order to educate the majority. When a student of color was asked whether or not she felt obligated to participate in multicultural groups on campus, she explained, "In order for people to know about our culture, we have to act." Some more confessions regarding this sense of obligation from interviewed minority students are as follows:

"There is an obligation to be involved, and represent your race as a whole. You have to be active in order to educate about your race."

"I know that most people don't intend to be racist; they're just ignorant. They weren't raised in a diverse environment. That's why I'm involved in ACA [(Asian Cultures Association)]. I want to raise awareness amongst the student body..."

"I do feel the responsibility, but I don't act on it as much as I should. Part of that has to do with being half white. I do regret not taking more action as far as getting involved, but I feel there's some level of exclusivity because I'm not fully Asian."

Academic Life

As President Anderson explained, "There is an educational value in diversity, that's why we are focusing on it." While there is a "focus" on it, there also exists a persistent lack of diversity within the walls of the classrooms throughout the country. A government document by the Committee of Health, Education, Labor and Pensions of the US Senate addresses the apparent lack of diversity in higher education classrooms, "Simply put, this lack of intellectual diversity in higher education shortchanges students by depriving them of the exposure to a robust debate on the issues of the day" (Lukianoff 2003). Indeed, St. Olaf students feel that in some instances, diverse views are underrepresented in the classroom, yet the reasons for this vary.

Academic life of students divides into two categories: perspectives of curriculum and diverse representation of views in class, and the actual experience of students within the classroom.

Perspectives of curriculum

In terms of curriculum, St. Olaf students and faculty emphasized the need for diverse perspectives from all areas of the world. Indeed, what students read and discuss is crucial because it exposes students to new ideas and provides a space in which to ask questions and become comfortable with diverse ideas and concepts. An article regarding multiculturalism and liberal arts colleges cites the concept of academic breadth as a significant contributor to diversity of the college overall: "The breadth of the curriculum, though reasonably limited by the size of the faculty, is argued to be one of the necessary ingredients of liberal learning, enabling students to inquire across disciplines, improving their intellectual scope" (Aleman 582).

Students went further to recognize the subjectivity of professors' personal opinions in terms of curriculum. As one student explained, "If you only have one perspective, it can be lopsided." Because of this, students expressed a need for more diversity within faculty because, "A professor's experience is reflected in their curriculum and how they teach it." Also important is the specific discipline that students study. A white male senior noted that, "Exposure to diverse issues depends on the major." For example, a history major may experience more diverse perspectives in the classroom than a chemistry major. At the same time, because St. Olaf is a liberal arts college, the chemistry major is required to take humanities and social science courses. In this way, he or she should experience diverse perspectives, even if it is on a lesser scale than the history major.

Overall, students expressed a desire for a curriculum that is more representative of the greater population and "less exclusionary." Students understand that class themes reflect professors' perspectives; therefore if the faculty is diverse, the curriculum and overall classroom experience provides an arena for challenges and exposure to new ideas. It is possible to learn things from a professor that are not in books, but are based on his or her personal life. To aid in increasing academic diversity, one student suggested an African Conversation program to supplement the current American, Asian and Great Conversation programs at St. Olaf.

Classroom experience and relational learning

Arguably as significant as the curriculum studied by college students is how they experience education within the classroom. The classroom experience includes how a student feels in the class, and how it affects participation and interaction with peers and professors. In an article from the *Journal of Higher Education* (2003), authors Aleman and Salkever describe the student-student and student-professor interaction as "relational learning" (584). Further, "The theme of relational

learning is based on the belief that good learning does not happen in a vacuum. The communication and exchange between students, particularly dissimilar students, is essential in college education" (Aleman 584).

In this sense, relational learning was a consistent trend in our interviews, as was the potential to learn from peers' experiences in the form of personal narratives and anecdotes. An African American freshman explained, "You can't just study; you have to come in contact with different cultures. Merely interacting on a day-to-day basis, small issues come up that give windows into each others' cultural background."

While many students value this type of relational learning, it can also be dangerous and potentially offensive. Because there is a lack of multiculturalism on campus, it is possible for students of color to experience moments when they are called to speak for their entire race or ethnicity. When asked about whether or not he felt obligated to speak on behalf of his entire race, a student of color explained,

"I feel obligated because there are not a lot of us, so I feel like what I say is valued...I've been interviewed about five times being asked about diversity...I have been asked to share examples and been used in examples for authentic answers because I was the person to go to at the time."

Another example is when issues such as slavery and African American history come up in class discussion. A female African American freshman said, "Discussing slavery is very uncomfortable, with not only peers but professors. You are constantly looked to for feedback and reassurance."

One reason students of color feel obligated and white students do not is that because white students are the majority, their experiences are seen as widely recognized; therefore, it is deemed unnecessary to speak to the majority experience. When studying another culture, race or ethnicity, and a student is present in the classroom that fits into that particular "diverse" category, it seems logical to ask for that student's perspective even though they may have no actual experience or knowledge. In this way, inquiry is solely based on assumption and ignorance of the majority. Indeed, one student explained that "I've never been to Africa, I'm from Cleveland."

At the same time, some white students expressed hesitation to start conversations about certain "diverse" issues with students of color in a classroom setting for fear of political incorrectness. A white male professor explained, "White students are unable to see their own race, having a tendency to feel raceless due to being the majority. During class, these students are often intimidated to say something politically incorrect and offensive, which again reflects our larger society." This professor emphasized the similarities between political correctness and silence about race in America on a small scale within the classroom and in society as a whole. He viewed the hesitancy of majority students as a common sentiment felt around the country regarding race. In our study, political correctness was also cited as "Minnesota nice" and passive ignorance.

Faculty views

Telling of St. Olaf's faculty diversity, a white professor of history declared, "I'm our African Studies department here." His sarcasm is not far-fetched. According to the St. Olaf Common Data Set, during this 2007-2008 academic year, there are 197 full time faculty members, and 13 full-time minority faculty, or 7% minority faculty (St. Olaf Faculty Profile 2007). These numbers are lower than the profile of St. Olaf's students. There are 12.6% minority students in this 2007-2008 academic year (St. Olaf Faculty Profile 2007).

Notably, President Anderson cited that for the next academic year, St. Olaf hired six new faculty members, all exhibiting "characteristics of difference." Hiring diverse faculty members is largely a result of a recently redesigned faculty selection process, which encourages diversity in the final pool of applicants. In the coming years, President Anderson wants to emphasize diversity among faculty because they serve as models in "authority, methodology and perspective in a post- racial America."

Yet the crucial role professors' play on college campuses also includes personal views and conceptions of the campus climate in which they teach. All of the faculty interviewed support and embrace the goals of student and staff multiculturalism and diversity on campus. For example, a professor of religion believes, "In order to offer relevant, effective education it depends on perspective." Further, "In order to improve different perspectives we need faculty with different perspectives that will guide curriculum, discussion and narrate in diverse ways that stray from the majority views."

What differs is the extent to which professors feel a strong commitment to increasing diversity. There exists a scale of how professors feel about diversity on campus. Some believe that St. Olaf is not doing nearly enough and call for more rigorous campaigns, and others see the initiatives as useful and effective. An Argentinean professor of Spanish repeated the need for "diversity within diversity." By this she meant that St. Olaf should not be satisfied with recruiting students of color from the same "diverse" high schools but rather constantly expand to new areas of the country and world. Also, a professor of computer science acknowledged the necessity of diversity but went further to say, "The big question is how people of those groups respond to diversity – tolerate, honor, appreciate, etc." Difference of opinion emerges in how diversity is achieved and experienced on campus.

In a paper titled "Diversity: the challenge for higher education," author Launcelot Brown argues that institutions of higher education need to commit to the responsibility of "preparing citizens for the world they now face" (Brown 21). The paper asks higher education leaders to go further than to simply "support" diversity, but rather make it a priority and commitment.

"The fact that almost everyone stated that diversity was good for the institution and should be promoted suggests that there may be genuine and general support for the institution's commitment to a more diverse community. However, the contrasting views on the specifics of policy implementation forces the consideration of alternative explanations. Thus, there is the possibility that persons, while being in agreement with the principles of diversity, in practice are content to leave things as they are, or alternatively, that the endorsement of diversity as being beneficial to the institution is simply a reflection of the political correctness of the times" (Brown 23).

The idea of being a diverse college campus is ideal and desired, but the realistic steps involved in becoming "diverse" are challenging and time-consuming and similar to other issues America faces today. A white male professor of anthropology said, "St. Olaf sincerely is trying to provide education to a wide variety, yet we inevitably reflect society's norms. It is a historically white institution; trying to undue this is very difficult."

Administration

Administrators and faculty recognize that students bring with them to college a sense of identity and purpose shaped by their parents, their communities, their religions, and other various avenues. The college understands that these influences are critically important to student's growth and development; they understand this because they are aware that colleges are agents of socialization. The problem many institutions face is trying to diversify their campus enrollments and figuring out how to improve the overall climate of the campus with out losing the traditional values and feel.

St. Olaf, like many colleges, faces a similar situation in terms of the question: how can we become more diverse without changing who we are as a college? President Anderson said "we want diversity, but not difference." At first this statement seemed a little contradictory, but after further explanation we came to understand the phrase and his use for it. Yes, the college does want to increase the rates of diversity but it does want to change its moral background. President Anderson stressed the importance of our college heritage and the connection to the Lutheran religion, such as how we were founded by a group of immigrants, minorities at the time: "in 1874 when our college got started it was a college for those regarded as the other by mainstream society." This school built was built on the morals of the Lutheran religion, morals and goals that emulate the college's missions. He would consider these moral as agents of guidance for the student to find his or her purpose, to find what he or she is good at along with making him or her well rounded.

It's our understanding that one of the main goals of the current President was to diversify the campus, especially the faculty, and to some extent he is fulfilling his promise and goal. President Anderson has also created a new position, which is The Executive Assistant to the President on Intuitional Diversity. The president along with his committee members have spent the last year trying to find a qualified individual for this position, it's until just recently that they have narrowed it down to a select few. The groups' hope is to have someone fill the position by the coming school year ('08-09).

In the President's short time here, he has been able to accomplish much of what he said he would do. To President Anderson and much of the college, it seems that he is fulfilling his goal in diversifying the campus. Mr. Green, the director of the Multicultural Affairs and Community Outreach office, agrees with Anderson on the need for more faculty and students of color. He comments on President Anderson's strong efforts on trying to increase diversity, "He's done a lot of great things, we're getting a lot of new faculty next year, and I'm excited." Although Mr. Green seems to give praise for what the President has done with the faculty, he is critical of the current situation of students and staff. Mr. Green referred to the numbers of students of color, and how over the past few years the numbers have remained the same, still only at about 9%.

Mr. Green challenged the President and his cabinets to speak about diversity and really address the issues the students and faculty face on this campus. He feels administration could do more to create discussion among faculty. He said that many faculty and staff are often unaware of what is going happening on campus, they are uninformed of the events put on by the students of this campus and their fellow peers, and it's only at special meetings that they actually get together and discuss what they are doing and what this campus is doing. The college has many resources and many ways of addressing the issues, but it is up to administrations that make the rules and control the resources to instigate lasting change.

A Reflection of the Larger Society

Most students who can afford an elite liberal arts education do not come from low-income communities, and those who apply are often Caucasian. In the example of St. Olaf, the student population remains white, and the context perpetuates the attitudes associated with overwhelmingly white communities. Therefore, one must ask: Are students educated in such places of privilege equipped to deal with the increasingly diverse world of today? St. Olaf College is part of the larger cultures of Northfield, Minnesota, the Midwest, and America. The student population lacks ethnic diversity, thus students study and prepare for professional careers in a setting that does not reflect the larger society.

The role of professors and peers is to bring the world into the classroom, to replicate some of the same diversity conflicts we face regularly outside of academia. It is in this way that St. Olaf life does represent the diversity issues that exist outside of academia. While St. Olaf College does not mimic the ethnic diversity that exists in the U.S., the inability to address the topic of race in a comfortable

and progressive way does seem to suggest St. Olaf is a microcosm of the outside world. This uncomfortable approach to race is prominent in the larger American culture, and usually produces the impulse to segregate (The Pioneer Press 2005). Therefore, the college community represents the trends and viewpoints of United States culture.

There are no simple solutions for easing racial tensions, just as there are no simple answers to the racial injustices that continue in our society today. Simply exposing students to various cultures is not necessarily the best form of diverse education, yet it is better than ignoring the conflicts that not only exist within the walls of a liberal arts college, but are engrained in the world around it. Bill Green, the Assistant Dean for Community Life & Diversity/Director of MACO at St. Olaf addresses this topic saying, "The world is changing, and effective students have to get a sense of different cultures and the global community" (The St. Olaf Interview). President Anderson brings up the issue of race issues outside of St. Olaf as well, saying, "America has a discourse about race. There is an assumed trade off with quality and increased diversity." St Olaf needs to be able to separate itself from this ignorance clouding racial issues in American culture. While St. Olaf does not represent the ethnic diversity within the United States, it does seem to represent the inability to address race in a progressive way. St. Olaf needs to break away from these societal norms, and empower education as the forefront for racial equality and understanding.

Looking to the Future

As stated earlier, "Racial dynamics in higher education are generally moving in more positive directions" (Chang 153). In this regard, Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor admits, "We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today" (Aguirre & Martinez 7).

Regardless of the encouraging outlook for the future, there have to be some concrete steps taken now to insure that the trends and outlook remain positive and realistic. One student suggests, "What can be done is to accept students of color. They're out there, so go get them...If St. Olaf wants to do it, there are qualified students out there who have applied, and some have been denied...They need to go out there and find and recruit the best and brightest students of color."

Along the same lines, Chang suggests that "Explicit treatment of diversity in the mission statement, sponsored social and cultural events, communication from all levels of leadership, support, and advisory groups can provide organic structure...Institutions will need to assess their own unique arrangements, situation, and needs to develop the most appropriate combination of tools and techniques" (171). Another scholar suggests: "Institutions of higher education must develop and promote responses to diversity that communicate to society their recognition of changes taking place in society" (Aguirre & Martinez 18).

Other suggestions include more scholarships for qualified minority students, more effort to advertise and promote the school to a diverse population, and ensuring that the changes made at the top don't have negative effects on the ground.

"We will be successful as an institution if we make a difference in terms of who is included among students, faculty and staff — who sits at the table — and also by how understanding and appreciative of diversity we all learn to be" (The St. Olaf Interview).

CONCLUSION

College campuses are complex social systems defined by the relationships between people, structural arrangements, institutional goals and values, traditions, and larger socio-historical environments. Therefore any effort to redesign campuses with the goal of improving the climate for racial and cultural diversity must be comprehensive and long term. Institutions change slowly, thus if we want to achieve institutional changes we need to rely on leadership, firm commitment to change, collaboration and long-range planning.

Through our research we were able to compile a variety of opinions, views, and ideas pertaining to racial diversity at St. Olaf College. With the inclusion of perspectives and perceptions of students, faculty, and administration alike, this paper should assist the entire St. Olaf community in collectively addressing the wants and needs (in terms of diversity) of this institution. It is our hope that the data we have collected can serve as a tool for enhancing the current racial climate at St. Olaf.

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