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## **Perceptions of Leadership at St Olaf College**

### **Abstract:**

Our research project began with the observation that the St. Olaf community seemingly refers to formal leaders at the college with an unusual familiarity and fondness. We set out to study whether or not this is true, the nature of these perceptions of leadership, and to discover what particular factors shape its character. Our 17 interviews included students, faculty and the president. We addressed interviewees' perceptions of leaders, their specific roles, and their relationships with members of the St. Olaf community. While most people had positive perceptions of St. Olaf leaders, we found they knew very little about what the actual roles of these leaders are—although faculty generally had more insight than students. While most perceptions were positive, perceptions addressed a wide spectrum of specific topics and drew mostly from personal lives and individual experiences.

### **The setting:**

#### ***The St. Olaf Community:***

St. Olaf College is a small liberal arts college located in rural Minnesota in the town of Northfield. The college was founded by Norwegian immigrants in 1874 and is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. St. Olaf has maintained a distinct Norwegian Lutheran identity, despite the fact that many of members of the community are neither Norwegian nor Lutheran. There are roughly 3,000 students at St. Olaf, 330 faculty, 12 members of the President's Cabinet, and many other staff members. This study defined the St. Olaf community as including students, faculty and administration. However, the community could also be defined in broader terms to include students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni, parents, and townspeople.

St. Olaf is known for its emphasis on service and integrity, as is exemplified by the RICH statement: "In order to nurture and foster the spirit of the St. Olaf community, I will strive to practice and encourage among my colleagues: Respect for the dignity of others, despite differences in our beliefs; Integrity in action and intent; Celebration of the gift of community by becoming engage in

it; Honesty in all aspects of life, in and out of the classroom; and recognizing that community has no boundaries, I will carry these values with me as I travel, work, study and serve.”

## **Administrative Leadership Structures at St. Olaf**

Administrative leadership at St. Olaf College is tiered. Word of mouth states that the elusive Board of Regents holds the most executive power, but official sources are lacking. The President of the college, currently President Thomforde, has a significant amount of authority, but ultimately answers to the Board. The President oversees the President’s cabinet, which consists of three deans, four vice presidents, an assistant vice president, a secretary, a special assistant to the president, and the director of financial aid.

Christopher Thomforde has been president of St. Olaf College since 2001. He was preceded most recently by President Mark Edwards and before that President Mel George. President Thomforde is well known across campus for his friendliness and visibility—he’s 6’ 8 ½” tall.

### **The Issue:**

The St. Olaf community seems to have a unique perception of leadership, and students in particular refer to formal leaders with an unusual familiarity. For example, many students refer to President Thomforde as “PT” and Pastor Benson as “PB.” Our research addressed student and faculty perceptions of formal leaders at St. Olaf, what in particular these perceptions consist of and how they vary, and what factors they are shaped by.

In order to better understand the concept of leadership, we must first define what it is and more specifically, what *type* of leadership we are addressing. As we define it, leadership is made up of people (leaders) who have the ability to guide and influence individuals or institutions, and implement or facilitate important decisions. There is no single kind of leadership, as Robnett (1997) argues. She creates a theoretical framework for studying leadership that addresses two kinds of leaders: formal leaders and bridge leaders. “The primary difference [between formal leaders and bridge leaders] is that formal leaders possess institutional and organizational power”(21). Bridge leaders, in contrast, work at a grassroots level and connect formal leadership to its constituents. Robnett’s framework informed our conceptualization of leadership at St. Olaf throughout our research. We term the kind of leadership we focused on as “upper-level administrative leadership.” Throughout this

paper when we use the word “leadership” we are referring to the more specific category of upper-level administrative leadership.

Much of our research focused on perceptions of President Thomforde. Adrian (1997) argues that it is generally believed that presidents have little power in higher education, but that that is not true of small religious schools. He emphasizes that the personal influence of the president is crucial in the way a college functions. Obenchain, Johnson & Dion (2004) also argued for the importance of a president in the Christian college atmosphere. Adrian’s and Obenchain, Johnson & Dion’s theories influenced our decision to make President Thomforde a central figure in our research.

We entered the interview process with the mindset that St. Olaf has a unique organizational culture, which shapes the nature of leadership as well as the perceptions of it. We drew from Gumport’s (2001) and Obenchain, Johnson & Dion’s (2004) descriptions of leadership models and organizational cultures in an effort to better understand the nature of the culture of leadership at St. Olaf. Gumport addresses the general move towards a corporate model in higher education:

Over the past 25 years, academic knowledge in the U.S. public colleges and universities has been reorganized along a utilitarian trajectory: at the macro level, the dominant legitimating idea of public higher education has been shifting from *higher education as a social institution to higher education as an industry*.

In their study on organizational culture, Obenchain, Johnson & Dion (2004) identified four main models of organizational culture: clan, adhocracy, hierarchy and market. They found that Christian schools face pressure to adopt the corporate model (market) but are less likely than other secular schools to follow it strictly. Most of the Christian schools in this study identified their organizational culture as clan, which is characterized by a sense of family, tradition, commitment and morale. We used Obenchain, Johnson & Dion’s descriptions of organizational cultures at institutions of higher education as a framework for our research. In addition, Gumport’s arguments alerted us to the national trend towards corporate leadership models in schools; a trend that may have penetrated organizational culture at St. Olaf.

### **Methodology:**

Our research consisted of a literature review and interviews. We interviewed seventeen subjects—twelve students, four professors and President Thomforde. Eight of our subjects were female and nine were male. Although

our interviews were of both students and staff, student perceptions remained our focus. We chose interview subjects that we already knew, but avoided interviewing anyone that we are particularly close to, such as our best friends, advisors, etc. An effort was made to find people of varying backgrounds (such as different majors, ages, races, political affiliations) but we had no specific quotas to fill.

Interviews lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour and took place wherever the subject felt comfortable. Locations included offices, dorm rooms, the library and window nooks. Different sets of interview questions were used for students and faculty. Our questions were focused on student and faculty perceptions of leadership at St. Olaf, particularly of President Thomforde as a leader. As an important, highly visible, and influential leader at St. Olaf, we felt that President Thomforde is symbolic of leadership (as was explained in the Issue section of this paper). But admittedly, we also chose to focus on President Thomforde as a leader because it allowed us to simplify our research process for a project with a limited time frame. Our interview with President Thomforde focused on the characteristics of his job as well as his perceptions of leadership at St. Olaf in general.

In retrospect, our focus on President Thomforde may have produced biased data. Although President Thomforde is spokesperson for leadership at St. Olaf, he is also a distinct individual, particularly in reference to his physical characteristics. Therefore, certain perceptions of President Thomforde are often only applicable to him, and not to leadership in general.

Our project also would have benefited from a larger interview sample, but that was not conceivable given the amount of time we had to complete the project. In addition, it would have been useful to compare the St. Olaf community's perceptions to a different college community's perceptions of its leadership. This is especially true since we were unable to find any similar studies with which to compare our findings.

### **Findings:**

All in all, the students we interviewed knew significantly less about leadership at St. Olaf than professors did, but that is not to say that professors possessed perfect knowledge of the roles of leaders. Despite a lack of official information, students still ventured a guess as to what the roles of leadership consist of and based many of their perceptions off of what reference points they had within their backgrounds and personal experiences. The response to leadership was overall positive; all interviewees liked President Thomforde and

St. Olaf administrative leaders in general but their perceptions beyond that varied. A few interviewees also expressed some negative perceptions of leadership. Such comments essentially addressed areas where the interviewees' felt they were denied access to information. This lack of information caused interviewees to feel excluded from important processes. Among these perceptions, several themes materialized. We identified and labeled the following: physical appearance, charisma, representation and networking, celebrity, role model, religion, money-related issues, past and present presidents, and lack of concrete knowledge on leadership.

We found that people's perceptions of leadership tended to fall into three overlapping categories: the personal sphere, public sphere and private sphere. The personal sphere consists of the personal lives of leaders, such as their families and personal history. The public sphere consists of leadership activity that is visible to the community, such as leaders' speeches, meals in the cafeteria, and attendance of campus events. The private sphere consists of behind-the-scenes activity that is usually inaccessible to faculty and especially students, such as Board of Regents meetings and many money-related executive decisions.

## **Physical Appearance—President Thomforde**

When we asked interviewees to list characteristics they associate with President Thomforde, most listed "tall," and usually put "tall" first. (One interviewee, gleefully answered "short." This was obviously a joke, which serves to highlight the humor surrounding this noticeable characteristic.) All interviewees mentioned President Thomforde's height at some point. Indeed, his physical appearance in general was a very popular topic. Many people mentioned bowties, baldness and his friendly smile in addition to height.

Interviewees had differing interpretations of why this was important. Many of the interviewees associated President Thomforde's appearance with power. As one student said, "when you stand next to him you feel like a little dwarf, so I mean, right there already shows some form of hierarchy...you just see some

form of power.” A professor noted that, “Physical appearance makes a difference” in how one perceives another person, and that President Thomforde is “like a spiffy Abe Lincoln in a way...he has this real free-flowing physicality...” While the student on the one hand saw President Thomforde’s incredible height as fitting into the rigid hierarchical power structure that has traditionally existed in the United States, the professor on the other hand understood it differently. Her comment implies that the grace with which President Thomforde carries himself invokes in our minds positive associations with other famous and well-liked leaders, such as Lincoln. When asked how the list of characteristics she’d composed affected her perception of President Thomforde, another student noted that “they pretty much *are* my perception of him...it would be hard for me to separate the characteristics that I listed from my perceptions of how he actually is...although I didn’t list anything about how powerful he is...and I suppose, despite his big, happy go lucky appearance, he is a very powerful man.” For her, President Thomforde’s physical appearance seemed to almost disguise his powerful position as the leader of the college.

In addition to associating physical appearance with power, one student noticed that President Thomforde’s physical attributes fit conventional American forms of leadership perfectly. “I think that he’s a tall, well-built white man and that’s what we generally see in power in the United states...if it were, you know, his ex-wife as president instead, I think that would change things. I think that gives him a lot of credibility whether that’s deserved or not.” Thus President Thomforde’s innate physical qualities reflect many of the images we see coming from Washington D.C. or from large and powerful corporations; in effect, President Thomforde holds some measure of ‘clout’ even before he communicates or otherwise begins to perform his duties.

Another student alluded to the interconnectedness between President Thomforde’s personal self/life and the public sphere of his position when she said, “I think he has a good sense of humor about being tall, although I can’t say how that would affect how he actually does his job. It’s part of his public image...” In this perception, ‘tall’ is part of how President Thomforde conceives of his job (but not necessarily how he chooses to execute it). He is a highly visible individual within the administration, the St. Olaf and Northfield communities, and circles of higher education as well. Having ‘a sense of humor’ about his height is a way for members of these various communities to better understand a piece of who he is, and to in turn feel more connected to him.

Some interviewees saw President Thomforde's physical appearance as an extension of the public image of the college. As one student explained, the president's appearance makes him "distinctive" and therefore "makes the college distinctive." In this way, he serves as an attractive attribute of the St. Olaf community. If more outsiders see the college as distinctive through him, more prospective students might apply, and more people might decide to become financial donors.

Some interviewees saw President Thomforde's physical appearance as an extension of his personality and an indicator of his quirkiness and friendliness. One student said, "He looks very friendly and approachable; he looks like he would listen to the students"; while another student joked, "He's a fun looking guy. Some people who are big are scary big, but others are playful big. He seems like a playful, big guy." Because he appeared to look friendly, playful, and approachable, many interviewees assumed that he actually was, even before getting to know him apart from saying hello on campus or passing him in the hallway.

Other interviewees noted that President Thomforde's height was not only an important element, but actually created his high visibility. When asked whether President Thomforde's height had any bearing on his perception of the president, a student responded by saying "the fact that he has a strong presence on campus means that I can have a perception of him at all." Another student commented, "It's just that he's very noticeable. You can recognize him at all these things." Indeed, one *does* see him at all four nights of Christmas Festival, at plays and sporting events, and even simply on the far side of campus because he is so tall; a president of shorter stature might get lost amid the crowds.

While all interviewees noted President Thomforde's appearance, particularly his height, a few did not think it was an important characteristic. One professor said, "It doesn't matter so much whether he's tall or not, but it's hard not to notice that, so that's why that's one of the things that comes to mind." One might not want to think of a president, or in fact any person in a position of leadership in terms of his or her physical appearance in an attempt to be objective. However, it is something that is noticed, and thus becomes part of one's mental set of vocabulary about that person.

One fascinating pattern found during our research was that student and faculty (but especially student) perceptions often blurred the boundaries between President Thomforde's physical appearance and his personality. Almost guiltily, one student stated, "You react to people based on the way they look,

whether you should or not” which was clearly the case during this particular study. In these perceptions of President Thomforde, personality and physical appearance are deeply intertwined, while perceptions of these two personal attributes (friendly personality and tall) form additional connections with the public nature of his presidency.

This emphasis on appearance did not seem to tie over to the perceptions of other leaders, which is where our data may have been biased by the focus on President Thomforde. Though he is in many ways representative of the culture of administrative leadership at St. Olaf, we would most likely have discovered different patterns in our data had we asked interviewees about their perceptions of other administrative leaders. At the same time however, this data is very important to our study because there is quite a bit of evidence that appearance influences people’s perception of others, particularly public figures. That President Thomforde’s physical appearance has an impact on the way students and faculty perceive him is a finding that we can generalize to all administrative leaders, at St. Olaf and elsewhere. Additionally, while President Thomforde may not make appearance a significant part of his leadership, it was nonetheless an important part of people’s *perceptions* of that leadership.

## Charisma

Though only a few interviewees discussed President Thomforde or the rest of the administrative leaders at St. Olaf using the term ‘charismatic’, many of them mentioned qualities that would fall under such a category. These comments were applied to President Thomforde in particular, but extend to other leaders as well. One student commented of President Thomforde, “I’m not exactly sure how he does what he does, but he definitely gives it a flavor.”

**Many students and faculty alike noted President Thomforde’s friendly and outgoing nature, particularly towards students. One student was reminded of the late Pope John Paul II in that President Thomforde “is always going around greeting and meeting people.” Another student commented that**

**[His friendliness] makes it a much smaller community. In the big colleges you would barely know what your president looked like, probably. It makes it a much more close knit community with him opening up like that. And with all of them [other members of the administrative leadership]...the deans come around and tell ghost stories every Halloween. They really try to interact with the students. And it makes it feel closer...**

In many instances remarks such as these invoked the notion that the friendliness of the administrative leaders played a part in shaping the culture of St. Olaf.

Mentioned almost always in conjunction with this discussion of President Thomforde's friendliness, is his tendency to take the time out of his busy schedule for members of the community. As one student aptly noted, "You have a lot of 'face time' with him which you don't get at a lot of schools." Another student who had never actually met with the President commented, "I feel like if I really did have a problem that was worth his time I could go talk to him and he would listen to me." This sense that the administrative leaders and President Thomforde in particular are open to having discussions with members of the community seems to foster a feeling of fondness not only for the administrative leadership, but also for the unique college culture which results. One student who actually had had a lot of 'face time' with President Thomforde told this story:

It seems like the president of the college would be really busy, and I imagine that he is really busy, but whenever I see him, he doesn't have a presence of business about him...there've been a couple of times when I've seen him walking, and he's just stopped and had a conversation with me for 10 or 15 minutes even...it's like he has the time for you...a lot of people would say, 'I'd love to stop and talk to you, but I have to go', but when he probably has to go the most of the time, (I would imagine he's pretty busy), he really has that sort of sense that stopping to talk to me is not only part of what he's supposed to do, but he wants to do it...he's really willing to take the time to be there.

Many of the student interviewees seemed to appreciate this 'face time' because it helped them to feel as if they were on the same level as the administrative leadership. One student said, "I feel like President Thomforde is approachable...I think that's part of the culture too, like they're people, they're

not demi-gods.” Because President Thomforde and other administrative leaders are known for taking the time to listen and communicate with community members (and students in particular), many students and some faculty noted feeling like they were on equal footing with the administrative leaders; like they were all just regular people.

**Quite a few interviewees mentioned President Thomforde’s ability to communicate articulately both *with* the St. Olaf community, and as a spokesperson *for* the St. Olaf community. As one professor put it,**

He’s been strong in being able to articulate some of the feelings of the community especially during difficult times such as when students have died and after 9-11, times when he was articulate and eloquent about some of what that meant for us all. It was good for someone in a leadership role to be able to express some feelings that many people were having and articulate that sense of concern about what all that meant.

Having a person in a position of leadership speak about the issues that concern the members of his or her community, and doing so with a deep understanding of the sentiments within that community can be important in two ways. It can create an increased sense of cohesion among members of the community, and it can also help individuals to process the meaning of that particular issue.

Of the students and faculty interviewed, several mentioned seeing in President Thomforde a strong ability to stand up for what he believes in. One student recalled noticing that shortly after war was declared against Iraq in 2003 he had “put up an anti-war sign in his front yard...some of the Regents [from what he understands] were not too thrilled with that.” Even though his actions may have found disfavor with the Board of Regents, President Thomforde stood firmly by his beliefs. Similarly, a professor noted that he’s “often been willing to speak up for activities like the Peace Prize Forum that have gotten criticism from conservative alumni, for having Jimmy Carter speak [for instance]...He [also] got flak for hosting the church conference on homosexuality.” This interviewee’s opinion of the President seemed to be positive in light of his efforts to stand up for these types of events, in particular because of all the letters and complaints he is compelled to deal with in addition to his other

work. Of those who mentioned President Thomforde's tendency to stand up for his beliefs, all felt that this was an admirable character trait.

Marshall, (1997) discusses Weber's theory of 'charismatic authority' noting that it "is based upon the perception of believers that a particular individual possesses extraordinary qualities." Clearly, the above perceptions of President Thomforde and the administrative leadership at St. Olaf invoke a sense of uniqueness or extraordinariness. Though they are both praised for maintaining an aura of ordinariness (by being friendly and taking the time to talk to members of the community), they are also extraordinary in the ability to do so while also occupying important and stressful positions of leadership. Marshall continues:

Charismatic authority thus denotes a *relationship* rather than an individual personality attribute...Institutionalized charisma is also represented by *charisma of office*, which pertains to beliefs that certain office holders, by virtue of occupying a sacred office (e.g. priesthood), acquire certain special powers or qualities" (Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 3, as paraphrased in Swatos).

Ironically, if students and faculty did not exist and therefore did not mention the extraordinariness of the St. Olaf administrative leaders, those leaders would consequently not *be* extraordinary. Though they may be friendly, they are in need of students and faculty to say as much in order to be characterized as charismatic. In addition, these leaders may derive some of their charisma simply as a result of being a dean, or of being the president. When they have a lot of 'important' work to do and still choose to chat with a student for 15 minutes, these leaders appear to possess special power.

Many faculty members commented on President Thomforde's emotional sensitivity, and the fact that he has cried while speaking in front of various groups. Though this seems to be the antithesis of Weber's concept of the charismatic authority, it is a characteristic that causes community members to be more sympathetic to the President. One professor said, I think people trust him because I have seen him so openly, *painfully*, affected by—I remember a couple of years ago when the bottom dropped out of the stock market and there was this *real* fear that [gestures with a falling hand]...he's not afraid to cry...and I think that when people see that vulnerability, when you only see the hard decision maker, then you're suspicious that they'll make decisions arbitrarily.

Seeing a display of emotion in this case caused a professor to feel as though the President was truly committed to his job and to making thoughtful decisions. Another professor who, when asked to make a list of descriptors that characterized President Thomforde wrote down 'emotional'. He explained by noting that it "might go back to the loss of one of his children...he identifies with the loss of students, and it really touches him because he knows what that feels like. He cries often during public speeches, probably some faculty feel uncomfortable with that, but some think it is good because he is able to feel stuff deeply enough to be able to express it." Though it might not appear to at first glance, this comment does fit with Weber's pattern of charisma. Although crying or otherwise showing emotion is generally characterized as ordinary and unmanly in American society, exhibiting such emotion while occupying a position of leadership is not. Defying the script of such a position is understood in this last comment as an extraordinary feat.

Many students, though they appreciated President Thomforde's friendliness, wondered about his motivations for being so sociable while walking around campus or participating in various events. Some understood it to be a little bit "forced", while others noted that it was probably part of his job description. Several students saw President Thomforde's affability as a strategy for maintaining favor within the community. In making a Star Wars analogy, and drawing a parallel between President Thomforde and Yoda, one student said, "he has a strong control of the force...he knows how to talk to people and get them to love him." Another student commented, "I think he does specifically go out of his way to say hi to all of us so that he has a good image on campus...You use what you need to to get a job done, and with his job being so [much about] just talking to people, you have to use every trick in the book, and I hope that he does, actually...that's how you do it in the working world." Several interviewees were quick to add however, that they did not think this necessarily meant that the President was unhappy to be outgoing to community members; in fact some thought that he must have been particularly drawn to the position of the presidency because it is a position that encourages him to make use of an innate friendly personality.

This notion that President Thomforde's charismatic nature has somehow been enlisted to serve his position as one of the top administrative leaders of the college is characterized by Weber as a process of 'routinization', which all charisma goes through in the end. Marshall notes "Weber...classifies this transformation into the bureaucracy of charismatic authority as the 'depersonalization of charisma': the internal gift of charisma is rationalized and made external into qualities that are 'transferable, personally acquirable and

attachable to the incumbent of an office or an institutional structure regardless of the persons involved” (Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 3, 1968, as quoted in Marshall, 1997, p. 21). According to this theory, the charisma of an administrative leader such as President Thomforde necessarily becomes a facet of the position held. Though it may exist intrinsically as part of the disposition of the leader, it becomes an element of the office or the leader’s public image, and can in some instances cause that image to be more favorable within the community.

## Representation and Networking

When asked to describe President Thomforde’s job, though interviewees often did not know for sure, many thought that he was a figurehead for the college, and thus a person who represented its various constituencies and acted as a go-between for all of them. In addition, interviewees noted that it was important for him to be visible within the community, and to ‘schmooze’ both with members of the community, and potential members of the community.

As one student put it, “I think of [President Thomforde] mainly as a figurehead for the campus, not as the one making all the laws or the rules.” As a spokesperson for the Board of Regents, alumni, Student Government Association, and other groups, President Thomforde is a “runner between kind of person.” Another student remarked, “I think that he feels that his job is making everybody happy, especially the students.” President Thomforde was generally not seen as possessing unilateral power in important decision-making, however he was credited with ultimate power in acting as the face of the college and in looking out for the well-being of his constituents. Indeed, President Thomforde himself noted during his interview with us that as the president, he understands his position to be that of “chief representative of the college to all [the] various constituencies” and must “keep all of the constituencies well informed”.

Interviewees may have been more inclined to see President Thomforde as a figurehead or as one concerned with the welfare and happiness of students and other groups because of his high visibility. One professor noted that “He seems to enjoy talking to students and going to student events...he goes to plays, concerts, chapel services, etc.” Students, and to a smaller extent faculty, may have focused on this aspect of President Thomforde’s position because those are the most public things he does as President; decision-making and other duties tend to be carried out behind closed doors within the private sphere.

Many interviewees believed that President Thomforde did not have a huge amount of 'official power'. Often, however, they commented that he held power in his ability to influence others in their decision-making. One student remarked, "I kind of feel like he gets paid to schmooze...he told me about a fundraising campaign that he does every spring, [when he is] really busy raising some number of millions." This student assumed that this fundraising campaign involved meeting with donors, and encouraging them to donate money to the college. Another student noted, "I truly think part of his job is smoothing things over...oiling the squeaky wheel...he needs to be finding out what each group is thinking [alumni, Board of Regents, students, faculty, etc.], and voicing each group's opinion. He is supposed to really be in touch with the community...getting people to be on the same page." By networking with and speaking up for his various constituents, President Thomforde is perceived to hold quite a bit of power. In addition, as the "public image of the college" he is able to "go around and sell the college to people...to prospective students..." thereby drawing more individuals into his constituency.

As such a recognized member of the administrative leadership at St. Olaf, President Thomforde is "known for his well knownness". Marshall notes that such persons are "walking commercials, advertisements for their selves/personae and for any product to which they are...connected" (Marshall, 1997, p. 1). Thus, as the 'public image of the college', it is not hard to see how President Thomforde might be perceived as the one making everything flow properly, the one watching out for the various groups within the St. Olaf community and the one seeking out individuals to become new members of the community.

## Celebrity

Being so well known has made President Thomforde into a celebrity of sorts. Many interviewees, when asked to describe or characterize him noted his unique qualities. A student commented that "He's very visible on campus because of his height, and he's made a name for himself with the bow-ties," while a professor noted that "He's kind of the rock star of campus." Because of his high profile, some interviewees spoke of experiences where they had met or bumped into President Thomforde and had felt star-struck. One student recounted this story of when she first met the President: "[It was] the first time I was walking to class [and] he walked by and said 'hi'. I was like, 'wow, the president just said hi to me! Is that cool? Did that happen? Maybe I'm special! It was really cool to think that he would actually go out of his way to say hi..." This "celebrity system" is a way for people to make meaning out of

questions and feelings like the ones stated above as well as providing a place to house and categorize that meaning (Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* [1977] as noted in Marshall, 1997, p. 57). As Marshall notes, it is also “a way in which the sphere of the irrational, emotional, personal, and affective is contained and negotiated in contemporary culture” (Marshall, 1997, p. 72-73). Thus, identifying President Thomforde as a celebrity was, for our interviewees, a means of organizing and clarifying their thoughts about his personality and his position within the college. Indeed, it was a way of combining both the public and personal spheres.

## Role Model

While discussing President Thomforde’s job and the culture of leadership at St. Olaf, many interviewees noted that administrative leaders tend to be role models for the rest of the community. Many interviewees mentioned the word ‘service’ or ‘serve’ in conjunction with the role of the administration, and others noted that leaders such as President Thomforde tend to lead by example.

One student, when asked what he thought President Thomforde would say about his Presidency, said “President Thomforde sees himself needing to be a role model for students, faculty, and staff...someone who is dedicated and devoted to St. Olaf.” Another student, when describing the nature of the administration commented matter-of-factly, “Service oriented. I think most of the administrative leaders are interested in doing what’s best for the college...they are generally interested in doing a service to us, the students, so that we can go out and be of service to other people.” Interviewees thus noted that serving the students and other groups within the St. Olaf community means more than simply giving them what they need. These responses indicate that they feel the administrative leaders are helping to foster an environment in which they are provided the tools in order to themselves be of service to others.

Several interviewees commented that the tendency of the administrative leadership at St. Olaf is to lead by example, in serving and being supportive of community members. As one student noted of President Thomforde, “He seems to have a prevailing perspective of pluralism.” Another student recalled that Dean May had lectured in one of his Great Conversations classes, saying, “it’s really amazing how he lives his philosophy...That’s a specific example, but I think it’s a trend...It’s not just do as I say but do as I do.” Another student, when asked to characterize the culture of leadership offered this:

It looks like the culture of leadership here is to...be a role model for the students, because it's basically like the students are kind of you know, kind of their kids...he probably influences people by going to chapel because people know that he goes to chapel and people know that he goes to, let's say, Black History Month, which would also obviously influence different staff and faculty members to [say]... 'oh, my goodness, we have to pay attention to that because our *president* does.' It's as if, there's like, the culture here that if the president can find time and if the president can do something then we all should be able to too, at least to some degree, that we should all be able to participate...

Thus interviewees felt that administrative leaders such as President Thomforde and Dean May were supportive not only of the kinds of academic learning that goes on in the classroom, but also in the kind of learning that happens in every other aspect of life.

### **Religion**

The college's mission statement opens, "St. Olaf, a four-year college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, provides an education committed to the liberal arts, rooted in the Christian gospel, and incorporating a global perspective." This immediate reference to Christianity illustrates the centrality of religion at St. Olaf. When we interviewed President Thomforde, he used religious language (even before we had asked him to address the subject of religion) to describe his responsibilities as president of the college, which included chief steward, prophetic, rabbinic, pastoral, and priestly functions. Considering this focus on Christianity it was surprising how few interviewees explored the topic in depth, although several mentioned the presence of religion in relation to leadership at St. Olaf.

Many interviewees brought up Christianity when discussing leadership as a whole. Some interviewees spoke briefly of Christianity, specifically Norwegian Lutheranism, as a "tradition," "heritage," or "roots" at St. Olaf. Another student described the culture of leadership as having a "Christian moral appearance," but thought that underneath there was more of a "typical college atmosphere" in which the leadership was concerned about things like money. This student then added, though, that despite cynicism towards the Christian image of the college, the student thought that "deep down [the leaders] are real Christian people." These people treated religion as a given, something that obviously influences leadership choices.

Some interviewees did not mention religion explicitly, but did mention characteristics of leadership at St. Olaf that correlate with Christianity, at least according to the St. Olaf mission statement. For example, one interviewee described leadership at St. Olaf as service-oriented, and another spoke of President Thomforde's humility. Several people spoke of the leaders as guides and role models who care for the students like their own children (as was addressed in previous sections). These observations demonstrate the influence of Christianity, although it may not always be explicit. Adrian (1997) writes in "The Christian University: Maintaining Distinctions in a Pluralistic Culture" that many Christian schools have broadened their academic and religious scope but maintain an emphasis on faith.

A transplanted visitor from the past might see less *visual* evidence of a Christian presence on most of these campuses, but beyond the visual, our visitor might recognize a Christian dimension of substantial breadth and depth.

The Physical Appearance section of this paper illustrates how powerful the role of visuals can be in shaping perceptions of leadership, if what Adrian says is true, it may be that interviewees mentioned religion less often because they see fewer visual signs of it. This does not mean that religion is not an important aspect of St. Olaf leadership.

Interviewees had mixed opinions on how religion played a role in President Thomforde's leadership. One student said, "When he talks he talks from a Christian perspective...I think that affects the way he does his job." Another student, who disagrees with many of President Thomforde's personal values, spoke of President Thomforde's religious and political views, as if they were one combined set of values. Although this student clearly felt that President Thomforde's views affects his job, he lauded the president for being open to different beliefs and being inclusive. Conversely, a different student said, "I think it's interesting that he's an ordained minister...I'm surprised at how little he brings it up and how little it works into his job." This student seems to be in the minority, though, because most interviewees felt the signs of President Thomforde's religiosity were apparent. Many people spoke of the obvious signs of President Thomforde's religious identity— whether it was through the speeches or sermons he gives or the values he exemplifies. While several people did not comment on religion in relation to President Thomforde, those that did thought it was significant part of his job as one of the most visible leaders of the St. Olaf community. One professor noted President Thomforde's use of religious language, in addition he commented on how President Thomforde seems to have a kind of pastoral care for the college community, a sense of responsibility for the community. Adrian (1997) writes that leadership

is the most obvious factor in the maintenance of a school's religious identity, Starting with the board of trustees [the Board of Regents], whose most important function is to select a president, the leadership of an institution can make a major difference. Beyond the board, the president is the most important figure for maintaining a school's distinctive religious character.

Adrian's argument appears to apply to St. Olaf in that those interviewees who did address religion usually incorporated the influence of President Thomforde into their statements.

### ***Money-Related Issues***

While many people (especially students) expressed confusion as to what President Thomforde and other leaders actually *do* at St. Olaf, most felt confident that fundraising is a significant aspect of such positions and the decisions make often involve money. Clearly, most people we interviewed associated the concept of power with control over money. Many people perceived fundraising as one of President Thomforde's main duties. At the same time, many believed that while the president has to raise money, the Board of Regents holds ultimate power over how that money is spent ("the Board controls the money, not him," said one student) and that the influence of donor interests often limit the president's power. This heightened awareness of money be indicative of a growing presence of the corporate model at St. Olaf or the money-oriented nature of American culture.

Most interviewees mentioned at some point that part of President Thomforde's job is to meet with donors and find potential donors. Reactions to fundraising varied—some felt this was necessary, while others were cynical about money taking priority over other important issues within the school. Some people cited fundraising as President Thomforde's main job requirement, but some mentioned it as part of a series of responsibilities. Fundraising was often presented by interviewees as juxtaposed with a seemingly more enjoyable or respectable aspects of the job, such as making decisions or talking to the community. For example, one professor spoke of how President Thomforde sometimes supports controversial things like the church conference on homosexuality, and then has to deal with the mixed reactions he receives, "while also trying to be a fundraiser."

Perceptions of the Board of Regents' involvement in money-related issues were obscure, but most interviewees were sure of the Board's dominant position. Many people, for instance, complained about the cost of tuition, the fundraising targeting current students, department budgets, and donors and alumni getting priority over students (i.e. be allowed to park in designated student parking spots during the Christmas Festival). However, interviewees often shifted the blame for these complaints to the Board of Regents. One student said, "I don't know if he has anything to with that, it's probably the Regents." Another student noted, "I just think the Board, who is, you know, donating a lot of money or overseeing programs really can decide where they want the funding to go in a lot of way, and that may not necessarily be President Thomforde's agenda." And one professor stated with authority, "While the President can work with [the Board] and make suggestions to them, ultimately the major financial decisions in some way are made through the Board." While many people focused on money-related issues, they were usually regarded as unpleasant. Yet all interviewees considered President Thomforde and other leaders likeable. By passing off financial decisions onto the Board of Regents, interviewees may be reflecting reality. Or they may be demonstrating their desire to like President Thomforde and other leaders and therefore do not want to associate these leaders with money. While many people spoke of fundraising as a distasteful, one student said in defense of financial decisions, "Whatever is profitable is just the best thing to do, I think."

Those who felt that President Thomforde has a considerable amount of power over money thought it contributed significantly to his power overall. Controlling the flow of funds throughout the school was often seen as an ultimate mandate.

The ability to fundraise was clearly linked to the concept of public image. One professor commented, "I think the President works hard at the business of representing the college externally and in that way being helpful to the development office in terms of money-raising...I see this as his main area of work at the college." Many of our interviewees' perceptions combined President Thomforde's image and charisma with his ability to pull in money, as if he were an advertisement for the college.

As we discussed in the Issue section of this paper, Gumport (2001) claims that the corporate model is becoming more prevalent in American schools, arguing that universities and colleges are being transformed into industries. Adrian (1997) confirms that there is indeed pressure on American institutions of higher

education to shift their focus. He writes that as Christian colleges strive to earn academic recognition they are pushed to be more market driven. Sustaining Christian faith and tradition in the face of the mainstream's demands is a major challenge, he argues. Obenchain, Johnson & Dion (2004) assert that while this is all true, Christian schools are less likely to adopt the corporate model than secular schools. Interviewees' emphasis on fundraising may be a response to the infiltration of the corporate model. However, it could also be an indicator that Americans in general are concerned about money—either because of its cultural symbolism or difficult economic conditions—and are therefore more alert to the role of money at the college. Money-related issues may also be more visible than other issues—chapel attendance is no longer required, but all students have to pay their tuition bill.

### *Power Dynamics*

Perceptions of power were complex and often conflicting. Some of our interviewees had more access to information about power dynamics within leadership than others; but overall, many people did not actually know who has power, how much and what kind of power, and his/her position in the hierarchy. Many people discussed power in confusing terms, some described the leadership structure as democratic, but added that President Thomforde has a lot of power, but only a certain *kind* of power, and that the Board of Regents also has a lot of power, and a lot of leadership happens off the radar.

As illustrated by the previous section on money related issues, many people perceive the Board of Regents to have more power than President Thomforde, at least over financial issues (although, financial power was often equated with power in general by many interviewees). Descriptions of the amount of power the Board of Regents has were usually in terms of money-related issues. However, many people perceived the president to have a lot of power but did not mention the Board of Regents. The deans, faculty, donors and students were also mentioned as power holders in the leadership system.

When describing the kind of power President Thomforde has, people referred to veto power, decision-making, finances, public image, facilitation and influence. The concept of influence was a common topic in the discussion of power. Most interviewees agreed that President Thomforde's most significant form of power is indirect; this power was referred to as "influential," "persuasive," "unofficial" and "social." This power was perceived to be exerted through public speaking, meetings, visibility and one-on-one interactions. One professor spoke of President Thomforde's influence over the

Board of Regents, saying:

There's a lot that he has official power [over], or pretty much de facto power to decide, and he seems to have a pretty good relationship with the Board of Regents, so if he felt strongly about something and made a reasonable case it would be unusual for them not to listen.

Several others expressed similar sentiments, saying that President Thomforde can convince people of what's important. One student connected this influential power to President Thomforde's position as a role model. Another student who was quoted earlier said,

It's as if...the culture here is that if the president can find time and if the president can do something then we all should be able at least to some degree, that we should all be able to participate.

Thus, the president's mere presence (which is accented by his visibility) influences what the college community considers important.

The power structure as a hierarchy came up less often than the topic of influential power, but was nevertheless a theme. Many interviewees mentioned it briefly. One professor said of President Thomforde, "He's like a CEO," invoking the corporate model and implying that he oversees a leadership structure from the top. Several interviewees, both students and professors mentioned a leadership hierarchy, often humorously referencing President Thomforde's height as a visual representation of hierarchy. Many people felt that there was a general hierarchy but that overall leadership is democratic and flexible. One professor who spoke of the administrative leadership's ability to listen to students and adapt to new needs also appreciated that people who challenge the system are not fired.

In contrast, a different professor spoke of the growing communication gap between faculty and upper level administrative leadership. This professor explained that under the previous president, Mark Edwards, the relation between faculty and administration was tense. Where once there was only the president and one dean, Edwards put into place the system of several deans and vice presidents—a structure that Edwards created but that President Thomforde has sustained. "Faculty meetings are not what they used to be, they used to be debates." This professor admired President Thomforde as a person and for the things he has supported at St. Olaf, but did not appreciate the increasing number of "layers" (i.e. committees and administrative positions) he is building up between faculty and administration, claiming that this has inhibited the faculty's ability to express itself and be more a part of the decision making

process. This professor's comments in particular implied that the corporate model is indeed being implemented at St. Olaf, however, probably not to the same degree as other institutions of higher education.

A small number of interviewees discussed that some leaders possess a certain amount of unearned power based on their privileged position in society. As one student noted, "the fact that he's a tall, white man gives him a lot of power, a lot of respect, a lot of ability to do so many things." Another student noted that if President Thomforde were a woman, he would probably have to work a lot harder at proving his credibility and would not be able to do quirky things like wear bowties. This student also noted that this privilege applies to most of the leaders at St. Olaf, who are predominantly male.

## Past and Present Presidents

Comparisons of President Thomforde to past St. Olaf presidents came mostly from professors, because none of the students interviewed were here at St. Olaf before President Thomforde came. These professors all commented on the significant difference between President Thomforde and past presidents in his relationship with the community and the leadership structures he has implemented. They also pointed out that the role of leadership in higher education is changing so that there is pressure on presidents today to behave differently than they would have a few decades ago.

As we conducted our interviews, it quickly became clear that President Thomforde stands in sharp contrast to his immediate predecessor, Mark Edwards. One professor said, "I've really lived through the nastiness of that [instability and mistrust] with the last president...there was open discussion about needing to find some kind of healer or whatever." The faculty we interviewed did not have fond memories of President Edwards, as one professor put it, his process of dialogue was "at best, threatening."

Under President Thomforde, these faculty members feel more appreciated and noted a much greater attentiveness to students. This affects the overall culture of leadership, but it is unclear whether or not the college chose President Thomforde because it had decided to revamp the culture and Thomforde fit into that culture, or if President Thomforde was the main factor in shaping that new culture. Most likely, it is some of both explanations. One professor said that, "He landed at an interesting time," when his leadership style fit into the college's current needs. This professor was hesitant to take a stance on how influential President Thomforde is because she did not feel well enough

informed on the many factors that may have shaped the leadership culture at St. Olaf.

One student—a transfer student—commented on the difference between President Thomforde and the president of her former school. She felt she could relate more to the president of her old school because that president was a woman, but she also felt that St. Olaf is in a different place than her old school. “I felt like she [the president] was really involved in pushing the college...whereas I feel like President Thomforde is really just trying to keep going what we have here. Not necessarily trying to push us in a different direction.” This student commented on how her old school was in need of some changes, for which this other president was well suited. One professor’s comments seem to contradict the idea that President Thomforde is not pushing the school, arguing that thought that Thomforde has encouraged the leadership model to be more hierarchical. But this professor also felt that President Thomforde has refocused the priorities of the college to things that are very important.

Professors’ memories of past presidents varied, but all were appreciative of the hiring of President Thomforde after the presidency of Mark Edwards. One professor spoke fondly of Mel George, the president who came before Edwards, saying that George’s office was always open to whoever had anything to say. In general, professors felt that President Thomforde has sustained a more hierarchical leadership structure that Edwards implemented, but also that Thomforde cares about relationships with students and faculty. President Thomforde is not unique in his orientation towards community, several professors spoke of past presidents who felt the same.

## **Lack of Concrete Knowledge on Leadership Roles**

Students in particular did not know very much about what President Thomforde and other leaders at St. Olaf actually do. It seemed that they drew conclusions based on their expectations of leaders in general, where they see leaders around campus, what they hear in public speeches and word of mouth. Word of mouth, in particular, seemed to be used often.

When asked what President Thomforde’s job is one student responded sheepishly, “I feel rather ignorant to what the president of the college actually does. I think that it would be just meeting with important people and making

important decisions...I guess I should know more about this!” Another student laughed nervously and stuttered, “Um, I think [laughs]...I don’t know. I never thought about what he does. I don’t really know what he does as president. I never, never thought of what he does.” And still another student made a guess about the balance of power between the Board of Regents and the president and then admitted, “I don’t know a lot about the administration but I assume they’re pretty democratic...I have no idea what [President Thomforde] has power over, honestly.”

When professors were asked what the roles of leaders were on campus they had more authoritative perceptions, but often admitted that they don’t actually *know* what goes on behind-the-scenes. Two professors mentioned that it is difficult to keep themselves informed when not on a presidential committee. Overall, though, professors had greater access to information about what leadership positions at the college actually consist of.

It is not surprising that many students knew so little about the facts of leadership, student life rarely intersects with formal administrative activity. This is why informal interaction between students/faculty and the administration is so crucial in shaping perceptions of leadership—it is the only direct contact between the two groups. For some people it is the information they do *not* have access to that informs their perspective. For example, one professor felt that that lack of transparency in administrative decisions was indicative of an increasingly undemocratic system. And several students expressed uncertainty over President Thomforde’s sincerity because they do not actually know him. This is not to say that all students and faculty should have access to all information, but there are certainly areas where leadership at St. Olaf could keep students and faculty better informed, and perhaps should.

### **Summary:**

This research project, on the perceptions of administrative leadership at St. Olaf College addressed both students and faculty, revealing a wide variety of views and opinions that tended to be positive. Throughout the interviewing and transcribing process we identified several prominent themes, which we used as a framework to organize our findings. These themes are: physical appearance, charisma, representation and networking, celebrity, role model, religion, money-related issues, past and present president’s, power dynamics, and lack of concrete knowledge.

From these findings, we came to several conclusions: interviewees tended to blend their perceptions of the public and personal spheres, and generally disregarded the private when forming their perceptions of leadership; the leadership model at St. Olaf is changing from a strong basis in the clan model to incorporate more aspects of the corporate/market model; leadership at St. Olaf does not easily fit into the dual categories of bridge and formal leadership; and perceptions were shaped by individual's backgrounds, experiences, and interests.

Interviewees tended to discuss leadership in relation to the specific issues that were important to them, based on their backgrounds and experiences. For example, three of our interviewees spoke passionately about the importance of diversity at St. Olaf. Their perceptions of leadership were shaped by how well they felt a leader addressed this issue. These interviewees appreciated President Thomforde's commitment to increasing diversity, and that significantly affected their positive opinion of him. Other interviewees mentioned issues that were highly visible, but were not important to them personally. For example, some interviewees recognized that other community members were justifiably upset over the leadership decision to sell the WCAL radio station, however, they did not allow this knowledge to color their view of St. Olaf leadership. Even when interviewees felt an issue reflected badly on leadership, they did not incorporate that issue into their personal views of leadership if they thought it would not affect them personally.

We began our research with a focus on formal leadership using theoretical frameworks from Robnett (1997). However, we eventually realized that leadership at St. Olaf is not quite so clear-cut. Robnett writes, "While formal leaders [keep] an eye on the state apparatus for opportunities and concessions, bridge leaders [keep] their hands on the pulse of the community". With this definition in mind, we found that upper-level administrative leadership often blurred the lines between formal and bridge leadership. Leadership at St. Olaf incorporates many elements of bridge leadership. President Thomforde and other leaders make a deliberate effort to connect with members of the community at an individual level, and take their feedback seriously. This is exemplified by traditions such as Dean Kneser telling ghost stories to students in their dormitories on Halloween, and President Thomforde inviting faculty to his home for meals. This use of the bridge leadership technique is plausible because St. Olaf is a relatively small college. However, leaders at St. Olaf still employ a considerable amount of charisma and structural power—the central aspects of formal leadership. Thus, we found that leadership at St. Olaf is

predominantly formal, but it borrows various elements from the bridge leadership model.

The St. Olaf leadership culture has historically been based in the clan model, which is characterized by a sense of family, tradition, loyalty, and a commitment to developing human resources (Obenchain, Johnson, & Dion, 2004). At St. Olaf this can still be seen through our strong Norwegian-Lutheran heritage and traditions. In contrast, the market or corporate model is characterized by competitiveness, goal-orientation, and market-dictated priorities (Obenchain, Johnson, & Dion, 2004). At institutions of higher education, the market model creates an emphasis on research and tuition costs and fundraising, and hierarchical social structures (Gumport, 2001). Aspects of this model have become more predominant at St. Olaf in recent decades, as illustrated by faculty comments on the increasing hierarchal structure, and the common topic of money in all interviews. Despite this, the college is still firmly rooted in its ethnic and religious heritage, and maintains a strong commitment to the cultivation of the global perspective. This was exemplified by interviewees' comments on the importance of community and the efforts of St. Olaf leaders to encourage strong community relations. Though our interviews would suggest that the culture of leadership at St. Olaf is moving more towards the corporate/market model, it continues to maintain many of the features of its traditional clan model.

Interviewee perceptions of the administrative leadership at St. Olaf consisted mainly of combined opinions of the public and personal spheres, but did not include knowledge of the private sphere. This was often demonstrated by discussions on President Thomforde's physical appearance, his outgoing and friendly nature, as well as rumors about his personal life. When prompted to discuss actual job functions of leaders such as President Thomforde, interviewees would either surmise about aspects of the private sphere, or claim not to know anything. There were of course notable exceptions to this pattern, particularly among professors who were more likely to know actual facts about the private sphere, because of their involvement on committees and their access to better-informed social networks.

The above conclusions are relevant to the study of leadership at St. Olaf College. Leadership is as much about those who are led as it is about those who lead. Therefore in order to accurately study leadership, one cannot simply consider the leaders themselves, but must also incorporate their constituents and their perceptions of leadership. While these perceptions may not all accurately reflect reality, they are nonetheless an important gauge of a

community's values and indicate the nature of its relationship with its leaders.

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**Appendices:**

**Appendix A– Information statement given to President Thomforde**

# An Inquiry on the Perceptions of Leadership at St. Olaf College

We, Saleha Erdmann and Ilana Zablow, request your participation in an inquiry for our Soc/Anthro 373 class Ethnographic Research Methods, under the supervision of professor Chris Chiappari. The following is a description of our project and your potential role within it:

**Goal:** The goal of this project is to study the St. Olaf community's perceptions of the upper level administrative leadership (i.e. your role as president of St. Olaf). We are particularly interested in the perspectives of students, faculty and yourself regarding the nature of your leadership role in and relationship with the St. Olaf community at large.

**Procedure:** To collect out data we would like to interview you, in one 45 minute-1 hour period. The interview will take place in your office, a public space, or another place where you might feel more comfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to better understand your role as a leader at St. Olaf College and to gain a sense of how you connect with the community. This is **not** an exposé. At the same time, we wish to bring to your attention the fact that protection of your identity is not possible considering your high profile position within the college. To the extent that we are able, we will be respectful of your concern for privacy, as well as for your time.

**Dissemination:** The results of our inquiry will be made available to the public on the St. Olaf Sociology/Anthropology web page in the form of an ethnography.

**Benefits:** The results of our project could be insightful to the entire St. Olaf community regarding the nature of the relationship between upper level administrative leadership and the community at large. These results could highlight specific areas in which these relationships could be strengthened.

Your participation in our inquiry is completely voluntary and you may end your participation at any time throughout the process.

If you would like to be involved in this inquiry you may either contact us, or wait for us to contact you.

Ilana Zablow  
[zablow@stolaf.edu](mailto:zablow@stolaf.edu)  
x6344

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x3517

Appendix B–Information statement given to faculty

## An Inquiry on the Perceptions of Leadership at St. Olaf College

We, Saleha Erdmann and Ilana Zablow, request your participation in an inquiry for our Soc/Anthro 373 class Ethnographic Research Methods, under the supervision of professor Chris Chiappari. The following is a description of our project and your potential role within it:

**Goal:** The goal of this project is to study the St. Olaf community’s perceptions of the upper level administrative leadership (ie President Thomforde). We are particularly interested in the perspectives of students, faculty and President Thomforde himself regarding the nature of President Thomforde’s leadership role in and relationship with the community at large.

**Procedure:** To collect out data we would like to interview subjects, such as yourself, in 45 minute-1 hour periods in one or two sessions (depending on your position as a student, faculty member or administrative leader). Interviews will take place in either your dorm room, office or a public space of your choice.

The cost of this procedure to you is mainly your time. In the case of students and faculty, once we have completed our data collection (which will be stored in a secure account with a password) we will remove your name and any other identifiers (ie your age, gender, department affiliation) from the information you have provided. Your identity and other private information will be available only to us, no one else will be able to link your identity to the data you provide. In the case of upper level administrative leadership, protection of your identity is not possible considering your high profile position in the college. We will be respectful of all subjects’ time and concern for privacy.

**Dissemination:** The results of our inquiry will be made available to the public on the St. Olaf Sociology/Anthropology web page in the form of an ethnography.

**Benefits:** The results of our project could be insightful to the entire St. Olaf community regarding the nature of the relationship between upper level administrative leadership and the community at large. These results could highlight specific areas in which these relationships could be strengthened.

Your participation in our inquiry is completely voluntary and you may end your participation at any time throughout the process.

If you would like to be involved in this *enthralling* inquiry you may either contact us, or wait for us to contact you.

<b>Ilana Zablow</b> <a href="mailto:zablow@stolaf.edu">zablow@stolaf.edu</a> x6344	<b>Saleha Erdmann</b> <a href="mailto:erdmanns@stolaf.edu">erdmanns@stolaf.edu</a> x3517
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Appendix C – Information statement given to students

## An Inquiry on the Perceptions of Leadership at St. Olaf College

We, Saleha Erdmann and Ilana Zablow, request your participation in an inquiry for our Soc/Anthro 373 class Ethnographic Research Methods, under the supervision of professor Chris Chiappari. The following is a description of our project and your potential role within it:

**Goal:** The goal of this project is to study the St. Olaf community's perceptions of the upper level administrative leadership (i.e. President Thomforde and members of his cabinet). We are particularly interested in the perspectives of students, faculty and the leaders themselves regarding the nature of leadership officials' roles in and relationships with the community at large.

**Procedure:** To collect our data we would like to interview subjects, such as yourself, in 45 minute-1 hour periods in one or two sessions (depending on your status as a student, faculty member or administrative leader). Interviews will take place in either your dorm room, office or a public space of your choice.

The cost of this procedure to you is mainly your time. In the case of students and faculty, once we have completed our data collection (which will be stored

in a secure account with a password) we will remove your name and any other identifiers (i.e. your age, gender, department affiliation) from the information you have provided. Your identity and other private information will be available only to us, no one else will be able to link your identity to the data you provide. In the case of upper level administrative leadership, protection of your identity is not possible considering your high profile position in the college. We will be respectful of all subjects' time and concern for privacy.

**Dissemination:** The results of our inquiry will be made available to the public on the St. Olaf Sociology/Anthropology web page in the form of an ethnography.

**Benefits:** The results of our project could be insightful to the entire St. Olaf community regarding the nature of the relationship between upper level administrative leadership and the community at large. These results could highlight specific areas in which these relationships could be strengthened.

Your participation in our inquiry is completely voluntary and you may end your participation at any time throughout the process.

In if you would like to involved in this *enthralling* inquiry you may either contact us, or wait for us to contact you.

<b>Iana Zablow</b> <a href="mailto:zablow@stolaf.edu">zablow@stolaf.edu</a> x6344	<b>Saleha Erdmann</b> <a href="mailto:erdmanns@stolaf.edu">erdmanns@stolaf.edu</a> x3517
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### *Appendix D—Affirmation of informed consent*

## **Affirmation of Informed Consent**

I have read and understood the Project Information Statement and agree to participate in the inquiry on Perceptions of Leadership at St. Olaf College.

I understand that I will be offered a copy of both the Project Information Statement and this signed and dated statement.

Signature of  
participant\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of  
investigator\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of  
investigator\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Appendix E—Interview Questions for Students**

##### Students:

\*While setting up tape recorder, etc. have them write down a list of characteristics they associate with President Thomforde.

1. When do you come into direct or indirect contact with President Thomforde?
  1. How often?
2. Would you say your impressions of him are positive or negative? (Or both?)
  1. What in particular do you like/dislike?
3. Beyond personal characteristics, how would you describe President Thomforde's job, what he's paid to do?
  1. [In response to their answer:] How much power do you think he has over things like \_\_\_\_\_?

(4) Do you think President Thomforde perceives his job or relationship with campus

differently that what you've described to me?

(5) [Returning to written lists of characteristics:] How do you think those characteristics affect his perspective?

1. Do you think they affect you perception of him?
2. For example, if he were not \_\_\_\_\_ would you perceive him differently?

(6) How would you describe the culture of leadership at St. Olaf? [By culture I mean

the values, structures and traditions within leadership here. So for example,

many people considerate leadership culture in big business to be competitive and

profit driven. How do you view the culture of leadership here?]

1. How do you think President Thomforde influences that? If the president were another person would the culture be different?

(7) Are there any issues you feel strongly about that President Thomforde has power over?

(8) Is there anything you'd like to add?

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#### **Appendix F—Interview Questions for Faculty**

##### Faculty:

\*While setting up tape recorder, etc. have them write down a list of characteristics they associate with President Thomforde.

1. When do you come into direct or indirect contact with President Thomforde?
  1. How often?
2. Would you say your impressions of him are positive or negative? (Or both?)
  1. What in particular do you like/dislike?
3. How would you describe President Thomforde's job, what he's paid to do?
  1. [In response to their answer:] How much power do you think he has over things like \_\_\_\_\_?

(4) How do you perceive President Thomforde's relationship with the faculty?

1. Does it vary?
2. Is it different than his relationships with students?

(5) [Returning to written lists of characteristics:] How do you think these characteristics that you've written down affect his perspective?

a. Do you think they affect your perception of him? For example, if he were

not \_\_\_\_\_ would you perceive him differently?

(6) [If they worked here before Thomforde came:] How would compare President

Thomforde to former St. Olaf presidents or other presidents you have worked for?

(7) How would you describe the culture of leadership at St. Olaf? [By culture I mean

the values, structures and traditions within leadership here. So for example,

many people considerate leadership culture in big business to be competitive and

profit driven. How do you view the culture of leadership here?]

1. How do you think President Thomforde influences that? If the president were another person would the culture be different?

(8) Is there anything you'd like to add?

#### **Appendix G—Interview Questions for President Thomforde**

##### President:

1. How long have you worked here? Where have you served as president before? How long have you been a pastor?
2. What would you say your job consists of?
3. How does your role as a pastor inform the work you do at St. Olaf?
4. How would you describe your relationship to the St. Olaf community?
5. How would you describe culture of leadership?
6. How does the St. Olaf culture influence you and your leadership?