

Imported Diversity at St. Olaf College:

Assessing Cross Cultural Relations between International, Multicultural, and White Students

Alesandra Boyle, Margot Fleming, Nicolai Svanefjord, Grace Tabatabai

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Abstract:

The principle objective of our project is to explore how international and American-born multicultural students contribute to diversity at St. Olaf by exploring the role of these students and investigating the similarities and differences between the two groups' social interactions among their fellow peers. We seek to examine the ways in which the college itself tries to increase diversity and promote cultural appreciation among the student body as well as how its current actions relate to the college mission and understanding thereof. Our study addresses how cross cultural acceptance is currently fostered on campus, the effectiveness of the college's plans to further this acceptance, and how diversity awareness and cross cultural collaboration can be better promoted on campus. Our findings suggest that international and domestic multicultural students view themselves differently on campus and require different needs. Moreover, it is noted that as St. Olaf increases its diverse population, friendships among students are divided between cultural lines. We also conclude that the administration must become more receptive of student voices before it implements plans to promote diversity on campus, and willing to explore additional ways in which cross cultural dialogue can be fostered other than building architecture and design.

Main Points:

- When our participants were asked how they defined diversity, we received a broad range of responses. Many different words were used to describe what diversity is, but overall there were a few key terms that came up consistently: race, ethnicity, and geographic identity.
- All students--domestic white, domestic multicultural, and international--expressed that they contribute to diversity at St. Olaf; whether that be through differing economic, religious, geographic, or cultural background.
- On campus, students segregate into groups based on similar ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. International students tend to form close relationships with fellow international students, and domestic multicultural students form close friendships with other multicultural students of the same background. Likewise, domestic white students primarily assimilate with other white students.
- The administration's decision to join the International Student Office and Multicultural Affairs Office without notifying the students prompted negative feedback from both international students and domestic multicultural students. Additionally, other administrative decisions aimed at promoting cross cultural collaboration have been negatively received.
- There is a disparity between the strategic plan of the administration to increase the number of international students at St. Olaf and their decision to decrease the budget of student affairs. By decreasing this budget and consequently student programming, there will be less resources available to incoming and current international students who need them. If the administration intends to actually increase student diversity, they must maintain these programs that address student needs.
- Students were both receptive and unreceptive to the idea of swiped events for courses with multicultural-domestic or multicultural-global credit.
- Further research would benefit from analyzing the current curriculum, especially the general education requirements and what content qualifies a course to have an MCD or MCG credit.

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Setting and Community:

Northfield Minnesota is a small college town found on the banks of the Cannon River. Located in Rice County, the town of 20,007 has motto of "cows, colleges, and contentment." Viewed as an agricultural center, the town is surrounded by farmland and exports wheat, corn, and dairy products. Malt-O-Meal, the third largest manufacturer of cereal in the United States, has a large manufacturing outlet based in Northfield that employs more than 1000 people. Furthermore, Northfield is home of two colleges: St. Olaf and Carleton which contribute to the town's high number of professor and student residents.

St. Olaf college, a small, Lutheran, liberal-arts school, was founded in 1874. The school's ideology is based on the values of the Lutheran church and commitment to the development of the whole student through body, mind, and spirit. St. Olaf is widely known for its music and

study-abroad opportunities. With eight choirs, two orchestras, and two bands, approximately one-third of St. Olaf students are involved in music. Furthermore, St. Olaf offers 110 domestic study-abroad programs and 660 non-domestic programs. With this multitude of options, study-abroad programs are very popular on campus and 68 percent of the student body studies abroad at least once. St. Olaf is home to 3,176 students, five percent being international students and fourteen percent being multicultural. The college is a predominantly white, Lutheran school. However, the campus abides by a mission that “seeks to fill each class with a diverse and energetic group of students who are eager to undertake the challenges of a liberal arts education.” Furthermore, the 2011 strategic plan of the college states that St. Olaf intends to increase its domestic minority student enrollment by at least one percent each year, recruit faculty reflecting the diversity of recent graduates and ethnic makeup of the College’s hiring markets, and ensure that the diversity of the student body is reflected in participation in academic and co-curricular activities.

The demographics characterizing the St. Olaf student body have changed greatly in terms of racial and ethnic diversity from 2008 to 2012. The number of international students currently attending the college has more than doubled from the number enrolled in 2008. Moreover, the number of U.S. multicultural students has increased from 9.6 percent of the student body in 2008 to 14.0 percent in 2012. This steady increase has been coupled with a growing participation in multicultural organizations on campus and a revision of the organization of the MCA structure. Harambee, the school’s collaborative multicultural outreach group, was revised to form a multicultural executive committee. The presidents of each MCA group are required to join this committee to make collaborative decisions regarding cultural outreach and participation on campus. Furthermore, elected presidents of MCA groups are required to attend a leadership

conference where they are educated in how to utilize the ways to advertise events on campus, promote group camaraderie, and organize events that allow the student body to become further educated about racial and cultural issues. These changes to MCA have been made to accommodate multicultural groups' growing number of eager participants. Moreover, the school has a Diversity Council Committee which approves budget proposals and events for a number of scheduled multicultural days. The council sets aside days for Viva la Raza, Black History Month, Africa Weeks, and Asia Weeks. The Student Government Association also hosts an international night program every year which includes a collection of multicultural dances, singing performances, talks, and other skits performed by the diverse student body. International night is regarded as a very popular event, and though the precise attendance is not known, organization leaders have estimated attendance of 300 to 400 students and faculty.

Within these outlets for ethnic and domestic multicultural students on campus, white American students play a small role in these organizations despite the fact that anyone interested in the culture of the group is welcome to join. Based on personal knowledge of the structure of MCA and group recruitment tactics, the hesitancy exhibited by domestic white students is not indicative of an exclusionary attitude carried by members of multicultural organizations. Instead, it suggests that lack of large-scale recruitment events makes it difficult to spread the message that everyone is welcome. Thus, students who feel most connected to the culture are the ones actively seek out the organization to join. Apart from this challenge of universal outreach, leaders of multicultural organizations are also hard-pressed to create events that truly educate the student body about a respective culture while maintaining a high enough incentive for students to take time away from their busy schedules to attend. Consequently, food, dance, and movies are usually the primary ways organizations provide cultural outreach.

To serve St. Olaf's growing international community, the college implements a Week Zero program for international students as a way to introduce them to American life and integrate them into the routines at St. Olaf. This program begins before the traditional week one program for American incoming freshman. For the most part, the International Student Office has received positive feedback regarding Week Zero, and has even been asked to extend its duration. To further provide a support base for the international population, administration created the International Student Lounge adjacent to the Multicultural Affairs Office in 2011. However, the wall separating the two spaces was removed in the summer of 2012 as part of the President's initiative to promote collaboration, growth, and group outreach. The decision was made without consultation of the students who most utilized these spaces. The president's leadership team intends to eventually create a One-center in this area by removing all the walls which make up MCA, ISO, SARN, SGA, ACS and the newspaper office. This vision, which is to be implemented in the next two to four years, is a way to further administration's goal of promoting collaboration among diverse students, diverse students, and student government. The *one space* tentative plan has been questioned by many, and the students' who would be most affected by this decision have taken a general dislike to the proposal. This does not suggest that students are against collaboration, but instead reflects student's opinion that privacy is still valued and necessary in certain cases.

Because of the recent endeavors the college has engaged in to increase the diversity of the student body and promote collaboration among domestic multicultural, international, and domestic white students, we sought to investigate the ways in which domestic multicultural and international students contribute to diversity on campus. Furthermore, our projects questions how

the current practices of the college either help or hinder the spreading of diversity on campus, and how current practices can be revised or transformed into more efficient methods.

Methodology

Our research was conducted in the Spring of 2013 on the St. Olaf campus where we examined the role of international and ethnic students. In this examination, we looked at the college mission and the means through which the college attempts to foster and promote a diverse campus, and how this impacts the student body. In order to shape the investigation, we consulted peer-reviewed literature that focused on the term diversity. We used the literature review to give shape to our preliminary interview questions, which we tested in three small focus groups, 'International Students,' 'Multicultural Students,' and 'Domestic White Students' before conducting the field research. We maintained this student grouping throughout our data collection, in order to maintain an evenly spread distribution of our participants across the student body. Using the revised interview questions, we conducted 40 interviews with St. Olaf students, faculty, and staff (approximately ten interviews were conducted in each category). The interviews were designed to last 30-45 minutes, though some took slightly longer.

In the recruitment phase, we were greatly concerned with the confidentiality of our research subjects due to their fear of potential retaliation by the administration. Hence, we made it a priority to keep the respondents' identities confidential, so as to provide a safe environment to exercise free speech and ensure that their individual identities would not be compromised or put at risk by criticism of the administration. For our focus groups, we primarily recruited our respondents through e-mail and used the BCC function to hide our list of prospective respondents. For the interviews, our recruitment was primarily carried out in person; this was

done in an attempt to ensure a greater rate of participation. It is inevitable that the students may be 'survey fatigued' due to constant and extensive exposure to surveys and other questionnaires, thus we found e-mail recruitment proved to be ineffective. The concern of confidentiality was a recurring issue with many participants, who feared retaliation by the administration, which affirmed the decision to make the research confidential.

The time period available to conduct this investigation was a clear weakness to the thoroughness of the examination, the effects of which carried over into the length of this paper and the number of research subjects interviewed. In addition, the research subjects were not chosen by random sampling. Although this is not ideal, it does not negate the value of their views. On the other hand, in certain cases it was advantageous to have little to some relationship with the respondents, as the respondents felt more comfortable with sharing their opinion. Although many participants were familiar people to the researchers, we still managed to incorporate a broad base of respondents.

Problem, Literature Review

Since the 1960's, diversity has steadily climbed the hierarchical ladder to become a priority among high education institutions. According to IIE, International student enrollment in the United States reached a record high of 764,495 in the 2011/2012 academic year, and St. Olaf itself has participated in this increased recruitment by expanding their international profile from 92 students in 2008 to 161 students in 2012, according to the IR&E database. St. Olaf has also increased its American multicultural profile by 10.4 percent since 2008 according to the IR&E database. This new focus on diversity is due largely in part to the fact that diversity is now incorporated into the ranking of a college or university. Well-known magazines that provide

rankings for universities such as US News, College Prowler, and Forbes Magazine, to name a few, all offer a diversity ranking as way for college seekers to make application decisions. This newly stressed form of academic measurement is based on education leader's arguments that diversity is crucial for academic quality by providing learning opportunities for students that prepare them for an ever more global world (Doss, Forbes, 2010). As Harvard president Neil Rudenstine exclaimed at an Education meeting in 1997 "There is simply no substitute for direct contact with talent people from other countries and cultures. We benefit from international students; they drive research and teaching in new direction that are very fruitful" (Rudenstine, 1997).

The principle goal of our project is to explore how international and domestic multicultural students contribute to diversity at St. Olaf. Additionally, we sought to examine the ways in which the college itself tries increases diversity and promotes cultural appreciation among the study body. Our search focuses on the role of these students while investigating the similarities and differences between the two groups' social interactions with their fellow students. Our study seeks to address how cross cultural acceptance is currently fostered on campus, and the effectiveness of the college's plans to further this acceptance.

Diversity, like other hot-button issues concerning health care, gay marriage, and political affiliation, has become a topic of discourse for St. Olaf College. The two incidents of cultural hate crimes that have occurred on the campus in the past year (the theft of the Palestinian Flags put up by OJP and the use of expressive derogatory terminology towards the black race in Rand Hall) have only heightened and further enforced an "appropriate" discourse for the issue of cross-cultural appreciation on campus through events like the Race Matters Campaign, the Enough Campaign, and Oles Against Discrimination. The discourse surrounding diversity is not

individually based, but set by the leadership of the school and the student body. This socially constructed dialogue, in keeping with a Foucauldian framework, is a way for the school to enforce a social culture into the lifestyle of its students through bio-power. For example, the removal of the wall between MCA and ISO can be viewed as one way in which the college forces intercultural collaboration between diverse students through increased interaction between the two groups. Moreover, the plan to open SGA into MCA can be seen as a further extension of cross cultural enforcement by opening “diverse space” into “white space.” The eventual plan to knock down all the walls to create a One-center that only supports the school’s hope to create a dominant cross cultural discourse to curtail, what administration views to be, a predominant white exclusionary discourse characterizing the college today.

Much has been written on the benefits international and multicultural students bring to a college campus. Georgette P. Wilson, a professor at Johnson & Wales University, specifically describes the benefits that international students bring not only to the institution but also to the country. These students contribute almost \$19 billion to the U.S. economy, improve cultural diversity, and improve international relations. This study can help in understanding our research and how we can analyze St. Olaf and its intentions of increasing diversity on campus. Do these changes make the college more aesthetically pleasing to visitors having more diverse students on campus or does this trait solely contribute to a higher college ranking? Furthermore, is St. Olaf truly invested in bringing people from all different ethnicities and backgrounds together to make on community dedicated to enriching students learning experience or is there more behind their efforts to increasing the number of domestic multicultural and international students on campus? These are questions we hope to pursue in our investigation.

In “Welcome to America? International Student Perceptions of Discrimination,” Jenny J. Lee and Charles Rice analyzed the perceptions of discrimination and other difficulties experienced by a sample of 24 international students at a research institution in the southwestern area of the United States. Within the first few lines of the article, Lee and Rice note that a benefit of international students studying at American institutions is that they “increase the diversity of student populations,” (Lee and Rice 381). Given this notion, we wanted to reflect on St. Olaf and how the college views international students in terms of diversity and the student body. This led us to examine the how the college breaks down different groups of students in terms of numbers and statistics, and to evaluate how this understanding impacts decisions made by the college--past, present, and future.

David O. Akombo states in his article on Scholarship and Diversity in Higher Education, that “the classroom environment is key to promoting diversity initiatives...especially as it relates to the benefits students gain from exposure to a diverse curriculum” (2013). He stresses that prejudicial thoughts about people of different backgrounds and skin colors are less likely to occur when students take a diversity-related course. A university must provide and foster situations that are conducive to learning in order to encourage students to engage in interaction and thus grow personally through a greater understanding of society, culture, and a fast changing world. Transforming curricula so they reflect multiculturalism promotes excellence in the liberal arts (2013). This analysis prompts us to question how the curriculum at St. Olaf currently promotes discussion and learning about cross cultural background, and how it can be revised to better promote intrigue and appreciation of cultural difference.

In the article composed by Jerry Gale, a team of researchers express that dominant discourse can suppress and undermine other views and opinion in a group through relational

power and pressure to conform. The authors proposed that a successful way of lessening the strain of dominant discourse is through creation of a culture as children in school that is accepting and appreciative of the voice of others. This point was further drawn upon in a quantitative study conducted by Mary J. Fischer. In her article “Does Campus Diversity Promote Friendship Diversity? A Look at Interracial Friendships in College,” Fischer studied a sample of 4,000 White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian first-time college students in 27 selective colleges and universities in 1999. The study revealed that although students arrive on campus as relative-status equals and in their role as students share the same goal of successfully completing their coursework to get a degree, campus diversity had little to no impact on the likelihood of domestic white students having non-white friends. The relationship between school heterogeneity and friendship heterogeneity did, however, show better response rates in the minority groups. Yet, despite the little impact of campus diversity, the study concluded that racial and ethnic diversity does lead to some formation of cross-group friendships. In view of this study, Fischer suggests that primary and secondary education promote more desegregation. That is to say, we have to address interracial friendship formation and acceptance of diversity at an earlier stage. This questions if there is a limit to the extent at which students at the college level can be fully open to new view points, ideals, and practices regardless of whether they interact with culturally diverse students or not.

In an article posted in *The Tufts Daily*, the student-run newspaper of Tufts University, it was reported that the large international student population at Tufts (16 percent of the undergraduate study body) faces significant academic and social challenges within the American-born Tufts community (Sieradzki, 2012). These challenges include adapting to American university culture, which involves understanding jokes and cultural references that

take time to learn. International students also expressed that though they had been speaking English since a young age, reading large amounts of English text and writing longer essays in English posed a significant challenge. These students, like the international students at St. Olaf, are required to participate in an international orientation. Here they meet people who are going through similar struggles, which provides a support base and aids in the transition. International students at Tufts are stereotyped as a group that sticks together and forms a separate community within the college itself. International students claim that seeking out familiar faces from International Orientation is comforting, but also limiting in the fact that other American students are left out of their immediate peer group. The finding raises the question if having more international students really contributes to diversity on campus, and how programs, such as International Orientation, can be revised in order to promote broader friendships during the freshman experiences of both international and American students.

Finding and Analysis

Focus Groups

We began our interview process with conducting three different focus groups, interviewing international students, domestic multicultural students, and domestic white students. For each of the focus groups we started by asking the participants, “how do you define diversity?” The domestic multicultural student focus group identified diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. The domestic white focus group identified diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and political views. And the international student focus group identified diversity in terms ethnicity, race, culture, and socioeconomic status. Although each focus group had different conceptions of diversity, overall, there was a clear understanding

that race and ethnicity were central in how diversity was defined. In addition, there was an overarching belief that characteristics of an individual that differed from that of the majority of those within the community constituted diversity.

When we asked our participants how the school could better promote diversity on campus, the domestic multicultural student focus group came up with an interesting suggestion, in a class with a Multicultural Domestic (MCD) or Multicultural Global (MCG) general education requirement, a student would be required to attend a certain number of cultural events. Much like the current system of swiped events put on by the Wellness Center for students in SPM courses, or the system of pink cards for students taking music lessons, where they must attend a certain number of events each semester. Overall, most of the participants in the focus group saw this idea positively, as they thought this could be a good way to get students more involved and engaged in the courses they are taking, but a few of the participants were hesitant about this suggestion. They thought it was a great idea, but were worried about students not following through, getting lazy, and not taking the events seriously. Our research group decided to pose this question in the following focus groups to gauge their opinions on the effectiveness of such a program.

Surprisingly, the domestic white student focus group was unanimous in believing that a program of swiped events would not be effective at all. They felt that many students would go to the events without actually caring about what was going on. These students would see such a requirement as a burden on top of an already busy schedule. There is also the potential that having to attend events such as these could create a further “other-ing” of students who already constitute a minority on campus. One participant, who had taken the Race and Class in America course offered by the Sociology and Anthropology department, stated that they were unsure that

attending a one hour event would actually change many students' perspectives on certain issues. Thus, they felt that in order to actually change common misunderstandings, more would have to be done than simply attending events outside of class.

The international student focus group was, furthermore, split in their opinions of how effective swiped events would be. One participant was open to the idea, while another participant felt as though it depended more on the attitude of people attending the events. It had the potential to be like a wellness center event where certain students go and get nothing out of it, but for others who were open to the experience, it could be quite rewarding.

Another question we asked each focus group was their thoughts on the rumors of replacing the wall separating the hallway from the International Student Office and the Multicultural Affairs Office, and replacing it with a glass wall. Each focus group felt these possible changes would have a negative impact on the students who use these spaces and wondered what the purpose of this change is? There was also discussion about how this change would create a "zoo" or "fish bowl" type atmosphere. This change would allow St. Olaf to show visitors that it is a very diverse campus just by walking by these two offices where many international and domestic multicultural students spend their time. Students from all the focus groups had similar beliefs about why the school would replace the existing wall with a glass wall, and this shows that because the school is not being open and sharing their reasoning for this renovation, students are forced to come to their own conclusions.

We also asked the international student focus group and the domestic multicultural student focus group their thoughts of the wall being torn down between the international student office and the multicultural affairs office last summer. The administration decided to tear down the wall that separated the two offices without any discussion or notifications about the

renovation before it took place. Many students who use these spaces returned to campus in the fall to find ISO and MCA as one office. There was no discussion to be had because the renovation had already been carried out. The school's reason for tearing down this wall was to create more interactions and conversation on campus, but this explanation was never announced to the student population. Both focus groups agree their biggest issue with this change was that they were not made aware of this decision to tear down the wall. Overall most of the participants were fine with the combining of the two office, they just do not understand why this decision was made and also why they were not even asked for their input because they are the ones who use these spaces the most.

How St. Olaf Defines Diversity

During our interviews, a question we asked all participants was how they defined diversity. The response to this question was very broad and there were many different terms used to define diversity, but overall there were a few terms consistently used. Most of the domestic white and domestic multicultural students defined diversity as a difference in race and ethnicity, but explained that race and ethnicity are not the only two defining factors. Many of our interviewees elaborated on their description that diversity can be any kind of difference that distinguishes an individual from the majority of people: other terms that students used to define diversity were religion, socioeconomic status, political views, geographical differences, sexual orientation, and different perspective from personal experiences.

International students defined diversity by describing that race and ethnicity are a component to diversity, but many of the international students focused on identifying diversity by the different perspectives people bring from personal experiences and how those perspectives

differ from the majority of the population. Faculty members defined diversity in a way similar to international students. They articulated that ethnicity, race, religion, and national backgrounds play a significant part in understanding what diversity is, but there are also many invisible characteristics that contribute. Personal experience, political views, sexual orientation, childhood upbringing – these are other components of diversity that are sometimes forgotten because they are not readily visible.

Another question we asked our participants was if they thought St. Olaf was diverse. The majority of the participants, students and professors, disagreed. A few participants – mostly domestic white students, admission staff, and one professor – said that St. Olaf was diverse. Realistically, St. Olaf may never achieve complete diversity because of its Lutheran, Norwegian, and Minnesotan background. These traditions have been the foundation of the institution's mission statement and a part of the college's identity since it was founded in 1874. Thus, we do not foresee the college making drastic changes in the near future to its well established foundational background in order to further increase campus diversity.

However, throughout the past ten years, St. Olaf has made progress in steadily increasing its diverse population. Those of our participants who are Ole alums and now work at St. Olaf stated that they did find St. Olaf to be more diverse today than when they attended the college as a student. Furthermore, one faculty member we interviewed who went to St. Olaf described how he has noticed a significant increase in international students and domestic multicultural students since his time as a student. He also described how there are many more opportunities for students to talk about issues like racism, diversity, and other issues that were still prevalent topics when he was a college student. Fifteen years ago there was no dialogue surrounding these issues because students did not know where or when they could bring these issues up.

Since 2005, St. Olaf has increased its degree seeking international student population from 20 to approximately 180 students for the incoming class of 2013. However, we questioned if this statistical increase in diverse students actually make the campus more diverse. A current student at St. Olaf described that diversity is not simply promoted through increasing numbers, but is fostered through conversation among people of differing backgrounds which, in turn, affect how students view diversity. Moreover, the international students interviewed did not think that statistical change was affecting diversity on campus. They did, however, articulate that the school needs to further its student resources and programs that accommodate the needs of current diverse students before the school further increases the diverse student population.

How do Domestic Multicultural and International Students Contribute to Diversity

All interviewees were asked if they felt that their presence at St. Olaf made the campus more diverse. Most domestic white students felt as though they contributed to diversity in their ideas and perspectives, but not in a racial or ethnic sense. International students unanimously agreed that their presence on campus increased diversity. And overall, domestic multicultural students felt that they added diversity to the campus in racial, ethnic, and ideological manners. The domestic multicultural students noted that they brought diversity to the classroom and their friend groups, as more often than not they were the only people of color in those settings. When posing this question to faculty members, there was a wider range of responses. Certain culturally diverse faculty members felt that the institution utilized this aspect of their identity as a marketing tool. In much the same way, many domestic multicultural students felt that the college viewed them as poster children and walking billboards of the college's diversity.

This expectation of certain students by the college prompted us to ask if our participants felt as though the college assigned them a role outside of being a student or faculty member. It was clear in many domestic multicultural student interviews that the college did assign them roles outside those of a typical student. This manifested itself in the classroom where they were treated as a cultural ambassador. Thus, domestic multicultural students were seen as speakers not just of their own ideas and thoughts, but of the ideas and thoughts of all people who shared their race and/or ethnicity. Many students felt uncomfortable with being put into such a position by professors; one participant felt these questions were prompted with “as a person of color, what are your thoughts on the matter.” In addition to the roles inside the classroom, participants felt as though the institution utilized their race or ethnicity in admissions materials and promoting the college to other multicultural students. One domestic multicultural interviewee commented that they were asked by a member of the administration to participate in a panel for admitted students, because of their involvement in a multicultural student organization. The student remarked that time and time again they were asked to be a part of events in which they would help to show the diversity on campus. However, they stated, “I can show up and prove St. Olaf is diverse, but it isn’t my job. I work for the students that are here, not the admissions office.”

Another interesting aspect of this section was that although domestic multicultural student feel the college assigns them the role of a mouthpiece, international students did not share the same understanding. Instead, they viewed these moments as opportunities to share their culture and educate fellow students about their home countries. International students did not see this as a burden, and even commented that the college could make better use of them as resources in certain instances. In assessing why this difference of opinions between international

students and domestic multicultural students occurs, there were a few manners of assessment that stood out. One suggested cause of this distinction could be that there is a difference in the othering of international and domestic multicultural students. In the case of international students, being an “other” is seen in a positive light, to the point that it elevates their status on campus. Alternatively, being another because one is a domestic multicultural student does not necessarily elevate that student’s status. Another possible cause of this distinction lies in how international students are asked to speak for their nations, while domestic multicultural students are asked to speak for their race. In the classroom, there is a difference between being asked to speak on behalf of your nation, where you were born and raised, and your race, which is associated with a much larger population of the world.

Domestic multicultural students also noted a process of tokenization by the college that occurs. We define *tokenization* as the practice of hiring or appointing a token number of people from underrepresented groups in order to deflect criticism or comply with affirmative action rules. Students found that the number of domestic multicultural and international student tour guides was an example of this tokenization by the college. One domestic white student commented that a friend of theirs was given a job in the admissions office before even reaching campus, simply because of her multicultural background. By having more domestic multicultural and international tour guides, the college is making a statement concerning the image they look to promote to prospective students. The problem here is that when prospective students become enrolled students, they will find that the picture painted by the admissions office is not a truly accurate depiction of what is present on campus. One faculty member told the story of a family friend whose child was accepted to St. Olaf. Upon visiting the college, the family found there to be a disparity between the diversity presented by the college in admissions

booklets and what they actually found on campus. Thus, the institution needs to be cognizant of the notion that they are creating disillusionment for those students who chose St. Olaf because they believe that they will find a diverse student body by promoting an image of diversity that cannot be found on campus

Friendships and Integration of Differing Cultural Perspectives

It does not come as a great surprise that the majority of students agreed that friendships and conversation is the best way to promote diversity on campus. Yet, sharing and learning from our individual differences has proven not so easy. The interviews with students revealed that multicultural students are mostly friends with other multicultural students and, likewise, international and domestic white students predominantly socialize with students of their own group, which suggests some level of segregation in the student body. On the other hand, there were some exceptions to this rule; students who actively tried to avoid this behavior and socialize with people outside of their own group. Nevertheless, this begs further examination of when and where students form their friend-groups. Hence, we looked at “Week One,” freshman corridors, and athletic team sports. With respect to Week One, we interviewed and questioned international students concerning the necessity of “Week Zero.” In response to the question “is the “International Orientation” necessary or could it be integrated with Week One orientation?” international students unanimously rejected this motion. Their arguments voiced concern pertaining to not only legal, but also practical insecurities of being far away from home. The majority of international students agreed that this orientation helped them bond with other international students, while few participants noted the negative impact this had upon their bonding experience with the rest of the community. Thus, by the time the rest of the freshman

class arrives during Week One, international students have already found a comfort-zone making it more difficult to branch out. Although it makes logical sense to cancel Week Zero and have international students attend the same orientation as other freshman, there are certain legal requirements that cannot be neglected and demand attention before the international students can be cast out into their classes.

In response to the critique of segregation, some domestic multicultural students posed the question: “why do we always have to put pressure on MCA (multicultural) students to branch out? No one tells the volleyball team to go eat with others at dinner, and no one tells the white kids to eat with the MCA students at dinner.” In respect to the volleyball team, an international student told of how she had once, during her Week Zero orientation, tried to sit down with the volleyball players in the cafeteria, only to find them looking awkwardly at her and getting up to find another table. Despite having reason for their actions, the volleyball players had made clear that this student was not welcome – international or not. Looking through a macroscopic perspective, it is obvious that uncomfortable and awkward social interactions, or even social disrespect, hinder students from branching out and force them to retreat to their comfort zone.

Utilization of Multicultural Spaces

The Multicultural Affairs Office and International Student Office are spaces uniquely designed to provide resources for International and domestic multicultural students. Throughout our research, it became evident that most everyone (white students, faculty, MCA, and International students) was aware that these spaces exist and knew of their location on campus. However, international students expressed that they used these spaces more frequently than domestic multicultural students. This is thought to be because of the culture shock most

international students experience when adapting to the American way of life and the unique social patterns that govern American student interaction. This cultural unfamiliarity prompts international students to seek the company of other international students going the same experience. Domestic multicultural students, on the other hand, have been exposed and integrated into American society through their upbringing in the states and thus have a less difficult time communicating with other American students. ISO (the international student lounge) and MCA (Multicultural Affairs) function primarily as a lounge space equipped with computers, couches, tables, and chairs. International students expressed that they didn't spend much time in MCA, but they enjoyed hanging out in the ISO lounge talking to friends, working on the computers, or talking to the international student affairs coordinator. Domestic multicultural students expressed that they didn't use the lounge frequently, and some expressed that they would have never found out about the space if they had not joined a multicultural campus organization (most of which hold their meetings in MCA.) All interviewed students and faculty, however, believed that these spaces serve a beneficial and important purpose and campus. One student said: "every student needs their niche, especially on this campus where white culture can be rather overbearing." Some students expressed in response to the hate crimes that have occurred on campus this year that the role of these spaces has become more important in providing support and communication among students of different cultural backgrounds.

Prior to this year, ISO and MCA were two separate rooms directly adjacent to one another. Over the summer, a decision was made by the president's leadership team in collaboration with the leaders of MCA to tear down the wall separating these two offices. MCA and ISO students have expressed differing opinions pertaining to this decision. International students tried to be indifferent about the joining of the spaces, but ultimately had very few pros

and many cons to communicate. One international student in particular said “I don’t like [the joining] one bit; being international and being multicultural are two completely separate things.” The views of domestic multicultural students were split between those students who used the space frequently before the remodeling and those who didn’t use the space frequently before the remodeling. Domestic multicultural students who use the space prior expressed dislike towards the remodeling, stating that the needs and of the two student groups are different and thus required different spaces. On the other hand, those who did not use the space prior felt that the joining of the offices was a step in the right direction toward increased collaboration between the international and domestic multicultural groups. For instance, one such student believed that the change has promoted greater collaboration among the two groups and simplifies the college’s job of managing the similar needs of the two student groups. This student also stated that the space has become much more welcoming since the remodeling of the offices and has attracted more members to join Karibu (the African multicultural group this student is part of). This divide in multicultural views can be reconciled through the fact that the experience of those students who infrequently used the space have a less personal connection to it and thus spoke on more ideological terms rather than personal. Overall, both international and domestic multicultural students unanimously felt undermined and cheated by the fact that that they were not confronted about the decision to remove the wall. In both our international and domestic multicultural focus groups, students made it clear that these spaces were made specifically for them, and thus felt that administration should have made a greater effort in seeking out student’s opinions in order to implement action that would best serve the students. Negative side effects from the remodeling have been expressed through what appears to be a smaller number of students using the offices. It is uncertain whether this decision to visit the office less frequently stems from a

feeling of violation at the hand of administration for not taking student opinions into account, or a lack of ability to feel comfortable and secure in the new space. However, a freshman international student who had not experienced the divided space was in favor of a wall. This student believed that it would make the space more intimate and thus allow international students to discuss their problems, thoughts and personal feelings more freely.

To further promote dialogue and collaboration among the student body, administration has made plans to create a One-center by breaking down all the walls where MCA and ISO currently stand. Administration officials stated that these plans would be implemented in the next 2 to 4 years when the college has the necessary funds to support the project. Though we were only able to ask a handful of our interviewees about their thoughts given our finding of the projected One-center occurred far into our research process, those domestic multicultural and international students who were asked had negative views to share. Students expressed that transforming ISO and MCA a one public shared space defeats the purpose of these two offices on campus. Because these spaces serve students who are minorities at a school that carries a white dominant discourse, they act as safe spaces for international and domestic multicultural students. Students expressed that these are places where they were not judged for having an accent or felt as though they were speaking for their country of origin or race. The administration believes that is one step towards fostering what diversity among youth is already becoming: a “world youth culture”. However, we suggest that there are better ways of going about promoting discourse and cultural acceptance among students like integrating diverse perspectives and cross cultural viewpoints into the curriculum – which is expressed by Akombo to be a key way to promote diversity in higher education institutions (4). Depriving students of safe spaces on

campus without looking into other ways in which to improve diversity seems to be an inadequate solution to addressing cultural acceptance on campus.

Addressing Finances

Throughout the length of this research project, it has become obvious that the college administration lacks transparency in its operations. Yet, on May 5, 2011 the St. Olaf Board of Regents approved a strategic plan to guide the college in the years ahead. A major topic in the strategic plan was to: “Increase the racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of St. Olaf students, faculty, and staff and their participation in the full range of college activities.” Furthermore, the strategic plan mentioned an increase in domestic minority student enrollment by at least one percent each year. Looking back to 2005, there were 20 international degree-seeking students at St. Olaf. Today, the college estimates to have as many as 180 international degree-seeking students in the 2013-2014 academic year. Statistically, St. Olaf has gone above and beyond their targeted increase of racial, ethnic and geographic diversity (one percent annually). Yet, the recent budget cuts to maintain a low annual increase in the comprehensive fee (next year: \$49,960, a 2.69% increase over the current year), has negatively impacted the fiscal aspect of the International Student Office. The International Student Advisor was raised from a 50% to 75% part time employee last year (2011-12). Yet, despite the increase in the international student body, the college has decided to cut the International Student Advisor back down to a 50% part time position for the year 2013-14, and to distribute the tasks of the advisor throughout a number of other offices. This strategic decision will surely put greater strain on the international student body in an already stressful environment. International students have raised concern about this decision, and our interviewees echoed this with their concern about the effects of cutting back

funding and programming in the International Student Office. In 2012-13, just two weeks before “Week Zero,” international student counselors were informed that this would not count as paid work. Such late notifications by the administration seem to have become a recent habit, which further problematizes transparency. Students feel too busy with the academic workload and other duties to respond to such actions, but their complaints that the administration doesn’t appropriately acknowledge their concerns, instead brushing them aside and justifying their actions by such ideas as, in few years from now students won’t know the difference, still rings true. This attitude by the administration undermines the student incentives to engage with the college and could have negative impacts on future funding by alumni. It is, in other words, not a sustainable administrative approach to the student body. In sum of these findings, administrative plans seem short sighted and unresponsive to the students that will be effected by them. It is crucial to the continuation of the international student recruitment that the administration become more receptive to student needs.

Conclusion

Our findings conclude that diversity is defined on a broad scale at St. Olaf. All students feel that they contribute to St. Olaf’s diversity, whether that be through their race, ethnicity, religion, economic background, geographic background, or combination thereof. Additionally, we found that not all students feel comfortable assimilating with students who are culturally different, thus dividing the campus among cultural lines. Students segregate on campus into groups of similar ethnicity and cultural background, for international students tend to form close relationships with other international students, and domestic multicultural students form close friendships with other domestic multicultural students of their same background. Similarly,

domestic white students primarily assimilate with other white students. In an effort to promote cross cultural collaboration among international and domestic multicultural students, the administration decided to join the ISO and MCA offices. However, this was not well received due to the fact that the students who utilize these spaces were not consulted before the decision was made. Students expressed that the administration must become more receptive to their needs if the school intends to increase diversity statistically.

We believe St. Olaf can benefit from our study as the college continues to find ways to improve diversity on campus. If the institution's reasoning for increasing its diverse student population follows that of other high education institutions, it hopes to prepare students for a more global world through cross cultural collaboration which equips students with differing multicultural perspectives and less prejudicial thoughts (Akomobo, 4). Though St. Olaf is steadily increasing its diversity numerically, it has paid little attention to the fostering of communication and integration among domestic white, domestic multicultural, and international students – a crucial aspect of cross cultural acceptance. By taking into account student views of administration's current decisions to promote diversity as well as students' personal views on how to further promote diversity on campus, we believe St. Olaf can generate more effective and accepted ways of encouraging diverse dialogue, and thus prepare students to succeed in a global environment.

Future outlook - suggestions for how to better promote diversity on campus

Intercultural dialogue, cross cultural collaboration, and increased awareness of diversity are integral to the creation of diverse environment. In order to promote these notions on campus, St. Olaf needs to create an atmosphere that encourages conversation by equipping students with a mindset open to cultural difference in the classroom. The college must also supply students with

the necessary resources and space for growth of that mindset through interaction with other students.

One suggestion from our focus groups for how the College can foster growth of an open minded conversation was to require swiped multicultural events for all courses with an MCG and MCD credits. This would entail students attending a few multicultural events, which would expose them not only to diverse cultural practices, but also introduce them to the diverse faces of St. Olaf. This, in turn, can lead to extended conversation and interest in multicultural events, and even friendship with other multicultural students. From our interviews, we received both positive and negative feedback concerning these swiped events. Students expressed that it would be beneficial in pushing people to be more actively engaged in issues and topics they might not know much about and can learn more. However, students claimed that the idea could prove ineffective if those forced to attend didn't pay attention to the event or left early. Another concern was that it may have an "other-ing" effect on the cultural groups presenting—the exact opposite of the desired outcome.

An additional suggestion for how the campus can foster cross cultural dialogue was to incorporate classes and conversations about diversity into week one. Formatted as either an informal conversation between students, or overnight workshop, this addition would enable students to consider how culture influences behavior and expectation of common human experiences. It would also provide structure for developing long term interaction among domestic white, domestic multicultural, and international students, as well as lay the foundation for establishing an open and welcoming environment at St. Olaf.

A St. Olaf professor proposed that getting students more involved in the Northfield community would be an effective way to increase awareness of diversity by exposing students to

people who have different experiences than those at St. Olaf. Tutoring students in the Northfield public schools, working at the community center, volunteering at the Northfield hospital or working in town are just a few examples of how students could become connected. This professor expressed that it is important for students to get out of the “St. Olaf bubble” and become more aware of the different cultural backgrounds in the community.

It was expressed by much of the faculty during our interview process that the classroom environment is important in promoting diversity initiatives at St. Olaf, for the curriculum is the only way to access those students who do are not directly exposed to cultural differences through study abroad programs or attendance of multicultural events. In order to foster differing cultural perspectives within all students, academic faculty must be able to discuss multiple diverse viewpoints in the classroom. To better do this, St. Olaf’s MCD and MCG general education requirements should be redefined to ensure that courses which fulfill these general requirements properly expose students to differing perspectives so they are able to apply them. Many interviewed students articulated that they believed some courses did not deserve to have an MCD or MCG credit, whereas other, which did not have the credit, did.

Are there limits to St. Olaf’s diversity?

St. Olaf was founded on Lutheranism, Norwegian roots, and Minnesotan traditions. Since its establishment, these distinct identities have been central to the college, and have attracted the attention of students with a specific demographic and cultural background (36 percent of the student body identifies themselves and Lutheran, and 49 percent of the student body is from Minnesota). With these limiting factors deterring a wider range of students from applying to St. Olaf, the question arises if whether or not St. Olaf can ever become fully diverse? In St. Olaf’s

2011 Strategic Plan, it states it will, “Increase the racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of St. Olaf students, faculty, and staff and their participation in the full range of college activities.” While St. Olaf does acknowledge and is taking the initiative to increase diversity, it is hard to believe that the college will accomplish this goal of greater diversity without abandoning its foundational roots.

Suggestions for Further Research

Given our findings, we considered ways in which the research that we have done could be furthered. An easy way to do this would be to interview a greater sample of people, including other administrative offices. Many of our interviews consisted of friends or friends-of-friends, and if subsequent research focused on recruiting a wider range of participants this could produce results which are more inclusive of wider campus demographics. This does not negate the research that we have done, as the opinions of those we researched are still valid. However, we do recognize that there are potential biases that exist when recruiting from those that one knows personally. Increasing the time period of the research would be helpful. It would allow for greater depth of our topic, for our time constraint forced us to narrow our research. Due to the fact that we had to narrow our focus, we were unable to look into the curriculum of the college and how this affects dialogue concerning diversity. Further research would benefit from analyzing the current general education requirements and what constitutes a multicultural-domestic and a multicultural-global course. Questions need to be raised as to whether the course that currently have MCD or MCG credit actually address multicultural ideas and foster their promotion outside the classroom.

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Appendix A

International Students Interview Questions

1. What is your age, year, and major?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where were you raised?
4. How do you identify yourself? [in a cultural or national sense?] (what are your five most important identities) (how much emphasis is given to being an International Student at St. Olaf)
5. How did you find out about St. Olaf?
6. Do you know what Multicultural Affairs Office is? Do you know what the International Student Office is?
 - a) How do you feel about the joining of the two offices over the summer?
 - b) Do you feel comfortable using these resources?
 - c) Do feel these spaces serve a beneficial purpose on campus?
 - d) Do you think there is a better way to format these spaces?
7. How do you utilize these offices, what are the resources they provide?
8. How do you define diversity?
9. Do you think St. Olaf is diverse? Please elaborate.
10. How has your view of St. Olaf's diversity changed over your time here?
11. Is diversity something that is discussed or promoted in the country where you grew up? If so, is it different from the way it is done here? please explain.
12. What are your social networks? What are your friend groups based on?
13. How do you think St. Olaf's diversity translates into your social networks?
14. How do you feel about bringing international freshman students to campus at the same time as other students instead of a week beforehand?
15. Do you feel that as an international student the college assigns you a role at St. Olaf other than being a student?
16. If so, is that role different from multicultural students? Please explain
17. How do you think diversity could be better promoted on campus
 - a) What are your thoughts on implementing a system where all classes with an MCG credit require students to attend a certain number of multicultural events on campus?
18. Based on your time here, how would you define American friendship? Is it different from that of the country where you were raised? Please explain.
19. How has being here at St. Olaf influenced your career plans?
20. Do you plan on staying in the states? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Multicultural Students Interview Questions

1. What is your age, year, and major?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where were you raised?
4. How do you identify yourself? [in a cultural or national sense?]
5. How did you find out about St. Olaf?
6. Do you know what the Multicultural Affairs Office is? Are you familiar with the International Student Office? What are the resources they provide?
 - a) How do you feel about the joining of the two offices last summer?
 - b) Do you feel comfortable using these resources?
 - c) Do you feel these spaces serve a beneficial purpose on campus?
 - d) Do you think there is a better way to format these spaces?
7. How do you utilize these offices?
8. How do you define diversity?
9. Do you think St. Olaf diverse? Please explain.
10. How has your view of St. Olaf's diversity changed over your time here?
11. Do you believe that your presence on campus makes St. Olaf more diverse?
12. What are your social networks? What are your friend groups based on?
13. How do you think St. Olaf's diversity translates into your social networks?
14. Do you feel that as a multicultural student, the college assigns you a role other than that of a student?
15. Do you feel that your role on campus is different than that of international students?
16. Do you feel that your presence promotes diversity on campus? How?
17. Do you think that international students promote diversity on campus?
18. How do you think diversity could be better promoted on campus?
 - a) What are your thoughts on implementing a system where all classes with an MCG credit require students to attend a certain number of multicultural events on campus?

Appendix C

American Students Interview Questions

1. What is your age, year, and major?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where were you raised?
4. How do you identify yourself?
5. Are you familiar with the Multicultural Affairs Office? Are you familiar with International Students Office?
 - a) Do you feel comfortable using these resources?
 - b) Do feel these spaces serve a beneficial purpose on campus?
 - c) Do you think there is a better way to format these spaces?
6. How do you define diversity?
7. Do you think St. Olaf is diverse? Please explain.
8. Do you believe that your presence on campus makes St. Olaf more diverse?(*Geographical?*)
9. Do you feel as though the college assigns you a role other than that of a student?
10. What are your social networks? What are your friend groups based on?
11. Have you ever attended a multicultural event on campus? (eg. International Night)
12. What prompted you to attend the event? (Personal? Course-related? Food?)
13. Do you feel as though you gained a better understanding of the culture presented?
14. Do you think St. Olaf needs more promotion of diversity?
15. How you think diversity could be better promoted on campus?
 - a) What are your thoughts on implementing a system where all classes with an MCG credit require students to attend a certain number of multicultural events on campus?

Appendix D

Professors/Faculty Interview Questions

1. What department(s) do you work in?
2. What is your area of expertise?
3. Where were you born?
4. Where did you grow up?
5. Do you know what the Multicultural Affairs Office is? Do you know what the International Student Office is?
6. How do you define diversity?
7. Do you think St. Olaf is diverse? Please explain.
8. Do you believe that your presence on campus makes St. Olaf more diverse? Please explain.
9. Do you feel as though the college assigns you a role other than that of a professor?
10. Do you believe that International students offer differing and enriching views in class discussion. Do multicultural students?
11. Can you tell the difference between an international and a multicultural student on campus?
12. Do you believe that international students promote diversity on campus? Multicultural students? How so?
13. How do you think diversity could be better promoted on campus?
 - a) What are your thoughts on implementing a system where all classes with an MCG credit require students to attend a certain number of multicultural events on campus?
14. Have you worked at another college or university? If so, how does the role of the diversity at St. Olaf compare with that of the other institution?