

SOLUTION SEEKERS



 ST. OLAF COLLEGE

SOLUTION SEEKERS

Our Strategic Plan for a Bright Future

2024-2030



At St. Olaf College, students work closely with dedicated professors who challenge them to ask hard questions — about the world and about themselves — and clearly communicate their own ideas. They have the opportunity to conduct graduate-level research, study abroad in nearly every corner of the world, perform in some of the world's great concert halls, contribute to national athletic championships, and hone their skills in internships at leading companies and organizations. They live and learn together on a beautiful 300-acre campus in historic Northfield, Minnesota, where they become part of an enduring community that takes pride in its innovations and traditions.

For 150 years, this foundation of a St. Olaf education has stood the test of time — for good reason. Founded in 1874 by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants, St. Olaf is grounded in the values of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and committed to helping students discern their vocation.

St. Olaf provides students not only with the skills needed to succeed in a career but also to become engaged and effective citizens in an increasingly fast-moving and complex world. The knowledge and perspectives that Oles develop in and out of the classroom are sharpened through the power of a residential community that brings students together across differences to learn, socialize, study, research, eat, and travel together. They learn not only with each other, but from each other. Along the way, they build lifelong connections and the ability to see the world through the eyes of others. It's an impactful experience that propels Oles to become leaders in their careers and communities.

As we look to the next 150 years, it's clear that the world needs Oles more than ever. Our promise for the future is to provide a *liberal arts plus* education, an approach that combines the best of the liberal arts with pre-professional and advising programs. To solve the pressing issues of our times, we need innovators and collaborators who seek solutions — and have the fortitude to implement them. Our strategic plan outlines the steps we will take over the next five years to elevate vocation, expand innovation, and sustain our community.

This work is done with mindfulness of those who came before us, as noted in the college's land acknowledgement statement:

We stand on the homelands of the Wahpekute Band of the Dakota Nation. We honor with gratitude the people who have stewarded the land throughout the generations and their ongoing contributions to this region. We acknowledge the ongoing injustices that we have committed against the Dakota Nation, and we wish to interrupt this legacy, beginning with acts of healing and honest storytelling about this place.



Our Purpose

Developing Solution Seekers

Oles thrive at the intersection of what they love and what the world needs.

As we mark the 150th anniversary of St. Olaf College and celebrate the generations of teachers and learners who have laid a strong foundation for a transformative liberal arts education grounded in our Lutheran faith tradition, we move confidently into the future. Our "True North" is developing individuals of action and substance who will shape the world — in other words, solution seekers.

The world needs the wisdom and courage of multidimensional St. Olaf students who can build strong and innovative communities, businesses, and relationships that enhance everyone's quality of life. Our students are hungry to contribute, and they are eager for a holistic education that provides them with the foundation to pursue their vocation with vigor. They seek a path for leading a life that brings value to themselves, their families, and their communities. We aspire to empower and prepare our students — and, in doing so, enhance community well-being and thriving. Developing solution seekers is the "why" of our plan.

The "what" and "how" of our strategic plan build on prior planning and visioning. St. Olaf offers many opportunities to develop the competencies that solution seekers need, from compelling academic programs to an abundance of centers of excellence to the co-curricular opportunities and experiences — including athletics and fine arts — where character, teamwork, and leadership are cultivated. This is a moment to be bold, to take a fresh look at what we can do together to advance *liberal arts plus* learning in the context of a fully residential college that embraces academic innovation and experiences around the globe.

The "who" of our strategic plan includes our curious and driven students, our brilliant faculty and staff, our dedicated regents, and our extensive and talented alumni network. Throughout our St. Olaf community, what sets us apart is our ability to produce leaders of excellence with bold spirits, layered perspectives, and open minds — people who are equipped to seek the change our world needs.

This strategic plan is rooted in three goals: elevate vocation, expand innovation, and sustain our community in service of developing Oles who are ready for the future: Solution Seekers.

Our Mission

St. Olaf College challenges students to excel in the liberal arts, examine faith and values, and explore meaningful vocation in an inclusive, globally engaged community nourished by Lutheran tradition.

Our Foundation

St. Olaf College's Lutheran identity shapes the character of our community and creates an environment where each person can explore their own beliefs, seek to understand the beliefs and experiences of others, develop their whole self, and contribute to the flourishing of their communities. The benefits of our Lutheran foundation include:

- Nourishing vocational exploration in all aspects of life
- Loving all neighbors through acts of service, care, and justice
- Fostering spiritual curiosity, development, and practice
- Encouraging a posture of humility and generosity in relation to the beliefs and commitments of others



Our Vision

St. Olaf College will be known as one of the country's best liberal arts colleges, nationally and internationally recognized for excellence, academic rigor, and community inclusivity, while developing and preparing students of character to lead lives of substance as contributing citizens of the world.

Our Strengths

We have a strong academic reputation. With 85+ majors, concentrations, and pre-professional programs, we provide students with a wide range of courses and fields of study. *The Princeton Review* ranked the St. Olaf classroom experience No. 6, and *U.S. News & World Report* ranked St. Olaf No. 50 overall nationally and No. 23 for best undergraduate teaching. The publication also ranked St. Olaf No. 30 for most innovative schools. We are also a leader in preparing students for graduate school, ranking seventh among the nation's baccalaureate colleges in the number of graduates who go on to earn doctoral degrees (2016-2022).

We help students discern their path. With a 12:1 student to professor ratio and one-to-one career and academic coaching, we provide students with impactful mentorship and guidance as they develop their future plans. *The Princeton Review* ranks St. Olaf's career services among the top 25 in the nation.

We provide hands-on learning experiences. St. Olaf advisors and career coaches connect students to a menu of more than 5,000 internships, undergraduate research experiences, and other hands-on opportunities at a breadth of organizations ranging from nonprofits to Fortune 500 companies. Oles are eager for these opportunities to test career paths and learn new skills — 88 percent of our grads have participated in an internship, research, or other hands-on learning opportunity while attending St. Olaf.

We develop global and civic-minded leaders. The college offers programs in more than 40 countries, including more than 70 semester or year-long programs and nearly 30 courses each January term. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks St. Olaf No. 17 for study abroad. For Oles, that engagement extends to communities closer to campus. In the last several election cycles, St. Olaf has won a national award for having the highest voting rate among more than 500 colleges and universities participating in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.

We help students successfully launch. Our graduation rates speak for themselves: 82 percent of our students graduate in four years, compared to 57 percent of students from national private institutions and 45 percent from national public universities. And the outcome of a St. Olaf education couldn't be more clear: 98 percent of our graduates are employed, in graduate school, or engaged in full-time service work within nine months of graduation.

We continue to meet 100 percent of demonstrated financial need. We are deeply committed to ensuring that St. Olaf is accessible to families from all socioeconomic backgrounds. St. Olaf is dedicated to making sure students have less debt so they have more possibilities when they graduate. The *Princeton Review* ranks St. Olaf #12 for Great Financial Aid and #50 on the Best Value Schools list.



Our Context

Despite our current strengths, there are three factors that present significant challenges for sustaining St. Olaf's future.

1. Decline in the perception of the value of higher education. According to a 2024 Gallup poll, confidence in higher education is down sharply, with only 36 percent of Americans having "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education (compared to 48 percent in 2018 and 57 percent in 2015). According to a recent study by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, only 49 percent of employers say they are "very satisfied" with the ability of recent college graduates to apply the skills and knowledge they learned in college to complex problems in the workforce.

2. Demographic shifts and decline of college-bound students. A steep decline in birth rates began in 2008 during the Great Recession. As a result, the number of high school graduates will drop from 3.9 million in 2026 to 3.5 million by 2037 (WICHE). The demographic makeup of those high school graduates will continue to shift to those with higher financial need and students of color, particularly in the west and south regions of the country.

3. A worried and disrupted generation of college students. Gen Z faced COVID-19 lockdowns during a life stage that is usually spent growing independence. According to a study by Ernst & Young, Gen Z is growing increasingly worried about a variety of topics (30 percent expressed worry in 2019 compared to 54 percent in 2023). In particular, this study found that 52 percent are very or extremely worried about not having enough money. The good news is that 85 percent of Gen Z students place a high value on spending time on things that will help them in the future.

Our Promise

THE ST. OLAF OPPORTUNITY

Every Ole Will Have



A Holistic, Intentional, Integrated Experience



Every Ole Can Become



An Innovative Thinker



A Prepared, Engaged Citizen



A Leader of Character



An Experiential Learner



A Culturally Competent, Global Explorer



Our Goals

- Elevate Vocation
- Expand Innovation
- Sustain Our Community

Through this strategic plan, the college is putting forward three goals that are each supported by three strategic priorities and action steps. These goals, strategic priorities, and action steps are in direct support of the vision, commitments, and opportunities stated above. The ideas outlined are intended to be interconnected, and no one strategic priority or action step should be viewed as prioritized over others.

Goal: Elevate Vocation

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will ensure that every student has access to vocational discernment through our academic programs and expanded access to study-away programs, internships, undergraduate research experiences, and/or relevant work opportunities.

Action Steps:

- Generate additional resources for the Collaborative Undergraduate Research and Inquiry Program, Piper Center for Vocation and Career, and the Smith Center for Global Engagement to provide need-based support for student participation in study away and experiential learning.
- Innovate and enhance the student employment program to build technical and leadership competencies aligned with character development, including the community-based work-study program.
- Enhance opportunities for alumni to connect with and support students in their vocational discernment by expanding on our existing Connections Programs.

- Ensure every student has vocational discernment opportunities through academic programs, including St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources (SOAR), *Design Your Life*, and continuation of the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community *Vocation Across the Curriculum* initiative.

Strategic Priority:

St. Olaf will develop an Academy for Leadership and Character.

Action Step:

- Establish an Academy for Leadership and Character that serves all students, with customized tracks in diverse fields — including athletics, fine arts, business, health care, civic leadership, and sustainability — with credentialing opportunities.

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will expand on the college's leadership in civic preparedness and engagement in partnership with the Institute for Freedom and Community.

Action Steps:

- Establish a Civic Preparedness and Engagement Program within the Institute for Freedom and Community that integrates and expands upon the current Academic Civic Engagement program and the student volunteer programs.
- Develop an annual college theme focused on solution-seeking for the common good that is supported by our centers and integrated into the curriculum.



Goal: Expand Innovation

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will cultivate innovation, creativity, and synergistic connections among our centers, academic programs, vocational discernment opportunities, and curriculum.

Action Steps:

- Assess and innovate our academic programs, building on our distinctive strengths to address the needs of students and growing industries.
- With an architectural firm, assess potential reconfiguration of existing spaces in Rolvaag Memorial Library to create an innovation and creativity space.
- Test and plan for program adjacencies to maximize creativity and imagination, focused on the benefits of bringing together our academic innovation with the college's centers of excellence — including the Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts — and the curriculum, makerspace, digital analytics, and leadership development to create a social impact or innovation hub.

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will guide each student's flexible, holistic St. Olaf Pathway through advising, mentoring, and the development or purchase of a software platform to capture student learning in and out of the classroom.

Action Steps:

- Generate resources and devise training to help advisors and mentors guide student exploration, reflection, and development of their St. Olaf Pathway.
- Develop a robust second-year experience with a holistic focus on vocation, which we define as "life on purpose for the common good." This builds on our existing first-year experience, and students should transition into a major through a process of discernment of their desired outcomes and contributions to the common good.
- Develop or adopt a software platform that makes the multiple dimensions of a student's pathway visible and amplifies and facilitates advising and mentoring.

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will innovate our academic programs by collaboratively developing credentials that uplift the value of liberal arts learning and embed career readiness skills across the curriculum.

Action Steps:

- Develop credentials programs to allow students to deepen, expand, and document competencies and character qualities they have cultivated within and beyond their classroom experiences. Possibilities include Public Leadership, Business and Entrepreneurship, Healthcare Innovation, Rural Health, Artificial Intelligence, and Google Analytics.
- Develop credentials that align with our Ole Core learning outcomes and the National Association for Colleges and Employers learning outcomes to assist students in articulating the career readiness competencies afforded by a liberal arts education.
- Enhance alignment of credentialing opportunities and academic programming, including collaborations with business and industry partners.
- Expand credential opportunities for alumni to enhance our commitment to lifelong learning.

Goal: Sustain Our Community

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will systemically infuse a culture of belonging and well-being across the entire campus community.

Action Steps:

- Implement our vision for a Vice President for Community and Belonging.
- Develop and implement a strategy for college-wide inclusion, belonging, cultural competence, and engagement across differences through all dimensions of our community, supported by the Division of Community and Belonging and the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community.



- Continually adapt our academic offerings to align with the needs of the changing demographics within the student body.
- Develop and implement a 10-year plan to advance the accessibility of the college's buildings, technology, and course materials.
- Attract and retain outstanding, diverse faculty and staff through competitive pay and benefits that are based on the appropriate benchmark/market for each employee group.
- Develop programs that provide support and professional development to faculty and staff through all the phases of their employment.
- Assess and adapt services for student, staff, and faculty mental health and wellness.
- Eliminate select activities/work for students, staff, and faculty.

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will advance a sustainable financial model for the future that includes increased investments in financial aid and exploration of new revenue streams.

Action Steps:

- Increase endowment support for need-based aid.
- Align the college's budget with strategic priorities.
- Create a St. Olaf-based cohort program focused on student retention that complements and builds on lessons learned from Posse and TRIO Student Support Services programs.
- Enhance the ability of students to transfer and integrate into the St. Olaf community while maintaining the distinctive elements of the St. Olaf residential educational experience.
- Develop a 10-year campus-wide renewal plan, including maintaining our residence halls for a population of 3,000 to 3,200 undergraduates.
- Nurture our relationship with Northfield and the regional community through the development of a community relations initiative.
- Plan and implement a comprehensive campaign that helps sustain the college.

Strategic Priority: St. Olaf will build upon the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals framework to ensure a sustainable future for the college and develop students who will contribute to broader local, national, and global sustainability using their St. Olaf education.

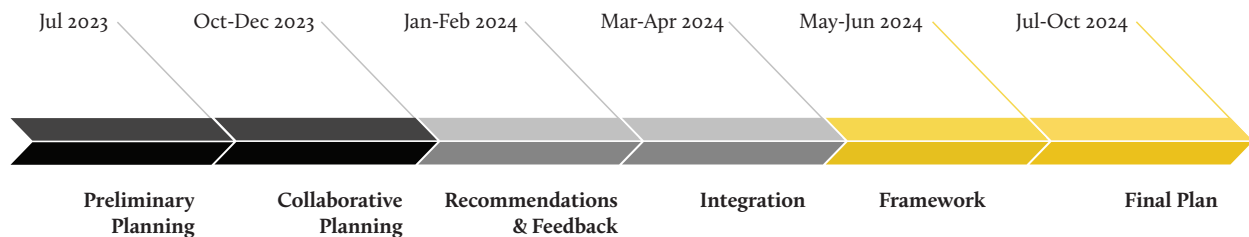
Action Steps:

- Identify steps for St. Olaf to be a leader in addressing the global climate crisis via modifications and commitments to the college's operations, with a goal of becoming climate neutral by 2040 or sooner.
- Identify and focus on two or three of the UN Sustainable Development Goals that align with our mission and our capacity through Voluntary University Review, the Brookings Institution 17 Rooms approach, and publicly sharing our progress through the Times Higher Education Impact Report.
- Partner with Carleton College and the City of Northfield in achieving our shared sustainability goals.



Appendix A

St. Olaf Strategic Planning and Implementation Processes



Solution Seekers, St. Olaf’s Strategic Plan for 2024-2030, was developed through a year of community-wide planning that built on the Board of Regents’ Visioning Task Force work in 2021. In July 2023, the President’s Leadership Team devoted two days to a design thinking retreat to identify St. Olaf’s attributes and the opportunities they provide to navigate the multitude of challenges facing higher education. This set the stage for a dynamic, collaborative strategic planning approach focused on three principles: we will thrive, be agile, and be sustainable as a community, environmentally and financially. Building on these principles, three innovation teams were charged, along with an integration team, to synthesize the work and ensure that two common strands — equity and inclusion and sustainability — were woven through the work. The Board of Regents approved the approach in October 2023, and teams of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and regents began their work. Additionally, interested community members served as rapid responders, allowing the teams to quickly test ideas. Before the February Board of Regents Retreat, the planning teams shared their initial plans in three community-wide town halls. Additional feedback was obtained from regents at their retreat.

Feedback on the emerging ideas was integrated into a draft plan and shared with the community for an iterative round of revision. The draft document was discussed with the regents at their May board meeting, and the President’s Leadership Team worked over the summer on revising the document, determining and outlining the costs for proposed

projects, and developing ancillary visuals and documents for another iterative round of community input before bringing the plan to the Board of Regents for endorsement in October 2024. Fifty community members served on the four planning committees, and 71 additional individuals served on the rapid response teams, all supported by a core group of college leaders.

The college engaged the Art & Science Group to conduct scenario-based research on prospective and incoming students, testing key themes emerging from the plan. This will enable us to further align our work and the market. In parallel, St. Olaf's Advancement team has engaged Washburn & McGoldrick consultants to assess our readiness for a comprehensive capital campaign. We are creating a multi-pronged strategy to guide the campaign.

Elements of Solutions Seekers planning will proceed through strategic allocations of our current resources. Page Architects is assisting us with a feasibility study for the creation of an innovation space in Rolvaag Memorial Library. Our Information Technology (IT) colleagues have identified a tool to track progress on implementing the plan, and we will provide community updates on progress at each Board of Regents meeting and the subsequent faculty and staff town halls and student town halls. Implementation charters have been developed for the multiple small groups to move our planning to reality and create a bright tomorrow for St. Olaf.



Strategic Planning Teams

Thriving

Faculty and Staff

Diane LeBlanc (Faculty Co-Convener)

Nate Jacobi (Staff Co-Convener)

Sungha Yun (Faculty)

Norman Lee (Faculty)

Steve Lindley '08 (Staff)

Chang Dao Vang '11 (Staff)

Students

Eskil Irgens '25

Yolanda Pauly '25

Board of Regents and Alumni

Jeff Bolton (Regent)

Scott Okuno '85 (Regent)

PLT Resources

Marci Sortor

Hassel Morrison

Strategic Planning Teams

Agile

Faculty and Staff

Sian Christie (Faculty Co-Convener)
Kirsten Cahoon '98 (Staff Co-Convener)
Susan Huehn '85 (Faculty)
Colin Wells (Faculty)
Jean Parish '88 (Staff)
Karina Sierra (Staff)

Students

Mariam Mikayelyan '25
Xiaoyang Hu '26

Board of Regents and Alumni

Soren Schwendeman '20
Craig Dean '78 (Regent)
Paul Grangaard (Regent)

PLT Resources

Enoch Blazis
Reginald Miles



Strategic Planning Teams

Sustainable

Faculty and Staff

Allison Luedtke (Faculty Co-Convener)

Chris George '94 (Staff Co-Convener)

Elaigwu Ameh (Faculty)

Charles Umbanhowar Jr. (Faculty)

Susan Hill '09 (Staff)

Mark David (Staff)

Students

Eimi Sander '24

Maroova Elkemary '26

Board of Regents and Alumni

Beth Jensen '02

Sabina Vadnais '17

Chad Jerdee '90 (Regent)

Kathryn Lohre '99 (Regent)

PLT Resources

Ryan Bowles

Mike Berthelsen

Strategic Planning Teams

Integration

Faculty and Staff

Jason Engbrecht (Faculty Co-Convener)

Roberta Lembke '81 (Staff Co-Convener)

Tina Garrett (Faculty)

Susie Smalling '97 (Faculty)

Katie Warren '95 (Staff)

Ben Gottfried (Staff)

Students

Else Madsen '25

Mimi Keita '26

Board of Regents and Alumni

Dave Van Wylen '80

Stephanie Fehr '87 (Regent)

PLT Resources

Michael Kyle '85

Jo Beld

