

Diversity & Inclusivity: Policies, Practices, and Beliefs at St. Olaf College

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May 20, 2015

Executive Summary

When you think of the word diversity, what comes to mind? Is it something you see or count? Does diversity encompass race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic class? Can diversity combine a variety of characteristics such as ideologies, interests, stories, and lived experiences? Or is it simply engagement across lines of difference? Our research aims not only to discover the perceptions of diversity at St. Olaf College, but to determine whether the current practices in place focus on inclusivity as an all-encompassing approach to diversity geared towards synthesizing practices and enhancing experiences. We used the framework divisions of policies, practices, and beliefs to analyze the current policies in play, how these practices look in motion, and the perceived success of these strategies by current students.

Main Points:

- St. Olaf is an increasingly diverse community and as defined by the Mission Statement, “St. Olaf College strives to be an inclusive community.”
- Students recognize a difference between diversity and inclusivity which coincides with the current literature: diversity concurring with a structural point of view focusing on the traits and attributes that differ between people and inclusivity coincides with a curricular and interactional focus that harnesses the ways we differ in order to create the highest quality experience possible.
- Students tend to associate *most* with those who are similar to them and while there are potential avenues to discuss race, they are not heavily attended.
- Statistically, St. Olaf is very homogenous yet there are acute differences in the population. These differences lead students to feel isolated or marginalized, and lead their peers to believe the campus is lacking in inclusivity and thus not reaching its goals.
- Major barriers included feeling uncomfortable discussing race due to a lacking vocabulary.
- Students felt that the desired inclusivity could be enhanced with more administrative transparency as well as creating more opportunities for students in order to give them the right tools to feel comfortable and thrive in all types of diverse environments, and more support for existing and creating new avenues that maintain and celebrate diversity.

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Abstract

When you think of the word diversity, what comes to mind? Is it something you see or count? Does diversity encompass race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic class? Can diversity combine a variety of characteristics such as ideologies, interests, stories, and lived experiences? Or is it simply engagement across lines of difference? Our research aims not only to discover the perceptions of diversity at St. Olaf College, but to determine whether the current practices in place focus on inclusivity as an all-encompassing approach to diversity geared towards synthesizing practices and enhancing experiences. We used the framework divisions of policies, practices, and beliefs to analyze the current policies in play, how these practices look in motion, and the perceived success of these strategies by current students.

Settings and Community

St. Olaf College is situated in Northfield, Minnesota just 45 minutes south of the Twin Cities. Founded in 1874 by pioneer pastors, the school is celebrated for its Lutheran and Norwegian heritage. Currently, St. Olaf is home to 3034 students. 48% of these students are from Minnesota, while the remaining half are from 49 US states and 73 other countries from around

the world. Pertaining to the racial makeup of the student body, as of 2014, 76% or 2,317 students classify themselves as white/non-hispanic while the remaining 24% include racial minorities, international students whose races are not acknowledged, and students whose race/ethnicity were unknown (St. Olaf College (A)). While the United States national average is 75% white citizens, Minnesota is well above this average with 86.2% (United States Government). These statistics are relevant to our study of racial inclusivity because students of color are a minority group not only at St. Olaf College but also throughout the country, putting them at high risk of becoming marginalized.

Inclusivity, as defined by Merriam Dictionary, is “an intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who are handicapped or learning-disabled, or racial and sexual minorities” (Google). St. Olaf directly addresses inclusivity in its mission statement, stating,

“St. Olaf College strives to be an inclusive community, respecting those of differing backgrounds and beliefs. Through its curriculum, campus life, and off-campus programs, it stimulates students’ critical thinking and heightens their moral sensitivity; it encourages them to be seekers of truth, leading lives of unselfish service to others; and it challenges them to be responsible and knowledgeable citizens of the world” (St. Olaf (B)).

Our project’s goal is to directly address these claims and attempt to understand how students perceive and experience racial inclusivity on campus in order to determine whether their experiences align with the college’s mission statement and other institutional policies.

At St. Olaf, the task of creating an open, friendly discourse and environment for people who are different from one another seems to fall on the shoulders of student-run organizations.

Currently, there are 12 clubs under the category “Diversity Celebration Programs” ranging from *Gay, Lesbian or Whatever (GLOW)* to *Team Tibet*. Additionally, there are 9 multicultural organizations, ranging from *Taiko Drumming Group* to *The Bridge*, which “hope to raise consciousness of racial inequality both on and off campus, encourage solidarity, and strengthen our community” (St. Olaf College (C)). Furthermore, there is the International Student Organization, situated under the Student Government Organization, as well as the Multicultural Affairs Office which utilizes both students and faculty “to provide resources and co-curricular support for multicultural students and work with and within the community to engage, educate, and enrich campus life for all students” (St. Olaf College (D)).

Although all of these organizations play an important role in serving the student body, our goal is to discover if and why there is a gap between the official policy of St. Olaf College pertaining to racial inclusivity and the lived experiences of all students who are affected by these policies. If and when we discover what is creating this gap, it is our goal to find various solutions to effectively bridge this disparity.

Methodology

Our research was done through personal one-on-one interviews with friends and peers. We chose to interview students because we sought to capture an insight into the perceptions of racial inclusivity through the eyes of current students of St. Olaf. We chose not to pursue focus groups because we wanted students to be able to fully express themselves and be able to discuss the full range of topics pertaining to racial inclusivity as they saw fit instead of the surface-level, broad conversation of a focus group.

We interviewed 24 students in a quiet location and recorded the interviews using iPhones and handwritten notes. Our interviewees were majority female with about 20% identifying as male. Our informants ranged from first years to seniors with a majority focus on the sophomore and junior classes. Our interviewees spanned a broad range of majors but a larger number were Political Science and Sociology/Anthropology with concentrations ranging from Race and Ethnic Studies to Gender Studies to Middle Eastern Studies.

Our interview questions were divided into three sections: Policies, Practices, and Beliefs. We began by asking students to define diversity and inclusivity and then asked about their experiences at St. Olaf, their current perceptions of the policies in place and if these policies were effective at achieving their goals. We ended our interviews by asking students about change: both what they thought was needed, if these changes were feasible and their opinion on the power of students to enact change. We asked these questions in an attempt to understand the reality of students' lived experiences with racial diversity and inclusivity juxtaposed to their perceptions of the institutional approach.

The organizational structure of our interview was very strong because it eased the student into talking about often sensitive subjects and ended in a way that allowed the student to fully express their concerns without leaving the interview feeling hopeless or alone. We realized midway through, however, that many of our questions were slightly redundant and overlapping. Often, students addressed a particular aspect of race, diversity and/or inclusivity before we got to our interview question dealing with that subject. To rectify this, we would give the student the option to elaborate on the particular aspect of the question or simply move on. Another weakness was reframing the questions on the spot so as to not contradict what the informant had just stated.

Despite these slight difficulties, overall our interviews gave us a thorough understanding of student experiences and perceptions of diversity and inclusivity at St. Olaf.

Problem

Our project's comprehensive mission sought to discover whether a gap exists between St. Olaf's policies and strategic goals, how the college implements these policies and goals on campus, and how students perceive these practices. Additionally, we hoped to investigate whether St. Olaf's policies include inclusivity and if so, do students feel that the community achieves inclusivity. Our theoretical framework was divided into three subcategories: Policies, Practices, and Beliefs. Policies encompasses the stated goals in official, written St. Olaf documents and the designs of programs on campus including curriculum or other institutionally-run initiatives. Practices cover how these policies manifest themselves and the reality of the actual St. Olaf community. Finally, Beliefs includes what students know about these policies, how they interpret them and whether or not they believe that change is possible.

A few specific influences shaped the design and direction of our research goal. We used past Sociology/Anthropology ethnographic studies focused on the topics of race and diversity as a starting point for our project. Certain studies such as "Reality Check: A Study of Diversity and Integration at St. Olaf College" from 2011 and "Perspectives on Diversity at St. Olaf College: An Ethnographic Study" from 2012 gave us ideas through their "Further Research" sections. Recent events on campus also spurred our research because they have created passion and interest in matters of race and diversity. Campaigns such as "Race Matters" and "Authentic Oles", the national "Black Lives Matters" campaign, and the discontinuance of the International Honor

House bring issues of race and diversity to the forefront of our discussions and Sociology/
Anthropology majors.

Literature Review

In recent years, as the demographic make up of undergraduate student bodies has changed on a national scale, the topic of diversity has risen to the forefront of discussions about higher education. As a result, researchers have set out to study diversity and its effects, revealing the benefits of a diverse college campus. The benefits of diversity on college campuses often include expanding students' knowledge base, enhancing students' ability to interact and work in an increasingly globalized world, promoting creative thinking, heightening students' ability to see from multiple perspectives, and fostering social and personal development and awareness (Hyman and Jacobs 2009). In summary, diversity greatly impacts students' cognitive development, intergroup attitudes and perceptions about each other— such as prejudice and stereotypes—as well as increasing civic engagement. While the term “diversity” brings about these advantages, some level of ambiguity traditionally accompanies the term, making it difficult to decipher exactly what educational rewards diversity prompts and how it does so.

Within the discourse among researchers and institutions of higher education as well as within the general public, definitions of diversity differ greatly and thus offer a wide range of ideas. Some of the definitions in scholarly literature speak broadly about all of the ways in which people differ, but other understandings of the term follow a more limited view, regarding diversity only as the demographic makeup of a group of people based on race. Alternative conceptualizations include additional facets of identity such as gender, socioeconomic class,

ethnicity, and sexual orientation, while other theories utilize diversity as a description of engagement across lines of difference. Regardless of an institution's specific use of the term, recent research reveals implementation practices as the more crucial aspects surrounding diversity.

The majority of research about diversity focuses on three types of diversity implementation: structural, curricular, and interactional. Structural diversity refers to the makeup of a group of people or the proportions of differing individuals in a certain place. Curricular diversity concentrates on programs and initiatives that expose people to diversity-related content. These efforts can include organizations, curriculum, seminars, and lectures. Finally, interactional diversity encompasses contact between diverse individuals; in this case, "diverse" means a trait or attribute that differs between the people interacting. The separation of these categories of diversity deserves acknowledgment because certain types of diversity can lead to different levels of success in furthering cognitive development, affecting intergroup attitudes and perspectives, and promoting civic engagement (Holoien 2013).

Numerous meta-analyses, which combine and contrast a variety of studies looking into racial diversity show specifically that curricular and interactional diversity lead to the most successful and widespread benefits. In regards to curricular and interactional practices, Denson and Chang found significant and consistent positive results showing that greater frequency of engagement with diversity through curricular activities or cross-racial interactions is associated with positive ratings of a person's own self-efficacy, academic skills, and self-change in their capacity to engage with racial-cultural differences (2013). Additionally, curricular diversity practices were even more effective when paired with intergroup contact (Denson and Chang

2013). Another meta-analysis completed by Nicholas Bowman confirmed this finding, stating that, “Interpersonal interactions with racial diversity are the most strongly related to cognitive development. Although diversity coursework, diversity workshops, and interactions with non-racial diversity are all positively associated with cognitive growth, these effects are significantly smaller than those for interactions with racial diversity” (Bowman 2010). A similar study found that interpersonal interactions also share the strongest positive relationship with civic engagement (Bowman 2011).

These studies all agree that while structural diversity plays a role in achieving beneficial learning outcomes, it is not enough to successfully and consistently reap the rewards. Diverse individuals’ sole “presence on campus neither guarantees integration into campus life nor does it lead to realization of the pedagogic benefits of diversity” (Tienda 473). Furthermore, education is severely undermined when universities allow homogenous groups of individuals to proliferate on campus (Tienda 473). This fact is supported by other scholars as well. Scholars Denson and Chang assert,

Empirical studies that have examined structural diversity suggest that the student body composition is an insufficient condition *in and of itself* for maximizing educational benefits, but rather, its value appears to depend on whether or not it leads to greater levels of engagement in diversity. (2009:324)

The work of these scholars and studies proves that structural diversity alone does not ensure the realization of the benefits of diversity. Individuals who differ greatly from each other can be put in the same space, but that does not mean they will automatically seek out the opportunities to learn about, learn from, or interact with each other that are imperative to experiencing the benefits of living on a diverse campus.

The type of curricular and interactional diversity also affects the level and magnitude of success at achieving the desired outcomes. According to scholar Nicholas Bowman, the greatest educational benefits occur when students experience meaningful and unexpected interactions that challenge their preconceived notions (2012). Other studies agree, asserting that prejudice and stereotypes must be actively broken down in order to achieve the educational benefits of diversity (Tienda 2013:471). Pettigrew and Tropp also found that interactional contact was the most effective mediator in improving students' intergroup attitudes and beliefs about one another specifically when it enhances knowledge of the other group, increases empathy and perspective-taking, and reduces anxiety about interacting with out-group individuals (2008).

Another noteworthy result indicates that campuses with a larger number of people engaging in diversity practices such as curricular and interactional diversity, "have measurable positive effects on all students irrespective of a student's own frequency of engagement with diversity" (Denson and Chang 2009:344). This knowledge should incentivize institutions to increase the opportunities for and likelihood of experiencing curricular and interactional diversity, because the more people experience curricular and interactional practices on campus, the more students and community members in general will benefit from diversity.

However, campuses with higher amounts of structural diversity, but *without* accompanying practices of meaningful curricular and interactional diversity tend to decrease the likelihood of successful achievement of diversity benefits. Tienda explores this relationship, quoting findings from McPherson et. al. (2001) that,

Because most students arrive with their coalition detection system engaged, merely bringing together a socially, economically, demographically, and ideologically diverse group of students reproduces existing group boundaries (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, &

Cook, 2001), thus diminishing the pedagogic benefits of heterogeneity and potentially undermining cohesion. (2013:471)

The coalition detection system in human brains serves to distinguish alliances and uses appearance as one indicating factor. People use coalition detection to separate into groups based on similarities. But humans also have a coalition-building system that can bypass these separations based on similarities and foster integration if preconceived notions about other groups are challenged. Therefore, diversity has the ability to either enhance group integration, or undermine it, depending on the circumstances in which the interactions occur (Tienda 2013). Thus, structural diversity alone can polarize people. The sole presence of different people *without* a focus on and active drive towards expanding one's knowledge-base surrounding diversity and engaging in meaningful contact with a variety of individuals can serve to further segregate and separate a community. Due to its polarizing effect, structural diversity must be accompanied by inclusivity in order to flourish.

Inclusivity is an all-encompassing strategy that focuses and ties together curricular and interactional diversity. Inclusivity focuses on a quality approach to diversity experiences and works to synthesize practices to best benefit students and community members. Additionally, “inclusion puts the concept and practice of diversity into action by creating an environment of involvement, respect, and connection—where the richness of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives are harnessed” (Jordan 2011). Inclusivity both leverages diversity as a resource for achieving educational goals and acts as a goal in and of itself to create a campus that values a quality education and experience.

Each of these facets of inclusivity are deeply intertwined with St. Olaf’s goals and values. St. Olaf shares many of the goals that meaningful curricular and interactional diversity foster including cognitive development gleaned from critical thinking and knowledge expansion, changes in intergroup attitudes and beliefs spurred by communicating and collaborating with others, and civic engagement inspired by developing the knowledge and skills to enhance the people and communities around them (St. Olaf College (E)). Furthermore, St. Olaf has recently committed to diversifying the makeup of the student body (St. Olaf Board of Regents). Since many of St. Olaf’s goals coincide with the benefits of diversity, and St. Olaf has committed to becoming a more structurally diverse campus, inclusivity must be a necessary strategy in approaching diversity on campus to best reap its rewards for everyone.

Additionally, St. Olaf regards inclusivity as a goal on its own. According to the mission statement, St. Olaf “strives to be an inclusive community” (St. Olaf College (B)). StoGoals—St. Olaf’s college-wide goals for student-learning—goes even further, wanting St. Olaf students to “participate responsibly and knowledgeably in public life” in order to “understand, learn from, and respect differences” and “recognize and confront injustice and oppression” (St. Olaf College (F)). St. Olaf’s Strategic Plan even asserts that St. Olaf will “ensure that the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the student body is reflected in participation in academic and co-curricular activities by measuring participation and offering programming to increase participation where it lags” and “promote intercultural engagement among students” (St. Olaf Board of Regents). While St. Olaf hopes to provide the benefits created from an inclusive, diverse campus, and aspires to produce an inclusive experience that enhances the quality of students’ education and development, the mere existence of goals does not guarantee their achievement.

With the St. Olaf Inclusivity goals of inclusivity in mind, we sought to discover whether students' lived experiences of the practices surrounding racial diversity show that St. Olaf is succeeding in incorporating inclusivity into its approach to diversity. Through interviews and statistics pulled from various outcome assessments, we explored the relationship between policies and practices surrounding structural, curricular, and interactional diversity at St. Olaf including students' experiences and perceived understandings.

We opened the interviews by asking interviewees about their conceptions of diversity and inclusivity and almost all identified a clear difference between the two. Diversity was defined as differences in culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status. These demographic and socio-cultural descriptors were expected, as nearly all public discourse falls into these two categories (Gotsis 1). However, our interviewees also moved beyond one-dimensional diversity descriptors to engage with the deeper-level implications of those descriptors such as differences in views, lived experiences, choices, opportunities, interests, thoughts, and perspectives. As one student eloquently stated, "all the special, wonderful, weird things that make each of us who we are...anything that makes you, you." This same student continued on to describe inclusivity as,

Not only accepting people for who they are, but on an institutional level providing spaces that are specifically geared towards affirming. So, not just saying we're going to tolerate who you are but we're going to celebrate who you are. It makes spaces where ... we are going to celebrate you without tokenizing you.

Interviewees often realized that diversity and inclusivity were buzz words with ambiguous definitions. However, the overarching understanding of inclusivity defined a subjective concept

described as authentic celebration, encouragement and acceptance that moves past mere tolerance.

Our interviewees' responses revealed theoretically distinct definitions of diversity and inclusivity, but students highlighted that the two concepts are inherently connected. Or rather, that they *should* work together. One student demonstrated this well, saying, "in order for diversity to exist peacefully, you must have inclusivity." Overall, students' explanations aligned with large amounts of literature on the topics. Understandings of diversity honed in on the differences that comprise individuals and groups of people and understandings of inclusivity acknowledged the interactions between individuals and groups of people.

Practices

Within our framework, practices included both the implementation of policies as well as students' lived experiences within the application of these policies. The answers we received depended on what students defined as "difference," in reference to diversity, but the overarching theme recognized that they often interacted with people different from them. One student summarized her experiences saying that she interacts with people, "Every day, everywhere, all the time," elaborating that "every person you interact with is not the same as you." Although racial diversity seemed to be on some interviewees' minds, the idea of difference encompassed many elements beyond race—incorporating experiences and ideologies as an important signifier of difference.

These interactions with difference occurred within the classroom as well as outside of it. Most students stated that classroom experiences with race were peculiar because they were largely department-specific and students felt less agency in instigating classroom conversations.

While most interviewees felt that they interacted with people different from them in the classroom, often their friend groups were more homogenous. Students said that their friends had different backgrounds and sometimes different views, but shared compatible personalities. Many interviewees also acknowledged the homogeneity of St. Olaf in general, referring to the majority white demographic—which may account for the racial homogeneity within friend groups. The responses to the question about what defines difference show that although St. Olaf students often interact with people who are different from them—however they define ‘different’—they tend to associate most with people who have similar backgrounds and interests.

The fact that students felt most welcomed in their friend groups, clubs, and classrooms—which tend to attract similar, like-minded individuals—reinforced the students’ associations with those that were similar to them. The role of clubs on campus is to create a safe place, and the majority of students we interviewed reiterated this role, stating that their respective groups and organizations were where they felt most valued and appreciated. Even though some students at St. Olaf feel comfortable in their clubs, for many students there are still barriers to entry that solidify the segregation on campus. These barriers take the form of different customs between a student and the group participants, an inability to take on the time burden of joining an organization, and a feeling that assumptions are made about a student’s culture based on their appearance. Even though clubs are intended to create a safe space—and they do for a small

number of students—they are not really working towards inclusivity because many students feel excluded and isolated from them.

Without being prompted, students brought up race in reference to not only feeling isolated, but also when questioned whether St. Olaf was an inclusive campus. The overarching answer dictated, “yes, treatment is equal,” however the policies of inclusion were unclear to the students we interviewed. Furthermore, the most prominent example of racial exclusivity found on campus referenced the cafeteria. As one student illustrated, “When I walk into the caf, it’s divided; [there are] different tables. Everyone sits at a table with people that look like them.” As another student answered, St. Olaf has “face value inclusivity. [There is a] gap between real friendships and actually being inclusive, and just saying, ‘Hi.’” These experiences of exclusion on campus create an environment of isolation and marginalization felt by many students, if not personally, than indirectly through their peers.

These forms of isolation occurred both atmospherically, as described above, as well as institutionally. Students stated that oftentimes programming was geared for the normative, white, cis-gendered “Ole” and that often racist undertones were ignored. As one student expressed, “In classroom conversations, no one acknowledges the offense [racist or offensive comment] and that makes it seem personal.” Furthermore, students stated that international students were treated as a statistic and that St. Olaf lacks practices and policies available to integrate them into the student body. An international student summarized this feeling saying, “In the beginning, I was very overwhelmed. For people not of this country, often you feel misunderstood, [or people are] unable to relate to conversations that people have here at the caf table.” Many other students tied this problematic separation back to domestic race issues by mentioning recent campaigns on

campus such as Authentic Oles and Black Lives Matter as verification that students feel marginalized.

These feelings of marginalization continued into the classroom setting. One student told a story about a professor who assumed that an international student did not know how to play tennis because of where she was from. Another student gave an example saying, “yes, when you’re in class and there’s one black person and the professor asks them to speak on behalf of all African-Americans ever—that’s an isolating factor.” These racialized assumptions, formally known as microaggressions, largely affect students’ perceptions of inclusivity as it pertains to the campus.

According to Solórzano, racial microaggressions are unconscious and subtle forms of racism (2000). In particular, “racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces have real consequences, the most obvious of which are the resulting negative racial climate and [minority students’] struggles with feelings of self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation” (Solórzano 2000:60). One student made this quite evident saying, “I’m the reason people don’t say certain words...they don’t want to offend me.” This narrative aligns with the literature outlining that diversity without implementation of inclusivity can vastly hinder the goals of the college. As Tienda demonstrates, increasing amounts of structural diversity on college campuses without an emphasis on undermining intergroup prejudice can lead to increased segregation, further preventing students from developing the abilities to converse constructively about sensitive topics (2013). Many of the feelings of isolation at St. Olaf stem from racial undertones that remain unacknowledged. The fact that students tend to associate most with those who are similar to them, the fact that race plays a determining role in levels of

isolation and marginalization, and the fact that many students at St. Olaf don't feel it is an inclusive community provide proof that St. Olaf is not achieving its goals of inclusivity and thus, the current implemented practices are not meeting the expectation of current students.

Barriers

Although about half of the students we interviewed had thought about race and inclusivity prior to attending college, many felt they lacked an in-depth understanding and thought that St. Olaf brought these issues to their attention. Although St. Olaf has slightly increased students' diversity awareness, many felt that St. Olaf still lacks in racial diversity, especially among student demographics. One student was actually discouraged from attending because, "I didn't want to be somewhere where virtually everyone looked like me." While St. Olaf had brought the subject of racial diversity to light, many students still felt they had a long way to go in achieving a fuller understanding and awareness of the issues surrounding diversity.

When asked about opportunities to discuss race, students were aware of formal settings such as Sustained Dialogue, Rethinking Diversity workshops, and Cultural Conversations, yet many had never personally attended. They stressed that these were opportunities and not requirements. One interviewee noted that oftentimes the same group of students would attend these diversity events and that the occasions did not obtain the attendance that they deserved.

Students also stated that there were academic opportunities to talk about race but that they were "departmentally specific; if the professor doesn't want to talk about then you won't." Furthermore, even the few existent classroom conversations were often discussed in the abstract, addressing how race affects society at large with little connection to the subject as it pertained to

the St. Olaf context. Otherwise, discussions about race took place almost exclusively with close friends or rarely if at all because not everyone was willing to have these conversations.

The major barrier we found that hinders constructive, open conversations about race is comfort level. Students highlighted their perception that their peers lay at two ends of a spectrum. On the one hand, some students seemed extremely comfortable (verging on too comfortable) if they either had a large amount of experience discussing or experiencing racial issues or if they had very little and were speaking from ignorance. Consequentially, a couple of our interviewees thought that too much comfortability without the knowledge or experiential backing led to further ignorance, a false understanding, and surface level discussion. This proves the exact opposite of St. Olaf's goals to create an inclusive campus where its students understand diverse perspectives (St. Olaf College (E)). This type of behavior also fails to encourage the types of meaningful interactions needed to break group stereotypes and promote the benefits of diversity.

On the other hand, many students fell under the category of feeling extremely uncomfortable talking about issues of race. This group comprised the majority of not only our interviewees but the majority of students they knew on campus. The reason behind their nervousness stemmed from students feeling "scared of being racist," not knowing the right thing to say, and constantly questioning if they "will be offensive." Another explanation was that many St. Olaf students feel vaguely guilty about white privilege and are "still trying to unlearn harmful thoughts." At the same time, our interviewees noticed many students on campus who are simply uninterested in having these conversations. As one interviewee stated, this campus contains "people who never think about it, who don't feel oppressed, don't see [that] it's a problem."

Comments like these illuminate the fact that St. Olaf could be doing more in terms of its curricular diversity efforts. Multiple students noted that there are seniors who get through their four years at St. Olaf without ever encountering critical discussions about diversity in any capacity. If St. Olaf produces graduates that never or rarely interact with curricular diversity initiatives, and the majority of students feel uncomfortable and unprepared to talk about diversity, then there is clearly a gap between where St. Olaf envisions the campus to be in regards to inclusivity and how the campus currently is perceived by students.

Beliefs

Without providing the actual policies, we asked students how they thought the St. Olaf policies and programs approached the topic of racial diversity. The majority of students either did not know the policy and even questioned if one existed or were extremely frustrated with the policy. Speaking in abstract conceptions about the diversity policy, these students described it as a “numbers game” and stated that it seemed like “a business plan...without integration”. One student thought that St. Olaf thought of racial diversity as “a party [that’s fun and cute]. It’s cute to have diversity. It’s pretty and decorative...we celebrate differences and organizations that do that.” Although students like these were unable to name specifics about St. Olaf’s stated diversity initiatives, they were still able to speak strongly about their own perceptions surrounding the campus’ policies and implementation.

In contrast to the students that knew little about the specific vocabulary of St. Olaf’s diversity goals, a few students were able to cite known goals from the policy that confirmed the feelings many of the aforementioned students were having regarding St. Olaf’s quantitative

approach to racial diversity. These students pointed out that St. Olaf plans to “increase domestic minority student enrollment by at least one percent each year” and “recruit faculty reflecting the diversity of recent graduates” (St. Olaf Board of Regents). While these goals can be found stated in written documents and those documents even state that St. Olaf seeks to ensure certain aspects of those goals, the actual steps taken to achieve them are much more difficult to find.

Additionally, no policy outlines how the college plans to combat the challenges brought about by increasing levels of structural diversity. The “Making Excellence Inclusive” initiative instigated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Milem 2005) supports this statement by mentioning that challenges that are generated by changing purely the compositional makeup of a college. According to the AACU, structurally-focused changes do not address the “campus climate once students and others arrive on campus,” students’ multiple identities, like how race intersects with gender, class, or sexual orientation among others, or “how compositional diversity influences classroom and co-curricular practices, and ultimately, student learning” (Milem 2005). Overall, our interviewees understood that the college deals with large amounts of complexities in creating diversity and maintaining inclusivity. However, the overarching consensus was that the administration lacks transparency with the students and was failing at their intended inclusivity.

In regards to increasing inclusivity, students agreed that St. Olaf was trying—at least they hoped the administration was trying—but that they struggled with the meaning of inclusivity at St. Olaf and struggled even more with its implementation. One student expressed that “we have a nice language but we aren’t actually fulfilling it.” The mission of the college is eloquently written, however the goals are so abstract that it is difficult to achieve them in the real world.

Many students noted that not all their peers felt that they belonged and that the traditions of St. Olaf could be quite alienating. One student stated that “the minute you start changing your student body, if you’re going to overturn the racial makeup of the student body, you need to be aware that it’s naive to do that without changing the attitude/mindset of the administration or community.” This demonstrates how students perceive the St. Olaf policies and how they understand the implementation of those policies. Students continually stated that they did not know the policies. If they did not even realize that St. Olaf aims to be an inclusive community, how could they actively be a part in creating that inclusive environment.

After we asked about students’ knowledge (or lack there of) about the policies, we referenced St. Olaf’s Mission Statement:

St. Olaf College strives to be an inclusive community, respecting those of differing backgrounds and beliefs. Through its curriculum, campus life, and off-campus programs, it stimulates students’ critical thinking and heightens their moral sensitivity; it encourages them to be seekers of truth, leading lives of unselfish service to others; and it challenges them to be responsible and knowledgeable citizens of the world (St. Olaf College (B)).

We then asked if St. Olaf was achieving its stated goals of inclusivity through the various academic and community channels it mentioned. In response to this question, students generally claimed that although St. Olaf was trying, it was not achieving its somewhat “lofty” goals. As one student said, “to some extent yes [they are achieving their goals]. We get exposed to a broader range of ideas and discuss what it means to be ethical.” BUT— Clearly, while it is true

that St. Olaf is achieving its goals to some extent, the achievement often depends on a student's specific experiences and the professors or friends they acquired at St. Olaf.

Overall, these comments illustrate that St. Olaf students are extremely dissatisfied with the current goals in regards to diversity and inclusivity. One student demonstrated her frustration saying, "they strive, strive is the key word in being an inclusive community...I think they try to respect too...[but this lack of success] boggles my mind." It seemed that while students could actively create an inclusive environment within friend groups, they felt little support from the administration and did not find the mission statement to be reflected in the implementation of these policies. This sentiment draws the conclusion that lack of administrative initiative causes passivity in students, leading them further away from bridging the gaps between the policies and practices.

Change

While the mission of our project was to discover whether a gap existed between the policies and perceived implementation of these policies, we also wanted to find creative strategies to combat this disparity that prevents our school and community from achieving our true potential. We ended our interviews continuing on the theme of change by asking students not only of the future but of possible changes that they felt would help St. Olaf reach its goals of racial inclusivity while increasing diversity. Their assessment that St. Olaf struggles to be an inclusive campus was solidified when students painted a picture of a more racially inclusive campus that differs greatly from the current reality. Students described a more inclusive campus as something "you should feel." They had various suggestions such as bringing in more

diversity and making more ways for students of a lower socioeconomic status to attend. Other recommendations included sensitivity training for Junior Councilors, less “cliqueness,” less tokenization and exoticification and overall a focus on quality of life for students. A racially inclusive campus would be more colorful but all of our colors would be integrated together rather than the current segregation that takes place. Students remarked that the inclusivity would be reflected in programming that would bring people together and tackle the boundaries between community members.

In particular, students offered suggestions pertaining to increasing diversity, international students, General Education Requirements, and training. Students strongly urged admissions to be aware of how they acquired a diverse student body. Students felt that St. Olaf recruits a limited scope of racial and ethnic diversity. In addition, St. Olaf is still lacking various other types of diversity such as socioeconomic class and sexual orientation. In regards to international students, suggestions included a permanent international house and a full time international coordinator. Students also thought that there should be either different General Education Requirements that discussed diversity or that these GEs should be connected to outside events. However, the main improvements existed in creating an “open channel of communication between students, faculty and staff.” One student even suggested training that involved all three groups—students, faculty, and staff—working together in order to bridge the gap between them and minimize misunderstandings in communication. Generally, students felt that change must come from everyone. They realized that this change had to start with admissions and the administration but that students had to continue these efforts into the informal environment created by students themselves.

Overall, our interviewees felt that as a community they had a powerful voice that could have the power to facilitate change. However, when we asked if they personally had an impact, their perceptions changed. A lot of students felt that they were stronger in a group or simply with their peers. However one student was confident stating,

“Absolutely! [You] don’t need to be elected to be a leader...there are so many different avenues to speak up. You can really listen, learn, be heard...Every time i go to a diversity focused event, I have the opportunity to be a part of the conversation. Doesn’t mean I always follow through or know what to say; sometimes I just listen. But I think there's a lot of student engagement that can change things.”

This positive outlook on change not only inspired us but allowed us to think critically about what we had learned and how we could use our research to enact change.

Summary and Conclusion

Our research provides a comprehensive analysis of the current status of racial diversity and inclusivity on campus drawing from personal interviews as well as other college resources documenting outcomes of various measures. Students recognized a difference between diversity and inclusivity which coincides with the current literature’s definitions of the words. Students defined diversity not only as visual differences but also as the traits and attributes that differ among people. Students regarded inclusivity as not simply tolerance but rather the celebration and acceptance of diversity, an acceptance which not only acknowledged but encouraged differing opinions and respected them. This understanding of inclusivity captures the literature’s

focus on harnessing all the ways we differ to benefit from all of the advantages they can offer us and each other, and to create the highest quality experience possible.

While most our informants thought of themselves as accepting, their immediate friend groups were mostly homogenous. The homogeneity of St. Olaf in general, and the segregation of groups of students based on similarities demonstrates that St. Olaf as a whole lacks inclusivity and its students are not pushed to be truly inclusive. Further, while a majority of students believed that there were many avenues for potential discussion about race, these were seen as opportunities and not obligations and were thus rarely attended. Statistically, St. Olaf College is a homogenous environment with acute differences that lead to feelings of isolation or marginalization for some students, leading their peers to believe that the campus is lacking inclusivity and thus not achieving its stated goals.

Some of the major barriers to inclusivity were feelings of awkwardness or being uncomfortable discussing race. Many students felt that they lacked the vocabulary and skills to have constructive conversations and to deepen their understandings. These findings are indicative that St. Olaf is currently not facilitating curricular and interactional diversity to enhance their student body. Students felt that although the administration attempts to increase inclusivity, they are not necessarily achieving their goals.

The changes students suggested, offer a starting point for the administration, faculty and staff, and students to work towards creating a more inclusive campus, a campus that focuses on curricular and interactional diversity in order to create the highest quality educational experience possible for *all* students. Specifically, these changes included more transparency about St. Olaf's goals in regards to increasing diversity and inclusivity, creating more opportunities for students,

faculty and staff from racial minorities to attend St. Olaf, and the creation of and more support for existing avenues of inclusivity to maintain and celebrate the diversity St. Olaf will attract. Further, students felt that change had to begin with the administration and faculty but that ultimately it is the students who create the environment at St. Olaf. Further, students felt that they had the most amount of power in groups and that together they could instigate change.

While students play a role in creating change, the literature surrounding diversity and inclusivity outlines specific adjustments that must be taken in order to further St. Olaf's goals and combat the barriers experienced by students. Students cannot be the only ones working to create an inclusive community. As St. Olaf grows in its diversity, the administration must take measures to actively break down prejudice and stereotypes between community members. The administration and faculty and staff must increase and emphasize curricular and interactional diversity. All members of St. Olaf's community must be educated in a way that gives all individuals the tools they need to create a more inclusive environment. At the same time, the institutional leaders must promote and ensure the occurrence of meaningful intergroup relations. As an educational institution striving for the best for its students and community, St. Olaf must continue developing innovative strategies to maximize benefits for all its members and institutionalize the inclusivity we hope to achieve.

The overarching consensus that our research reveals is that the policies in place are not implemented efficiently and they do not achieve the aims that students want them to accomplish. By exploring this gap between policies and their execution, we hope to shed light on how these policies could be improved to better reflect the wants and needs of the current campus residents. Based on our research, St. Olaf claims to be something it is not. If St. Olaf truly desires

inclusivity and we, as a community, aspire to live lives of integrity, we cannot wait around passively for inclusivity to come about on its own. St. Olaf must actively prioritize and *create* inclusivity for the good of everyone on this campus.

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Word Count: 8,168