

# FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

---

Diane LeBlanc, Rolvaag Memorial Library 526B  
507-786-3438  
leblanc@stolaf.edu  
wp.stolaf.edu/firstyear/

## The First-Year Experience

During your first year at St. Olaf, the First-Year Experience offers opportunities for you to explore campus resources, take courses designed for your college transition, and find the people and programs that will support your personal growth, social development, and academic success.

## Team Advising

Your First-Year Experience begins with advising before you arrive. Virtual advising sessions and a summer registration advisor will help you navigate registration resources and choose Fall courses. When you arrive, a team of advisors, including a pre-major advisor, a Success Coach, and a peer leader will welcome you and support your transition to living and learning on campus.

## New Student Orientation

New Student Orientation guides your transition to living and learning within the St. Olaf community. From the day you arrive on campus until fall classes begin, you'll participate in activities to help you become part of your residence hall community, explore academic interests and resources, navigate campus, and develop a sense of belonging.

## First-Year Experience Courses

First-Year Experience courses focus on ideas and questions about the world and your role in it. In these courses, you'll engage with big questions, deepen your understanding of the liberal arts, and learn new ways to think, write, and have conversations. These courses emphasize active learning as you build community with peers and the professor.

All students complete First-Year Seminar and Writing and Rhetoric — one course each semester. You may choose to enroll in Individual Courses OR participate in a Conversation Program. What interests you? Explore the two paths below. (You'll choose one or the other, not both.)

## SOAR

As part of your Fall and Spring First-Year Experience, you will participate in SOAR (St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources). These small group sessions, led by highly trained SOAR peer leaders, provide time and space to create intentional community, access resources, and meet new people.

## What is the First-Year Experience?

### Individual Courses

The First-Year Experience at St. Olaf provides you with a foundation for college success. The two courses that make up the First-Year Experience focus on critical thinking, discussion, research, and writing skills to support your college experience.

You may complete your First-Year Experience on one of two paths. You may take First-Year Seminar 120 and Writing 120 as individual courses, one in the fall and the other in the spring, OR you may enroll in a

Conversations program. Students who opt for the First-Year Seminar 120 and Writing 120 are split into two groups. One group takes First-Year Seminar 120 in the fall and one group takes Writing 120 in the fall. In the spring, students who completed First-Year Seminar 120 then take Writing 120, and students who completed Writing 120 take First-Year Seminar 120.

## Conversation Programs

The Conversations programs focus courses around a theme that students engage with in multiple courses during one or two years, and through the Conversations, students may fulfill additional Core requirements beyond the First-Year Seminar 120 and Writing 120. Note that Enduring Questions is a two-year program.

Students wanting maximum flexibility with regard to their schedule should opt for the individual course option as most of the Conversations programs are offered at only one time period, and therefore may conflict with other courses.

You do not have to participate in a Conversations program. In fact, only 30% of incoming students do.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Do you have questions? Someone else might be wondering the same too! Visit our FAQ page about St. Olaf's First-Year Experience.

## Courses

During their first year at St. Olaf College, students enroll in two courses as part of the First-Year Experience: First-Year Seminar and Writing and Rhetoric. During fall and spring semesters, all students enrolled in First-Year Experience courses participate in St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources (SOAR).

### **FYS 120: *First-Year Seminar***

This course emphasizes critical thinking, conversation, collaboration, and academic habits for the liberal arts. Students learn key skills like locating and evaluating academic sources, as well as reading, reflecting, and responding to texts. Students cultivate their own curiosity while also learning how to engage in community, better understanding their responsibilities to each other. This course is open to first-year students and a limited number of sophomores.

**Prerequisite:** first-year student status.

Writing Intensive First-Year Seminars are available for students who may benefit from extensive writing instruction and practice during Fall semester. Students enroll in these sections through writing placement or permission of the instructor.

### **WRIT 120: *Writing and Rhetoric***

Writing and Rhetoric courses, taught by faculty across the college, engage students in writing for multiple purposes and audiences. Each course explores a contemporary question of interest to college students. Students write in multiple genres and engage in writing as a systematic process with opportunities to respond to feedback. They learn, evaluate, and use appropriate technologies to explore, discuss, and write about course content. This course is limited to first-year students and sophomores.

### **St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources (SOAR)**

SOAR provides an extended orientation for all students in their first year to equip them with the knowledge and tools to be successful at St. Olaf. Students learn key skills such as how to utilize campus

resources and implement college level reading and study techniques through small group conversation, reflection, and the practice of successful academic habits. As part of students' Fall and Spring First-Year Experience, they will participate in SOAR. These small group sessions, led by highly trained SOAR peer leaders, provide time and space to create intentional community, access resources, and meet new people.

## Faculty

### Joshua R. Anderson

Assistant Professor of Political Science  
American politics; political philosophy; history of science

### Anne G. Berry

Adjunct Instructor of Writing; Assistant Director of Multilingual Student Language Support  
linguistics; English as a second language

### Emily Bowman

Visiting Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology

### Heather Campbell

Professor of Education  
ESL; reading; special education; Director of Assessment - Education

**David M. Carter** (on sabbatical January term and spring semester 2024-25)

Professor of Music  
cello; chamber music; string techniques; string literature/pedagogy; music appreciation

### Chris B. Chapp

Professor of Political Science; Morrison Family Director of the Institute for Freedom and Community  
American elections; political communication; public opinion

### Arthur J. Cunningham

Associate Professor of Philosophy  
philosophy of physics; philosophy of science; science and religion

### Marc David

Associate Professor of Practice of Sociology/Antropology  
Social class, race, cultural politics of heritage and historical representation in the U.S.

### Shelly D. Dickinson

Associate Professor of Psychology  
behavioral neuroscience; addiction; conditioning and learning; psychopharmacology

### Bridget Draxler

Adjunct Assistant Professor of Writing; Associate Director of Writing, Speaking, and Academic Support

### Averill Earls

Assistant Professor of History

### Vera Foley

Visiting Assistant Professor of English

### Daniel Forstner

Instructor of Education  
education; first year writing

### Michael A. Fuerstein

Professor of Philosophy  
social and political philosophy; social epistemology; American pragmatism

### Leigh Ann Garner

Assistant Professor of Music  
music education

### Abdulai Iddrisu

Associate Professor of History  
African history; Islam in Africa

### Paul T. Jackson

Professor of Chemistry and Environmental Studies  
green chemistry; environmental chemistry; water quality; sustainability

### Brianna Johnson

Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance

### Kim A. Kandi

Professor of Biology; Paul and Mildred Hardy Distinguished Professor of Science  
cell biology; molecular biology; genetics

### Erica Kanewischer

Associate Professor of Practice of Social Work and Family Studies

### Diane C. LeBlanc

Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Writer in Residence, and Director of Writing; Associate Dean of the First-Year Experience and Sophomore Thriving  
rhetoric and composition; creative writing; gender studies

### Kari Lie Dorer

Professor of Norwegian and Race, Ethnic, Gender and Sexuality Studies, King Olav V Chair of Scandinavian-American Studies  
Norwegian language and culture; applied linguistics; Sami studies; Nordic film

### Emily K. Mohl

Associate Professor of Biology and Education  
evolutionary ecology; plant-insect interactions; science education

### Nissa Parmar

Visiting Assistant Professor of English

### Jennifer Shaiman

Assistant Professor of English

### William Sonnega

Professor of Theater; Patrick J. Quade Endowed Chair in Theater  
theater; media studies

### Katherine Tegtmeyer Pak

Professor of Political Science and Asian Studies  
Asian politics; comparative democracy; immigration; citizenship; human rights

### Nancy M. Thompson

Professor of Art and Art History and Race, Ethnic, Gender and Sexuality Studies  
medieval art in Europe; medieval and early modern art in Italy; women's and gender studies

**Colin Wells** (on sabbatical spring semester 2024-25)

Professor of English

early American literature; 18th-century literature

**Karen K. Wilkerson**

Adjunct Instructor of Music

voice

**Patrick Wilz**

Visiting Assistant Professor of History

**Ka F. Wong**

Professor of Asian Studies

language pedagogy; cultural studies; Asian American studies; visual culture