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## Academic freedom: words and their consequences

- Use of the n-word in academic contexts provokes controversy
- Upcoming task force will focus on academic freedom in the classroom

Read the full article at [manitoumessenger.com](http://manitoumessenger.com)

Claire Strother/Manitou Messenger

By Iain Carlos & Sam Carlen  
News Editor & Editor-in-Chief

Associate Professor of Art History Matthew Rohn saw the artwork in a museum – a well-known reimagining of the American flag. He planned to lecture about the piece, and when class came April 23, its title left his lips:

“Die N\*\*\*\*\*.”

A black student left the room around 10 minutes after Rohn said the word and another left shortly after that. The next morning, Provost Marci Sortor informed Rohn that a bias incident report had been filed against him.

The backlash Rohn faced mirrors numerous high-profile incidents that have occurred at institutions across the country. Several of these cases contributed to a recent decision to re-examine St. Olaf’s own academic freedom policies, especially as they relate to speech in the classroom, said Chair of the Faculty Life Committee (FLC) Corliss Swain. The FLC is preparing to form an Academic Freedom Task Force to undertake this work and issue policy recommendations.

### Flag for the Moon

Rohn said the name of Faith Ringgold’s 1969 painting, “Flag for the Moon: Die

N\*\*\*\*\*” in class. The painting features the word “DIE” behind the stars of the American flag and warps the stripes to spell the n-word. In contrast to the era’s common use of the flag to symbolize the American conquest of the moon, Ringgold’s flag symbolizes “America’s historical mistreatment of black people,” art historian Sharon Patton writes.

When Rohn finished lecturing on the work, a white student told him his use of the word was hurtful. Rohn apologized to the student, and realized he would need to apologize to the entire class.

The next morning, Rohn received an email from a black student in the class condemning his use of the n-word and saying they would not attend class again. Rohn swiftly apologized to the student in a response email.

That afternoon, Rohn learned from Sortor that a student had filed a bias incident report against him for his use of the n-word. Shortly after that, Sortor came to Rohn’s office and established a protocol for the next class meeting: Rohn was to apologize, allow students to speak their minds and

a third party would facilitate a class discussion with Rohn out of the classroom.

After Rohn apologized to the class, a black student berated him for using the n-word and the rest of the class for their alleged complacency, and left. The remaining students decided it was best to conclude class for the day. After that, Rohn, Sortor and Chair of the Art Department Irve Dell began brainstorming how class should proceed.

Megan Hussey ’20, a student enrolled in the course, said the class’ morale was low at this point.

“[Class] wasn’t the same,” Hussey said. “I remember two students who used to sit next to each other who were friendly acquaintances sat across the room from one another after that happened.”

Associate Professor of Art Paul Briggs joined Rohn to lead an April 30 class session aimed at reconciliation. Only about a third of the students attended, Rohn said.

When class met again two days later, attendance remained low and a brief discussion indicated to Rohn that more changes would need to be made before class could move forward.

Briggs, Dell, Sortor and Rohn decided that the remaining classes

would be taught by surrogate professors. Rohn would grade the final exam, but students’ names would be redacted.

Parties involved in the incident and its aftermath hold a variety of views on Rohn’s use of the n-word.

“I didn’t feel shocked,” wrote Harper Bischoff ’22, a black student enrolled in the course. “The class was African American art history, but I wasn’t really shocked that it wasn’t set up in a way that felt like I was being represented. I left the classroom not necessarily to cause a scene, but more because I felt as though I shouldn’t have to be subjected to something that made me uncomfortable because of my race.”

“I personally don’t think that it was wrong for me to say the title of a work, especially a work that was meant to be provocative in class,” Rohn said. “I am fully aware though that it did cause hurt and pain and for that I am apologetic.”

Professor of English Mary Titus, who served as a surrogate instructor, does not see a clear answer as to how Rohn should have approached the piece.

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## New dorm, townhouses to replace honor houses, relocate PDA

By Jacob Maranda  
News Editor

The College has commenced the development process for a new dormitory and fourteen townhouses to replace nine honor houses on St. Olaf Avenue in an effort to expand options for on-campus student housing.

Current plans will see the College construct a single three-story dormitory on the south side of St. Olaf Avenue. Fourteen townhouses will occupy the north side, replacing Boe House and the nine honor houses. Due to the removal of Boe House, student health and counseling services will relocate to the first floor of the new dormitory.

St. Olaf hired Workshop Architects and Boldt Contractors this fall to form a project development team. The team will first confirm the proposed site of the dormitory and townhouses on St. Olaf Avenue and then create design schematics for the new buildings, Chief Financial Officer Jan Hanson said.

Pending approval by the Board of Regents in late January and development of a financing plan, Hanson said the project could break ground as early as fall 2020. The timeframe for completion depends upon whether the development team chooses to work on the project in one or two phases, Hanson said. Under current estimates, the project would be completed no later than fall 2022.

With his home set to be removed to make room for the new dorm, the College will have to find a new on-campus residence for President David Anderson ’74. While several parties are discussing the future of the president’s home, there is no definitive plan for relocation.



Claire Strother/Manitou Messenger

“The housing project has the potential to be truly transformative for the College, and especially for students, so that’s the most important thing,” Anderson wrote in an email to the Messenger. “I’m confident we’ll find the right place for a new house. I’ll be happy wherever it lands.”

The College is currently considering two plans for relocating students who reside in honor houses, said Associate Dean of Students Pamela McDowell. One plan would see the dormitory constructed before demolition of the houses to allow honor house residents to move there. The other option involves allowing more students to live off-campus to free up on-campus housing for the relocated honor house residents.

The development of new campus residences follows a comprehensive housing analysis completed by Workshop Architects earlier this year. The analysis identified a need for 440 more beds, primarily due to the ongoing process to “detriple and decompress existing residence facilities,” Hanson said. To that end, the College is converting some triple rooms into double rooms and restoring lounge and study spaces present in the original design of the residence halls, Hanson said.

Returning the dormitories to their original state will create a need for 300 new beds, which the new housing project is designed to fulfill. An additional 140 beds are included in the project to make up for the removal of honor houses, Hanson said.

The process for students residing in the townhouses could follow a similar system as honor housing, with students applying to live in a townhome in cohorts

with a set purpose, McDowell said.

“I’m not necessarily wedded to the fact that it has to be a project or it has to be a language, but I do think that some intentionality of why you’re living in the townhome, there’s some positives to that,” McDowell said.

The College is considering integrating a living-learning component into the new dormitory in conjunction with the relocated health services and counseling center, McDowell said. The traditional room-draw process will fill the rest of the dormitory.

The dorm will have three wings, featuring a mix of four-person pods and single rooms, with kitchens on each floor. The dorm will include lounge areas similar to those in Rand and Ytterboe Halls, as well as study rooms and small study “nooks” along each hallway, Hanson said.

The single dormitory was initially designed to be split in two, with one wing occupying each side of the avenue. The College moved away from this design for practical reasons, as it is more cost-efficient to construct a single structure than to construct two, Hanson said.

As part of the housing development, the College will create a new formal entrance at the intersection of Lincoln Street and St. Olaf Avenue.

“We’ve referred to this as a transformative project,” Hanson said. “This is going to be the next transformative project on campus, just as Buntrock Commons was transformative 20 years ago and Regents Hall [of Natural Sciences] was transformative 10 years ago.”

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## Title IX data indicates reduced barriers to reporting

By Alyson Brinker  
Senior Reporter

Title IX Coordinator Kari Hohn released data on intakes, investigations and investigation outcomes from the fall of 2016 to the summer of 2019 in an email to the student body on Nov. 5, fulfilling the final recommendation of the 2016 Title IX Working Group.

The data includes the number of intakes and reports, filed every time a student or mandatory reporter alerts Hohn to a potential Title IX policy violation, the number of reports that led to a formal investigation process, the number of responsible findings and information regarding sanctions, suspensions and expulsions for violations of the College’s Title IX policy.

The intent behind releasing Title IX data every three years is to increase transparency between the College and students while also protecting the privacy of those involved in the process, according to the Nov. 5 email.

There can be too much transparency with information regarding Title IX violations, said Sexual Assault Resource Network (SARN) Co-Chair Sydney Peterson ’20. Hohn and SARN understood that “mail blasts,” or campus-wide email announcements every time a student came forward, were actually barriers to reporting and an example of “bad transparency.” The three year data release can protect any one individual from being identified through the data, Hohn said.

The data release shows that in the past three years, there have been 145 intakes and reports. Peterson and Hohn believe the high number is actually a reflection of reduced barriers to reporting, not an increase in the number of Title IX violations.

“I think the fact that our reporting numbers continue to go up demonstrates trust in that process and that students are comfortable coming forward,” Hohn said. “It’s the schools that are saying they only have one or two reports a year that I would be more concerned about.”

“We can’t help or respond to something that we don’t know about,” Hohn said.

According to the data released in the email, 77 percent of the 145 intakes and reports did not result in an investigation.

“When I meet with a student and do an intake, 99 percent of the time it’s up to them about how they want to proceed, and that includes whether or not they want to move forward with an investigation,” Hohn said.

Those who did not participate in an investigation may

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# NEWS

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## Mental health resources fail to meet student demand at St. Olaf and beyond



By Claire Drewes  
Senior Reporter

Liz Conkey/Manitou Messenger

With the recent departure of counselor Nina Mattson '95, Boe House Counseling Center continues to struggle in meeting the mental health needs of St. Olaf students. Inadequate mental health resources at the College follow a national trend of institutions failing to meet growing student needs.

### Mental health services struggle to meet student needs

"When I talk to my colleagues, other directors, whether it's at Carleton or the cities or Chicago schools, we're all facing the same problem where we're under-resourced to meet the demand, much like what's happening in the community," said Director of Boe House Steve O'Neill.

Long wait times highlight this disparity between student need and support given. Boe House currently has up to a three week wait for a student to see a counselor and up to a four month wait to see a psychiatrist or nutritionist, according to the St. Olaf website.

Boe House employs three full-

time counselors and is currently looking for a fourth to fill Mattson's position. O'Neill is the only counselor present during the summer. Four interns also work 20 hours a week under supervision.

In recent years, counselors and interns have faced growing demand for their services, with 21 percent of the student population visiting Boe House last year, O'Neill said. The October departure of Mattson, one of only four fully-licensed counselors, highlights the understaffing problem.

Abby Benua '20, a former patient of Mattson, said she waited two weeks for her third meeting with Mattson before receiving an unexpected email from O'Neill announcing Mattson's departure. The email included an apology and resource alternatives two days prior to the appointment. Benua then rescheduled to meet with an intern counselor three weeks later.

"This is just super not sustainable for me," Benua said. "I'm in a time in my life where I just need a lot of support right now."

O'Neill offered sympathy for students whose mental health care was

disrupted by Mattson's exit.

"For those students, that was really unfortunate for them and it's a disruption for them especially last minute, but that was the circumstance so we tried to do what we could to best meet their needs," O'Neill said.

Mattson could not be reached for comment regarding her departure.

### Nationwide trend

St. Olaf is not alone in facing strained mental health resources – far from it. Growth in the demand for mental health care has far outstripped increases at numerous institutions. Between 2009-2010 and 2014-2015, the number of students seeking counseling center services grew by an average of about 30 percent, while student enrollment increased by only five percent, according to a 2015 report from the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH) at Penn State University.

A subsequent 2017 analysis of the CCMH data published in the journal "Psychological Services" found that demand grew steadily over the five-year period. Colleges and universities across the country are struggling to meet this recent increase in need, an increase driven by rising prevalence of anxiety and depression among college students, greater awareness of mental health issues and reduced stigma associated with receiving mental health care, among other factors.

Moreover, Northfield as a community lacks enough resources for students who need a higher level of support than Boe House can offer. Allina Health's Northfield clinic currently has a two to three week wait time to see one of its five psychologists and is not currently taking new patients for either of its two psychiatrists, according to Alexis, a scheduler for Allina Health that could not provide her full name for confidentiality reasons.

Grinnell College, a liberal arts insti-

tution in Iowa with an enrollment of around 1,700 students, faces a similar situation to that of St. Olaf.

Licensed Psychologist at Grinnell Student Health and Wellness (SHAW) Charles Bermingham explained that

**"When I talk to my colleagues, other directors, whether it's at Carleton or the cities or Chicago schools, we're all facing the same problem where we're under-resourced to meet the demand, much like what's happening in the community."**

- Steve O'Neill

the college's remote location limits its resources, much like St. Olaf in the Northfield area.

"We're in a rural part of Iowa, so the resources just aren't the same as if we were in a more populated town or a more populated city," Bermingham said.

Bermingham is glad that the stigma behind reaching out for help has decreased, but noted that the volume of students seeking resources outstrips those provided by institutions and community providers.

"I think this is a key topic that's on the minds of pretty much everyone on campus," Bermingham said.

Due to the expanding need, innovation and creativity in utilizing exist-

ing resources is crucial, Bermingham said. To look towards more innovation, Grinnell offers drop-in appointments and has recently added group therapy as well as telepsychiatry to their list of resources.

Macalester College, another small, liberal arts institution with an enrollment of roughly 2,200 students, is also under resourced.

"We're considered to have a good clinician to student ratio, which is about one clinician for every 300 students, but as you can imagine that's still quite insufficient to the task," said Liz Schneider-Bateman, Director of Counseling at Macalester's Laurie Hamre Center for Health & Wellness.

In contrast to St. Olaf and Grinnell, Macalester has the benefit of being located in Saint Paul, a large metropolitan area with a higher number of mental health resources. Despite this geographical advantage, the demand for mental health services among students has continued to increase, Schneider-Bateman said.

Schneider-Bateman sees the challenge of meeting demand as a national problem, primarily due to the U.S. healthcare system which she said does not provide equitable access and is slow to bolster resources to keep up with increasing numbers of individuals seeking care.

As students look for increased support, colleges continue to struggle to find their place as institutions that can help provide mental health services to students.

"We're in a historically unique or crucial time period in terms of college student mental health, and I don't think anyone at any school has totally mastered what to do about it," Schneider-Bateman said. "I think the questions of equity and access are central in that."

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## Title IX data - Students dictate nature of investigation

Continued from A1...

have participated in the informal process, obtained a non-contact directive or made connections to resources which Hohn facilitates.

Hohn said there are a variety of reasons why students may not want to move forward with a formal investigation and that it is different for every person. Students can also choose to pursue an investigation after the initial report. Not automatically investigating every report fits with Hohn's philosophy that if you force people to move forward with processes they don't want or aren't ready for, they will stop coming forward.

"I want decisions to be at [the reporting student's] pace," Hohn said.

The informal process can involve not interacting, not having classes together and not living in the same residence hall, SARN Co-Chair Jamie Farley '20 said.

The 77 percent of students who do not formally investigate incidents explains the gap in collected data, with many students choosing to utilize the informal resolution process, Peterson said.

Of the 23 percent of cases that do pursue a formal investigation, only 58 percent result in responsible findings.

"It's a hard number to see, but we have to

trust our process," Peterson said.

An external investigator uses a "preponderance of evidence" standard to assess if it is more likely than not that the College's Title IX policy was violated. If there is not enough evidence to reach that bar, the investigator uses a phrase such as "there is insufficient evidence to find this student responsible" when adjudicating, Hohn said.

"It's not really an exoneration," Hohn said. "It's saying given all the information that was available, that I was able to collect, there's not enough to reach that tipping point. That's what I try to explain to reporting students who didn't get that outcome they were looking for."

The data release also reveals that only four students have been expelled for Title IX violations in the past three years. Additionally, nine students have been suspended and six have received a combination of sanctions including limited campus involvement, required counseling, required training and/or disciplinary probation.

"I think our school takes expulsion really, really seriously," Peterson said. "I wouldn't say I'm terribly surprised that the number is that low."

A two person panel decides on the sanc-

tions by using a three pronged approach of stopping the misconduct, preventing it from happening again and remedying the impact, Hohn said.

Sanctions, suspension and expulsion are decided based on several factors which may include severity, persistence and prior misconduct according to the data released in the email.

Hohn said that she hopes to continue to see an increase in the percentage of intakes because it indicates to her that people feel comfortable enough to seek assistance while at the same time bolstering Title IX's education and prevention work.

Hohn, Peterson and Farley want to remind the St. Olaf Community that while it is important to review the statistics, ultimately the numbers represent real people in our community and that no instance of sexual or interpersonal violence is ever acceptable.

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### Campus Resources

#### Confidential

Sexual Assault Resource Network (SARN)  
College Ministers  
Boe House  
Health Services

#### Non-Confidential

St. Olaf Faculty and Staff  
Kari Hohn and anyone on the  
Title IX Team  
Residence Life Staff  
St. Olaf's EMTs  
Public Safety

## Evolution of the SPM requirement



Courtesy of Marketing & Communications

By Lydia Bermel  
Senior Reporter

Over the last decade, the physical activity general education (GE) requirement, currently known as Studies in Physical Movement (SPM), has evolved to become both more inclusive and more accessible to the student body.

From the start, St. Olaf has focused on and valued the inclusion of physical fitness in its curriculum. In January of 1897, one student wrote in the Manitou Messenger, "the descendants of the Vikings ought to take the lead in making bodily exercise compulsory. There ought to be a gymnasium at every Norwegian college."

Physical education classes became a requirement in 1907 under the administration of President John Kildahl.

In 1923, the College offered activity courses similar to current courses offered in the exercise science department, but some of them were a little more unusual. At nearly 92 years of age, Rev. Arnold "Andy" Andersen '23 was interviewed by the Manitou Messenger in 1985 and recalled his experience on campus. In one required course, the men were required to take boxing, Andersen '23 said.

"We had to learn how to box. You had to know how to defend yourself," Andersen said in an interview with the Messenger in 1985.

Other required courses also sought to maintain St. Olaf's Norwegian heritage. In the past, the College required students to take Norwegian classes if they were of Norwegian ancestry.

Over time, St. Olaf has built and rebuilt three gymnasiums, including the current Skoglund Athletic Center built in 1967. At its opening, Skoglund was only available for male students, as female students completed their gym courses in a separate gymnasium on campus.

In the 1990s, students had to fulfill the "Physical Activity" (PHA) GE, one of the predecessors of the SPM

that carried a four-course requirement. Due to financial troubles at the time, St. Olaf faced budget cuts to faculty and programs, which resulted in the requirement being reduced to two courses and re-titled as Studies in Physical Movement in 1998 as part of larger GE reform.

The most recent draft of the new GE curriculum will reduce the requirement to a single course and change the name to the "Active Body" requirement, as the faculty continue to strive for a more equitable and accessible activity requirement.

The SPM requirement has been criticized in the past due to its lack of accessibility for students with differing mental and physical capabilities. The GE Task Force, which recently completed the OLE Core Curriculum that was approved by faculty at a recent meeting, initially chose not to include the SPM in the curriculum due to the ableist nature of the courses offered, said Task Force student representative Myrto Neamonitaki '20.

In a Messenger opinion article last fall, Kayla Carlson '19 questioned the SPM's lack of accessibility for students with disabilities.

"Students with disabilities have to jump through enough hoops regarding accessibility in everyday life — should a GE requirement at an educational institution be another one of those obstacles?" Carlson wrote.

The Task Force is looking to make the activity requirement more cross-disciplinary, with classes in departments such as theater, biology and music able to fulfill the requirement, as well as study abroad programs, said department chair of exercise science Cindy Book.

Moving forward, the exercise science department will offer an inclusive fitness course spring 2020 that is accessible for students with physical disabilities. Held in the Pause, the class will allow students to move and be involved as much as they can, Book said.

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