

What I Believe

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What should we believe? How should we live? How should we treat others? What is important in the world around us? What is not important? For a successful and satisfying life, each of us needs find answers to these and other significant questions that present themselves over the years. Some questions are of universal relevance and the outcome affects all of us, while others relate to personal choices. In the future issues we must deal with are likely to become even more complex and difficult. We cannot depend on others to solve widely consequential questions without our involvement, nor let our personal decisions and priorities be determined by intuition only. To approach life's problems we need an anchoring set of values plus a method of looking at the questions.

All St. Olaf students bring with them a set of values. Many times these are rudimentary and have not been given a great deal of thought. Because of this, values and traditions espoused by St. Olaf are particularly important and should be discussed in appropriate settings. This should stimulate the students to refine their own thoughts.

I believe the skills needed to critically evaluate political, environmental, and personal choices can be learned but have often been neglected. To determine whether there is a need for us to make better choices we need only to consider some of our daily conversations, newspapers and television to see examples of irrational behavior and tortuous faulty explanations of events. Another example is the wide misunderstanding of the nature of science and its increasing contributions.

To help resolve difficult questions, I believe students need to be taught the elements of a process of critical analysis. Even a brief course or seminars should provide an introduction to the topic upon which the student can build in the future. This is an opportunity for St. Olaf to add a significant aspect to the broader education of its students. Thus, while the college maintains its traditions of unique value, it can also respond to the changing needs of its students. This does not mean reducing efforts to provide students a broad knowledge base of history, arts, science and literature, and a focus preparing students for a vocation or additional advanced study. An analytical approach to these efforts can also be introduced: What are the functions of art, and written works, and how do they or should they influence our thinking? How does science work? What has science done for us and what are its limitations? These latter questions all bear on our ability to think in a critical fashion and analyze new conflicts and concepts we will continue to face.

Thus, I believe the students of St. Olaf will have the best opportunity to lead contributing and satisfied lives if they leave campus with a maturing interest in spiritual and personal values, a developing life long interest in learning, a solid preparation for a chosen vocation, and skills to rationally and critically evaluate important issues of the day.