Re-Imagining Steensland Library; Applying Design Principles for Constructing
Hospitable Spaces

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Project Inspiration

St. Olaf College, being prestigiously known in the Midwest and all over the country, attracts a very diverse population of prospective students. This liberal arts institution has a lot of interesting features and emphases that make it unique such as the different styles of learning that can be found in every classroom on campus. One thing that I found to be enticing when I was a prospective student was the element of trust that is accepted by everyone who steps foot on the campus; students leaving their expensive possessions sitting on tables and knowing that nobody would bother them. St. Olaf has created a rare environment to be able to study, live, and interact with peers.

In my four years at St. Olaf, I believe that I was shaped into a new person by my interactions with the people who also chose to go there. The spaces that I was both forced to interact as well as those I chose to congregate made my experiences unique to other institutions. When I was formulating thoughts about this project and what it meant to me, I wanted to focus on the college because of what it has offered me in my time there. My aim was to design a project that would potentially give new offerings to future students of St. Olaf because of the way that the world and society is constantly making changes. I know that my experiences will not be those of future students because of this and I wanted to allow for my project to give these students experiences that could still be considered life-changing the way that I was able to.

The best way that I feel I could instill this kind of experience within people was to consider my current peers and the way in which my interactions have achieved this goal. The places where I was engaging with people seemed to be the defining factor in the way that I would either engage with my peers or not. Whether it be the classroom

where there was not any choice of who I would be interacting with, or the cage where I frequently met up with my friends and chatted with aquaintances; in both instances, the space where we were was what mattered the most in determining the type of interaction we would be having. After this consideration, the focus of this project fell right into my lap when I was walking through campus. Thinking about the different spaces on campus and what they offer in terms of their design and use, I found that the already existing spaces on campus are predominantly focused on the education aspect of college life. Every building on campus essentially is a place to learn and study and is advertised as such. With the campus of St. Olaf being so diverse, I wondered if there was a place that every student felt they could go and feel comfortable and accepted while they did their work or simply relax. I realized that the campus of St. Olaf is missing a place that's sole purpose is to be for all students, not just students with certain interests, and I thought reframing an existing culture on campus would be a difficult change to make for those people who were already using it. For example, re-designing the atrium of Tomson would most likely cause some form of discourse for the people who regularly used the space. It was then that I remembered a place on campus that was not currently in use and could provide a perfect canvas for this new, inclusivity oriented space, Steensland Library.

The purpose of this project is to apply existing design principles to re-design the Steensland Library in a way that promotes community and inclusion for the students and other users of St. Olaf College.

History of Steensland Library

The library was gifted to the school in 1902 by Halle Steensland and was, up until that point, the $13,000 gift was largest donation that the school had ever received. This building served as the school's library for 40 years until it was deemed to be over congested by the large literary and artistic collections owned by the college. As collections were moved out of this building to make room for more, the library housed other uses as well such as the campus' first museum. Eventually, in 1942, the Steensland was relieved of its service duties and the library was retired. This space was deemed to take on many different roles over the history of its operation but is now left unused by the general public and student body.[1]

Analyzing a Collective Space

When considering an examination of a collective space, it is important to contemplate what kinds of spaces hold information about a group that is diverse, unique in itself but can be expanded to a broader community, constantly in contact with each other, and aiming for a common goal or goals that are understood by the masses. A college campus engages a group of people who all, or almost all, can be presumed to complete the considerations on the list. Further than the broad concept of a college campus is the subgroup of the liberal arts college camps. In a article contrasting universities and liberal arts colleges (LACs) by Rebecca Fang, a research assistant at World Education Services, it was found that LACs offer a broader range of education with a higher focus on the social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, and arts. The

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[1] Olaf, S. (n.d.). Steensland Hall: A Century of Service. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from
https://www.stolaf.edu/files/archives/shows/steensland/artgallery/index.html

article also states that liberal arts colleges tend to be smaller in size which corresponds

with the emphasis on small class sizes, intimate learning exposure, and greater student

engagement. One final point that is relevant to factor in is that students of LACs tend to

have a stronger bond or relationship with faculty and alumni which gives them better

chances at receiving aid in post-graduation opportunities from them.[2] These

comparisons can be interpreted to show that the collections of people who gather at

liberal arts colleges are typically education oriented and focused as a group, as well as

diverse and coming in close personal contact with others of the group on a daily basis

due to formation of the liberal arts campus and class culture.

  With these considerations at the forefront of an examination of shared space, the

search and selection of a liberal arts campus fitting the criteria leads to that of St. Olaf

College. St. Olaf's mission shows characteristics of a comprehensive liberal arts

education as previously mentioned. The mission statement is broken into subheadings

including the colleges goals: "*To excel in the liberal arts," "To examine faith and values,"*

"To explore meaningful vocation," "To be an inclusive community," To be a globally

engaged community," "To be nourished by Lutheran tradition." [3] St. Olaf's mission

shows, at a surface level, that this LAC campus is fit for a comprehensive examination

of the student collective who create the community. Choosing an institution such as this

allows for the development of their mission through research and investigation by

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[2] Differences Between Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities. (2018, February 16). Retrieved from
https://www.wes.org/advisor-blog/differences-between-liberal-arts-colleges-and-universities/
[3] Olaf, S. (2017, September 26). Mission. Retrieved March 10, 2020, from https://wp.stolaf.edu/about/mission/

creating a type of research of which the college can use to assist them in maintaining their campus goals.

By considering this specific liberal arts campus, there comes the opportunity to see the community from a reflexive perspective of a student and what needs and social issues are pressing to the student body. With access to the inner workings of one campus, research can be done and connections can be made while bringing in broader sociological themes and frameworks as a means to make sense of ways in which this LAC can be improved to solidify their dedication to their mission for all students. After considering that the St. Olaf mission incorporates multiple different sections of supports, one that is known to be an issue in recent years is that titled, *"To be an inclusive community."*

St. Olaf Demographics

Inclusivity stems from the respect given to people of different backgrounds and who have had different experiences from one another. St. Olaf prides itself on the claim that they are a diverse campus, an examination of the latest demographics of the school supports that claim. In a report published in 2018 by the National Center for Education Statistics, St. Olaf was noted to have a total enrollment of 3048 students, all of undergraduate status. Of these students, 43% were reported to be male and 57% female; it is important to note that this is a binary calculation which means there is room for error because it does not include students of non-binary status. In terms of race and ethnicity, 69% of students were reported to be White, 7% were Asian, 7% were Hispanic/Latinx, 3% were Black/African American, 4% selected being of two or more

races, 1% were Unknown. The student body were all aged at 25 or under. In terms of

residency, 42% of students were from Minnesota and were considered to be "in-state"

residents, 48% were from any of the other 49 states and were considered "out-of-state"

residents, and 10% of students held permanent residency in a forgeign country outside

of the US.[4]

The demographics of the St. Olaf student body are an essential consideration for

re-designing a space because these are the people who the area is being made for

essentially and knowing who they are and what they like or respond to will be the

foundations for the project. Inclusivity on a campus as diverse as St. Olaf can be difficult

to create. There have been instances in the past few years that have jeopardized the

integrity of the inclusive mission for the school and have caused tensions between

students.

A Change in the Social Climate of the Campus

In 2017, a black student received threats and slurs because of their race. The

torment started with derogatory words being found written on white boards in

classrooms and study rooms across campus but it escalated after emailed reports came

out about the non-tolerance of such actions via the administration. While these

statements of warning should have deterred further actions, it seemed to elicit an even

more aggressive response from the perpetrator(s) and more notes were found. The

summit of such racist and discriminatory actions was the leaving of a note on a

windshield, targeting a specific individual, making threats about speaking out against

the prevalence of hate crimes at St. Olaf. The reporting of this act spurred action from

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[4] College Navigator. (2018). Retrieved April 15, 2020, from https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?id=174844#enrolmt

the student body which lead to the formulation of protests as a way to express the severity of the situation to the administration and also the public community. Students of all backgrounds joined in to show support for the marginalized individuals and groups who were being directly impacted by the messages. Professors and students alike rallied together and there were even class cancelations so that students could protest and gather without missing out on class time. Although there was support from students who were named, "allies" and of who were not students of color, there was an immediate tension that created an us-vs-them or you're with us or against us mentality within the community on campus. The campus culture was changed to the extent that students were feeling like they were not apart of the community anymore.

In an article from the Startribune reporting on the story, one student of color was quoted saying, "he no longer felt safe or welcome at the school." [5] The events of the Spring of 2017 were in direct violation of the area of the school's mission regarding student inclusivity. The toll taken on the student body, for all members of the community, was strong and highly evident in the common spaces across campus. Tensions were very high immediately following the occurrence and carried on for the rest of the Spring semester. While there have been precautions taken and changes made to combat such events, attitudes and feelings of belonging were still not equally distributed through the community members. The St. Olaf student body has been trying to recover from that incident for the past few years and has made strides toward educating themselves and others about marginalized groups on campus as well as in

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[5] St. Olaf students rally in the face of campus racism. (2017, May 2). *StarTribune* . Retrieved from http://www.startribune.com/st-olaf-students-rally-in-the-face-of-campus-racism/421077733/

the world. Though the people of the community have been malleable in their approaches to campus life in the recent years, one thing that has not changed in the same respect in the physical nature of the communal spaces that are utilized by every individual at this LAC. Rebuilding and reframing the campus culture to fit the mission of the school becomes an interest and examining where changes can occur as a means to reconnect the recovering student body has become the focus of this exploration.

A space where students can feel that they are respected, safe, and comfortable has been hard to find for some since the events of 2017 and that is what makes this project so important. Taking steps to mend the campus culture and life is key to also mending the attitudes of students to each other and a new space that considers all is one way to do this.

Designing to Promote Inclusivity

I am not the first one to decide that the design of a space may have an impact on the way people experience it; in fact, there is an already existing collection of research and literature that has been done on the topic.

Charles C. Strange and James H. Banning had a similar agenda to my own in the writings of their textbook, "Designing for Learning: Creating Campus Environments for Student Success."[6] In this text, the authors identify six different kinds of significant learning which include foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. When students are able to reach these levels of higher learning, they are then able to enhance their individual lives, social

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[6]Strange, Charles C., and James H. Banning. *Designing for Learning: Creating Campus Environments for Student Success*. Jossey-Bass a Wiley Brand, 2015.

interactions, as well as become more thoughtful as citizens. The authors also introduce the idea of a "Hierarchy of Environmental Design," which they define as, "the need for environments that promote inclusion and safety precede the need for environments that encourage engagement and community." With this in mind it is also important to note that a campus needs to exude safety, inclusivity, and security within its environment in order to be considered successful. When a space can be considered to be successful, there is a better potential that the students who are in use of it will feel and promote inclusivity and community.

When designing an environment for inclusion, three types of factors contribute to its success. The first are physical factors and to design a space with the goal of promoting inclusion there are facets to avoid. Spaces of inclusion should not isolate or distance students from one another and the space should have a limited capacity because high densities of people lead to a less communal feeling. That means that the space should not have the feeling of being cramped or tight because it can make people feel uncomfortably close to one another and encourage people to leave the space. The second factor is that of organization of the space. Strange and Banning highlight the fact that inclusion is strengthened by having personal and affirming encounters and so the size of the space is crucial. The space must be able to make people feel comfortable as previously mentioned. Finally, there are socially constructed factors for designing an environment for inclusion. These kinds of factors are created and reinforced by the people who are utilizing the space; inclusive attitudes can promote a sense of positivity and mattering to a peer group.

Designing for a sense of safety and security is another key factor for promoting inclusion within a space. A few attributes that are helpful to accomplish this successfully are to have permeable barriers that have a lot of visual space through them; being able to see all around oneself can make them feel safe and that there are no looming dangers around that they cannot see. Eliminating the excessive use of separating walls and corners will be useful to do this. Acknowledging the physical, organizational, and socially constructed factors of a space are helpful when creating a design plan, especially one with the focus and goal of an inclusive and community building space.

Community building is one of the goals of the success of the space and it goes hand in hand with the feelings of inclusion that were just discussed. Having the ability and tools to design a space that promotes community and community building is completely dependent on knowing how a successful one operates and functions. Strange and Banning identify three main characteristics of a prosperous community as being commitment to the community, a sense of empowerment within the community, and a sense that one matters to others within the community. These criteria in short mean that those who are in the space are wanting to be there as well as require a feeling of being needed by others which makes them feel included. It is a cyclical function that occurs when there is a successful community.

Designing spaces for community building can be an elusive task but when doing so, there are some physical features to include that can help accomplish the goal. The use of grand, inviting interior spaces give the feeling of openness and air and can be seen with the use of stairways and balconies. There should also be a well balanced

mixture of transparency, this was mentioned previously as a way to promote safety and security, and can be found with the use of glass paneling in walls or room separators. Having enough open, floor space for activities will allow for congregations of different organizations and groups. Lighting is one of the most important design features that must be considered for any project and when referencing community building, a proper mixture of low-light and bright spaces and natural light tends to create positive communal areas. Due to the idea that it is a space made for the students, it is also necessary to include a sense of those students through the use of their art, furniture, music or any other student-made faculties. Attributes such as these are intended to make the students feel connected and comfortable which is how communities are formed and maintained.

The challenges for creating a space that is considered to be communal are a lack of involvement with supportive interactions, a low sense of influence, low investment, and lack of identity. When students are lacking in their community involvement, they are losing their sense of helping and interaction with their peers. A low sense of influence can be understood as feeling as though one's contributions are not valued, important, or unessential to the betterment of the group. Low investment happens naturally with a lack of involvement and low sense of influence. Finally, lack of identity is detrimental because a sense of group identity is the foundation for a successful community.

If the design of a space can clearly promote the sense of community through the formerly listed characteristics, these challenges can either be avoided or the effects can be lessened. The authors are quoted commenting on communal spaces, "regular

interactions between students as a foundation for ongoing relationships, opportunities

for collaboration, being small enough so that no one feels superfluous, inclusion, and

service as a reference group so there are no boundaries of the "in" and "out" groups."

This statement reinforces the idea that community and inclusivity go hand-in-hand and

both need to be treated with the upmost importance when creating a design plan.

7 Principles of Universal Design

In the text by Strange and Banning, they made use of the Principles of Universal

Design to formulate some of their design conclusions. These principles were formulated

by a group of individuals led by Ronald Mace at NC State University back in 1997.[7] The

Center for Excellence in Universal Design defines the principles as having the ability,

"...to be applied to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and educate

both designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable products and

environments." The 7 Principles for Universal Design can be understood as follows:

1. Equitable Use: the design is able to be deemed useful to diverse people, provide

    the same use to all, and make design appealing to all users.

2. Flexibility in Use: the design is accomodating to a wide range of preferences and

    abilities, provide choise in methods of use, and provide adaptability.

3. Simple and Intuitive Use: the use of the design is easily understood regardless of

    experience, knowledge, language skills, or concentration.

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[7] The 7 Principles. (n.d.). Retrieved April 22, 2020, from http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/The-7-Principles/

4. Perceptible Information: the design communicates information effectively, and provide compatibility with variety of devices or technologies.

5. Tolerance for Error: the design minimizes hazards or accidents, provide warnings, and provide fail safe measures.

6. Low Physical Effort: the design can be used efficiently and comfortably with minimum fatigue, and minimize sustained physical effort.

7. Size and Space for Approach and Use: provide a clear line of sight to important design elements, make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user, and provide space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's mobility or body size.

These principles are used in the design field and should be applied in a design plan whenever possible. For a space that of which the main purpose is to facilitate inclusion and community, these principles highlight the components of equity that will be necessary to promote a goal-oriented space such as the one for this project.

Psychology of Design

Sally Augustin wrote her textbook titled, "Place Advantage: Applied Psychology for Interior Architecture," as a means to present the extremely large role that psychology plays in the world of design. She lays out different psychological factors that ultimately lead to how to design a space to optimize learning and human interactions. Augustin uses was she calls Place Science which she defines as, "using structured thinking to establish how the place you're in physically influences the state you are in mentally and then determines what changes need to be made in a space to achieve personal and

professional objectives."[8] People tend to be more goal oriented and creative when they are in a good mood and the space that they are in factors heavily on that mood. Mood and emotions are critical in the discussion of human behavior and because spacial design has an affect on these, it can be said then that places have the power to influence this human behavior. When designing with psychological factors in mind, it is important to recognize all of the functions that the space does and could potentially have. Augustin makes the point that spaces communicate more truthful information than verbal statements because we are internally motivated to attempt to figure out the world around us. Making judgements is a large part of this process and people tend to have a great deal of accuracy when making their conclusions solely based on the space they occupy. Another phrase that Sally Augustin uses frequently in her build up to specific design features is that of a Well-Designed Space as, "providing people with energy and supports their need to communicate with others and supplies inspiration and comfort to enhance lives on a continuing basis. - being in a space like this leads to a desirable emotional state." Her focus on emotions is important to this discussion because no two people feel emotions the same way and so incorporating them into the goal of inclusivity and applying her methods only strengthens the solidarity of the design plan here. There are some important criteria that she lists as contributors to a well-designed space. The first criteria is the ability for the space to comply with planned activities; this relates directly to principle # 7 of the Principles of Universal Design. Another mentioned criteria is the capacity for the space to be comforting by meeting the psychological needs for a person's perceived control over their environment; by fulfilling this criteria, the space

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[8] Augustin, Sally. *Place Advantage : Applied Psychology for Interior Architecture.* Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons, 2009. Print.

has the ability to restock the mental energies of the users. A well-designed space should also be able to challenge the user by providing opportunities for personal growth and development while helping them execute their life plan. Finally, the most important criteria that Agustin highlights is that the space has to be able to communicate important information about the other people who are in use of the space while providing opportunities for people to choose whether or not they desire to socialize; in short, provide a context for social interaction.

After outlining and providing background regarding the different psychological factors of spacial design, Augustin provides more specific guidelines to follow in terms of how to execute a design and the implications of different design features. This portion of the text reinforces the idea, previously mentioned by Strange and Banning, that a mixture of low and bright light is optimal for making people feel moderately energized which is best for learning and communal existence. One thing that I found to stand out was the advising from the authors to never paint these kinds of spaces red in color but rather, in terms of paint and color, what should be used is a moderate variety of contrasting colors so not to inhibit the ability to learn new materials. When considering transparent barriers, the author highlights the importance of not only having them but also stating that windows are pivotal for natural light and therefore productivity. The presence of nature and the outdoors makes for a highly calming and satisfying environment and large windows are perfect to showcase these views; it is mentioned that if these views are not available, that having leafy plants creates a similar affect. Continuing on to other physical characteristics of spaces that are more likely to produce

a communal and inclusive environment, I want to discuss the actual architectural shape of the space. Rectangular shapes are not optimal for learning and inclusion, here is where the author introduces three alternative shapes that both create spaces for group activity as well as personal activity and other multi-use spaces. The first shape is the "Plus Sign" shape, the second shape is the "Fat T" shape, and finally the "Fat L" shape. Being adjustable to fit different activities and plans make a space more suitable and desirable for a multitude of situations.

Sally Augustin was able to give explicit direction on how to create designs for spaces that have a stronger capacity to be successful, inclusive and community building venues. Applying her various criteria and suggestions, along with those from Strange and Banning, to the Steensland space will give a strong foundation and basis for creating a design plan that will accomplish the set goals.

Focus Group Interviews

As a means of generating feedback on ways in which Steensland Library could be planned out, a group of 5 current St. Olaf students were virtually interviewed and presented with different design styles based on the research that was collected prior to the discussions. Each interviewee was presented with verbal descriptions of two different design scenarios:

a. A space with high-ceilings decorated with sharp wooden vaults. It is a split level space with the first floor arranged with booths and round tables. Plants decorate the edges of the room in large colorful pots, potentially made by St.Olaf students. Hanging student art can be seen on around the room, suspended by invisible

wire. The main color of the room is a beige base with accents of cool colors found in the art and pottery. In one corner of the room, there is an L-shaped couch and other upholstered chairs circled around a round coffee table. These sit on top of a cool colored, very large rug. There are standard 4x6 foot windows on the side walls and no windows at the back of the room. Also at the back of the room is a counter that could be used as a second coffee shop of sorts that is positioned under the platform and stairs of the second level. Shelves would extend across the entirety of the back wall behind the coffee counter for storage and access of supplies. The second level would be a split level and would have a balcony that would overlook the first level. There would be mid-level to ceiling windows on all sides of this second floor. Two arrangements of couches and chairs can be found up there as well as scattered round tables. Decorative artwork would be found on pedestals and easels for display. There would be no singular classroom or study rooms in this space.

b. A space with similar high ceilings but no trusses; exposed duct work would be at peak height. It would still be split level area with the first floor arranged similarly to scenario a in the sense of tables and booths. At the back of this space would be a bank of study rooms made completely of glass, much like the meeting rooms in Regents Hall. The decor would be of similar fashion with student art and pottery to hold plants around the circumference of the room. A fireplace sits along the center of one of the side walls and has tables strewn in front of it as well as two small love seats. String lights would hang in a zig-zag pattern from

one side of the room to the other. There would also be transparent glass pannels separating "stalls" of tables on the side wall opposite the fireplace. The main color palette for this space would be a mixture of beige and granite colors being browns, grays, and golds. The second level would not have a balcony in this scenario but a wall of glass instead. There would be standard windows on both floors. The second floor here would function mainly as a quick snack shop where a student could purchase prepackaged food and drink like cold sandwiches and juices much like a snack corner. There would be minimal decorations on this floor but there would still be potted plants and trees in one corner of the room. There would also be cafe style tables and a couple of booths for seating.

After the presentation of each design scenario, the interviewee was to identify which features stood out to them as desirable or interesting, as well as those that they did not find to be useful in the purpose of this project.

There was a general consensus that most of the desirable features came from design scenario A. All of the interviewees preferred the balcony to the glass paneled wall. Four out of the five identified that they enjoyed the first floor layout of chairs and booths with a single couch/chair/coffee table configuration; the one interviewee who chose the layout of scenario B said that they prefer to study in rooms even if they are to be made out of transparent glass and they also liked the idea of a fireplace. The student-made art and pottery was a ringer in a interviews; having a place to submit pottery to and have it actually used was appealing to the art student of the group. Along with that, the students loved the idea of year-round greenery to look at, especially in the

harsh Minnesota winters. The trusses on the ceiling were a choice favorite for three of

the five students, one liked the way the exposed duct work looks in CAD, and the other

did not have a preference. All five students said that they would also enjoy having

another coffee shop on campus so that they have a choice to go to either the

Steensland shop or the Cage; one student said that the majority of their classes are in

Regents or Old Main and having to walk all the way back to Buntrock is not usually an

option due to their class schedule so another location was a convenience to them.

When asked about which scenario they thought would be more successful at

promoting inclusion and community, three of the five students chose scenario A

because they all essentially agreed that the function of the space, along with the options

and arrangements of seating would make it easier for congregating and conversing with

peers. The other two students liked elements of both but could not come to a solid

conclusion of how to promote inclusion.

Steensland's Design

After contemplating the research and the interviews that I had conducted, I made

a choice on how I would re-design Steensland Library for the purpose of promoting

inclusivity and building community. I believe that based upon the literature and the focus

group reactions, design scenario would be the most effective in achieving the goals set

out by this project. The characteristics that are explained in this scenario connect

directly to the research that was outlined in this examination both in their function and in

their design and aesthetics. While there is something to say about the fact that two of

the five interviewees were unable to make a connection between the designs of the

spaces and the ideas of inclusion and community, I also think that it could partly be due to the fact that we don't always know how to picture that kind of experience unless it is happening first hand and then reported about later. High-ceilings with wooden trusses also help tie in the space to the other buildings on campus, such as Stav Hall and the English department, so there would also be a sense of community over the entire campus and not just this newly designed building.

I believe that by reproducing design scenario A, that Steensland Library would be a place on campus that would not only promote inclusivity and community, but that it would also foster creativity and ideas for future projects such as this one.

Conclusion

This project has given me the tools and proper, applicable knowledge to make the attestments about the new design for Steensland Library. A fully functional, secondary coffee shop with the intimate feeling of community and congregation along with the potential to simultaneously allow for the ability to make studious strides and instill a sense of focus and space to learn. This design plan incorporates the necessary characteristics, outlined by the research literature, as well as the individualistic input of a group of St. Olaf College students to create a unique composition on the campus. Re-designing Steensland Library in this way would be a major improvement in the current campus culture and social climate and would hopefully help mend some of the broken bonds that have shaken the student body over my four years at St. Olaf.