

# \$30,000 grant to help immigrants and refugees succeed

Friday, October 18, 2002

ST. CLOUD, Minn. - The Otto Bremer Foundation has awarded more than \$30,000 to St. Cloud State University to implement a pilot project aimed at helping immigrant and refugee students succeed in higher education.

According to Julie Condon, coordinator of the English as a Second Language program at SCSU and co-director of the project, many immigrants and refugees settling in Central Minnesota find financial aid readily available based on their economic status and decide to enroll in higher education. "Unfortunately," said Condon, "due to a lack of academic and cultural preparation, many fail in the first semester and become ineligible for financial aid as a result."

When individuals lose financial aid due to poor academic performance, they may not re-apply until their GPA is above 2.00. "This creates a dilemma for many immigrants. They can't afford to raise their GPA to renew financial aid, essentially locking them out of higher education after their first semester," said John Grether, instructor of reading and study skills in SCSU's Academic Learning Center and co-director of the project.

The admissions process for international students differs from the process for immigrant or refugee students. International students who enroll at SCSU are tested on their ability to use English and then placed in English as a Second Language courses based on their test scores. In addition, international students receive instruction and other services intended to prepare them for American and academic cultural norms.

Immigrants and refugees — individuals who have come to the U.S. for purposes other than education — are not automatically identified as requiring language assessment and/or academic preparation services when they enroll. "Current grade and voluntary testing data indicate that these students (immigrants and refugees) are less prepared than their international peers to succeed in a college environment," noted Condon.

The pilot project will combine first-semester curriculum — existing courses tailored to meet the needs of this unique population — with support services to assess and develop college readiness in language proficiency, reading and writing skills, and basic technology. In addition participants in the project will learn about American academic norms, such as timeliness, attendance, and student-centered learning — norms that may differ from those of their home countries and thus offer substantial roadblocks to success.

"The university and the community need to be responsive to the needs of this population in order to facilitate the upward socioeconomic mobility of this motivated, determined, and able group," said Grether.

To identify potential participants for the project, Condon and Grether will work with local groups, such as the St. Cloud Area Somali Salvation Organization, and a variety of SCSU offices, like Multicultural Student Services, Records and Registration, Admissions, and Financial Aid. Approximately 20 individuals will be selected to participate, including new students as well as previous students who might benefit from a second chance at higher education. Individuals interested in participating should contact Condon at 654-5275.

Condon and Grether plan to share the results and outcomes of the project with the other 35 Minnesota State Colleges & Universities. "We hope the project will serve as a model for developing programs to serve the needs of immigrants and refugees throughout the state," said Condon.

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