



TIMES PHOTO
BY KIMM ANDERSON

As a class assignment that stemmed from work as a caretaker at Mississippi River County Park, St. Cloud State University political science major Stephanie Brown wrote a proposal to help provide manpower for Stearns County's Quarry Park and

Class assignment turns ideas into money

Two St. Cloud State University students write grant applications that help local groups obtain money for their causes

By Amy Becker
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A political science class at State Cloud State University teaches students to bridge the gap between foundations with money to give away and nonprofits scrambling for funding.

It's a skill that allowed students in Patricia Bodelson's administering public policy class to combine coursework with personal interests.

The students were asked to find, research and write a grant application during fall quarter. Matching a nonprofit's needs with a funding source can be tough. But two of Bodelson's students successfully wrote grants to help Washington Early Childhood Center and Quarry Park.

Dave Schroers, a senior in local and urban affairs, applied to School District 742 for a grant that brought \$5,000 in funding to the Washington Early Childhood Center. He is a building use facilitator for the school district.

Schroers said he was intimidated

when Bodelson gave the class the assignment.

"We actually had to go out and get the grant and write it," he said. "I wasn't sure I could do it."

He sought suggestions from people at the early childhood center and went to work.

The grant will allow the center to assess children without using letter grades. It provides a way to define their strengths and weaknesses in more depth, Schroers said.

Stephanie Brown's grant work grew from an issue that's important to her. Brown, a senior majoring in political science with a minor in biology, worked last summer as a caretaker at Mississippi River County Park. She found the park a great place for quiet contemplation.

When Brown received the assignment, she sought suggestions from the Stearns County Parks Department. Quarry Park, she found, could use a lot of help.

"It's a huge program that needs a lot of funding," Brown said. She sought a way to

save money on park development costs by using donated people power. She asked groups for volunteers to help clear trails.

"You can save about \$4,000 a mile (on trails) by getting the community involved," she said.

Brown's project is on hold temporarily while the parks department develops an information packet for potential sponsors.

She said she learned a great deal from the process.

"Public monies can be tapped if you take the right avenue," she said. "There are so many small details you aren't aware of. You just don't realize how much red tape is involved in procuring any kind of monies."

Writing grants is a tricky process, Bodelson said. About 50 percent of her students have been successful in their grant requests, with awards ranging in size from \$400 to \$5,000. But the knowledge can prove invaluable after college.

"It shows them where there's funding sources to accomplish goals they have in

other interest areas, so when they get out there they know where to find money, or try to find it," she said.

The university offers the grant-writing class every other year. In addition, some English classes include segments on grant writing.

Why is it important? Minnesota has 3,600 financially active charities, with more than 700 active organizations that give money to nonprofits.

"You can be very successful with nonprofits," said Jill Ciliberto, assistant vice president for research and faculty development. However, many people involved with nonprofits have to seek training to learn grant writing.

Learning the process in college gives students a leg up, Ciliberto said. On a resume it indicates research, writing, organization and teamwork skills. For the people who have it, it gives a measure of confidence.

"It's very much like, if you have learned good table manners at home, you have no fear eating anyplace," she said.