Encouraging active student learning

Thursday, December 19, 2002

Proposals by SCSU faculty members won three of the eight grants that were recently awarded by the "Learning That Lasts" grants program, which promotes active student learning.

The three grants, totaling nearly $15,000, were awarded by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL).

Richard Rothaus, Assistant Vice President for Research & Faculty Development and Associate Professor of History at SCSU, along with Assistant Professor Matt Julius, Biology, received $5,000 for their project, "Cultural and Environmental Landscapes Laboratory: A Community of Active Learning." The project brings faculty from different disciplines together to provide active learning opportunities in Mille Lacs Kathio State Park around the theme, "People change the land, and the land changes people."

According to Rothaus, experiential learning is essential to teaching in areas that deal with landscape studies such as archaeology, biology, geography, geology, and history. "Students must go outside, walk the land, touch the earth, examine the ecology, and look for the hand of humans in shaping these areas," said Rothaus. "This cannot be replicated in the traditional classroom."

Associate Professor Lakshmaiah Sreerama and Assistant Professor Mohammad Mahroof-Tahir, Chemistry, received $5,000 to make it possible for more students to work side-by-side with chemistry and biology faculty on original research projects. The students will help design experiment plans, prepare formal research papers, and present research findings.

Assistant Professor Michael Dvorak and Professor Jack McKenna, Chemistry, received $4,831 to incorporate computer controlled data acquisition into freshman-level general chemistry courses. The action will provide more opportunities for student control over experiment design, set-up, and execution.

According to Dvorak, many undergraduate students conduct experiments as they would follow cookbook recipes. "By increasing the efficiency of data collection, students will be able to design their own data collection approach and be able to perform multiple experiments in less time."