

## Faculty, staff receive funds to encourage active student learning

Thursday, June 17, 2004

ST. CLOUD, Minn. - St. Cloud State University faculty and staff recently received three grants for activities that promote active student learning: using alternatives to traditional chalkboard teaching methods, evaluating



student learning and the effectiveness of courses and programs, and providing undergraduate students with meaningful research experiences.

The grants, totaling nearly \$27,000, were awarded by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL).

Professor Lakshmaiah Sreerama and Assistant Professor Mohammad Mahroof-Tahir, chemistry, received \$12,800 to build upon a pilot program previously supported by the MnSCU CTL. The pair—along with 10 other faculty from chemistry, biology, and environmental and technological studies—will continue to encourage interdepartmental faculty-student collaborations on research projects. Students in the program help faculty design and conduct experiments, prepare formal research papers, and present research findings.

"Students who've participated in the past are excited and feel very proud of their accomplishments," said Sreerama. "Their learning via interdisciplinary research has left a long-lasting impression on their lives. In fact, several have changed their career paths and have decided to go to graduate school to further improve their research skills."

Assistant Professor Ming Chien Lo, Associate Professor Philip Grossman, and Professor Masoud Moghaddam, economics, received \$8,860 to replace traditional chalkboard teaching methods in economics statistics and forecasting courses with computer-based games and exercises that make learning more concrete and fun. In addition, the trio will host workshops and develop resources for other SCSU and MnSCU faculty who would like to incorporate active learning methods into their economics courses.

"Traditional statistics textbooks are based on a world full of mathematical objects that do not really exist, and students often have a hard time understanding these statistical concepts," said Lo. "In the 21st century, with the help of computer simulation, we can actually create concrete examples that illustrate the importance of these concepts."

Mary Soroko, director of information and planning, and Professor Brad Sleeper, college assessment director, both from the G.R. Herberger College of Business (HCOB), received \$5,000 to develop and implement a college-wide academic assessment program. The program will enable the HCOB—one of only four Minnesota institutions accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB)—to systematically gather data about student learning and evaluate the effectiveness of the college's courses.

"The process developed by the college will be on the cutting edge and should be of great interest to other AACSB-accredited schools struggling with the issue of assessment," said Soroko.

CTL grant programs are supported by funds from the MnSCU Office of the Chancellor and The Bush Foundation. Funded projects will take place during the 2004-05 academic year.

MnSCU consists of 32 state universities, community colleges, technical colleges and combined community and technical colleges located on 53 campuses across the state. The system serves approximately 235,000 students annually in credit-based courses and another 130,000 in non-credit courses.

A member of MnSCU, SCSU is the second largest public university in Minnesota, offering its 15,500 students 175 majors, minors and pre-professional programs in Business, Education, Fine Arts & Humanities, Science & Engineering, and Social Sciences and 50 master's degrees through its School of Graduate Studies.