

Grant will fund minority student mentoring

Thursday, September 20, 2007

St. Cloud State University will share in a \$2.45 million grant aimed at increasing the number of minority students earning bachelor's degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

By 2012, an alliance of Minnesota education institutions hopes to double the number of bachelor's degrees earned by students from Native American, Hispanic/Latino, African American and other under-represented communities.

"The foundation of the program is really mentorship," said Bruce Jacobson, associate professor of biology.

"St. Cloud State is famous for quietly doing great things," said Jacobson, who also is director of bioscience outreach. "This grant will give us a shot in the arm."

Jacobson cited St. Cloud State's summer Math-Science-Computer Camp as an example of a program that nurtures youngsters from historically under-represented communities. For 20 years the camps have delivered life-altering experiences to more than 2,500 young people. The camps are led by Robert Johnson, chair of the Ethnic Studies Department.

Mentoring is a critical component in St. Cloud State's efforts to recruit and retain minority students interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, according to Jacobson, who is site coordinator for the grant.

The grant will help the University support current students during crisis points such as holiday breaks, final exam time and summer – points at which students may lose faith in themselves and drop out, Jacobson said. The grant will also fund initiatives that create an expectation among minority youngsters that they can attend college, he said.

The National Science Foundation awarded the grant as part of its Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation program. Stokes, a retired attorney and former Ohio congressman, has long championed education issues, including increased minority participation in higher education.

Assisting Jacobson is an advisory committee that includes Shahzad Ahmad, director the multicultural student services; Oladele Gazal, biology professor; Andrew Ditlevson, associate director of Career Services; Mahmoud Saffari, associate vice president of enrollment management; and David DeGroot, dean of the College of Science and Engineering.

Jacobson said that many more faculty and staff members help pursue the goals of the grant.

The other alliance members are the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (lead institution); University of Minnesota-Duluth; University of Minnesota-Morris; Augsburg College; Carleton College; Gustavus Adolphus College; Macalester College; St. Olaf College; Metropolitan State University; Minnesota State University, Mankato; Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College; Anoka-Ramsey Community College; Century College; Minneapolis Community and Technical College; North Hennepin Community College; Science Museum of Minnesota; and the Minnesota High Tech Association.