

SCSU
 faculty
 mentors
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 the
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 excellence

Ask students past and present to identify what's best about a St. Cloud State education and, more often than not, the answer is faculty -- those special instructors who through teaching, mentoring and caring have influenced lives and careers. The individuals profiled on these pages represent the hundreds among faculty and faculty emeriti who not only have helped raise the quality of a St. Cloud State University education academically, they have experienced the rewards of being "in it for the students."

Robin Hasslen

Robin Hasslen didn't get the nickname "Mother" by coddling her students. She got it by remembering they are worthy of her respect and her investment.

Hasslen interacts with her students the way she would want teachers and mentors to interact with her own daughter.

"My philosophy is really very simple," she said. "I try to view every student as unique. Everyone who takes my class is someone's child. Each comes with a life outside the classroom and with something to contribute."

In a way, this associate professor of Child and Family Studies is teaching by example. Hasslen's most popular course, "Children in a Changing World," is about recognizing the impact that culture and values have on individuals as they grow, and how that impact doesn't have to be irreversible."

She speaks from experience. Reared in the South and educated in segregated schools, Hasslen had her own cultural influences to sort out, just as her students examine their own. At the end, she asks what they've learned and how it will change their actions.

"Her course, 'Children in a Changing World,' literally changes students lives," said Joane McKay, Dean of the College of Education. Hasslen's personal influence also is considerable, since she gives so much of herself to the students who seek a mentoring relationship with her.

Be Vang is a good example of a student who reached out to Hasslen and has not been disappointed.

"I met Robin through a class, and then found out she was in a mentoring program through Minority Student Programs," Vang

Story by Marsha Shoemaker

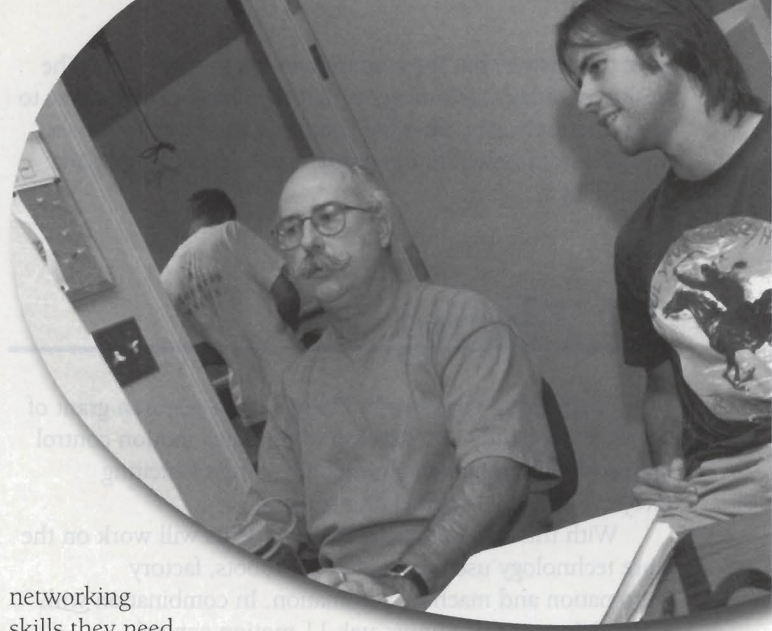
Photos by Jim Altobell
 and Neil Andersen

said. "I said I want Robin to be my mentor."

Vang is a fourth-year elementary education major married to Phia Pha, a fourth-year Business Computer Information Systems major. Be and Phia are both of Hmong heritage. She came to St. Cloud State from California; he from St. Paul. As is common in their culture, theirs is an arranged marriage, and their two small children live during the academic year with their grandparents.

Because of her awareness of the cultural influences on Be and Phia, Hasslen can relate as a mentor to Be. "She's helped me in a number of ways," Be said. "She's just a wonderful person."

Graduate student Ray Shorter agrees with Be's assessment of Hasslen's value as a mentor. "She stands out because she's always the one who's checking on you, how you are doing and what can be done to help," he said. "She's willing to invest to help facilitate that growth -- short-term and long-term. That's that motherly type of comfort and support, and I use mother in the most powerful sense of the word."



networking skills they need to succeed after graduation.

"He's concerned about what's happening in the field," said senior Scott Marlin, who is a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) intern at Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District. "One of the reasons the department is growing is Bob," said Marlin, who moved to St. Cloud from Texas after being directed to SCSU's top-rated GIS program.

"It's my philosophy that it isn't enough to teach from the book," Bixby said. "You have to practice."

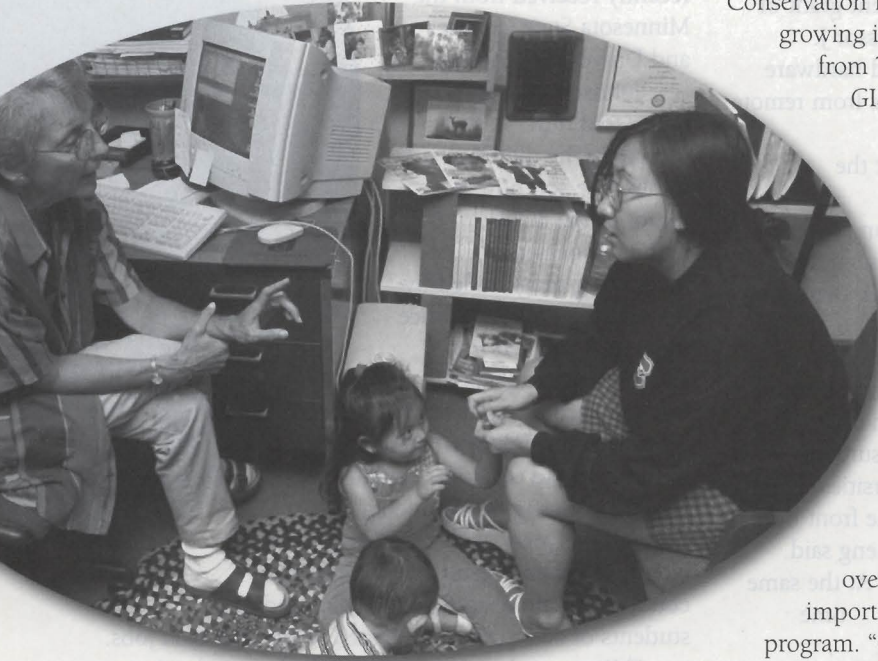
Marlin said he felt well prepared for his internship because of the hands-on education he's received. In the Spatial Analysis Research Center, students work on externally funded projects. They do computer mapping for such clients as Camp Ripley, Minnesota's U.S. Army training facility, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and county and local governments.

Contracts for such projects bring in overhead for the university. They also bring an important experiential learning component to the program. "Often when I have local government contracts I will incorporate the content into a class," Bixby said.

This past summer, GIS graduate research assistants worked on projects such as a planning/projection study for the Indianhead Council of the Boy Scouts of America, a Greenway Study for Washington County and an EcoSystems Recovery project for the Minnesota Land Trust.

Despite their excellent training, student interns and graduates sometimes encounter problems, and Bixby is "always a phone call away," Marlin said. "If he doesn't have the answer, he works through it or finds someone who can."

But according to Bixby, he doesn't always solve problems as quickly as he could. "In a lot of these situations, I could



Bob Bixby

Schwendenan's *Directory of College Geography* lists St. Cloud State as the nation's fifth largest department of geography by number of undergraduate degrees awarded. Part of the reason for the popularity of the department is faculty like Bob Bixby. This is true, in part, because Bob and his fellow faculty give students the problem solving and

give the answer, but the student wouldn't learn much. The reality of today's technology is that they have to learn how to do it themselves because the solutions will be different six months from now. "It's the problem-solving skills that are important."

Yi Zheng

Engineering Professor Yi Zheng's latest research grant of \$182,300 to study and develop Minnesota's motion control industry will provide one more in a string of exciting projects for SCSU engineering students.

With this latest grant, Zheng's students will work on the core technology used to implement robots, factory automation and machine automation. In combination with Tech80 Inc, one of Minnesota's 11 motion control companies, Zheng's new project will not only help boost high-tech industry in the region, it will be one more way to provide practical and unique learning opportunities for future engineers.

Senior Lloyd Dalton is one of 12 students working on a distance learning project fueled by another recent grant of \$226,848 This project, led by Zheng and Professor J. Michael Heneghan, has developed software and hardware that will allow students to conduct experiments from remote sites over the World Wide Web.

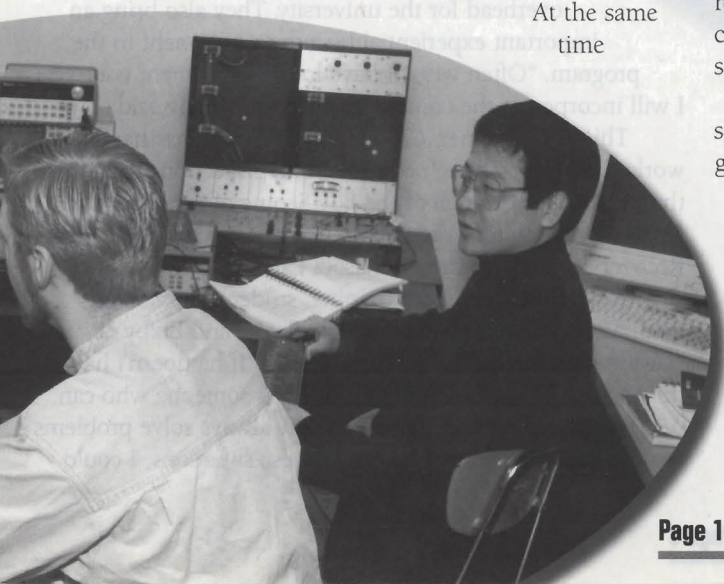
Dalton did a presentation on the project at the Electronic Academy Conference in June.

"We were one of the few groups that had an actual working solution for some of the problems presented by distance learning," he said. "As far as we can tell, there was nobody else who was doing this in the nation."

In addition, Zheng, along with two Mayo Clinic physicians, has been involved in groundbreaking ultrasound research that decreases the need for biopsies on breast lesions -- decreasing the need for unnecessary surgery.

"Research opportunities are vital for universities. I feel this is a way to keep my research activity on the front but teach too," Zheng said.

At the same time



Dalton and other engineering students benefit immeasurably. "It's been excellent, kind of like an internship," he said of his work on the distance learning project. "But even in an internship, you don't always get a chance to do groundbreaking research."

Robert C. Johnson

Minority Studies Professor Robert C. Johnson is justifiably proud of how his summer Math-Science-Computer camps for elementary and middle school students of color and girls have exposed those underrepresented groups to exciting learning experiences, as well as what St. Cloud State has to offer. But a recent encounter with the father of a boy who attended one of Johnson's camps in 1989 dramatizes the need for the \$175,000 grant he recently received from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System.

Johnson said the father told him something he didn't know: The son now is a junior in the SCSU Arthur Andersen accounting program led by Accounting Professor Bruce Busta and targeted to encouraging students of color into the accounting field. With his new grant, Johnson intends to find ways to track and retain positive contacts with students through the years, with recruitment and retention the end results. St. Cloud State could attract more students of color and more students of color can be educated to fill high-tech jobs.

"Minnesota has an abysmal record of graduating students of color from high school and worse yet in graduating them with degrees in science and technical fields in higher ed," Johnson said. "So if we can start at an early age introducing them to these subjects, we will give them and their families some hope that there is opportunity in these fields."

"There's a big gap between our needs and what we have. By capitalizing on the interest students have while they're young and building on it over their developing years, young minority Minnesotans can fill those jobs."

