

# SCSU touts social responsibility

Master's program lets students gain skills in business, nonprofit sectors

By Amy Becker  
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A new master's program at St. Cloud State University is working to replace "me" with "we" in the vocabulary of the community.

The social responsibility degree combines aspects of sociology, human relations, women's studies and American studies on global and local levels.

The 48-credit program was approved recently, allowing about 40 graduate students to transfer their special studies coursework into the social responsibility degree. It uses existing staff.

The degree is thought to be unique, said John Alessio, a sociology professor who has worked for a decade to get the program approved. Some universities offer a similar set of courses under a social justice label, but social responsibility is meant to be broader in scope.

"It puts us on the map as being at the forefront of programs like this," he said.

It also opens a door for traditional and nontraditional students to gain skills aimed at both business and nonprofit sectors.

"I think it's one of those programs that can make a difference," said Dennis Nunes, dean of graduate studies. "I'm assuming a number of the graduates will work in nonprofit areas."

John Hamerlinck, who recently graduated with the special studies/social responsibility



TIMES PHOTO BY JASON WACHTER

**John Hamerlinck was one of the students at St. Cloud State University called social responsibility in a recently approved master's program.**

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degree, is looking forward to starting his job for the Minnesota Office of Technology in a few weeks. He will try to pair communities with appropriate technological resources.

Hamerlinck said he didn't want to work in the for-profit sector.

"I think the nonprofit sector is going to change dramatically," he said. "There's a limitless number of potential jobs out there."

The idea of social responsibility is also important to the for-profit sector, he added.

"No matter what you do for a

living, no matter who you are, you're not just a component of the economy," Hamerlinck said. "You're still a citizen. You're still a part of a community."

"We're really hoping the private sector will recognize a need to have people with this background to help guide their decisions," Alessio said.

Karen Barcus is hoping for the same thing. A Realtor living in Inver Grove Heights, Barcus commutes to St. Cloud for her master's program in social responsibility. She plans to continue working in real estate.

"It's my responsibility to make all the agents aware of all the laws," she said. Many fair housing laws address protection for

certain classes of people.

"The further I get in this master's program, the more I realize all these things are interrelated," said Barcus, who has one year of study left for her degree. "It makes me a more well-rounded professional."

She hopes to expand that role to include diversity training and classroom teaching on fair housing, she said.

"I certainly see a trend in business toward social responsibility," she said.

Alessio agreed.

"We're seeing institutions hire people who are experts in diversity. That's a person coming out of this program," he said.