

SCSU wins three grants to encourage active student learning

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ST. CLOUD, Minn. - Proposals by St. Cloud State University 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, which totaled 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.

"Interdisciplinary research has been the path to success of most important discoveries and innovations, such as the human genome project and building of the international space station," said Sreerama. "Incorporating interdisciplinary research concepts into our curriculum will go a long way toward emphasizing its importance for our students."

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. "In reality, scientists spend large amounts of time simply determining or discovering the best way to take a particular measurement. Unfortunately, many undergraduate science majors never realize this truth until they enter graduate school or industry," said Dvorak. "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."

CTL grants programs, designed to improve student learning through enhanced teaching effectiveness, are supported by funds from MnSCU and the Bush Foundation.

The MnSCU System consists of 34 state universities, community colleges, technical colleges, and comprehensive community and technical colleges in 46 Minnesota communities. The system serves about 225,000 students per year in credit-based courses and an additional 95,000 students in non-credit courses.

A member of MnSCU, SCSU is the second largest public university in Minnesota with about 16,000 students and 175 majors, minors and pre-professional programs in Business, Education, Fine Arts & Humanities, Science & Engineering, and Social Sciences. The university is located 70 miles northwest of the Twin Cities along the oak-crowned banks of the Mississippi River.