

Women's Center wins grant to reduce gender violence

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

The St. Cloud State University Women's Center has received a \$300,000 grant from the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice, to enhance its campus-based Gender Violence Prevention Program. The project is designed to help reduce sexual assaults, domestic/dating violence and stalking on campus and in the community, to strengthen victim services, and to increase apprehension, investigation and adjudication of cases of gender violence on and off campus.

To achieve the goals of the three-year project, the Women's Center will collaborate with its partners, Anna Marie's Battered Women's Shelter, the Central Minnesota Sexual Assault Center, the St. Cloud Police Department, the office of the Stearns County Attorney and the Stearns County Family Violence/Sexual Assault Council.

Last year, the SCSU Women's Center documented 400 individual contacts related to sexual assault, sexual harassment or dating/domestic violence.

While the number of SCSU students who report their sexual assault cases to police has gone from 29 percent to 66 percent during the last four years, the number of cases charged for prosecution has not increased. Stalking, in particular, is believed to be under-reported and under-adjudicated: the National Sexual Victimization of College Women survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2000 found that 83 percent of students who are stalked did not report it to campus security or law enforcement, and the SCSU Women's Center has found that stalking cases on campus and in the community are often prosecuted as harassment with lesser penalties.

The Women's Center initiative will include development of a peer education program for men, a procedure for responding to relationship violence and stalking crimes, an enhanced educational program for new students, enhanced victim services with more accessible information, a coordinated community response to stalking and a five-year plan for increased prosecution of sexual assault cases. The Center also will expand the impact of SCSU efforts by sharing results with the 31 other colleges and universities in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

SCSU has for many years required participation in a "respect and responsibility" program that addresses sexual violence. The grant project will allow for purchase of an online program that can track student participation, test their understanding of the material, and track their feedback.

Lee LaDue, coordinator of the gender violence prevention program and assistant director of the Women's Center since 1992, will lead the initiative.

The SCSU Women's Center offers advocacy and support services, a specialized resource library, information and referral, a sexual assault prevention program, and educational programming that examines issues related to gender, sexism and feminism.