

SCSU TACKLES TOXOPLASMA GONDII

Students get real-world lab experience in project



Times photo by Kimm Anderson, kanderson@stcloudtimes.com

St. Cloud State University student Mathew Routh, a fifth-year senior biomedical science major, pours an agar solution into petri dishes Thursday to prepare them for use in the toxoplasma gondii research project. The solution is a growth medium that provides food for the single-celled parasite.

Parasite infects 20% of U.S. population, can cause birth defects, encephalitis

By Michelle Tan
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A local research project could one day help keep pregnant women, organ transplant recipients and people with poor immune systems healthy.

The St. Cloud State University project studies toxoplasma gondii, a single-celled parasite that lives in human beings and animals.

The project is led by assistant professor Christopher Kvaal and is supported by a three-year, \$162,500 Academic Research Enhancement

Award from the National Institutes of Health.

Toxoplasma infects one in five people in the United States — and about one in three people worldwide — and remains inside the body permanently. It rarely affects healthy people, but it poses a significant threat to unborn babies and people with suppressed immune systems.

The research gives undergraduate students valuable research experience and advances years of toxoplasma research, bringing scientists a little



Christopher Kvaal
Leads the SCSU research project

know it," Kvaal said.

Serious infection

The most common ways to be infected by the organism are by eating undercooked meat and touching cat feces, even the trace amounts con-

bit closer to finding a cure.

"It can hit home because one in five people you talk to is infected but doesn't

tained in dust from a litter box.

Most people don't realize they've been infected because healthy people experience few, if any, symptoms, Kvaal said.

"Cysts form in your brain, eyes and muscle tissue, but you won't even know that's happening," he said.

Toxoplasma presents serious health issues for pregnant women, people with AIDS and patients receiving chemotherapy or organ transplants.

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