

Professor Michele Hluchy gets \$713,803 grant from NSF

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Dr. Michele Hluchy, professor of geology and environmental studies, has been awarded a \$713,803 grant from the National Science Foundation. The grant, which came from the NSF's Division of Undergraduate Education, will be used over the next five years to organize and present 20 national and regional workshops for college-level faculty from across the nation. Hluchy and her co-principal investigator, Dr. James Haynes, professor of biological sciences at SUNY Brockport, will be presenting strategies and techniques to develop interdisciplinary courses that use environmental problem-solving to teach undergraduates in environmental studies programs and related disciplines such as geology, biology, and chemistry. During the 20 workshops, Hluchy and Haynes will also help undergraduate faculty put similar programs in place -- and figure out how to finance them -- at their home colleges and universities. They'll also be working with professional evaluators to devise and establish evaluation protocols, to be used for two purposes: first, to measure how effective their workshops are, and second and more important, to determine how effective the new teaching strategies are at the participants' home schools. "The NSF program director hopes our evaluation protocols will be able to be used for other projects of this kind funded by NSF," Hluchy commented. Several years ago, Hluchy and colleagues at AU (Dr. Gordon Godshalk and Dr. James F. Booker) began teaching their students how to analyze the environmental impacts of proposed actions. "At that time, the University was investigating the feasibility of encouraging fraternities to move to Pine Hill," she said. "So as a classroom strategy, a whole class wrote an environmental impact statement (EIS), which analyzed the potential impact of that plan." The project seemed an ideal way to teach students that a building proposal has many effects, not just one, and that the environmental effects are interrelated, she said. "The class presented the EIS to University administrators. We went through the whole process -- collected and analyzed data, held public hearings, submitted drafts for public comment, etc.," she said. Since the EIS process typically uses paid consultants, the three AU faculty members teaching the course acted in that role. The NSF grant is not a research grant but a teaching grant, although for Hluchy, the development and implementation of innovative teaching methods is one of her areas of research. "One of my interests is research about science education at the college level," she said. She has published papers on that topic. Her research has focused on students' design and implementation of experiments as a way to learn, an approach known as "participatory learning" or "hands-on learning." The workshops for college faculty will be held in all regions of the country. In the summer of 2001, there will be one in Maine, one in Alabama, one in North Carolina, and one at the national meeting of the Geological Society of America. The workshop schedule for 2002-2005 hasn't yet been set, except that each year, one workshop will be held at the national Society meeting.####