



Coleman

Vos

Nayenga

By Earl H. Potter III, St. Cloud State University

Last month The Associated Press released the results of its international search for answers to a question of utmost importance to college graduates: What are today's pickier-than-ever employers looking for in potential hires? After talking with corporate recruiters, economists, college career counselors and students, the AP reported that "soft skills" separate a good college graduate from an exceptional one — "those who can work well in teams, write and speak with clarity, adapt quickly to changes in technology and business conditions and interact with colleagues from different countries and cultures.

"This report affirms St. Cloud State University's mission — to prepare our students for life, work and citizenship in the 21st century.

We are committed to offering students every opportunity to develop the skills needed to succeed through experiences and appreciation for active and applied learning, community engagement, sustainability, and global and cultural understanding.

These experiences happen in classrooms, in campus life, in community involvement and a range of activities that transform students into the well-rounded team players, problem-solvers and critical thinkers employers want. Most of all, these life lessons happen because of faculty and staff, teachers and mentors who lead by example and leave their unique footprints on the campus and the lives of students.

Without doubt the foremost component in St. Cloud State's ability to achieve our mission is the people whose knowledge, talent and dedication to teaching, mentoring and service make an extraordinary education possible.

In 144 years nearly 130,000 graduates have moved on from St. Cloud State with memories of special faculty and staff who breathed life and passion into their educational experience.

Some of those role models are "home-grown" graduates who make their career influencing future generations of alumni with their special brand of leadership. One such mentor is retiring Atwood Memorial Center Director Margaret Vos, whose energy, warmth and style invested during her 27-year St. Cloud State career will continue to reverberate in the walls of Atwood and the careers of the many students who followed in her footsteps at colleges and universities nationwide.

Another example is Peter Nayenga, who came to St. Cloud State's history department in 1978, fresh from a year as an international Fulbright scholar at the University of North Florida/Florida Junior College. His scholarly journey had been one of overcoming barriers, especially in his native Uganda, where Idi Amin's oppressive policies threatened safety and freedom.

This fall Nayenga will begin winding down his exceptional 36-year career as a teacher, leader and innovator. He arrived on a campus with only a few persons of color and went about creating and sustaining an African Studies program, helping to launch the South Africa study-abroad partnerships and chairing the History Department.

Through decades of social evolution and change, Nayenga has met the challenges of teaching African history to students from very different cultural backgrounds with grace, determination and effectiveness. Like so many other exceptional faculty and staff who have left their mark on our St. Cloud State heritage, he influenced the course of countless students' lives, including St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis.

As we say goodbye each year to those who leave their unique stamp on our campus, we welcome new faculty and staff with fresh bodies of knowledge and perspectives.

One notable example is Monique Coleman, our first Veterans Resource Center Director who brings several years of experience in veterans' advocacy, mentoring and resource building to this significant new position. St. Cloud State's student veteran and active military population has grown to more than 700, and with Coleman's leadership we look forward to better serving their needs.

The demographics of our campus community have changed dramatically since 1869, when we opened our Normal School in a city of 2,000 with a principal and five teachers. In years since, thousands of influential faculty and staff have modeled and taught the "soft skills" that serve graduates well in any generation.

This is the opinion of Earl H. Potter III, president of St. Cloud State University. To A Higher Degree is published the fourth Sunday of the month and rotates among the presidents of the four largest Central Minnesota higher education institutions.