Alden gets contract extension

By Joe Walljasper

The University of Missouri announced yesterday that Athletic Director Mike Alden has received a five-year extension that will keep him under contract until 2017.

"It’s very few and far between that you can do what you want to do exactly where you want to do it," Alden said today. "For us, this is what we want to do and where we want to be. That’s pretty special."

Alden’s guaranteed salary will remain at $537,375. Future raises in base salary are limited to the same percentage raises allotted to other MU employees. But he can earn incentives based on the success of the football, men’s basketball and women’s basketball teams, as well as the academic and financial success of the department.

Alden, who is entering his 12th year at Missouri, will receive one month’s salary if the football team appears in a non-BCS bowl game, two-month’s salary if the Tigers win a conference title or make a BCS bowl and $60,000 if they win a national title.

He will receive $15,000 if the men’s basketball team makes the NCAA Tournament, plus $15,000 if the Tigers make the Elite Eight, two-month’s salary if they make the Final Four and $60,000 if they win the national title. He gets $2,500 if the women’s basketball team advances to the NCAA Tournament and one-month’s salary if the Tigers make the Final Four.

The incentive benchmarks for the academic and financial success of the department are not specified in the contract. It states that those goals will be agreed upon by Chancellor Brady Deaton and Alden annually. Alden would receive an extra two-month’s salary for meeting academic goals and three-month’s salary for financial goals. That money would be placed in an "incentive and retention account" which he could access if he remains at MU through June 30, 2014.

"If you left Mizzou and went somewhere else in the next four or five years, there’s the potential you would leave a heck of a lot of money on the table," Alden said. "So that incentive base was their way of saying, ‘We want you to stay here.’ It really kind of ties you here, but that’s fine. This is where we want to be."

MU’s athletic department recently completed one of the best — if not the best — year in school history. The football team won 10 games and a Big 12 North Division title, the men’s basketball team won the Big 12 Tournament and advanced to the NCAA Tournament’s Elite Eight and the soccer and softball teams both won Big 12 Tournament titles. Also, Missouri continued to lead the conference in the Academic Progress Rate.

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Missouri and Kansas health officials approve of new federal guidelines on swine flu

By MARK WIEBE  Posted on Fri, Aug. 07, 2009

With another school year approaching, area health and education officials welcomed new federal guidelines designed to stem the spread of the H1N1 virus.

The Kansas and Missouri health departments said the guidelines, released Friday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, offered a sensible approach.

"I think that the COC guidance is a good balance between the goal of reducing the number of people infected with H1N1 with the goal of minimizing the disruption that occurs to children’s learning," said Margaret Donnelly, director of the Missouri Department of Health and Human Services.

Among other things, the government said schools should close only if large numbers of students had swine flu. Parents could allow their sick kids to return 24 hours after a fever is gone without the aid of medication.

The decision on closing rests with local school officials, who have been looking to the federal government for advice about the new flu strain that has caused a global epidemic.

The advice on sick kids returning is a change from previous recommendations that people with swine flu stay home for a week.

Although the new standard places less of a burden on single parents and dual-income families, it remains a burden. As much as most educators said they welcomed the guidelines, some expressed concern.

Many families in the Kansas City, Kan., School District don't have the freedom to take off work for long periods, said David A. Smith, assistant to the superintendent for communications.

"If they're going to get paid, they have to go to work," Smith said. "That puts them in such a bind. We worry on behalf of our families because of that."

One parent in the district said schools should keep their focus on education and encouraged parents to keep sick children home.

"I hear people say I can't afford to be off work," said Maurice Gray, whose 12- and 14-year-old children attend school in Kansas City, Kan.

"The parent should be the first line of defense to make sure the education system remains functional. . . . If you see your child is ill, then you should make arrangements for your child to stay home."

Another challenge: following the guideline to isolate students or employees who show flu symptoms at school.

"Our buildings aren't easily equipped to isolate students," said Cindy Galemore, director of health services for the Olathe School District.

That said, Galemore thinks schools need expert guidance from the CDC.

"If we try to figure this out ourselves, or if we have one school district doing something and another school district doing another," she said, "that creates confusion."

Colleges also are planning for a resurgence of the virus. Several University of Missouri departments met this week to discuss a plan to address the potential spread of the H1N1 virus. The University of Kansas and Kansas State University will use the campus electronic alert system to update students, faculty and staff on any outbreak.
"We anticipate it, so we are preparing for it," said Todd Cohen of KU. "We will do what we do best — educate."

Although Kansas and Missouri officials were not aware of any schools that closed last spring because of the flu, nationwide more than 700 schools temporarily closed.

Although this particular flu virus is new, the matter of school closings is not. Every winter, regular flu outbreaks prompt a small number of schools to close for a few days because of high absenteeism.

But unlike regular flu, this virus has not retreated this summer and so far has infected more than 1 million Americans.

To see the new federal guidelines, go to KansasCity.com.
The Star’s Mará Rose Williams and The Associated Press contributed to this report. To reach Mark Wiebe, call 816-234-7745 or send e-mail to mwiebe@kcstar.com.

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Federal grant helps create MU math and life sciences program

By Jenn Ballard
August 10, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A $2 million grant will help MU create a program that integrates mathematics and life sciences in order to build a learning community around their intersection.

In July, MU was awarded the grant, funded by the Proactive Recruitment in Introductory Science and Mathematics through the National Science Foundation. The grant, one of four given to universities nationwide, will create the Mathematics in Life Sciences Scholarship Program.

"A key element of the program is to create a learning community," said George Smith, professor of biological science and part of the team of investigators that applied for the grant.

The MLS program, organized by a dozen MU faculty members, will give incoming freshmen interested in math and life sciences financial aid, a weekly seminar and research internships, said Frank Schmidt, a biochemistry professor and another co-principal investigator.

"People have been talking about the interaction of biology and math for years," Schmidt said. "I think everyone agrees this is a big need."

The grant will provide funding for five years and primarily focus on easing students' financial burdens throughout their undergraduate education, said Jeni Hart, assistant professor in educational leadership and policy analysis. Hart will monitor the program's overall progress.

Committee members, led by principal investigator and math professor Dix Pettey, come from the fields of mathematics, biological sciences, chemistry, biochemistry, education and English.

"Faculty between different disciplines will actually be talking to each other," said Rainer Glaser, a co-principal investigator and chemistry professor. "I know it sounds trivial, but it does not happen anymore as much as it should."
E-mail recruitment for students has been under way since late July and continues through Aug. 15, Hart said.

"The overall goal of NSF is to recruit students who would not normally consider this type of education," Smith said.

This fall, the 20 freshmen who make the cut will participate in weekly, one-hour seminars worth one credit. The seminars will be in three modules: biology, chemistry and mathematics. A fourth module, in English, will be added in the spring, Glaser said.

"We are focusing on getting people to broaden their horizons," he said.

The program was designed to begin in the fall of 2010, but the committee was told it had to start a year earlier. Next year, selected freshmen will be organized into a freshmen interest group; the original students will take a second year of seminars, Schmidt said.

Smith said the MLS faculty will continue to interact with the students informally after their sophomore year.

"We will provide support when needed," Hart said.

MU was one of 62 applicants for the grant. Two of the other recipients are the University of California-Irvine and Northeastern University. The last school has yet to be announced, said Henry Warchall, the program director in applied mathematics of the NSF.

An annual report of the program's progress will be submitted to the NSF based on quantitative and qualitative research, and adjustments to the program will be made where necessary, Hart said.

"We will have a benchmark to make sure we are making a difference in interdisciplinary work," Hart said.
Nixon presses insurers on autism coverage

Friday, August 7, 2009

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon wants to require insurance companies to pay for as much as $55,000 worth of behavioral treatment services annually for autistic children.

Nixon said yesterday that coverage of the costly behavioral treatments should be an essential element of legislation that both the Democratic governor and Republican legislative leaders have pledged to make a priority next year.

Nixon’s proposal is similar to a bill passed earlier this year by the Senate that never came to a vote in the House. Insurance industry lobbyists had warned that mandating of coverage of childhood autism would cause premiums to rise for other policyholders.

At issue is what’s known as “applied behavioral analysis,” which some parents say produces dramatic improvements in their autistic children but which can cost upward of $50,000 a year. Such services are not now covered by Missouri insurers.

Fourteen states have laws mandating insurance coverage of “medically necessary, evidence-based autism therapies” such behavioral analysis services, according to advocacy group Autism Speaks.

At Nixon’s side as he announced his plan yesterday were Myles and Lora Hinkel and their 6-year-old son, Blake, who provided an example of the challenges of raising autistic children by attempting to rip a seal off the lectern during Nixon’s news conference. Unable to speak until age 3, Blake now can talk in several-word sentences and read short words as a result of behavioral treatment services, Myles Hinkel said.

A local social services agency has helped the Hinkels pay for Blake’s treatment. But that aid runs out next year, the father said, and the family is hoping for a state insurance mandate.

State Department of Insurance Director John Huff said the proposals backed by Nixon and the Senate would be affordable for consumers.

Nationally, about 1 in 150 children are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, and Nixon said more than 30,000 people could have autism in Missouri.

An actuarial analysis conducted for Autism Speaks of a previous Missouri legislative proposal, which included a $72,000 annual benefit cap for autistic people younger than 21, estimated that an insurance mandate would result in a less than 1 percent increase in the cost of health
insurance premiums. For an average group health insurance premium of $3,573 a person, that would equal a $27.10 increase, the study said.

But industry group America’s Health Insurance Plans has warned of premium increases of greater than 3 percent, which it estimates would make health insurance unaffordable for thousands of people.

Nixon said he’s not interested in compromising on four key elements. He said the bill must cover both the diagnosis and treatment of childhood autism, provide between $35,000 and $55,000 annually of behavioral services, cannot cap the number of treatment visits, and must bar insurers from terminating coverage solely because of an autism diagnosis.

Since the General Assembly adjourned in May, Nixon has repeatedly criticized both the insurance industry and Republican House leaders for not voting on the Senate’s autism legislation.

But House Speaker Ron Richard, R-Joplin, said Nixon has not talked to him about the details he wants included in an autism bill. Richard has created an interim committee to craft autism insurance legislation and pledged it will be one of the first bills debated when lawmakers return in January.

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Electronic books lack the feel — and the feelings — of paper

By LEWIS W. DIUGUID
The Kansas City Star

Trends in education sometimes have great, long-term benefits, and I applaud them.

But other times news of the latest goings-on just make me scratch my head and wonder what the result of decisions made today might be 30 years from now. E-textbooks fit into that category.

Some colleges such as Northwest Missouri State University are attracting a lot of attention and praise for the innovative switch from old-style textbooks to enabling students to carry a lightweight electronic device that can fit in a coat pocket and hold textbook material for all of their college courses. The material also can be downloaded onto students’ laptops.

It is cheaper. The average college student spends $700 a year on textbooks, said Charles Schmidt, director of public relations with the National Association of College Stores.

Chasing down the right books at college bookstores is a pain, particularly if the store is out of the books a student needs. I struggled with that when I was a college student and when I tried to help both of my daughters years ago when each was a freshman on different campuses.

Electronic textbooks eliminate that problem. They also offer students search functions so they can quickly find information on the pages and take notes in on-screen posted notes.

Schmidt said that only 3 percent or less of today’s college students choose the digital textbook option, although that segment of the market is growing rapidly.

It makes sense to offer e-textbooks. Today’s college students are the most computer savvy generation ever.

But I am still committed to the printed pages of traditional books. When I graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1977 I kept many of my textbooks from history, sociology, literature, economics, science, journalism, religion and photojournalism courses.

I have used those books as references over the years, drawing on notes I’d made ages ago to jog my memory. The books and my notes in them offer an intellectual capital that continues to pay great dividends.

In the decades since college, I have acquired many more books with more notes, which I refer to frequently to support opinions and for presentations to groups that ask me to speak. My library reinforces for me that each of us is greater than the sum of the books we’ve read and our ability to find, recall and use the content that the texts contain.

Books fill two nearly 7-foot-tall, 5-foot-wide bookcases in my loft apartment. When my daughters left for college, they took some of my books for their use.

When each graduated, I got to add some of their castoff college books to my own collection. Sharing is another beauty of owning textbooks.

I worry whether electronic textbooks will be as enduring and create as many opportunities to share. My doubt comes partly because of the ever-changing digital technology.
I first bought a computer in 1992. It was to enable my daughters — each then in grade school — to have the advantage of growing up wired into high technology. I also got them an encyclopedia.

A few years later I got the computer hooked up to the Internet, enabling the girls to be on the bountiful side of the digital divide. But as technology changed, that computer quickly became as obsolete as the old encyclopedia.

New computers seemed worthless after three to five years as programs kept changing. Hard drive crashes also wiped clean a lot of stuff that had been stored.

I worry that e-textbooks on computers might suffer similarly tragic fates if age traps the content of a book in a laptop or desktop, or programs or hard drives in computers fail, wiping out the intellectual capital more swiftly than wealth got zapped from people’s 401(k) retirement accounts in 2008.

That would be disastrous. It’s good that traditional textbooks haven’t died. They’ll never follow the path of eight-track tapes and Beta cassettes. If they do the intellectual capital of our nation would never be the same.

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Tribune, J-School launch Web directory

By Justin Willett  Friday, August 7, 2009

Boone County businesses have a new home on the Web.

EverythingMidMo.com, an online business directory launched by the Tribune in partnership with the University of Missouri School of Journalism, includes a free basic listing for every business in the county, Tribune Associate Publisher Vicki Russell said.

The site was launched in mid-March, and over the past few months three full-time Tribune staffers have been helping businesses check and update their entries, which include business hours, a photo and a map. This week, the Tribune began promoting EverythingMidMo.com to consumers, who can use it to locate and research businesses.

“We have been working on upgrading business information and making it as complete as possible,” Russell said. “Now, we’re working on our consumer awareness program. We are also continuing to add business information.”

Russell said businesses can purchase an expanded listing — which can include more photos, video, coupons, menus and other features — for a “nominal monthly charge.” Business owners can access and change their information whenever they like. For instance, if their hours change during the holidays, they can log into the Web site and make adjustments.

Russell said that for businesses that don’t already have a Web site, EverythingMidMo.com can serve as their home on the Web. For those businesses that do have Web sites, it can drive traffic to their sites.

The journalism school shared the cost of leasing the software, which is called Ellington Marketplace and was developed by Mediaphormedia, the interactive and software division of Lawrence, Kan.-based The World Co., the publisher of the Lawrence Journal-World newspaper.

The goal of the partnership is two-pronged: to create a new revenue stream for the newspaper and to serve as a research tool for journalism education.

Many media companies have created similar directory sites in recent years as a way to generate revenue from the Web, which has changed the traditional advertising paradigm.

Locally, JW Broadcasting, parent company of KMIZ-TV, operates 360Columbia.com, which includes information about businesses and local events.

Margaret Duffy, associate professor and chairwoman of the strategic communication faculty at the school of journalism, said she and Esther Thorson, associate dean for graduate studies and
research and director of research for the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute, discovered the marketplace concept in their studies of newspaper business models.

"When I discovered the Marketplace concept at the Lawrence Journal World, I was very intrigued," Duffy said in an e-mail. "We proposed a partnership with the LJW and the concept of a multi-media partnership in Columbia utilizing local search and a business/civic directory."

Duffy said the journalism school plans several levels of involvement with the site, "including research and developing prototypes for multi-media local search that other news organizations could use. Our students have already worked on developing strategic communication campaigns and we expect that to continue in coming years."

Russell said the school also will help expand the site to include businesses beyond Boone County.

Duffy said she sees involvement in the site as helping journalism school students prepare to compete in a changing industry.

"One important goal at the J-School is to assist in developing business models and conducting research that will support quality journalism in this new media landscape," Duffy wrote. "Of course, we want our students to learn and practice excellent journalism. But we also want them to be entrepreneurial in their thinking. The quality journalism that underpins our democracy depends on finding new ways to support it. EverythingMidMo is a model that we think has lots of promise."

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