Students rally across country to advocate cleaner energy usage

MU campus criticized for relying on coal-based electricity.

Alan Scher Zagier
The Associated Press

Columbia -- College students from Missouri to Oregon are urging their schools to stop using coal-based electricity in favor of cleaner energy sources ranging from wood chips to geothermal power.

On Wednesday, students at the University of Missouri and other schools nationwide mounted a Sierra Club-led campaign targeting coal-based power at colleges, whether generated at on-campus plants or purchased from private utilities. The campaign began the same day a group of college presidents rallied in Washington in support of clean energy legislation.

Student organizers said colleges have a societal obligation to reduce and eventually eliminate coal use in favor of renewable energy. At Missouri, the school used more than 48,000 tons of coal to generate electricity in 2007, accounting for 80 percent of campus energy use.

A Sierra Club report singled out UCLA, Oregon State, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina and five other schools along with Missouri. The environmental group identified 60 campuses with their own coal-burning power plants, including Georgia, Penn State and Virginia.

"University campuses have been at the forefront of many of the most important movements in history," said Mallory Schillinger, a senior from St. Louis County. "Global warming is where the fight is at, and the most crucial part of that fight -- coal -- is located right here on our campus."

In recent years, several schools have opted to forego campus coal plants in response to student protests and regulatory scrutiny.

A 2007 Sierra Club lawsuit charging the University of Wisconsin with violating federal pollution standards and a subsequent court ruling led that state's governor to endorse a $251 million project to convert the school's coal boilers to instead burn paper pellets and wood chips.

Northern Michigan University withdrew plans to use coal as a backup fuel in its new power plant after the federal Environmental Protection Agency declined to issue an air permit. The new plant will burn only wood products.

And Ball State University is moving to eliminate coal use as it creates what the Sierra Club says is the nation's largest closed geothermal energy system on its campus.
In response to the protest, Missouri's sustainability office issued a statement outlining its efforts to reduce fossil fuel use.

Among the projects planned is a new biomass boiler that will replace a coal-fired unit and reduce the school's coal usage by up to 25 percent. The school is also a member of a broader university presidents' initiative on climate change.

"We're very proud of our sustainability efforts, but we know we have more work to do," said Steve Burdic, Missouri's sustainability coordinator.

Statewide, Missouri generates more than 80 percent of its electricity from coal. That reliance accounts for the state having the fourth-lowest energy prices in the country, according to the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity.

A spokeswoman for the northern Virginia-based energy group said the new campaign will hurt the state's economy and could lead to increased college costs for Missouri students and their families.

"It's certainly not a proposal the people in Missouri are going to get behind," said Lisa Camooso Miller. "What is the cost for developing these kinds of fuel sources?"
MU students join coal protest

By Janese Heavin  Wednesday, September 16, 2009

About 15 University of Missouri students joined in a Sierra Club rally against coal Wednesday, calling for college campuses to be leaders in renewable energy use.

The Speakers Circle event was one of 60 being held at colleges nationwide and coincided with the release of a Sierra Club report challenging universities to eliminate coal use.

Specifically, the report cited MU’s use of more than 48,900 tons of coal for electricity generation in 2007.

“University campuses should be leaders in technological innovation and sustainability,” said Ryan Doyle, a graduate of St. Olaf College in Minnesota and an organizer for Green Corps. “They should be places of learning, development and growth where students can thrive — not homes to polluting 19th-century technology.”

MU sophomore Sky Robinson said colleges are an ideal place to begin using renewable energy sources because students can join university administrators to influence higher-level decision-makers.

“We know that by winning visible victories to move beyond coal at the university level, we can inspire a transition off of coal and over to clean fuels all across America,” she said.

And because MU owns its own power source, it can be even more influential in leading the charge, she said.

“Having our own power plant on campus is truly an asset,” Robinson said. “It gives us the ability to not only be self-sufficient in our electricity and heat generation, but also to choose what types of fuels we want to provide power to our campus buildings — and that choice should not include coal.”

It is possible to completely move away from coal use, but it’s going to take time, said Steve Burdic, MU’s coordinator of sustainability.

“We are looking at biomass boiler use and are reducing coal through the use of biomass and alternative fuel sources,” he said. “With those plans, by 2012, we expect to reduce about 25 percent” of coal use. “The real point here is we’ve reduced the amount of coal we use, but we’re not going to be able to stop doing it tomorrow. It’s going to take a long time to completely get rid of coal.”
Students at the rally praised university administrators for taking those steps but said more should be done.

“We have an opportunity to create clean energy jobs, clean up our air and water and solve the climate challenge by moving away from coal,” senior Mallory Schillinger said. “Mizzou should be investing in the future, not tied to the past. A clean energy campus — now that’s an alma mater I could be proud of.”

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
Students protest MU power plant's use of coal

By Alanna Nunez, Matthew Reinig
September 17, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Missouri depends on coal. In fact, the state gets 85.6 percent of its electricity from coal, according to a report from Missouri’s Energy Task Force.

There’s just one problem, some environmental groups say — coal is one of the biggest contributors to global climate change.

MU, at least from the perspective of the Sierra Club and other environmentalists, is contributing too much to the problem. The MU power plant serves more than 35,000 students, faculty and staff by burning coal.

That conviction brought 15 MU students and a campaign organizer to Speakers Circle on Wednesday to make a statement in protest of MU's coal-fired power plant.

"We have an opportunity to take a lead in the heartland and in the Show-Me state and make a switch away from coal entirely," Mallory Schillinger, an MU senior, said as she stood in front of an arc of students who had coal smeared beneath their eyes. They held signs saying, "No more coal!" and "I (heart) renewable energy."

The event, one of about 60 held Wednesday on campuses powered by coal, is part of a campaign by the Sierra Club to eliminate coal and advocate for the use of cleaner energy.

The Energy Information Administration reports that coal produces 36 percent of energy-related carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S. and creates half of the electricity generated in the nation.

"This is not only devastating for our mountains, our acres of land, the streams, and devastating our ecosystem, but it is creating huge public health hazards," Schillinger said.
According to the EPA, prolonged exposure to burning coal has been linked to an increased susceptibility to pneumonia, bronchitis and other pulmonary disorders. Additionally, it's believed to cause birth defects.

After the demonstration, Green Corps coordinator Ryan Doyle delivered a report to MU Sustainability Coordinator Steve Burdic on the dangers of coal on campus, and the two sat down and talked about what the university is doing to reduce emissions.

"We have made a lot of decisions based on cost-effectiveness and frugality," Burdic said after the meeting. "Now we're looking more at the environmental impact, and we're getting away from coal as we can afford to do that."

Burdic said the university has started several initiatives to wean itself off coal, reduce its carbon footprint and become more energy-efficient.

"We've been working on energy conservation here for 30 years," Burdic said. "The building space has grown 30 percent, and our energy use has been reduced by 10 percent, and our greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced by 11 percent just through energy conservation."

Another step MU has taken toward cleaner energy is burning more biomass fuel, such as wood chips.

"Biomass has a much smaller carbon dioxide footprint than coal does," he said. "We've been using 5 to 10 percent of that biomass everyday to replace coal."

The university's new $60 million to $70 million biomass boiler, set to be running by 2012, will burn only biomass. Burdic said the boiler would replace about 25 percent of the coal.

"The biomass boiler is going to cost more to run than a coal-fired boiler, but we're willing to do things to be doing the right thing," he said. "We just can't break the bank to do it."

Burdic also said the coal-fired plant at MU is one of the most efficient in the U.S. because the waste steam is used for heating and cooling.
Consequently, Burdic said, MU's utility bills are only about half of what one would pay with a typical electric utility boiler.

"The existing cost of the boilers that we've got there is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and so we can't just walk away from that tomorrow," he added. "We're doing a lot of really great things, but we've got a long ways to go."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

LETTER: MU should seek cleaner alternatives for fuel

By Caitlin Reader, Columbia
September 13, 2009 | 3:19 p.m. CDT

Columbia is a beautiful city. From my fifth-floor residence I can see the tree line on the horizon, the blue sky, the top of Jesse Hall and...two huge smokestacks.

The smokestacks come from MU's power plant. I was stunned when I found out we get 80 percent of our campus energy in that plant from coal. It seemed like such an old-fashioned figure for a school that's at the forefront of so many social justice movements.

Coal plants are a serious contributor to global warming, emitting 40 percent of the nation's carbon dioxide emissions (The Department of Energy reported that in 2006, coal-fired power plants produced approximately 36 percent of the total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions). Coal is flat out dirty and damaging to our community.

But the great thing is that at MU we have the means to change that. Because we own the power plant, not only can we be self-sustaining in energy production, but we also have complete control over the kind of fuels we burn on campus. We need to switch to a clean energy source for the sake of our students, our city and the world.

I love MU, because every day I see students and faculty advocating important issues and really making an impact. Let's take the next step and invest in coal-free, sustainable energy on our campus.
Budweiser confirms 'fan cans' will go

AB says controversial promotion will end in "near future"

ByMattGrant

COLUMBIA -- The makers of Bud Light say they're going to stop selling the controversial black and gold striped beer cans in Columbia.

A KRCG News investigation first prompted the university to speak out against the "team pride" fan cans. On Wednesday, KRCG obtained Anheuser-Busch’s written response, which confirms the beer giant will scrap their "tailgate approved" promotion in Columbia.

Two weeks ago, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton sent a letter to AB. Deaton took issue with two things: First, that the team-colored beer cans targeted students, many of whom are underage.

Second, the university said recent store displays, which used MU's tiger logo, was done so without permission.

"This is completely unacceptable," the chancellor wrote in a letter to AB dated Aug. 28. It "conveys the impression to the consumer that the university of Missouri is somehow supportive of this marketing effort."

Budweiser Responds

Anheuser-Busch's St. Louis office wrote back to Deaton in a letter dated Sept. 9. The letter, which the university received the next day, confirms the promotion will end "in the near future."

"Anheuser-Busch does not believe that it has infringed any rights or created any confusion with its responsible marketing of beer under the famous Bud Light trademark in cans bearing color combinations also used by the University of Misosuri," wrote Scott Miller, with AB.

"Nevertheless, in light of our long-standing friendship with Mizzou, and in order to avoid a dispute over the concerns raised by your letter, the Fan Cans program in such color combinations will be ended in your community in the near future."

The letter reminds the university that Budwesier does have permission to use Mizzou's logo to market beer. But the letter says AB will keep Mizzou's logo away from fan cans already on store shelves.
At least 25 other communities have complained about the fan can promotion. It’s not clear how many of them have seen the cans removed, or when they will stop being sold in Columbia.

Anheuser-Busch's letter to MU

Dear Mr. Deaton,

This is in response to your August 28, 2009 letter to Anheuser-Busch.

Anheuser-Busch does not believe that it has infringed any rights or created any confusion with its responsible marketing of beer under the famous Bud Light trademark in cans bearing color combinations also used by the University of Missouri. Nevertheless, in light of our long-standing friendship with Mizzou, and in order to avoid a dispute over the concerns raised by your letter, the Fan Cans program in such color combinations will be ended in your community in the near future.

As you know, our company does have the right to create and utilize point-of-sale materials bearing the Mizzou logo and other school indicia under an agreement, but we will work to make sure that any such materials are kept separate from the Fan Cans as sales of the latter end soon. Anheuser-Busch values its relationships with the collegiate community and looks forward to continuing to work cooperatively with the University of Missouri in future endeavors.

As you know, Anheuser-Busch has a longstanding commitment to promoting responsible drinking. Our company's position on college drinking is clear: if students are 21 or older and choose to drink, we want them to do so responsibly; if they are under 21, we want them to respect the law and not drink. Since 1982, Anheuser-Busch and our wholesalers across the country have invested more than three-quarters of a billion dollars to help prevent alcohol abuse, including underage drinking and drunk driving.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Scott D. Miller, Associate General Counsel
The Seven-Year Slide

Since 2003, the Tigers have tumbled down U.S. News & World Report's college rankings. But that didn't stop 5,620 freshmen from enrolling in 2009.

BY JENNIFER GORDON
SEPTEMBER 17, 2009 | 12:00 A.M. CST

Like a freshman who celebrated too many Thirsty Thursdays and hit the snooze too many times the next morning, MU's grades are slipping. The dip has nothing to do with student binging, though. In fact, on first glance, MU's scores look like a healthy B average. In reality, 73, 86, 85, 88, 91, 98 and 102 are more than MU's collegiate rankings from the past seven years, they're markers of MU's descent into the middle-ranks of the U.S. News & World Report's America's Best Colleges list.

Each year, U.S. News & World Report releases its list for prospective students who want to compare schools. For the past seven years, MU has fallen a little further in the undergraduate rankings. This year, the school dropped to No. 102 in spite of its $1 billion-plus For All We Call Mizzou campaign drive. U.S. News started the list in 1983, but MU has only been ranked since 2003.

A study of US News' methodology and reasons for MU's drop this year points to financial and faculty resources as prime culprits, followed by lackluster scores in graduation rate performance and student selectivity, four of the seven broad criteria the magazine studies.

In the 2010 edition of the list, the 102 ranking put MU tied for eighth among Big 12 schools. (For a full breakdown, see chart). And whether it's right to compare schools, these scores matter. The college rankings bring about 500,000 visitors to the U.S. News Web site per month. The newsweekly's America's Best Colleges edition also sells 50 percent more copies on the newsstand than any of its other issues. Studies from the National Bureau of Economic Research show that moving up a ranking on the U.S. News list gives a school a better yield — the percentage of admitted students who actually enroll — and better standardized test scores of new students.

Like anything else, when it's good, the U.S. News ranking is a bragging right. In fact, it's the first publication mentioned on the MU Pride Points Web site: "MU is highly ranked in quality and value by U.S. News & World Report, The Fiske Guide to Colleges, Barron's Best Buys in College Education and numerous other college guides." MU competes in the national universities list, which includes Harvard and Princeton, this year's top schools. It's the largest category with 262 listed schools. But, despite MU's touting, U.S. News only gives numbered rankings to 138 universities — the rest are listed alphabetically as tier III and IV schools — which means MU hasn't cracked the top half of those ranked schools.

"The university's main goal for prospective students is that they have the information that truly reflects what is available to them at MU," says Christian Basi, associate director of the MU News Bureau. Basi declined Vox's request to speak with MU Chancellor Brady Deaton.

U.S. News won't claim to be the end-all of college searching. "Rankings are not meant to provide the level of information to choose one school or another," says Robert Morse, editor of America's Best Colleges 2010. "It puts schools into a quantitative system, but it doesn't measure everything." Still, the issue's popularity speaks for itself.
But high school students in Columbia don't typically consider the publication a collegiate bible, says Pam Massey, a guidance counselor at Hickman High School and a college parent. "Our students look more at the campus and how it works for them than what a book says."

Sarah Smith, a sophomore at MU, said she used rankings when choosing. Smith initially wanted to attend Purdue because its engineering program was ranked, while MU's was not. Ultimately, she changed her mind. "I visited and that influenced my decision more than any kind of list," Smith says. "(Purdue) was a lot of money, and I didn't really see anything there that (MU) didn't have."

Colin Gardner, a senior at Columbia Independent School, says ranking isn't really an issue. "I think (my parents) would prefer that I go to a school with a rigorous curriculum where I can challenge myself." His mother agrees. The right program is more important than the rankings, she says.

In part, Basi and Morse have a point: MU certainly doesn't need the help of a list to attract students. After all, at eight slots higher in the ranking last year, MU attracted the largest freshmen class in its history — 5,812.

Controversy usually surrounds ranking systems, particularly among schmucks that don't fare as well on the list. Outspoken critics of the system such as Yale Dean of Admissions Jeffrey Brenzel claim that U.S. News & World Report's process oversimplifies a college's services. But the statistics U.S. News uses say more about a school than whether it beats Harvard on the list (Yale, at third, did not). Breaking down the U.S. News score, readers can compare universities in the same category. For MU, the sub-scores reflect the school's weaknesses in a national light.

Measuring Up

Before the schools for America's Best Colleges are evaluated, they are divided into four categories based on an institution's mission statement: national universities, liberal arts colleges, universities-master's and baccalaureate colleges. The qualifications for each category are straightforward: in a baccalaureate college, fewer than half of the awarded degrees are in a liberal arts field; liberal arts colleges must have at least half of the awarded degrees in a liberal arts area; universities-master's have master's programs but few, if any, doctoral programs; and national universities offer a full range of graduate and doctoral options.

Once a school is on the list, U.S. News analysts look at 16 qualifications based on its Common Data Set from the prior year. Those qualifications are then grouped into seven categories (See chart). The information for the categories is taken as a weight percentage so that the final score, like the ACT standardized test, is a composite score.

Lost Profit

The first section, financial resources, is a measure of a school's financial status per student. It makes up 10 percent of the total score. This category doesn't lend much weight in the rankings, which should be good news for MU, because it scored 142 of 262 in that sub-score. But the category points to a bigger issue — the budget.

Financial resources were a problem for MU long before 102 ever meant more than a Disney sequel. The 2001 recession hit Missouri's economy hard with Rawling Sports Co., Sunbeam, Farmland Industries Inc. and General Mills closing plants in Licking, Neosho, Kansas City and Hazelwood, respectively. In 2002, Missouri lost more jobs than California, a state that has notoriously struggled with its budget.

This was bad news for higher education funding, which receives about 11 percent of Missouri's total revenue. Missouri's state appropriations, which have never been strong according to Frank Schmidt, a biochemistry professor and former chair of the MU Faculty Council, started to fall. As a member of the Faculty Council, Schmidt met with Chancellor Brady Deaton to discuss faculty concerns and plan policy for the university and witnessed the change in state money. He sees the evidence of it in MU's current ranking.

"I think that the major issue in the U.S. News & World Report is the financial issue," Schmidt says. "We haven't suffered as badly in all rankings because not all rankings put that much emphasis on financial resources." Schmidt believes the U.S. News ranking points to a serious problem. "The university's going to have to come up with a different relationship to the state. Otherwise, we'll end up a backwater state."
MU's state appropriations dropped by 12.2 percent in the 2002 fiscal year as a result of the recession. The next year, state funding increased slightly by 2.6 percent, but the trend didn't last. In the 2004 fiscal year, it fell again — by 3.2 percent.

Although state appropriations started to go up during the 2004-2005 academic year, they still haven't reached the 2001 fiscal year level when adjusting for inflation. According to MU's 2009 budget report, MU has lost $337 million in state appropriations over the eight-year period.

“The state has not lived up to its responsibilities,” Schmidt says. Improvement has been too gradual to keep up with the demands of the campus. Without a more drastic turn around, Schmidt says, “I think there’s a real danger that we'll have a university that doesn’t meet the needs of its students.”

For now, the university's budget is buoyed by outside support. Even in the midst of a recession, MU not only reached its $1-billion goal for For All We Call Mizzou, but surpassed it by $300,000. MU's alumni donations sub-score, boosted by the campaign's success, was 66th in the U.S. News rankings this year compared to a low of 176 in 2006. Alumni donations make up 5 percent of the score. The campaign money helped where state appropriations and tuition fees ran out: $79 million of the fund went to 86 new faculty positions, $210 million to scholarships and $233 million to research grants.

Of course, MU is not unique in budget troubles. Private universities aren't faring well in the future either because a good portion of funds are tied into the stock market. The recession has hurt endowment revenues, Morse says. Missouri's budget still looks better than some other states, such as California and Washington, whose budgets are running up billion-dollar deficits. The impact on higher education on the West Coast has made MU's hiring and wage freeze look like chump change. The University of California system cut freshmen enrollment this year by 2,300 students. The Washington state legislature trimmed its higher-education funding by 10.6 percent and bumped tuition up 14 percent to make up the loss. Even with the extra tuition money, however, Washington State University had to shut down its entire theater department.

MU has tried the tuition-raising approach. Tuition rates shot up 14.8 percent for residents in the 2003 fiscal year. The next year, rates went up 19.8 percent, going from $194.60 to $209.20 per credit hour. Since then, student fees and tuition replaced state funds as the largest contributors to MU's operating revenue. The rate for 2009 was $245.80 for residents and $615.30 for nonresidents.

The gap between nonresident and resident fees has remained at roughly the same proportion, with nonresidents paying about two-and-a-half times more per credit hour than residents. The tuition spike for both groups ended in 2007, when the state legislature passed a law that tied tuition increases to the Consumer Price Index. This left one easy option to get more money: tax a bigger student body for student fees.

The More the Merrier

More tuition and fees mean more revenue for the operating budget. Jim Spain, vice provost for undergraduate studies, says that during the past few years MU has been able to cover the gap in state appropriations and meet university needs through enrollment.

Student selectivity rate — a sub-category of the U.S. News report that includes acceptance rate, percent of students who were in the top 10 percent of their high school class, percentage of students who were in the top 25 percent of their high school class, critical reading and math portions of the SAT and composite ACT scores — makes up 15 percent of the overall U.S. News score. In the 2007 edition, when MU was 88, MU's student selectivity rate was 101 out of the 262 schools. This year it was 135, even though the average ACT score of the incoming class has been increasing from 2006 to 2008. While the selectivity rate keeps the university from slashing programs, it's hurting the school's standing.

With 23,659 undergraduates, campus enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year is at an all-time high. Freshmen retention rates are also increasing. The 2006 freshmen retention rate was 84.6 percent, 0.1 percent higher than the previous class' retention rate. So far, retention rates are not on the rise nationally. MU's 2007 freshmen class' retention rate was 85.4 percent. The national average was 76.5 percent.
Total graduation and retention rates make up 20 percent of the U.S. News score. This year MU scored a 99 out of 262. The students are not only coming in droves, they're staying. For all of MU's struggles, it's still more affordable than a private school, especially for residents.

The number of MU students who graduate, compared to how many were predicted to graduate within six years, is still low in the U.S. News rankings (a score of 129), but if freshmen retention rates are at all a preview of the 2006 and 2007 classes' graduation rates, that number could be trending up.

Then there's the hiring freeze UM System President Gary Forsee implemented last November. And the wage freeze. Record enrollment means the need for more faculty, but with salaries low even before the recession, complications come into play.

In January, there were 117 open faculty positions. Exceptions were made for endowed or grant positions, and department heads could also file a petition to get around the freeze, which made new hires difficult, but it didn't stop MU from bringing on more staff to help with class sizes and enrollment. For the 2009-2010 school year, MU was able to hire 29 new tenure or tenure-track faculty, 29 nontenure faculty and 10 instructors.

Most of the new faculty and part-time help this year went to general education courses, Spain says. In some instances, high-demand courses that were typically offered only in the fall semester were added to the spring schedule. But, this year's solution to balancing class size and staff doesn't get at the bigger issue — faculty pay.

U.S. News takes class size, student-to-faculty ratio and faculty compensation into consideration with its faculty resources category. Also included in the category, which has 20 percent weight in the composite score, are the percent of faculty that is full-time and the percent that has terminal degrees. MU's sub-score was 119.

Considering MU's faculty is relatively low-paid compared to other universities, 119 out of 262 isn't too shabby. Faculty saw a 7.1 percent increase in pay from the 2007 to 2008 fiscal years, but the increase didn't help MU's standing in faculty pay among other public universities. In a study conducted by the American Association of University Professors this spring, MU was ranked 33 out of 34. KU is more than just a smidge ahead in that poll — they're in the top 10 for best-paid faculty.

Due to the economy, faculty members have to take extra precautions to secure their futures. Now, faculty have to contribute one percent of their salaries to their retirement and pension funds if they make less than $50,000. If they make more than $50,000, faculty have to pay two percent on any wages on top of that. The faculty council tried to spare the first group because it thought the contribution would put a strain on those faculty. In an e-mail, current chair and biochemistry associate professor Leona Rubin said:

"Decision makers need to be reminded what it feels like to live on $50,000 minus taxes, SS (Social Security) and health insurance before they consider tapping into this group again."

Although faculty resources were hurt this year, the current problem is nothing like what it will be in the future if things continue this way. Roughly a third of MU's current faculty is older than 55.

"If our salaries are not competitive, we will not be able to attract new, young faculty that are needed to teach the next generation and bring the research component of the university to the next higher level," Rubin says.

Flash Forward

The only subjective part of the U.S. News evaluation is the peer assessment, a system of surveys sent out to the provost and admissions office from each of the universities that asks them to rate their schools on a scale from one to five. For a national university, the peer assessment gives the most weight (25 percent of the overall score), a fact that should have helped MU's standing this year because MU's peer assessment score is, at 68, the second-highest U.S. News sub-score.

"It's ironic that the peer assessment has held strong while other parts have gotten weaker," Morse says.

Other universities aren't the only ones who continue to hold MU in high esteem. Despite the financial difficulties strains the staff, the university continues to draw a more high-achieving class than the year before. Last year, the average ACT for first-time college students was 25.5. This year, it was 25.6, the highest in eight years. The state's average is 21.6, and the national average is 21.1.
College rankings do matter to some high school students, says Paige Reed, another guidance counselor at Hickman. "The kids who look at the lists are the ones who want to put the very best school on their graduate school applications, the same kids who are looking at Ivy Leagues," she says.

According to Reed, students who look to public universities and state schools such as MU tend to go where the scholarship money is. But Reed stresses that tuition rates aren't everything. Even if MU maintains a flat tuition rate, many students will still go out of state.

"Some schools have better funding," Reed says. "Scholarships will make it better to go to an out-of-state school."

Whether MU can continue to draw students to its campus comes down to funding. So far, it has avoided the pitfalls of other budget-strapped universities. Enrollment numbers are still up, and students are enrolling with higher test scores than ever.

But the budget situation is like the story of the farmer and his mule, Schmidt says. The farmer cuts back 10 percent of the mule's food, but the mule performs just as well. So, the farmer cuts 10 percent more. The mule keeps working hard. The farmer keeps cutting back, until all of a sudden, he's left with a dead mule.
Stimulus wish list clarified

Lawmakers don’t endorse projects.

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

JEFFERSON CITY (AP) — Missouri lawmakers agreed yesterday to a system for deciding what to build using the federal stimulus package, but only after ensuring the resulting list isn’t considered an endorsement of the projects.

It means the proposal is more an example of how construction plans can be evaluated than a document that will directly guide state planning on what projects to complete.

Rep. Ed Wildberger quipped that creating a project list but not recommending funding it sets up the report to be ignored.

"Put it on the shelf and let it gather dust," said Wildberger, D-St. Joseph.

A House and Senate joint committee spent the summer evaluating possible construction projects that could be funded using the federal money and approved a report yesterday detailing about $1 billion worth of proposals that were roughly ranked according to their priority.

But lawmakers only approved the report after stipulating that the plan wasn’t a recommendation that the projects should actually be funded.

Several senators—including the Appropriations Committee chairman who has significant influence on budget issues—said they were concerned that approving a project list could appear to be a recommendation that the proposals receive money. State revenues declined last year and are still falling, and many lawmakers are skeptical there will be money for capital improvement projects.

Over the past decade, several proposed state construction plans have fizzled. Critics of yesterday’s report said approving another construction list that might never be funded lowers the chance that past projects will ever be completed.

Committee leaders said it nonetheless was helpful to develop an evaluation process for potential projects, because budget leaders struggled last year with how to use the stimulus money. The committee’s chairman, Rep. Ryan Silvey, said the report will be a starting point for future discussions on capital improvements.

“It was worth it if nothing else than to show the public that we are capable of having a deliberative process and that not every deal is made in a smoke-filled room,” said Silvey, R-Kansas City.

The projects outlined in the report were broken into four groups with about $250 million worth of construction in each category.
The first category generally includes the top priorities, the largest of which calls for spending $50 million for previously approved state maintenance projects that have been withheld. It also includes money for a series of stalled college construction projects that initially were to be funded by selling assets from the state’s higher education loan authority.

That includes $40 million for renovations at Truman State University in Kirksville, $31 million for the Ellis Fischel Cancer Center at the University of Missouri and $29 million for two academic buildings at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

The first group of projects also included $4.4 million for the Missouri National Guard's top maintenance needs and $1.9 million for repairs at the state’s veteran homes.

In the second grouping of projects, one of the largest items was $69 million for the top repair and maintenance needs at state office buildings. Among those items was $33 million to repair the outside of the state Capitol and $3.1 million to replace falling concrete inside the Senate’s parking garage on the Capitol grounds. Maintenance at state prisons would use $29 million.

The most expensive construction project was $350 million to replace the Fulton State Hospital within the Department of Mental Health. That construction project was too large to be included in any of the project groups, so its cost was split between the third and fourth categories.
Veterans get leg up from new class

Transition to school is difficult for some.

By Janese Heavin  Wednesday, September 16, 2009

Nick Holman didn’t expect college life to be so difficult. After all, he had been an honor student at his St. Charles high school and had just completed five years in the Marine Corps.

"The military was structured, and that worked for me," he said. "I excelled at my job."

That success didn’t automatically follow him when he enrolled at the University of Missouri last fall after a 13-month deployment to Iraq. He overloaded himself with core classes and found out he wasn’t prepared for them. “It was absolutely horrible,” Holman, 24, said.

A new MU class offered to veterans is helping Holman better adjust to his sophomore year. The course, Learning and Transition Strategies, teaches veterans academic skills, such as the basics of writing college-level essays, that they can apply to other classes.

Even veterans who have taken college courses before need help readjusting to academic life after serving in the military, said Keith Widaman, a Marine Corps veteran. He started at MU this summer as a transfer student less than two months after returning from Iraq.

“You’re in a combat zone, then two or three months later, you’re in school,” he said. “You need a refresher course.”

The course also helps veterans navigate the campus and government resources available to them. Yesterday, for instance, a representative from the Veterans Administration fielded questions about medical benefits.

The two-credit-hour pilot class has 26 students who meet on Tuesday then split into smaller discussion groups later in the week to talk in a more informal setting.

Daniel Sewell, president of the Mizzou Student Veterans Association, and Anne Case-Halferty, the wife of a soldier, helped get the course on the fall schedule. Now, they assist class instructors Anne-Marie Foley, director of the Office of Service Learning, and Alex Waigandt, an associate professor of education and former Marine.

Sewell, an Air Force veteran, knows from experience how tough academic life can be for returning vets. Simple things, such as figuring out what to wear when a uniform is no longer required, can be difficult to get used to, he said.
“It may seem silly, but the military is a very structured environment,” he said. “Once you leave the military, that structure and support is totally gone. It’s tough to adapt to basic things.”

Case-Halferty recognized the need for a campus support system while her husband was deployed to Iraq. After talking to him on the phone and hearing from others, she realized those serving overseas are sometimes leery about the future.

“These guys don’t think twice about serving their country and being deployed overseas, but they’re anxious about coming back and entering that academic environment,” she said. “They shouldn’t be afraid.”

When Case-Halferty learned Sewell and others were hashing out a similar idea, they joined forces to turn the plan into reality, she said.

One side benefit of having the class exclusively for veterans is it allows them to network and preserve some of the camaraderie they had in the military, Sewell said.

“Veterans didn’t really know each other around campus,” he said. “The networking experience wasn’t really there for them. This class helps get veterans together in one place, so they know who each other are around campus.”

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Getting a feel for farm life

High schoolers flock to event.

Matthew Brooks, a doctoral student at the University of Missouri, holds a cow steady as Savana Broz, 16, of Winfield reaches her arm inside to feel its stomach Tuesday at the Bradford Research and Extension Center southeast of Columbia. About 1,600 FFA students from 44 Central Missouri high schools attended the agriculture day.

By Jonathon Braden  Wednesday, September 16, 2009

Savana Broz, a junior at Winfield High School, engulfed her right arm in a blue plastic sleeve similar to a garbage bag.

With instruction from Matthew Brooks, an animal science doctoral student at the University of Missouri, Savana stood on her tiptoes, lifted her arm and shoved it into the side of Milly, the 3-year-old dairy cow on display yesterday at MU’s Bradford Research and Extension Center.

Savana felt Milly’s hot rumen, the largest part of the Holstein cow’s stomach. “It’s really creamy,” Savana said afterward.

Feeling Milly’s insides was just one of the activities yesterday at the annual FFA Field Day hosted by MU. More than 1,600 students from 44 high schools attended the daylong event,
aimed at introducing students to an assortment of careers in agriculture, including turf grass management and careers in wildlife.

Since the event began in 2002 with about 300 students, it has adapted to changes in agriculture. Fewer kids learn agriculture at home. Instructors at the event say they teach the basics of agriculture more than ever, reflecting the lack of beginning knowledge but continued interest from students.

"The number of people living directly on farms is so small anymore," said Tim Reinbott, superintendent at the Bradford center. "But we all need to know where our food comes from."

From 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. yesterday, each time an air horn blew, the students transferred between stations, which included a corn maze. At each stop, an instructor taught them about various agricultural topics.

For Austin Van Booven, a senior at Hermann High School, the day refreshed him on topics he didn't know a lot about and further informed him on subjects in which he had a good grasp. Austin, 18, said he knew a lot about livestock but appreciated learning about animal genetics.

"I thought it was a really good time, good food and great people," he said.

Savana said she wasn't sure about sticking her hand inside a cow. But that was the purpose of the day: to educate yourself on all things agriculture.

"It was a lot of fun," she said. "We learned a lot of different things."

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Spanking linked to aggressive behavior
Published: Sept. 16, 2009 at 1:59 PM

Spanking 1-year-old children leads to more aggressive behavior and less sophisticated cognitive development in the next two years, U.S. researchers say.

Researchers at Duke University, the University of Missouri-Columbia, the University of South Carolina, Columbia University, Harvard University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill say verbal punishment is not associated with aggression, especially when accompanied by emotional support from mothers.

The researchers interviewed and observed more than 2,500 poor white, African-American and Mexican-American mothers and their children at ages 1, 2 and 3.

Mothers reported how often anyone in the home had spanked their children in the past week and researchers made in-home observations of how often mothers verbally punished by scolding, yelling or making negative comments.

The study, published in the journal Child Development, found African-American children were spanked and verbally punished significantly more than the other children in the study.

Children spanked more often at age 1 behaved more aggressively when they were 2 and had lower scores on tests measuring thinking skills when they were age 3, the researchers determined.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Journalist Lisa Ling speaks at MU about global reporting

By Kelsey Mirando
September 17, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Already an international war correspondent at 25, journalist Lisa Ling has reported in more than two dozen countries to date.

Lisa Ling, known for her reporting on wartime rape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on child soldiers in Uganda, spoke in MU's Jesse Auditorium Wednesday night about notable experiences throughout her career.

“I'm going to take you around the world with me,” Ling said as she began detailing her career history and globe-trotting experiences, including her first international reporting stint in Afghanistan and covering Colombia's drug war.

Ling works as a special correspondent for the “Oprah Winfrey Show,” National Geographic’s “Explorer” and CNN’s “Planet in Peril.” She makes it her mission to raise global awareness and give voice to issues under-covered by mainstream media.

“The thing I love most about my job is I always go into every story with a definitive, preconceived idea,” Ling said. “As soon as I hit the ground, I realize a story is never black and white.”

After a tenure as a host on “The View,” Ling returned to field reporting to tackle some of the most sensitive issues around the world.

“I've been telling these stories because even with so many bona fide news outlets, how often are we given the opportunity to know what's going on in the world?” Ling said. “Having a global perspective and the opportunity to be in the world and travel has transformed my life.”
Ling showed several clips of her work for National Geographic, including highlights from a trip to China where she accompanied families throughout their daughters' adoption processes and an excerpt from her investigation of a California maximum-security prison.

“A little different from ‘The View,’” right?” Ling said.

Before breaking for a question and answer session, Ling closed with a reading of a poem she wrote about the suffering of child brides she encountered in her travels.

Ling offered a lesson she heard from television talk show host and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey.

“Now that you know, you can’t pretend that you don’t,” she said.

Ling’s MU visit was her first time speaking at a campus since the summer, said Nick Lang, senior chairman of the Missouri Students Association Department of Student Activities.

During what Ling called a “tumultuous and emotional summer,” she shared the public eye with her sister, Current TV reporter Laura Ling, who was arrested in North Korea in March and held until August.

Part of the Delta Gamma Foundation Lectureship in Values and Ethics series, the event was sponsored by Delta Gamma, Mizzou Alumni Association, MU Parent Development Council, the MU Department of Student Life and MSA/GPC Speakers Committee. Ling’s visit marked the 10th year of the fall lectureship.

Earlier in the day, Ling visited the MU Bookstore to promote her new book “Mother, Daughter, Sister, Bride: Rituals of Womanhood,” co-authored with Joanne Eicher.
MU to host Take Back the Night with a focus on sexual violence prevention

By Tanya Ortiz
September 17, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Kelley Lucero, coordinator for the sexual assault and outreach programs for The Shelter, estimates she works with 20 to 25 students a year who have been victims of sexual violence.

"It happens all the time," she said.

When Lucero addresses a rally on Thursday before the annual Take Back the Night march, her emphasis will be on encouraging bystanders to take a role in preventing sexual violence.

Take Back the Night has been held at MU since started its rape education center about 20 years, said Sharon Giles, coordinator of the Rape and Sexual Violence Prevention Center at MU. Many colleges around the nation organize similar events.

MU chooses to hold the event in September because the most vulnerable population are the new freshman and sophomore women, Giles said.

"We try to spend September educating our campus community on what sexual violence is really like," Giles said. "Our hope is that by getting information out early, we might be able to give students the truth about sexual violence: that over 80 percent of sexual assaults and rapes are committed by someone the victim is familiar with."

Take Back the Night is designed to break the silence on rape and sexual violence. The event will begin at 6 p.m. in Memorial Union's Stotler Lounge and includes a poster-making party along with the march and rally.

In order to prevent sexual violence, Lucero likes to focus her outreach education on what people can do as bystanders.
"There's always people who know that this happens," Lucero said. "The predators are not unseen. They're not unknown. They tell stories about it afterwards."

It is important for the people who witness those who might be vulnerable to attacks to speak up or do something about it, Lucero said.

According to data from the Missouri State Highway Patrol, 1,424 arrests were made for sexual offenses and 312 arrests for forcible rape in Missouri since the beginning of this year.

In Columbia, 23 arrests have been made — 19 for sexual offenses and four for rape, according to the Highway Patrol.

The Rape and Sexual Violence Prevention Center, which is among the sponsors of the rally, also works towards integrating bystander intervention into its presentations.

"We try to teach folks how to possibly intervene, in a safe way, regarding issues that look potentially dangerous or that could lead to a sexual assault," Giles said.

Giles also said there is certain language and jokes that her educators tell people to stay away from.

"Sexist comments and jokes are statements that lead to the mentality that supports sexual violence," Giles said. "When good bystanders interrupt this kind of behavior, they are making a dent in the social norms that support sexual violence."

Lucero said another big problem is a blame-the-victim mentality.

"For everybody who hears about a sexual assault and immediately starts blaming the victim — wanting to know where she was, where'd she go, what'd she do — and you don't even mention the perpetrator, you're the problem," Lucero said. "That's what I'm fighting against."

Lucero said that when people punish the victims, they discourage them from speaking out about the violence they experienced.

Time will be set aside for victims of sexual violence to share their experiences.
It's going to take more than just attending Take Back the Night to make a difference, Lucero said.

"If this is about taking back the night, it's more than about yelling in the street, it's about what you are going to do," Lucero said. "If you're not going to do anything about it, you are part of the problem."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Museum crawl will showcase art galleries at MU

By Andrew Feiler
September 17, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Night "crawlers" can visit art exhibitions in five MU locations Thursday.

The fifth annual MU Gallery and Museum Crawl runs from 4:30 to 8 p.m. with exhibits including Missouri artifacts to portraiture, editorial cartoons and a "nest" of glass and twigs.

Each gallery will stamp "crawl" cards that give patrons a chance to win prizes donated by event sponsors, including University Bookstore.

“We want to make people more aware about what great resources these organizations are for both students and families,” said Christine Montgomery, a photography specialist with the State Historical Society and co-founder of the event.

Here is what visitors can expect to see:

• At the State Historical Society of Missouri in MU’s Ellis Library, famous and not-so-famous Missourian faces are displayed in the exhibit, "Twentieth Century Missouri Portraits: From Famous to Familiar."

Mark Twain and former President Harry Truman share the spotlight with a portrait of a nameless Kansas City man and others.

Ben Nichols, portrayed in Thomas Hart Benton’s 1941 lithograph, "Aaron," was born a slave before he was freed, said Joan Stack, curator of art collections and another co-founder of the event.

She said the title references the Old Testament patriarch Aaron, a former Hebrew slave freed with the help of his brother, Moses.
The historical society is also displaying a series of editorial cartoons, "Wall Street and Main Street: Editorial Cartoons of the 1930s" by St. Louis Post-Dispatch cartoonist Daniel Fitzpatrick. The exhibit features more than 40 original drawings depicting the economic crisis of the 1930s.

- The Museum of Art and Archaeology in MU's Pickard Hall is showing paintings and sculptures of real and fictional woman as part of the exhibit, "The Sacred Feminine: Prehistory to Post-Modernity." Visitors can see how the depiction of women changed from ancient to modern art.

- The George Caleb Bingham Gallery in MU's Fine Arts Center is displaying the "Communal Nest." Artist Susan Taylor Glasgow created the 10-foot nest using hundreds of glass and wood twigs. The sculpture is the centerpiece of the exhibit, "Absence of Body."

- The Craft Studio & Art Gallery at MU's Memorial Student Union will feature oil on wood paintings by Elizabeth Snipes displaying the human figure. Prizes from the Craft Studio include pottery pieces, do-it-yourself classes and day passes.

- The Museum of Anthropology in MU's Swallow Hall is showcasing the exhibit, "Show-Me the Best: Remarkable Artifacts of Missouri." The exhibit includes artifacts excavated from Missouri. Also on display at the museum is the Grayson Archery collection.

For more information, go to mugallerycrawl.missouri.edu