System to consider three-year degree

Forsee discusses finding new ways to fund projects.

By ALAN SCHER ZAIGER of The Associated Press

Thursday, December 10, 2009

Add the University of Missouri to the growing number of schools considering three-year undergraduate degrees to reduce college costs.

University of Missouri President Gary Forsee told anxious employees yesterday the gloomy economy and continued lack of adequate state support will force the four-campus system to consider the option of a "no-frills degree."

He cautioned the idea of a truncated undergraduate degree program is merely for discussion's sake — at least for now. There is no specific proposal on the table.

"People just can't afford to waste time and money anymore," Forsee told about 100 people on the Columbia campus at the final in a series of town hall budget meetings for students, professors and campus workers. "There's a national appetite to get through faster ... and finish cheaper."

Three years of undergraduate education is the norm in Europe, but so far only a handful of U.S. schools, including Bates College in Maine and Ball State University in Indiana, have followed suit.

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon has said statewide higher education spending must be cut by about $50 million in the coming fiscal year, a relatively minor hit compared to some cash-strapped states. California, for example, has approved a 32 percent fee increase for students attending that state's top public schools. Those increases come on top of 20 percent spending cuts and enrollment cuts.

Nixon struck a deal with Forsee and other higher education leaders that calls for tuition and academic fees at Missouri's public four-year schools to remain frozen at current rates for the second consecutive year. The pact is subject to approval by state lawmakers, who return next month to Jefferson City.

Forsee also talked about other cost-saving approaches yesterday, including pursuit of new ways to finish delayed construction projects. The university system has seen its efforts to get state money for capital construction projects such as a new cancer research center in Columbia repeatedly fall short in recent years.
Forsee said he will return to Columbia, Kansas City, St. Louis and Rolla in early 2010 to meet with civic leaders about possible public-private partnerships.

He said it’s time to move past “the old-fashioned way of waiting for the state ... or relying on donors” to help pay for big-ticket construction projects.

The former Sprint Nextel CEO, who is nearing completion of his second year leading the university, also spoke publicly for the first time about the controversy surrounding his request that federal lawmakers from Missouri oppose climate-change legislation.

Displaying a PowerPoint slide titled “Lost in Translation,” Forsee said his concern about proposed cap-and-trade legislation was driven by his desire to protect the university’s fiscal resources, not partisan politics.

His translation of the letter, which was subsequently criticized by student protesters and several Democratic members of Congress: “We have no money. Give us some help.”

Paul Pitchford, an educational leadership and policy analysis professor, credited Forsee’s steady hand in the midst of what he called “a mess.”

“I have confidence in what our president is doing,” he said. “He has made measured responses based on the data at hand.”

Pitchford was more skeptical about the suggested three-year degree, a shift whose boosters include U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander, a former Tennessee governor, federal education secretary and University of Tennessee president.

“We have a responsibility to provide a comprehensive education for our students,” Pitchford said. “I’m afraid a three-year degree might get in the way of that.”

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UM hears call for partner benefits

By Janese Heavin  Thursday, December 10, 2009

The University of Missouri is unfairly applying benefits to its employees, an MU biology professor told system President Gary Forsee yesterday.

During a town hall meeting on the MU campus, Candace Galen said she and a professor down the hall share the same duties, bring in similar amounts of research dollars and have both won awards.

They have something else in common, too: Both she and her male co-worker have female partners, with whom they share families. But Galen’s colleague, she said, is allowed to provide health benefits for his wife while her benefits don’t cover her lesbian partner.

“I don’t understand that rationale,” she told Forsee.

Same-sex domestic benefits for university employees have been on MU Faculty Council’s radar for years, although the council has not passed any formal resolution.

This fall, UM-St. Louis’ Faculty Senate adopted a formal resolution asking the system to provide health benefits to same-sex partners of gay and lesbian faculty members.

That request will have to work through a normal process, and the Board of Curators would ultimately decide whether the system would offer domestic partnerships, Forsee said. Any decision, he said, would apply uniformly to faculty members on all four campuses.

UMKC Faculty Senate hasn’t formally discussed domestic partnerships, but, in general, the Kansas City campus would support offering those benefits, said Hali Fieldman, an associate professor of music and vice chairwoman of the UMKC Faculty Senate.

Fieldman said she personally thinks the lack of domestic partner benefits “seems really discriminatory.”

Rolla might be the wild card. Although Missouri University of Science & Technology spokesman Andy Careaga said the Faculty Senate there hasn’t discussed benefits for same-sex couples, Rolla is a more conservative community than Columbia and its urban counterparts.

But there’s also the question of whether the public university adopting such benefits would have political ramifications from conservative state lawmakers, who are responsible for allocating money to UM. Forsee acknowledged that’s in the backdrop of the discussion and said whatever decision is made will be in the university’s best interest.
Galen said offering the benefits — which is thought to have little financial impact — would be a way to better compensate employees while salaries remain flat.

“They keep telling us our salaries are so low and it will take years to fix it,” she said. “This is a fix — not a complete fix, but something that would help.”

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Student issues at heart of 2010 legislative session

The state faces a budget deficit $261 million.

By Wes Duplantier
Published Dec. 11, 2009

The Missouri General Assembly reconvenes for the second part of its 95th session Jan. 6, 2010. These are five issues affecting MU students that could be on the legislative table in the coming session:

In-state tuition freeze

On Nov. 18, Gov. Jay Nixon held news conferences at public universities across the state to announce a partial continuation of the freeze on tuition rates at the state’s public colleges and universities.

Under an agreement the legislature and university boards still have to approve, Nixon would propose cuts of only about 5.2 percent to the state’s higher education budget, or about $42 million, if the state’s public universities agree to not raise tuition for in-state undergraduate students.

The 5 percent cuts are part of plan to reduce the state budget deficit, estimated at $261 million.

Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, said she supported the plan, but said she would rather see no cuts to higher education funding because of MU's impact on the local economy.

"We depend on a healthy and just tax system and support from the government on education and health care," she said. "That's the backbone of our economy here."

Texting while driving

In August, a state law banning drivers 21 years old and younger from sending text messages on a cell phone while behind the wheel went into effect.

Missouri became the 22nd state to pass some law against texting, but the only state to assign a specific age limit. Rep. Still is co-sponsoring legislation to extend that ban to drivers of all age groups.

HB 1315, one of several pre-filed bills of which Still is a co-sponsor, would prohibit all drivers in Missouri from sending, reading or writing a text message or electronic message from a hand-held electronic wireless communications device while driving.

Still said she sees texting while driving as a dangerous activity regardless of the driver's age.

"I think people over 21 need it even more than people under 21," Still said. "It's just too much of a distraction and it only takes a second for an accident to happen."

MU budget situation
On Wednesday, UM system President Gary Forsee held a town hall meeting at MU, where he talked about how the MU budget could be affected by state budget cuts.

Forsee said though higher education would not see the same double-digits cuts other state agencies and departments had, the system would have to make additional cuts to its budget to keep up with rising fixed costs, such as electricity and building maintenance.

"At the end of the day we have to take a number of cuts despite state funding remaining steady," Forsee said. "The recession is real, it's with us and it is what caused us getting together with the governor and figuring out what to do."

Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said the university's budget could be affected by cuts to other areas of the state budget such as Medicaid.

"It'll look like a health care cut," Kelly said. "But it will come home to roost at the University of Missouri."

**Voting student curator**

Craig Stevenson, former chairman of the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, said he expects the legislature to put forth a bill to give the student representative on the UM system Board of Curators voting powers in its next session.

Stevenson said the bill is necessary because student tuition makes up more than half of the UM system operating budget, effectively owning more of their education than the state.

"The students are paying more than the state is for their education," Stevenson said. "So they need to have representation."

Stevenson said he was confident a bill calling for a student curator with voting power would be put forth in the legislature but said it faces different challenges than the previous bill, which passed both houses, but was vetoed by former Gov. Matt Blunt.

"The biggest hurdle we have is that the Board of Curators will use their political clout to fight the bill," Stevenson said.

**University construction bonds**

Kelly said he would sponsor another bill to let the state sell $700 million worth of bonds to finance university construction projects like renovations of the MU's Lafferre Hall.

"I'll be going after the bond issue hammer and tongs," Kelly said.

Kelly sponsored such a bill last year after funding from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Association was unable to pay. The bill passed the House with bipartisan support, but it failed in the senate.

Kelly said his new bill would closely resemble the bill Sen. Kurt Schaefer put forth in the upper house last year.

Rep. Steve Tilley, R-Perryville, co-sponsored Kelly's previous bill and said the legislature should pass it both to improve universities and create jobs inexpensively.
"The state misses out on a good opportunity to inject capital into the state, to put people to work, to do projects that are probably going to get done at some point in time anyway," Tilley said.
MUPD makes nuisance arrests on extended campus

Students living at Mizzou Quads must follow campus regulations.

By Rachel Allred
Published Dec. 11, 2009

Numerous arrests have been made by the MU Police Department at Mizzou Quads due to nuisance gatherings.

MUPD made four arrests over the weekend at Mizzou Quads with charges including cause or permit of social gathering on the premises to become a nuisance and drug possession.

According to the city’s nuisance party ordinance, nuisance parties might include unlawful sale, furnishing, possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages, fighting, outdoor urination or defecation in a place open to public view or property damage.

The Crime Free Multi-Housing guidebook for residents states social gatherings of 10 or more people on residential property that results in any of a number of crimes on or adjacent to the party location is prohibited.

Mizzou Quads is a group of 200 apartments at the Campus Lodge apartment complex. This is the second year Residential Life has rented out apartments at Campus Lodge to MU students, Residential Life Director Frankie Minor said.

Minor said the same alcohol and drug policies that apply to on-campus residence halls also apply to extended campus locations.

"Part of the issue is the students' perceptions," Minor said. "As it revolves around alcohol or drugs or safety issues, all the same policies apply at our extended campus locations as they are on the main part of campus."

In order to maintain regulations and on-campus experience, hall coordinators and community advisers are also present at extended campus living facilities and the process of handling violations is comparable, Minor said.

"If they're a Mizzou Quads student, that information is referred to the hall coordinator just like it would be for a student who the police had to respond to in a residence hall," Minor said.

Minor said when MUPD has to respond to incidents at residence halls, he receives an incident report. He has not yet received an incident report regarding the arrests made at Mizzou Quads but said the process can take some time.

"Typically we will receive incident reports for incidences that occur in our residence halls or at Mizzou Quads," Minor said. "I haven't received a report on this incident, but that's not unusual. The MUPD officer has to write the report and sometimes has to collect additional information."
MUPD Capt. Brian Weimer said the incident at Mizzou Quads isn't unique and similar incidences occur at on-campus residence halls.

"There's nothing to indicate it's any different from anywhere else on campus," Weimer said. "Things could happen anywhere."
Letter to the Editor:

IncludeME MU hard at work behind doors

By Erin Horth, president, Triangle Coalition, IncludeME; Sean Jarvis, vice president Triangle Coalition, IncludeME; Jordan Paul, president, Missouri Students Association
Published Dec. 11, 2009

The time for making signs is over. While flying in Speaker's Circle and speaking to classes was necessary and effective in garnering student support for the MSA constitutional amendment, for IncludeME, visibility is not crucial to the closed-door meetings that are now occurring. To say that because the movement is not creating photo ops, it has “dropped the ball” on the issue is patently false. The fact of the matter is, as is evidenced by the Maneater's own coverage of the campaign, IncludeME's leaders have been diligent in contacting departments, colleges, deans and other administrators, including the Chancellor. The issue has been reiterated to multiple administrators on campus nearly to the point of exhaustion.

The purported lack of communication between the campaign's leaders and administrators is not indicative of a failure on behalf of the campaign’s leaders or administrators, but rather a result of miscommunication among Maneater staffers.

In reality, IncludeME has been and will continue to be persistent and communicative in pursuing its goals. Since May, campaign leaders have discussed the issue with deans in the College of Engineering; School of Journalism; College of Arts and Science; College of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Truman School of Public Affairs; as well as the dean of Graduate Studies. The English and Women’s and Gender Studies departments have both changed their non-discrimination policies to include “gender identity and expression,” and the Missouri Student Association, Graduate and Professional Council, the Legion of Black Collegians, the Residence Halls Association, and FourFront have all changed their non-discrimination policies to reflect the same change. A formal proposal was sent to the Chancellor last semester, and a response was recently received.

Beyond discussions, progress has been made on making tangible changes to reduce discrimination. The TransAction Team has been working on encouraging use of a “preferred name” on class rosters as well as forms in the health center, changing the Student Health Center’s forms to indicate a blank rather than boxes to check for gender, and finalizing the list of gender neutral bathroom housing to post on the LGBTQ Resource Center’s website. TAT has also conducted trainings for graduate teaching assistants and residential life staff to educate and promote inclusion. IncludeME is looking into increasing the number of facilities on campus with gender-neutral restroom facilities. While the list of changes that have already occurred is short, this is hardly for lack of effort.

While we apologize to the Maneater for failing to provide the sort of jumping and shouting that generally comprise a “quality” story for the paper, this is not indicative of inaction on our parts, as the staff would know if they had been fully aware of Jessica Silverman's coverage of the campaign. Until the Maneater's staff finds itself ready to commit to that task, however, it would be best for them to stop projecting their staff's failure onto the hardworking members of the IncludeME campaign.