MU wants med school diversity

Post created to help efforts in recruitment.

By Janese Heavin Tuesday, December 29, 2009

A University of Missouri faculty member has been tapped to fill a new administrative position aimed to increase the diversity of students admitted to the MU School of Medicine.

Ellis Ingram is an associate professor and cytology director for the Department of Pathology and Anatomical Sciences and will continue serving in those roles. In his additional position, he is charged with helping prepare and recruit minority and underrepresented populations, including black, low-income and rural students.

“We want to have the population of doctors in the health science center and the population of students in our medical school look like our community,” he said.

MU’s medical school, like similar programs across the country, has been struggling to attract qualified minority applicants for years. Last year, 11 Asian students, six black students and one Hispanic student were admitted to the program, compared with 75 white students.

Meanwhile, blacks and Hispanics are among the fastest-growing segments of the population nationwide.

Despite those groups making up 25 percent of the U.S. population, just 6 percent of doctors fall into those demographics, according to an Association of Medical Colleges report.

“As the country grows increasingly more diverse, there’s a need for health sciences to reflect that,” Ingram said.

Although the position is new, Ingram already oversees several initiatives aimed to get minority students interested in science-related fields.

For 15 years he has sponsored Caleb, The Science Club, which lets students in fifth grade and above learn about the medical field. Although the program is open to anyone, members are predominantly black.

Ingram also coordinates a program that lets high school students shadow professors in health professions and works with Washington University in St. Louis to introduce students there to medical fields.

“Dr. Ingram has been a mentor to MU medical and pre-medical students for many years,” Robert Churchill, dean of the medical school, said in a prepared statement. “We believe that intensifying and expanding on his existing efforts to increase diversity will help us train more culturally competent physicians, increase patient satisfaction and improve access to health care in the future.”

Ingram said he doesn’t have specific numbers of minority students he hopes to recruit to MU; he simply wants to see an increase.

“If we can look back in a few years and see that we’ve made some steady progress,” he said, “I’ll be happy.”
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU High continues to grow

By Kaylee Nelson  December 30, 2009

COLUMBIA — MU High School is an online high school that allows students to take online courses in conjunction with attending a brick-and-mortar school or attend virtually as their primary school. It awards diplomas after students complete the required courses.

The mission of MU High School includes striving to “provide distance learning courses, through a variety of delivery methods, that will complement traditional high school curricula,” according to its Web site.

“We're constantly developing more online courses and having a more online presence,” Principal Kristi Smalley said.

MU High School is a part of the Center for Distance and Independent Study and is accredited by the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation and School Improvement. It began offering online classes in 1997 and two years later was accredited as a diploma-granting institution.

Smalley said students typically sign up because they have scheduling problems, they want to take a course their traditional school doesn’t offer or they want to graduate early.

“The biggest plus, I think, would be the flexibility and convenience of scheduling your own coursework,” Smalley said. "Students can enroll at any time, and they can work at their own pace.”

Today, the high school enrolls about 7,000 students a year who choose online courses from among 200 or so offerings. Students come from all 50 states and about two dozen countries.
Seven hundred students are enrolled in MU High School’s diploma program, where they are able to earn — online — all of the required credits equivalent to a four-year high school program and earn a diploma.

MU High School has won numerous awards since its founding, including a Program of Excellence Award and a Meritorious Award, both given by the University Continuing Education Association.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Partnership pairs MU High School with older prospective students

By Kaylee Nelson
December 30, 2009

COLUMBIA — Even though Martha Allen-Tyson never finished high school, she has decided to once again try for her diploma. She has worked at BJC HealthCare in St. Louis for 34 years and, after her employer formed a partnership with MU High School, she enrolled in the school’s diploma program.

**MU High School, part of MU's Center for Distance and Independent Study**, is an online high school through which students may complete a full diploma program. About 700 students are enrolled in the diploma program, which was accredited in 1999, and are completing their high school education through online courses.

In August of 2008, MU High School partnered with BJC HealthCare, a nonprofit health care organization in St. Louis with almost 27,000 employees.

Through BJC's Center for Lifelong Learning, employees are offered a $4,500 tuition benefit that allows them to take classes at certain universities. They can use this for the MU High School program, which costs about $150 per class.

This is BJC's first partnership with a high school diploma program; all others have been at the college level.

“There is a certain sector of their employees which lack a high school diploma,” said Kristi Smalley, principal of MU High School. “So what they were interested in doing, as a part of their lifelong learning center, was being able to provide those employees with an option for getting a high school diploma rather than just a GED.”

The GED, or General Educational Development, is a series of tests that, when passed, certifies high school-level academic proficiency. The MU High School program is high school coursework taken online that leads to a diploma.
Srnalley said the Missouri Students Association approached the high school because BJC HealthCare wanted to expand some of the options it offered to its staff.

“This is something we really didn’t go out looking for,” Smalley said. “Quite honestly, they found us.”

Now there are 36 BJC HealthCare employees enrolled at MU High School. Most are employees who have been with BJC HealthCare for a while, and most are older than 25, said Jo Ann Shaw, vice president and chief learning officer.

“(Our students are) people who thought a) I’ll never be able to get this done, or b) I’m too old and probably don’t want my employer to know I don’t have this done,” Shaw said.

No one has completed the program yet. Most students at BJC HealthCare can only take a couple of courses at a time because they work full time. They also sign an agreement before the start of their class saying that if they pass the class, the cost is deducted from their tuition benefit, but if they fail, they have to pay back the cost.

Allen-Tyson, 54, had been taking classes toward earning her GED during her days off of work but not through a program affiliated with BJC HealthCare. When her manager explained the program with MU High School, she began taking classes there instead.

“All I have is me and my husband, and there’s not nothing to stop me,” said Allen-Tyson, whose children are grown. “I’ve been wanting this for a long time.”

Allen-Tyson is taking her time with the classes because she also takes care of her sick sister, but she plans to graduate sometime next year.

“I suggest that to anybody that wants their high school diploma, these are good classes to take,” Allen-Tyson said. “This is an opportunity, and I say take it.”
Out with the Aughts: Abstinent vampires are the new black

Peter Saltsman

Vampires have had a startling resurgence of late, crawling out of the coffin-like obscurity of black-and-white filmography to terrorize contemporary popular culture. Television series such as True Blood and Vampire Diaries have become hugely popular, to say nothing of the uncontested lord of neo-Nosferatu culture - Stephenie Meyer's book-turned-movie series Twilight.

This year, the second film instalment of the series, New Moon, came out to record-breaking box-office numbers. But it didn't just contribute to the usual teenage pop consumption, the frustratingly reserved girl-meets-vampire love story gave teens a valuable lesson: don't have sex.

It's a message that parents have been trying - and failing - to instill in their children for years, but Twilight is the first abstinence-education teaching tool the kids can relate to.

Meyer writes fantastical romance novels - without any physical contact. Bella and Edward are in a purely hands-off relationship. That might have something to do with the fact that Edward doesn't want to kill his human girlfriend if their necking gets too heated. But it also might have to do with the fact that they're supposed to make abstinence look like fun.

And the scary part? Science has proved that it's working.

A University of Missouri study on the female response to Twilight shows that the "No Means No" message of the series just makes sense to a lot of fans.

"They really saw an example of abstinence that seemed cool," says Melissa Click, assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri and one of the authors of the study. "Teen girls use romances like this to imagine what relationships will be like when they find that right person."

And whether this is positive or not, it's been reinforced financially, as New Moon grossed over US$26-million on its opening midnight show alone.

We've been told that the fourth book, things will be different (spoiler alert: vampire babies are coming, apparently). But for now, in the wake of New Moon, it's safe to say that millions of teenage girls can't possibly be wrong. Abstinence is so, totally, in.