Roar for live tiger mascot at Mizzou dulls

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The brief roar for a having a live tiger mascot at University of Missouri football games has faded to a whimper.

The proposal by Missouri Students Association President Tim Noce drew widespread public criticism. He now says the proposal was “blown completely out of proportion” and is not a priority.

A student committee will instead explore whether the school could build a proper habitat for an abused or neglected tiger and have it cared for by animal science experts.

Noce has also suggested that Missouri sponsor a tiger at an existing zoo or animal sanctuary.

Both alternatives would be funded with private donations rather than public money.
Would-be entrepreneurs get boost from club

By Janese Heavin

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

The University of Missouri's vice chancellor for research is challenging students to create their own careers after college instead of struggling in a slow job market, and he wants faculty members and local entrepreneurs to help.

That's why Rob Duncan has created the Club Innovation for Missouri Business, or CLIMB, a venture that will pair innovative students with experienced mentors. Duncan unveiled his plans to a crowd of about 70 last night at Stotler Lounge in MU's Memorial Union. Attendees included business leaders, faculty members and students.

"We're literally trying to climb to new heights," Chancellor Brady Deaton said, adding that MU is in "for some very, very exciting new times."

Duncan envisions a student-led organization that would invite researchers and established entrepreneurs to speak at regular meetings. Students interested in particular subject areas would then flesh out their ideas for new products or services with experts in related fields.

"We need to engage members of the community so students get the opportunity to translate those ideas into products and services people are ready to pay money for," he said.

CLIMB would provide a network of resources to help the best ideas get off the ground. Duncan has enlisted attorneys willing to provide free consultation on a limited basis, venture capitalists, and university licensing and tech transfer offices.

Jake Halliday, president and CEO of the Missouri Innovation Center, said CLIMB participants would be welcome to use the center's facility for meeting space. Jim Gann, director of technology business development at MU's Small Business Development Center, said he could provide manpower. Columbia's Regional Economic Development Inc., or REDI, is ready to help, too.

"We'll focus as much of our resources as available to support the University of Missouri as it builds this economic climate," REDI President Mike Brooks said.

With all the assistance available, Duncan urges students not to let a lack of funding stand in the way of promoting an idea. "Don't worry about money," he said. "Think about doing something that changes everything."
Students who want to get involved but don’t have ideas are welcome, too. Duncan has several ideas in the hopper, and he’s looking for individuals to start researching them. Specifically, Duncan is interested in seeing young entrepreneurs look into the possibility of an air taxi service and new ways to transport and use natural gases.

Duncan detailed his e-Jet air taxi idea yesterday, inviting people to run with the idea even if they don’t need the university’s help.

“Go for it,” he said. “This is a free market.”

Duncan touted the effectiveness of the free market throughout the forum. He began his presentation with a quote attributed to Margaret Thatcher: “The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.”

“It’s important,” Duncan said, “for students to find a place in the free-market system.”

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This article was published on page A1 of the Wednesday, February 10, 2010 edition of The Columbia Daily Tribune.
Required courses reviewed

Faculty say list needs an update.

By Janese Heavin

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

University of Missouri faculty members are reviewing general education requirements to make sure students are taking courses they need to be well-rounded college graduates.

Students should not be taking classes just to get a requirement out of the way, said Mary Moore, an academic adviser in the English department.

Rather, courses should be required only if they add value to a career path, she said.

“We need to be able to articulate the point,” Moore said. “If it doesn’t have value, we don’t need to be doing it. If it has value, we need to be able to articulate that.”

MU requires students to take specific courses, such as college algebra and American history or government, as well as courses from a variety of subjects including history and political science. All students also must take a writing-intensive course and a capstone class at the end of their college careers.

Specific departments and majors have additional course requirements.

For the past year, a task force created by MU’s Faculty Council has been reviewing the general education program to see whether new courses should be allowed to meet its requirements or whether any requirements that have lost relevance should be removed.

Yesterday, faculty members hashed out ideas at a meeting in Jesse Wrench Auditorium at Memorial Union.

Ian Aberbach, a math professor, suggested MU remove its capstone requirement, a class typically taken by seniors as a culmination of what they’ve learned. That requirement might work in some disciplines, but it doesn’t make sense in math, Aberbach said.

“It’s a useless course,” he said, adding that students could use that time to take a meaningful math class.
Some faculty members agreed the general education course list should be simplified to let students know exactly what counts toward a requirement and why. In some cases, upper-level courses don't meet a requirement because they require too many prerequisite courses. Explaining to students why a certain class doesn't count toward general education mandates can be tough, faculty members agree.

Now, students and advisers have to navigate through a cumbersome course catalog and try to determine whether a class counts toward general education. Some suggested a clear, searchable online list that would easily spell out which classes meet which requirements.

Marty Steffens, a journalism professor, suggested holding a general education fair each spring where students could talk to representatives from various departments.

"It sounds retro, but if you think about how a student really chooses a class now, they hear from people in their fraternities or sororities or through friends and advisers," she said. "It's all word-of-mouth anyway."

There is no set timeline for changes to the general education program, Faculty Council Chairwoman Leona Rubin said.

"We were hoping it would be done this year, but it doesn't look like that will happen," she said. "It's a big committee with lots of things to look at, so it will run into next year."
MU faculty discuss possible changes to general education requirements
By Katelyn Amen
February 10, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — MU faculty proposed adding, dropping and changing class requirements in a forum about the General Education Program on Tuesday in Memorial Union.

John Adams, a chemistry professor, led the discussion and kept it geared around a central question:

"Are there things that we're doing that are irrelevant these days?"

Adams is chair of the General Education Task Force, a committee put together by the MU Faculty Council to address concerns about the current requirements. The committee's original purpose was the discussion of a diversity initiative, but it's now focusing on a possible overhaul.

About 25 faculty and staff members weighed in on the usefulness of the general education program. Some proposed changes in personal finance and health and nutrition courses.

Tom Thomas, professor of nutrition and exercise physiology, said his department hadn't thought through the technical aspects of adding a health and nutrition requirement, which would add three more credit hours to the general education curriculum, but classes to fit his proposed requirement already exist.

Deanna Sharpe, associate professor and director of graduate studies in the financial planning department, proposed allowing it to satisfy general math requirements in an effort to better prepare students for life after graduation.

Eliminating the capstone requirement was a popular idea among many professors at the forum. Ian Aberbach, director of undergraduate studies for the math department, said capstone courses take the place of more useful courses in a senior's schedule. "We end up with this kind of generic senior seminar," he said.
Larry Ries, associate teaching professor of statistics, said that while capstone courses might be relevant in certain areas of study, they're unhelpful to students in programs such as math or statistics.

Faculty members also voiced concerns that general education course listings are difficult to find and interpret.

Mary Moore, an academic adviser in the English department, worried students see general education requirements as tiresome. "I want a Gen. Ed. list to help me do my job," she said. Having a more accessible list and knowing general education objectives would make advising easier, she said.

The requirements now include a college algebra course, an English exposition and argumentation course, a writing intensive course and an American history or government course, according to the MU General Education Program Web site.

Other requirements are determined by department.

Forum participants also discussed the mission of the General Education Program, the process for deciding which courses satisfy which requirements and how to handle transfer or dual credits.

Adams said the purpose of the forum was to bring the Task Force's attention to the faculty's ideas about general education requirements — some of which were more revolutionary than evolutionary, he said.

The task force will report these ideas to the Faculty Council, who would then evaluate these suggestions and make changes. Adams said he was unsure when they would present their ideas.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Clean Energy Panel hopes to inform, instill action in students

By Jonathan Hinderliter
February 11, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — **MU is committed to becoming carbon neutral, said Steve Burdic, MU sustainability coordinator.**

Burdic spoke at a panel discussion hosted by Coal Free Mizzou, an unofficial student organization sponsored by Sierra Club, about plans and goals the university has for moving towards reducing and eventually eliminating the use of burning coal for energy.

A group of about 25 people showed up to hear four panelists speak for 10 to 15 minutes each about ways to reduce MU’s carbon footprint.

“We wanted to inform people,” said Mallory Schillinger, a co-chair for the organization and moderator for the event. “We want people to know what the university is doing and can do.”

Schillinger said the way to get the university to change and reduce their coal usage is to educate the students, who will have more impact on convincing the university that this is a priority.

“What better way to set an example than seeing the leading educational institution in the Show-Me state lead that charge,” said panelist Jim Pierobon, a policy and market developer for Standard Solar.

The greatest intended change in MU’s carbon emissions will come from a biomass boiler, which is expected to be completed in 2012. The biomass boiler, which generates electricity from burning materials such as roots, switch grass and rubber tires, is expected to reduce the amount of coal the university burns by 25 percent.

Jan Weaver, director of MU’s environmental studies department, said that while thinning forests to use the wood for the biomass boiler will likely not have long-term
sustainability, the power plant is working with the state forestry department to ensure that the wood is being harvested in a sustainable manner.

She said unchecked deforestation would take more nutrients from the soil than is healthy.

"It will take 80 tons of biomass per year to run the power plant," Burdic said.

Certain "energy crops" such as switch grass, however, work best for burning and regrowing because they do a good job of sequestering carbon in the soil, Burdic said.

The panelists also discussed other ways MU can reduce its carbon emissions, such as increasing efficiency and conserving electricity. Henry Robertson, a lawyer for Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, advocated higher efficiency standards of buildings, something MU has taken care to ensure in each of its new and renovated buildings.

Pierobon, who was unable to attend personally, participated through the use of a webcam and Skype. He spoke about the potentials of universities like MU to use his company’s solar panels as an alternative means to generate energy.

If the university were to choose this option, Standard Solar would own the panels and allow the university to use them for free. The company would buy the energy produced by the panels.

Regardless of what decisions the university makes in the coming years, funding will be a major issue.

"We are going to do it as fast as is financially feasible," Burdic said. "But the problem is that we are trying to look into a crystal ball of the next couple decades. We don’t know what technology will be discovered.”
State cuts could jeopardize computer service through MOREnet

MOREnet provides discounted access for libraries, school districts.

Each day, members of the public log on to computers at Springfield-Greene County Library District's 10 branches, scouring the Internet for everything from school research to jobs.

The growing use amounted to 5 million individual computer sessions in 2009, up significantly from 3.6 million sessions in 2006, said Jim Schmidt, associate director of public services for the library district.

The library district's high-speed Internet bill totals about $15,000 a year, thanks in large part to the state of Missouri subsidizing the cost, Schmidt said. But that subsidy is in danger of eroding under budget cuts Gov. Jay Nixon has made to the Missouri Research & Education Network.

As part of nearly $700 million in spending restrictions he's made this year, Nixon cut $5.1 million -- or 40 percent -- from MOREnet's $12.7 million budget. He proposes keeping most of those cuts in place for the 2011 fiscal year.

MOREnet, an arm of the University of Missouri System, provides broadband service at a deeply discounted rate to nearly every public K-12 school district and library system in southwest Missouri. Ozarks Technical Community College, Missouri State University, Drury University and other private schools also utilize the service.

In response to the governor's cuts, MOREnet is starting to charge customers for additional bandwidth and also may attempt to recoup the lost state revenue from schools, libraries and universities, said John Gillispie, executive director of MOREnet.

"There will more than likely be a rate increase to the customers," Gillispie said.

But users also fear Nixon's large cuts could signal an end to the state subsidizing MOREnet altogether.

"It could be a huge, huge cost to Springfield-Greene County Library if MOREnet's service were to be eliminated," Schmidt said.
For the library system to purchase the amount of Internet access its computers consume now would cost at least $150,000 annually -- 10 times what they pay now to MOREnet, Schmidt said.

MOREnet is funded in the state's higher education budget bill.

Linda Luebbering, the governor's budget director, says Nixon's top priority this year was preventing cuts to operational funding for universities and community colleges in exchange for those institutions agreeing not to raise tuition.

"It's not as a high of a priority given the severity of our revenue situation," Luebbering said.

Some consider the cuts to MOREnet a backdoor way to cut into the operation funding of educational institutions the governor vowed to hold harmless.

"When it comes to cuts, there's not only direct cuts, but there's indirect cuts that make our costs go up," said Hal Higdon, president of OTC. "This is a little like your utility bills -- you can't not pay it."

OTC paid MOREnet $29,735 last year, but Higdon expects the cost to rise in light of the reductions.

The University of Missouri System's budget has several different entities not directly related to its four campuses, such as the state historical society and agriculture extension service. Those entities have traditionally been targeted by governors and the legislature for reductions to the higher education budget without cutting direct aid to the schools, Higdon said.

"It's always an easy target, it's easy to beat up on the big guy, but some of us little guys are tied into that big guy," Higdon said.

Schools rely on it

The cuts to MOREnet come at a time when digital video is exploding in use in classrooms at all levels of education.

"MOREnet has been experiencing a 35 percent upward growth year-over-year for the past couple of years," Gillispie said.

But with that growth in video services over the Internet comes a cost and the need for more bandwidth.

"There's so many more things streamed over the Internet now with video ... which chews up bandwidth," Schmidt said.

Springfield Public Schools recently upgraded to MOREnet's 100 megabits service to handle the growing use of the Internet on the district's 11,000 computers, said Rick Green, director of information technology for SPS.
SPS students increasingly rely on high-speed Internet for taking state-mandated tests, as well as class research, Green said.

SPS pays MOREnet $18,000 annually for Internet access for 9,500 classroom computers and 1,500 computers for employees, Green said.

"For us, $18,000 is a really good deal for the services that we get," he said.

Schmidt said Springfield-Greene County District Library could purchase broadband access if MOREnet were dismantled. But he fears cash-strapped rural schools would be without access to the information superhighway if MOREnet loses its state funding.

The concern is not lost on legislators, who could scale back Nixon's proposed cuts by reducing spending elsewhere in the state's $23.7 billion budget.

"I think it's important that we have that access, particularly in rural areas," said Rep. Jay Wasson, a Nixa Republican who serves on the House Budget Committee.

Luebbering said Nixon doesn't intend to permanently reduce MOREnet's state funding. But he also isn't making promises given the uncertainty of tax revenue right now, she said.

"I can't say no because we all know the next couple of budget years are going to be more challenging than this one," Luebbering said.