University system color-codes effectiveness

The Associated Press • February 12, 2010

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The four-campus University of Missouri system is developing a new system for charting success using the colors of traffic signals.

The color-coordinated report card is called the Accountability Measurement System. It’s a compilation of roughly 80 measures encompassing all four facets of the university’s mission: teaching and learning, research, service and economic development.

For each measurement, the chart contains three years of baseline data, peer averages and, in some instances, goals for 2012.

Green shows a campus is meeting its goal, while yellow indicates progress. Schools will seek to avoid red, which implies they aren’t making progress.
Heavy kids struggle with heavy emotions
Shame, stress and depression often spur further weight gain
By Jeanna Bryner
LiveScience
updated 1:00 p.m. CT, Sun., Feb. 14, 2010

The ballooning waistlines of children hit the spotlight when Michelle Obama admitted publicly her daughters had an unhealthy body mass index. And while many urge kids to slim down to avoid heart disease and other physical ailments, the emotional consequences from teasing and low self-esteem could be just as debilitating, scientists say.

About 37 percent of children in the United States are overweight and roughly 16 percent of children ages 2 to 19 are obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Among 6- to 19-year-olds, obesity has tripled over the past two decades, according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

We've heard that these fat children may be set up for a life at the doctor's office with health risks including type-2 diabetes, high cholesterol and blood pressure, and sleeping problems. But these same kids are more likely to have a hard time with emotions and with their peers.

"Overweight kids are more likely to have depression and low self-esteem, to be teased or bullied, and to bully other children," said Catherine Davis, associate professor of pediatrics at the Medical College of Georgia. "These can be serious problems for these children."

Researchers point out that no matter your age, carrying around lots of extra weight has its psychological consequences.

"Overweight and obesity are terribly stigmatizing conditions, regardless of age," said Sara Gable of the University of Missouri, Columbia. "Living as a member of a stigmatized group is stressful and can produce feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness."

Gable said research on other stigmatized groups, such as racial minorities, shows these negative feelings can interfere with academic performance and other aspects of a person's life, and "there is good reason to think" these findings would apply to children struggling with weight problems, Gable told LiveScience.

While some responded to the First Lady's divulging of her kids' weight problems as insensitive, psychologists say pretending the issue isn't there doesn't help anyone involved. And they offer tips for how parents can be sensitive to their child's feelings while encouraging healthy behaviors.
**Toughest spot: the playground**

Playground teasing may seem like a childhood rite of passage, but overweight children get more of it. And that name-calling can grate on a child's self-esteem.

"A lot of who we are is based on how others interact with us," said Eric Storch of the Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at the University of South Florida. "With kids who are overweight they internalize others' feedback, 'You're fat, you're no good, no one wants to go out with you.' That contributes to anxiety and depression."

He estimates rates of depression are as high as 20 percent in kids who are overweight.

"It's not simply being overweight that leads to depression," Storch said in a telephone interview. "It's being overweight and getting a bunch of crap about it from peers that leads to anxiety or depression."

While one paradigm suggests weight leads to teasing, which then leads to psychological issues, another reverses those arrows to suggest depressed kids are less likely to exercise and more likely to gain weight.

In fact, Storch and his colleagues studied 100 overweight children and those at risk for being overweight, ages 8 to 18, to find out the effects of bullying. About a quarter of the children reported significant problems with bullies during the prior two weeks. The study, published in a 2007 issue of the Journal of Pediatric Psychology, revealed bullying often caused kids to avoid situations where they had been picked on, such as gym class and sports fields.

Storch's team also found bullied kids were more likely to be depressed, lonely and anxious.

"When you think about it, it makes intuitive sense, when you consider the hallmark signs of depression – sadness, fatigue, lack of interest in things you used to like," Storch said in a statement about the study. "When kids are having a tough time with peers, and struggling with depression, then this can translate to reduced rates of physical activity."

**Problems start early**

Though steering clear of physical activity may, in part, lead to a heavy child, it doesn't explain the weight gain in very young kids. Before the age of 2 and as early as three months old, infants could be on the path toward obesity, according to a new study published this month in the journal Clinical Pediatrics.

And just as the extra weight comes early in life, so do the social and psychological consequences. A nationally representative study of about 8,000 children who were followed from kindergarten through third grade, beginning in 1998, showed the psychological ramifications of being plus-sized start young. For instance, by third grade overweight kids reported less favorable peer relations and feeling unpopular.
The study, published last year in the journal Applied Developmental Science, also showed overweight girls were also more likely to act out – fighting and arguing – than slim peers, according to their teachers.

Kids with weight problems from the start (in kindergarten) were more likely to be sad, lonely and to worry than kindergarteners without extra poundage, according to reports by their teachers and the kids themselves. As overweight kids entered higher grades, these feelings just got worse.

The fact that overweight boys and girls reported more loneliness and worrying suggests that, as early as first grade, they may have an understanding of the stereotypes that accompany living with the stigma, the researchers say.

What's a parent to do?

For parents wanting to help their children slim down while also keeping self-confidence intact, the key is balance, researchers say. A mom who's constantly nagging Billy about his weight is not going to see a positive outcome, Storch said. But neither will a laissez-faire parent who lets a kid eat with abandon.

Parents should let children know they are concerned about their health, not kids' looks, Davis said.

"Pretending the child is not overweight or obese sends a harmful message that they should ignore their health," Davis said. "Rather than being punitive or setting dietary rules that only the child has to follow, have the whole family improve their diet and physical activity habits together."

And when overweight or obese children get out and exercise, the results can be a boost to their self-esteem, in addition to any physical gains.

A study published last year in the Journal of Pediatric Psychology suggested 40 minutes a day of exercise lessened depression in overweight kids and made them feel better about themselves.

The study, conducted by Davis and her colleagues, included more than 200 overweight children who either continued their sedentary lifestyle, or engaged in 20 minutes or 40 minutes of fun activities that increased heart rate, such as running games, jumping rope, basketball and soccer.

"Just by getting up and doing something aerobic, they were changing how they felt about themselves," said the lead researcher and Davis' colleague at MCG Karen Petty. "Hopefully these children are taking home the idea: Hey, when we do this stuff, we feel better."

Overall, the emotional consequences are just as bad as the physical ones.

"Comparing the emotional consequences of pediatric obesity to the health related consequences is sort of like missing the forest for the trees," Gable said. "Obesity has the potential to interfere with all areas of human functioning; that's part of what makes its treatment during childhood such a tricky undertaking. Children suddenly get lots of attention for the exact reason that makes – at least some of them – feel really bad."
Panel backs scholarship status quo

Senate bill aims for equal public, private allotments.

By Janese Heavin

The state's Coordinating Board for Higher Education voted yesterday to support the current structure of the Access Missouri scholarship program.

Members will explain their decision during testimony next week on a Senate bill that would equalize Access Missouri scholarships. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, will go to the education committee Wednesday. Reps. Mary Still and Chris Kelly, both Columbia Democrats, have co-sponsored similar legislation in the House.

Access Missouri is a three-year-old state scholarship program that awards as much as $2,150 for a student attending a public college and as much as $4,600 for students who opt to go to a private school. The proposed bills would equalize those amounts to $2,850.

Members of the coordinating board had mixed reasons for not wanting to change the current distribution. Some board members said any changes to Access Missouri should be the decision of all sectors affected and noted that the current program was the result of an 18-month process that involved representatives from public and private schools.

Board Chairman Lowell Kruse cast the lone dissenting vote, saying he supports the proposed legislation.

"Conditions have changed dramatically since the award amounts were established," Kruse said in a prepared statement. "State support for public institutions is not at the level that was anticipated at the time, and they are struggling."

But conditions are always changing, said Marianne Inman, who is president of Central Methodist University in Fayette and attended the coordinating board meeting in Lexington.

"To me, the compelling issue was that the independent sector was simply omitted" from discussions of equalizing the scholarship amounts, she said. "The original Access Missouri plan was the result of two years of meetings of financial-aid professionals and representatives from all sectors. The awards were developed based on careful consideration."
Inman pointed out that percentagewise, the scholarship distribution works out to about 25 percent of public four-year tuition and 22 percent of private school tuition. Those percentage amounts fluctuate based on availability of state funding.

The percentages work out that way because private schools are more expensive, Still said.

“Columbia College and Stephens benefit greatly from this, and I don’t want to see anything that pulls the rug out from any student,” Still said. “But philosophically, I can’t get my arms around this. I think it’s wrong.”

Kelly said he supports equalizing the scholarship amounts partly because he thinks it would be a more effective use of tax dollars.

“I do not hold anything against private institutes; I just wouldn’t make the awards bigger,” he said. “A dollar is a dollar, and why should Missouri taxpayers have to subsidize people to send kids to more expensive colleges when they can get them educated at less expensive public colleges?”

University of Missouri System President Gary Forsee has been a vocal critic of Access Missouri’s current distribution. During his State of the University speech in Kansas City last month, Forsee said Missourians should be “shocked” that Access Missouri gives more money to students who attend private colleges than those who go to public institutes.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Two MU professors say U.S. remains weak on climate change

By Paul Mossine
February 12, 2010 | 8:55 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The message was clear Friday as two MU professors addressed a packed auditorium on the MU campus: the United States has not carried its weight as a world power in addressing climate change.

Geography professors Mike Urban and Mark Cowell said hopes that the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen would make headway towards an international consensus on how to reduce the impact of global climate change were not fulfilled.

The professors served as observers at the December climate conference for the Association of American Geographers. The conference included 194 nations and 84 non-governmental agencies.

“People were aching that someone would show a strong leadership position,” Urban said. “You could almost hear the bubble pop when a negotiation failed to be reached.”

Urban said the U.S. negotiating position at the conference consisted of modest proposals and unprogressive policies, which he believes are due to the Obama administration’s fear of policy rejection in the U.S. Senate.

Cowell said that a large goal of the conference was to make legally binding agreements that would supersede the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement that commits nations to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions, which ends in 2011.

An international, legally binding agreement would ensure that nations make good on their promises to reduce emissions.

Urban said the U.S. would be more likely to strike deals directly with China, the world’s largest polluter, to reach more modest goals than were presented by the United Nations.
The professors said that while skepticism surrounding the legitimacy of climate change persists in America, the international community sees climate science as a given and is more interested in tackling the issues implied by scientific evidence than questioning its validity.

“There was virtually no talk of skepticism in the two weeks that we were there,” Urban said.

David O’Brien, a professor of rural sociology at MU who attended the Friday afternoon event in Memorial Union, said he believes political division surrounding the issue in the last decade has been counterproductive.

“People get scared,” O’Brien said. “The problem is people not understanding the science.”

Cowell and Urban encouraged people to learn more about the scientific basis of climate change and to take an active role in exerting pressure on legislators to make environmentally conscious policy decisions.

“It’s not a question of convincing politicians but rather convincing people to convince politicians,” Urban said.

“The best political solution is mobilization,” he added.
Copenhagen disappoints MU profs

U.S. ‘lackluster’ in climate push.

By T.J. Greaney

As the two weeks of the Copenhagen Summit on climate change wore on, the hopes of two University of Missouri professors melted like arctic icecaps.

Mark Cowell, an MU associate professor of geography, shares his view of the December conference Friday at Memorial Union. He and Urban went to Copenhagen as official observers for the Association of American Geographers.

The two men, attending the December gathering as official observers for the Association of American Geographers, had hoped to see the creation of a muscular, binding international treaty to slow the growth of greenhouse gases spewing into the atmosphere.

Instead, they say they saw an American delegation unwilling to lead and many other countries inflexibly staking out positions based on naked self-interest.

Most striking, said Michael Urban, an associate professor in the MU Department of Geography, was the gap between the dire predictions presented by top U.S. scientists and the policy offerings from top U.S. officials, which he described as “lackluster” and “milquetoast.”

“I think everybody had built up this notion that” President Barack Obama would come to Copenhagen and make everything better,” Urban said. “And that the U.S. would have some sort of aggressive position that he would announce, and that would lead to some sort of international binding agreement. That didn’t happen.”

One of the reasons it didn’t happen, Urban said, was Obama’s apparent unwillingness to sign any treaty that he couldn’t later get approved by the U.S. Senate. That hesitancy was a legacy held over from the Kyoto Protocol, a binding international treaty that the Senate unanimously voted to reject in 1997.

Proposals in Copenhagen, therefore, were much more modest and, ultimately, the world settled for a non-binding treaty asking countries merely to make “pledges” to reduce their emissions.

“The rest of the world was incredibly disappointed,” Urban said of the U.S. leadership. “There was this deflation. You could almost hear the bubble pop from Copenhagen all around the world.”
Urban and Mark Cowell, an associate professor of geography at MU, had virtually unfettered access to the proceedings at Copenhagen. They spent 12 hours a day at the sprawling Bella Center among some 30,000 attendees and blogged their observations. The two men shared their thoughts yesterday with a crowd of about 150 at MU’s Memorial Union.

During a PowerPoint presentation, the professors said they came away from the conference with a new sense of urgency for finding a solution to climate change. They heard Alaskan Inuits describe melting ice in hunting areas and the president of the Maldives say his country is in danger of going underwater.

During a robust question-and-answer session after their talk, the pair rejected any notion that climate change is not settled science. They pointed to recent NASA research showing that the past decade was the warmest ever and 2009 was the second warmest year on record. This heating trend follows closely a tripling of CO2 levels in the atmosphere since 1990.

Cowell said there was virtually no talk at the conference of climate skepticism outside of a handful of U.S. congressmen who gave speeches denouncing global warming as a hoax. “That’s not skepticism,” he said. “It’s rejectionism.”

After the presentation, attendees said they were grateful for the insider’s perspective from Urban and Cowell that described Copenhagen, warts and all.

“I’ve heard some people try to spin it as, ‘We really worked out a solution.’” said Mollie Freebairn of Jefferson City. “I think they drew a more real picture of how disappointed the world was that we didn’t make the progress we needed to make.”
Plants ease antibiotic risk to farms

BY GEORGINA GUSTIN
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
02/15/2010

Scientists worry that the routine use — some say overuse — of antibiotics in livestock could lead to strains of antibiotic resistant diseases in humans.

Researchers at the University of Missouri's Center for Agroforestry believe they've found a way to mitigate the potential risk.

The researchers performed three different studies, looking at whether buffer strips — of grasses or other plants — grown strategically in farm fields can capture and dilute antibiotics that livestock eliminate and farmers distribute as fertilizer. They found, in one study, that such buffers could reduce up to 80 percent of the total mass of antibiotics in an animal's manure. In the others, they determined that buffers improved soil's ability to improve the uptake of pollutants, and that certain plants are especially effective in dissipating the drug compounds.

"We're hoping with these buffers that we can prevent these antibiotics from making their way into water resources, and then find a process by which the compounds are degraded more quickly," said Keith Goyne, an assistant professor of soil chemistry.

Goyne estimates that 30 to 80 percent of any given dose of antibiotics ends up as waste rather than absorbed by the animal. One study, by the Washington-based Union of Concerned Scientists, said that 70 percent of all the antibiotics sold in the United States, or roughly 50 million pounds, are given to food animals for nontherapeutic uses. Though the concentrations are generally quite low, a body of research says that these antibiotics are making their ways into streams, rivers and lakes.

Some farmers already grow these buffers to capture and dilute herbicides or insecticides, or control erosion. Goyne and his colleagues hope their newest findings will encourage more farmers to plant them.

"That's one of the nice things about the buffers," Goyne said. "People have been using them for other reasons. This is just an additional incentive."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

More MU police on the prowl Friday

By Paul Mossine
February 12, 2010 | 1:45 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The MU Police Department will have additional officers on patrol looking for intoxicated drivers from 11 p.m. Friday to 3 a.m. Saturday.

MU Police Capt. Brian Weimer said he could not release how many officers would supplement the usual three on patrol, but said they will focus on the campus area and will not be utilizing checkpoints.

The saturation patrol, which will add more officers to police MU’s campus, is funded by money from the Highway Safety Division of the Missouri Department of Transportation. The allotment can be used for various enforcement operations including saturation patrol and checkpoints in the future, Weimer said.

“This is the first of several upcoming events,” Weimer said.

Weimer said Friday’s patrol will be carried out solely by MU police, although past operations were in conjunction with city and county police.
COLUMBIA — Cynthia Frisby, an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism, is scheduled to appear on The Oprah Show to get a “make-under” - a simplification of someone - and talk about style and confidence.

Frisby was unable to comment about the show.

The episode is scheduled to air at 4 p.m. Tuesday on KOMU-TV.
MU students bring black-perspective publication online

By Katy Bergen
February 14, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Dorothy Gaiter remembers national outrage when the Ohio National Guard fired into a group of protesting college students at Kent State University in 1970. Gaiter, then a journalism student at MU, participated in a campus vigil for the four dead and nine wounded.

She also remembers that 10 days later, police fired at protesting students at Jackson State College, a historically black school in Mississippi. Although two students were killed and others injured, Gaiter and other black students found that news coverage fell far short of that surrounding Kent State.

From their perspective, the times were already hard enough: Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy had been murdered, and the draft for Vietnam had claimed far too many young black men.

"There was a general turning inward by many black Americans," said Gaiter, who graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism in 1973 and whose career so far has taken her to the Miami Herald, The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.

Months before the shootings, Gaiter helped start "Blackout," a publication by the Legion of Black Collegians at MU meant to unify the black community on campus and provide a black point of view.

"Our coverage of the Jackson State killings was one of our most memorable efforts," she said.

Forty-one years later, two MU seniors think black perspectives are still needed. Veronica Wells and Victoria Uwumarogie, both journalism majors, have revamped the original newsletter, which ended in 1971, and turned it into an online publication that addresses national and local issues.
Its name slightly modified, the BLACKout began in September with a mission similar to that of the founders: adding a distinctly black perspective to Columbia-area media. In its first month, the publication included Uwumarogie's reaction to Kanye West's interruption of fellow music artist Taylor Swift's speech at the Video Music Awards and Wells' story about an MU student who created Dream Outside the Box, a program for underprivileged minority students.

"The publications here are good, but there is always something missing," Uwumarogie said.

Gerald Boyd, who became the first African-American managing editor of The New York Times, also felt that something was missing when he helped found the first Blackout as a journalism student. "Our biggest problem, and one faced by all revolutionaries, was the inability to communicate our concerns to the broader campus," Boyd wrote in his memoir, "My Times in Black and White: Race and Power at The New York Times."

Boyd, who died in 2006, wrote that the publication reflected how black students felt excluded from participating fully in university activities. Excerpts from Boyd's book can be found on the Missourian's Opinion page Sunday and online at ColumbiaMissourian.com. His wife, journalist Robin Stone, will be at MU this week; please see the sidebar for times and places.

"You can imagine how a lack of diversity played a role in the (original) Blackout," Wells said.

Uwumarogie said that although racial and cultural diversity in media coverage has improved since the 1970s, there have been situations during her training in the School of Journalism in which she has felt obligated to cover stories about the black community.

Wells mirrors this belief, "You don’t want to be put into a box and be the black girl writing about black people," she said. "But sometimes it’s like, if you don’t take it (the story), no one will."

Gaiter thinks the opportunity should be embraced. She said that after successful stints at the Missourian and the Savitar, MU's yearbook, she was told by an editorial writing teacher that he wished she had written more about the black community in Columbia. "Gee, I wish I’d known he felt that way," Gaiter said.

"It was an opportunity that I should have made more of, but I didn’t," Gaiter said. "Over an almost 37-year career, of which 27 were spent writing about race, I tried not to make that mistake again."
The **BLACKout Breakdown**

The online publication covers any topic staff writers think is of overall interest to blacks. That includes:

- Black Homecoming weekend at MU;
- **Greek probates**, which is the coming-out ceremonies for historically black fraternities and sororities;
- The black sorority Delta Sigma Theta's drive to help Haiti.
- **Profiles of famous black Americans** for every day in February's Black History Month
- The controversial practice of "bleaching" among blacks
- A review on the British documentary: "Is it Better to be Mixed Race?"

"We know what is going on, but we wanted other people to know about what we are doing and be participatory," said Jehan Roberson, president of the MU chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists.

Staff also sound off on issues and topics that affect blacks on a national level.

Freshman Calvin Stovall examined Tiger Wood's **recent sex scandal**. An article about director Spike Lee's derogatory comments about Tyler Perry, written by sophomore Dreana Johnson, is one of the most viewed on the Web site.

Uwumarogie and Wells search mainstream media for national stories that could be expanded by incorporating a black perspective. "I don't think these publications are racist, but people just get comfortable," Wells said.

They also look at Web sites geared toward the black community such as **The Root**, an online magazine devoted to the black perspective and **Young, Black and Fabulous**, a gossip blog about black celebrities.

Wells and Uwumarogie think being "comfortable" can result from unbalanced media. They want to combat negative portrayals of blacks, who they feel are too often highlighted in crime stories at the expense of more positive accomplishments in the community.

Gaiter has given this a lot of thought. "One reason why I devoted so many years to writing about race was because I felt that the media, even when good-faith efforts were made, often fell short in their coverage of race in America," said Gaiter, who returned to MU last year to deliver the **May commencement address** for the School of Journalism.
Sophomore Jamal Andress doesn't think there is a failure in local media coverage but rather an untapped interest on campus for topics the Web site addresses.

"It's not that the Missourian wouldn't cover it," Andress said. "It's just that I can go to the BLACKout and know I'd be interested in what I'm reading."

Freshman Jade Earle said she joined the BLACKout staff after learning about the publication through the National Association Black Journalists. Earle said it has allowed her to cover aspects of campus she would not have known about otherwise, such as the African Students Association's Miss Africa Mizzou pageant.

"You get a sense of different ideas, events or issues that are not really talked about," Earle said.

**Concept to Reality**

Wells and Uwumarogie first started hearing about bringing back the publication when they were sophomores. Students were excited, but the NABJ executive board had differing opinions on the format. The idea stalled.

So when Uwumarogie ran for NABJ vice president in April 2009, she included revitalizing BLACKout in her platform. In September, Roberson challenged members to create a publication before the end of this school year. Wells and Uwumarogie created the Web site in less than a week, writing most of the posts until more students became interested in becoming contributing writers. The students said the skills they learned in their Journalism School training have prepared them to successfully manage the BLACKout.

Currently, the Web site is not financially supported; a strategic communications committee is looking at ways to bring in money. Staffers hope to move it off its Wordpress host and eventually become a print publication.

"I was surprised by all the freshmen who said they wanted something tangible," Wells said. She and Uwumarogie think that younger students will step up to lead the publication when they graduate.

The BLACKout has pitch meetings at 6 p.m. every other Monday in the Reynolds Journalism Institute. The next meeting will be March 1. New writers, of any race, are welcome.

"It's for the enlightenment of everybody," Uwumarogie said.
But just to be clear, Wells said, the focus is on black issues locally and nationally.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU professor tries to bring nuclear disarmament through new book

By Ally Anderson
February 15, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Almost 48 years ago, Bill Wickersham, adjunct professor of peace studies at MU, took on a task that would come to dominate his life: trying to bring about global nuclear disarmament.

Wickersham is part of the eight-member Missouri University Nuclear Disarmament Education Team, which he helped found in 2009. Their mission is to enlighten Missouri and the rest of the world about the need to abolish nuclear war weapons from the planet through discussions and presentations to interested groups. In November 2009, he self-published the book "Confronting Nuclear Warfare: The Role of Education, Religion, and Community."

Twenty years after the Cold War ended, Wickersham asserts that nuclear annihilation is still a threat.

"Nuclear disarmament needs to be put back at the top of the academic agenda, and dealt with seriously in colleges and universities throughout the world," he wrote in the article "Confronting Nuclear War: The Role of Peace Studies."

Hence, Wickersham's motivation for writing his book.

Wickersham and Jared Gassen, a journalism graduate student and Wickersham's assistant, wrote "Confronting Nuclear Warfare: The Role of Education, Religion, and Community," to explain why they think nuclear weapons are still a threat, what can be done to reduce or eliminate them, and what the obstacles are to accomplishing this goal.

The book is a citizen's guide to the role parts of culture should play in abolishing nuclear weapons. The authors want everyone to know that nuclear weapons are a threat because there have been numerous accidents in the last 50 years.
"Confronting Nuclear War: The Role of Education, Religion, and Community" is available online and at MU Bookstore. The book is free at confrontingnuclearwar.com. Gassen and Wickersham decided to help advocate nuclear abolition through a simple medium.

"We came to the conclusion that self-publishing would be faster, reach more people and we can retain the rights to do what we want," Gassen said. "The point is for people to use it, not making money. What makes this book different is that Bill has been doing this work for fifty years and he gives examples from his life of what has, and hasn't, worked over the years."

Wickersham agreed. "You have to appeal to different audiences in different ways. In the early days, scientists were all over (nuclear disarmament). National organizations were all over it; the good materials were with the people at the top, but never got down to the bottom. This book is an attempt to get to the top and the bottom. There needs to be local attitude change - which requires time, energy and money."

Many members of the community don't think it is a local problem, Wickersham and Gassen both said. Naturally, people focus primarily on issues like their household incomes, their jobs and their children's health, they said.

Wickersham warned that, while paying attention to personal needs is important, there is a danger of countries like the U.S. and Russia destroying communities with "suicidal weapons."

"Contrary to conventional wisdom, nuclear war is a local problem," he said. "For over 45 years, we in mid-Missouri are less than 30 minutes away from instant extinction by missiles that the Russians have aimed at St. Louis, Kansas City and Whiteman Air Force Base near Knob Noster, Missouri."

Mark Haim, director of Mid-Missouri Peaceworks, agreed that most people don't take nuclear warfare seriously enough.

"What's at stake is not only the welfare of ourselves, our children and grandchildren, but the other life forms that we share the biosphere with could be destroyed," he said. "We have the potential to tear asunder the very fabric of human life."

Haim had heard of Wickersham for years, but their paths hadn't have crossed until Wickersham moved back to Columbia. Haim has known Wickersham since the mid-1990s. While both have worked to educate people on the dangers of nuclear arms, there are many obstacles to overcome for nuclear disarmament.
Wickersham names three major problems with trying to disarm:

- Psychological denial, sometimes known as the ostrich technique, causes people to avoid a troubling situation.

- "Obscene" profits made by nuclear war profiteers, such as the arms-producing companies like Boeing, Honeywell Corp. and hundreds of others.

- The U.S. quest for the weaponization of space causing an arms race.

Wickersham said he is hopeful that nuclear disarmament will re-emerge as a national priority. He responded to a speech by President Barack Obama's promise of making the "elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide a central element of U.S. nuclear weapons policy."

"Without question, this is the most promising nuclear disarmament statement by a U.S. president in recent history," Wickersham wrote.

There are treaties, like the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, that government officials worldwide are advocating to advance.

Meanwhile, local activists like Wickersham and Gassen plan to carry on their work of raising awareness and education, hoping that more political leaders will heed their call to action.