COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Retirement? Dental? UM System asks employees to weigh in

By Kourtney Geers
February 15, 2010 | 6:14 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — A survey assessing pay and benefits is now at the fingertips of almost 25,150 staff and faculty members in the University of Missouri System.

The survey asks employees to state their preferences among 14 areas of pay and benefits, including medical payments and premiums, dental coverage, retirement plans and life insurance. Right now, about $300 million is spent annually on employee benefits.

The 35-page survey was expected to be available online late last month or early this month, but system leaders decided to add an explanatory video, said Betsy Rodriguez, system vice president for human resources. The minute-long video was created to explain the purpose of the survey to employees and staff members.

"It was worth the extra time to make sure the survey technology works and to make sure the employees knew exactly why we were the conducting the survey," Rodriguez said.

The survey is not about making cuts, she said. "We strongly encourage the employees to give us feedback, and this survey is intended to provide as much value as possible to the employees and their families."

It has been at least 10 years since a survey of this kind has been conducted by the UM System, Rodriguez said previously.

One question in the survey's final "Perspectives" sections asks employees to rank how much they "strongly disagree" or "strongly agree" that domestic partner benefits should receive a high priority if UM resources became available to improve benefits.

MU Equity Director Noel English, who had not yet looked at the survey, was not surprised to be told the question was being asked. It indicates the system has heard this issue is important and is responding, she said.
"Hopefully people will fill out the survey and continue to tell the system that the partner benefits issue is something they support," English said. Her office has been seeking anecdotal accounts of whether the system's lack of domestic partnership benefits affects hiring and retention.

The survey was distributed via e-mail and is available through Feb. 28. It is being conducted by the human resources consulting firm Hewitt Associates, which is being paid $100,000 for the job. The expected response rate is 45 percent, Rodriguez said.
MU study: Plants ease antibiotic risk on farms

The Associated Press • February 16, 2010

St. Louis -- Many farmers grow grass or other plant buffers to control erosion or capture herbicides from their fields.

Now, University of Missouri scientists say there's another reason to plant them. They say the buffers can mitigate the potential risk of routine use of antibiotics in livestock.

Keith Goyne, an assistant professor of soil chemistry, told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that the buffers can prevent antibiotics from leaching into water resources.

Some scientists are concerned that antibiotic use in livestock could lead to antibiotic-resistant diseases in humans.

The researchers found that buffer strips can reduce up to 80 percent of antibiotics in an animal's manure, and that certain plants are especially good at dissipating the substances.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Monsanto donates money for MU lecture series

By Dana Kimpton
February 15, 2010 | 5:09 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Agricultural technology company Monsanto has donated $11,600 to MU's Saturday Morning Science lecture series.

Saturday Morning Science is a free program offered every Saturday while classes at MU are in session. The program is geared toward anyone who has a general interest in science, but no background knowledge is necessary for the lectures. It gives attendees the opportunity to learn about science through entertaining and interactive talks.

MU faculty members give most of the lectures, while volunteers organize and put them together. Monsanto is the first private firm to ever help support this venture with a substantial donation.

Monsanto's donation will help in three different areas, according to a news release:

- bring in scientists and lecturers from beyond MU, thus expanding the topics covered
- the "Science Talks to You" program, which brings the talks to smaller communities that don't have access to larger research facilities, museums and universities
- a newly-designed course that teaches future scientists how to make their research easier for the public to understand through lectures at community venues

All of these efforts attempt to provide science outreach to the public and extend the conversation between scientists and the community.

According to the Saturday Morning Science Web site, 18,075 people attended a total of 146 talks.

The program meets from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Saturdays in Monsanto Auditorium in the Christopher S. Bond Life Sciences Center on the MU campus. The MU Office of Research and the University Bookstore provide complimentary bagels and beverages starting at 10 a.m.
Engineering student found dead Thursday

CPD is investigating the case.

By Zach Toombs

Published Feb. 16, 2010

Senior engineering student Matthew Acra was found dead in his mother's home Thursday in Columbia, Columbia Police Department spokeswoman Jessie Haden said.

Acra's mother, Sharon Acra, found a handgun next to her son in the basement where she discovered him. Haden said the scene had all the signs of a suicide.

"At this time there's nothing to indicate that this was anything other than a suicide," Haden said.

CPD received a call from a friend of Sharon Acra, reporting the incident around 8 a.m. Thursday.

"We received the call and received information from someone at the scene that the victim might already be deceased," Haden said.

Sharon Acra arrived home from a night shift at her job Thursday.

"She came home at 8 in the morning and saw her son's car was still in the driveway, which was unusual since he had class at that time," Haden said. "She searched the house for her son before heading down to the basement."

Haden said Sharon Acra discovered her son with the handgun and immediately tried to apply medical care to him.

"She has medical training and tried to administer medical care for him, but she knew he was probably already deceased at the time," Haden said.

Sharon Acra called a friend, who then called CPD to report the incident.

"As people often do when they're in shock or panicking, she called an acquaintance rather than 911," Haden said. "But that acquaintance almost immediately called 911, and CPD responded within a few minutes."

Haden said Sharon Acra knew of no previous attempts at suicide from her son. He was on no medication or taking any prescription drugs.
According to the Boone County Medical Examiner's Office, Matthew Acra died a few hours before his mother found him Thursday.

The officers on scene called a detective and investigative unit in after arriving at Sharon Acra's house. Haden said this is regular procedure, even for cases that seem to be obvious suicides.

"This is something we always do, even in a case like this, when all signs seem to point to the same conclusion," Haden said.
Grad school dean finalists selected

The interview process for the four candidates will conclude March 2.

By David Conway

Published Feb. 16, 2010

The search for a new Graduate School dean has drawn nearer to its conclusion with MU narrowing the field of applicants to four.

Included among the finalists are candidates from Oklahoma State University and the University of Kansas, an MU engineering professor and the interim dean of the Graduate School.

The four finalists were selected after an extended period of searching for as many qualified applicants as possible, College of Engineering Dean James Thompson said. Co-chairman of the committee tasked with finding a replacement for former Graduate School Dean Pam Benoit, Thompson said a list of objective criteria was developed to find a group of semifinalists. Those semifinalists then participated in a round of shorter interviews conducted by the committee.

The finalists consist of OSU Graduate College Dean Gordon Emslie, Interim Graduate School Dean George Justice, KU communication professor Diana Carlin and Cerry Klein, National Science Foundation program director and engineering professor.

Thompson said the four remaining candidates best embodied the ideals initially established by the search committee.

"We're looking for someone that has background and understanding of the importance of graduate education," Thompson said. "Someone who has innovation with regard to graduate education."

In the next step toward finding a dean, each finalist will go through a two-day interview process, Thompson said. While in Columbia, the candidates will meet with both faculty and student organizations. Each candidate will also be present for an open forum on campus. One candidate will be interviewed each week until the process is scheduled to conclude March 2.

Search Committee Co-chairwoman Lee Wilkins said there will be opportunities for MU students to let their opinions on the candidates be known.

"People can e-mail, there's a Web site open for this purpose and they can give feedback in that way," Wilkins said.
Thompson said the voice of the student body will be taken into account when the final decision is made.

"All of the input from the various constituencies, and it's a two-day process, so there are many groups that will be meeting with the candidates, all of that information will be given to the provost," Thompson said. "Student input will be very important."

Although the committee will provide insight on the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate following their interview, Wilkins said the final decision lies with Provost Brian Foster.

"The search committee, in general, feels that these people would a good job fulfilling the duties of the dean as explained on the Web site," Wilkins said.

The Graduate School's Web site features the resume and interview dates of each candidate, as well as a formal description of the duties of the graduate dean.

"The graduate dean is expected to support and promote the highest quality graduate programs, aligning graduate education with research, public service and economic development activities," the Web site stated. "The dean must be an effective advocate for graduate education, both within the university and externally."

Thompson said neither faculty nor the outside applicants would receive a leg up on the competition because of their connections to the university.

"We have made it very clear that the objective of the committee and the objective of the provost is to find the best candidate," Thompson said. "If that person is not present internally or externally, it doesn't matter. Our job is simply to find them."
MU receives increased admission applications

The majority of the applicants are out of state.

By Isabelle Shaw

Published Feb. 16, 2010

Incoming freshman admission applications to MU at this point in the academic year have increased 6.1 percent since last year, Vice Provost for Admissions Ann Korschgen said.

MU has received 16,329 applications as of Monday. Last year at this time, it had 15,385 applications.

At this point, 4,460 students have paid enrollment deposits. Last year, MU received 4,307 at this point in the year. Korschgen said the majority of the increase in applications is coming from non-residents of Missouri. The enrollment deposit secures a student's place in the freshman class. The enrollment deposit deadline for the class entering the university in fall 2010 is May 1.

Korschgen said the increase in applications would not necessarily translate to a larger freshman class in the next academic year.

"While we are pleased with the increase in applications and deposits, we feel it is still too early to make any predictions about what this means for our fall enrollment numbers," Korschgen said.

The criteria for admission to MU consists of a 24 or higher composite score on the ACT or a 1090 or higher on the SAT critical reading and math scores, according to the MU admissions Web site.

Last year's average score for the incoming freshman class was a 25.6 on the ACT, according to a previous Maneater article. This was the highest average for the university in eight years. Last year's freshman class was also the second largest class in history; the first was the freshman class of 2008.

The percentage increase in admission applicants between last academic year and this academic year has leveled off since the fall semester. In November, MU had received 9,914 applicants. The number indicated a 9.5 percent increase in applicants from the same point the year before.
Korschgen said MU has continuing discussions about capacity issues. In a previous Maneater article, Korschgen referenced the increase in instructors and advisers at MU as steps taken to prepare the campus for more students.

Michael O'Brien, College of Arts and Science dean, said his school and MU as a whole are constantly preparing for a larger incoming freshman class.

"The university anticipates an increase in the freshman class for fall 2010, just as it has seen increases the last two years," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said the school takes several steps to make adequate room for a larger class.

"We believe that in the College of Arts and Science, we have the courses and sections that the fall 2010 student body will need," O'Brien said. "We add sections, hire more teachers and do whatever else is needed to ensure that the anticipated increase is handled smoothly."
MSA works toward on-campus tailgating

*MSA has been collaborating to devise a plan for next year's tailgating*

By Megan Pearl

Published Feb. 16, 2010

MSA has been collaborating to devise a plan for next year's tailgating for future football home games in response to the closing of Reactor Field last semester.

"We are working on the plan and are not finished, although I think we are all optimistic that we might have found a way to provide some tailgating space for students," Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Cathy Scroggs said in an e-mail.

MSA President Tim Noce has been meeting with Scroggs, along with other MU administrators, to discuss a tailgating pilot program for the upcoming football season.

"We are exploring using the metered lot on the corner of Maryland and Rollins as the place for student tailgating prior to games," Scroggs said. "There would be no cars allowed in the lot and MSA is considering whether to rent tents for those who want to use the area."

Scroggs said they have also considered shutting down part of Rollins Road for tailgating, but nothing is absolute yet.

Although Scroggs said they are still exploring costs, as far as they know, the tailgating endeavor would not raise student activity charges. Because it is an MSA initiative, MSA will use its event money.

Noce said the program would potentially include student organizations setting up stands around the designated tailgating area. Noce is also considering the possibility of umbrellas for rent during tailgating.

"We are putting together a student committee for the event," Noce said.

They also aim to incorporate more people from Greek Life and other aspects of MU spirit. The student committee will officially begin meeting this week to sort out responsibilities and goals for the project.

"My main concern is that students feel comfortable no matter what their age," Director of Student Communications Andy Chambers said. "They should want to come here."
All parties involved said though the plan is becoming more defined, it is still in its preliminary stages of development.

"We want a product that we can market and talk to students about," Chambers said.

Chambers said he aims to build a new and improved Web site for MSA that would allow students to voice their opinions about campus issues through polls, and tailgating would be one of the bigger issues.

Although MU is a dry campus, the university has an exception to the rule — alcohol is allowed at university administration-approved events, as long as all legal requirements are met in the sale and distribution of the alcohol.

"This plan creates an accountability factor that was not at Frat Pit or Reactor," Noce said. "Since it's a walk-in tailgate it creates a better, more social atmosphere."
Column:

Live tiger shouldn't be an issue

By Ryan Beck

Published Feb. 16, 2010

OK, it's about time we lay this issue to rest. There has been a lot of talk about this, and I am here to kill this issue once and for all.

While watching ESPN last week, I was pleased to see there would be some discussion about MU. Could it be the long-standing 32-game home winning streak our team had? How about how former quarterback Chase Daniel winning a Superbowl ring as a member of the Saints? Or could it even be the fact Kareem Rush is averaging 1.3 points per game in the NBA?

Nope, nope and definitely nope.

The story was about this school's idea to get a living, breathing Bengal tiger at home sporting events. I am ashamed this will be the only mention of MU on national television until March Madness.

ESPN reported 1,300 students are in the Facebook group to bring a tiger to home games, and only 1,000 are in the opposing Facebook group. What undoubtedly started as a drunken conversation at Harpo's on a random Thursday night a few weeks ago has now sparked a huge nationwide controversy.

Thanks, Internet.

This whole idea is ridiculous and utterly stupid.

When I was presented with the choice to either join the "yes" group or the "no" group — I did what every other MU Tiger should have done.

I ignored both.

I am 100 percent against this drunken "Let's get a freakin' tiger, man!" idea.

I am so against it that when the choice was brought before me to oppose the idea I said, "There is no way that I am going to give merit to such a ludicrous idea, so I will ignore it completely." To
acknowledge this could have been a real conversation a few weeks ago is completely baffling to me.

Now I guess I'll eat those words because this story now has legs — four striped shameful legs, and I am here to say, "Stop talking about this."

To everyone in the "Vote Yes" group, you are why people at the University of Iowa think MU is an academic joke.

To everyone in the "Vote No" group, why the hell would you believe this is a real proposal? Don't be so irrational. Go apply to the University of Iowa.

To the Missouri Students Association president, whose name I don't know, stop drinking so much.

Mr. MSA President, there are a few things this school could use: a good headlining comedian for this semester, more fans for the rugby team and a whole lot more Ryan Beck. There is another handful of things this school doesn't need and leading the pack? You guessed it: a fucking Tiger.

The ESPN reporters said, when referring to the people in the "Vote Yes" group, "These kids are in college? What's wrong with them?" And so I am here to congratulate everyone responsible for this outlandish news story for making my and everyone else graduating in May's degree laughable. You people are a dark stain on MU's already bruised torso.

John Anderson is spinning in his grave — the one he surely just dug out of embarrassment when people around the office realized he went to MU.

From merely a pragmatist's standpoint, who's feeding the tiger? Why are we basically inviting animal rights groups to tie our school up in legal drama?

What MSA should do is sponsor a tiger at the St. Louis Zoo.

Name it Truman.

Everyone wins.

A professional caregiver can manage the tiger in a safe environment. We get our tiger, we lay this issue to rest and we can go on with our lives assuming nobody jumps into the tiger pit and gets eaten like last year.
RHA votes on condom funds

RHA's decision to continue the program depends on next week's vote.

By Luke Udstuen

Published Feb. 16, 2010

A majority of representatives in the internal committee of the Residence Halls Association approved the Sexual Health Advocate Peer Education's funding request of $2,440 for campus condom machines.

The condom machines provide constant access to sexual health resources. The boxes come in three varieties: male condoms, female condoms and oral dams.

RHA representative Tim Banks abstained from a voting on the funding request.

"I personally abstained on the vote," Banks said. "While the condom machines are a great idea, they're being vandalized. They fill them up on Thursday and they're gone by Friday."

Banks said he also sees the resources being wasted by jokesters who leave condoms or lube on other students' doors. The Wolpers residence hall condom machine has been broken multiple times over the past year.

Banks suggested using students I.D. cards as a way to track who is taking condoms from the machines. Students' privacy would be retained because their information would only be accessed in the event of excessive usage.

"They'd see that 'Joe' swiped 80 times in 10 minutes, so we'd know he wouldn't be using them properly," Banks said.

RHA Vice President Lauren Thomas said adding the requirement of swiping student identification cards would increase the cost of operating the machines, which were intended to provide students with sexual resources free of charge.

There is no tracking system in place to see who takes condoms from the machines.

"I would like to hear people's ideas on how to stop it," Thomas said.

Thomas said though vandalism is a problem with the machines, she sees the set-up as the only effective way to distribute condoms to students but keep their right to privacy in tact.
"We want to see them used for protection, and for students to be educated and aware of how to practice safe sex," Thomas said. "But, we are in college, and there are those goof balls who are going to use it no matter how we regulate it."

Banks said students only used condoms for nefarious purposes because they had easy access to them.

"No one would go out to the BCC to get condoms to use improperly," Banks said.

Wooden condom machines were introduced as a cheaper alternative than metal machines. If existing parts on the wooden machines break, new parts can be created in MU facilities.

Thomas said the wooden machines haven't caused problems.

RHA representative Nick Brown voted in favor of the resolution for its full amount and said it was a fair amount.

"I definitely think it will benefit the residents," RHA representative Laura Heck said. "I know that residents can easily get themselves into sticky situations, no pun intended, without these products."

RHA has $8,815.73 left in its budget for this semester.
Dining waste increases in fall semester

The Can the Waste campaign will continue to educate residents.

By Zach Toombs

Published Feb. 16, 2010

Campus Dining Services' campaign to reduce plate waste faltered in the fall semester; the amount of waste per tray increased 12.8 percent, CDS Associate Director Steve Simpson said.

CDS began tracking waste in its five buffet-style dining halls in October 2008. Although waste per tray increased in fall 2009, the total has dropped from 5.74 to 5.02 ounces per tray in the last 15 months. CDS spokesman Andrew Lough said waste totals for this semester have been trending downward.

"On average, our numbers have been down each month this semester," Lough said. "There are particular months where a particular unit has superseded their number from last year, but overall, the numbers look somewhat encouraging."

Changes of 1 or 2 ounces of food waste per tray in CDS' dining halls can translate into hundreds of thousands of pounds of waste each year, Simpson said.

"CDS serves approximately 2 million meals per calendar year in the 'all-you-care-to-eat' venues, excluding take-out locations," Simpson said. "If waste per meal averages 4 ounces per person, this results in approximately 500,000 pounds of wasted food and beverage annually. A reduction of just 1 ounce of food and beverage food waste per meal would equate into a savings of 125,000 pounds of product annually."

The average plate waste in September 2009 was 4.45 ounces per tray, Simpson said. December 2009 had 5.02 ounces of waste per tray, an increase of 0.57 ounces per person.

Food waste is not being measured at Baja dining hall and other take-out locations.

"The dining halls that are tracking plate waste are the five residential all-you-care-to-eat units," Simpson said. "Rollins, Eva J’s, Plaza 900, Pavilion at Dobbs and Mark Twain Market. Rollins is closed for renovation during spring semester 2010, so they are not tracking this semester."

The data is collected once a week and averaged over a four-week period to produce the month statistic.
"All-you-care-to-eat residential dining locations measured consumer food waste each week and posted the ounces-per-customer results each month from October 2008 through April 2009 with the goal of reducing customer food waste," Simpson said.

CDS has implemented several different campaigns and procedures in the attempt to reduce food waste, Simpson said.

"Can the Waste was a five-day campaign designed to heighten residential student awareness regarding the wasted food, paper, cleaning supplies and natural resources due to excessive amounts of plate waste in all-you-care-to-eat environments," Simpson said.

Can the Waste took place Oct. 5 through Oct. 9 last year.

Freshman Cietta Grose said she is not surprised with the increased figures for plate waste.

"I myself am guilty of wasting food," Grose said. "It's like the old saying goes, your eyes are bigger than your stomach."

Lough said he's hopeful CDS' waste output would decrease again in the next few months.

"The percentage increase is a bit larger this year," Lough said. "But I do expect to see the numbers trend down in second semester, as they did last year."

— Staff writer Jared Grafman contributed to this report