2 U. of Missouri Students Charged With Littering for Cotton-Ball Incident

The two University of Missouri students who were arrested on March 2 for scattering cotton balls in front of the Columbia campus's Black Culture Center have been charged with littering, according to the university's student newspaper, The Maneater. The students were originally charged with tampering in the second degree, which is a Class D felony, and committing a hate crime, because many viewed the cotton balls as an offensive reference to slavery. The new charge is a Class A misdemeanor, and the students could each face a $1,000 fine, up to a year in prison, or both. The students are expected to plead guilty on April 29.
Scholarship projects are linked in bill

Access Missouri, Bright Flight go to House floor for debate.

By Terry Ganey

JEFFERSON CITY — A plan to equalize payments under the state's Access Missouri Scholarship Program gained another life today when House leaders added it to legislation dealing with a scholarship for high-achieving students.

As the legislative session nears its May 14 adjournment, lawmakers often combine bills that are moving through the process in hopes of getting them approved. The House Higher Education Committee voted to do just that by linking the revised Access Missouri Scholarship Program with proposed changes in the Bright Flight program.

House Higher Education Committee Chairman Gayle Kingery, R-Poplar Bluff, said the combined bill would now become the main legislation that attempts to award students attending public and private colleges the same amount of money under Access Missouri.

Students attending private four-year institutions now are eligible for a maximum Access Missouri award of $4,600, and the most that students attending four-year public colleges are eligible for is $2,150. Under the proposed legislation, beginning in the 2014 academic year, all students would get a maximum of $2,850.

The committee already had approved a single bill changing the Access Missouri award program. But combining it with the Senate-approved changes to the academic achievement scholarship could give it a better chance of passing.

The changes to the Bright Flight scholarship adjust how state funds will be distributed in the future. Students in the top 3 percent in testing to qualify for college would be eligible for $3,000 Bright Flight scholarship awards. If funds are available, awards of $1,000 would be made to students achieving test scores in the top 4 percent and 5 percent levels. Bright Flight awards now are made to students in the top 5 percent of college aptitude test scores.

The committee adopted the combined bill 8-4 after two amendments were rejected. Some lawmakers complained that a sunset provision on the Access program was removed, meaning it was possible the program would continue to be in perpetuity.

But the committee defeated an attempt to put a sunset of 2020 on the scholarship program. Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, attempted to implement the equalization plan for freshman students beginning in 2011.
“This is a fair approach for the students involved,” said Rep. Margo McNeil, D-Florissant.

She said Missouri was fourth in the nation in support for private colleges and 48th nationally in support for public higher education.

“If this amendment goes on, the bill is dead,” Kingery said.

He and others said any changes would jeopardize an agreement that had been reached between public and private higher education institutions.

Still’s amendment lost 7-5. The full bill now goes to the House floor for further consideration.

Reach Terry Ganey at 573-815-1708 or e-mail tganey@columbiatribune.com.
House OKs Access Missouri changes

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

JEFFERSON CITY — The House gave first-round approval Tuesday to a plan that makes needs-based scholarship payments equal for all students, whether they attend Missouri’s public or private colleges, beginning with the 2014 school year.

Under the proposal, students attending all four-year higher education institutions in Missouri beginning in the fall of 2014 could be eligible for as much as $2,850 under the Access Missouri Scholarship program. Currently, the maximum award amounts are $2,150 for students attending public four-year institutions and $4,600 for students attending private colleges.

With the 133-20 vote, the House put its stamp of approval on an agreement worked out between leaders of private and public universities, including the University of Missouri, over the past few weeks. The discussions accelerated after Gov. Jay Nixon suggested eliminating the scholarship for private college students altogether in the face of the state’s budget crisis.

Under the proposal, the maximum needs-based award for community college students would increase to $1,300 from $1,000.

The award amounts are maximums based on the number of students applying for the scholarship as well as the availability of state funds. Because of the state’s budget situation, the maximum for private school students now is about $3,000.

The House spent much of the afternoon debating how long the new system would remain in effect and when it would begin. The House defeated an amendment offered by Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, that would have implemented the equalization in 2012.

Rep. Mike Thomson, R-Maryville, sponsored the equalization change saying the money from the program would go to families with financial needs.

“It has everything to do with need,” Thomson said. “We can settle something we have been debating for three years.”
Proposed consolidation of education departments stirs heated debate in Senate

By Trevor Eischen
April 21, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

JEFFERSON CITY — While the Missouri Senate gave first approval to combining Missouri's two education departments, debate stalled on a subsequent proposal outlining the details.

The consolidation is one of many moves made by the Senate in the session to "reboot government."

"Right now, the Coordinating Board of Higher Education is the greatest oxymoron in state government," President Pro Tem Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, said.

Before the Senate are two joint resolutions that detail the merger. The legislation, sponsored by Shields, dissolves the current education departments and boards and creates a new one, combining both higher and elementary and secondary education into one department. Senate debate stalled on a companion proposal that outlines the authority the new board would have over education in Missouri.

The intent of the bill, Shields said, was not limited to saving what he predicted to be a "million plus" dollars for the state. The ultimate goal of the consolidation, he said, was to create one education department "responsible for the entire spectrum from pre-K to post-secondary."

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, tried to exempt the University of Missouri System from the jurisdiction of the proposed education board. Many senators spoke against the amendment, which Schaefer eventually withdrew from consideration.
Sen. Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, said he did not agree with this extension of power.

"I have no problem if we want to exempt the University of Missouri from all the taxpayer money and to exempt them from the appropriations process here," Crowell said. "But I have yet to see a time in my service in the General Assembly where the University of Missouri has not come here and asked for money."

Schaefer said Crowell, as well as Sen. Gary Nodler, R-Joplin, misunderstood his amendment and the "constitutional obligation outlined in the Missouri Constitution." He said the language in the state constitution allows the UM System Board of Curators to suggest appropriations directly to the General Assembly without an education board as an intermediary.

The amendment would have provided the UM System with the power to circumvent the new board for funding requests.

The university is the only higher education institution recognized in the Missouri Constitution.

"I know (other institutions) don't like that," Schaefer said. "But you don't get to pick and choose the provisions of the constitution that you think you want to enforce. You got to take in lock, stock and barrel."

After Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Glendale, suggested repealing UM as Missouri's priority from the constitution, Schaefer conceded and withdrew his amendment. But Schaefer said even though he couldn't get UM special privileges, he said Missouri has too many higher education institutions.

"If we are low on funds, which we truly are, then what we need to do is look at how much are we giving to these other institutions," Schaefer said.

Sen. Frank Barnitz, D-Lake Spring, said he worries the board could render institutions' regional boards useless and close several of Missouri's universities. He said that would be a problem, because it is important to give students choices.
"At the end of the day, the goal of this thing is not to preserve institutions; the goal is to have a more educated citizenry," Shields said, adding that some states, such as Iowa, only have three higher education institutions that serve the entire state population.

Shields said consolidating universities would be a viable option to state funding over a smaller area.

"We have a state with institutions in every corner offering duplicate programs all over the state, and at the same time, we're not a very high state in terms of educational retention," Shields said.

But Shields said he doubts the General Assembly could do that without many internal disagreements and huge constituent disapproval.

Debate stalled over a second amendment, proposed by Nodler which would give the new board appropriation power. Other senators said the language was too vague and would give the board too much power.
Nixon to ask educators for help

Tax credit reduction is governor’s focus.

By Terry Ganey

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon is enlisting Missouri’s education community in his campaign to reduce state spending on tax credits, telling educators their financial future depends on it.

Jay Nixon:
Wants to reduce state spending on tax credits

Nixon has scheduled a meeting for tomorrow morning with about 80 representatives of higher, secondary and elementary education and their related interest groups to encourage them to lobby lawmakers for tax credit reform.

“He will want them to go out and talk to legislators and impress upon them that for our long-term economic and budgetary health, we need to get serious about tax credit reform,” said Jack Cardetti, a spokesman for Nixon’s office.

Most of the focus will be on the state House, where Nixon’s proposal to cut tax credits has encountered stiff opposition. Some teacher and school board groups are already on board with Nixon’s proposal.

Nixon wants to reduce tax credit spending to $314 million, about 70 percent of what was redeemed in 2009.

“The governor thinks we are being inefficient with some of our tax credit programs,” Cardetti said. “We have more than 60, and over the last decade, spending is up more than 85 percent.”

Tax credits cost the state treasury $448 million last year. The two biggest programs are for historic preservation, $186 million, and low-income housing, $106 million. Lawmakers in the Senate have questioned how enormous sums get spent on tax credit programs while education funding has been cut this year because of a sharp drop in tax revenue.

The Missouri State Teachers Association, the Missouri National Education Association, the Missouri Association of School Administrators and the Missouri School Boards’ Association
have issued a joint statement calling on the General Assembly “to overhaul the current process of issuing tax credits to ensure there is accountability and control of all tax credit programs.”

“The evaluation and possible elimination of some state tax credits would provide additional revenue to the state at a time when it is desperately needed,” the statement said.

Representatives of the state’s public four-year higher-education institutions and community colleges are scheduled to meet with Nixon, along with representatives of the educator groups that issued the joint statement. Budget Director Linda Luebbering and Economic Development Director David Kerr are to give them a briefing on the budget and the impact from tax credit programs.

“There are some that give a good return, but some need to be reformed,” Cardetti said. “Because higher education and K-12 are huge parts of Missouri’s budget, this will put them in a better position.”

Reach Terry Ganey at 573-815-1708 or e-mail tganey@columbiatribune.com.
Ranking rankles students

Law dean tries to calm fears.

By Janese Heavin

The dean of the University of Missouri School of Law continues to meet with students to ease fears over the recent drop in the program’s national ranking.

Dean Larry Dessem said he is awaiting additional data from the American Bar Association to better understand why U.S. News & World Report ranked MU’s law school 93rd this year, a nearly 30-spot drop from its 65th-place ranking last year. The law school’s ranking had hovered between 58 and 69 on the list over the past eight years.

Dessem hosted a town-hall forum when the numbers were released last week and has met with smaller groups and plans to meet with student leaders soon.

Some students have suggested transferring to another program in light of the drop, Dessem said, but he believes “calmer heads will prevail.” Although a handful of students transfer in and out for various personal reasons every year, it would not make sense to transfer for academic reasons, he said.

“Transfers make even less sense at law schools because that first year is really basic training,” Dessem said. “That’s when students bond and make lifelong friendships and acquaintances. To transfer to another law school and give that up makes little sense.”

On the flip side, Dessem said he has heard from students who “tell me they were proud of their decision to come here and are just as proud today. I think at the end of the day, students are going to base decisions on the quality of instruction and not on numbers others may put on us.”

U.S. News and World Report’s annual rankings are based on a dozen quality measures, and one-fourth of a school’s rank is based on peer assessment scores, which means deans and chairs at other law schools are asked to rank their peers on a scale of 1 to 5.

Assessments from lawyers and judges count as 15 percent of a grade, and in that category MU ranked 50th, Dessem noted. Other factors include median LSAT scores and undergraduate grade-point average as well as selectivity and acceptance rates.

Last week, President Gary Forsee blamed the drop, in part, on lack of state funding. Although state support is not one of the 12 criteria described, funding does affect faculty-to-student ratio, extracurricular programs and other measures of quality.
“The continued slide in funding mechanisms continues to show up in our rankings,” Forsee told the system’s Board of Curators at the Rolla meeting.

U.S. News and World Report considers placement success and shows MU as having 50.7 percent of its graduates employed at graduation in 2008. However, that number might not reflect what is actually happening with MU graduates, university spokesman Christian Basi said.

He pointed to MU enrollment data that show 95 percent of those who graduated from the law school in fall 2007 and spring or summer 2008 were employed in the field. Those figures are based on an alumni survey conducted several months after graduation, and in this case 100 percent of graduates responded. The employment percentage for fall 2008 and spring or summer 2009 was 92 percent.

“Our concern is not the U.S. News report,” Dessem said, “but finding good legal jobs for our graduates.”

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
MU will test mass notification system Thursday

By Katy Bergen
April 20, 2010 | 9:13 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — All MU students, faculty and staff registered with the university’s mass notification system will receive a test text message at 2:50 p.m. Thursday.

MU plans to test the system at least once a semester. Recipients will be asked to verify they received the text.

The message will be:

"This is a test of the MU Alert Notification System on April 22, 2010. This is only a test."

Directions for registering with the system are available at mualert.missouri.edu.
MU Stressbusters program aims to relieve student stress

By Katelyn Amen
April 20, 2010 | 4:59 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — When MU sophomore Sarah Davis entered her Stressbusters' training session, the room felt a little tense, she said. Then the students began giving each other back rubs, practicing to become "busters" for the Stressbusters program, and everyone seemed to loosen up. Literally.

"You could tell it was a different kind of atmosphere once we had all gotten massages," Davis said.

It's no secret that college students are stressed out. In a 2009 study done by the Associated Press and mtvU, 85 percent of college students said they felt stressed on a daily basis. And stress hurts more than a student's mental well-being. Data from the National College Health Assessment consistently cites stress as the number one factor in poor academic performance.

This semester, the MU Student Health Center is working to combat student stress with Stressbusters, which promotes relaxation with free five- to seven-minute back rubs. Program creator Jordan Friedman of Columbia University said MU is the first public institution to adopt the nationwide program, which is used in several private universities.

Terry Wilson, director of health promotion at the Student Health Center, began looking at the program in February 2009 as an addition to the center's developing stress management program.

"Stress without good coping strategies really gets in the way of clear thinking," Wilson said. "Over time, stress long-term can really impact our immune system ... and we see that here at the Student Health Center."
She said students are often drawn to unhealthy stress coping mechanisms — alcohol misuse, tobacco use and changes in food behaviors — so adequate stress management resources are necessary. "This is a really wonderful way to meet that need," Wilson said. "Just to take a break, just to regroup and rebalance."

To adopt the program, the health center paid a one-time fee of $15,000, which included training time, Friedman's visits, marketing materials and ongoing program support. Ann Nadler, director of administrative services for the Student Health Center, said Friedman gave MU a lower cost to encourage the program in a public university.

Friedman said start-up costs range from $9,500 to $18,000. Starting this spring, schools adding the program will pay an annual membership fee as well.

**Events and busters**

Pam Roe, spokeswoman for MU Student Health Center, said Stressbusters schedules back massage events on campus that are open to all students, but student organizations can also request Stressbusters to work at their own events. The events also serve as a way to give students information on the health center.

Courtney McLain, student coordinator of Stressbusters at MU, said the program often gains student volunteers, known as "busters," after they get back rubs at events. Thanks to this, an MU announcement and word of mouth, Roe said, it's been easy to find volunteers for the program.

"Most of them said the reason they want to get involved is because they want to help make students' lives better," Roe said.

Davis heard about Stressbusters through the MU announcement and applied with a friend. She's in the first group of students to be trained as busters at MU.

“It was pretty awesome to feel like you're the starter of something," Davis said.

McLain said Friedman, Wilson and a licensed massage therapist train Stressbusters volunteers. Friedman, who traveled to Columbia for the program's start-up, said trainees learn how to communicate with students during a back rub and practice specific and appropriate back-rubbing techniques.
"People are surprised at how well we are able to do it," Davis said.

She admits that she found the back rub concept peculiar at first. "I thought, 'Do people actually want to be touched by other people they don't know?'' she said.

Stressbusters creator Friedman said the answer is yes. Supportive touch "is important to emotional wellness and even academic performance," he said.

A 2005 study by the University of Illinois found that one-time back rubs reduced anxiety while short back rubs over time reduced depression and pain, according to the Stressbusters website. Back rubs are also done in public places with approved techniques and participant consent.

**Stressbusters nationwide**

Friedman started Stressbusters at Columbia University in 1996. As then director of the university's health promotion program, he said he wanted to give students a convenient method of stress relief.

"The program's events turned out to be great places to talk about health topics and resources on campus," he said.


"We knew we needed to do more outreach on the subject of stress," said Melissa Ruwitch, chief of health promotion services there. "We wanted to reach out at community events in a bigger way."

The program has received overwhelmingly positive feedback. "We get more and more students involved every semester," Ruwitch said. "The events are well-attended and it's going really strongly."

Courtney Stein, health promotion manager for the New York University Student Health Center, said NYU implemented the Stressbusters program in spring 2008.
"Stress contributes to so many wellness concerns including poor grades, sleep difficulties, emotional distress, difficulty with relationships and physical illness among others," Stein said. "We wanted to provide our students with relaxation opportunities that would encourage them to practice protective health behaviors."

NYU students have reported feeling less overwhelmed and having lower levels of stress, loneliness and muscle tension after taking part in Stressbusters, Stein said.

Wilson said students respond to questions before and after their back rubs to gauge the change in stress levels. "They're having a good experience with this," she said. "We get things like, 'Amazing' and 'This is a great idea.'" She also said students often say they're glad the health center has the service. McLain said students have reported improved stress levels and feeling more capable of work after participating in a Stressbusters back rub.

Roe said busters at MU have given more than 500 back rubs since mid-February. More than 70 volunteers have been trained with the program.

Off college campuses, stress continues to be a problem. Wilson said that in a national study of patients accessing primary health care, stress was a contributing factor in 70 percent of reported symptoms.

Friedman sees his program as part of the bigger battle against stress in society. He said it's a way to combat the stressed-out norm that causes health issues, and he hopes to expand the program to all campuses nationwide. Stressbusters "sends a very visible message that nonstop stress isn't the only road to success," he said.