State budget cuts mean MU salaries stay low

By Nicole Lebsack
May 10, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA – MU faculty salaries fell to last place among Association of American Universities schools this year, and MU officials say the ranking isn't expected to improve in the near future.

The average salary for all ranked faculty at the 35 AAU public institutions is $96,382, according to the 2009-10 Report on the Economic Status of the Profession from the American Association of University Professors.

The average for all ranked MU faculty is $81,656, which puts the university in last place. Oregon was the only school that ranked below MU in 2008-09, but it jumped ahead this year. Oregon’s average faculty salary is now $82,321.

The data shows that MU also ranked last on the list in salaries for assistant professors ($60,749) and associate professors ($74,114). Salaries for full professors ($110,997) rank No. 34 out of 35 schools.

Salaries for assistant professors were at the bottom of the list for 2008-09, but associate professors were at No. 33 out of 34 schools and full professors were at No. 31. Georgia Tech was added to the list this year, increasing the number of comparative public universities to 35.

A total of 1,069 MU faculty made up the data set, said Ann Patton, a programmer analyst expert for the university. This number does not include instructors, part-time staff or faculty from the medical school.

MU Deputy Provost Ken Dean said the consistently low rankings are due to the state's lower-than-average funding per capita for higher education.

“Missouri ranks between 40 and 50 in terms of funding from the state,” Dean said.

For the 2008-09 academic year, MU faculty members received their highest pay increases since 1998-99, MU Budget Director Tim Rooney said. This year, state budget cuts necessitated a freeze on merit increases.

In a deal between UM System President Gary Forsee and Gov. Jay Nixon, the university budget would not exceed 5.2 percent in fiscal year 2011 if undergraduate in-state tuition remained the same.
At MU, the cut amounts to $10 million. That means the university will receive less money on July 1 than it did in 2001, Rooney said.

“It’s just hard to overcome that $10 million,” he said.

Pay increases are a top priority for MU employees, according to a recent employee benefits survey, but Dean said the university isn’t able to address that issue right now.

“We certainly wish we were in a position to give raises,” he said. “I think it’s important to be able to reward faculty and staff who have been productive, and it’s unfortunate to be in this situation.”

However, university officials were clear that no one is to blame.

“The governor and the legislature are doing all they can to help higher education,” Rooney said.

“The low monetary amount per capita is just a fact of life, but they have really protected higher education in the last year."
Would Missouri be a fit in Big Ten?

BY VAHE GREGORIAN
OF THE POST-DISPATCH
05/09/2010

First in a series of stories on the issue of college conference expansion.

Seeking to dispel indications of an enchantment with the Big Ten, the University of Missouri chancellor wrote to the school's longtime conference home expressing his hopes of a "long and highly positive relationship."

Just the same, he added: "It is my responsibility ... to evaluate carefully any and all options (that) could enhance MU's ability to carry out its mission of teaching, research and service."

The tone echoes what MU has been saying since the Big Ten announced in December that it would explore expansion.

But the words go back nearly 17 years, written by then-MU chancellor Charles Kiesler to the Big Eight Conference just before it morphed into the Big 12 and shortly after the Big Ten — stop us if you've heard this one — said it was studying further expansion. The conference had added an 11th school with Penn State in 1990.

With the Big Eight in flux and the Big Ten representing a stable and prosperous brand, MU administrators and boosters sought to be in the next wave.

"Everyone just anticipated (the Big Ten) would get to 12 pretty quickly," Woody Cozad, then an MU curator, said this week. "Who has an 11-team conference?"

Kiesler's note was sent to Big Eight officials and administrators after a statewide group of businessmen calling itself "MU — A National Asset" had rankled conference brethren with its campaign for membership in the Big Ten.

"Don't come to my house and eat dinner, and then go outside and tell people what a terrible cook I am," then-Iowa State football coach Jim Walden said. "We ought to give them some options. ... Thirty days — either shut up or get out."

Flash forward to 2010:
MORE MIZZOU
• SOUND OFF: Mizzou Talk forum
• BLOG: Tiger Tracker
• SCHEDULE/RESULTS: Mizzou in '09-10
• STATS: '09 Tigers
While no one is saying it publicly this time, MU's current stance that it is a proud member of the Big 12 but would listen to opportunities to improve itself has offended several Big 12 administrators.

At least some of that resentment was created not by the school itself but by comments from Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon to the Associated Press: "I'm not going to say anything bad about the Big 12, but when you compare Oklahoma State to Northwestern, when you compare Texas Tech to Wisconsin, I mean you begin looking at educational possibilities that are worth looking at."

Still, MU specifically has complained about the Big 12 bowl structure that several times has relegated its football team to bowls below where it finished in the standings. And the school also has been critical of the Big 12's lack of equitable revenue sharing.

(Perception of unfairness notwithstanding, the heart of the issue is the fact the Big 12 generates substantially less overall television revenue to be shared — between $7 million and $12 million per school compared to $20-22 million per school in the Big Ten.)

MU's posturing, said one Big 12 source, is comparable to being in a marriage but openly seeking another partner, creating an impression that it is both whining and rattling a tin cup to the Big Ten — acts that could backfire both in terms of how the Big Ten sees MU and the omelette MU could be scraping off its face if the apparent gambit fails.

"It's your history; it's your culture," one source said. "The Big 12 shouldn't be a second option."

Perhaps that's why Mizzou's most recent statement, issued Tuesday, is sheer vanilla extract.

"The University of Missouri is receiving numerous inquiries related to public speculation about conference membership. MU is a member of the Big 12 Conference and will not respond to speculation about conference realignment."

MU chancellor Brady Deaton declined to be interviewed for this story. Athletics director Mike Alden was traveling and unavailable to comment.

However it is responding publicly, though, Mizzou has acknowledged a self-examination of its priorities and needs — likely code for studying how it might prosper further by joining the Big Ten.
Whether that means it would jump if asked is another matter, though the prospects of boosting revenue an estimated $10 million a year and sprucing up its academic reputation by association could make an irresistible case.

But for now, anyway, that point is almost irrelevant compared to the real questions of the moment as the Big Ten prepares for its annual conference meetings and convenes its presidents and chancellors in the next few weeks.

Will the Big Ten ask MU to join? Is MU a good fit?

Countless variables could be at play in the decision, not the least of which is whether the conference would seek to add multiple schools and the greatest of which is what it would take to increase the financial pie enough to justify any additional mouth or mouths to feed.

Those answers may be known only to Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany and the analysts crunching numbers for him, and any decisions simply could sizzle down to money.

A NATURAL FIT?

Interviews with college athletics officials intimately familiar with the Big Ten and Big 12, plus an analysis of various indices the Big Ten could consider, indicate MU in some ways is a natural.

By some measures with certain Big Ten schools, one said, MU has a "separated at birth" profile.

Or as Cozad put it:

"In many ways, we just look a lot more like Indiana, Illinois and Iowa — I'm not going to say Michigan — than we look like Kansas State and Oklahoma State."

While Illinois interim president Stanley Ikenberry last fall told the Champaign News-Gazette that there's "not a good academic fit" with Missouri in the Big Ten, it was unclear what he meant specifically. He was traveling and unavailable to comment last week.

Conceivably, he was referring to measures used by U.S. News & World Report, which ranked MU 102nd in its 2010 report on the nation's best colleges.

Illinois is 39th in that ranking. No Big Ten school was lower than 71, and the three Big East schools also considered potential Big Ten targets (Pittsburgh, Syracuse and Rutgers) were between 56th and 66th.

Yet in several other ways, MU looks the part more than others thought to be receiving consideration — less in any one area than across a breadth of cross-indexed measures.

Nebraska, for instance, has a national brand in football but offers only the vague hope that that would be meaningful beyond the state borders and limited Omaha-Lincoln TV markets.
Conversely, Iowa State holds a higher academic standing than MU (88th in the U.S. News report) and ranks well above MU in the Director's Cup standings measuring its athletics program (22nd to 42nd) — but it offers no real addition to Iowa in terms of TV and has had only sporadic success in football and men's basketball, the most visible sports.

Kansas has one of the nation's marquee basketball names, but its outdated and small football stadium would be a liability in what many believe would be a football-driven expansion.

Meanwhile, despite the state financial crisis that has created enormous challenges for MU, like many Big Ten schools Mizzou is the flagship public university in the state — the "gemstone," as one official put it.

"Shoot, (Missouri) could be fantastic," said another, though noting that resolving budget issues is crucial to MU achieving its potential.

OVERRIDING FACTOR

MU offers a broad base of programs, including a world-renowned journalism school, and is a 102-year member of the 63-school Association of American Universities — a distinction of research commitment that marks all 11 Big Ten schools and is considered a baseline for Big Ten membership.

The AAU membership, said a source familiar with the last Big Ten expansion analysis, is the overriding academic factor.

So much so, the source said, that Notre Dame's absence from the AAU would make conference leaders have to swallow hard before admitting the school that on the surface seems the most conducive to Big Ten interests.

This, despite the fact Notre Dame academics are well-distinguished; the school is No. 20 in the 2010 U.S. News & World Report rankings of the best colleges.

RUTGERS IS A POSSIBILITY

Because of its passionate national following, of course, Notre Dame likely would be an overwhelming economic attraction if it were to come off its priority of maintaining football independence.

As for how MU rates next to others conjectured to be in contention, by its sheer proximity to New York, and to some degree Philadelphia, Rutgers is perhaps the most compelling possibility to the East. But some question Rutgers' true pull in New York or Philly and its cultural commitment to athletics, despite the fact it has a similar athletics budget ($58,354,222) to MU's ($58,604,216).

The Big Ten "doesn't need an albatross, and Rutgers has a chance to be an albatross," said one official, adding, "Missouri can say, 'Hey, look at us.'"
While Mizzou would offer a more modest television market than Rutgers, it's still an intriguing one that would seal up St. Louis and add Kansas City, several with knowledge of the Big Ten's interests believe.

As for what Mizzou has to look at, consider gleaming Mizzou Arena, a men's basketball program loaded with tradition that has won four NCAA games the last two seasons and a football program that's appeared in four straight bowl games and plays in a well-refurbished stadium that holds 70,000-plus.

MU also has enjoyed a string of recent success in other sports, particularly baseball, soccer, softball and wrestling, and finished 42nd in the final winter standings in this year's collegiate Director's Cup. Rutgers was 78th.

But how MU might compete in the Big Ten is another question. Its Director's Cup finish would place it ninth among current Big Ten schools, ahead of only Iowa, Purdue and Northwestern.

While the comparison is imperfect since the competition would differ, its 4-4 conference football record last season would have left it tied for sixth place with Michigan State and Purdue. It also was tied for sixth in the Big 12 last season.

Adjusted for percentage points because of two fewer conference games in the Big 12, MU would have been fifth in the Big Ten in men's basketball last season — the same perch it occupied in the Big 12.

But that's only a snapshot of how it would stack up.

Looming over any change would be the question of whether MU can keep pace with its athletics budget of just under $59 million — a budget that stacks it seventh among the Big 12's 11 public schools (figures for Baylor were unavailable). MU's budget would be at best ninth among the 11 Big Ten schools, according to figures for 2008-09 obtained by USA Today.

As part of the Big Ten, of course, MU's revenue would increase dramatically and thus its budget likely would follow.

Yet as compatible as its profile and mission might be, the question of whether it will be invited still hinges most on whether it can do as much for the Big Ten as the conference can do for Missouri.

**MEDIA MARKETS**

That question was answered in the negative in the early 1990s, for reasons that still may be applicable today.

The late Kiesler's predecessor, Haskell Monroe, recalled this week that he was told by three or four Big Ten presidents that they were more interested in the media markets of New York and
Philadelphia and schools like Rutgers and Syracuse.

"They said Missouri wouldn't give them much extra exposure," said Monroe, MU's chancellor from 1987-1993, who remembered that the presidents considered the St. Louis market already covered by Illinois. "And at that time, there did not seem to be any particular real interest" from MU.

That interest evidently changed in the months after Monroe's departure — and apparently is revived today.

But whether the interest and a ramped-up athletics commitment in the last 10-15 years are enough to make Mizzou compelling to the Big Ten remains to be seen, no matter how much MU might have in common with it and how long it's clung to its interest.
MU Awarded $8.5 Million to Explore Tiny Vessels’ Role in Cardiovascular Diseases

One of the largest medical research grants ever awarded to the University of Missouri was announced yesterday by MU scientists and administrators. The National Institutes of Health grant will help answer important questions about such prevalent health problems as high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke. The conditions are closely associated with cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death in Missouri and the nation.

The $8.47 million program project grant from the NIH’s National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) will fund an integrated research effort involving more than 20 scientists across campus. Their discoveries will further understanding of the smallest blood vessels in the body, collectively known as the microcirculation. How the miniscule vessels contribute to health and disease is a growing field of study for cardiovascular researchers.

“The grant has given us a very large opportunity that will help us focus on the many questions we have about microvascular function,” said Gerald Meininger, PhD, the program director and project principal investigator, as well as director of MU’s Dalton Cardiovascular Research Center. “By focusing the efforts of many scientists, we hope to further understand the underlying conditions that contribute to many different types of cardiovascular diseases.”

Life literally depends on the microcirculation. The network of vessels, with walls as small as a single cell thick, are responsible for transferring gases, nutrition and hormones throughout the body. The vessels also remove waste, such as carbon dioxide, from organs and tissues. The ability of these processes to function properly, over and over again through many miles of tiny vessels, is what determines the health of the entire cardiovascular system and all the organs and tissues it supports.

“MU has spent decades developing one of the most productive groups of cardiovascular investigators in the world, with a special emphasis on the emerging field of microcirculation,” said Robert Churchill, MD, Hugh E. and Sarah D. Stephenson Dean of the MU School of Medicine. “This grant is the latest example of what MU can achieve when scientific talent and resources from across campus come together to achieve a critical mass in a critical area of medical research.”

The grant projects are particularly reliant on scientists and resources at MU’s Dalton Cardiovascular Research Center, School of Medicine and College of Veterinary Medicine. Other key collaborators include MU’s Center for Gender Physiology and Environmental Adaptation, Cosmopolitan International Diabetes and Endocrinology Center, Charles W. Gehrke Proteomics Center, and research support cores for computing, translational science and electron microscopy.
Microscopy and spectrometry technology at Dalton and MU’s Christopher S. Bond Life Sciences Center provide advanced tools for high-resolution imaging and analysis.

“The imaging resources give MU a powerful advantage in terms of trying to answer questions about blood vessels that are thinner than human hair, as well as cells and tissues,” said Ronald Korthuis, PhD, chair of the Department of Medical Pharmacology and Physiology and a project leader for the grant. “Where others can only speculate, we are able to show the world.”

All of the project leaders in the program grant are faculty members in the MU School of Medicine Department of Medical Pharmacology and Physiology, which is ranked 12th in the nation in terms of research grant funding. The prominence of Dalton and the department in microcirculation research led to MU’s selection as host for more than 150 scientists from around the world for a meeting of the Microcirculatory Society in October 2009.

The pharmacology and physiology department also is generously supported by private gifts for endowed faculty positions and research centers. Grant program director Meininger, project leader Michael Davis, PhD, and George Davis, MD, PhD, and other department scientists involved in the grant are Margaret Proctor Mulligan Distinguished Professors in Medical Research. Korthuis, a project leader, is the George L. and Melna A. Bolm Distinguished Professor in Cardiovascular Health. Center for Gender Physiology director Virginia Huxley, PhD, is the James O. Davis Distinguished Professor in Cardiovascular Research. She and other scientists are housed in the Thomas W. and Joan F. Burns Center for Diabetes and Cardiovascular Research.

“These endowments helped transform MU into a highly competitive institution for cardiovascular research,” said Chancellor Brady Deaton, PhD, who recently led MU in receiving more than $1 billion in gifts for a campuswide fundraising campaign. “With this new NIH grant, we’ll continue to leverage our significant investments in cardiovascular research to improve the health and quality of life for people across our state and throughout the world.”
Professor upset over losing status on Navy project

By Janese Heavin

Sunday, May 9, 2010

Greg Engel feels as though his career is going up in smoke and the University of Missouri is lighting the match.

Engel is an associate professor in MU's College of Engineering, where he's studied electromagnetic launchers since he arrived in 1995. Engel said he has created one of the most efficient electromagnetic launchers in the world, a weapon similar to a rail gun aimed to help the Navy upgrade its fleets to an all-electric force. Federal legislators recently earmarked $2 million to continue that research.

But now, his dean has taken the project out of Engel's hands and placed it in the lap of Annie Sobel, the wife of MU Vice Chancellor of Research Rob Duncan. Engel dubs it a "hostile takeover."

MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken would not talk about the specifics of the case, citing personnel issues. In general, she said the earmark process is different than a traditional grant proposal, which is sent directly from a faculty member to an agency. In that process, the researcher is usually the principal investigator, which means he or she not only does the work but also controls the grant budget.

In this case, Engel had to submit his idea to Duncan's office for a review. Congress earmarked funding for the project to the university. Now, MU is working with the Office of Naval Research to finalize the award, Banken said. Engineering Dean Jim Thompson tapped Sobel to serve as project liaison, but Banken said a principal investigator has not been named.

E-mail exchanges tell a different story. Last month, MU's grants office indicated Engel had been principal investigator. And on April 16, Engel's department chairman, Noah Manring, sent him an e-mail saying Sobel is the "principal investigator."

After a string of tense back-and-forth messages, Manring sent a follow-up e-mail last week telling Engel he still wanted him to provide technical assistance for the project. Banken said all engineering faculty members who study electric launcher technology have been invited to participate.
A review of the college’s research directory shows four faculty members work in the broader field of pulse power. Of those, only Engel is listed as specifically researching electromagnetic launchers.

Sobel is not among those four. Instead, she is listed as researching human performance under stress, disease surveillance and countermeasures to weapons of mass destruction. Also, she is listed in the engineering school as an adjunct professor which, according to the UM rules, would be considered “non-regular faculty.” But Sobel’s official title, according to MU’s directory, is assistant to the provost for strategic operations. Banken did not return follow-up messages seeking clarification.

Duncan and Sobel declined an offer to comment on the situation.

As long as MU satisfies the Navy’s requirements, Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., will continue to support the efforts, spokesman Jordan Clothier said.

But Engel believes MU cannot deliver what he promised in the proposal lawmakers approved. Engel said he refuses to contribute his insights or knowledge while letting Sobel control the money and take the credit. If the university changes the scope of the project, Engel said it would be a misappropriation of federal funds.

Engel’s opposition hasn’t gone unnoticed. Last week, Manring sent him a second warning to stop contacting the naval office about the project. Failure to comply, he wrote, would not only have internal consequences, but “our legal counsel has advised us that this behavior may be construed as harassment which is a criminal charge. It is in your interest to comply.”

Engel said he will continue to fight what he sees as “unethical, illegal action.” “Your actions are destroying me, my research and everything I’ve done at MU,” he wrote in an e-mail to administrators. “I put MU on the map in electromagnetic launcher research. I will do everything in my power to stop this, as I think anyone would.”

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After near-drowning, ‘life is good’

Recovering student heads back to China.

Yuiri Wei talks Thursday about her recovery from a near-drowning in a pool last June at Tara Apartments. Wei was a graduate student at the University of Missouri at the time of the accident.

By Janese Heavin

Saturday, May 8, 2010

When she flashes a smile that lights up her whole face, you almost forget this is the same girl who nearly drowned last summer. But the deep scar on her throat from a tracheotomy serves as a jarring reminder that Yuiri Wei has made a remarkable recovery.
It’s been nearly a year since Columbia fire crews pulled an unconscious Yuiri Wei (pronounced ee-ray way) from a swimming pool at Tara Apartments. Injuries from the near-drowning kept her in intensive care at University Hospital for weeks as doctors and breathing machines kept her alive.

Wei remembers nothing from the night of the accident and recalls only snippets from her early hospital stay.

“I’m glad I can’t remember that part,” said Wei, who sat down with the Tribune this week to talk about her recovery.

Wei, now 23, came to Columbia in fall 2008 to study graduate-level chemistry at the University of Missouri after finishing studies in pharmaceutical science at Tianjin University in China. At MU, her research interests turned to nuclear magnetic resonance, and she works under adviser Lesa Beamer.

“My goal is I want to become a professor like Lesa and work in China,” she said.

Those career goals haven’t changed, but Wei will have to postpone her doctoral studies. At the end of this month, she’s heading back to China to take another year off to recover. There, she plans to continue working on research but also wants to pick up a book or two about how the brain functions, knowledge she hopes will help her regain some cognitive skills.

For the most part, memories from her life before the swimming accident are intact. Learning abilities post-accident, though, have proven a little more difficult. Still, her recovery to date has been remarkable, said Beamer, who has stood beside her throughout the ordeal.

“It’s been an odyssey, a very long trip,” Beamer said. “It’s hard to believe that it turned out so well.”

Reports from the accident indicate Wei had been swimming at the university-owned Tara Apartments for about 45 minutes on the evening of June 25 when she went underwater in the 8-foot-deep pool and didn’t emerge. A friend who was with her wasn’t able to swim so instead rushed to get help. A resident tried to help but also wasn’t an experienced swimmer and had to use a flotation device that prevented him from reaching Wei.

She was underwater for about five minutes by the time Columbia firefighters recovered her unconscious body.

“I can tell you, we’re very fortunate that this incident did turn out the way it did,” said Capt. Eric Hartman of the Columbia Fire Department. “Most cases do have a tragic outcome. Because bystanders there were able to give early notification, crews were able to pull her from the water quickly, and it was a successful rescue.”
Wei spent more than a month in intensive care and much of the fall recovering at University Hospital and Rusk Rehabilitation Center. Although she has not been able to return to classes, Wei resumed lab work and teaching duties at MU this semester.

Wei said she had a hard time comprehending what had happened to her. “I thought I was in a dream,” she said. “I thought it wasn’t real.”

Wei’s parents flew to Columbia from China shortly after the accident, and her mother continues to stay in town with her. Yonghua Fu’s support has had an obvious impact on her daughter’s attitude.

“My mom always tells me an accident is not a bad thing,” Wei said. “My mom said, ‘Though you have a sad story, it is sad stories that push you ahead.’ ”

For Wei, that sad story gave her a chance to prove what she’s made of. Wei said she always knew she was strong, but “the accident proves I’m a strong girl.”

She’s also a thankful girl. Wei said she hopes to have a chance to thank the firefighters who saved her and remains grateful to the doctors and to those who donated money to help offset her medical care. Wei said she plans to donate back to society. “Life is good now,” Wei said. “I have so many friends around me, and teachers like Lesa, and my mom is here.”

As for that scar on her throat, Wei said it bothers her mom more than it bothers her. “I don’t care about it,” she said, touching her neck. “Someone told me, ‘That’s your scar in life. You should keep that.’ I think I will keep it.”

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Lavender' grads celebrate courage

Gay students and allies cross stage with pride.

By Janese Heavin

Saturday, May 8, 2010

Elisa Glick jokingly followed a checklist of things she should tell graduating seniors as she delivered the commencement address at the University of Missouri’s Lavender Graduation ceremony last night.

After mockingly checking off things most commencement speakers say — recalling her own college memories and saying she was humbled to be there — the speech took a different turn when she got to the part about how times have changed since her own graduation.

“When I graduated college, I was in the closet,” said Glick, an associate professor of English and Women’s and Gender Studies.

The 11 MU students who participated in the unofficial “Lav Grad” ceremony weren’t stuck in any closet. They’ve been part of MU’s LGBTQ community throughout their college years, and the ceremony aimed to recognize that openness.

“I know the courage it takes to live your lives openly as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered people,” Glick said. “You should be honored for your contribution to campus. You all inspire me.”

Lavender Graduation, held at Wrench Auditorium in Memorial Union, is in its second year at MU. The color is symbolic because it blends the colors homosexuals wore in Nazi Germany: Gay men were forced to wear pink triangles, and lesbians were made to wear black.

The special graduation ceremony is a cultural celebration to acknowledge achievements and unique experiences LGBTQ students and their allies have on campus, said Ryan Black, coordinator of the LGBTQ Resource Center.

It acknowledges that the graduates have “had to deal with things others haven’t had to deal with,” said Zach Rose-Heim, who’s earning a degree in sociology.

Valerie Pollock, who will graduate in December and participated in last night’s ceremony, considers herself an ally to the LGBTQ community, which means she often challenges others’
insensitive comments or jokes. Just knowing the hurdles students cross to get to graduation justifies the separate celebration, she said.

"Considering a lot of the inequality, oppression and acts of violence, it's kind of good to recognize the fact they made it to this point," Pollack said.

Rose-Heim, who is gay, said he's seen some improvements in the treatment of LGBTQ individuals on campus during the three years he's been at MU, but progress is slow. The university still doesn't include gender and identity expression in its non-discrimination policy, which he said should be changed to protect students. On the plus side, he said, "the level of visibility and awareness has gone up."

During the 30-minute ceremony, graduates took turns walking across stage receiving violet-colored tassels and were given an opportunity to say a few remarks. Most opted to thank their family and friends for helping them get through the tough spots. Erin Horth, who's graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science, didn't mince words with her sentiments. "I would have hated Mizzou a lot more than I did," she said, "if it weren't for you guys."

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Ceremony marks graduation of gay MU students

The Associated Press • May 9, 2010

Columbia — Gay students are getting some special recognition as they graduate from the University of Missouri.

For the second year at the school, something called the Lavender Graduation was held at Wrench Auditorium in Memorial Union. Eleven students participated Friday night.

The Columbia Tribune reported that lavender is symbolic because it blends the colors homosexuals wore in Nazi Germany: Gay men were forced to wear pink triangles, and lesbians were made to wear black.

Associate professor Elisa Glick praised the students during the unofficial ceremony, saying she knows the "courage it take to live your lives openly as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered people." She said she was in closet when she graduated from college and told them they should be honored for their contribution to campus.
Elite cyclists at risk for bone loss

COLUMBIA, Mo., May 7 (UPI) -- U.S. researchers advise elite cyclists maintain proper nutrition during races to avoid bone loss.

Researchers at the University of Missouri in Columbia say competitive cyclists participating in multistage races were found to have lower bone densities -- increasing their risk of fractures.

Reasons for the bone loss are unclear, researchers said, but they suggested inadequate energy intake during races may disrupt bone turnover.

The study, published in Applied Physiology Nutrition and Metabolism, examined markers of bone formation and bone breakdown in the blood of cyclists in the Tour of Southland -- a six-day, 10-stage cycling race.

"The results are consistent with the practical recommendation that elite cyclists should match their energy intake to the high-energy demands of stage racing," researcher Pam Hinton said in a statement.

The researchers note other factors -- including low body weight, increased loss of calcium through sweat and significant time spent cycling -- an activity exerting only minimal mechanical loading on the skeleton -- may also be involved.
Higher education gets boost from sagging job market

BY TIM BARKER
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
Sunday, May 09 2010

A degree from one of the nation's top business schools should be enough to make a job search as difficult as choosing what to wear in the morning.

In normal times, that might very well be the case. But with the nation still struggling through its economic malaise, this year's crop of more than 100 MBA students coming out of Washington University's prestigious business school are finding the job search to be rather daunting.

"It's a rough time to come out as an MBA. You can't paint it any other way," said Mark Brostoff, director of the career center at the Olin Business School.

It is, he says, one of the worst markets he's seen, even worse than the one that followed on the heels of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

It has the economy playing a key role both in driving record enrollment on colleges campuses across the nation, and in making life difficult for those ready to leave. To be sure, reports suggest that the job market for undergraduates appears a bit stronger this year.

But many companies still are reluctant to go after the pricier graduates such as those with master's degrees in business administration, Brostoff said. The school won't say how many of its graduates are still looking for work, but even many of those who have found jobs say the search has been tough.

Chris Curtis, 28, of University City, spent several months chasing jobs before capturing a position with Anheuser-Busch. It was a search marred by frustration and dead ends.

"A lot of those jobs — you apply, and it goes off into a black hole," Curtis said.

The lean market prompted Peter McCarthy, 39, of St. Louis, to join the school's two-year-old MBA search team program. It puts students in support groups, meeting once a week to offer each other encouragement and advice in sessions designed to improve networking and personal marketing skills.
Working with those other students — some considered among the best in the class — kept McCarthy's spirits up during a lengthy search that finally yielded a job two weeks ago with a local financial services firm.

"You get a lot of rejections," McCarthy said. "But there's a comfort level knowing we're all struggling."

There also seems to be a general understanding among students that this is simply the way things are right now. And that they won't stay this way forever. Relief could be coming as soon this summer or fall, suggests John Challenger, chief executive officer of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, a Chicago-based job consulting firm.

"Corporations can ill afford to keep the pipeline closed down to new graduates for too long," Challenger said.

It's the sort of talk that's encouraging for students such as Ashwin Pejaver, 26, of India, who has applied for more than 100 jobs in his quest to find a spot with a multinational company, with an eye toward returning to India.

"There have been a lot of times where I thought I did a good job and I thought I was close," Pejaver said.

But even as Pejaver and others look to their future beyond college, there's an even larger group of would-be students lining up to replace them. Campuses across the nation have reported record enrollments during the current academic year, and there's no reason to think the coming fall will be any different.

At the University of Missouri-St. Louis, enrollment topped 16,500 students last fall, after hovering in the 15,500 range for four years. St. Louis University witnessed a 4.6 percent increase last year. The same held true at smaller schools in the region, with Fulton's Westminster College reporting an increase of more than 8 percent.

The increases have even prompted the Missouri University of Science and Technology, in Rolla, to consider limiting freshman enrollment.

Certainly, the economy isn't the only factor involved. Some schools, including the University of Missouri-Columbia, see little correlation between the economy and the influx of students.

"There's been steady growth here since before the economy tanked," said Barbara Rupp, the school's director of admissions.

The simple fact, Rupp and others say, is that high school graduating classes are bigger today than yesterday. Yet the influx of larger graduating classes
does not, by itself, explain surging enrollment everywhere, experts say.

Law schools across the nation, for example, have seen record numbers of applicants, said Jeff Thomas, director of the pre-law program at New York City-based Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions.

"It's a historic trend that we see time and time again related to the economy," Thomas said.

Indeed, all levels of higher education — from community colleges to doctoral programs — are seeing new or renewed interest by those looking for new careers, skills and credentials. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the pool of young adults.

Recent U.S. Labor Department statistics showed 70 percent of last year's high school graduates were enrolled in colleges or universities — the highest level on record since data collection started in 1959.

"The kids college-bound now are simply more savvy about the value of an undergraduate degree," said Robert Franek, a senior vice president with The Princeton Review, which publishes a mix of college guides and help books.

It's easy to see why, with so many families suffering. High school students are watching their parents struggle with layoffs and job uncertainty. That's particularly true in cities such as St. Louis, which has seen a steady loss of jobs — automobile assembly lines, for example — that once beckoned to students who had no wish to pursue a college degree.

"Those good-paying jobs, where you only needed a high school diploma, are evaporating," said Joanie Friend, director of enrollment management for St. Louis Community College, where enrollment grew by 13 percent this spring.

But even as new students are flocking to campuses, older students aren't always in a hurry to leave. With new job opportunities still tough to come by, some students are prolonging their college careers, pursuing advanced degrees.

That helps in two ways. First, it gives the economy more time to recover. But it also delays the onset of student loan payments, which kick in once the student leaves school.

"They figure they might as well stay in school if they don't have a job or any solid leads when they graduate. They just enroll in grad school," said Alan Byrd, director of admissions for UMSL.

It wasn't exactly the economy that spurred Paul Snitker, 28, of University City, to head back to graduate school at Washington U. But it was certainly on
his mind during the past two years.

He watched from the comfort of his classrooms as the economy slid into the tank. He couldn't help but marvel at his good fortune. Surely, he figured, it would all be over by the time he was ready for a job search.

"I thought, great, this is perfect timing. But that turned out not to be the case," said Snitker, who did manage to find a job — only instead of staying in town, he'll be moving to Texas.
Bipartisanship lives where rancor rules
Lawmakers who will tussle over court nominee collaborate on other issues
By Ken Strickland
Senate Producer
NBC News
updated 5:50 p.m. CT, Fri., May 7, 2010

In the coming weeks, the president’s Supreme Court nominee will — with much fanfare and snapping of flashbulbs — testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Congress’s coliseum for ideological, philosophical, and political battles.

The panel, which has jurisdiction over all things covered under the Constitution, has hosted history-making clashes over abortion rights, immigration, and — perhaps most famously — judicial nominations. But for the past few years, those same legislative gladiators have also been quiet comrades-in-arms, writing a significant and complex law that could dramatically improve the way America invents life-changing products.

Its bipartisan work on the sweeping patent reform bill has grabbed few headlines, but it indicates that collegiality is no stranger to the lawmakers who may wrestle over the confirmation of the country’s next Supreme Court justice.

"You may see a lot of partisanship, and that's what occupies 90 percent of the media,” said Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz. “But 90 percent of the work we do is not partisan.”

Leading their party’s message
Many members of the Judiciary Committee are long-serving stalwarts who champion their party’s core beliefs, in and out of the hearing room. Besides Chairman Patrick Leahy, the Democrats include Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California, Chuck Schumer of New York, and Dick Durbin of Illinois. The Republicans include Kyl, Utah’s Orrin Hatch, Alabama’s Jeff Sessions, and South Carolina’s Lindsey Graham.

They were among the first senators called by President Barack Obama when he was seeking suggestions on his court pick, and they will be among the first visited by the nominee after he announces his decision.

In addition to their committee duties, these senators are often enlisted to wage war in the form of press conferences, op-eds, and Sunday morning talk show appearances.

Occasionally they take aim directly at each other.
In a recent news conference on financial regulatory reform, Democrat Schumer took aim at one of Kyl’s arguments against the bill, using language seldom used in the Senate.

"The minute these things come out of the mouths of some of our Republican colleagues, we rebut them," Schumer said, "and fortunately, these lies are not talking hold."

But at the same time public rhetoric soared, Schumer and Kyl (and several of their committee colleagues) were united behind closed doors, putting the final touches on a bill to overhaul the nation's patent system.

"The greatest asset America has"
In simple terms, patents are granted to inventors — both individuals and companies — to protect their products from being used by others for a period of 20 years. The concept is as old as the Constitution.

However, the consensus is that the patent system is broken and hasn't been updated in more than 55 years. The process for getting patents and defending them in court has become problematic, costly, and burdensome. Dennis Crouch, an associate professor at the University of Missouri School of Law, says the U.S. Patent Office has a backlog of 750,000 applications.

Supporters of an overhaul effort say that the flawed system stifles innovations and can delay the discovery of life-saving drugs and energy technologies. And those discoveries would lead to more jobs, boosting a sagging economy.

"Intellectual property is probably the greatest asset America has in terms of future economy and if we don't protect it, everyone will lose," said Schumer. "It creates jobs."

"The only way we can compete in a worldwide market is to have the best technology, the most innovative," said Leahy.

Not an ideological issue
Crouch believes the Judiciary Committee’s bipartisanship on the bill exists primarily because patents skirt the issues most likely to draw fire: party ideology, taxpayer dollars, and size of government.

"It's about issues of property rights, rather than growing or shrinking the size of the government," he said. (The patent office is supported by application fees rather than by tax dollars.)

Sessions, the committee's ranking Republican, seemed to agree. Patent reform is "a complex thing, but it's not a ideological thing or a philosophical thing. Those are the things that divide us," he said.

Bipartisanship is more common than most Americans would realize. Just within the past week, senators have collaborated to introduce several bills, including ones addressing Wall Street reform, airline passenger rights, gun ownership, and tweaks to Senate procedure.
Many of these bipartisan proposals do not survive the daunting legislative process. Others pass, without national fanfare, tucked inside the more popular or controversial provisions of other bills.

"[On] the major issues, unfortunately, the top level issues ... there's not much bipartisanship," added Schumer. "But you go one layer deeper and there's lots of it. The patent bill is a great example."

While the patent reform bill has a majority of the panel's support, its future is unclear. The bipartisan bill must fight for time on the Senate floor with other more partisan bills, like the financial reform overhaul currently dominating legislative headlines. And while the House has passed a patent bill in the past, it has not acted this year.

"[Majority Leader Harry] Reid would do well to make sure that there is time, because I think we could have a nice debate, a good discussion like the Senate is suppose to operate," said Sessions. "We would look like grown-ups on that issue."

But with a Supreme Court nominee expected to be named within days and a confirmation vote before July 4, the committee will more than likely return to the coliseum.

"On judges, you have a conservative approach and a liberal approach and that's kind of different" from the patent bill, Sessions said. "And if the judge is going to act in a way that you think weakens the constitution then you've got a burden to object."

In Senate parlance, those are fighting words.

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MU grad student wins $50,000 on first night of 'Millionaire'

By Lauren Rauth
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COLUMBIA — MU graduate student Cassie Belek breezed through questions as she made her way to winning $50,000 on "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire," Friday.

Belek will continue with the $100,000 question and one lifeline left, on Monday, May 17 at 6:30 p.m. on KMIZ (ABC).

During Friday's show, Belek used the "ask the audience" lifeline for the $25,000 question, "Mentioned in the title of the documentary 'Waltz with Bashir,' Bashir Gemayel was killed in 1982 after becoming the president-elect of what country?" The audience voted and Belek went with their advice, answering Lebanon, correctly.

Belek used her second lifeline on the $50,000 question, "Because he later became the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who is the only U.S. president to also administer the oath of office?" The "Double Dip" lifeline allowed Belek to guess William Howard Taft, the correct answer.