University celebrates excellence

Teachers gather to learn best practices.

By Janese Heavin

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They finished giving finals last week and scrambled to get grades turned in this week, but rather than taking a break from academia, some 200 educators at the University of Missouri are spending two days learning how to become more effective teachers.

Dan Heath: Delivered keynote address

The first Celebration of Teaching Excellence at MU kicked off yesterday with two featured speakers and continues today with work sessions. Participants include faculty members, academic advisers and other teaching staff, most of whom are nine-month employees technically “off the clock,” said Jim Spain, vice provost for undergraduate studies, whose office is sponsoring the conference.

“It speaks to the fantastic commitment that our faculty and staff have to teaching and learning,” he said.

Dan Heath delivered a keynote address yesterday from his best-selling book “Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die.” Although the book was meant for the corporate world, the concepts apply to teaching and learning, Spain said.

Heath outlined examples of ideas that have stuck over the years, from the incorrect but widely believed idea that humans use only 10 percent of their brains to Aesop’s fables that have spanned
centuries. Heath and his brother researched what makes concepts stick in an audience’s collective mind and discovered the “stickiest” ideas are simple and unexpected, use concrete images and generate emotions.

One successful example is the state of Texas’ campaign to get residents to stop littering, Heath said.

The state discovered it could appeal to culprits by playing on their state pride. Thus, the slogan “Don’t Mess with Texas” was born, and Heath said the state saw a 75 percent reduction in litter over a five-year period.

“The bad news is that good ideas are never enough,” Heath said. “Lesson plans are full of great ideas. The good news is that good ideas made to stick can have enormous impact.”

Also during Celebration of Teaching Excellence, administrators recognized three faculty members MU has nominated for U.S. professor of the year. They are: John Adams, professor and associate chairman for undergraduate studies in the chemistry department; Tony Lupo, professor and chairman of the atmospheric science department; and Wendy Sims, professor and director of the music education department.

The U.S. Professor of the Year is sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

“This is the first time our campus has nominated faculty for the Professor of the Year Award,” Spain said. “So we’re excited about being able to recognize them.”
The Legislature in the final week of its 2010 session passed a bill to prevent Weldon Spring from annexing any Missouri Research Park tracts whose owners don’t agree in writing in advance.

However, City Administrator Michael Padella said the city had no current plans to repeat its 2008 effort to mount an annexation there.

In 2008 Weldon Spring voters approved an involuntary annexation of the 700-acre area, which was developed by the University of Missouri to attract technology companies. After Nike, one of the corporations there, filed a lawsuit challenging the annexation, Weldon Spring dropped its effort.

Sen. Scott Rupp, a Wentzville Republican and the sponsor of the state legislation, said he later was approached by Nike and some other research park firms to take some action on the issue in case the city wanted to try again.

Padella said Wednesday that city officials were confident they would have prevailed in litigation over the 2008 annexation but decided to drop the issue because it could have dragged on in court for a long time.

Moreover, he said, “at the end of the day you’re left with having a bunch of angry businesses in the city.”
ST. LOUIS - For years, police have taken mentally ill people to the St. Louis Metropolitan Psychiatric Center. Now, they're not sure where they'll turn.

As of July 1, the center will close to emergency and acute-care psychiatric patients as part of the state's cost-cutting plan.

"We take the hardest-to-serve and most noncompliant there," said St. Louis County police Sgt. Barry Armfield. "These people aren't going to go away (just) because they close the MPC. They'll still be there."

Mental health workers and advocates have protested the closure, saying it could lead to increases in homelessness, crime and hospital overcrowding.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that the St. Louis Area Police Chiefs Association is asking the private sector and community leaders to step forward and help save the center.

Police on the Missouri side of the St. Louis region handle about 200 incidents a month involving the mentally ill. About 89 percent end up with trips to emergency rooms, including the one at the Metropolitan Psychotic Center.

Police say that for those without health insurance, the center is often a better option.

Many of those taken by police to the center suffer from a mental illness such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Most are released within 10 days, often after adjustments to medications.

Two similar state-run facilities have been saved elsewhere in the state in recent month. In Columbia, the University of Missouri now runs the Mid-Missouri Mental Health Center. And in Kansas City, Truman Behavioral Health took over emergency and acute care at the Center for Behavioral Medicine.

The Kansas City arrangement has worked "very well," said Marsha Morgan, chief operating officer for behavioral health at Truman Medical Center. The hospital expects to break even on costs, with beds running at about 96 percent occupancy.
"It was an opportunity to get people who were mentally ill out of our medical emergency department and get them to where psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses and social workers are, so they could get appropriate care and give our medical emergency department a chance to focus on traumas and other emergencies," Morgan said.

In St. Louis, members of the Missouri Hospital Association plan to talk with state officials on Thursday about the closure of the center. Laurent Javois, regional executive officer for the state Department of Mental Health, said she remains hopeful a community partner will come forward.

But officials from two of the region's largest hospital companies, BJC HealthCare and SSM Health Care, said they were not aware of any efforts to take over the center.
There was a clear agenda of legislative challenges facing the second session of the 95th Missouri General Assembly back in January. While a great deal of time and attention was focused on budget reductions to meet declining revenues, overall the legislative session earned the equivalent of about a .270 batting average, a 7-7 record in the Big 12, either a B- or a C+ at midterm or another year without a pay raise.

Gov. Jay Nixon's penchant for sports analogies and the goal captured in his phrase "moving forward," is an appropriate way to evaluate the session. It feels a lot like halftime with a tied score on a rainy Saturday against a nonconference football opponent. Although some state legislators give the session a positive spin, they are spinning knowing that next year will be the train wreck they could have better prepared for this year. There is always next year, but the problems may be a little bigger and, because of legislative term limits, the starting lineup will not be as experienced as this year.

Below is a review of 2010 legislative action on 10 issues that I predicted back in January would be priorities.

1. The budget. As expected because of the state of the economy, the budget dominated the session. With cuts mainly focused on social and education programs, there was little legislative or public resistance. Budget cuts were embraced as either inevitable or a chance to reduce the size of state government. Legislative leaders acknowledge the final $23.11 billion budget is not truly balanced because it is based on unlikely economic
assumptions and presumed savings. Either because they figure Nixon will bear the political costs of making budget cuts or because they wanted to preserve legislative harmony, the House and Senate Republicans avoided the tough budget decisions, punting them to the governor instead.

2. **K-12 and higher education funding.** Although Nixon hails holding state tuition constant with a 5 percent cut in higher education funding and equalizing Access Missouri scholarships for private and public college students as notable accomplishments, they affect a small number of Missourians and have practically as many losers as winners. Not making progress on fully funding the 2005 Foundation Formula or adopting significant long-term education reorganization are opportunities delayed. The K-12 cuts in transportation, Career Ladder and Parents as Teachers will have lasting consequences.

3. **Health care.** Two anticipated issues were adopted. First, insurance coverage for autism with reimbursement up to $40,000 per year until a child is 18 was adopted, endorsed by Nixon and legislative leaders. Second, the Health Reform Freedom referendum was placed on the August ballot. An effort was made at Medicaid cost containment but seems to have fallen short of its goal of saving $100 million.

4. **Legislative and campaign finance reform.** After both Republican legislative leaders and Nixon called for “ethics reform,” and with a strong campaign reform bill coming out of the House Special Committee, the end result is small potatoes. Even calling the final bill “Ethics Lite” is wishful thinking. Of all the “in the huddle” talking that goes on within legislative chambers, the public would be most surprised to hear legislators talk about the influence of money in state politics. The legislature, presumably the Senate, fumbled this one.

5. **Economic development and employment.** A proposed manufacturing jobs bill, primarily aimed at the Ford plant in Kansas City, was one of the two last-day casualties of legislative politics. The rapidly increasing volume of tax credits, some estimate to be $500 million to $600 million of $8 billion in state revenue, has survived and will live to face another legislature.

6. **Children’s issues.** Missouri’s own invention, Parents as Teachers, was cut and only saved by radical reorganization that shifts costs onto local schools and participating parents. Kids don’t vote or lobby, and it shows.
7. Water quality and quantity. Efforts to require better local sewage treatment were not successful. This is an issue where public action will most likely come way too late.

8. Distracted driving. Prohibiting texting while driving and banning hand-held devices for all drivers both were not adopted. Nipping this growing, unsafe habit about five years ago seemed like a no-brainer, though, granted, there are enforcement problems. Opposition to banning is apparently widespread and effective. This might be the next issue that the federal government requires states to act on in order to continue to receive federal highway funds.

9. Judicial selection. With an initiative to repeal Missouri’s Nonpartisan Judicial Selection plan and to reduce judicial terms to eight years on the November ballot, the legislature did not deal with this issue.

10. Crime and prison costs. Some progress was made in that drunken driving laws were strengthened and DWI courts were authorized. Chief Justice William Ray Price’s “State of the Judiciary” speech on Feb. 3 proposing expanding drug courts was very warmly received by legislators and editorial writers around the state. For a month or so, it appeared that a plan to eventually close one state prison would be adopted. Concern about shifting the cost of short-term incarceration stalled that effort.

The effect of Price’s speech and Senate’s “Rebooting Government” workday on March 23 were unpredicted back in January. Together they had the impact of a halftime locker room talk resulting in new ideas and a renewed enthusiasm to address Missouri’s budget problems. Unfortunately, time ran out before new plays were fully drawn up.

Although the refrain around the Capitol the last day of the session was “it’s a beginning” on ethics, education cuts and the sagging budget, it might have just as easily been the blind optimism of “wait till next year.” The only problem is that 10 (of 34) starters in the Senate and more than 50 (of 163) starters in the House, including the co-captains, are graduating. There will, of course, be promising freshmen ready for next season — err, session — but most would benefit by being red-shirted. Meanwhile, the forces of the status quo have a rigorous off-season training program to tend to.

See you next year.
David Webber is an associate professor of political science at MU. This article is presented courtesy of The Missouri Record, which carries Webber’s column each Tuesday during the legislative session.