Mizzou Center opens in Blue Springs

The University of Missouri officially opened its Blue Springs branch last week.

About 150 people helped dedicate the new Mizzou Center, which Mayor Carson Ross called the first step in developing the research center to be known as Missouri Innovation Park.

"This is the first manifestation," said Ross, who has been championing the presence of the university in Blue Springs. "This is the signature that says that we are for real."

The event attracted officials from across Jackson County as well as the university, such as Chancellor Brady Deaton and Provost Brian Foster.

Deaton said the center would aim to be a "major economic driver for the state." He said the tenants would hope to build partnerships between the university researchers and industry leaders.

Al Black, an official with the University of Missouri Extension program for almost 40 years, was announced as director of the center, located in the Heartland Financial Building just south of Interstate 70 near Adams Dairy Parkway.

The center will include representatives from several university programs, among them the School of Information Science and Learning Technologies and the College of Veterinary Medicine, as well as the university Office of Research.

"It was the moment we had been waiting for," said Ross.

The city is still pressing forward on developing the 500-acre Missouri Innovation Park. The university has signed a memorandum of understanding with the city and the Blue Springs Economic Development Corporation.

In March, university officials announced that the office space had been leased.

"We would have liked to have had a free-standing building, but this gets them to Blue Springs much earlier," said Ross. "And the MU sign can be seen from Interstate 70."
The Tribune's View

Ellis Fischel

UM in a box

By Henry J. Waters III

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

Work is under way on a new $280 million patient care tower near University Hospital on the University of Missouri campus. In the long-planned tower, the first two floors are devoted to a new Ellis Fischel cancer treatment center to replace the aging facility on Business Loop 70 at Garth Avenue.

For several years the university has sought funds from the Missouri General Assembly. A $31 million capital item has been on again and off again as the state’s fiscal picture has gyrated like an image in a kaleidoscope. Funds from the sale of MOHELA assets dried up. Last year the legislature included Ellis Fischel money in the budget but Gov. Jay Nixon nixed it, citing lack of revenue. This year the money still isn’t in the budget and Nixon is no mood to provide money from federal stimulus funds, but construction continues on the tower. Something had to give.

Unable to wait longer, the UM Board of Curators last week approved the sale of $30 million in revenue bonds to pay for the project, which must be done in conjunction with the completion of the tower.

It would have been nice for the state to underwrite Ellis. It is a statewide project, a state-of-the-art cancer treatment and research hospital available to patients far and wide. Capital money from the state would have allowed MU Health money to be used elsewhere.

But Ellis was on the university must-do list regardless of state funding. Maybe state budget makers knew if they failed to include the money, the treatment center would be built anyway.

HJW III
Public colleges, universities grapple with tuition hikes

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

Tuition increases for undergraduates attending public colleges and universities in their home states appear to be all over the map this fall.

The range so far — from no change at Maine's community colleges to double digits at some Virginia and Arizona universities — reflect the variety of strategies schools and states are trying to balance their economic challenges with those of students and parents.

"States are starting from different places," says Julie Bell of the National Conference of State Legislatures. But in general, money for higher education "just isn't there."

In most states, governing boards approve tuition rates for public institutions. But legislators and governors control state budgets, which influence tuition.

Missouri's public universities, for example, agreed to freeze tuition for the second year in exchange for a promise by Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, to cut budgets no more than 5.2%. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a Republican, has proposed cutting state aid to public colleges that exceed a 4% tuition increase. He also proposes a 7.7% cut in higher education spending.

In West Virginia, public two- and four-year colleges honored a plea by Gov. Joe Manchin, a Democrat, to freeze tuition; stimulus money will replace a 5% budget cut.

Tuition freezes typically aim to ensure affordability at a time when many families are struggling. "They are putting the needs of students first," senior Antonio Cosme says of his school, Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, where tuition, fees and room and board will remain unchanged this fall. The plan assumes passage of a proposed 3.1% state budget cut.

Tuition caps get mixed reviews. A freeze since 2007 at the University of Maryland state system has been praised for keeping costs down for families and blamed for limiting enrollments on some campuses. The freeze ends this year.

In 2005, Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm, a Democrat, cut $30 million in funding to the state's 15 public universities after earlier vowing to spare those that held down increases.
"Further tuition restraint requests by the governor are respectfully declined," says Mike Boulus, executive director of the non-profit Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan.

Sandy Baum, who tracks college costs for the non-profit College Board, says financial aid, rather than a freeze, may better help people "who have become unemployed or seen their incomes decline significantly." Despite rising sticker prices, the average net price at public four-year colleges — after grants and tax benefits — was lower last year than a decade earlier, after adjusting for inflation, her research finds.

A few states, including Texas, Virginia and Florida, have loosened legislative reins on tuition policy in recent years. At the University of Virginia, where tuition will increase 9.9% this fall, the extra revenue will go toward financial aid, academics, building maintenance and employee benefits.

That strategy, too, has raised eyebrows. In Texas, where average academic charges increased 72% from 2003 to 2009, according to data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, some legislators have called for a return to tighter state regulation.

Though controversial, tuition deregulation is gaining momentum, policy analysts say. Proposals have been debated this year in New York, Louisiana, Washington state and Colorado.

"It's been reassuring," says Daniel Hurley, director of state relations and policy analysis for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "Despite pressure to keep college costs at a minimum, lawmakers are recognizing the vital role tuition revenue plays in meeting rising student enrollments."
Missouri farmers talk cap-and-trade at MU seminar

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Missouri farmers will discuss proposed federal climate change regulations at an annual seminar Thursday in Columbia.

The 2010 Breimyer Seminar is entitled “Greenhouse Gas Regulation: Boom or Bust for Agriculture?” The program at the University of Missouri’s Reynolds Alumni Center is sponsored by the school’s Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute.

Scheduled discussion topics include a presentation by the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation on agricultural carbon credits.
Missourinet

Business executives will help Nixon Administration plan growth

by Brent Martin on May 25, 2010

in Politics & Government

Business executives will be advising the Nixon Administration on how to best plan for Missouri’s economic growth.

Four business leaders from throughout the state form the Executive Advisory Board to aid State Economic Development Director David Kerr develop a five-year plan for economic growth. Ann Marie Baker, UMB, Springfield; Paul Combs, Baker Implement, Kennett; Bill Downey, Kansas City Power & Light; and David Steward, World Wide Technology, St. Louis comprise the Executive Advisory Board. Governor Nixon appointed the four.

Kerr says it’s vital Missouri hone in on six to 10 strategic objectives.

“With the limited resources with that we, from a business perspective and from a state perspective have, that we use those limited resources and are very strategic and very specific in terms of how we use those,” Kerr says.

The strategic objectives will pinpoint both industries that now exist in Missouri and those that could be drawn to the state to drive economic growth. Kerr says an example of what the groups might focus on is the animal health corridor developing between Columbia and Manhattan, Kansas. More than 30 animal health companies have located in the area between the home of the University of Missouri-Columbia and Kansas State University. Those companies employ more than 30,000 workers carrying out $638 million in research and development annually.

Missouri’s economy thrives on agriculture, tourism, manufacturing and energy. Kerr believes the state can improve on its strengths, expand and pursue other industry. The key, he says, is to not spin out so many ideas and concepts that everything is planning and nothing is done.

“I think the problem that sometimes states and communities and organizations have is they’re not specific and they’re not targeted in terms of identifying a small number of critical priorities and that’s what we intend to do,” according to Kerr.
The Executive Advisory Board will identify members of a statewide Steering Committee that will work with Regional Planning Teams to ensure involvement by leaders throughout Missouri. The Steering Committee plans to meet in early June. Meetings will take place throughout the year with completion expected by the end of the year.

Some of the suggestions that grow out of this process might be before the legislature next year.
Professor added to Bush Institute team

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

Mike Podgursky, an economics professor at the University of Missouri, has been tapped to work with former President George W. Bush on education reform issues.

The George W. Bush Institute announced the appointment of Podgursky and two other fellows to support the institute’s educational reform mission. Also appointed were Jay Greene of the University of Arkansas and Matthew Springer of Vanderbilt University.

Initially, the institute will work to find ways to improve the leadership of school principals and strengthen middle schools. Podgursky has studied teacher pay and retirement structures, school finance and school productivity.
Campuses are going green
By Tim Barker
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
Wednesday, May 26 2010

No MU mention

Earth Day this year at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville brought a fancy set of new toys to campus — a fleet of shiny red bicycles free for everyone to use.

It's not the sort of thing that makes the university unusual. In fact, it puts SIUE right in line with other schools across the nation striving to cut energy costs and, in general, become greener campuses. It's the same thing with the reusable water bottles given to freshmen.

"I don't think we're going to save a lot of polar bears," said Kevin Adkins, the university's sustainability officer. "But we're just trying to change the culture."

In this era of environmental awareness, it's hard to find a school that isn't doing something in the name of the environment, particularly with mounting evidence suggesting that prospective students are starting to notice — and even demand — the changes.

Campuses are upgrading lighting, replacing tired heating systems, offering car rentals, developing recycling programs and devoting chunks of food budgets to organic growers.

Initiatives come in a wide range of sizes and budgets. Drury University in Springfield, Mo., for example, recently removed trays from its dining area to conserve the water and energy needed to wash them, while the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has invested $100 million on building upgrades aimed at energy efficiency.

For evidence of the trend, one need look no further than the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, a Denver-based organization of colleges and universities that started in 2005 with 40 members. Today, its ranks have swelled to more than 1,000, with a new member signed every other day.

"That's an indication of the phenomenal interest in this subject," said Paul
Rowland, executive director.

It doesn't hurt, he said, that schools are worried they could actually lose prospective students if they aren't active in this arena.

And there certainly seems to be reason for those concerns.

Last month, the Princeton Review released its guide to green campuses along with an attention-grabbing statistic from its survey of nearly 12,000 college applicants and their parents. Two-thirds said their school selections would be influenced by an institution's commitment to the environment.

Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean a student would reject a college just because it doesn't use energy-efficient light bulbs. But it does offer a reminder to universities about the importance of creating an attractive setting for incoming students.

"Many things might be the tipping point for different students," said Robert Franek, senior vice president for the Princeton Review. "This is simply the next variable that students are looking at."

It's something current students are paying attention to as well.

Earlier this year, for example, student leaders at Washington University passed legislation urging the university to cut energy consumption through the use of a power management system targeting thousands of computers scattered across campus and left on while not in use.

"I physically counted 1,000 computers just in the computer labs of eight academic buildings," said Vinod Ravikumar, a sophomore from San Jose, Calif., who authored the bill. "It's wasted power. Wasted money. From every perspective, it seemed logical to change it."

The student suggestions have since been incorporated into the university's environmental sustainability plan, which was finalized last month. It calls for a 27 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, putting the school back to 1990 levels within 10 years.

"Any time we get word that students are pushing for this type of thing, we are supportive," said Matt Malten, assistant vice chancellor for campus sustainability.

But not all students say the green initiatives are a priority for them.

On Earth Day at SIUE, Alex Ray sat inside the Morris University Center, a few hundred feet from the festivities, focused on finishing up his senior year.
Student Organization for Sustainability? Ray's never heard of it.

And he expresses doubts about the notion of high school students picking one college because it's greener than another.

"When you are 18 years old and just getting out of high school, I don't think that's something you pay attention to," said Ray, of Edwardsville.

Even so, many students are not only demanding their campuses act on the environment, they are voting with their pocketbooks.

Two years ago, 73 percent of students at Southern Illinois University Carbondale voted to approve a $10-per-semester "green fee" to raise money for campus improvements. The fee has raised more than $200,000, which is distributed by a committee whose membership is dominated by students.

Not every campus has that sort of money available. So, at a time when states are slashing higher education funding, it's often the price tag of improvements — and the time it will take to reap the benefits — that dictates which projects go forward, said Tim Gaidis. He is the Sustainable Design Practice Leader in the St. Louis office of the architectural firm HOK.

"If it looks like it will save them dollars over the next five years, they may push for it," Gaidis said. "But if it's over five years, it's a tougher sell."