Extent of cuts for school aid hits home
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When Gov. Jay Nixon revealed plans Thursday to slash a pair of scholarship programs aimed at the state's neediest and brightest students, it sent the higher education community into a frenzy.

A day later, public and private schools are still scrambling to figure out exactly what the news will mean for students. And they fear that some of those students could be forced to leave school.

"Everyone was expecting a cut. But no one expected it to be this large," said Jim Brooks, director of student financial aid at the University of Missouri-Columbia, where one in four Missouri students is helped by the two programs.

Nixon's plan to trim more than $300 million from the state budget includes the virtual gutting of Access Missouri, an $82 million program for low- and middle-income students that was cut to $32 million. There also is a 25 percent reduction in the smaller Bright Flight program, aimed at keeping top students from leaving the state.

For now, administrators, parents and students are awaiting details on the cuts. In a worst case scenario, Bright Flight awards could drop to $1,500 from $2,000. Access Missouri awards have two payment levels, based on whether a student goes to a public or private school. The maximum award could drop to $500 from nearly $1,700 last year at public schools, and to $1,000 from more than $3,500 last year at private schools.

While the Department of Higher Education figures out the new payment levels — it could be a week or more before financial aid officers have more information — schools such as the University of Missouri-St. Louis are exploring ways to minimize the damage.

"We'll look for ways to make sure the campus remains accessible for students in need," said Bob Samples, spokesman for UMSL, where more than 1,600 students receive aid from the programs.

The problem is that most, if not all, of the state's institutions have financial troubles of their own. Endowments have suffered along with the nation's economy. Private donors have become more tight-fisted. And the state
also cut funding for higher education by 5 percent.

Still, the cuts in Access Missouri soon may be modified because of an infusion of cash announced last week by the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, which is giving the state $30 million for scholarships.

The student loan agency characterized the infusion as a one-time event and said the money comes from a surplus generated through a series of financial restructurings undertaken during the past few months.

Will Shaffner, director of business development and governmental relations for MOHELA, said the money is being released to the state, which will decide how to use it.

"With the current crisis, we want to make sure that when the state has to make tough choices, the students will be protected," Shaffner said.

While it's possible the money could be used to create a separate scholarship program, the Department of Higher Education said Friday that it simply may be rolled into Access Missouri.

But even with that $30 million, the governor's cuts still represent a 25 percent reduction in funding for a program that had already been trimmed about 10 percent by legislators.

For some students, that's going to be too much, said George Wolf, vice president and dean for enrollment services at Westminster College, where nearly a third of the students get money from the targeted programs.

"Bottom line: It will keep some kids from going to school," Wolf said. "I have no doubt about that."

That type of thinking has some financial aid leaders suggesting that it's time to reconsider the Bright Flight program, which rewards students based on their ACT scores.

Rarely does that money make a difference in whether those students — who don't tend to come from poor families — are able to attend college, said Faith Sandler, executive director of the Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis.

"It may be a nice benefit, but does it fill a critical need when we are cutting essential aid?" Sandler asked.

For some schools, however, the governor's cuts were far from a worst-case scenario. The state's private schools are understandably conflicted about the cuts, considering that, just a few months ago, they were battling not to be
left out of Access Missouri altogether.

That was one scenario floated by Nixon while working to get everyone on board with a plan to end the practice of giving larger scholarships to students at private schools. The so-called equalization will go into effect in 2014.

One of the schools at the forefront of the campaign to retain Access Missouri money for private-school students was Missouri Baptist University, which organized a pep rally, phone bank and letter-writing campaign.

University president R. Alton Lacey took the news of the governor's cut with that in mind.

"It's not great news. But it's probably not the worst news either," Lacey said. "I'm just glad the program is funded at any level. And that we are included."

Still, things will be getting considerably tougher for students like Montez Brown, a freshman among 650 Missouri Baptist students helped by Access Missouri and Bright Flight.

Brown, 19, a business administration major who's already working 30 hours a week, still owes the school $1,500 from last year. Now's he looking for a second job to offset the lost scholarship money while wondering when he's going to find time for study and homework.

"I thought we were supposed to be the future," Brown said. "But now they're taking this money away from us."
Nixon cuts funding for MOREnet, largest Internet access manager

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS

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Internet access has just gotten more costly for the state’s financially strapped schools, colleges, universities and libraries.

The $281 million in state budget cuts approved by Gov. Jay Nixon this week included the last $7 million of the state’s subsidy to MOREnet, the largest manager of Internet access for educational services. It’s the fourth cut made to the subsidy since January.

To offset the loss of those state dollars, the MOREnet consortium, serving more than 700 institutions across Missouri, Friday voted to bump up the cost for its service. How much has not been determined.

The state cut represents about a quarter of the MOREnet budget and the second half of what had been a $14 million state subsidy.

The executive director, John Gillispie, said MOREnet has provided low-cost telecommunication, support services and training for students, community residents and telehealth-care clinics for 20 years.

“This budget cut may make access to some of these services cost prohibitive to certain members of the consortium,” Gillispie said.

The largest MOREnet client is the University of Missouri four-campus system. MOREnet manages all the Internet access for the system, including MU’s University Hospital. Gary Allen, system vice president for information technology, was not sure what the financial impact will be to the university.

Gillispie said the budget cuts “primarily impacts K-12,” which could see a minimum 35 percent rate increase. Service cost varies among school districts depending on size and the level of band width service used.
But he said a district with the maximum student population and using the maximum band width could be charged about $33,875 a year.

Kansas City School District officials said they, too, haven’t been told what the additional cost will be to the district.

“‘But we are going to have to try and find a way to pay it to continue having Internet access for our schools,’ said Eileen Houston-Stewart, district spokeswoman. ‘In our current financial state, any
State budget reductions affect scholarships

"MOREnet lost all its state funding due to cuts."

By Jimmy Hibsch

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Several college scholarship programs took a big hit with about $300 million in state budget cuts announced by the governor Thursday.

"Some might say we've been belt-tightening," Gov. Jay Nixon said at a news conference Thursday. "We may have to punch another hole in the belt this time."

Nixon announced a $301.4 million cut in spending reductions – about $280 million from state program cuts and $20 million to be offset by increased federal funding. These cuts come after $900 million in cuts during the 2010 fiscal year, which ends June 30. State budget director Linda Luebbering said the cuts were necessary for two reasons.

"One, our state revenue collections continue to come in less than expected," Luebbering said. "Two, there was some legislation that needed to be passed in order to save money and the legislature was not able to get it all passed."

Among the hardest hit was the Access Missouri college scholarship program, which lost $50 million of its $83 million. The Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority may offset this with a one-time $30 million grant. The Access Missouri program currently provides need-based scholarships of up to $2,150 for students at MU and other public state, as well as various other amounts for private institutions and community colleges. Luebbering said the cuts may shrink the awards to $500 at public institutions.

Also affected is the state's Bright Flight scholarship program, which will lose $4.1 million, about a quarter of its state funding. The merit-based program currently offers high-achieving high school seniors a $2,000 scholarship to attend a Missouri post-secondary college or university. The Missouri Department of Higher Education predicts the scholarship will drop to $1,900 for the 2010-2011 school year.

Nicole Jones, an incoming freshman journalism student, will be receiving the Bright Flight scholarship for the next four years. As a result of the statewide cuts, she may receive $400 less than Bright Flight scholars in the past.

"I personally am not very happy about it because they already cut it this year and that's money you count on from the time you get your ACT score back if it's high enough," Jones said. "I'm
also glad that at least I am guaranteed that much money from it because I wouldn't be surprised if they end up raising the necessary score with that big of a cut."

In the fall 2009 semester, 60 percent of Missouri students received some form of financial assistance such as the Access Missouri or Bright Flight scholarships.

Despite all of the higher education cuts, the tuition freeze agreement Nixon reached with public four-year colleges remains safe, Luebbering said.

"The tuition freeze is a high priority for the governor," she said. "Even if we have to make more cuts, I don't see that deal ending."

The Missouri Research and Education Network, or MOREnet, a consortium of schools, public libraries, higher education institutions and the University of Missouri System, lost $6.8 million, all of its state funding.

Members of the MOREnet council met Friday to determine the future of the 20-year-old consortium, which provides technical services and high-speed Internet connections to its members. The council unanimously agreed to continue all services by enforcing budget reductions and increasing member fees, executive director John Gillispie said.

"The governor faced an incredibly difficult decision," he said. "We find the result unfortunate and disappointing at best."

Gillispie said MOREnet will cover 20 percent of its reduction by further lowering the operating budget, and compensate for the rest by raising member fees.

"The state subsidy, which has traditionally been used to equalize services between urban and rural areas will no longer be available," Gillispie said. "MOREnet has no choice but to increase fees in order to make up for this loss of resources."

Although Luebbering said she hopes Thursday's cutbacks will suffice for the 2011 fiscal year, which begins July 1, she acknowledged she isn't certain.

"We had to make cuts in just about every area of state government," Luebbering said. "We're hoping that the revenue will start to turn around a little bit and the $300 million the governor had to reduce will keep us in balance for the entire fiscal year. We obviously don't know anything for sure, but we'll continue to monitor it."
The more things stay the same ...

Despite sticking in Big 12, Missouri still can expect some big changes.

By Dave Matter

Sunday, June 20, 2010

It was the biggest story in the history of Missouri athletics that didn’t happen. An offer from the Big Ten Conference never materialized. The Big 12 Conference never folded. The Tigers are staying right where they are.

But change is still on its way, especially in football. Whenever the new downsized Big 12 officially takes shape — Nebraska plans to leave for the Big Ten in 2011; Colorado is mulling a 2011 or 2012 departure for the Pac-10 — Missouri will have to adjust. If not, Gary Pinkel’s program risks being capsized by the South Division programs that chose to stay and assert their influence over the ravaged league.

Pinkel could not attend last Tuesday’s news conference at Mizzou Arena and has not been available for interviews since then, but Athletic Director Mike Alden said his 10th-year coach was pleased that Missouri remains part of the Big 12.

“If I were to speak for him, maintaining and strengthening the Big 12 Conference was of critical importance to us,” Alden said. “So, I know that he believes strongly in that. ... Overall, he’s excited about the fact that the Big 12 is here, that it’s going to stay and is strong and the footprint that we’ve made and the brand that Mizzou has in that has a chance to flourish.”

The summer’s quick burst of realignment only displaced four teams from their conferences — Colorado, Nebraska, Boise State and Utah — but the impact will be felt throughout the country, including Missouri. Here are four ways the remodeled Big 12 will affect Pinkel’s program.

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT: The Tigers are going to be heading south more than ever once the Big 12 goes to nine-game conference schedules. The league will wipe away the North and South divisions and everyone will play everyone every season. That means annual matchups with national championship contenders Oklahoma and Texas. Ouch.

In his nine seasons at MU, Pinkel is 12-17 against the South teams, with most of those losses coming against the powerhouse programs: Pinkel is 0-5 against Texas and 0-6 against Oklahoma, including two losses to the Sooners in Big 12 championship games. Pinkel is 3-1 against both Texas A&M and Texas Tech, though both teams have undergone head-coaching changes since MU last played them. In fact, Pinkel is just 2-14 against the South’s current lineup of head
coaches: 0-6 vs. OU’s Bob Stoops, 0-5 vs. Texas’ Mack Brown, 1-2 vs. Oklahoma State’s Mike Gundy, 1-1 vs. Baylor’s Art Briles and 0-0 against Texas A&M’s Mike Sherman and Texas Tech’s Tommy Tuberville.

At the other end of the spectrum, Missouri says farewell to the conference opponent it’s bullied like none other the last four years — Colorado. The series has become one of the most lopsided in the conference since Dan Hawkins took over the Buffaloes in 2006, as the Tigers have won four straight meetings, outscoring CU by 137 points in those games.

CUPCAKE FEAST?: With one more league game added to the slate, what becomes of Missouri’s nonconference scheduling philosophy? The Big 12’s unequal revenue distribution shines on programs that schedule aggressively with attractive non-league matchups — look no further than Oklahoma for evidence — but MU’s track record suggests it will avoid such glitzy showdowns.

As its future schedules stand, MU has filled only one season’s four nonconference slots, 2013. That season, Missouri opens with home games against Murray State, Toledo and Kent State then travels to Indiana. Missouri Senior Associate Athletic Director Mark Alnutt said it would be easier to drop Murray State or Kent State because both are only one-year contracts — in 2014, MU plays host to Indiana and travels to Toledo — but for now, MU is exploring all options.

Considering how well MU’s tryst with the Big Ten turned out, could the Indiana series be destined for the guillotine? Beyond the upcoming season, the Tigers have also secured contracts with Arizona State (2011-12), Miami (Ohio) (2012), Memphis (2015-16), Wyoming (2017-18), Western Illinois (2011) and Southern Illinois (2012).

LONE STAR EXPOSURE: Last week’s developments soothed any fears that MU’s recruiting efforts in the state of Texas would wither away after a move to the Big Ten. In fact, the program’s Texas exposure should increase with the nine-game league schedule. Recruits from Texas will play more games on their home-state soil and more games on TV against other teams from Texas.

Speaking of TV, ABC/ESPN plans to carry the same number of Big 12 games through the length of its contract — it lasts through 2015-16 — despite the loss of two teams. In a smaller league, that gives everyone else a better chance to have their games televised.

BOWL OUTLOOK: The Big 12’s eight bowl contracts are locked into place through 2013, but the league’s bowl selection process will not change. Records, standings and head-to-head results will have no more influence on a team’s value than its ability to sell tickets, a challenge to programs, like Missouri, that carry a reputation for not traveling to bowl games as well as others. Half the Big 12 bowls are in Texas cities, giving the Tigers even less leverage in the new South-heavy league.

Here is the Big 12’s bowl selection order for the next several years: Fiesta Bowl (vs. BCS opponent in Glendale, Ariz.), Cotton Bowl (vs. SEC in Arlington, Texas), Alamo Bowl (vs. Pac-10 in San Antonio), Insight Bowl (vs. Big Ten in Tempe, Ariz.), Holiday Bowl (vs. Pac-10 in
San Diego), Texas Bowl (vs. Big Ten in Houston), Pinstripe Bowl (vs. Big East in New York),
Dallas Football Classic (vs. Big Ten/ACC in Dallas).

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Online course expansion aims to meet needs of new-age students

By Christie Megura; June 18, 2010 | 4:25 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Students are not the same as they were 20 years ago.

Today they blog, tweet, text, listen to iTunes and write a paper all at once. They are technology addicts who are constantly multitasking — in and out of the classroom.

Many traditional classrooms have failed to meet the needs of this new student generation. That's why the University of Missouri System aims to address the ever-changing student learning styles by spending $482,000 to develop 124 new online courses.

The new online courses will include diverse offerings such as agroforestry, dental hygiene, criminology and financial engineering. UM also plans to employ several strategies to help faculty learn how to use new technological tools in traditional classrooms. The project will affect all four UM System campuses.

Steven Graham, senior associate vice president for academic affairs, said today's students want to communicate digitally and use technology in multiple areas of their life.

"That's how they learn. That's how they think," Graham said.

Writing on a chalkboard or listening to a lecture for an hour often doesn't satisfy students' technological cravings. Graham is excited about giving UM faculty the chance to expand the ways they use online discussion forums, educational YouTube videos and other technology in classes to help make material come alive.

Zac March was hired as the director of electronic learning, or eLearning, in May 2009.

Faculty members won't be required to change their teaching techniques or to incorporate new technology, but UM is trying to make multiple resources available for faculty who are interested.
Fifty-five faculty members attended a workshop June 2 to 3 to learn how to use mixed media in the classroom. Faculty were able to pick and choose which tools to learn about.

"It was kind of like speed dating for eLearning," March said about one of the workshop sessions.

March described the workshop as a hub of faculty creativity and a good networking tool. More workshops are being planned, and March said spots are filling quickly.

Faculty also have the help of 15 eMentors who work across the four campuses. The eMentors are faculty members enthusiastic about using technology in teaching with extensive experience to share.

"Oh, I would imagine there will be a lot of anxious and frustrated folks out there who want to teach online but experience anxiety," eMentor Shawna Strickland said.

The mentors work to stop this anxiety and get faculty comfortable with using technology in class.

Funding for the new online courses came from savings over the past few years and reallocating money in the budget. Because the funding was generated from a request for proposal, the project requires one-time funding. Money is not expected to be added to the project every year to keep the new online classes running.

Graham said he's unsure how soon tuition revenue from the new classes will make up for the initial $482,000 investment.

Graham said UM was very purposeful and frugal in developing the program but sees the classes as a long-term investment. He also does not anticipate any increase in tuition for online courses.

**Videos that demonstrate why the UM System is focusing on using technology for learning**

Video description: "This short but powerful video summarizes some of the most important characteristics of students today — how they learn, what they need to learn, their goals, hopes, dreams, what their lives will be like, and what kinds of changes they will experience in their lifetime. The video was created by Dr. Michael Wesch and 200 students enrolled in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology at Kansas State University during the Spring of 2007," from the UM System website.
Iraqi students come to U.S. colleges to help rebuild country

By Didi Tang, USA TODAY

Iraqi and American educators are collaborating to bring Iraqi students to the USA, where they will study at American universities and then return home to help rebuild Iraq's higher-education infrastructure.

A 600-student pilot program, launched by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki last summer, is bringing 400 students to U.S. schools this summer; 200 will go to the United Kingdom.

Also, a U.S. Embassy program to help Iraqi students enroll at American universities brought five Iraqi educators to Missouri in late May for a two-week tour of colleges and a national conference for international educators in Kansas City, Mo.

The first batch of the 400 Iraqi students arrives in the USA this month. They will attend 24 universities, including Michigan State, the University of Missouri-Columbia, the University of Colorado, the University of Iowa and Syracuse University, says Mary Maguire, spokeswoman for the non-profit Academy for Educational Development, based in Washington, D.C.

"The students want to go out to study, and we want them to be here," says Sabah Alwachi, director of international cultural relations at the University of Baghdad.

Adds Rund Ali Hammoudi, a geologist from the University of Duhok in Iraq's Kurdistan region: "We have been isolated for a long time. We want to know the opportunities outside in the world."

Missouri college officials who hosted Iraqi educators in May say Iraqi students' arrival on U.S. campuses is a prime opportunity to diversify campus demographics while helping Iraq build democracy through its youth.

"We hope democracy will thrive in Iraq, and we will do our part to contribute to world peace," says Elizabeth Strong, director of the study-away program at Missouri State University in Springfield.
Todd Parnell, president of Drury University in Springfield, Mo., a private liberal-arts school, says the program is mutually beneficial: "It gives (Iraqi students) a look at the real America ... and Drury students get real-life exposure to have those students in their classroom."

The pilot program is the precursor to a five-year national scholarship program, by which the Iraqi government plans to eventually send 10,000 Iraqi students a year to study abroad with all expenses paid, says Suhailah Naser Harib of the Higher Committee for Educational Development in Iraq. Scholarship recipients must agree to return to Iraq after graduation and work for the government for the same amount of time they would spend abroad, Harib says.

To encourage more Iraqi students to enroll at U.S. colleges, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in May 2009 awarded a two-year grant to the Academy for Educational Development to develop the Iraq Higher Education Advising Network, says Stacey Bustillos, the project manager.

That project plans to help the Iraqi government carry out the five-year scholarship program and will bring more than 200 Iraqi faculty members and higher-education officials to the USA, Bustillos says.