Scientists bemoan ruling on stem cells

BY TIM BARKER • tbarker@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8350 | Posted: Wednesday, September 1, 2010 12:25 am

COLUMBIA, MO. • In a refrigerator-sized incubator in a small lab on the second floor of the Bond Life Sciences Center at the University of Missouri-Columbia, researchers are growing tiny colonies of embryonic stem cells.

Every day, a small squad of scientists nurtures and feeds those controversial cells, searching for clues about pre-eclampsia, a disease that causes hypertension in pregnant women.

Until last week, the research was supported by tax dollars. But a federal judge's ruling has cast doubt on the future of such research, in Columbia and in labs across the nation.

For now at least, the impact at Mizzou is virtually unnoticeable — unless you count the dampened spirits and wounded morale of scientists who've invested years of their lives in research that could end prematurely for lack of funding.

Professor Michael Roberts, who's been leading the school's embryonic stem cell research since 2003, isn't all that worried. Yet.

"I can keep going for at least another year," said Roberts, who is using other funding sources to pay for work no longer supported by federal dollars. "But ultimately, I'll have to stop."

That's if lawmakers don't intervene. Or if a higher court doesn't reverse the decision by U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth, who ruled such research is a violation of the Dickey-Wicker Amendment of 1999, which says federal dollars cannot be used to destroy human embryos.

On Tuesday, President Barack Obama's administration said it had appealed Lamberth's order, while asking the judge to reconsider his restraining order.

As it stands, the ruling affected all lines of embryonic stem cells, including 21 lines approved for research during the administration of President George W. Bush in 2001. The range of lines was expanded by President Barack Obama in 2009.

Researchers at Mizzou and Washington University, both of which have received federal support for stem sell research, have bemoaned the court decision.

There is a certain irony in the timing of the ruling, which comes at what could be a crossroads of sorts for stem cell research.
That's because researchers across the nation and at Mizzou have been using federal funds for projects that could determine whether noncontroversial adult stem cells show as much promise as embryonic stem cells. Researchers say without the federal funds for embryonic research, those comparisons will be tougher to achieve, with the financial burden falling on private or state funding.

Mizzou, for example, was close to securing a $1.8 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. Among the goals of researchers was a hope that treatments for pre-eclampsia could be pursued without the need for embryonic stem cells. The research was asking if so-called induced pluripotent stem, or IPS, cells — adult cells coaxed into behaving like embryonic cells — might be just as useful.

But last week, Roberts learned that he won't be getting that money.

And while his faith in the future of IPS cells has softened the blow of last week's court ruling, he stops short of concluding they will be as useful as embryonic stem cells. This, despite the fact that he believes IPS cells are the future of stem cell research.

"That's my suspicion. But I've been in this game long enough to never bet on one horse," Roberts said.

There are those, however, who argue that embryonic stem cells no longer offer anything for scientists. Critics point out that embryonic stem cell research has not provided a single cure for any disease or illness. In fact, no treatments have even been tested on humans, though there is a trial about to begin dealing with blindness and spinal cord injuries.

Supporters of IPS research also point out that those cells, which behave remarkably similar to embryonic stem cells, can be taken from a patient's own body, eliminating the threat of the body rejecting the treatment.

"It seems that the science has passed beyond embryonic stem cells," said David Prentice, a senior fellow for life sciences at the Family Research Council. "Shouldn't we be focusing on things that are going to help people now?"

But others argue that it's too soon to proclaim the superiority of IPS cells. Among their pitfalls is the fact that they tend to retain some residual memory of what they once were — a skin cell, for example — making them potentially less useful in treating disease elsewhere in the body.

"The IPS field is still in its infancy," said Elaine Fuchs, president of the International Society for Stem Cell Research.

Echoing the concerns of many researchers, Fuchs said embryonic stem cells are still needed essentially as a reference point — to make sure IPS cells behave as they should: "It's the gold standard that allows us to eliminate the need for embryonic stem cells."
Without access to those cells, researchers like those at Mizzou say they'll lose a valuable tool, even if their focus is on adult stem cells.

"I have to have something to compare it to," said Bhanu Telugu, a Mizzou research scientist who's spent the past two years working with embryonic stem cells.

For Telugu and fellow researcher Toshihiko Ezashi, last week's court ruling has been a particularly unnerving event. Both have dedicated a significant portion of their research lives delving into this arena.

Both are left wondering about their future and a larger debate that just doesn't make sense to them.

"I just don't get the point," Ezashi said. "We're trying to use this technology to help others."
COLUMBIA, Mo., Aug. 31 (UPI) -- "Free as a bird" may not be as free as it sounds, researchers say, as a study suggest what's on the ground greatly affects where birds fly.

Scientists at the University of Missouri says the findings could be useful to foresters and urban planners alike to improve bird habitats that would perpetuate strong, diverse bird populations, a university release said Tuesday.

Dylan Kesler, assistant professor in fisheries and wildlife at the university's School of Natural Resources, found that non-migrating resident birds tend to travel over forest "corridors," areas protected by trees and used by wildlife to travel.

Birds choose to travel over woodlands because they can make an easier escape from predators as well as find food, he says.

"Movement of individuals influences nearly every aspect of biology, from the existence of a single population to interactions within and among species," Kesler said.

"Movement determines where individual birds procreate. How they spread across the landscape affects who meets whom, which in turn dictates how genes are spread."

Man-made features such as roads, as well as gaps in forests from agriculture or rivers, can restrict birds to certain areas, he says.

When forests are removed, bird populations become isolated and disconnected, which can lead to inbreeding and weaker, more disease-prone birds, Kesler says.
Textbook order cancellations cause stress

Orders have been suspended until problems can be resolved.

By Alex Pesek

Published Aug. 31, 2010

Due to record volume numbers in textbook orders and a University Bookstore-wide switchover of inventory control software, University Bookstore cancelled all orders for students taking classes on campus last week.

Student Auxiliary Services spokeswoman Michelle Froese said the decision to switch to new inventory control and point of service software was made in July to account for the burden of a record-size incoming class.

"In July, the University Bookstores migrated to a new point of sale system because the system that had been used for almost 15 years could no longer meet the growing needs of our multiple campus stores," Froese said in an e-mail. "Migrating to a new system always presents bumps, but we experienced a significant problem with our e-commerce order fulfillment sites."

Froese said such issues did not arise during previous years of textbook order procedures, and this made the time to process online orders unmanageable for bookstore employees.

“There are a multitude of issues, including order authorizations, duplicate shipments and inaccurate order information, causing staff to manually verify each order,” Froese said. “The time to process orders became unmanageable, so the decision was made to cancel the orders for those students who were physically taking classes at MU.”

University Bookstore employee Graham Spence said the bookstore offered gift certificates to those whose orders had to be canceled.

“People whose orders had been canceled were offered $25 certificates to the bookstore for the inconvenience,” Spence said. “After they’ve come in to pick up their books, they can redeem their gift certificates at the customer service desk.”

Spence, a bookstore employee for the past three semesters, said he did not sense the rush caused by canceled orders was noticeably different than previous years.

“There's no doubt the rush was crazy, but it's the kind of crazy you come to expect,” Spence said. “Once textbook season comes around, the bookstore hires temporary employees, and that helps make things run more smoothly on our end.”
Sophomore Katrina Ball, who was notified of her textbook cancellation two days before the start of classes, said she could have been notified earlier.

"To be honest, I was kind of pissed off about the fact that I had processed my order far in advance yet was only given a few days notice to get my books," Ball said. "If I would have known earlier I could have saved myself the time and hassle by ordering off of Amazon."

Ball said she recognizes the large task of processing textbook orders, but feels the process should have been planned for further in advance.

"I, as a student, can't really think of a feasible way for the Bookstore to deal with such large quantities of orders other than to plan ahead," Ball said. "It unfortunately became my task to compensate for their slip-ups, and it became an inconvenient burden, especially as an off-campus student."

Froese said textbook orders, if not fulfilled by students coming to the bookstore, will remain suspended until infrastructure issues are solved.

"MU Direct students' orders were processed, but these students were informed that books would not arrive before the first day of classes," Froese said. "Until the bookstore can have the e-commerce system issues resolved, they will suspend any textbook orders."
Remember 1995? That was the year the first feature-length computer animated cartoon, “Toy Story,” came out. Cell phones were largely uncommon and likely bigger than most landline home phones are now. The DVD had just been announced as an alternative media format.

The year was an almost unrecognizably long time ago in terms of technology. It was also the last time University Bookstore updated the system used to keep track of textbook orders. So why did we wait 15 years until the system failed us right before the fall semester to change it?

If the crash of the system and canceling of orders didn’t affect you and yours, consider yourselves lucky. Students who had made an extra effort to be prepared spent hours just getting books because their orders were cancelled, and students who expected to have their books mailed to their homes were instead forced to come by the bookstore to pick them up. A process that wasn't supposed to take any more of their time than an order weeks ago turned into a long winding line through the bookstore checkout labyrinth.

Another issue: the e-mails sent out describing the situation weren’t all created equally. As of now, we know of two different e-mails. One didn’t offer the compensatory gift card, and both confused the lines between whether or not the books were not going to arrive to their homes before classes started, or if they should be in the bookstore fighting for books. Many students who had ordered used books missed out on being able to purchase them, and a $25 gift card definitely does not make up for the difference there.

The bookstore lost money on this debacle, about $10,000, by handing out bookstore gift cards to compensate for the enormous pain in the ass this was for students. Because that’s what these students want: more time in the bookstore.

With the amount of money and staffing they had available, it seems there could have been a better solution. For instance, they could have picked up all the books and boxed them for students like they do for the Early Bird sign ups.

As the primary customers of the bookstore, students should be given highest priority, especially when it comes to their books. Of course, second to books is wide and varied accessibility to Tiger yoga pants.
Letter to the Editor:

MU's Department of Information Technology is failing students

By Patrick Anderson, senior in BSBA of Marketing, pwayv2@mail.missouri.edu

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If you don't realize it, we as students pay an information technology fee of a $183 for the fall semester. On top of our tuition and other fees, we hope that this additional fee that specifies for technology gives us good and working services. So far this semester I haven't seen my $183 fee come to use. The services we rely on have failed us more than once.

During the first week of class, I missed a class due to myZou being down for a while. Since I pay a substantial fee that is higher than our student healthcare or rec center fee, I expect myZou to work as that is our only source for our schedules. When it's down on a crucial day of the year, we need that site up and working. Even one of my teachers had to ask her assistant where her class was because she couldn't log onto myZou. To be fair, I can understand when new services or servers go down due to inexperience and instability of a new system like our email service did when they switched to Outlook a year ago. But, myZou has been around since I started coming here in fall of 2007. On top of that, IT had about three to four weeks from the summer semester to fall semester to repair and make sure the servers are ready for classes on Aug. 23. But on Monday, Aug. 23, when students keep getting a page with the words "internal server error," it was obvious they didn't repair or have the servers ready for class.

Now in the second week of classes, I saw at the library that the printing system is having issues where it can "take up to 10 minutes" for the "accept charges screen" to come up. For the second week in a row, our IT department has failed to deliver. If myZou down was bad enough, now people can't print off notes, papers, or anything important in a quick manner. Not everyone has a printer and it isn't uncommon that students are pressed for time during the day and can't spare ten minutes to print off something that should take no more than 30 seconds. This is unbelievable and unacceptable.

I hope the Department of IT figures out what to do since we each pay $183 and if you times that by about 30,000 students, which is roughly our total enrollment for undergrad and graduate students, equals a good amount of money. Because I know I'm not alone on how I feel when I say this but when I pay a lot of money for this school and especially for a fee that is supposed to provide me reliable services that are necessary for our education, I expect them to work.
Student center “Welcome” translations misspelled, blacked out

The signs misspelled “Welcome” in Arabic and Farsi.

By Allison Prang

Published Aug. 31, 2010

Banners were hung displaying the word “Welcome” in various languages in the student center when it opened, but some of the translations were spelled incorrectly.

Student Unions Assistant Director Joe Hayes said after the signs were printed, it was discovered the Arabic and Farsi translations of “Welcome” were misspelled.

Student Unions staff painted over the misspelled words with black paint, but left the banners hanging in the student center.

“(The Unions staff) blacked out the Arabic and Farsi languages,” Hayes said. “It was an attempt to be as welcoming as possible but unfortunately our translation was incorrect. To be respectful, we blacked them out.”

The misspelled Arabic and Farsi words were painted over during office hours in the student center. The signs have since been taken down as originally scheduled since the student center’s opening was more than one week ago.

“They were up for the first week,” Hayes said. “When we do it again next year, we’ll get it right. It was an honest mistake.”

Hayes said the incorrect words were painted over while patrons were present because the student center staff was probably made aware of it at that time.

“We blacked them out when we were made aware of it,” Hayes said.

Senior John Thomas said he was getting a slice of pizza when he said he observed that certain languages had been painted over in black.

“That’s very unwelcoming if an Arabic student were to notice that,” Thomas said, who also acknowledged the reason the words were painted over could have been due to a printing mistake.
MU International Center Director Jim Scott said he was not aware of the mistakes painted over on the welcome signs, but wasn’t concerned about them.

"It’s great to provide welcome in languages our students speak," Scott said. "It’s OK with me that they tried. These things happen."
The University of Missouri and six other members of the soon-to-be downsized Big 12 Conference are considering forming their own cable television network.

Mizzou Athletic Director Mike Alden and his counterparts from Big 12 schools Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Kansas State, Texas Tech, Texas A&M and Iowa State met Aug. 20 in Dallas for an hour-long breakfast meeting to discuss their long-term options. Learfield Sports of Plano, Texas, handles multimedia rights negotiations for all seven colleges.

The gathering, organized by Learfield, was held immediately before a Big 12 Conference scheduling meeting but was not sanctioned by the league, said Big 12 spokesman Bob Burda.

Andy Rawlings, Learfield’s chief operating officer, confirmed the directors “spoke about a variety of ways, including TV, to increase revenue for them and exposure for their fans. It was a good and productive meeting, yet still fairly early in the process to say much more.”
Pinkel takes Mizzou problems head-on

BY BRYAN BURWELL • bburwell@post-dispatch.com, 314-340-8185 | Posted: Wednesday, September 1, 2010 12:15 am

When you do things the right way for a long time you build up a little credit. So consider this a vote of confidence in Gary Pinkel even as his Missouri football program suffers through the embarrassment of way too many episodes of young men behaving badly.

Pinkel has done a lot of things right in his 10 years at Mizzou, winning a lot of football games and doing it with a tangible sense of discipline and integrity. But now within the stretch of one horrendous month, three members of his program have been arrested on suspicion of driving while intoxicated, and his star tailback has been suspended indefinitely facing felony charges of deviate sexual assault, a mess I'm sure will prove to reek of alcohol-soaked stupidity, too. None of these unfortunate episodes has suddenly turned Missouri into some renegade football program. But you don't have to be an unrepentant haven for convicts and reprobates to set your program down a dark path.

So thankfully, Pinkel has taken the right attitude about this rash of bad behavior. On Monday when facing the media, the coach didn't act like a man with his head in the sand or act like an arrogant enabler who pretends that these legal missteps are the mere collateral costs for doing business when trying to create a consistent national football power.

Instead, he took responsibility.

"Just like a parent," he said. "A parent is responsible for their kids, no matter what they do or what they get involved with."

Too often the eventual downfall of schools and coaches is the arrogance to ignore that responsibility. Too often, particularly at programs that believe that there are shortcuts to success, the people in charge choose to cut corners or look the other way when trying to make those radical makeovers, or desperately attempting to keep a football program afloat in the Top 25.

But Pinkel said he was embarrassed by these repeated incidents and vowed to make sure the nonsense ends now. He left linebacker Will Ebner and long snapper Beau Brinkley off the two-deep roster for Saturday's season opener against Illinois. Tailback Derrick Washington, charged with the felony assault, was suspended indefinitely until his case is resolved. Pinkel says his program was built on discipline, and I happen to believe him. He's earned that trust by keeping MU football clean for the bulk of his 10 years in Columbia.
But the trouble with the life of a college football coach is that everything you build over a decade can be ruined in no time by the repeated mistakes of a few foolish young men.

Why have his players (and assistant coach Bruce Walker, who was punished internally by Pinkel) suddenly gotten themselves into these alcohol-related arrests? Pinkel better find out in a hurry if there's something developing in the culture of his program — or in the overall culture of a college town notorious for its party-all-the-time national reputation — that he needs to immediately correct before something very tragic occurs that either ruins a life or ends one.

None of us knows for sure what happened that night involving Washington, but Missouri's policy of suspending any athlete charged with a felony is the absolute right way to go. Playing college football is a privilege, not a right. So unless he clears up his name, he should not be allowed to play.

Pinkel says his program must find a way to restore the respect that he spent building over the last decade. "That's the way it should be," he said.

The true test of regaining that respect will be how high Pinkel sets the bar for Washington's possible reinstatement. A plea bargain deal shouldn't cut it. A plea bargain says "I did it, but let's make a deal."

That might work to keep Washington out of jail, but complete innocence should be the only path that gets him back in a Missouri uniform. Anything less is a compromise that Pinkel should never consider if he's truly interested in rediscovering that respect.
Pinkel’s faith in system is steadfast

Coach believes MU ‘first-class’ despite recent legal woes.

By Dave Matter

Tuesday, August 31, 2010

In a four-week stretch of August, the Missouri football program averaged a drunk-driving arrest every nine days. All the while, a senior co-captain was under investigation for sexual assault, leading to a felony charge filed yesterday by Boone County prosecutors.

With the crime wave providing a gloomy backdrop for the opening of Gary Pinkel’s 10th season at Missouri, the coach confessed his embarrassment over the legal scrapes yesterday. But he also strongly defended the disciplinary policies that for years have defined his coaching personality.

After opening his weekly media session by acknowledging the felony charge filed against tailback Derrick Washington — one count of deviate sexual assault, a Class C felony — Pinkel said he took responsibility for the string of arrests that has swept through his program.

“Just like a parent,” he said. “A parent is responsible for their kids, no matter what they do or what they get involved with.”

“We’ve done a good job of building a reputation for running a first-class program, a disciplined program,” he continued. “I’m embarrassed. I’m embarrassed that we’ve taken a few of these hits. But we built the program with the discipline that we have… I’m disappointed. That’s an understatement. But our program was built and got us to this point. And we’re going to continue to do what we do. And I expect it to clean up. But we have to earn that back. We have to earn that respect back.”

Since offensive line coach Bruce Walker was arrested for driving while intoxicated outside the team facility on Aug. 2 — he was sitting in his parked vehicle with the motor running — two players have been arrested for the same crime, linebacker Will Ebner on Aug. 22 and tight end/long snapper Beau Brinkley on Sunday morning. Neither player, nor Washington, was listed on the team’s depth chart for Saturday’s game against Illinois in St. Louis.

Washington is suspended indefinitely. He turned himself in to the Boone County Sheriff’s Department yesterday and was released after posting $4,500 bond and ordered not to contact his accuser or her former roommate, who is named as a witness in the probable-cause statement obtained by the Tribune. Washington is scheduled for arraignment on Sept. 23.
For the MU players available to play Saturday, most insisted yesterday that the off-field trouble hasn’t shifted the team’s focus away from the Illinois game. De’Vion Moore, one of the tailbacks asked to pick up slack in the running game in Washington’s absence, said the last few days around the team facility have been “a little different and a lot more focused.”

“When you get issues like this and adversity occurs, you’ve got to lock in and just be that much more focused to get the job done,” he said.

“Things go downhill sometimes, but everyone’s still focused,” outside linebacker Andrew Gachkar said. “It might seem bad on the outside, but on the inside everyone’s just focused on Illinois. We’re not really paying attention to what’s going on in the news and all that.”

Quarterback Blaine Gabbert echoed the locker room sentiment, saying the recent incidents won’t affect the players still around to contribute this week.

“Every team’s going to have adversity throughout the season,” he said. “We just happen to have a bunch at the beginning. We’re going to fight through it and do our best.”

With a small group of seniors playing prominent roles this season — there are only 11 listed on the depth chart — Gachkar said it’s up to each of them — not just the elected captains — to police the roster.

“As seniors, we expect for this kind of stuff not to happen and for there to be leadership around here,” he said. “The young guys don’t really know what’s going on. So we definitely have to step up and point everyone in the right direction.”

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MU athletics one of 14 FBS programs to turn profit

More than 100 schools in the Football Bowl Subdivision lost money on football.

By Steven Dickherber

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A report released by the NCAA last week found MU’s Athletics Department was one of 14 athletics programs of the 120 universities making up the Football Bowl Subdivision that turned a profit in 2009. In 2008, 25 of the FBS schools were able to post figures in the black.

Although the NCAA doesn’t release revenues for individual schools, MU along with University of Texas, University of Alabama, Ohio State University, University of Florida and University of Tennessee, were some of the schools confirmed to have earned money in the report, which was authored by Transylvania University professor Dan Fulks.

"We place a really high emphasis on fiscal responsibility," Athletics Department spokesman Chad Moller said.

The men's basketball and football programs were the only two programs in which any university reported higher revenues than expenses. Sixty-eight football programs and 67 men's basketball programs were profitable in 2009, an increase since 2004.

Institutions generally use the money earned from football and men's basketball to fund lower-profile sports, which generally do not generate enough revenue to cover their expenses.

"For anyone in a BCS Conference, football is the engine that drives the department," said Kevin Klintworth, Oklahoma State University Athletics Department spokesman.
The impact of a successful football program is seen in Fulks' report. Out of the 97 Division I schools without a football program, all 97 had higher expenses than revenue with a median loss of just under $3 million.

"There's no question that football and men's basketball drive our economic engine, and because of the success of those programs both on the field and the court and then financially, that helps us fund all of our other sports," Moller said.

According to the study, part of MU's fiscal success comes from the achievements of its athletic teams. In 2009, the MU football team went 8-4 and was chosen for the Texas Bowl shown on ESPN. Under coach Mike Anderson, the MU basketball team went 31-7 and reached the Elite Eight in the NCAA Tournament.

"Winning programs create more excitement in your fan base, and the more excitement there is, the more willing people are to jump on board and support you," Moller said. "It's vital. Losing programs are much harder to keep afloat."

According to the report, last year was the first year no institution posted a profit in women's basketball dating back to 2004, the earliest year with relevant data.

The gap between the most fiscally successful programs and those in need continued to increase in 2009, though at a slower rate than previous years.

"The largest generated revenue of $138,500,000 compared with the median generated revenue of $32,264,000 in 2009, is indicative of the disparity in the FBS," Fulks said.

Most athletic programs in the country rely on subsidies from the university they represent. The most recent economic recession has caused several schools to lose some funding and as a result, they have had to make cuts in the classroom as well as on the playing field.

As several states continue to make budget cuts, self-sustaining athletic programs will continue to pull away financially from programs, which rely on funding from their institution.

Moller said MU athletics is on its way to become self-sufficient within a few years.

"The support that comes to us from our main campus is being reduced gradually over the next couple years until eventually it's zero, so it's going to make it tougher," Moller said.
Missouri tests artificial turf for germs, heat

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) -- The newest crop at a University of Missouri research farm is a man-made product more commonly found in sports stadiums than the state's rural reaches.

South Farm scientists are studying five brands of artificial sports turf to better understand the synthetic material's density and heat-absorbing properties.

They also want to find out if infectious bacteria can survive if not thrive amid the fake blades of grass. A growing number of high schools in Missouri and elsewhere are converting their sports fields to artificial surfaces.

The turf samples and other material were donated to the university by manufacturers and distributors.