The University of Missouri's flagship campus is reviewing 75 degree programs for possible elimination under a statewide cost-cutting edict.

The state Department of Higher Education defines such "low-producing" programs as those awarding fewer than 10 bachelor's degrees a year on average. The cutoff is five graduates for master's programs and three graduates for doctoral programs.

Computer science, food science and nutrition and three foreign languages are among the subjects on the Columbia campus meeting the state's criteria.

Chancellor Brady Deaton is expected to discuss the state review Wednesday afternoon at a campuswide faculty meeting. Final approval of any program elimination rests with the university system's Board of Curators.
Less popular MU programs under review

Janese Silvey

University of Missouri administrators are taking a look at academic programs that graduate only a handful of students every year, but that doesn’t necessarily mean those programs are on the chopping block.

The Missouri Department of Higher Education has instructed public colleges to review “low-producing” degree programs — undergraduate units that graduate, on average, fewer than 10 students a year, master's programs that graduate fewer than five students and doctoral programs that graduate fewer than three students.

The exercise aims to highlight where universities could be more efficient, said Paul Wagner, deputy commissioner of higher education.

"The institution will be asked to provide their commentary or rationale for whatever they recommend happen to a program, if it should be continued for some reason or discontinued for some reason,” Wagner said. “But the ultimate decision of whether or not to end a program or to scale it back rests with the institution’s governing board.”

Last week, MU Provost Brian Foster called on deans and department chairs to start talking about the degree programs. Although the state is expecting universities to submit details of these programs by Oct. 21, the discussion is still early, he said.

Foster released a list of 75 programs — mostly graduate-level — that graduate fewer students than the Missouri Department of Higher Education criteria.

But the numbers are only part of the picture. In many cases, these programs have a place on campus and in Missouri’s higher education landscape, regardless of the number of graduates.

For example, an average of eight students earned bachelor’s degrees in statistics over the past three years, but doing away with that degree wouldn’t save a significant amount of money. Only one class — the senior capstone — is specific to a statistics degree. Most students take statistics classes for other majors, department Chairwoman Nancy Flournoy said.

Plus, Flournoy said, the statistics major is rising in popularity. Thirty students are pursuing the degree, and 24 undergraduates are considering a statistics degree, she said.
That’s the case in other programs, too. Although no one received a doctorate in classical studies from MU in the past three years, about a dozen students are now in the doctorate program. It takes about eight years to complete that degree, so the department’s push to increase enrollment six years ago won’t show up in graduation numbers for a couple of years, said George Justice, dean of graduate studies.

Classical studies faculty also work with art history, religion, language and other disciplines, he said. “That just shows how complex it is,” Justice said. “Even looking at what would seem to be a very niche program is complexly embedded in lots of things we do here.”

Other small graduate programs remain critical. Few students earn degrees in foreign studies or languages, but the studies are important in a global society, Foster said. “We live in this monolingual culture, and we’re not well-prepared to be effective in a global business world or a global political world,” he said.

Administrators already are coming up with ways to defend their low-producing programs. Michael O’Brien, dean of the College of Arts and Science, sent an e-mail to chairs outlining arguments for keeping those programs.

“We as a college are going to make the case that as an Association of American Universities college of arts and science, we are bound to produce high-quality programs, and that given the size of the faculty we have (read small), we’re doing a great job of it,” O’Brien wrote.

Although cases can be made for keeping small programs, Foster said, he expects MU to make some changes. “We’re under all kinds of fiscal pressure these days,” he said. “Business as usual isn’t really an option.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
A statewide charge for public colleges to review degree offerings is just a large-scale version of what institutions already do, a University of Missouri System administrator said.

The Missouri Department of Higher Education is asking public colleges and universities to submit reports this month showing which degree programs are only graduating a handful of students annually, shining a spotlight on areas where schools could collaborate and be more efficient.

There are dozens of examples of where Missouri colleges and universities have already teamed up, said Steve Graham, vice president of academic affairs for the UM System. MU partners with Missouri State University to provide a master’s degree in library and information science, for instance, and with Missouri Southern State University to offer a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering.

“In doctoral programs that are small, it makes a lot of sense to collaborate,” MU Provost Brian Foster said. “Certainly we’re interested in doing that.”

Talk of the degree program review is already generating new ideas, Graham said. An association of chief academic officers from public colleges and universities, for instance, is considering how to redistribute faculty and programs and come up with new ways to provide common, high-demand courses.

The state review “gives us an opportunity to look at programs statewide and an opportunity to collaborate in ways we haven’t before, Graham said. “And I think that’s very exciting.”

Although some fear the review of low-performing degrees will put small programs on the chopping block, Graham stressed that it’s not uncommon for schools to refresh their academic offerings.

“We don’t get much credit for it, but it is pretty typical for campuses to constantly be adding and deleting programs,” he said.

In recent years, MU has done away with 10 graduate-level degree programs, including agronomy, entomology and horticulture. In some cases, eliminated programs have evolved to become new majors. Students can no longer get a doctorate in exercise sciences at MU, for example, but the college is offering master’s degrees in public health and occupational therapy and a doctorate in physical therapy.
“We’re constantly refreshing programs that aren’t making sense to offer anymore,” Graham said.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
Faculty and students react to list of "low-producing" degrees

By Abi Getto, Jessica Krampe, Johanna Somers, Kellie Kotraba, Melanie Loth
October 5, 2010 | 7:32 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU faculty, administrators and students whose programs were included in a list of 75 “low-producing” degrees warranting review said they don't fear being cut but instead see an opportunity to make constructive evaluations.

The list, which became public Monday, identifies programs that fail to meet Missouri Department of Higher Education thresholds for average numbers of graduates over a three-year period. Although the list might carry negative connotations, most are choosing to look at it from a different vantage point.

“I think it’s a healthy thing to go through and do self-assessment of a program,” geology department chair Kevin Shelton said.

MU, like other public colleges and universities across the state, has until Oct. 21 to evaluate the programs and report its findings to the higher education department. Sixty-three of the 75 programs on the list are either master’s or doctoral programs.

George Justice, dean of the MU Graduate School, said the list does not reflect negatively on the school.

There are many important factors other than numbers that indicate the success of the programs, Justice said, citing job placement and the service graduate students provide as teaching assistants as examples.

“This data is important to look at in terms of trying to understand the role of those programs on campus,” Justice said, adding that the evaluations will challenge faculty to become more creative.

Shelton said that in the case of the geological sciences programs, it is important to consider the department’s size. Within the past few years, the program has graduated fewer than two
doctoral students on average rather than the cutoff number of three, but Shelton said the program as a whole is "vigorous and alive."

The graduate program in geology has 35 students now; that’s the largest number in the past two decades. And of those 35, 22 work in assistant positions funded by grants obtained by the department’s 14 faculty members.

“That’s a huge success story,” Shelton said.

Geological sciences faculty met Tuesday to focus on articulating the value of the program and evaluating what is being done right and what needs improvement.

Rose-Marie Muzika, professor and chair of the Forestry Department, agreed that enrollment and graduation numbers can be misleading.

The programs are about “quality not quantity,” Muzika said. The department’s goal, she added, is to produce high-quality graduates.

“The program has variation in the number of graduates each year,” she said, “so looking at a snapshot of three years is not appropriate.”

MU’s forestry program is the only one at a major research university in the lower Midwest. Muzika said cutting the program would be a loss not only to MU but to the region.

The master’s in geography program is also on the evaluation list, but Geography Department Chair Joseph Hobbs said the program is not underperforming. A look at the past 10 years, he said, shows an average of about six graduate students per year, more than the cutoff number of five. Hobbs said one slow year brought the average down.

MU has the only master’s in geography program in Missouri, and because there are no doctoral programs in the state, it is the leading geography degree program. MU geography also houses the state’s spatial data and is “a hub of contract work,” Hobbs said.

“When it comes to top-quality research in the discipline in the state, people come to us,” Hobbs said.

The number of graduates does not reflect the geography program’s cross-disciplinary impact, Hobbs said. Students in other majors, such as education, are required to take geography classes to graduate.
“We are hugely important to the mission of the university,” Hobbs said.

Hobbs said geography involves much more than rivers and capitals, and people often come to the department with cultural questions.

“We educate the citizens of Missouri about how the world works,” Hobbs said.

Foreign language programs also are on the list, including the bachelor's and master's degrees in German, the bachelor's degree in Russian and the master's degree in Russian and Slavonic Studies. Timothy Langen, chair of the German and Russian departments, noted that the evaluations are simply a review. He said his department offers a lot to students.

“I really think that what we offer is crucial to the mission of the university,” Langen said. “We are preparing students with a high level of cultural and linguistic knowledge.”

Langen emphasized how his department helps students when they graduate.

“In a more academically significant way, training people to think is really why programs such as the German and Russian BA and MA program have always been central to universities,” Langen said. “You are learning about the world that’s different from you. (It’s) designed to make you a more orderly and stronger thinker.”

An option for low-producing degree programs is to integrate several smaller programs into one.

The Division of Plant Sciences formed the plant, insect and microbial sciences master's and doctorate degrees in 2005. By merging the agronomy, entomology, horticulture, and plant pathology master's and doctoral programs, only one graduate program actually exists.

The list of “low-producing” degrees to be evaluated includes all of those except plant pathology. Mike Collins, director of the Division of Plant Sciences, said that when the programs were merged, students were no longer admitted to the smaller, preceding programs. So the proper tally for the merged program would be to add together the numbers of students enrolled in the formerly separate programs.

“Our average master’s graduation rate over the period between 2007 and 2010 is 9.8, almost twice the minimum,” he said. “PhD is 8.3, nearly three times the minimum.”

Collins said he doesn’t think they should actually be on the list.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU students abroad vigilant in face of travel advisory

By Pavan Vangipuram
October 5, 2010 | 11:59 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The U.S. State Department issued a travel advisory Sunday for U.S. citizens in Europe, but it’s business as usual for Columbia.

According to the State Department, "current information suggests that al-Qaida and affiliated organizations continue to plan terrorist attacks," and the U.S. Government advises people to register with the U.S. Consulate wherever they travel in Europe.

The State Department's advisory is the first such action taken this year for a specific continent, but makes clear that it is not a travel ban, merely advice to remain vigilant.

Barbara Lindeman, director of MU Study Abroad, said that "the safety and security of our students is our No. 1 priority. We are always vigilant and always monitoring all State Department communications."

The MU Study Abroad office sent an e-mail to all of its students in Europe, reminding them to exercise caution. The e-mail told students, though, that the advisory is not a recommendation against travel in Europe.

"There was nothing in the State Department's travel advisory that our guidelines didn't already cover," Lindeman said. "I think this is a reminder to exercise good judgment and be aware of your surroundings."

Jerry Price, office manager of Suzi Davis Travel in Columbia, didn't anticipate people will change their travel plans to Europe.

"Advisories of this nature have been through our experience before," he said.

Columbia travel agency Great Southern Travel is advising their tourists to "be watchful, still travel and be as safe as possible."
"European governments usually keep main tourist areas safe," said Lisa Bright, office manager for Great Southern Travel. "They know tourist areas are a big part of their economy, and they watch out for those areas as much as possible."

Bright did not think the advisory will harm Great Southern Travel.

"We just deal with it," Bright said. "This is a new age after 2001. People are getting used to these advisories."

MU strategic communications junior Kaleigh Glaza, now in London, said she "doesn't feel unsafe at all, but I do think it's important to be aware that these travel warnings are out there."

The Study Abroad office has been "great", she said, even flying out a representative to assuage student fears.

"Europe, like America, deals with threats like these," she said. "And, if anything, the openness and communication we have received has been nice."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Sterilization clinic gives glimpse of unwanted horse economy

By Lydia Mulvany
October 5, 2010 | 6:31 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Jamie Holmes bought her stud horse, Boogie, because he was the best ride she'd ever had. Holmes intended to have him sterilized, but after a truck accident, a broken foot and a breakup, she couldn't afford the $400 quotes she was receiving from vets.

On her ex-boyfriend's 110-acre farm in Franklin County in east-central Missouri, Boogie had to live isolated in a round pen after mares broke down the electric fence to his 10-acre paddock and had four unwanted foals.

Holmes ended up moving farther away and didn't see Boogie for six or seven months. When she did, he wasn't the same.

"He lost some weight, his feet weren't trimmed enough, his mane and tail looked kind of rough," she said. "He was the most beautiful horse I had before, and now he's not."

When Holmes, who lives in Washington, Mo., heard about a free horse sterilization clinic at MU, she jumped at the chance.

"I pulled every string possible to get transportation and drove an hour and a half away because I couldn't afford to miss that," Holmes said. "It was an all-day event, and it was worth it."

Boogie was sterilized and will be able to run free with the other horses on the farm in less than a month.

MU veterinary students sterilized 10 other horses this weekend at the clinic at MU's Middlebush Farm. The clinic is the only one of its kind in Missouri. Organized by MU vets, it aimed to combat horse overpopulation as well as mitigate burdens on horse owners affected by both the economic downturn and a glut of horses on the market, said MU veterinarian Alison LaCarrubba. All of the horse owners had to demonstrate a financial need.
LaCarrubba said the clinic was a success.

"The owners were just thrilled. They were really thankful for the whole procedure and said that it was handled professionally," LaCarrubba said. "They were also excited to work with the students and be part of the process."

Some veterinarians and equine organizations around the country have attributed the overpopulation of horses to the closing of slaughterhouses in 2007. A nationwide survey by the Unwanted Horse Coalition, a nonprofit that sponsored MU's weekend clinic, said more than 58,000 horses were slaughtered in the country in 2007.

Another benefit of the clinic is that students gained field experience. About 20 students performed anesthesia and surgery, LaCarrubba said. The students sedated the horses, put them under anesthesia, laid them on the ground and flipped them onto their backs and performed the surgeries. The horses ranged from about 600 to 1,200 lbs. Normally, students get experience in field castrations through an ambulatory elective offered at the veterinary school.

"Each student was involved in surgical procedures and was able to be involved in anesthesia," LaCarrubba said. "They were excited to have the opportunity to be involved in multiple procedures in one day."

MU veterinary student Sarah Spidel said she had performed sterilizations during on-the-job training with veterinarians, but she had never done so many in one day. She called it a great opportunity for a good cause.

"A lot of people have big hearts and want to take in these animals, but they don’t necessarily have the financial means to take care of them," Spidel said. "It's a nice service we can offer to people."

Kim Doller said veterinarians get asked about the problem but don’t always know how to fix it.

"The unwanted horse problem is definitely a big problem, so it's nice to do something to help," Doller said. LaCarrubba hopes to repeat the clinic in other areas of the state if funding is available and area vets are supportive.

"It would be nice to do this in different areas of the state where we could affect different groups of people," she said.
Changing lives: Three area agencies get nearly $600,000 to help ex-offenders return to community

By MARK MORRIS

Offenders returning to Kansas City from Missouri's prisons pay about $30 a month for the privilege of being on probation or parole.

Soon, they'll see the benefits of those payments.

The Missouri Department of Corrections recently announced that it had awarded almost $600,000 in grants to three Kansas City agencies that serve offenders returning to the community.

The grants, paid for with offender fees, will provide and sustain a range of services, including literacy training, and employment and housing programs.

Lora McDonald, a program director for the Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission, said the grants will allow the commission, Catholic Charities and Literacy Kansas City to fill important gaps in service to a population that has, in some cases, an 83 percent chance of re-offending.

“We're not about charity,” McDonald said. “We're about changing lives so we have less crime.”

According to the corrections department, about 97 percent of the state's inmates eventually will return home. And the department contends that these grants can provide essential services that reduce recidivism and promote a safer Missouri.

A study by the University of Missouri's School of Public Affairs has shown that a similar, but much smaller, round of grants awarded in 2009 improved employment rates and job skills, increased access to housing and improved transportation to jobs and medical care.

“It's really about changing their mindset so they can get a job and keep it and get an apartment and keep it,” McDonald said.
Almost $215,000 in grants to the crime commission will go to support its Second Chance Program, targeting high-risk offenders.

The program has established a risk reduction center and works with police and state and federal probation officers to provide behavioral, employment and family support, as well as substance abuse programs.

The grants also will pay for an employee who will conduct two re-entry orientations a month for returning offenders referred by probation and parole officers. That employee also will coordinate information on community services available to the more than 3,000 offenders who return to Kansas City on parole each year.

The Second Chance Program also will establish a housing placement program for returning high-risk offenders, particularly those convicted of sex offenses.

Sex offender housing and services also are a focus of Catholic Charities’ TurnAround program, which received $300,000 in state corrections department grants.

Rita Flynn, TurnAround’s manager, said housing is a tough problem for returning sex offenders because of laws that keep them away from public facilities, such as schools and playgrounds.

Flynn said her program counsels such offenders as they come out of community release centers, helping them find housing, make good decisions and get registered with local sheriff’s department.

“We believe it’s better to work with them … because it keeps the community safer when they make right choices,” Flynn said.

The grants also will allow TurnAround to expand mentoring programs to develop stable and productive lifestyles and promote crime-free living. Now, TurnAround has about 80 such mentors, who go through a six-hour training program, teaching them how to serve as role models and advocates for their clients.

An unrelated Department of Justice grant also will allow TurnAround to address a statewide problem with prisoner re-entry programs that MU’s public affairs school identified in its evaluation of the 2009 grants.

“In general, awardees reported that they struggled to recruit offenders to participate in their programming,” the report noted. “A more systematic referral system could be designed to ensure clients are being connected with the services they need.”

The new federal grant will allow TurnAround to hire transition managers who will work with men and women in prison six months before they get out, preparing them for life on the outside.
Department of Corrections funders also awarded $69,190 to Literacy Kansas City, an adult reading program established here in 1985. The grant will allow the nonprofit to continue its Open Doors offender literacy program for a second year.

The program hopes to help 150 offenders improve their reading skills and work on personal goals, such as getting a job, enrolling in high school diploma equivalency programs or passing a written driver’s test.
MU College of Education dean inspired by multicultural experience

By Michelle Markelz
October 5, 2010 | 1:34 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — On the dirt floor of a scorched skeleton of a building, a group of children waited patiently. Windows and doors that used to provide privacy had been shattered or burned. If anything could make this place identifiable, it had been reduced to ashes. But the objects were not what made this room what it was. It was the people. They were students, and they were waiting for a teacher.

Staring back at the children of East Timor, a country near Indonesia, was Daniel Clay.

“All of the assumptions I had about teaching and education were shattered, just like that,” he said.

At the University of Iowa, Clay was part of a team of experts sent to East Timor to aid the civil war-battered people. He had come to help rebuild their education and change their lives. He found, however, that they changed him.

“That experience really brought home for me how we really just take for granted what we have for education opportunities in our country,” Clay said. “When I drop my kids off at school like I did this morning, I know they’ll be in a safe environment. That’s not true everywhere, and I didn’t know that — I didn’t see that at the time.”

Clay said he knows his eye-opening experience is an important factor in his success as an educator. It allowed him to be more sensitive to diversity, open to new learning styles and appreciate what different students bring to the classroom.

This multicultural awareness is one of the goals of the teacher training program at MU, said Linda Bennett, an associate dean in the College of Education.

Eight years later, Clay would share the lessons he learned in East Timor with MU students through an initiative called Personal Transformational Pathways.
“As a dean, you can paint on a bigger canvas,” Clay said. "I’m really interested in having an experience for every student that’s as meaningful to them as mine was for me.”

It’s an effort that Clay said he hopes will result, after five years, in every student of the College of Education walking away with a multicultural experience that improves them personally and distinguishes them from the scores of graduates they will compete with for jobs.

“The more opportunities an individual has to work with whom they’re going to teach, the more likely they [are to] have the expertise to stay in the profession,” Bennett said.

Already, Clay has addressed faculty and students and received positive feedback.

I think it’s a very impressive program,” said Kelsey Ponder, a member of the Education Learning Community that houses students of the same major together. “I think it’s really good they’re opening it up to everyone, not just people who have the money.”

Ponder said she hopes to work in a St. Louis urban school district for her pathway.

Bennett said Clay used the word 'pathway' because it suggests the improvement is not over when one program is completed, but rather students will continue to seek out challenging experiences.

Students have the choice about whether to participate in the pathways initiative.

“This is not a graduation requirement,” Clay said. “This is a goal for the college.”

The pathways initiative has already begun, and is making use of some traditionally offered opportunities like study abroad and alternative spring break programs.

“Those kinds of experiences could teach you so much more than you could ever learn about by reading a book,” Clay said. “Imagine the stories some of them will have to tell.”
You Can’t Make Chocolate Milk By Feeding a Cow Chocolate

In last week’s episode of Fringe, the man who is fast becoming my favorite mad scientist, Walter Bishop, tried to make a cow lactate chocolate milk by feeding it cocoa beans.

Obviously this doesn’t work. Which is too bad. I spent a lot of time trying to see if one could flavor milk by feeding cows different things, but unsurprisingly, their stomachs digest most of the flavor out of what they eat.

Not that feed is irrelevant. As it happens, putting turmeric and coriander into cattle feed may reduce the production of global-warming inducing methane, according to research from Newcastle University in the United Kingdom. Methane is actually much more effective at trapping heat than carbon dioxide, so the vast quantity of methane produced by the world’s millions of cows and sheep is a significant contributor to global warming.

Mostly it’s the bacteria that live in the cows’ digestive tract that produces the methane. The Newcastle researchers put cloves, cinnamon and cumin, in addition to the turmeric and coriander, into a solution that includes cow rumen, the bacteria that lives in the cow’s digestive tract. They found that the coriander and turmeric reduced the bacteria by 40 percent. But it doesn’t make the resulting beef taste like curry, sadly.

Feed does influence the taste of milk to a limited degree. A taste test conducted by the University of Missouri in 2008 found that customers preferred both conventional milk and pasture-fed milk to organic milk. And trained taste testers in 2007 found they noticed a distinct grassy flavor when they compared pastured cows to conventionally fed cows (conventional feed is a mix of grains and grasses balanced to meet the nutritional needs of penned cows).

So, sorry Walter. Perhaps next time you go to try and change the taste of the milk, you should consult the vast wealth of agrarian science already available, or at least this handy website. It’ll save you some time, and reduce your crazy maybe a little.