COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM System to invest $5 million in university-affiliated entrepreneurs

By Megan Cassidy October 13, 2010 | 5:53 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The University of Missouri System Enterprise Investment program, which opened for applications this month, will invest up to $5 million in university-affiliated start-ups.

Chosen entrepreneurs will receive up to a $500,000 seed to help cultivate their new businesses.

The UM System will draw from its portfolio of investments, worth $2.4 billion as of fiscal year 2009, to fund the program. The purpose is to promote the growth of university-based intellectual property, said Mike Nichols, vice president for research and economic development.

“We thought, why not create our own and invest in the things that come back to the university?” Nichols said. “We’re looking at it in terms of job growth and places for our students to work. This is providing places for our graduates to be employed in Missouri.”

Nichols said that Missouri entrepreneurs have historically faced more investment hurdles than their counterparts in surrounding states and that Missouri’s technology commercialization and innovation output suffers.

Applicants to the enterprise program will find the process similar to that of other seed investment firms. The mandatory university connection buys them a lighter burden of return expectations — many firms ask for a 20 to 30 percent return, while the goal of the UM program is to recoup its investment.

“The most important thing here is return of the investment itself,” Nichols said. “Then it’s perpetual. We can turn that investment around and give it to somebody else.”

No submissions have been received yet. Nichols said the application process could take several weeks. However, the program has generated interest among local UM-founded businesses hoping to catch a break in a difficult economic landscape.
Rebecca Rone is chief scientific officer of Dermele, a medical device start-up invented during the 2008-2009 MU Biodesign and Innovation program. She said current economic conditions have made it more difficult to raise capital for a high-tech venture start-up. She said the Enterprise Investment program is "a great opportunity to help in getting the innovation to the market."

"This initiative to increase the success of early stage companies through financial support will not only enhance the development of the technology but also benefit the University of Missouri and the community," Rone said in an e-mail.

Other U.S. universities have similar ideas and are investing in programs that support campus-affiliated technology start-ups. For instance, the University of Washington has recently contacted the UM System to learn more about the business model of the program, and Colorado State University has already enjoyed the success of its own private equity investment fund.

CSU Fund 1 focuses on Colorado State University-connected technologies. The company made its first investment with Prieto Battery Inc., created by CSU chemistry professor Amy Prieto.

"Because the fund was committed to supporting CSU ideas, they were able to commit earlier and faster," Prieto said. "I got the definite sense that I would get the support and resources that I would need."

Two successful clean-energy start-ups got off the ground in the past 12 months. Prieto CEO Tim Reeser said neither would have done so without the support from Fund 1.

"Most universities in the country did not have a single clean-energy start-up last year," Reeser said. "(This was) due in large part to the constrained seed capital markets."

UM System schools now have an opportunity to emulate the success of CSU. Nichols said he hopes that investing in the development of MU-linked organizations will act as a gateway to larger investments for the companies and help foster a new breeding ground for technology.

"It is remarkable how technology-based businesses can grow a whole culture of innovation," Nichols said.
Temple Grandin advises attendees to see their skills, not themselves

By Briana Gast | October 13, 2010 | 11:35 p.m. CDT

Temple Grandin explains the different sensory problems that children and adults with autism struggle with. Grandin is a professor of animal sciences at Colorado State University and was named one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people this year. While talking about growing up with autism and establishing a career, Grandin said she realized “you have to sell your work, not yourself.”

COLUMBIA — In high school, Temple Grandin said she was once suspended after throwing a book at another student. She said her emotions are hard to handle, remembering that she often hid to escape her fears.

Grandin, who was diagnosed with autism at age 3, spoke Wednesday at MU about her experiences growing up with autism, her achievements and her advice on raising a child with an autism spectrum disorder. Grandin was named one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people of 2010 and was the subject of the HBO film “Temple Grandin.”

Grandin discussed different types of autism with the crowd that packed the auditorium and left many sitting on the floor. She talked about the warning signs of the disorder and specific ways to handle it, saying that autistic people have visual, cognitive, auditory and sensory problems.

“Autism takes many different forms,” she said. “We have got to work on developing these kids’ strengths. If a kid likes trains, teach them English, art and physics with the train. Using their fixation motivates them to learn.”

Grandin said that the autistic mind is geared toward details and that everything is learned by specific examples.
"It's all memorization in the beginning but after learning more and more things, it's easier to put things into boxes and relate them to each category," she said. "You sort the cats and dogs. That's how I form concepts."

Grandin also stressed the importance of work experience. When she was 13, she worked for a seamstress, and at 15 she was given the responsibility of caring for nine horses. She emphasized the importance for students with autism to recognize their strengths instead of focusing on their weaknesses.

"There are too many smart kids leaving college with no work experience," she said. "It's important for them to network and gain life skills. See your skill, not yourself."

Grandin, who said she has been on anti-depressants for 30 years, also spoke about alternative ways to handle the symptoms of autism in young people instead of resorting to heavy doses of drugs.

"I am on a low dose of anti-depressants, but that's the secret — low dosages," she said. "Sometimes there is a place for a heavy artillery of drugs but not in a 5-year-old to make him or her a little less hyper."

Grandin urged the crowd to try simpler alternatives such as a better diet with less sugar, omega-3 fatty acids, amino acids, gluten-free foods and lots of exercise.

**MU freshman Mike Kirk**, who is majoring in special education, came to the event after receiving an e-mail about it. Kirk said his interest in special education sparked after he befriended another student with Down syndrome in kindergarten. Throughout high school, he was a physical education leader in an adaptive gym class for students with special needs.

"Special education has always been important to me," Kirk said. "I received the e-mail and wanted to see what it was about. I'm very glad I came because it was very educational and informative, and I can't wait to watch the movie about (Grandin's) life."

Paula Carter, **an MU doctoral student** interested in combining autism and theater, has an 8-year-old daughter with an autism spectrum disorder.

"It was amazing to find a person who was so clear about her experiences growing up with autism," Carter said. "It's comforting that I could see somebody with her results, knowing that my daughter will go through that eventually."

Carter said she appreciated Grandin's concrete and tailored teaching methods on how to help her daughter become a productive individual.
"Because of Temple, I can tell my child that her brain is strong and it doesn’t make her less, it makes her different," Carter said. "She’s kind of like our role model."

**Janet Farmer, director of academic programs at the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, helped bring Grandin to MU as part of the Thompson Center Exceptional Achievement Series.**

"The message for the series is that people who start out with disabilities can take advantage of it," Farmer said. "We picked her because she is just excellent and very willing to do it."

Grandin will also speak in various animal science lectures Thursday.
Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon appointed two new members to the Coordinating Board for Higher Education.

They are Thomas Strong of Springfield and Dalton Wright of Conway.

Strong, whose term expires in June of 2012, is an Independent and a graduate of the University of Missouri - Columbia law school. He founded the Strong-Garner-Bauer law firm in 1976.

Wright, a Republican, is the owner of Ozark Media, which owns the Lebanon Daily Record, weekly newspapers, radio stations and an Internet service provider. He is a graduate of the University of Missouri - Columbia. His term expires in June of 2014.
In 2003, Joseph-Désiré Otabela was in a bind. Through no fault of his own, his visa had expired, and he had become an illegal immigrant.

A 33-year-old Cameroonian student living and studying in Madrid, Spain, Otabela had been working on his doctoral dissertation for four years. Two years earlier, the Spanish government had inexplicably canceled scholarships for a group of foreign students including Otabela. Most of them had gone home without finishing their studies, but Otabela's university had agreed to cover his expenses while he completed his 460-page dissertation.

But in May 2003, after he presented the paper to faculty members, his time at school was officially over and his visa expired. He was flat broke, and because he was an illegal immigrant, he had no way of earning money.

He went to the Cameroon Embassy to ask if they could help arrange a plane ticket home, but a swift “no” came back from the ambassador. He called up friends and nongovernmental organizations to see if anyone could scrape together the $600 he needed but had no luck. The prospect of being arrested and deported was very real.

But then Otabela heard of another option: A friend told him about a foundation that specialized in outreach to Latin American students studying in Europe. He decided to visit the foundation on the slim chance it might make a one-time exception to help a needy African.

The attorney for the foundation said that, unfortunately, they couldn’t make an exception. But out of curiosity, the man asked Otabela what his studies had been about.

Otabela answered that he had written a comparative literature study on the work of famed Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa.

The attorney grinned, “Would you like to meet his daughter?” he asked.

It turned out Vargas Llosa’s daughter, Morgana, worked at the foundation. She offered to give a copy of Otabela’s dissertation to the literary legend. Three weeks later, the phone rang. “My father read your dissertation, and he’d like to meet you,” Morgana Vargas Llosa said.
Anxiously, Otabela made his way to Madrid’s swanky shopping district, the Gran Via. At an outdoor café, he was awed when he met Vargas Llosa, now 74, who cut a dashing profile with meticulously combed white hair and intense squinting eyes.

“His first comment was... ‘I don’t usually read what people write about me or my novels, but this one I read,’” Otabela recalled. “And he said, ‘I’m wondering how a Cameroonian can write such good Spanish.’”

After sipping espresso and discussing literature, Vargas Llosa dropped a bombshell. He said he’d pay for Otabela’s ticket home. “He was a good person,” Otabela said. “A famous person — they’re not usually like that.”

Otabela has published two books since and is an assistant teaching professor of Spanish at the University of Missouri. Thursday, he was again in Spain for a conference when he got word that Vargas Llosa had won literature’s highest honor, the Nobel Prize. “I was so excited,” he said.

Michael Ugarte, a professor of romance languages at MU, said the story sheds new light on Vargas Llosa’s personality. The author is perhaps best known in his public life for a run for the presidency of Peru in 1990. He is also known for a prickly personality exemplified by a dispute with fellow Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Márquez that culminated in Vargas Llosa punching Márquez in the face.

“Here’s a side of him that I was surprised to hear about,” Ugarte said. “That he had the generosity to finance Joseph’s trip back to Cameroon when he was stuck there — that puts Mario Vargas Llosa on a pedestal way higher than I had him before.”

Otabela said over the years he has tried to contact Vargas Llosa and thank him for his gesture. He has never received a response.

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MU's biomass boiler isn't carbon-neutral

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Editor, the Tribune: Now that the University of Missouri has begun its march toward saving the planet from global warming by building a biomass boiler that will burn anything from "waste" wood to switch grass to municipal solid waste, the people of Columbia must know that this is a scam.

Biomass burning is dirtier than coal per unit of energy produced. It is not carbon-neutral, no matter how you slice it. Burning tons of wood per hour that take decades, if not centuries, to replace is not carbon-neutral. Only 25 percent of what is burned will actually produce electricity.

One must ask whether the $75 million it's going to take to build this thing could have been better spent insulating the campus and converting all its lights and appliances to energy-efficient ones. Solar skylights could provide daylight in dark rooms. LED lights are 90 percent light, 10 percent heat. Incandescent bulbs are exactly reversed.

Instead of using its researchers and scientists to follow the conservation, efficiency and innovation path to energy independence, the bobbleheads at MU are trying to burn their way out of global warming.

Einstein said we can't use the same logic to get out of the pickle that put us there. I suggest that burning can't get us out of global warming. Maybe MU could join the 21st century instead of living in the 19th!

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Mountain View
Michelle Obama hits campaign trail

Democrats turn to popular first lady in bid to bolster sagging voter support

By SHELTON ALBERTS, Postmedia News October 14, 2010

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When U.S. President Barack Obama travelled to Wisconsin last month to campaign for Senator Russ Feingold, the impact was clear and immediate: the incumbent Democrat's poll numbers dropped overnight.

But Michelle Obama? Well, Democrats are hoping she'll have a different effect altogether.

The U.S. first lady returned to the campaign trail yesterday for the first time since helping her husband win the White House in 2008. Her goal this year: to save Democrats in danger of being swamped by a Republican tide in next month's mid-term elections.

Obama's first stop came in Milwaukee on behalf of Feingold, a three-term senator who polls show is trailing his Republican opponent, Tea Party favourite Ron Johnson, by seven percentage points.

Pitching herself as a concerned mom rather than a partisan surrogate for the U.S. president, Michelle Obama refrained from any direct attacks on Republicans. Instead, she urged dispirited Democrat supporters to turn out on Nov. 2, even though "change hasn't come fast enough" since the 2008 election.

"I think that many of us came into this expecting to see all the change we talked about happen all at once, right away, the minute Barack walked through the Oval Office door," Obama said in a speech that highlighted Americans' anxiety over a flagging economic recovery. "But the truth is, it's going to take a lot longer to dig ourselves out of this hole than any of us would like. The truth is, this is the hard part."
Across the UM System

Janese Silvey's Blog
10/13/10

A 10-year study from the UM-St. Louis campus has found costly lobbying efforts don't work.

David Kimball, associate professor of political science, led the research, which was published in book form: "Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses and Why." Last month, the book won the Leon Epstein Outstanding Book Award given by the American Political Science Association for "outstanding contribution to research and scholarship on political organizations and parties."

The study concluded that despite millions of dollars spent on lobbying campaigns, most fail to change policy.


No mention of whether the end result conveys some important information closer to home -- UM System lobbyists spent close to $1 million in 2008 and 2009 on lobbyists.

Those in the Rolla area Friday can get a glimpse of Missouri's only licensed fuel cell plug-in vehicle created by Missouri S&T students. The car, a hydrogen fueling station and a green office will be on display at the E Cubed Commons at S&T Hydrogen Park across from Collegiate Station. The event runs from noon to 4:30 p.m.