MU lands $3 million to study plants

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COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — University of Missouri researchers have received three grants worth $3 million to study how plant genes function in corn, soybeans and canola.

Plant sciences professor Gary Stacey is the main researcher on a four-year, $1.5 million project to use soybean root hairs as a model system to study cellular function in plants.

Associate biochemistry professor Scott Peck is working on a four-year project that will aid in developing canola with greater tolerance to drought. He is receiving roughly $600,000.

James Birchler, a curators’ professor of biological sciences, is getting $900,000 to study the functional genomics of chromosome centromeres in maize.

All of the professors are members of the university’s Interdisciplinary Plant Group.
Shopping for special needs children poses dilemma

By JANESE SILVEY | Posted: Monday, November 29, 2010 8:36 am

Julianna Basi glanced at the pink dress-up gown her mother, Kate, offered her, but she wasn’t interested.

The 3-year-old was even less impressed with the jack-in-the-box, pushing the toy off of the bench where her mother had placed it.

Buying gifts for little Julianna come Christmastime is tough, Kate Basi said. Julianna has Down syndrome and isn’t quite ready for some of the gifts her peers will unwrap Christmas morning.

"She’s much more interested in bows and boxes than what is inside them," Basi said.

If it’s tough for parents to buy for children with developmental disabilities, imagine being a friend or relative trying to figure it out.

Julie Brinkhoff, associate director of the Great Plains Center at the University of Missouri, is lending some expertise this holiday season.
Oftentimes, she said, gift-givers either overestimate a child’s ability - offering something that’s potentially frustrating - or they underestimate abilities and run the risk of offending recipients.

"People just make the best guess they can. Frequently, though, they're even less accurate than ours," said Basi, whose husband is MU spokesman Christian Basi. "As a parent, you do have the responsibility to be honest with people."

And it’s important to ask parents not only what a child might want but also to ask what a child wouldn’t want, Brinkhoff said. Children with autism, for instance, can have strong reactions to certain colors or sounds, but "you're not going to know that unless you talk to the parents," Brinkhoff said.

If relatives know the interests of a child, they can try to match that interest with the child’s skill level.

An older child with reading problems might not be able to read the bound copy of "Harry Potter" his peers are reading, for instance, but he still might be interested in the storyline.

In that case, a book on tape might be ideal, Brinkhoff said.

As kids get older, they’re likely to want similar gadgets regardless of development.

"Buying a pink, doll-themed CD player for a 15-year-old with a developmental disability is probably something to avoid," Brinkhoff said. "That 15-year-old is probably interested in an iPod, just like her peers."

It’s also important not to buy gifts that try to "fix" a child's disorder, Brinkhoff said.

Her son, for instance, suffered from dyslexia, and friends and family members showered him with books every Christmas hoping to encourage him to read.

"Not that a book isn’t appropriate," she said, "but he wouldn't have minded something a little different for Christmas."
Moody's signs off on University of Missouri bonds, warns of tuition increases next fall

Submitted by Steve Rosen on November 29, 2010 - 2:00am.

Moody's Investors Service handed out an Aa1 rating to the University of Missouri's planned $265 million revenue bond offering.

The bonds will finance campus improvements systemwide, including three projects for the university's Health System.

Moody's also offered a stable outlook for the university, citing its "strong market position" and "well-managed" financial operations.

But the rating service raised concerns about future state funding cutbacks and the impact on tuition next fall.

Here's what Moody's said: "Through fiscal year 2010, the system has not experienced the deep cuts in state support seen within many other states, and the recurring appropriations amount received in fiscal year 2010 was flat with fiscal year 2009.

In fiscal year 2011, the system has incurred a 5.2 percent cut in state funding in exchange for not increasing in-state undergraduate tuition in the fall of 2010. We expect pressure on state support in fiscal year 2012, with the system likely imposing tuition increases next fall and continuing to focus on operational efficiencies to compensate."
Term limits

Bad for good government

By Henry L. Waters, III

In January, 91 lawmakers will take office for the first time, 79 in the House of Representatives and 12 in the Senate. Most are succeeding members ousted by term limits. These neophytes barely will get their feet on the ground before facing term limits of their own.

Not only does this give scant time for lawmakers to learn their trade and make valuable lasting contacts with other members; it ensures that early in their terms their interests and attitudes will turn from current duties to future employment.

Gone are the days when members learned to respect and work with other members, often in the opposite party, forming enduring coalitions providing ongoing support for good causes, like support for the University of Missouri. Instead, short-term interests prevail, often resulting in primarily negative efforts. Incumbents with short tenure have little time to build bipartisan consensus. They will be satisfied with beating the other side regardless of the merits of proposals.

I can remember, before term limits, when a tour of state facilities for newly elected lawmakers was a valuable biennial event. Now it no longer is held at all, the excuse being lack of funds. But my guess is a subconscious lack of interest in enduring knowledge of the system plays a part.

As the new session looms, MU officials scramble to educate the newbies of the value of supporting the state university system. If legislators typically were returnees instead of first-timers, perhaps the chore would not be quite so hard.

Of course, some consider term limits valuable tools for creating automatic turnover, not letting incumbents hang around too long, accumulating too much power, but I do not know a single person with an informed long-range view of state government who does not now regard term limits with disdain. Some supported term limits when first initiated but now are convinced Missourians and their government would be better off without.

Term limits were embedded in the state constitution by popular initiative. Most political analysts believe a repeal effort would fail and that most people vaguely think term limits are a good idea. I wonder.
Would people grasp the idea that term limits primarily impose on voters, not bad officials? After all, voters at the ballot box always have the option of ending or extending an incumbent’s term in office. If term limits are in place, we have no option at all in the matter.

Sooner or later, a proposal to end term limits must be put before voters. At no moment will the political class be sure it will pass. It’s not a partisan issue. Any policy change would not affect incumbents.

Might we in Missouri get rid of term limits? We’ll never know until we give it a shot.

HJW III
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU struggles to meet state need for more health providers

By Walker Moskop
November 29, 2010 | 10:59 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — **MU’s teaching institutions are having difficulty producing enough graduates to soften the state's escalating need for more health care providers.**

As health reform provisions kick in over the next few years, many of the more than 700,000 uninsured Missourians will gain access to coverage, increasing the need for MU and other institutions to produce more health care providers. Administrators at the School of Health Professions, School of Medicine and Sinclair School of Nursing said they've taken steps to increase enrollment and prepare students for modern health care challenges, but with space and funding in short supply, they can only do so much.

"Right now, there are literally hundreds of jobs in health care (in Missouri) that are unfilled," said Richard Oliver, dean of the School of Health Professions.

"We're woefully behind," he said.

While enrollment in the School of Health Professions has increased from 584 to 1,748 students since 2002, the vast majority of that jump is outside of the school's professional programs. Professional student enrollment increased from 77 to 176 in that time. The school received a one-time, $1.6 million grant last year from a state initiative, Caring for Missourians, which it used to upgrade facilities and increase enrollment, but Oliver said professional programs are now maxed out.

He said the school has outgrown its space in Lewis Hall and can't create more spots for professional students with current facilities.

"To some extent, we're just turning away more and more qualified students for our professional programs and that is not a good trend," Oliver said.

"It's a three-edged sword — students wanting in our programs, employers screaming for more graduates and this bottle neck of buildings and facilities," he said.
The School of Medicine is confronting a similar difficulty.

Last year, the School of Medicine received $5.8 million from Caring for Missourians and used some of the money to increase the size of the 2010 and 2011 classes from 96 to 104 students. But the school can’t further increase enrollment without additional space, said Linda Headrick, Senior Associate Dean for Education and Faculty Development.

To help meet the nationally anticipated shortage of doctors, the Association of American Medical Colleges recommends that medical schools increase enrollment by 30 percent by 2015. A major investment would be needed to meet that goal, Headrick said.

“In order to increase class size by eight we had to clean out a closet in the corner and turn it into a problem-based learning room,” she said.

Headrick said that if Caring for Missourians is not renewed, class size will return to 96 students. She said she worried the school was too lean to do much more with its current resources.

“I would rather stay small and have very high quality (graduates) coming out that we know are going to go out and do great work than stretch too far,” she said. “What I’d really like to do is have the funding and resources from the state to do more, because if anyone ought to be training more docs in Missouri, it ought to be us.”

At the Sinclair School of Nursing, Associate Dean Roxanne McDaniel reiterated the notion that the school can only expand as much as its resources allow.

Through a $1.7 million grant from Caring for Missourians, the school increased enrollment in its accelerated baccalaureate and doctoral programs by 10 students each. Because the online graduate courses available are less of a physical strain on the school, graduate enrollment has also gone up, McDaniel said.

“We are increasing, but without additional resources, we can’t do a whole lot more,” she said.

According to the Institute of Medicine, by 2020, the number of nurses with baccalaureate degrees needs to grow from 50 to 80 percent and the number of nurses with doctorates needs to double in order to meet the swelling need for health care.

“To increase our baccalaureate program, we really need bigger facilities because there are times when we really have trouble finding classrooms,” she said.
Although she stressed the importance of increasing undergraduate enrollment to produce new nurses, chief among McDaniel’s concerns is the lack of nursing educators.

“We have a horrible nursing faculty shortage and its probably going to get worse,” she said. To produce more educators, she added, more nurses need to be prepared at the doctorate level.

Although McDaniel, Headrick and Oliver all expressed concern over roadblocks to graduating more health providers, they said their students were being well prepared for modern health care challenges. In particular, curriculum changes in recent years have placed a greater emphasis on patient interaction, preventative care and collaboration between professions, they said.

For example, students from all three schools work together in simulated and clinical settings to learn how to assess and meet a patient’s needs while developing an understanding of the roles other health providers play in caring for patients.

Oliver said it was critical for MU graduates to understand the full continuum of care.

“You don’t have the luxury anymore of just saying let me do my job and I don’t need to know about all these other things,” he said. “You’ve got to have an understanding of how the health system works.”

He said he believed health reform “shines a light on our institution as the kind of institution that’s going to be required to respond to challenges.”

But despite the difficulty of preparing students for a tenuous, complex health care landscape, Oliver said the school’s ultimate challenge is getting a new building.

“We’re in a 1960s era dormitory,” he said.

“We think it’s very ironic that a school dealing with rehab and health care is in a building that is one of the least accessible by (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards on the MU campus.”
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

COLUMN: Refusing to allow certain media, Nixon distances himself from public

MU Mention on Pg. 2

By Andrew Denney
November 29, 2010 | 3:56 p.m. CST

There are plenty of reasons to hate the media. I won't make any excuses for that.

We shove microphones in your face in times of personal tragedy. We tend to oversimplify and undercontextualize. Some of us are not above digging through your trash for a story.

Just say the word “media” out loud. It's hard not to say without a sneer.

When the rich, the famous or the powerful have a problem with their image, blaming the media for unfair treatment (read: Sarah Palin and the “lamestream” media) is an easy go-to strategy that will always pick up some points with the public.

But on the final day of the Missouri General Assembly’s 2010 session, I experienced something truly surreal.

I witnessed outgoing Senate President Pro Tem Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, give props to the press for all of our work in the capital that year.

An elected official showing the media some gratitude? I hadn't been sleeping much during the last few weeks of the session; I could have been dreaming.

Shields’ comments that day, however, were much easier to believe than hearing that, on Nov. 17, Gov. Jay Nixon had once again snubbed the Jefferson City press corps and
hand-picked a group of reporters that would be attending his “background briefing” on higher education.

Higher education reporters from the Columbia Daily Tribune, the Springfield News-Leader and The Kansas City Star were on the list to get into “Club Nix” that day, as were state government reporters from The Associated Press and Stateline, a national news publication that focuses on politics in the states.

**Among the losers who had to stand outside in line arguing with the bouncer were student reporters who provide content to the Columbia Missourian, KBIA and KMOX in St. Louis.**

The reason for Nixon’s game of favorites? His press people say it was because the governor wanted to speak with higher education beat reporters when he delivered the news that day that state funding for Missouri’s colleges and universities may very well see a reduction this year.

As if higher education were too complex a topic that the regular statehouse press corps would never comprehend it.

**Also left out in the cold were veteran statehouse reporters Bob Priddy of MissouriNet and Phill Brooks, director of the MU School of Journalism’s state government reporting program. Much of the Capitol press corps did not even know the meeting was taking place.**

For some readers, it might be hard for me to drum up any sympathy for my fellow journalists on this issue. But limiting press access to the governor is the same as limiting the public’s access to our state’s top official.

In an interview, Brooks said that the press corps has not had any meaningful access to the Democratic governor since the Nov. 2 election, when Republicans grew their ranks in both the Missouri House and the Missouri Senate.

Since that time, we have also learned that Nixon will have to draft a budget for the upcoming legislative session containing up to $1 billion less than what state leaders were spending in 2000. In this kind of situation, funding for K-12 education — which leaders typically loathe to cut — can no longer be considered a sacred cow.
In addition, unemployment in Missouri is on the uptick, and the Missouri Department of Labor is borrowing more and more from the federal government to pay Missourians’ unemployment insurance.

And, just announced last week, Nixon will back a controversial proposal to bring a second nuclear power plant to Callaway County, a project that will be paid for in part by increased utility rates for consumers.

It is my hope that the invitation-only arrangements made for the Nov. 17 press conference were a one-time experiment by Nixon’s media staffers and that this does not become common practice.

I’m not even asking that he or anyone from his office extend us the same amount of gratitude that Shields did just a few months ago. Just let us do our jobs.

In terms of political livelihood, this is not the right time for Nixon to shut out public access, as he has already begun to pool support for his 2012 re-election bid. Endorsements from newspapers still mean something in political campaigns, and they’re going to be hard to come by if he is barring their reporters from his conferences.

And it is downright disrespectful to the people of Missouri to try to limit a Jefferson City press corps that serves that public by asking tough questions of their elected officials. Gov. Nixon, I think the people that pick up the tab for your travel expenses deserve at least that much.

What is unfair to the press is, in essence, unfair to the people.

Andrew Denney is a senior at the Missouri School of Journalism and a political science major at MU. He is also a copy editor for the Missourian. He is set to graduate in December.