Budget shortfalls lead to more talk of raising tuition at Mizzou

St. Louis, MO (AP)– University of Missouri planned to discuss a possible tuition increase in the coming academic year at a meeting Thursday in St. Louis.

The governing board of the four-campus system typically waits to set tuition rates in the spring, after the Missouri governor releases a proposed state budget for the fiscal year that starts in July.

But with an expected shortfall of $400 million to $500 million in the next budget, curators want to get an earlier start. They hope to set next year’s tuition rates at a meeting in January.

That would give officials more time if they need to seek a waiver from the state required whenever tuition increases exceed the Consumer Price Index inflation rate.
Tuition on curators’ table
Rolla could pay more, rep says.

By JANISE SILVEY

Students on the University of Missouri’s Rolla campus wouldn’t mind paying a little higher tuition than students on other UM campuses as long as they’re ensured a top-notch education, student Curator Laura Confer said.

She plans to relay that message to the Board of Curators tomorrow. Confer is leading a lunchtime roundtable discussion about tuition and other student concerns before the curators’ meeting at the UM-St. Louis campus.

Curators already have approved a rule that allows them to set tuition at different rates on all four campuses, but they have yet to implement it, mostly because undergraduate, in-state tuition has remained frozen systemwide for the past two years.

Most students support separate tuition rates, Confer said. “We are a system, but each university has different market demands,” she said.

The science, engineering and technology programs that are the hallmarks of the Missouri University of Science and Technology cost more to run than programs on campuses that don’t have that focus, Confer said. Students in Rolla, she said, don’t want the quality of those programs to be stilled because tuition isn’t high enough, but they also don’t expect students on other campuses to pick up the lab.

Curators are scheduled to discuss tuition during a finance committee meeting tomorrow but won’t set rates until January.

Board materials do not disclose how much of an increase they might be eyeing. UM System President Gary Forsee said recently the system might ask the state for the OK to increase tuition higher than the consumer price index. Under a state law, universities that raise tuition beyond the rate of inflation will lose state funding unless they get special approval from the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education to do so.

Tim Noce, president of the Missouri Student Association on the MU campus, said students realize the state and university are facing budget deficits. But if tuition is increased substantially, he said, “students want to see something come out of it. Something we cannot negotiate is the quality of education we have. Students are willing to pay a little more premium for high-quality education.”

Curators also are expected to hear an update on retirement benefits, although the board is not slated to vote on any changes. System administrators have spent the past year dissecting the defined benefits plan current employees can expect at retirement and trying to determine whether new employees should be offered a defined contribution, or savings plan, instead. A systemwide committee established last month to further review potential changes has a meeting scheduled for later this month. According to board materials, that committee has until March to come up with a recommendation.
Grape Scott! Mizzou Scientists Engineering Fungus-Free Wine Grapes

By John H. Tucker

Missouri has long been one of the world's leading exporters of beer. But now, researchers at the University of Missouri say that vino could be the state's next big alcoholic gift to mankind.

The state grape of Missouri -- the Norton variety -- is known for its resistance to powdery mildew, a fungal pathogen that affects wine grapes around the world. Suddenly, scientists here are realizing that the individual genes of Norton grapes might one day transfer into other, mildew-prone grapes, making them less susceptible to fungal invasion.

Yep, we're talking FrankenGrapes, here. But we don't hear many oenophiles complaining.

Researchers aren't exactly sure why the Norton, which is grown in many vineyards around the state and is possibly the country's oldest grape, fights fungal pathogens better than other varieties. But they believe it has something to do with a certain protein, which is carried in larger quantities by Norton.

"The hot, humid environment of Missouri is perfect for the growth of fungal pathogens such as mildew, yet Norton resists the fungus," says Walter Gassmann, a researcher in the Bond Life Sciences Center and associate professor of plant sciences in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, in a press release. "Understanding what makes Norton resistant to fungus -- and European varieties, such as Cabernet Sauvignon, susceptible to fungus -- can help us improve grape production around the world."

Gassmann is currently studying the Arabidopsis plant, which features a gene similar to the targeted grape protein. After Gassmann added the Norton's grapevine gene to a mutated Arabidopsis plant that lacked its own gene, the plant quickly became resistant to mildew, according to the University of Missouri-Columbia's press release.

For the record, Gassmann cautions that it will be years until fungus-resistant grapes can be put into commercial production.

It's also interesting to note that, in 1873, a Norton wine made just south of St. Louis was declared the "best red wine of all nations" at a worldwide competition in Vienna.

"Many people forget that before Prohibition, Missouri was the second largest wine-producing state in the country after New York," Gassmann says, according to the release. "We see this work
as eventually providing an economic impact through the high-value agriculture and tourism that wineries can provide."

We'll toast to that.
MU degree rationales rebuffed
State wants more proof of need for programs.

By JANSE SILVEY

University of Missouri administrators thought they had justified why dozens of degree programs should remain intact, but the state wants more proof.

The Missouri Department of Higher Education is asking the campus to explain exactly how it’s going to reconfigure other degree programs.

The new request is the latest in the state’s controversial “low-producing” degree review. The process began this fall when the department — under direction of Gov. Jay Nixon — asked universities to identify and justify programs that award fewer than 10 bachelor’s, five master’s and three doctoral degrees a year.

MDHE has requested more information about 40 of the degrees MU defended in its original report to the state. In three cases — graduate-level neuroscience, public health and linguistics — MDHE is asking for further proof after MU reported that the degrees were justified because they use resources from multiple departments and don’t cost much.

“What we’re asking for is just documentation that it is, in fact, interdepartmental by giving us the percentage of courses unique to that program and whether it shares faculty and courses,” said Rusty Monhollon, senior associate for academic affairs at MDHE.

The department will not accept “low cost” as justification because there’s no way to prove that claim, he said.

MU also told MDHE it would consider reconfiguring 25 degree programs, but that also is not good enough.

MDHE wants specific plans.

“They said they’re going to review those degrees ‘and make a decision, and we’d like to have what that decision is,’” Monhollon said.

MU also attempted to justify its graduate-level theater programs because they have a prominent national reputation, but MDHE rejected that defense.

“I’m just shocked that anyone who thinks about education would care more about numbers of graduates than quality,” MU Faculty Chairwoman Leona Rubin said.

“And that seems to be what we’re getting from MDHE. When we tell them a program is nationally ranked as one of the best programs in the country, they don’t seem to care.”

Provost Brian Foster yesterday sent a letter to MU deans calling on them for more specific plans as to how they want to see 25 degrees reconfigured.

MDHE plans to take a report of all small degree programs in the state to the Coordinating Board for Higher Education in February. Monhollon said that will start some tough discussions about
how to address those degrees. Unjustified low-producing degrees won’t automatically be eliminated, he said, adding that it’s up to each institution to make those decisions.

George Justice, MU’s dean of graduate studies, said he is optimistic that the discussions will lead to stronger programs.

By promoting collaboration between departments, he said, MU should be able to continue to offer the same range of academic offerings even if there are fewer degrees on the books.

“Hopefully by having productive conversations among faculty members whose areas overlap,” he said, “we can still provide high quality, in-depth instruction but have more faculty contributing to a broader student experience.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com
Shelter dogs get a fighting chance with these grants

Many groups, large and small, from the ASPCA to the Humane Society of the United States devote themselves to helping animals. Here's a happy story about one of those groups and the steps it's taking to move more homeless dogs out of shelters and rescue organizations into loving homes.

We know many of you rescue pets or adopt them. You told us so during our shelter pet contest. Here's the latest good news: The Pedigree Foundation is awarding $226,000 to 10 innovative programs designed by shelters and rescue groups across the USA with the aim of increasing forever adoptions. Each one of these programs deserves a story of its own. Here's a look at them:

- Central Missouri Humane Society of Columbia, Mo., was awarded $25,000 for a project that hopes to facilitate successful adoptions of shelter dogs and help combat veterans fight post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms as they re-integrate into civilian life. This project was created in collaboration with Dr. Rebecca Johnson of the Research Center for Human and Animal Interaction at the University of Missouri's College of Veterinary Medicine.
- Charleston Animal Society of North Charleston, S.C., was awarded $15,000 for a program that will ensure domestic animals are placed with the right individuals. Their initiative aims at increasing dog adoption during peak months of intake.
- Dubuque Regional Humane Society of Dubuque, Iowa, was awarded $25,000 for its "Corporate for Canines" program. This program presents a new way of partnering with corporations and bringing adoptable pets to the public.
- Houston Humane Society of Houston, Texas, was awarded $25,000 to fund its "Diamonds in the Ruff" adoption program geared toward helping dogs that take a little longer than others find a home. The program provides community education and intensive behavior modification training to help less-adoptable dogs get ready for their new forever homes.
- Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles (spcaLA) of Los Angeles, Calif., was awarded $25,000 for their training services program called Helping Enhance Animals Lives (HEAL). This funding will help continue to improve the lives of shelter pets through training and enrichment activities.
- Leon County Humane Society of Tallahassee, Fla., was awarded $25,000 for their "Rescue Waggin" program that moves dogs from rural shelters with high euthanasia rates...
and little chance of adoption. The dogs receive veterinary care and are put up for adoption with the hope of finding them a loving home.

- Muttville Senior Dog Rescue of San Francisco, Calif., was awarded $12,000 to help underwrite the shelter's Welcome Home Kits for the "Seniors for Seniors" program, greatly reducing the initial financial impact of adopting a dog. The shelter rescues older dogs (seven years and older) from euthanasia and places them in homes with local senior citizens.

- North Shore Animal League America of Port Washington, N.Y., was awarded $25,000 to help conduct 77 adoption events, which will help approximately 700 animals, many of whom would be otherwise destroyed, find forever homes.

- Washington Animal Rescue League of Washington, D.C., was awarded $25,000 to help underwrite its dog rehabilitation program. The program aims to decrease return rates of dogs by making them ready for adoption with intensive behavior training and rehabilitation prior to adoption.

- West Suburban Humane Society of Downers Grove, Illinois, was awarded $24,000 to help fund the organization's successful Special Training and Reinforcement (STAR) Dog Program. The funds will help rehabilitate shelter dogs exhibiting difficult-to-handle or aggressive behavior so that they may have a better chance at being adopted out permanently.
Goal of funding is more nurses
Universities set to get $3 million.

By JANISE SILVEY

A year-old state program that helps educate future nurses got a booster shot yesterday when Gov. Jay Nixon proposed a new revenue source to continue funding it.

Nixon unveiled a plan to use $3 million from a state nursing fund to award grants to four-year public universities, allowing them to add nursing faculty positions and extending the Caring for Missourians program launched in 2009.

"Nursing is a vital and rewarding profession, and students who earn degrees in nursing have a pathway to a secure and rewarding career," Nixon said in a prepared statement. "By investing in nursing education, we are meeting a vital need for more qualified health professionals in Missouri, and we are helping students compete in a rapidly growing industry. This is a strategic investment in the health of Missourians and the health of our economy."

The Board of Nursing has already voted to award $1 million a year over the next three fiscal years. The funding comes from a fund made up of license fees nurses pay to the state. That fund has about $9.4 million, and most of the fees are now used for licensing and disciplining nurses, according to The Associated Press.

Changing how that money is spent will require approval from state lawmakers, said Travis Ford, a spokesman for the board.

"The goal is to address the nursing shortage," he said. "Definitely a key part is making sure we have a good, robust population of health care providers out there in the future."

Judith Fitzgerald Miller, dean of MU's Sinclair School of Nursing, praised the funding decision, calling it a wise investment.

"I applaud Gov. Nixon for recognizing the power nurses have to change people's lives in the state of Missouri," she said.

By the time the money is spread across multiple universities, MU's Sinclair School of Nursing might not see a significant chunk, but the school has proven it can stretch a dollar: Miller said she's adamant about being a good steward of public funds.

With the $1.7 million it has already received from Caring for Missourians, the school has been able to increase enrollment by 129 students, including enrolling 10 undergraduates on an accelerated track and 56 within a new doctorate of nursing practice program, Miller said. Those numbers also include practicing nurses who are taking online classes to advance their nursing degrees.

The number of additional students who will be educated under the $3 million plan will depend on the universities' grant applications. The governor's office expects the money to fund roughly 13 full-time faculty positions each year for three years.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM curators approve financing for projects at MU

By Walker Moskop
December 8, 2010 | 2:04 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The UM System Board of Curators approved the issuing of $252.3 million in bonds to finance a variety of projects across the system's four campuses Wednesday.

At University of Missouri Health Care, $30 million will be used to expand the Green Meadows Outpatient Care Center and $51.7 million will help finance the previously approved $200 million project for the patient care tower and Ellis Fischel Cancer Center.

At MU, debt financing will facilitate renovations to Mark Twain Residence Hall and East Campus Chilled Water Plant, as well as a heat and power upgrade for the power plant and a replacement for the South Campus storm sewer.

The debt financing was issued through Build America Bonds. A 35 percent subsidy on the interest from the federal government treasury will reduce the total interest rate on the bonds to 3.79 percent from 5.97 percent.

The bond program, part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, was designed to bolster municipal bonds after the stock market crash in 2008.
Some at MU find staff newsletter's 'Kung Pao Kitten' recipe in bad taste

By JANSE SILVEY

COLUMBIA | A mock recipe calling for boneless kitten meat that landed in a University of Missouri internal newsletter has riled some on campus.

"Kung Pao Kitten" was one of two featured "Recipes of the Month" in the December issue of Staff Spotlight, a staff newsletter within MU School of Medicine's Department of Surgery. The newsletter was sent to about 90 employees.

The recipe is similar to kung pao chicken but instead calls for kitten halves to be chunked and marinated in white wine, soy sauce and oil and combined with water chestnuts and peanuts.

There's a disclaimer under the recipe that reads: "The tastes and opinions within the Staff Spotlight do not necessarily represent those of all contributors. No animals were hurt in the making of this Spotlight."

School spokesman Rich Gleba said it was not supposed to be taken seriously.

Staff members apparently weren't amused. An anonymous complaint sent to the Tribune along with a copy of the newsletter said employees found the recipe "extremely offensive, discriminatory, tasteless and not something that should have been distributed in a professional environment."

David Kubiak, a care coordinator within the surgery department, submitted the recipe, according to the newsletter. Kubiak referred questions to Gleba.

A formal statement from the department said the "material is inappropriate and insensitive, and the staff member responsible for sending it apologized minutes after it was distributed."

Gleba would not say whether any disciplinary actions were taken against Kubiak or employees who printed the newsletter. Kubiak is still employed by the university.
Roger Worthington, assistant deputy chancellor and chief diversity officer, learned of the incident from a Tribune reporter. With thousands of employees on campus and within the health system, it's not surprising to have "somebody who may not be as culturally sophisticated as we would like," he said.

These issues provide opportunities for quick lessons about cultural sensitivity, Worthington said.

In general, he said the School of Medicine has been a leader in diversity efforts over the past several years, including forming a task force to promote diversity.

The feline recipe has administrators rethinking how the monthly Staff Spotlight is put together.

Right now, an employee collects recipes and other information, such as birthdays and fitness tips, from staff members and distributes it in newsletter form without administrative oversight. In the future, Gleba said, administrators will review that content first.
MU seniors bring classwork into the retail world

By Kelsey Kennedy
December 8, 2010 | 9:40 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Each group of women was given the same task, yet every idea was unique.

Graduating seniors from MU’s department of textile and apparel management presented their capstone projects Wednesday to state officials in hopes of finding support for their ambitions. Students showcased a variety of designs including T-shirts, jeans, a wedding line and a home collection.

"Ultimately they are pitching their ideas to the president of each retailer, but two of the audience (members) we have here tonight are from the Missouri Department of Agriculture, who have very strong interest in Missouri cotton marketing," said Jung Ha-Brookshire, an MU assistant textile and apparel marketing professor.

The students targeted companies such as The Buckle Inc., Vera Bradley Inc., J. Crew Group Inc. and Polo Ralph Lauren Corp.. Professors will send the final proposals to company presidents.

The Missouri Department of Agriculture’s interest was piqued because under the students' hypothetical label, Heartland Premium, proposed products would use cotton grown entirely in Missouri.

"My favorite part was seeing all the students engaged in this project," said Judy Grundler, director of the agriculture department's Division of Plant Industries. "I think it’s very exciting."

The Heartland Premium project began about two years ago through different classes in the textile and apparel management department, Ha-Brookshire said.
The groups for each pitch started their individual research the first week of the semester, building on the research of Ha-Brookshire and Pam Norum, associate professor of textile and apparel management.

"It has been an entire semester of hard work and lots of research," said Victoria Erhart, one of the presenting seniors.

Steffi Dickmann, Erhart's classmate, estimated the workload for the research — from setting up the actual presentation and putting on the finishing touches — to be about 10 hours per week.

"Just developing the product line was the most fun, and for as much research as went in to it, it was fun research," said Clare Reisel, another student.

Ha-Brookshire emphasized the range of skills involved in the presentations, noting that the women had to draw from lessons learned since childhood.

"They have to use creativity, analytical skills, research skills, communication skills, everything," she said.

The students were inspired by a question Ha-Brookshire posed. She asked how they could help communities that grow superior cotton in the Missouri Bootheel and create a product that could succeed in retail.

"You never know, it could be the next hottest thing," Ha-Brookshire said.
A good place to start cutting

Thursday, December 9, 2010

IF YOU'RE wondering which of America's leaders are serious about cutting wasteful government spending, you might start by examining who's behind the effort to extend tax breaks to America's corn ethanol industry, which expire at the end of the year.

For decades, the idea behind corn ethanol has been that fuel derived from the crop could diminish America's dependence on distasteful foreign regimes for fuel - it's done some of this - and cut carbon emissions - it's done little of this. Congress established an overlapping and expensive system of subsidies, requiring that billions of gallons of ethanol be blended into the nation's gasoline, slapping tariffs on foreign ethanol and handing those who blend the fuel into gasoline a tax credit of 45 cents a gallon.

In other words, the government pays the industry for the privilege of selling to a captive market, spending $6 billion in 2009 on the tax credits alone. Without the tax credits, the amount of corn ethanol produced would still increase over the next 10 years, the Agricultural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri calculates. Yet the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that taxpayers still pay $1.78 to replace a gallon of gasoline with its energy equivalent of corn ethanol. The numbers are far worse when put in terms of greenhouse gases. The CBO reports that it costs a staggering $750 to reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions one ton by burning corn ethanol - and the CBO makes some generous assumptions to get even that figure.

Yet because the policy directs cash to farm states that are rich in political influence, lawmakers are rallying to save this payoff from expiration. Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), who insisted Sunday that President Obama's fiscal commission didn't go far enough in its deficit reduction plan, has paired with Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) to press for renewal of the gratuitous corn ethanol tax credit and the ethanol tariff through 2015. Typically, the farm lobby has won out on such issues. But this year it's meeting stronger than usual opposition from a bloc of fiscal conservatives and environmentalists, backed by such strange bedfellows as Tea Party organizer FreedomWorks and ultra-liberal pressure group MoveOn.org - even Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) and Al Gore.

An extension of the corn ethanol provisions shouldn't be part of the deal that's emerging on the Bush tax cuts, and if it is, senators should remove it from the resulting legislation. While they're at it, lawmakers should reconsider their blending mandate, too. There are far better ways to address oil dependence and greenhouse emissions.