University enrollment cap contemplated

Is the University of Missouri’s burgeoning enrollment too much of a good thing?

Coupled with declining state aid, the school finds itself in the unenviable position of trying to educate more students with fewer resources.

As a consequence, university officials now are contemplating a previously taboo topic — an enrollment cap.

Enrollment at the university's main campus in Columbia has been increasing steadily during the past decade. Enrollment topped 32,000 students at the beginning of the fall 2010 semester, and an increase of 1,000 students is anticipated when classes resume in August.

Revenues largely are derived from tuition and fees, which account for nearly 50 percent, and state aid, about 36 percent of the school’s total income.

In response to the university's 5.5 percent tuition hike that exceeded the state's recommendation, Gov. Jay Nixon cut the school’s budget by an extra $4.4 million, or 8.1 percent for fiscal year 2012.

"We cannot continue to take more and more students while state support declines and there are legal and practical restrictions on our ability to increase tuition," said Steve Owens, the university system's acting president. "Without adequate resources, the quality of our academic and research programs is at risk."

His sentiments are shared by Columbia's state lawmakers representing both political parties.

"Something has to give," lamented Republican Sen. Kurt Schaefer. And Democratic Rep. Chris Kelly said: "The university cannot continue to deliver a quality education to more people with ever-shrinking resources. That's the reality."

An enrollment cap would mark a reversal of the philosophy guiding the land grant school founded in 1839 to broaden access to higher education in Missouri.
The value of a college education has become increasingly more vital and valuable in the 172 years since the school was founded.

The university system must make every conceivable effort to maximize resources, eliminate waste and prioritize instruction.

If an enrollment cap becomes a financial necessity, it will serve as a sad commentary on our commitment to higher education in Missouri.
Colleges to counteract dwindling ranks of high school graduates

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS

The Columbia and Kansas City campuses of the University of Missouri again will be awash in freshmen this fall.

But it may be a high tide.

In eight years, if a recent national report is correct, the number of high school graduates in Missouri will fall by 5 percent.

An aging population, coupled with a decline in high school graduates entering college and the workforce, is a matter for national concern, experts say.

Seeing the writing on the marker board, some area educators are looking past the freshman glut and trying to entice other sources of college fodder, including former dropouts.

Overall, fairly flat national high school graduation rates until 2020 are predicted by the Center for Law and Social Policy and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

The decline is most pronounced in parts of New England, Ohio, Michigan, North Dakota, Massachusetts and New York. Connecticut, for example, expects a 10 percent drop in high school students, the report says.

Kansas will fare somewhat better with a dip of only 1 percent.

Some of the Midwest declines come from out-migration but, in general, the report said, the high school student population is shrinking with declining birth rates, said Vickie Choitz, senior policy analyst with the law center.

On the Kansas City and Rolla campuses, educators already are addressing shifting trends, including encouraging old faces to return and finish up.

In December, UMKC began an aggressive search for adults who left in the past decade without a diploma.
Using the National Student Clearinghouse, which verifies college enrollment and degrees granted, UMKC found 475 to call about returning to finish up.

“We only looked at people from the Kansas City, Missouri, area,” said Jennifer DeHaemers, assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management. “People who would logistically want to come back.”

One reason for this initiative is Gov. Jay Nixon’s goal to improve the ratio of residents with a college degree from 37 percent to 60 percent by 2025.

Besides the soon-to-stagnate student pool, the state institutions also find themselves struggling with an 8.1 percent budget cut in fiscal year 2012.

“We know from history and from studies such as these that post-secondary education provides enormous economic benefits to individuals and their communities,” said David Russell, Missouri higher education commissioner.

“We need to graduate 4,000 more students each year if we are to meet our state’s future workforce needs.”

While in this slow economic recovery jobs for college students may be slim, employment demanding some post-secondary training will rise 16 percent by 2018. At that point, two-thirds of all jobs will require it, according to a state-by-state analysis.

With more non-traditional students being recruited, colleges and universities also are embracing some different ways for their campuses to deliver credit hours. That means four-year schools are launching more online courses and are being more flexible about when classes are offered. In some cases, it may even mean designing classes more attractive to older students.

Unlike the Kansas City and Columbia campuses, Missouri University of Science & Technology is not expecting more freshmen this year. However, the Rolla school last year had a record enrollment, the largest since the 1980s. The school’s strategic plan had projected 6,500 students at this point, but it’s now 7,200.

“We do have capacities, and we do have some programs that are bursting at the seams, mechanical and civil engineering for example. We can’t grow much more,” said Andrew Careaga at Missouri S&T.

Educators acknowledge that enrollment is cyclical and are well aware of the expected demographic changes.

So at Rolla, too, dropouts are considered an important source of college fodder. Many located by S&T are only one math class away from a degree.
Richard Sluder, vice provost for enrollment management at the University of Central Missouri, said the Warrensburg school enrolls about 50 such students a year, many on a general studies track.

"And with a little work, maybe a three-hour class, they finish with a degree," he said.
Kelly wants lawmakers to have say in disaster spending

By Rudi Keller

The three budget lines Gov. Jay Nixon is using to support as much as $150 million in state disaster spending don’t have nearly that much allocated, but the lines have something special that makes it theoretically possible to spend much more than even the large amount Nixon already has allocated.

That something special is an “E” after the appropriated amount, which means the figure is an estimate designed to give Nixon flexibility to respond quickly to changing conditions when lawmakers are not in session.

Two of those lines appropriate a single dollar, and the other allocates $999,999 for emergency purposes. “Those are pinholes to most legislators, but a smart governor can drive a truck through them,” said Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia and a member of the House Budget Committee. “And he is driving a truck through the legislative intent.”

Kelly said Nixon should call lawmakers into special session to appropriate more specific amounts to cover the state’s costs for tornadoes in Joplin, St. Louis and Sedalia, and for flooding in southeast Missouri and along the Missouri River.

When lawmakers went home for the year, disaster spending was estimated to be $25 million. But that was before the tornadoes and before the Missouri River flooding. The much higher figure now being considered should be appropriated by lawmakers, Kelly said, especially because Nixon cut funding to higher education and other programs to make sure he had enough money for disaster relief.

“In my opinion, the governor has overstepped in this area and effectively made appropriation decisions,” Kelly said. “He has decided how he wants to spend the money, and he is withholding from some things and then spending other money based on the flexibility we give the administration for emergencies.”

Kelly objects to Nixon’s decision to withhold $57 million in spending approved by lawmakers, including $4.3 million for the University of Missouri, to help pay for disasters. He said strong revenues for the fiscal year just ended mean there will be money to support that spending, and Nixon should consider tapping the state budget reserve fund for disaster aid.
The constitution directs the governor to spend the amounts lawmakers set in the budget as long as revenues match expectations, Kelly said. “I think that if the money is there, you can’t withhold.”

But Linda Luebbering, state budget director, said it is premature to decide that state revenues are going to be adequate for every need. “We are within the constitutional provision that requires and authorizes the governor to make sure what we spend is balanced with revenue,” she said.

The $150 million is just an estimate, she said. The actual figure will depend on whether the Federal Emergency Management Agency pays the state and local share of disaster aid and whether there are large needs not covered by federal law.

“Simply don’t have enough information to know what the state’s obligation will be,” Luebbering said. “The spending part of it is part of the equation as well. We have to balance revenue and spending, and both of those are still unknown.”

That uncertainty, added to Nixon’s willingness to use small estimated budget lines to spend large sums, means lawmakers are going to look closely at whether he overstepped his authority, Kelly said.

“The only remedy we have for that would be to further curtail his flexibility,” he said. “I think that is what he is looking at here.”

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A new federal rule that will force universities to get approval from each state where they enroll students online might affect who can sign up for University of Missouri e-courses in the future.

That’s because some states are charging out-of-state institutions as much as $25,000 per academic program or $2,500 per student to offer distance education to residents.

“We can’t afford, nor can our students afford, to pay that kind of additional educational fee on top of tuition,” said Jim Spain, interim director of MU’s online program. “So there are going to be cases where those costs are going to be so excessive that it will be cost-prohibitive for us to offer our programs to students” who are residents of certain states.

The law essentially forces schools offering online programs to comply with existing state licensure regulations. One of the problems, observers say, is those regulations vary greatly by state. For instance, some states don’t require colleges to be licensed if they don’t have a physical presence in the state. In some states, including Missouri, that means brick-and-mortar offices, but in other states, having an adjunct professor or a student doing an internship is enough to meet physical presence requirements.

Complicating the picture is that some states are ramping up their regulations — and fees. “State governments are struggling financially, and some see this as a potential opportunity to generate some much-needed revenue to support higher education,” Spain said.

The federal rule was intended to give states more control of for-profit online colleges thought to be degree mills that don’t provide quality academics. But those for-profit schools can afford to pay licensing fees, said Zachary March, director of e-learning for the UM System. “They were trying to create a rule to really attack for-profits, but, in the end, it’s really hurting us more than them,” he said.

MU has 6,000 students enrolled online. About 80 percent of them live in Missouri and wouldn’t be affected by this change. Schools have until 2014 to come into compliance with the regulations.

Columbia College has 21,000 online-only students and has the OK in most states to operate, said Misty Bush, compliance director. The not-for-profit is in the application process in two states.

Stephens College has 244 online students living in 40 states.
“After we evaluate requirements particular to each state, we will explore our options,”
spokeswoman Amy Gipson said in an email. “Our concern with this regulation is that it may
become prohibitively expensive to provide unique, high-quality online programs to students
across the country.”

The Missouri Department of Higher Education has received about 300 requests from out-of-state
institutions wanting to teach Missourians online. Schools that don’t have a physical campus or
office here aren’t required to get a license, said Leroy Wade, assistant commissioner for financial
aid and proprietary certification. Still, it’s forcing those schools to show the department what
they’re doing here.

“It’s certainly been an eye-opener in that regard,” Wade said. “I had no idea how many ... were
enrolling Missouri residents.”

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Scholar moves alternative meat project to MU

By Janese Silvey

A visiting scholar who arrived on the University of Missouri campus Monday is studying a way to produce meat in a factory rather than on a farm.

Nicholas Genovese ultimately envisions a process that bathes animal cells in a nutrient-rich substance where they would multiply and grow to resemble steak or other meat products. He’s careful to note that any final, edible product would be grown in a production facility, not a lab.

So-called cultured meat is a long-term goal, though: Genovese is on campus to assist in stem cell research in Michael Roberts’ lab. Roberts is a curators’ professor of animal science and biochemistry who said his primary interest is in using agricultural animals to advance biomedicine.

“I do not have grants to produce meat,” Roberts said. “That is not the primary interest in my lab, although I am interested in producing muscle cells.”

“The beauty is that the science is the same,” Genovese said.

Genovese comes to Columbia from the Medical University of South Carolina, where he worked under Vladimir Mironov, one of the country’s leading researchers of in-vitro meats. Mironov was suspended from the university in February, and media reports from South Carolina have said his suspension was the result of “unacceptable behavior” involving contact with a research administrator. He declined to discuss the situation with reporters there.

While at South Carolina, Genovese snagged a three-year award from the People for Ethical Treatment of Animals to continue the work. PETA is currently paying his salary at MU.

The animal-rights group is interested in the work in an effort to provide meat in a more humane way, Genovese said. The idea is not to replace traditional meat but rather to provide more options as demand grows.

Countries such as China are not only growing in population, requiring a need to produce more food, but also in the wealth needed to buy beef.

Raising more cattle to meet that demand isn’t necessarily efficient. There’s only so much land suitable for pasture, not to mention the additional land needed to grow cattle feed. Cows also
The sick swimmer

Menu Courey’s losing struggle

By Henry J. Waters III

I hope everyone read the excellent piece by David Briggs on our sports front page Thursday.

It was a story about a young woman apparently full of life who harbored mental demons that led her to suicide. The family of Sasha Menu Courey talked about their daughter’s struggle with an illness blessedly foreign to most of us but more common than we would know without brave revelations like those made by the parents.

Menu Courey was on the University of Missouri swim team. Her story need not have had a root in the world of sport, but athletics often bring more attention to the personal plights of competitors. Fans — most people — will fixate on the personalities and troubles of individual athletes in ways never seen for shoe salesmen or newspaper editors.

Particularly athletes such as Sasha Menu Courey, who, by the accounts relayed by Briggs, had a personality like few other people: a bright and cheery presence completely at odds with the furor lurking inside her brain.

She loved college and, in her last semester, racked up a 4.0 grade point average. She wanted to go to graduate school, seemingly looking ahead to a rewarding life. All of a sudden, the young lady lost her ability to cope and in a seeming moment had taken her own life in a Boston hospital.

The message of Menu Courey’s story urges us all to face up to mental illness just as we do to physical ailments. These diseases often are kept in the shadows, regarded as a weakness rather than an ordinary sickness requiring treatment.

After all, the brain is a physical organ, just like a heart or kidney. When the brain does not work right, the patient needs help. That such help involves psychological as well as physical attention puts mental illness in the shadows for many of us.

Sasha Menu Courey did not die because nobody knew or cared about her condition, but her particular condition was concealed by her disarming behavior. It is far beyond the scope of this comment to analyze her condition or judge whether those in her circle of friends had any way to know.
For us on the outside, the best we can do is learn from the compelling story of Sasha Menu Courey told in a brave parent’s revelation relayed so well by David Briggs.

HJW III
Hanging out with your iPad

The iPad may be for people on the go, but most iPad owners prefer to use them as they lounge on the couch or in their bedrooms, according to a recent survey.

This spring, the Reynolds Journalism Institute, part of the University of Missouri’s Missouri School of Journalism, surveyed 561 iPad owners with an average age of 45.

Among its findings -- much of it aimed at understanding how people use the iPad to access the news -- 23 percent said they had downloaded 75 or more apps and just 9 percent said that had downloaded less than 15.

The top two apps, not surprisingly, were the Safari web browser and e-mail. But the other top contenders included the New York Times, USA Today, AP News, the Weather Channel and Flipboard.

The top things to do with their iPad included catching up on the news through an aggregator and reading newspapers, magazines and books. Shopping, working and watching videos ranked at the bottom.

Three quarters of the respondents also said that they did not plan on purchasing a rival tablet in the next six months. More than half are Apple loyalists and own an iPod and/or an iPhone. A little more than a third owned an Amazon Kindle.
MU study: Happier employees mean more return sales

By MU News Bureau
Jul 8, 2011

Previous studies have shown that customer satisfaction plays a key role in the health and future success of any company. When customers are satisfied, they keep coming back to the same store and invite their friends to do the same.

A new study from the University of Missouri found that CEOs who pay attention to employees' job satisfaction are able to boost both customer satisfaction and "repurchase intentions," or the number of customers who intend to purchase products repeatedly from the store.

Christopher Groening, assistant professor of marketing at MU's Robert J. Trulaske Sr. College of Business, found that CEOs should pay more attention to employees' job satisfaction if they want to boost customer satisfaction for their companies.

"You might think that, as an owner, you only need to pay attention to the customers, providing them with what they want," Groening said. "Yet, we found that keeping your employees satisfied with their work experience, providing them with challenges and allowing them to have a sense of ownership in the business can have a tremendous effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty."

Although Groening and co-authors Heiner Evanschitzky from Aston Business School in the United Kingdom, Vikas Mittal from Rice University and Maren Wunderlich from T-Mobile International studied a large franchise, they said they believe the results would be comparable with a business of any size. In their study, the research team reviewed a European retail franchise system that has approximately 300 outlets with 933 employees and more than 20,700 customers. Satisfaction data was obtained from employees and customers regarding working for or buying from the business. The study was published this month in the Journal of Service Research.

The study shows that the link between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is almost twice as strong when a business has high employee satisfaction compared to when employees are not satisfied with their jobs. "This double-positive finding stands in contrast to the idea that a firm can neglect to satisfy their employees as long as they pursue customer satisfaction," Groening said.

Groening said that it is not a one-way street where companies implement policies and can expect to experience gains solely through customer service. "The relationships among the CEO, the employees and the customers are all linked," he said. "It's important for CEOs to know that they can have a large impact on customer service without ever talking with a customer or implementing a new customer-service policy."

Following his study, Groening recommends the following actions — based on answers from the employee survey questions — to increase employee satisfaction:

• Train and empower employees so they have the tools to make decisions. This allows them to make decisions that are beneficial to the company and each individual customer instead of following a simple flowchart and possibly upsetting a customer with the final outcome.
• Hire managers who serve as examples and also can be mentors with employees. If a company policy is established, it should be honored by managers as well as employees. Additionally, managers should help employees know what is expected to advance in the company.

• Create good working atmospheres. Offer incentives or such intangible benefits as flexible working hours, if possible.

"While many of these actions might seem like common sense, they can be very difficult to maintain," Groening said. "It’s also very important to hire the right people in management positions who will take part in these activities — for example, serving as mentors — or employers might have difficulty meeting their goals."