States slam shut the gateway to our future

By BARBARA SHELLY, The Kansas City Star

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In California, college students are protesting tuition hikes. Professors are leaving for pastures that, if not greener, at least pay better. The vaunted university system is reported to be in crisis.

“This fall, for the first time, the University of California will take in more money from student tuition than from state finances,” announced a recent New York Times story.

For the first time? California is so behind. Missouri crossed that unfortunate line in 2004. Kansas, three years ago.

The recession and its aftershocks forced most states to deeply cut public college and university money. Up to a point, this makes sense. If the choice is closing a prison or cutting university funding, states choose the later.

The turning point occurs when legislatures start to see the cuts not as regrettable but as acceptable and permanent. After all, doesn’t everyone know universities are bastions of excess? A little belt-tightening would do them good.

Schools can and should seek efficiencies. But Missouri, a trendsetter in higher education deprivation, turned belt-tightening into emaciation.

Until about 2000, Missouri’s per capita higher education spending was in the middle of the pack. That changed when Gov. Bob Holden, a Democrat, and the GOP legislature made deep cuts to deal with a drop in revenues. Missouri never restored the cuts when the economy improved.

The last decade, especially in Republican Matt Blunt’s term as governor, saw a marked hostility to public colleges on the part of key leaders in the Republican legislature.

Rather than invest in the state’s own schools, they preferred giving students scholarships to use at either public or private colleges in Missouri. Lawmakers also restricted the ability of public colleges and universities to increase tuition.

By 2008, Missouri’s per capita funding for colleges and universities ranked at the bottom of the 50 states. Campuses were seeing scientists and teachers leave for better salaries and more welcoming research climates. Families were chaffing at tuition bills that were higher than what students were
paying in neighboring states. Alumni were complaining about rankings that showed Missouri’s universities slipping.

Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon, who took office in 2009, and a new group of Republican legislative leaders stopped the bleeding for a time. For two years, they offered colleges and universities flat funding or minimal cuts in return for the schools not raising tuition.

Still, adjusted for inflation, Missouri’s funding for the operating budget of the four-campus University of Missouri system today is at 1984 levels.

Meanwhile, the system is serving 17,000 more students than it did in 1999, while expenses such as health care and utility payments have soared.

Campus and system administrators have been both creative and brutal about cutting costs. They have shrunk administrative staffs, found energy efficiencies and created more competitive contracting systems.

But years of austerity have taken their toll. University buildings are creaking for lack of maintenance. Students pay more in tuition for less access to professors and counselors. Faculty salaries rank near the bottom of comparable schools.

Politicians expect Missouri’s public universities to lead the state into a 21st century economy on a 1984 expense account. It doesn’t work.

Even Nixon has turned balky. He cut the state’s higher education budget for next year by more than the GOP-controlled legislature wanted.

For good measure, the governor docked the University of Missouri system and Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph by an additional 1 percent because he considered their tuition increases of 5.5 percent to be excessive.

“Politicians like access to higher education better than they like quality of education,” said state Rep. Chris Kelly, a Columbia Democrat against Nixon’s school cuts. “At some point you have to ask: Access to what?”

An excellent question. It’s easy for politicians to talk about college access and a better-educated workforce. But public colleges have always been the gateway to opportunity. They won’t remain so unless states keep their end of the commitment.
Farmers in uproar over artificial meat researcher at Mizzou

BY GEORGINA GUSTIN | ggustin@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8195 | Posted: Friday, July 15, 2011 12:09 am | (6) Comments

In vitro meat. Test tube meat. Lab meat.

Regardless of its handle, artificial meat has some real meat farmers pretty fired up.

This week a researcher paid by the animal rights group PETA hung his lab coat in the University of Missouri's Division of Animal Sciences — bringing his goal of creating cultured meat right to the middle of Midwestern hog land.

Nicholas Genovese, a researcher formerly at the Medical University of South Carolina, began his stint as a visiting scholar Wednesday, working in the lab of R. Michael Roberts, a pre-eminent reproductive biologist who works with stem cells and livestock.

But Genovese's presence has triggered a flare of alarm from Missouri hog producers who aren't happy that a PETA-financed researcher is now working at the state's flagship public university.

Artificial or cultured meat, not to be confused with imitation meat, is made in a lab from animal tissue — and, in theory, could mean fewer actual animals on the farm one day. Researchers have successfully created meat, but not in a commercially viable way — yet.

"Let me tell you," said Blake Hurst, president of the Missouri Farm Bureau, "my farmer friends are exercised."

Genovese declined comment Thursday, saying the university had not authorized him to speak.

In an interview Thursday, Roberts said that Genovese applied to work with his research team in April after finding himself without a job when his mentor, Vladimir Mironov, got the ax. Mironov, known for his efforts to grow in vitro meat from animal stem cells, is now in Brazil working on similar research there for a large meat company, according to Roberts and a PETA representative.

Roberts accepted Genovese's application but stressed Thursday that Genovese was not an employee of the university and continued to work under a three-year grant from PETA.

"He's essentially a private citizen who chose to work with me," Roberts said. "I'm getting a well-trained young scientist to work in an area that interests me."

Roberts' recent work has focused on the transformation of cells into embryonic stem cells. In 2009 his research team used pigs' connective tissue to create stem cells that act like embryonic stem cells. These
induced stem cells can, potentially, be converted into tissue cells. That breakthrough could allow researchers to steer clear of the controversies surrounding embryonic stem cells because the process does not require an actual embryo and does not involve cloning.

"I'm interested in these cells to get them to differentiate toward muscles," Roberts said. "That's the primary component of most meat."

Last year, PETA, which has waged a fierce campaign against industrial livestock farming, gave Genovese a three-year grant to create meat from tissue cells — a meat that has never actually been part of an animal.

"This is the wave of the future," said PETA's Ingrid Newkirk, in an interview Thursday. "People who are environmentally aware are keen on this, animal rights advocates are keen on this, health advocates are keen on this. The only people who aren't keen are in a business that this will affect."

Newkirk explained that PETA had been in touch with Mironov, whose research aligned with the organization's philosophies. PETA then learned about Genovese's interests and decided to fund his research for three years. Newkirk said PETA wasn't troubled by Genovese's move to a different lab, "As long as it's adding to the sum total of knowledge in the field."

"He's decided to hang his hat in your neck of the woods," Newkirk added, "and this has put the wind up the skirts of these farmers who are getting all panicky and apparently haven't been following trends in eating."

Roberts said that his lab was not actually going to make cultured meat. His goal, rather, is to create cultured tissue for human and livestock medical research.

"I still don't see this as a being a feasible project — making meat," he said. "I think Nicholas does."
Our Opinion: University enrollment cap contemplated

By News Tribune

Saturday, July 9, 2011

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.
Federal judge tosses rule affecting university online-learning programs

By Janese Silvey

A U.S. District Court judge struck down a federal rule that would have required universities to get permission from states to enroll residents in online programs, but that doesn’t mean schools are off the hook.

Some states require colleges and universities to get licensed before enrolling students online. The federal rule would have given those regulations more teeth by threatening federal funding to colleges that don’t comply with state laws. But even without federal oversight, area institutions say they want to meet state requirements.

“We’ll continue to follow up with states to work to be in compliance,” said Jim Spain, interim director of the University of Missouri’s online program.

In some cases, that might mean no longer enrolling students from certain states in MU’s e-courses because of cost-prohibitive fees. Some states are charging outside colleges as much as $25,000 per academic program or $2,500 a student to offer distance education. Spain has said MU can’t afford those lofty fees.

Columbia College, which enrolls some 21,000 students online each year, also won’t change compliance efforts in light of the recent court decision.

“The bottom line is that all institutions must still comply with all state laws in order to offer distance education program,” Misty Bush, director of compliance, said in an email.

One of the concerns with complying with state rules is that they vary greatly. Although states typically require programs to get licensed if they have a physical presence in the state, definitions are different. In some, including Missouri, schools that don’t have brick-and-mortar campuses or offices in the state aren’t required to get a license. But in others, a resident adjunct professor would be enough to trigger the physical presence requirements.

Judge Rosemary Collyer of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia tossed out the state authorization requirement Tuesday on a technicality: The U.S. Department of Education, she ruled, did not allow time for stakeholders to comment on the rule. The department said it is weighing its options, which could include an appeal.

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University Hospital again earns top rank

University Hospital’s trauma center again has been recognized as a Level I trauma center — the highest national status a center can receive.

The American College of Surgeons verifies the center’s status every three years and recently reverified the Frank L. Mitchell Jr., MD, Trauma Center. A team from ACS’s committee on trauma visited University Hospital to evaluate the program and services.

To receive the Level I status, the hospital had to demonstrate the center is equipped to handle the most serious types of injuries in adults and children at all times. In a final report, the evaluation team praised the hospital for demonstrating a commitment to “provide superior trauma care.”

The Frank L. Mitchell Jr., MD, Trauma Center is one of three Level I centers in Missouri verified by the ACS.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU Research Reactor Center to hold emergency drill

By Bi Yoo
July 14, 2011 | 7:55 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — An emergency drill will take place at the MU Research Reactor Center at about 10 a.m. Monday and will last about an hour.

The simulation will be conducted by various agencies in Columbia, including the Columbia Fire Department, the MU Police Department, University Hospital and Clinics, the MU News Bureau and reactor staff.

This is a real-emergency simulation that includes the emergency response of outside agencies as well as the center. It takes place every two years and is required by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The MU Research Reactor Center is located south of Stadium Boulevard, west of Providence Road.
Racist graffiti case continued in court

A preliminary hearing for the former University of Missouri student accused of painting a racist slur on campus was continued yesterday, the fourth time the case has been postponed since his arrest in February.

Benjamin Elliott: Accused of painting racist graffiti

Prosecutors are waiting for lab results that might determine whether Benjamin Elliott also was tied to a different incident near the same time he is suspected to have spray-painted "nigger" on a statue outside Hatch Hall on campus.

The graffiti on campus was discovered the morning of Feb. 12. Later that day, Columbia police responded to 1517 Ross St. near campus for a report that an anti-Jewish message had been spray-painted on a Toyota.

The investigation revealed some similarities between the incidents, Columbia police Sgt. Jill Wienke said at the time. Evidence was collected and sent to the lab in March.

Elliott is now due in court Sept. 12.