

JAN 23 2012

## **Nixon: Missouri public universities should avoid big tuition increases**

CALIFORNIA, Mo. | Gov. Jay Nixon urged Missouri's public universities on Friday not to seek large tuition increases in response to his proposed funding cuts to their institutions.

Nixon has proposed cutting state aid to public colleges and universities by 12.5 percent for the 2012-2013 school year, but indicated that a corresponding increase in student tuition would be unreasonable.

The Democratic governor noted that Missouri law generally limits tuition increases to the rate of inflation, unless schools receive special permission for larger increases from the state higher education commissioner. After Nixon outlined his proposed budget this week, some university presidents said they likely would have to request permission to exceed the state tuition cap, which is set according to the previous year's Consumer Price Index.

Nixon cautioned against it.

"Missouri has a law that says tuition shouldn't rise above CPI, and folks should do the best they can to stay within the constructs of that law," Nixon said after a news conference held at a rural meat processing plant to promote his job-training proposals.

The CPI rose by 3 percent from December 2010 to December 2011. Under state law, that means universities could face penalties if they raise tuition by more than 3 percent without state permission. The law also allows institutions where tuition is below the state average to increase it by slightly more than the 3 percent cap.

The Department of Higher Education sent letters dated Thursday to each institution informing them of their specific tuition caps for the next school year.

If lawmakers adopt Nixon's proposed funding cuts, Missouri's public colleges and universities will have seen their state aid cut by about 25 percent during a three-year period. Their financial troubles are compounded by the fact that student enrollment has been growing and – under an agreement with Nixon – schools held tuition flat during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years.

**When the University of Missouri system campuses and Missouri Western State University raised tuition by more than Nixon had deemed appropriate for the current school year, the**

**governor responded by increasing the amount of money to be withheld from those institutions.** That gives heft to Nixon's latest caution against large tuition increases.

The governor said Friday that he expects university officials to find efficiencies in their administrative budgets and develop new models of educating students to help offset the proposed state funding cuts.

“We shouldn't just look at it and say, ‘All right, what we've got to do is just cost shift over to students,’ “ Nixon said. “I think we need to look at ways and options to continue to keep the cost of higher education affordable.”



## Legislators advocate fight against MU cuts

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Friday, January 20, 2012

Before Gov. Jay Nixon's State of the State address Tuesday, the number of people signed up to attend this morning's legislative forecast breakfast at the Reynolds Alumni Center was about 140.

**The day after the speech, in which the governor proposed a 12.5 percent cut in funding for higher education — amounting to a \$45 million budget slash for the University of Missouri — registrations for the breakfast on the MU campus surged above 200.**

"There seems to be some interest here," said program emcee David Shorr, an attorney with the Lathrop and Gage law firm, which sponsored this morning's event.

Reps. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, and Caleb Jones, R-California, along with Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, called on university officials, business owners and community leaders to help them fight to avoid deep cuts that the legislators projected would create a devastating ripple across the local economy.

Nixon's budget addresses an anticipated \$300 million to \$800 million shortfall in revenue for 2012-13.

Kelly called the governor's proposed cuts "demeaning and insulting to the people who run the university," adding that a \$45 million cut would be "absolutely devastating."

In the past, MU administrators and other campus and community leaders have faced state budget cuts without much real opposition, but "this institution has an obligation to stand up to that," Kelly said, punctuating his call to action by slapping the lectern. "We cannot make this fight without somebody behind us. And I mean very, very tough backing."

Kelly estimated Columbia's economy would take as much as a \$22 million hit if the proposed funding cut becomes final.

Schaefer noted another 12.5 percent cut to MU's state allocation would mean a total cut of 25 percent in the past three years. "That's absolutely unsustainable," he said. "You cannot continue to run a university with those kinds of draconian cuts."

Jones also said business and community leaders should be vocal in their opposition to proposed cuts to higher education. "Make sure everyone at the Capitol knows this is not acceptable," he said.

Schaefer said higher education seems to be an easy target for Nixon because "there is very little if any political liability" for those cuts. He said organizations such as the university's alumni association and Flagship Council "really need to step up to the plate."

Schaefer said the cuts could hurt the university's standing as a research institution, possibly driving away top researchers and the funding they often bring. Last spring, the Association of American Universities booted the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from its membership.

"That's the precipice that we're on," Schaefer said. "If we go through with this cut, it is a substantial game-changer for decades to come. It's unacceptable and cannot happen."

Schaefer identified the state's Medicaid program as one area where "we can look at efficiencies." Kelly said he supports increasing the state's cigarette tax. Missouri's tax is 17 cents per pack while the tax is \$1.10 per pack in neighboring Oklahoma.

Kelly said he has heard cigarette tax opponents contend an increase would be "socialist."

"I have not noticed an arising of socialism in Oklahoma," he said.



## **Mo. Gov. Nixon's proposed budget books \$41M of savings from planned debt refinancing**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Missouri is planning to refinance more than \$500 million of debt as part of Gov. Jay Nixon's plan to balance the state budget.

Budget director Linda Luebbering (LOO'-buh-ring) said the state also hopes to refinance \$317 million of principle from bonds issued by the Board of Public Buildings, and \$175 million of principle from bonds issued by the state Board of Fund Commissioners.

Nixon's budget proposal for the next fiscal year assumes the state will save \$41 million from the debt restructuring.

**The governor's budget office says the state already has refinanced \$20 million of principle from the debt used to build Mizzou Arena at the University of Missouri-Columbia.**

Budget director Linda Luebbering (LOO'-buh-ring) said the state also hopes to refinance \$317 million of principle from bonds issued by the Board of Public Buildings, and \$175 million of principle from bonds issued by the state Board of Fund Commissioners.



## The Tribune's View

# Nixon's budget Saved by the recession

By Henry J. Waters III

Friday, January 20, 2012

In his annual State of the State speech Tuesday, Gov. Jay Nixon pointed out the obvious: The state of the state, at least its fiscal state, is parlous. Meaning state revenue is expected to fall short of current expenditures by about \$500 million, removing almost every opportunity a chief budget official might have for creative initiative.

**Republicans, the majority in the Missouri General Assembly, are getting their way with spending because public revenue is lacking, but how will they criticize Nixon when he is Mr. Parsimonious? And do they have any suggestions at all for raising revenue to meet basic needs, like funding the University of Missouri?**

Sen. Kurt Schaefer is in a particularly curious position. As chairman of his body's budget committee, he will lead its budget-making activities. As the most influential member of the so-called Boone County delegation, the university is his top priority. As a leader of the Republican Party, he led the rebuttal to Nixon's budget speech. He is getting good practice with his dance steps.

At this moment in state fiscal history, it's worth mentioning a word of essential wisdom about the annual budget process. Although the governor is obliged to propose a budget and typically does so with great fanfare, the legislature conscientiously ignores his document, actually relishing its power to thumb its collective nose at the chief executive from the other branch of government. The governor proposes; the legislature disposes.

This tension was obvious in the familiar comment from Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, who blamed Nixon for not proposing new revenue sources and instead leaving it to the legislature to do this onerous task. What Mayer left out of his barb is the land mine awaiting Nixon if he had indeed laid out pushy ways to raise revenue. What a delicious opportunity the GOP majority would have as it lambasted the tax-and-spend governor.

Nixon proposes a cut of 12.5 percent to the higher education budget, throwing open the question of tuition rates. UM officials have been looking at a 3 percent increase to match the cost of living, providing state appropriations remain constant. Now, Curator Wayne Goode tells the Tribune, the UM Board of Curators probably will want a larger increase.

For decades in this state and others, support for higher education has been shifting from state appropriations to money generated on campus, mostly from tuition and research. UM officials say actual legislative dollar support is lower now than it was in 2001, when the university had 17,000 fewer students. Facing this equation, state officials have little room to argue the state university should hold off on tuition increases.

Nixon does support public scholarships for certain students, and institutions of higher education these days provide ever larger dollops of financial aid funded from private sources.

So, it's a mixed bag, a political pushing-and-pulling match hard to discern with precision by observing annual state legislative budget high jinks. University appropriations are not set in stone by the governor's budget, but in this tight revenue year the shift toward institutional self-dependence will continue.

I know educators who would like to be off the state dole altogether to diminish political influence from Jefferson City, but that sad or glorious day of non-reckoning, depending, is not yet upon us, nor should it ever be. For now, the sweating and heaving under the Capitol dome continue, and UM tuitions will keep on rising.

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

## McClellan: Blowing some smoke in the Show-Me state

Bill McClellan • [bmcclellan@post-dispatch.com](mailto:bmcclellan@post-dispatch.com), 314-340-8143 | Posted: Monday, January 23, 2012 12:15 am

### MU mention page 2

Good morning, ladies and gentleman of the Missouri General Assembly. It is my pleasure -- and an honor -- to introduce Gov. Jay Nixon, who intends to give a second State of the State address. Last week's address was for public consumption. This morning's is the real deal. Please give a Show-Me welcome to Gov. Jeremiah "Jay" Nixon!

(Muted applause. Sen. Jason Crowell makes flatulence sounds into his microphone.)

"Good morning. Or maybe it's not so good. Let's be honest. You can't count on the weather in this state. This time of year, we might go through three seasons a day, and none of them are summer. Yet we're supposed to compete with places that are warm and sunny all year?"

"But that's what we're trying to do. Our economic development team is working with our marketing team to identify our strengths and build on them.

"Our number one strength? We have the lowest cigarette tax in the country!"

(Wild applause. Sen. Crowell makes siren sounds into his microphone.)

"By the way, the smoking lamp is lit. Smoke 'em if you got 'em!"

(More applause and siren sounds.)

"Our economic development team is working to identify companies with CEOs who smoke. Once those companies are identified, we'll be contacting the CEOs. We'll point out that a heavy smoker can save hundreds of dollars a year in our state.

"Our marketing team is working with our friends in Washington ..."

(Boos, hisses and flatulence sounds.)



"No, no. Hear me out. Our marketing people are trying to get permission to place a Missouri logo next to the warning labels on packs of cigarettes. Right after 'Smoking can cause lung cancer and emphysema,' we'll have our logo!"

(Applause, siren sounds.)

"As part of that same campaign, we're thinking of dropping the 'Show Me' slogan in favor of 'Cheap Smokes.' That has a ring, doesn't it? 'Missouri, the Cheap Smokes state.' "

(Applause, siren sounds.)

"Maybe we'll make the Dirt Cheap Bird our state mascot. I'm sure some of the do-gooders will criticize me, but what part of 'Cheap, Cheap, Fun, Fun' don't they get?"

(Applause, siren sounds, some chanting, "Cheap. Cheap, Fun, Fun.")

"Our tourism people will also be targeting smokers. We'll soon unveil an entire campaign aimed at getting smokers to vacation in Missouri.

"In that same vein, we're going to try to grow our state by getting smokers to move here. But we'll be looking for a certain kind of smoker — a healthy smoker.

"That's because we're cutting Medicaid again!"

(Wild applause, siren sounds.)

"I don't know about you, but I'm sick of people expecting the taxpayers to provide their health insurance."

(Uneasy mumbling, half-hearted flatulence sounds.)

"Present company excluded, that is!"

(Wild applause, siren sounds.)

**"Speaking of cuts, I'd like to talk about higher education. If you follow higher education in this state, you already know that Mizzou has joined the Southeastern Conference. We're in the SEC!"**

(Deafening applause, siren sounds. As the applause finally dies down, a few legislators start singing "Dixie.")

"I want to be perfectly clear about this. We face some financial challenges, but I have assured Coach Gary Pinkel that the football budget will not be cut. It will be raised! Significantly!"

(Wild applause, siren sounds.)

"The same goes for Coach Frank Haith and his basketball team! And isn't Coach Haith doing a fantastic job!"

(Applause and siren sounds.)

"Of course, less vital parts of the university will face severe cuts. Academics, for instance. In these difficult times, we can no longer afford to throw money at math and science and engineering.

"And journalism. Does anybody think we really need more journalists?"

(Boos, hisses, very strong flatulence sounds.)

"I'd like to mention a book I read recently ..."

(Boos, hisses, flatulence sounds.)

"No. Please. Hear me out. I didn't read the book itself, but I read the title. The title was, 'All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.' I thought to myself, 'If this man is so smart that he can write books, and he admits that everything he needed to know he learned in kindergarten, why are we spending so much money on post-kindergarten education?'

"Maybe that is something to look at in next year's budget. For now, though, I just want to say thanks for the great job you're doing. You are the reason the state of the state is strong."

(Wild applause, siren sounds.)

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

## Lawmaker wants to undo UM policy on sharing lecture recordings

By The Associated Press

January 22, 2012 | 4:35 p.m. CST

**COLUMBIA — A St. Louis-area lawmaker has introduced legislation to reverse a new University of Missouri policy that limits how students can redistribute recorded classroom lectures.**

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports that a bill filed by state Representative Paul Curtman, R-Pacific, would allow public college students to freely share audio and video recordings of lectures.

The bill is a response to a University of Missouri system policy issued last month that requires students who want to distribute those recordings outside of class to obtain "the express permission" of those on tape. Students and professors who violate the policy could face university disciplinary sanctions. The rule change doesn't prevent students from sharing recorded lectures with classmates.

The rule emerged in response to an edited video posted online of a labor studies lecture at the University of Missouri-Kansas City campus that suggested the professor advocated union violence.

Curtman said some students at the University of Missouri-St. Louis "were concerned about the policy because they think they ought to be able to record lectures and share them with anybody. I agree with that."

University administrators would not directly comment on the bill but did reiterate the purpose of the policy.

"Students should be free to contribute their own thoughts and opinions in a learning environment void of fear that their personal opinions will be disseminated outside of the classroom," university spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said.

The policy issued by interim university President Steve Owens in mid-December says it's intended to ensure that students and professors can have open discussions without worrying that their remarks would invite outside "ridicule, harassment or reprisal from those who do not agree with their views."

An internal investigation by the UMKC strongly supported professor Judy Ancel, director of the university's Institute for Labor Studies, after she was targeted by conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart's Big Government website, which obtained recorded copies of her lectures.

Ancel has previously said that her comment about union violence was a paraphrased remark of a statement made in a documentary shown in class about the 1968 Memphis garbage workers' strike and Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. The recordings were obtained from a university website available only to students enrolled in the class.

Charles Davis, a journalism professor at MU and former executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, said the broader access to the videos prior to the policy change wound up helping, not harming, Ancel and another professor who was targeted.

"If you put some sort of prohibition on (recordings), then it's he-said, she-said city," Davis told the Tribune.

The university's new policy is too broad, said Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center and a commercial litigation attorney. One concern, he said, is whether it would apply to student reporters who obtain a contentious recording from someone else. As written, it would seem to prohibit a student reporter from distributing such video.

"What the courts have always said is that if you, as a journalist, come into possession of newsworthy information, that information is yours to print," LoMonte said. "It doesn't matter if the original source violated a rule or stepped across a line."

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He also worries about the impact on students who experience harassment or other problems in a classroom.

"If a student really felt like she was suffering harassment in a course, the student might very well want a recording for her own protection," LoMonte said.

The policy will be applied on a case-by-case basis and shouldn't hinder a student's ability to report problems, said Clyde Bentley, an associate journalism professor who helped tweak the wording.

# Nixon nomination to UM System curators in jeopardy

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

January 23, 2012 | 7:18 a.m. CST

**JEFFERSON CITY — The nomination of a Columbia attorney to the University of Missouri System Board of Curators remains uncertain as state lawmakers continue to question his gubernatorial appointment.**

The [Columbia Daily Tribune](#) reports that a Senate committee has pulled Craig van Matre from its latest list of nominees facing confirmation by the full Senate.

Van Matre was appointed in January 2011 but had to temporarily step down after the Senate didn't take up his nomination last year. Gov. Jay Nixon then reappointed him over the summer, but the curator again had to leave the board when no Senate confirmation occurred during the 2011 special legislative session.

Van Matre, a Democrat, will have to permanently step down if his nomination isn't approved by early February.

Another curator, Judy Haggard, resigned from the board last week.



**The★Star**  
THE KANSAS CITY STAR

## UM curator Judy Haggard resigns

By Janese Silvey

Published January 20, 2012 at 12:07 p.m. Updated January 20, 2012 at 1:28 p.m.

**A University of Missouri System curator has stepped down, saying personal reasons will prevent her from completing her term.**

Judy Haggard of Kennett resigned Tuesday, a year before her term was set to expire.

Her resignation leaves an unexpected vacancy in the nine-member board that will force Gov. Jay Nixon to find a replacement. Two curators, Craig Van Matre of Columbia and Pamela Quigg Henrickson of Jefferson City, still need Senate confirmation, but no curators had terms expiring this year.

Haggard is the second curator to resign recently. Bo Fraser of Columbia left the board in 2010, two years before his term expired.

The vacancy opens a Democratic seat on the board. Former Gov. Matt Blunt appointed Haggard in 2007 as a Democrat, but some lawmakers questioned her political affiliation. Haggard's husband, David, is an active Republican who has helped GOP candidates in elections. Judy Haggard said at the time that her husband's affiliation shouldn't matter, and ultimately the Senate OK'd her appointment.

Haggard served as chair of the Board of Curators in 2010, during which time she promoted e-learning efforts, and she has headed several committees.

"Judy's passion and enthusiasm for higher education will be greatly missed," board Chairman David Bradley said in a statement.

Haggard is a family nurse practitioner in Kennett who has a bachelor's degree in nursing from MU and a master's degree from UM-St. Louis. She is a founding member of the parent organization at MU and a member of the MU Alumni Association.

"It has been an honor to work on behalf of the four campuses," she said in a statement. "I am grateful for the privilege to have served the state in this capacity."

## **MU officials might hire firm to assess transit needs**

By Hannah Cushman

January 21, 2012 | 5:54 p.m. CST

**COLUMBIA — MU officials are working to finalize a contract with a consulting firm that will assess transportation needs for students living both on and off campus.**

The contract comes mere months after the inaugural meeting of the Transit System Task Force, a team of city officials and students charged with evaluating transit needs and structure not only for MU but for the entire city.

Jim Joy, MU representative for the Public Transportation Advisory Commission, said he anticipates some degree of collaboration between the bodies.

Commission member Alyce Turner, however, called the contract "a hand in the face of the city." By commissioning a consulting firm rather than relying on the task force, she said, the university might be trying to retain control.

The consulting firm hired by MU will consider students its top priority in creating a long-term strategy for rectifying transit issues. Joy said the members plan to consult student organizations and conduct site visits to off-campus housing in an effort to gather as much feedback as possible.

Potential solutions, though, remain ambiguous. "There's nothing that's not on the table," Joy said.

Although a timeline has not yet been solidified, Joy estimated the assessment will begin the second week of February and will continue through the end of March.





## **‘Daily Show’ correspondent to honor MLK**

By Aarik Danielsen

Sunday, January 22, 2012

Using humor might seem an unlikely way to honor the late, great Martin Luther King Jr. But when it's Larry Wilmore at the microphone, the laughter is likely to result in lessons about the leader's legacy and the world he left behind.

**An award-winning television personality best known for his work on the culturally integral “The Daily Show,” Wilmore will speak Wednesday night at the Missouri Theatre Center for the Arts as part of a belated MLK celebration, sponsored by the Office of the Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative at the University of Missouri.**

Wilmore often is the best thing about any show he's in. On an early episode of “The Office” — a show he has served as both a writer and producer — Wilmore held his own with Steve Carell, playing his straight-man role to the hilt. In his role as “senior black correspondent” — the gag is that, until recently, he has been the show's only black correspondent — on “The Daily Show,” Wilmore skewers every type of politics, from national to racial, with a voice that is singular and surprising, using what NPR once deemed “un-PC insights.”

“Wilmore's humor turns on observations of the black experience, observations often unexpected from an African-American,” said a 2007 Nightline report, which gave the example of Wilmore's commentary on Black History Month.

“When asked by Stewart on the show if he believes Black History Month serves a purpose, Wilmore said, ‘Yes, the purpose of making up for centuries of oppression with 28 days of trivia,’” the report said. “‘You know what? I'd rather we got casinos.’”

Whether discussing Black History Month or the viability of the N-word, Wilmore's comedy often highlights other people's adventures in missing the point, underscoring racial inequality and cultural impropriety in a way that's irreverent but ultimately insightful.

Wilmore's career has been marked by a great deal of television success — he helped create “The Bernie Mac Show,” worked as a producer on “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air” and wrote for the pioneering sketch comedy show “In Living Color.” He's also an author and has appeared in films such as the Carell vehicle “Dinner for Schmucks.” For his work, Wilmore has received Emmy,

Peabody, Humanitas and NAACP Image awards. Despite his many and varied talents, Wilmore takes his creative output in side-splitting stride.

“I think most writers are masochists in some ways,” he told *The New York Times* in 2007.

“Most actors are sadists in many ways. So I have that sadomasochistic thing going on.”

Wednesday’s event begins with a reception at 6 p.m., with Wilmore’s performance to follow at 7. Both parts of the evening are free and open to the public. For more information, visit [www.motheatre.org](http://www.motheatre.org) or [thelarrywilmore.com](http://thelarrywilmore.com).

## Two MU Veterans Center members to receive service award

By Chris Roll

January 20, 2012 | 5:56 p.m. CST

**COLUMBIA — Two individuals will receive the U.S. Department of Defense's second-highest civilian award Monday for their efforts to establish the MU Veterans Center.**

Carol Fleisher, MU Veterans Center director, and Daniel Sewell, former Mizzou Student Veterans Association president and Student Veterans of America national vice president, were nominated by U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Ann E. Rondeau for their work with veterans on campus and in the community. They will receive the Outstanding Public Service Award, which consists of a silver medal, a miniature medal, a rosette and a citation signed by the secretary of defense.

The award ceremony is from 2 to 3 p.m. in Stotler Lounge, in Memorial Union at MU, and is open to the public.

Fleisher said the MU Veterans Center was one of the first three such centers to be formed in the U.S., and its establishment in 2008 helped to raise awareness of student veterans' needs at other universities as well.

"This is a fantastic national recognition of the work Carol and Dan, and the University, have done for veterans and service members," MU spokesperson Christian Basi said.

Speakers at the event will include Ann Korschgen, MU vice provost of enrollment management, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton and Dalton Wright, civilian aide to the secretary of the Army.

"Anyone who wants to come to the event and help recognize these individuals is welcome," Basi said.



## Elastin plays key role in supporting arteries

By Janese Silvey

Columbia Daily Tribune

Saturday, January 21, 2012

**Using advanced 3-D microscopic imaging technology, University of Missouri researchers have identified and monitored the proteins involved in the stiffening of human arteries.**

The findings eventually could help physicians treat complications associated with cardiovascular disease, which often set in when arteries stiffen as people age.

Most scientific knowledge about how blood vessels are put together is based on older techniques that only measured the amount of protein in the artery wall — not how the proteins were arranged to support functions, said Gerald Meininger, director of the MU Dalton Cardiovascular Research Center and a professor of medical pharmacology and physiology.

With imaging technology and computer-based models, researchers visualized structural elements in an intact blood vessel and found one protein, elastin, plays a key role in supporting the arterial wall, Meininger said.

With age, elastin decreases, and other proteins contribute to arterial stiffness. Figuring out how to alter elastin levels could alleviate problems associated with vascular aging, such as high blood pressure.

“Molecular biologists are trying to determine how to turn elastin production back on in the correct places, but it has proven very difficult so far,” said Michael Hill, a professor of medical pharmacology and physiology who also works in the Dalton Cardiovascular Research Center.

The study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, was published in *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology*, a journal of the American Heart Association.



## MU celebrates Chinese art and culture

By Andrew Denney

Saturday, January 21, 2012

**With the beginning of the Chinese New Year just days away, local residents were given the chance last night to ring in the Year of the Dragon with Chinese Culture and Art Night at Jesse Auditorium on the University of Missouri campus.**

At the annual event, hundreds of attendees were treated to musical performances and martial arts demonstrations by 65 performers who are students at prominent middle schools in Beijing.

Jim Scott, director of MU's International Center and assistant vice provost for international initiatives at MU, said bringing the students from China to perform is a break from past years in which the event had been called "China Night" and generally featured performers from the university.

Scott said as China's economy and influence grow, it has become increasingly important for Americans to learn more about Chinese culture. "I think it is enriching to our community life to learn about Chinese culture," said Scott, who was in attendance at the event.

He added: "After all, they are a sixth of our world's population."

The event started with a bang, as the first performance of the night was a martial arts demonstration from four Chinese middle school students.

They wowed attendees with jumps, handstands and displays of swordsmanship.

Troy Hogg, principal at Benton Elementary School, attended the event with his wife, Sanae, who is of Japanese descent, and their sons Takashi, 9, and Taichi, 7.

Troy Hogg said he and his wife try to keep the boys connected to Asian culture, and the event is one of the few offerings featured in Columbia to help them do so.

"There's not much else out there, other than restaurants," Hogg said.

Takashi and Taichi said their parents have taken them to Japan before, and Takashi said he enjoyed the exposure to a world that was different from the one he knows in Columbia.

"I like to go to other places and explore new things in those places," Takashi said.

Lifang Wen, who is from China and is a student at MU, said she attended yesterday's event as a way to commemorate the Chinese New Year, which begins Monday and is celebrated for 15 days.

"I wanted to celebrate the Chinese New Year in a special way in America," Wen said.