Cigarettes, Internet can help fill gap

Higher ed needs money; revenue lid bill is a loser.

By MARY STILL

Sunday, January 29, 2012

Lathrop & Gage, one of the state’s largest corporate law firms, recently provided several area legislators an important opportunity to discuss their opposition to the proposed funding cuts to the University of Missouri. Though I was not invited to the event, I, too, oppose the cuts and have some proposals to add to the discussion.

I urge all area legislators who care about the University of Missouri and all university leaders to join in support of legislation I will be filing to raise the cigarette tax. This proposal would add about $396 million to the state’s budget for education and would go to a vote of the people for ratification because of our state’s strict Hancock law. Missouri has the lowest cigarette taxes in the country, the fourth-highest rate of lung cancer and more pregnant women who smoke than any other state. Research indicates a higher tax on cigarettes reduces the number of teenagers who start this deadly habit. And my proposal would bring our rate closer to the tax rates of surrounding states but still well below the national average. I urge MU leaders to speak up on this issue for the sake of the university and the health of our citizens.

I have also filed legislation to join with surrounding states in a compact that will allow us to collect taxes on Internet purchases. Simply by joining the compact, we can raise an estimated $20 million annually, and that amount will continue to grow. The revenue can be earmarked for education. I call this the Main Street Protection Act because it will have the added benefit of protecting local businesses that are currently at a 6 percent to 9 percent price disadvantage because of Internet competition. These are our neighbors who do so much to support our community, and they deserve this protection.

I urge all area legislators to reject the newest shortsighted Hancock-like proposal, which would place an additional lid on the state’s ability to raise revenue in the future. The Hancock lid already works to restrict state government growth, but this new effort will serve as a lid with handcuffs — further hampering the state from making proper investments in education. I spoke against this bill on the House floor, and I am proud Rep. Stephen Webber and every other Democrat in the House, except Rep. Chris Kelly, joined with me in rejecting this proposal.
Sadly, that was not enough to stop the measure. If the Senate approves, Missouri voters will decide whether the new spending lid becomes law.

I call on MU leaders, faculty, staff and the Flagship Council to discuss the implications of this restrictive legislation with their peers at the University of Colorado and learn about the challenges they faced after the adoption of a similar measure. In fact, in Colorado, where the measure was known as TABOR, the business community, including the Denver Chamber of Commerce and others, worked to sunset the measure because of the negative ramifications on business. After the failed experiment in Colorado, no other state has passed similar legislation.

Finally, Missouri has some of the lowest corporate taxes in the country. Last year, Sen. Kurt Schaefer placed ideology over reality and voted to eliminate the franchise tax for the state’s largest corporations, an action that will reduce our state budget by an additional $80 million. We can’t have it both ways. We can’t vote to cut revenue and then complain about cuts to higher education. I call on all area legislators to stop complaining and take action and support MU by adopting these eminently reasonable revenue measures.
The Tribune’s View

UM tuition

A rock and a hard place

By Henry J. Waters III

Columbia Daily Tribune

Sunday, January 29, 2012

Whom shall we blame for the tough choice facing University of Missouri curators?

The governor, for not recommending more state funding in the coming budget? The curators, for threatening to charge a higher tuition than the system of higher education oversight seems to allow? The gods of economics, for not providing enough economic activity in the state to generate higher tax revenue and more state support?

Last year Gov. Jay Nixon punished institutions that raised tuition above cost-of-living guidelines by withholding a commensurate amount from their state appropriations. This year the governor hints he might do the same thing. What the legislature does in the meantime seems moot. In a year when revenue almost certainly will fall short of aggregate appropriations requests, the governor will probably have to withhold money from here and there to balance the budget. Higher education is a prime target for such adjustment.

So, my unpaid and unauthorized advice to curators is to hold tuition hikes carefully to the cost-of-living index, putting the governor on his word not to withhold additional funding.

Several reasons: This tactic presumably will produce as much revenue from tuition and state appropriations; it will avoid a fight with the governor; and it will keep tuition rates lower, a good thing for obvious reasons.

At the end of the day, the university will have the same revenue, and the mix of state funding to tuition will keep the state in the game more fully, if only marginally.

Meanwhile, regardless of this mix, university officials must look hard at operations, finding ways to provide internal budget relief through operational savings and enhanced “earned” income. It’s not pleasant, but it’s not complicated.
DEAR READER: No passing grade for MU budget

By Tom Warhover
January 28, 2012 | 4:37 p.m. CST

Dear Reader,

What would your response be if I told you a local company was pulling $21 million out of the Columbia economy?

What would you say if you knew the corporate CEO said there would be an undisclosed number of job cuts there as a result?

Columbia is a company town, and that company is higher education.

*So when the governor pledges a $50 million cut in state appropriations for the University of Missouri System's budget, we all should take note.*

*The letters emanating from the UM System president and the MU chancellor are dire. They make compelling arguments for the value of higher ed. But after more than a decade of declining support from the state, the points sound all too familiar, at least to a General Assembly that finds higher ed a favorite punching bag.*

The letters sent to faculty, staff and students from interim UM President Steve Owens and Chancellor Brady Deaton are polite. If I translated to the simplest terms, though, the message might be this:

Higher ed over the past decade has been successful — MU has increased enrollment by 52 percent, raised a billion dollars and held its own in various academic rankings, says Deaton, while state funding has dropped by $27 million since the '01 fiscal year. But you can only stretch so far, and this time “doing more with less” hurts everyone in the state. Huh?

The economic fate of the biggest employer in town is a difficult story to tell when your window looks out at Jesse Hall. The trouble is one of distance more than allegiance.
The Missourian resides at a university address. It receives funding from the U. The paychecks of the editor-professors here say University of Missouri on them. That graduation certificate on the wall at my house bears the university seal, and as do those of my wife.

Am I biased then? You bet. If I didn’t believe in the value of higher education, I wouldn’t be here. I’m grateful to have one of the best jobs I could ever imagine.

So how well has the Missourian covered the state appropriations issue over the years?

My hypothesis: Your newspaper has probably underreported it.

Don’t get me wrong. Each year, you’ve read a good bit as the political process wends its way through the state Capitol. You’ve heard the pronouncements from the governor’s office. You’ve watched as the curators try to figure out just how much they might raise tuition without invoking the wrath of Jefferson City.

Rinse and repeat.

But the Missourian could do more.

Part of the reason is in trying to correct for those affiliations — those biases — toward the university. Another reason: Editors ask their student staffs to turn outward. They want this next generation of journalists to connect to the larger community that is Columbia, not the insulated university world they’ve been exposed to previously.

If my hypothesis is correct, then your newspaper needs to do more this time. Not as cheerleader for MU, but as involved community member in College Town, Mo. Your ideas and opinion can help.

Thanks for listening.

Tom
College presidents wary of Obama tuition plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fuzzy math. Illinois State University’s president called it. “Political theater of the worst sort,” said the University of Washington’s leader.

President Barack Obama’s new plan to force colleges and universities to contain tuition or face losing federal dollars is raising alarm among education leaders who worry about the threat of government overreach. Particularly sharp words came from the presidents of public universities; they’re already frustrated by increasing state budget cuts.

The reality, said Illinois State’s Al Bowman, is that simple changes cannot easily overcome deficits at many public schools. He said he was happy to hear Obama, in a speech Friday at the University of Michigan, urge state-level support of public universities. However, given the decreases in state aid, tying federal support to tuition prices is a product of fuzzy math, Bowman said.

Illinois has lowered public support for higher education by about one-third over the past decade when adjusted for inflation. Illinois State, with 21,000 students, has raised tuition almost 47 percent since 2007, from $6,150 a year for an in-state undergraduate student to $9,030.

“Most people, including the president, assume if universities were simply more efficient they would be able to operate with much smaller state subsidies, and I believe there are certainly efficiency gains that can be realized,” Bowman said. “But they pale in comparison to the loss in state support.”

At Washington, President Mike Young said Obama showed he did not understand how the budgets of public universities work. Young said the total cost to educate college students in his state, which is paid for by both tuition and state government dollars, has gone down because of efficiencies on campus.
While universities are tightening costs, the state is cutting their subsidies and authorizing tuition increases to make up for the loss. "They really should know better," Young said. "This really is political theater of the worst sort."

Obama's plan would need approval by Congress, a hard sell in an atmosphere of partisan gridlock.

In his State of the Union address Tuesday, Obama described meeting with university presidents who explained how some schools curtailed costs through technology and redesigning courses to help students finish more quickly. He said more schools need to take such steps.

Obama said at Michigan that higher education has become an imperative for success in America, but the cost has grown unrealistic for too many families and the debt burden unbearable.

"We are putting colleges on notice," Obama told a crowd of students. "You can't assume that you'll just jack up tuition every single year. If you can't stop tuition from going up, then the funding you get from taxpayers each year will go down."

The response to Obama's plan wasn't all negative. Many university presidents said they welcome a conversation about making college more affordable and efficient.

In Missouri, where Gov. Jay Nixon has proposed a 12.5 percent funding cut for higher education in the coming fiscal year, Obama's proposal could put even more pressure on public colleges and universities to limit tuition increases. By state law, schools must limit such increases to the annual inflation rate unless they receive permission for larger ones. Nixon has warned schools that he doesn't want to see a tuition increase of more than 3 percent, the latest Consumer Price Index increase.

"The president's message isn't inconsistent with the agenda that we've been pursuing here in Missouri," said Paul Wagner, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Higher Education. "It's good to see him put the focus on the same things."
Legislator suggests cuts to state administration

By Janese Silvey

Friday, January 27, 2012

A local lawmaker is using Gov. Jay Nixon’s instructions to universities to instead devise a plan that would soften the cut to higher education funding next year.

State Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, wants to reallocate money from the state’s Office of Administration budget to partially plug an expected 12.5 percent cut to universities. After all, Kelly told a group of University of Missouri supporters last night, Nixon advised colleges to cut administrative overhead, so state agencies should do so, too.

“To cut a lot of money out of the Office of Administration would be really harmful to the state of Missouri … as if a cut to the University of Missouri is not,” he said.

Kelly joined other local lawmakers last night for the Mizzou Alumni Association’s 10th annual legislative forum at Harpo’s, 29 S. Tenth St. The forums began in response to a cut in state funding to higher education.

“If you were upset in 2003 about a 10 percent cut, you should be livid about what’s happening now,” Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said.

Kelly said he is in the early stages of looking at the OA budget and stressed that cuts would not be made flippanly. But, he said, “that’s where the money is.”

The OA’s budget this year is roughly $246.4 million, of which $116 million comes from general revenue. Nixon is recommending $242.8 million for the office next year, which would use $112.5 million from general revenue.

The office has had deeper cuts over the past decade, said Linda Luebbering, budget director. “There simply isn’t, from our perspective, more money to get from that source,” she said.

“We’ve done it. If you go back a couple of years, we’re consistently reducing administrative expenses every year.”

The OA has divisions responsible for state accounting, payroll, human resources, information technology and budgeting.
Nixon’s recommendation to cut funding to higher education “is not something we made because we wanted to,” Luebbering said. “We simply don’t have the revenue right now. If we do see an increase in revenue from some source, certainly” higher education “would be the governor’s recommendation for where to put that money.”

That revenue could come from an increase in cigarette taxes, Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, said. “There’s no redeeming value in having the lowest cigarette tax in this country,” she said, referring to Missouri’s 17-cent-per-pack tax.

UM Curator Warren Erdman is leading efforts to get voters to approve a 73-cent tobacco tax hike. Ballot language for the proposal has been approved, but supporters still need to collect about 100,000 signatures to get it on the ballot.

Kelly suggested the Mizzou Alumni Association help in those efforts and encouraged members to sign the petition and donate money to the campaign. “We’ve got to help,” he said.
MU students join funding fight

By Janese Silvey

Friday, January 27, 2012

If fans and supporters don’t want to see state funding to the University of Missouri cut again this year, Tigers are going to have to roar.

That’s a battle cry lawmakers and students sent out this week — and a change from previous years when Gov. Jay Nixon was cutting and withholding money to colleges without much pushback.

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, told a group of Mizzou Alumni Association members last night that the latest cut is happening, in part, because there wasn’t uproar over previous cuts, making higher education a politically safer target.

“Somebody needs to be a squeaky wheel,” Schaefer said. “That’s what you can do, and that’s when it matters.”

Nixon is proposing a 12.5 percent cut to what universities received this year. Compared to the budget lawmakers approved last year before Nixon withheld additional funds, though, it’s more like a 15 percent cut, Schaefer said.

If the proposed budget is approved, the UM System is facing a $50 million gap. That would mean lost jobs, less research, cuts to state services and top faculty members finding better-paying employment elsewhere, UM administrators warned in a letter sent to employees yesterday.

Local lawmakers urged MU supporters to write letters and call Nixon’s office to oppose the cut.

“We have to be lions because the lambs are going to get eaten,” Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia, said. “And we’re on the menu this year.”

Students also are getting in on the fight. The Missouri Students Association launched an online petition that had more than 130 signatures this morning.

“We’re coming loud this time,” MSA President Xavier Billingsley said.
It’s somewhat unusual for MSA, which represents MU’s student body, to get involved in state politics. Typically, that job is left to the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, a student lobbying group that represents all four campuses.

Billingsley is trying to get student council groups at the other campuses involved, too. Nixon “will have to hear our voices when it is coming from four different universities,” he said.

MSA also is encouraging students to write letters to their hometown legislators explaining why state funding to the university should be preserved. A sample letter online outlines the university’s funding history, pointing out that the system is operating with less state funding than it received in 2001 while educating 17,000 more students.

The association is calling its campaign “more for less,” and it’s using Twitter to spread the word that students will be paying more for less if tuition increases and state cuts force campuses to reduce services.

The UM Board of Curators is meeting next week to determine tuition rates for next year. Nixon has warned universities to keep tuition capped at the rate of inflation, or 3 percent. It would take an 8 percent tuition increase to balance the MU budget if Nixon’s budget is approved, Budget Director Tim Rooney said this week.

But raising tuition beyond inflation could be risky for the university. Last year, Nixon withheld additional funding from the UM System because curators raised tuition higher than he wanted.

“Nobody wants to see tuition increase,” Schaefer said, but Nixon’s “punitive response was more insulting than the cut itself.”

Asked what advice he would give curators when they set tuition, Billingsley declined to talk numbers, saying the board should try to reason with Nixon before setting rates.

“First,” he said, “fight.”
Areas with most smoking-related illness have most exemptions to smoking ban

By Robert Joiner, Beacon health reporter
Posted 10:23 am Fri., 1.27.12

Many establishments that are exempted from St. Louis County's public-smoking ban are in areas with the highest incidences of smoking-related illnesses, according to an analysis by Tobacco-Free St. Louis. It also argues that the exemptions could undo the health benefits of the Clean Air Act and that they are unfair to the majority of county establishments that have banned smoking.

According to the group, 56 of the exempted establishments are in north county. Another 41 are in south county. 29 are in west county and the remaining 20 are in the mid-county region, including the smoke-free communities of Clayton, Brentwood and Kirkwood.

Dr. Stuart Slavin (right), a member of Tobacco-Free St. Louis, stressed that the group isn't arguing that illnesses related to smoking would vanish without the exemptions.

"But what's striking to me is that if you look at illnesses that may be smoking related, whether it is heart attacks or hospitalization for chronic lung diseases, you will find significantly greater risks and rates in north county," Slavin said.

He also said that many residents of north county may lack adequate access to health care and "can least afford to suffer from these problems."

He added, "We aren't saying this is the cause of health disparity. But it certainly is one that's contributing, and it's easy to fix. It simply requires an act of the County Council, and these exemptions would disappear."

No council members were available to comment on the analysis, which shows that the 56 exemptions are in districts represented by Democrats Hazel Erby of University City, Kathleen Kelly of Overland, and Council Chair Michael O'Mara of Florissant. Kelly and O'Mara have raised questions over the years about the ban.
to get an exemption

The “Indoor Clean Air Code” allows smoking in drinking establishments with a valid liquor license that have applied for and met the qualifications for exemption.

St. Louis County Ordinance 605.030 defines the term “Drinking Establishment” as follows:

Any business with a valid license issued by the St. Louis County Department of Revenue (pursuant to Chapter 801, Title VIII St.CRO 1974 as amended, "Alcoholic Beverages") to sell intoxicating liquor by the drink or to sell beer and light wine by the drink whose on-site sales of food for consumption on the premises comprises no more than 25% of gross sales of food and both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages on an annual basis

--St. Louis County Department of Revenue

In any case, Slavin says ending the exemptions would level the playing field by "making all the casinos, bars and restaurants smoke-free so that everybody is playing by the same rules."

In addition, he says, the Clean Air Act would do much to protect residents in St. Louis and St. Louis County while the exemptions undermine the benefits.

"These exemptions allow people who work in these bars and casinos to continue to be exposed to what we know is a dangerous substance: second-hand smoke. We feel that that should not be allowed to continue," Slavin says.

Appearing with Slavin at a press conference to discuss the group's analysis were Rance Thomas, president of North County Churches United for Racial Harmony and Justice; Buffy McKinney of the American Heart Association; and Derek Deaver, owner of Three Kings Public House, the site of the press conference.

Those who support a right to smoke continue to say that bans ignore individual freedom and should be modified to account for filtration and other systems they say can address health issues.

Missouri's low cigarette tax

The group's opposition follows the American Lung Association's criticism of Missouri's smoking-related policies. The group gave the state grades of F for its low cigarette taxes, weak smoke-free laws, and relatively low local spending on tobacco cessation and tobacco prevention.

The Lung Association criticized Missouri's cigarette tax of 17 cents a pack, the nation's lowest. Another critic of that tax is Linda Lair, director of clinical education at the University of Missouri-Columbia's school of health professions.

"If we could increase the tax rates (for tobacco), we could generate money for education and prevention as well as smoking cessation programs," Lair says. The Lung Association's report says the state spends less than $60,000 a year on tobacco cessation and prevention in spite of the
$4.7 billion in economic costs due to smoking every year.

State spending is low, but others are funding anti-smoking campaigns. The Missouri Foundation for Health funds projects across the state, and some regions are receiving federal dollars. An example is the roughly $6 million going to the Communities Putting Prevention to Work in St. Louis County, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Patricia Washington, media coordinator of the county's program, noted that some of the smoking cessation projects are in the three districts mentioned by Tobacco Free St. Louis "because of the higher smoking rates."

She says Communities Putting Prevention to Work's projects included:

- Policy changes to discourage tobacco use in schools, countywide, and particularly among students, faculty and others in Ferguson-Florissant, Hazelwood, Riverview Gardens, Jennings and Pattonville school districts.
- Free smoking cessation programs, which might normally cost $300 a person, in companies in north county and south county.
- Sharing information and resources to help people understand the risk of tobacco use and to prevent youth from using tobacco.
- Working with local retailers in high risk school districts and neighborhoods to focus more attention on tobacco use among the young. The campaign is being taken to retailers situated within 1,000 feet of schools in high-risk districts in north county and south county.
Missouri senator calls for legislative session to end earlier to save money

Monday, January 30, 2012
By WES DUPLANTIER ~ The Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- Missouri lawmakers scrounging for ways to save money in a tight budget may have hit upon a personal solution -- work less.

The state Legislature could save more than $400,000 annually by shaving several weeks off its session, according to a financial estimate for a proposed constitutional amendment that could be debated in the Senate as soon as this week.

The proposal would shorten the length of Missouri's annual legislative session by ending it in late March instead of mid-May, beginning in 2015. The plan was endorsed last week by a Senate committee. If approved by the full Senate and House, it would appear before voters on the November ballot.

The financial estimate, prepared by legislative staff, based the projected savings on reduced per diem and mileage expenses for lawmakers and a lower cost for the extra employees needed to staff the House and Senate when the chambers are in session. Neither the legislation nor the fiscal estimate mentions anything about changing legislative salaries, which are about $36,000 annually per lawmaker.

Although he acknowledges a potential savings, sponsoring Sen. John Lamping, R-St. Louis County, said that costs aren't his motivating factor behind the proposal. Instead, Lamping said, a shorter session would encourage lawmakers to be more efficient when they are meeting.

He said they could draft more of their bills in the Legislature's off-season. That could ease the burden on legislative staff, who often work late into the night in the session's final week as lawmakers scramble to craft last-minute compromises.

Data provided by Lamping's office shows that the length of state legislative sessions varies considerably between states. Lamping said the pending legislation would shorten Missouri's session from about 73 legislative days to about 48.
Lamping said he thinks the Legislature would be able to complete its work of passing laws and crafting a state budget, even on a shorter time frame.

"I think if they understood that they have 48 days, they'd be more prepared when we get here," he said. "You play to whatever the rules are."

This would not be the first time that Missouri has changed the length of its legislative session. Lawmakers used to meet in regular session only every other year, until voters amended the constitution in 1970 to have annual sessions -- ending on June 15 in odd-numbered years and April 30 in even-numbered years. Voters amended the constitution again in 1988, requiring lawmakers to end their work each year on the first Friday following the second Monday in May -- the deadline that remains in effect today.

Marvin Overby, a political science professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, said it's difficult to predict whether a shorter session would make the legislature more productive. That's because legislators do more than just make laws. They also debate ideas that may become bills in the future and keep an eye on the rest of the state's government.

Having lawmakers in session for less time might make it harder for them to oversee the executive branch, which operates on a full-time, year-round basis, Overby said. And lawmakers might not be able to do as much "fire-alarm oversight," responding to complaints about state government as constituents bring them up.

"Part of representation is having someone to (complain) to," Overby said. "You want to have legislators who are on the job so that they can handle issues that constituents have."

The current measure is similar to a 2010 proposal by Sen. Luann Ridgeway, R-Smithville. That measure also gained committee endorsement but stalled in the full Senate.

Lamping, a first-term senator, said Senate leaders had voiced some support for his bill. He predicted that voters would "overwhelmingly" support it if it were on the November ballot.

Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer said Lamping's proposal could come up for debate during the current session, but he also said shortening the session could mean that fewer laws get passed, even if there is a two-year adjustment period.

"In the past we've had shorter sessions," said Mayer, R-Dexter. "A lot of things have changed in that time, not only in the government but also in society."

George Connor, head of the political science department at Missouri State University, agreed that it might appeal to voters in the state who feel government should do less.

"Missouri is already a part-time legislature, and making it more part-time is going to have an appeal for the small-government culture," Connor said.
But because much of legislative work gets done in the session's final week, shortening the time lawmakers have could increase the chance that a special session is needed, which might end up actually increasing what the Legislature ultimately costs taxpayers, Connor said.
The Tribune's View
City buses
Are we making progress?

By Henry J. Waters III

Saturday, January 28, 2012

Having heard from number crunchers at City Hall, Mayor Bob McDavid made a move to solve the primary budget gap plaguing the city bus system. He proposed a substantial increase in the amount University of Missouri students pay for service.

Not surprisingly, his idea received substantial pushback, partly because students and administrators thought the mayor had been a bit pushy.

McDavid does tend to go for solutions with a good deal of energy, a welcome exemplar of leadership, but when he marched into campustowne’s Russia, he got bogged down. His time and university time are not synchronized, but actually progress is being made.

By university time, MU is moving quickly. It has commissioned a study by a consultant familiar with college town transportation issues who will begin work Feb. 7 and promises a reasonable process. If work ticks along as promised, the university can develop its thinking within a reasonable time and the parties can negotiate reasonably toward a reasonable plan. Obviously, the root word here is “reasonable.”

McDavid did try to move quickly for the constituency he sought to influence, but if City Hall had not pushed the issue, Jesse Hall would have had no incentive to do anything. You can’t blame Jesse for liking the status quo, but the city has good reason for wanting change.

McDavid agrees with the university study, but he and MU guru of administrative affairs Jackie Jones remained at slight odds. The mayor said the university regarded his initiative “from their own perspective.” Jones hinted if the city canceled bus routes on campus, she has enough parking space to handle an increase in auto traffic.

This minor standoff should not obscure the basic interest both parties have in reaching accommodation.

Subsidies for the bus system are reasonable from both sides. Students should pay more, but local taxpayers have good reason to help underwrite the system and keep a new barrage of student cars
away from off-campus streets and parking spaces. These days, the basic relationship between town and gown is excellent. McDavid and Jones personally get along fine. It makes no sense to see the south-side bus service go poof.

The consultant will notice that in Columbia, students pay less than elsewhere and less than necessary to support service. Jones & Co. should provide more revenue, but just how to go about this is not an easy dunk. Give her time to navigate.

The city already promises to keep buses running until semester’s end in May. By that time the issue should be clarified if not finally resolved.
Infants understand more than thought

By Janese Silvey
Saturday, January 28, 2012

Infants have a better understanding of physics than they let on, a University of Missouri researcher has found.

Kristy vanMarle is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences who reviewed scientific literature from the past 30 years to look for trends in infant studies.

She, along with a researcher from Northwestern University, found that infants as young as 2 months—the earliest age they can be tested—intuitively understand that hidden objects still exist and that unsupported objects will fall. By 5 months, infants also understand substances such as sand or water are not solid, scientific testing shows.

“We believe that infants are born with expectations about the objects around them, even though that knowledge is a skill that’s never been taught,” vanMarle said in a statement. “As the child develops, this knowledge is refined and eventually leads to the abilities we use as adults.”

Adults use intuitive physics all the time without realizing it, she said. For instance, if a glass of milk falls off a table, a person will try to catch the cup but not the liquid spilling out. That person is reacting rather than consciously thinking about what to do.

“We believe infants have the same ability to form expectations, predicting the behavior of objects and substances with which they interact,” she said.

Despite that early knowledge, there is not much parents can do to advance their child’s skills at the infant stage, even though videos are marketed as being able to improve math or language skills, vanMarle said.

“Natural interaction with the child, such as talking to him or her, playing peek-a-boo and allowing him or her to handle safe objects, is the best method for child development,” she said. “Natural interaction with the parent and objects in the world gives the child all the input that evolution has prepared the child to seek, accept and use to develop intuitive physics.”

The study was published in the January issue of WIREs Cognitive Science.
MU students could get library improvements with proposed fee increase

By Ryan Finan
January 30, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The Missouri Student Association is considering a proposal for a student library fee at MU. The fee would provide benefits for students that they have shown interest in.

Jim Cogswell, MU libraries director, said the fees from this proposal would go toward accommodating three main wants of students: a section of the library that is open 24 hours, more study space and expanded book collections.

"The idea of an additional library fee needs to be considered," Cogswell said. "I want to meet these needs, but it is getting more and more difficult to do with our current budget."

Ellis Library used to close at midnight. Currently, it is open until 2 a.m., but when that change was made, the library didn’t receive any extra funding. It costs around $25,000 per year for Ellis Library to maintain these hours. Opening up the other branches of the MU Library system until 2 a.m. would bring that cost up to $35,000, Cogswell said.

The fees from the proposal would cover this cost and allow for expansions in the other areas the library is focusing on. Without these fees, Cogswell said he is not sure how much longer the library can keep the current hours.

If a new 24-hour section for the library were created, it would only be a small section of Ellis Library. Building an addition is not an option, but renovations and construction would be required to develop the new area.

In order to achieve the level of improvement the library hopes for, Cogswell said it would need to collect more than $100,000 per year, although that is a rough estimate until the proposal is completed. Each of the three goals would require a different amount of funding.
In comparison to the library's total annual budget of $13.9 million, this is not a large sum of money. It would cost about $3 a student to reach this goal, Ben Levin, academic affairs chairman at MU, said.

Cogswell and Levin will discuss and decide on the contents of the proposal this week. The library is scheduled to present the finished proposal to the MSA Senate's Academic Affairs committee on Feb. 20.

The library has discussed student fees with MSA for the past five years. The last time the fees were considered an option because of budget constraints was in 2009, Cogswell said.

There is some debate as to whether students will support the implementation of a fee, Levin said.

"MSA have conducted polls in the past that show skepticism towards a library fee," he said. "But I imagine that things like 24-hour access and 'for pleasure' books will draw student support."

"A lot of students have been wanting to see more from the library, a place to stay 24 hours," MSA President Xavier Billingsley said. "There are a lot of periodicals right now. Students want to see more books in general."
COLUMBIA -- A new University of Missouri research park in south Columbia is struggling to find tenants.

The Columbia Missourian reports that an addition to the university’s Discovery Ridge Research Park is on hold until at least half of the space is leased at the proposed 80,000-square-foot lab. The project was announced seven months ago by a Kansas City developer.

The university system’s research park manager says the economic downturn is to blame.

The research park is now home to ABC Labs as well as an animal research company.
Firm completes work on MU power plant

Saturday, January 28, 2012

Kaiser Electric of Fenton has completed the first phase of a $4 million project to upgrade the power plant at the University of Missouri.

The project includes construction of a new truck-unloading facility, five storage silos and a conveyor system as well as replacement of an existing coal boiler with an environmentally friendly biomass unit, according to a news release from the company.

Kaiser Electric is providing all of the electrical, lighting, control and instrumentation wiring on the project.

MU’s power plant supplies energy and heating and cooling for buildings totaling more than 13 million square feet, including three hospitals, a research reactor and several research facilities.

The general contractor on the project is McCarthy Construction of St. Louis. Sega Engineering and Technical Services of Overland Park, Kan., is the project engineer.
MU performance project shares stories of domestic violence

By Bari Bates
January 30, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA – Emily Rollie sits in back of Starbucks on Ninth Street, a pile of books beside her.

“Look around,” she instructs.

Three women are near the front window. Three are standing in line. Four are talking around a table in the middle of the shop. Two more are walking into the store.

Rollie throws out a statistic from the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence: One in four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.

Statistically, then, at least three women in the coffeehouse that day could encounter domestic violence during their lifetimes, if they haven’t already.

But it isn’t about statistics. Statistics don’t reveal any stories about domestic violence — the fear and feeling of powerlessness, the loss of self-esteem and confidence, the anxiety, or even the depression.

But Emily Rollie and a group of fellow volunteers do.

They are part of MU’s Troubling Violence Performance Project, a troupe of actors who share stories about domestic and sexual violence with Columbia audiences and prompt discussion afterward.

In so many cases, Rollie said, these subjects are taboo. There may be embarrassment or shame on the part of victims, fear that an abuser might retaliate, or a sense that others are uncomfortable talking about it.

Members of the Troubling Violence Performance Project not only bring up these issues, but they encourage the conversation.
During the performance, narratives are told in first person, and all of them are true. Nothing is fabricated or exaggerated, Rollie said. Each story is someone's actual experience.

Rollie has been at the helm of the troupe for the past four years, acting as the associate director. She leads the conversations that comprise the second half of the performance and serves as the coordinator for scheduling and performance logistics.

The troupe began at MU under the direction of Heather Carver, an associate professor in theater, and Elaine Lawless, an English professor. Lawless' book, "Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative," was the original cornerstone for the troupe's performances, which began in 2003.

Lawless wrote her book as an ethnography of a shelter for battered woman, and Carver adapted the stories for performance.

Originally, all of the material came from Lawless’ book, with a pool of three or four stories presented during each performance. As new members joined, they added their own stories, and gradually, the project reflected the voices of MU students and community members.

Performers can share their own experiences or choose ones that resonate with them. The point is that every narrative is "somebody's truth," Carver said.

**The performances**

Each performance begins with two chairs on stage — one for the speaker and the other as a symbolic seat for narrators of untold stories.

No lights are dimmed; no curtains rise or fall. There is no backstage area where performers can prepare.

Rollie introduces the troupe and someone from the audience rises to walk toward the chairs. Though it appears to be an audience member, it's the first performer.

One evening earlier this winter, the performer took her seat and began her story. She had been a "good girl" and attended church regularly, the all-American cheerleader.

She met a boy, and although her parents didn’t approve, she went out with him anyway. *There was initial infatuation and excitement, but then pressure for sex.*
The situation eventually turned grim. She was riding in his car one day when he twisted her arm and pushed her face against the door.

Name calling and physical abuse led to a night of violence when she was certain he would kill her. He held her face under a bathtub faucet, with the water running. She said she couldn’t breathe.

Most of the youth in the audience were sitting on the floor, and several of the girls pulled their knees to their chests. They watched with wide eyes as the performer abruptly ended the story.

"No one ever talked about it," the speaker said and walked back into the audience.

The mood in the room had changed. It became still, more serious. Another performer, Jordan Talbott, calls it "reflective silence."

"People are thinking, 'Wow, it could really be the person sitting next to me.'"

Courtney Bandeko, an MU senior and troupe member since her freshman year, said it’s an interesting experience to return to the audience.

"They sit up a little straighter because it’s right next to them," she said.

The next performer that evening talked about witnessing his father’s abuse of his mother as a child. One night, he saw him throw plates at his mother in a fit of anger.

He thought it happened in everyone’s house. He wondered if he would repeat the cycle of violence.

"Someday, I worry that it will be me throwing plates."

The next performer had suffered abuse from her family — her parents and then her sister. Her voice quaked as she remembered being afraid of the people who were supposed to care for her.

The final performer shook visibly as she walked toward the stage. She steadied herself by placing her hand on the back of the chair and faced away from the audience.

She took a deep breath. This was only her second time sharing this particular narrative. It was her own, but the audience had no way of knowing this.
She turned toward the audience and began talking about her ex-boyfriend, how much time they spent together, and how it became too much time together.

Eventually she felt isolated and cut off from her previous life. The boyfriend began overwhelming her with suspicions about what she was doing, and the emotional abuse escalated.

The performer paused to take a breath, then continued.

"I said 'no' to something big that happened anyway," she said, and left the audience to surmise the rest of the story.

"I want to make sure that people understand that even though I was never slapped around or beaten up, sometimes emotional control is just as bad," she said.

'What did you hear?'

After the performances, Rollie stands in front of the audience and asks, "So, what did you hear?"

Reactions vary, depending on the audience where the troupe is performing.

"We sit until someone says something," Rollie explained.

When the audience processes the performances, there is always the possibility that some might reject or misunderstand the point, she said.

"To some people it seems really simple: He hit you, why don't you just leave? But it's more complicated," she said.

During the performance, it's often apparent to the performers which stories resonate most with audience members, Bandeko said.

"You can see it in their eyes, and you can see that it hasn't been talked about around them." she said. "These are the people who need it."

Rollie and her troupe gather to debrief after every performance and make sure that everyone is all right. Talking about intense issues can take a mental toll, Rollie said, but knowing the work can be inspiring keeps it from becoming overwhelming.
Even after the discussion ends, audience members will approach members of the troupe, sometimes to thank them, sometimes to share their own experiences.

"We had a woman burst into tears because it had hit her so hard," Rollie said. "And we've had kids in middle school come up to us and say, 'This is happening to me.'"

For some, it's about saying something out loud and having the courage to admit that it happened, Talbott said.

"And sometimes that's enough for people," she said.

The troupe travels with a counselor who can offer professional help when needed.

Lately, the troupe has been working with Teen Relationship Education and Empowerment. It provides faith-based groups with "resources to educate and empower youth for nonviolent, healthy relationships," according to its website.

The coordinator, Kim Gage Ryan, often fills the role of counselor for performances, after serving as a congregational pastor for 25 years.

In the end, the possibility that people can acknowledge that these issues exist in the community motivates the troupe.

"They want to challenge what society is telling you," Carver said.

"It's not, 'You make your bed and you have to lie in it' — you can get away. It's not easy, and no one here is going to say that it was easy, but you can do it."
Missouri first responders attend Electric Vehicle Safety Training

By Jon McClure
January 28, 2012 | 6:58 p.m. CST

A Chevy Volt sits outside of the MU Student Center during the electric vehicle safety training session held by the National Fire Protection Association on Saturday. The training consisted of classroom presentations as well as a hands-on portion where firefighters could interact with the Chevy Volt and a Toyota Prius.

COLUMBIA — Hybrid and electric car owners enjoy high mileage rates and reduced carbon emissions, but the vehicles pose a problem for firefighters at accident scenes.

It's a different process to put out a fire on the newer vehicles, where emergency personnel must deal with electric charges instead of gasoline or diesel.

Fifty-seven representatives of nearly 50 local fire departments and first-response units met Saturday in the MU Student Center to attend an Electric Vehicle Safety Training project presented by the National Fire Protection Association and the MU Fire and Rescue Training Institute.

The course was designed to give representatives training and safety information that they could use to teach local staff about how to correctly respond to traffic accidents involving electric and hybrid cars.
In conjunction with the courses, which are scheduled to be conducted in all 50 states within the next year, the MU Fire and Rescue Training Institute is developing electric and hybrid vehicle training materials for national distribution. These materials, called Electric Field Guides, are being compiled with the help of the MU College of Engineering Electric Car Club.

The guides were designed to be used by first responders at the scene of accidents. They will contain easy-to-reference information on how to identify an electric or hybrid vehicle, as well as technical information on how to properly disable the high voltage circuit, which could pose a danger to first responders and accident victims.

Assistant Director Kevin Zumwalt of the Fire and Rescue Training Institute said the goal is to produce the field guides in three formats: print, which will be published nationally; electronic, which can be accessed by mobile data terminals on fire engines; and as downloadable PDF files online.

The courses being conducted nationally were funded by a $4.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy.

As hybrid and electric cars become more commonplace, the information offered Saturday will “become a normal course of training” for fire and rescue crews, Electric Vehicle Safety Instructor, Jason Emery, said.

Saturday’s training included three essential safety steps for first responders: identifying an electric or hybrid vehicle involved in an accident, immobilizing the vehicle and disabling the high voltage circuit connected to the car’s power supply.

A Chevrolet Volt and Toyota Prius were on the site Saturday to demonstrate some of the specific design issues Missouri first responders would be encountering between different makes and models of electric cars. These differences will also be detailed in the Electric Field Guides produced by the institute.

While Emery said most of the feedback from training courses has been positive, there were a few discontented voices from firefighters at Saturday’s seminar when they were told they would not be allowed to crash the model vehicles for some real hands-on training.