Missouri system eyes tuition increases

COLUMBIA, Mo.—Faced with yet another round of likely state budget cuts, the University of Missouri system wants to increase tuition next year by 7.5 percent at its flagship Columbia campus and even more at its campuses in St. Louis and Rolla.

A proposal released Tuesday afternoon spells out proposed in-state tuition hikes of 8.2 percent at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and 9 percent at Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla. The Kansas City campus would see a 3 percent increase. Similar increases are being sought for graduate programs and non-resident undergraduates.

The proposals follow a recommended 12.5 percent cut in state funding for higher education in Gov. Jay Nixon’s proposed fiscal 2013 budget. And while that recommendation is subject to lawmaker approval, Nixon has already warned university leaders to avoid hefty boosts in tuition and instead explore administrative spending reductions.

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 over the past three years.

Under Missouri law, public institutions need state approval to increase resident undergraduate tuition beyond the inflation rate, which is roughly 3 percent. The Missouri system received such approval last year -- then watched Nixon impose spending restrictions on higher education beyond those approved by legislators, once he signed his budget into law.

University curators will discuss the proposal Thursday at the start of a two-day meeting at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, with a possible vote on Friday.

In Jefferson City, some lawmakers said the university system had little choice but to ask students and their families to pay more, given the governor's budget proposal.

"None of us want to see the tuition hikes, but can you blame them?" said Ryan Silvey, R-Kansas City, chairman of the House Budget Committee.
Nixon's budget proposal would cut $50 million from the Missouri system, including $21 million from the Columbia campus. Concern over the impact of such reductions prompted the four campus chancellors and the acting system president, Steve Owens, to send a dire letter to professors and other university employees last week outlining the possible ramifications.

"This represents a reduction that will pose significant financial challenges for our students and their families as well as our university colleagues," they wrote. "The proposed level of state support for FY2013 likely will mean additional job losses, research program reductions, the loss of faculty to competing schools, further deterioration of our facilities and cutbacks in our ability to extend our teaching, research and service to citizens across the state."

The joint letter goes on to note that many of the cost-cutting steps Nixon wants to see are already in place.

"We have reduced administrative overhead, cut travel and other expenses, deferred necessary maintenance and repairs on our facilities, and left hundreds of positions unfilled. For the past several years we also have pursued "shared services" in information technology, human resources and our finance operations to improve the cost-effectiveness of our administrative functions," the campus leaders wrote.

Columbia campus chancellor Brady Deaton followed up that Jan. 26 letter with his own direct appeal to his employees the next day. He noted that the university's state appropriations could fall to their lowest levels since 1995 if Nixon's suggested cuts hold up -- even as campus enrollment grew by more than 50 percent over that same time.

And even should the proposed tuition increase hold up, the added revenue still won't be enough to deal with the state's budget woes. Making up for the expected loss of state revenue would require an even heftier tuition hike of 11 percent, according to university officials.
Curators to consider 7.5 percent MU tuition hike

By Janese Silvey

Published January 31, 2012 at 3:49 p.m.

The University of Missouri System is requesting that curators this week approve a 7.5 percent tuition increase for MU students.

System administrators are requesting tuition and required fees on all four UM campuses increase by an average of 6.5 percent, with the Kansas City campus seeking the lowest hike of 3 percent. With required fees included, students at MU would be paying 7 percent more than this year’s costs if the board approves the funding proposal.

Curators are meeting on the UMKC campus Thursday and Friday.

The tuition proposals are based on a 12.5 percent cut in state funding Gov. Jay Nixon proposed in a budget he outlined this month. If lawmakers approve that budget, UM is facing a $50 million cut; the Columbia campus would see a $21 million decrease in state funding.

Without tuition increases at the proposed levels, the campus fears ranking will continue to fall and upcoming accreditation of programs as well as its” Association of American Universities “status could be at risk,” administrators wrote in a presentation that will go to curators. “Further complicating the issue are funding challenges associated with meeting the campus’ land grant mission. All this, combined with anticipated and realized reductions in state support, increases in operating costs such as information technology and benefits as well as increased costs in delivery of specific programs, drives their tuition and supplemental fee recommendations.”

UM would need a waiver from the state to increase undergraduate in-state tuition beyond the consumer price index, or 3 percent. Even with approval from the Department of Higher Education, raising tuition beyond inflation is risky because Nixon has warned colleges to cap increases at 3 percent. Last year, when UM curators approved tuition increases above what Nixon requested, he withheld funding from the university at the end of the legislative session.

Administrators are recommending 7.5 percent tuition increases for graduate and non-resident students, too, which do not require state approval. Several professional schools are seeking fee increases as well.
University of Missouri curators to vote on tuition increase

The University of Missouri System is requesting its Board of Curators approve tuition increases for the system’s four universities at its next meeting held Thursday and Friday in Kansas City.

According to the minutes for the scheduled meeting, proposed tuition increases include an 8.2 percent increase at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, a 7.5 percent increase at the University of Missouri-Columbia, a 3 percent increase at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and a 9 percent increase at Missouri University of Science & Technology.

The increases come in response to Gov. Jay Nixon’s State of the State address, where he proposed a 12.5 percent cut in state funding for higher education. If lawmakers approve the budget this month, the university system could face a $50 million cut.

Plans for tuition hikes have rolling out across the area. Last week, Washington University said it plans to increase undergraduate tuition by 3.8 percent, or $1,550, for the 2012-2013 academic year, to $42,500. The hike follows last year’s increase of about 3.9 percent that took undergraduate tuition above $40,000 for the first time, according to the school’s newspaper.

Also announced last week, Saint Louis University said it would increase its undergraduate tuition by 3.8 percent and increase its graduate and professional tuition by 2 percent.

The University of Missouri system would need approval from the state Department of High Education for a tuition increase beyond 3 percent.
Board of Curators to discuss tuition and fee increases this week

By Zach Murdock
January 31, 2012 | 6:40 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — To help cope with Gov. Jay Nixon’s proposed 15.1 percent cut to higher education next year, the University of Missouri System is proposing an average tuition increase of 6.5 percent to UM campuses.

The proposal is broken into individual increases at each UM school. As proposed, tuition and required fee increases for resident, undergraduate students are 7 percent for MU, 3 percent for the University of Missouri-Kansas City, 8.3 percent for the University of Missouri Science & Technology at Rolla and 7.7 percent for the University of Missouri-St. Louis — that’s an average increase of $580.

As proposed, MU would see an average tuition increase of 7.5 percent to undergraduate and graduate students, both in and out of state.

The UM System Board of Curators will discuss the proposal to increase tuition and fees at its first full board meeting of the year this Thursday and Friday at UMKC.

Required and supplemental fees are getting some attention too, and proposed course fee increases to MU schools include a 32.8 percent increase in the Trulaske College of Business, a 10.4 increase in the College of Engineering, a 15.7 percent increase in the School of Health Professions, and an 18.3 percent increase in the School of Journalism.

These increases are substantially larger than what the board originally considered.

In December, the board discussed a preliminary plan to increase tuition by 3 percent — the rate of inflation — at UMKC, UMSL and MU and a 5 percent increase at Missouri S&T to help fund need-based scholarships. The December proposal also included course fee increases similar to those being considered this week.

However, Senate Bill 389, passed by the Missouri legislature in 2007, limits how much institutions can raise tuition for in-state, undergraduate students to the rate of inflation. To
avoid fines, schools increasing tuition above inflation must request a waiver from the Missouri Department of Higher Education.

Last year, the UM System requested — and was granted — the waiver, but in July, the governor withheld an additional 1.1 percent from the system budget for raising tuition above inflation.

At a forum last week, Columbia Democrats Rep. Stephen Webber and Rep. Chris Kelly said they will try to fight the cuts to the UM System and other public colleges and universities in the General Assembly. Kelly called for cuts to the Missouri Office of Administration to help soften the blow to higher education.

At the event, state Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said there are a lot of other places in the budget from which cuts could come.

"(This budget) has been balanced on the back of K-12 and higher education. Period," Schaefer said.

Last week UM System interim president Steve Owens and the four UM Chancellors sent a letter to faculty and staff addressing the governor's proposed cuts and outlined the system's commitment to quality education. The letter highlighted the system's success despite declining state support and record system enrollment.

On Friday, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton echoed the president's facts and figures in his own letter to MU faculty, staff and students.

The Missouri Student Association and new MSA president Xavier Billingsley are urging students to speak up about the proposed higher education cuts, and the MSA website offers sample letters to students interested in writing local state representatives and senators.

In addition, the board, which normally operates with nine members, may be without two voting curators this week.

Former board chairwoman Judith Haggard stepped down Jan. 17, citing personal reasons that prevent her from fulfilling her position, but the board may also lose curator Craig Van Matre, who still needs to be officially confirmed to the board by the Missouri Senate.
Van Matre has been an on-again, off-again curator since January 2011 and if he is not confirmed by the Senate this week, or the governor again withdraws his name, Van Matre will not be a curator during Friday's votes.

The board will tackle a multitude of issues at its meetings Thursday and Friday, including a report on deferred maintenance, an update on the new retirement plan and a state of the university address by Owens, among other items.

*Columbia Missourian higher education reporters Breanna Dumbacher and Zach Murdock will be reporting from the board's meetings in Kansas City on Thursday. Follow their reporting online and on Twitter at @CoMissourian and with the hashtag #uncurators.*
Cig tax
Is it time to agree with Mary?

By Henry J. Waters III

Tuesday, January 31, 2012

For years activists have urged an increase in Missouri’s cigarette tax, currently the lowest in the nation at 17 cents per pack. In recent years an energetic proponent has been our own Mary Still, the Democratic representative from Boone County. As the horizon darkens for University of Missouri funding, Still and others raise concerns in a variety of ways. Many urge the governor and legislature to avoid harsh appropriations cuts. Some, led by Still, also look for more revenue.

In recent years as the debate over cigarette taxes has limped along, I have been a skeptic, not eager to levy taxes on a particular product willfully bought and sold by consenting adults. It seemed punitive without overriding benefit. My stalwart position reeked of libertarian freedom.

But now maybe the time has come to slither over to the other side.

As Still and others point out, our state cigarette tax has fallen so far to the bottom it makes diminishing sense to hold out against a modest hike. She suggests we can raise $396 million a year for education by increasing taxes to no more than the level in surrounding states and still keep our lug below the national average.

Her proposition might not come entirely true — estimates of revenue might be mitigated if smoking rates continue to decline, in part because of higher taxes, and tobacco tax increases surely will not show up entirely as net gains to education — but the shortage of revenue is obvious, and looking for new sources makes sense. What better than hiking the tobacco tax?

Still says research shows higher cigarette taxes discourage teenagers from starting the habit. She says we can help the university and improve the health of our citizens with a tax hike.

I suppose there’s no good contrary argument, leastwise my principled opposition to the unfairness of the cigarette tax, so I hereby shrink from the field and join Mary Still in her call for an increase in the cigarette tax. Since today’s state legislature has a DNA block against higher taxes of any kind, Still & Co. are launching an initiative campaign. A public vote is required to overcome revenue-raising limitations of the Hancock Amendment.
This debate is part of a larger discussion about how much of a role government should play in funding and managing the affairs of society and state. Those who think “the less, the better” should be happy with Missouri’s current status. Having gotten firmly into the do-little camp, we can afford to look at modest ways to increase revenue and spending without becoming a bunch of radical left-wing communists.
JEFFERSON CITY — The fate of Craig Van Matre’s seat on the University of Missouri Board of Curators depends now on the lung power of his opponents.

A constitutional deadline looms for Van Matre, whose confirmation must be approved before lawmakers break for the week Thursday. Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer refused an attempt last week by Gov. Jay Nixon to extend the clock and said yesterday he intends to debate Van Matre this week, perhaps as early as today.

The Senate Gubernatorial Appointments Committee, which held a hearing Jan. 18 on Van Matre, voted 8-1 yesterday in his favor. The lone vote against Van Matre was cast by Senate Majority Leader Tom Dempsey, who controls floor action, and other Republicans have said they will filibuster Van Matre’s nomination.

“I want somebody in that position who is going to be a leader in bringing people together,” he said.

Republican ire is focused mostly on Van Matre’s opinion writings, many of which have appeared in the Tribune. Van Matre did not return a call this morning seeking comment.

Van Matre in 2007 criticized a Republican-led attempt to overhaul Missouri’s judicial selection, alleging it was a step toward religious rule. But he also has taken up libertarian themes, criticizing efforts to enlarge government surveillance.

Exactly how Republican ire became focused on the writings is uncertain. Dempsey said he was sent a link to the article on the judiciary by Sen. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington.

Engler said today that friends in Columbia alerted him to the writings.

Van Matre was a member of the Tax Credit Review Commission, a body that in 2010 recommended several changes in state economic development law, including cutbacks in politically protected developer tax credits. Van Matre’s writings have helped sink his chances with some senators who also favor cutting or eliminating tax credits.
Van Matre also is seen as a solid vote for Nixon’s agenda for the university, which could be another cause for opposition.

Van Matre’s nomination is before the Senate for the third time. Nixon first nominated him Jan. 26, 2011, to replace Bo Fraser, who had resigned the previous December. When the Senate was closing out last year’s regular session, Nixon withdrew Van Matre’s name to avoid having it rejected via inaction.

Mayer last year was holding out for Nixon to make an appointment he favored.

After lawmakers adjourned, Nixon gave Van Matre an interim appointment. That allowed Van Matre to participate in meetings. Nixon asked the Senate to consider appointments during the special session that began in September, but he was refused.

He withdrew Van Matre again, waited for lawmakers to adjourn and again named him to the board.

Van Matre has been participating in meetings. A board meeting is scheduled this week that will discuss the impact of Nixon’s cut in UM funding for the coming year.

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, remains behind Van Matre but was unwilling to predict today that he will be confirmed.

“I don’t know how things will play out on the floor,” he said.
Professor sues MU over harm to reputation
Panels ruled in favor of Engel.

By Janese Silvey

Tuesday, January 31, 2012

Greg Engel isn’t waiting to see whether the University of Missouri ultimately clears him of wrongdoing: He thinks administrators already have damaged his reputation and career, and he wants them to pay.

Engel, an associate engineering professor, filed a lawsuit against the UM Board of Curators and several College of Engineering administrators Friday in Boone County Circuit Court. He is seeking $5 million in punitive damages from the administrators for allegedly denying him due process and breaching contractual agreements.

The lawsuit sums up Engel’s rocky relationship with his employer over the past two years, during which he has been removed as lead of a research project, accused of discrimination and kicked out of the classroom. He is the target of pending faculty irresponsibility charges aimed to get his tenure status revoked.

The college’s actions have taken a toll, the petition says, blaming administrators for causing Engel lost income, mental anguish and embarrassment.

Engel’s troubles started in early 2010 when College of Engineering administrators accused him of not fulfilling duties related to a $2 million federal earmark he had secured to conduct research on electromagnetic launchers — an accusation Engel denies.

In May 2010, engineering Dean James Thompson and Engel’s chair, Noah Manring, displaced Engel as project lead and gave the position to Annie Sobel. Sobel is an adjunct professor who works in the provost’s office and also is the wife of Rob Duncan, MU’s vice chancellor of research.

Later that year, Engel’s teaching duties were suspended after students complained he discriminated against them. Three female Chinese students accused him of racial and gender discrimination when he gave them zero grades on an assignment they allegedly plagiarized, and a fourth female student also accused him of gender discrimination when he lodged a complaint against her for disruptive behavior in class.
The lawsuit accuses Manring and associate engineering Professor Scott Kovaleski of conspiring with students to lodge those complaints in retaliation after Engel went public with concerns about losing his research status. The students have publicly denied that.

Last month, a student grievance committee cleared Engel of wrongdoing, with members unanimously voting they found no evidence of gender or racial discrimination in either case. However, the committee said Engel should have better clarified his expectations, and members recommended he write apology letters to the Chinese students. Provost Brian Foster concurred with the findings, asking Engel to also write a letter to the fourth student. Engel has since written those apology letters.

A faculty committee also cleared Engel of accusations of irresponsibility, although that process is awaiting a final decision from Chancellor Brady Deaton.

Early last year, Kovaleski and other engineering faculty filed faculty irresponsibility charges against Engel accusing him of being disrespectful to students and not being an effective teacher.

The committee — made up of non-engineering faculty — voted 4-3 this month that the evidence to support those claims wasn’t sufficiently “clear and convincing.” In their report, committee members said administrators seriously overreacted when they suspended him of teaching duties, and members recommended Engel be immediately reinstated to the classroom.

Foster is challenging the report, though, saying in a letter to Deaton that “clear and convincing” is too high a standard to put on the evidence. Instead, he calls for the use of “preponderance of evidence,” which would require decision makers to determine whether Engel’s accusers have shown their version of facts is more likely than not to be the correct version.
Suspended MU engineering professor sues for $5 million

By Jon McClure
January 31, 2012 | 9:18 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Previously suspended MU College of Engineering Associate Professor Greg Engel is suing the UM System Board of Curators and three MU faculty members for $5 million in damages.

Engel filed suit in the 13th Circuit Court for Boone County on Friday.

The suit alleges Noah Manring and Scott Kovaleski of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and James Thompson of the College of Engineering subjected Engel to “a hostile and offensive work environment, harassment, retaliation, and deprivation of his constitutionally protected interests,” according to the petition for damages.

The suit outlines how Engel’s relationship with Manring, Kovaleski and Thompson became fractious after he was removed as head of a project to research electromagnetic launchers, or rail guns. The project, authored and proposed by Engel, had won a $2 million grant from the Office of Naval Research.

Engel was suspended from teaching duties Nov. 13, 2010, on the grounds of “sexual and racial discrimination” after four female students lodged complaints against him.

Engel claims three of the students, who are Chinese, committed plagiarism.

An email included in the case file alleges the charges of plagiarism against the three students, were suspiciously filed only “minutes” after Manring notified Engel that the students had complained about Engel’s behavior.

On Dec. 17, 2010, faculty from the College of Engineering signed charges of professional and academic irresponsibility against Engel, which were delivered to Provost Brian Foster.
Shieldcroc used jaws to ambush fish

A dinosaur-age ancestor of modern crocodiles from Morocco had a huge armoured head designed as a "fish trap", scientists have revealed.

The extinct creature, dubbed "Shieldcroc", lived around 95 million years ago but was unlikely to have wrestled with dinosaurs.

Instead, it probably used its long flat jaws to ambush fish.

"We believe Shieldcroc may have used its long face as a fish trap," said undergraduate researcher Nick Gardner from Marshall University in the US.

"It is possible that it lay in wait until an unsuspecting fish swam in front of it. Then, if it was close enough, Shieldcroc simply opened its mouth and ate the fish without a struggle, eliminating the need for strong jaws."

The crocodile, officially called Aegisuchus witmeri, is the earliest ancestor of modern crocodiles to be found in Africa.

The new study was conducted on a fossilised partial skull specimen unearthed in Morocco several years ago and now housed at a Canadian museum.

Scientists calculated that the creature was 30ft long with a 5ft head bearing a shield-like structure never before seen in crocodiles.

The shield may have been used to attract mates and intimidate enemies, or as a thermo-regulator to control head temperature.

Dr Casey Holliday, from the University of Missouri, US, said: "Today's crocodiles live in deltas and estuaries, the environments put under the most stress from human activity. By understanding how these animals' ancestors became extinct, we can gain insight into how to protect and preserve the ecosystems vital to modern crocodiles."
MU researcher discovers ancient crocodile, 'Shieldcroc'

By Ratko Radojcic
January 31, 2012 | 6:23 p.m. CST

Casey Holliday holds a skull fragment believed to be 95 million years old belonging to a Aegisuchus Witmeri, or "Shieldcroc" at the Medical Science Building in Columbia on Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2012. Holliday found the bone in a drawer while working at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and noticed its structures were different from previously discovered crocoddilian bones.  

COLUMBIA — If the 30-foot-long body wasn't enough to intimidate its enemies, the thick-skinned shield on the top of its 5-foot-long head was likely to get the job done. About 95 million years ago, this reptile roamed the Mesozoic Era rivers of Africa and is believed to be the earliest ancestor of modern crocodiles.

Aegisuchus witmeri, or "Shieldcroc" as it has been nicknamed, was discovered by MU researcher Casey Holliday, an assistant professor of anatomy in the MU School of Medicine. The research, published Tuesday in the journal PLoS-ONE (Public Library of Science), was co-authored with Nick Gardner, an assistant undergraduate researcher at Marshall University in West Virginia, according to a news release from the MU News Bureau.

Holliday's discovery of Shieldcroc makes a good storyline. One day, while working at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, he pulled open a drawer and found "some scrappy looking chunks of skull" that had no identification tags.
"The skull was originally dug up in Morocco by locals, as a part of a fossil trade in Morocco," he explained in his office Tuesday, the reddish chunk of skull in front of him on the desk. "The local people go in and look for things that people will pay for, and a lot of it ends up at gem and mineral shows and rock shops." Museum curators go to those shows and shops and look for things that might be valuable to researchers, he said.

By studying the grooves on the skull that were made by blood vessels, Holliday concluded that the crocodile had a shield-like structure on top of its head that it used to show off and attract other crocodiles. This is similar to the manner in which modern crocodiles lurk in muddy waters with the back of their heads tilted up above the water line, just enough to reveal their ear-like horns and the size of their head.

Another theory is that the shield may have served as a thermo-regulator that helped control the temperature of Shieldcroc’s head.

Before Holliday’s discovery, such a shield has never been seen on a crocodile.

"It’s only a chunk of the skull, but we can actually tell a lot about an animal based on structures associated with the braincase," Holliday said. "We were able to take some measurements from the skull roof and to use CAT scanning to pull out the size and shape of the brain, and use those estimates to see how big the head and the body might have been."

Shieldcroc is also the first close ancestor of modern crocodilians found in Africa. The identification of the species and its unusual head feature can help scientists discover more about the evolution of crocodiles as well as offer new information about how to protect modern reptilian habitats.

Shieldcroc lived in the river systems in Morocco, and river systems typically have a high diversity of animals and are quick to show the impacts of humans, pollution and other changes.

"Understanding the climate of the past, and knowing what we know about climate changes today, it does give us an idea that this type of an ecosystem is a hotbed of diversity, and they are highly susceptible to changes, whether due to the climate, the chemistry of water or carbon dioxide in the air," Holliday said.

Whit Gibbons, professor emeritus of ecology at the University of Georgia, has spent years researching relationships between populations and their environmental conditions.
"Any time scientists acquire information about a species and the relationships with its habitat, we gain insight into how animal communities respond to various components of their environment," Gibbons said.

He said one aspect of studying a prehistoric species is that it provides insight into how a species interacted with its environment without human influences. He said they are "research opportunities that do not exist for present-day species anywhere in the world."

"Such information is applicable to present-day situations in that by understanding how we arrived where we are today in regard to species and habitat relationships, we may be able to have more predictability about future circumstances," Gibbons said.

Holliday plans to give the skull chunk back to the Royal Ontario Museum, where it will be put on display later this year, the MU news release said.

He will continue to research the evolution of crocodiles.

"Researchers are finding a lot of fossils of crocodiles that were terrestrial predatory crocodiles or terrestrial herbivorous crocodiles with adaptations on the teeth to eat plants, as well as all sorts of aquatic crocodiles and fully marine ones," Holliday said. "These prehistoric fossils tell us that today's crocodiles are actually kind of boring."
JEFFERSON CITY — The House Higher Education Committee unanimously approved a bill Tuesday forcing Missouri’s public universities to accept transfer credits from sister institutions.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Mike Thomson, R-Maryville, would streamline the process of transferring credits by requiring the universities to create a list of 25 transferable lower-division courses.

The bill also requires Missouri’s Coordinating Board for Higher Education to adopt a statewide "reverse transfer" policy. The policy would let students at four-year schools receive associate degrees from community colleges once they’ve completed a two-year school’s requirements — even if they leave the four-year school without receiving a more advanced degree.

Thomson says the current system of transferring credits isn’t always to the student’s benefit.

"They’re not universal. They’re not all the way across the state and we often time have students that transfer from school to school that don’t really lose a credit, they still have it, but it doesn’t really count for what they intended it to," said Thomson, a former school administrator.

Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, is opposed to the bill.

"It’s a bad idea to tell universities how to conduct transfer credits because the legislatures don’t know anything about (the process)," Kelly said.
He said colleges should individually deal with how credits are transferred.

Thomson said he hopes the bill will save time and money for students by streamlining the transfer of credits.

"We really feel like the more agreement we have across the board, the better off we will be for the students. If the student is held up, for different reasons, it takes more time so they are less likely to graduate," Thomson said.

Thomson added that the bill would help students graduate faster by allowing students to transfer credits back and forth between schools. It would also prevent students from paying the same course fees multiple times.

No one spoke against the bill during the hearing, and it will now move to the House Rules Committee for clearance and full House debate.
Peace Corps volunteers have more master's degree options at MU

By Lauren Page
January 31, 2012 | 5:41 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — MU’s Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Fellows Program, a graduate fellowship offering financial assistance to returned Peace Corps volunteers, has expanded degree options.

Before the expansion, MU offered returning volunteers master’s degrees in fields such as geography, agricultural economics, political science, social work, rural sociology and public affairs. It now offers all of MU’s 96 master’s degree programs, allowing more people to pair Peace Corps service with graduate school.

Through the program, each fellow receives an annual stipend of at least $24,000 to cover living expenses, a full tuition waiver and full health insurance coverage throughout the two-year graduate program, according to the MU fellows program website.

In the Peace Corps, participants complete internships in underserved communities and then return home with new skills, such as adapting to new cultures and dealing with language barriers.

After serving, students apply to master’s programs at schools that participate in the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program. MU has been awarding fellowships to returning Peace Corps volunteers since 2006.

"They (the fellows) are aware of cultural differences and international issues," said Meredith Dorneker, Peace Corps Fellows Program coordinator at MU and former Peace Corps volunteer. "Most are fluent in another language. Capacity building and learning to build and strengthen relationships is the foundation of Peace Corps training; RPCVs (returned Peace Corps volunteers) have this approach engrained in them."

Dorneker said more students have contacted her for information about the program, and she is expecting that there will be an increase in applicants in the future.
An increase of students in the fellows program could result in even more students on campus with the two-year international Peace Corps experience.

"Serving with the Peace Corps is a unique, life-changing experience," Dorneker said. "Peace Corps volunteers provide technical assistance on a grassroots, community level in a variety of areas."

Peace Corps volunteers are also more likely to find a job than someone who hasn't volunteered, according to Andrew Fritz, recruiter for MU and the central Missouri area.

"Employers understand that they already have two years of international experience, which gives returned volunteers a different perspective than people who have stayed in the U.S.,” Fritz said.

Fritz volunteered with the Peace Corps in Zambia, which is in southern Africa. He worked for Zambia's government in conservation, farming, natural resource protection and agroforestry.

Prior to volunteering with the Peace Corps, Fritz was certain he was going to seek a master's degree in fine arts, but the experience changed his mind.

"It changed my mind about what's important in life," Fritz said.

Now he plans to obtain a master's degree in a program that focuses more on community development. He didn't wish to disclose the specific degree program.

Since Peace Corps' founding under John F. Kennedy in 1961, 950 MU alums have served, and approximately 30 are serving today.

Central Missouri Returned Peace Corps Volunteers will host the Third Goal International Film Festival on Friday, Feb. 3 and Saturday, Feb. 4 at MU.

On Friday, there will be a free filmmakers workshop from 6 — 7:30 p.m. where aspiring filmmakers, or anyone interested, can learn about the art of film-making. The workshop will be held at Columbia Access Television's Studio A on Stephens College's campus.

Following the workshop, there will be a social dinner at Broadway Brewery at approximately 7:30 p.m., where attendees will have the opportunity to meet one of the filmmakers leading the workshop, Cy Kuckenbaker.
Those interested in attending the dinner should RSVP to Mike Burden at mikeburden77@gmail.com by Thursday.

The free films will be shown Saturday in Chamber Auditorium at MU. These films are set in Malawi, Afghanistan, Nepal, Uganda and Honduras and cover access to education, women’s rights, conservation and more.
Sierra Club criticizes slow Hinkson Creek action

By Andrew Denney

Columbia Daily Tribune

Tuesday, January 31, 2012

One year after the Environmental Protection Agency issued a Hinkson Creek pollution control standard to local government officials and the University of Missouri, environmental activists say little has been done to improve the stream’s condition.

Representatives from the local chapter of the Sierra Club said Columbia, Boone County and the University of Missouri have not taken steps to reduce bottom deposits in the Hinkson and have not worked to improve “best management practices” for the waterway, which help to reduce soil erosion and stormwater runoff into the Hinkson.

Ken Midkiff, a member of the Osage Group of the Sierra Club and chairman of the Missouri Clean Water Campaign, said in the year since the TMDL was issued, the city, county and university have not changed their own policies regarding best management practices.

“They keep doing the same things over and over again and somehow expect the Hinkson to come back to health,” Midkiff said. “That’s insanity.”

The total maximum daily load, or TMDL, document issued to the three entities in January 2011 calls for a 39 percent reduction in stormwater runoff into the Hinkson. In 1998, the Hinkson was added to the federal government’s “impaired waters” list, which listed waterways that do not meet the standard set by the Clean Water Act.

Critics of the TMDL have complained the study cites stormwater runoff rather than naming a specific pollutant as the source of problems for the Hinkson. They also have complained the TMDL, which was proposed by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and finished by the EPA, is based on old data. Because the data were released in 1998, the city and county worked to limit stormwater runoff and also to eliminate private sewer systems.

The EPA has allowed the city, county and MU to use a “collaborative adaptive management” plan that would allow for the gradual phasing in of new regulations for the entities involved in the plan. The plan includes stakeholders from the city, the county, the university, the EPA and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.
Boone County stormwater coordinator Georganne Bowman said the group of stakeholders is days away from finalizing an agreement that would protect its members from administrative shifts — such as the election of new officials — that could change the composition of the group.

Bowman said the work of developing regulations to reduce pollution into the Hinkson still lies ahead, however.

In the Sierra Club’s statement, Midkiff also raised questions about the progress of MU researcher Jason Hubbart, who set out in 2008 to complete a hydrology study of the Hinkson. Those data were supposed to help provide more current data on the health of the stream.

Last spring, Hubbart asked the entities for $100,000 to help complete the project, which he said could help pay for replacement sensors on equipment that he has been using for the project, but he said he was unable to obtain the money.

Hubbart said he has managed to continue the study through grants from various entities, but he said he has been unable to afford a research assistant to help him analyze the data in a timely manner.

He said a better assessment of the Hinkson would be a long-range one in which decades’ worth of data could be assessed to take into account changes in water flow and other trends.

“‘I had this funny idea that we should continue doing research,’” Hubbart said.
Services monitor athletes on Facebook, other sites

BY KATHLEEN NELSON knelson@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8233 | Posted: Wednesday, February 1, 2012

Sophomoric pranks, trash talking, goofy pictures taken in a stupor at an all-night party: the cornerstones of the college experience.

Thanks to the Internet, though, they've also become part of a student's legacy. An embarrassing photo or caption on a Facebook page, an attempt at humor misinterpreted as a racial slur on Twitter, can haunt him or her during a job hunt and for years.

The damage can double if the poster or subject is a college athlete, because the school's reputation can take a hit as well. The NCAA cited the University of North Carolina for failure to monitor social media in its case against the school's football program last fall.

Yet the task of monitoring the Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and YouTube postings for the 100-plus members of a Division 1 football program would easily overwhelm a harried grad assistant or two or three or 20. To help in the process, monitoring services have sprung up in the past few years. Among them are Varsity Monitor, CentrixSocial and UDiligence, which is used by the University of Missouri football team.

"It's not a gotcha tool, it's a mentoring tool," said Kevin Long, CEO of UDiligence. "We provide a mechanism for the school to keep up and the athlete to protect himself."

How it works

UDiligence has developed a program, used by about three dozen colleges, that searches for key words in tweets, blogs, comments on Facebook and photo captions that could be considered objectionable or raise a red flag: anything from "kill" to "agent" to racial or sexual slurs. Long said that UDiligence provides each school with the list, from which the school can add or subtract. He noted that some coaches will delete curse words, while others might add the nickname of a rival school or some of its top players.

Players then must download an app to each of their social media accounts, which gives UDiligence permission to monitor the account.
"Once athletes agree to our terms, it’s no different than if we were friends on Facebook," Long said.

UDiligence then performs an initial scan of the entire account and sends emails to the athlete and school administrator of entries that contain a key word. After that, the service scans new entries only, once a day, and follows up with emails to athletes and the administrator of potential problems.

"It’s up to schools after that point to decide whether it needs attention. We don’t get involved with that," Long said.

Consequences could span the gamut of removing the material to missing practices to suspensions. Because the monitoring process involves athletes downloading apps and giving consent, schools seem unlikely to use the service to vet recruits.

"I don’t know that there’s a prohibition against it, but I’m not aware of a school that does it." Long said.

UDiligence charges $1,500 a team or $8,000 a school. Long considered it a bargain, when compared to the salary of assistant coaches, compliance staff or grad assistants who would otherwise monitor the sites. Some schools, though, find the services cost-prohibitive and instead use spot searches by staff members.

Such was the case with defensive back Yuri Wright, a four-star recruit from Don Bosco Prep in New Jersey. The University of Michigan withdrew its scholarship offer to Wright when officials discovered racial and sexual slurs on his Twitter account. Wright subsequently accepted a scholarship from the University of Colorado.

Red flags

The biggest objections to the service don’t concern money but issues of privacy, fairness and censorship.

"Critics are looking at it from the wrong perspective. We’re not Big Brother, we’re big mother. We’re trying to take care of the athletes’ future, the athletes’ reputation and things that could haunt them," Long said. "It’s not about disciplining them, it’s about teaching them."

Neil Richards, a professor at the Washington University School of Law, noted an Orwellian twist when he wondered whether it would be better if all athletes were created equal or if some were more equal than others. Most of UDiligence's clients monitor every athlete who represents the school, citing fairness. Missouri is an exception in that only the football team uses the service. Representatives of Mizzou did not respond to requests for an interview.

"On the one hand, the actions of an athlete can bring the university disrepute," Richards said. "But so can any ordinary student, and I think people would find it highly objectionable to apply this to all students."
"Maybe the actions of a star wide receiver can impact a school's reputation, so the university has an interest in his social media. But what about the 10th player on a Division III golf team? He's more like an ordinary student. So, the question becomes should the standard be different for some athletes."

Richards also noted the gray areas in disciplining an athlete for an objectionable posting, citing two examples. In the first, an athlete is suspended one game for tweeting that the police treated a roommate badly at an Occupy Wherever rally and declared, "Cops are pigs." In the second, an athlete gets an identical suspension for proclaiming on Twitter, "Coach is an idiot."

The second, he said, "is harder to get too worked up about from a free speech perspective. These things call for a tricky balance. Depending on the context, discipline could be problematic or not from the perspective of censorship."

Both Richards and Long agree that the issue of social media and athletes shouldn't begin and end with monitoring but be part of a program to help athletes learn to use Twitter, MySpace, et al, to their advantage. Hence, Long's company also offers social media training to students.

"You want to be Google-able for the right things: touchdowns, honor rolls, being all-conference," Long said. "You don't want to be Google-able for criticizing your coach or because you're in some photo from a party. We want to take a mentoring approach and protect their reputations."
Ultrasound could give men birth control option, study finds

A few blasts of ultrasound to the testes could soon provide men with an effective, inexpensive and pain-free birth control option, new research suggests.

Scientists at the University of North Carolina have found that zapping rats’ testes with ultrasound treatment drastically reduced sperm levels.

“The study is the first to provide detailed insight into how ultrasound might be working inside,” said Elaine Lissner, director of San Francisco-based Male Contraception Information Project.

During the study, published Monday in *Reproductive Biology and Endocrinology*, researchers rotated high-frequency ultrasound (typically used in physical therapy) around the rats’ testes.

When researchers tested the rats two weeks after treatment, they found that two ultrasound sessions dropped the rat’s sperm count to a Sperm Count Index of zero and killed sperm-producing germ cells.

According the study, the best results were achieved when researchers combined elevated temperature, high power and high-frequency ultrasound — and when each rat was given two 15-minute doses two days apart.

Though the quantity of sperm cells that human males produce varies, the average male produces between two and five millilitres of semen each time they ejaculate, and each millilitre may contain from 20 million to 300 million sperm cells.

Lissner said the ultrasound treatment’s sperm-killing effects on rats would likely prove similar for human males.

“You can’t always translate results from rats to humans, but the team has shown what’s going on inside and that mechanism seems to be conserved across species,” she said.

The study builds on the work of Dr. Mostafa Fahim, a University of Missouri-Columbia researcher who first tested the effects of ultrasound treatment on cats, dogs, monkeys, rats and eight men beginning in the early 1970s.
Fahim found that brief ultrasound treatment killed off germ cells and caused infertility — but the technology he used to complete his research went out of circulation and scientists and researchers were unable to replicate his work.

The latest research findings, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2010, proves that ultrasound treatment holds great promise as the base for a male contraceptive, said Lissner.

But the full effects of ultrasound treatment are still unclear, he added. He and other researchers do not know how long the treatment lasts, its effects on the body if used repeatedly and whether its effects are fully reversible.

In Canada, birth control choices for men are limited to abstinence, withdrawal, condoms and the more-invasive vasectomy — a surgical procedure where the vasa in the scrotum is cut and blocked to prevent sperm from reaching the ejaculate.

According to a United Nations report on world contraception, between 10 and 15 per cent of married couples in Canada, the United States, parts of Europe and China opt for a vasectomy.

With few options for men, birth control responsibilities lie largely with women worldwide.

According to a 2009 national study of Canadian women’s contraceptive practices, condoms, oral contraceptives and withdrawal remain the most commonly used methods.

Women also have access to a spate of other contraceptive options, including the diaphragm, sponge, patch, ring and intrauterine device. But less than five per cent of survey respondents opted for those methods.

According to the World Health Organization, about 50 million abortions are conducted worldwide every year. About half of those procedures are unsafe, resulting in roughly 47,000 maternal deaths.

For Lissner, ultrasound therapy — if proven to be safe in the long term — would not only provide another safe and inexpensive contraception method, it could also encourage men to share a greater role in family planning.
Unfortunately 'We Are Mizzou'

By Joe Walljasper
Tuesday, January 31, 2012

The boys from Fifth Down have come up "We Are Mizzou." It's no improvement on "Cats of Ol' Mizzou," starring Nathan Buntin.

So I've seen the "We Are Mizzou" music video created by a group of University of Missouri students known as Fifth Down. The hip-hop ode to the MU basketball team has taken the Internet by storm, with 181,000 views on YouTube as of noon today.

My reaction?

I believe I speak for white people everywhere when I tell Fifth Down: You're not helping.

As a race, we've made so much progress in the field of rhythm. But, alas, we are never more than one sports-inspired Caucasian rap from forfeiting all we've gained. And even by the pale standards of the genre, this one is Romney-esque in its whiteness.

One guy's name is Tanner. I rest my case.

These earnest young men are bursting with school spirit about their successful basketball team and can't help but express themselves in the way we've come to expect since the "The Super Bowl Shuffle" -- with exaggerated jabbing hand gestures and at least one pair of large sunglasses.
“We’re not knocking on the door, we’re busting in. ... Screw red and blue, we are Mizzou,” they sing with the help of Auto-Tune while gyrating — sort of — around the Francis Quadrangle and Mizzou Arena. Eventually all the active scholarship basketball players get a shout-out, whether they want one or not.

Surely, this video violates some sort of copyright law or NCAA rule. If not, Missouri officials should just pretend that it does. If these kids aren’t pre-law, they’ll never know the difference.

Besides, the Missouri basketball program already had a perfectly good — and by good I mean terrible — rap song. In 1987, Norm Stewart and the Tigers recorded “Cats of Ol’ Mizzou,” which included this classic lyric: “I’m Stormin’ Norm, I don’t speak jive. I’ve coached 20 years, I’m glad I’m alive. I’m old and bald and down in the back. You would be too if you coached this pack.”

In the 25 years since, we’ve seen progress in bad white rapping, such as the death of Vanilla Ice’s music career, but let’s remain vigilant about putting a stop to this plague. We can’t just knock on that door, we must bust it in.
Future of Missouri Grand Prix swim meet uncertain

By The Associated Press
January 31, 2012 | 12:32 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Top U.S. and international swimmers will return to Columbia next week in an Olympic-year event with an uncertain future on the University of Missouri campus.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reported that the Missouri Grand Prix at the Mizzou Aquatic Center is in the final year of a four-year deal with USA Swimming, leaving the future of the event uncertain.

This year's meet is scheduled for Feb. 10-12 and will include more than 700 participants, an event record. A USA Swimming official says the governing body is considering bids from several host cities for future Grand Prix stops.

The event was first held in Columbia in 2007. Michael Phelps competed that year and in 2008, before he won a record eight Olympic gold medals.