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The Chronicle of Higher Education

After Outcry Over Closure, U. of Missouri Press Is Back to Printing Books

By Jennifer Howard

The University of Missouri system is rethinking the future of its university press—again.

In May, Missouri announced it would phase out the press for budgetary reasons. This summer, it said that Speer Morgan, editor of *The Missouri Review*, would take charge of a new publishing operation with a focus on teaching and on digital output. On Tuesday, Missouri reversed course on that plan, announcing that the press's current staff, including the interim director, Dwight Browne, had been asked to carry on in their roles.

Missouri also said it would form a committee "to provide advice and counsel" as the University of Missouri system shifts oversight of the press to the campus at Columbia. That administrative move takes effect right away.

Richard L. Wallace, the university's chancellor emeritus, has been tapped to help lead the press-transition team. He confirmed in an interview that Mr. Browne would continue as interim director and that a search would be conducted for a permanent director. Mr. Morgan will not have a direct hand in managing the press but will continue to edit *The Missouri Review*.

"Speer is likely to have some leadership role in an area that we're calling 'media of the future,'" Mr. Wallace said. "It's not a direct responsibility for the press, but it's a recognition that the way in which we communicate worldwide is changing rapidly." (*The Chronicle* was not able to reach Mr. Morgan or Mr. Browne for comment on Tuesday.)

As for the press itself, "we'll continue to do print books" as well as digital books, Mr. Wallace said. "Right now I just want people to know we're going to have a quality press. Our starting point is what we've got. That's our foundation, and we're going to go forward from that."

A Campaign to Save the Press

The news comes too late for some editors and authors who had been affiliated with the press. Its editor in chief, Clair Willcox, lost his job after the May announcement. A number of series editors have jumped ship since then, and 50 of the press's authors have said they want the rights to their books back.

News of the press's impending doom triggered a coordinated campaign to save it, with protest letters from authors and alumni donors and a petition and a Facebook page. Tuesday's statement acknowledged some of the opposition.

"My goal is to develop a press that is vibrant and adaptive, but I realize that change is often difficult," the Missouri system's president, Timothy M. Wolfe, said in the statement. "I have been listening to the support and dedication the community and others have shown the press and make every assurance that university administration is working to create the kind of press of which the academic community and those that it serves can be proud."

Mr. Wallace only just got involved in the situation, so he missed the worst of the outcry. He acknowledged that there had been "one heck of a lot" of opposition, and said he wished the decision to put the press under the Columbia campus's control had been made earlier.

"We need to bring people back on board as quickly as we possibly can, and begin to move forward as quickly as we possibly can," he said. Protests or no protests, though, the campus's top leaders "know what a university press is all about," he said. "They know what scholarly communication requires. They understand the importance of our being a part of that."

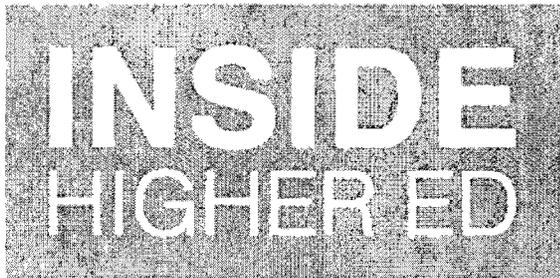
'Bittersweet' Victory

On the "Save the University of Missouri Press" Facebook page, organizers described the latest news as "tremendous" but "bittersweet," calling it a Pyrrhic victory. University of Missouri administrators "can reverse their decision, but they can't reverse history," the organizers wrote, citing the exodus of authors and editors. "They have broken Humpty Dumpty. They have been reckless at Pottery Barn and now own a bunch of broken plates."

Bruce Joshua Miller, president of Miller Trade Book Marketing, has been one of the most active voices in lobbying to save the press. He reacted cautiously to the latest announcement. "If it is true that the nine remaining staff members are keeping their jobs, I am very happy about that," he told *The Chronicle* by e-mail. "However, we still need to hear how the administration plans to rebuild the press."

The first order of business is to assemble the advisory committee, Mr. Wallace said. Missouri's four campuses will be represented, along with outside experts, authors, and other interested parties. "We're reaching out pretty broadly to the constituencies that care and can make a difference," he said. He hopes the committee will be ready to have its first meeting in mid-September.

Mr. Wallace said the press would be stronger for its affiliation with a specific campus. Beforehand it "was an island unto itself," he said. "They were basically out of place. They needed to be located closer to the scholarship, the teaching, the research. There would have been a better understanding over the years of what the press needs to be high quality and to survive."



insidehighered.com

U. of Missouri Press Survives

By

Scott Jaschik

The University of Missouri Press will survive after all.

The University of Missouri System announced in May that it no longer wanted to provide the press with its annual subsidy of \$400,000 and would shut down the operation. Amid widespread criticism from faculty members and authors, the university first announced a plan to keep the press functioning in a teaching-oriented way that was never fully fleshed out.

But on Monday, the university's flagship campus at Columbia announced that the press (which has until now been overseen by the system office) would join it. And the announcement made clear that the press would continue to publish new works of scholarship, and to do so in print and digital formats.

Brady Deaton, chancellor of the Columbia campus, said in a statement: "Going forward, we envision that the press will publish not less -- but more -- scholarly work. A viable, fully functioning press is essential to a major [Association of American Universities] university. The press will continue to publish hard-copy books while adding a more broad-based and a longer-term approach to scholarly publishing while preserving the identity of the original press."

Several university presses have closed or had their operations suspended in recent years -- with administrations not reversing themselves amid faculty criticism.

In the case of the Missouri press, faculty locally and nationally repeatedly drew attention to the university's unwillingness to pay \$400,000 for a university press while spending millions on athletic coaches. Supporters of the press showed up at university board meetings, wrote numerous op-eds and letters to local newspapers, and used social media to keep focus on the university's decision. Authors demanded the rights to their books back.

Via e-mail, Peter Dougherty, director of Princeton University Press and president of the Association of American University Presses, called Monday's news "a new beginning for a great Midwestern press and for American scholarly publishing."

The Facebook page for Save the University of Missouri Press was less enthusiastic, noting that some press staff members have left (having been told their jobs were eliminated), that planning for the next season's books was halted, and that many authors may doubt Missouri's commitment.

"This is a tremendous victory, but it is also bittersweet, because unfortunately the administration did not hear the thousands of people who protested this decision all summer and they have waited too long and mis-stepped too often. They can reverse their decision, but they can't reverse history," said a statement posted by the group.

The Chronicle of Higher Education

U. of Missouri Press to Remain Open

August 28, 2012, 1:26 pm

The University of Missouri on Tuesday announced that its scholarly-publishing outfit would continue to operate, and staff members currently employed by the press would be asked to continue in their jobs. The move follows the university's controversial announcement in May that it would shut down the operation in the face of budget pressures and replace it with a digital venture. Control of the press will be transferred from the system to the Columbia campus, where administrators are forming an advisory committee to direct its future, according to the announcement.

“My goal is to develop a press that is vibrant and adaptive, but I realize that change is often difficult,” the system’s president, Timothy M. Wolfe, said in a written statement. “I have been listening to the support and dedication the community and others have shown the press, and make every assurance that university administration is working to create the kind of press of which the academic community and those that it serves can be proud.”

University of Missouri press will remain open

The University of Missouri will take over responsibility for an academic press, printing books and digital publications, administrators said Tuesday.

The announcement comes after recent controversy about the future of the University of Missouri Press. University officials said control of the press will be shifted from the four-campus university system to the Columbia campus.

The press will remain at its location in Columbia.

Earlier this year, Tim Wolfe, president of the University of Missouri system, announced plans to phase out the press, which has received a \$400,000 annual subsidy.

Before Tuesday's announcement, concerns about the possible plans for the press had prompted several authors to say they would take book projects elsewhere or ask for their publishing rights to be returned.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

University of Missouri press will continue, after all

By Tim Barker

The fate of the University of Missouri Press has taken yet another turn.

A little over a month after the press was brought back from near death, university officials have announced a new plan for its continuation.

The University of Missouri System and the Columbia campus said the press is being put under control of Mizzou immediately and that current employees — once slated for layoffs — will be kept. Officials also announced plans to create an advisory committee that will include representatives from the four campuses as well as experts in scholarly publishing.

"My goal is to develop a press that is vibrant and adaptive," University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe said in a release, "but I realize that change is often difficult."

That's certainly been the case with the university's plans for the beleaguered publishing unit.

In May, the University of Missouri announced it was pulling its annual \$400,000 subsidy as part of an effort to rein in costs systemwide. The plan was to phase out the 54-year-old press and its nine employees and replace it with something else.

The announcement was greeted with criticism from the literary world and from faculty across the system.

So too was the follow-up plan, announced last month. It called for the press to be taken over by Mizzou over time and put under the leadership of Speer Morgan, an English professor, novelist and editor of the Missouri Review, a literary journal.

The press would be folded into the school's College of Arts and Science. It would feature a new emphasis on student labor and would make a stronger push in the realm of digital publishing. Current employees were not guaranteed their jobs.

Things changed again on Tuesday, though not as much as some might think, said Mary Jo Banken, a spokeswoman for Mizzou.

Banken said there was never a plan to rely heavily upon student labor. She also dismissed the notion that the press planned to leave traditional book publishing behind.

"The press is going to keep doing what the press has been doing for years," Banken said.

Even so, some elements of the plan — which continues to evolve — have changed.

Morgan is no longer tabbed to be the director. And it's uncertain there will be a director once the reorganization is completed. And the seven employees who haven't already found other jobs are being asked to stay.



Press to stay open, shift to MU campus

The University of Missouri Press will remain open in its current building and with its current staff, administrators announced this morning.

Although the press is being shifted out of the UM System and put under the helm of MU, today's announcement essentially reverses the decision to close the 54-year-old publishing house. It also negates an earlier announcement that MU would develop a new type of university press.

Administrators are forming an advisory committee to help the press move forward as a campus entity.

"I consider this a great victory, absolutely, but I don't consider this as over," said Ned Stuckey-French, a Florida State University English professor who helped organize a Coalition to Save the UM Press. "We shall see whether they can undo the damage they've done."

Since UM President Tim Wolfe announced May 24 that the university would phase out the press, several series editors have resigned and about 50 authors have asked for their rights back. MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said administrators are working with those authors individually as the situation evolves.

One UM Press employee, former Editor-in-Chief Clair Willcox, was laid off last month. The nine remaining employees have been asked to remain in their current roles, though acquisitions editor John Brenner said he has accepted another job. Dwight Browne will continue to serve as interim director, and the advisory committee will help with a search for a new editor-in-chief, who will also have a faculty role.

Speer Morgan, an MU English professor who had been tapped to direct a new press model, will have a leadership role as the press is integrated into campus, Banken said. Morgan is editor of The Missouri Review literary journal, which will "be working alongside the press," she said.

The UM System and MU are working out details of how the press will be subsidized in the future, Banken said.

In a statement, Wolfe said moving the press to MU will help integrate it with the university's academic and research missions.

"My goal is to develop a press that is vibrant and adaptive, but I realize that change is often difficult," he said. "I have been listening to the support and dedication the community and others have shown the press and make every assurance that university administration is working to create the kind of press of which the academic community and those that it serves can be proud."

Stuckey-French questioned whether authors and new editors will want to work with the UM Press after the negative publicity the university received regarding the press over the summer. He said the university waited too long to make today's announcement. The UM Press also has lost some book titles that were expected to be included in the spring 2013 catalog.

"They can reverse the decision, but this does not reverse history," he said. "You can't put Humpty Dumpty back together again."

Some employees this morning said they were processing the new information but weren't yet ready to comment on the decision.

For faculty, today's decision is a victory and shows administrators are listening to concerns, said Craig Roberts, a member of MU Faculty Council's executive committee.

Although the council voted down two proposals that would have called on Wolfe to reverse the original decision, he said faculty members were concerned because he made that decision without their input.

"My major concern with this whole thing wasn't about the staff, per se, and it wasn't about whether or not the press should be following this model or that model," he said. "It was about the idea of a press and not having involvement in the decision."

MISSOURIAN

UPDATE: Control of UM Press shifts to MU

Tuesday, August 28, 2012 | 9:14 p.m. CDT
BY Lizzie Johnson, Stephanie Ebbs

COLUMBIA — A shift in control of the University of Missouri Press from the University of Missouri System to MU is opening the door for changes so the press can continue operating and maintain its commitment to scholarly publication.

Dwight Browne, the interim director of the press, now reports to MU Provost Brian Foster. The change took effect Tuesday. Foster said MU will create a Press Advisory Committee, intended to guide the press through a transition period and search for its new editor-in-chief.

MU sent letters to leaders throughout the UM System asking for nominations for the committee. The heads of the faculty councils for the four campuses, the president of the Missouri Student Association and the head of the Graduate Professional Council all received letters, among others.

"I think (the committee) needs to be people who have a lot of experience publishing books and have a lot of editorial experience," said Lois Huneycutt, an MU associate professor of history.

Nominations must be received by Sept. 4, when a group of administrators, including UM System President Tim Wolfe, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton, MU Chancellor Emeritus Richard Wallace, UM System Assistant Vice President Deborah Noble-Triplett and Browne, will choose members for the committee. At least one member of the committee will be a student.

Foster said the committee will examine long-term goals for the press, adjust contracts and look for new staff members. The committee will also discuss incorporating students into the press as graduate students and interns. He said the committee will be doing research on scholarly communication and helping the press adapt to the digital world, just like newspapers and magazines.

"The press isn't going to be changing in any dramatic way in the foreseeable future," Foster said. "It's going to be doing what presses do."

Willcox, former editor-in-chief of the press, was laid off in July. One duty of the advisory committee is to hire a new editor-in-chief. The editor-in-chief will also serve in a faculty role, and will need a balance of academic credentials and experience in the publishing world, Foster said.

"The top person that I want nominated is Clair Willcox. I can't think of anyone that has as much expertise and experience," Huneycutt said.

Huneycutt said Willcox's work with authors might keep them from ending their relationship with the press.

The executive director of the MU News Bureau, Mary Jo Banken, said the nine remaining staff members were asked to stay but two had already taken other jobs.

John Brenner posted on the "Save the University of Missouri Press" Facebook page that he was asked to stay in his position as acquisitions editor but declined. According to the post, he will begin work at the State Historical Society of Missouri on Sept. 10.

A string of editors, including Bill Foley, Roger Launius and Tom Quirk, have resigned from their positions and distanced themselves from the new press.

Quirk, editor of the Mark Twain and His Circle series, resigned from his position Monday. He will continue the series at another press, according to a resignation letter posted on the Facebook page.

"I am left merely with the bitter taste of humiliation," Quirk said in the letter.

John Bullion is one of more than 50 authors asking the press for the copyrights to their work back. He said the reputation of the press has been damaged and he no longer wants to work with it.

"Authors, both experienced and young scholars and the rest, they aren't going to be inclined to submit manuscripts to this place. You just can't reverse that overnight," Bullion said.

Whether authors are able to get those rights transferred depends on their contracts, but Banken said the press would like to continue work with authors individually.

"The press intends to keep their commitment to all authors to publish their books and ask them to continue to work with us," she said.

Foster said the committee will immediately begin communicating with authors about the future of the press.

Speer Morgan, editor of the Missouri Review, will take on a leadership role in the press that has not yet been determined, Banken said.

KBIA-FM

University of Missouri Press will remain open

BY KRISTOFOR HUSTED AND ASSOCIATED PRESS

The University of Missouri says it will keep its academic publishing business open and drop plans for a new reimagined publishing operation.

The university announced Tuesday the University of Missouri Press will stay in its current building and keep its current staff.

MU officials say the responsibility of running the Press will pass from the UM System, to the Columbia campus. Initially, people can expect the model to look the same, according to MU Provost Brian Foster.

This decision comes on the heels of a summer-long uproar to save the press by authors, faculty and academics. On May 24, UM System President Tim Wolfe announced the press would be shutting down and reopening in a reimagined model.

Speer Morgan, who had been slated to take over as director, will also stay on in some leadership capacity, according to MU spokesperson Mary Jo Banken. Dwight Browne will continue as interim director and all press employees have been asked to stay on, except former editor in chief, Clair Wilcox. Administrators are moving quickly to put together an advisory committee to work with a transition team and the current press staff. Foster says the ultimate goal of the committee is to help facilitate the gradual evolution of the press.

“And I’d like for us to be out front, given all our expertise on campus with media and that sort of thing. I’d like to have us to be out front and be a national model,” Foster said.

Nominations for the committee are being accepted now and Foster says the selections will be made within the next week.



Faculty survey gives MU provost C-minus

By Janese Silvey

Tuesday, August 28, 2012

University of Missouri faculty members gave Provost Brian Foster a 1.7 grade-point average — a C-minus in classroom terms — on his first evaluation.

MU's Faculty Council last semester conducted a campuswide survey asking professors to weigh in on Foster's strengths and weaknesses. Between 235 and 270 faculty members responded, with some skipping certain questions.

Among his strengths are Foster's ability to understand issues and enhance diversity, and many said he's ethical and takes pride in MU, according to a summary of the evaluation made public yesterday.

But Foster needs to improve communication and better share governance with faculty, the evaluation suggested.

One indicator was that a large percentage of survey takers responded that they had "no basis to judge" Foster in certain areas, said Harry Tyrer, chairman of the Faculty Council. "We think he needs to improve his communication with the university, and he has made some effort to respond that way," Tyrer said.

Foster said his office tries to communicate effectively but that the survey showed a need for that communication to reach down to the college and department levels. The provost is the university's chief academic officer.

"I want to at least have a conversation about how to have substantial discussions about issues in the colleges, their concerns, what they think we're doing well and not doing well, and so on," he said.

Communication surfaced as a problem in Chancellor Brady Deaton's evaluation conducted in the spring 2011 semester. Concerns about a lack of shared governance also showed up in both administrators' surveys but were more prominent in Foster's evaluation. He said that might be a timing issue: His evaluation came after administrators faced backlash for trying to close the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute without faculty input.

"There were several things like that, a couple of personnel issues that became high-profile, too," Foster said.

Foster and Deaton are expected to meet with the Faculty Council next month to discuss how to better share governing power.

"It's a very important issue but a difficult one," Foster said. "Faculty is in charge of academics, but there's complexity in that. There's a lot we can't do because of limited resources. ... But the last thing in the world we want to do from the administrative side is to somehow compromise the creativity, innovation and scholarly work of the faculty and teaching of faculty."

In written comments, more than a dozen survey takers expressed concerns about Mizzou Advantage, an initiative Foster rolled out two years ago to promote interdisciplinary research and boost MU's strengths.

"Most respondents felt that Mizzou Advantage fails to meet the goals of expanding impacts," according to a summary of survey comments.

Foster said it's too early to start seeing the implications of Mizzou Advantage, in part because he wants to allow plenty of time for communication.

"It just takes a while to roll these things out," he said. "And one reason it takes a long while is that we're getting a lot of input from people."

Faculty Council member Tony Lupo said the council is ready to work with Foster on communication and shared governance issues. "The attitude of the council has been one of trying to work with him to find out ways we can improve perception among faculty," Lupo said.

MISSOURIAN

MU invests \$2.5 million to expand online coursework

Tuesday, August 28, 2012 | 2:11 p.m. CDT
BY [KEITH REID-CLEVELAND](#)

COLUMBIA — MU will invest \$2.5 million toward creating new online degree and certificate programs in the next year.

In total, MU is expected to make an investment of nearly \$5 million toward Mizzou Online over the next 24 to 36 months, said Jim Spain, MU vice provost for undergraduate studies and interim vice provost for e-learning.

The \$2.5 million comes from reserve funds that have accumulated during the past 20 years through MU Direct and the Center for Distance and Independent Study, two programs that have been merged to create Mizzou Online.

MU plans to add 10 to 15 online degree programs by 2014 with the new investment, according to an MU News Bureau release.

Currently, MU offers more than 690 courses and 66 degree and certificate programs — including five bachelor's degrees and 33 master's degrees — that can be completed entirely online, Spain said.

In the past five years, the number of students enrolled in distance courses through MU has doubled; last year, 18 of MU's 19 schools and colleges offered degrees, certificates or individual courses online, according to the 2011-12 distance education enrollment report released Friday.

Last year, Mizzou Online offered online classes to more than 9,000 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in online courses.

Spain said he thinks making MU more accessible played a major role in the decision to invest in the expansion.

New programs that offer online courses will be able to apply for the funding, a maximum of \$250,000. The first allotments will be awarded in February 2013 and will be used to start up the online curriculum.

About 60 percent of the revenue from online courses will go back to the departments that host them, while the rest will cover operating costs, Spain said.

"There's a couple of outcomes: The primary outcome is that certificate and degree programs will become more accessible to students," Spain said. "Secondly, it will make courses more available to our off-campus students."

Michael O'Brien, dean of the College of Arts and Science, said his goal is to offer enough courses online so that students can complete a bachelor's degree of general studies or interdisciplinary studies completely online. Then students taking online courses would be able to graduate with a degree in the same amount of time as students taking courses on campus.

"By this time next year, I want to be able to assure a student who wants to do an interdisciplinary degree or a bachelor's of general studies, a BGS, he or she can do it online," O'Brien said. "That could be a student in some small town in rural Missouri who can't come to the university but desperately wants a degree. He or she ought to have that opportunity."

O'Brien said he wants to make sure students know MU has interdisciplinary online degrees.

"I don't want to look at this as any kind of money-making operation — in fact, it won't be," he said.

"What we want to do is to make sure that students have that option."

Divorcés advised to use social media for good, not evil

Email, texting and social media may be effective communication tools for couples going through divorce, but a new study also shows that some are using the services less for good, and more for evil -- at their children's expense.

In a small study that examined the communication habits of 49 couples, researchers from the University of Missouri found that couples going through acrimonious divorces and separation were using technology as a weapon by either manipulating or withholding information and limiting access to their children.

For example, some parents in the study admitted to pretending that they had never received emails from their ex.

"Technology makes it easier for divorced couples to get along, and it also makes it easier for them not to get along," said lead researcher Lawrence Ganong. "Parents who use technology effectively can make co-parenting easier, which places less stress on the children."

For instance, those in co-operative relationships used communication tools to effectively coordinate the exchanges of their children. Among some of the most productive uses of the technology included using online calendars to share information about their kids' activities.

"Email is a great resource for hostile parents who can't talk face-to-face. They can communicate essential information while editing what they say to avoid conflict," said Ganong. "Also, the parents have a record of what was agreed upon."

Meanwhile, studies have shown that social media activities on Facebook are being increasingly cited in divorce petitions around the world. Lawyers in the US, for instance, are likewise increasingly demanding to see a partner's Facebook page as evidence, while some studies even cite the social network as the leading cause of divorce.

According to a British divorce website, for instance, 33 percent of divorce petitions in 2011 contained the word "Facebook," citing inappropriate online behavior like flirting with the opposite sex and posting negative comments about their spouse.

Divorced parents are turning to technology to sabotage relationships, researchers claim

- Parents found to pretend they did not receive emails
- Researchers call for counselling to address the problem

By Mark Prigg

PUBLISHED: 08:37 EST, 28 August 2012 | **UPDATED:** 09:00 EST, 28 August 2012

Divorced parents are turning to technology in a bid to ruin their ex-partners relationship with their children, it was claimed today.

Researchers found that parents were increasingly using emails, text messaging and social networks to communicate, rather than talk face to face.

However, they also found many were misusing the technology, claiming to have missed or not received messages.

The University of Missouri researchers called for divorce counsellors to teach ex-spouses to use technology responsibly.

'Technology makes it easier for divorced couples to get along, and it also makes it easier for them not to get along,' said Lawrence Ganong, a professor of human development and family studies at MU.

'Parents who use technology effectively can make co-parenting easier, which places less stress on the children.

'Parents who use communication technology to manipulate or withhold information from the other parent can cause pain to the child.'

Researchers found separated and divorced couples are increasingly using emails, texting and social media to communicate with their ex-partners about their children.

Professor Ganong found that ex-partners who were cooperative with one another used emails and texting to schedule visits and other activities.

Couples who did not get along used communication technology to avoid confrontations and control their former partners' access to their children.

Ganong and his colleagues interviewed 49 divorced parents individually about the quality of their relationships with their ex-partners.

Parents who had cooperative relationships saw technology such as email and texting as an effective tool to coordinate exchanges of their children, and some even used online calendars to share information about their children's activities.

However, separated parents who had hostile relationships used the same technology to manipulate their ex-spouses and limit communication.

For example, some parents in the study pretended they never received emails from their former partners.

However, the team concluded that email was a useful tool.

'Email is a great resource for hostile parents who can't talk face-to-face,' said Professor Ganong.

'They can communicate essential information while editing what they say to avoid conflict.

'Also, the parents have a record of what was agreed upon.'



University of Missouri students work for change

By Janese Silvey

Tuesday, August 28, 2012

Buoyed by the success of a campaign earlier this year that showed just how powerful a collective student voice can be, two University of Missouri groups will continue to work together this year.

The Associated Students of the University of Missouri, a UM System lobbying arm, is adding members to its board from student body governments from all four campuses. At MU, that group is the Missouri Students Association, which is considering adding a position to its executive body that would act as a liaison between the two groups.

More closely aligning aims to take advantage of the strengths of both groups, said Corbin Evans, legislative director of ASUM. His team of student lobbyists has the know-how to work the halls of the state Capitol, he said, but MSA has the ability to reach out to the students on campus.

"ASUM is down there every day and understands how things work legislatively, and MSA can provide the warm bodies and make students aware of what's going on," said Steven Dickherber, MSA chief of staff.

MSA got involved in state government in January when Gov. Jay Nixon threatened to cut funding to higher education by 12.5 percent. Through a campaign called "More for Less," the student group gathered signatures, wrote letters to lawmakers and rallied in Jefferson City to fight the cut. Lawmakers ultimately passed a budget keeping funding flat.

Historically, students have not had a strong voice in the Capitol, in part because of the population's turnover, said state Rep. Stephen Webber, who also is an MU law student. "I think it noticeably improved last session, and I'm encouraged they're trying to build off that," he said.

It's easy to lose that momentum, though, when legislators aren't in session and students are concentrating on schoolwork, Dickherber said. That's why this fall MSA and ASUM are using the election season to keep students engaged. The groups are hosting voter registration drives and forums to educate them on candidates and issues, including a proposed tobacco tax increase.

Even though some of the revenue from the proposed 73-cent cigarette tax increase would support higher education, MSA is not taking a stance, Dickherber said.

"Our goal is not to push one way or another," he said. "MSA's goal is we're going to be hosting informational sessions, forums and debates for advocates on each side. It's important students understand what the tobacco tax is, how it affects different organizations and different people and that they vote based on their convictions."

And while More for Less was a one-time campaign, that doesn't mean lawmakers won't hear from students again.

"I think that lawmakers in Jefferson City should expect a much higher student participation in the democratic process," Dickherber said. "If budget cuts continue, if financial aid — Bright Flight, Access Missouri — is underfunded, students absolutely will be at the Capitol and writing letters."