COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM System, others give feedback on performance-funding model

By Allison Prang
February 18, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Key players in higher education are expressing concern about the possibility that performance goals will factor into state calculations of not only new but also base funding for Missouri's public colleges and universities.

That concern was one of many addressed in a summary of public comments the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Education received in response to a new draft of a proposed funding model for higher education.

The committee summarized the input it received and offered notes in response. The Missourian obtained copies of the comments submitted by the Missouri Department of Higher Education, the Council on Public Higher Education and the University of Missouri System.

A few of the suggestions were echoed by multiple schools and higher education organizations. One recommendation was that only new funding for higher education be allocated based on performance. That's what Gov. Jay Nixon has proposed in his budget for fiscal 2014.

State Rep. Mike Lair, R-Chillicothe, vice chairman of the joint committee, said the goal is to have the new funding model approved and in place by the time the budget process for fiscal 2015 begins.

The joint committee's model proposes that 10 percent of a school’s total state appropriation be based on performance. House Bill 1731 called on the committee to develop a new funding model by Dec. 31 and "requires the General Assembly to implement the funding formula beginning July 1, 2014."

Bob Mullen, director of institutional research and planning for the UM System, wrote a letter to the committee expressing the concerns of UM administrators.
"A formula could allocate performance funding first as a percent of the total new funding," he wrote. "If performance funding is treated as part of the base, in a year in which state support is reduced relative to the prior year, an institution that does not reach its performance goals will suffer not only the overall reduction in state support but also a reduction due to performance."

The agreement between Nixon and the state's colleges and universities was that only new funding would be based on performance, said Nikki Krawitz, UM System vice president of finance and administration.

Krawitz said in a follow-up email that the Missouri Department of Higher Education worked with two- and four-year schools to come up with a model for performance funding. The Coordinating Board for Higher Education recommended to the governor that the model solely apply to new funding.

The goals that the institutions identified were "stretch goals," given administrators' belief that only new appropriations — and not base funding — would be affected by performance, Krawitz said.

For schools to change their goals, Krawitz said, the model adopted by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education would have to be changed.

Lair said the problem with that idea is that the performance funding model wouldn't be used in years when the state has no new money to give to higher education.

The Department of Higher Education submitted two pages of comments to the committee, expressing serious concern over a simulation that estimates Missouri colleges and universities are being underfunded by about $389 million.

“The spreadsheets that were released with the revised model show how an additional $389 million above the current appropriation would be distributed among the institutions,” the letter states. “However, the state is obviously not likely to have that amount of money to invest in the next fiscal year, or over the course of the next several fiscal years. Thus it is both necessary and crucial for the model to provide a mechanism for distributing whatever amount of money is actually available."

“In other words, how will the model actually function in real life? This fundamental question remains unanswered and the appropriateness and viability of the model simply cannot be fully evaluated without an answer,” the letter continues.
One topic that received a lot of attention at a Thursday hearing on the model was funding for community colleges. Unlike four-year institutions, community colleges have the ability to tax area residents, which is an extra source of revenue that other schools don't have.

"We're trying to do it for the good of the state," Lair said of the performance model. "The entire state. All of the four years and all of the two years. And that's what really creates the hassle."

Another recommendation from the Council on Public Higher Education was to "consider not incorporating the funding model into statute," or not actually putting the model into legislation.

"It's been eight months of really hard work, a lot of data, a lot of meetings around the state, trying to do the right thing and it would really be a shame not to use it," Lair said.

Supervising editor is Scott Swafford.
Faculty group gets reply to NSEI request

In response to a request by the MU Faculty Council, University of Missouri Chancellor Brady Deaton has opened admissions to the nuclear engineering program and promised to keep the existing curriculum in place for the next five years.

In March, University of Missouri Graduate School Dean George Justice announced the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute would close. Admissions were halted, and administrators proposed moving the institute into the College of Engineering.

The institute's four faculty members recently proposed that the MU Faculty Council adopt a resolution seeking several changes in relation to the institute, and last month the council agreed to ask Deaton to open admissions and protect the curriculum. In his response, Deaton said in a letter that admissions to the nuclear engineering graduate programs would be open immediately and the four professors will have control over the curriculum for five years.

The institute's professors had asked the Faculty Council to seek other measures, which included appointing an NSEI faculty member as interim director and changing the line of administrative reporting. MU Faculty Council decided against including those items in the resolution sent to Deaton.

Deaton said in his response that all current students previously guaranteed the opportunity to finish the power engineering, medical physics, or health physics curriculum would be allowed to carry on, and the institute's research program will remain intact. Deaton said NSEI will be a research center in the College of Engineering. "The Center will receive the normal Engineering overhead of 50 percent of all funds returned to the college by the campus for Center grants. This could increase the current overhead going to NSEI by 100 percent, allowing the faculty greater flexibility in their research endeavors."
Deaton puts admissions and administration under John Gahl, who will serve as director of the newly created Nuclear Engineering Program, which will consist of 14 interdisciplinary faculty as well as the four faculty members from the institute.

“This administrative change will allow us to assure continuity to new students who seek degree programs in Nuclear Engineering,” Deaton said. “We have enormous strengths in Nuclear Engineering that remain untapped. This move is intended to begin the process of opening up opportunities at the University of Missouri to a broader range of outstanding students.”

However, Sudarshan Loyalka, a curators' professor in nuclear engineering and one of the four institute professors, questioned the makeup of the faculty in the Nuclear Engineering Program.

“They do not have faculty members who are practicing nuclear engineers,” Loyalka said. “These people are environmental engineers and mechanical engineering and chemist. Out of 14, none have practiced nuclear engineering in the last five to 10 years and have not been active in research.”

Gahl said a professor with a doctorate in mechanical engineering would be "highly qualified" to teach nuclear engineering.

On Thursday, Justice, Provost Brian Foster and College of Engineering Dean Jim Thompson attended the MU Faculty Council meeting to explain the decisions concerning the institute. Foster said the institute could not continue under its current form as an administrative unit, and the College of Engineering decided to develop a new nuclear engineering emphasis that would help broaden the nuclear engineering presence on campus and engage more people.

“These four faculty members” from NSEI “have control over what the curriculum looks like,” Justice said at the meeting. "They get to choose what courses they teach, and they can continue to advise whatever students they want to advise.”

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MU religious holiday guide intended to inform, not inflame

By Zach Strader
February 15, 2013 | 8:24 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Contrary to Fox News reports, Wiccan and pagan holidays do not carry the same weight at MU as Christmas and Hanukkah.

A story that surfaced Friday by Joshua Rhett Miller on the Fox News website asserted that MU treats Wiccan and pagan celebrations the same as mainstream holidays, offering students a pass on tests and papers due those days.

The story declared that an official MU guide on religions suggests accommodating all observers to make it so.

Not true, responded MU.

Spokesman Christian Basi called the story “sensational reporting.”

The "Guide to Religions: Major Holidays and Suggested Accommodations" was put together as part of the Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative.

An introduction describes the guide "an educational resource for the myriad of religious holy days celebrated at Mizzou."

It lists almost 45 observances that spring from Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Shinto, Hindu, Eastern Orthodox, Sikh and other traditions, as well as Wiccan and pagan practices.

For a number of holidays, the guide suggests adjusting class schedules to avoid important academic deadlines for students on those days.

No such recommendation is proposed for Wiccan or pagan holidays, such as winter solstice, spring equinox, May Day and Candlemas.
Basi said the guide is just another resource for people interested in learning about other cultures. MU is "not pushing the guide or the holidays on anyone."

"The guide is informational to help faculty, staff and students know about the different customs and traditions of multiple religious groups," Basi said.

Noor Azizan-Gardner, chief diversity officer for the university, said, "The accommodations are for people in those respective belief systems, not for everybody."

She said the Diversity Office acknowledges all requests to add holidays to the guide but passes no judgment. The office consults with religious scholars to compile the information in the listings.

The story originated as a post by Christopher White, a graduate student in journalism at MU. He wrote a piece Feb. 12 for The College Fix — a website branded, "your daily dose of right-minded campus news."

(Note: White was the author of three stories during a class held over the past winter break at the Columbia Missourian.)

He argued in his Feb. 12 post that listing the holiday dates in the MU religions guide implies consideration should be given to all when creating class schedules.

"It's an underlying suggestion that [teachers] should not do projects on those days, coercing them into abiding by the guidelines," he said on Friday.

White said he felt slighted that Fox News did not acknowledge his article.

"To see them take it and write their own story, not link to mine, I thought it was a little bizarre," he said.

MU has at least 30 religious organizations to serve the student population and Columbia has more than 100 places of worship off-campus.

"We are proud of the diversity on this campus," Basi said. "We have students from over 120 different countries, from every state and from many different cultures and backgrounds."
MU guide noting pagan, Wiccan holidays draws attention

A Fox News story about the University of Missouri's inclusion of pagan and Wiccan holidays on guidelines for dealing with religious observances was sensationalized and inaccurate, an MU spokeswoman said.

The story, posted on the Fox News website yesterday, said that MU students "don't need to cram for exams that fall on Wiccan and Pagan holidays" and that the university has put those holidays "on par with Christmas, Thanksgiving and Hanukah."

The story cites a university guide "designed to help faculty know when and when not to schedule homework and exams."

"The Fox News story was really incorrect," MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said. "It is not part of the policy of the university to ask professors not to give exams during holidays."

Instead, she said, the inclusion of holidays in the guide is provided to "faculty, staff and student leaders as an educational resource, just so they are aware of these holidays and to be sensitive."

The guide includes holidays from a multitude of religious traditions, including Jewish, Hindu, Islamic and Christian. Pagan and Wiccan holidays were added to the guide in the fall at the request of students and staff, said Noor Azizan-Gardner, chief diversity officer for the university.

"We are about being inclusive. If we have requests, we have to respond to a request and be able to let people know there are students, faculty and staff who are in this community ... and these are holidays that they have," she said.

She said there are no recommendations for accommodations for any of the eight pagan and Wiccan holidays listed in the guide. Instead, the guide only describes general practices associated with those days. For other holidays, the guide recommends avoiding scheduling important academic activities on those days — for instance, Jewish Sukkot or Chinese New Year. Some days come with
recommendations for food accommodations, such as Ash Wednesday and Good Friday for Christians.

The guide, however, is just that — a guide, not formal university policy, Azizan-Gardner said. "If you look at the guide to religion, it just lists all of the religious observations. Many do not have any accommodations whatsoever," she said. "Some do, and it's very specific about the people who are in that faith system. It doesn't apply to anybody else."

Overall, she said, it's about awareness and respect of the many religions on MU campus. "It's not about putting value on any faith communities," she said. "Our role is to acknowledge every faith community on campus and let everyone know these faith communities exist."

She said she was "very sad" when she saw the Fox News story. "It's obvious to me the reporter didn't really go to the website and read what's on it or seriously look at it," she said.

In a statement to Fox News, the MU News Bureau said MU had not had complaints about the guide and that many have found it "useful and informational."

The same statement also said the guide is "a resource for faculty, staff and students to help them learn about the many religious customs they might encounter in a diverse community such as the university." Nowhere does it say that the guide exempts students from homework or tests.

This morning, a petition was started on change.org asking Fox News and Tammy Edwards, a Fox News contributor quoted in the original article, to retract statements regarding MU's religion guide.
University of Missouri to recognize Wiccan, pagan holidays

Students at the University of Missouri may no longer have to worry about cramming for exams on Wiccan or pagan holidays, as they've been included in the university’s Guide to Religions.

There are 42 holidays listed in the university’s calendar, with Jewish holidays counting for eleven, Wiccan and pagan holidays for eight and Christian holidays for seven. The other holidays include Hindu, Muslim, Baha’i, Shinto, Buddhist and Sikh holidays.

“The holidays and accommodations section of this guide is provided to faculty, staff and student leaders as an educational resource for the myriad of religious holy days celebrated at Mizzou,” the guide reads. “Not only does this section offer crucial information about dates and practices, we also hope that the information about recommended academic and food accommodations will be valuable to those planning classroom activities and other academic and co-curricular events.”

Among the holidays listed for Wiccan followers is Beltane, an event in May to celebrate the arrival of summer and wishing for fertility in the coming year, The Daily Mail reports.

Another summer festival, Litha, is marked by lighting bonfires and staying up all night to watch the sun rise.
No Mizzou Job for Administrator with Ties to Abu Ghraib

Amid controversy about one of two finalists' involvement in military prison systems, the University of Missouri at Columbia has halted its search for a new division executive director in its College of Education.

Dan Clay, college dean, sent out an email last week saying he "decided to not fill the position at this time" after receiving a recommendation from a faculty search committee and "input from other stakeholders," The Columbia Daily Tribune reported.

The announcement followed a protest and additional community backlash related to retired Col. Larry James' consideration for the post, after his name surfaced as a strong candidate earlier this month. Opponents cited the former Army psychologist’s work at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the military detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as disqualifying for an academic position. James, dean of the School of Professional Psychology at Wright State University, wrote about his experiences reforming both prisons' treatment of detainees as their director of behavioral health in a memoir called Fixing Hell: An Army Psychologist Confronts Abu Ghraib. He maintains that numerous independent investigations have revealed no wrongdoing on his part.

A spokeswoman for Mizzou's College of Education, told the Tribune it was "really a decision about both candidates," which also included Matthew Burns, a faculty member of the University of Minnesota Department of Educational Psychology. "Neither of the individuals was the right person at this time."

James did not respond to a request for comment.
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Search halted for MU position sought by Larry James

By MISSOURIAN STAFF
February 15, 2013 | 5:29 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The MU College of Education has decided not to fill the position of division executive director right now.

The college declined to select either of two candidates, including former military psychologist Larry James, who were finalists for the position. The other candidate was Matthew Burns of the University of Minnesota.

James proved to be controversial because of his connection to the interrogations at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Since 2008, he has been dean of the School of Professional Psychology at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

According to a memo from Education Dean Daniel Clay, Mike Pullis will serve as interim director after John Wedman retires Feb. 28. Pullis will continue in that interim role until another director is found, Clay told faculty and staff.

Wedman will assume a part-time role throughout the next year to help facilitate the transition, Clay said. As director, he was paid $162,314 during the 2011-2012 school year, according to UM System payroll data.

"The search committee completed its work by summarizing feedback from faculty, staff, students and other sources," said Pullis, who chaired the committee. "After receiving our input, Dean Clay made the decision not to fill the position."

The college does not have a set time frame for any future hiring process, said Barbara Peterson, director of strategic communications.

"The college is going to take time to evaluate the best way to move forward," she said.
The division executive director leads a team of about 60 faculty and 29 staff in nine graduate academic programs, according to the job description.

James wrote a memoir, "Fixing Hell: An Army Psychologist Confronts Abu Ghraib," as a chronicle of the events in Iraq and Cuba. Ethical situations in his book were cited by critics as key reasons to investigate his role in the interrogations. James was deputy director of the behavioral science consultation team at Guantanamo Bay from January to May 2003 and served as director from June 2007 to May 2008. He was director of a similar team from June to October 2004 at the Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center at Abu Ghraib prison, according to the curriculum vitae he provided to the College of Education search committee.

During those periods, reports surfaced about the abuse of the detainees in custody. Legal complaints were filed in Louisiana and Ohio seeking an investigation of James' role in the interrogations. James has said that no adjudicatory body has ever found probable cause to initiate sanctions against him because of his connections to the interrogations in Cuba and Iraq.

His critics said a thorough investigation of his possible involvement in the abuses has never taken place. They also asserted that his ethical decisions at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib should disqualify him to practice psychology.

"There has never been any evidence whatsoever for any of these boards to have the slightest cause to investigate," James told the Missourian in early January.

MU Spanish professor Michael Ugarte said he was pleased with the outcome. Ugarte co-authored a letter directed to Chancellor Brady Deaton, requesting revocation of James' candidacy.

"I commend the chancellor and search committee for acknowledging our letter and allowing community members to listen to James' talk," Ugarte said of a Feb. 5 public forum during the candidate's on-campus interview. "That speaks to the transparency of the process."

Jeff Stack — coordinator of the Mid-Missouri Fellowship of Reconciliation, which helped organize a protest before James' visit — said he was elated about the decision. The fellowship and several other organizations were planning to hold another demonstration Thursday.

"We're happy to call it off and are thankful for the decision the College of Education has made," he said.
MU halts administrator search after torture controversy

The University of Missouri is holding off on filling an administrative position that attracted a controversial candidate.

Larry James, who served as the director of behavioral science division at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, was one of two finalists being considered for the job of division executive director at the MU College of Education.

His past experiences, including allegations of involvement in torture, drew criticism from staff and sparked a protest on campus. An on-campus interview last week was open to the public, and questions from community members centered on James' alleged connections to torture.

Yesterday, Daniel Clay, dean of the College of Education, sent out an email saying he "decided to not fill the position at this time" after receiving a recommendation from the search committee and "input from other stakeholders."

Barb Peterson, director of strategic communications for the College of Education, said it was "really a decision about both candidates," which also included Matthew Burns, a faculty member of the University of Minnesota Department of Educational Psychology.

"Neither of the individuals was the right person at this time," she said.

When asked whether the protest against James affected the decision, Peterson said "both candidates were evaluated on their merits."

"We encouraged faculty, staff, students and community members to provide input on both candidates," she said. "We valued and respected opinions … of stakeholders and gave those opinions serious consideration."

Michael Pullis will serve as the interim division executive director after John Wedman retires Feb. 28. The statement said "he will continue in that interim role until another individual assumes that role."
Peterson said there isn’t a time frame yet for when the university will select a person to fill the role permanently.

"The college is going to evaluate the best way to move forward," she said.
The University of Missouri has ended a search for a leader for its College of Education after controversy over a finalist's background as a psychologist at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib.

The Columbia Daily Tribune (bit.ly/15iedLf) reports that the school is appointing the head of its faculty search committee as an interim replacement rather than hire retired Army Col. Larry James, or a second finalist from the University of Minnesota.

James is dean of professional psychology at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. His 22-year military career includes two stints overseeing interrogations at the U.S. military detention centers.

Faculty and student critics said James was involved in abuse of detainees. He denied the charges.

James had also coordinated mental health resources at the Pentagon after the Sept. 11 terror attacks.
U. of Missouri Stops Job Search Amid Dispute Over Finalist’s Military Record

The University of Missouri at Columbia has halted a search to fill a leadership post in its College of Education after a controversy erupted over a finalist’s background as a retired military psychologist, according to the Columbia Daily Tribune. Students and others had protested the university’s recruitment of Larry James, who worked at military detention centers in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and Abu Ghraib, Iraq. His critics have raised allegations about his involvement in torture, which he denies. The college’s dean, Daniel L. Clay, wrote in an e-mail on Thursday that he had “decided to not fill the position at this time” after receiving input from the search committee and others, according to the newspaper. A spokeswoman for the college told the newspaper that the move was a decision about both finalists for the job; the other was a faculty member at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. The professor leading the search will serve in an interim role until another person takes the job, though the university does not yet have a time frame for filling the role permanently, the newspaper reported.
Napoleon Chagnon may well be the most famous and most infamous anthropologist alive. Famous for the years he spent conducting fieldwork among the Yanomamö, a large and isolated native tribe in Venezuela and Brazil, and his extensive writings on their kinship structures, marriages, warfare, and more (most notably his 1968 work *Yanomamö: The Fierce People*, which sold close to a million copies in numerous editions and which for decades was routinely assigned in introductory anthropology courses); infamous even today in the wake of the 2000 book *Darkness in El Dorado*, by Patrick Tierney, who accused Chagnon and several of his colleagues of the most appalling and egregious sorts of misconduct and abuse.

The most extreme of the many allegations in *Darkness in El Dorado* was that Chagnon and his sometime collaborator, the late geneticist James V. Neel of the University of Michigan, had introduced or exacerbated a measles epidemic among the previously unexposed Yanomamö. While that claim has been repeatedly and thoroughly rebutted, its lingering stench -- and that of some of Tierney's other charges, whose veracity (or otherwise) is less clear (such as that Chagnon incited violence among the Yanomamö merely to provide support for his own, spurious, theories) -- has clung to Chagnon (and has sparked numerous and heated debates within the American Anthropological Association) -- ever since.

Much of why Chagnon has never quite been able to extricate himself from scandal has to do with his particular facility for cultivating enemies. Over the course of his career, he managed to alienate the Salesian missionaries who wield a great deal of influence over Yanomamö affairs in Venezuela; a number of his former colleagues and collaborators; and a wide array of anthropologists -- American, Venezuelan, Brazilian, and otherwise.

Chagnon's new book, *Noble Savages: My Life Among Two Dangerous Tribes -- the Yanomamö and the Anthropologists* (Simon & Schuster) is a 500-page behemoth dedicated to nailing down every aspect of his side of the story: from the earliest years he spent among the Yanomamö, in the mid-1960s, all the way through to the ongoing fallout of the El Dorado scandal. The book is both a fascinating (and layman-friendly) look at a nearly extinguished way of life and a scathing polemic against Chagnon's numerous critics, whom he does not hesitate to name and shame.
In Chagnon's view, the bulk of the criticism against him stems from what he deems the "widespread biophobia" among anthropologists -- particularly cultural anthropologists -- who have no stomach for his theories about the impact of evolution on human behavior. (One notable example: a 1988 *Science* article in which Chagnon showed that Yanomamō men who had killed other men had more wives and more offspring than those who had not, and argued that violence might therefore be seen to serve an evolutionary function, i.e., maximizing one's reproductive opportunities.) Another factor, he says, is the trend among anthropologists toward "activism and advocacy" on behalf of "political cause[s]," rather than the straightforward scientific study that he sees as anthropology's raison d'être.

Indeed, asked to comment on the new book, Chagnon's longtime critic Leslie Sponsel, professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of Hawaii, wrote in an e-mail:

"[T]he controversy, and probably the book... will continue to distract attention from serious issues of the violation of professional ethics and human rights that remain unresolved, and most tragically of all, distract attention from the Yanomami and their situation which are immensely more important. Why don't you research and write an article on the Yanomami? Are they unimportant in all of this?"

Another noted Chagnon foe, Leda Martins, associate professor of anthropology at Pitzer College, was more phlegmatic: "Well, it is what it is," she wrote.

*Inside Higher Ed* conducted an e-mail interview with Chagnon, now Distinguished Research Professor and Chancellor's Chair for Excellence in Anthropology at the University of Missouri at Columbia and adjunct research scientist at the University of Michigan, for his perspective on his career, its controversies, and the state of the field of anthropology.

Note: This article uses the spelling Yanomamō, which is Chagnon's own preferred term for the tribe and the one used throughout *Noble Savages*. Chagnon's critics and many neutral parties tend to use the spelling Yanomami.

**Q:** How would you describe the current state of the discipline of cultural anthropology?

**A:** Cultural anthropology has gone through some important changes, beginning at about the time I was in the most productive state of my Yanomamō field research in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One important change was the disappearance of tribesmen in the traditional regions of the world where they had been found. Part of this was the consequence of the improvement in transportation technology -- the availability of helicopters and light aircraft that could reach remote, isolated areas and the widespread use of outboard motors on watercraft and outposts of civilization like missions and trading outposts that could provide fuel for these.

Another change, especially in forested areas like Amazonas, was the spread of the lumber industry and cattle ranching where formerly dense forests existed.... So, in general, the traditional subject matter of cultural anthropology -- the study of remote tribesmen -- was disappearing and most cultural anthropologists began studying other groups, like traditional peasants in Latin
America, ghettos in large cities, youth gangs in small cities in Europe, and even the areas whence their grandparents and other relatives came.

In addition to these changes in the subject matter itself, new approaches, styles, and intellectual directions developed -- "postmodernism," political activism on behalf of native peoples, gender studies, and other -isms that shared, in general, a skepticism bordering on contempt for the scientific method and evolutionism. Finally, in my estimation, the cultural branch of anthropology tended to have increasingly fewer academic guidelines and rules, intellectual demands, and rigorously structured graduate programs that entailed comprehensive training in, for example, linguistics, statistical methods, field research requirements, and general knowledge about the history of the discipline. It was very possible for someone to earn a Ph.D. in anthropology and essentially know only about one specialized topic -- like the reasons why women in rural Poland were suppressed and unable to have their voices heard.

But another branch of cultural anthropology went in the direction of science and evolutionary theory and was more rigorous in the kinds of field studies and analyses its members did. Today it is generally known as either evolutionary psychology or evolutionary ecology, and it tends to be more in line with the kinds of issues and methods that biologists and ecologists use in the study of a variety of animal population -- including humans and other primates.

One consequence of these developments has been a great deal of bickering, backbiting, and often open conflict in major departments of anthropology leading, in some cases, to the splitting of departments into "the scientists" and "the nonscientists." I retired, for example, from the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1999, just before this kind of friction reached a climax. I was hired by the University of Missouri’s anthropology department, where an abiding respect for science and evolutionary theory is shared by all of the faculty I have gotten to know.

In short, I think those departments of anthropology whose members adhere to the scientific method will endure and again come to be the "standard" approach to the study of Homo Sapiens, while those that are nonscientific will become less and less numerous or eventually be absorbed into disciplines that are nonanthropological, like comparative literature, gender studies, philosophy, and others.

Q: What were some of your key conclusions about human behavior based on your observations of the Yanomamó? What made these ideas so controversial?

A: Foremost among my conclusions about human behavior based on my longtime study of the Yanomamó is that Yanomamó behavior is essentially like our behavior. Like us, they choose courses of action that, in general, contribute to their own well-being and the well-being of their families -- their kinsmen. Our behavior differs in degree, not kind, because we now live in communities that number in the billions of individuals and have developed institutions like the political state, the empire, or the nation and, very importantly, laws that proscribe many kinds of behavior and activities at the pain of severe penalties, fines, censorship, incarceration, and even execution.
The ideas on which my research rest in fact are NOT controversial to most educated people, especially those who understand the procedures of science and the more general thing we call common sense. But I have argued all during my academic life that humans and all organisms have an evolved nature and a learned nature. Unfortunately, many cultural anthropologists hold the view that humans are virtually unique among living organisms in having only a cultural nature -- and are repulsed by the notion that aspects of human behavior can only be understood if one admits that humans are the product of evolution, as are all forms of life.

Let me give just one example. Most anthropologists never think about the question: “Why are humans social, i.e., live in groups containing both sexes and individuals of all ages?” Anthropologists just assume that it is “natural” to be social. But many species are not social and the sexes come together just long enough to mate and then disperse. Thus, the most central characteristic of humans, “sociality,” must be explained. That explanation cannot be provided by cultural anthropology because it is a biological question. My Yanomamö field studies were conducted AFTER I became familiar with the profound developments in biological theories after about 1965 that explained cooperation, altruism, competition, etc., in ways that were new and generally unknown in anthropology. This ignorance in the theoretical canon of anthropology made this idea controversial.

Q: Can you explain your concerns about the effect of postmodernism on the field of anthropology?

A: I probably have an overly skeptical view of postmodernism in anthropology, largely because my work has generally been singled out as “wrongheaded” by academics who purport to be postmodernists. My “wrongheadedness” inevitably comes down to my defense of the scientific method in my work and my complete rejection of the notion that “explanations” in anthropology are merely ideological constructs and therefore arbitrary because “constructs” are always contaminated by the individual’s political, economic, religious, social, etc. views. In short, there are no acceptable means of verification of claims about events in the external world because each person’s view and explanations are simply contaminated “constructs.” This implies that an empirically verifiable external world does not exist and the standard practice of appealing to empirical evidence cannot be used to verify someone’s claim: all claims are equal because they are all constructs of the human psyche.

Q: The study of anthropology has changed a great deal since the 1960s, when you first went to live with the Yanomamö. How do you view the changes in the image and role of the anthropologist over time?

A: If by anthropologist you mean “cultural” anthropologist who has contempt for the scientific method, then my response would be that the “image” of the “cultural anthropologist” among other scientists is probably that they have nothing important to add to any discussion of meaningful things in important human matters and are, for all intents and purposes, irrelevant. I am concerned about this for the future of cultural anthropology as a viable avocation. My view is that the only way cultural anthropologists can remain relevant in pronouncements about human affairs -- whether it is advocating for native rights or attempting to explain violence in human
societies -- is if they use common sense, express opinions based on verifiable and repeatable data, and don’t simply make up stuff.

**Q:** What are some of the more common misconceptions about the Yanomamô?

**A:** I would say that the main misconception that most people have is the impression that the Yanomamô are uniformly like the groups that I have studied and there is little or no variation from one group -- a cluster of villages with a common historical origin -- to another group. But I have repeatedly indicated that the Yanomamô are a very large tribe of over 20,000 individuals who live in some 250 or more separate villages scattered over a very large area, an area about the size of the state of North Dakota. Several distinct dialects of their language have developed due to geographical isolation of some of these groups and lack of contact between them for a variety of reasons, including differences in terrain, altitude, preference for certain types of ecology, and possible deliberate avoidance due of fear of neighbors with a reputation for nastiness.

There have been a number of anthropologists who have lived among different groups of Yanomamô and have published excellent works. In fact, over 40 different anthropologists have visited and worked among the Yanomamô for brief periods of time. This should have turned into a wonderful opportunity for informed anthropologists with firsthand experience to compare notes on the measurable and documentable differences between the various groups in both Venezuela and Brazil -- things like differences in average village size, elevation and terrain differences, distance between villages, forms of antagonism between villages if any existed, results of lethal raids in terms of deaths, causes of other deaths, frequency of polygynous marriage, and a host of other questions.

But this kind of cooperation and discussion never developed, possibly because each anthropologist wanted his or her work to be unique and stand out from the work of others....

So, in the end, most of the anthropologists who worked among the Yanomamô decided it was “safer” to simply denounce me, contributing to the misconception that I was the only anthropologist who studied a group of Yanomamô who engaged in warfare, club fighting, and homicide -- making possible the rather humorous accusation that I projected my allegedly “vile” personality into the Yanomamô I studied, thereby either making them violent, or having to invent my evidence that they did engage in violence. One wonders how others have managed to avoid reporting deaths caused by violence in the groups of Yanomamô studied by other anthropologists. It would be refreshing if these data, if collected, would be made public so we anthropologists could begin trying to explain the differences in the rates and patterns.

**Q:** How would you answer the question that you pose in the book’s final chapter: "If the central allegation in Tierney’s book was false, why did his other accusations cause such a sensational scandal in the media and in academia?"

**A:** The answer to that question is probably one that a sociobiologist like me would give; people are very interested in the misfortunes of others who have had a little more success in life than they have had, and tend to be willing to accept stories that imply that they got ahead by dishonesty, cheating, subterfuge, or unfair privilege.
So, when someone like the editor of The New Yorker, known for its meticulous fact-checking, or a respected publisher like W. W. Norton with a large college text division, publishes an article by Tierney or a book by him, they do so because his story is most likely to be sensational and sell a large number of magazines or books because it is simply too sensational to turn down, despite its improbable veracity; two prominent scientists are exposed for their unethical and reprehensible treatment of innocent natives, like what the Nazi doctor Josef Mengele did to Jews in the death camps of WWII.

People just love to have the dirty laundry of others exposed and made public. Never mind what this does to the victims of the false accusations, and their families.

Mizzou creates terrorism, disaster research center, boosts mental health training efforts

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The University of Missouri has started a research center on disaster and terrorism in hopes of boosting training for mental health workers.

Assistant communications professor J. Brian Houston recently received a $2.4 million federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. He wants to study the long-term emotional turmoil faced by disaster and terror victims.

The center will employ a university social worker to train school teachers and counselors in Joplin, Kansas City, St. Louis and New Orleans in crisis intervention.

The four-year grant continues through September 2016.
More drought in 2013 threatens Midwest farms
Christopher Doering, Gannett Washington Bureau
8:35 a.m. EST February 15, 2013

Some experts predicted Thursday that the drought which cut crop yields this summer across much of the nation will continue this year, but one was more optimistic.

Story Highlights

- Some experts tell Senate Agriculture Committee that drought conditions will continue
- One expert is more optimistic that drought will ease and crop yields will increase
- Drought conditions drove down yields, increased corn prices and forced many to cut livestock herds because of high feed costs

WASHINGTON — After suffering through the worst drought in decades last year, farmers throughout the Midwest should brace for another round of hot and dry conditions in 2013, weather forecasters warned on Thursday.

As the spring planting season nears, forecasters have expressed concern that much of the Midwest could remain starved for moisture, though they caution it's still too early to safely predict the weather several months out. The Midwest could see a late summer increase in rainfall, but the relief will be much too late to help farmers, according to one prediction from a University of Missouri researcher.

"The continuing conditions really look like they're setting up for a very similar level of drought in the Midwest and West," Roger Pulwarty, a director with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who focuses on drought, told lawmakers on the Senate Agriculture Committee.

The 2012 drought spread beyond the Midwest to affect more than 60% of the contiguous United States, making it the worst since the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. A sharp drop in crop yields pushed corn and soybean prices to record highs during the summer and costs to feed U.S. livestock soared, forcing ranchers to send their herds to slaughter rather than pay the higher feed costs.

Conditions have since improved in the eastern Corn Belt states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois where most areas are no longer being hit by drought. The western Corn Belt, primarily Iowa, remains severely or extremely dry.
Joe Glauber, the U.S. Agriculture Department's top economist, embraced a more optimistic view. He told Senate lawmakers conditions should recover this year, lowering prices for corn, soybeans and other crops.

"Assuming adequate precipitation, it is likely that the major spring planted row crops will see a return to trend yields," Glauber said. "If so, a rebuilding of stocks and lower commodity prices would be expected in the fall. This should help relieve feed prices."

The latest Drought Monitor, a report by the U.S. government and the University of Nebraska, shows that through Tuesday much of the northwest quadrant of Iowa is still gripped by exceptional or extreme drought while the rest of the state is in at least a moderate-drought category. A recent USDA survey of Iowa soils showed that — even after recent rains and snowstorms — 90% of Iowa's 24 million acres were moisture-deficient.

But Glauber said the early season moisture levels are "a poor predictor" of how things will play out during the growing season. During the past 60 years in Iowa, when the season began with low subsoil-moisture levels, half had corn yields that were above average, Glauber said.

Throughout the United States, drought conditions persist in 66% of corn areas, 59% of winter wheat, 56% of soybeans and 69% of cattle-producing areas at the end of January, according to government data. "Cattle on the southern Plains are in a dry situation," Glauber told reporters after he appeared before the Senate panel. "We are very concerned."

Crop insurance payments helped farmers recover lost income caused by the drought in 2012. Glauber told the committee about $14.2 billion in indemnity payments have been made to producers for 2012 crops, but he said that figure could rise even higher to about $16 billion to $17 billion.

"Nobody feels the effect of weather disasters more deeply than our nation's farmers and ranchers whose livelihoods depend on getting just the right amount of rain at just the right time," said Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., who heads the Senate Agriculture Committee. "We all know that farming is the riskiest business in the world. Mother Nature certainty made sure we didn't forget that" in 2012, she said.
In historic Lexington, Mo., hope for survival as an art center

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS
The Kansas City Star

About 50 miles east of Kansas City, a town known for two Civil War battles and a cannonball lodged in a courthouse pillar is arming itself for a fight for survival.

This time the weapon of choice isn’t artillery but art.

Last month, Lexington beat out four other Missouri towns competing for two years of help from University of Missouri faculty and students to launch an art-driven revitalization effort. The competition was a first for the MU Extension service. If the pilot is successful, the effort could be replicated in other towns.

“This would not be art for art’s sake,” said Chris Campbell, a Columbia native who moved to the Lafayette County seat from Los Angeles two years ago after marrying the county prosecutor.

“The strategy is to use the arts as a vehicle for economic and community development.”

Those leading the charge — Campbell, Mayor Jerry Brown, the MU Extension, a handful of artists and a 17-year-old high school sculptor — envision the town teeming with artists from Kansas City, St. Louis and elsewhere. They see artists sculpting, painting and designing in basements, lofts, warehouse studios and galleries. They see visitors filling the streets for art fairs and music festivals that attract business owners and young families looking to live in a vibrant, culturally rich town.

Right now, though, Lexington’s streets are mostly empty.

An occasional customer wanders into one of the few women’s fashion boutiques, antiques shops and restaurants on Main Street. Around the corner, three burned-out buildings await a wrecking ball. Rows of quaint storefronts stand empty. In the three-square-block downtown, 10 buildings are vacant. Like so many other small towns, Lexington seems to be gasping for breath.

“If we do nothing now, Lexington will slowly deteriorate, and we will have a sign one day that says, ‘This was historic Lexington,’” said Brown, the former president of Wentworth Military Academy, just a few blocks off the town square. His wife, Georgia Brown, owns two of the 10 or so boutiques and shops on Main Street.
“I think our job is to educate people within a hundred-mile radius that we are here,” Georgia Brown said. “There are so many opportunities for the arts to work here.”

Lexington sprouted in 1820 atop Missouri River bluffs. As late as the 1980s, as many as 6,000 lived here.

Today it’s home to former U.S. Rep. Ike Skelton and about 4,700 other people. Jerry Brown says their average age is about 55. The per capita income is $22,000, but the town’s past is rich.

Beneath the loess soil and the tombstones in Machpelah Cemetery rests almost 200 years of Lexington history. “Everyone from statesmen to bankers and outlaws are buried there,” Campbell said.

Jesse James and his gang rode through a few times and stopped to do a little banking. As late as the 1960s, a half-dozen brothels operated.

Those are the kind of tales tourists might hear during a walking/driving history tour that the arts project advisory committee is planning as part of its revitalization program.

The committee, with the help of MU students and faculty who have photojournalism, art and design skills, expects to develop a CD and smartphone app that would correspond with a map tourists would use to visit Lexington’s historic sites, including the field where the Battle of Lexington was fought and the Oliver Anderson house with its preserved bullet and cannonball holes.

About 160 antebellum homes still stand in defiance of time, but recent years haven’t been kind to Lexington.

Through the 1990s, it fared better than many small towns. It had a booming antiques business, with more than a dozen stores. Its biggest employer was the Dunbrooke Apparel Corp.

But the Dunbrooke plant closed about 10 years ago, and the recession that started in 2008 reduced the number of antiques stores to five.

It was about that time that a report in the Chronicle of Higher Education concluded that when young people leave for college, jobs and life in the bigger city, they take with them their hometown’s future.

If a town can’t hold on to its young or at least lure them back after college, it dies. The higher education journal reported last year that in just over two decades, more than 700 rural U.S. counties have “hollowed out,” losing 10 percent or more of their population.

“Most of the time what I hear from the students here is that they just want to get out of Lexington,” said Marlin Roach, principal at Lexington High School, which has lost 25 percent of its student population over the last dozen years.
Young families aren’t moving to Lexington “because it is hard to be in a bedroom community when work is an hour away,” said Brad MacLaughlin, superintendent of schools. “The kiddos who go off to college, unless they’re nurses or teachers, they don’t come back.”

Seth Ritter, a junior at Lexington High School and the youngest member of the town’s arts advisory committee, admitted that at one time, “I thought about leaving here.”

But that has changed since the town won the MU Extension community art contest, he said.

In a chilly old brick building a few blocks from the town square, Seth admired stacks of rusty metal farm tools and neat piles of driftwood and river junk — raw materials for his art.

A sculptor and welder, he recently got use of the former grocery as his studio in exchange for watching over it for a family friend.

“I’d love to see this all turn into an even bigger picture with art classes for youth and adults, and artists and galleries all over town,” Seth said.

Brown thinks the community art project, coupled with a new hospital, is the prescription for the town’s cure.

Lexington tried in November for a $4 million bond issue to build a new hospital and lay infrastructure to support hoped-for hotels where Missouri highways 24 and 13 cross, but it failed by a narrow margin. City officials still expect they’ll get their new hospital in the near future.

“We are down to very few chances for survival if we lose this hospital,” Campbell said.

A rich coffee aroma wafted from Patricia Worth’s River Reader bookstore and café in one of the Queen Anne buildings on Main Street.

Community arts committee members drifted through the café door about 10:30 a.m. on a cold Tuesday in February and sat around a table toward the back. A group of women set another table with placemats and salads for their book club meeting later that afternoon.

Worth opened her bookstore in Lexington nine years ago.

“I fell in love with the place,” she said. “I wanted to open my shop where there was already some retail. This was perfect.”

Worth is the kind of business owner the art committee wants more of. She was first in town to rent studio space to a local artist, Jacque Chinnery, who fell in love with Lexington while on a day trip from Johnson County, Kan. She works in the coffee shop basement.

Talk of the Missouri Extension pilot project has already churned up movement among artists in Lexington.
“This program will enhance what we already have in this town,” said Maggie Bonanomi, a quilter and textile artist who came to Lexington for a workshop in 2002. “I decided I loved it here and bought a home.”

Bonanomi joined the arts advisory committee and this month bought a building where she’ll open a shop.

Art is already evident around town. Drawings of historic Lexington buildings cover City Hall’s lobby walls. Handmade lampshades hang from the ceiling of the women’s clothing store that Joann Ritter owns on the edge of downtown. The costume design artist and former Columbia College professor exhibits her work there, including a dress made of Taco Bell wrappers.

The local art, the river location and the history are reasons MU Extension chose Lexington for its pilot arts project. “Lexington was the most ready to start a project,” said Lee Ann Woolery, community arts specialist for MU Extension. “And having youth on board makes the project sustainable.”

Tuesday evening’s City Council meeting would be the committee’s chance to convince the eight-member council. The meeting began with a resident’s complaint about a 60-cent-a-month increase in the cost of garbage pickup.

Then Campbell made his pitch for civic backing for the arts project.

“Several of us are trying to open up Lexington and trying to bring the rest of the world to us,” he said. Borrowing words from other project supporters around town, Campbell said the arts program would strengthen the community from the inside out and spread.

“It’s positive momentum, something for people to talk about and we need that,” he said.

Brown agreed it will take time for the entire town to embrace the idea of art sparking economic development.

“There are some longtime residents who remember the way things were,” Brown said. “But it will never again be the way it was. Change is coming. The way I figure, either you are going to direct that change or just let it happen to you.

“I think we should direct.”
University of Missouri Chancellor Deaton and Katti, professor of radiology and physics in the School of Medicine and the College of Arts and Science and senior research scientist at the MU Research Reactor, were awarded honorary degrees from the Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences in Allahabad, India, on Dec. 9.

Deaton was honored for his contributions in the field of agricultural economics and his leadership as the chairman of the board for International Food and Agricultural Development.

Katti was honored for his scientific contributions in the green nanotechnological and nanobiomedical sciences.
Chamber endorses Medicaid expansion

The Columbia Chamber of Commerce voted Friday to support expanding Medicaid to 300,000 Missourians, citing concerns about the negative impact of rejecting the proposal.

The chamber Board of Directors voted to endorse the plan proposed by Gov. Jay Nixon to accept federal aid to add the uninsured people, saying in a news release that expansion would be good for chamber members and the Columbia-Boone County community.

With the announcement, the Columbia chamber joins a growing list of business organizations that have endorsed Medicaid expansion. A study by the University of Missouri found that expansion would add 24,000 health care jobs next year and add more than $8 billion to the state's economy over the coming seven years.

Federal aid would cover the full cost for three years, with the state share rising to 10 percent of the total.

The chamber statement focused largely on the negative economic impact of turning down the money. Missouri hospitals will lose about $4 billion from a program that pays compensation for caring for indigents. The health care industry also projects a loss of 9,000 jobs, $1.9 billion less in capital investment and $1.1 billion in costs shifted to people with insurance, which the statement called a “gloomy forecast.”
No MU mention
Airport says Frontier flights will end in May

Columbia Regional Airport flights on Frontier Airlines to Orlando, Fla., apparently are set to be discontinued in May, the airport announced Sunday.

However, it appeared the airport was not aware of the reason Frontier was discontinuing the service. The last flights are scheduled for May 13, according to the airport's website. The matter was brought to the airport's attention Sunday afternoon by travelers who had booked travel that was discontinued, a notice on the website said.

"We are trying to get an official statement or comment from Frontier as to why service with Frontier at COU is being discontinued," the notice said.

A search for flights on Frontier's website shows flights available through May 13, with a notice that reads: "Service between Columbia/Jefferson City area, MO (COU) and Orlando, FL (MCO) is discontinued after May 13, 2013."

The airport was encouraging those with flights booked after May 13 to contact Frontier immediately.

Frontier began its service from Columbia to Orlando in November. It was scheduled to increase departures per week from two to three in April, but a flight calendar on Frontier's website currently shows only two flights per week in April, on Mondays and Fridays.
Our City of the Future

By Al Germond

The visitors were impressed. Squiring a couple of old Mizzou grads around town recently left them rather impressed by all the development and construction both on and adjacent to the University of Missouri campus. Taking note of the considerable sprawl that has appeared since their last visit left them wondering what the city of Columbia would look like in, say, another 20 years. Although not in residence to participate in the ongoing daily discussion about the future of downtown Columbia, they were quickly brought on board about the challenge and balance of in-fill development as well as the major topic du jour — the fate of the Niedermeyer Building at 10th and Cherry streets.

They wondered whether downtown Columbia would ever accommodate a collection of high-rise office and business buildings, as is the case in Clayton. Will The District become an even larger off-campus dormitory as it rises upward and outward to accommodate more and more students? For now, the apparent highest and best use for certain parcels of land is the ongoing student housing and parking lot development extravaganza. With MU saying it can accommodate up to 40,000 students within its existing plant, private investors are still stepping up to feed and house these young people while university recruiters comb Illinois, Texas and other states to grab freshmen and upperclassmen wherever they can.

Benefits of growth
The economic benefit for the university with another 5,000 students on campus will be considerable. For example, if only 350 students sign up for a certain class — the overhead of instruction costs has already been established — but the auditorium can accommodate 400, filling those additional 50 seats multiplied by the tuition received per student on a credit hour basis would yield a very sweet gain. This profit, if you will, offsets the losses incurred by smaller, more specialized courses or could perhaps be set aside for research, infrastructure improvements or whatever.

Anyone who has lived here a while knows how expendable many buildings have become. Buildings have been summarily cut down with little or no objection for surface parking lots. Dozens of homes have been dispatched by the backhoe for nonresidential uses. The building at the northwest corner of 10th and Broadway lost the upper two stories more than half a century ago. Examining old photographs, plat books and Sanborn maps tells us a great deal about the evolution of Columbia’s business center since the community was first established.

Now perhaps it’s the Niedermeyer Building’s turn to be torn down; this heretofore ignored but rather elderly structure is what an investor would call a “hot potato,” or less charitably, a fire trap. Faced with costly, life-safety upgrades including a fire alarm system first — required for
human occupancy — and a sprinkler system later hardly makes economic sense on a square-foot basis for any but the most charitable of investors given the existing two story L-shaped structure’s inefficient use of the tract it occupies. With its growing list of historical pedigrees — indeed, by the time you read this, we’ll have certified proof that even King Tut darkened the Niedermeyer threshold a very long time ago — the only sensible thing for those adamant about saving it would be to buy the place, restore it and bring it into full compliance with Columbia’s life-safety codes.

**Cost of code compliance**

What we’re slowly finding out is that there are other Columbia structures, said to number more than 100, that are faced with typically costly life-safety upgrades if they are to continue housing people; this includes the installation of a fire alarm system first and a sprinkler system later. Columbia, like virtually every other community across the land, has adopted various national safety codes that, in turn, it imposes on its citizens. Favorable insurance rates — the city and county’s “3” fire rating is considered exemplary — stems from adherence to and enforcement of these codes with the unfortunate consequence that in the future, some existing structures might never be brought into compliance. And then what?

Looking at certain buildings, some of them rather close to the MU campus, has us wondering whether a few structures about to reach their centennial will still be standing 20 years from now. One can roam about and make suppositions about buildings that might have to come down because they’re too costly renovate and bring into code compliance. Don’t be surprised if some are marked for destruction and replacement by something brand new — perhaps even ugly in the eyes of some — but in full compliance with all the current and relevant life-safety codes. It’s sad but true. Although we can say we’re all for preservation, still, there comes a point.
A way back for Missouri teens who opt out of foster care?

When she turned 17, Mynecia Taylor had mapped out her life. First, she would leave foster care early. It would free her to live her way without the obstacles and rules that she felt were holding her back. Once out of foster care, she'd return to her unpredictable mother — it would be a challenge, but she'd make it work. She'd keep going to Roosevelt High, the fourth high school she'd attended since she went into foster care four years ago. She would keep working part-time jobs to save money. She would graduate Roosevelt. She would go to college.

A year later, like an estimated 20 percent of kids who leave foster care at 18 or younger, the soon-to-be Roosevelt senior class president was homeless. The night after her 18th birthday, she slept in an apartment building stairwell.

As teens who lack permanent placements in foster care approach 17 and 18, many chafe to leave a system they did not want to be a part of in the first place. Emboldened by years of living apart from family, some think they can do better on their own. But once out, they find they have no safety net when things go wrong.

“Now I feel like, well, gosh, I should have just stayed in the system,” Mynecia said of her early departure from foster care. “I would have had more help versus no help.”

Missouri allows foster youths to remain wards of the state until they are 21, entitling them to housing and other programs. And yet, despite those benefits, 237 youths in their 18th year left Missouri foster care during the most recent fiscal year, 51 of them on their 18th birthday. Once out, there’s little chance of getting back in.

A bill filed in Jefferson City by Sen. Jolie Justus, D-Kansas City, would change that. The proposal would enable former foster youths to re-enter state custody up to age 21.

“Allowing kids back in until age 21 can make all the difference for a young man or woman who makes the shortsighted decision to leave the system early,” Justus explained in a text message.
response to questions. “It’s no different than the parents who allow their kids to move back home for a couple of years when the kids realize that the world is a lot tougher than they anticipated. The only difference is, these kids don’t have parents. As Missouri citizens, we are their parents.”

Justus said that besides being a legislator, she is a lawyer who represents children in the foster care system and knows the risks that those who age out are less likely to continue their education and find jobs and more likely to become homeless, unemployed, imprisoned or face an unwanted pregnancy.

Child protection advocates say it would be a step toward improving a system they say fails young adults emerging from foster care.

“The state has stepped in to be the parent for children without family. To the extent we are the parents, we have to take that seriously, and we don’t do that by shutting them out at the first opportunity,” said Clark Peters, an assistant professor at the University of Missouri’s school of social work.

Mark Courtney, a social scientist at the University of Chicago, noted that in the last U.S. Census, about half of adults between 18 and 24 were living at home with one or both parents. Studies show young people today get about $38,000 in direct support from their parents or relatives between the ages of 18 and 30.

“Almost no one these days is expected to be independent at the age of 18,” he said.

BOUNCING AROUND

When Mynecia turned 17, she persuaded the judge in charge of her foster care placement to let her go back to her mother.

Studies estimate about 75 percent of children who opt out of foster care go back to the family they were removed from because they long to reconnect.

“They try to go back home, but the family is not ready for it,” said Susan Wagener, CEO of Covenant House Missouri. “They end up running away from home or the family kicks them out.”

In Mynecia’s case, the judge had his doubts.

“The judge warned me, 'There's no going back,'” Mynecia said.

But Mynecia was drawn to her mother and her younger brother. When she was in foster care, she would skip out on her foster families to see her brother at her mom’s house. Her visits were supposed to be supervised by caseworkers, but Mynecia said the visits were too infrequent.

“I could not be myself I could not see him,” she said.
Cattle rustlers targeting SW Mo. ranches

16 hours ago

Authorities say several ranches in southwest Missouri have been targeted recently by cattle thieves.

The Joplin Globe reports (http://bit.ly/W3LLG4) that Lawrence County is one of Missouri's top cow-calf producing counties and is among several area counties that have become the target of cattle rustlers.

A cattle industry spokesman estimates that about 200 cattle have been stolen in the past two years in Southwest Missouri, making a potential loss of $200,000. Local cattlemen think the actual number of cattle stolen has been underreported.

Eldon Cole, a cattle expert with University of Missouri Extension in Lawrence County, says it appears thieves are mixing the stolen cattle with other cattle of a similar type before taking them to market.

There are also $5,000 rewards for the arrest and conviction of cattle thieves.