Campus workers do essential jobs despite snow

By Karyn Spory

Tuesday, February 26, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Although college campuses are closed because of the winter weather, not everyone gets a snow day.

The lecture halls are empty, the doors to the research labs are shut, but students must be fed, and sidewalks must be cleared.

"I'm short-staffed, but we'll get it done," said Steven Bay, director of dining services at Columbia College.

Bay has eight staff members to feed nearly 350 students today. "It's still business as usual today; we'll just have to double up on work."

To make sure he would have enough staff, Bay offered his workers a place to stay last night. He said two employees stayed at his house last night, and his assistant let two employees stay with him.

Members of the dining staff weren't the only ones looking for a place to stay last night.

"We had several maintenance staff and campus safety staff stay overnight," said Bob Klausmeyer, director of campus safety at Columbia College.

Klausmeyer said even though staff found a place to stay, there wasn't much sleeping involved. "We worked late into the night to keep the area in front of resident hall clear and were up early to clear sidewalks," he said.

During campus closure, Klausmeyer said one of the most important routes is from the residential halls to the dining halls.

Several facilities on the University of Missouri campus, such as the hospital and veterinary hospital, never close.
"We serve as an emergency hospital for the Mid-Missouri area," said Marie Kerl, associate teaching professor of veterinary medicine and surgery. "Area practitioners count on us to remain open and provide service."

Kerl said being a veterinary disaster response facility means they are required to have a plan in place for a time of emergency. "The different sections of the hospital have severe weather plans, so we know what is supposed to happen" during an emergency.

During severe weather, the hospital works with minimal staff, usually working 12-hour shifts.

John Dodam, chairman of the department of veterinarian service and surgery, said many staff members have spent the night at the hospital.

"Everyone from anesthesiologists to surgeons are available and in the hospital to take care of patients brought in despite of the bad weather," Dodam said.

In fact, surgeons were working this morning to help an animal that had been hit by a car.

It's not just staff that is stuck on campus; students are confined to campus for the day.

"As inconvenient as it is, I think the students enjoy the snow day," said Kat Thomas, area coordinator of Banks Hall at Columbia College.

Thomas and her resident assistants have the task of helping keep students entertained during the snowstorm. That usually consists of programs, game days and the occasional snowball fight.

"We have to find a way to let" students "get their energy out and have some fun," Thomas said.

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As sequestration nears, possible effects at MU becoming clearer

By Dan Burley
February 26, 2013 | 3:23 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — This week, Kristofferson Culmer flies to Washington, D.C., to make his case against sequestration.

A fancier word for budget cuts, sequestration is an automatic, across-the-board reduction to federal spending. Culmer, an MU doctoral student in computer science, is president of MU's Graduate Professional Council, whose members would be acutely affected by the cuts.

Culmer plans to meet with the staffs of Missouri Sens. Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt and others. His key message: Federal funding for research helps graduate students, who, in turn, become professionals in various industries and help local, state and national economies.

Rob Duncan, MU vice chancellor for research, is already in Washington making a similar case. Cutting federally supported research "turns off our ability to recover (economically) in the first place," Duncan said.

In round two of the sequestration standoff, a clearer picture has emerged of what might happen to MU research that receives federal dollars and which MU researchers might be most affected.

At the same time, uncertainty still permeates all discussions.

"Everyone's apprehensive," said Sam Kiger, associate dean for research at the MU College of Engineering. "The agencies don't know what the situation will be yet. There's this cloud hanging over us."

MU research concerns

In January, Congress "kicked the can down the road" when it reached a deal on the fiscal cliff and postponed sequestration for three months, Duncan said.
The cuts, which begin Friday if no deal is reached, could reduce MU's federal research grants and contracts by $16 million this year, MU spokesperson Christian Basi said.

In 2011, MU received about $176 million in research support from federal agencies such as NASA, the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense, Duncan said.

So far, Duncan said, no federal agency has contacted an MU researcher to cancel or modify one of MU's 3,400 research contracts and grants.

The MU College of Engineering has major contracts with the Department of Defense, among other agencies, Kiger said. The department funds research on nano-explosives and sensors to detect explosives at airport screenings.

In total, the Defense Department contributed $14.2 million to MU in 2011, according to a University of Missouri System report.

Duncan said he's noticed slow response times from federal agencies as the cuts near.

He said no-cost extensions, which provide researchers with more time to spend unused money after their contract period ends, have been harder to get approved. He has also observed a delay in the time it takes an agency to decide on a new research award.

Duncan speculated that plans for new research grants and contracts would be the first thing shelved if sequestration hit, followed by a reduction in existing programs.

If it were to go into effect, sequestration would split evenly between defense and domestic discretionary spending. The measure would cut $85 billion from the federal budget by September and cut a total of $1.2 trillion over the next 10 years, according to the White House Office of Budget and Management.

The government awards MU researchers about 1,500 new grants and contracts a year, Duncan said. Most grants have a three-year lifetime, or performance period.

"If they turned all new funding off now, then in three years, there would be no contracts and grants to speak of," Duncan said.

**MU researchers affected**
The potential $16 million in cuts account for about 10 percent of MU’s federal research budget. Duncan said the cuts would likely hit students with graduate assistantships and those pursuing postdoctoral research.

"Federal grant money pays the salaries of our most junior colleagues," he said. "We could have some tough decisions to make."

Dennis Lubahn, a researcher and professor in the MU Biochemistry Department, said a 5 percent cut from his grant would hurt; a 10 percent cut, he said, would likely force layoffs.

"I’m not sure what to tell you," Lubahn said in an email. "We have gotten no details."

The potential effect on graduate students is taking Culmer to Washington with other members of the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students. Culmer plans to speak with Blunt’s staff. At a news conference at MU last week, Blunt said he expected sequestration to go through.

"The only way to change sequestration, in my opinion, is for President Obama to propose other spending cuts or to accept other spending cuts," Blunt said.

**Uncertainty reigns**

Ultimately, Duncan said MU researchers and their federal funding agencies are both in the dark on the true effect the potential cuts would have.

"It all depends on the agency," he said. "If we could prepare an Excel budget sheet for exactly what money will be turned off, we’d be planning for those eventualities right now."

The National Institutes of Health was MU’s largest contributor in 2011, funding $56.4 million that year, according to the UM System report.

NIH spokeswoman Amanda Fine said the agency does not have specifics on exactly how it will implement the cuts.

The NIH released a guide to grantee institutions on Friday that warned it would likely reduce funding for noncompeting continuation grants this year and make fewer awards available should the budget cuts occur.

**Financial aid prospects**
Federal funds that are tagged for cuts also contributes to MU student financial aid.

Because aid is already awarded for the educational year 2012-13, the federal budget cuts won’t affect student aid programs until the 2013-14 year, Nick Prewett, MU director of student financial aid, said.

The financial aid office receives a pool of money from the federal government each year, Prewett said, and uses the money to allocate financial aid and work-study jobs based on results from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, that measure the student population’s financial need.

For fiscal year 2014, Prewett said he expects a $247,000 cut in federal funding for student financial aid and work study, or roughly 17 percent.

"We haven’t determined where we’ll cut yet," he said. "We could limit the total number of awards or lower existing award amounts. The financial aid budget fluctuates every year."

Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixev.
MU rewards diversity efforts

Honorees cited for boosting inclusivity.

By Karyn Spory

Tuesday, February 26, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Seven individuals and one group were recognized on Monday for their diversity efforts at the University of Missouri.

"This one event allows us to take a look at the contributions and the progress being made universitywide to make this a more welcoming and inclusive community," Deputy Chancellor Michael Middleton said.

At the Inclusive Excellence and Faculty Achievement in Diversity ceremony, awards were presented to those who have made contributions to any area of diversity, including those related to gender, racial/ethnic background, language, religion, sexual orientation, disability and economic status.

The first of five Inclusive Excellence Awards was presented to a group that works on transgender student health care through the Student Health Center and Counseling Center. The group was recognized for working to make a safer and more inclusive environment for transgender students as well as ensuring insurance coverage for hormone therapy and providing and monitoring hormone therapy. Award recipients were Susan Even, Erika Patterson, Jessica Semler and David Tager, all of the Student Health Center and Counseling Center.

For the group, the award means people understand the importance of serving trans-identified and gender-nonconforming students, members said.

"It means the work that we're doing is actually making a difference in people's lives," Patterson said.

Tracy Johnson, a third-year law student and president of MU's chapter of Lambda Legal, was nominated by fellow law student Aaron Prenger for her commitment to Lambda Legal.

Lambda Legal works on LGBT community issues as well as HIV issues through legislation and litigation.
Johnson said it's not always easy to find diversity within the law school, "but it is an extremely open-minded environment."

"Tracy Johnson singlehandedly revived the law school's Lambda Legal organization," Prenger said.

Prenger said that before Johnson came to MU, Lambda Legal had nearly vanished.

Since then, the organization has flourished and become one of the most visible within the law school.

"I've witnessed Tracy spend countless hours trying to increase awareness about LGBT issues," Prenger said.

Johnson said her biggest achievement has been helping to build a growing community around Lambda Legal.

"They have been so supportive of me trying to grow Lambda Legal into an organization that will sustain itself when I'm gone," she said.

Trulaske College of Business academic adviser Jennifer Chism, accelerated nursing student Rhonda Miller and theater Professor Clyde Ruffin also received Inclusive Excellence Awards.

Demetrio Gonzalez, Antonio Castro and Astrid Villamil received the Faculty Achievement in Diversity Awards. The recipients were nominated by students and selected by student representatives.

Ruffin said he thinks such award banquets are "great" because they bring awareness that there are many people working toward the same goals.

"One of the things that happens is when we work in our different areas, it's very easy to feel isolated," Ruffin said.

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Posted in Education on Tuesday, February 26, 2013 2:00 pm.
The University of Missouri will be open Wednesday, Chancellor Brady Deaton announced Tuesday afternoon.

Classes are scheduled to be held as usual, but if weather conditions change, students and faculty will be alerted to any changes to university operations by 6 a.m. via the MU Alert system.

The campus was shut down Tuesday because of heavy snowfall during the morning hours. Meanwhile, campus roads and sidewalks have been cleared, and parking areas are accessible, according to a campuswide alert issued at 4 p.m.

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Posted in News on Tuesday, February 26, 2013 4:30 pm.
Ameren/Westinghouse SMR bid gets bad news

By Jacob Barker

Tuesday, February 26, 2013 at 4:13 pm

Bad news for Missouri’s bid to get in on the federal funding for research into small modular reactor designs.

First an industry publication suggests the coalition that could benefit Mid-Missouri may be a long shot for a second-round of federal funding. Then, a taxpayer advocacy group gives the program the dubious “Golden Fleece Award” for funding technology that may never make it to the marketplace.

And we had such high hopes.

For those of you who don’t remember, it was almost a year ago that Gov. Jay Nixon first told Missourians about small modular reactors, or SMRs in industry parlance. St.Louis-based utility Ameren had partnered with engineering firm Westinghouse to apply for a piece of $452 million in U.S. Department of Energy funding to design and build one of the small reactors, ostensibly near the site of Ameren’s existing nuke plant in Callaway County.

The smaller and purportedly easier-to-build reactors would then be manufactured here, and a new global industry would be born. Billions of dollars of exports would be shipped out of Mid-Missouri, and collaboration with the University of Missouri would foster some of the industry’s most important research in our backyards. Local governments and MU bigwigs gushed at the prospect.

Alas, in November DOE shocked everyone by announcing only one winner instead of two like it had originally indicated. The nod went to the Tennessee Valley Authority and Babcock and Wilcox. No one was quite sure why. The state’s Congressional delegation even sent a letter to DOE demanding answers. DOE has said it will award a second round of funding, but it has been sparse with more details.

No matter. The program is a waste of money anyway, says Taxpayers for Common Sense, a federal spending watchdog. It bestowed the not-so-prestigious “Golden Fleece Award” on DOE’s SMR program, a label attached to the worst of federal waste for the better part of 40
years. Frequently quoted in some of the nation’s leading publications, Taxpayers for Common 
Sense is not an insignificant group. And The Golden Fleece, started in 1975 by former 
Wisconsin Democratic senator William Proxmire, is not an insignificant award, going to notable 
boondoggles like the infamous “bridge to nowhere” in Alaska.

“Even though small modular reactors are benefiting from glowingly uncritical news reporting 
today, the simple truth is that this is corporate welfare,” the group said in a statement released 
Tuesday. “Adding insult to injury, U.S.taxpayers have no guarantee that the money that is wasted 
on SMR licensing and R&D will ever generate a single kilowatt of power.”

If the technology is so desirable, the group asks, why isn’t the private market picking up the tab? 
And what about the risk that one of these things will never be licensed or built after all this 
investment?

Probably of more consequence, though, is an article that appeared last week in industry 
newsletter IHS The Energy Daily. Citing multiple anonymous sources, reporter Jeff Beattie 
reveals that Ameren and Westinghouse were in line as the No. 2 pick for the DOE award last 
year.

According to the story, that fell through after Energy Secretary Stephen Chu stepped in and 
changed the criteria to emphasize funding for a more “innovative” design. The change came 
amid intense lobbying from the firms vying for funding who had come in behind Babcock and 
Westinghouse, particularly Holtec International and NuScale Power.

The lobbying apparently delayed the funding announcement until late fall instead of summer, as 
originally planned. And now DOE wants “innovative” designs. The problem is Westinghouse’s 
design, like Babcock and Wilcox’s, is more traditional than those of Holtec and NuScale.

Babcock and Wilcox got the award, according to the article, because it was closest to 
commercialization. Westinghouse’s was second-best. If DOE does indeed want to use the rest of 
the funding for more “innovative” designs, Ameren and Westinghouse may be at a disadvantage.

Publicly, local leaders of the effort and Ameren and Westinghouse reps have stayed positive 
about their chances in the second round. And there may still be hope: The article says less than 
half of the $452 million may go to Babcock and Wilcox so DOE can make more than award in 
the second round. Previously, the plan was to split the funding 50/50.

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