Dean of MU Graduate School George Justice resigns

By Jessica Thomas
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COLUMBIA — George Justice, dean of the MU Graduate School, will resign effective June 1, MU Provost Brian Foster announced Monday.

Justice will take the position of dean of Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University, according to a news release from the MU News Bureau.

“I love working to advance the agendas of great research universities, so I’m looking for the next step in my career,” Justice said.

Justice has served as vice provost for advanced studies and dean of the graduate school since 2010. He has been teaching English at MU since September 2002.

Foster will immediately seek an interim dean and will start a full-scale, national search for Justice's replacement this fall, according to the release.

MU experience

Foster said in the release that Justice provided excellent leadership and accomplished a number of significant goals for the graduate school.

In January, three of the four professors from the MU Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute sent a letter to Chancellor Brady Deaton calling for Justice’s removal from his position, according to previous Missourian reporting. The letter accused Justice of violating a section in the university's Collected Rules and Regulations.

The professors were Sudarshan Loyalka, Mark Prelas and Robert Tompson.

Justice oversees the institute, which was restructured last March. The letter to Deaton claims professors were not included in discussions about closing admissions to the institute.
Prelas said Justice’s resignation came as a surprise.

“Honestly speaking, I’m glad,” Loyalka said. “I wish him well, and I’m assuming that he’s taking a position that will be good for him and good for his constituents there.”

**ASU future**

Justice heard about the job opening at ASU last fall but has been applying for other positions since November 2011, he said.

He traveled to ASU once in late January and again in early February to discuss the job.

Justice said he made the final decision Feb. 25, but he and Foster waited a week to announce his resignation as details of his new position were finalized.

The Department of Humanities at ASU includes 3,500 students and hundreds of faculty, Justice said in the release. His new office oversees numerous departments, including English, which is Justice’s background.

“It’s a close link between my academic background and the job,” he said. “But the reason I chose this particular position was the size and the dynamism of this particular university.”

Justice said the ASU position has an entirely different focus than his current position because he will no longer work with departments across the university. In his time at MU, he worked with all graduate departments.

During his time as dean, MU gained membership to the Center for the Integration of Research, Training and Learning, a network of 25 doctorate-granting institutions funded by the National Science Foundation to prepare faculty members trained in science, technology, engineering and math for teaching diverse student populations.

He also helped develop the MU Informatics Institute, an interdisciplinary doctoral program among six MU colleges or schools that offers concentrated studies in bioinformatics and health informatics.

“Our science disciplines have been much more open into thinking about how their programs support students across the board,” Justice said. “I think science programs have been more innovative than humanities programs. That’s certainly something I’ll be bringing to my new position.”
Justice said he plans to continue to collaborate with other departments at ASU, finding ways their projects can intersect with areas of humanities. He credits his interdisciplinary experience with helping him get this job.

“"My experience was something that I certainly thought was an appealing part of my candidacy," Justice said.

He will move to Arizona sometime this summer with his wife and two sons.

*Supervising editor is Karen Miller.*
MU graduate school dean takes Arizona post

After 11 years at the University of Missouri, the last three serving as vice provost for advanced studies and dean of the graduate school, George Justice will be leaving MU for a job at Arizona State University.

Justice’s resignation will be effective June 1. He will take the position of dean for humanities in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University.

MU Provost Brian Foster said he will immediately begin an internal search for an interim dean and will initiate a national search to fill Justice’s position this fall.

Justice joined MU in 2002 as an assistant professor of English. During his tenure, he has helped develop programs including the Glimpse into Graduate School Seminar Program and the MU Informatics Institute.
Scorecard outlines college costs

Site comes from federal initiative.

By Karyn Spory

A college scorecard the Obama administration launched last month will be a positive tool for students looking at college affordability but shouldn’t be their only source for information, University of Missouri administrators say.

"I think the scorecard represents a place to start in terms of comparing institutions," said Ann Korschgen, MU's vice provost for enrollment management.

However, there is a lot more that goes into deciding on a college, and Korschgen said the care and concern of faculty and staff, as well as a student's comfort level on a campus, are also factors.

"That means a student really needs to make a trip to campus to make a decision," she said.

The College Scorecard website is part of a push to improve transparency and accountability within higher education. President Barack Obama announced during his State of the Union address Feb. 12 that the scorecard would be released the next day.

The scorecard is presented by the College Affordability and Transparency Center under the U.S. Department of Education. It includes costs, graduation rates, loan default rates and median borrowing and soon will add information on average earnings.

MU has been compiling data on its graduates since 2001, surveying them on whether they are continuing their education, working or seeking employment. The study also determines how many work in fields related to their degrees.

Among the fall 2010 and spring/summer 2011 graduates who are employed, 91 percent were working in fields related to their degrees, the survey showed. The average overall salary for those with undergraduate and graduate degrees was $44,700.
Korschgen said she thinks the scorecard highlighted strengths at MU such as high graduation rates and low default rates but didn't accurately reflect cost increases, showing an average net price increase of 10.1 percent from 2007 to 2009. She cited a University of Georgia study as a better reference: That 2010 study showed MU as having one of the lowest cost increases over a 10-year period among comparable institutions.

Information for the scorecard was collected by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the National Student Loan Data System. The information on the scorecard is similar to that in the College Navigator, a free consumer information tool from the National Center for Educational Statistics.

Nick Prewett, director of student financial aid, said although the scorecard was a way to compare universities in an apples-to-apples sort of way, "with higher education it's hard to do that."

The scorecard shows MU students' median borrowing is $19,403, averaging monthly payments of $223.29. "Our average is right at the national average," Prewett said.

He also noted MU's loan default rate was 3.9 percent, compared to a 13.4 percent national rate.

Columbia's Hickman and Rock Bridge high schools have a link to the College Scorecard on their websites.

"It looks like a wonderful tool," said Susan McWilliams, director of guidance at Hickman. It is always valuable when she and her staff can provide families with a free resource, she said.
Former Congressman Skelton Speaks at Mizzou

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Former Missouri congressman Ike Skelton heads to the University of Missouri campus Wednesday to address aspiring politicians and other students in the Truman School of Public Affairs.

Skelton, a Democrat, spent 34 years in the U.S. House. He chaired the House Armed Services Committee from 2007 through 2010, the year he lost the general election to Republican Vicky Hartzler.

Skelton now lobbies in Washington for the Missouri law firm of Husch Blackwell. He's also on the advisory board of the Center for New American Security.
Sequester threatens MU research, student financial aid

Every higher education institution in the nation is facing cuts as a result of the sequester. Here's a look at what the UM System has been dealt.

Overall cut to the UM System

$8.3 million

$16.7 million

MU Department Cuts

$2.8 million

$2.9 million

Source: MU Graduate Professional Council

*25.1 million cut from Medicare through 2021

The Columbia Regional Airport may also close its air traffic tower

MU is expected to lose approximately $17 million in funding after sequestration cuts took effect Friday.
Cuts to the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense and United States Department of Agriculture could lead to MU losing research grants, according to a report from the UM System’s Government Relations office. These grants currently fund numerous projects, including some of MU’s cancer, cardiovascular, psychology, nanotechnology and insect research.

Students’ financial aid is also at risk. The report estimated 1,166 Missouri students would lose federal work-study benefits and nearly 2,000 students would lose federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants. Pell grants will not be affected by the sequester, although fees for subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans and PLUS loans will increase.

As a whole, the UM System will lose about $25 million in funding in Fiscal Year 2013.

Before the sequestration took effect, leaders in the Missouri Students Association and Graduate Professional Council sent letters to Missouri representatives and senators urging them to spare higher education funding as they tried to reduce the deficit.

“'The proposed cuts are a blunt instrument that would slash valuable funding to programs, regardless of the success of the programs or the return generated by federal investment in education,'” the letter stated. "Members of both parties agree that long-term deficit reduction should include, not eliminate, investment in higher education.'"

Outside of MU, cuts to the Federal Aviation Administration are expected to close Columbia Regional Airport’s air traffic tower. City of Columbia spokeswoman Toni Messina said flights will continue to proceed normally, with pilots communicating with air traffic control towers in Springfield and Kansas City instead of Columbia.

“Air traffic can still come in and out," Messina said. “We don’t anticipate that flights will end." Messina said although flights will continue, losing Columbia’s air traffic tower could have some negative repercussions. Recently, a private plane had an engine fire while flying near Columbia and was able to communicate with the Columbia tower to arrange for an emergency landing at the airport. If the tower closes, pilots dealing with similar emergencies would have to arrange to land elsewhere.

“I don’t know if I want to call (closing the air tower) minor," Messina said. “It’s not going to keep our traffic down, but you worry about cuts that do anything that may impact passenger safety.”

The airport had more than 25,000 takeoffs and landings and served more than 38,500 patrons in 2012, according to airport records.

According to the White House, across-the-board cuts would also reduce Missouri’s military, environmental and K-12 education spending by millions of dollars. Law enforcement, job search, nutrition assistance, public health and domestic violence programs would also experience smaller cuts.
The sequestration cuts are a provision in Congress’ 2011 debt ceiling negotiation. The legislation said if Congress did not produce $1.2 trillion in deficit savings, the government would instate automatic across-the-board budget cuts to defense and non-defense spending. Although the threat of cuts was designed to be so unpopular that Congress was forced to compromise, legislators failed to reach an agreement before they took effect.

Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., criticized President Barack Obama for only proposing tax increases as a solution to sequestration.

“Spending cuts will happen,” Blunt said in a news release. “The president first proposed sequestration, and he’s had months to plan for these cuts. Unfortunately, the president appears to have ignored this looming deadline, and he refuses to propose anything to replace the sequester other than tax hikes.”

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., and Bill Nelson, D-Fla., introduced legislation on Friday that would cut legislators’ salaries if federal employees face furloughs during the sequester.

“The federal workforce is looking at furloughs that would result in a sizable pay cut, and there's absolutely no reason members of Congress should exempt themselves,” McCaskill said.
Editorial: An entire generation let down by sequestration cuts

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Editorials represent the majority opinion of The Maneater editorial board.

School is where everything starts. Innovation, creativity, progress — these things cannot happen without a strong and broad education, one that offers challenges and opportunities. Whether you want to change the world or just comfortably succeed in it, you need a good education first. And in our modern America, that includes a college degree — once an option, today a virtual necessity.

It stands to reason, then, that our government, created and sustained to protect and benefit the success and happiness of its citizens, would prioritize education for its children and young adults and ensure the country’s education system is spared the bitter, uncertain politics of its usual functioning. But on March 1, Congress failed to do this, letting $3 billion of education spending be automatically cut as part of the budget sequestration, and in doing so, endangered our future as collateral of its political games.

Of this $3 billion, the UM System will likely lose $25 million of its budget for fiscal year 2013. This is in three primary categories: research funding (for which MU will bear $11.5 million in cuts), health system support and financial aid for students.

The $11.5 million in estimated cuts to research funding at MU is extremely damaging. This has been a banner year for MU research, and these devastating cuts — which come via lost funding for federal agencies and departments, such as the National Institutes for Health and the Department of Agriculture, that provide research grants to MU faculty and graduate students — will jeopardize, strain or end many research projects at the university.

This has several short- and long-term consequences. Not only will a weakened research program make it tougher to attract and retain top-tier faculty and graduate students and decrease the amount of positive attention the university gets, it will stunt the progress of scientific exploration and innovation that is made possible by this funding. For example, groundbreaking research on prostate cancer treatment may not continue in the face of NIH cuts. MU will lose $1.3 million from the Department of Defense that helped fund research on applied nanotechnology for national defense. The $11.5 million on paper is tough, but may be minuscule compared to the long-term cost of cutting the vital research that MU faculty and students carry on each day.
The financial aid cuts are especially abhorrent in the face of ceaselessly rising tuition rates. An estimated 1,166 UM System students will lose federal work-study benefits this year, and 2,000 UM students will lose Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants — in fact, Pell grants are the only type of federal financial aid protected from the sequester.

In the past few decades, it has become increasingly tough for lower- and middle-class students to pay for college. Congress eliminating the grants, loans and work-study opportunities many of these students rely on to achieve their dreams of a college degree is a cold slap in the face. It is even more insulting because the sequestration, set as part of the Budget Control Act of 2011, was created artificially, as an unwanted “last resort” for Congress to motivate itself to act. Apparently, the thought of hundreds of thousands of lower-income students losing the ability to pay for a vital college education (among all the other critical cuts of the package) was not enough to persuade Congress to set aside its ego and petty political posturing.

Perhaps the worst part of the sequestration cuts is how little it actually achieves. Like the rest of the negotiations and deadlines Congress has set and squabbled over for the past several years — the “fiscal cliff,” the “debt ceiling,” the Bush tax cuts expiration — it’s just a short-term fix that kicks the deeper problems of federal spending down the road. We, the next leaders of the United States, will be the ones who eventually have to fix this on a grander, more critical scale. Why, then, is Congress cutting our education without much of a thought? They should at least provide us with the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to grapple with the calamitous problems they have methodically built and will soon leave for us.

It’s also terribly disappointing to see these cuts after the victory of last spring’s More For Less campaign, in which MU and other university students successfully persuaded the Missouri general assembly and Gov. Jay Nixon to take state higher-education cuts off the table. Unfortunately, education lobbyists could not achieve the same kind of results in Washington, D.C. — not when they’re competing with large corporations, Super PACs and Grover Norquist. As a result, educators and students across the country will shoulder a greater burden for fewer opportunities. Although $3 billion may be a drop in the federal-budget bucket, our representatives failed to recognize the true gravity of what these education cuts truly entail.

Is a balanced budget the No. 1 goal of our society? Must our leaders prioritize austerity over opportunity, penny-pinching over progress? We fervently disagree. Not when there is so much to be gained from keeping our education system strong. Not when our country and our world so badly need bright young thinkers and doers. Congressional budget hawks may be proud of this federal belt-tightening, but everyone will pay the cost of these myopic cuts, both in 2013 and for decades to come.
Column: Public education jeopardized by Congressional inaction

By Sarah Suerig  Published as a part of Maneater v. 79, Issue 41

The opinions expressed by The Maneater columnists do not represent the opinions of The Maneater editorial board.

NO MENTION

Many in Washington seem to have forgotten the essential lesson of sharing.

In 2011, President Barack Obama signed the Budget Control Act. This act would postpone any across-the-board budget cuts, or “sequesters,” until March 1, 2013. This gave Congress members two more years to work together to come up with a cohesive, bipartisan spending plan. However, this deadline came and went and no deals were made. These across-the-board cuts will affect everything from flight times to mail delivery — and more importantly, it will greatly change public education’s funding.

Public education, in my opinion, is one of the greatest things about the United States and, at the same time, is probably one of our worst qualities. We are one of the only countries that guarantees a free education to all children in the country; that in itself is an amazing feat. Despite this, we treat our public educators like bureaucratic slaves as opposed to dedicated molders of the next generation.

The education department will see cuts to the tune of about $3 billion. The real kicker to this is that this money is cut evenly across all programs in education. This will eliminate jobs for teaching, balloon class sizes and deeply cut many safety net programs that have the sole purpose of helping children.

Class sizes in the U.S. public school system are already out of control. There have been reports of inner-city schools in New York having kids share desks and sit in windowsills to learn. Having these engorged class sizes not only puts incredible stress on an underpaid teacher, but also creates a negative environment for the child. When a negative environment is created, students stop wanting to learn, and this creates dropout factories.

The fact that safety-net programs will be cut is just another example of the rich getting richer and the poor falling into the gutters. Many in Congress do not have the incentive to fund public education — their kids go to private school. This is a continuation of those who can afford a
private education getting it and those who cannot afford it getting an education riddled with overpopulated class sizes, outdated textbooks and frustrated leaders.

The most outrageous cuts include free and reduced lunch programs, special needs funding and Head Start programs. With free and reduced lunch programs being cut, fewer kids will be promised a hot meal. This hot lunch might be the only meal that kid gets for the day. Special needs funding would cut the one-on-one personalized learning experience some students require. Head Start allows children of families that could not afford preschool on their own to begin learning at an earlier age. Studies show this advantage can define a child’s learning path as young as 3 years old.

I obtained my education from a public school system and my mother is a public elementary school librarian. This has given me the opportunity to see things from both a student and an educator's point of view. I had phenomenal, life-changing teachers - ones that not only taught me the curriculum, but also taught me an immeasurable amount of life lessons. However, I also had to share textbooks because there were not enough and I dealt with unfair standardized testing and a few teachers that had given up because they were not paid enough to care. I have also seen my mom, along with the teachers at her school, become exhausted and frustrated with the way our education system is going.

What is a teacher to do when a student does not speak English? Or the kindergarten teacher who knows a child had potato chips for breakfast? What about the kid in the class with bruises on her arms? All of these problems and more are left to be dealt with by teachers. Teachers benefit as much as students from government-funded second language programs, free and hot lunches and child abuse victim identification. All of these programs are things that Congress apparently does not find important.

With the current, extreme separation between socioeconomic classes, I am reminded of the time I spent working at an after-school program. I watched kids so much younger than me teach me so many lessons I had forgotten: when a girl forgot her lunch, others split sandwiches and chips. When one needed a pencil, it was offered without asking. Congress has forgotten those fundamental lessons of teamwork and morals. I ask you to remember one important lesson — sharing — and to go thank the teacher that taught you.
MU professor awarded $3.4 million grant to research HIV

Stefan Sarafianos, an MU joint associate professor of biochemistry, works with post-doctoral fellow Lefteris Michailidis on Monday in Bond Life Sciences Center. Sarafianos was awarded a $3.4 million five-year grant for his research to stop a genetic mutation that allows HIV to evade potential treatments. Tim Nwachukwu/Staff Photographer

By Katherine Knott  Published as a part of Maneater v. 79, Issue 41

Professor Stefan Sarafianos brings 20 years of experience to the project.

An MU professor was awarded a $3.4 million five-year grant for his research to stop a genetic mutation that allows HIV to evade potential treatments.

Stefan Sarafianos, associate professor of molecular microbiology and immunology, said he plans to use the funding to develop a chemical inhibitor designed to target the HIV enzyme RNase H. The enzyme allows the HIV virus to grow through DNA replication.

The RNase H project is a different approach and a totally new target, Sarafianos said.

Sarafianos, who has studied the virus since 1993, is working with University of Pittsburg virologist Michael Parniak and University of Minnesota medicinal chemist Zhengqiang Wang on the project.
Sarafianos is working on mapping the structure of RNase H, while Wang is designing the chemical compound of the inhibitor, and Parniak is evaluating how the compounds interact with the structure.

"A number of people have looked at RNase H and have been unsuccessful," said Tony Conley, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases liaison for the project. "Dr. Sarafianos' specialty is in structural biology. He has very good skills and talents to define structure and develop inhibitors."

NIAID, a branch of the National Institute of Health, awarded the grant. The NIH is made up of 27 institutes and centers each with a separate research agenda, according to the NIH website.

Grant applications from the NIH go through a two-step peer review process to assess scientific merit, according to the NIH website. Two groups of non-federal scientists with relevant research interests and expertise must both recommend the application before funding can be awarded.

The NIH institutes and centers make decisions about funding based on research priorities, according to the NIH website. The NIAID considers funding HIV research a top priority and currently funds hundreds of active research projects, Conley said.

"It would be nice if we knew more about RNase so we could inhibit it," Conley said.

Sarafianos began studying HIV in 1993 because there were a lot of unanswered questions and challenges concerning the virus, he said.

"Twenty years later — my gosh, there is still so much to do," Sarafianos said.

In 2010 he discovered the N348I mutation, which causes the HIV to resist treatment.

HIV research has led to the development of inhibitors for three other HIV enzymes, Conley said.

Sarafianos worked with Parniak to develop the EFda drug, an extremely potent inhibitor of HIV reverse transcriptase that prevents the virus from copying itself. This drug is undergoing clinical trials.

Sarafianos said he never gets bored of HIV research.

"It's an enigma wrapped in a riddle," Sarafianos said.
Students petition to keep Honors College graduation on the Quad

A student passes by the Columns on Francis Quadrangle on Monday afternoon. Senior Michelle Fiesta created a petition to keep the Honors College graduation ceremony on the Quad. Brent Pearson/Staff Photographer

By Andrew Beasley  Published as a part of Maneater v. 79, Issue 41

This year, the graduation ceremony will take place at Mizzou Arena.

MU Honors College students are petitioning to keep the Honors Graduation Ceremony in its traditional location on Francis Quadrangle.

The petition, created by senior Michelle Fiesta and posted online on Feb. 27, has reached more than 240 signatures. Many of the signatures include comments in support of Fiesta’s stance.

Fiesta said she was under the impression that after working toward graduating with honors for three years, she would be able to graduate in the traditional location.

“I just heard about (the change) recently,” she said. “I had assumed it would be on the quad, and some friends of mine who work in the Honors College told me that this would not be the case this year.”

This year, the ceremony will be held at Mizzou Arena, a site formerly used only when weather would not permit the event to take place on the Quad, Fiesta said.

Though the petition is designated to Honors College administrative officials, Honors College Director Nancy West said that her department had very little to do with the change.
"It is the Registrar Office's decision," West said. "The ceremony is run entirely through them. I think one of the confusing thing about honors at MU is that there are so many ways to graduate with honors, be it as a Latin scholar or through their individual departments, so we're actually just one part of the ceremony, but when this news came out, we got all of the irate phone calls."

West said graduation on the Quad is a tradition that has been around since she's been a faculty member of the university.

"Personally I think it's a lovely tradition to have outside, and I know quite a few of the parents and students are disappointed," she said. "Many of the parents went through this tradition themselves so they are sad to see it go."

Fiesta said she published the petition partially just to find out who she needed to address the issue to, as well as to gather some support for the initiative.

"I guess the idea behind the petition was that I would have some backing," she said. "I was thinking about getting students from different types of honors and others from around the university who have established themselves as leaders, like Mizzou 39, to get a small group of students to talk to the Registrar's Office and see if we can change their minds."

In her petition, Fiesta said she understands the administration's concerns about the confusion that occurs when weather-related changes have to be made to the ceremony, but she thinks that with enough preparation these can be overcome.

"As members of the Honors College and recipients of high academic honors, we humbly request that the Honors College and upper-level administration reopen the possibility of graduation on the Quad, dependent on projected weather conditions the week of the ceremony," the petition states.

Both Fiesta and West said the graduation ceremony on the Quad is an expected benefit of completing honors requirements.

"Though (graduating with honors) is a distinction on its own, one of the most attractive benefits of being a member of the Honors College at the University of Missouri is the opportunity to graduate on the Quad," the petition states.

The petition is named "Keep the Mizzou Honors College Ceremony on the Quad!" and can be viewed online at Care2.com.
Month-long events to celebrate Women’s History

By Liz Brown  Published as a part of Maneater v. 79, Issue 41

The Women’s Leadership Conference is the big-ticket event of the month.

"Women inspiring innovation through imagination" is the national theme of Women’s History Month, which emphasizes celebrating women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The MU Women’s Center and the campus-wide Women’s History Month Committee have planned a record 26 different events.

Women’s History Month at MU kicked off Feb. 23 with the seventh annual Women’s and Gender Studies Graduate Student Conference and will end March 21 with a Spa Night from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center. The recently-launched whm.missouri.edu is a live site that will post events and facts and highlight campus women year-round.

“The intention of this focus is to shed light on gaps in our history where women were systematically excluded, as well as provide an outlet to celebrate women’s current achievements and further development,” Women’s Center Coordinator Suzy Day said. “We hope that, here at Mizzou, we will remember the spirit of March all year.”

Events like the 17th Annual Women’s Poetry Night on March 12 and the screening of the movie "Miss Representation" on March 11 are tailored toward students interested in celebrating the notable achievements of women in the community as well as challenging the media’s portrayal of women, according to the calendar of events.

Kaitlyn Ingersoll, a Women and Gender Studies major and a member of the Feminist Student Union, said she enjoys that what she does gets to be in the spotlight.

“Everyone’s history is your own history,” Ingersoll said. “To better understand yourself, you have to understand others. You don’t have any idea how women have contributed to the world until you’ve learned about it.”

Presentations such as "InsideOut: Queer Women in History" on March 20 and "Fatty Over Here: Being a Big, Beautiful Queer" on March 6 will focus on women throughout history who have worked on behalf of the LGBTQ community, as well as unlearning body shame and reclaiming bodily independence.
The big-ticket event of the month is the Women’s Leadership Conference on March 9. The workshop celebrates women’s accomplishments and provides leadership and networking skills.

Co-sponsored by the MU Women’s Center and Stephens College, this event is held to coincide with Women’s History Month, MU graduate adviser Erlisha Tamplin said.

“We hope that the Women’s Leadership Conference serves to celebrate the accomplishments of women,” Tamplin said. “With our theme ‘Finding Power in Your Passion,’ we want this conference to inspire and motivate Columbia-area women to develop, articulate and support their dreams by learning how to develop their leadership skills through various presentations and by connecting them with several networking opportunities at this exciting and educational event.”

Speakers include speaker Jasmin James, filmmaker Byron Hurt, speaker Dr. Treva Lindsey, Triangle Coalition president Taylor Dukes, UMKC professor Dr. Jennifer Phegley, former CEO of Heifer International Jo Luck and Kathleen Hanna, symbol of the riot grrl movement.

Sponsors include the Women’s Center, the WHM Committee, Department of Women’s and Gender Studies, MU LGBTQ Resource Center, Triangle Coalition, MU Love Your Body Committee, MSA/GPC Craft Studio, KCOU, Stephens College, the Center for Leadership Development and Community Involvement, Black Women Rock! Committee, Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center and the Queer People of Color Committee.
Naming something, or selecting a college course title, shapes its perception. In the case of a course title, it frames the topics discussed, the questions asked, the readings assigned, and the papers that will be written. I selected the course title “Is America in Decline?” because it is the question posed by prominent observers, including James Fallows’ “How America Can Rise Again” in the Atlantic Monthly and Fareed Zakaria in The Post-American World.

Frames, perceptions and titles are seldom neutral. Often, they serve as a Rorschach test reflecting how one thinks about a situation, in this case America, incorporating his/her comfort in evaluating our Nation’s promise and current performance. A recent example is the December 2012 Gallup national survey finding that about 49 percent of Americans think that “today’s youth will have it as good as their parents.” This is down from 66 percent in 2008 and the high of 71 percent in 2002. Political partisanship filters perceptions as indicated by the 66 percent of Democrats who are optimistic compared with 29 percent of Republicans.

Over the past several months I accumulated a list of more than 50 alternative course titles for “Is America in Decline?” I considered briefly, but dismissed, “American Exceptionalism” because it tends to be ideologically polarizing. A 2011 Pew poll found that when given the choice 38 percent of Americans respond that “America stands above all other countries” but this varies greatly from the 67 percent of “staunch conservatives” and 19 percent among “solid liberals.” Seldom does polarization result in effective teaching.

Similarly, I decided against a title that included “American Dream” because while sounding precise and traditional, it is rather ambiguous and more recent (it was coined in 1931) than many people expect.

“Has America Changed?” and “The Changing Dynamics of America” are bland and too simple, as if change is inevitable. Then there are the variants of “Is America still Great?, “Is America
Still the Greatest?”, “Can America Stay #1?” and “America: Still Exceptional” suggesting a clear superiority that pushes the limits of academic detachment.

“The Inevitable Decline of Great Powers including the U.S.” would be a classic book title should Adam Smith be reincarnated but more modern titles are the briefer “The Decline of the American Empire” and “The Rise and Fall of the U.S.” “Is America Falling Behind?” invites comparisons with other nations or, perhaps, other times. “The Great Slip” sounds more like a movie than a course title.

Several possibilities focus squarely on the place of the United States in the international system. These include “America Confronts the Rise of the Rest,” “Is America Indispensable?” and “America in a Post American World.” “Is America Over-extended?” and “Is America Vulnerable?” reflect ill-ease about national security.

Alternatively, some titles suggest an inward focus. These include “Is America in Turmoil?,” “Is America in Trouble?,” “Is America Trapped?,” “Is America Screwed up?,” and “Is America Coming Apart?” These are seem rather harsh so I doubt I would be attracted to such a course.

“American Decadence,” “American Decay,” “American Deterioration,” and “America: Debt and Decline,” “Slumping America” seem overly negative and a little too literary and fatalistic. “America: Hitting Bottom or Coming Back?” seems like a debate topic or an essay question on the final exam. “Has America Apexed?” is eye-catching but potentially a turn-off to students wanting to select a familiar topic.

Some titles are particularly economic in nature: “Is America Stagnant?,” “Can America Rebound?,” “Is America Leveling off?” and the more immediate “Is America Going over a Cliff?” One student suggested “The Great Regression.” “Has America Slipped?” and “Is America Back Sliding?” seem to focus on the economy, too.

Several more philosophic titles such as “Is America Falling Short?” “Has America Failed?” or “Has America Been Successful?” seem rather unanswerable.

Because I am particularly interested in policy-making and governance several proposed titles are promising. Titles like “Is America Governable?” or “Is America Broken?” “Is America Myopic?” “Has America Ossified?” or “Is America in Crisis?” all seem to focus on political institutions. “America muddles along” is a catchy title for a book chapter, but not for a course title. “Is America Sleeping?” is too dramatic.
While we often think about the future, we do not seem to keep it in focus, allowing today’s crisis too much influence on our thinking and policy-making. Perhaps course titles such as “America’s Place in the Future,” “America: The Next Generation,” “Preparing America for the Future,” or “Is America Sustainable?” would serve that goal.

In hindsight, “Is America in Decline?” alright? It is inquisitive, easily comprehended, and open to reflection and discussion. That’s a lot of weight for a title to carry. Maybe the title should have simply been “The State of America.”

David Webber is an associate professor of political science at MU where he is currently teaching a course on "Is America in Decline?" He can be reached at webber@missouri.edu. Questions? Contact Opinion editor Elizabeth Conner.
True/False ticket sales top 43,000

By Andrew Denney

For the 10th annual installment of the True/False Film Fest, which concluded on Sunday night, 43,762 tickets were sold, a 17 percent increase over last year and a more-than-tenfold increase since the festival's first year.

Festival co-director David Wilson said about 5,000 festival passes were sold this year, up from about 4,000 last year. Wilson said ever-increasing attendance at the annual documentary film event is likely because word has continued to spread about the festival, which has evolved from a quirky idea hatched in the minds of Wilson and Paul Sturtz to a spectacle with a seven-figure economic impact for the city.

"I think it's word-of-mouth," Wilson said. "People come to the festival and love it and tell their friends and family."

Wilson said he had initially been concerned that cold weather and snowfall would keep any attendance increases to a minimum this year, but he was pleased to find out that wasn't the case.

Wilson said there was an increase in screenings this year from last year, another factor that could lead to higher ticket sales. Organizers have gradually tried to add more events to the Friday lineup, which is usually the second day of the festival, to give attendees more options.

"It's asking people to take off work," Wilson said. "It's asking people to make the weekend a little longer."

In 2011, an economic impact study conducted by University of Missouri researchers for the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau found that the festival had a more than $1 million economic impact, with almost half of that amount being spent on lodging and food. That year, 30,000 tickets were sold.

Amy Schneider, director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, said an economic impact study will be conducted again this year, and results could be available in six to eight weeks.
She said it seemed clear from just being downtown over the weekend that the festival would have a noticeable economic impact for downtown businesses, as patrons with laminated passes dangling from their necks packed into downtown bars, coffee shops and restaurants.

Schneider said each year the festival attracts travel writers, which helps to raise the festival's profile nationally and internationally and attract a more diverse offering of patrons.

"How great is it to walk down the street and hear two or three different languages being spoken?" Schneider said.

The festival received $10,000 this year from the CVB's "signature series" fund, which also provides financial support for events such as Roots N Blues N BBQ, Art in the Park and the Citizen Jane Film Festival.