Lightning rod sets up camp at MU

March 9  By DARRYL LEVINGS   The Kansas City Star

Who would have thought that anthropologists could fire more poisoned barbs than the Amazon Indians they study?

Napoleon Chagnon

One of the best known and most controversial of this squabbling scientific clan, Napoleon A. Chagnon, has just joined the University of Missouri’s Department of Anthropology. Coincidentally, a few weeks later came the release of his memoir, “Noble Savages: My Life Among Two Dangerous Tribes — the Yanomamô and the Anthropologists.”

Now 74, Chagnon is setting up camp in Columbia, a research professor preparing to wade into the seminar rooms to relate again what he once found in the rain forests of southern Venezuela.

“He is a very high-profile anthropologist, no doubt,” said department chairman R. Lee Lyman, and not just because Chagnon’s 1968 book — “Yanomamô: The Fierce People” — was read by more than a million college undergraduates over the decades.
Chagnon also has been a scorched but unbending lightning rod at the center of an academic tempest over evolutionary anthropology. In Darwin’s world (and Chagnon’s), where the fastest, fiercest, smartest and perhaps cruelest survive to pass down their genes, what does this mean to human nature today?

Those arguing against this sociobiology fiercely contend our behavior and culture are rooted in our environment — or, at least, one cannot credibly discern the effects of a “mean gene” from a war-ax-wielding ancestor in the family tree.

Beyond his research into rain forest genealogy, a cloud was cast over Chagnon’s methods, as well as his personal dealings with the peoples. He’s been called brilliant, incompetent, swashbuckler, braggart, rebel and sociopath.

“I’ve been responding to all these academic criticisms all my career. I unflinchingly defend the scientific method,” Chagnon noted in an interview last week. “A prominent academic told me that I’ve changed the face of anthropology and caused a paradigm shift in the social sciences.”

His election last spring to the prestigious National Academy of Sciences was taken as vindication by many. When accepting the honor, he remarked: “In the end, my defense of the scientific method won.”

But the academic war cries hardly were silenced. Last month, Marshall D. Sahlins, a retired and highly regarded anthropologist at the University of Chicago, resigned his membership in the august academy in protest, condemning Chagnon’s inclusion as a “large moral and intellectual blunder.”

And so it goes. A posting on the Chronicle of Higher Education says: “Take sides with (or against) Napoleon Chagnon here.”

Bringing to the table Chagnon and his contributions to evolutionary theory shows the University of Missouri’s hunger to move into “the high echelons of anthropology departments,” as Lyman puts it.

“If you’re not the lead dog, the view never changes. The Darwinian perspective might give us unique insight. Chagnon was one of the founders of that approach. Unfortunately, it became a political issue as opposed to a scholastic issue. It was heresy.”

Chagnon and Hobbes

Doing his first field work as a University of Michigan graduate student, Chagnon posited in “Yanomamo: The Fierce People” that the isolated tribe existed in lives of stress and brutality, “in a state of chronic warfare,” mostly over the chance to kidnap women from neighboring villages.

No romantic primitivism, no utopia here. What he described was the “state of nature” of “war of all against all” suggested by the 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, “in which one suffered through lives solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”
Chagnon seems to have reached this conclusion almost immediately, writing of his first confrontation in 1964 with “filthy, hideous” warriors, who in turn were startled by the large white man and so drew their bows at him. He still likes to relate how they were covered with green slime — that is, dripping mucus from a hallucinogen blown up their noses — and had just returned from a bloody, club-wielding, woman-snatching raid against another clan.

“Noble Savages,” his new book, looks back on his years of observations moving from shabono to shabono in the anthropological “Wild West” of the South American jungles. Its last chapters sum up, too, how he and his empirical work were stoned by some of his academic peers.

“It’s a heck of a good basic anthropological study and it’s written in a way anyone can understand it,” said Lyman.

The New York Times’ science section called it “a beautifully written adventure story.”

But “Noble Savages” infuriates some of his peers anew. In a New York Times Book Review last month, Professor Elizabeth Povinelli, an anthropologist at Columbia University, blistered Chagnon for his attitude toward the Indians.

“Does their pain and grief matter less even if we believe, as he seems to, that they were brutal Neolithic remnants in a land that time forgot?” she asked. “By the time the reader makes it to the sections on the Yanomamö’s political organization, migration patterns and sexual practices, the slant of the argument is evident: given their hideous society, understanding the real disaster that struck these people matters less than rehabilitating Chagnon’s soiled image.”

Chagnon dismisses Povinelli as anti-science and throws scorn on the charge that he has painted the natives in an unfair light.

“Apparently, to be an acceptable Indian, he can’t fart, belch, perspire; he must be as clean as the driven snow. And he can’t steal his neighbor’s wife. He can’t do a lot of things that even we do.”

He said many of his detractors “were jealous of my success and my career. Most accusations are made against me by people who have never seen a Yanomamö.”

Perhaps, but some of his critics have worked the shabonos themselves.

Much of the criticism, his supporters say, began during the Vietnam War when the “Ugly American” was seen by Marxists and the politically correct as the aggressor against other peoples of the world. But with Chagnon’s old-fashioned swagger and theories about Indian violence, one suggested, he was “scarcely indistinguishable from a conquistador, at least when you squint at both in the dim jungle light.”

“The Yanomamö are now very famous, mostly as a result of my work,” he said.
But detractors decry Chagnon’s descriptions of the tribe, saying his work encouraged gold hunters to take over the Yanomamō lands in northern Brazil — why preserve such a “savage” way of life?

Even the title of his first best-selling book, “Yanomamō: The Fierce People,” came under fire, to which Chagnon, who said he was threatened various times, replied that the Indians describe themselves as the waitiri, translated as “fierce and valiant.”

Peers accused him of exaggerating the violence, even being the root of some of it. One foe quoted one Yanomamō as saying: “Chagnon is fierce. Chagnon is very dangerous. He has his own personal war.”

The lanky, shotgun-carrying “Shaki” — the Indians’ name for an annoying bee — gave out steel fish hooks, knives and axes to those who cooperated. These items were precious to those metal-poor tribesmen, but they could cause jealousy and anger.

One Rutgers anthropologist, R. Brian Ferguson, who tracked over some of Chagnon’s ground, believes the Indians he studied had already been disrupted by contacts with the outside world, such as introduced diseases, which explained much of the violence. Ferguson suggested further that it was not women and reproductive opportunity that explained the pattern of warfare, but the struggle over steel tools provided by missionaries and scientists.

But colonial Spaniards noted the Yanomamō raids too, and similar pre-state warfare was observed in New Guinea and other primitive places. All the back-and-forth arguments seem as endless as the Amazon.

As John Tooby, a faculty colleague at Santa Barbara, wrote, the Yanomamō were hardly a petri dish of purity into which Chagnon alone “sneezed.”

‘Killers have more kids’

Chagnon’s determination to build a genealogy of as many of the 25,000 scattered tribe members he could reach was either ticklish or callous, depending on whom one talks to — because the Yanomamō believe it is taboo to speak the names of the dead.

He tells a story about leaving one village only to discover at the next how he had been tricked. When he mentioned some recently acquired names, hilarity ensured. He was repeating the Yanomamō words for genitalia.

But no one was laughing after Chagnon used those family trees for a 1988 article in the journal Science, arguing that the killers among the Yanomamō fathered three times as many children as the less violent men.

From that, he suggested: “Violence may be the principal driving force behind the evolution of culture.”
A dozen years ago, at the University of Chicago, Sahlins had blasted the article: “Chagnon’s statistics were hardly out before Yanomami specialists dismembered them by showing, among other things, that designated killers among this people have not necessarily killed, nor have designated fathers necessarily fathered. Many more Yanomami are known as killers than there are people killed.”

The article, summed up as “killers have more kids” by some, rattled or outraged many in his discipline. Suggesting that brutality might be embroidered into our genes by evolution seemed a slippery slope toward racism or a step backward toward eugenics that saw the forced sterilizations of thousands.

“This is no longer thought to be true. There are, of course, a few holdouts,” explained Bill Irons, Northwestern University professor emeritus and a Chagnon ally. “Many anthropologists and many on the political left as well preferred to believe that human behavior was shaped completely by culture.

When elected into the National Academy of Sciences last spring, he called it “a great honor for any researcher, especially one whose work has provoked a great deal of controversy like mine has done … because of an article I published in the journal Science.”

And then came whistling in Sahlins’ flaming arrow last month, his resignation from the academy after more than 20 years of membership: “By the evidence of his own writings as well as the testimony of others, including Amazonian peoples and professional scholars of the region, Chagnon has done serious harm to the indigenous communities among whom he did research.”

Sahlins declined to comment for this story about his resignation, which also was to protest academy scientists’ work with the U.S. military. But his statement also referred back to the 1988 Science article: “proven to be shallow and baseless, much to the discredit of the anthropological discipline.”

That old article, Chagnon has acknowledged, “was like pouring gasoline on a smoldering academic fire,” but he says the criticisms of his science are invalid.

“I spent a lot of time in the villages, amassing data meticulously.”

With the refreshed emphasis on evolutionary anthropology, he said, “I’m afraid Professor Sahlins and his followers are going to take a beating.”

Chagnon complains that too many in his field have shifted to what he calls “forensic anthropology” — that is, emphasizing how the indigenous people have been harmed by contact with civilization, including earlier generations of their colleagues.

“I object to turning anthropology into a criminal investigation. They have defined my activities as criminal. It’s just nonsense.”
For Irons, “evolutionary anthropology applied to social behavior and culture is coming into its own, and Missouri is now leading the way.”

A ‘Darkness’ descends

Chagnon made just over two dozen trips to South America, but even by the mid ’70s, he was finding it more and more difficult to get the right papers in Caracas back into the jungle.

His personality, often described as arrogant by his enemies and abrasive even by his friends, may have been a factor. Part of his problems stemmed from a feud — turf war, some called it — with the Catholic Salesian missionaries operating in the back country for a century.

His last sight of the jungle was in 1995 on the Brazilian side of the Yanomamö territory. Frustrated, he retired four years later from his University of California-Santa Barbara post. But worse was to come.

The American Anthropological Association received an email in August 2000 from two members warning of a “nightmarish story — a real anthropological heart of darkness beyond the imagination of even a Josef Conrad (through not, perhaps of a Josef Mengele).”

It was “Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon,” written by journalist and human rights activist Patrick Tierney. Published late that year, the book attacked Chagnon and others on several fronts, from helping cause a measles epidemic to staging documentaries, even to looking for gold, slanders later dismissed.

The AAA assigned a task force. Its strongest finding was that he “violated Venezuelan laws, associated his research with the activities of corrupt politicians and involved him(self) in activities that endangered the health and well-being of the Yanomami.”

(Chagnon told The New York Times, “I got a year’s worth of data. … It was worth it for that reason.”)

The University of Michigan investigated as well and found behind the attacks “a professional vendetta that had been going on for years.” Similarly, Tooby at UC Santa Barbara examined the case and in 2001 declared that “Darkness in El Dorado,” up for a national non-fiction award, “should have been in the fiction category.” An independent study at Northwestern years later found the same. Tierney has acknowledged only minor mistakes.

To The Star, Chagnon said: “Tierney’s book is totally debunked and absolutely irrelevant to the discussion going on now.”

And in 2005, the AAA membership voted more than 2-to-1 to rescind the task force report.

“Those five years seem like a blurry bad dream,” Chagnon writes in “Noble Savages.” “What seems to stand out in this fog are the many articles that were published about this scandal and
how ill-informed, misleading and outright wrong many of them were and how self-righteous, unkind and cynical many were.”

He said his health suffered under the stress.

Chagnon was working as an unpaid research professor at the University of Michigan, his alma mater, when he heard from MU anthropology professor Mark Flinn, one of his students at Penn State who followed him to Northwestern.

“He’s one of many of my advocates,” Chagnon said.

Flinn has said the Yanomamö research could be useful in studying aspects of modern humanity, from genocide to the nuclear arms race.

So he agreed, mostly as a courtesy, to visit Columbia and talk to people there, who ended up offering a paid professorship to write articles and hold seminars on his take on sociobiology.

“I had no idea of moving to Columbia. I thought, goodness, this is a wonderful opportunity. And I signed on the dotted line.”

Chagnon likened the old article in Science to gasoline. Now he’s back at the bonfire with a fresh, sloshing can — “Noble Savages.”

“This book has ignited a firestorm of new interest in my career,” Chagnon exclaimed, “and shaken out of the bushes many anthropologists who know what I went though with the American Anthropological Association. The tide has turned in my favor.”
Ex-Naval researcher to lead MU institute

Saturday, March 9, 2013 at 2:00 am

A former Naval Research Laboratory nuclear physicist will be director of a new nuclear institute at the University of Missouri.

Graham Hubler will lead MU's Sidney Kimmel Institute for Nuclear Renaissance, MU Vice Chancellor for Research Rob Duncan announced yesterday. Hubler spent 40 years at the Naval Research Laboratory until retiring from there in 2012. He has a doctorate in nuclear physics from Rutgers University.

At the MU institute, Hubler will lead a team of scientists investigating alternative forms of energy, including reactions creating unexplained heat effects that some describe as "cold fusion."

"I know him as a brilliant and very open-minded scientist, making him well-suited to study yet unknown phenomena, which is the underlying charge of SKINR," Duncan said in a news release.

SKINR was created last year with a $5.5 million gift from Kimmel, an apparel tycoon who founded The Jones Group. Kimmel chose MU to create the institute because of its ability to involve researchers across several disciplines, including at its research reactor.

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Posted in Education, Local on Saturday, March 9, 2013 2:00 am.
Retired Navy physicist to lead MU's Sidney Kimmel Institute for Nuclear Renaissance

By Ian Servantes
March 8, 2013 | 5:44 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — A nuclear physicist with 40 years' experience at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory will lead MU's Sidney Kimmel Institute for Nuclear Renaissance.

As its first director, Graham K. Hubler will oversee the year-old institute's search for new energy sources. Hubler has served in the position since November 2012 and said he will continue to commute between Columbia and his home in Washington, D.C.

A release from the MU News Bureau said Hubler will lead a team of scientists in investigating alternative forms of energy, including "anomalous heat effects," whose origins have yet to be explained. Previously known as "cold fusion," scientists have seen the phenomena but have had difficulty replicating the experiments.

"In my experience, Missouri is the foremost lab in exploring this area," Hubler said Friday. "I'm very excited and optimistic to make good progress."

Before taking the position at MU, Hubler worked at the Naval Research Laboratory for 40 years until retiring as the head of the Materials and Sensors Branch, the news release said. He received a bachelor's degree in physics from Union College and a doctorate in nuclear physics from Rutgers University.

Rob Duncan, vice chancellor of research at MU, said in the release that the university was fortunate to attract Hubler.

"He's very well-versed in nuclear and solid state physics and has a long history in highly responsible positions," Duncan said. "I know him as a brilliant and very open-minded scientist, making him well-suited to study yet unknown phenomena, which is the underlying charge of (the institute)."
The institute was created by a five-year, $5.5 million gift from the Sidney Kimmel Foundation to help research new energy sources and encourage collaboration between scientists in physics, the MU Research Reactor, engineering, material science and chemistry, the release said.

Hubler has written 100 journal articles, edited four books and procured six patents, the release said. He has received awards including the Navy Meritorious Civilian Service Award, the Navy Superior Civilian Service Award, the NRL 75th Anniversary Technology Transfer Award and the Veneto Research Consortium Award.

*Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.*
House spikes funding idea

Chair takes out performance as budget factor.

By Rudi Keller

Friday, March 8, 2013 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY — The latest House budget plan scraps performance-based funding recommendations for colleges and universities in favor of across-the-board increases, a change that would cost the University of Missouri more than $600,000.

The House Budget Committee yesterday heard parts of Chairman Rick Stream's $25 billion spending plan for the coming year, which includes $20 million to increase funding for campus operations. It provides a 2.3 percent increase over this year's base budget for each four-year institution.

Under the plan for performance-based funding, each school would have received a boost based on how well it did on five criteria the schools developed under the guidance of the Coordinating Board for Higher Education.

"There were some quirks or problems with it," Stream told the committee. "We found out that one of the universities had some difficulty with the criteria."

The committee listened to Stream's recommendations for several state departments and will hear the rest Monday. Stream intends to finish committee work on the budget next week, setting up floor debate for the week lawmakers return from spring break.

Stream's proposal makes several changes to Gov. Jay Nixon's budget. The biggest change rejects federally supported Medicaid expansion, which strips $890 million from social service spending and forces $46.6 million in general revenue cuts. The general revenue cuts must be made because Medicaid expansion was expected to save the state that much in the coming year.

Stream also altered Nixon's proposal for state pay raises. Instead of a 2 percent increase for all employees, Stream wants to give them a $500 increase in annual pay but start the raise halfway through the budget year to save money. The plan gives a greater benefit to lower-income employees, Stream said.
Using the performance funding model, Nixon's budget divided $34 million among community colleges and four-year institutions. The UM system met all five of its performance criteria and was slated for funding equal to a 4.3 percent budget increase. Lincoln University met only three of the five measures and was slated for a 2.6 percent boost.

Under Stream's plan, the UM System would receive 55 percent of the amount Nixon recommended from that $34 million pool, while Lincoln would receive 92 percent of Nixon's recommendation. By giving each school the same increase, Lincoln gains $182,000 over a pro-rated distribution of performance funding. UM would lose $615,000 it would have received under a pro-rated distribution.

State Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said he's keenly aware of the loss and will work to reverse it.

"I believe that performance ought to be an indicator," he said. "I don't think the governor ought to be the determiner of the performance standards, but in this case the universities themselves determined the performance standards, and I think it makes for a legitimate basis to reward performance."

UM President Tim Wolfe, who was in the Capitol for an annual display of undergraduate research projects, said the university will deal with whatever budget decisions legislators make. An increase in state aid, if received, is not targeted to any single project, he said.

"Once we get confirmation of what the budget will look like, we'll push that down to the campuses, and the campuses have their priorities, and the campuses are going to have to make the tradeoffs," Wolfe said.

Stream declined to say which school had complained about the outcome of using performance funding.

Assistant Commissioner of Higher Education Leroy Wade said he wasn't sure which school defected from the agreement on performance funding. The schools had agreed to abide by the results, he said.

The next step, Wade said, is to educate lawmakers on why it is important.

"We're not going to give up on performance funding," he said.

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Posted in Politics on Friday, March 8, 2013 2:00 pm.
University of Missouri to move honors graduation from Francis Quad

COLUMBIA — Some University of Missouri students are crying foul over plans to move the spring honors graduation ceremony from historic Francis Quadrangle to Mizzou Arena.

University officials tell the Columbia Missourian that there’s no longer enough room on the quad framed by Jesse Hall, Eighth Street and the Columns to fit students and their guests.

Mizzou Alumni Association Director Todd McCubbin acknowledges the decision goes against recent tradition. He says the large crowds have forced some parents and guests to stand or benches in order to see the ceremony.

More than 300 students have signed an online petition asking the university to reconsider.
MU leaders say White House's college scorecard is a good idea but clarifies little

By GH Lindsey
March 11, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A college scorecard system launched last month by the White House is useful in providing some information, but it doesn't shed sufficient light on the true cost of a degree, MU and other higher education leaders say.

"The scorecard seems to be a reasonable approach for people to use to begin to compare information such as graduation rate and costs," said Ann Korschgen, MU vice provost for enrollment management. "But it is so limited in the amount of data that it provides that no one should make a decision based only on this scorecard."

Following President Obama's State of the Union speech on Feb. 12, the White House website launched the college scorecard to help prospective college students find out, in the words of the president, "where they can get the most bang for their buck."

The scorecard features five statistics — cost, graduation rates, loan default rates, median borrowing and employment — that aim to help college shoppers understand the financial realities of the schools they may attend.

However, these statistics are unclear and lack the context to help people understand them, said Barry Toiv, vice president for public affairs at the Association of American Universities, of which MU is a member.

"We absolutely agree with the importance of transparency, but it's critical that any information conveyed to the public concerning affordability and value be complete, accurate and meaningful," Toiv said. "In these respects, the college scorecard needs substantial revisions to accomplish its laudable goals."

How it works
Users can access the scorecard through the White House website’s higher education page. Once users reach the scorecard, they can search by college name or use filters such as location, campus setting and majors offered.

Searching for a specific college sends the user directly to that college's scorecard. If the college shopper decides to search using the filters, a list of colleges that match the selected criteria are displayed. From there, users can select individual schools to pull up their respective scorecards.

**Loans and borrowing**

The median borrowing section of the scorecard reflects federal government loans, such as Federal Perkins loans to students or PLUS loans for parents of students, but not private loans used to cover the cost of attending a college. Private loans, unlike federal loans, have variable interest rates and often require a co-signer.

Additionally, there is no information on the scorecard about how many students at a particular school need to borrow.

"The median borrowing statistic is misleading for students because the totals do not provide the necessary context," Toiv said. "For some schools, the fact that a large percentage may not borrow at all is not reflected."

The card also does not differentiate between loans to students and loans to parents. According to a 2012 report by Sallie Mae, 13 percent of families borrowed money in 2011 to help fund their child’s college education.

The average net cost number also has its own issues. The information is dated from the 2010-11 academic year. In 2012 alone, the average cost of college tuition increased by 4.8 percent, according to the College Board.

Additionally, for many private schools that rely more heavily on tuition, such as Stephens College, listing such a price can be misleading.

"The numbers appear accurate but probably do not reflect a true picture of what our students are paying at Stephens," Stephens spokeswoman Janese Silvey said. "The net price listed is an average that would be skewed by those families who can afford full tuition. Many of our students pay much less because of the scholarships and grants they receive."
**Graduation rate**

The six-year graduation rate highlighted on the card includes only first-time college enrollees, excluding transfer students and those who have previously attended but not completed college. At MU, this discounts about 18 percent of the student body, or almost 5,000 people.

Nationally, almost a third of students who eventually earn a degree transfer at least once, according to a 2012 report by National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Some of the metrics on the card, including graduation rate and median borrowing, compare a school to a national average of other college and universities that mostly grant the same level of degrees, rather than comparing institutions of similar size, type or educational model.

MU, Stephens and Columbia College are all considered "primarily bachelor's degree granting," as are almost 2,000 other schools. Among the 2,000 are institutions as disparate as the private, 50-student Alaska Bible College and the public, 50,000-student University of Minnesota, along with for-profit institutions such as DeVry University and University of Phoenix.

**Employment**

Getting a job and earning a higher wage is clearly a priority for prospective college students and their families. Sixty-seven percent of Americans say getting a good job is a "very important reason" for getting education beyond high school, according to a February 2013 report from the Lumina Foundation.

A 2012 report, from student loan company Sallie Mae, found that 73 percent of undergraduate students strongly agreed that earning more money was a reason for attending college.

The White House scorecard has a section for employment data that as of 3 p.m. Sunday had no data. This data would allow prospective students to weigh their borrowing costs against the added income a college education might help them to find the most cost-effective school.

According to the scorecard page, the U.S. Department of Education is working to gather such data; until then, students should obtain the information directly from the institutions.

However, some educators, such as Catherine Hill, president of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., believe this focus on immediate earnings is a distortion of a college
education’s value. For example, students who go to graduate or professional schools may not have high immediate earnings, but their earning potential is much higher down the line.

Toiv agrees. "The stated goal of providing average earnings for graduates immediately after graduation is misleading to students and parents as it is a short-term, utilitarian measure that is wholly inappropriate to evaluate the value of education."

**Lost in the noise?**

The data on the college scorecard, despite its shortcomings, could be helpful to prospective college students, if they opt to use it.

The federal government alone has four other services intended to serve the same purpose: the College Navigator, the College Affordability and Transparency Center, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s college cost comparison tool and the forthcoming Financial Aid Shopping Sheet.

"It is a bit of duplicative effort," said Nicholas Prewett, director of financial aid at MU. "But any tools that students can use to make that decision are useful."

The government’s shopping aids also have to compete with tools from other organizations, such as the College Board’s Big Future page, which allows students to sort schools based not just on costs, majors and financial aid, but also on campus activities and where they can get the most Advanced Placement credits, among other things.

Many colleges also provide their own tools and information for potential students. By law, all colleges are required to have their own net price calculators, which provide a personalized estimate rather than a sweeping average.
Town & Country couple donates $5 million

Town & Country residents Cottrell and Kay Fox made an estate gift of more than $5 million to the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine in Columbia. Through their generous gift, the Foxes recognized the work of their long-time family veterinarians, James Schuessler and Fred Bendick of St. Louis, both alumni of the college.

The Foxes’ gift will support an endowment in companion animal medicine. The gift also will fund studies in comparative oncology, which is research to develop therapies and cures for people and animals with naturally occurring cancer, as well as to enhance training for graduate students and veterinary oncology residents.

The Foxes’ interest in the MU College of Veterinary Medicine first began when their family dog was treated for cancer at the MU Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital. As part of that treatment, MU veterinarians used a drug developed at MU called Samarium. Years later, Kay Fox’s father was treated for cancer using the same drug.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

One Health, One Medicine uses dogs for cancer research

By Riley Simpson
March 8, 2013 | 5:13 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Dogs earned the title of "man's best friend" by helping their masters hunt and herd, as well as keeping them company.

At MU's Comparative Oncology Laboratory, they have a new duty: Helping improve the treatment of cancer.

The second installment of the One Health, One Medicine forum series, held Friday at the Stony Creek Inn, focused on comparative oncology clinical trials held at MU, in which researchers treat dogs with cancer to gain insight for human treatment.

"Our treatments on our patients today help their owners tomorrow," said Dr. Jeffrey Bryan, director of the laboratory.

As a member of the Comparative Oncology Trials Consortium, MU is one of 20 academic centers performing cancer research by treating dogs, according to the consortium's website. MU's College of Veterinary Medicine received a $5 million donation from a St. Louis-area couple last month for the research.

Dr. Carolyn Henry, a professor with the School of Medicine and the College of Veterinary Medicine at MU, said treating dogs is similar to treating humans. Researchers can use the same imagery instruments, such as MRIs and PET/CT scans, as in human treatments, and they can also use radiation therapy.

It's better to use dogs than rodents, the most commonly used animal in clinical trials, because researchers treat dogs who already have cancer, while rodents are infected with cancer for the trials, Henry said. Dogs are also closer to the size of humans and live in similar environments.
Mitch Wasden, chief operating officer of MU Health Care, applauded the collaboration of several MU Health System departments in the animal trials. Collaboration is the "secret sauce" to success, he said.

Bryan said humor is important in assuring the pet owners that comparative oncology aims to improve the quality of life for the dogs. He said he wants to put an advertisement on a bus: "PET scans for pets? Only at MU!" and that he jokes with his researchers about doing lab tests for Labrador retrievers.

The key to improving quality of life, Bryan said, is lower doses of chemotherapy drugs and using other medications, such as anti-nausea drugs, to help the dogs feel better. Thanks to these methods, some dogs can hunt during treatment.

"The goal of chemotherapy is that (the dogs) can resume a normal life," Bryan said. "Their whole treatment is calibrated to make them feel better."

Bryan said pet owners have two motives when they bring their dogs to him: They want the best for their dogs and they want their dogs' misfortune to bring insight that can help other dogs and humans.

"When dogs can help us make cures for cancer, they become that much better of best friends," Bryan said.

*Supervising editor is Richard Webner.*
Personalities drive news consumption

By MU News Bureau

Saturday, March 9, 2013 at 2:00 am

University of Missouri researchers have found that news organizations should target readers with certain personality traits to optimize their online viewership. Paul Bolls, an associate professor of strategic communication at the MU School of Journalism and a 2011-12 MU Reynolds Journalism Institute Fellow, has found that news consumers who have "reward-seeking" personalities are more likely to read their news online and on mobile devices and to engage with websites by leaving comments on stories and uploading user-generated content.

In a study accepted for presentation at the 2013 International Communication Association conference in June, Bolls surveyed more than 1,000 respondents and placed them into two groups: reward seekers and threat avoiders.

He found reward seekers tend to use the Internet liberally, searching out entertainment and gratification, while threat avoiders tend to be more conservative, looking only for information that directly affects them. Bolls found that respondents identified as reward seekers were much more likely to engage with news websites as well as more likely to use mobile devices to consume news. He said that, to maximize the amount of revenue they can earn online, news organizations should find ways to specifically target reward seekers and engage them with their websites.

Bolls also recommends news organizations use "brain-friendly" designs when building their websites. He said the brain is engaged through motivation, so the most effective way to get readers to visit and stay on a website is to give them proper motivation, such as evoking emotion with stories and pictures. He also said the simpler the design, the better.

The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute engages media professionals, scholars and citizens in programs aimed at improving the practice and understanding of journalism. Fellows spend an academic year at RJI, working with Missouri faculty, students and staff to develop new ways to gather, process and deliver news, information and advertising.
Wolfe touring state to tout college's role

Moberly High was first stop.

By Karyn Spory

Saturday, March 9, 2013 at 2:00 am

University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe is spreading the word about the value of education to eighth and ninth graders with his "Show Me Value" tour.

The tour, which Wolfe kicked off yesterday at Moberly High School, is directed at those students so they will begin thinking about their futures. "If you wait until you're a senior, it's too late," Wolfe said.

Wolfe spoke with students about the importance of receiving a college education and then met with education, business and civic leaders to discuss barriers to students attaining a higher education.

Moberly School District Superintendent Gena McCluskey said she was excited that Wolfe decided to begin his tour in Moberly because his message is one she has tried to instill into the district's students.

"We've always had the message that we want the students "to have every door open when they graduate from here," McCluskey said.

Wolfe told the students that when making the decision to attend college or a technical school they should embrace their backgrounds and interests.

"For our state and nation to prosper, we need each one of you to live up to your potential," Wolfe said.

During his tour, Wolfe hopes to quash fears that receiving a college education is too expensive, and graduates are unable to pay back their debt.

"I think that message needs to be balanced with what the return" of having a degree "is and what doors are opened with a college education," Wolfe said.
Wolfe explained that student financial aid is an option and that long term, people with four-year
degrees earn $1.6 million more over a lifetime.

Wolfe said he felt the first stop on the tour was a success. "The interaction, the questions they've
asked, proves to me that they were listening and are interested in pursuing a college education,"
Wolfe said.

Eighth grader Ian Shippers said he thought the discussion was very informational. Shippers, who
would like to attend the University of Alabama, asked Wolfe what he thought of out-of-state
universities.

"I think you have to look and evaluate what is the best fit for you," Wolfe said. "My message is
to go to college — where is up to you."

Shippers said he felt Wolfe gave the students a lot of helpful tips for how to start researching
colleges.

The next stop on the tour will be St. Joseph on March 22.

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Posted in Politics on Saturday, March 9, 2013 2:00 am.
UM System President Tim Wolfe opens statewide tour in Moberly

By ALAN SCHER ZAGIER/The Associated Press
March 8, 2013 | 3:31 p.m. CST

MOBERLY — As an adult, Tim Wolfe parlayed a lucrative career as a software executive into a return to his alma mater as the University of Missouri's 23rd president. The teen Wolfe? A self-described "unfocused student" who cared more about football, girls and his part-time job at a Columbia gas station.

Those personal details don't often make into the speeches Wolfe typically gives to civic leaders, business owners, alumni donors or state lawmakers. But as he kicked off a statewide "Show Me Value" higher education tour Friday morning in the Moberly High School gym, the 54-year-old prodigal son played to his audience.

"No matter what path you follow, you should include college on that plan," he told more than 300 Moberly eighth-and ninth-graders. "Quite simply, education is a path toward lifelong success."

Although few in Columbia — home to both the flagship campus and the four-campus system's headquarters — need a reminder about the university's prominence, the statewide tour is aimed at promoting higher education to Missourians who live outside the state's major cities. Wolfe next heads to St. Joseph on March 22, with additional stops planned in April and May as well once classes resume after summer break.

Wolfe, who took office in February 2012, said he wants to combat what he sees as a growing national sentiment that devalues the benefits of a four-year college degree and suggests more students should enter the workforce sooner. He didn't gloss over those criticisms, making reference to both spiraling student debt and plunging job placement rates.

He encouraged the students not to be "scared away" by college costs, noting that generous financial aid means many students won't pay the full "sticker price" at the Missouri campuses and other schools. Wolfe also referenced recent research by Georgetown University's Center
for Education and the Workforce estimating that those who obtain a four-year degree will earn $1 million more over their lifetime than their counterparts who only graduate high school.

Count 15-year-old Gage Mast among those who took the message to heart.

"It kind of made me want to go to college more," he said. "You see not just your parents want you to go, but somebody else who was successful."

Wolfe isn't the first University of Missouri president to hit the hustings in hopes of propping up higher education's battered image. Elson Floyd, the university's president from 2003 to 2007, took pride in visiting each of the state's 114 counties on a more informal goodwill tour. But his audiences consisted of grown-ups, not kids.

"The more you can personalize it, and they see you as a human being, the (better) it can be," said Moberly High principal Aaron Vitt. "They're used to adults pontificating, being on a pedestal. When you can humanize it, it's more effective."

Stan Jones, president of Complete College America, said it's rare for those of Wolfe's stature to work so directly on community outreach. He also suggested the personal touch could resonate in ways that reminders from teachers, parents and guidance counselors could not.

"For an awful lot of students who go to college, it's a 12th-grade decision," said Jones, whose nonprofit group works to boost college completion rates. "Some of its not as deliberate and thoughtful as it needs to be."

Jones, a former Indiana higher education commissioner, said Wolfe's visit could help demystify the college experience and get students thinking sooner about what classes to take to prepare for college, how to obtain financial aid or even prompt some early campus visits — an experience he said is pivotal to winning over noncommittal or disinterested prospects.

"A lot of the knowledge these students have of college is from watching basketball games," he said. "They've not been on campus. It makes it more tangible."
Campus sets stormwater master plan

MU identifies future projects.

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Friday, March 8, 2013 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri's first master plan for stormwater management shows dozens of sites throughout MU's campus where wetlands, planter boxes and bioretention systems can be put in to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff that eventually reaches Hinkson Creek.

A committee of business people, homeowners, environmental advocates and others got a look yesterday at the just-completed MU stormwater master plan as part of the group's discussion about ways to improve the quality of Hinkson Creek.

Gary Ward, associate vice chancellor for facilities at MU, told fellow stakeholders meeting at the Boone County Government Center that the storm water plan was the result of work done last year with Geosyntec Consultants.

The stakeholders group, along with an action team and a science team, is part of a process known as collaborative adaptive management. The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Agency approved the process as a way to bring Hinkson Creek into compliance with federal clean water standards.

The effort includes Boone County, the city of Columbia and the University of Missouri because those entities are joint holders of a DNR permit that allows discharge of stormwater runoff into local streams.

MU's stormwater master plan includes a detailed "stormwater baseline map" to show existing best management practices, or BMPs, and other potential possibilities such as planter boxes, cisterns, wetlands and research that can play a role in achieving water-quality standards for the Hinkson.

"How can we measure success?" Ward asked. "Some of these projects are very hard to measure."

Existing best management practices on the MU campus include:
• An underground cistern below Tucker Hall, used to irrigate greenhouse plants.

• Pervious pavers outside the MU Sustainability Office that filter pollutants and reduce stormwater runoff.

• A swale at the corner of College Avenue and Stadium Boulevard that manages runoff from a nearby parking lot.

• A bioretention system at the Rollins Group residence halls that pools excess water so that it can infiltrate the area or evaporate, reducing runoff.

Additional practices will be put in place when needs are more clearly identified and funding is available.

"For now, we've just identified potential BMPs," said Karlan Seville, campus facilities spokeswoman.

"And we'll implement those as we can. We don't currently have a schedule to do that. It's just helping us see what we can do."

The Hinkson stakeholder group already has recommended moving forward with a physical habitat assessment of select sites in the creek. Critics of a pollution-control document established by DNR and adopted by the EPA in early 2011 said it was based on outdated, unreliable and even unscientific data.

A legal challenge on behalf of the city, university and county resulted in the collaborative adaptive management process as the way to achieve water-quality standards for the Hinkson.

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Posted in Local on Friday, March 8, 2013 2:00 pm.
A conversation with: Ron Lykins

Mizzou Wheelchair Basketball coach is headed back to the Paralympics

By HILARY WEAVER

March 7, 2013 | 12:00 a.m. CST

On the Brewer Fieldhouse basketball court at 6 a.m. on a Wednesday, Mizzou Wheelchair Basketball coach Ron Lykins has no time to let the early morning hours affect him. His eyes dart quickly across the gym as he watches a swarm of players whiz past him, dribbling, passing and shooting the ball as they move across the wood floor.

After coaching the USA Paralympic women’s team three times, the National Wheelchair Basketball Association announced earlier this year that Lykins will coach his fourth Paralympic games, this time for the U.S. men’s team in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro.

Lykins has coached the wheelchair basketball team at MU since 2009. Carter Arey, in his third year with the Mizzou Wheelchair Basketball team, says Lykins is the reason for his success as a student and a player. With a prosthetic leg, Arey had played able-bodied basketball. Lykins noticed Arey playing at the Mizzou Recreational Center and persuaded him to transfer from Moberly Area Community College to MU.

“He’s a full-time father figure, coach and a full-time mentor,” Arey says. “He’s there when you need him at all times, and he’s a phone call away at all times.”

What sparked your interest in wheelchair basketball?
I needed volunteer hours for a class. On campus (at the University of Kentucky) we had a wheelchair basketball team. Someone said, “They’re always looking for volunteers.” I loved basketball; I did my 90 hours in two weeks.

What made you want to coach?
It was new to me. I’d never seen it before. Getting to know the guys and watching the game being played was just really fascinating to see. Then I got to do a little bit of coaching, and I could start to see the resemblance to able-bodied basketball. I would work out with the guys and get in the chair some. They would show me the real nuances of the game that I couldn’t pick up.
I said, “I’d rather like to be the guy on the floor, out there and doing it rather than the guy setting it up.” So that’s how I took off coaching.

Are there stigmas about wheelchair basketball?
Yeah, I hear, “I’m not disabled; I don’t need that.” Carter is a good example. He played stand-up ball with his prosthetic foot. He was good. He was really good. We started talking one day, and he said, “Yeah, I tried it when I was like 4, and I was too slow.” Then he watched it, and he got interested, tried it and fell in love with it. You only use the chair to play. What (people) fail to do is realize that that chair is just a piece of athletic equipment.

What are some of your key coaching techniques to push the players to reach their potential
Treat them like a player, like how any athlete would be treated. I complement when they do well and correct them when they don’t. I just tell them how to do things better. I just have high expectations for them and work with them to achieve those goals.

What do you remember about your first experience at the Paralympics?
Barcelona in 1992. When I look back on it, I think back to the enormity of the event. It sounds kind of corny, but you get to it, and you realize that the world is a small place; it’s neat to see how much we have in common instead of differences. That was one thing I took away after being at these games. It’s something I want my players to experience.

What do the players on the Mizzou team think about the fact that you have the chance to go to Rio?
They were the first ones I talked to after I got my phone call. I brought them in and told them what happened and that they were going to be my No. 1 priority. I’m not going to let things here slide because of my involvement with the U.S. national team. I wanted to make sure they knew that and they heard it from me before they got on the Internet or Facebook. Good things are going to come out of this for everybody.

What is your favorite Paralympics memory?
Winning gold. The first one was in 2004, and the second was in 2008. When you hear your anthem being played, that’s really a cool feeling. You can’t describe it. After Athens, anytime I hear the anthem, I hear it differently. Watching our flag go up a little higher than anybody else’s, then hearing the anthem being played. It just brings me back to some of the things we did.
It's a balancing act: Trayless dining halls at MU cut consumption, increase cleaning

By Stephanie Graftage
March 8, 2013 | 11:12 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — MU's Campus Dining Services' 2012 decision to go trayless has reduced the size of students' meals but has increased the amount of food that hits the floor.

The "whoops" factor has forced an increase in cleaning staff by at least one person per shift in the four dining halls where trayless dining was tested: Plaza 900, Pavilion at Dobbs, Mark Twain Market and Rollins.

“One thing we noticed that we kind of anticipated, but we didn’t know what the effect would be, was the amount of garbage that hits the floor,” marketing manager Michael Wuest said.

MU's Campus Dining Services expected the decision to go trayless to reduce waste by nearly 26 percent. Wuest said he's also noticed that students eat less per meal because they're more aware of how much they eat when they have to carry it.

*During the fall semester, students reduced waste to 2.76 ounces per meal, a decrease from the 3.8 ounces wasted per meal in 2011, according to a report from Dining Services. That's 1.04 ounces less per meal with the removal of trays.

It's hard to estimate the cash savings for Dining Services because dining plans have changed as well, Wuest said. But in about a year, Dining Services will have more data and a more accurate picture of how much money is being saved and what waste is avoided, he said.

Campus Dining Services also expected the elimination of trays to save nearly 100,000 gallons of fresh water each year, reducing expenses for Dining Services, according to a report from Hobart dish-washing machine representatives, which was conducted in 2008 when the project originated.
The money saved with the changes will go toward improving MU's dining services, Wuest said. Money saved in previous years was reinvested into renovating Mark Twain Market, for example.

Although there has been a reduction in the amount of food consumed and water used, Wuest said eliminating trays has not changed the types of food students eat. They still like traditional favorites such as pizza, chicken strips and toasted ravioli.

Supervising editor is Katherine Reed.
Students stand against slavery

Group keeps vigil for 27-hour stint.

By Karyn Spory

Friday, March 8, 2013 at 2:00 pm

For 27 hours, a group of University of Missouri students say they will stand their ground and stand up for freedom.

At noon yesterday, students with Mizzou Stand for Freedom descended on MU's Speakers Circle with petitions and cardboard signs asking, "What do you stand for?" The group working in support of the human rights agency International Justice Mission planned to be at Speakers Circle until 3 p.m. today.

Jill Bushery, a senior journalism major, said she heard about the agency at a conference in January. She described it as a group that tries to end modern-day slavery around the world by helping rescue victims of oppression.

A speech at the conference by the founder of International Justice Mission caught her attention. "I think it really struck a chord with all of us," said Bushery, who said she was shocked by statistics about the number of people living in slavery.

Based on an estimate that there are 27 million people worldwide who are forced slaves, sex slaves or victims of human trafficking or child labor violations, the group's goal over 27 hours was to obtain 1,000 signatures, raise $2,700 and have 270 people stand together. By this morning, the group had collected more than 1,000 signatures, raised more than $500 and had about 150 people who stood.

"Our main goal today is just to raise awareness because I think many people think slavery is a thing of the past. But it's not; it's very real and prevalent today," Bushery said.

The petition will be sent to President Barack Obama, requesting that he commit his second term to "confronting and eradicating modern slavery at home and abroad."

Kirsten Buchanan, a freshman nursing student, and Seth Colston, a junior soil, environmental and atmospheric sciences major, heard about the event through friends and decided to take part. Even though slavery is prevalent, they said, it seems to be an issue most people aren't aware of.
Adamilson Abreu, a graduate student from Brazil, paused to add his name to the list because he said it sounded like a “fair petition.” He said it wasn't the first time he had heard about modern slavery.

"A soap opera in my home country has talked about sex slaves," he said, explaining that Brazilian soap operas have added more social issues to their plotlines as their popularity has increased. "They try to make people think and not just entertain."

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Posted in Education, Local on Friday, March 8, 2013 2:00 pm.
MU Human Library aims to overcome stereotypes with stories

By Valentine Lamar
March 8, 2013 | 6:48 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — MU sophomore Farah El-Jayyousi identifies as a Palestinian, a white Muslim, a feminist and an incurable bookworm.

El-Jayyousi shared her multiple identities at the MU Human Library event at the Memorial Union on Friday. She was one of 14 MU students and faculty who shared their stories by representing themselves as "living books"; her title was "Life as a Third Culture Kid: Navigating Multiple Identities."

The event aimed to overcome stereotypes and prejudices with stories about women from multiple cultures. Most of the presenters focused on feminism, globalization and cultural and language differences.

“We wanted to encourage the community — faculty, students and the larger community — to come out and talk to people they normally wouldn’t talk to,” said Nadège Uwase, executive assistant of the Chancellor's Diversity Initiative, the event’s sponsor.

The Human Library project was first held at MU in November 2012. Occurring on International Women’s Day, the event was incorporated into Women’s History Month. Juanqui Pane, a Paraguayan Fulbright student, was the only male presenter.

Uwase said she has received some positive responses and hopes to expand the program.

“We're figuring out a way to have these books presented each semester, but obviously it depends on readers' response, (Chancellor's Diversity Initiative) resources and personnel to plan the event."

In her presentation, El-Jayyousi put forth her idea of feminism: to champion the human rights of all groups, not just women and Muslims. She also related her experiences with prejudice.
"I think that a lot of time prejudice is implicit rather than explicit," El-Jayyousi said. "For example, people might avoid talking to you in the classroom or on the bus because of ignorance or misconceptions."

She finds it amusing and surprising that Muslim women are misrepresented as submissive and uneducated, which she attributes to biased media reports.

“I’ve lived in the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, and I saw women who were highly educated and just as vocal in supporting causes like education and healthcare,” El-Jayyousi said.

She added: “It’s people who have power and influence that use religion to oppress women.”

Although El-Jayyousi has found that some of her peers don’t take her seriously, she continues to serve as the President of the Muslim Students Organization, a role she took this spring.

The idea of being a white Muslim also rubs many people the wrong way, El-Jayyousi said, because they expect Muslims to have brown rather than white skin.

El-Jayyousi, an aspiring creative writer, hopes her life experiences can help eliminate xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.

“I’d like to change the world but obviously that’s not realistic, so if I can change one person’s perspective, then that would make me very happy,” El-Jayyousi said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Speakers debate life sentences for juveniles at Missouri Law Review symposium

MU Mention Pg. 2

By Samantha Sunne
March 8, 2013 | 8:35 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Life without parole is one of the harshest sentences a judge can pass down, surpassed only by death. For that reason, the sentence is reserved for society’s harshest crimes, such as murder.

A watershed U.S. Supreme Court decision last year ruled that no state can have mandatory life without parole for juveniles.

Speakers at the annual Missouri Law Review symposium Friday discussed the Miller v. Alabama decision in front of an audience of more than 100. They agreed the decision is a sign of the justice system’s willingness to take psychological research into account.

Will Berry, as assistant professor of law at the University of Mississippi, said juveniles have "diminished culpability" for crimes and a higher ability to be reformed.

“This is about science,” said keynote speaker Judge Nancy Gertner, a professor at the Harvard School of Law. The research, she said, shows the human brain is not fully developed until after a person reaches adulthood.

The U.S. Supreme Court cited that research in its ruling that mandatory life without parole sentences were cruel and unusual punishment, as well as unconstitutional according to the Eighth Amendment.

“I don’t think that the court has gone far enough in exercising its constitutional authority to define what is cruel and unusual punishment,” Gertner said. “I think they ought to do more.”
The speakers debated whether judges or legislators should decide the definitions and penalties for crimes.

**MU law professor Frank Bowman said it’s “universally held” that the legislature holds that authority. The court’s decision in Miller v. Alabama is significant because it conflicts with that idea, he said.**

Douglas Berman, a law professor at Ohio State University, said sentencing should be up to the judge, not the legislature.

Gertner said judges should have more leeway to decide a sentence. She said she’d heard of someone sentenced to life in prison for stealing three golf clubs under California’s “three strikes” law.

“Legislature doesn’t do proportionality analysis,” she said.

There are 84 prisoners serving life sentences in Missouri who were juveniles when they committed their offense, according to the Missouri Department of Corrections.

Juveniles can still be sentenced to life with the possibility of parole. That was the case for Alyssa Bustamante, who was 15 when she murdered 9-year-old Elizabeth Olten in 2009. Bustamante will spend 35 years in prison before she’s eligible for parole.

It has been illegal for juveniles to be sentenced to death since 2005.

That ruling had implications in Ryan Ferguson’s 2005 trial. He and Charles “Chuck” Erickson could not be put to death for murdering Columbia Daily Tribune editor Kent Heitholt in 2001. Instead, Ferguson was sentenced to 40 years in prison, and Erickson 25.

For years, the U.S. Supreme Court has been shortening the list of offenders who can legally be put to death for their crimes, Berry said. Rapists, mentally disabled people, non-homicide offenders and others were, one by one, removed from that list.

“That language opens the door to a lot of different potential avenues for constitutional challenges,” Berry said of the trend. “The question is, where are they going next?”

*Supervising editor is Richard Webner.*
MU agriculture report foresees dip in corn price

Annual outlook offers forecast.

By Jacob Barker

Sunday, March 10, 2013 at 1:00 am

Missouri farmers who saw their corn whither during last year’s drought could miss out on the jump in commodity prices it caused if the predictions of a University of Missouri study come true.

The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at MU released its 2013 projections on food and farming prices Friday, and among the bigger changes in the farming outlook is a $2 drop in the price of corn to near $5 a bushel. That prediction assumes normal weather this season as well as another near-record planting of almost 97 million acres, which, except for last year, is the highest since the 1930s.

“We don’t pretend to know what happens with the weather, so when we do this, we actually look at 500 different ways this could happen,” FAPRI Director Pat Westhoff said.

For years, policymakers in Washington, D.C., and other economists have regarded FAPRI’s annual outlook of commodity and livestock prices, consumer food inflation and other agricultural data as a valuable starting point for predicting what the season will bring. The institute runs economic models with 500 different scenarios to develop its predictions.

Still, like in farming, it’s hard to predict what nature and the markets will do. Last year, FAPRI’s baseline prediction saw corn prices falling to $4.81. Instead, the drought pushed them above $7.

Even so, Westhoff said the large acreage likely to be planted, both for corn and soybeans, Missouri’s largest crops, means those commodity prices likely will decrease. FAPRI predicts a 1.3 million increase in the acres of soybeans planted, to 78.5 million, and that the price per bushel will drop from around $14.20 to $11.49. “There’s likely to be some drop this year, and futures markets are already reflecting it,” Westhoff said.

If farmers do see normal weather this year and prices fall, FAPRI’s report still predicts another record year for farm income. The report projects $128.8 billion of net farm income in 2012.
dollars, the highest since the 1970s — even after adjusting for inflation. It would be the third straight year of record-high income for farmers.

However, net farm income includes the value of surplus stocks, which, if a record harvest does happen this year, farmers will have in abundance. Net cash income in the 2013-14 season is actually projected to decline by about $8 billion from 2012, to around $127 billion, which is still high by historical standards.

And consumers could see another year of increased food inflation — FAPRI predicts a rate of 2.9 percent, a bit higher than the 2.6 percent last year. A good portion of price increases have come from the meat industry, which has seen dwindling herds as livestock farmers struggle with feed costs.

"In 2013, we're still gonna be down in terms of aggregate supplies of meat on the market," said Scott Brown, a livestock economist for MU's Agricultural Markets and Policy group that assisted with the FAPRI report. "Supply of product really continues to keep prices at record levels."

Five times more corn grown in the nation is fed to animals than is consumed by humans, and the run-up in prices has hit livestock producers hard. Add in dry weather in recent years that used up hay supplies and scorched pasture, and it helps explain why livestock farmers have had a rough time.

That could change this year if a big harvest comes in and drives down feed costs. That's what Brown tells the livestock farmers who have held on.

"I say, 'You will smile at the end of 2013 if we have a good crop,' " he said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Despite snow and rain, deeper soil remains too dry for crops

By Abigail Geiger
March 8, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Rain and snow this winter have provided much-needed moisture to central Missouri topsoil, but scientists say the above-average precipitation hasn’t reached the deeper soils that crops and plants depend on.

A layer of soil in Central Missouri called a clay pan, which is hidden two to 10 inches beneath the topsoil, provides a reserve for plants in the toughest days of summer. MU soil scientists say these deeper soils have been running a water deficit since the winter of 2011-2012.

**Tim Reinbott, superintendent of MU’s Bradford Research and Extension Center, said the rain and snow this winter will help the topsoil but haven’t been enough to permeate the clay-pan subsoil.**

Reinbott said the top three feet of the subsoil in Central Missouri, which he uses to measure for moisture, is fully charged when it contains six inches of water. At this time, he said, that moisture content is only about two inches.

The 6.29 inches of precipitation recorded at Columbia Regional Airport since Jan. 1 was 1.6 inches above normal. But Reinbott said the rain and snow arrived so swiftly in central Missouri that it will create a "perched water table" above the clay pan where the upper layers of soil will be so full of water that additional rain will run off.

MU soil professor Randall Miles said that to overcome the dry conditions, it would take more than two years of 10-plus inches of precipitation above Columbia’s annual average of 42.6 inches from 1981 through 2010. It would be ideal, he said, for rains to continue this spring before “the faucet is turned off for about six to eight weeks” in early July.

Jason Hubbart, a forest hydrology professor at MU, agreed the recent moisture won’t be enough to replenish moisture deeper in the soil. He said plants and crops in Central Missouri stretch their roots three to six feet and can depend on the deeper reserve to make it through the heat of summer.
The latest U.S. Drought Monitor showed the recent moisture has improved conditions in Boone County. The severe drought classification for the southern half of the county was removed, leaving the entire county in moderate drought.

"Snow water equivalent of the snow pack is in the two to three inch range, so warmer temperatures should yield considerable benefit to well depths and pond/lake levels in the days and weeks ahead through melting," the drought monitor summary for the Midwest reads.

A seasonal drought outlook from the Climate Prediction Center for March 7 through the end of May shows no drought in roughly the eastern half of the state with improved conditions for the western half.

Making predictions about the future of soil moisture can be as difficult as forecasting the weather.

The land and the soil work on their own schedule, Reinbott said. “Nature doesn’t know when one year ends and another begins, but it’s amazing to see how to keeps itself going,” he said. "We’re here trying to see what we can do to help it along."

Supervising editor is John Schneller.