Sequester threatens college research funding

By Tim Barker tbarker@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8350

The region’s top research universities stand to lose tens of millions of dollars this year in federal grant money to the budget battle underway in Washington.

There are many unknowns, but schools such as Washington University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are nervously watching and waiting to see how a handful of federal agencies handle sequestration — the automatic federal spending cuts that went into effect this month.

All they know now is that those agencies — including the National Institutes for Health and its massive $30.9 billion research pot — have to trim their budgets by 5 percent. Exactly how that’s going to happen is unclear.

“Information is coming out slowly,” said Evan Kharasch, Washington University’s vice chancellor for research.

The school gets the bulk — 77 percent — of its $620 million research funding through the federal government. Most of it comes from the NIH, though it also pulls in money from the National Science Foundation, NASA and other agencies.

But even though everyone knows how much the agencies must trim, there’s no easy way to know how those cuts will play out on a campus-by-campus basis, Kharasch said.

“It’s really not possible to simply do the arithmetic,” he said.

That’s because each of the agencies will get to decide how they go about balancing their budgets as part of this overall effort to cut $85 billion in federal spending.

The National Institutes of Health, for example, already has cut its current grants to 90 percent funding. And the agency may award fewer new grants this year.

Other agencies may decide to prioritize some research projects, meaning certain grants could be cut more severely than others.

And that’s making it difficult for schools such as the University of Illinois to make plans.
“Until you get rulings from the individual agencies, there’s not a whole lot that can be done,” said Randy Kangas, vice president for planning and budgeting for the three-campus system.

The system anticipates losing $40 million to $65 million this year, with up to $46 million of that coming from the Urbana-Champaign campus.

And with some jobs on campus tied directly to research grants, Kangas said it is likely that positions will be lost along the way.

The impact also will be felt by St. Louis University, which says it could lose $2 million to $4 million from its $40 million in federally funded research.

It is less clear what might happen at the University of Missouri-Columbia campus. A spokeswoman said there is too much uncertainty surrounding cuts at various agencies to provide an estimate of potential losses.

The school had a $230 million research budget in 2011, with large chunks coming from the NIH, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Science Foundation and the Department of Defense.

And while most of the attention, nationally and here, is on this year’s funding, there also may be reasons to be concerned about the long-term impact of the nation’s budget battle.

Kharasch and others worry that research dollars could be lost permanently, reducing the pipeline of new medical breakthroughs, spin-off tech companies and skilled workers.

“There is a concern that the nation’s research enterprise could undergo a significant contraction,” he said.

FINANCIAL AID

In the earlier days of sequester talk, there was some fear that college financial aid departments could also be hurt. But for the moment, there appears to be minimal impact.

The widely used Pell Grant program is shielded from sequestration. But there will be small cuts in Federal Work Study, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and TEACH Grants.

But financial aid officials at both Mizzou and the University of Missouri-St. Louis described the impact as minor.

UMSL doesn’t expect the cuts to hit more than a couple dozen students.

Nick Prewett, Mizzou’s financial aid director, said students will find themselves paying $17 more in loan origination fees. But the school doesn’t expect any changes in its SEOG awards, while about 20 students may see their TEACH grants cut by 12.6 percent.
But more importantly, Prewett doesn’t see any reason to hit students, who are starting to receive award letters in the mail, with unexpected surprises this summer.

“The offers on the table, I wouldn’t expect us making any changes,” he said.
Medicaid expansion decision may affect businesses and consumers in a big way

By Jacob Barker Saturday, March 23, 2013 at 2:00 am

MUMENTIONS P. 13 and 4

Sarah Miller didn’t have steady work when she moved to Mid-Missouri in 2009, but a year and a half ago she decided to change that.

She started attending Metro Business College to get her medical assistant certification, and in February she landed a part-time job at Capitol Region Medical Center in Jefferson City, making about $200 a week.

Now, Miller will be booted off Medicaid at the end of September.

The federal/state health insurance program helped her while she was pregnant with her daughter, Madilynn, now 2 years old. Miller is still young enough to be on her mother’s health insurance, but when she needed emergency gall bladder surgery, Medicaid subsidized the high deductible that she couldn’t afford. Although Capitol Region, part of University of Missouri Health Care, offers health insurance, she said the premiums would eat up too much of her paycheck to afford.

“I’m pretty worried because ... I’m looking for a place to rent right now, and if they drop me completely and my daughter, yeah, it’s a pretty high priority,” Miller said.

Miller’s daughter probably won’t be dropped from the program; Missouri covers children whose parents make up to three times the poverty level. But Miller, with her current pay, would still make above Missouri’s Medicaid eligibility threshold: 18 percent of the poverty line. For a family of two, that’s $2,791 a year.

Missouri legislators, if they wanted to, could expand the safety net and keep Miller on Medicaid. In doing so, they would allow about 218,000 more Missourians to enroll in the program. It’s a choice they didn’t have until last summer, when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act but allowed states to choose whether they would expand Medicaid.

The Republican legislature is balking, while state Democrats and the health care industry are fiercely lobbying for expansion. Even traditionally conservative groups such as the Missouri Chamber of Commerce are supporting expansion, saying it would be impractical to turn down federal support for expansion and the money it would pump into the state’s economy.
The fight pits future costs to the state against present economic benefits, not to mention assisting a vulnerable population. Without expansion, some employers might have to pay more as health care mandates take effect next year, and hospitals stand to lose money as federal payments for charity care go down. Medicaid expansion would blunt that blow, especially for poor hospitals in rural parts of the state. The big systems, with hundreds of millions of dollars sitting in their fund balances, would be better able to absorb the hit.

Even if Medicaid is expanded, the question remains on whether it will expand access. Doctors already are hesitant to add Medicaid patients because of the program’s low payment rates. Many low-income people already receive uncompensated care from hospitals, and if Medicaid doesn’t expand access to primary care and other services, it could end up being just another pot of money paying for emergency room visits.

“That is definitely still a question, whether” Medicaid “reimbursement will be sufficient for those providers to continue seeing patients,” said Akeiisa Coleman, a health policy associate at the Missouri Foundation for Health.

The law envisioned all states would cover people up to 138 percent of poverty, or $21,403 for a family of two. Gov. Jay Nixon, joined by health care providers and their lobbyists, has called for Missouri to take the expansion. Proponents argue it’s essentially free money for the state because the federal government will pay the entire cost of expansion for the next three years. In 2014, it’s estimated to bring in more than $1.1 billion, and through 2020, the federal government would put more than $8.2 billion for Missouri’s Medicaid expansion into the economy, according to a study prepared by the University of Missouri School of Medicine for the Missouri Hospital Association and the Missouri Foundation for Health.

But Republicans who control the legislature have been unwilling to advance the expansion proposal, citing the future cost to the state. In 2017, Missouri will begin paying a portion of the costs, and by 2020, Missouri would be responsible for paying 10 percent of the cost of expansion, estimated at $119 million that year.

Proponents say the influx of money will boost the health care economy and ultimately pay those future bills through increased tax revenue. With a large portion of Mid-Missouri’s economy reliant on health care, the Columbia Chamber of Commerce came out in support of Medicaid expansion.

“From a practical standpoint, Mid-Missouri, and particularly Columbia, is going to disproportionately benefit from those medical dollars coming into this community,” said Steve Spellman, the co-chair of the Columbia chamber’s government affairs committee. “Everything else being equal, it’s more money for the state; it’s more money for the health care industry.”

Republicans counter that it’s risky to trust the federal government to hold up its end of the bargain and keep the state’s share of future payments at what it says it will be.

“What we’re doing right now is balancing that against the bigger-picture issues of how much money is this going to take from public education to pay for this in the long term,” said Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, who voted against expansion in committee. “It’s not free money. It’s money that the federal government is borrowing.”
Traditional Republican allies, particularly the Missouri Chamber of Commerce, have urged the party to support expansion. “Missouri tax dollars are being shipped to D.C. to pay for this thing, so we might as well get as many of them back as possible,” said Brendan Cossette, the Missouri chamber’s director of legislative affairs.

Schaefer, though, said the influence of the hospital lobby and health care industry has influenced those groups’ support. “The reason for that is all of those chambers have hospitals on their boards,” he said.

The ground doesn’t seem to be shifting in favor of expansion, said Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, and it’s “inexplicable” that in communities like Columbia, legislators are opposed to expansion. “I haven’t seen the support from where it should be,” Kelly said. “We take a huge lick in our local economy.”

The reason that hospitals have been so vocal is that, no matter what decision is made on the issue, they are required to treat people who walk through their doors. The federal government reimburses them a portion of their costs through disproportionate share hospital, or DSH, payments. The health care law, envisioning that Medicaid would be expanded in all states, begins reducing those payments next year.

“DSH payments are being phased out, but the amount of people who are coming in to get care are not,” Cossette said. “If we don’t expand Medicaid to cover these folks, then hospitals and providers are going to be saddled with these costs, and they’re going to have to pass them on somewhere.”

That has been the line from the hospital lobby: Without Medicaid expansion, premiums for private insurance will go up to cover the increased cost of uncompensated care.

Jonathan Gruber, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology economics professor who helped craft the Affordable Care Act, said premiums for commercial insurance are expected to rise 5 percent to 15 percent in states that don’t expand Medicaid. People between 100 percent and 138 percent of the poverty level might be able to buy insurance on the under-construction health exchanges because they will be eligible for a federal subsidy.

“The bigger issue is those below the poverty line,” Gruber said at a health care journalism conference last week.

Although consumers’ wallets are affected, hospitals’ bottom lines will be, too. The Missouri Hospital Association says its members will lose $6.3 billion over the next nine years in DSH payments and reductions in Medicare reimbursements that will take effect. Dave Dillon, a spokesman for the hospital lobby, said the 2013 budget for DSH payments was about $780 million for hospitals in the state.

Although hospitals say Medicaid doesn’t even cover the cost of care, they say it’s better than nothing. Without it, hospitals are in danger of closing, said Mitch Wasden, CEO of MU Health Care.
“It’s really probably hard for the public to appreciate those kinds of cuts until they see the effects of them, until they see hospitals close and things,” he said.

That might be true for smaller, rural hospitals. Audrain Medical Center, for instance, had run a deficit for several years. But it was acquired recently by SSM, a much larger health system, as part of a trend that is occurring with small hospitals across the state.

The large hospital systems are in a better position to absorb the cuts. For instance, BJC Healthcare, which operates Boone Hospital Center, made $339.9 million more in revenue than it spent in 2011. The year before that it made $269.4 million in profit. In 2011, it spent $154.3 million on charity care, $65.7 million of which was reimbursed, according to its most recent 990 form filed with the Internal Revenue Service. It was sitting on $3.3 billion in net assets, including $2.2 billion in publicly traded securities.

Jacob Luecke, spokesman for Boone Hospital, did not make an administrator available for an interview. Luecke said there were no estimates for DSH payment cuts at Boone Hospital. Messages left with interim President Randy Morrow’s office were not returned.

At MU Health Care, Wasden said the hospital is expecting a reduction of $5 million to $6 million in DSH payments next year. Another $2 million in reduced Medicare payments are expected.

MU Health Care, too, is sitting on a pile of cash. Its fiscal 2013 budget assumes $682 million in revenue and $624 million in expenditures. However, after debt service of $24 million and voluntary capital investments in its facilities of $40 million, it actually ends up spending more than it would make. Still, the system would end fiscal 2013 with a $330.7 million fund balance.

Plus, hospitals haven’t been talking about the increased revenue they would receive from an expanded pool of commercial insurance once insurance companies can no longer bar people with pre-existing conditions from obtaining coverage, and the exchanges open up.

Whether Medicaid expansion would improve health for poor people or just soften the blow to hospitals’ pockets is up in the air. Many doctors don’t even take Medicaid, and even though its reimbursements have been increased to Medicare rates for two years, no one knows if they will stay that way. If people can’t get care before they go to a hospital, not much will change.

“A lot of physicians have no choice, as a matter of practice, to limit how many Medicaid patients they see,” said Tom Holloway, executive vice president of the Missouri State Medical Association.

His group, which represents doctors, is supporting expansion in the hope that payments can be “reformed,” he said. Reform, in this context, means increased reimbursement rates.

“I have to presume that if the rates got acceptable, there would be more private providers interested in serving that population,” said Gloria Crull, CEO of the Family Health Center of Boone County.
Her organization is one of the few that does, but it receives federal grants to help cover the cost. Medicaid helps it expand its resources for care, and like hospitals, she expects federal assistance to provide charity care to decrease as many states adopt Medicaid expansion. If that happens and Medicaid isn’t expanded, it’s more people getting sick and going to hospitals, which taxpayers and people with insurance end up paying for anyway.

“It’s kind of a fluid environment right now,” Wasden said. “The problem is the authors of the ACA didn’t anticipate a scenario in which states did not expand Medicaid. That was not an option.”

This article was published in the Saturday, March 23, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "LOOMING QUESTIONS: Medicaid expansion decision may affect businesses and consumers in a big way."
Retirement system is in great shape

Academic fear-mongers ignore reality of MOSERS.

By Gary Findlay Sunday, March 24, 2013 at 2:00 am

MU MENTION P. 2

In his March 17 commentary regarding the retirement system for state employees, Michael Rathbone, a research analyst with the Show-Me Institute, expressed concern about the viability of his mother's retirement benefits from the state retirement system. First, let me assure him his mother's retirement benefits are safe and secure. The Missouri State Retirement System (MOSERS) is a defined-benefit plan funded by long-term investment earnings and a long history of adherence to responsible funding practices.

What people should be concerned about is the Show-Me Institute's continued disingenuous fear-mongering tactics in its attempts to persuade government policymakers to replace defined-benefit pension plans with 401(k)-type arrangements.

Rathbone did not say what would have happened in 2008 if his mother's retirement had been reliant on the 401(k)-type arrangement the Show-Me Institute advocates for public employees. With the credit crisis in 2008, many 401(k) participants saw their individual accounts go down dramatically in value. At that time, many individuals moved their investments out of stocks when the market reached its low point and then completely missed the stock market rebound that started in March 2009. Many who were on the verge of retirement had to postpone those plans, and many who were already retired had their standard of living materially reduced.

The flaw in Rathbone's analysis is it is predicated on an academic economic theory that completely ignores reality. Academic economists support the concept of using a low discount rate, or so-called "risk-free rate," that eliminates investment risk. From a realistic and practical point of view, that low discount rate has no relationship to the actual investment returns that have been earned, and continue to be generated, by efficiently and effectively managed retirement plans such as MOSERS. Rathbone and academic economists have taken a position that is the approximate equivalent of saying the government should eliminate the risk of vehicle accidents by prohibiting the use of vehicles.
As evidence of the difference between theory and reality, one need look no further than the way in which the state and the University of Missouri responsibly manage their respective retirement plans for state employees and university faculty and staff. Both use a discount rate of 8 percent and diversify their investments in many different asset types, including what academic economists characterize as being "risky assets." If these retirement systems followed the academic risk-free approach to investing, the cost to the taxpayers and the MU students would be substantially higher. Instead, the state and the university retirement plans are taking reasonable levels of risk to mitigate the long-term costs of the plans and provide retirement income security for thousands of people, consistent with their fiduciary responsibilities. In fact, MOSERS investment returns have been at the very top of the public retirement plan universe nationally. For the past 10 years, the annual compound rates of return for the MU plan and MOSERS have been 8.0 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively.

Rathbone wrote that 98 percent of a recently surveyed group of elite economists agreed public retirement plans like MOSERS and the MU plan use discount rates that are too high. It would be no surprise to find out that those "elite economists" would have included professors from the University of Missouri, such as those who also do work for the Show-Me Institute. The fact that the university has not subscribed to the academic economic theory in the management of its pension plan speaks well of the university's administration in its role as guardians of our largest academic institution of higher education.

Gary Findlay is executive director of the Missouri State Employees Retirement System, or MOSERS.
Why All Reporters (Not Just J-School Students) Should Learn to Fly Drones

These days the future of journalism may look cloudy. But one thing about the future of the business is clear, according to ABC News. It will be full of drones.

In fact, the emergence of drone journalism is expected to become such a mainstay of the media industry in the next few years that “undergraduate journalism students at the University of Missouri Journalism School, in Columbia, Mo., are now taking courses on how to use drones to report stories,” ABC News reported March 22.

“The project’s goal is to use drones to gather images that will enhance news stories and, potentially, to generate stories,” reports the website for the University of Missouri.

All of which makes perfect sense. But given the growing importance of drones, why limit drone training to cub reporters? Here are seven reasons why all journalists should be trained to fly drones.

1) Journalists will need something new and brave to entertain readers once the GIF-journalism bubble collapses.

2) It is more exhilarating than transcribing interviews.

3) It will make it easier to collect overdue freelance checks from rickety publishers.

4) “Shoe-leather” reporting sounds so 19th century.

5) It is only a matter of time before Ben Smith starts hiring drone reporters for massive BuzzFeed native-advertising, Corgi-Idditarod expansion thingy in Antarctica

6) It is better for a journalist’s ego than writing for free.

7) It will be fun to accuse rival reporters of “droning it in.”
MU course uses drones for newsgathering

Aircraft being used for newsgathering in class.

By Rudi Keller

Saturday, March 23, 2013 at 2:00 am

A new class at the University of Missouri School of Journalism is testing the legal limits of using tiny aircraft as a newsgathering tool, but once the boundaries are clear their use could become common.

The graduate students in the Drone Journalism Program — a collaborative effort between the school, the university's Information Technology program and KBIA — are learning how to use five machines of varying sizes and capabilities. The program is funded by a $25,000 grant.

The students adhere to model aircraft operating rules written in 1981 by the Federal Aviation Administration, said Scott Pham, director of the program. The rules direct enthusiasts to stay away from populated areas and airports, to fly below 400 feet and to always keep the aircraft within sight. "It's not clear whether or not you can fly in the city of Columbia," Pham said. "We have chosen to take a relatively strict view."

By sticking to agricultural and environmental issues, the students are avoiding most of the issues covered by the rules. Those rules, however, also ban the use of drone or model aircraft for commercial purposes.

That will change within a few years. Under a law passed last year, the FAA has until 2015 to write rules for the commercial use of drones. The agency is taking applications for test sites to understand them and taking comments now on how the rules should protect privacy.

"We are not drone advocates," said Bill Allen, assistant professor of journalism. He is teaching the classroom part of the course.

"We are using drones to figure out what they can do and answer the question, 'Can we use these machines effectively, efficiently and responsibly to do good public service journalism?'" he said. "In my opinion the jury is still out on that."

For as little as $200, anyone can purchase a drone with real-time video and Wi-Fi communication that can be controlled from a smartphone.
"We call those things Chinese toys," said Bob Ackerman, safety officer for the Mid-Missouri Radio Control Association.

The association is a club for enthusiasts who fly over a field off Hunt Road southwest of Columbia. With the growing number of drones available for purchase, club members have been discussing commercial and recreational uses, he said.

"There are a lot of rules, and there are more coming into play as we speak," he said.

The drone program's aircraft are sophisticated thanks to Matthew Dickinson and the Information Technology program, Pham said. Dickinson designed and built the journalism drones, saving large sums over off-the-shelf technology with similar capabilities.

Whether the students already have crossed the line into commercial use is debatable. So far, their work has appeared only in a story on the KBIA website that highlighted the lingering presence of snow geese driven from their normal winter grounds to Central Missouri.

"I wouldn't consider what we do a business use at all," Pham said. "It is an educational and research project funded by a small and temporary source of grant funds."

The drone program was highlighted in a recent segment of "NBC Nightly News" that focused on the emerging legal issues involved.

A photographer can legally take pictures of anything that can be seen from a public location. Under federal law, the FAA regulates anything flying, which creates privacy issues if drone aircraft become commonplace.

Allen said he's not interested in teaching students how to use the aircraft to hover over a yard enclosed by a privacy fence. But he sees that use as a real possibility that must be addressed.

"I am worried about privacy as a citizen," he said. "It is so complicated, and it is something for our society to sort out. My job is to prepare journalists so they can lead journalism into the proper use of these."

This article was published in the Saturday, March 23, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Course tests use of drones: Aircraft being used for newsgathering in class."
Head of police group apologizes for Facebook post

By Brennan David  Saturday, March 23, 2013 at 2:00 am

Correction appended

The Columbia Police Officers' Association yesterday apologized for a comment posted on Facebook that drew criticism from Mayor Bob McDavid and the attention of some national media.

CPOA Executive Director Dale Roberts apologized to all who viewed the comment posted Tuesday on the association's Facebook page to be racially insensitive.

"I apologize if the post was read to be something different than intended," Roberts wrote in a statement.

The comment in question was posted by Roberts, an adjunct assistant professor at MU and teacher of constitutional law at the Law Enforcement Training Institute, in response to the Columbia Police Department's request for Columbia City Council approval to purchase an armored personnel carrier. During its meeting Monday, the council tabled the request to its April 1 meeting, saying it would like more data on when and how the vehicle would be used.

"CPD wants a new armed vehicle. Partly b/c when you drive up in one, people surrender and come out of the house. BUT...if CPD rolled up in the new Mercedes 6x16, you KNOW all the boys in the hood would come running out the house — just to admire your ride! I say we roll up in style," Roberts wrote in the post.

Roberts said he apologized online as soon as people on Facebook began to question whether the comment was racially insensitive. The comment in question was then removed. Roberts said he apologized before removing the comment so all who "liked" or commented on the post would know of his apology.

"Although intended to be satirical in nature, the post was taken out of context and perceived to be quite different than intended," Roberts wrote in a CPOA news release.

The Huffington Post on Tuesday noted the blurb on its website calling it an "ugly Facebook post."

On Wednesday, Mayor Bob McDavid called for an apology from CPOA.

"This Facebook post from" CPOA "shows breathtaking racial insensitivity that cannot be tolerated. The post displays an attitude and lack of professionalism that is unacceptable to the citizens of Columbia. Furthermore, it reflects poorly on the many fine, disciplined police officers in Columbia."
SECOND THOUGHTS:

This page has been revised to make the following correction:

March 24, 2013

A story yesterday about the Columbia Police Officers’ Association incorrectly said Dale Roberts, the association’s executive director, was an adjunct professor at the University of Missouri School of Law. Roberts is an adjunct assistant professor at MU and teacher of constitutional law at the Law Enforcement Training Institute.
The Tribune's View
Grasslands

The lay of the land

By Henry J. Waters III Saturday, March 23, 2013 at 2:00 am

It doesn’t take a highly refined sense of political momentum to see the lay of the land regarding the Providence Road Grasslands project.

In a word, for the time being, at least, the idea of demolishing houses is dead.

The city made a mistake with its planning procedure, following legal requirements for public hearings but not involving stakeholders explicitly enough in discussions about the demolition aspect. This oversight rankled opponents and provided grounds for broader arguments about eminent domain and historic preservation.

City Hall has gone back to the drawing board, producing 10 alternative plans for public consumption and making sure this time nobody can criticize the process. To enrich or befoul the political stew, Columbia City Council candidates are out and about opposing demolition as a way to demonstrate how they would have made better decisions than incumbents. Sensing an advancing horde, incumbents are abandoning the ramparts.

The project is framed by imperatives of the Missouri Department of Transportation, which manages Providence Road, and the University of Missouri, which owns property on the east side of the street that it won’t relinquish as an alternative to gaining space with demolition on the west.

MoDOT insists on extending a right-turn lane north alongside most of the Grasslands and prohibiting left turns into or out of the subdivision.

To resolve the enigma, Grasslands residents, the city, the university and MoDOT held a number of meetings, finally deciding the best plan removed eight west-side houses to make room for proper remodeling of the street. The council approved a two-stage plan for implementation, but when the stuff hit the fan, members took a powder, saying they had not had enough time to consider the plan, etc.

So now a compromise of some sort will be made, remodeling the street with less space to work with. The one common denominator of the alternative plans is loss of the right-of-way space on the west side.
Looking farther down the road, it seems clear the value of the houses along Providence will steadily decline, traffic pressure on Providence will increase and public acquisition will become more attractive to owners and officials. Already the buildings are being converted to rental use, a problematic departure from original single-owner occupancy.

As one public official told me, "Those houses can be removed later on," at which time the street can be remodeled again. When the time is right, of course.

Chances are that will be the eventual outcome, but not yet. For now the city and its residents will choose among alternative options that have no advantage except avoiding the taking of the adjacent properties.

Driving lanes on Providence are already too narrow. With less space to work with, MoDOT will be pressed to build as small a center lane barrier as possible, raising worry that some sort of Jersey barrier might emerge. For an example, observe the ugly plastic divider on Providence just south of Stadium. Expanding that concept to the north is not a happy prospect.
Public memorial service Monday for corrections head Tom Clements

The Associated Press

A private funeral was held today in Colorado Springs for St. Louis native Tom Clements, the head of Colorado's prison system, who was shot to death as he answered the door at his home Tuesday night.

A public memorial service will be held at 10 a.m. Monday at New Life Church in Colorado Springs.

A former prison inmate who was killed Thursday in a shootout with Texas authorities is a suspect in Clements' death. The man, Evan Spencer Ebel, was a member of the 211s, a violent white supremacist prison gang in Colorado.

Authorities hoped to know by Monday whether a gun found on Ebel in Texas matched the weapon used to kill Clements.

According to his obituary in the Colorado Springs Gazette, Clements, 58, was born Oct. 2, 1954, in St. Louis.

He attended Hazelwood High and St. Louis Community College. He graduated from Mid-America Nazarene University and earned a master's degree from the University of Missouri.

Before moving to Colorado in 2011, Clements worked for the Missouri Department of Corrections for 30 years, most recently as director of adult institutions.
University of Missouri autism research center hosts annual conference for parents, caregivers

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — An autism research center at the University of Missouri will hold a conference in Columbia for parents and caregivers next month.

The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders will showcase the latest in research and diagnostics April 19-20 at its eighth annual Autism Intervention Conference. A pre-conference workshop for health care and mental health workers is scheduled for April 18.

Advance registration is required. The conference costs $50 for students and family members of people with autism and $185 for professionals who register by April 5. The pre-conference workshop is an additional $120.
MU taps into syrup business

By KARYN SPORY

Friday, March 22, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Peyton Bennett, a senior forestry student at the University of Missouri, grew up hearing stories about long-ago family members making maple syrup.

Now Bennett and his fellow forestry students are getting the chance to produce their own.

Research specialist Kevin Hosman, who also manages MU's Baskett Wildlife Research and Education Center near Ashland, said he saw an untapped resource at Baskett.

"The Baskett area has 2,500 acres, and there's a lot of maple" trees, Hosman said.

Hosman and Richard Guyette, a professor of forestry, wrote a proposal about what to do with all those untapped trees, and it landed them a $15,000 grant from the MU Ag Foundation.

Guyette said the purpose of the grant is to educate students and landowners about the maple syrup process, all the way from production to sales.

So far, the grant money has gone toward equipment including spoons, buckets, evaporators and refractors that can tell the sugar density of the sap.

To produce the sap, maple trees need nights to hover around 20 degrees and daytime temperatures around 40.

"Like most agricultural situations, weather is a big deal," Guyette said. "That really determines how much we're going to get out of the trees because it takes that freeze/thaw action within the wood to get the tree to push the sap out of the tree."

Hosman — who noted that Missouri is not known for its maple syrup — said he has noticed that in the Northeast, landowners will apply lime to the ground to increase sugar content in their maples. However, Missouri maples grow on limestone, so Hosman is interested in how that affects the sweetness of the sap.

Bennett, who is graduating in the spring, has been in charge of tagging the maple trees, keeping track of the weather and sap production.
He and his fellow students recorded the volume of sap and sugar concentration for each maple tree. The findings are logged and will provide baseline information about maple trees and sap production in Missouri.

Now that syrup season is coming to an end, the syrup is being stored in large jars to keep it preserved until the students can bottle it, label it and try to sell it under the name MUpie Syrup.

Hosman said the students will develop a business plan that includes how the syrup will be marketed and distributed.

Syrup season usually runs from January to March. At a time of the year when people tend to be less active in general, Guyette said "syruping" adds physical and social components. Walking through the timber and collecting the sap is a workout in itself, and the fire needed to boil the sap requires a continuous stream of wood, which the students chopped.

Everyone working together also has social benefits, Bennett said. "You get a great sense of camaraderie."
Celebrating a 'both/and' poet

By Jill Renae Hicks

Poetry and jazz can be two oft-mingled bastions of riff, be-bop and elegy.

One of the most notable living writers of jazz-inflected poetry is Michael S. Harper, a professor of literary arts at Brown University and Guggenheim fellow. This Brooklyn-born poet visited the University of Missouri on March 14-15 for a symposium sponsored by the English department and Cave Canem, an organization that sponsors programs by and for black writers in support of their artistic growth.

The Michael S. Harper Symposium celebrated the life and work of the poet-professor with papers presented by guest lecturers, many distinguished writers in their own right, a Coltrane-infused tribute by the Dennis Winslett Jazz Quartet and a reading from Harper himself March 14. Publishers Weekly has attributed folk, African and blues influences to Harper's lyrical writings, but the stylings are entirely his own convergent creations. Words stand in for musical notes in their clanging and crooning, singing tales of blood, kinship, love, nature and war.

A record of Harper's accomplishments avoids quick summary — among other accolades, he was the first poet laureate of Rhode Island, has had two books nominated for the National Book Award, and in 2008, the Poetry Society of America awarded him the prestigious Robert Frost Medal for a lifetime achievement in poetry.

He writes of music and of nature, of his family, of death and life and love, of Africa, Sweden, the United States and other countries, of historical events, of slavery, of freedom, of writing itself. Many of his poems are tributes to influences and friends: He has penned odes to Bud Powell, Billie Holliday and his wife, Shirley, whom he affectionately calls "Shirl." His subjects squash fireflies on their cheeks; traipse through cities and cockleburs; impregnate or celebrate women; fry juice-bursted poultry on iron ovens; harvest cotton and cane sugar; moan and laugh and sing.

The sheer number of writings ensures the resonance of Harper's poetic anger, sadness, intelligence and joy with anyone who has the ears to hear.

Musician Brian Muni opened the night with three guitar-driven folk songs, inviting the audience to sing along. Some unwitting members of the "chorus" were tentative, but by the time the third
song drew to a close, many readily joined in with an alternate version of "Happy Birthday" — Harper's 75th birthday was Monday. Simmons College Professor Afaa Weaver introduced Harper with some personal reflections on his poetry; the poem Weaver considered his official introduction to Harper's work was "Driving the Big Chrysler Across the Country of My Birth." The big car, Weaver noted, represented the black man's neutral space in an era where riding public transportation was still a place of oppression and false guilt. Like that poem and many others, Weaver added, Harper's canon exemplifies "what makes America both grow and ache."

When Harper reached the lectern, he immediately began to sprinkle his readings with easy, conversational stories about the ideas and people inspiring each piece. Leaning over the podium with his beret slightly askew, he spoke of jazz drummer Elvin Jones playing with "recklessness and certainty" and during the evening also referred to poet Sterling Brown, multi-talent Gordon Parks and Romantic poet Samuel Coleridge, among others. Jones "could slay you with his zeal // if he wanted youngest of 10 the baby boy of the family playing his mother's pots // at 2): // the ancestors are happy to have him!" he read in a poem from his 2009 collection, "Use Trouble."

Among other poetry he read was the Stockholm-infused "Myrdal's Sacred Flame," inspired by Swedish Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal:

"Your radiant blue eyes / glisten in extremities / of labored breathing, / shuffling pace, / and when your children / surface on your face / you speak of a trip / across the north Atlantic / in wartime, and the occupation."

Many of his poems explore wars both official and subterranean — the wars between countries, families, races and souls, cross-hatched with reflections on personhood and the consciousnesses of imaginative, dissimilar individuals.

One anecdotal reflection was a musing on one of his most well-known poems, "Dear John, Dear Coltrane." Harper mentioned no publication was willing to print it for quite a while. But "the longer I left it there not published, the more I liked it," he said, to the chuckling of the audience. Eventually, it was not only published but served as the title work in Harper's National Book Award-nominated collection, first published in 1970. The easy tone continued throughout the night, drawing in the listeners gently crowded into the A.P. Green Chapel inside Memorial Union. Near the end, Harper broke from one of his musings and said, "I could tell you other stories, but I'm going to read the poem instead."

For his encore, Harper read "Maroons," which perhaps hinted at a personal epiphany gleaned from years of writing.

"Poetry teaches belief in people / it chooses you you don't choose it … / this metaphor will do heartwork to heal / heartache the chambered work for us for us …"

demonstrates a 'both/and' sensibility. He views poetry as a place where 'the microcosm and the cosmos are united.'

Certainly, it has been tempting for scholars and readers to lump Harper in with different groups over the decades. Yet, in the end, it is the uncategorical "both/and" beauty of his poetry itself that will serve as his most enduring legacy.
Live and let die

By Aarik Danielsen

Forget the glasses and whether they're half-empty or half-full. So much of living completely comes in learning to drink down whatever's in the cup life gives you, recognizing the distinct flavors of bitter and sweet. It's in never denying either but rather appreciating both, knowing these two flavors complement and accent each other and one could not be as potent without the other.

This is a taste Milbre Burch seems to have acquired. That's why when she discusses a recent honor in a life full of them — Burch is a Grammy-nominated recording artist, respected storyteller and current Ph.D. candidate at the University of Missouri — she expresses pride and satisfaction but also notes of sadness and longing.

Burch's "Washing Up" was recently named one of just four national finalists in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival's National Ten-Minute Play Festival. Next month, she will see her work performed in that venerated venue. Yet, to hear Burch tell how the play came into living, breathing, grieving form is to see it as just the latest in a series of "painful privileges" she has endured.

Give some people 10 minutes to tell you a story, and they'll barely get past what they had for breakfast. Give Burch the same bounds, and she can compose a symphony of humor and heartache, sad goodbyes and surprising hellos, family history and the profundity of the present.

Penned for a nonrealistic playwriting course, the work features a cast of three and little in the way of stage design but a few chairs and a rented hospital bed. There sit sisters waiting at their mother's deathbed. Ruth, the younger, desires to perform one last service and give her mother a ritual Jewish bath, even though those cleansing waters have been diluted by generations of distance from the faith. Older sister Rebekah protests, ostensibly calling on the family's current Unitarian practice, but ultimately masking her own discomfort with death. As they debate, the audience is, in a startling and ultimately lovely scene, regaled by the mother herself, who explains how the family arrived at this moment.
The first "painful privilege" of Burch's life came as she lost the sweetheart of her 20s to cancer, an experience that was understandably indelible. Had she walked away from that experience unwilling to put herself in that position again, few would question or scold. Yet, it was while at his bedside that she realized we are, by and large, a people far too removed from death.

We speak of death in terms of someone losing their life, yet when we remove ourselves from the process, "it's our loss because what an important doorway to leave your loved one alone at," in a sterile room with strangers and the sickly beeping of monitors, she said. We view death as inherently dehumanizing, yet Burch and her work long to remind us of the very human experience death can be, provided we engage it as a community. You can't take anything with you when you go, but you don't have to come and go from this world alone. That is the message of "Washing Up" and the notion underlying Burch's concept of death.

As Burch has furthered her study of what it takes to bring a story, particularly that story, to the stage, she discovered a kindred spirit in the work of Edward Albee, especially his one-act "The Sandbox." There, two young people bring an elderly mother to the beach to live out her last moments. She is confronted — and ultimately comforted — by the Angel of Death in the guise of a young man doing exercises on the sand.

"I began to think of the two of us as theater thanatologists, people who put death and grief on stage" she said. "Because we are so death-avoidant in our culture, ... it feels important to stand on the stage or place people on the stage and say, 'Here's what grief looks like.' " Burch's hypotheses about our resistance to grief and loss have been borne out as she's received audience feedback about "Washing Up." On multiple occasions, viewers have said "they didn't need" to see a certain moment, clearly uncomfortable with the emotional import. It's that sort of conflicted communication that makes Burch feel she is, indeed, on the right track.

More than a successful project or play, "Washing Up" was ultimately Burch's "rehearsal" for washing her own mother, she said. Her mother, for whom she was named, died in October at 91. Burch traveled to her mother's Atlanta home to work on her dissertation and spend time with her last semester. She was able to be there for her mother's final illness and death. The two had previously discussed Burch's desire to be at her side in that moment. "She gave me my wish. ... That was its own amazingly painful privilege," Burch said.

Her mother's death was as it was meant to be, in that it reflected the way she lived. Old friends from out of town stopped by, as did multiple family members. A brand-new great-grandchild entered the house as if to bring assurance that life would indeed go on. And, moments after death, Burch, her sister-in-law and her mother's longtime caregiver provided one last service, kindly, gently washing and preparing her body.

"There is a kind of intimate camaraderie in that that I will treasure for the rest of my life," Burch said.
Those last days were summed simply but beautifully in a line from her mother's funeral program: "In her final days, she was surrounded by family and friends, and buoyed by the love of a wide community that stretched across four continents."

Burch will turn 60 this year, and while she has a vibrant, vital career still ahead — "Washing Up" is just one piece of proof — she has begun thinking about the artistic legacy she will leave. Many of her past works were either for solo performance or involved such distinctly personal details as to engender respect but not encourage repeat performance by anyone but her.

"Washing Up," then, is a first step toward putting "old stories on new tongues," she said, toward writing works that speak and seek the same sort of emotional purity and integrity yet could be articulated by others long after she finishes her work. Leaving well, it seems, has long been on Burch's mind. In this case, it is a privilege that doesn't need to be painful.
Earth Hour brings focus on sustainability

MU MENTION PAGE 2

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Donna Walter was an avid advocate for the environment more than half a lifetime ago during the 1970s, so she was quick with answers yesterday morning when quizzed by Monta Welch about issues related to renewable energy and sustainable living.

Welch, executive director of the Columbia Climate Change Coalition, was with one other volunteer surveying willing patrons at the Columbia Public Library to get a head start on Earth Hour, which was observed last night from 8:30-9:30.

Welch has helped coordinate local Earth Hour activities since 2008. Last night, more than two dozen downtown restaurants and businesses powered down to candlelight. Walter said she wasn't aware of the Earth Hour observance and was planning to attend a party last night.

"I'm going to insist they light candles," she said.

Walter teamed with architects to design energy-efficient houses in the 1970s, when the environmental movement was spurred by new interest in the nation's dependence on fossil fuels — in particular, imported oil and coal.

"These issues are not being addressed," Walter said yesterday, suggesting that building smaller homes to be more energy-efficient would be an important step toward more planet-friendly living.

"I think we're too rich," she said. "I think we need to pare down. I just can't understand this town — the way they are building."

Walter's friend, home-schooled 14-year-old Star Pluschke-Gerard, who lives in a yurt with her parents in southern Boone County, said her lifestyle and decision to be a vegetarian are the result of her philosophy to not hurt anyone.
"I don't want the environment to get ruined," Pluschke-Gerard said. "When I step on the earth, I'm hurting the earth." She said her objective was that her lifestyle would leave as little impact as possible on the planet.

"We're people on the fringe," Walter said.

"We just have to communicate more and learn more about each other," Welch said. "And then we realize we're not as different as we think we are."

At an Earth Hour launch and proclamation-reading Thursday at City Hall, Welch said that even if skeptics don't believe that human activity is causing climate change, there is common ground where everyone can work for change.

"Pollution is bad for us," Welch said. "I think we can all agree."

City Manager Mike Matthes told a group of about 20 people assembled for Thursday's noon-hour event that "going green" fits with stewardship, which he identified as one of the city's six "core values."

"Sustainability is obviously embedded in that idea," he said. "It really is part of our DNA as an organization."

_Columbia Transit offered free rides on Thursday and Friday. Also Thursday — because students were on spring break by the time Earth Hour rolled around — the University of Missouri turned off the lights on the Jesse Hall dome, in addition to turning off lights on other campus-area landmarks._