Joplin hospital renews medical school program

JOPLIN, MO. (AP) — A Joplin program to train medical students as rural health care providers opens a new housing unit for University of Missouri students nearly two years after the deadly May 2011 tornado.

Mercy Hospital Joplin and the University of Missouri School of Medicine have scheduled a ceremony Tuesday to publicly unveil a small housing unit for third-year medical students in MU's Rural Track Pipeline Program.

The previous site was destroyed in an EF-5 twister that also leveled the hospital. The tornado killed 161 people while injuring hundreds more and destroying thousands of homes and buildings.

The two townhouses are located three blocks from Mercy Hospital and can accommodate eight students serving their clinical rotations.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

University Hospital patient damages room, faces three charges

By Brandon Weiss
April 22, 2013 | 4:28 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A patient at University Hospital is facing the possibility of three criminal charges after an episode Saturday morning in which the patient flicked HIV-infected blood at the door and caused damage to his room.

MU Police Department was waiting Monday afternoon for warrant requests to be returned on possible charges of third-degree assault, first-degree property damage and serving as a donor or risking infection of another with HIV. The charges would likely lead to probation if the patient has no criminal record, according to the Missouri Sentencing Advisory Commission guidelines.

Agitated by an IV falling out, the patient began flicking blood from the end of the IV at the door. A nurse who knew the patient had HIV told the person that no one would come in to help until the person stopped, MU Police Capt. Brian Weimer said.

The patient then threw a table that broke a hanging dry-erase board and then threw other furniture in the room that broke a heart rate monitor.

Weimer said the total costs of the damage were unknown beyond the sure costs of $350 for the adjustable table and $50 for the whiteboard. The heart rate monitor could cost up to $6,000, depending on whether the whole monitor must be replaced or just the screen.

The patient remained Monday afternoon at University Hospital.

Supervising editor is Simina Mistreanu.
U.S. Senate moves forward with proposal to tax Internet sales

By Bill Lambrecht blambrecht@post-dispatch.com 202-298-6880 and Kavita Kumar kkumar@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8017

WASHINGTON – U.S. senators heard an unfamiliar term on Monday — “show-rooming.” It refers to customers sampling shoes and other products at stores and then buying them on the Internet to avoid paying sales taxes.

The argument may have been a factor in the Senate's voting overwhelmingly to begin formal debate on a bill allowing states to begin taxing online purchases from companies situated outside their borders.

The Senate is moving swiftly with the so-called Market Fairness Act, and a final vote could take place this week.

“How in the world can you expect the bricks-and-mortar businesses of America to compete with Internet competition when the bricks-and-mortar business has to collect sales tax and the Internet competitor does not?” asked Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., a chief sponsor of the legislation.

“What it means is a lot of money for our states and localities,” he said.

Rather than mandating the collections, a potential sticking point, the bill gives states the option of collecting the taxes. Given their budget travails, many states would probably rush to participate. Several GOP governors have endorsed the legislation.

Consumers are already supposed to pay sales taxes for online purchases, but very few do. In Illinois, for example, anyone who fills out a state income tax return is asked to itemize online purchases and pay a 1 percent tax on food and drugs and medical equipment and a 6.25 percent tax on other online purchases.

Last year, researchers at the University of Missouri’s Truman School of Public Affairs found that the state of Missouri lost approximately $468 million a year in tax revenue from online sales during the past decade. They estimated that the state will miss out on $1.4 billion in potential revenue from 2011 to 2014.

In cash-strapped Illinois, the legislation could mean an additional $1.05 billion annually, according to the Alliance for Main Street, a coalition of businesses and individuals pressing for passage.

Missouri Sens. Claire McCaskill, a Democrat, and Roy Blunt, a Republican, joined Durbin in supporting debate on the bill, advanced by a vote of 74-20. Illinois Sen. Mark Kirk, also a Republican, voted no.
The bill exempts small businesses that take in less than $1 million annually from their out-of-state sales, another concession aimed at winning support.

Kris Kleindienst, co-owner of Left Bank Books, is thrilled there's finally momentum building on the issue.

"I'm really happy this is happening," she said. "First of all, it levels the playing field for locally owned businesses and their remote Internet competition, which has been a real problem."

The book industry, of course, has been more challenged than most by competition from online retailers — notably Amazon. The taxing issue, Kleindienst contends, has been a significant factor in that. She said she often hears people say they plan to make a purchase online because that way they won't have to pay sales taxes.

"I do think it will help us," she said of the legislation. "It's not just Amazon. It's e-commerce in general. There are other companies out there, too, who have gotten away with tax evasion as a strategy."

Tom Wilcher is chief executive of Creve Coeur-based Soft Surroundings, an apparel company that sells most of its products online and through a catalog. It also has a growing roster of about a dozen stores in several states.

"If it does pass, it will be a big burden administratively to us," he said. "To program our systems and the preparation of tax returns, it seems easy, but there's a lot of work involved. There are over 9,000 taxing jurisdictions."

He said his company wouldn't object to collecting the tax if there was a simple, streamlined system put into place to help retailers collect the tax.

"For consumers, it's effectively a new tax for them at a time when the economy is not exactly robust," he said. "But the government has an insatiable appetite for taxes."

Many online retailers oppose the legislation, and Wall Street interests argued Monday that the legislation could have consequences for investors if states began taxing stock trades.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., was among senators from states without a sales tax who voted against moving forward.

"This is going to be regarded as money that comes out of the pockets of American taxpayers that haven't come out of their pockets before," he said, calling the bill "premature and coercive."

The administration of President Barack Obama announced that it supports the legislation, saying that disparity in collections "undermines the ability of cities and states to invest in K-12 education, police and fire protection, access to affordable health care, and funding for roads and bridges."
Editorial: MU leaders’ outspoken support of gay rights is admirable

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Editorials represent the majority opinion of The Maneater editorial board.

Mizzou Athletics released a video on Friday called “If You Can Play, You Can Play.” It involves various MU athletes, coaches and administrators affirming their commitment to avoid bigotry and discrimination in the athletic program, and it includes Athletic Director Mike Alden stating the department’s anti-discrimination policy, “No individual shall be judged on the court, in the locker room or amongst each other based on their sexual orientation and their gender identification,” he says in the video, which was done in support of the You Can Play Project, an organization to combat homophobia and bigotry in sports.

It couldn’t come at a better time. Although support for same-sex marriage, openly gay military members and other major LGBTQ causes has been bubbling over in recent months, the acceptance and rights of gay athletes seems to lag behind. Basketball star Brittney Griner nonchalantly came out as gay last week after facing ridicule all through her college career at Baylor for her “masculine” appearance and court performance. Outspoken NFL veteran Brendon Ayanbadejo began a series of Fox Sports columns Monday advocating for more gay tolerance in sports.

Outside of sports, the recent Supreme Court hearings on the Defense of Marriage Act and Proposition 8 raised the national dialogue on same-sex marriage to a peak. Our Southeastern Conference counterpart Texas A&M caused a furor earlier this month when its Student Senate passed a bill allowing students to “opt out” of funding the school’s GLBT Resource Center for religious reasons (the bill was then vetoed by the student body president).

We don’t know much about the real locker room atmosphere of MU’s athletic teams or how LGBTQ student-athletes may actually be treated by their peers, but the outreach of the MU Athletic Department is a positive sign. For such a visible and influential presence such as Alden to appear making an unequivocal statement in support of LGBTQ student-athletes is a big deal — to prospective and current student-athletes, to other students, faculty and staff, to fans and to other schools’ athletic departments. It’s a message of inclusivity, of mature and open support of all student-athletes, and we commend Alden and the entire MU Athletic Department for making such a thoughtful video.

The MU Athletic Department isn’t alone in speaking up and standing up for gay rights. In an admirable response to the bigoted actions of the Texas A&M Student Senate, MSA President Nick Droege sent an open letter signed by several dozen MSA senators to Texas A&M criticizing the bill and its culture of intolerance. And the LGBTQ Resource Center has done a fantastic job so far with its Pride Month events, which have empowered both members of the LGBTQ community and its allies to live their lives with pride and acceptance.
None of these actions will solve homophobia or discrimination at MU, but they all help. In a time when changing one’s profile picture or sending a compassionate tweet, although certainly a positive show of support, is often confused with activism, it’s outstanding that MU’s leaders understand the impact of sending out a well-crafted message of support and love. Only a holistic university effort, with students and leaders standing up for diversity, tolerance and acceptance, can make a difference in the culture of this campus. We’re proud to see that happening.
Professor to head American College of Physicians

By Lakshna Mehta

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David Fleming's research interests include medical ethics and end-of-life care.

**A professor in the MU School of Medicine has been elected president of the largest medical specialty group in the U.S.**

Professor of Medicine David Fleming will serve as president-elect of the American College of Physicians beginning April 11, and his official presidency will begin in April 2014.

As president of the ACP, Fleming will represent the college at multiple national and international events. He will also be responsible for advising the Board of Regents in formulating policies.

The election results did not come as a surprise to Fleming, as there were only four or five individuals nominated by the Board of Regents, the policy-making branch of the ACP, Fleming said.

"I am very thrilled about this," Fleming said. "It is an honor to be selected and represent the organization at a very high level."

The ACP, founded in 1915, is the largest medical-specialty organization in the country. It has 133,000 members consisting of professionals, students, internal medicine sub-specialists and fellows.

"It started out as an education institution but has grown since then to educate and mentor internal medicine doctors," said Alan Forker, governor of the Missouri chapter of the ACP in 2011. "The organization also monitors and responds to policy issues affecting the healthcare system."

Fleming, a former governor of the Missouri chapter of the ACP, held a position on the board of governors for a year before joining the Board of Regents in 2012.

The board nominated Fleming for presidency, and he won by a majority, Forker said.

"(Fleming) is a great leader and contributor to policy formations," Forker said. "I think his leadership, great voice and expertise helped him get to where he is. He is going to be a fabulous president."

Fleming, who also serves as the director of the Center for Health Ethics and Chair of Internal Medicine at the MU School of Medicine, doesn't think his titles had much to do with him being elected president.
"When we elect our officials, they are folks we trust to represent accurately and have the right skills to do the job," Fleming said.

Anne Winkler, former governor of the Missouri chapter of ACP, believes Fleming has those qualities.

"He is a confident, ethical man who has always been dedicated to delivering and having access to quality healthcare," Winkler said.

Winkler has known Fleming since she was in medical school in 1980. Fleming's dedication to quality healthcare led him to practice as a general internist in Moberly, Mo., a small, rural community in north central Missouri for 20 years, Winkler said.

"I think that has been one of my most significant achievements so far," Fleming said.

Fleming has received several awards for teaching and service, including the Distinguished Service Award from the MU Medical Alumni Organization and Faculty Member of the Year in the Department of Health Management and Informatics, but there is one award Fleming is particularly proud of.

"Of all the awards, the Jane Hickman Teacher of the Year Award from the MU School of Medicine, which I received in 2010, means the most to me," Fleming said.
Attention to Rios spurs victim's mom to speak out

By Brennan David

The mother of a murder victim, angered by the continued media attention given to the former Columbia police officer convicted of killing him, is putting a renewed focus on continuing to tell her son's story.

Linda Valencia traveled to Columbia this weekend to take part in the filming of a TV show about the 2004 murder of her son, Jesse, and the conviction of former Columbia police Officer Steven Rios. Valencia, 53, on Friday and Saturday participated in interviews for a new series on the Investigation Discovery channel titled "Deadline: Crime with Tamron Hall." One of the series' 13 episodes will highlight the June 5, 2004, slaying of 23-year-old University of Missouri student Jesse Valencia outside his East Campus apartment.

Rios was given a life sentence plus 23 years to be served consecutively after his 2008 retrial.

The series will premiere this fall, associate producer Josh Penchina said.

In February, Valencia was at a public library in her hometown of Berryville, Ky., when she saw a KOMU special report about Rios. The news crew drove to Sioux Falls, S.D., to interview Rios in prison, but Valencia said she hadn't gotten a call for an interview.

"I found out by glancing at the computer next to me. I heard Rios' voice. It's unmistakable," Valencia said. "I ran out of the library crying. The poor girl ran after me wanting to know what she did wrong."

Still haunted by the death of her son, Linda Valencia said she was so upset she has now vowed to do whatever she needs to do to tell her son's story. She is convinced Rios is her son's murderer, but she fears further sensationalizing of the story could result in Rios getting a third jury trial. Rios does not have a pending appeal, according to online court records.

"That is what aggravates me — when they say he is suffering," she said of interviews featuring Rios' family members. "I miss my son, too."
Speaking about the case with reporters, however, is difficult, she said. Her interview over the weekend with Investigation Discovery crews in Columbia lasted a day and a half. She was not scheduled to return to Kentucky until Wednesday, but she said she cut the interview short because talking about her son's murder reopens a wound. "Everyone told me not to do it," she said of the interview. "They worry it will kill me."

She said she has had three strokes since the murder, and she lost what was left of her son's personal items in a house fire last year. Despite her health issues, she said, she will continue to seek justice.

"I have to get justice for Jesse," she said. "I still don't feel like justice has really been done." Rios "still gets all of this media attention and is constantly whining about how he didn't kill my son."

Jesse Valencia is buried on his mother's Kentucky farm. Each morning and night, she visits his grave, she said — family members have found her asleep there.

Nine years after the murder, Valencia attends counseling and has been comforted by the birth of two grandchildren. The two small boys, she said, bring new light into her life, but she still struggles with grief. "They bring me a lot of joy, but they are not Jesse," Linda Valencia said. "If Jesse was still alive, he would be doing so many wonderful things."
Students, faculty inducted into MU’s six secret societies during Tap Day ceremony

New members of Omicron Delta Kappa, the National Leadership Honor Society, stand on the stage of Jesse Auditorium on April 19. Tap Day is traditionally held on Francis Quadrangle, but, due to weather, the ceremony was moved inside to Jesse Auditorium. BRENT PEARSON / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

By Jack Howland

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Tap Day is an 86-year-old MU tradition.

There was an air of secrecy in Jesse Hall on Friday.

A select group of students and faculty wearing hooded robes walked into a packed Jesse Auditorium in two winding lines. The group’s identities were completely hidden from spectators, and it was no accident — it was all part of the 86th annual Tap Day ceremony.

“Tap day is a tradition at the University of Missouri that has spanned more than three quarters of a century,” Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Cathy Scroggs said to those in attendance. “Its purpose is to publicly recognize students who have made significant contributions to the university both academically and through service to our community.”
Initiates were welcomed into MU’s six secret organizations, which include such MU alumni as Chancellor Brady Deaton and former MU basketball coach Norm Stewart. Although the event was moved from Francis Quadrangle to Jesse Auditorium due to weather, it went on without problems.

Stephanie Logan, instructor of American Sign Language courses, was among the instructors inducted into the Mystical Seven secret society. Logan said she wasn’t expecting the honor.

"I felt like it was the end of my life," Logan said, laughing. "(The people who inducted me) were telling me about all of the work that I have done, because I am an honor ‘tapee’ – it was basically all my life history wrapped into a 30 minute meeting."

Although she’s dedicated years of her life to MU, Logan said she’s not about to go complaining that the honor is overdue.

"I think anybody that’s part of the Mystical Seven doesn’t do it for any sort of recognition," Logan said. "It’s just the cherry on top of what I already do."

Senior Laurence Bowers, who has received numerous accolades for his performance on the MU basketball team, was welcomed into the ODK secret society on Friday. Bowers said the induction was rewarding because it helps define him as a well-rounded man, not just a basketball player.

It’s one of the biggest honors across campus, Bowers said.

But a year ago, Bowers said he didn’t even know what Tap Day was. He had to learn about it from a former MU basketball player, and even then there were parts of the tradition he didn’t understand.

After his own induction, he said he’s catching on quickly to all the ceremony’s highly sought-after secrets.

"Nah, it’s not too secretive," Bowers said, smiling. "The only secretive thing about it is not telling people."

MSA President Nick Droege, who also serves as president of Mortar Board secret society, delivered two speeches during the ceremony.

Droege said the ceremony helps students appreciate all of the great people on campus. Honorees don’t often seek recognition, and Tap Day is a great day to recognize their efforts.

The decades-old tradition, with its hooded robes and layer of secrecy, makes it a highly anticipated event every year on campus, Droege said.

There’s still a lot the general public doesn’t know about the selection process; much of Tap Day is kept under wraps.

"I was involved in that process (of choosing honorees for Mortar Board)," Droege said. "But that kind of remains for the organization for them to talk about."
Man walking on Interstate 70 hit by semitrailer

By GH Lindsey
April 22, 2013 | 11:57 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — An MU student was hit by a semitrailer driving on Interstate 70 at around 1 a.m. Monday, according to a release from the Columbia Police Department.

As of Monday morning, he was in serious condition at University Hospital.

Nicholas D. Braun, 23, was walking in the westbound lanes of I-70 between U.S. 63 and Paris Road when he was hit. The driver of the semitrailer, Robert Berst, tried to swerve away from Braun, but ended up hitting him near the passenger headlight, according to the release.

According to the MU directory, Braun is a senior studying hospitality management, Michael DeLeon, shift manager at Quinton’s Bar & Deli, confirmed Braun was a student and was employed at the bar.

The case was under investigation, but police said they did not believe that inattention, excessive speed or alcohol on the part of the driver were factors in the accident.

Supervising editor is Simina Mistreanu.
A new MU study will focus on the effects of therapeutic horseback riding on veterans.

The study will be funded by a $50,000 grant from the Horses and Humans Research Foundation (HHRF) awarded to the MU College of Veterinary Medicine’s Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction (ReCHAI).

HHRF aims to advance knowledge of horses and their potential impact on the health and wellness of people, especially through therapy, according to its website.

With the money from this grant, ReCHAI will examine the effects of six weeks of therapeutic horseback riding on 40 U.S. military veterans who either suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, according to a news release.

Rebecca Johnson, director of ReCHAI and professor of veterinary medicine, said the study would engage the veterans in two main aspects of therapy.

“There’s interacting with horse on ground — brushing the horse and all that,” Johnson said. “Then there’s also riding the horses in our regular curriculum and riding activities.”

Johnson said the effects would be measured in perceived health of the veterans after therapy.

“We’re measuring, in the veterans, mood regulation and social interaction, family adjustments and physical activity,” Johnson said.

The program, set to begin in May, is a collaboration between team members from the MU School of Nursing, MU School of Social Work, MU School of Psychology and MU College of Veterinary Medicine, as well as graduate students studying social work, psychology and public health.

The project is currently seeking approval through the Campus Institutional Review Board and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. There will be two stable sites, one in St. Louis and one in Columbia.

“We can recruit a broader area than just Columbia,” Johnson said. “Veterans served by the VA Hospital often come long distances, so it would be nice for them to be able to go to a riding stable nearer to their home.”
Johnson said inspiration for the study came from the idea that there are many therapeutic riding programs focused at various populations, including veterans, but none are research based.

“There has not been a systematic study on the outcomes or effects,” Johnson said. “Because we are a research center, we felt like we ought to be studying the outcomes.”

One of the collaborators is David Albright, director of the Center for Education and Research for Veterans and Military Families and assistant professor in the School of Social Work.

“Social work expertise contributes to the TORCH study by helping to inform how animal interaction might improve veterans’ ability to engage within their families and communities,” Albright said in an email.

Albright said social workers are uniquely trained to help restore or enhance veterans’ capacity for psychosocial functioning.

The study will last six weeks rather than operating as an ongoing program. Albright said some veterans attribute wellbeing and successful readjustment after deployment to animals as well as other emotional and social supports.

“Once we find out the results, we’ll know better how to tailor rider intervention to achieve the best outcomes,” Johnson said. “We can guide riding programs around the countries on how best to serve veterans.”

Albright is grateful for the service opportunity the study provides.

“I’m thankful to be working with a great team under the leadership of Dr. Johnson while having the opportunity to serve our men and women who have worn our country’s uniform,” Albright said.
New dining hall to open in Mark Twain next fall

By Paul Albani-Burgio

An expansion of Plaza 900 is scheduled for fall 2014.

Students who purchase a campus meal plan next year will have the option of eating at a brand new dining hall, which is opening on campus next fall.

The new dining facility, the Mark on Fifth, will open inside Mark Twain Hall at the beginning of the school year after renovations are completed in July. Its offerings will include sandwiches, pizza and salads. This new dining hall will replace Mark Twain Market, which was located in Mark Twain prior to the renovations and known for its world fare concept, offering a variety of ethnic cuisines.

“Our big project right now is the new Mark Twain market, which will be opening in the fall,” Campus Dining Marketing Manager Michael Wuest said. “The facility will be upscale and offer additional seating. The focus will be on sandwiches made with fresh baked breads and hot proteins.”

The Mark on Fifth’s manager, Lisa McDaniels, said she hopes that the new facility, with its focus on deli fare, will fill a niche on campus by providing a new and different experience that will appeal to students.

“Our hope is to be known for our deli which we are hoping will be the most extensive on campus.”

McDaniels said in a speech at a Residential Halls Association meeting April 1. “A unique aspect of this will be that we will offer hot proteins including meatball, chicken and French dip sandwiches as well as a panini grill.”

In addition, cheese pizza will also be offered daily along with one of nine rotating pizzas and a variety of pizza breads. The facility will also include an expanded salad bar, which will offer a variety of yogurts and toppings and fresh fruits. Like other dining facilities on campus, the Mark will include a grill offering chicken, fish, hot dogs and hamburgers. McDaniels said that one of her future goals is to expand the Mark’s grill offerings.

McDaniels said that the facility would have seating for 275 and extensive hours. The facility will be open in the morning from 7 to 10 a.m., at lunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and at night from 4:30 to 7 p.m. The facility will not be open for morning hours on weekends. Take-out deli fare and pizzas will be available from 8 to 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday in a format similar to Rollins Late Night.
Once the Mark on Fifth opens in the fall, Campus Dining Services will turn its attention to the other dining hall renovations it is currently planning. In January, Sabai will close and then reopen the following fall along with Johnston Hall, where it is located.

“We are planning to move toward more of a made to offer menu,” Wuest said. “We will still do batch cooking but we want to offer more customizable items. We are in the process of conducting research to see what students would want from Sabai,” Wuest said.

Also on the horizon is an expansion of Plaza 900, which will add about 200 seats to the facility. A new upscale café will open in place of Emporium Café, and the renovated facility will also include a new food station, which is still under development. The plan is for the Plaza renovation over the summer of 2014 with Plaza closing at the end of the spring semester and opening in time for the fall semester so as to not be closed during the school year.

Wuest also said that CDS plans to renovate the Pavilion at Dobbs dining area during the fall of 2016.

“We have not gone into full planning mode for Dobbs yet, but that is something we are looking into and starting to develop,” Wuest said. “We will begin seeking student input on that renovation soon.”
How to Improve Public Online Education: Report Offers a Model

By Charles Huckabee

Public colleges and universities, which educate the bulk of all American college students, have been slower than their counterparts in the for-profit sector to embrace the potential of online learning to offer pathways to degrees. A new report from the New America Foundation suggests a series of policies that states and public higher-education systems could adopt to do some catching up.

The report, "State U Online," by Rachel Fishman, a policy analyst with the foundation, analyzes where public online-education efforts stand now and finds that access to high-quality, low-cost online courses varies widely from state to state.

Those efforts fall along a continuum of organizational levels, says the report. At the low end of the spectrum, course availability, pricing, transferability of credit, and other issues are all determined at the institutional level, by colleges, departments, or individual professors, resulting in a patchwork collection of online courses that's difficult for students to navigate.

Some states, though, have taken "a series of steps that build on one another to make public online higher education more rational and accessible for different student populations," Ms. Fishman writes. "Taken together, these steps result in something that looks less like an unorganized collection of Internet-based classes, and more like a true public university."

That "something" is a model she dubs "State U Online," in which "students can move freely among institutions within a state and eventually beyond state lines."
The report identifies five cumulative steps that build toward State U Online and gives an example of a state or system at each step. Each example illustrates how that state or system overcame such obstacles as cost, getting faculty buy-in, and assuring course quality.

6 Steps

The first step is for state institutions to collaborate to establish a searchable clearinghouse of online courses and degrees. At Step 2, institutions further collaborate through shared contracts on resources, like learning-management systems. At Step 3, systems also provide shared student-support services, such as advising, that can be used by students at all institutions in the system, regardless of where they are enrolled.

At Step 4, an entire state, or a system of public higher-education institutions within the state, achieves all the previous levels of collaboration and in addition makes it easy for students to transfer credit among institutions. Students enroll in a program at their "home" institution, but can easily take classes at any institution within the consortium.

Step 5 carries that concept beyond state borders. Students can take courses at any institution in such a multistate consortium and not worry about whether their credits will transfer, because institutional agreements within the consortium make that automatic.

The report notes that no one model is going to serve all states' needs and priorities, but it suggests that regardless of the organizational level that states or systems choose, they can improve their online-education efforts to help students find streamlined, affordable pathways to a degree.

It offers practical suggestions about concerns like building sustainable revenue streams that are less dependent on allocations from legislatures, and on providing incentives and support for faculty members to offer online courses. It also recommends experimenting with innovative course-delivery systems, including massive online open courses, or MOOCs, as well as alternative credit systems, such as prior-learning assessments and competency-based measures.

And, while it welcomes recent federal changes that allow colleges to distribute student aid on the basis of such alternative measures, it notes that colleges are hesitant to use the new definitions. It urges the Department of Education to do more to ease uncertainty about alternative measures and federal financial-aid eligibility.
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

In the ‘War on Drugs,’ signs of truce with marijuana

1 hour ago • By KEVIN McDERMOTT kmcdermott@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8268

ST. LOUIS • Marijuana, the most prevalent illicit drug in America, seems to be getting less illicit by the day.

Among recent developments that would have been unfathomable during the “War on Drugs” begun under President Ronald Reagan:

• The states of Colorado and Washington voted last fall to legalize marijuana for recreational use, the first states ever to do so. Though technically still a violation of federal law, the administration of President Barack Obama has responded with a shrug.

• The Illinois House voted last week to join the 18 states that have already legalized marijuana for medical use. The measure now moves to the Senate, which has passed it before. Gov. Pat Quinn has said he is keeping “an open mind.”

• The St. Louis Board of Aldermen voted overwhelmingly last week to establish a citywide marijuana statute that in effect reduces the penalty for minor possession to a traffic-ticket-level offense. Mayor Francis Slay is expected to sign the bill.

It’s not that the drug war is over. But people on both sides of the marijuana issue agree that pot has largely been nudged off the battlefield.

That may be partly because “hard” drugs such as crack and heroin are wreaking as much havoc as ever in cities, while methamphetamine has become the scourge of rural America. To those familiar with modern hard-drug culture, joints and bongs may sound almost quaint by comparison.

"Methamphetamine is a really wicked substance. (Meth addicts) look like they’re 100 years old," said John F. Galliher, a professor of criminology at the University of Missouri at Columbia. “Marijuana is a different story. With methamphetamine around, pot doesn’t seem so bad.”

Proponents of loosening marijuana laws says it’s less harmful than other drugs, and even alcohol and nicotine, and that police should concentrate on other crimes. Opponents counter that marijuana has health effects that aren’t well understood and that it provides a “gateway” to other drugs.

A growing list of states allow use of “medical marijuana” to ease the pain of chronic or terminal patients — perhaps also easing the perception of the drug as something entirely illicit.

To some anti-drug activists, that new sheen of legitimacy is one of the most dangerous developments.
“It’s an unfortunate trend,” centered on “false information that marijuana is benign,” said David Evans of the Drug Free America Foundation foundation, a national group based in Florida.

“We’re going to wind up with ‘Big Marijuana,’ the way we have ‘Big Tobacco,’” Evans warned. He maintains that the public’s view of pot has been skewed by misconceptions and money from the nascent medical marijuana industry. “Remember when the tobacco companies said cigarettes weren’t addictive?”

In any case, polls show the American public gradually moving away from what was once overwhelming agreement on the evils of pot. In 2011, Gallup found a record 50 percent national support for legalizing marijuana, with 46 percent opposed. When Gallup first asked the question, in 1969, support was at 12 percent, and it was still in the low 30s by the year 2000.

Support for medical marijuana is even stronger, at about 70 percent, according to a 2010 Gallup poll.

Opponents warn that even medical-marijuana laws change the perception of pot as an illicit drug, which in turn can lead to more use by young people.

“People want to help people who are sick ... but this opens it up and changes the perception” of marijuana, said Anita Bedell, director of Illinois Church Action on Alcohol & Addiction Problems. The group has succeeded for years in keeping medical marijuana illegal in Illinois.

“When you change the perception that marijuana is a dangerous drug, you make it more acceptable and accessible, and more people will use it (recreationally),” said Bedell. “Especially young people.”

Like Illinois, Missouri has a medical-marijuana bill awaiting action. Unlike Illinois, the Missouri bill is probably going nowhere this year.

“It has not been assigned to a committee,” said the sponsor, Rep. Mike Colona, D-St. Louis, who tries every year to get the measure passed. “Historically, this bill has never gotten a hearing.”

Colona said his annual campaign was emboldened after watching his mother die of lung cancer two years ago. He said her doctor told him he wished he could give her marijuana because it was more effective with fewer side effects than pharmaceutical pain-killers.

“My philosophy has always been, if we can trust a doctor to prescribe Vicodin, which is more dangerous, why can’t we trust a doctor to prescribe medical marijuana?” said Colona. Colona, whose bill would require a statewide referendum before legalizing marijuana, said that he believed attitudes in Missouri were changing as elsewhere, but that “I can’t tell you when we’ll reach that tipping point.”

“It is a shame that a state like Illinois will give a bill like this a hearing, and here in Missouri we’re just facing a concrete wall,” he said.

The simple explanation is that Missouri’s political system is far more conservative than Illinois’. But that hurdle may be getting less daunting than it was once was. The politics of pot has become more complicated lately, especially for conservatives.
During past marijuana debates, "conservatism" was usually defined by strict law-and-order views, making a zero-tolerance approach to pot an easy call. But today, with many conservatives defining themselves primarily as libertarian or even anti-government, it's not that simple.

"Some of the Tea Party folks in the General Assembly have quietly said they support this," said Colona. He declined to name them. "If they want to 'come out,' they can do that."

Illustrating that ideological complexity is Illinois state Sen. Bill Haine, D-Alton, who is among the more conservative lawmakers in Springfield. He's a former prosecutor, vociferous defender of gun rights and Illinois' now-defunct death penalty — and co-sponsor of the pending medical-marijuana legislation.

"I've always believed evildoers should be punished. But the hallmark of the law is reasonableness," said Haine, who has carried medical-marijuana legislation before. "It's reasonable to allow a natural substance to be used by people to relieve pain."

The current measure passed the Illinois House, perhaps its highest hurdle, last week. Senate final passage could come within two weeks. While Haine said "there's no question" that opposition on the issue has softened, he stressed that he isn't assuming it will pass.

"Many opponents just don't want to say anything good about marijuana," said Haine. "They think, 'It's a controlled substance, so nothing good can come of it.' "