Students get advice on looming loan debt

New MU effort targets grads.

By Karyn Spory

Thursday, May 16, 2013 at 2:00 pm

With more than 5,000 University of Missouri students set to graduate this weekend, some MU staff members have been working to lend them the skills to manage their student debt via a new counseling program.

Exit loan counseling is mandated by the federal government, but this year the Office of Student Financial Aid and the Office for Financial Success began offering one-on-one counseling sessions and saw a big response from students.

Students were notified about the program earlier in the semester and allowed to set up appointments. Nick Prewett, director of financial aid at MU, said more than 500 students responded.

Prewett said he thinks the program is successful because while online counseling provides an overview, the financial aid office and OFS can provide a counseling session that is designed specifically for the individual student.

During the 30-minute appointment, counselors give the student a copy of their student loan history and talk to them about repayment options, Prewett said. He said the average student at MU takes out $19,265 in student loans, which translates into a monthly repayment of $221 for 10 years.

"The students had told us they wanted more interaction with our office," and that's what the program is giving them, Prewett said.

In the fall, the financial aid office offered a pilot one-on-one counseling program for December graduates. Prewett said about 25 percent of graduating undergraduate students took advantage of the program.

"We realized in the spring we couldn't accommodate that many students in our office, so we partnered with the Office for Financial Success," Prewett said.
Ryan Law, director of OFS, said the program also has been a good opportunity for his student volunteers.

“It's a peer-counseling model where students who are either majoring or minoring in personal financial planning do the counseling over the six weeks,” he said.

Prewett said the financial aid office is tracking the students who have completed the one-on-one sessions to see how they compare with students who took online exit counseling to keep track of default rates. His hope for the program is that MU sees its loan default rate drop from 3.9 percent to zero.

Student loan debt is roughly estimated between $902 billion and $1 trillion, according to reports from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Consumer Finance Protection Bureau. Congress is working on a bill to keep interest rates from doubling on new subsidized Stafford loans, but Democrats and Republicans differ on the methods that should be used to prevent the increase. Members of the Republican-led House Education and Workforce Committee today were working to finalize the bill.

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Posted in Education on Thursday, May 16, 2013 2:00 pm.
WASHINGTON — The days of fixed-rate student loans could be coming to a close, with House Republicans on Thursday advancing a proposal that would link rates to financial markets.

The GOP-led House Education and the Workforce Committee sent to the full House a bill that would offer some students a better deal at first. Democratic critics warned that graduates would face steadily climbing rates and costs over the long haul if the markets change.

"Our families deserve better than this bait and switch," said Rep. George Miller of California, the senior Democrat on the committee, who led the opposition.

The Republican chairman of the panel, Rep. John Kline, said critics were giving too much credence to Congressional Budget Office figures that anticipate future interest rates and don't accurately measure real costs for the program that helps 36 million students.

"We don't know what these interest rates are going to be. No one actually knows what they will be," Kline said. "Pick your score and make your best guess."

Without Congress' action, interest rates for new subsidized Stafford student loans would double from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent on July 1. Neither party wants that to happen, although there remain strong differences in the methods to dodge that.

Democrats attempted to hold the rates at 3.4 percent while Congress considers a long-term fix. Their proposal received no votes from Republicans who hold the majority on the panel.
"Student loan rates should not be subject to the whims of Congress," said Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C. "Students' families and taxpayers deserve a long-term solution. ... This legislation offers predictability and simplicity."

Democrats were not swayed.


Under the GOP proposal, student loans would be reset every year and based on 10-year Treasury notes, plus an added percentage. For instance, students who receive subsidized or unsubsidized Stafford student loans would pay the Treasury rate, plus 2.5 percentage points.

Using Congressional Budget Office projections, that would translate to a 5 percent interest rate on Stafford loans in 2014, but the rate would climb to 7.7 percent for loans in 2023. Stafford loan rates would be capped at 8.5 percent, while loans for parents and graduate students would have a 10.5 percent ceiling under the GOP proposal.

"These rates reset every year. Buyer, beware," Courtney said.

Democrats on the panel objected to increasing the rates within a program that generates vast income for the federal government. The Congressional Budget Office this week revised its figures this week, reporting that federal loans will generate almost $51 billion this year. Over the last five years, that sum is almost $120 billion.

"That $51 billion is more than Exxon," Miller said.


In real dollars, the GOP plan would cost students and families heavily, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service. The office used the CBO projections for Treasury notes' interest rates each year.

Students who max out their subsidized Stafford loans over four years would pay $8,331 in interest payments under the Republican bill, and $3,450 if rates were kept at 3.4 percent. If rates were allowed to double in July, that amount would be $7,284 over the typical 10-year window to repay the maximum $19,000.

For students who borrow the maximum subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans, they would pay $12,374 in interest under the Republican bill. The interest charges would be
$10,867 if subsidized loans were allowed to double in July, or $7,033 if rates stay the same. The maximum available in subsidized and unsubsidized amounts is $27,000 for four years of school.

Graduate students and parents, meanwhile, would see interest payments reach $27,680 for four years of college under the GOP plan. If Congress keeps the rates the same, their interest payments would be $21,654 on the original maxed-out $40,000 loan, according to the Congressional Research Service report.

Republicans, however, stood by the proposal as needed amid economic struggles. A two-year extension of the 3.4 percent rate for subsidized Stafford loans would cost taxpayers about $9 billion.

"I would love to have the rates at 2 percent. It's just not realistic," said Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn.

President Barack Obama's budget outline included flexible rates for student loans, pegging the interest to markets, but did not have a cap. Republicans had long pushed for the flexible rates and Kline said he would go along with Obama on that principle while adding a cap that Democrats sought.

The White House, however, has not embraced Kline's proposal and stressed there are serious differences between proposals.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Kevin Crane is an inappropriate commencement speaker

By Michelle Howard
May 16, 2013 | 12:18 p.m. CDT

An open letter to Dean O’Brien of the College of Arts and Sciences about his decision to allow Kevin Crane to speak at commencement.

I am a 2010 graduate of the MU College of Arts and Sciences. I am active in the alumni association, so far as representing the university at the Legislative Day in April. There are not enough words to illustrate how disgusted I am by your decision to allow Kevin Crane to speak at commencement. Kevin Crane is a monster. I believe he is single-handedly responsible for keeping an innocent man, Ryan Ferguson, behind bars.

I assume you must have lived oblivious to more than 10 years of legal proceedings based on your decision. Ryan was a Columbia resident who was convicted of the murder of Kent Heitholt, who was a sports writer for the Columbia Daily Tribune, with no physical evidence and a case I believe was built on lies. There was no murder weapon and no DNA. Ryan has been sitting in the Jefferson City Correctional Center since October of 2005. I cannot tell you how angry it makes me every time I go to mail Ryan a letter and have to write “No More Victims Road” on the envelope. I believe Ryan did not murder Kent Heitholt. Ryan never hurt anyone. Ryan was a teenager living his life, exploring everything the world had to offer when had his life turned upside down by a lying “friend” and a crooked lawyer.

MU’s support of Kevin Crane is sickening and heartbreaking. As an alum myself and the child of two MU alums, I have always been incredibly proud to show my black and gold spirit. Not anymore. MU is no longer a school I am proud to represent or support, and I will not in any way.

Ryan has thousands of supporters, in Missouri and across the world. I can only hope that enrollment at MU will be affected by the university’s clear lack of judgement, research and integrity. Outside of the Journalism School it reads, “Wise Shall Be The Bearers Of Light.” For the first time in my life, I believe that no longer applies to MU.
I hope the university will more carefully consider decisions in the future.

Michelle Howard is a graduate of Arts and Sciences and has been supporting Ryan Ferguson since 2005.
MU looking for new vendor to run alert system

By Stephanie Graflage
May 16, 2013 | 6:21 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU plans to begin using a new alert system when its contract with the current provider expires Aug. 27.

The committee in charge of selecting the new system has been sending proposals to several vendors as part of a standard process. Terry Robb, MU’s director of information technology, said in an email that the committee is looking for a system that is hosted on the vendor’s servers and doesn’t require downtime for maintenance.

MU also wants a system that can deliver alerts to a variety of devices in times of emergency. The proposal requires that the vendor be able to deliver via email, landline phones, cell phones, smartphones, pagers and devices for the deaf. AT&T, Blackboard, Everbridge, Send Word Now, and MIR3 are among the vendors that have responded to the proposal. The current provider, Cooper Notification, has also applied.

Cooper Notification has had "issues" delivering text messages and building its contact database, Robb said. There’s also been a problem with carriers blocking its messages as spam.

MU Police Chief Jack Watring said there have also been concerns expressed about the speed of the notifications. The delayed notifications “could affect the safety of the whole campus,” he added.

"We are just not satisfied with the service we are getting," Watring said.

The current system allows students to opt in to receive text message alerts, Robb said. Over 48,843 total people use the alert system including faculty, staff and students. This includes the 23,102 people who use the text messaging service.
Keri Petty, an MU freshman who lives in Campus View Apartments, said she's worried about the alert system's coverage of off-campus students. During the statewide tornado drill March 5, she didn't receive an alert.

It wasn't the first alert she didn't receive this year. She also didn't get campus closure notices for the MU snow days in February.

"I don't even get most of the alerts," Petty said. "The fact that we are the last to know could really affect how we prepare."

Petty said she wants MU to use a system that can immediately send alerts to all wireless internet users.

The current system scans the National Weather Service for emergency alerts. When an alert is activated for Boone County, the system automatically sends a message by text, phone, and email to all subscribers in emergency situations, MU spokesman Christian Basi said.

From 2007 to 2010, MU used Everbridge, a mass notification company, to send its alerts, and it worked fine, Robb said. When the contract with Everbridge expired, MU signed a $78,000 per year contract with Cooper Notification. MU chose Cooper Notification because it was better suited to fulfill the university's requirements, Basi said.

The new system is estimated to cost the University of Missouri System $77,000 per year. Funding will continue to come from each campus' budget based on a faculty, staff, student headcount, Robb said.
An interim vice president of finance has been named for the University of Missouri System.

Thomas Richards, who now serves as treasurer of the UM System, has been named interim vice president of finance and administration. Richards was appointed treasurer in 2011.

Richards will be taking the place of Nikki Krawitz, who will retire this summer. Krawitz has worked at the university since 1996, and as vice president of finance and administration, she is responsible for a budget totaling $2.7 billion and investments totaling $5.5 billion.

Richards' position becomes effective July 1.
Simvastatin, Type Of Statin Drug, Could Limit Exercise Effects In Obese, Study Finds

Posted: 05/16/2013 5:14 pm EDT

A certain type of the most commonly prescribed prescription drug in the world could limit the beneficial effects of exercise in people who are obese, according to a small new study.

The study, published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, shows that simvastatin, a cholesterol-lowering statin drug also known by its brand named Zocor, seemed to "block the ability of exercise to improve ... fitness levels" among people who are overweight or obese, study researcher John Thyfault, an associate professor of nutrition and exercise physiology at the University of Missouri, said in a statement.

"Statins have only been used for about 15 [to] 20 years, so we don't know what the long-term effects of statins will be on aerobic fitness and overall health," Thyfault added in the statement. "If the drugs cause complications with improving or maintaining fitness, not everyone should be prescribed statins."

The study included 37 people between ages 25 and 59 who all had low fitness levels and were obese. For 12 weeks, everyone participated in a fitness regimen; about half of the study participants also took 40 milligrams of simvastatin every day.

Researchers found that the study participants assigned to take the simvastatin experienced less benefit from the exercise than those who didn't take the drug. For example, those who took the statins had a 1.5 percent increase in cardiorespiratory fitness after the fitness regimen, compared with a 10 percent increase among those who didn't take the statins.

NPR recently reported that 25 percent of adults over the age of 45 take a statin drug to lower levels of "bad" cholesterol, but that a new study shows 17 percent of statin-users stop taking the drug because of negative side effects. And a 2011 post in the Harvard Health Blog from editor Peter Wehrwein showed that half of men ages 65 to 74, as well as 39 percent of women ages 75 and up, take a statin drug.
Hitting the books

Next generation digs into farm financials.

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Thursday, May 16, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Jake Anderson didn't have to delve too deep into the University of Missouri's agricultural economics program before realizing he was destined to return to the 1,500-acre family farm. After all, that's been the Anderson family trade since 1891, when his great-great-grandfather came to Callaway County from Sweden.

What the self-described "farm kid" was less certain of was how to manage a volatile business where market price fluctuations are common, the weather is unpredictable and long-term planning — at least for his parents and their parents — often meant scratching out financial estimates on a yellow legal pad or the back of an envelope. So, each Wednesday in the just-concluded spring semester, Anderson and a dozen other Missouri students crunched numbers in a campus computer lab, the male students' agrarian roots betrayed only by baseball caps sporting farm equipment logos.

The focus on data is intentional: While other classes teach ag students how to repair combines or learn the proper chemical mixes of common fertilizers, students in agricultural economist Kevin Moore's "Returning to the Farm" class create business plans using financial information from their own family farms. It's an approach more commonly found at the county agricultural extension office or in community college classrooms rather than flagship public research universities.

Moore says the skills are essential for the next generation of farmers for whom technology is second nature, but bringing their elders on board remains a challenge.

"For a lot of the students, the first time they actually get exposed to the real financial numbers on the farm may be through this class," Moore said. "Generally, Mom and Dad try to make everything rosy for the kids. ... For many, it's really their first honest exposure to the complete financial side of things."
The necessity of having those conversations will only increase. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says the number of U.S. farmers older than 65 grew by nearly 22 percent between 2002 and 2007. Farmers 75 and older outnumber those younger than 25 in the country 5-1.

Anderson, a 21-year-old junior, returns to the farm that’s 30 miles east of campus on the weekends to help out. When it’s time to harvest the rows of soybeans and corn, he makes the same trip three to four times weekly. He also sells corn from his own small patch of land at a roadside stand in front of the family home, a part-time summer job he’s done since he was 9 that helps pay for college.

After graduation, he hopes to add 50 to 100 head of cattle and grow the family operation by another 500 acres, as well as sell seeds for supplemental income. He said Moore’s class has given him the financial tools to support that decision.

"In high school, I didn't expect to get back on the farm. It seemed like times were getting tough," Anderson said. "And at Mizzou, I saw all these other farm kids who couldn't come back. But this is what I've grown up doing; it's what I have a passion for."

Dale Nordquist, associate director of the Center for Farm Financial Management at the University of Minnesota, said Missouri’s practical approach to understanding farm finances is relatively uncommon at large, land-grant universities where both students and professors are more likely to concentrate on theoretical approaches as opposed to practical solutions, and the use of personal data can still be seen as an intrusion.

Beyond the nuts and bolts of finances, he said such training can serve an equally valuable purpose: It forces farm families to prepare their sons and daughters to take over the business.

"You certainly hear the stories about the older generation that never really wants to let go of the reins," Nordquist said. "Even though they might be going through the motions of letting go of the kids, they never release" control "of management. So they keep on doing the same thing. ... Maybe they don't ever step back."

For some, the statistical approach could lead to a disheartening conclusion: The family farm might not survive another generation. And other students’ parents remain resistant to opening the family’s books — even to their own progeny. In those cases, Moore encourages his students to "use me as a scapegoat."

Anderson’s parents, though, were more than happy to hand over the books, and now their son shares his newfound insights into estate planning, asset transfer and other financial management details.

"I'm very proud he wants to come back, but I wanted it to be his decision," said his father, John Anderson, 53, whose three daughters also attended MU but pursued other professions.

"Technology is taking over agriculture just like it's taking over the world," John Anderson said. "And he's getting it firsthand."
Animal welfare group boosts anti-cruelty efforts

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — A national animal welfare group has donated $50,000 to a University of Missouri training academy to help rural law enforcement investigators attend anti-cruelty workshops.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says the donation will cover nearly 170 partial scholarships for classes offered by the university extension office's Law Enforcement Training Institute. The scholarships are also available for animal shelter employees and veterinarians.

The four-week anti-cruelty classes are held in Columbia as well as cities in 12 other states. They focus on topics such as dog fighting rings and unlicensed breeders.
Smith brothers, both MU professors, bond through academics

By Katie Yaeger
May 17, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — As an 11-year-old living on an Army base in Sagamihara, Japan, George Smith spent his spare time collecting snakes and butterflies.

His brother, A. Mark Smith, a year and nine months younger than George, spent more time in the Ginza district of Yokohama, playing a pinball-like game called patchinko. Mark also favored medieval history; while other kids memorized baseball statistics, he memorized the names of English kings and queens from 1066 to 1603.

Nearly 50 years later, the brothers are well-known professionally in areas they were interested in as children. Both are curators' professors, an appointed position in the University of Missouri System.

George, a biological sciences professor, found a practical use for technology now commonly used in the drug industry and academics. His discovery changed how people thought, MU biochemistry professor Frank Schmidt said.

Mark, a history professor, is best known for studying visual perception theories until the 1600s and how they influenced ideas about how people understood the world through sensory perception. He's considered to be one of the top historians studying optics in the world, MU history professor John Bullion said.

As children, the Smith brothers didn't see themselves as having much in common. "We hated each other," Mark deadpanned before breaking into a smile. It's something you see in each brother — that deadpan, followed by a smile or laughter.

George, sitting next to his brother at the Catalyst Cafe in the Bond Life Sciences Center, laughed. "Oh, we didn't really hate each other," he said.
It was a common sibling relationship: George and Mark hung out at home, but they were two years apart in school and had different sets of friends. Years later, though, academic interests would bring them closer.

The brothers and their sister, Helen, moved a lot because their father, who also went by A. Mark Smith, was a career Army officer. George's best guess is that he attended 12 or 13 schools, primarily on the East Coast, before graduating high school.

Their father left the U.S. for Japan in 1951. The family followed in 1952, returning two years later.

"I didn't want to come back to the States," Mark said. "I loved it."

After high school, George went to Haverford College in Pennsylvania. After teaching high school in fall 1963, he attended Harvard University, where he earned his doctorate in bacteriology and immunology in 1970.

Mark, a self-described "indifferent" student as a child, attended St. John's College in Maryland, earning a bachelor's degree in liberal arts. The Great Books Program curriculum included reading works by authors such as Euclid and Isaac Newton. It also included performing science experiments such as Albert Einstein’s photoelectric effect experiment — experiences that would be pivotal for Mark.

**Living in Wisconsin**

After St. John's, Mark went into the Army, where he worked with electronics and circuitry during the Vietnam War. That gave him the discipline to continue his education. After he got out of the service, Mark wanted to study the history of science, and one of the top programs was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where George was a postdoctoral fellow.

Mark had missed the deadline to apply for graduate school there in 1970. But while visiting his brother, Mark went to see the chairman of the History of Science Department. Impressed in part by Mark's undergraduate experience at St. John's, the chairman let him in.

"By hook and crook, I managed to get them to accept me," Mark said.
The brothers first lived in Madison separately. But when the bottom floor of George's house became vacant, Mark moved in. It became the brothers' house, and that was where they especially began to recognize their common intellectual interests.

George's postdoctoral training was in molecular immunology with Oliver Smithies, a future Nobel Prize winner in physiology or medicine, and Mark studied medieval history and the history of science. They often had arguments about high-brow philosophical issues such as the Chinese room paradox, which refutes claims that artificial intelligence exists.

"He still doesn't have the right opinion," George said, with that deadpan again.

After five years at Wisconsin, George came to MU in 1975 as an assistant professor of biological sciences.

A year later, Mark earned a joint doctorate in medieval history and the history of science from Wisconsin. He taught at Brandeis University in Massachusetts for three years. He then spent a year as a member at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., before spending a year in Toronto as a research associate at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. After he moved back to the U.S., he joined the faculty at the University of California-Riverside.

Then, in 1986, he got a job at MU as an associate professor of history.

"I had no clue he was applying," George said. "I heard from Jerry Barrier, who was the chair of the History Department at the time."

**The gentleman scientist**

George, 72, is best known for being the first to find a practical use for phage display, technology that allows one to search through protein structures to find specific proteins. It's commonly used in the drug industry and academics.

Scientists used to put molecules into their purest form and study them individually, but George took a different approach in that he made a wide variety of molecules and only purified the ones that worked best, Schmidt said. George also figured out how to create the large library of molecules necessary to do this.

"George's genius is his ability to see through to the end as well as the possibilities and technology," Schmidt said.

He described George as intensely collaborative.
"I think of him as an old-time gentleman scientist," Schmidt said. "He's much more interested in science than a personal agenda."

In 2001, George was invited to speak at a conference in Stockholm celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Prize in chemistry, which was associated with the Nobel Prizes given that year.

George is passionate about teaching science, said Marjorie Sable, his wife and director of the MU School of Social Work. He is highly involved as the freshman coordinator of the Mathematics in Life Sciences program at MU. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the two-year program includes a Freshman Interest Group and provides students with special coursework and research opportunities.

George starts by meeting with students at MU's Summer Welcome, making sure they have correct information about the program. He also eats with them every week, is the faculty instructor of the Freshman Interest Group and teaches the group's biology lab section.

"He's very involved with the students and incredibly engaged and committed to their learning," Sable said. "I've never met anyone who spends as much time on teaching as he does."

The witty word nerd

Mark, 70, is best known for his work in visual theory from Greek antiquity until the early Enlightenment Period. This includes, not only how people understood vision, but also how the eye and body have adapted to light and how that's then translated into perceptions, sensations and conceptions. He particularly looks at how Arabic theories influenced how people in medieval times thought.

Bullion, the history professor, said Mark is one of the most visionary academics he's ever met. He's concerned about the future of higher education and how his department should plan for it, Bullion said.

"It's a sign of Mark's commitment to the university, department and students that he's deeply concerned about what they're going to do in the future," Bullion said.

Students can find Mark intimidating, said Lois Huneycutt, his wife and the director of graduate studies in the History Department.
"People are constantly coming to me — and because we have different last names, they don’t know we’re married — and they say he has a reputation for being tough," Huneycutt said, laughing. "When they find out we’re married, they’re embarrassed."

Mark is known for having a large vocabulary, which is something their kids picked up, Huneycutt said. "They said ‘detritus’ instead of ‘trash’ at 3 years old."

The secretaries in the History Department office even created a game: the Dr. Smith Word of the Week. This reputation earned him the title of "word nerd" as a finalist in the 2009 Nerds of Mizzou competition. "It's something our kids are proud of," Huneycutt said.

Bullion said Mark’s "wicked and ingenious sense of humor" extends into academics:

He once gave a fictional lecture at an international conference in which he argued that only those who handled money died in the Middle Ages and that everyone today dies because everyone handles money. Mark ended the lecture with Benjamin Franklin’s quote, "The only things certain in life are death and taxes," explaining that because money is used to pay taxes, everyone dies.

"The audience thought it was hilarious," Bullion said. "The lecture was supposed to be fun, but Mark took it to a whole new level."

**Family and fun**

The brothers met their wives and started their families in Columbia. George met Sable in 1979 during the designated MU staff swimming time at a now-demolished pool on the corner of Maryland Avenue and Rollins Street. They used to swim together several times a week, Sable said.

They got married two years later, in 1981. They have two children: Alex, 27, is a third-year medical student at MU, and Bram, 25, is participating in the Coro Fellows Program in Public Affairs in St. Louis.

Mark met Huneycutt, an MU associate professor of history, in 1984 when she was a student in one of his classes. Huneycutt had returned to school after working for the police department. She said that after taking four or five of Mark's classes, there was an attraction between them.

"He said if I stopped taking his classes, then he would ask me out," Huneycutt said, laughing. They got married in 1990. They also have two children: Derek, 21, works at the Starbucks
off East Broadway and is a part-time MU student, and Aubrey, 17, is a junior at Rock Bridge High School.

The brothers' mother, Jessie Smith, joined the families in Columbia in 1995. Until she died in 2000, the family gathered for dinner each week at George's house on East Parkway Drive. The families continued their frequent get-togethers while their children lived at home. The families also have vacationed together, visiting places such as Rome; New York; Moab, Utah; and Phoenix, Ariz., home to Helen Boyd, the brothers' sister.

"It's unusual for academics that cousins grow up knowing each other," Huneycutt said. "I'm glad they've grown up with a sense of extended family."

Mark, who loves to travel, he took his younger son to the Grand Canyon last year so he could experience the Southwest.

"To me, it was me retracing old steps and old memories but also showing him stuff he'd never seen so he could share my memories," Mark said. George has been an activist for Palestinian rights for the past 10 years. He's had opinion pieces published in the Columbia Daily Tribune and has helped organize demonstrations.

The brothers both have musical backgrounds. Mark used to play 16th- and 17th-century lute music on the guitar. He, George and others at Wisconsin would get together and sing madrigals. George helped start the Ad Hoc Singers, now called the Columbia Chorale, in 1978 as a bass. Now, he is a tenor.

George said that, as the 11-year-old in Japan, he would have been surprised at how much he, the "quintessential nerd," and his brother, the "wannabe jock," would connect intellectually in adulthood.

The brothers still get into arguments, but they do because they have differing views on the solution to a problem they both recognize as important, such as that Chinese room paradox.

Mark said he wouldn't have even tried to tell his childhood self anything about the brothers' relationship. As a father, he knows children won't listen, he deadpanned.

_Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey._
On Mother's Day, we celebrated the hand of God at work in our lives through the nurturing presence of a parent. As one of the 40 percent of Americans born to a single mom, this day means a great deal to me. But as the leader of a local philanthropy committed to serving our community's most impoverished children, it disturbs me. It causes me to question our fitness as a "mothering" metropolitan community.

The Kids Count in Missouri report released last month suggests we may not have earned our Mother's Day flowers and obligatory Sunday brunch. The report — supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and produced by Partnership for Children, Missouri Children's Trust Fund and the University of Missouri Office for Social and Economic Data Analysis — reveals a glaring disparity in the well-being of children in the St. Louis metropolitan region.

St. Louis city ranks dead last among the state's 115 counties in the composite ranking of economic well-being, health, safety and education. Meanwhile, three surrounding — and more affluent — counties rank in the Top 20: St. Charles finishes second; St. Louis County comes in at 12; and Jefferson County 17.

In the area of economic well-being, St. Charles County took the No. 1 spot with the lowest percentage of children qualifying for free or reduced lunch, a widely accepted proxy for child poverty. While less than 20 miles away, St. Louis city finished again in last place, with more than 85 percent of its students qualified.

Considering children's health, Jefferson and St. Charles counties tie at 37 in low infant mortality rates, while St. Louis city ranks 105. Violent deaths for youth ages 15-19 is a key indicator of child protection and safety. Here St. Charles County ranks 16 while St. Louis City ranks 106, a difference of 90 positions.

And in education, St. Louis city has the state's highest public high school dropout rate, ranking 115, while St. Charles County ranks 49. St. Louis city teens were more likely to give birth, ranking 96, than their counterparts in St. Charles County, ranking fourth. Both of these rates increase teens' risks of long-term economic insecurity.

To be clear, these numbers are not a critique of our community's kids. Rather they reflect some challenges in our approach to communal parenting. So what would a mothering metropolis look like?

First, a good mother works to build a home where all her children can thrive. The data illustrate that our region has the assets and access to the means to produce exceptional outcomes for children. What is lacking is a civic infrastructure to deliver for the children in the greatest need. For a metropolitan area of 2.8 million people, this means a unified children's continuum. For years, we've studied cities like Atlanta, Cincinnati and Memphis that engaged this work with difficulty and reward. Now is the time for us to build.
A mother also affirms that her kids are unique, but refuses to accept disparities among them. Children in St. Louis city and Jefferson County face different life realities. But, children’s outcomes are directly connected to structural equality in their opportunities. This is to say, our region must affirm diversity in approach to children’s services, but come to unity regarding desirable outcomes — accepting nothing less for any of our kids.

Finally, a great mother speaks up when her kids are in trouble. Our community must actively mobilize public will to advocate for child-friendly policy and realize children’s interests are our region’s interests. The precipitous decline in the state of Missouri’s support for early childhood programs, higher education and health care for the indigent have had a drastic impact on our region.

While kids don’t have or hire lobbyists, every legislator representing our region must recognize that children’s legislation is St. Louis legislation. And the public must work to assure accountability.

Infrastructure. Equity. Advocacy. These make a mothering metropolis and build a better world for kids.

Rev. Starsky Wilson is CEO of Deaconess Foundation and pastor of St. John’s United Church of Christ in north St. Louis. Deaconess recently announced a round of grants to support nonprofits engaged in children’s advocacy.