MU seeks public opinion on Deaton's replacement

The University of Missouri won't be publicizing the names of its top choices for the flagship campus' next chancellor, but system President Tim Wolfe still wants public input on the closed search.

A one-hour public forum begins at 10 a.m. Monday in Jesse Hall Auditorium in Columbia. A second session is set for the same time Thursday at Wrench Auditorium in Memorial Union.

Wolfe and the university's Board of Curators are seeking a replacement for Brady Deaton, who plans to step down in mid-November after nearly a decade as chancellor. Deaton will remain on campus and head a new global development center named in his honor.

Wolfe has said he hopes to have Deaton's successor on board without the need to select an interim replacement.
Despite recently imposed budget withholdings from the governor, the University of Missouri Board of Curators is moving ahead with its fiscal year 2015 state appropriation requests for the Missouri General Assembly.

The board of curators met this morning via teleconference to vote on the requests for state appropriations. Members unanimously approved a $494.5 million request that includes funding for core operations and programs. That request includes $10 million for an MU medical school expansion.

Last year, the board requested $483.4 million of state appropriations for core operations.

In regard to the medical school expansion, which would involve a new partnership between MU and hospitals in Springfield, an allocation for those funds in the coming budget year was recently restricted by Gov. Jay Nixon.

Funds for the medical school expansion were just a portion of the $400 million appropriated by lawmakers that Nixon announced he would withhold last month.

The governor made the move in response to threats to override his veto of a tax bill. The bill cutting income tax rates would have serious budget consequences, he said, so he said he would withhold the money until he knows whether his veto will stand.

Tom Richards, UM's interim vice president for finance and treasurer, updated curators on the spending restrictions, including $15.7 million in core appropriations for the UM System for this fiscal year. Richards said that broke down to a decrease of about $7 million for MU, $3.1 million for UM-Kansas City, $1.8 million for Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla, $2.2 million for UM-St. Louis; $1 million for UM Extension and a half-million dollars for the UM System.

In addition to the core spending restrictions, there are two programs in particular for which the entire amounts have been withheld, Richards said. Those are the large animal veterinary medicine program for $1 million and the medical school expansion project, which would have included the development of a clinical campus in Springfield and an additional 32 students per year at the MU School of Medicine. UM System President Tim Wolfe said the medical school had previously announced it
would expand by eight students this semester, but because of the lack of funding, that would not happen.

Mary Jenkins, a spokeswoman for the medical school, said the additional eight students had not been admitted; only after funding had been secured would those students have been admitted for fall.

Richards said the total impact to the budget would be $26.4 million; the spending restrictions have already been implemented and will become permanent in October if the veto is overridden.

"President Wolfe has asked each campus to begin work on contingency planning efforts with respect to this year's budget, if the spending restrictions would become permanent," Richards said.

The board also approved a request for $389.8 million for the FY2015 capital appropriations request, which includes $194 million for critical facility needs between the four campuses and $55.9 million for reconstruction, additions and renovations to the College of Engineering-Lafferre Hall at MU.

This article was published in the Friday, July 19, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "UM board looks ahead at funding: Medical school expansion still seen as priority."

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Posted in Education on Friday, July 19, 2013 2:00 pm.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM System prioritizes projects for 2015 funding, discusses 2014 restrictions

By Claire Boston
July 19, 2013 | 12:31 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Lafferre Hall once again tops the list of MU’s renovation priorities.

The UM System Board of Curators on Friday requested funding for three major MU renovations in its 2015 state appropriations request.

MU’s primary request is $55.9 million to renovate Lafferre Hall, an item that has been on its agenda since at least fiscal year 2012. MU’s other requests, which have also appeared in previous fiscal years, break down as follows:

- $31.4 million for a new School of Music facility
- $47.5 million to renovate Arvarh E. Strickland Hall
- $82.8 million in critical facility needs such as updates to classrooms and laboratories

The system request includes $653.7 million for capital improvements and $494.5 million for system-wide operations.

During the curators’ meeting, Tom Richards, interim vice president for finance and UM System treasurer, presented an update on what he and others called the fiscal year 2014 “spending restrictions.” MU is subject to a $7 million across-the-board freeze on core spending. Gov. Jay Nixon also withheld $1 million for the large animal veterinary program and $9.7 million for a School of Medicine expansion.

Richards said UM System schools are already feeling the effects of the restrictions. Fiscal year 2014 began on July 1, limiting the amount of money the system could count on from the state.

If the Missouri General Assembly chooses not to override Nixon’s veto of House Bill 253 in a special veto session in September, the UM System will receive the $26.4 million Nixon is withholding. In the case of an override, Richards said it is unlikely the system will receive the funding.
UM System schools are forming contingency plans. Richards said the restrictions do not affect any of the system's $12.4 million in performance funding, which UM System President Tim Wolfe wants to go toward each campus' strategic plan.

Richards said the restrictions will be difficult for all schools.

"Contingency planning efforts will require continued difficult decisions by each campus as each cut in state appropriations must be offset by some combination of increased revenue or reduced cost," Richards said.

Although contingency planning is in early stages at each campus, Wolfe said the restrictions forced the School of Medicine to scrap plans to increase its enrollment by eight students this fall. He said the school will wait until the next academic year to increase enrollment.

Wolfe asked the curators to speak with their legislators and urge them not to override the veto.

"Our focus is going to be primarily on the House, not the Senate because of the way the Senate vote took place," Wolfe told the curators in a teleconference. "We have got in our sights those individuals that we could either flip or make sure that their vote that they had previously pans out."

Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.
Ads to urge override of Nixon’s tax cut veto

Campaign has large war chest.

By Rudi Keller

Sunday, July 21, 2013 at 2:00 am

During the next five weeks, Missourians will see an ad blitz designed to sway lawmakers to override Gov. Jay Nixon’s veto of a bill that would trim state income tax rates and slash in half the taxes paid by business owners.

Fueled by $2.4 million from wealthy conservative activist Rex Sinquefield, the ads promise that businesses will create jobs with the money rather than government using it for “increasing spending for special interests.” Sinquefield’s money is backing ads prepared for the Missouri Chamber of Commerce, Associated Industries of Missouri and the Missouri Club for Growth.

In response to the possible override, Nixon has withheld $400 million from the budget, eliminating increases for public schools, higher education and doctors who take Medicaid patients. There are provisions in the bill, Nixon and his supporters argue, that could drain as much as $1.2 billion from the treasury by June 30.

Nixon told reporters in Kansas City last week he would not try to match the ad campaign. “I’m not going to get into a check-writing contest with a billionaire,” he said.

Lawmakers meet Sept. 11 to consider vetoed bills. The first vote on the tax measure will come in the House, where Republicans hold 109 seats, enough to override if everyone shows up and remains united. Republicans must pick up a Democratic vote for each Republican they lose.

When the House passed the bill 103-51 in May, three members of each party bucked their caucus majorities. One GOP House member who supported the bill in May — Rep. Nate Walker of Kirksville — appeared with Nixon last week and said he will vote to sustain the veto. Seven of the nine members absent during the vote were Republicans.

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said Friday that he’s ready to override Nixon’s veto. He said he’s convinced businesses will add workers if the tax cut takes effect.

“I don’t think there is much dispute that if you let them keep the money, they are going to invest it,” Schaefer said.
The bill would gradually cut the highest state income tax rate to 5.5 percent from the current 6 percent and cut the corporate income tax rate in half. For small business, only half the profits would be subject to tax.

For the average wage earner, the bill does little, said lobbyist Jim Moody. “If you are the guy in the middle class, it is five or six bucks. Why do we have a tax policy that benefits the super wealthy and does nothing for the middle class? I am a Republican, and I don’t understand why Republicans think it is a good idea.”

Moody, a former state budget director who represents the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City, has been outspoken in questioning provisions of the bill that change taxes in ways that are unintended.

The measure would reimpose sales taxes on prescription drugs, and, if opponents are correct, create a rush to file amended returns if Congress allows a sales tax on Internet purchases. Supporters of the bill said the prescription drug language can be fixed quickly and that the demand for refunds will not materialize.

Supporters of the bill have latched on to recent reports showing Kansas did not suffer falling revenue in the fiscal year after it dramatically cut taxes. That shows tax cuts spurred that state's economy, said Anne Marie Moy of Grow Missouri, which is coordinating the override campaign.

Opponents of an override point to the $300 million tax increase passed in Kansas this year to make up an anticipated future shortfall to say that state is not a model to follow.

Moy and Schaefer were working together last week to promote the override. Missouri business owners should get a tax break not available to wage earners to reward them for taking risks, Schaefer said.

“You have to give them the ability to take more of the money they earn to hire people and to invest in their business,” Schaefer said.

The group Coalition for Missouri’s Future brings opponents of the override together, including educators and medical groups. Brent Ghan of the Missouri School Boards Association said their campaign will be a grass-roots effort.

“There is no way we can match the big money being contributed on the other side,” he said.

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Posted in Local on Sunday, July 21, 2013 2:00 am.
LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Gov. Nixon's withholding is hurting student's chance to attend medical school

Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder • Jefferson City

A constituent recently wrote me a letter in which he expressed his delight that $10 million appropriated to expand the class size for the University of Missouri's medical program passed the Legislature and reached the governor's desk (HB 3). This young man, a first-generation college student from your home county, is on the waiting list for admission to the University of Missouri School of Medicine.

“As June came to an end, I was anxiously awaiting the governor’s signature on House Bill 3 and was thrilled to find it had been signed,” he wrote. “However, when I heard of the withhold, I was crushed.”

Part of your $400 million withholding, governor, is $10 million to help MU expand its medical school class by 30 percent. If the funding were released as appropriated before July 29, another eight spots would be added to the six or so that move off the waiting list each year; the difference between whether this student is accepted into the program or not.

“Currently, my future rests in the hands of Governor Nixon,” he wrote. “I am writing to you, Mr. Kinder, to be my voice and call Governor Nixon and emphasize the importance of this section before the September (veto session).”

By freezing $400 million in state funding already appropriated for education and other vital services, you hold Missourians hostage in your political machinations to forestall the state’s first broad-based tax cut in nearly 100 years.

The vast majority of cuts in the bill would not affect state revenue until FY2015 and take effect only if revenues increase by $100 million above the prior fiscal year. Further, the bill’s amnesty provision would actually bring in additional revenue in 2014 on top of this year’s projected surplus. So, why withhold funding, governor?

Your withholding is unconstitutional and a naked attempt to intimidate lawmakers into shying away from an override of your veto. The money is there, governor, and this hopeful student is the victim of your ploy. Release the funding immediately.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU's Engineering Building West evacuated after elevator fire

By Sarah Dettmer
July 21, 2013 | 5:44 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A burnt rubber and oil smell filled the air on the western edge of MU on Sunday after the hydraulic fluid in an elevator overheated and caught fire in the Engineering Building West on Sixth Street.

Five Columbia Fire Department units were sent to the scene in response about 4:30 p.m. and saw white smoke emptying onto Fifth Street from the rear of the building.

Marty Walker, the director of administrative services in the College of Engineering, said a few parts needed to be replaced in the elevator but it is structurally intact.

Computer science student Kristofferson Calmer said he was working in a lab on the second floor when he smelled smoke and was told to evacuate the building.

Division Chief Marc Wright said the situation was quickly under control and did not pose a threat to passersby.
MU to host international conference on cold fusion

By Brendan Gibbons
July 21, 2013 | 6:00 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — From Sunday through Friday, MU will host the 18th International Conference on Cold Fusion. The conference will bring together scientists studying the potential for new forms of energy production.

Since April 2012, MU has been home to the Sidney Kimmel Institute for Nuclear Renaissance, which funds research in the field of low energy nuclear reactions.

This field grew out of the highly publicized “cold fusion” experiments conducted in 1989 by Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann at the University of Utah.

Many in the scientific community accused Fleischmann and Pons of violating scientific ethics, mostly by presenting the results of their experiments without proper peer review.

Public misunderstanding, the difficulty of reproducing Fleischmann’s and Pons’ results and the lack of an established theory that would explain their observations steered the study of low energy nuclear reactions into troubled waters almost as soon as it began.

Today, some scientists maintain that their work has value and requires further scrutiny. Many of these scientists will be attending the conference.

"There have been great advances in this discipline over the last five years by research labs and private institutions around the world," MU physics professor and Vice Chancellor for Research Robert Duncan wrote in the conference’s welcome letter. "The Naval Research Lab (NRL), and many other excellent laboratories have confirmed that the excess heat effects reported by Fleischmann and Pons are real, and roughly one thousand times larger than can be attributed to a chemical process."

Here are some resources to learn more about the study of low energy nuclear reactions:
• The experiments by Pons and Fleischmann are presented in a primer compiled by "Understanding Science," a science communication effort developed by the University of California Museum of Paleontology and funded by the National Science Foundation. The article explains their experiment at a layperson level and makes a case that the two acted immorally.

• The two first revealed their conclusions to the general public at a 1989 press conference.

• David Kidwell, a scientist with the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C., briefly summarizes his lab's eight years of research into low energy nuclear reactions. Kidwell will deliver a keynote speech at the conference Monday morning.

• This 2009 report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency summarizes the work being done on low energy nuclear reactions in labs around the world. It also gauges the implications of a breakthrough in understanding the processes behind the excess heat effect.

• In 2009, Duncan accompanied a "60 Minutes" crew to a lab in Israel (starting at 7:15 mark), where he observed low energy nuclear reaction experiments and weighed the evidence himself. "I found that the work done was carefully done, and that the excess heat, as I see it now, is quite real," he told reporter Scott Pelley. The video features interviews with several physicists and ends on an interview with Fleischmann.

• Edmund Storms, a scientist who worked for 34 years at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, has been investigating low-energy nuclear reactions in his own lab since his retirement in 1991. He has compiled more than 4,000 papers on the subject, which are available at LENR-CANR.org. In "A Student's Guide to Cold Fusion," he summarizes the state of the science and offers a guide for future studies. Storms will also be speaking Monday morning at the conference.

_Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey._
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

DEAR READER: Schlundt story leads to reflection on the transience of the digital

By Brendan Gibbons
July 19, 2013 | 7:10 p.m. CDT

In May, the MU News Bureau included the following in its explanation of Pickard Hall's closure:

"Portions of Pickard Hall still contain some radiation that resulted from experiments conducted in the 1900s."

I was never satisfied with this minimal back story. I thought there might be a more interesting story to uncover, and I wasn't disappointed.

I would never have been able to piece together the story of Herman Schlundt's radium and thorium refinery without his letters and notes. Schlundt probably would never have imagined a reporter sifting through these primary documents more than 75 years after his death.

After Schlundt died in 1937, his daughter and the MU chemistry department donated his huge collection of papers to the State Historical Society of Missouri and the University Archives. If it weren't for these donations and the diligent work of the staff who keep them safe and organized, many details of Schlundt's life would have remained unknown.

Today, this type of information flows through email, not letters. I wonder how someone will put a story like this together 80 years from now.

In the information age, not all information is equally available. Public relations documents, surface-level news briefs and promotional materials have been fruitful and multiplied. Original material, the kind of information a reporter can actually use, is harder to come by.

It's strange to think that, despite current technology, the words you scribble on paper could be more enduring than those you type on a keyboard. But that's not because it isn't being collected and stored.
Almost every keystroke I’ve ever typed online — social media messages, emails, search queries — is stored somewhere, mostly on the servers of Google, Microsoft, Apple and Facebook and (from my middle school days) MySpace.

The National Security Agency might have even vacuumed some of it up, though it’s still too early to tell with certainty who the agency monitors, what they collect and why.

I have access to much of this information, but you don’t. The only way people in the future could read my correspondence is if my family petitions Google to hand over the contents of my mail account.

I doubt anyone would be interested in reading my correspondence. But what about people more powerful than me, those whose decisions affect many others and influence future generations?

These are questions I can’t answer, but I do know this:

Because we can’t know today what information will be available tomorrow, getting the story right today will be crucial for future historians and journalists.

I believe true reporters recognize that today’s opportunities seized or not seized — and risks taken or not taken — will determine what kind of tomorrow we have. Their goal in news coverage should be to explicitly define the terms of a transaction. What did we gain by taking a certain action? What did we lose?

I attempted to define these terms with my story about Herman Schlundt, and I will let you decide whether I pulled it off. The story would have undoubtedly been better if it had been written back then, when more information was available.

Journalists should never lose the opportunity to set the record straight today. Tomorrow, the facts might be even harder to uncover.

_Brendan Gibbons graduated in May from MU with a degree in science and agricultural journalism. He is working as a reporter at the Missourian this summer before heading off to a new adventure._
UMKC seeks millions of dollars for construction

By The Associated Press
July 21, 2013 | 4:45 p.m. CDT

KANSAS CITY — The University of Missouri-Kansas City has asked the state to provide more than $95 million toward its campus construction projects.

University curators on Friday approved requesting those funds, as well as millions of dollars more in state money for 10 other building and renovation projects proposed by the other University of Missouri system schools in Columbia, St. Louis and Rolla, The Kansas City Star reported.

The funding requests are part of a system-wide list of capital improvement projects, some of which have been waiting years for state money, said Bob Simmons, associate vice chancellor at UMKC. He estimated the need totals about $300 million at UMKC.

"Every building on this campus constructed before 1990 needs work, repairs and renovations," Simmons said.

Wayne Goode, chairman of the Board of Curators, said it has been nearly a decade since the state has allocated money toward capital improvements on any of the campuses.

"The system currently has a $1.3 billion backlog in renovation and repair," according to a report in Friday’s curators' meeting information.

Among the requests from UMKC are $48 million in state support for renovating the School of Medicine and a Health Science education building. The total cost of that project would be $54.5 million, and the university is raising $6 million of that in private funds.

UMKC also wants the state to provide about 75 percent of the $20 million needed for the science education building and about $24 million for a $30.6 million School of Dentistry building addition and renovation.
Under 2012 legislation, in which the state offers to match the money a school raises for capital improvement, UMKC also hopes to build a $15 million, three- or four-story Free Enterprise Center. UMKC has $7.5 million to put toward the building and hopes the state will contribute the other half.

Simmons said for any of the proposed projects, "ultimately it is the legislature deciding what to fund."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Korean student must return home from MU without degree

By Unho Yi
July 21, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — In the spring, Wonjoon Moon got a phone call from his parents in Seoul, South Korea: “It would be better if you could take one or two semesters off until we will be able to fully support you,” they said.

But even before receiving the phone call, Moon, a senior from South Korea studying finance and banking at MU, knew his parents were struggling financially to support him.

“I changed my major from accounting to finance in the summer semester to finish the school as soon as possible — accounting is a five-year program and finance is a four-year one,” Moon said in an interview conducted in Korean. “But that was not enough.” Just like Moon, students with F1 visas must enroll in at least 12 credit hours in an American university or college to maintain their legal resident status.

“I’m feeling really bad because money is the main issue that I have to stop studying when everything seems all right,” Moon said. “But I also learned paying for tuition is not something I can control.” The MU International Center estimates that, including living expenses and tuition, the cost of a year at MU is $35,000. Moon said he might spend less than that, but it is still too much for his family.

He worked part-time jobs at a dining hall and other places to meet personal budget demands. During the school semesters, Moon worked an average of 20 to 25 hours per week, and during the summer and winter breaks he worked 30 to 35 hours a week.

“I just can’t only depend on the parents,” Moon said. “I need to do something on my own. I made some pocket money by doing some part-time work, but it is not enough to meet the budget line.”

“Some of my friends are doing part-time jobs to make pocket money, but for me it is directly linked to my life. I can’t only focus on working on school.”
Costs for international students

It usually costs more for international students to get an education because state universities charge them non-resident education fees as well as health insurance costs and international fees, according to the MU International Center website. Living apart from the family is another challenge entirely.

Moon began attending MU in January 2008 to get a better education in the U.S. In South Korea, getting a bachelor’s degree from an American university was a pretty big deal, he said. Although he said he "didn't even know what was Missouri at that time," every experience has led to new opportunities. But it was not easy for him to adapt to the new culture and language.

"Staying in Laws Hall at the first semester in Missouri was not easy," Moon said. "My language capacity was not enough to communicate to make a lot of friends. I felt isolation sometimes in the beginning."

A semester after arriving on campus, he moved from the dorms to the Christian Campus House on College Avenue. Friends at the house turned Moon into a new person with a sense of humor, surrounded by friends, he said. While hanging out with friend and roommate Josh Rusert, who Moon described as "really open-minded," Moon learned how to behave and what to say when people around him learned about his home country.

"It is pretty fun to see some people who ask me 'South or North Korea?' when I said 'I am from Korea,'" Moon said. "I would love to meet North Koreans in person." Being an international student gave Moon opportunities to be independent and to stand by himself.

"During my high school days, my mom woke me up, she made me food and she took care of me," he said. "But over here ... it is great deal because I learned how to manage my life." He has not visited home in South Korea since 2011, when he was discharged from the South Korean army, in which almost all men serve for two years.

"On the other hand, I am pretty excited to catch up with my loved ones and old friends back in my home at the same time," he said. Moon said he wants to earn his finance and banking bachelor’s degree at MU, but he's not sure he'll be able to come back to Columbia to complete his remaining classes.

"But I will do what I can," he said.
Historians in KC this week to discuss Karl Marx, race

Don’t underestimate the reach of “The Daily Show.”

After Jonathan Sperber, a University of Missouri history professor, appeared on the show in April to discuss “Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life,” his biography of the German philosopher and revolutionary, he heard from several old friends.

“That included the girl I had a crush on in 1966,” Sperber said recently.

Sperber held his own with host Jon Stewart, describing Marx’s money troubles and domestic dramas: In 1851 Marx and a family servant became parents of an illegitimate son. (Stewart: “I think it’s exciting that the champion of the proletariat had a maid in a one-room apartment.”)

If much laughter ensued it was, Sperber said, in service of a more nuanced understanding of Marx.

“I see Marx as a figure who had enormous influence on human development, but who fundamentally belonged to a past world,” Sperber said. When Marx pondered economic theory, Sperber said, he often thought in terms of Adam Smith, an 18th century Scottish economist and philosopher.

“Economics has become very different since,” Sperber said.

Sperber speaks at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Kansas City Central Library, 14 W. 10th St. To RVSP, call 816-701-3407.
Colleges look for ways to keep students from quitting before they graduate

Looking back on her college days, Heather Norton has a memory of sitting in an auditorium with a bunch of other bright-eyed freshmen, listening to a long-forgotten administrator issue a sobering warning.

The students were urged to look at the person sitting to their left. And to their right.

At least one of you, they were told, won’t make it to graduation.

Those were the days when poorly prepared and unmotivated students were quickly weeded out by the rigors of classroom and campus life.

“That was pretty typical of that time,” said Norton, Fontbonne University’s interim associate vice president for academic affairs. “And that seemed OK with colleges for the most part.”

Not any more.

Today, universities are in the midst of a collective hand-wringing, asking themselves if they are doing enough to shepherd students from admission to graduation. It’s a movement driven by rising student loan default rates, a nationwide effort to turn out more college degrees and heightened pressure on schools to improve performance.

For Fontbonne, the idea that something needed to change took root around 2007 as administrators watched a precipitous drop in the school’s retention rate, which essentially measures how many freshmen return for their sophomore year. A rate that was 73 percent just three years earlier had fallen to 58 percent.

In standard higher education fashion, a committee formed to tackle the issue. Faculty and staffers now gather for annual retreats, followed by smaller meetings through the year, at which they look for ways to keep students enrolled.

Among the initiatives: They’ve added a three-credit-hour course to help freshmen better understand college life. They provide midterm reports that serve as an early warning system to identify struggling students before it’s too late.

And they’ve done a few things that, at first blush, sound almost silly.
"We have hammocks on campus, which seems like a really small thing. But it creates a warm and welcoming atmosphere," Norton said.

Something appears to be working.

In 2011, the latest year for which federal data are available, the school’s retention rate hit 78 percent.

**FINANCIAL CRISIS**

Some see the battle to improve student retention as something of a moral obligation for colleges at a time when the nation’s student loan default rate is on the rise. The most recent federal data show a startling increase in the two-year default rate, which reflects the percentage of students who stop making loan payments after just two years. From 2007 to 2010, that number rose to 9.2 percent from 6.7 percent.

Lost on many college dropouts is the fact that their loans still must be repaid, said Linda Hagedorn, an education professor at Iowa State University, who studies student success.

That growing financial crisis is pushing many college administrators to reconsider priorities. Instead of focusing on getting more students into college, they’re paying more attention to how those students do once they get there.

"Access without success: You’ve gained nothing.” Hagedorn said. “In fact, you’ve lost because of the loan problem. They’re in worse shape than if they had never enrolled.”

Retention rates get a lot of attention, in part, because they are closely linked to graduation rates. One of the biggest challenges, educators say, is getting a student to return for that sophomore year.

**It's not surprising, then, that area schools with high retention rates — including Washington University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Missouri-Columbia — also have the highest graduation rates.**

“If you can see a rise in one, you’ll usually see a rise in the other,” said Kevin Thomas, who was hired last year to be the new director of retention at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Thomas is leading the charge to raise the school’s retention rate by 1 percentage point in each of the next five years as part of an effort to improve the overall quality of students on campus.

The thinking is simple: The more students the school can keep each year, the fewer students it needs to admit in the next year’s freshman class, allowing it to be more selective.

At the University of Missouri-St. Louis, a retention push is motivated by several factors, including the desire to reduce the number of provisional students — those who don’t meet entrance requirements — admitted each year.
But also, the school is fighting a demographic shift that’s producing smaller high school graduating classes each year — a trend not expected to reverse itself for many years.

Schools such as Mizzou, WU and U of I are able to counter that shrinking pool of traditional prospects by pulling in more students from other states. And while UMSL is trying to expand its reach into Illinois, it lacks the hefty budget needed to make a serious impact.

“It costs three times as much to recruit a student as it does to retain a student,” said Alan Byrd, dean of enrollment services.

For UMSL to simply maintain its current enrollment levels, Byrd said the school needs to push its retention rate — now at 78 percent for freshmen and 77 percent for transfer students — to 80 percent.

MORE THAN HAMMOCKS

Clearly, it takes more than a comfortable place for naps to keep students in college.

The reasons they quit vary but include financial difficulties, conflicts between work and college schedules, academic problems and homesickness. And sometimes, students just don’t feel like they fit in.

Christopher Williams, 23, of University City, is something of a case study.

The recent UMSL graduate came close several times to leaving school in frustration.

He started work on his sociology degree in 2008 and almost immediately regretted the decision. Most of his friends went to school in Chicago. St. Louis was not his first choice.

“I really wanted to be out in Miami or in California. But that didn’t happen,” said Williams, who struggled to find a connection to the school.

In the end, he hung on through the encouragement of his grandmother and college advisers: “I didn’t want to be known as a quitter at the end of the day.”

To keep students like Williams from reaching the point where they consider quitting, schools are hiring more tutors and counselors and using early-warning software designed to identify struggling students. They’re crafting orientation programs and, increasingly, mandatory classes that teach a variety of college survival skills, including how to study, take notes and navigate financial aid. They’re pushing students to get involved in campus activities to help develop key connections.

And some are urging students to spend less time as “undecided” majors.

“If they can figure out what they want to do early on, they tend to stick around longer,” said Keith Ross, senior vice president for institutional advancement at Missouri Baptist University.
To be sure, there are many cases — say for example, a student with thousands of dollars in campus debt — where schools can do very little to help. There are some who simply won’t be able to finish college.

Instead, administrators are focusing on those students on the edge, while looking for ways to keep others from getting there.

UMSL is in the midst of a multi-year effort to boost its freshman retention rate, which dropped to 69 percent in 2009. Those efforts appear to be working, with the rate climbing to 78 percent in 2011.

Much of the emphasis is on helping inexperienced students — the school has a large population of first-generation college students — understand what college is all about, and what it takes to succeed.

Among the recent changes are a mandatory freshman orientation program and a new first-year experience class that’s required for most freshmen.

Last month, the school opened its new Office of Student Retention Services, which will, among other things, coordinate an outreach program that seeks out students who fail to re-enroll. In some instances, counselors have been able to work through problems that were keeping those students from returning.

Sometimes, it’s as simple as finding last-minute financial assistance for students who are a few dollars short.

Byrd acknowledges there are those on campus who question using scarce resources on what critics might call hand-holding. He draws comparisons to highway guardrails.

“You can have highways without guardrails, but we think it’s in our best interests to have them,” Byrd said. “We have students who rely heavily on these services to keep them on track.”

Among them is Hazelwood’s Taira Collins, who’s been working with various counselors and mentors to overcome a spring semester that fell short of her own expectations and pushed her to the brink of leaving school.

Like many first-generation college students, Collins struggled with adapting to campus culture and the freedoms and responsibilities that come with it.

“I’ve never had a support system. I’ve just always tried to do it on my own,” said Collins, who is studying public policy. “I knew I had to reach out and ask somebody for help.”
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Peace advocate loved family, enjoyed fishing

MU Mention on Pg. 2

By Lakshna Mehta
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COLUMBIA — Charles Luther Atkins died at home Tuesday, July 16, 2013, with his family beside him. More than 150 people celebrated his life at a party last Saturday. He was 85.

Atkins was born in McKenzie, Tenn., on May 26, 1928, to James Euel Atkins and Lucy Lurlyn (Baker) Atkins. He graduated from Poplar Bluff High School in 1946. He competed in basketball, football and track and was captain of the basketball and football teams.

“He was going over his life,” his wife of 33 years, Ellen Atkins, said. “He talked about his elementary school teacher. He called out my name every once in a while, even though I was close to him. We were hugging and kissing, till the end.”

Atkins died of metastatic colon cancer, barely a month after diagnosis. Ellen Atkins said he had been “ill with many things over the years, but never terminal.”

Adored by his stepdaughter, Beth Perra, and loved by his sons, Doug and David Atkins, Charlie Atkins spent a lot of time with family, especially his grandchildren.

His wife said that he taught his grandchildren how to fish and went on fishing trips in Alaska with his sons.
“He was a fisherman through and through. He got his love for fishing from his father. Charlie would take anyone fishing or go with anyone,” Ellen Atkins said. “The first five years of our marriage we went to Montana to fish for trout in the Madison River. I had never fished before. I loved him so much, I loved fishing!”

Described by his wife as a very soft-spoken man, Atkins was a strong advocate for peace. He was the president of the Columbia chapter of Veterans for Peace, and two years ago, the chapter became the Charles Atkins Chapter of Veterans for Peace.

“He was a wonderful activist and role model for the peace community,” Mary Manderino, a member of the Columbia chapter, said. “He educated people about the real costs of war in a very quiet way.”

Atkins served in the Korean War as a first lieutenant in the Army. After being wounded by shrapnel on the front lines, he spent six months aboard a Dutch hospital ship before being shipped home to Poplar Bluff in 1953. He received a Purple Heart and a Silver Star for valor.

He spent his first year as a college undergraduate at Westminster College in Fulton. Following his parents’ death on Christmas Day 1947, he transferred his undergraduate studies to MU on an Army ROTC scholarship. He graduated with a degree in business.

After his return and recovery from the wars, Mr. Atkins worked at Stovall’s clothing store, which was owned by his family.

In 1963, he returned to MU to get his master’s degree in community development. In 1979, he co-founded and financially supported the peace studies program at MU.

Because he enjoyed living in Columbia and sensed a good business opportunity in the city, he opened a Stovall’s store in 1967 but renamed it Roth’s Department Store.

“It was cheaper to buy a sign that said ‘Roth’ instead of ‘Stovall’,” Ellen Atkins said with a laugh.

Atkins went on to open three more stores, one each in Jefferson City, Osage Beach and Sedalia. The chain had seven stores in all.

A very independent man who wanted to do everything for himself, Mr. Atkins indulged in a lot of do-it-yourself projects.
"One time he built a screen out of cardboard on a hand-truck to show slides, instead of buying a projector," Ellen Atkins said. "He also repaired everything he could with duct tape. It was a running joke in the family."

He loved fishing; she loved swimming. She read fiction; he read nonfiction. But despite these differences, Mr. and Mrs. Atkins always held hands when they read.

"His favorite was a pamphlet written by Maj. Gen. Smedley Butler, called 'War is a Racket,'" Ellen Atkins said. "He would buy copies of it and give them to people who were interested in peace."

They also traveled extensively, visiting countries like Myanmar, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Switzerland and Thailand. His traveling created a love for international cuisine, influencing him to go to international restaurants whenever he ate out.

"He was the best thing that happened to me," Ellen Atkins said. "He would always tell me I was beautiful and I always told him he was the handsomest man I had ever met."

Mr. Atkins is survived by his wife, Ellen Atkins; two sons, David Atkins, and Doug Atkins, and his wife, Paula; stepdaughter Beth Perra; stepson Brian Sweeney, and his wife, Vera; twenty grandchildren, Amy Atkins, Tyler Atkins-Mose, and his wife, Koda, Holly Strawn, and her husband, Addam, Abe Atkins, Cary Atkins, Jay Atkins, Kristyn Atkins, Jeff Atkins, Lauren Meesey, and her husband, Ryan, Chase Atkins, Conor Perra, Jacques Perra, Ginger Perra, Alison Sweeney, John Sweeney and Megan Sweeney; and one great-grandchild, Braeden Ayala.

A daughter, Buffy Atkins, died earlier.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to the following locations: Charles Atkins Veterans for Peace Chapter, C/O Dick Parker, 215 W. Sexton Road, 65203; Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbia, 2615 Shepard Blvd., 65201; and Boone Hospital Home Care and Hospice, 601 Business Loop 70 W., Suite 260, 65201.

A memorial will be held at a later date.