MU celebrates dedication of retiring administrators Foster and Jones

By Emily Donaldson

November 8, 2013 | 9:07 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Laughter rang from the rotunda of Jesse Hall as friends and supporters of retiring Provost Brian Foster and Vice Chancellor of Administrative Services Jackie Jones celebrated the administrators' dedication to MU.

Speakers took turns making jokes and recounting memories of the two, at some points pausing to let the crowd laugh over "Brianisms" — Foster's well-known phrases — and the potential of WWJD — what would Jackie do — bracelets in the Administrative Services department.

Both administrators announced their retirement earlier this year, and MU faculty, staff and students gathered Friday evening to reflect on their time at the university.

Chancellor Brady Deaton began the event by talking about his gratitude for Foster's and Jones' constant pursuit of progress at MU, a sentiment many other university administrators echoed throughout the evening.

"These individuals have one very important thing in common — they are tireless, dedicated, 24/7 workers on MU's behalf," Deaton said.

Dean of the School of Journalism Dean Mills polled fellow deans for a word or phrase to describe Foster: "Lets deans do work, collaborates, consultative and visionary, encouraging of innovative thought, integrity, openness, tenacious — that one keeps coming up," Mills said in response.

Deputy Provost Ken Dean touched on Foster's immense support of female faculty and his quickness of thinking.
"On a personal level, he is fair, thoughtful, always willing to listen," Dean said. "But he is intense and always moves at breakneck speed. It is a challenge to keep up with him, we all try and don't always succeed."

Speakers also honored Foster's wife, Lerke Foster, as a woman who always welcomed newcomers into the community. Anne Deaton kissed Lerke Foster's cheek in a display of gratitude.

Brady Deaton also honored Jones' contribution of maintaining the beauty of MU.

"If you had any question of our campus' beauty at all, you must only look through the north windows behind me," Deaton said in reference to windows facing Francis Quadrangle and the MU Columns.

Paul Toler, director of Business Services, reflected on Jones' interactions with her staff in her time at MU.

"We are more than a team, we are a family in Administrative Services," Toler said.

At the end of the ceremonies, Foster was presented with a colorful poster in commemoration of his love for the arts, and Jones was given a bench to be dedicated in her name close to the quadrangle.

Foster will retire on Jan. 1 and Jones will leave her position at the end of 2013, Deaton said.

*Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.*
MU, company partner to boost supply of isotope used in diagnostic drug

By Karyn Spory

Saturday, November 9, 2013 at 2:00 am

The University of Missouri Research Reactor Center is nationally recognized as a leader in isotope production, and now the university will join with Global PET Imaging LLC to produce an isotope that’s in short supply.

Steve Wyatt, MU vice provost for economic development, said MU signed an agreement with Global PET Imaging — GPI — to produce Rubidium-82, which is used in tests to determine if heart bypass surgery is necessary.

Rod Martin, executive chairman of GPI, said until recently there hasn't been a huge market demand for the isotope, and demand had been supplied by the U.S. Department of Energy. Martin said as PET scanners, which are nuclear imaging machines that produce a three-dimensional image of a human body, become more popular with cardiologists as a test, the demand for the isotope will increase.

Martin said PET provides better data for cardiologists and reduces the amount of radiation exposure for patients.

"There has been a growing demand for a very stable supply, and so there's a real need to increase that supply," Martin said. He said the supply of the isotope is limited because there are few facilities in the world that can produce it, which is why his company began looking for a partner.

Martin said it was the reactor's nuclear research program that attracted the company to Columbia. Martin said Bruce Guier, his co-founder and national sales director, is from Missouri and pressed to have MU be part of the project. "We looked into all of the reasonable options" for the project, and Guier’s "bias towards Missouri was dead on — they are absolutely the best," Martin said.

According to a news release, the agreement says GPI will build a 70 million electron volt cyclotron and related facility at MU’s Discovery Ridge. Martin said he doesn't know how much the project will cost, but he estimates it could be nearly $20 million.

A cyclotron is a machine that accelerates proton particles at high speeds, resulting in the production of isotopes. The machine will be purchased after the facility is built.
Wyatt said besides using the cyclotron to produce isotopes, which will be sent to medical facilities across the nation, MU graduate and postdoctoral students would be able to use the machine to identify additional isotopes that might be able to occur after additional research.

However, Wyatt said it will still be a couple years until the facility is built. "We still have to work through some of the additional details about setting up the operation," he said.

Once the facility is built, Martin expects big things. "This facility, we believe, will double global supply, not global as in our company, but double the world's supply of Strontium-82, which is the crucial material to make Rubidium," Martin said.
Museum’s move to off-campus home is going well

By Karyn Spory

Sunday, November 10, 2013 at 2:00 am

Moving a museum requires careful planning and execution, and it doesn't hurt if you're good at puzzles.

Alex Barker, director of the University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archeology, one of two museums in the midst of a move, said things are going well so far. "Moving a museum is always a difficult process, but as such things go, I think it's going well," he said.

The Museum of Art and Archeology and the Museum of Anthropology are moving to the former Ellis Fischel Cancer Center on Business Loop 70. The museums are temporarily moving off campus so Swallow Hall, the former home of the Museum of Anthropology, can be renovated and Pickard Hall, where the Museum of Art and Archeology was housed, can be decommissioned. The latter building has radiation contamination.

Fortunately, Barker said no radiation has been found in museum artifacts. He said more than a third of the museum's collection, which includes more than 1,600 objects, has been moved to the new facility. The university hired two fine arts moving companies — U.S. Art Co. Inc. of Randolph, Mass., and Terry Dowd Inc. of Chicago — to move the Museum of Art and Archeology. The status of the Museum of Anthropology's move is unclear because the director has not responded to interview requests. The two museums will be housed in the same building.

Barker said the Museum of Art and Archeology's collections are being moved in a particular order so they can be put into storage in the reverse order they'll be needed.

"As we unpack into collection cabinets or we install exhibits, there's a sequence in which that has to be done because of the construction sequence of what will be done when," he said. "It's not simply a matter of moving everything into storage. But as we're doing that we have to move in in the right sequence."

The museum is expected to be completely moved by the end of the year.
The Museum of Art and Archeology's large sculptures and casts likely will be the last items moved because of their weight and bulk, and the cast gallery likely will be the first thing open to visitors.

Barbara Smith, chief preparator for the Museum of Art and Archaeology, said one of the first things she began working on after the university announced the museums would move was creating a scale model of the cast gallery, which will be on the ground floor of the building, dubbed Mizzou North.

"This is one of the first things that needs to be set up," she said. "It was also one of the spaces that could be prepared for us first"

Smith said museum staff members have moved into offices on the second floor of Mizzou North, but the galleries have not yet been renovated. Once that happens, the second floor will feature exhibits of ancient and modern artwork, European/American paintings and the non-western display. There will be no room for rotating exhibits.

"We worked on storage first and because the ceilings are lower at Mizzou North, our footprint had to expand laterally and we ended up giving some exhibition space to storage," she said.

Smith said there are no schedules for openings yet.

The Museum of Art and Archeology and the Museum of Anthropology will move back to the MU campus eventually, but the timeline is still unknown. The university wants to move them back at the same time. MU spokesman Christian Basi said the timing is dependent on the status of Pickard Hall, and that won't be known until the Museum of Art and Archeology is completely moved out and further testing can be conducted.
Purdue University's president, Mitchell E. Daniels Jr., challenged the nation's public universities to adjust their costs to meet the needs of students and families. Nancy L. Zimpher, chancellor of the State University of New York, called on land-grant universities to cooperate in nationwide efforts to make universities more effective and efficient.

Mr. Daniels and Ms. Zimpher shared the stage on Sunday evening at the annual meeting of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities. While the scope and specifics of their recommendations differed, both leaders said that public higher education should be playing a larger role in solving the nation's biggest challenges, primarily by providing accessible, affordable, and effective educational opportunities.

Mr. Daniels, a former Republican governor of Indiana, said he had pushed for the two-year freeze on tuition that Purdue approved this year because he was more concerned about the increasing cost of college for students and their families than he was about the loss of roughly $40-million in tuition revenue. After encouraging people on the campus to contribute ideas, finding ways to deal with the tuition freeze "turned out not to be so very hard," Mr. Daniels said. "It served as a point of unity on our campus," he said.
While trying to contain costs, Purdue has announced plans to expand its programs in computer science, engineering, and technology, in order to build on the university's strengths and help meet the economic needs of Indiana and the nation.

Universities can save money by eliminating many of the redundancies and inefficiencies that have accumulated over the years, Mr. Daniels said, including the institutional rigidity that has developed from the tenure system.

Ms. Zimpher said that the problems higher education faces can't be fixed one university at a time, but through the collective impact of their actions.

One way to better cooperate, she said, would be for the land-grant association itself to coordinate initiatives to share administrative services, provide online courses, and spur economic development.

In addition, higher education could help eliminate the cost of remedial education by better cooperating with elementary and secondary schools. "We educate the teachers," Ms. Zimpher said.
College billboards capture captive highway viewers

Sunday, November 10, 2013

ST. LOUIS — Interstate travelers in search of food, fun or gas routinely turn to highway billboards to determine their next rest stop.

In Missouri, a bevy of institutions of higher learning hope those highway ramblers also pay attention to their oversized suggestions on where to send the kids to college.

Schools from the massive University of Missouri to highly selective Westminster College to trade schools galore are blanketing Missouri interstates with billboard ads. In central Missouri near Kingdom City, a lone billboard touting Webster University's national championship chess team is a strategic bid to capture some of the buzz the state's flagship university enjoys with an eastbound Interstate 70 display of six black-and-gold billboards spaced slightly apart to spell "M-I-Z-Z-O-U," with one billboard per letter. Westbound drivers on I-70 — including those traveling from St. Louis to Columbia — see a similar message, albeit with just two billboards: "MIZ" and "ZOU."

"People see those great Mizzou billboards, and now all of the sudden, they see our chess team," said John Costello, creative services director at the Webster Groves private school. "Hopefully, they remember Webster."

College marketers and billboard owners call the old-school advertising efforts vital as institutions in Missouri and across the country face increased enrollment pressures amid a drop in the college-age population.

"This was very, very tactical," Costello said.
Vince Miller, senior vice president and general manager at DDI Media, said his company provides billboard space to no fewer than 24 colleges and universities in Missouri and Illinois, including Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla; Fontbonne and Lindenwood in the St. Louis region; Ranken Technical College, Vatterott College and Kaplan University, which are for-profit schools; and Southern Illinois University's campuses in Carbondale and Edwardsville.

Miller said the higher education sector ranks among the company's Top 20 clients, with a noticeable surge of interest in recent years.

"They are fighting for a shrinking pool of prospects," he said. "They're very cognizant that their target audience is going to shrink in the next few years."

At Missouri, the athletics department's billboard-driven foray into Florida, Georgia and other once-unfamiliar territory to announce its 2012 entry into the Southeastern Conference remains the envy of other schools' marketing shops, said Andrew Grinch, associate athletic director for external operations and content.

The six-figure campaign included $61,000 for highway signs in Atlanta; Dallas; Jacksonville and Tampa, Fla.; Memphis, Tenn.; Birmingham, Ala. and Valdosta, Ga.

"It's kind of an antiquated way of advertising, with everything digital," acknowledged Grinch, who helped create Missouri's digital TV channel. "But they're still a viable way to get people talking."

More importantly, highway drivers and passengers have little choice — short of turning their heads or closing their eyes — but to look at the oversized ads.

"People can't help but see them," Grinch said. "You can't change the channel if you're driving."
FOUL: Chess team boast leaves Gorlok jocks shocked, mocked

November 08, 2013 3:00 pm

**FOUL:** It should be assumed that when a university’s athletic teams bear the nickname of an intersection rather than a fierce beast, student athletes might be a little defensive.

So it is that some Webster University Gorloks (Gore and Lockwood avenues, get it?) have their noses a shade out of joint. Reason: a billboard that the university caused to be erected on Interstate 70 in central Missouri touting its chess team. “Our top recruits are chess players,” the sign reads, alongside a photo of two Webster chess team members looking fierce and jock-y.

**The idea was to contrast Webster with the University of Missouri-Columbia, which has seven billboards of its own a few miles west touting its Division I athletic programs. Some of the Gorlok jocks didn’t appreciate the humor.**

Some of them took to social media to post irate comments and a link to a Wall Street Journal story about the cheeky billboard. The campus newspaper, the Webster Journal, quoted a post by Kevin Miller, a member of the Gorloks’ Division III men’s basketball team: “Webster University Athletics has won the SLIAC All Sports Trophy 9 straight years. How does (the university) repay us, by putting up a billboard saying the top athletic recruits on campus are on the chess team.”

SLIAC, by the way, is the St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, a 10-team loop that extends as far north as Mount Pleasant, Iowa, (Iowa Wesleyan) and as far east as Louisville, Ky. (Spalding University). Sure, they don’t offer scholarships in Division III and it’s not the Southeastern Conference, but the academics are pretty good and the competition is intense.

Webster’s student athletes may soon be soothed with a billboard of their own. Next: Rethink the Gorlok thing.

— Kevin Horrigan

---

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Mid-Missouri will observe Veterans Day in various ways
COLUMBIA — To recognize Veterans Day, a number of commemorative events are taking place in the next few days to honor servicemen and women, former and current, around Columbia.

MU will hold several events as part of Mizzou Veterans Week including a vigil, a parade and a wreath-laying ceremony. In Jefferson City, there will be a ceremony in the first-floor Capitol rotunda on Monday.

Mizzou Joint ROTC Veterans Day Vigil

- 2:15 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 9
- At the Boone County Courthouse

The vigil will be held in front of the Boone County war memorials at the courthouse. Volunteer cadets and midshipmen from the Army, Navy and Air Force ROTC will form two-person details every hour for 24 hours. A list of veterans’ names will be read during the vigil and at the final ceremony after the parade.

The Mizzou Joint ROTC Annual Veterans Day Parade and Closing Ceremony

- 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10
- From the MU columns to the Boone County Courthouse

The 28th annual parade will begin at the columns on Francis Quadrangle and move down Eighth Street, ending at the courthouse. It will feature the Boone County Fire Protection District's pipe and drum band, World War II-era Jeeps, antique convertibles and two veteran motorcycle groups, according to Cadet Patrick Stark, the primary in charge of the ROTC events. This is the first time in recent years the event is not scheduled for Veterans Day and also the first time in recent years it's being held in the afternoon.

"We really wanted the community to have access to the parade and enjoy it, so we moved it back to Sunday," Stark said.
The closing ceremony will be held outside the courthouse and include a three-volley salute and the playing of taps.

**Wreath Laying Ceremony**

- Noon Monday, Nov. 11
- At the Memorial Tower, Memorial Student Union

A wreath-laying ceremony and a guest speaker will precede the Remembrance Day National Roll Call when the names of fallen servicemen and women from Iraq and Afghanistan will be read. The ceremony will conclude with a national minute of silence at 1 p.m.; a reception at Memorial Union will follow.

**I Support Mizzou veterans photos**

- 1:15 p.m., Monday, Nov. 11
- At the Memorial Tower, Memorial Student Union

Students, staff and members of the community are invited to a group photo opportunity in honor of MU veterans.

**Speaker: Michael Hingson**

- 7 p.m. Monday, Nov. 11
- At the Chamber Auditorium, MU Student Center

Michael Hingson, a survivor of the Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks, will talk about how he escaped with the help of his guide dog Roselle. A reception will proceed at 6 p.m.

**Jefferson City Veterans Council Veterans Day Ceremony**

- 11 a.m. Monday, Nov. 11
- At the Capitol, first floor rotunda

The capitol’s ceremony will include music and speakers to pay tribute to veterans, according to Wanda Seeney, Office of Administration spokeswoman.
Car crash damages MU's Conley House

Friday, November 8, 2013 at 2:00 pm

The historic Conley House on the University of Missouri campus was struck by a car early Friday morning, MU police Capt. Brian Weimer said.

James Burke, 20, was driving a 2001 Lexus westbound on Conley Avenue at 2:20 a.m. when he lost control of the car just west of Sixth Street and struck the building, Weimer said. Burke was taken to University Hospital. He was treated and released. The car, which sustained extensive damage, was towed from the scene.

Campus facilities crews were assessing damage to the home, which was built by businessman Sanford Conley in 1869, Weimer said.

There is no indication alcohol was involved in the crash, and the cause is still under investigation, he said.
Car crashes into Columbia's historic Conley House

By Alex Stewart

November 8, 2013 | 7:08 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — A car crashed into the historic Conley House on Sanford Street early Friday morning. Two windows of the building were broken, and its structure was damaged.

On Friday morning, bricks littered the surrounding grass, and insulation was exposed around the damaged area.

The house, built in 1868 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is owned by MU and used as office space. Campus Facilities is assessing the damage.

At 2:20 a.m., a security officer heard a loud noise and saw the car hit the building, said Capt. Brian Weimer, MU Police Department public information officer.

The driver, Burke James, who had been acting as a designated driver, had already dropped his friends off, and there was no one else in the vehicle, Weimer said. James was taken to University Hospital. Weimer said James had no visible injuries but complained of pain.

Weimer said there was no indication that alcohol was a factor in the accident.

An investigation into the cause of the crash is continuing.

Supervising editor is Allie Hinga.
MU gets chance to buy into Arizona observatory

Deal offers chance to boost research, status.

By Karyn Spory

Sunday, November 10, 2013 at 2:00 am

Angela Speck can't promise that buying into a world-class observatory will help boost the University of Missouri's rating in the Association of American Universities or attract more students to the MU physics department, but she knows it will allow for riskier research, and that is what science is about, she says.

Speck, director of astronomy at MU, has led the charge to get the university to buy into the WIYN Observatory, which sits atop Kitt Peak National Observatory in southern Arizona. The observatory is a facility with a 3.5-meter telescope that is owned and operated by the WIYN consortium, which consists of the University of Wisconsin, Indiana University, Yale University and the National Optical Astronomy Observatory. However, two partners, Yale and National Optical Astronomy Observatory, are leaving the consortium, opening up the chance for MU.

"This is also a really good research-class telescope, it means we can go and do things that otherwise we might not get time to do," Speck said.

MU has a telescope in Law Observatory, located atop the Physics Building, but its main purpose is for outreach and education for the general public.

Eric Hooper, a professor of astronomy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and interim director of the WIYN Observatory, said the mirror within the Arizona telescope is 75 times
larger in area than the one at MU. It also has a suite of sophisticated custom instruments and two large cameras. The telescope is known for its image quality.

Speck said MU will buy into the observatory at a 5 percent level, meaning it will have 15 dedicated nights for research. Speck said at this level, the annual payment will be $130,000, with $50,000 coming from the physics and astronomy department and $80,000 coming from the MU Provost's office.

Speck said having dedicated time at the Arizona telescope will allow students to learn how to use the telescope and faculty to conduct more innovative research.

"It's enough time that we can spend 10 nights doing solid" research "that will definitely get publication but might not be earth shattering, but this gives us time to do something that's on the edge — that's something that in science we have to be able to do," she said.

Engaging in more and better research could help the whole MU campus.

As part of MU's strategic plan, the university has set a goal of improving its ranking in the American Association of Universities, or AAU, from No. 32 of 34, its current ranking, to No. 28 by 2018. Universities are ranked on four metrics — federal research funding, National Academy of Science members, faculty awards for quality work and faculty citation in high-impact journals. If MU improves its ranking, the university could get more funding from the UM System.

Speck sees the observatory deal as a way to improve, especially in faculty citations and the number of post-doctoral students. "I have had three different people turn me down when I offer them a job because we didn't have institutional access to a telescope," she said.

Speck said she had the same issue when she tried to recruit new faculty. "Now we have something that makes it a little bit easier to get people," she said.

Haojing Yan, assistant professor of physics and astronomy, agreed.

"For astronomy students, especially graduate students, it will be helpful for their career if they can be properly trained in the techniques of observation," he said.

This article was published in the Sunday, November 10, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "MU buying into major observatory: Deal offers chance to boost research, status."
City hires consultant to develop broadband plan

By Ashley Jost

Saturday, November 9, 2013 at 2:00 am Comments (2)

The city of Columbia this week hired Magellan Advisors to determine the state of broadband infrastructure in the area and how to improve it.

The effort is a collaboration of the city, the University of Missouri and Boone County. Magellan Advisors, a Denver-based telecom consulting firm, is charged with developing a broadband strategic plan that is broken down into a multi-step process, said Connie Kacprowicz, spokeswoman for Columbia Water and Light.

Currently, Magellan Advisors is in the needs assessment stage of the process, Kacprowicz said, and that involves talking to different companies in town to gather information about their experiences with broadband services and suggestions for improvement.

"A lot of it is finding out what kind of resources we already have in town and what can be done with them," she said.

The timeline for the project is about four months, Kacprowicz said, which includes the current needs assessment stage, the development of a broadband strategy and the delivery of a final report to the city. The latter will include the firm's findings and a suggested way to move forward.

The contract with Magellan Advisors is for $47,250, Kacprowicz said.

After the strategy and final report are complete, the issue likely would go through the normal city review process and be put in front of the Columbia City Council, she said.

Magellan Advisors was chosen from 10 responses received from the city before the May 31 request for proposal deadline. The initial responses were reduced to three finalists, and each of the three finalists made presentations about their proposals to the city and Regional Economic Development Inc. before the final decision was made.
Columbia, Mo. – The University of Missouri Trulaske College of Business launched an execMBA program last fall. Bloomberg Businessweek recognized the program for its innovative hybrid set-up.

The execMBA program only requires students to be on-campus 25 percent of the time. The rest of their coursework is completed by watching online lectures at their convenience. This was a risky move, according to Bloomberg, because MBA applicant usually place high importance in in-person interaction. But with 19 students in its first year of existence and an estimated 35 person-participation by Trulaske Dean Joan Gabel, the program has proven success.

The execMBA program stretches across 21 months requiring 48 credit hours, plus an international trip. Advancements in technology still allows for classmates to collaborate and cater the workload to their individual schedules.

Although the off-site style program excludes the Trulaske College of Business from the Bloomberg Businessweek ranking, the publication acknowledges that almost all programs host some portion of their curriculum online.
MU composers soundtrack upcoming Stephens dance concert

By Amy Wilder

Sunday, November 10, 2013 at 2:00 am

When artists of differing disciplines combine their talents, the results can be magical, as dancers from Stephens College and composers from the University of Missouri are discovering this fall. Creative minds, focused on one aspect of an event or performance, challenge and feed the minds of their partners and vice versa, and the result is mutual growth and, ideally, the creation of something that couldn't have been otherwise achieved.

This first-time collaboration has been a long time coming — MU Professors William Lackey, Stefan Freund and Tom McKenney first contacted Stephens dance Chairwoman Carol Estey last winter to suggest the project — and it is not entirely unprecedented; MU professors, including McKenney, have worked with choreographers at Stephens in the past. But direct student exchange was a new idea.

"I thought it would be interesting for our composers to work with their choreographers," Lackey said. "We don't have a dance department here at MU, and we try to put our composers in situations where they can expand themselves artistically. Naturally, collaboration with other artists is a part of that."

Collaboration involves new challenges, in the form of communicating between creators from different backgrounds and with vocabularies that might be foreign. It also involves the challenge of negotiating a merging of what could be very different artistic visions.

"Our part was really different from theirs," Estey said. "We've always had this class. Usually, it's their senior capstone project, and they usually choose to choreograph. … We thought the students in this particular class were in an ideal place to participate in the project "because their heads were really in a place where they could get around this idea."

There were various possibilities for the shape and scope of the project. When Stephens decided to incorporate the project into its senior capstone course, "I was quite happy," Lackey said, because it lent a high degree of importance and commitment on their end.

"But then, it's also intense because it means … there's no backing out, really," he added. "This isn't a class for our composers; they signed up to do this as part of their portfolio."
Because it wasn't part of the MU curriculum, composers at all levels of study were invited to participate, and they range from sophomores to graduate students. Trey Mackler, an MU sophomore who is working with Stephens student LeeAnn Davis, said he was a little nervous at first about being stacked up against more educationally advanced composition students but was relieved after everyone gave presentations about their visions "because there's no real way to compare us all," he said.

"We're all such different voices, and we all have completely different ideas of composition and the creative process and what we want to represent. I didn't feel intimidated … because really it was a battle against myself."

Mackler said his collaboration with Davis was a little unusual in the group because her vision heavily influenced his composition, and the pair have negotiated something entirely new between them.

"She had a very clear idea of exactly what she wanted," he said. "Talking about these ideas, I was like, 'I think I have a lot of things I can apply to this and really bring this out.' This is my first time ever collaborating, and what I think is good is not always what she thinks is good.

"It's really challenging," he continued, "and it gives us a new way to look at our processes, and we can really get out of the box — and get out of these old habits that we've established and create something new that's really great. When everything comes together and works out. It's really rewarding, and it's so worth it."
Beginnings are exciting — full of promise and potential, not yet beset with challenges and trials. For one pair of musicians, Paola Savvidou and Jonathan Kuuskoski, a new beginning in college also meant the beginning of a productive professional career. And later, the partnership formed a romance, as well — the two are married.

Professors in the music department at the University of Missouri, Savvidou and Kuuskoski met while undergraduates at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "We met in theory class," Savvidou recalled. They began practicing and performing together then but didn't begin dating for some time.

"You know how you say, when you first come into college that 70 percent of people meet their life partner in college? I remember hearing that in orientation and thinking, 'OK, whatever,' and then in my first class, I actually met her," Kuuskoski said. "So they're really right about that."

"Life partner" seems to be the perfect description for the couple, who work together, are married and converse in a complementary fashion similar to a musical performance, listening in turn and adding harmonies and embellishments to one another's melodies.

In addition to teaching, the two tour the country as the four hands — or two pianos — duo "New Muse," bringing new compositions to audiences in innovative ways. Their name is a shortened version of "New Music Everywhere," an ensemble the couple co-created while in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin. "The idea behind it was to bring new music to new audiences and unconventional venues," Savvidou said.

"Madison is a very hip town," Kuuskoski added. "There's a lot of arts in general, and there's a lot of cool music, especially indie bands and that kind of thing. But what we found … is that if you wanted to see contemporary classical music, … it wasn't happening anywhere off campus." Classical performances were limited to either the concert hall in the music school or the symphony, and though these programs drew in big-name performers, audiences tended to be small.
Observing that different groups of people — especially younger people — tended to gravitate more toward venues such as coffee shops or clubs with which they were comfortable, the pair decided to take music directly to these places to make classical music more accessible and fun.

Combining forces with a composer and a conductor, "we basically created these one-off concerts in different venues, and each one was based on the space," Kuuskoski said. Every member of the group had some degree of experience with community-based art programs, running outreach programs or coordinating piano pedagogy labs, "so we had a lot of connections to the community and experience, and that helped," he added.

Partnering with different musicians and the administrative staff of particular venues, they designed each show to fit the space. "We did that in a gallery. … We played installations of new music for different performers in different parts of the gallery space," Savvidou said.

All of the group's original members are now in far-flung locations, and the duo has adapted their own performances to the scope of their current lives. "We're very open to evolving," Kuuskoski said. "One of the most exciting things about the School of Music here is its new-music program," in which the pair participates, in one capacity, as a faculty duo.

They also put out calls for original scores and travel the country performing, most recently at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Their goal is to get an audience involved in the experience and comfortable in the concert hall, which tends to be stiff and formal.

"We try to always have a fun spin to our concerts," Kuuskoski said. "Last year, we had the audience sit on stage in Whitmore Recital Hall, which maybe had never happened before. But they liked it. They liked being up close because playing four hands piano is fun to watch."