MU School of Medicine’s pre-admissions program adds seven schools

Students in rural areas are sought.

By Ashley Jost

Thursday, January 9, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (2)

The University of Missouri School of Medicine's Bryant Scholars Pre-Admissions Program is now accepting applications from rural students at twice as many colleges and universities.

The program expanded to include seven institutions from which students from rural areas of Missouri can apply for pre-admission to the School of Medicine. Pre-admission allows the students the opportunity to get to know the program, and each other, before they arrive, said Kathleen Quinn, program director of the MU Area Health Education Center.

Quinn said since 1995, the School of Medicine has been able to pre-admit 15 students from rural areas around the state, but in the past few years, it has been unable to fill those 15 spots. The hope is that by adding these seven schools, the program can fill the 15 spots during the coming year.

The seven institutions added to the program, effective immediately, are Missouri Western State University, William Jewell College, Missouri Southern State University, Westminster College, Northwest Missouri State University, University of Missouri-St. Louis and University of Missouri-Kansas City. Before the addition of these schools, there were six participating schools.

Quinn said she isn't sure why the school has had trouble filling the 15 pre-admission slots, but she said a guess would be the rigorous requirements. Students have to be Missouri residents from a rural area, as designated by the National Center of Education Statistics, must have a 28 on their ACT, be finishing their sophomore year of college and have a 3.3 minimum grade-point average.
"We know successful rural kids are out there; it's just a matter of informing them about the program," Quinn said.

The program students start after graduation teaches them everything about practicing medicine in rural areas, in hopes they bring their medical knowledge to a rural area later on.

"Students in rural areas are more likely to return to rural areas to practice," Quinn said, adding that in the program, students are exposed to three clinical programs, all which expose them to rural areas. "We like to have them experience pretty extensively what it's like to be a rural practitioner and the joys and challenges that brings."

Quinn said 37 percent of the Missouri population lives in a rural area, but only 8 percent of practitioners in the state are practicing in rural areas. If a physician works in a rural place, he or she brings practitioners, pharmacists and nurses, as well as around $1.3 million annually to a town, she said.

Michael Amspoker, biology professor and coordinator for the pre-admission program at Westminster College in Fulton, said putting students in medical school programs has been a strength for the college for years. It already had programs for pre-admission in osteopathic medicine at A.T. Still University in Kirksville and for a chiropractic program, but many students are more interested in the allopathic route, and this program fills that need.

"This is an opportunity for us to start attracting rural students who want to come to a smaller school," he said.

The goal is to expand to all four-year Missouri institutions, Quinn said, but there isn't a timeline for that. Applications for students interested in the pre-admission program are due June 1, giving students time to get their spring 2014 grades.

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Belcher to retire from Columbia Public Schools, take MU job

By Catherine Martin

Thursday, January 9, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (25)

Columbia Public Schools Superintendent Chris Belcher has announced he will retire effective June 30 and take a job at the University of Missouri that will allow him to teach future school administrators.

Belcher sent a letter to the Columbia Board of Education notifying members of his decision yesterday afternoon.

"My five years of service to Columbia Public Schools has been the highlight of my many years in public education," he said in the letter. "This decision was more emotional than I anticipated."

Belcher has spent more than 30 years in public education, which makes him eligible to retire and receive the maximum benefits, district spokeswoman Michelle Baumstark said last month.

Since the district last renewed Belcher's contract in April, he is making $198,992 a year. His maximum benefit from the public schools retirement system is estimated to be $13,225 per month, or $158,700 annually. Belcher said very few people take the maximum benefit.

Public school employees are not eligible for Social Security.

Belcher said yesterday that when he came to Columbia Public Schools five years ago, he knew it would be his last job in the public school system because of the way the retirement system works. He became eligible to retire two years ago, he said, but he planned to stay for another three years or so, when he hit the six-year point in the district.

"The university didn't care about my plans," he said.
Belcher said he saw a position advertised at the university that seemed like the perfect fit — an assistant professor of professional practice, which focuses on training superintendents and principals. Belcher has been a superintendent for nine years and was a principal for five years.

"When the job offer came, it seemed like the best of both worlds," he said. "I could stay in Columbia and still have all my contacts, and I could train future superintendents."

Belcher will start the MU job in August. The university will pay Belcher $70,000 a year, MU spokeswoman Jesslyn Chew said.

Although the MU job seems ideal because it allows Belcher to continue working on something he's passionate about, he said he wasn't prepared for emotions he felt when he announced his retirement.

"After all of these years preparing for retirement, … I thought it would be more celebratory," he said. "But I have a guilty feeling. People have treated me so well here that I don't want to let anyone down."

The school board will meet Monday and vote whether to accept the letter of retirement and will begin talking about next steps, Baumstark said.

The district doesn't have an official timeframe set for selecting a new superintendent, but that will be part of the board's discussion.

"We want it to be a very fluid process" and want to make sure "the board has the opportunity to interact with the candidates and the community has the opportunity to interact with candidates," Baumstark said.

Ideally, a new leader would be selected a couple of months before Belcher's June retirement, so Belcher would have some interaction with his successor. The fact that Belcher will still be in town, however, provides a "significant advantage" for the district, Baumstark said.

"He has spent more than 30 years in public education and five years in Columbia Public Schools. He's accomplished quite a bit in his time as superintendent, and with that comes a lot of background knowledge that will have to be transferred to the new individual," she said.

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Posted in Education on Thursday, January 9, 2014 2:00 pm.
Danforth Center adds research muscle

Launches four new research teams, adding 40 to 50 jobs in total

By Tim Logan tlogan@post-dispatch.com

NO MU MENTION

One of the region’s biggest biotech research institutes is beefing up its roster again.

The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center will announce today that it is hiring four new principal investigators, a move that will add 40 to 50 new jobs at the Creve Coeur research facility. The expansion comes as work gets under way on a new $45 million building at Danforth, but is actually separate from that growth, said president Jim Carrington.

“These people will be filling up the existing space in our current building,” he said. “We’re squeezing as much as we can into what’s now a very crowded space.”

Two of the four new principal investigators — who help shape the center’s research agenda, apply for grant funding and manage teams of scientists — will fill open positions, Carrington said. Two will be new positions. They’ll bring the number of research teams at Danforth to 20, Carrington said, and help deepen the center’s expertise in in-demand fields like plant genomics, root growth and microbe interactions.

“They’re going to be focusing on technologies that will really move us forward,” Carrington said.

Three of the four investigators — Rebecca Bart, Dan Chitwood and Christopher Topp — are relatively early in their research careers, while the fourth — longtime University of Missouri-St. Louis professor Elizabeth Kellogg — is a veteran of the field. That’s intentional, said Carrington. He’s trying to build a team of researchers with a variety of experience levels.

“We think of ourselves like a baseball team, seeking two types of talent,” he said. “Young talent that’ll be developed and ultimately has a good chance to succeed, and free agents with a record of achievement.”

Also like baseball, hiring top-notch research scientists is a competitive sport. These scientists are in high demand at other facilities around the country and the world, Carrington said, and to attract them and get their teams up and running will cost $500,000 to $2 million apiece, depending on the scientists and their research needs.

“We have to be competitive,” he said.
Once they’re on board, the investigators should be largely self-sustaining, seeking grant funding to launch their projects and hire teams of scientists and technicians. Each team is typically 10 to 12 people, meaning that four new principal investigators can translate into about 40 or 50 new jobs.

The center’s growth, he said, will help St. Louis compete in a slice of the economy where it has some strong advantages — plant sciences. Danforth researchers and support staff go to work at local plant and biotech companies, and it’s not unusual for technology developed at Danforth to be licensed to private companies either big and established or small and startup. So when hiring new lead researchers, Carrington said, the center tries to look for those with an entrepreneurial bent.

“We’re really excited,” he said. “This group collectively is a really entrepreneurial, really creative group.”

Carrington said he expects to hire more principal investigators as the Danforth Center’s new facility, which is on track to open in early 2016, gets closer to completion.
Higher education is one of the more expensive investments many people will ever make. The average cost of a year in college, including tuition, fees, room and board, now runs about $23,000 — enough to buy a new car. Graduates typically leave with $30,000 each in student loan debt.

But cost is just one thing that deserves to be considered when young people decide whether and where to go. Another is what they get for their money. That's harder to measure, and it's not something that can be reduced to a dollar figure.

A school that offers mediocre instruction or demands too little of students may leave them poorly equipped for the real world even though they have diplomas.

Most people hope a college education will help them get a good job. But universities have a broader and deeper mission than that. Reading Shakespeare is valuable even if it doesn't strengthen your resume.

Fortunately, someone has decided to try to figure out what people get out of college, in both tangible and intangible ways. The Gallup polling organization and Purdue University have unveiled a project to survey college grads to find out how they're doing.

Gallup Chairman Jim Clifton and Purdue President Mitch Daniels write in The Wall Street Journal that the survey will ask college graduates questions like: "Are you employed? How much do you earn? It will also measure those critical qualities that
Gallup finds employers truly value and are predictive of work success: a person's workplace engagement and well-being.

It will also inquire about community involvement, personal relationships and physical well-being. Purdue will commission a separate survey of its own alumni to see how they are doing and how they compare with other college graduates. The first results, based on a sampling of 30,000 people, should be out in the spring.

"We owe it to potential students, we owe it to businesses who might recruit our students, to be able to say something with statistical confidence about the quality of our graduates," says Daniels, the former reform-oriented governor of Indiana.

This knowledge can only be helpful to youngsters and their parents who are making decisions of huge importance for their careers. It also promises to be a spur to schools to learn how their graduates are doing and what professors and administrators can do to improve their professional outcomes. The published data will even allow conferences to compare themselves with others.

But more than money and career are relevant. The survey is designed to tell colleges whether they are helping their students achieve the worthwhile, rewarding lives they seek.

"What Gallup is measuring is well-being, and that in the end is the purpose of a college education, especially in a democracy -- pursuit of happiness is the bottom line," Anthony Carnevale, director of Georgetown University's Center of Education and the Workforce, told The Chronicle of Higher Education.

"If college serves these other purposes — that is, it allows you to live more fully — that is not unimportant."

New data about important matters can be highly valuable, and the Gallup-Purdue undertaking, funded with a $2 million grant from the Lumina Foundation, should provide a lot of it. Employers are bound to welcome the project. But no one stands to gain more than colleges and those who attend them.

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Lawsuit challenges executive order on same-sex couples tax filings

By Marie French

JEFFERSON CITY • Four Missourians filed a lawsuit on Wednesday challenging Gov. Jay Nixon’s decision permitting same-sex couples married in other states to file tax returns jointly.

The lawsuit, filed in Cole County Circuit Court, argues that the executive order violates Missouri’s Constitution. An amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage was passed by Missouri voters in 2004.

Michael Whitehead, a Kansas city attorney representing the plaintiffs, said the governor should respect the state constitution as it currently stands.

“I am personally concerned about the Governor’s disrespect for the will of over 70 percent of voters,” Whitehead said.

Nixon announced his direction to the Department of Revenue in November after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in June 2013 struck down the Defense of Marriage Act. The Internal Revenue Service accepts joint tax returns from married same-sex couples regardless of the policy of the state they reside in.

A spokesman for the governor declined to comment on the lawsuit. In November, Nixon said Missouri law requires couples who file joint tax returns with the federal government to file state tax returns jointly. However, his office later clarified that exemptions, deductions and other tax benefits available to married couples under Missouri state law would not apply to same-sex couples filing jointly.

Joshua Hawley, an associate professor at the University of Missouri’s School of Law who has practiced constitutional law, said the governor’s actions were not the norm.

“It’s a little unusual for an executive to be able to materially vary a state tax law by executive order,” Hawley said. “The federal government regulation which permits same-sex couples to file jointly certainly doesn’t compel the state to do the same.”

The order may substantially change tax liability, Hawley said. “The question is, ‘Does he have the administrative authority to change tax liability and filing requirements to issue this order?’”

The office of Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster had not yet received a copy of the lawsuit but spokeswoman Nanci Gonder said in an email that Nixon was following the law on tax filings.
“The attorney general’s role is to defend such state laws to the extent possible, and not to presume that our Legislature’s actions violate our state’s constitution,” Gonder said.

Whitehead said the lawsuit also challenges the law that ties federal and state tax returns. “That statute has become unconstitutional,” he said, if it means the state must allow jointly filing same-sex couples at the federal level to file jointly at the state level.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit Missouri Baptist Convention leaders Justin Mosher and Don Hinkle, Missouri Family Network founder Kerry Messer and Joe Ortwerth, executive director of the Missouri Family Policy Council and a former St. Charles County executive.

A.J. Bockelman is the executive director for PROMO, which advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality. He said the attention drawn to the tax benefits of marriage actually supports the argument for marriage equality and that he wasn’t concerned about the lawsuit.

“We know our opponents are going to lash out,” Bockelman said. “I would categorize this as the last dying breath of a wounded animal.”

Missouri is the only state that prohibits same-sex marriage which has decided to accept joint tax returns from gay couples.

A couple in Kansas filed a lawsuit in December arguing the ban on same-sex couples filing joint tax returns is discriminatory. Legislation has been filed in Ohio and Colorado to allow same-sex couples to file joint tax returns. Ohio also has a constitutional amendment banning recognition of same-sex marriages while Colorado allows civil unions for gay couples.
More snowy owls flying south in search of food
Thursday, January 9, 2014 | 6:53 p.m. CST; updated 12:22 a.m. CST, Friday, January 10, 2014

Snowy owls are rare in Missouri. This snowy owl was observed at Smithville Lake near Kansas City in December. | COURTESY OF TERRI NICKERSON
BY HANNA JACUNSKI

COLUMBIA — At least 10 sightings of snowy owls have been confirmed in Missouri, said Brad Jacobs, wildlife ecologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Hedwig, a pet snowy owl in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, is an icon of the species. Mid-Missouri residents now have a better chance of seeing a snowy owl in their own neighborhoods, but take caution: It might not be as eager to carry your letters as Hedwig would be.

An eruption of an irruption
When numbers of the snowy owl’s mouse-like prey, lemmings, run low the owls travel south in search of new food sources. This migration is called an irruption, according to a news release from the Missouri Department of Conservation.

"Think of sugar being out at the grocery store you always go to: You may have to go to another store that is farther away," Boone County conservation agent Adam Doerhoff said in an email. Missouri "is one of those places we see a few of these owls when that happens."
This winter snowy owls are appearing sooner, further south and in greater numbers than in previous years. Snowy owls typically live in high arctic regions of North America and Eurasia, but the owls' southern-most winter range can stretch through the Midwest.

The state may be on target to top the most recent and largest irruption in the winter of 2011-12, according to the release.

**How to spot one**
The first sign of a snowy owl is the bird's size. **Snowy owls can be up to 20 inches tall with a 4.5-foot-long wingspan, said MU School of Natural Resources Director Mark Ryan.** Male snowy owls are predominantly white while females have darker speckling on their wings and back, but all will look distinctly white from a distance.

Snowy owls have rounded heads because they do not have ear tufts. John Faaborg, MU professor of Biological Science and Fisheries and Wildlife, said the barred owl doesn't have tufts either, but isn't white enough to be easily mistaken for a snowy owl.

If you hope to find a snowy by listening for unfamiliar hooting, you might be out of luck. "Hooting is generally related to territory, nesting and mating, which snowy owls aren't really doing down here," Faaborg said. "They're pretty quiet."

Since snowy owls' natural habitat is wide-open tundra, the owls can be found most often in open fields and near airports. Faaborg said they don't really require trees.

"Keep an eye out though," Faaborg said. "They like to sit on top of telephone poles."

**Not the safest journey**
Even though the phenomenon is not a new or mysterious one, snowy owls this far south are decidedly out of their comfort zones. Jacobs encourages motorists to be especially wary of birds landing near the highway or other open spaces.

"Most of the owls are no more than eight months old, and have probably never seen a human or a car before," Jacobs said. "They're kinda fearless."

Not only can the owls be easily hit by cars and trucks, they are also outside of their typical hunting conditions. In Missouri, the owls tend to hunt mice and voles but they are unfamiliar with the prey's behavior and aren't always successful.
"They can't really figure it out," Jacobs said.

Faaborg said many owls die before they are able to return north again.

"A few, maybe three, years ago, we were actually able to catch [a snowy owl]," Faaborg said. "They took it into the vet school, and it was emaciated."

The birds should be admired from afar rather than approached or disturbed.

Snowy owl sightings should be reported to either Jacobs or a local Conservation agent, and birders can log their sightings on the Audubon Society website.
COLUMBIA, Mo. — The last project Molly Myers worked on before leaving her job at Women's and Children's Hospital was a video service that would allow parents to see their newborn babies staying in the neonatal intensive care unit. Pregnant with twins at the time, Myers hadn't expected to be one of the first to use the program.

Called the Telehealth Love and Care service, it allows parents to see and talk to their babies even if they can't get to the NICU.

"It's kind of like Skype," said John Pardalos, a neonatologist and medical director of the NICU at the Children's Hospital.

Its simplicity is deceptive, however, because it fills two important needs: It allows mothers who give birth at University Hospital but go home before their babies to see and talk to their babies if they can't get to the hospital. And it allows mothers who give birth at about a dozen other hospitals in mid-Missouri to recover in the hospitals where they gave birth while their babies are transported to Columbia for the special care they need.

"That was one of the goals: Let the moms stay where they need the care," Pardalos said. "Before this service was available, moms would force their (obstetrician) to discharge them from the hospital so they could go see their baby."
Myers went into labor nine weeks early, and her twin daughters, Suzi and Layla, were born Nov. 21, 2012. They spent 55 days in the hospital's NICU. During that time, Myers and her husband, Danny Myers, split their time between their son, Will, and the NICU.

"Not being able to visit my girls was awful," Myers said. "At the time, (my son) was 21 months. I felt for 55 days of our life we had a divided household."

Although the Myerses live in Columbia, Molly Myers twice found herself unable to visit her daughters: once when she developed a respiratory infection and again when her son was sick.

"The first time I was kept out of the NICU, it was four days after I delivered them," Myers said. "We still didn't know what was going on with them, so especially during that time, I utilized (Telehealth Love and Care) to talk to the doctors and ask about everything that was going on."

Danny Myers, who manages the program for the hospital, said they are working to create the service in more hospitals around mid-Missouri so that when a baby is transferred to the NICU, "mom can see her baby from there," he said.

That interaction between mothers and fathers and babies is important to babies' development and health, research shows, because it builds an important bond that not even the best medical stuff can substitute to provide.

For parents who live outside of Columbia, a baby in the NICU can mean many long commutes.

"We've had some moms who have other children who can't leave because of school," Pardalos said. "This way they can see this baby while they're still at home taking care of the older kids."
Once parents head home, they can see their babies by calling into the NICU and letting a nurse know they'd like to video chat. The nurse sets up an iPad at the baby's station and lets the parents know which device to log into from a secure website.

"You just have to have an Internet connection and a Web camera," Danny Myers said. Parents can almost always talk to their babies immediately when it's convenient for them. The only times they have to wait are during nurse shift changes and if the baby is having a procedure done.

Myers said the hospital is looking to work with local libraries around mid-Missouri to allow families without Internet access or Web cameras a chance to see their babies.

Children's Hospital NICU nurse Jennifer Hanford said the hospital is the major center for infant intensive care for all of mid-Missouri, so many parents live outside of Columbia.

"Some of the parents are hours away," she said. "They can't always get to the hospital every day, and of course that's everybody's goal."

**It's more than peace of mind for parents; it's about forming the important bond between parents and babies that begins right after birth, said Kristy vanMarle, an assistant professor of psychology at MU.**

"One of the most important things that starts to develop right after birth is attachment," she said. "Babies are engaging in interactive experiences, having people touch them, love them and look at them."

Strong attachment bonds built early in life are indicators of future success. Research shows that babies with good attachment grow into children who are better at regulating and controlling their emotions and behavior, are better at reading others' emotions, and are more competent in school, vanMarle said.
She said the program may help babies in the NICU make up for some of the early attachment experiences they may miss out on while in the hospital.

"New babies that are born full term are in their mom's and dad's arms for much of the day," she said. "Premature babies are lacking in that physical contact. It's not going to replace those kinds of early experiences, but if they're going to be missing out on those opportunities, this is something that will have a positive impact."

Direct parental interactions "are much emotionally richer than they would be otherwise," she said. "It's a good thing to have the parents doing this because the staff at the hospital, as loving as they are, don't love the babies in the same way the parents do."

Read more here: http://www.kansascity.com/2014/01/10/4736423/hospital-links-parents-nicu-babies.html#storylink=cpy