University of Missouri Health Care shifts nurses’ job titles, duties

Staff apply for the positions.

By Ashley Jost

Thursday, March 27, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (12)

University of Missouri Health Care is eliminating current job titles for the hospital's nursing staff and reclassifying them into new roles.

About 75 inpatient nurses are applying for new positions under the new organizational model hospital administrators have been exploring over the past year, MU Health spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said in an email.

None of the staff has been laid off, Jenkins said, adding that there are enough new positions for all of the current staff members whose roles no longer exist. The time that clinical nurses have from their previous roles will still count toward their retirement.

Previously, nursing staff fell within three job types: nurse manager, nurse educator and nurse supervisor. Those titles are being eliminated. Through the new system, nurses will operate under three new roles: clinical manager, service line specialist and performance improvement specialist.

"What we're doing is organizing inpatient care at University Hospital around service lines: cardiology, oncology, neurosciences and so on," Jenkins said during an interview. "A new management model pairs physician co-managers with administrative co-managers. The reason behind this is one of our great strengths is our multidisciplinary approach to patient care and the breadth of our specialty care."

Physicians will be paired with nurses in hopes of streamlining the reporting structure. The ratio of doctors to nurses hasn't been finalized as the reapplication process is in progress.

Because much of the implementation of the new model is still in progress, there is no total salary cost amount, Jenkins said in an email.
"However, we expect the overall salary amount for the new leadership model will be equal to or greater than the current salary total, because all three newly created positions have higher salary ranges than the former positions," she said.

Jenkins said Chief Nursing Executive Deborah Pasch and Chief Medical Officer Stevan Whitt are leading the restructuring. The timeline for when it began and when staff members were notified is unclear. For many nurses, the reapplication process started in the past month.

Bridgett Robbins is one of several people who have reapplied and already received their revised roles in the new organizational structure. Robbins is the clinical manager for the progressive care and family medicine unit.

"I wasn't concerned," she said about when she heard restructuring was on the way. Robbins has been at the hospital for 20 years.

Robbins said new leaders are hoping to gain input from the other nurses so the changes can be molded around any needs. It's all a work in progress.

"It's all the same people with new, dynamic titles," she said.

One of the benefits Robbins said she expects is a model that allows "intentionally collaborative support" with physicians because nurses ultimately will be paired up with them. She said that partnership existed before, but it wasn't codified in policy.

The new model is based on ideas obtained from management and supervisors as well as employee and patient surveys, Jenkins said. She said input from nurses, physicians, administrators, support staff and other health professionals was sought to better understand their "ideas about education, training, goals, patient satisfaction and employee engagement."

The service line structure isn't new to the health care system. A report from the Center for Organization, Leadership and Management Research within the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs in 2001 said service lines serve multiple purposes, including determining and reducing costs, improving marketing of services and/or improving processes and quality of care.

There are four goals for the new clinical leadership model, Jenkins said: improving patient outcomes; investing in additional training, education and coaching; giving staff a greater voice in identification of problems; and implementing a process for succession planning based on training and education.

This reclassification is unrelated to the job consolidation pilot program that MU Health tried in May that reclassified many union employees to non-union, Jenkins said.
Nurses face new education standards as MU Health Care restructures jobs

Some will need further degrees.

By Ashley Jost

Thursday, March 27, 2014 at 2:00 pm

For the 75 University of Missouri Health Care nurses who have to apply for new, reclassified positions, education is a factor in their decision-making.

Although the job descriptions of the three new positions differ from the jobs they're replacing, there is some overlap. Regardless, all three jobs have increased education requirements that must be met in the next three years.

Previously, nurse managers required a Bachelor of Science in nursing. A position that incorporates nurse manager duties, the clinical manager, requires a bachelor's degree in a clinical specialty, as well as a Master of Science degree in the health care field, business field or something related, according to the job description.

Clinical managers hired before July 1 have three years to get their master's degrees. Anyone hired for the position after July 1 must already have a master's.

The old job of education nurse required a bachelor's in nursing, though a master's degree is preferred. A new position, performance improvement specialist, has similar duties involving professional development. The new role requires a master's degree in nursing, engineering, health management or a similar field. Internal candidates selected for these roles before the end of the year will have three years from their appointment date to receive their master's.

The eliminated role of acute nurse specialist required graduation from an accredited school of nursing — a registered nurse license. The similar role of service line specialist now requires a bachelor's degree in an assigned clinical specialty. Internal candidates hired before July 1 have three years to get their degrees.

Although some of the new positions mirror the responsibilities of the old spots, a person who previously served as an acute nurse specialist can apply to be a performance improvement specialist. The roles aren't limited to people who held similar spots previously.
According to MU's Human Resource Services website, 75 percent of the educational fees are waived for eligible employees taking six credit hours of MU courses per semester. To be eligible, employees must work full time and not be in a probationary period, meaning they must have worked more than six consecutive months.

House finishes debate on budget

By Rudi Keller

Thursday, March 27, 2014 at 3:04 pm

JEFFERSON CITY — The Missouri House finished debate on a $26.6 billion operating budget for the coming fiscal year after another round of arguments about Medicaid expansion and the accuracy of revenue estimates.

Roll-call votes on the 13 spending bills included near-unanimous agreement on spending to pay the state debt, maintain highways, operate prisons and lawmakers' salaries. The chamber split into partisan camps on Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act or whether the state should operate the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

The budget, as approved, spends more than $1 billion less than recommended by Gov. Jay Nixon, who predicted revenue would increase faster than lawmakers were willing to accept. Rep. Margo McNeil, D-Florissant, said the budget shortchanged education and other programs because it does not include the money Nixon anticipates.

“Unfortunately the committee worked with the wrong set of numbers,” she said. “They were stingy.”

The budget now moves to the Senate, where it will be rewritten again in coming weeks. The revenue issue is one of the big unanswered questions for the Senate. In the House, Budget Committee Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood, set up a surplus fund in case Nixon is correct and sets aside more than $200 million for various programs from the fund.

The biggest item is for public schools. Nixon sought $278 million more for the foundation formula, the state’s basic aid program for education. Stream added $122 million, bringing the fund to $3.2 billion in the coming year, with another $156 million from the surplus fund if available.
Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, has not said how he will handle the difference between legislative estimates and Nixon’s revenue projection.

When Democratic lawmakers argued that more should be done for state workers — Nixon proposed a 3 percent pay increase and Stream’s budget provides 1 percent — Stream defended the committee’s decisions, arguing that the money was not available for firm commitments to higher spending.

“We are trying to do something for state employees,” Stream said. “We have a fiduciary obligation to the state’s taxpayers that we are spending their money wisely and prudently, efficiently and economically.”

**For higher education, the budget provides a firm 2 percent increase in state aid and another 1 percent from surplus funds if available. That would provide $420.6 million in the coming year for the University of Missouri System.**

Other increases in higher education would add $7 million to the Bright Flight Scholarship program, adding a forgivable loan for students who work in the state after graduation and $16 million for the Access Missouri Scholarship, giving the state’s main need-based scholarship $83.5 million to distribute next year.

In Columbia, the State Historical Society of Missouri would receive a budget increase of almost $500,000, restoring its budget to pre-recession levels.

Medicaid expansion remained the most divisive budget issue. The bill authorizing spending on the Department of Social Services, which oversees Medicaid, passed on a 99-52 vote, the only budget bill to receive fewer than 100 favorable votes.

“We are turning our backs on the people of the state of Missouri who are the working poor,” said Rep. Jill Schupp, D-Creve Coeur.

Republicans who opposed expansion, which would add 300,000 working adults to the Medicaid rolls at a cost of $1.7 billion, said they want to reform the program before considering whether to cover more people. The expanded eligibility would cover adults who earn up to 138 percent of poverty. Federal funding would pay the full cost for two years and 90 percent thereafter.

“It is a big monster and basically we are working to control it and reform it,” said Rep. Sue Allen, R-Town and Country.
UPDATE: Missouri House OKs $26.6 billion two-tiered budget

NO MU Mention

By CHRIS BLANK/The Associated Press

March 27, 2014 | 4:51 p.m. CDT

JEFFERSON CITY — The Missouri House approved Thursday a novel two-tiered state spending plan that would increase public school funding by up to $122 million if more conservative revenue projections turn out to be right or up to $278 million if Gov. Jay Nixon's rosier predictions come true.

The two-tiered approach is atypical for Missouri and stems from a disagreement between the Democratic governor and the Republican lawmakers responsible for putting together the budget. The lawmakers have a more somber outlook than Nixon for Missouri's revenue collections next fiscal year, and they were unable to agree with Nixon on the estimate that normally forms the basis for crafting the budget.

Under the House plan, school districts would receive a $122 million increase to the current $3 billion spent for basic school aid. However, the increase could climb to $278 million if the state's tax revenues match Nixon's more optimistic projection. Both fall short of the $556 million increase that would be needed to comply with Missouri's school funding law, and schools might have to wait until the end of the academic year to know whether they would get the larger increase.

Colleges and universities also would get more money next year, though the amount also would depend upon whose revenue estimate is more accurate. The House plan calls for a 2 percent increase for two-year and four-year schools and a 3 percent increase if state revenues are larger. Nixon sought an increase of 5 percent for universities and 4 percent for community colleges.
Democratic Rep. Margo McNeil said the budget proposal is unnecessarily low.

"The committee chose to work with the wrong set of numbers," McNeill, of Florissant, said. "They chose to be stingy. I don't know why."

Republicans said Missouri is unlikely to have the funds needed to support a larger budget.


Missouri's roughly $26.6 billion operating budget takes effect July 1. The 13 bills comprising the spending plan now move to the Senate, where additional changes are likely. The legislature has until early May to approve a budget for the 2015 fiscal year.

In addition to education funding, the budget also proposes to trim state government positions by 1 percent while boosting pay by 1 percent. Nixon proposed a 3 percent pay raise that would start partway through the fiscal year.

House Budget Committee Chairman Rick Stream said the proposal would trim about 540 positions and that many currently are empty.

"It's a way to begin to reduce the size of the state workforce so that we don't get out of control," said Stream, R-Kirkwood.

The House plan also has $6 million to operate the Ozark National Scenic Riverways in case the National Park Service agrees to give up control of the park in southeastern Missouri. The park service is working to revise a management plan that has been in place for three decades that could include new regulations and restrictions. Critics contend the changes would harm the local economy, restrict tourism and drive out local businesses.

Republicans rejected a Democratic effort to include funding for expanding the Medicaid health care program for the poor. The program currently covers about 830,000 people at an annual cost of roughly $9 billion. Missouri in 2005 lowered its adult Medicaid eligibility levels to the lowest income thresholds allowed under federal law. The federal government for two years would cover the cost of allowing more people to access Medicaid under the federal health care law.
Nixon and Democrats in the legislature contend expanding Medicaid would increase access to health care. Republicans contend the health program first needs changes and have cited concerns about the potential long-term costs.

EDITORIAL: COLLEGE FOOTBALL UNION RULING OPENS A LONG-OVERDUE CONVERSATION

By the Editorial Board


As Mr. Nixon was speaking, Peter Sung Ohr, the regional director of the National Labor Relations Board in Chicago, was ruling that scholarship football players at Northwestern University were, in fact, university employees and had the right to seek collective bargaining status.

The decision, if it is upheld by the NLRB in Washington, D.C., and the courts, could rock the $16 billion world of big-time college sports. It’s a world that desperately needs a good rocking. Athletes get room, board, books and tuition. Meanwhile, universities, coaches, television networks, shoe and apparel companies make billions from the labor of people who now should be known as student/employee-athletes, not just student-athletes.

But there’s an angle in there for Mr. Nixon, too. The NLRB ruling would apply only to Northwestern and the 16 other private universities that play Division I college football. Public universities are governed by labor laws in their states. Generally they follow federal standards, but not always.

Union football players at state universities would be public employees. State-by-state rules on public employees vary widely: most Southern states don’t allow them to bargain collectively. Despite efforts of Republicans in the Legislature, Missouri does, which could offer Mr. Nixon and his beloved Mizzou Tigers a big recruiting advantage.

Say players at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., the only private institution in the Southeastern Conference to which Missouri belongs, follow the Northwestern model. Vanderbilt can say to prospective recruits: Play for the Commodores. Get extended medical insurance and a concussion expert on the sideline. Get access to a
trust fund that will help you graduate after you use up your sports eligibility. And maybe we’ll cut you in on licensing loot.

Missouri’s ready to compete. Its public employees can’t strike, but Mizzou players could bargain collectively. Those in football-mad Alabama couldn’t. It will be fascinating to see if the state of Alabama loves its Crimson Tide and Auburn Tigers more than it hates unions.

**Our bet is on football, but in the meantime, Mizzou would get a recruiting advantage, which it certainly wouldn’t want to dilute by passing right-to-work legislation and further gutting public employee unions.**

**Sure, this is** speculative, but it demonstrates the sort of well-earned chaos that the NCAA could be in for. Tonight the universities of Kentucky and Louisville will meet in a “Sweet 16” game of the NCAA’s Men’s Basketball Tournament. In 2010, CBS and TBS paid nearly $11 billion to broadcast the tournament for 14 years.

Each of the coaches for tonight’s game, John Calipari of Kentucky and Rick Pitino of Louisville, is paid in excess of $4.2 million a year, plus bonuses. Forbes Magazine ranks Louisville, with 2013 basketball profits of $24.4 million, as the richest program in the NCAA. Kentucky tied with the universities of Kansas and North Carolina for No. 2 with profits of $19.9 million.

Graduation rates among “March Madness” teams generally have improved. The graduation rates for white players is now 89 percent; for black players, it’s 65 percent. (Local note for new St. Louis University president Fred Pestello: The graduation rate for black players at St. Louis U. was 25 percent, placing the Billikens in the bottom 20 percent of the 68-team field).

Even if all the football and basketball players graduated, the kids would still be getting stiffed. Everybody else is getting rich off their labors.

**The NCAA** and its member schools (whose conferences cut their own TV deals for football) invited the chaos that the Northwestern labor decision portends. Had they not been so greedy, had they offered better medical benefits and a stipend beyond scholarships, they might have headed this off.

Instead they’ve opened themselves up a Costco-sized can of worms. If players in revenue-producing sports can unionize and get compensated, what about those in non-revenue sports like wrestling and swimming? What about women’s athletic programs? They make very little money, but the kids work just as hard.

Even more troubles lie ahead. In June, a suit filed more than four years ago by former UCLA basketball player Ed O’Bannon will finally go to trial. Mr. O’Bannon, who brought the suit after seeing his name and image used in a video game, argues that players should be allowed to license their own names, likenesses and images on TV broadcasts, video game rights and apparel.
You can, for example, buy an autographed Johnny Manziel Texas A&M jersey for $349, and the only reason the former Aggie quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner will make any money on it is that he’s declared for the NFL draft.

Former Fort Zumwalt West and Mizzou wide receiver T.J. Moe offered what we thought was a valuable insight on his Twitter feed (@tjmoe28) on Thursday: “No perfect solution. Very, very complex situation. Union isn’t the answer, but I think it’s obvious that something needs to change.”

U.S. WEALTH GAP WIDENS BECAUSE OF $1 TRILLION STUDENT LOAN DEBT

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

NO MU MENTION

Every month that Gregory Zbylut pays $1,300 toward his law school loans is another month of not qualifying for a decent mortgage.

Every payment toward their student loans is $900 that Dr. Nida Degesys and her husband aren’t putting in their retirement savings account.

They believe they’ll eventually climb from debt and begin using their earnings to build assets rather than fill holes. But, like the roughly 37 million others in the U.S. saddled with $1 trillion in student debt, they may never catch up with wealthy peers who began life after college free from the burden.

The disparity, experts say, is contributing to the widening of the gap between rich and everyone else in the country.
“If you graduate with a B.A. or doctorate and you get the same job at the same place, you make the same amount of money,” said William Elliott III, director of the Assets and Education Initiative at the University of Kansas. “But that money will actually mean less to you in the sense of accumulating assets in the long term.”

Graduates who can immediately begin building equity in housing or stocks and bonds get more time to see their investments grow, while indebted graduates spend years paying principal and interest on loans. The standard student loan repayment schedule is 10 years but can be much longer.

The median 2009 net worth for a household without outstanding student debt was $117,700, nearly three times the $42,800 worth in a household with outstanding student debt, according to a report co-written by Elliott last November.

About 40 percent of households led by someone 35 or younger have student loan debt, a 2012 Pew Research Center analysis of government data found.

Allen Aston is one of the lucky ones, having landed a full academic and financial-need scholarship at Ohio State University. The 22-year-old software engineer from Columbus estimates it let him avoid $100,000 in debt.

Without loans to repay, Aston is already contributing 6 percent of his salary to a retirement fund that is matched in part by his employer and doesn’t have the same financial concerns his friends do.

“I’m making the same money as them, but they have student loans they’re paying back that I don’t. So, it definitely seems noticeable,” he said.

At the other end of the spectrum is Zbylut, an accountant-turned-attorney in Glendale, Calif. He’s been chipping away at nearly $160,000 in student debt since graduating in 2005 from law school at Loyola University in Chicago. Now 48, the tax attorney estimates he could have $150,000 to $200,000 in a 401(k) had the money he’s paid toward loans gone there.

“I’m sitting here in traffic. I’ve got a Mercedes behind me and an Audi in front of me and I’m thinking, ‘What did they do that I didn’t do?’” Zbylut said by cellphone from his Chevrolet. He’s been turned down twice for the type of mortgage he needs to buy a home big enough for himself, the fiancee he would have married already if not for his debts and her 10-year-old son.

“I have more education and more degrees than my father, as does she than her parents, and yet our parents are better off than we are. What’s wrong with this picture?” he said.

**DEBT ROSE DURING RECESSION**

Student debt is the only kind of household debt that rose through the Great Recession and now totals more than either credit card or auto loan debt, according to the Federal
Reserve Bank of New York. Both the number of borrowers and amount borrowed ballooned by 70 percent from 2004 to 2012.

Of the nearly 20 million Americans who attend college each year, about 12 million borrow, according to the Almanac of Higher Education. Estimates show that the average four-year graduate accumulates $26,000 to $29,000 in loans, and some leave college with debt in six figures.

The increases have been driven in part by rising tuition, resulting from reduced state funding and costlier campus facilities and amenities. Compounding the problem has been a trend toward merit-based, rather than need-based, grants as institutions seek to attract the higher-achieving students who will boost their standings.

“Because there’s a strong correlation in this country between things like SAT scores or ACT scores and wealth or income, the (grant) money ends up going disproportionately to students from wealthier families” who tend to perform better on those tests, said Donald Heller, dean of the Michigan State University College of Education.

Those factors, along with stagnating family incomes and declining savings, have made student loans a much bigger part of funding higher education, Elliott said.

Harvard Business School’s Michael Norton wonders whether greater public awareness of the widening wealth gap in the United States would hasten policy change. Norton’s 2011 survey found that people tend to think wealth is more equally distributed than it is.

But with elected officials from President Barack Obama on down now talking about the wealth gap as an urgent public problem, a more complete picture seems to be emerging, he said.

“Both parties are now saying, perhaps inequality has gotten to the point where it’s not fair when people don’t have a chance to rise, and we need to do something about it,” Norton said.

Targeting the soaring cost of higher education, Obama proposed in August the most sweeping changes to the federal student aid program in decades. His plan would link federal money to new college ratings and reward schools if they help low-income students, keep costs low and have large numbers of students earn degrees.

Lawmakers in Congress also are debating how to address the issue, including proposals to allow graduates with high-interest loans to refinance at lower rates.

The American Medical Student Association supports expanding the National Health Services Corps, which provides loan forgiveness in exchange for service in underserved areas.
Nida Degesys, AMSA’s president, graduated in May 2013 from Northeast Ohio Medical University with about $180,000 in loans. The amount has already swelled with interest to about $220,000.

“There were times where this would make me stay up at night,” Degesys said. “The principal alone is a problem, but the interest is staggering.”

Yet, as costly as medical school was, Degesys sees it as an investment in herself and her career, one she thinks will pay off with a higher earning potential.

College degrees can pay off. College grads ages 25 to 32 working full time earn $45,500, about $17,500 more than their peers with just a high school diploma, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of census data.

Elliott says the country needs to re-think college financing options to bring debt down and graduation rates up.

“We can’t,” he said, “let debt hinder a whole generation of people from beginning to accumulate wealth soon after graduating college.”

**MISSOURIAN**

**GUEST COMMENTARY: Missouri legislators flush with fancy gifts from lobbyists**

By State Rep. John Wright

March 28, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

Lobbyist gifts to Missouri legislators and other public officials surpassed $968,000 in 2013, according to Missouri Ethics Commission data.

That’s the total value of sports tickets, dinners, concert tickets, golf outings and the like showered on our elected state representatives by groups who are in the official business of seeking to influence legislation.
This figure encompasses personal gifts alone and does not include additional hundreds of thousands of dollars of campaign contributions, which are reported separately.

A quick scan through the list of more than 10,000 separately recorded lobbyist gifts in 2013 reveals some extraordinary expenditures.

Consider the House Utilities Committee, whose members racked up a $4,827.11 dinner bill at CC Broiler in Columbia on March 4 of last year, paid for by a lobbyist (that particular dinner bill set the record for the year, topping the $3,788.58 lobbyist dinner enjoyed by the same committee in Jefferson City the month before).

Why would a lobbyist sponsor a $5,000 dinner for a group of legislators who help oversee the rates that utilities are permitted to charge more than a million Missouri families? Check your next electricity bill, and you may find out.

Your elected representatives accepted more than $40,000 worth of Cardinals and Royals tickets in 2013, including tickets to the Cardinals' playoffs and World Series games, according to the Ethics Commission reports. **They also accepted more than $15,000 in Rams, Chiefs and Tigers football tickets, $8,200 in Tigers basketball tickets and $2,300 in Blues hockey tickets.**

Over the past two years, your elected representatives accepted tens of thousands of dollars worth of concert tickets from lobbyists — including tickets for family members and staff — to see Lady Gaga, Bruno Mars, John Mayer, George Strait, Keith Urban, Taylor Swift, Bon Jovi, LL Cool J, Van Halen, New Edition and many other acts.

How these practices are consistent with every legislator’s sworn oath to “not knowingly receive, directly or indirectly, any money or other valuable thing for the performance or nonperformance of any act or duty pertaining to my office” is a question worth pondering.

The influence of lobbyists is clear to anyone who works at the state Capitol, and it is one of the most surprising things that I have discovered since I was elected to serve our community there a little over a year ago.

Lobbyists routinely draft bills and hand them to legislators to sponsor. Too often, the sponsoring legislator does not fully understand what is in the bill or what its
ramifications are. These practices have become so routine that they are rarely even questioned.

A few weeks ago, a fellow House member took to the witness table at one of my House Committee hearings to explain one of his bills to our committee. When he was asked a basic question about the bill’s content, the legislator said that he did not know the answer, and he called forward a lobbyist from the back of the room to explain the content of the bill to the committee.

Evidently, the lobbyist had previously given the bill to the legislator to sponsor, and the legislator either had not read the bill or, at a minimum, had not understood it. Perhaps the most surprising thing about this episode, to me, was that nobody else in the room seemed to be surprised.

A review of the Missouri Ethics Commission reports shows that the lion’s share of lobbyist gifts comes from regulated industries and industries that receive state subsidies. Prominent among them are utilities, which set our electric rates; telecom companies, which set our phone rates; and metro area real estate developers, who receive tens of millions of dollars in annual tax subsidies.

When one considers that Missouri grants over $500 million in tax subsidies to private industry each year, the expenditure of a lowly $1 million to court legislators with steak dinners, sports tickets, concert tickets and golf outings seems a remarkably high-return investment for lobbyists and the industries that sponsor them.

As an elected representative of the community that I grew up in and love, I take my job very seriously. Nearly every day, I meet working families in my district who are worried about covering their monthly utility bills and the costs of their children’s college tuition.

I think about the emerging generation of Missouri kids who are doing their best to learn and grow through our public schools, and teachers who are doing their very best to teach them. I think about our unborn grandchildren, who will inherit the debts of our own less fiscally responsible generation. None of them have their own lobbyists.

With each passing day, I become increasingly frustrated to know that influential groups are using steak dinners and sports tickets to try to divert our limited public resources toward private gain.
That’s why I was pleased to be the first Missouri House member to sign the Missouri Gift-Ban Pledge last year. I am encouraging my colleagues to do the same. As of the date of this writing, only one other Missouri legislator has done so (Sen. Scott Sifton, D-Affton).

Your elected representatives are letting you down, and it’s time that we do something about it. The best step forward would be a comprehensive new ethics law that places strict limitations on lobbyist gifts. I, and several of my mid-Missouri colleagues, have been working to try to get this done.

Twelve other states have already passed effective zero-tolerance gift bans, and we should join them. The next best step, in the meantime, would be for each of us to call our own representative or senator and ask him or her to sign a no-gifts pledge.

I still believe that most of the participants in our political system are decent people. The industries and individuals who seek influence in the Capitol are not acting illegally; they are pursuing a profit motive under the rules of the game that exist today.

I am told, in fact, that many lobbyists would prefer statutory limits on lobbyist gifts because our current no-limits system has led the lobbyist community into an expensive “arms race” to seek legislators’ attention. By the same token, most of our representatives are well-meaning, but many have become lulled into complacency by the pervasiveness of modern gift practices and the associated bad habits that have set in.

It’s time for a wake-up call and a change in lobbyist gift practices. In the meantime, the people of my community elected me to represent them and their families — not to represent special interest groups — and that is exactly what I intend to continue to do.

*State Rep. John Wright, D-Rocheport, represents the 47th District, which includes parts of Boone, Cooper, Howard and Randolph counties.*
Is BPA-free plastic safe?

It's an unsettling thought: What if all the BPA-avoiding we've been doing—carefully checking for a "BPA-Free" label before any plastic purchase—has all been for naught? That BPA alternatives are actually just as harmful, if not worse?

The problem with BPA

The anti-BPA movement gained momentum in 2007 when parents took to legislatures to demand a ban on bisphenol-A (BPA). While they didn’t get it to the federal level, several states have banned the chemical in baby and children’s products, and a number of manufacturers have since removed it from water bottles and food containers. A victory, for sure, as the hormone disruptor has been linked to a boatload of issues, such as causing reproductive, immunity, and neurological problems, as well as childhood asthma, metabolic disease, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

What is it about BPA that’s so dangerous? To understand the far-reaching effects, it helps to know how the endocrine system works. After producing hormones in endocrine tissues (such as the ovaries, testes, and thyroid), the hormones are sent into the bloodstream like messengers, where they bind with hormone receptors throughout the body. By plugging into the receptors, the hormones activate responses throughout the body to control functions like growth, energy levels, and reproduction.

Here’s where it gets shady: Because it has a similar shape to the hormone estrogen, BPA can bind with hormone receptors, too, and that’s not good—the receptors get plenty of natural hormones. “**BPA is acting on receptors that are already above thresholds because everyone has estrogen in their body,**” says Frederick vom Saal, a University of Missouri biologist who studies endocrine disruptors. When the receptors get overloaded, it can alter cell function throughout the body.

And it doesn’t take a lot to do damage. For BPA and other chemicals like it, even a weaker amount is exactly in the range to cause our system to go haywire, and that’s the amount we’re exposed to, vom Saal says. Indeed, studies show that BPA can significantly affect us in doses that are smaller than what’s used in traditional toxicology tests.
What does it mean for future generations? A new study finds low-dose prenatal BPA exposure may effect brain function.

**The problem with BPA replacements**

In order to keep our plastics plastic, all that BPA had to be replaced, and the other chemicals aren’t much different: Their effects on health remain unclear at best—and scary at worst, according to research released earlier this month in Toxicological Sciences. BPA’s replacements, related compounds like bisphenol-S (BPS) or bisphenol-F (BPF), actually appear to have similar—and sometimes even worse—endocrine-disrupting effects. “The chemicals have the same function [as BPA], which usually means they’re similar in structure, and therefore have similar health effects,” says Lindsay Dahl, deputy director of the organization Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families.

Our exposure to BPA-related chemicals occurs when they seep out of plastics and into food and drinks, as demonstrated during a 2011 Environmental Health Perspectives study when the majority of BPA-free commercial plastics tested were exposed to common-use stressors like microwaving, UV radiation, or steam sanitization. But it isn’t only plastic containers that expose us to these chemicals; researchers at the State University of New York at Albany also found BPF and BPS (in addition to the usual BPA) in canned foods, as well as in foods packaged in paper and even glass.

The suite of BPA-like substances we’re now being exposed to appear to join forces to wreak greater havoc on the body. In a 2013 study performed at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, exposure to multiple endocrine-disrupting chemicals, like BPS and nonylphenol, activated proteins involved in cell mutation or death, which can cause damage to genes—something that didn’t happen when cells were exposed to the chemicals individually.

Perhaps most troubling of all is recent research prompted by the Center for Environmental Health (CEH), an Oakland, California-based organization that seeks to protect people from toxic chemicals. It commissioned two independent labs to test 35 children’s sippy cups, and found that nine models labeled as BPA-free yielded moderate to high levels of estrogenic activity, meaning they contained chemicals that mimicked natural estrogen. Which specific chemicals were causing the estrogenic activity wasn’t determined, but some don’t think that makes much of a difference.

“If you went into a space with a [radiation detection device] and found radiation, would you stop to take additional time to find out where the radiation was coming from? It wouldn’t matter—you’d just want to get out,” says George Bittner, founder of CertiChem, an endocrine disruptor testing lab based in Austin, Texas, that examined the sippy cups.

It isn’t surprising that we have ended ended up replacing one toxic substance with others that might be just as bad. There are no federal laws requiring chemicals to be proven safe before they’re placed on the market. “So if a manufacturer decides to stop using BPA, they have no laws to follow that require them to use a safer chemical. As a result, they’ve been switching to chemicals that work the same,” Dahl says.
Where does this leave us?

Maybe we’re best to avoid plastics completely, especially when you hear about the weirdness surrounding some newer, supposedly safer alternatives like tritan copolyester, a plastic used in products made by Nalgene, Rubbermaid, and Tupperware. It’s free of the all the bisphenols, and according to the manufacturer Eastman Chemical Company, has been verified by third-party laboratories as safe. But in June 2013, the Washington Spectator reported that Eastman was suing CertiChem to put the kibosh on its findings that one of Tritan’s ingredients, triphenyl phosphate, is just as bad as BPA.

The courts ruled in Eastman’s favor later that summer, stating that CertiChem’s claims were false and misleading. But the controversy raises the question of how much we really know about the safety of any type of plastic. “Until we have some idea of what chemicals are added in all stages in making a final product, we will not be able to determine the safety of any plastic product,” says vom Saal. For now, sticking to leach-free materials like glass or stainless steel as much as possible seems to be your best bet.

MU law school class focuses on cultural consciousness

By Thomas Dixon

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COLUMBIA — Ilhyung Lee sips water from a plastic Shakespeare’s cup, combing through papers as his students file in. "Shall We Dance" from "The King and I" plays over their conversations.

Lee is wearing a dark-gray suit complemented with a bow tie, his hair neatly combed and parted to the left. He is crisp in the way someone practicing law often is, but has an especially acute awareness of the nuances and implications of appearance and habit.

In a way, this is what he will be teaching today.

Lee is a professor at the MU School of Law, specializing in international dispute resolution, law and society in East Asia, intellectual property dispute resolution and international and comparative law.
On Wednesdays, he teaches cross-cultural dispute resolution, a class he said only four other universities in the country offer regularly in their law schools: Northwestern University, University of Oregon, Pepperdine University and Willamette University.

"This is not your typical law school class," Lee said.

The class is an alternative dispute resolution course, a field that explores ways to resolve a dispute between two parties other than going to court, including negotiation, mediation and arbitration. The field didn't take form until the 1970s, Lee said.

The point of the course is to get future dispute resolution professionals to see how culture might affect what they do. Lee said most law schools don't have enough time or resources to give much attention to this subject. They might devote one hour of a three-credit course on dispute resolution to cultural issues.

"The joke was, you would bring in a guest speaker to talk about his or her experiences having gone to an exotic country and having negotiated with exotic people, and that was it," Lee said. "I really thought ... that there should be more time devoted to culture."

**Rewriting the joke**

In 1999, Lee found out about a class on cross-cultural dispute resolution that was taught at Pepperdine University School of Law.

"I was delighted that there was a course offered, period," Lee said.

He thought that given his personal experiences and professional background in international law, he could teach a similar class effectively and passionately. Lee then sat in on Grant Ackerman's class at Pepperdine for two weeks in the summer session and worked closely with him to help mold Lee's own style of teaching. He now calls his class the Missouri version of the Ackerman model.

Since then, the course has been offered usually once a year at MU as a writing-intensive upper-class elective. Writing serves the important role of analysis and reflection in the class, Lee said. It's a skill he's stressed throughout his career for law students, as he did in a 1999 article for the Santa Clara Law Review called "The Rookie Season."
What he stresses more, however, is acknowledging and understanding the role culture can play in legal interactions.

"My thinking has always been, if you're not aware of culture, it could lead to more problems," Lee said. "You could miss settlement opportunities, or it could make the dispute worse. So, we look squarely at the question of culture and see how it affects dispute and dispute settlement."

The first part of addressing culture is to find out what the word means, a question he proposed to his students. They offered their own opinions, and Lee presented alternative approaches to the issue of culture, specifically those of authors and lawyers who don't think culture is relevant.

Lee said he does this as a matter of balance, and to get students to realize there are some people who are skeptical about the importance of culture.

"We kind of come to a compromise," Lee said. "Isn't it possible that culture could be present in virtually every setting? So the question is, how much?"

**The culture of his class**

A range of culture certainly provides an interesting setting for Lee's own classroom. There are 11 students, from China, Korea, South Africa, Spain and the U.S.. One is a Catholic priest.

About half are Juris doctorate students, studying in the conventional three-year law degree program. The other half are LL.M students, working on a one-year Master of Laws in Dispute Resolution degree.

Lee said the diversity of the class makes it a better experience, as students come in with a wider breadth of experience that helps fuel discussion.

"I like to think we have a little fun in class, that students learn about themselves," Lee said.

Ignacio Lleo, an LL.M student from Valencia, Spain, said he can relate to the cultural dimensions Lee talks about.

"I can feel the differences between my culture and here," Lleo said. "I feel this every day in America. Every foreign student feels that, so it's amazing."
Jafon Fearson, a second-year J.D. student, said what sticks out about the class is that it provokes thought. Fearson is from Hatchechubbee, Ala., a small town he described as about half African-American and half white American.

Lee said the most memorable comment he's received was a similar praise from a former state trooper.

"I think his exact words were, 'the course made me think about things that I never thought about before,'" Lee said. "You always want students to think about the subject ... but here's someone who's involved in law enforcement, and for him to realize the impact of culture in his work ...

Maybe as a result of that, more people might have confidence in the legal system. I was very, very touched by that."

**Lee's model in practice**

Lee said he has also received criticism, specifically regarding the tangible legal component of the class. He's worked to address that, including discussions of how culture is seen in specific court cases and how it shapes specific laws. Lee also incorporates two to three mock simulations for the students to practice in dispute resolution situations where culture may be present.

In the past, visiting scholars from China, Korea and Japan have acted as executives of a company from their country, while students play the role of American executives in a mock patent infringement negotiation.

This semester, students participated in a simulation via video with students from Cornell University and a professional mediator from Washington, D.C. The simulation was an employment discrimination dispute where an elderly lifeguard alleged he was fired because of his age. Lee said he also hopes to have at least one simulation this semester via video with students in Tokyo or Seoul.

Along with a more conventional textbook, Lee teaches Anne Fadiman's "The Spirit Catches You When You Fall Down," which he described as the account of a clash between a non-Western, agrarian culture and Western medicine. He said its themes reflect and highlight the other course material.

Lee frequently calls on students in class, either to contribute to discussion in class or read an excerpt in their "best judicial voice." He even takes into account the cultural differences in his
own classroom. He often writes down phrases he uses that he thinks might be too nuanced for his international students to understand, such as "tip my hat to you" and "from the gut."

Lucy Chen, an LL.M student from southern China, said she can feel the cultural differences in the way the class is taught.

"In my country ... we do not speak at all," Chen said. "Most of the time we just keep silence, waiting for the teacher to call on us or for he or she to speak themselves. But here, we're participating."

*Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.*

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**SPORTS COMMISSION, MIZZOU TO CO-HOST NCAA WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS**

By Joe Lyons jlyons@post-dispatch.com 636-493-9675

The 2014 NCAA wrestling championships wrapped up Saturday night at Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma City, with Penn State winning its fourth consecutive team title.

**Local highlights included back-to-back titles at 125 pounds for Illinois’ junior Jesse Delgado and Mizzou’s J’Den Cox winning at 197 to become just the 14th true freshman champion in the 84-year history of the event.**

The Tigers’ Drake Houdashelt, a junior and Fort Zumwalt West alum, also earned All-American honors with a fifth-place finish at 149.

Illinois placed 13th and Missouri 14th in the team standings.

**Next year’s championships, set for March 19-21, return to Scottrade Center and will be co-hosted by the St. Louis Sports Commission and the University of Missouri. They also will host the event in 2017.**

Since 2000, St. Louis has been the site of the tournament six times and set a three-day attendance mark of 109,450 in 2012. In fact, St. Louis owns four of the top five attendance marks in the history of the event.

The wrestling championships have sold out every year since 2010.
“Oklahoma City did an outstanding job and now the pressure’s on us to deliver again,” said Chris Roseman, the Sports Commission’s vice president of events. “When I came on board in 2000, I didn’t know a thing about wrestling but I’ve really come to appreciate the event and the passion it generates.

“When I go to an event like this, I’m always looking for things we can do to be better. I tend to spend a lot of time on the concourse listening to the fans, and one of the things I hear over and over is how they’d love to see the tournament in St. Louis permanently.”

Finding a set location for the event, similar to the College World Series in Omaha, Neb., has been discussed. But it is not likely to happen given the popularity and profitability of the event.

“This tournament, there’s really nothing else like it,” said Illinois coach Jim Heffernan. “The competition, the intensity, the passion — it’s really something you have to experience to truly get a feel for.”

Sports Commission president Frank Viverito said the wrestling championships have a special place in his heart.

“It’s the first event I ever bid on and that bid eventually led to us getting the 2000 championships here,” he said. “I still remember, we were set up at a table in Bryce Jordan Center at Penn State during the 1999 championships when I was approached by an older gentleman who just about poked me in the chest when he said, ‘I’ve been coming to this tournament for 62 years. Don’t you screw it up!’

“That’s something that’s always stuck with me.”

**The 2015 wrestling championships are nearly a year off, but preparations are well underway. Working closely with the University of Missouri, the Sports Commission again is looking to outdo itself.**

“We’re obviously excited about getting another chance to wrestle so close to home,” Mizzou coach Brian Smith said. “But the great thing about working with the Sports Commission and the people in St. Louis is they’re constantly working to make the event better. Every year, they find some way to improve it, to make those three days even more enjoyable for the fans and the student-athletes.”

One of the keys to the event’s success in St. Louis is the many volunteers who work to help all aspects run smoothly.

“We’ve got people who schedule their vacations in order to work the event,” Roseman said. “And they’re a big reason why, after all these years, we don’t have to worry as much about the 330 wrestlers, the eight mats and the 600-plus matches. Instead, we can focus on finding ways to make the event more special in 2015 than it was when we last hosted in 2012.”

Both Viverito and Roseman stressed the team effort that goes into putting on an event like it and mentioned the cooperation they’ve received from hotels and restaurants around Scottrade Center.

Roseman is eager to see how Ballpark Village adds to the fans’ experience and sees it as a perfect bookend to the Fan Fest activities at Union Station, which is in the midst of a $25 million makeover.
In addition to teaming with Mizzou on the Division I event, the Sports Commission also will co-host the 2015 Division II wrestling championships March 13-14 at Chaifetz Arena with Maryville University.

“Our goal is bridge the two events for nine great days of college wrestling,” Roseman said.

Tickets for the 2015 NCAA Division I championships are available exclusively online at NCAA.com/wrestling.