COLUMBIA — A Bloomberg News reporter and the co-founder of the mobile payment company Square are among the scheduled speakers at MU’s spring commencement this weekend.

Angela Greiling Keane, a Bloomberg News White House correspondent and an MU alumna, will speak at the School of Journalism ceremony at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Mizzou Arena.

Jim McKelvey of Square, a system that makes it possible to accept credit cards on iPhones, will speak at the Honors College ceremony the next morning. The ceremony, at 8:30 a.m. Saturday at Mizzou Arena, will also feature Jim Held, the founder of Stone Hill Winery in Hermann, who will speak and will receive an honorary degree from MU.

This weekend’s commencement, which starts Friday and runs through Sunday, will honor more than 5,300 graduates who are receiving 5,452 degrees. According to a news release from the MU News Bureau, more than 270 of those graduates are receiving their degrees after completing online degree programs.

Other notable speakers at this year’s commencement ceremonies include:

- Don Walsworth, CEO of Walsworth Publishing, at the Trulaske College of Business ceremony at 2 p.m. Saturday at the Hearnes Center.

- Tim Wolfe, University of Missouri System president and MU alumnus, at the College of Arts and Science ceremony at 7 p.m. Saturday at the Hearnes Center.

- U.S. Rep. Vicky Hartzler of the 4th Congressional District at the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources ceremony at 10 a.m. Sunday at the Hearnes Center.
More information about MU's spring commencement, including a full list of ceremony times, locations and speakers, is available on MU's website.

MU Department of Child Health to receive $500,000 donation

Tuesday, May 13, 2014 | 5:16 p.m. CDT; updated 10:32 p.m. CDT, Tuesday, May 13, 2014

BY DANIEL ROE

COLUMBIA — The Leda J. Sears Trust announced Tuesday that it would donate $500,000 to the MU School of Medicine's Department of Child Health for pediatric research.

During a reception at the Women's and Children's Hospital conference center, trustee Lou Leonatti said the funds would be allocated over eight years.

The donation will mark $1.2 million of research funding for the Department of Child Health provided by the Leda J. Sears Trust.

Leonatti said making public the result of pediatric research is crucial in mid-Missouri, where major medical centers in places like St. Louis and Kansas City are far away.

"The mission is central Missouri," he said. "We have to tell our story."

A faculty committee within the Department of Child Health will meet annually to determine how the funds will be used. The first meeting will occur later this year, MU Healthcare Media Coordinator Derek Thompson said.

Since its creation in 1990, the trust has helped fund the Thompson Center, which researches autism and neurodevelopmental disorders, and research on childhood obesity, Type 1 diabetes, blood and brittle bone disorders and maple syrup urine disease.

Charlotte Phillips, associate professor of Child Health and Biochemistry, conducted trust-funded research that saved the lives of three children with maple syrup
urine disease. She initially received $196,005 from the trust, but she received an additional $1.8 million from external sources as a result of receiving those initial funds.

"Science is like business; you have to spend money to make money," Phillips said.

Medical School Interim Dean Les Hall said the support MU receives from the trust makes the university an attractive recipient of donations from other organizations.

"I believe this gift will signal to others that MU is worthy of philanthropic investment," he said.

The Leda J. Sears Trust was created by the estate of Leda and Forrest Sears, who moved to Mexico to invest in real estate during the Great Depression. Before Leda Sears died in 1990, she established a trust that would direct her income to medical research funding.

The trust has made donations to the University of Notre Dame, Washington University in St. Louis and MU. Leonatti said MU was selected for donations because he was promised all donations would directly fund research.

"We needed accountability and assurance the money was being spent," he said. "We found honesty at MU."

Addressing Campus Sexual Assault Must Be a Coordinated Effort

Posted: 05/13/2014 6:24 pm EDT Updated: 05/13/2014 6:59 pm EDT

By Tony West, Associate Attorney General of the United States

NO MU MENTION

Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to hold many titles. But they all pale in importance to the roles I play as a father, brother, uncle, son and husband.
When I think of the amazing women who make up the constellation of my life, I can't help but think about the statistics about violence against women, which many of us know all too well: Nearly 20 percent of undergraduate women report that they have experienced sexual assault since entering college, most often during the first two years of school. That's in addition to the 6 percent of college-age men who report that they have experienced a sexual assault, a number we know is underreported.

This isn't some abstract policy debate. This is about each of us. It's about our family members. It's about our friends.

That is why I have enthusiastically joined my colleagues to participate in a nationwide university tour to raise awareness of campus sexual assault. We visited 11 schools across the country to meet with students and faculty, many of whom are working every day to fight intimate partner and sexual violence on campus and to train young people about how to prevent and report this type of activity.

This effort is part of the overall initiative by this administration -- which includes the historic White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault, led by Vice President Joe Biden -- to talk with students and school administrators about how we can build a future where domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking and teen dating violence are eradicated.

Over the last two decades, we've made important progress, getting resources devoted to stemming the tide of abuse that plagues too many women's lives. At the Justice Department, through our Office on Violence Against Women, we've awarded more than $5 billion in grants to states, tribal governments, educational institutions, and victim service providers, and this year we'll award nearly $400 million more to provide communities and campuses with resources to help address sexual assault and domestic violence.

But one of the things that stood out during my visits to North Carolina Central University in Durham, Loyola University in Chicago, and United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck was that none of these schools is dealing with sexual assault by itself. Each is employing innovative, holistic and campus-specific strategies to develop coordinated community response teams to comprehensively address sexual assault. And they're doing it with Justice Department grant funding.

We know that a coordinated community response -- one that relies on partnerships with student groups, campus police, community victim services organizations, campus ministries, and school officials -- is what is required to turn the tide on this issue.

We have to make sure that schools have a proactive approach to the prevention of sexual assault on campus, one that's grounded in effective, clear policies. We have to do more to ensure that survivor assistance and support is easily accessible and sustained. We have to insist on campus disciplinary processes that deal with offenders fairly, consistently and with certainty, and that they clearly communicate zero-tolerance for sexual assault and dating violence.
Equally importantly, we have to make sure that male students are part of the solution. We need to do more to encourage our young men to explore healthy masculinity and be strong without being violent, and to educate them about the fact that sexual assault is not about sex but about power, violence and abuse. And we need to support those men who are survivors themselves and who summon the courage to share their stories.

We also need to make sure that all students know what consent -- and non-consent -- really means, and how to take action in safe and positive ways as active bystanders to prevent violence from happening.

Survivors everywhere should know that they have a place -- and a voice -- in this administration. They should be reassured that, as President Obama said, "[w]e've got your back."

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**Editorial**

**How to deal with the campus sexual assault crisis**

By The Times Editorial Board

**NO MU MENTION**

Not too long ago, a woman who was sexually assaulted on campus might understandably have felt that her experience was, if not unique, at least uncommon. Colleges, worried about their reputations, often downplayed such incidents, sweeping rape accusations under the rug, underreporting assault allegations or failing to take meaningful action against perpetrators.

Today, however, it would be difficult for a student anywhere to be unaware of the issue. There are few schools in the country — big or small, public or private — that are not agonizing over how best to address what is increasingly seen as an epidemic of sexual assault. Even President Obama has taken on the subject, asserting at a news conference in January that an estimated 1 in 5 women is sexually assaulted in college. Usually the crime is committed by someone she knows, often by someone who has done it before.

This month, the U.S. Department of Education said it was investigating no fewer than 55 institutions of higher learning for possible mishandling of sexual assault complaints; that includes two schools in Los Angeles — Occidental College and USC — as well as UC Berkeley. The same week, a White House task force released its first report, a general overview that emphasizes measures to prevent assault, flags some of the confusing reporting protocol and offers a checklist for drafting a comprehensive policy to prevent sexual misconduct. Misconduct
includes not just sexual assault — which is non-consensual sexual contact or intercourse or an attempt at it — but also sexual harassment, dating violence, stalking and intimidation.

These are important steps toward changing a pernicious culture that for many years allowed students — overwhelmingly female students — to be victimized without effective recourse. But addressing sexual assault is complicated. Schools are not law enforcement agencies; they’re not set up to conduct investigations or hold trials or render verdicts, yet they are required to do so under federal law. In establishing procedures to deal with sexual assault, they must be sure that victims are treated with respect, that complaints are taken seriously and pursued vigorously — and that the due process rights of the accused are not abridged.

There are some overarching principles that should guide any school’s investigation into an allegation of sexual assault or misconduct. Any school panel should be trained before investigating and sitting in judgment on a student’s complaint. Everyone on the panel needs to understand certain basic realities: For instance, that a previous sexual relationship does not imply consent or preclude a finding of sexual violence. And that sex with a person who does not consent — or cannot consent — is unacceptable.

There is nothing wrong with having students on the panel, but we are troubled by the idea of allowing a majority of members to be students. Do students, even if they’re trained, have the maturity and life experience to dominate such a serious proceeding?

The rights of the accuser and the rights of the accused must be protected equally. Both should have the same opportunities to present witnesses and evidence, to have lawyers and to appeal, among other things. These hearings can result in a student being expelled, a severe punishment that can cripple a person for years. Of course, someone proved to have committed sexual assault should face a long suspension or expulsion, to protect the campus community.

In many cases, victims prefer confidentiality, and that wish can and should be respected during the counseling process that most schools offer. But victims who want to take a complaint through a school disciplinary process should have to come forward in the course of that process just as they would in a criminal proceeding. The accused have a right to know who is accusing them.

Colleges are required to investigate and take action in cases of sexual assault. Nevertheless, it is to everyone’s benefit if serious crimes are also brought to the attention of the police and investigated. Victims of sexual assault sometimes don’t want to go through the emotionally wrenching process of a criminal investigation and trial, but it is important and should be encouraged.

Stanford University’s sexual misconduct review process, which the school overhauled several years ago, offers some smart ideas about how to run a fair hearing. All complaints of sexual misconduct are first investigated by a trained judicial officer on staff, who then makes a decision on whether a complaint should go on to a review panel. The rights of the accuser and the accused are meticulously spelled out and are comparable. Whatever advisors, information or opportunity to explain that the accuser gets, the accused gets as well. Although the accuser and accused are never in the same room during the hearing, when one is speaking before the review panel, the other is allowed to listen in on a telephone line — and email questions to the panel members. That way they don’t have to face or address each other but may hear and respond to each other’s assertions. The decision of the panel and the punishment it decides on can be
appealed by either student. From 2010 to 2013 at Stanford, 12 complaints were sent on to a review panel, and in seven, the accused student was found responsible.

The 1-in-5 figure cited by Obama is based on a 2007 study and has been criticized for sampling only two large, unnamed universities. The fact is that much more study is needed to understand the prevalence of campus sexual assault. One of the best recommendations in the White House task force report is a call for schools to undertake a "climate survey" of all their campuses. The task force offers a blueprint for how to proceed. Survey techniques should be comparable across the country.

A school can't manage a problem if it doesn't know the extent of it.

Colleges can’t play cop in sexual assault investigations

By Cathy Young

| MAY 14, 2014

NO MU MENTION

PASSIONS HAVE been running high on the issue of sexual assault on college campuses, with women telling wrenching stories, universities being accused of failing victims, and the federal government seeking ways to force schools to do better. It seems like an unimpeachable cause. But, like many moral crusades, this one relies on too many uncritically accepted claims, often embraces blind zealotry, and has the potential to hurt innocent people without necessarily aiding those it seeks to help.

As proof of the catastrophic scope of the problem, we are told that one in five college women will be sexually assaulted by the time they graduate. But this figure comes from surveys in which the questions used to measure alcohol- or drug-facilitated sexual assault are worded so broadly as to lump together incapacitation and impairment, and in which most women classified as victims of rape do not believe they were raped and do not report the incident because they don’t think it’s serious enough to report.

Much-publicized personal narratives of sexual assault are likewise plagued by fuzzy definitions, ranging from violent rape to intoxicated sex in which the woman feels she was too drunk to properly consent. A recent letter in The Harvard Crimson from an anonymous student who failed in her quest for redress illustrates these gray areas. The letter describes a drunken encounter in which the woman never said she wanted to stop, only telling the male student to “stop kissing [her] aggressively,” and
“obeyed” when he asked her to satisfy him. When the account was posted on Slate, the liberal online publication, even many commenters usually sympathetic to rape accusers felt the man’s behavior sounded boorish but not criminal.

At Yale, as an official memo released last summer reveals, the definition of “non-consensual sex” in disciplinary proceedings is so broad that it includes reciprocating a sexual act without an explicit signal to go ahead — even if you stop immediately when asked to stop. Ironically, this creates a Catch-22, as universities find themselves criticized for insufficiently harsh punishments for nonconsensual sex.

Universities are under strong pressure from activists, backed by the federal government, to use a “preponderance of the evidence” standard in adjudicating sexual assault complaints. This is the lowest legal burden of proof, often defined as meaning that it’s more likely than not that the assault occurred. (Traditionally, disciplinary charges by students have been judged by the higher standard of “clear and convincing evidence.”) But what does that mean in practice, especially in he-said/she-said cases? Since anti-rape activists insist that wrongful accusations are extremely rare (and demand that college investigators and “judges” be trained in that dogma), the goal seems to be a presumption of guilt for any accused student, unless there is strong proof of innocence.

Obviously, this is not a question of sending people to prison. Nonetheless, it means that a student may be expelled from college, with a black mark that will follow him to other schools and places of employment, and in some ways acquire the equivalent of conviction for a very serious crime without any of the safeguards of a trial.

While the media have focused on women’s claims of the universities’ inadequate response to sexual assault complaints, there is also a growing number of lawsuits by male students who say they were railroaded by kangaroo courts. This trend will no doubt continue if schools are strong-armed into a more hard-line approach.

But no matter how tough colleges may get on sexual assault, real victims are also ill-served by having such offenses treated as college disciplinary violations rather than crimes. Emma Sulkowicz, who is suing Columbia University after what she says was a badly botched rape investigation, describes a terrifying, painful, violent attack. If true, the answer is not to kick the perpetrator out of school and leave him free to seek victims elsewhere; it is to put him in jail. Yet Sulkowicz never went to the police, apparently believing the university process would be more victim-friendly.

Victims of sexual assault should be encouraged to report these crimes to law enforcement and document the evidence. While colleges certainly have a role in ensuring student safety, they should not be playing cop or judge — or set themselves up as a morals police regulating non-criminal sexual behavior.

*Cathy Young is a columnist at Newsday and RealClearPolitics.com. Follow her on Twitter @CathyYoung63.*
Interim co-director named permanent leader of Mizzou Online

Expansion on top of agenda.

By Ashley Jost

Tuesday, May 13, 2014 at 2:00 pm

After three years of serving as an interim co-director for Mizzou Online, Kim Siegenthaler is now the director of the University of Missouri's online program.

"What's happening with distance education at MU is really exciting," she said. "It's great to have the opportunity to help shape that. It really is a changing landscape."

Mizzou Online offers more than 90 graduate and undergraduate degrees and certificates. The most recent degree addition was an online master's in public health, which was announced in early April. The first session of the new program starts this summer.

Administrators for months have been discussing the need to expand distance education efforts to meet student needs.

During the fall, the UM System announced there was a 26 percent increase in students taking online classes.

Siegenthaler said she wants to see that number grow, and the creation of new online programs requires working with the university's colleges and departments.

"There is enthusiasm on our part to do that, though," she said, adding that she plans to create a Mizzou Online advisory group with representatives from different academic units to shape upcoming online programs.

Jim Spain, MU vice provost for undergraduate studies, said Siegenthaler's job is to talk with academic administrators about what they want to do and how Mizzou Online can help get them.
"I think having a permanent director in place allows there to be a little less uncertainty of a program that, by its very nature, is kind of an uncertain venture because people aren't used to or sure about online education," he said.

If a new provost puts an emphasis on online education, that would help boost Mizzou Online.

MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin has previously said he hopes to have a new provost in place this fall. Judy Wall, search committee chairwoman, said she doesn't have a set timeline.

During her time as an interim co-director of Mizzou Online, Siegenthaler worked to merge the Center for Distance and Independent Study, Extension Marketing and MU Direct into Mizzou Online, which was created in 2011.

One of Siegenthaler's top priorities is getting the five existing units within Mizzou Online — marketing, program coordination, human resources, information technology and student services — to work more cohesively. That process "doesn't happen overnight," but it will happen, she said.

According to a news release, Siegenthaler was chosen from a pool of more than 30 candidates from private and public schools. Leona Rubin, associate vice chancellor for graduate studies, co-chaired the search committee for the director spot.

**Illinois lawmakers advance college loan study plan**

The Associated Press

**NO MU MENTION**

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) — State lawmakers on Tuesday advanced a plan to explore if Illinois could ease students' college payments by using a plan similar to efforts across the country to reign in mounting student loan debt.
A Senate committee voted 9-0 to approve a plan to study a program that could allow students to receive interest-free college loans and pay them back based on their post-graduation incomes. Similar "Pay It Forward, Pay It Back" efforts are underway in states such as Oregon, Pennsylvania and Michigan.

State Sen. Mike Frerichs, a Champaign Democrat, is sponsoring the legislation because he says an educated workforce is critical to the state economy but student debt is creating difficulties.

"College affordability is a real issue for our state, and it's a drag on our economy," Frerichs said. "We have student debt in this country now exceeding a trillion dollars, higher than credit card debt. It's clear we have to do something."

But it's unclear how Illinois could pay for such a program in an expectedly tight budget year. The state faces a $1.6 billion drop in revenues if legislators don't extend an income tax hike set to roll back in 2015.

A state Board of Higher Education spokesman said universities are concerned they couldn't afford the upfront costs of such a program.

"We definitely understand what the Legislature is doing from an affordability perspective," agency spokesman Jonathan Lackland said. "We're all going to have a discussion to figure out how best to do it and to not jump into a plan that, to be honest with you, has not been fully vetted across the country."

The House approved the measure 111-0 in March. It now moves to the full Senate for consideration.

MU learning garden inspires healthy choices in early childhood

COLUMBIA — "Is this poop?" Colton Dodds, 4, asks as his tiny fingers poke a hole in the soil.

Christopher Murakami assures him it's not and hands him a small cabbage plant.

Colton carefully places the plant in the hole, banks it with soil, pats it down and rocks back to admire his work.
He and several other children in the MU Child Development Lab are tending a vegetable plot as part of the new Children's Learning Garden, which opened last fall.

Murakami, a doctoral candidate in science education, developed the idea for the garden when he came to Columbia in 2010. He wanted to observe the ways children interact with food and how they learn about themselves through gardening.

The kids in the lab get their hands dirty every week by planting, nurturing and harvesting seasonal produce — rosemary, broccoli rabe, sunflowers, cabbage and peas.

The raised beds are labeled with colorful signs that mark the different plants. Children in the lab can start gardening as young as 18 months and can continue until they are 5.

Once his cabbage is planted, Colton joins his classmates to wander around the garden as part of free exploratory time. Murakami said this interaction is critical to their connection with nature.

Murakami waves to the children to come smell his favorite plant, a sprig of chocolate mint. The kids lean in to smell the leaves, then zoom down the gravel walkways that weave through the garden.

The children like to play in an isolated bin of soil called a "sensory table," which holds mini flower pots, a gourd and a plastic blue shovel.

Trying to find worms, Colton picks up the shovel and sifts through the dirt. Other kids use their hands to dig up roly polies and watch the bugs wiggle in their palms.

A few of the children line up to hop down a path of uneven tree stumps mounted in a raised flower bed. Others zip through the red brick paths that cut through various soil plots.

"The garden is meant to be a place for kids to explore," Murakami said.

Getting started
The learning garden sits just south of the People's Garden near MU's Curtis Hall. Both gardens are about one-tenth of an acre.
The People's Garden, an experimental plot, is managed by the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. It sends most of its produce to the Food Bank of Central and Northeastern Missouri and its Central Pantry.

The learning garden is under the supervision of the Human Development and Family Studies Department. Children can learn how to cook produce there, and sometimes they eat the vegetables for lunch.

**How it started**

Murakami's vision for a learning garden can be traced back to his experience in east Los Angeles as an eighth-grade science teacher.

He wanted to teach his students about the importance of sustainable living but decided most ideas about sustainability were too abstract.

When he came to MU to pursue a graduate degree, he knew he needed to demonstrate a concrete way to show kids how to decrease their environmental impact — he found that in food.

"Food is a direct way to interact with the environment," Murakami said. "And something we do all the time whether we are aware of it or not."

Putting kids in a cafeteria to eat whatever is placed on their trays does not contribute to food education, he said. Murakami said are always a learning and that should include learning about the nutrients they put in their bodies.

"Children should think it is normal to participate in growing and eating their own food," he said.

Children in the lab have used the tomatoes they grow to make salsa and the juice from beets to make pink lemonade. Vegetable soup, mint tea and salads have also been made with learning garden produce.

Murakami said teaching children to garden makes it easier for them to recognize vegetables and more likely to try new ones.

"One of the parents told me their son has started asking for kale at the grocery store," he said.
Colton’s mom, Lisa Dodds, said the learning garden is a "wonderful" addition to the curriculum and the kids love working with Murakami — even if planting seeds isn’t always her son’s favorite part.

"He wants to take the shovel and dig in the dirt," Dodds said. "He also loves the hose. The messier the better."

The garden has inspired parents to try gardening as well. Dodds will be planting a small vegetable garden in her backyard this summer.

"I’m not sure how successful it will be," she said, "but we’ll see."

**Working together**

A donation from MU’s Nutrition and Exercise Physiology Department launched the program, but a contribution from alumni Robert and Marlese Gourley funded the garden’s construction. Murakami also received the National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology Fellowship to help pay for the project.

A division of the Agricultural Research Service and other contributors provided plants and insects. The insects should counteract the harmful insects in the garden, making pesticides unnecessary.

For some of the kids, the bugs are the best part.

Murakami said he is looking forward to expanding his research, improving the garden teacher learning process and starting courses related to using learning gardens in early childhood and elementary education.

But for now, he said he is satisfied with the progress this learning garden has made.

"It’s about being intentional in learning about ourselves and our connection with food and each other," he said.
Build financial security with a truly affordable car

Median-income families in only one major city can afford the average price Americans are paying for new cars and trucks nowadays.

That's the sobering result of Interest.com's 2014 Car Affordability Study, which determined how much the typical household in the nation's 25 largest cities should be spending on a new vehicle.

According to Kelley Blue Book, the average price of a new car or truck sold in the United States in 2013 was $32,086.

Only in Washington, D.C., could the median income support buying a vehicle at that price.

In the lower end of the scale, median-income buyers in Tampa could only afford to spend $14,209 on a vehicle.

Big differences across major cities were due not only to median household incomes but to a wide range of tax rates and insurance costs.

The results point to one important conclusion: Most Americans are spending far more than they can truly afford on their vehicles.

"Just because you can manage the monthly payment doesn’t mean you should let a $30,000 or $40,000 ride gobble up all such a huge share of your paycheck," says Mike Sante, Interest.com managing editor.

"You can get a great car for much less and use the savings to invest in yourself. Here’s where the money for your retirement or kids’ college can come from."

Adam Koos, founder and president of Libertas Wealth Management in Dublin, Ohio, says every family should be saving at least 10% of their income.

Yet the latest data from the Department of Commerce show that the personal savings rate in January was a paltry 3.4%. 
Where is it going?

"Many people spend all their money on a car," Koos says. "Spending too much can quickly limit your ability to save or invest in your future."

There's no point in cutting out lattes to save a few bucks if you're forking out $500 or $600 a month per month for a vehicle.

We created the Car Affordability Study to provide consumers with a smart and simple way to decide how much they can truly afford to spend before they ever step foot in a dealership.

We gathered data on median income, auto insurance costs and vehicle sales tax rates in the nation's 25 metro areas from the most reliable sources we could find, including the U.S. Census Bureau and National Association of Insurance Commissioners.

We calculated how much the median-income family should borrow and budget for a monthly payment based on what we call the "20/4/10 rule."

It says prudent buyers should:

- Make a down payment of at least 20% (and that can include the value of your trade-in).
- Finance the balance for no more than four years.
- Not let your total monthly vehicle expenses (including principal, interest and insurance) exceed 10% of your gross income.

We then used Interest.com's auto loan calculator to determine how much the typical family in each of those cities could afford to spend on a car.

Click here and we'll walk you through the process with your paychecks and insurance bills to see exactly how much you should spend on a new car or truck.

In our study, the difference in median incomes among the 25 largest cities is substantial, running from $88,233 a year in Washington to $44,402 in Tampa.

Sales taxes vary greatly as well, from a high of 9.8% in Seattle and 9.5% in Chicago to a low of 0% in Portland, Ore.

Following the 20/4/10 rule, we assumed the buyers would make a 20% down payment and finance the balance over 48 months.
We used an interest rate of 4.16%, the average cost of a 48-month new-car loan when the calculations were made. (Since then, rates have fallen slightly.)

If you have good credit, you can probably find a better rate, maybe even qualify for a free loan from one of the automakers. (Search our extensive database to find the best car loans from dozens of lenders in your area.)

The lower the rate, the more you'll be able to pay for a new car or truck and still limit your principal, interest and insurance payments to 10% of your gross income.

It's not the end of the world if you bend the rules a little, especially if you're the kind of person who drives a car for 10 years or more.

But if the calculations say you should spend $30,000 and you sign on the dotted line for $40,000 or $45,000, your finances are going to take a hit.

"You need to have the discipline and be realistic about what you can buy versus what you want to buy," says Karl Brauer, senior analyst at Kelley Blue Book. "Sometimes it can't be both."

Ryan Law, director of the Office for Financial Success at the University of Missouri-Columbia, says that a new car or truck is one of the biggest expenses we can actually control.

Unfortunately, most car buyers aren't making rational decisions about their financial future when they hit the showroom.

A lifetime of advertising has turned this purchase into an emotional decision that tells the world how successful we've been or how hip we are. Every salesperson knows how to profit from that by touting the priciest possible models.

You won't hear them fretting about the 20/4/10 rule.

Yet, as Law puts it, "if you can cut your car note in half and save the rest, it can have a tremendous impact on your finances."

But be careful, it's not all about the monthly payment. One of the auto industry's favorite tricks to lower monthly payments and help customers buy more expensive cars than they can really afford is to push longer loans.

The 48-month loans we recommend are bad enough, siphoning thousands of dollars in interest from your savings to pay for something that's losing value every day you own it.
Longer loans are just bigger wealth killers. Brauer says if you need to finance a vehicle for six years, it's a sign you can't afford it.

Experian reported in December 2013 that the average amount financed for a new vehicle reached a whopping $26,719, its highest point since 2008.

Experian also reported that the average new-vehicle loan was for 65 months. Almost 20% of loans in the in the third quarter of 2013 were for lengths between 73 and 84 months.

Which brings us to one of the smartest ways to get into a car or truck that's more expensive than you can afford — buy a used one.

"There are good values out there," Brauer says. "Slightly used cars are still very nice, have warranties and are much less expensive."

The average price of a used vehicle sold at new-car dealerships is still well under $20,000, according to Kelley Blue Book ($19,268 to be exact.)

Many of those were "certified" preowned cars and trucks that have been rigorously inspected and come with five- to seven-year warranties with up to 100,000 miles.

Brauer likes that option and suggests that buying a certified, low-mileage used vehicle, then "driving it until the wheels fall off," is the most efficient use of your money.

Unless you're swimming in cash, what you park in your driveway and how much you pay for it relative to your income, can have a big impact in your life.

"It's easy to overspend on vehicles because we love cars and financing makes it seem easy to afford." Law says. "But it's a depreciating asset and does nothing for you financially in the long run."