The University of Missouri System is implementing a new course-sharing program this fall in an effort to expand access for students at each of the four campuses.

The effort serves multiple purposes: to create an online alternative for classes that typically have low enrollment, to broaden access to unique classes and to give partnering faculty members time to work on other projects, such as research, because they’re ideally alternating semesters of teaching their online courses.

Through course-sharing, faculty members from two or more campuses partner up on their ideas for unique courses, said Steve Graham, UM senior associate vice president for academic affairs.

The faculty members can then apply for a grant from the UM System to help them get their course online.

Each of the campuses still have their own online programs, which are separate from the new effort, but if an MU student is interested in something available at the University of Missouri-Kansas City campus, that student’s enrollment dollars for that class then move to Kansas City.

Graham said he expected a dozen classes for the first year of inter-campus course-sharing. Instead, they’re rolling out 34. Graham didn’t anticipate this much interest from faculty across the four campuses, he said, calling it a pleasant surprise. The plan is to increase the number of classes available each year.

This year, an MU professor will teach a class called Military Culture: Issues for Helping Professionals, while an UMSL professor teaches Social Policy and Military Veterans. Students who are working toward social work degrees or graduate certificates can earn credit by taking both courses, which will likely alternate semesters.
Margie Sabel, director of the MU School of Social Work, said working with the course-sharing program will be a positive experience for students because it expands their options. She called it a “win-win” for faculty and students.

Graham said the UM System administrators doled out about $250,000 in 20 grants for the courses.

“We were worried people wouldn’t be interested in it at first, which is why we offered the grant money,” Graham said, adding that with faculty members’ research and teaching responsibilities, it would be hard to find the time and resources for many of them to make these online courses possible without some help.

The success of this pilot year will determine how the program will operate in the future.

City, county and MU to present Hinkson progress report

On Wednesday, city of Columbia, Boone County and University of Missouri officials will present a progress report on efforts to curb pollution in Hinkson Creek to officials from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The city, county and MU have been working together for about two years to abate the flow of stormwater runoff into the Hinkson.

According to a release from the city, DNR Director Sara Parker Pauley and Karl Brooks, administrator for EPA Region 7, will be in attendance to accept the report. Columbia Mayor Bob McDavid, Boone County Southern District Commissioner Karen Miller and Gary Ward, MU’s interim chief operating officer, will present the report.

The event is scheduled for 5 p.m. Wednesday at the 3M Flat Branch-Hinkson Creek Wetlands pavilion, located at the 2-mile marker on the MKT Trail.
University of Missouri researchers are developing an in-home health monitoring and alert system that can sync patients’ individualized health information between homes and hospitals.

Marjorie Skubic, an MU professor of electrical and computer engineering, and her colleagues are fronting the new “closed loop” health care system initiative. The new sensor technologies will allow doctors to monitor patients while at home.

“As patients transfer between care units, sensor data are automatically delivered to their bedsides by the integrated health care platform,” Skubic said. “When the patients return home, the system continues to track their activity, behaviors and vital signs and sends alerts if health changes are detected.”

With information sharing between homes and hospitals, the closed loop technologies will allow for more individualized care with a lower risk of complications. The system’s ability to provide comprehensive, personalized health information can also lead to lower costs, Skubic said.

“These ‘smart home’ systems have the potential to create tremendous cost savings for individuals and health care systems,” Skubic said. “By streamlining the health care operation into a cohesive system, we will save costs, provide better care and achieve improved health outcomes.”

Skubic and her team have already successfully integrated sensor technologies into assisted-care facilities. These sensors, placed in residents’ rooms, can monitor an individual’s pulse and respiration rate, how often he or she uses the restroom and can detect falls.
By implementing these data sensor technologies in patients' homes, Skubic hopes that the in-home technology will allow elderly patients to "age in place" and live healthier lives with increased, personalized care.

Skubic, along with her collaborator Julian Goldman of Harvard University and several of her team members, presented their research on closed loop health care Wednesday, June 11, in Washington D.C. at the SmartAmerica Challenge Expo.

Nicklaus: To improve Missouri's economy, invest in the kids

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NO MENTION

Education is a prerequisite for success in today’s economy, and that’s as true for regions, states and nations as it is for individuals.

Yet states and regions don’t talk about education the way individuals do. Young people are told repeatedly that education is their ticket to the future, but for governors and legislators, it’s just one competing priority among many.

Should we spend more on schools or cut taxes? Invest in universities or boost business incentives? These kind of trade-offs are made every year in state capitals, and they often come down to tests of clout — rural versus urban interests, business groups versus teachers unions, and so on.

Economist Rik Hafer wants to reframe the debate. We should think of our schools and universities, he says, as sources of a key ingredient for economic growth: human capital.

If schools don’t produce a capable future workforce, the local economy will stagnate. It’s as simple as that.

Hafer, a professor of economics at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, recently compared states’ economic performance to their ranking on various measures of educational attainment. His study was published by the Show-Me Institute, a free-market think tank.
States with higher percentages of high school and college graduates, Hafer finds, tend to have faster-growing economies. He finds an even stronger correlation between economic growth and scores on standardized tests taken by fourth- and eighth-graders.

Graduation rates measure how long people stayed in school, but the test scores measure how much they learned. It makes sense, then, that the tests are a better proxy for human capital.

“We can’t ignore graduation rates, but it’s equally important, if not more important, that we think about what the students know when they graduate,” Hafer says.

The bad news for Missouri is that its students rank 27th among 41 states for which test scores are available. Its high school and college completion rates also rank in the lower half of all states.

A few weeks ago, I wrote about a separate study in which Hafer gives Missouri a “D” for economic performance. Job growth in has been anemic, and Missouri is losing ground economically to other states. His new paper helps explain that poor economic performance. It also sounds a pessimistic note for the future. “Do not expect long-term progress anytime soon in the state’s economic standard of living,” the paper concludes.

The link between education and economic performance hasn’t been ignored in policy circles. The St. Louis Regional Chamber has set an ambitious goal of increasing the number of area residents with college degrees, partly by focusing on adults who started college but didn’t finish. Such efforts are a good start, but human capital is the ultimate long-term investment. “It may take a decade, or it may take a whole generation of students to come through before you see any change in the statistics,” Hafer says.

What we know is that the kindergartner who gets a substandard education today — perhaps because we can’t figure out a regional solution to the problem of unaccredited school districts — will be a drag on the Missouri economy of 2027, 2047 and even 2067.

Hafer is an economist, not an education policy expert. He’s not making any specific recommendations about how to get that kindergartner a better education, but he is saying that we can’t afford not to try.