Incoming MU medical school dean faces challenges

By Ashley Jost

Sunday, July 27, 2014 at 12:00 am

It will be different, and probably difficult, for Patrick Delafontaine to step away from his role as a researcher to lead hundreds of faculty, staff and students as the new dean of the University of Missouri School of Medicine.

Though he won’t be in the laboratory himself as much, Delafontaine is charged with boosting the research done within the medical school. Delafontaine is set to join the MU campus on Dec. 1, days after he leaves his role as chief of cardiology at Tulane University in New Orleans. He said he knows he has a big challenge ahead of him.

As part of its strategic plan, MU has placed an increased focus on research-based projects and hiring to improve its status within the Association of American Universities, or AAU, of which Tulane is also a member. For many universities, medical schools are among the top, though not the only, vehicles for bringing in federal research money.

Since his arrival in February, MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin has stressed that one of the ways to raise MU’s rank within the AAU is to boost research from the medical school.

Delafontaine said he has had conversations with Loftin about their strategies.

“There will be a couple of things we will do,” Delafontaine said. “One is recruitment. We will place a high emphasis on research in the selection of faculty.”

The second focus will be on getting faculty involved in inter-school research programs, he said. Being one of the only AAU institutions with a medical school and a veterinary school gives MU an edge, and that was one of the factors that drew Delafontaine to Columbia.

But it’s not just the veterinary school. There is engineering, animal sciences and an array of other possible dual appointments for faculty.

The announcement of Delafontaine’s appointment comes more than two years after the college’s former dean, Robert Churchill, resigned as the school faced a federal fraud investigation. An
internal investigation found two of the school’s radiologists committed billing fraud. A federal investigation and accompanying lawsuit are still in progress.

Since Churchill’s departure, the college has been led in the interim by Les Hall.

“It’s been a very difficult time,” Loftin said about the past few years. “Les Hall has done a great job as interim dean, but it’s difficult without a sense of permanency in leadership.”

The lack of permanent leadership wasn’t just at the top. At least three of the 21 department chairs hold the interim title, including the surgery department.

“When you don’t have that permanent leader, it’s tougher to get things done,” said Doug Wakefield, professor and director of the Center for Health Care Quality. “It’s a less satisfying situation for everyone involved, and it really has been.”

Wakefield said it’s “frustrating” that “the message has been the School of Medicine isn’t working hard enough on research.” He said many faculty members are, but they’re working on research that isn’t related to what’s measured by the AAU, including spending time in clinicals.

“The new dean is going to have the challenge of maintaining and growing our clinical efforts to maintain that revenue to the school and increase our focus on research,” Wakefield said. “That’s a pretty big job.”

Loftin agrees that although a chief effort is to increase research, “we can’t just cut back on teaching.”

Morale isn’t at its peak after years of uncertainty. Faculty members have taken concerns to the MU Faculty Council, which is creating a fact-finding committee to look into them. Delafontaine said he understands the situation, and he hopes to reach out to faculty before he arrives on campus to gather their input while making plans for the future of the medical school.

“I’m a collaborative person — I like to get input from people,” Delafontaine said. “I like to listen. At some point, I will make a decision, but often the decision is a consensus when working in a shared government model.”

Delafontaine and his wife, Mary, plan to move to Columbia in November. The couple has two sons, Jean-Luc, 25, and Laurent, 21, who both attended Tulane. Delafontaine jokes that he hopes to convince Laurent to move to Columbia and attend graduate school at MU.
MU Faculty Council panel to look into medical school issues

By Ashley Jost

Sunday, July 27, 2014 at 12:00 am

The University of Missouri Faculty Council is creating a “fact-finding committee” to look into multiple concerns brought forward by faculty from the MU School of Medicine.

Issues with ability to get research done, interactions with superiors and use of faculty input by superiors are among the issues that have been raised over the past several months, members said.

“This is not an investigation. It’s fact-finding,” said Dennis Miller, a member of the MU Faculty Council executive committee, which requested Chairman Craig Roberts form the fact-finding committee. “We want to know, ‘Is there any truth to this?’ ”

The idea is similar to a committee created when the nuclear science and engineering program was closed abruptly a few years ago. The committee spent months interviewing employees and administrators, compiling notes and creating an entire chronology of conversations, emails and interviews to piece together what happened, giving council members the chance to gain perspective and ask questions.

“Faculty Council doesn’t want to get involved in individual departments,” Miller said. “It’s just that colleagues in the School of Medicine led us to believe this is an important issue. We want them to be happier and more productive in their work.”

Roberts said he hopes to have members of the fact-finding committee in place in the next month.
Deaton works on new development program

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Brady Deaton has been leading his namesake institution that targets international development since his retirement last year as chancellor of the University of Missouri.

University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe said after Deaton retired that the university was honoring Deaton with a new program, the Brady and Anne Deaton Institute for Leadership and International Development. The organization focuses on how the university can be more effective in influencing international development in areas such as food security and economic development.

The institute had a $301,921 operating budget for FY2015, with about $236,000 going toward Deaton's salary and benefits, The Columbia Daily Tribune reported (http://bit.ly/1pMPjMe). The budget includes $25,236 for unspecified operating expenses and $3,500 for equipment.

Deaton so far has divided his time between Columbia and traveling to conferences or events. Deaton said his job is to advocate for the university and be a liaison between the research community, the policy community and the university. He said he's made several major presentations around the country.

"I'm trying to get as familiar as possible with the range of research we're doing at the university so I know what we're on the cutting edge of," Deaton said. "I've done a lot of relationship building and information collecting. I take all of what I've learned about what we're doing and bring it with me to meetings and conferences."

He and Kattesh Katti, a University of Missouri curator's professor of radiology and physics, also received a speaking request from Gov. Jay Nixon to present what they've learned about green nanotechnology, a field that connects agriculture with emerging technology.

"It's important that someone from our campus is working on these issues," Katti said. "That's how we make higher education sustainable. It's not enough to do research and teach anymore, we need to be involved in helping the economic development of our state."
AAU 101: Ranking? What ranking?

By Ashley Jost

Sunday, July 27, 2014 at 2:15 pm Comments (1)

When the University of Missouri named the new medical school dean a week or so ago, my editor suggested I add a line or two about where the new dean’s home institution, Tulane University in New Orleans, stands within the Association of American Universities.

“I’m really sorry, but there is no such thing as a ranking within the AAU,” a spokesperson for Tulane told me.

What? You’re joking, right? What in the world have we been talking about these last few months then?

Sometimes it takes eight months into the job to learn something really, really important, apparently. I wanted to share what I found, and explain how unique MU is for being open about this alleged ranking that its peers keep under wraps.

Background: The AAU is incredibly prestigious. Only 34 public institutions in the country are members - 62 total including private schools. MU has been a member since 1908. There were 12 universities that were part of the AAU before MU and hosts of other schools joined in 1908. A dozen - that’s it.

A few years ago, under the leadership of MU Chancellor Brady Deaton, the discussion began about how the Columbia campus was struggling, arguably. They needed to be doing better within the AAU. Deaton, and UM System President Tim Wolfe, spoke openly about MU ranking 32 out of the 34 public schools in the AAU.

Deaton, Wolfe and now Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin all speak openly about a goal, too. MU wants to be ranked No. 28 out of the 34 public schools by 2018.

So how could this Tulane spokesperson tell me there’s no such thing as a ranking?

My first email was to Hank Foley, executive vice president of academic affairs for the UM System as well as the senior vice chancellor for research and graduate studies at MU.
“To the public, you’re either in or you’re out,” he told me. “Internally, you know exactly where you stand.”

Foley said he and other MU administrators “know exactly where we’re ranked, and we’re not where we should be.” Administrators at other schools know to, even if they choose to keep it quiet.

The stress - which possibly caused the openness about MU’s ranking, though I’m just guessing - for some AAU schools about their performance came after the University of Nebraska at Lincoln was given the proverbial boot from the association in 2011.

There are a series of membership indicators that every institution is considered on. Heavily weighted among those indicators are federal research expenditures. For the University of Nebraska, the flagship campus didn’t house the medical school, which affected research expenditures, according to an Inside Higher Education article from 2011. Additionally, the campus is focused on agricultural research, but Department of Agriculture grants don’t hold the same weight within the AAU as National Science Foundation grants.

Administrators are very cognizant of where their university stands on the eight indicators. Aside from research dollars, citations and faculty honors are among the other indicators.

With faculty being so key in where a university would rank because so many indicators depend on them, why not be open and deliberate about where your university stands, Chancellor Loftin pointed out to me Friday.

“I was a little surprised, and pleasantly so, that Chancellor Deaton had been so transparent about sharing this information all the way down the line,” Loftin said. At Texas A&M University, his former employer, the conversation about A&M’s ranking didn’t go past the dean level.

Loftin said that he is unaware of any school that speaks openly about its ranking like MU does. Out of curiosity, I called a few regional AAU public schools, including the ever-rivaled University of Kansas. A voicemail response from a spokesman indicated they don’t discuss it either.

Somewhere along the process here, I reached out to the AAU to see if, by chance, I could see this elusive ranking list. Worth a shot, I thought.

Barry Toiv, AAU vice president for public affairs, informed me that information isn’t public, which I expected.

The closest we’ll really get to knowing the rankings is looking at and comparing research funding through the National Science Foundation, Toiv and Foley both told me. I’ve included some of that data in the sidebar, but I have to stress that I have no way of knowing how much of an indicator this really is to actual rankings. The most up-to-date data on the NSF site is from fiscal year 2012.
You will see two attached documents. The first shows a list of all public schools, ranked by research dollars. MU is ranked No. 64 out of hundreds. Compared to all of the other AAU schools (which are highlighted in green), MU is ranked 31 out of 34.

The second document is only Missouri schools, public and private. MU has about $240 million in research dollars from fiscal year 2012. Washington University in St. Louis, the only other AAU school in Missouri, sits at about $706 million. WashU is a private school so, in a way, that is comparing apples and oranges. That’s why MU administrators are concerned about their standing among other public schools, because this is how well those private institutions sit in terms of research dollars alone.

Enjoy, datamongers.

**COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN**

**UM curators approve request of more than $240 million for STEM funding**

Friday, July 25, 2014 | 6:14 p.m. CDT; updated 11:55 a.m. CDT, Saturday, July 26, 2014

BY CAMERON DODD, JOE GUSZKOWSKI, ZACHARY VAN EPPS

COLUMBIA — **Improvements to the University of Missouri System's STEM facilities — those related to science, technology, engineering and math — topped the list of capital state funding requested by the university for the 2016 fiscal year.**

The UM System Board of Curators unanimously approved the request at a meeting Friday. The board also approved the system's request for operating funding for 2016 — a total of $521.4 million among the system’s four campuses, $24.9 million of which would also go toward STEM initiatives.

*To view the complete documents prepared for the Friday meeting, [click here.]*

**Capital budget**

Almost $243 million in state funding has been requested for the rehabilitation of STEM facilities throughout the system.

*The funding request doubles as a way to repair buildings that have deferred maintenance needs, said Thomas Richards, interim system vice president for finance. This allows the university to achieve several goals at once.*
MU requested $104.3 million for its STEM Renovation and Rehabilitation Project, which includes renovations to five campus buildings and would eliminate $57.6 million of deferred maintenance, according to board documents.

In 2013, MU’s deferred maintenance added up to $552 million and grows by $22 million each year, according to previous Missourian reporting.

According to board documents, the STEM project would have a $255.6 million impact on Missouri’s economy, generate $76.6 million in state earnings and create 1,930 jobs statewide.

MU buildings included in the STEM project are:

- **Lafferre Hall** — The building, most of which was built before 1950, makes up 70 percent of the College of Engineering's space at MU. Funding would pay for the consolidation of undergraduate teaching labs on the first floor, helping to support a nearly 60 percent growth in enrollment over the past seven years, according to board documents.

- **McKee Hall** — Built in 1922 as the "Women’s Gymnasium," McKee has undergone few renovations, according to board documents. Proposed renovations for the building are aimed at utilizing nearly 3,500 square feet created when a swimming pool was in-filled in 2005. The space could hold six new labs for several types of basic science courses, increasing the class lab capacity up to 144 student stations and allowing more than 2,500 students to be enrolled each year, according to board documents.

- **Waters Hall** — More than 100 years old, Waters is one of several buildings used by the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources and the Division of Plant Sciences. About 7,500 students use the building each year, despite needed improvements in classrooms and research labs, according to the documents. In the event of future facility consolidation, the curators think a renovated Waters Hall could be used for various types of science courses.

- **Mumford Hall** — Built in 1922, the building serves about 2,500 students each year through its large lecture hall, class laboratory and classrooms. By renovating Mumford, MU hopes to provide more access to STEM laboratory courses for students, as well as eliminate leftover maintenance on campus buildings, according to board documents.

- **Stewart Hall** — Built in 1912, about 9,500 students use Stewart Hall each year for its auditorium, nine laboratories and two classrooms. Having identified a critical need for more labs, MU hopes to allow more students access to STEM laboratory courses by improving Stewart Hall’s facilities. According to board documents, renovating the hall...
would also address MU’s need to eliminate deferred maintenance in general and educational buildings across campus.

Board documents cite economic studies that show a state’s prosperity depends on STEM education and research in its universities. A 2010 Missouri Gateway-Skills Report predicted a more than 22 percent increase in STEM-related jobs by 2018 and the university "has a responsibility to the state for producing educated graduates to meet those workforce needs," according to the documents.

Richards, who presented the request to the board, said the university has deliberately focused on funding for STEM initiatives as a way to create a clear message for legislators.

"What we'd like to do ... is really to develop a very clear story about this initiative as a whole that will make it easier to explain to legislators," Richards said. "We want to make it very focused, very targeted from this point forward. This will be part of the message when selling this project."

During a January curators meeting, UM System President Tim Wolfe said he supported renovations to Lafferre Hall and other STEM facilities at the four system campuses.

He said in January that there is a growing need to fill STEM-related jobs and the condition of the university's buildings keeps the system from maintaining its mission and producing STEM graduates.

Operating budget

The university's request for general operations funding included $441 million in recurring appropriations — those that are anticipated to be granted every year.

In addition to the recurring funds, the board approved $53.1 million in new state funding requests, including a total of $24.9 million in STEM funding.

Of that request, $12.9 million would be used for recruiting teachers and research faculty in STEM fields. Another $12 million in recurring funding was requested for the renovation and rehabilitation of STEM buildings.

Added to the list of operating requests was $12.3 million for the Caring for Missourians Mental Health Initiative, proposed by Gov. Jay Nixon in December 2013 as part of his budget for the 2015 fiscal year.
The initiative is a joint effort between Missouri’s public universities and the Missouri Department of Mental Health to provide aid to areas in the state that have a shortage of mental health providers.

The requests do not reflect the $98.1 million in UM funding being withheld by Nixon in an attempt to deter legislative overrides of his vetoes of 10 tax cut bills. If the legislature overrides the vetoes at its September session and Nixon continues to withhold funds, it would impact the requests, Richards said.

Wolfe said there were backup plans in place in the event that the tax bill vetoes are overridden, including a 1.5 percent increase in tuition.

MU summer program highlights undergraduate research

By Ashley Jost

Saturday, July 26, 2014 at 12:00 am

Not all research is conducted by graduate and doctoral students. In fact, graduate and doctoral students are not the only ones to bring federal dollars to the University of Missouri for research.

More than 130 students from schools across the country wrapped up their nine-week stint at MU’s undergraduate research summer program yesterday. The annual summer program ended with a conference giving students the chance to discuss their research with faculty and other students.

Linda Blockus, director of the MU Office of Undergraduate Research, said what she enjoys about the program and her job is the chance to show that it’s not just doctoral or graduate students who bring in the federal dollars for research.

About half of the student participants in the program were from other institutions, including universities in Puerto Rico, Hawaii and across the United States.
The majority of the students received federal funding for their MU research opportunity, and a little more than half specifically received funding from the National Science Foundation. The grants averaged around $7,000 per student, depending on the supporting agency, and covered room, board and a stipend for students, Blockus said.

Students in the summer program typically are more science-oriented, Blockus said. Much of the arts and humanities research conducted by undergraduates is presented during a larger spring conference.

During Thursday’s research conference, the students’ work covered three floors of the Bond Life Sciences Center. The students stood by their posters highlighting their work, discussing it with passersby.

Ryan Goul, an incoming senior at the University of Kansas, spent the past several weeks using X-rays to measure how silver grows, or stacks up, on silicon. The research, which he worked on with a MU faculty mentor and was sponsored by the National Science Foundation, has possible applications in nano-scale processors and circuits, he said.

Goul said the reputation of the program and the proximity to his home state of Kansas made MU the right fit for the summer. He’s even considering MU as a graduate school option.

Zac Crane, an incoming junior at MU, said the convenience of staying at home and working on his National Science Foundation-sponsored research was an easy choice. Crane’s focus this summer was on how the elderly interact with information technology, particularly addressing struggles such as accessing buttons, reading from screens and other issues that come with aging.

“It was an interesting view into what graduate school research is like,” he said. “Just seeing what a lab is like with graduate students and professors interacting with each other was really cool.”

MU students who participated in similar undergraduate research programs at other institutions will present their work to their peers and faculty at a conference Sept. 16, Blockus said.
Students volunteer in cleanup project as part of MU leadership program

By Roger McKinney

Friday, July 25, 2014 at 10:20 am Comments (1)

Braden Smith was close to exhaustion Thursday after hiking along Flat Branch creek gathering trash.

“The stream’s tiring,” said Braden, a 13-year-old from Centralia. He said he expected some trash, but not this much. “I feel glad and happy that I helped the city.”

Braden was one of several area students involved this week in the Truman Leadership Camp, presented by graduate students in the University of Missouri Truman School of Public Affairs.

Braden said he learned a lot during the week.

“There’s a lot of qualities a leader has to have,” he said. “You have to be responsible. You have to be respectful. You have to be smart and courteous.”

Camp Director Adam Schmid said the camp has emphasized critical thinking and decision-making in tense situations. He said they talked about ethical dilemmas and the correct choices.

He said several in leadership roles at the university spoke with the students.

Yesterday afternoon, students were to play roles of members of President Harry Truman’s cabinet during the Berlin blockade of 1948.

Autumn Kane, 13, of Columbia said the program has taught her about “respect and responsibility and things like that.”

She was part of a group picking up trash and cleaning up graffiti downtown.

“At first I thought it was going to be really hard, but I haven’t found anything too nasty so far,” she said.

Elena Seville, 12, of Columbia also was volunteering on the downtown cleanup.
“Eww, eww, eww, I don’t want to touch it,” Elena said as she picked up a child’s sucker from a downtown sidewalk by the stick and placed it in a bag.

She said she was impressed by a presentation by representatives from True North, a Columbia emergency shelter for victims of domestic and sexual violence. She said the week had been filled with workshops and presentations.

Logan Baker, 13, of Columbia said he had learned a lot from the camp.

“Helping your community is very good and that’s how you become a leader,” Logan said.

Tina DeClue, volunteer programs specialist for the city of Columbia, said the downtown and creek cleanup was a great way to get young people exposed to volunteering — an important aspect of leadership.

“Volunteering isn’t an event in life, it’s a lifestyle,” she said.

Round up: FOIA Friday returns, MSA president resigns

By Ashley Jost

Saturday, July 26, 2014 at 12:53 pm

Have a great weekend, everyone. Look out for a post tomorrow about the AAU and what makes the University of Missouri unique within the prestigious organization.

Also, check out tomorrow's Tribune for a feature on the incoming MU medical school dean, as well as a story on a recent a recent Faculty Council executive committee request for a fact-finding committee to look into faculty concerns related to the MU School of Medicine.

Inside the system:

- FOIA Friday: This week’s request is for University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe’s travel expenses to date during 2014. The largest expenses were for a few trips to national conferences or events. There was one surprisingly large expense - $1,271 - for Wolfe’s Show-Me Value Tour trip to Kansas City. I say surprisingly large because this trip to Kansas City is
comparable to the cost of traveling to some of the national events. Since I received this document, I’ve asked for all expenses tied to the Show-Me Value Tour.

- The UM Board of Curators had their annual teleconference meeting yesterday. Their main business was approving the state appropriation requests for capital projects and operating budgets.

- The University of Missouri-Kansas City is going smoke-free starting Aug. 1, just one year after the flagship campus in Columbia implemented a similar ban.

- UMKC also named its new medical school dean this week. Steven Kanter, a neurosurgeon from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, comes to the campus Oct. 1.

- Mason Schara, president of the Missouri Students Association, is resigning at the end of the month (which is a few days away). In a news release, he said that his resignation and departure from MU stems from a family medical emergency. His current vice president will serve as the president for the rest of the term/year.

- The Wall Street Journal led a story on CEOs and CFOs who share alma maters with a few MU alumni.

- An area researcher from the ParentLink, an education extension of MU, is looking for people who can participate in her study about “grandfamilies,” or families where children are being raised by grandparents or other relatives who have already raised children of their own earlier in life. Traylor is still looking for families to help with her research.

**Outside the system:**

- The Department of Higher Education’s Inside magazine, a quarterly publication, is out.

- Missouri State is offering a new, free online course this semester, the first time the university offering a Massive Open Online Courses. MOOCs have been pretty popular during the last year or two. The Missouri State MOOC is called “Laura Ingalls Wilder: Her Work and Writing Life.” Details are on the Springfield News-Leader site. According to Christine Temple, SN-L higher education reporter, about 2,500 people have signed up for the course so far.

- Another week, another sexual assault investigation at a renown college. Brown University has been added to the list of schools being investigated for mishandling of a sexual assault case, according to the Huffington Post.
When you experience strange pains, mysterious digestive issues, or other unexplained symptoms, you'd hope a trip to the doctor would solve your health woes. But sometimes, doctors have just as much trouble identifying certain disorders and conditions as their patients.

"A lot of symptoms are nonspecific and variable, depending on the person," says David Fleming, MD, president of the American College of Physicians and a professor of medicine at the University of Missouri. "On top of that, many diagnostic tests are expensive and aren't done routinely, and even then they don't always give us a black and white answer."

The following five conditions are notoriously difficult to pin down.

**Irritable bowel syndrome**

Some conditions are difficult to diagnose because there is no real test to prove their existence; rather, they require a "diagnosis of elimination," says Dr. Fleming, as doctors rule out all other possibilities.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)—a chronic condition that affects the large intestine and causes abdominal pain, cramping, bloating, diarrhea, and/or constipation—is one of these cases. According to diagnostic criteria, a patient should have symptoms for at least six months before first being seen for a formal evaluation, and discomfort should be present at least three days a month in the last three months before being diagnosed with IBS.

**Celiac disease**

So much confusion surrounds celiac disease—an immune reaction to gluten that triggers inflammation in the small intestine—that it takes the average patient six to 10 years to be properly diagnosed.

Celiac sufferers would, in theory, have digestive problems when eating gluten-containing foods like wheat, barley, and rye, but in fact, only about half of people diagnosed with the disease have experienced diarrhea and weight loss. Celiac disease can also cause itchy skin, headaches, joint pain, and acid reflux or heartburn, and it's all too easy to blame these symptoms on other things.
A blood test can diagnose celiac disease no matter what symptoms are present, and an endoscopy can determine any damage that's been done to the small intestine.

**Fibromyalgia**

Fibromyalgia, which is characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain, involves "medically unexplained symptoms"—a term doctors use to describe persistent complaints that don't appear to have an obvious physical cause.

When doctors can't find a root cause for a patient's chronic pain and fatigue, they often settle on this diagnosis. This may involve seeing specialists and ruling out other diseases, some of which prove equally difficult to diagnose, says Eugene Shapiro, MD, deputy director of the Investigative Medicine Program at Yale University.

"There are studies that show that people with certain symptoms who show up at a rheumatologist will be diagnosed with fibromyalgia, but if the same patients show up at a gastroenterologist they'll be diagnosed as having irritable bowel syndrome."

**Rheumatoid arthritis**

Unexplained aches and pains may also be caused by rheumatoid arthritis (RA), an autoimmune disorder.

Unlike osteoarthritis (the "wear and tear" kind that appears as people get older), RA causes inflammation and painful swelling of joints and can occur at any age.

"Early stages of RA can mimic many other conditions—sometimes it's just a sense of aches or stiffness in the joints, which could be caused by a lot of different things," says Dr. Fleming.

Blood tests can help detect the presence of inflammation in the body, he says, but an exact diagnosis of RA also must take into account a patient's medical history and a doctor's careful physical exam.

**Multiple sclerosis**

Another autoimmune disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) occurs when the immune system attacks the body's own nerve cells and disrupts communication between the brain and the rest of the body. Some of the first symptoms of MS are often numbness, weakness, or tingling in one or more limbs, but that's not always the case.

"Multiple sclerosis can be episodic; the disease waxes and wanes," says Dr. Shapiro. Depending on the number and location of lesions in the brain, he adds, signs and symptoms may be more or less severe in different people. Once a doctor does suspect MS, however, a spinal tap or MRI can help confirm the diagnosis.
DECATUR, ILL. • They came from across the country to learn more about the ways farmers can use drones to manage their sprawling fields.

They watched flight demonstrations. Listened to presentations by experts. And learned what it costs to operate a well-equipped machine.

But what they didn’t hear — at least not officially — was anyone urging them to actually buy a drone to use for farming.

That’s because the Federal Aviation Administration, just days before the gathering, delivered a blow to this young but promising farm tool.

In a fresh interpretation of rules governing model aircraft, the agency says you can fly a drone for fun, but can’t use one to make money or business decisions.

“It’s made a lot of us rethink how to approach it,” said Bill Wiebold, a soybean specialist and new drone enthusiast at the University of Missouri Extension.

Wiebold, who spoke at the Precision Aerial Ag Show earlier this month, said he’s been forced to adjust the language he uses when talking to farmers, who are increasingly interested in the technology. With the FAA’s current stance, he’s fearful of making suggestions that could get someone in trouble with regulators.

“There’s so much promise. But it’s just potential, now,” he said.

When farmers look at drones, or unmanned aircraft systems, they increasingly see tools capable of giving them a better handle on the health of their crops and their land. They can help determine the size of plants, weed infestations, insect problems and drainage issues. But most importantly, they can do these things quicker and more efficiently than is possible on foot, said Stu Ellis, an organizer of the show, which drew some 1,400 attendees from 33 states and six countries.

“You could spend four to five hours walking an 80-acre soybean field,” Ellis said, noting the same ground could be covered in half an hour or less by drone.
But even further, he sees a day when farmers use a small drone for scouting, and a larger model for delivering herbicides or pesticides to troubled areas.

The potential is certainly drawing the attention of farmers such as Matt Ganz, of Compton, Ill. Ganz, who traveled to Decatur on behalf of his family’s farming operation, was intrigued by what he saw, though he was hoping for stronger diagnostic tools.

“From the air, it doesn’t tell you what’s wrong,” Ganz said. “You still have to get out and look.”

And with price tags in the $5,000 to $10,000 range for a well-equipped drone, he said it’s a bit pricey for a smaller operations such as theirs, with a couple thousand acres.

And then there’s all the uncertainty over what the FAA is going to do.

“I think we’re going to wait right now and see what happens,” he said.

**MAKING RULES**

Until recently, the agency essentially ignored the drone realm, simply offering a few basic rules for model aircraft hobbyists to follow. But as drones have grown more sophisticated — and with companies such as Amazon pushing to use them for deliveries to customers — the agency has been forced to reconsider its position.

One of its most closely watched cases started in early 2012, when the FAA went after Raphael Pirker, who used a drone in 2011 to shoot aerial footage for a University of Virginia Medical Center promotion. The agency slapped Pirker with a $10,000 fine for unsafe use of an aircraft.

In March, a federal administrative judge ruled against the agency, saying it had no basis for the fine and that it shouldn’t have applied aircraft rules to what is essentially a model aircraft.

The agency is appealing the decision, even as it works to come up with a new set of regulations for unmanned flights, as directed by Congress.

In the meantime, the FAA is working to assert control over model aircraft — or at least those not being used by hobbyists. In its June notice, the agency made it clear that any commercial use of drones must have FAA approval. The agency specifically mentioned farming — along with photography and delivery services — as the types of businesses subject to regulation.

There is hope in agriculture and drone circles that the agency will soon offer some sort of exemption for commercial farming, perhaps as soon as this winter.

But some worry over the future of an industry projected by the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International to have an $82 billion economic impact from 2015-2025.
Among them is Brendan Schulman, the New York attorney representing Pirker in his fight against the FAA.

Schulman expects any relief from the FAA to come at a significant cost to commercial users and makers of unmanned aircraft systems. Farmers, for example, could be required to get a pilot’s license. And manufacturers may be forced to gain costly certificates of air worthiness, similar to those required of passenger planes.

“I think we are going to see onerous rules and regulations,” Schulman said. “I think it will destroy a large segment of this industry.”

It’s a situation that certainly has the attention of the companies that have sprung up in recent years and months.

Steve Petrotto is a product designer for Champaign-based Horizon Precision Systems, an eight-month-old subsidiary of Horizon Hobby, which has been around for nearly three decades, selling radio controlled cars, boats and planes around the world. Horizon Precision has developed a quad helicopter-style drone that can be programmed to fly itself around a farm, while collecting images.

That the fledgling unit is backed by a larger firm should be helpful during times of uncertainty, he said.

“If we need to sit back for a year or two for things to get worked out, we can do that,” Petrotto said.

For now, companies like Gibson City, Ill.-based Crop Copter are left to figure out ways to fit into a landscape where the targeted customers can’t really use what’s being sold. At least not without the fear of running afoul of the FAA.

The two-year-old firm had its own tent at the expo, where it had a dozen or so drones on display, in prices ranging from $5,000 to $20,000.

Sales manager Tom King sees tremendous growth opportunities in the field, along with serious questions about whether there’s any real future at all.

“What’s going to hinder it is what the FAA decides to do. That could be the roadblock,” King said. “At this point, we’ve formed a business plan to see what the FAA is going to do. From there, we’ll make our decisions.”
Student debt once again popular on the campaign trail, as Democrats look to keep Senate

Submitted by Michael Stratford on July 28, 2014 - 3:00am

Student debt attracted unprecedented levels of attention during the 2012 presidential election.

As the nation's collective student loan bill for the first time surpassed the $1 trillion threshold and a Congressional deadline on interest rates loomed, student debt captured the attention of both presidential candidates.

Two years later, student debt remains a hot topic in Washington. And even without the drama of a presidential contest, the issue is cropping up on the 2014 campaign trail in some of the most contentious Senate races.

Since holding a vote on their student loan refinancing plan last month, many Senate Democrats have been promoting the plan across the country. Most visibly, the proposal's main architect, Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, has traveled to West Virginia and Kentucky in recent weeks to campaign for Democratic candidates for Senate.

Warren has rallied voters in both states with a populist message about helping the middle class, including providing relief to student loan borrowers. As she has before, she framed her debt relief bill as a choice between helping students or wealthy Americans.

In West Virginia, the Democratic Senate candidate Natalie Tennant, the current secretary of state, distanced herself from Warren’s support of the Obama administration’s regulations on coal emissions.

But Tennant enthusiastically embraced Warren’s student debt refinancing bill, including it as part of her education agenda. Both Tennant and Warren were introduced at a campaign rally this month by a West Virginia University law student who said she would be $108,000 in debt by the time she graduates.
Tennant has also criticized her Republican opponent, U.S. Representative Shelley Moore Capito, for her opposition to the refinancing legislation.

In Kentucky, Democratic challenger Alison Lundergan Grimes has also sought to use student debt to bolster her effort to unseat Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Appearing with Warren at a college affordability rally at the University of Louisville earlier this month, Grimes endorsed the student debt refinancing legislation and criticized McConnell for blocking it.

There too, Warren took some flak. In addition to criticisms about her liberal policies being out of step with Kentucky votes, local Republicans took on Warren’s student aid message directly with a dig at her Harvard University salary, holding signs that said she “took $429,981 from students,” according to The Boston Globe.

Other Senate Democrats across that country who are looking to hold on to their seats this election cycle have also turned to student loan issues to some extent. In Hawaii, Senator Brian Schatz is airing ads that tout his support of last year’s student interest rate compromise. (The ad also cites his legislation aimed at tying federal student aid to colleges’ performance on accountability measures).

Virginia Senator Mark Warner is airing a biographical ad that says he lived out of a car and slept on friends’ couches while “trying to pay back my student loans.” The ad also says Warner has fought to lower the interest rates on student loans.

Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, meanwhile, has posted on her website a student loan calculator where constituents who have existing student loans can see how much they would have saved under the refinancing bill that she supported. She also lists reforming student loans as among the priorities she is fighting for in one of her television ads. Her campaign points to the refinancing legislation as the evidence to support that claim.

In Arkansas, Democratic Senator Mark Pryor has also touted his support of the student loan refinancing measure while criticizing his Republican opponent, Representative Tom Cotton, for voting to reduce student aid.

Pryor’s also had some help from outside political groups in that line of criticism. The National Education Association’s advocacy arm and the
Democratic Patriot Majority USA [13] group are both running ads against Cotton for what they perceive to be hypocrisy in his position on student aid.

“Congressman Tom Cotton used federal student loans to help pay for Harvard, but now Cotton wants to put an end to those same loan programs,” one of the ad’s narrator says. A teacher then says that Cotton is trying to deny Arkansas students the same advantage that he was afforded.

Higher education issues have also been playing a role in the New Hampshire Senate race. Incumbent Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen last week released a new ad focused solely on student loan refinancing.

“Right now, our students can’t refinance their loans the way you can refinance a car loan or a mortgage,” she says in the ad [14], citing the state’s average student loan burden of $33,000. “I want to change that. I am fighting for a bill to allow students to refinance their loans. It will lower rates and save families thousands of dollars.”

After Shaheen first touted her vote in favor of loan refinancing last month, her Republican opponent, the former Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown, released his own higher education plan [15]. Among other things, it calls for wealthy universities to be held accountable for their endowments, and administrator and faculty pay. He has separately [16] called for large university endowments to be taxed.

Missouri’s Memorial Stadium to debut east-side expansion for 2014 football season

BY TOD PALMER, 07/25/2014 4:48 PM

Since joining the Southeastern Conference, Missouri has aggressively upgraded its athletics infrastructure as part of a $200 million facilities master plan.
The Tigers’ athletic department renovated Memorial Stadium’s west side before the 2013 season, adding new club seating and a new press box.

Now, Memorial Stadium’s east-side expansion — with its $45.5 million price tag — will add 4,100 upper deck seats and 1,200 premium seats ahead of the 2014 season.

The new construction also doubles the street-level concourse and adds a 23,000-square foot indoor club.

The east-side expansion — which also includes a new premium tailgating area, Truman’s Terrace — should be completed before the Aug. 30 season opener against South Dakota State.

The stadium capacity will return to 71,000 after dropping to roughly 68,000 last season with initial construction eating up some seating.

Last month, Missouri announced plans for a new full-length indoor practice facility and a new softball stadium as part of the master plan.

Those projects require individual approval from the MU Board of Curators before construction would begin.