A buyout offer by the University of Missouri at Columbia has been accepted by 110 faculty members, who will retire between December 31 and August 31, the Columbia Missourian reports.

The payouts would cost about $17.7-million but would save a similar amount in budgeted salaries and benefits, Christian Basi, a university spokesman, told the newspaper.

The departing professors represent about 42 percent of those who were eligible for the offer, which was made in September.

The buyout offer—a one-time payment of 1.5 times annual base salary, up to $200,000—was made to tenured professors at the flagship university who will be at least 62 years old by August 31.

The College of Arts and Science accounted for 43 of those who accepted the buyout.

In all, 97 of the 110 retirees will depart in August. That leaves plenty of time to fill any crucial slots, said the arts-and-science dean, Michael J. O’Brien. “This came up early enough that we could plan for it,” he said.

A buyout program for 28 eligible administrators is to follow, Mr. Basi said.
110 MU faculty members accept retirement buyout

The University of Missouri offered a buyout to 261 retirement-eligible tenure track faculty members, and we now know 110 have accepted the offer. Those faculty members will receive a onetime payment of 1½ their base salary not exceeding $200,000. The program was designed to free up money to hire new faculty members as well as grant appropriate pay increases to current faculty.

Taking the buyout however, doesn’t mean that the faculty member will disappear from MU. Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin discussed that on KBIA’s Intersection last week.

“Many of these faculty have already chosen to enter negotiations with their department chairs or their deans about remaining at MU. Perhaps in a pure research mode, a pure teaching mode, something other than a pure tenured or tenure track faculty member.”

The hiring of new faculty as well as the rehiring process Loftin described will be done by department chair people or deans, with all hires having to be approved by the provost. The university has not set a timetable on when the new hires will be made, instead leaving that decision to individual departments.
JEFFERSON CITY, MO. - Missouri is cutting back slightly on the amount of aid students will receive under the state's A+ scholarship program.

The program typically provides free community college tuition to students who graduate from high school with at least a 2.5 GPA and meet various other criteria.

But for the spring 2015 semester, the state says it will pay for all but one of a student's credit hours. That means a student taking 15 credit hours would get a scholarship for 14 hours.

The Department of Higher Education says the change is being made because of a funding shortfall, rising tuition rates and a growing number of eligible students.

Department spokesman Liz Coleman says it will be up to each college to decide how to make up for the decreased scholarship funding.
A+ scholarship students only have to cover costs of one credit hour

By Alex Stuckey

JEFFERSON CITY • A+ scholarship recipients only will be digging into their own pockets to cover one credit hour spring term — an improvement from the possible four the Department of Higher Education warned of this summer.

The announcement was made Monday, just a few weeks before spring term begins for thousands of Missourians participating in the program this year.

The Post-Dispatch reported last month that even after Gov. Jay Nixon released $2 million for the program previously withheld, the $33.1 million appropriated for the scholarship was inadequate to accommodate every participating student. This problem is attributed to increasing student participation as well as higher tuition costs.

Department officials estimate about 14,000 students will participate this year, compared to the 12,500 last year.

“Fortunately, the reimbursement gap appears to have narrowed somewhat, and many community colleges across the state are working to help students cover the cost of the one-credit hour reimbursement reduction so they can continue their education uninterrupted,” said David Russell, Missouri commissioner of higher education.

One such school is St. Louis Community College, which pledged to cover the credit hours the state could not for its 1,200 A+ students.

To qualify for the scholarship, students must graduate from A+ designated high schools and attend participating public community colleges or technical schools. Students must maintain a 2.5 grade-point average (about a C+), have a 95 percent high school attendance record and do 50 hours of unpaid mentoring and tutoring. Students also must maintain a good record of conduct.

Starting with the senior class of 2015, students also will have to score proficient or advanced on the Algebra I end-of-course exam or higher level end-of-course math exam approved by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Russell said department officials would continue to monitor the program.

“If the situation changes and additional public funds become available later in the spring semester to reimburse students for the cost of the additional credit hour, we will hasten to inform the students affected,” Russell said.
Any changes to financial aid program should go through Legislature

NO MU MENTION

We couldn’t agree more with the editorial board (“Shortchanging scholarship,” Dec. 18) that the real battle is to increase need-based assistance to help students of working families across our state pay for college. It’s a critical investment in Missouri’s citizens that continues to give them — and our state’s economy — a bright future.

In fact, Independent Colleges and Universities of Missouri led the effort in 1971 to create our state’s first need-based financial assistance program. The program was refined into what is now known as Access Missouri in 2007 with input from financial aid professionals, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education and the Legislature.

ICUM presidents, faculty, students and alums have been at the forefront of advocating for its funding, often being the sole sector to testify before House and Senate committees in support of the program.

This work has become more critical as the state appropriation for Access Missouri has dropped from $93 million in fiscal year 2009 to $60 million in fiscal year 2014. ICUM and its student-led Keep Me In College Coalition succeeded in convincing the Legislature to approve a $15 million increase for Access Missouri in the recent session. Gov. Jay Nixon has withheld $11 million of that money, resulting in students receiving only 51 percent of their maximum awards.

ICUM has been in the news recently for challenging an attempt by Missouri Department of Higher Education officials to get a joint House and Senate panel to redefine the standard for higher education institutions to be considered as “located in Missouri.” ICUM seeks to prevent the unintended consequences of opening up eligibility for Access Missouri to students of institutions based outside of Missouri.

It’s regrettable that the editorial board framed the issue as ICUM merely opposing the inclusion of students of another public institution in the program, especially given the fact that Western Governors University is a private institution.

Access Missouri is the linchpin of our state’s commitment to helping students to earn a college degree. Given the anemic funding, we believe it’s especially important that any move to alter the statutory scope of the program be done with transparency by the Legislature.

William Gamble • Jefferson City
Executive director, Independent Colleges and Universities of Missouri
Missouri farmers eager to export to Cuba

CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO. - Missouri farmers are hoping to add a new buyer for their crops as the U.S. and Cuba begin to normalize relations for the first time in half a century.

Currently, exports to Cuba are limited by prohibitions requiring it to pay cash for the shipments it receives, the Southeast Missourian (http://bit.ly/1zV8Ilo ) reports. If talks continue, U.S. exports such as rice, soybeans, poultry, beef and pork could become popular items to ship to the communist nation.

Rice is particularly promising because Missouri is among the nation's top rice producers and Cuba is a huge consumer.

"With the possibility of being able to export agriculture products to Cuba, rice would be the first likely commodity imported," said Michael Aide, chairman of the Agriculture Department at Southeast Missouri State University. "Missouri rice is readily exported all through the Caribbean, and there would be a great market opportunity for Missouri rice in Cuba."
In 2013, approximately 160,000 acres of rice were harvested in Missouri, according to the University of Missouri Extension. Acres planted for rice began to increase in the state in the 1970s, and yields have risen about 60 pounds per acre since then. Rice sales currently exceed $15 million per year, according to extension.missouri.edu.

"If Cuba imported U.S. rice, we would probably see markets rearrange to a point where rice would be more attractive to plant," he said.

Matt McCrate, vice president of the Missouri Soybean Association, said crops grown in the Bootheel can be shipped down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, which is "just a hop, skip and a jump" away from Cuba.

"I think our supply is more than enough to supply anything that Cuba needs. It would just be an added market for us," he said. "Right now soybean prices, corn prices, rice prices are much lower than what they were a year or two years ago, and opening up that market would help up some of the pricing that we have."