Discovery Ridge radioisotopes project awaits federal approval

Plans for an $80 million radioisotope production facility at the Discovery Ridge Research Park southeast of Columbia are “moving forward,” said an executive of Northwest Medical Isotopes, which is awaiting federal approval for the project.

“We feel very confident in the success of our project,” said Carolyn Haass, chief operating officer for the Oregon-based company. “We are definitely moving along. We feel that we’re in a great spot” in the process.

Northwest Medical Isotopes announced its plan last year, and company officials touted the project to state legislators as one reason to boost funding for training at the University of Missouri Research Reactor. MU also owns Discovery Ridge. The plant would provide nearly 100 jobs and make Columbia the hub of the domestic supply of an isotope widely used in medical imaging tests.

The company plans to collaborate with the MU Research Reactor, a 10-megawatt research facility located southwest of Stadium Boulevard and Providence Road, if its Columbia plant is approved. The MU reactor supplies several radioactive elements used in medical imaging and treatments.

Reactor officials see the Northwest Medical Isotopes project as a potential anchor for a cluster of companies processing and shipping products nationally.

Haass planned to meet this week with MU officials to provide an update on the project. She will be among the speakers at a Regional Economic Development Inc. event on Tuesday.

“When you’re trying to build a facility that they’re building, it does require a long regulatory approval process,” said Steve Wyatt, a member of the REDI board of directors and MU’s vice provost for economic development. “It’s not the same as someone wanting to start a business and beginning construction right away.”

A December public meeting by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission sought public input on the project. Several local government and economic development officials spoke in support of the project at the NRC meeting. No one publicly opposed the project.
The NRC staff is reviewing the permit application to determine how the facility might affect fish and wildlife, human health and water and air quality, among other things. Haass said an environmental impact statement will be ready for public review in a few months.

She expects NRC approval could come by next summer, with construction starting soon after. Meanwhile, MU is working to bring the needed utilities to the site.

Boone County adds new software assistance for emergency response

COLUMBIA—Boone County Emergency Management has implemented a new tool to help citizens in time of emergency.

The software, called Smart Prepare, provides accurate and timely information to emergency personnel to access user profiles during disaster events.

Tom Hurley, deputy director for Boone County Emergency Management, said Smart Prepare is free and open to everyone who lives and works in Boone County.

“It allows for emergency responders to a have bit more depth as to what they’re going to and what ailments might be there,” Hurley said.

Hurley mentioned Smart Prepare is also confidential and self-identifiable so citizens can decide exactly what information the management staff is permitted to view.

A main goal for the software is to increase efficiency and resource allocation in time of emergency.
“For example, if someone is on dialysis, we’re able to better our resources for that person and make sure that they receive the assistance,” Hurley said. “And perhaps quicker than someone who is relatively healthy.”

Hurley said citizens can go to smart911.com to set up a profile that is completely confidential.

The idea is “by being aware that they are in need of a critical service, it allows us to allocate those resources rather than going door-to-door haphazardly coming across that person,” Hurley said.

Smart Prepare is up and running in Boone County, but it has yet to be deployed. Hurley said it is only used during disasters.

Smart Prepare has been tested nationwide in large metropolitan areas and is part of a larger system including Rave notification and Smart 9-1-1. Hurley mentioned the broader system is used by universities, as well.

Christian Basi, associate director for MU News Bureau, said the university recently purchased the Rave Alert system at a discounted price because they bought it in conjunction with the county.

He said both the county and the university have specific individuals they can contact in case of emergency, but the system software is the same.

“The system itself is much more user-friendly, and we hope that this will mean we are able to create and send those messages more efficiently,” he said.

Hurley noted the significant discount came about from being an early subscriber.

“We’re able to maximize the benefits on that to help our citizens,” he said.
Project in Missouri to study cats for children with autism

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The University of Missouri center for Human-Animal Interaction is raising money for a research project to study the possible benefits of placing adoptable cats in the homes of children with autism.

The Columbia Missourian reports that the project is called Feline Friends and a goal of $29,000 has been set. Researchers intend to go into animal shelters and identify cats that would do well in homes of children with autism. The money will also go toward families that participate in the study to pay for supplies such as food, a litter box and toys.

Researchers hope to give the families better information about choosing a pet for their home.

The research center says it'll measure the behavior of cats before using the animals in the study to make sure they're calm enough for interaction.
University of Missouri Assistant Teaching Professor Provides Commentary on Presidential Debate

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=db79196c-5b61-4935-b48a-51bbfc0abc34

KU Enrollment Up, MU Campus Takes a Big Hit

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=bae033a4-64d7-4dc8-a278-47d64ab4405f

An Allegation of Racial Profiling

A black student at Prairie State College says he was racially profiled on his way to class by a campus police officer. A dismissive response from the chair of the college's board draws criticism.

No MU Mention
A black student at Prairie State College, a community college located outside Chicago, told the college’s trustees last month that he believes he was racially profiled by a campus police officer while trying to attend his first class of the semester. Prairie State officials say the officer did nothing wrong, but some of the college’s faculty and staff members are expressing concern that the board chair was combative and too quick to dismiss the student’s complaints.

“Officers should not stop and question students because of their ethnicity or the fact they think they seem out of place,” an anonymous letter, signed “faculty and staff,” stated. “We ask, would this have happened if the student were white? We don’t think it would have.”

The student, D’Marco Griffin, said he was entering the college’s health-tech building on Aug. 23 when he was stopped by a campus police officer. Still wearing his blue work vest, Griffin had arrived early after concluding a shift at the local Walmart so he would have time to locate his classroom. Within minutes of entering the building, the student was approached by a campus police officer.

Griffin said the officer told him that he “looked out of place,” and that something “seemed off” about him being in the building. The student explained he was there for a class, and the officer asked him to provide identification. When he reached into his pocket to retrieve his ID, Griffin said, the officer “tensed and sternly instructed [him] not to reach into” his pockets.

As another officer arrived, Griffin said, he was told to put his hands behind his back. The officer patted Griffin down and asked if the student had any items on his person he should know about. Griffin told him he was carrying his box cutter from work, and the officer temporarily confiscated it, as well as Griffin’s wallet and class schedule. After confirming Griffin was a student, the officer returned the wallet and schedule and walked him to his class.

The next week, Griffin attended a board meeting and told the trustees about the incident, according to a video of the meeting.

“It was a very humiliating experience,” Griffin said during the meeting, adding that he felt sick to his stomach during the incident and that he worried about his safety when the officer ordered him not to reach into his pockets. The officer never drew any weapons on Griffin, but the college’s police force is a sworn agency and many of its officers are armed. A short police report of the incident largely confirms Griffin’s account, but it does not contain details about what the officer may have said to the student during the encounter.

Throughout Griffin’s time speaking during the meeting, the board’s chair, Jacqueline Agee, repeatedly interrupted the student.
Griffin: This is just an ordeal that I know definitely could have went very less --
Agee: What do you mean by that?
Griffin: It could have went badly, seeing --
Agee: Why is that?
Griffin: Seeing as how, you know, myself and the officer having different perspectives. I'm just on my way to class and he perceived me as a threat, if you will. If I had just failed to properly comply when he told me not to reach for anything, even after he asked for some type of identification, I could have easily not been here today.
Agee: Why?
Griffin: Due to perceived notions on his end, him seeming to be on the defensive with me giving him virtually no reason to be defensive.

When Griffin began to hand out a written statement to the board members and conclude his remarks, Agee allowed him to distribute the documents but interrupted him again. “You've gone way over your time, D'Marco,” she said. “I'm letting you go because it's usually cut down to three minutes, but I'm letting you go, so you need to wrap it up.” Griffin had spoken for about four minutes.

In a statement Monday, the college said that administrators first heard of the incident through a post on the student's Facebook page, and that the college's dean met with him the following day. Following the meeting, the dean "felt the situation had been resolved," the college stated, but Griffin addressed the Board of Trustees later that evening. The college said it had not seen the anonymous letter signed by "faculty and staff" until Monday.

"Because the board takes students' concerns very seriously, the board chair agreed to give Mr. Griffin the floor that evening, despite the fact that, according to board policy, the board is allowed four business days' notice before allowing a member of the public to address the board on items not included in the agenda," the college said. "College officials have reached out to Mr. Griffin through various channels since he addressed the board, but to date, Mr. Griffin has declined to meet with any of those individuals. It is the opinion of the college that the officer acted appropriately, given the circumstances."

Toward the end of the board of trustees meeting, Prairie State College's police chief, George Pfotenhauer, also defended the officer's actions, saying he had done nothing wrong or illegal. Griffin, Pfotenhauer said, had entered the building through a door that was normally locked by that time in the evening. Pfotenhauer acknowledged that Griffin would not have known not to use the door, as it was accidentally left unlocked that particular evening, but said that it was the student using this entrance that worried the police officer.

"He didn't say anything derogatory, he didn't say anything inflammatory," Pfotenhauer said, also noting that the officer did not touch the student, "other than a quick pat down." "And he had a knife," Agee responded, referencing the student's box cutter he had in his pocket from work. "Through that [stop], he found a knife."

When another board member clarified that it was a box cutter, and attempted to explain that the college should provide comfort to the student for being stopped and searched when had done nothing wrong, Agee interrupted her, as well.
“When the police officer gives the comfort level to the wrong guy, that’s when the police officer doesn’t go home at night,” she said. "What if he was a bad guy with an AK [assault rifle]? I'm going to give him comfort?"

In the anonymous statement this week, faculty and staff members said they sat “paralyzed in shock as [Agee] glared across the room at Mr. Griffin, interrupting him and trying to make the student feel incompetent.” That Prairie State College is a predominantly black institution -- with 57 percent of its students being black or African-American -- made the incident all the more disturbing, they wrote.

“Working in a diverse environment at a predominately black institution brings both opportunities and challenges,” the statement said. “As our college becomes increasingly diverse, an understanding of culture and its effect on communication is more important than ever. These behaviors have a devastating impact on people’s physical and mental well-being, as well as their ability to fully engage as members of our learning community.”

Economists Offer Unconventional Wisdom on Student-Loan ‘Crisis’

By Beckie Supiano  SEPTEMBER 27, 2016  PREMIUM

St udent debt is a crisis, holding back the economy and hobbling a generation.

Wonder why today’s young adults aren’t getting married, having children, buying homes, starting businesses, saving the world? Look no further, the culprit is obvious. That’s the conventional wisdom, and it’s taken for granted in many news articles and plenty of policy prescriptions.
That narrative, however, is misguided, according to two new books. What’s worse, they argue, the crisis talk precludes a closer examination of the student-loan system’s real problems and hinders efforts to help the borrowers who are struggling the most. To push back on that understanding of debt, the books offer data, evidence, context. But will any of that change people’s minds? After all, the assumption that the country is in a student-debt crisis is everywhere.

The books, *Student Debt: Rhetoric and Realities of Higher Education Financing* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), by Sandy Baum, and *Game of Loans: The Rhetoric and Reality of Student Debt* (Princeton University Press, 2016), by Beth Akers and Matthew M. Chingos, make complementary arguments — as one might guess from the similar subtitles. (In fact, the authors know each other. Ms. Baum and Mr. Chingos are now colleagues at the Urban Institute, though they weren’t aware of their similarly themed book projects until last summer, when he was starting there.)

Both books describe the current student-loan landscape and trace its history. Based on that evidence, they throw water on the idea of a general crisis and seek to redirect readers’ worried attention from high-debt borrowers (many of whom hold advanced degrees) to college dropouts, who have less debt but are much more likely to default on it. That perspective guides their policy recommendations, which describe tailored ways to help struggling borrowers, versus approaches like forgiving all debt or refinancing interest rates, a move that would disproportionately help those who’ve borrowed a lot.

The stakes for changing the conversation are high, Ms. Baum said in an interview. "If we keep talking about student debt as an unmitigated evil," she said, "we’re going to discourage a lot of people from going to college."

But persuading the public won’t be easy, Mr. Chingos admitted. "Changing national debates is like turning a battleship," he said. If *Game of Loans* "can in a small way contribute to nudging the battleship a couple degrees in the right direction," Mr. Chingos said, "I’d be pleased with that."

Kristen Dickerson thinks the public fixation on student debt brings some benefits. "It’s definitely not a positive viewpoint," said Ms. Dickerson, a school counselor at Gahanna Lincoln High School, outside Columbus, Ohio. "But at the same time," she said, "I’m not sure that’s a negative thing." Ms. Dickerson doesn’t recall hearing any discussion of the pros and cons of borrowing back when she was heading off to college. But these days, it’s something that the families she works with have many questions about.
"I definitely think the media has done a good job of bringing this to light," Ms. Dickerson said. Sometimes students tell Ms. Dickerson that they don’t want to borrow at all. Her response? "Student loans aren’t bad," she said. "You just have to watch what you take out."

Lately Ms. Dickerson has observed that families are waiting until students have their aid awards from every college they’ve been admitted to before making a careful choice. And that’s a good thing, she said. Both finding the right fit and making sure it’s affordable are important.

**Distorted Impressions?**

What *Student Debt* and *Game of Loans* share more than anything is an understanding of the logic behind student loans. All three of the authors are trained in economics, Ms. Akers pointed out in an interview. She is a fellow at the Brookings Institution, where Mr. Chingos also worked before moving to Urban. From an economic perspective, the idea that people borrow money to invest in themselves and reap a benefit later makes perfect sense. The problem with the status quo, as the authors see it, is something much narrower: It’s not that so many students take out loans to help pay for college; it’s that the system doesn’t work for everyone, and better protections are needed to help those who run into trouble.

The public’s broad anxiety about student debt, Ms. Baum writes, is similar to other instances in which general worry overshadows the more narrow frequency of a problem, such as fears about the dangers of data breaches at stores and banks. Because it tends to focus on worst-case scenarios, she writes, "reading the news distorts our impression of the magnitude of the issue."

Ms. Baum’s position isn’t that college is such a good investment that students should bear the full cost, she said. It’s that there should be debate about how much of the burden of paying for college rightly falls to students versus taxpayers, instead of a knee-jerk assumption that it’s wrong to ask students to contribute to their own educations.

Economists are trained to consider alternatives and opportunity costs, to think of how best to allocate limited resources, Ms. Baum said. They don’t assume there’s enough money to pay for every desired policy. So even an economist focused on higher education can’t take it for granted that college should be the country’s No. 1 funding priority. "As a group, the people with college debt are not the most oppressed people in society," she said. After all, most people with student loans went to college, an advantage many others lack.
Besides, Ms. Baum said, if other policy priorities like early-childhood education and health care aren’t addressed, fewer people will be ready for college in the first place. Higher education’s problems can’t be solved by higher-education policy alone, she said, because "by the time you’re 18, it’s too late."

Questions of ‘Class Privilege’

So the authors are frustrated by the kinds of anecdotes that often illustrate the student-debt problem: the travails of traditional-age graduates of name-brand, four-year colleges who’ve borrowed way more than the national average (nearly $30,000 for graduates who borrowed at nonprofit colleges) and are working in low-level service jobs, if they’re working at all.

"It’s class privilege," Mr. Chingos said. "The public discussion of this is about the problems of readers of The New York Times," he said. "The real problems are typically for 30-year-old single moms with $5,000 in debt, with credits, but no credential, probably from a for-profit college."

The authors turn to what the data show: what’s happening nationally, on average, and over time. They "tell a very compelling story, steeped in data," said Justin Draeger, president of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, who has read Ms. Baum’s book and is familiar with Ms. Akers and Mr. Chingos’s earlier work on the subject.

There’s just one problem. People connect with — they remember — anecdotes. That’s as true of policy makers as it is of the rest of us, Mr. Draeger said. The fresh-faced English-major-turned-barista who’s $80,000 in debt is memorable. The data? Not so much. The nonfiction books that persuade readers make a big effort to entertain them, Mr. Draeger said. The student-debt books aren’t aimed at academics, but still, no one would accuse them of being what Mr. Draeger calls "infotainment."

So who exactly are these books for? They’re both pretty short, and assume little prior knowledge. Still, it’s hard to imagine either one on the nightstand of a typical parent of a high-school junior. Student Debt is "obviously not an advice book for families," Ms. Baum said. She sees her audience as journalists, policy makers, and people who are particularly interested in the issue.

"I wrote the book because I wanted to be able to talk about it," Ms. Baum said. After all, many more people will hear about a book than will ever actually crack it open.
**Worries About Rhetoric**

For the most part, the authors are trying to correct the view of student debt held by an anxious public. But that’s not to say that all experts share their assessment of the scope of the problem, or their ideas on how best to solve it.

Ms. Akers and Mr. Chingos, in particular, spend a lot of time on the question of whether a crisis is present, or imminent. Their conclusion? "It is true that many borrowers are facing personal crises related to student debt, but the overall body of evidence contradicts the notion that a student-lending crisis exists on a systemic level," they write. "This distinction may seem semantic, but recognizing the difference has important implications for policy making."

Mark Huelsman, a senior policy analyst at Demos, a liberal-leaning think tank, agrees with the authors about which borrowers are really struggling. But that, he said, doesn’t mean that there isn’t a student-loan crisis.

Some people see that the typical borrower is all right but that those in some corners are struggling, and think that "crisis" is the wrong description, Mr. Huelsman said. He’d put the authors in that category. Others look at what’s happening in those corners and see a crisis. "Most smokers don’t die of lung cancer," Mr. Huelsman said, and "most people in the wake of the housing crisis didn’t lose their houses. But there’s real pain."

Mr. Huelsman is also unconvinced that calling student debt a crisis hurts would-be students. "I’m much less worried about rhetoric preventing people from going to college," he said, "than prices" — which do keep some people out.

There’s plenty of room for experts to disagree on questions like those. But for many casual observers, the evidence and arguments presented in *Student Debt* and *Game of Loans* will be new. And if they read either book, that could help inform a public debate that’s bound to stick around for some time.