Boosting Mizzou’s reputation

The new Mizzou Advantage initiative has its critics, but advocates say the $6 million plan for collaboration between academic disciplines is a smart investment.

By Janese Heavin

Sunday, June 13, 2010

To the skeptics who question whether Mizzou Advantage will be worth its $6 million price tag, Charles Davis is with you.

Well, he was for a few minutes, anyway.

When Provost Brian Foster called him into the office to outline the new initiative, Davis was skeptical. After all, he is a former reporter and a longtime faculty member at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, making him a skeptic by nature.

But after about 10 minutes with Foster, “I found myself listening intently to what he had to say,” Davis recalled. “It’s about getting faculty out of silos and moving time-worn traditions of academia to more businesslike strategies. It’s smart thinking.”

These days Davis is one of Mizzou Advantage’s more vocal cheerleaders, leaving his full-time gig as executive director of the National Freedom of Information Center to become facilitator of Mizzou Advantage’s new media initiative.

If you haven’t heard the hype, Mizzou Advantage is being touted as an initiative that will capitalize on MU’s strongest areas, break down barriers between those disciplines and come up with solutions for the real world. Administrators have high hopes for the plan and its impact on MU’s national and even international reputation.

It’s an approach that focuses on five key areas: health, food, energy, media and technologies. But it’s tough to explain because it’s still in its infancy. Players in each of the key areas, as well as an educational coordinator, are reaching out to faculty members, forming advisory boards and coming up with ways to cross-pollinate campus.
“It’s a little like building an airplane as we’re flying,” said LuAnne Roth, who has been tapped to be education coordinator of Mizzou Advantage.

And the landing strip is tough to see. Success won’t be evident for years, and it will come in subtle forms.

Sure, there should be large-scale grants that come MU’s way because of the interdisciplinary efforts, but the main goal is to boost the university’s reputation, or at least put a new face on it to better expose what’s already happening.

If, 10 years from now, an undergraduate at Harvard or Princeton asks an adviser where he should go to graduate school for agriculture and MU is a top answer, “that’s where we need to get,” Foster said. “That takes time. That really takes time.”

MAKING CONNECTIONS

It’s hard to define Mizzou Advantage without using academic jargon such as “strategic initiative.” It’s easier to explain using possible examples of what it will look like.

The primary goal is to get faculty members and students from different departments together to solve real-world problems. For instance, it should help medical researchers tackling obesity better understand what College of Agriculture researchers are doing to make food healthier. And while engineering students, for instance, study ways to make energy greener through wind, they might consider working alongside the associate law professor who is researching legal issues regarding wind rights.

Cross-discipline collaboration already happens at MU. It’s one of the aspects of the university that makes Mizzou Advantage possible, spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said. Collaboration is natural on campus partly because MU is one of only a handful of universities in the country with a law school, medical school and veterinary medicine school on the same campus. Hands reach across campus in other ways, too, such as in the annual Reynolds Journalism Institute contest that lets journalism and engineering students work together to solve real-world problems.

But a collaborative project here or there is not the same as having a network of faculty members from across disciplines who work together regularly, Foster said. Mizzou Advantage aims to make interdisciplinary research and education part of the culture at the university.

Roth said she was “thrilled” when she first heard that goal. She’s been involved in researching the role of food in culture and film under the Department of English for years — multi-disciplinary work, but not necessary collaborative.

“I thought I was working in a bubble,” she said. “My teaching and research was interdisciplinary, but it never occurred to me to go out and talk to someone in nutrition. Since Mizzou Advantage was rolled out in September, I’ve met two dozen people I didn’t know before who are doing similar things.”
It was a “duh” moment, she admitted.

In fact, the goal to get faculty members talking with those outside their own disciplines makes so much sense to some, they’ve questioned why it’s taken so long to get the initiative off the ground.

“It’s a fair question,” Foster said when asked about Mizzou Advantage’s slow evolution.

But, he said, when he started talking to faculty members more than three years ago about how MU should move forward, he did not have a specific agenda.

“This took shape from discussions with hundreds of people,” he said.

MATCHING THE WORK FORCE

By connecting disciplines, MU ultimately hopes to create new certification programs that equip students with what they need to survive in today’s marketplace.

“It’s an age-old academic institute delivering age-old disciplines while the world is moving 300 miles per hour under our feet,” Davis said. “We need to get people out of their silos and working together. The nature of academia is we mine a little area deeply and rarely come out of the light. Mizzou Advantage is creating, by design, opportunities where faculty members can bump into each other, literally.”

It will be Roth’s responsibility to come up with these certificates, specialized fields that can be tacked onto traditional degrees. She hasn’t met with her advisory board, so Roth said she does not know yet what they will look like.

“It isn’t just about learning new content areas, but really giving students the skills to deal with a volatile work force,” she said. “Sustainable energy, media, technology — things are already changing. This is about knowing how to deal with the constantly changing” market “and the work force needs that are out there.”

Roth also is eyeing the possibility of adding a sophomore class that would give students a chance to team up with other students to work on solving real-world problems, possibly over the course of a school year. Although details still have to be hashed out, the coursework would aim to get students working with peers from other disciplines early in their college careers, before they start focusing solely on their own majors.

Another possibility is to create new classes that would be team-taught by faculty members from different fields.

Many of the educational changes will be the result of each Mizzou Advantage initiative, spearheaded by facilitators Foster appointed. In addition to Davis, they are: Jo Britt-Rankin, who will oversee Food for the Future; Carolyn Henry, One Health, One Medicine; Cerry Klein, Sustainable Energy; and Carsten Strathausen, who will oversee Transformational Technologies.
The facilitators, who each get a $10,000 administrative stipend, will form teams of faculty members related to their specific areas, oversee research projects, and schedule conferences and events that bring in well-known guests.

Last month, Mizzou Advantage awarded more than $900,000 in seed grants to get the initiative off the ground. Funding went to “network proposals,” efforts to help faculty members build relationships on campus; and to “fellow proposals” to fund research, service, education or economic development projects. A total of 26 proposals were awarded funding, meaning grants were less than $50,000.

The amount has raised ire from critics who consider the grants too small to make a difference. Although that might be true for projects in engineering or life sciences, Foster countered that the sums are hefty for some departments, such as English.

Plus, he said, the grants are only meant to provide seed funding to get an idea off the ground. It will be up to researchers and facilitators to turn those ideas into proposals that snag large external grants.

“It’s not a staggering amount of money. On the other hand, it’s seed money,” he said. “Everybody should get enough to get something going.”

CULTURE FUels SKEPTISM

Mizzou Advantage has critics who question whether it’s a ploy that takes money away from colleges and gives administrators more control over research and faculty members.

The Tribune solicited input about Mizzou Advantage from some faculty members and critics who have commented online. Some discussed their concerns for background information only, and others said they were not familiar enough with the program to comment.

“The MU Advantage program is an administrative scheme for routing moneys through their offices to create programs which they control,” said Galen Suppes, an engineering professor. “The way it should work is that research programs that are highly successful should be supplemented to bring more faculty into the productive areas in a manner that is objective and free from administrator management. But this would not create a means for the administrators to create their empires. Most of the administrators are totally unqualified for these research endeavors, and they make sure that their lack of qualification does not become obvious by not pursuing competitive funds. They do not apply for grants; they simply take the money from programs.”

Stephen Montgomery Smith, a math professor, also said he thinks Mizzou Advantage is too top-heavy.

“I have a feeling it’s going to be big plans that never get anywhere,” he said. “People will be more interested in figuring out how to get to the money rather than how to do effective research. My gut feeling says this isn’t the way to go.”
Skepticism likely stems, in part, from incidents on campus in which administrative decisions have left bad tastes in professors’ mouths. Suppes has been entwined in legal battles with the university over rights to his research for years. A more recent example is Greg Engel, the engineering associate professor whose $2 million federal earmark was reassigned to Annie Sobel, whose husband is an administrator.

This month, the American Association of University Professors wrote a letter to UM President Gary Forsee and Chancellor Brady Deaton about that decision, questioning how successful Mizzou Advantage can be in that environment.

“We know that MU professes to seek to be at the forefront of research and education,” the letter read. “But all the ‘strategic plans’ and ‘Mizzou Advantage’ initiatives will fail if faculty believe that the fruits of their lifetime works will be usurped and that their efforts will bring upon themselves unwarranted punishment.”

Leona Rubin, chairwoman of MU Faculty Council, said Mizzou Advantage will likely have “growing pains,” but overall, she supports it and said it’s a worthwhile investment.

In addition to the facilitators and administrative costs, the $6 million annual budget will be used to sponsor conferences on campus and provide travel stipends to let students attend out-of-town events.

“Whether it really pans out, we just have to wait and see, but it’s certainly worth trying,” she said. “Higher education and research need to reinvent themselves to really be successful.”

Small grants awarded to individual principal investigators are getting harder to receive, she said. Now, money is being awarded to large-scale, multidisciplinary efforts, and MU must keep up with that trend, she said.

Rubin also said the actions and outcomes task force, which is overseeing MU’s new strategic plan, is aware that Mizzou Advantage needs to have an accountability system to gauge outcomes. The task force is charged with making recommendations about the strategic plan, and those will likely include instructions for monitoring Mizzou Advantage’s goals and successes.

**SHARED GOALS**

It’s no accident that Mizzou Advantage is coming at a time when the UM System’s attention is on economic development. At the system level, research parks and business incubators are popping up across the state. On the MU campus, Vice Chancellor of Research Rob Duncan created CLIMB — Club Innovation for Missouri Business. CLIMB was not a direct result of Mizzou Advantage, but they are the result of shared goals, Foster said.

“I think that this spirit of innovation that we have here at Mizzou is driving a lot of this,” Duncan said last month. “Mizzou Advantage will have outstanding concentration and interaction in areas where we can really make a difference.”
CLIMB is a student-led group that aims to connect faculty inventors with business students who have the time, drive and creativity to turn ideas into marketable products. Although it’s unclear exactly how the club will fit into the Mizzou Advantage picture, Roth said she and Duncan have talked about how the two initiatives can benefit one another.

In a down economy in which nearly every public entity is making budget cuts, Davis said it’s exciting to see resources pumped into efforts aimed to turn that market around.

“While we’re whacking at the budget,” he said, “we’re protecting this intellectual egg that can grow.”

MU cannot be Berkeley or Yale or Harvard at everything, Davis said, “but we already are better at some things.”

“I’ve always thought Mizzou is better than it lets on,” he said. “We have incredible faculty members doing amazing things. Mizzou Advantage is doing a good job putting a public face on that. It’s full of potential.”

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
UM wants cut funding back, plus millions

Repairs, salaries are high on list.

By Janese Heavin

Friday, June 11, 2010

Correction appended

The University of Missouri plans to ask state lawmakers next year for a 30 percent increase in state funding.

That $123.7 million boost would include funding administrators said is needed to give employees raises for the first time in three years and also includes the money state legislators cut from UM’s budget this fiscal year.

It’s a lofty request. Gov. Jay Nixon this year is scrambling to make the proposed 2011 budget balanced, and many predict 2012 will be a financial doomsday as federal stimulus money dries up.

But the request ensures the university isn’t sitting on the sidelines when the economy does turn around, administrators said.

“We must take forward to the legislation what our needs are,” UM System President Gary Forsee said.

And UM has a laundry list of funding needs, including money to repair buildings and operating funds to keep good faculty members from finding greener pastures.

MU employees, as well as those on UM’s other campuses, have spent the past two years without pay raises. Faculty members on campuses in other states aren’t seeing pay increases, either, but Missouri already was behind its peers before the economy soured.

For the upcoming fiscal year, which starts July 1, the university will manage a 5.2 percent cut in state funding, part of a deal with Gov. Jay Nixon that also kept undergraduate, in-state tuition frozen for the second year. Campuses are feeling the effects of decreasing revenue, said Nikki Krawitz, vice president of finance and administration. She said the Rolla campus had to cap
enrollment for undergraduate engineering students this fall because it does not have the space or faculty to handle any more students.

“And class sizes here on the MU campus have grown tremendously,” Krawitz said after yesterday’s Board of Curators meeting at Reynolds Alumni Center. “We can’t offer the breadth of services or the quality of services like we’ve been able to offer” in better times.

Administrators will take their 2012 wish list to lawmakers when the legislative session begins in January. On that list is a $23.5 million request in additional core operating support, which includes restoration of this year’s cuts, plus another $3.6 million to better compensate faculty and $1.95 million to support enrollment spikes.

Curator Wayne Goode, a former state senator, questioned whether the system should ask for this year’s cut back on top of a request for other increases. He said he supports the university asking for the amount it needs, but he questioned whether asking for previously cut funds would “cloud the message.”

In addition to operating funds, the university has a list of building projects it wants the state to fund. Topping the list are Benton and Stadler halls on the St. Louis campus and MU’s College of Engineering’s Lafferre Hall, both previously expected to be funded with the sale of Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority funds.

The system also plans to ask for $46.5 million to build a new home for the State Historical Society of Missouri, now operating in MU’s Ellis Library. The society has an architectural rendering of its proposed new facility at the corner of Sixth and Elm streets. Some have asked whether the YouZeum building up for sale on Cherry Street could meet the society’s needs, although Columbia College already has expressed interest in the building. Krawitz said the historical society would be responsible for selecting its own building, and it would have to meet the agency’s unique needs.

Curators this morning approved the 2011 operating budget with little discussion. The $2.5 billion budget allocates $1.62 billion for compensation, up slightly from $1.55 billion budgeted this year, and $725 million for travel and supplies, down from $747.5 million in fiscal year 2010.

This page has been revised to reflect the following correction:

SECOND THOUGHTS: Monday, June 12, 2010

A story about University of Missouri budget discussions should have listed the total 2011 operating budget as $2.5 billion, not million.

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COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM System chancellors tout accomplishments of four campuses

By Clay McGlaughlin, Nikki Tekeei
June 11, 2010 | 3:33 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA – Chancellors from each of the University of Missouri System campuses noted accomplishments from 2009-10 and forecast admissions for the upcoming school year at Friday's Board of Curators meeting.

Highlights from each university include:

Missouri University of Science & Technology:

- Will host the state championship of the FIRST Robotics Competition, pairing engineering professionals with high school students
- Closing admission to the 2010 Freshman Engineering Program; any new admissions will be deferred to one of 52 partner institutions until January 2011.

- Enrollment forecast for fall: 50 percent increased enrollment, enrollment up to 6,800

University of Missouri-St. Louis:

- Criminology and Criminal Justice graduate program ranked fourth in the nation for criminology programs by U.S. News and World Report
- Ten percent increase in first-time full-time students to 16,600
- 31 percent minority student population (20 percent African-American)
- 3,200 graduates this year (33 percent increase)
- 60 percent graduation rate for student-athletes
- Enrollment forecast for fall: 6 percent increase

University of Missouri-Kansas City:
• 8 percent increase in research productivity
• 4 percent increase in fall enrollment, 5.6 percent increase in spring enrollment, 5.5 percent increase in summer enrollment
• 19 percent increase in first-time students, 14 percent increase in transfers
• 88 percent graduation rate for student-athletes and a grade-point average of 3.1

University of Missouri-Columbia:

• $50 million in revenue generated by licensing technological innovations
• 5,532 graduate degrees (4,015 bachelors, 931 masters, 258 doctoral)
• Enrollment forecast for fall: 5,952 incoming freshman, 32,000 total student population
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Budget cuts mean no salary increases for UM System employees

By Clay McGlaughlin, Nikki Tekeei
June 11, 2010 | 6:04 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — With the University of Missouri System's annual operating expenses down 10 percent from fiscal year 2009 as of the end of April, President Gary Forsee told the Board of Curators on Friday that the four campuses have "developed muscle tone for controlling expenses."

That fitness will be tested again this year as legislative budget cuts have reduced state appropriations for UM by $96.8 million for fiscal year 2011.

Nikki Krawitz, vice president for finance and administration, presented the 2011 budget to the curators during a two-day meeting Thursday and Friday. The board approved the budget Friday morning.

Krawitz said total state appropriations for next year are around $452.5 million. Appropriations account for about 17 percent of the total budget for the UM system, which is $2.6 billion for fiscal year 2011.

More than one-third of the decrease in appropriations, $35 million, is due to capital appropriations that were anticipated for fiscal year 2010 but subsequently vetoed or withheld.

Krawitz said Gov. Jay Nixon plans to cut an additional $350 million from the state budget by July 1. Although the cuts are expected to leave the UM System's core operating budget unaffected, Forsee said the budget gap probably will impact other programs.

The university system is "very focused on student accessibility and affordability" despite the budget cuts, Forsee said. "Our key focus has been to protect the quality of the delivery of our mission of teaching, research and services."
The curators in April approved tuition increases for out-of-state undergraduate students and some graduate students. In-state undergraduate tuition remained unchanged, however, in accordance with a November agreement between UM and Nixon to freeze in-state undergraduate tuition as long as state budget cuts do not exceed 5.2 percent of operating appropriations.

The financial crunch will prohibit campuses from giving salary increases to administrators and faculty for the second year in a row. A 1 percent contingency pool will pay for raises for faculty who are promoted.

Forsee said the situation has put "an incredible amount of pressure on us collectively to work with the governor's office, the state and the General Assembly" to find a way to fund salary increases across the board in 2012.

As reported previously in the Missourian, MU faculty salaries fall last among the 35 ranked schools belonging to the American Association of Universities.

Faculty compensation is "one of our highest, if not the highest, strategic priority," Forsee said.

The 2011 state budget was bolstered by $887 million in federal stabilization funds that will not be available in fiscal year 2012.

Krawitz said administrators are "acutely aware" of the economic challenges facing the state in the next fiscal year.

"We've known for a couple of years that 2012 could be even worse from a budget perspective," Krawitz said, "We've been working hard to get ahead of the curve and preserve the quality of our services by finding ways to be more efficient and effective."

The budget talks were overshadowed at the curators' meeting by interest in whether MU will remain in the Big 12 or join a different conference. At a news conference Friday morning, Forsee fielded a question about whether any new athletics revenue from a different conference alignment might be funneled toward faculty salaries. That, he said, would be something he and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton would have to discuss with Athletics Director Mike Alden.
COLUMBIA, Mo. Missouri curators met behind closed doors Sunday night for the fourth time in as many days as the school turns its attention to saving the Big 12 Conference after its apparent bid to join the Big Ten failed.

The meeting followed two days of discussions in Columbia amid a shifting landscape that saw fellow Big 12 members Colorado and Nebraska bolt for the Pac-10 and Big Ten, respectively.

Missouri was considered one of the top prospects for an expanded Big Ten, and the school could still wind up there as conference realignment continues to unfold.

For now, school officials are publicly pledging their loyalty to a 10-team Big 12 - even as their counterparts in Texas and Oklahoma prepare for their own private meetings this week that could result in an exodus from the conference, with as many as five Big 12 teams possibly headed to the Pac-10.

Chancellor Brady Deaton told alumni in an e-mail he "will do everything possible to assure the success of the conference." He offered similar assurances Sunday night at a crowded news briefing on the steps of University Hall after the one-hour curator meeting, which resulted in no action.

He noted Missouri's century-old history with the schools that form the core of the Big 12 and its predecessors - institutions such as Kansas, Kansas State and Iowa State that are also faced with trying to save the conference.

"We have been a proud member of the Big Six, Big Seven and Big Eight, and we continue to take great pride in the accomplishments of the Big 12," Deaton wrote while noting Missouri's role in forming the Missouri Valley Intercollegiate Athletic Association in 1907. "Our position as a member for more than 100 years gives us a great appreciation for the tremendous value of our conference and a vital stake in its future."
Those words represent a sharp turn from Missouri's previously stated interest in exploring all its options with conference realignment.

But those earlier flirtations came before Nebraska's departure and assertions from both Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany and Big 12 leader Dan Beebe that the oldest conference in Division I sports was not targeting any other Big 12 schools - at least for the time being.

Missouri's interest in joining a bigger and broader Big Ten was met with criticism Friday from Nebraska Chancellor Harvey Perlman, who cited public comments by Deaton, Athletics director Mike Alden and Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon as fodder for the 14-year-old Big 12's possible collapse.

Alden responded by calling such assertions "silly" and "ridiculous." And University of Missouri system President Gary Forsee said the school bears no blame for simply protecting its self-interest.

"We were only doing what you would expect any institution, whether you're sitting here or in Lawrence, Kan., or Waco, Texas," Forsee said. "Did we contribute more or less than any other institution in the Big 12 or nationally? No. I think we've all been caught up in now this national discussion that certainly has spread beyond the Big Ten, and the Big 12 is certainly in the middle of that."

That would be the 10-team Big 12, as Deaton pointed out after struggling to differentiate Missouri's current home with the now 12-team Big Ten and 11-member Pac-10.

"We're working hard to strengthen the Big 12, or the Big Ten as it is right now. In other words, the 10 institutions left in the Big 12.

"Nomenclature is very difficult in this process," Deaton said.
Collapse of Big 12 means big uncertainties for KC, Mizzou, KU and K-State

By SCOTT CANON

Well, we still have barbecue.

Our regional universities still boast impressive trophy cases. Memories of impressive tournament failures. Tickets so hot they spawn federal investigations. And researchers who can tell you the best way to mend a heart, grow some corn or plant a wind turbine.

Kansas City remains home to a pair of not-so-major-league sports franchises, affordable housing, a pared-down cell phone company, those oversize badminton thingies, a school district boldly lopped in half, a proud history of a musical genre few people listen to anymore and a funky, thriving arts district.

All is not lost.

But something is lost.

Last week’s attack on the Big 12 could toss our loyalties and rivalries to the winds. At best it leaves the Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri campuses as well as Kansas City at the center of something lesser. Now the region is a hub of schools left behind by more sought-after universities tempted to hang with a cooler, better-heeled crowd.

“It’s all bad,” said Jim Chappell of Chappell’s Restaurant and Sports Museum in North Kansas City.

The looming disintegration of the Big 12 is a gut shot to Kansas City and to the three schools that live in the souls of so many of us.

Let’s face it. The rivalries of the Big 12 — and the Big Eight before it — formed a connecting fabric that gave virtually everyone within two hours’ drive of the Kansas-Missouri border something in common. Nearly all of us either go to a Big 12 school, went to one or are close to someone who did.

For starters, the conference crack-up is bad for business — stealing the revenue that came with the lucrative (albeit less frequently here) conference basketball tournaments and championship
football games. That's empty hotel rooms, vacant restaurant tables and countless beers never poured.

Secondly, it's potentially bad news for bookworms — although the link between academic and athletic success can prove fuzzy. Schools stuck in smaller conferences get less TV time — meaning alumni less likely motivated to send along donations and campuses off the radar of many prospective students.

“It’s something that’s scary right now,” said Ryan Wilkerson, a K-State senior and student ambassador.

Next, the diminishing of the Big 12 dashes decades of tradition, makes it hard to recruit blue-chip athletes and makes those runs for national championships all the more elusive.

And once again, Kansas City is left at the altar. It’s bad enough that we build an arena that has drawn only yawns from the NBA and NHL. Now the gang that we thought was especially our own has fractured and fled.

You need not know the difference between an alley oop and a shotgun formation to appreciate how a Big 12 weekend brings a certain bigger-city buzz of badly dressed out-of-towners wandering through Westport, the Country Club Plaza and, in recent years, downtown.

“If they all go their separate ways, to put it colloquially, Kansas City is screwed,” said William Worley, a Metropolitan Community College instructor and the author of several books on Kansas City history. “Not that we should, but psychologically we’ll see ourselves going to even more of a second-class level. … There’s a loss of cohesion.”

Rumors had been building for much of the year that the Big 12 was in peril. Colorado was the first to go last week, dashing west to the Pac-10. Next came Nebraska, cashing in an offer from the Big Ten.

For the moment, the Big 12 has only 10 schools, while the Big Ten has 12. Go figure.

From here, a seemingly endless string of possibilities has emerged for the remaining schools. Most signs point to the Pac-10 inviting Texas and four others, which would kill the Big 12 and leave MU, KU and K-State looking for homes. There are options for each, but it’s looking unlikely that they’ll land someplace together.

What drove the shifting allegiances were love and money showered on collegiate athletics that have made big-time sports less about tradition and more about revenue.

So news of the conference’s evaporation fed cynicism about the smarminess of college sports, its never-ending scandals and the manner in which money shoves aside concerns about academics and loyalty.

For some, in fact, college sports weren’t worth building around in the first place.
“What’s lost has already been corrupted,” said Crosby Kemper III, director of the Kansas City Public Library and a member of this former cowtown’s most prominent families. “We need to stop looking at the Big Eight, the Big Ten, the Big 12 and NCAA as things that bring prestige and make us a better community. They don’t.”

Campus fallout

The Big 12, said K-State President Kirk Schulz, “put us on TV a lot. ... The visibility impact is tremendous.”

Television contracts may generate millions for athletics without putting much into the classroom or laboratory, but Schulz and other administrators say the attention props up the schooling side of the schools in incalculable ways.

Consider the $5 million that the Manhattan campus landed a few weeks ago from an East Coast donor. That alumnus gave the money to the academics but told Schulz that the success of Wildcat sports stoked his generosity.

“Certainly, athletics is viewed as the front porch of the university. And part of that front porch is conferences, rivalries,” said Jaren Pope.

Two years ago Pope co-authored a study in The Southern Economic Journal showing a slight boost in enrollment at universities with winning sports teams. From 1983 to 2002, it found, schools in the NCAA men’s basketball tournament experienced a 1 percent hike in applicants each year. Final Four teams showed a 4 to 5 percent bump, with the NCAA champion posting a 7 to 8 percent spike.

A school that broke into the top 20 in football could expect a 2.5 percent jump in student applications the next year.

“There is a relationship of success building on success,” said Kansas State Foundation director Fred Cholic. “We have a lot more passionate conversations where athletics are being successful.”

Even schools with basement-dwelling teams can get a boost from the luster of a big-time conference.

The bonds of an athletic conference can foster connections between researchers at universities while forming benchmarks for tuition rates and faculty salaries. Professors in Manhattan have long complained of being the lowest paid in the Big 12. Some faculty in Columbia had been eager to join the Big Ten because the average salaries in that conference are higher.

This year KU hosted separate gatherings for Big 12 faculty, Big 12 undergraduate deans and a group of Big 12 campus diversity officers. Studies also have shown that public opinion tends to group a school’s academic strength with that of others in their conference.
“That cohesiveness of conference helps develop strong ties that last over time,” said KU Vice Provost Danny Anderson.

That jocks-to-docs connection only goes so far, though.

All Big Ten schools belong to the exclusive Association of American Universities. That puts them — along with Missouri, Kansas and five others in the Big 12 — among the 61 top public research institutions in the country. Yet AAU officials see any correlation between big time research and a big time athletic conference as just coincidence.

“We focus on federally funded research as an association,” said AAU spokesman Barry Toiv. Membership in an athletic conference, he said, “should have no bearing whatsoever on federally funded research.” Such research is driven by things like publications in scholarly quarterlies, he said, not quarterbacks.

But since all of the Big Ten schools also are AAU research schools, the perception is the Big Ten is a more academic conference. True or not, universities in the conference use the prestige to draw faculty, students and researchers.

There’s no denying the impact of athletics on campus life.

Justin Prochaska, an MU junior from Arlington, Texas, has attended every football, baseball and basketball game since coming to Columbia.

If MU ended up in a lesser conference, “I would probably still go to the games,” he said, “but … I don’t think I would have as much invested in it.”

Rightly or wrongly, sports can define a campus. Games played on a smaller stage — something less than the current Big 12 and its status as part of the Bowl Championship Series, or BCS — would seem to many like smaller games.

“That’s what sort of identifies us and makes us different than, you know, Newton, Kansas, or any other city in the state,” said Tom Kern, president and CEO of the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce.

“They’re all fine places, but I think everybody looks for what makes their identity, and obviously a great part of Lawrence’s identity is its affiliation with the University of Kansas and a conference like the Big 12.”

A lot to lose

When it comes to the actual games that our universities play, the stakes coming out of the Big 12 have never been higher.

Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State have competed in the same conference for nearly a century, but in the last 14 years of the Big 12 era, all three have reached unprecedented peaks athletically.
• In 2007, Missouri climbed to the No. 1 ranking in college football for the first time and finished the season with a school-record 12 victories after winning the Cotton Bowl. Two years later, the Tigers’ men’s basketball team captured its first Big 12 championship by winning the conference tournament.

• Kansas set a school record with 11 consecutive football victories in 2007 and won the Orange Bowl the following January, the Jayhawks’ first victory in the Bowl Championship Series. In April 2008 the Jayhawks won their third NCAA men’s basketball title, their first in two decades.

• Kansas State’s run of 11 consecutive bowl games continued into the Big 12 era, culminating in 2003 when the Wildcats upset No. 1 Oklahoma at Arrowhead Stadium for the Big 12 championship. The conference title was the first for K-State since 1934. Last year, K-State’s men’s basketball team came within a game of reaching its first Final Four since 1964.

Playing in the Big 12 helped make those achievements a reality — competing in football with national powers Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas raised everyone’s game.

Missouri recruits heavily in Texas in football and relied on several Lone Star State stars such as quarterback Chase Daniel to win back-to-back Big 12 North championships in 2007 and 2008. If MU, KU or K-State didn’t compete in a conference with Texas schools, they likely would reduce their recruiting presence in a state that produces the country’s most football talent.

The Big 12 has also increased the schools’ bottom lines. In the final year of the Big Eight, the conference distributed $26 million to the schools, an average of about $3 million. This year the Big 12 will distribute $139 million, with each school receiving $8 million to $12 million.

Major conference affiliation provides revenue streams through football television contracts and Bowl Championship Series automatic qualifier status that guarantee a conference at least $18.5 million a year. The Mountain West Conference, which would angle to add Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State if the Big 12 dissolves this week, distributed $26.5 million to its eight members this season and does not currently have automatic qualifier status.

Losing the Big 12 without landing in another major conference also would cost Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State exposure.

For Kansas, protecting its nationally renowned basketball program is of most importance. Coach Bill Self believes the KU brand is good enough that the Jayhawks will always be competitive, regardless of conference affiliation. But Self also acknowledges that his program has benefited from being in the Big 12.

The Big 12’s television contracts provide the Jayhawks with prime-time exposure. ESPN’s “Big Monday” almost always features the Jayhawks in high-profile or rivalry games on cold January and February nights.
“The league has been a big bonus,” Self said. “Kansas, we have a lot of things to sell. But (recruits) are going to make a decision based on what they can see. Selling the unknown is very difficult to do.”

If Kansas cannot find a home in a major conference, the Jayhawks could look to the Mountain West or Conference USA. Neither league is strong in basketball, so it’s hard to imagine Self coming along for that ride long term. As Self said Thursday, “There are absolutely no other options” than landing in a BCS league.

Why not go independent like Notre Dame in football?

Although the Fighting Irish make $15 million a year by negotiating their own television contract, which they don’t have to share, they also have to schedule 12 opponents on their own.

In football, most teams have a bye week when they can schedule a nonconference game with Notre Dame. Basketball is much harder.

Teams play two to three times a week during their conference season, which takes up the last three months of the schedule. Although KU could schedule a lot of big games during the early part of the season, finding high-quality competitors with open dates would be nearly impossible later in the season. Not even Notre Dame tries to do that in basketball or its nonrevenue sports, which compete in the Big East.

Wherever KU and the others land, they’re looking at a potential increase in travel expenses. Losing Nebraska means that Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri have lost a conference rival within driving distance. The closest Mountain West schools to Kansas City are in Colorado Springs, Colo., and Fort Worth, Texas.

Even if all three are able to land in the same conference, longstanding rivalries have already been shattered, adding to the anxiety that the Sunflower Showdown or the Border War could be next.

The nation’s longest uninterrupted college football series — Kansas and Nebraska have played 104 consecutive games since 1906 — could end after this season. The Border War — Kansas vs. Missouri — is the most-played football rivalry west of the Mississippi River at 118 games. Kansas and Kansas State will play for the 100th consecutive season this fall.

Arguably the biggest college football game in Kansas City’s history was played at Arrowhead Stadium in 2007, when unbeaten Kansas and Missouri played in front of 80,000 fans for the No. 1 ranking and a spot in the Big 12 title game. Missouri won 36-28.

“It was a huge game for us,” Missouri athletic director Mike Alden said. “And it’s a huge city for us. We recruit students there. Our athletic successes, so many have come there.”

While the future of KU-MU football games at Arrowhead is uncertain — KU athletic director Lew Perkins has said it would be difficult to maintain a series against a team that’s not in the same conference — Nebraska’s departure from the Big 12 is sinking in.
Thomas Hill, who played tight end when the Wildcats won the Big 12 championship at Arrowhead in 2003, arrived in Manhattan a few years after K-State’s centerpiece victory of football coach Bill Snyder’s turnaround — the “Manhattan Miracle.”

Snyder ended a 30-game winless streak at the start of his K-State career. A decade later, in 1998, the Wildcats took down defending national champion Nebraska at home, ending a 29-game losing streak to the Huskers and advancing to the Big 12 championship game.

K-State also racked up double-digit winning streaks against rivals Kansas and Missouri during Hill’s time. Returning to his alma mater to watch K-State play any new set of teams would simply be a letdown.

“It’s saddening to think I could come back late in the season and not see that classic K-State/Nebraska clash,” Hill said. “It’s one of those games where the gloves come off, and everyone on the field fights for that extra inch.”

**KC’s bottom line**

As if whistling past the graveyard of Kansas City’s big-time aspirations, Mayor Mark Funkhouser declared last week, “We’re going to be a player no matter what happens.”

Didn’t the city just refurbish Arrowhead and Kaufmann stadiums? Isn’t the Sprint Center one of the newest downtown arenas in the country? How many Midwestern cities are surrounded by strong regional college teams, and back them with such rabid fans?

“This is a great sports town,” the mayor said, “whether the Big 12 is here or somebody else.”

The Kansas City Council passed a resolution Thursday supporting a “role as a home and destination for intercollegiate athletic events and organizations.” It steered clear of taking a specific position on the Big 12’s future — an issue on which it was powerless anyway.

“We hope,” said Councilman Ed Ford, “the Big 12 survives.”

That hope is about paying the bills.

Acting City Manager Troy Schulte worried what the possible disappearance of the Big 12 means to the downtown KC Live entertainment district. It sits across from the Sprint Center, which is scheduled to host the men’s basketball tournament through 2014, and the women’s tournament through 2013.

Convention officials estimate that the tournament is a $12 million to $15 million boost to the local economy. That could mean as much as $4 million on hotel rooms, $3.4 million on food and drinks, and $2.8 million on shopping. Hotel occupancy jumped by nearly 20 percent compared to years when the tournament was elsewhere.
In the years to come, that adds up to a loss of perhaps $45 million in the absence of the tournaments.

“The Big 12 was always the biggest week of the year for us. By far,” said Kyle Kelly, a co-owner of Kelly’s Westport Inn. “It just kills me to think of it going away.”

The Sprint Center will be able to fill its dates with other entertainment, Schulte said, but they wouldn’t offer the day-long and weekend-long events that entice crowds into KC Live in the Power & Light district.

“We need more people and more activity,” he said.

Any dip in activity at the Power & Light district could further nick taxpayers. City Hall must pay for any fall off in the downtown entertainment district’s performance.

Even before the Big 12 started to dissolve, the Power & Light district fell short of revenue projections. That meant the city has had to dip into its general fund to pay the debt on bonds sold to build the district. This year that subsidy might grow to $11.4 million.

“We’ve spent a lot of taxpayer money to build up a downtown area,” said Stretch, an artist, restaurant owner and Tax Increment Financing Commission member. “Our taxes don’t stop coming, and our bills keep coming.”

The Kansas City Council last week also approved spending $250,000 on an option to buy downtown property for a potential new convention hotel.

“If we do see the Big 12 fall apart, we’ll take those numbers into account,” said council member Cindy Circo. “But we’ve got a ways to go. Who knows how the world will change by then.”

Should Kansas, Kansas State, Missouri and Iowa State end up in the same conference, Schulte wants Kansas City to be its first home. That would mean championships, tournaments and other events centered here.

“We want to be at its heart,” he said.

Kansas City would be in hot pursuit to anchor the league.

“We feel like we’re in good shape right in the middle of the country. We have good facilities to compete,” said Kevin Gray of the Kansas City Sports Commission. “If we didn’t have all those, I’d really be concerned.”

Certainly, Whitney Terrell is worried.

He has published two novels set in Kansas City and sees the old Big Eight as part of the city’s psyche. Some of that was lost when the league expanded to the Big 12 in the 1990s and lost some of the basketball tournaments and football championship games to Texas. Still, he suggests
the Sprint Center would not have been built except for the desire to bring more Big 12 events back to town.

Without the league stopping here regularly, Terrell said, Kansas City becomes left behind.

"I'm totally bummed about it," he said. "It seems disastrous. It seems like the place most affected by all this is Kansas City."
MU curators reveal nothing to ease conference anxiety

BY VAHE GREGORIAN
OF THE POST-DISPATCH
Monday, Jun. 14 2010

COLUMBIA, Mo. — The scene surrounding the future of University of Missouri athletics appeared surreal Sunday evening, as 30 reporters and eight TV cameras crammed into Room 321 of University Hall and surrounded a table with a speaker phone while the school's Board of Curators convened a telephonic meeting along with athletics director Mike Alden — who was in town but unavailable Sunday night.

Present as a vote immediately was introduced to close the session were curator Bo Fraser, chancellor Brady Deaton and MU general counsel Steve Owens.

After the vote, reporters were sent out of the building — leaving the conduits for a perplexed and anxious base of followers literally standing in the dark as the Big 12's future lies in jeopardy.

To what degree MU itself is in the dark remained open for debate after the hour-long meeting.

In the four minutes Deaton took questions, he cast little light on the meeting, saying only it was a "productive, engaging discussion" and that "no action was taken."

While Deaton said he was "reasonably optimistic" the Big 12 could be saved and added that "we're not engaged in further planning or speculation" about alternatives if it dissolves, he added, "Clearly, you'd have to be blind not to have concerns about what's happening to the Big 12."

None of which will soothe anxious MU coaches, fans and alumni.

If nature abhors a vacuum, Mizzou's constituents are being tortured by it, left conjuring worst-case scenarios that have it anywhere from in a mid-major to being homeless if the Big 12 crumbles in the wake of Colorado and Nebraska's departures late last week for other conferences.

But as one BCS conference administrator put it Sunday, "The first domino hasn't even fallen yet."

While Colorado and Nebraska's moves have heightened the sense of urgency among
not only observers but also administrators around the nation, neither in itself represents seismic change.

But that massive domino lurks at least in the form of the Pac-10's courtship of Texas and several other Big 12 South schools.

Pac-10 Commissioner Larry Scott on Sunday visited Texas Tech, Texas and Texas A&M, completing a weekend round of visits that included Oklahoma and Oklahoma State. The Pac-10 tour was scheduled to hit Kansas late Sunday night as the Jayhawks were considered an option to replace A&M on the Pac-10 invite list if the Aggies were swayed by the Southeastern Conference. A&M remains under consideration by the SEC, a source familiar with the situation said Sunday.

Each school has noted it continues to explore its options. But between interviews with sources and public statements from Texas and Texas A&M, at least four of the six Big 12 South schools have indicated a preference to keep alive the Big 12, which says it has financial figures that indicate the current group would have more media value than the current "Pac-11."

And The Dallas Morning News reported that Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe was presenting a plan to the Big 12 South schools that a 10-team Big 12 would have future revenue equal to that of the SEC's recent payout of $17 million per team once the Big 12 gets a new TV deal.

Asked if he knew of any direct conversations among Big 12 North schools, Deaton said he would have to defer to Alden — who on Friday was named spokesman for expansion matters but for unspecified reasons was not on hand.

Trouble is, all involved seem to be leaving themselves some sort of out, at least partly because of the climate of distrust being fostered by the Internet-driven pandemonium.

Case in point — a statement Sunday from Texas A&M President R. Bowen Loftin:

"As Bill Byrne and I have said on several occasions, our desire is for the Big 12 Conference to continue. ... We are aggressively exploring our options, one of which is for the Big 12 to continue in some form. We have also had extensive discussions with other conferences over the past few days."

To what degree Missouri can say it has options to explore if it must remains uncertain.
Politicians look small dealing with the Big 12

By STEVE KRASKE

So who’s to blame for this Big 12 mess?

Got to blame somebody, right?

This is America, after all. We blame somebody for everything.

A 21-year-old goes on a crime spree? Got to be the parents’ fault. The Twin Towers are attacked? It’s got to be Iraq’s fault. Oil gushes into the gulf? Paging President Barack Obama.

The Big 12?

Here’s a mess of such far-reaching proportions that someone surely screwed up. Talk about a situation where pols from Topeka to Jefferson City had lots of warning that something was afoot — and yet seemingly did nothing.

Now KU, K-State and MU are twisting slowly in the wind.

Gov. Jay Nixon, after all, brought up the topic last December when he first mentioned the possibility of his Tigers bolting the Big 12 for the Big Ten.

“I’m not going to say anything bad about the Big 12,” Nixon said then. “But when you compare Oklahoma State to Northwestern, when you compare Texas Tech to Wisconsin, I mean, you begin looking at educational possibilities that are worth looking at. … If they want to talk, we should talk, and we should listen.”

Warning or not, the Missouri-Kansas political class remained awfully quiet until last week, when the alarm bells began sounding. Only then it was too late.

Still, it was as if someone had fired the starter’s gun at a track meet. Everybody was talking at once.

Gov. Mark Parkinson of Kansas issued a statement saying he had called some governors.

“A regional partnership between our universities is essential,” Parkinson said. “…Maintaining the Big 12 Conference is, therefore, of great importance. … I will do all that I can.”
With solemn faces, Sen. Sam Brownback and Sen. Pat Roberts faced the cameras Wednesday in Washington. Brownback called the Big 12 “strong” and “vibrant” and a conference “with a bright future.”

For his part, Roberts said he had been in touch with KU and K-State and was taking instructions from them. One day last week, he buttonholed his colleague from Nebraska, Democrat Ben Nelson, just off the Senate floor.

“Don’t be the domino that blows college football up into four major conferences and gets rid of the NCAA,” Roberts was quoted as saying.

Nelson, it seems, wasn’t fazed.

Neither Roberts nor Brownback was inclined to go down the path advocated by some of their Republican colleagues that called for Congress to stall scouting out all the antitrust implications or examining the nonprofit status of major universities.

“He’s not necessarily going down the legislative route,” a Brownback spokesman said.

In Missouri, neither Sen. Kit Bond nor Sen. Claire McCaskill was going there either. McCaskill, an MU grad, said she was “sick to my stomach” over the whole thing, but added: “We need to be very cautious about trying to assert that Congress could do anything about it.”

Bond believes Congress has enough trouble doing what it’s supposed to do without meddling with college sports. But he also couldn’t help himself from taking a shot at Obama.

“Not even this president is willing (yet) to take over management of college athletics,” Bond chortled.

That leaves Nixon, whose early interest in the Big Ten, Nebraska officials revealed Friday, nudged them to start looking around.

On Friday afternoon, one e-mailer put it this way:

“If (Nixon) ever shows his face around the University of Missouri-Columbia and pretends to represent the ‘good intentions’ of our major university, please do not ever, ever, ever quote him. … Lord help us, and let’s hope we are able to find a conference home after he put us at such a horrible disadvantage on the college conference landscape!”

Congress has never had much success when it comes to sports. Lawmakers tried to regulate boxing and ban steroids in baseball and solve the conundrum of the college football national championship. All those efforts fell flat.

The same thing probably would have happened with the Big 12 fiasco.
But the reverberations from all the conference-hopping last week are going to be shaking around these parts for a long time.

As a lot, the governors and right honorables in Missouri and Kansas came off looking like a pretty helpless lot.

Sports fans — many of whom vote, believe it or not — are going to want to blame somebody.

Someone has to pay. After all, this is America.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM System Board of Curators meets for an hour, mulls conference realignment

By Dieter Kurtenbach
June 13, 2010 | 10:40 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The University of Missouri System Board of Curators met in a special session Sunday night, over teleconference, continuing its closed meeting regarding conference realignment that began Friday afternoon. That Friday meeting lasted for nearly three hours and included Missouri Athletics Director Mike Alden.

Alden opted to call into the Sunday meeting. Missouri Media Relations director Chad Moller confirmed to Gabe DeArmond of powermizzou.com, through text message, that Alden was in Columbia on Sunday night.

The meeting lasted for an hour, and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton addressed the media after the meeting adjourned.

Deaton refused to comment on any "speculation" regarding conference realignment and Missouri, though he did say that he and the Board of Curators are "recently optimistic" after meeting with Alden.

Multiple reports say that current Big 12 Conference members Texas Tech, Texas A&M, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and Texas are on the verge of leaving the conference. Pac-10 Commissioner Larry Scott met with officials from each school this weekend. Colorado and Nebraska left the conference on Thursday and Friday, respectively.

Deaton said that Missouri officials have remained in constant communication with other schools in the Big 12 and reaffirmed the school's public stance that Missouri is a "proud member" of the conference.
There is still a chance that the Big 12 remains intact with only 10 teams.

Orangebloods.com reported Sunday that Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe presented a proposal to the Pac-10 targeted schools that he hoped would keep them in the Big 12. That proposal reportedly included the freedom for each school to create its own television network (a concept that could be lucrative to Texas); a new television contract that would up conference payouts to $17 million per school; and an equal division of the total $20 million buyout that Colorado and Nebraska will have to pay for leaving the conference.

Until the next move in conference realignment is made, Deaton and the curators do not plan to meet. The next officially scheduled curators meeting is in July.

"We are fully committed to the Big 12. We are not going engage in further planning," Deaton said.

That next move could come on Tuesday morning, when the University of Texas Board of Regents is scheduled to meet in Austin to discuss where Texas stands in conference realignment.

The fate of the Big 12 likely rests with the decisions that come out of that meeting in Austin.

The Missouri Board of Curators released a statement after the meeting:

"Amidst announced and speculative conference realignment moves by members of the Big 12, the University of Missouri Board of Curators met for an hour with university officials in closed session this evening via a teleconference call to continue their discussions from closed meetings last week.

"No action or vote was taken during the meeting, but board members again received information and legal advice from the university's general counsel. The board also considered contract obligations and related matters."
Saturday, Jun. 12, 2010

COLUMBIA, Mo. — As speculation was swirling over conference expansion in April at the BCS meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz., Big East Commissioner John Marinatto asked Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe what he would call his league if it lost two members as was perceived possible.


The gallows humor became a reality Friday, when Nebraska deserted the Big 12 for the Big Ten a day after Colorado left for the Pac-10, making for a mess of misnomers in conference tags with an 11-member Pac-10, a 12-member Big Ten and a 10-member Big 12 — for the moment, anyway.

And the numbers game is looking increasingly pessimistic for Mizzou, which now is dependent on Texas — the conference jewel with which Missouri has had philosophical issues — for the sustained viability of the Big 12.

If Texas leads Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas Tech and perhaps Texas A&M with it to the Pac-10, as now is being widely reported by media in Texas and Oklahoma, the Big 12 probably would dissolve and MU could be left to fend for a hazy new affiliation along with league brethren Baylor, Kansas, Kansas State and Iowa State. Texas A&M is also said to be looking at moving to the SEC.

Nebraska's departure came with an extra kick in the gut to Mizzou, with Nebraska President Harvey Perlman suggesting during a news conference that Missouri had a part in triggering its departure.

After the Big Ten announced it would study expansion in December, Perlman said, "We saw reports that Missouri would want to go to the Big Ten, including a statement by their governor, a member of (the) board of curators and chancellor — comments that weren't clearly supportive of the Big 12."

Speaking broadly about insinuations that MU engaged the avalanche, MU athletics director Mike Alden called the idea "silly" and "ridiculous," and said MU has had its focus on strengthening itself and the Big 12 all along.

Still, Mizzou had complained about such issues as the Big 12’s lack of equitable revenue sharing and had been open to listening to the Big Ten at
least as a matter of due diligence.

Now, even as MU officials continued to evade questions about whether the school had been extended an overture from the Big Ten, the case that they haven't was amplified during a conference call with Beebe late Friday afternoon.

Beebe said that when Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany called him Friday morning to tell him Nebraska had been invited into the Big Ten, Delany also told him no other Big 12 schools were in the Big Ten's plans.

"My understanding is there isn't any other conference institution being considered by the Big Ten," Beebe said.

Then again, while Beebe understood Nebraska's departure was imminent in the last few days, he was surprised that Friday was the first direct statement of that by Delany, who has said repeatedly he would give fair notice.

And hours after concluding two days of meetings Friday, the Missouri Board of Curators announced a special Sunday night meeting. No further information was made available, and attempts to clarify the topic were unsuccessful.

Earlier in the day, Missouri President Gary Forsee and Alden tried to ease concerns about MU being left stranded.

"I would say it's a nine-inning game," Forsee said before the curators entered a closed session with Alden, adding, "And whether we're in the bottom of the first inning or the bottom of the ninth, the speculation has been running away — for the last seven months."

He called Missouri "well-positioned" in the landscape and added, "I can't imagine being any better prepared or being any more action-oriented than the University of Missouri has been. We have stayed on top of these national developments and discussion about conference realignment since it surfaced last year."

But Alden said the scene is so "fluid," it seems to change "by the minute," and board Chairwoman Judith Haggard added: "I'm not sure what's true and what isn't. My TV was broken last night, and I think that was a good thing."

Alden acknowledged the "angst" MU fans and alumni might be feeling but tried to convey a message of "be patient and trust us."

"I hope they come back to who we are, who we are as an institution," he said.

He said MU was working "aggressively and diligently" on all it could control. Yet plenty seems beyond MU's control, most notably Texas, whose regents are
scheduled to meet Tuesday to address its athletics future.

"They are a huge part of who we are," Alden said. "They have brought tremendous strength to our league. ... To keep moving forward, Texas is really important to what we're trying to do."

That was among the reasons MU's call for calm and patience might be hard to heed.

"This is kind of uncharted waters for everybody throughout the country right now," Alden said. "So I really think to be able to respond definitively and say, 'Hey, we should be able to know (the future conference affiliation) by this time or that time,' I think it would be inappropriate. ...

"Probably it would actually even be irresponsible. Because I don't think anyone knows."
MU’s Big Ten opportunity may have passed

By MIKE DeARMOND

June 11, 2010

COLUMBIA | Missouri’s opportunity of receiving an offer from the Big Ten Conference appeared to have passed Friday afternoon when Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe said there weren’t any other Big 12 members “being pursued by the Big Ten at this time.”

But MU athletic director Mike Alden told The Star that he is not ready to close the door on the Big Ten.

“We don’t have knowledge of that,” Alden said. “To me that certainly is speculative, that deal. I appreciate the commissioner saying what he said. But we don’t know that to be accurate or not.”

Beebe made his comments on a national teleconference after Nebraska announced it was joining the Big Ten. Beebe said he spoke earlier in the day with Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany, and Beebe said he believed the Big Ten was done shopping in the Big 12.

Delany, speaking later in the afternoon at a news conference in Lincoln, Neb., said the Big Ten would adhere to its original timetable when it comes to further expansion possibilities.

“We’re going to pause,” Delany said as he was welcoming the University of Nebraska to his conference Friday.

In December, the conference said the process would take 12 to 18 months, but the Cornhuskers were fast-tracked.

The Big Ten may not be finished growing after adding the Cornhuskers as its 12th member. Delany said his conference won’t be idle if there are other changes in the college sports landscape.

“We’re still open, we’re aware of what’s going on,” Delany said. “Change won’t abate anytime soon.

“But we’re in a great place. We’re stronger today than we were yesterday.”
Beebe, during his teleconference, twice made references that it was his understanding, after talking to Delany: “There aren’t other conference members being considered by the Big Ten.”

On the second reference, Beebe seemed to add what could be a qualifier, saying: “There aren’t any other conference members being pursued by the Big Ten at this time.”

Alden, listening to that conference call in his office at Mizzou Arena, also termed “ridiculous and silly” a statement from Nebraska president Harvey Pearlman that blamed Missouri — and Colorado — for unleashing the winds of change and conference realignment.

“I’ve heard that suggestion out there,” Alden said. “And I would tell you, that’s ridiculous. That is silly.”

Perlman said he and athletic director Tom Osborne approached “our friends in the Big Ten” because of fears over Missouri and Colorado leaving the Big 12.

Almost immediately, a report came out of the Austin American-Statesman that Texas, Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State had already accepted bids to join Colorado in the Pac-10 Conference. That same report said Texas A&M had 72 hours to accept an invitation from the Pac-10. A&M, the report said, was split between a desire to join the Pac-10 or pursue inclusion in the Southeastern Conference.

Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds issued a statement Friday afternoon that stopped short of confirming that scenario.

“Our goals and hopes all along have been to keep the Big 12 Conference intact,” Dodds said. “But, as the dynamics of the Big 12 continue to change around us, we will utilize additional time to continue our work and evaluate our options.”

The Texas Board of Regents has announced it will meet Tuesday to review that school’s likely course of action. Big 12 officials are trying to get all remaining members to commit to staying in the league with a loose deadline of the end of the day on Monday.

The MU Board of Curators has called for an 8 p.m. Sunday meeting at the board offices at University Hall.

Alden said he could not confirm that a discussion — likely by phone — of currently uncommitted Big 12 members would be held on Saturday, but sources close to Missouri have indicated that one is anticipated.

Alden said he could not estimate a time line when the waves of change might settle down.

“This is kind of uncharted waters for everybody throughout the country right now,” Alden said. “To respond definitively and say, ‘We kind of know what’s going on by this time or that time,’ I think it would be inappropriate for anyone to respond to that.
"Probably, actually irresponsible because they don’t know. I don’t think anyone knows."

Before Beebe’s teleconference, Alden said he could see the Big 12 surviving.

“I’m confident,” Alden said. “There’s a lot of strength in this league.”

That said, Alden indicated that concerns over the viability of any conference could meet critical mass if the number of remaining members dipped to eight or fewer.
Missouri Mania and the Curator's Sunday Meeting

By Mike DeArmond - Posted on 12 June 2010

Those given to seeing hidden meaning in the confluence of tea leaves won't believe this, but what Sunday night's special Board of Curators gathering is about is preparing for eventualities.

In other words, it is an opportunity for Mike Alden to update the curators and then for that group, including systems president Gary Forsee and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton, to map out strategy scenarios.

If the Big 12 blows up, what is Mizzou's stance?

If the Big 12 stays together, what is Mizzou's stance?

If absolutely nothing has happened by Sunday night, what is Mizzou's stance?

I'll be there with many other members of the media, I'm sure, either waiting outside in the parking lot or in the hallway at University Hall, to make sure I'm all ears if anyone has anything to say. Or, if they have nothing to say.

I expect a brief exchange. The curators have designated Alden as their spokesman and he'll fulfill that role. But I don't expect anything of great substance, and nothing definitive.

Sorry, Mizzou fans. No one can blame you for not being satisfied with assurances that MU officials are on top of the situation and that they are confident Missouri will wind up playing in a major conference.

But the next move won't be played out in Columbia, Mo.

The next big move should come by Monday and Tuesday at the latest when we find out if Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe and officials at some remaining Big 12 schools hear from Texas.

The Longhorns, by announcing they'll stay and save the Big 12, could put on a 20-gallon white hat, play the hero to some.

Or, Texas could do what is best for Texas, which might well be to lead an exodus to the Pac 10.
It is being suggested to me by some that the best thing for Missouri might be that the Big 12 goes away, causing the Pac 10 to become the first mega conference.

That would increase the anxiety level among many Missouri fans, who won't be comfortable in the wait to find out if Missouri will be assigned to the minor leagues or still get a chance to remain in the majors.

But it also would likely trigger action outside the Pac 10 in the formation of three other mega conferences.

If college athletics winds up with four, 16-team leagues, I just don't see any way that Missouri and Kansas and Kansas State are left out of that 64-team mix.

MU officials contend they are still in play for the Big Ten and while there is little talk emerging from the SEC, Missouri is being mentioned there as well.

The Big East - if it is raided by the Big Ten and needs to replenish the roster to keep BCS status - could be a landing place for MU, KU, and/or K-State as well.

The ACC should be a player, as well as the Mountain West.

I won't try to fool you into thinking I know what is going to happen. I don't. But for right now, I'm swearing off trying to read tea leaves and keeping the ears and my mind open.
COLUMBIA | Chances of the Big 12 Conference staying together are “significantly greater than 24 hours ago,” a source close to Big 12 realignment negotiations has told The Star.

The same source said a new television contract being touted by commissioner Dan Beebe could produce “significantly more” than $17 million for each of the 10 remaining Big 12 schools. Perhaps upwards of $20 million per school.

And, that a departure penalty of around $20 million withheld from Colorado and Nebraska would mean $2 million each to the remaining Big 12 members.

That, of course, is dependent on there being a Big 12 Conference beyond the 2010-11 academic year. Last week Colorado agreed to leave for the Pacific-10 Conference, and Nebraska agreed to join the Big Ten Conference. It was anticipated that Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott would make offers over the weekend to Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State.

But on Sunday morning, word began to filter in to media outlets all over the Big 12 — from the Texas Rivals.com site Orangebloods to The Star — that Beebe’s efforts to halt a mass exodus from the Big 12 might be gaining at least a tenuous foothold.

A source close to the realignment negotiations suggested that Texas — the key to league survival in its present form — probably would gain concessions for “getting to play the hero.”

It was concessions to Texas — for example, in the form of uneven revenue distribution that allows schools to keep more of their money from TV appearances — on which an unstable foundation was laid when the Southwest Conference and the Big Eight Conference merged.

“There is a price,” the source said. “But the price is worth it, or it’s a price we have to pay.”

Sunday was a day of news confirmed and news denied in the case of Texas A&M.
Chad Moller, media relations director for Missouri, confirmed that a Big 12 official had informed Missouri late Sunday afternoon that Texas A&M had turned down an offer to join the Pac-10.

At about the same time, the Rivals.com site devoted to A&M athletics, Aggieyell.com, reported the Aggies had turned down the Pac-10 and they “will be the newest member of the Southeastern Conference.”

Barely had those statements been made than officials at Texas A&M denied that the Aggies had committed to the SEC or spurned the Pac-10.

Jason Cook, vice president of marketing and communications, told Orangebloods.com: “Texas A&M continues to evaluate its options. At this point, all options continue to be on the table.”

That, at least for one more day, seemed to leave open the option of Big 12 survival.

Still out there is the obvious specter of dissolution. If the Pac-10 can convince even three more of the Big 12 South schools to leave, then the Big 12’s days are numbered.

After a one-hour special session of the MU Board of Curators — most of those involved hooked up by telephone — MU chancellor Brady Deaton emerged from University Hall and addressed a large media gathering shortly after 9 p.m. Sunday.

No votes were taken, merely MU athletic director Mike Alden briefing the curators by telephone on the current situation.

Numerous times, Deaton referred to Missouri’s commitment to helping the Big 12 remain viable.

“We continue to work in every way we can to strengthen the Big 12,” Deaton said. “We’ll be continuing discussions over the next few days.”

**Asked whether he felt more optimistic about the survival of the Big 12 than he might have a few days before, Deaton said: “We’re reasonably optimistic. You’d have to be blind not to have concerns about what’s happening to the Big 12.”**

“That’s why it’s important to get meaningful information, knowing where we stand.”

Deaton said Missouri was maintaining daily communication with other members of the Big 12.

Alden declined an interview with The Star.

Speculation continues to list Missouri’s possible options — beyond staying in the Big 12 — as eventual inclusion in the Big Ten if it grows to 14 or 16, or possibly becoming of interest to the SEC. The Big East, if it loses members to other leagues, might welcome Missouri as well as Kansas, according to several speculative reports. And the Mountain West Conference, looking to
move forward to gaining a BCS berth, has been reported to be looking into taking Missouri, Kansas, Kansas State and Iowa State.

Moller said he could neither confirm nor deny anything about realignment involving Missouri outside the Big 12.
No wrong in looking, MU officials say

Conference affiliation in limbo as brass deflects blame for exodus.

By Dave Matter

Sunday, June 13, 2010

Missouri dilly-dallied.

That was the sentiment in the early 1990s when MU’s administration didn’t initially embrace the idea of merging with four Southwest Conference schools — and instead batted eyes with the Big Ten Conference.

"From my perspective, I wish they would either make a commitment to us or go somewhere else. But this dilly-dallying has got to stop."

Those were the words of then-Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne in 1994, prompted by the perception that Missouri was reluctant to pledge loyalty to the Big Eight Conference, which was about to become the Big 12.

At the time, MU Chancellor Charles Kiesler and Athletic Director Joe Castiglione publicly supported the Big Eight-SWC alliance. But MU raised suspicions about that support when it was the only school to abstain from an otherwise unanimous vote for expansion and when Kiesler released a statement pledging lukewarm support for the newly formed league.

“We are not going to sign a lifetime deal with anybody,” Kiesler’s statement read. “The responsible thing to do is keep the door open to any options that may come our way and keep the best interests of the University of Missouri protected at all times.”

In other words, MU’s Facebook status circa-1994 would have been: Engaged but looking.

Sixteen years later, has a similar approach by Missouri contributed to the Big 12’s imminent erosion? Before school officials adopted a strict code of Big 12 public loyalty, did MU’s brief flirtation with the Big Ten set off a chain of events that could redesign all major conferences?

And, the most urgent and local concern, did Missouri cost itself a seat at the adult table of college athletics?
Harvey Perlman would say yes. As Nebraska was welcomed into the Big Ten Conference yesterday as the league’s 12th member, the school chancellor blamed Missouri’s wandering eye for initiating the Big 12 breakup. Colorado became the first to defect on Thursday when it officially joined the Pac-10 Conference. At least four more schools — Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas and Texas Tech — are reportedly headed to the Pac-10, too.

"Nebraska did not start this discussion," Chancellor Perlman said Friday in Lincoln, Neb. "After the Big Ten announced it planned to consider expansion" in December, "we saw reports that Missouri would want to go to the Big Ten, including a statement by their governor, a member of board of curators and chancellor, comments that weren’t clearly supportive of the Big 12."

Perlman was citing comments from Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton and Athletic Director Mike Alden that essentially reflected the tone of Kiesler’s original “keep the door open” statement, though at the time, only Nixon’s December comments to The Associated Press comparing the Big Ten’s academic reputation to the Big 12’s seemed to generate much scorn around the conference.

If anything raised the pulse of Alden during Friday’s news conference, it was MU’s perceived role in the Big 12’s meltdown.

"Folks out there are trying to suggest that Mizzou was a focal point to start discussions, that is, seriously, just ridiculous," Alden said. "And it’s silly."

The day before Perlman spoke, UM System President Gary Forsee sounded off on MU being miscast as instigator, saying the Big Ten began the speculation when Commissioner Jim Delany announced in December the league was studying expansion candidates.

"When we immediately were asked about that, our reaction was very simple," Forsee said. "We at the University of Missouri are very proud of our history, very proud of our relationship with the Big 12 Conference and would continue to do things that are in interest of the University of Missouri. Period. The end. We didn’t deal with speculation at that point in time and have been very consistent, very professional for the last six months in that regard."

By Friday, Nixon, too, brushed off Perlman’s suggestion, pointing instead to a system that had been moving toward expansion for years.

"Clearly, the Big Ten’s been looking to expand for a number of years," Nixon said. "They tried to get Notre Dame a few years ago. Delany has made no bones about the fact that he wants to be bigger. The Pac-10 has clearly been wanting to move into the Mountain Time Zone in the northern section and looking at that Denver media market for a lot of years. And the" Southeastern Conference “has been talking to schools from the southern part of our conference for a long time.”

Missouri’s role in the ongoing expansion process remains muddled. Delany said the Big Ten could continue to add members, though MU is not considered a high-priority candidate, one Big
Ten source said. But if a system of 16-team megaconferences unfolds, MU should have the credentials to land somewhere among them.

The UM Board of Curators will hold a special meeting at 8 p.m. tonight, during which, one source said, Alden is expected to update board members on the weekend’s developments. Alden wants to consult with Texas officials to determine if what’s left of the Big 12 has any chance to survive collectively. If not, MU will have to weigh all options … with no time for dilly-dallying.

Reach Dave Matter at 573-815-1781 or e-mail dmatter@columbiatribune.com.
Did MU Urkel the Big 12?

By Joe Walljasper

Saturday, June 12, 2010

Do you remember that TV show "Family Matters," the one in which the suspendered, bespectacled Steve Urkel would accidentally cause a catastrophe and then say in his high-pitched tone, "Did I do that?"

Yesterday, Missouri was Steve Urkel.

The school receiving the most blame for the destruction of the Big 12 Conference was left standing amid the rubble with no particular place to go, pledging loyalty to a league with the structural stability of a Jenga tower. Athletic Director Mike Alden spoke to reporters and said Missouri's allegiance was with the Big 12, and for the first time in months, he really meant it.

With no Big Ten offer, he didn't have much choice. Technically speaking, MU did beat Big 12 Commissioner Don Beebe's alleged deadline for a loyalty oath, so the Tigers have that going for them.

But seriously, is it possible that MU created this mess? That was the message Nebraska Chancellor Harvey Perlman conveyed yesterday at a press conference announcing his school had applied for membership to the Big Ten — which was held a few hours after Colorado announced it was leaving for the Pac-10.

Perlman said the only reason Nebraska ever considered leaving the Big 12 was because MU planned to do so and the Cornhuskers had to guard against being left out when the whole game of conference musical chairs ended. Then, Perlman added, Texas and the South Division schools who were contacted by the Pac-10 indicated they would stay in the Big 12 if Missouri or Colorado left but not if Nebraska departed.

By this logic, Missouri destroyed the Big 12.

I have this question. Is Perlman completely unfamiliar with Missouri's athletic history? Missouri gets excited about things. It dreams big. But everyone kind of assumes that something awful will happen to ruin it all. Did Perlman not watch Shevin Wiggins kick a ball to Matt Davison in the
end zone? These are the things that happen when Missouri is on the verge of something big. You
don’t base life-changing decisions on your confidence in fate smiling on Missouri.

Realistically, Nebraska would have gone to the Big Ten no matter what. Missouri certainly
would have departed if its invitation didn’t get lost in the mail. Same for Iowa State, Kansas or
Kansas State.

And that’s why I don’t really play the blame game for Missouri being stuck in the We’re Totally
Hosed Conference.

In December, Alden, Chancellor Brady Deaton, President Gary Forsee and Gov. Jay Nixon all
made it known that MU would listen to what the Big Ten had to offer. Alden was vocal with his
opinions on the Big 12’s unequal revenue sharing and its resistance to starting a TV network on
the model of the Big Ten Network. Nixon made an oft-repeated comment about the academic
superiority of Northwestern and Wisconsin compared to Oklahoma State and Texas Tech.

But after that, a university-wide mandate to shut the hell up was observed strictly. I don’t know
what discussions happened privately, but Missouri hasn’t been holding weekly press conferences
begging for Big Ten membership. Alden dismissed the idea that MU brought the Big 12 down as
“ridiculous” and “silly,” and I agree.

So, is there any hope left that MU comes out of this thing smiling?

There is a dim chance Texas and the other South Division schools will stick with the Big 12 and
the league will either proceed with 10 teams or look to expand. Failing that, Missouri’s best bet
is for the other power conferences to expand to 16-team leagues and hope MU finds a home
somewhere.

It could happen. More likely, it will seem like it’s going to happen, and then at the last moment it
won’t happen. That’s the way it always happens.

Reach Joe Walljasper at 573-815-1783 or e-mail jwalljasper@columbiatribune.com.
Alden offers assurances that MU will remain in good position

By Dieter Kurtenbach
June 11, 2010 | 6:48 p.m. CDT

UM curators schedule special meeting for Sunday night

COLUMBIA — It's been a crazy week in college athletics. With Colorado defecting to the Pac-10 and Nebraska to the Big Ten, the Big 12 is down to 10 schools.

And it appears the craziness isn't over. The UM System Board of Curators, after completing two days of meetings dominated by talks — and questions — about its future conference alignment, announced Friday evening that it would hold a special closed meeting at 8 p.m. Sunday.

Meanwhile, Texas is reportedly on the Pac-10's radar, and they could take Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas A&M and Texas Tech with them. The Texas Board of Regents has scheduled a special meeting on conference realignment Tuesday. That meeting could lead to an announcement that Texas is leaving the Big 12, but Texas Men's Athletics Director DeLoss Dodds recently said in a news release that "our goals and hopes all along have been to keep the Big 12 Conference intact."

As of Friday afternoon, the Pac-10 had extended no more invitations, but Commissioner Larry Scott has been authorized by the presidents of his conference to invite any school he wants. In a media teleconference, Scott said he will wait to see what happens nationally over the next few weeks before deciding the Pac-10's next move.

On Friday, Missouri Athletics Director Mike Alden met with the curators for nearly three hours. Alden and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton characterized the meeting as informative. Alden and Deaton later held a news conference at which Alden shed little new light on the issue of conference realignment.
Alden said an Austin American-Statesman report that MU had been given a deadline to announce whether it would remain in the Big 12 was unfounded.

"There are no firm deadlines that we are aware of," Alden said. "There has been nothing that has been presented to us in any fashion of ultimatums."

Ultimatum or not, Alden pledged allegiance to the Big 12 on Friday.

"We aren't looking at any other conference," he said.

Alden said that there also has been no self-imposed deadline in regard to conference realignment and that he does not know when speculation about MU will be put to rest.

Nebraska Chancellor Harvey Perlman said Friday that it was MU's conduct since the Big Ten's December announcement about expansion that forced Nebraska to court, and eventually apply to join, the Big Ten.

The Big Ten informally invites schools to apply. Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delaney said in May that no school would be asked to apply if it would not certainly be admitted to the conference by the member institutions' presidents. Nebraska announced Friday that it would apply to the Big Ten.

"Nebraska did not start this discussion. After the Big Ten announced it planned to consider expansion, we saw reports that Missouri would want to go to the Big Ten, including a statement by their governor, a member of board of curators and chancellor — comments that weren't clearly supportive of the Big 12," Perlman said.

MU officials are pleading innocence.

"What's that song, 'We didn't start this fire?'" UM President Gary Forsee said Thursday.

"That is ridiculous, that is silly," Alden said Friday. "And when folks out there try to suggest that Mizzou was a focal point to be able to start discussions, that is ridiculous, that is silly."

Alden said that he remains confident that the Big 12 will endure but that he and others are working hard to ensure MU remains in strong position should the conference
continue to lose members. Leagues with eight or fewer schools are problematic and hard to keep together, he said.

"We are not operating with our heads in the sandbox," Alden said.

"The goal is certainly to always make sure that you are protecting the best interests of the University of Missouri as an institution and athletics program and to make sure to position ourselves in the national spotlight," Alden said.
University of Missouri’s Director of Athletics Mike Alden joined the Board of Curators for a teleconference Sunday night at 8pm to up the board on the ongoing Big 12 Conference realignment. Chancellor Brady Deaton said no new decisions were made and everyone remains “cautiously optimistic” that the Big 12 will remain intact.

On Tuesday, University of Texas officials will meet and vote whether to stay in the Big 12 or move to the Pac 10. Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe made a strong plea to Texas over the weekend to keep the Big 12 alive. Texas is the lynch pin in this whole thing now. If they leave, others will follow.

On Sunday, Pac-10 Commissioner Larry Scott made stops at Texas Tech, Texas and Texas A&M, after meeting with Oklahoma and Oklahoma State. I also read a report that said Scott was going to make a late night stop in Kansas as a backup plan for Texas A & M, who has some interest from the Southeastern Conference. One of A & M’s concerns with the Pac-10 is travel out west for olympic sports. Officials at A & M admit they are looking at options, but their first desire is to keep the Big 12 going.

The Big 12’s argument to the remaining Big 12 schools, or in this case Texas is that the Big 12 will garner bigger television revenue’s than what the current “Pac 11” will bring.

Missouri’s options could be limited if the Big 12 breaks apart. Mizzou is not bright on the Big Ten radar and if the Big 12 broke up, it’s possible Missouri could be an add-on if the Big Ten wanted to expand to 16 teams. (This is still my prediction). However, a report came out this weekend, that the Mountain West, who added Boise State on Friday would be interested in Mizzou, KU, K-State and Iowa State if the Big 12 broke up. Plus, a story from the Washington Examiner reported the Big East would listen to Missouri and other Big 12 castoffs.
Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden is meeting with the UM Board of Directors during its closed session at the Reynolds Alumni Center. It's unclear whether he'll be available for interviews.

University of Missouri System President Gary Forsee and MU Board of Curators Chairwoman Judith Haggard took questions after the board's open session on Friday morning but added little to the mystery of Missouri's conference situation.

Asked how much more the board has learned about the situation in the last 48 hours, Haggard said, "Not much of anything actually. We are trying to be patient. We continue to say we're committed to the Big 12 at this time. And we will most certainly inform when we can inform."

Adding to the statement he delivered after Thursday's meeting, Forsee insisted that Missouri has been on top of this matter.

"On the question of preparedness and our action, I can't imagine being any more prepared or action oriented than the University of Missouri has been. We have stayed on top of these national developments and discussions about conference realignment since it surfaced last year. We have done our homework on the University of Missouri's standing nationally.

"So, we know the landscape. .... The University of Missouri is very well positioned in that landscape, and we have been very well positioned for 104 years in what is now the Big 12 Conference.

"It's a nine-inning game, whether we're in the bottom of the first inning or bottom of the ninth, the speculation has been running away from everyone, including all of you in this room for the last seven months. The fact that we have obligations to our Big 12 Conference first and foremost ... you shouldn't be surprised the lack of information from the University of Missouri."
Assume crash positions

With Big 12 on brink, MU has few options.

By Dave Matter

Saturday, June 12, 2010

On the day Nebraska parachuted out of the mythical Big 12 Conference airplane, Missouri braced for a crash landing.

Not long before Nebraska was celebrating its official introduction as the 12th member of the Big Ten Conference — the Big 12’s second defection in as many days — Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden emerged from a more dour setting yesterday, capping a two-hour closed session with the University of Missouri Board of Curators with a news conference to address MU’s unsettled scenario.

“I can assure you, and I would try to assure others, we’re not operating with our head in the sand,” Alden said. “We’re working very hard. We’re very diligent. We’re very focused on the issues at hand.”

To recap another historic day for college sports, those issues included Nebraska snapping a century-long affiliation with its core of conference brethren … more reports that four Big 12 South schools are set to join the Pac-10 Conference … and a message from Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany, courtesy his Big 12 counterpart, that Missouri’s Big Ten hopes might be shattered.

In a phone call yesterday morning, Delany informed Big 12 Commissioner Dan Beebe that Nebraska had applied for admission to the Big Ten and would be accepted then hinted he was done shopping the Big 12.

“At this point, I think as far as we’re concerned … my understanding is there aren’t any more conference members being considered by the Big Ten,” Beebe said during a conference call with reporters.

Assuming Delany was being truthful — and, for that matter, Beebe, too — Missouri might be left with few promising options. Though he said Missouri was never presented with an ultimatum or deadline to pledge loyalty to the Big 12, Alden expressed confidence that the
remaining Big 12 schools could keep the conference going, especially if all 10 are swayed by a proposed television agreement that Beebe said has more value per school than projections for an expanded Pac-10’s TV deal.

“I’m doing the best I can to make sure they understand what they would give up by leaving and what they have by staying,” Beebe said.

But those efforts might be crushed by a report from the Austin American-Statesman that Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas and Texas Tech will join the Pac-10 once formal offers are made.

In the Pac-10, they would join Big 12 exile Colorado, which was formally introduced as the league’s newest member with a news conference yesterday in Boulder, Colo.

Should the South schools head west — Texas A&M is reportedly fielding interest from the Pac-10 and Southeastern Conference — the remaining Big 12 members could look to other conferences for new members or scramble for new homes elsewhere.

Echoing a message delivered by UM System President Gary Forsee earlier in the day, Alden launched into a list of reasons Missouri fans and alumni have reason to remain confident in the school’s future.

“I hope they continue to be come back to who we are, who we are as an institution,” he said. “We’re the flagship institution of this state. We’ve got 30,000 students that go to school here. We’ve got one of the best faculty in the country. We’ve got a terrific athletic program that has succeeded at an unbelievably high level academically and athletically, particularly over the course of the last five years. My hope would be that our fans would continue to have that confidence in who we are.”

Adding another layer of suspense to this story, after yesterday’s session, the Board of Curators called for a special closed meeting scheduled for 8 p.m. tomorrow in Columbia, though some board members will participate via teleconference. The school’s news release did not specify what the board would be discussing, and two campus officials declined to elaborate on the agenda.

As news unfolded in Lincoln and Missouri’s waiting game continued here, Gov. Jay Nixon offered words of caution for MU’s situation.

“When you see established programs moving around, this is a moving merry-go-round,” he said at Columbia College, where he was participating in the Senior Games basketball competition. “I’ve told people, ‘Don’t think about ultimatums. Just think about getting in the right place when this thing ends.’

“When you have a program like Missouri, a top football program, a basketball team with a great recruiting class and coming off another NCAA appearance, a softball team that went to the World Series the second year in a row, a women’s soccer team that won two”
“championships in a row, we’re a valuable commodity. I’m counseling everyone to stay calm. People really want Missouri, and we need to analyze all the opportunities.”

Reach Dave Matter at 573-815-1781 or e-mail dmatter@columbiatribune.com.
MU leaders state tentative commitment to Big 12

By The Associated Press
June 11, 2010 | 2:50 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Relegated to a sideline seat for the first wave of college sports’ conference shake up, officials at Missouri said Friday they remain committed to the Big 12.

For now, anyway.

"We have obligations to our Big 12 Conference, first and foremost," said Missouri system president Gary Forsee. But he added that conference realignment is "a nine-inning game" — and it's still the first inning.

Forsee spoke to a roomful of reporters while Missouri curators met behind closed doors for the third time in two days.

Among the topics in the closed session: gauging the impact of fellow Big 12 North division member Colorado’s defection to the Pac-10 and deciding whether Missouri remains a viable candidate for inclusion in an expanded Big Ten if Nebraska joins as expected.

The departure of those two schools could be just the start of the Big 12’s unraveling as the Pac-10 considers inviting as many as five of the six Big 12 South members and the Big Ten mulling its own expansion. That would leave Missouri, Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas and Kansas State on the sidelines, waiting for offers from other, less prestigious conferences.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the Big 12, Forsee and other Missouri leaders again offered strong statements of support for the Big 12.
"We are trying to be patient," said board chairwoman Judy Haggard. "We are committed to the Big 12 at this time."

The Big Ten announced late last year it was considering adding at least one school, and possibly more, to add a league championship game in football and broaden the reach of its cable television network.

That move set off a wave of jockeying by other schools and conferences, with Missouri considered among the top Big Ten prospects thanks to its geographic proximity, academic profile and existing rivalry with conference member Illinois.

Athletics director Mike Alden, who met with curators for more than three hours Friday, suggested that Missouri is not interested in the Big Ten or any league other than its own.

"We aren't looking at any other conference," he said.

Alden has previously emphasized the school's commitment to its conference while also expressing his desire for more equitable revenue-sharing when it comes to TV revenue — a problem that would be solved by a move to the Big Ten, which divides its booty equally among its 11 members.

He acknowledged concern about whether the league can survive, saying the Big 12 "no doubt takes a hit" with Colorado's departure. And those comments came before Nebraska announced its widely anticipated desire to move.

Alden said that a further exodus could cripple the Big 12, which was created in 1996 when the Big Eight added four Texas schools.

"In general, when you get eight (teams) or under, that's where it becomes a bit more problematic to hold it together," he said.

The league's fate may rest with Texas, where university regents will meet Tuesday to decide whether to remain in the Big 12.
As the Big XII crumbles, all Mizzou officials can say is, “We’re on top of this.” Alden says blaming MU is “silly”

by Ryan Famuliner on June 11, 2010

The University of Nebraska has made it official. It is applying to make the move to the Big Ten, and expects to be accepted. This comes a day after the University of Colorado confirms a move to the PAC 10. So with the Big XII all but assured a collapse, where does this leave Missouri?

The new Interim Commissioner of Higher Education in the state, David Russell, was a part of the MU Curators meetings in Columbia, continuing through Nebraska’s announcement Friday.

“I suppose you’d like me to give you the standard language, ‘that we remain a loyal member of the Big XII Conference and are looking forward to a bright future.’ Everything seems to be in play, it changes by the hour. Had we been very vocal about details a week or two ago, all of that would have been totally invalidated by now. There are changes occurring that even we had not anticipated. All I can tell you is that our leadership at the University of Missouri-Columbia remains very much on top of this national discussion. A lot of exchanges are going on, a lot of sharing of ideas. It’s gonna shake out eventually, but it’s hard for us to tell when all these ideas are going to shake out,” Russell said.

MU Athletic Director Mike Alden echoes that sentiment.

“I can assure you we’re not operating with our heads in the sand. We’re working very hard, we’re very diligent, we are very focused on the issues at hand at trying to operate in a tremendously dynamic and fluid environment that’s changing on a regular basis,” Alden said

During the official announcement Friday, University of Nebraska leaders said they felt ‘vulnerable’ after reports as far back as last year that Mizzou and Colorado were considering leaving the Big XII. They said that prompted the Cornhuskers to start talks with the Big Ten. Alden says if the Big XII collapses, it’s not right to put the blame on Mizzou.

“I’ve heard that suggestion out there, and I’ll tell you, that’s ridiculous. That is silly and when folks out there are trying to suggest that Mizzou was a focal point to be able to start discussions, that is just, seriously that is ridiculous and that is silly,” Alden said.
When asked point blank if Missouri was potentially moving to the Big Ten at some point, University of Missouri system President Gary Forsee refused to speculate.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Big 12 uncertainty causes some anxiety in business community

By Erica Hunt, Sarah Sontag
June 11, 2010 | 4:45 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Julie Rader has been following the shakeup in the Big 12 Conference and keeping her business in mind.

“It's certainly a hot topic,” said Rader, owner of Bengal's Bar and Grill on Sixth Street downtown. “We depend heavily on football season.”

Rader said any decision on Missouri's conference membership will “most definitely” affect other businesses as well.

Rader, who grew up in Columbia, said she hopes the Tigers won't get left out. “It's a little unnerving,” she said. “I don't think anybody knows. It's kind of a little scary.”

Don Laird, president of the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, said there's a mixture of curiosity and anxiety on the business front.

Laird said he trusts the leadership of the university but doesn't know what's going to happen. “We're just anxious to see how it's all going to unfold,” he said.

On Thursday, Colorado left the Big 12 for the Pac-10 Conference. Nebraska announced its intention to leave the Big 12 for the Big Ten on Friday.

Rader said her restaurant and bar sees more customers when Missouri plays big conference teams like Nebraska and Kansas than when the Tigers play teams from smaller schools.

Restaurants, entertainment and nightlife venues, and hotels see the biggest increase in business during football weekends, said Lorah Steiner, executive director of the
Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau. The increase in business is seen “pretty much in that order,” she said.

The average football weekend in Columbia brings in an estimated $1.5 million to $2 million, Steiner said.

People are more likely to stay in Columbia longer and dine out more when Missouri plays higher-profile teams like Nebraska, Steiner said.

“Those are rivalries,” Steiner said. “It depends on how the team is doing.” She said Columbia businesses do well even when the Tigers play smaller colleges.

“Definitely a better team gets a better crowd,” said Rusty Walls, owner of The Heidelberg on Ninth Street. He said football weekends in Columbia are among his top 10 busiest weekends.

Walls said he isn’t worried about his business being affected by changes to the Big 12. "We’re a good enough school. Someone will pick us up somewhere," he said.

With two schools from the Big 12 jumping ship, it remains to be seen whether the conference will survive.

“The handwriting is kind of on the wall for the Big 12,” said Lance Wood, general manager of Flat Branch Pub and Brewing.

“It doesn’t bother me what conference (Missouri) goes to,” Wood said. He said the danger would be if Missouri doesn’t make a change or if the Big 12 falls apart.

“Do I think if the Big 12 implodes it will hurt business?” Wood said. "Yeah, I think so."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM System news conference doesn't quench Big 12 conference realignment curiosity

By Christie Megura
June 11, 2010 | 10:52 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Questions of conference realignment and the future of what conference MU will belong to remain unanswered after Friday morning's press conference with the University of Missouri System Board of Curators.

UM System President Gary Forsee said he guessed that discussion of Colorado's decision to move to the Pac-10 would have to take place within the next few days, though he said no formal meeting has been scheduled.

As for rumors about Nebraska leaving the conference and how Missouri might react to this, he said he would not respond to speculation of any kind.

Forsee said he maintains his previous stance: Missouri is a proud member of the Big 12.

Forsee halted discussion about the conference reshuffling to address the other UM Board of Curators agenda items such as raising tuition, the budget and teacher salaries.

Watch ColumbiaMissourian.com for more information from the Board of Curators news conference and meetings.
Forsee: 'We're on top of' conference realignment issue

The UM system president said MU has a record of loyalty to the Big 12.

By Travis Cornejo and Zach Toombs

Published June 10, 2010

UM system President Gary Forsee refused to comment on rumors of MU’s possible conference realignment, but said university officials have the issue under control, after the Board of Curators meeting around 6 p.m. Thursday.

The curators, the university's governing board, began their meetings at 9 a.m. this morning, in wake of the University of Colorado's official announcement of its move to the Pac-10 conference.

"I know there's been a lot of speculation today about conference realignment," Forsee said. "Colorado’s move has a big effect on the Big 12. We won’t feed any speculation, but rest assured that we are on top of this. Rest assured that MU is going to continue to be important on a national stage, despite whatever happens."

Forsee said rumors regarding conference realignment have gained too much attention in the past few days.

"The Big 12 dissolving is total speculation,” Forsee said. “Colorado’s move is the only fact we have at this point.”

The UM system president also refused to comment on rumors of Nebraska moving to the Big Ten conference.

“I haven’t seen the comment from Nebraska,” he said. “I’ve seen a lot of rumors about it, but I haven’t seen the comment itself.”

Forsee closed by reaffirming MU's "history of loyalty" to the Big 12 conference.

“We have been loyal members of the Big 12,” Forsee said. “I don’t think we need to justify our loyalty.”

Chancellor Brady Deaton said the Big 12 is far from dead, despite Colorado's move to the Pac-10.
"The Big 12 is certainly well," Deaton said. "We're just minus one right now."
Deaton, Alden address Big 12 alignment

The two spoke at a news conference after the Board of Curators' executive session Friday.

By Travis Cornejo and Zach Toombs

Published June 11, 2010

Chancellor Brady Deaton and Athletic Director Mike Alden refuted the idea of a deadline regarding MU's commitment to the Big 12 and expressed their intent to work with the league's remaining members during a news conference Friday.

These statements came after a two-hour meeting between Alden, Deaton and the UM system Board of Curators behind closed doors. The curators' first meeting this week took place Thursday morning in the wake of the University of Colorado's announcement that it was leaving the Big 12 for the Pac-10. The news conference with Deaton and Alden came only a few minutes after the University of Nebraska announced its own departure from the Big 12 to the Big Ten.

"Yes, two institutions have left the Big 12, and they were valuable members, which means this is a big hit for the conference," Alden said. "However, we have to look at what's best for the league and all the remaining schools in the league."

Alden said the MU administration is not in the process of looking at any other conference.

"Our focus is on the Big 12 and on Mizzou getting better every day," Alden said. "I don't think looking at other conferences is something that's entered into any of our thought processes, at least not consistently."

Although Alden neither confirmed nor denied the possibility of MU leaving the Big 12, the athletic director reaffirmed MU's loyalty to the conference and its earlier variations and dispelled rumors the Big 12 had given MU a deadline for announcing its intentions.

"Our association with the Big 12 has lasted over 100 years, so they know where our commitment is," Alden said. "There are no firm deadlines that we know of. None of these deadlines or ultimatums I hear about have been presented to us."

Deaton gave few details on a possible conference move for MU before turning to Alden but said the university will be in constant communication with the rest of the Big 12 conference.

"We'll be working with the remaining members of the Big 12 to do what's best for the conference," Deaton said. "We're moving forward and making sure everyone is informed, namely our board."
Alden also wished Colorado and Nebraska "the best" in moving to new conferences, calling them "great colleagues." Although neither Deaton nor Alden would pinpoint a number of members leaving that would make the Big 12 irrelevant, Alden said the exit of at least two more schools would be a cause for concern.

"I think that, as far as leagues are concerned, it's very problematic when you get to eight and under," he said.

In response to claims that MU might have been the school responsible for beginning the trouble for the Big 12, Alden said those reports have relied purely on speculation.

"That is ridiculous," he said. "That is silly. When folks out there are trying to suggest that MIzzou was the one starting discussions, they just have no ground to stand on."

Alden also apologized to MU students for the uncertainty concerning MU's fate in the Big 12.

"I am sorry that we don't have the answers that a lot of students are looking for at this stage, but I hope they realize that we are working non-stop for them on this," Alden said. "I would hope that our fans' confidence in Mizzou is enough to get them through the anxious feelings they have about this."
Deaton, curators remain 'optimistic' regarding Big 12's future, but take no action

Posted to On Campus by Zach Toombs at 9:23 p.m., June 13, 2010

Chancellor Brady Deaton fields questions after a closed session with the Board of Curators. Deaton said the meeting was to review information and options regarding possible conference realignment.

Chancellor Brady Deaton said MU will continue its work to strengthen the Big 12, but has taken no definite action at the close of the UM system Board of Curators executive session.

"There will be no action taken today," Deaton said. "This meeting was to go over the information we have and review our contractual obligations."

Deaton said he and the board remain optimistic that the Big 12 can move on from the departure of two members, the University of Nebraska and the University of Colorado, last week but realize concerns regarding the conference's future.

"You'd have to be blind to not have concerns about what's happening to the Big 12," Deaton said. "Still, we remain in constant communication with the other members of the Big 12 and are confident we can work together to keep the conference strong."

The chancellor called the special executive session with the curators "productive and engaging," and said there was no future meeting scheduled yet that he knew of.

In response to a question of the University of Texas' impact on MU's decision-making process, Deaton said all remaining members of the Big 12 have a hand in discussions.

"This involves all of us," Deaton said. "We'll do whatever we can to help the strength of the Big 12 in the next few days."

Deaton also handed out a printed news release, the full text of which follows.

Amidst announced and speculative conference realignment moves by members of the Big 12, the University of Missouri Board of Curators met for an hour with university officials in closed session this evening via a teleconference call to continue their discussions from closed meetings last week.
No action or vote was taken during the meeting, but board members again received information and legal advice from the university’s general council. The board also considered contract obligations and related matters.
UM System vice president appointed to interim state position

By Ji Young Won
June 11, 2010 | 7:55 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — David Russell, University of Missouri System vice president, said he is excited to contribute to higher education in the state of Missouri.

Russell has been appointed the state's interim commissioner of higher education. He will begin his duties July 1, replacing retiring Commissioner Robert Stein.

"David understands the complex nature of higher education," board chairman Lowell Kruse said in a news release from the Missouri Department of Higher Education.

For Russell, the appointment was a pleasant surprise. He said he's been interested in higher education governance since he joined the UM System 19 years ago.

"It's kind of fun to get hired to do something that you enjoy doing and that you have been doing for such a long time," he said.

Russell said he is familiar with the university presidents both at two-year and four-year institutions and the people in the state government who work with issues regarding higher education.

"I feel very confident that I can help to build a network of people who can make things happen for higher education," Russell said.

As senior associate vice president and chief of staff for the system, Russell has served as both an associate director and a director of university relations, according to the release.

In 2001-02, he organized the first statewide meetings of university and community college trustees to address state support for higher education. He also helped establish The Missouri 100, composed of people who support higher education.
During his appointment, Russell wants to start working on four major goals:

- Developing a clear, easily understood agenda for higher education.
- Helping to forge a strong team of two-year and four-year institutions, both public and private.
- Improving access and affordability to higher education for more Missourians.
- Figuring out how to balance between income and expenses.

In order to improve access and affordability, Russell encourages two-year and four-year institutions to keep collaborating to provide students with opportunities that will help them prepare for future jobs.

Upon his appointment, Russell said he is going to take a leave of absence from the university to work full time as an interim commissioner. The interim role could be as short as six months, but it could be longer.
The University of Missouri School of Music is filling a “sorely needed” role by teaching students a range of skills marketable even if they do not become performers, the school’s chairman, Robert Shay, said.

“The focus is art entrepreneurship,” Shay told the UM Board of Curators and about 50 others who attended a curators’ luncheon yesterday. The event, sponsored by the MU Faculty Council, was held at Reynolds Alumni Center and kicked off curators’ open meetings in Columbia yesterday and today.

Arts and entertainment are key to healthy economies, Faculty Council Chairwoman Leona Rubin said. Not only are they cornerstones of tourism, she said, arts-related businesses also foster other jobs.

She pointed to the local example of Ragtag Cinema, telling out-of-town attendees that what started small in 1997 has led to a new building and the annual True/False Film Fest, creating jobs and making Columbia an international destination for filmmakers.

Likewise, Orr Street Studios has led to the creation of restaurants and lofts in the area, she said, bringing construction work and steady jobs.

Statewide, Missouri has more than 10,000 arts-related businesses that employ 50,000 people, Rubin said, citing a January database.

“MU’s role,” she said, “is to create the next generation of arts and art-business leaders.”

The School of Music is doing that, Shay said, especially with new programs over the past few years. Although MU has been home for years to high school music competitions, today it’s also the site of the New Music Initiative. The program, created with a $1 million gift from Rex and Jeanne Sinquefield, allows MU to have a New Music Ensemble, host K-12 composition contests and sponsor a weeklong workshop for a select number of young would-be composers.
But the School of Music goes beyond teaching the basics of performance, Shay said, adding that faculty members are also preparing students for real-world work such as composing for film and music-related businesses.

"We want our students to be agents of change as musicians," he said.

Of course, there’s always the one in 1,000 music students who will go on to be successful in the performance realm, he said.

Lunch attendees might have gotten a peek at such a student during the event when Molly Clodius performed an opera selection. Clodius, who graduated with a master’s degree this spring, won the 2010 Young Artist Voice competition of the Music Teachers National Association this year. Yesterday, she received a standing ovation from MU Chancellor Brady Deaton and other administrators and curators for her performance.

Clodius praised her MU music education, saying it “exceeded my expectations.”