

Campus Chatter



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Curators to vote on benefits change

By **JANESE SILVEY**

Looks like the **UM System Board of Curators** will decide this week whether to change retirement packages for future employees.

Dear university colleagues:

The University of Missouri Board of Curators is expected to vote on changes to the UM retirement plan for new employees only at its regularly scheduled meeting June 16-17. These changes, which have been explored in-depth for nearly two years, would change the current retirement plan for new employees hired after Sept. 30, 2012. If the board accepts the proposed changes, university administrators will work with the Retirement and Staff Benefits Committee to develop an alternative retirement program for new employees that includes a combination of both defined benefit and defined contribution features.

As promised, the current UM defined benefit plan for existing employees and retirees will not change by this action, including the benefits paid upon retirement. The university remains committed to honoring the obligations of the current plan, including funding the annual required contribution and continuing the annual mandatory contribution from employees with an amount as low as reasonably possible. Detailed reports and independent actuarial analyses have confirmed that the current plan will not be harmed by closing the plan to new employees next year.

Details of the "combination" plan for new employees is still under development, but we are not expecting any increased costs to the university or employees. We also anticipate that new employees will be asked to pay approximately the same mandatory contribution as current employees. Our goal is to bring a recommended plan design to the board of curators at its regularly scheduled October 2011 meeting or as soon as possible thereafter.

These recommended changes are the result of considerable analysis and input from numerous constituencies across the campuses, including the ad hoc Retirement Plan Advisory Committee. This

committee was composed of several members of the Retirement and Staff Benefits Committee, Intercampus Faculty Council, Intercampus Staff Advisory Council and UM Health Care. We understand the importance of this change to university benefits, and like the committees and actuaries who reviewed the current plan, we continue to believe that a change in plan design for new employees is necessary to protect the long-term viability of the current plan for current employees and retirees. We also believe that the new combination plan, some features of which are more typical in higher education, will help us better attract and retain new employees.

Once again, I thank the faculty and staff across our four campuses who took part in these ongoing discussions during the past couple of years. As always, your input, questions and comments are valued. We look forward to hearing the board's discussion regarding the retirement plan this week. In the meantime, additional information regarding these proposed changes, including the Retirement Plan Advisory Committee's report and recommendation, as well as proposed action by the board of curators, can be found online on the Retirement Project page at <http://www.umsystem.edu/ums/hr/benefits/retirementplanproject>.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Owens

Interim President

Although Owens says details of a new combined benefits plan are still being hashed out, the last talked-about model would guarantee employees 1.1 percent based on salary and years of service and UM would contribute 3.4 percent of salary. Both are half of what is now offered to employees.

Additionally, the university would set up a defined contributions, or savings, plan for new hires that would allow them to contribute more money on a voluntary basis. UM would match as much as 3 percent. That's on top of a mandatory employee contribution — 1 or 2 percent of salary, depending on income level — into the defined contributions plan. Current employees pay that match, too, but theirs goes into the defined benefits package.

Curators are meeting in Columbia. Thursday's committee meetings and Friday's official meeting are all open to the public. I'll post an agenda when I get one.

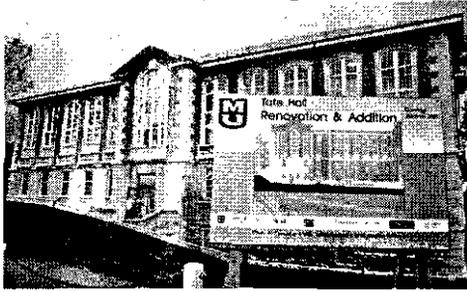
UPDATE: Thursday's meeting starts at 7:30 a.m. and Friday's public session at 8:45 a.m. in the Reynolds Alumni Center.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU English and Communication departments embrace renovated halls

By Bridget Murphy

June 14, 2011 | 5:30 p.m. CDT



Renovations were wrapping up at Tate Hall when this picture was shot, on May 25. MU's English Department will move back into the building, which had been closed for reconstruction since December 2009. A remodeled Switzler Hall, home to the Communication Department, will also reopen. | Qi An

COLUMBIA – The English and Communication departments are ready to move back to their respective homes this summer.

Renovations for Switzler and Tate Halls are complete, and an open house will be held Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

People are invited to stop by to see the renovations before the halls are opened for classes this fall. The halls were closed in December 2009, according to a previous Missouriian report.

These halls are part of a renovation plan including over 30 buildings, said Karlan Seville, communications manager for Campus Facilities. Campus Facilities hired a national benchmarking firm, Sightlines, to survey properties on campus. The survey included an analysis of building features such as energy efficiency and life safety features.

Sightlines found it is cheaper to do complete renovations than smaller ones one at a time, Seville said. She said Switzler and Tate halls were at the top of the list for renovation.

“The university is in need of space that works for today’s researchers, faculty and students,” Seville said.

Dean of Arts and Science Michael O’Brien said the English and communication departments will be back in much better surroundings. He said it will boost the number of classrooms on campus and there is even a net gain of three classrooms.

The College of Arts and Science faculty were very involved in the renovations, O’Brien said. Even individual faculty members were able to give input to things that would make life easier, he said.

“It was as integrated a project as you could ever hope for,” O’Brien said.

Both buildings now meet all code requirements. Campus Facilities replaced inefficient mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems that were beyond their life cycle.

The buildings now meet new fire protection standards. They have new fire alarms and security systems. ADA accessibility has been improved in both buildings as well.

“We have a new renovation model that we implemented on these two projects, and it was successful so we will use it again for the next building,” Seville said. “We are very happy with the model.”

Some architectural features from the original buildings were purposefully maintained, such as windows being put back in after the renovation, O’Brien said.

The combined project cost was \$15 million.

The next building to undergo renovation will be Gwynn Hall, in the summer of 2012.

Missourinet

MU ag professor: flood-damaged Delta farmland a huge economic loss

by Jessica Machetta on June 14, 2011 in [Agriculture](#), [Fires/Accidents/Disasters](#), [Flood](#), [Weather](#)

University of Missouri professor Gene Stevens teaches in Columbia, but he's based in Portageville, in the Bootheel.

When the Army Corps of Engineers blew a two-mile hole on the 35-mile-long Bird's Point-New Madrid floodway to save several small towns along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. As a result, 134,000 acres of prime farmland was flooded.

Stevens says now that the floodwaters have receded, it's time to restore the land, which he says isn't just the most fertile in the state, or the nation, but globally. A result of a high water table, alluvial soil from the rivers, high nutrients and a soil density that holds water well, Stevens says. "The counties bordering the Mississippi and Missouri rivers account for almost 60 percent of the state's corn and more than 52 percent of soybean production. Delta counties along the Mississippi River accounted for all of the state's cotton and rice production."

"People know Missouri is an agricultural state, but they don't know how much is grown and sold from just two counties," Stevens says.

Last year, Mississippi County produced 9,381,000 bushels of corn and 6,287,000 bushels of soybeans. New Madrid County produced 11,300,000 bushels of corn, 676,000 bushels of wheat, 140,000 bales of cotton and 1,535 hundredweight of rice, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service crop production data. These commodities are a critical element in helping the U.S. manage its trade gap, he says.

Stevens is calling on the Army Corps of Engineers to now repair the levee, before more damage is done, and then compensate the farmers who are trying to get their farms up and running again. He says at the north end of flood, the top soil was scoured from the land. Further down, there are 30-foot gorges, and deposits of sand — sandbars in the middle of fields in some cases — up to 8 feet deep. It's a repair process he says will take several growing seasons.

According to previous agriculture reports, the land produces nearly \$100 million annually of corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton and rice for domestic consumption and export.

Restoring the area is important for the region's economy because it is heavily based on crop production, Stevens says. Most of the businesses in Mississippi and New Madrid counties are connected to agriculture, Stevens said. It is estimated that \$75 million in damage was done to the area's transportation and community infrastructure when the flooding occurred. Stevens said that rice fields along the river also are important food and habitat sources for winter migratory birds on the Mississippi Flyway.



Antelope stranded by floodwaters

Hundreds of Canadian pronghorn antelope could be the next victims of snowmelt-driven flooding plaguing central Montana. Herds are stranded on the wrong side of the swollen Missouri River and face doubtful survival as they try to get back home, Montana wildlife officials report.

Nine feet of snow fell this winter in parts of central Montana, driving pronghorn antelope south from Canada sooner, and farther, than in past years. "Not only was there a lot of snow, it was freaking cold," says wildlife biologist Kelvin Johnson of Montana's Fish, Wildlife and Parks office in Glasgow.

Pronghorn antelope range broadly across western states and Canada, numbering in the hundreds of thousands. This winter, Johnson says, about 55% of migrating antelope tagged in one survey were killed crossing rivers, fences, railroads and highways, as well as by cold and starvation. Even those that successfully migrated are now stuck on the south side of the Missouri River and Fort Peck Lake.

The Missouri River is now a mile wide along a 60-to-80-mile length frequented by the antelope that leads into Fort Peck Lake. "You can see them walking up to the water, a dozen to a few hundred, gathered and looking to the north side of the river," says wildlife photographer Michael Forsberg of Lincoln, Neb. "The drive to migrate is very strong in these animals."

Over the past two weeks, Forsberg and World Wildlife Fund biologists have documented antelope herds attempting to cross the river. Typically only the lead animal makes it across, he says, while the rest turn back, weaker than before. Adult pronghorn antelope stand about 3 feet tall at the shoulder and weigh 90 to 120 pounds. Even in normal times, the river is about 9 feet deep.

"They are built for running, not swimming," says antelope expert Joshua Millspaugh of the University of Missouri in Columbia.

Canadian antelope numbers will rebound after this year's brush with nature's cruelty, Johnson says. Most of the stranded antelope will have given birth to twin fawns, and some will likely attempt to summer in the rough terrain of central Montana, he says, where they may be more vulnerable to predators.

"One take-away message of this is we need to conserve room for species to move," says wildlife researcher Andrew Jakes of Canada's University of Calgary. If the antelope hadn't faced fences, highways and train tracks, he suggests, they might be stronger now to swim the river.

TIME

The Absurdity of Sending Palin's E-mails Via Snail-Mail

By [Katy Steinmetz](#) Monday, June 13, 2011 | [71 Comments](#)

The amount of money the state of Alaska and news organizations are spending on the Sarah Palin e-mails — copying costs, shipping costs (or flight costs), man-hour costs, and opportunity costs — should inspire some skull-clutching. It's all the more extravagant considering how much of the content has been redacted, how old the e-mails are and how long the government of Palin loyalist Sean Parnell had to cut out the juicy bits. But the whole fiasco could have been streamlined if Parnell's people embraced the spirit of the state's public records law and provided electronic copies of the e-mails rather than printing them out.

The Alaskan public records code recommends doing the opposite of what the governor's office decided to do, though it doesn't command it (emphasis mine):

A public agency may provide electronic services and products involving public records to members of the public. A public agency is **encouraged** to make information available in usable electronic formats to the **greatest extent feasible**.

So why, one might ask, did the Alaskan government turn thousands of e-mails into paper records, which news organizations have been busy scanning back into electronic form? The official line from the governor's office is that "The state of Alaska doesn't have the software to produce these electronically." But it's hard to imagine they don't have a processing program as basic as, say, Microsoft Word, the skills to cut-and-paste and the ability to burn electronic documents onto easily reproducible CDs. (When TIME asked the governor's press secretary Sharon Leighow about this possibility, she gave no explanation and said we should talk to the people who actually carried out the request. That office has not yet returned a call.)

Looking to the letter of the law, it's hard to imagine anyone bold enough to argue that it was more "feasible" for the government workers to print and copy all these e-mails than to leave them in electronic form. It was, however, much, much more costly for everyone involved. And this logical conundrum pushes us toward a more cynical answer: that they turned them into paper copies simply *because they could*.

Public records guru Charles Davis, an associate professor at the University of Missouri, imagines the mentality thus: "We're going to produce paper records, and the paper's going to cost you more money, it's going to take up more physical space, and it's going to be less useful to you. But that's what the law says we can do, so we'll do it."

Though the process wasn't Sarah Palin's call, it does fall in line with her make-the-media-earn-it mentality. Palin declined to provide the press with a schedule of stops during her recent bus tour and told Greta Van Susteren that the media should "have to do a little bit of work." It seems Parnell has taken that page out of the Palin playbook.