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Drought machine helps develop hardier crops

ALAN SCHER ZAGIER, Associated Press Wednesday, September 7, 2011



University of Missouri plant scientist Felix Fritschi looks over a few stalks of corn as he stands under a drought simulator Friday, Aug. 26, 2011 at the Bradford Research Farm at the university in Columbia, Mo. Fritschi uses the simulator, a motorized greenhouse on a railway track, to move over crops to keep rain from reaching the plants to aid in the development of drought resistant varieties.

Felix Fritschi likes to damage plants.

He's no vandal. The plant scientist and his colleagues at the University of Missouri are using a new device to deprive plants of water in an effort to better understand how they're affected by drought. The researchers hope their work will help develop drought-resistant crops for use by farmers.

The drought simulator — think motorized greenhouse on rails — allows Missouri researchers to mimic short dry spells as well as persistent or even severe droughts. A handful of similar machines can be found elsewhere in the U.S. and overseas, particularly in China and India. They give scientists an edge by letting them control precisely how much water plants receive.

"Normally in the field, we're dependent on natural conditions," Fritschi said. "The problem with that is, the sensitivity of plants to drought stress is different depending upon their developmental stages. "If we want to control that time aspect, we need something (to deliver water) whenever we want."

A \$1.5 million grant from the Missouri Life Sciences Research Board enabled the university to build two adjacent shelters, each 50 feet by 100 feet with a translucent roof. Rain gauges trigger an oversized garage door that covers the corn and soybean plots at the first sign of water and lowers once the rain passes.

Fritschi and co-investigators Robert Sharp, Rob Kallenbach, and Grover Shannon also plans to use the drought simulators, sometimes referred to as rainout shelters, as "heat tents" to measure the effect of rising temperatures on plant growth, since "drought and heat often occur together. Those are the two biggest stresses on plants."

A dozen researchers, including water quality scientists, soil biologists and physicists and plant breeders, will collaborate with Fritschi on the long-term project. They hope to build two more shelters in parts of the state with significantly different soil types — the sand loams of southeast Missouri, where cotton and rice sprout along the Mississippi River valley, and the Missouri River hills at the university's Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center in New Franklin, where Chinese chestnuts are grown about one hour west of Columbia.

Drought is a recurring problem in Missouri, even in years like this one where summer floods from the upper Missouri River overran fields and shut down an interstate highway in the state's northwest corner.

The simulators were put up this summer, so research data so far is scant. But landscape researchers at a Texas A&M University lab in San Antonio have used drought simulators for several years to help the city's water district test turf grasses' ability to withstand summer dry spells.

The often-parched city passed an ordinance in 2005 requiring new residential and commercial construction to include only approved turf grasses with "summer dormancy capabilities" — but didn't specify which ones met those requirements.

"After they passed it, they realized there was very little information about 60-day drought recovery on turf grass," said Guy Fipps, director of the Texas A&M Irrigation Technology Center in College Station.

"We know how much water turf likes," Fipps said. "But the question is, how much can you cut that water back without compromising quality?"

A two-year study found that grasses with 4-inch roots failed to survive the simulated drought, but those with roots of 18 inches or more endured. The work enabled the San Antonio water district to let homeowners and developers know which varieties could endure South Texas summer droughts.

Mike Hayes, director of the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, called the drought simulators "a fairly robust way" of advancing research on an issue critical to agriculture. The development of hybrids and other agricultural research has already helped U.S. farms cut their water use, but drought remains a problem.

"Over the years, there have been many efforts to try to simulate drought," said Hayes, who earned his master's and doctorate degrees at Missouri. "The way they've described it, and their plans for it, go a step beyond."

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Jobs incentives proposal in peril as special session begins

BY VIRGINIA YOUNG Post-Dispatch Jefferson City Bureau Chief vyoung@post-dispatch.com > 573-635-6178 | Posted: Wednesday, September 7, 2011 12:05 am

MU mention page 2

JEFFERSON CITY • The Missouri Legislature kicked off a special session Tuesday that Republican legislative leaders hope will provide a quick makeover for the state's job incentives. But before the first vote was taken, there were signs that the compromise they had crafted was unraveling.

Stung by charges that the GOP's package would unfairly hit the poor, the bill's sponsor readied an alternative aimed at spreading tax credit cutbacks more equally among low-income residents and developers.

"Republicans are always portrayed as taking from the poor and giving to the rich, and we didn't want to do that," said the sponsor, Sen. Chuck Purgason, R-Caulfield.

But Purgason's proposed changes could spell trouble for the bill. To provide money for new programs such as an Aerotropolis tax credit designed to attract Chinese cargo shipments to Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, he would make deeper cuts in two development subsidies supported by House leaders. A similar showdown last spring killed the economic development legislation.

Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, and House Speaker Steve Tilley, R-Perryville, announced in July that they had forged a tax credit compromise and wanted Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon to call them into special session. Nixon did so last month.

But as legislators assembled for the long-awaited opening on Tuesday, it was unclear how broadly that consensus extends.

Senators used a routine session to talk for three hours about whether they should even convene. Most of that time was taken up by Sen. Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, who blasted Aerotropolis as "Errortropolis" and accused Nixon of imposing "noose-like parameters" on the session.

Nixon wants legislators to scale back subsidies he deems inefficient and replace them with tools that create jobs. The centerpiece is a \$360 million package aimed at turning Lambert into a hub for freight flown between China and the Midwest.

Other new programs would be geared to attracting technology businesses, data warehouses and amateur sports tournaments.

To pay for such ventures, Missouri would trim or eliminate several tax credits, such as one that goes to about 100,000 low-income elderly and disabled people who rent their homes.

Taxpayers claim the credit on a sliding scale, based on income and how much they paid in rent. The maximum credit is \$750. To be eligible, a person who rents a home can make no more than \$27,500; couples can make up to \$29,500.

Legislators who want to eliminate it say the credit was intended to help homeowners on fixed incomes cope with skyrocketing property taxes. Axing the subsidy for renters would save the state an estimated \$57 million a year, more than any other proposed tax credit cutback in the GOP leadership's bill.

The proposal came from a commission appointed by Nixon. The credit "doesn't really do anything" to make units more available to low-income people, said Tax Credit Review Commission Co-Chairman Chuck Gross. "It's just an arbitrary number. Therefore, it's not really a credit for property taxes paid."

The governor, who initially balked at eliminating the renters' credit, now says he is on board.

But the plan has drawn fire from a diverse array of legislators and groups, ranging from conservative anti-tax advocates to liberal groups that press for policies to aid people in poverty. They are circulating lists showing how many people in each legislative district use the subsidy.

"Hopefully, the legislators are starting to understand that this has kind of broad support," said Amy Blouin, who lobbies for the Missouri Budget Project, a liberal-leaning group.

Hortense Moore of St. Ann says the credit helped her pay utility bills and put food on the table — "just everyday things."

"It helps you so you can keep your household going," said Moore, a former firefighter who is on disability. She said legislators "forget what's going on with poor people. It's like, they haven't lived this life."

Brenda Procter, a University of Missouri extension specialist in personal financial planning, sees the impact of the credit when she volunteers to help low-income families do their taxes.

Procter recalls telling one woman she could expect a \$600 credit. The woman's stove had broken and she was relying on a borrowed camp stove to cook her food.

"She almost crushed me with a hug," Procter said. "She said, 'Oh, my God, I can buy a stove.' We're not talking about people going out and buying fancy clothes."

Purgason's new version of the bill wouldn't preserve the credit, but it would phase it out over six years instead of ending it all at once. He said his goal was to split the budget pain equally between the renters' credit and business-oriented subsidies.

Toward that end, he would gradually reduce the credits available for low-income housing developers and historic preservation, so that after several years, each program would be guaranteed \$50 million.

Legislators could appropriate more money to those programs but instead of being locked in, they would "be in competition with things like higher education, (elementary and secondary) education and other essential services," Purgason said.

Wendy Timm, president of the Missouri Growth Association, a commercial real estate trade group, said she hadn't yet read the proposal and didn't want to jump to conclusions. But on the surface, she said, it sounded like too deep a cut.

"If there's no way to tie the appropriations to (state) revenue, I'd say it's just way too much of a shock to the pipeline," she said. "(At \$50 million) there're too many deals that won't be able to get done."

Purgason's bill also would change the Aerotropolis proposal, which includes money for warehouses to hold Chinese goods in "gateway zones" near the airport. Purgason would tie such subsidies to actual jobs created by putting the initiative under the state's Quality Jobs program.

Even if a Senate committee recommends the leadership's version of the bill, Purgason said he will offer his alternative during floor debate. He contended it provides the best way to get past a potential Senate filibuster, which could jeopardize everything on the table — including an unrelated bill giving St. Louis control of its Police Department for the first time since the Civil War.

Nixon included the police measure — a longtime priority of St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay — in the special session. Other agenda items include moving the presidential primary date to March from February and repealing a new law that could have barred teachers from contacting students through social media such as Facebook.

Consumers willing to pay more for sustainable apparel | University of Missouri study

By MU News Bureau

Sep 2, 2011

The public often views the apparel industry as lacking transparency, sustainability and ethical practices. Scandals such as child labor, sweat shops and environmentally damaging manufacturing methods have alienated many consumers from the industry.

University of Missouri researchers, however, recently discovered that consumers are willing to support apparel companies that employ sustainable and ethical practices; but those businesses have to prove it.

MU doctoral student Gargi Bhaduri and Jung Ha-Brookshire, an assistant professor of textile and apparel management in the College of Human Environmental Sciences, surveyed apparel consumers to find out if they were willing to pay a premium for products produced using sustainable and ethical methods. They found that consumers would be willing to pay 15 to 20 percent more for such products. However, they also found that consumers are likely to remain skeptical about apparel companies' claims of transparency and sustainability.

"While consumers seem willing to support businesses that do practice sustainability and ethics, general distrust in the transparency of all apparel businesses tends to keep consumers from spending money on those businesses with sustainable practices," Bhaduri said. "To solve this issue, consumers seem to demand a universal standard authorizing agency to verify the claims of the businesses with transparent practices."

Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire found that consumer skepticism of corporate transparency stems from the suspicion that sustainability claims are falsified or exaggerated by apparel companies as marketing ploys. Their study suggests that consumers feel the need for authentication of these businesses' claims from one standardized and objective authority, such as the government, whom they can trust.

"The apparel industry is one of the most globalized modern industries," Bhaduri said. "Multiple countries are involved in manufacturing a single garment, making it almost impossible for consumers to know all the suppliers involved in apparel manufacturing. Because of this, if a business wants to establish a relationship of trust with consumers, it is up to the business to supply finished goods with visible and accessible information concerning the global manufacturing processes."

Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire also found that consumers want information regarding product sustainability to be available conveniently. They suggest the use of hangtags, care labels and point-of-purchase tags with clear information about their sustainable business practices so consumers can make an educated purchase decision.

Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire's study was published in the Clothing and Textiles Research Journal.

Examining relationships among colleges, universities and communities | Tourism Development

By Brian McNeill

Sep 2, 2011

Without its universities and colleges, the Columbia area would look and function quite differently.

Each school year adds nearly 35,000 to the local population. Most of those students have at least one family member or friend who visits the area. So to say that higher education impacts Columbia's tourism industry is putting it mildly.

Representatives of area colleges and universities, hospitality leaders and public service administrators who gathered for the Columbia Business Times' Tourism Development Forum breakfast Aug. 19 agreed that tourism and higher education go together well.

"Prospective students are our largest group of visitors, and with them and other scheduled groups we have about 40,000 visitors a year to our campus," said LeAnn Stroupe, visitor relations coordinator at the University of Missouri.

Stroupe added that, from her perspective, the community does a lot to make visiting the university and Columbia a pleasant experience for university guests. "This is a community that does believe in working together, and it shows," she said.

Bob McDonald of Courtyard by Marriott, a sponsor of the Tourism Development Forum, said that potential guests routinely ask how close the hotel is to the MU campus. "In addition to a lot of visitors and business guests related to the university, we host a number of meetings from MU departments," he said. "These have big impact."

Mike Kelly, manager of Stoney Creek Inn, said that his hotel has a strong relationship with the university. Two years ago the hotel became pet friendly, and working with the MU College of Veterinary Medicine, it selected two rooms and redesigned them so that the owners of dogs that are cancer patients at the veterinary hospital can stay at the hotel with their dogs.

"They found that it's much better if the dogs can stay with their owners," Kelley said. "It's a unique and rewarding opportunity." He added that the hotel also worked with the Columbia-Boone County Health Department to make sure that the rooms follow health regulations.

Kerri Yost and Paula Elias of Stephens College said that the college's Citizen Jane Film Festival is growing and attracting national attention. "We heard from colleagues who attended the Sundance Film Festival this year that our festival was mentioned several times," Elias said. "We've had a lot of fun with our growth."

Yost said that the college depends on all hotels and motels in the area during the college's graduation and parents' weekend. She added that the airport is a selling point among students who consider attending Stephens. Additional selling points are the college's proximity to The District and that MU is nearby.

In addition, Yost said, the college has increased its attention toward partnering with MU and Columbia College to bring guest artists to Columbia. "Money is tight these days, and it's been great to have these resources," she said.

Gerald Brouder, president of Columbia College, said that the college's commencements and other activities, including lecture series, bring a lot of people to Columbia. "We have three commencements each year, and there are a lot of out-of-town guests for those," he said. "Also, our athletic teams bring folks here, and the community has always been great in accommodating those crowds."

Brouder said that partnerships are key to getting city improvements accomplished. "We partnered with the city to improve Range Line Street on the eastern edge of our campus, and that area has improved significantly," he said.

Bryan Goers operates the Venture Out program in the Department of Student Life on the MU campus. The program specializes in group teambuilding using low and high rope courses. "We have about 100 groups a year, and approximately 60 percent of those are university-related groups," Goers said. "We also get groups that are already in Columbia for another reason and decide to check us out."

Goers added that his business doesn't necessarily attract visitors to Columbia, but it does add to the variety of activities that the area offers. He said that Venture Out's Alpine Tower, located south of the university's nuclear reactor facility, is becoming more popular among his new customers.

Jewel Coffman of the MU Conference Office said her department works with university and non-university clients to help them organize conferences and other events. "We had 93 conferences and events last year," she said. "Most were in Columbia, so we appreciate the support we receive from area hotels, motels and restaurants in bringing those people here."

Emily Janssen of the MU Athletic Department said the home football and basketball games each season bring a large number of visitors to the area, and her department is working with the NCAA to bring more post-season events to the university. "We expect to see even greater exposure for the university and Columbia," she said.

Columbia Regional Airport Manager Andrew Schneider said within a couple of years the airport hopes to attract an additional airline. "Growing financial support will help make that happen," he said.

Yost added that the airport's limited flight service is a hindrance in attracting stars to the Citizen Jane Film Festival. "The logistics are bad when you have to direct people who are seasoned travelers first to Kansas City or St. Louis," she said.

When did this all begin?

Truthfully, conference realignment has been around since conferences have been around. The Big 12 was once the Big Six, then it became the Big Eight and eventually the Big 12.

This particular round of conference realignment began last summer, when the Big Ten decided to add another team. Missouri wanted to be that team, but the Big Ten decided they wanted Nebraska instead. Then Colorado bolted for the Pac-10 (which has become the Pac-12) and the Big 12 was left with 10 teams.

If there are only 10 teams, why is it still called the Big 12?

Believe it or not, the Big 12 wasn't the first conference to commit a crime against mathematics. The Big Ten has had 11 teams since Penn State joined in 1991. Now that it added Nebraska, the Big Ten has 12 teams.

Wait, so the Big Ten has 12 teams, and the Big 12 has 10 teams? That makes no sense.

The leagues claim that their brands are too strong with their current names and logos to just switch names. Truthfully for most fans, a swap would be extremely confusing. The conferences decided to sacrifice mathematics in favor of tradition. Plus, changing names would be a logistical nightmare. What would Ohio State do with all of its Big Ten championship banners if the conference changed names?

The lesson here is that if new conferences are created, we shouldn't name them numerically. Or as you'll see later, geographically for that matter.

So Nebraska and Colorado left. That was a while ago, why are we still talking about this?

On Aug. 31, Texas A&M, one of the 10 remaining Big 12 schools, announced that it would be leaving the conference, most likely to join the Southeastern Conference, which includes schools such as Florida, Alabama and Arkansas.

Why does a school from Texas want to play in a conference where they would be a six-hour drive from their nearest opponent?

The first reason is the most obvious: money. The SEC just signed a 15-year, \$3 billion television contract with ESPN. Who wouldn't want a piece of that?

The second reason is that the Aggies are tired of getting pushed around by the Big 12's resident kingpin, Texas. For a long time, Texas A&M has felt like a little brother in that relationship, and the current setup of the Big 12's revenue distribution, and Texas' latest move to start its own TV network, have done nothing to quell the unease.

Whoa, slow down. Revenue distribution?

In college football, there are two different types of revenue. The first is money that goes directly to the school. Under this umbrella is revenue generated from ticket sales and merchandise sales.

Most of the money in college football, however, is generated from TV contracts and bowl payouts. That money goes to the conference, which distributes it to the schools. In other conferences, the money is distributed evenly between the member schools.

So, if the SEC makes \$120 million from TV and bowls (just an example, the actual figure is likely astronomically higher), each of its 12 schools gets \$10 million, regardless of whether Florida wins the national championship and Vanderbilt doesn't win a game.

In the Big 12, the revenue is distributed unevenly. The percentage of the pot a school gets depends on how many times it is on TV. So a team like Texas, which gets picked to be on TV often because it has lots of passionate fans, ends up with more money than a school like Baylor, which doesn't.

Not only that, but Texas recently started the Longhorn Network, which ESPN is paying \$15 million per year for 20 years to carry.

Isn't that capitalism? This is America, right?

Yes, but when every other league does it a different way, schools get upset.

Also, college sports are built on a pedestal of amateurism and fairness. That's what is supposed to make them unique. This type of distribution model, where the rich get richer, clearly goes against that.

Where does Missouri fall in this model?

In the middle. Because lately, the Tigers have been a winning team, Missouri is on national TV reasonably often. However, regardless of how good a team is, schools like Texas and Oklahoma inevitably get picked more often because of giant, rabid fan bases.

So Texas A&M is gone. Why do I keep hearing that the Big 12 is going to die any day now?

Once Texas A&M jumped ship, the Big 12 was left with nine schools. Nine is not a viable number for a major football conference, so the league, if it is to survive, will be forced to add another school.

Unfortunately, with its recent instability and uneven revenue distribution, the Big 12 is not exactly an attractive option for the schools it's trying to attract. After all, why would anyone want to jump on a sinking ship?

How far away are we from the Big 12's demise?

It could happen at any moment. Right now, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State are in discussions with the Pac 12. If they join, the Pac 12 would grow to 14 teams and would likely expand to 16. Texas and Texas Tech could follow.

The bottom line is that if the Big 12 has Texas and Oklahoma, it can survive. If it doesn't, then it will die.

Oklahoma President David L. Boren said Friday that this decision was "consuming his life" and that his university would make a decision in less than three weeks. Oklahoma's move dictates what happens after that.

If the Big 12 dies, what happens to Missouri?

The short answer is that no one really knows, probably including MU Athletics Director Mike Alden and Chancellor Brady Deaton, who might not divulge anything if they did know.

Alden declined to comment on whether other conference have approached the Tigers. Because Deaton is currently the chairman of the Big 12 Board of Directors, his rhetoric has been focused on saving the Big 12.

At some point, Deaton will be forced to take off his chairman's hat and put on his chancellor's one, and then it will be decision time for Missouri.

If the Pac-12 wants to increase membership to 16 teams, there are no guarantees that Texas and Texas Tech will follow the Oklahoma schools. Texas would have to give up its beloved Longhorn Network, so perhaps the Pac-12 reaches out to the Tigers next.

The SEC, if it takes Texas A&M, would have 13 teams. Because of scheduling issues, conferences do not like to have odd numbers, so the conference will be looking for at least one more team to make it 14. If the Pac-16 comes to fruition, the SEC may decide to go to 16 teams to remain competitive.

The latest rumor, reported by the New York Post, is that the Big East would invite Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State to join.

The Big Ten has repeatedly said that it is content with its current 12-team alignment but in a world where everyone else goes to 16 teams, the Big Ten might be forced to follow.

The prevailing view is that the end result of all of this is four 16-team super conferences. When the dust settles, Missouri will end up in one of the four.

How do you know that?

Missouri has a football program that has won 40 games in the past four seasons. St. Louis and Kansas City are the No. 21 and No. 31 media markets in the nation. While Missouri doesn't have as many fans as Texas, it still has enough to prevent the Tigers from being overlooked.

Wait, so Missouri could go to the Big East or the Pacific-16? When did geography lose importance?

Right around the time math became so unimportant. The Big East recently added Texas Christian, and with Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State, the Tigers would have enough opponents within a reasonable distance to make the move make some sense.

As for the Pac-16, there is nothing to suggest that it would be a good idea to be crossing two time zones to play 10 of your 16 conference opponents. But once again, it's all about the dollars, and the Pac-12 has engineered what experts call the best television contract in college sports.

What about sports other than football?

A conference change would include all sports. But football, and the massive revenue it brings, drives the bus. Remember, the money the school makes on football gets poured back into the athletics department to pay for all of the sports that don't make money on their own, such as baseball or soccer.

That's one of the reasons the Pac-16 might not be a viable option for Missouri. Paying for all of these teams to fly to the west coast for games would add up quickly. Whatever financial windfall Missouri gains from joining could get wiped out by the increase in expenses.

How does a new conference affect me as a Missouri fan?

The most obvious thing a new conference changes from a fan's standpoint in scheduling. It's conceivable that Missouri and Kansas could end up in different conferences, and while they could work out nonconference matchups, they would likely be less often.

Certainly there would only be one basketball Border Showdown each season if the teams went their separate ways. How would you like it if the Missouri-Kansas basketball game were only in Columbia once every two years?

Games against other traditional conference rivals like Kansas State, Texas and Iowa State would also fall by the wayside.

Why should I care about conference realignment if I'm not a sports fan?

Well, no one is telling you that you have to. But just remember that while the funds of the athletics department do not get mixed with those of the university, success on the field does help pay for things in the classroom. It's no coincidence that MU has seen enrollment spike since Gary Pinkel has had the Tigers in the mix for conference and national titles over the past few years.

Whatever happens, if the Big 12 dies it will bring at least a year or two of instability for the MU athletic department. So while you might not care about sports, it will affect the people around you. Many MU students and Columbia residents care deeply about the Tigers and their success, and those people will likely be stressed.

If you've got more questions about realignment that aren't answered here, send them to Missouriian sports reporter Harry Plumer. You can find him on twitter at @HarryPlumer or email him at harry.plumer@gmail.com. You can also go to the Missouriian's twitter account or Facebook page.

News Digest

By CBT Staff

Sep 2, 2011

The Columbia Chamber of Commerce along with the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau released a study done by students at the University of Missouri's Trulaske College of Business showing the impact of MU Athletics at nearly \$120 million. The study examined athletic events from 2009 to 2010 that accounted for more than \$72 million of direct spending and a total impact of about \$118 million. This study was done to determine the indirect impact on the community and find change in flow of resources that occurs from outside dollars that are introduced into the economy. Athletics have a positive effect on the community of Columbia with increased enrollment figures, and this study may be used to measure the impacts on successful teams and PR issues, said Athletic Director Mike Alden.

MU distance ed forms Mizzou Online

By MU News Bureau

Sep 2, 2011

This year marks the 100th anniversary of distance education at the University of Missouri. It also marks the strategic merger of the two offices that coordinate distance education — both fully online and hybrid programs — for MU's schools and colleges.

MU Direct: Continuing and Distance Education and the Center for Distance and Independent Study have combined to form Mizzou Online. The integration of operations and processes will continue throughout the upcoming academic year. The Mizzou Online main office will be in 136 Clark Hall.

"We celebrate not only a century of service to students outside Columbia but also the tremendous growth in distance offerings and student credit hours generated," Dr. Jim Spain, interim vice provost for eLearning, said. "Mizzou ranks second in the Big 12 in the number of distance offerings and offers more distance degree and certificate options than any school in the Big 10."

Dr. Gera Burton and Dr. Kim Siegenthaler will serve as interim co-directors of Mizzou Online and will work with several campus offices to fully integrate processes and increase efficiencies to better serve the unique needs of distance students.

Mizzou Online supports the more than 8,000 distance students who are enrolled in one or more of the 540 MU distance courses.

The MU Faculty Council, in cooperation with the MU Provost's Office and the interim vice provost for eLearning, has formed a faculty task force to address academic policies and operational issues associated with online and distance education course development, approval and assessment on the MU campus. The task force, under the direction of Dr. Leona Rubin and Dr. John David, will facilitate a series of faculty forums throughout the fall 2011 semester.

"This is an exciting time for the University of Missouri," Spain said. "We look forward to building on the 100-year history as we continue to make Mizzou accessible to students from across the state and around the world."



The Tribune's View Special Olympics An important lead gift

By Henry J. Waters III

Columbia Daily Tribune Tuesday, September 6, 2011

I was more than happy to see news of a million-dollar donation to Special Olympics Missouri for construction of a unique training facility and headquarters for the state organization.

Eleven acres is in hand on Bonne Femme Church Road near Highway 63 South for the 44,000-square-foot, \$7.5 million facility. The lead gift is provided by Centene Corp, a St. Louis-based health plan company. University of Missouri football Coach Gary Pinkel is honorary chairman for Special Olympics Missouri.

Everyone has a soft spot for Special Olympics, but to get properly ginned up, it helps a lot to come face to face. Several months ago I attended a presentation at the MU Athletic Department training facility to hear about the project. Several special-needs athletes and state Special Olympics officials were there, and Pinkel displayed his serious personal interest in the project.

For me, the outing turned into more than the usual money hustle. It had a nice economic development component, but moreover it promises new opportunities for the Special Olympics athletic program.

Back then I wrote in this column that the \$1.5 million component the group is seeking from this area would not be forthcoming without a few serious lead gifts from people with special interest in Special Olympics, most likely people with family members who need and benefit from the program.

To get local gifts, donors must believe the project will happen. The Centene gift and others seem to make it certain. Even in a tough economy, people will help do projects that move them. My check is in the mail.