

Deaton confirms Big 12 talks today, MU curators Tuesday

By Mike DeArmond - Posted on 02 October 2011

Missouri chancellor Brady Deaton has confirmed to The Star that Big 12 Conference presidents will speak Sunday afternoon via teleconference and that Missouri's Board of Curators will meet on Tuesday.

With the question of Missouri's stance in conference realignment – whether to stay in the Big 12 or pursue admission to the Southeastern Conference - of prime interest, Deaton stopped short of providing further information.

“I can't speak to that at all,” Deaton said.

Bob Burda, a spokesman for the Big 12 Conference, said the league anticipated making no statement as the result of the Sunday meeting. However, Burda said interim Big 12 commissioner Chuck Neinas would speak to the media at the end of the league's weekly Monday morning coaches' media call.

And, with no public comment Sunday, the day ended the same way it began, with expectations that the next big point on the timeline of college realignment likely will come Tuesday at the Missouri Board of Curator's meeting.

How to save the Big 12: a new Missouri Compromise

By Mike DeArmond - Posted on 03 October 2011

Politics have never been a game I could easily play.

Compromise always seemed like giving up something that should not be given.

And perhaps that, at the core, is what is wrong with the Big 12 Conference as it is so comprised today with three teams gone and a fourth, Missouri, headed for a pivotal Board of Curators meeting on Tuesday.

That meeting looks more and more as if it could determine if the Tigers join secessionists Colorado, Nebraska and Texas A&M.

It seems the most popular course of action by many – perhaps most – Missouri fans if judging by the tsunami of emails and text messages flooding those who would make the decision on whether Missouri stays or goes (most likely it seems to the open arms of the Southeastern Conference).

But forcing myself to play the politician, here are the basic tenets of a plan that, borrowing from history, we'll call the new Missouri Compromise.

It is based not on individual rights but on the tenet that we the people of the Big 12 Conference as so populated today would be served by a greater good if only:

1. Revenue sharing from this day forward is an equal proposition for all schools. No matter what teams appear on television how many more times than another, the payout is split equally to all on the major TV contracts existing or signed in the future for all games. This would eliminate any Tier 3 games shown only on networks established by individual schools. Any and all football games not picked up by the major TV partners of the conference would be made available on a Big 12 Network with games of only regional interest being offered in those regions. Monies – if any – from those broadcasts would still be shared with all conference members.

2. Any school desiring to have its own over the air or cable or Internet network could keep – after selection of men's basketball games by Big 12 media partner networks – the rights to the rest of its men's basketball games for telecast on any available outlet and keep all, if any, monies accrued from those telecasts. Further, telecast revenue of any other intercollegiate athletic event

– including women’s basketball - would now and forever belong to the individual schools. Other content that might be considered to give an individual school an advantage – say in recruiting – over other conference members would be allowed or denied by a simple majority vote of all conference members.

3. The Big 12 Conference will expand, as soon as possible, to rebuild league membership to 12 schools, thus enabling the Big 12 to go back to divisional play in football and hold a league championship game.

4. The slotting of teams in Big 12 Conference-allied bowl games will be established by simple and hard and fast rules based on overall record, then head to head competition and ultimately an equitable tiebreaker like a flip of a coin. Bowls under contract with the Big 12 would no longer have the power to choose a league representative but would be assigned that team as the result of a merit-based slotting order.

5. Any and all other matters – including designation of where league tournaments and individual sport championship games will be held – are put to a simple majority vote of all conference member schools.

Could such measures take the politics out of the Big 12 Conference? Could they help establish a more perfect union without the need to further compromise? Could the haves of the Big 12 possibly agree to any of this?

Hey, I’m just a sportswriter who is slogging toward retirement in February of 2012. So feel free to tell me I’m naïve and that none of this could possibly work.

Stability of Southeastern Conference beckons Mizzou

By **BLAIR KERKHOFF**

In each of the last two years, the Big 12 has cheated death, but survival has come with pain and scars.

Three schools and counting are gone. So is a commissioner. Still, the Big 12 lives, without the conviction of other conferences, but the heart beats just the same. And the pulse figures to quicken this week with news on two fronts.

Missouri and expansion.

A decision for the ages may await the Tigers. Interest from the Southeastern Conference appears real, and the school's Board of Curators' meeting on Tuesday will address the issue.

That may be all they do, according to a Big 12 official. "My guess is they will do what Texas A&M did, what Oklahoma and Texas did when their boards met and give (Chancellor) Brady Deaton the authority to deal with the issue," the official said. "I'd be very surprised if what came out of the meeting was news that Missouri made application and was accepted an offer from the SEC."

If that's the case, there would be more time to further consider a move — yes, everybody has realignment fatigue, but a possible decision this important shouldn't be fast-tracked — or to have the Big 12 meet the concerns of Missouri.

But even if some Big 12 schools give or bend on issues — displeasure with high school content on Texas' Longhorn Network remains a hot-button topic — would it be enough? Perhaps not.

The SEC, like the Big Ten and Pac-12, offers the kind of long-term athletic financial security that only exists in conferences that understand the greater good is achieved through an equal partnership approach.

The Pac-12 came to this notion late, but it's there now, and it's a reason why Texas and its network weren't welcome.

The Big 12 is working toward this approach, and an announcement on equal revenue sharing of its largest TV contract income could come soon.

But twice having been driven to the brink of collapse, the Big 12 cannot assure long-term guarantees, no matter how many years of television rights are signed over to the conference.

Stability becomes the overriding factor, and the last people who could point a finger at Missouri are from Texas and Oklahoma, who only two weeks ago had saddled up for the ride out of the Big 12.

Other factors in such a monumental decision deserve discussion around the curators' table. Goodness knows, the fans have flushed them out for weeks, and there are many reasons to oppose a move.

Joining the SEC ends the possibility of becoming a member of the group Missouri has long coveted, the Big Ten. The school has inquired several times over the years to different commissioners about membership. If college sports become super-sized as some project, perhaps the Big Ten reopens the expansion file.

But the SEC is a death-do-us-part commitment. No more dreamy-eyed looks at a region and school grouping that's a better fit.

Competitively, the Big 12 offers the better home. Although Missouri has the fewest conference regular-season and postseason championships among Big 12 schools, several sports compete nationally.

And football would be fine. The SEC is the nation's most ferocious conference — we all know that. But by most measures, the Big 12 has been the second best, and no worse than third, for most of its existence.

The football staff, however, would live in a new recruiting world, less in Texas, which has been so good to the Tigers, and more in the Southeast. Not to say Mizzou couldn't pull it off, but as one recruiting analyst told me, the Missouri staff is as well-connected there as anybody outside the Lone Star State.

The two games in Texas have become a major selling point. The staff would need to come up with new sweet-talking lines.

Finally, for Missouri, there's the Kansas City factor. With the basketball tournament and Border War game with Kansas at Arrowhead, we could be affected by a conference switch more profoundly than any other region in the state.

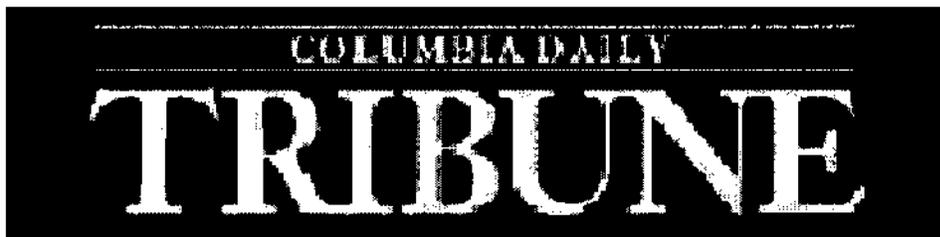
But that would be our tough luck. Missouri, if faced with a decision, has to act in the best interest of the school.

Whatever Mizzou's future holds, the Big 12 seems determined to replenish. Rumors ran rampant last week that Brigham Young and the conference had come to an agreement, a story denied by both sides.

But BYU remains a favorite, a school that at some point in the last month, when it was becoming apparent Texas A&M would leave for the SEC, was seen as a schedule filler for the Aggies. Just plug the A&M holes on everybody's schedule next year with BYU. It might not have been that easy, but perhaps a starting point.

If Mizzou also leaves, the Big 12 will need to move aggressively. Boise State would love to become a member, and although Big East presidents said Sunday that they would "aggressively pursue discussions" with expansion targets and change bylaws to make fleeing more difficult, no deterrent has prevented a move yet.

Big 12 interim commissioner Chuck Neinas is expected to make public comments today, and he's as pro-Big 12 for Mizzou as it gets. Who knows where the story goes? Wherever it does, we're in for at least another week of realignment competing for attention with great matchups like Saturday's Missouri-Kansas State and Oklahoma-Texas games.



Conference choice puts curators on the spot

Board inundated with fan input on Big 12.

By **DAVID BRIGGS**

Sunday, October 2, 2011

The separation of campus and athletics at Missouri used to be understood.

For former curator Fred Hall, that became clear in December 1993 as the school searched for a new football coach to replace Bob Stull. Many of the curators wanted the ear of the men leading the search committee — Athletic Director Dan Devine and consultant Al Onofrio.

The chairman of the board contacted University of Missouri President George Russell.

"George, we'd like to have something to say on the new coach," John Lichtenegger told the president, Hall recalled.

Russell's response: "Well, John, sure, we could do that, if that's what you want to do. Matter of fact, if you want to call some of the plays, you can do that, too."

Message received.

"In other words," Hall said with a laugh, "stay out of it."

It's not so simple now.

As a groundswell of support for Missouri to join the Southeastern Conference mounts, the decision whether to leave the Big 12 — if there is indeed an opportunity to leave — rests with the seven voting members of the UM System Board of Curators.

The governor-appointed assembly includes a Kansas City businessman sensitive to his city's economic interests, a newspaper publisher in St. Joseph and a substance-abuse counselor in Kennett. The board is required to approve any proposal to change conference affiliation.

The curators, who a source said will meet Tuesday in Columbia to discuss Missouri's conference affiliation, traditionally have deferred to Athletic Director Mike Alden and Chancellor Brady Deaton on athletics issues. They could rubber-stamp Deaton's recommendation or vote to give the chancellor unilateral authority to act on behalf of the university.

That's what the board of regents at Texas and Oklahoma did when those schools were considering switching conferences.

"People on boards get involved, and when they get involved, collegiality sometimes stops," Texas Athletic Director DeLoss Dodds told reporters last week. "We've got to empower people on the athletics side to put this together and keep it together."

The conference realignment saga is probably the most high-profile issue the board will encounter in their six-year terms, and they are being lobbied from every direction.

A former curator said the board was "very involved" in examining the possibility of Missouri joining the Big Ten last summer. This year, as the curators waded through thousands of overwhelmingly pro-SEC fan emails, the stakes and emotions are raised.

"If I was chairman of the board, I would want to be very involved in that decision," said a source familiar with the board dynamics.

He's also glad he is not.

"I'm sympathetic to the administration at the University of Missouri," the source said. "I know that they're in a hell of a situation. You can't win on this deal. You might satisfy some people, but ... you wait and see, it's going to be a firestorm."

The seven voting curators all declined comment or did not respond to messages.

The most fervent opposition to Missouri joining the SEC originates from Kansas City. Board Chairman Warren Erdman, the only curator from Kansas City, is "sympathetic" to the concerns of city leaders over the potential economic impact of MU's exit from the Big 12, a source said. Kansas City would no longer be a Big 12 hub and could lose the lucrative conference basketball tournament, which is under contract with the city through 2014.

Kansas City attorney Paul Blackman, a prominent MU booster, described the area as "evenly split."

Assuming Missouri is wanted by the SEC, the curators would also weigh the more tangible economic costs of bolting the Big 12 — exit fees and a potential lawsuit — and the opinion of Deaton, whose stance remains unclear despite his position as the chairman of the Big 12 Board of Directors. One recent curator said the board has "a lot of respect" for the chancellor.

Still, as MU student Cory Steinman typed more than 3,000 times in an email to curators, opinion is tilting toward the "SEC!"

Sources told the Tribune that Missouri athletic officials and Gov. Jay Nixon, who appointed five of the seven voting curators, are on board with a move to the SEC. So, too, are many fans, some of whom have threatened to stop donating to MU if the school bypasses the SEC and grants its primary television rights for the next six years to the Big 12.

"If the University of Missouri does not end up in the SEC, you will never see another dime from me again," one fan wrote to the curators.

Through an open-records request, the Tribune obtained hundreds of emails sent to the curators on Sept. 21. Nearly all contained a plea for MU to leave the Big 12.

"For once in my life," one fan wrote in a message sent to the curators, Deaton and Alden, "I would love to see The University of Missouri, the school that I have loved since the day I was born, come out and give everyone else in the Big 12 the 1 finger salute & do what's best for this University."

Columbia attorney Clark Jones pledged to increase his annual donation to the Tiger Scholarship Fund from \$3,000 to \$12,000 if MU moved to the SEC.

Even Blackman, who said he is as passionate about Kansas City as he is MU, is now behind a move south. He sent a signed letter to Erdman.

"If there is an opportunity to go to the SEC, to me it would be reckless to gamble that the Big 12 would be viable in three, five, six years," he said.

Hall, a curator from 1993-1999, said the board should ignore the outside pressures and defer to Deaton.

"He would have the advice of a very knowledgeable athletic staff and Mike Alden," Hall said, "and they would make a far better decision than a group of curators that don't know everything about it."



After years of ignoring pleas that benefits be extended to same-sex couples, the UM System is starting to listen

By **JANESE SILVEY**

Sunday, October 2, 2011

There's mounting pressure on the University of Missouri System to adopt benefits for same-sex couples — and much of the weight is coming from top campus administrators.

MU's Council of Deans is the latest group to rally for domestic partner benefits, sending a letter to UM interim President Steve Owens urging the system to extend benefits to domestic partners of faculty and staff.

Chancellor Brady Deaton has sent two letters to University Hall in support of domestic partner benefits. So have the Missouri Students Association and MU's Graduate Professional Council.

Even MU Athletic Director Mike Alden weighed in, sending a letter to Board of Curators Chairman Warren Erdman asking for his support on the issue.

Erdman has no plan to expand health benefits this year, but he will ask the board's Compensation and Human Resources Committee to review benefits, including the possibility of adding domestic partner benefits, Owens said in a statement to the Tribune.

That announcement adds a significant cog in the movement toward providing same-sex partner benefits, a subject curators have long ignored.

Owens said UM System staff has been carefully — albeit quietly — studying the issue since spring.

"Like other public institutions, the UM System must consider this within our own institution as well as within our state and national context," he said. "While other public higher education institutions throughout the country have made domestic partner benefits available, public universities in Missouri and most of our surrounding states have not done so."

Owens also asked faculty groups to make a business case for why domestic partner benefits are needed. Faculty members are responding with a report outlining reasons the university should extend its benefits.

With large companies and other major research universities now offering retirement and health benefits for same-sex couples, some say MU is falling behind the competition.

BUDGET BURDENS

It's no secret university campuses have been tightening the purse strings as state funding dwindles and restrictions are put on their ability to raise tuition.

And those economic realities force the university to carefully prioritize where administrators spend money, Owens said.

Providing insurance packages to same-sex families is expected to add 1 percent to 2 percent to the system's benefits costs, which amounts to between \$1 million and \$3 million, Betsy Rodriguez, vice president of human resources, told the Tribune in April. That might not sound like a lot, she said, but "frankly anything is a lot of money at this point."

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, also cited fiscal impact as the most significant consideration. "Any change in policy that requires an increase of expenses of any kind should be looked at very closely," he said. "That's my only concern."

UM administrators have, at times, indicated they also would be worried about political ramifications if the university were to adopt benefits for partners of gays and lesbians.

Rep. Mike Thomson, R-Maryville, chairs the House Higher Education Committee. He wasn't familiar with the ongoing discussion about domestic partner benefits at UM when the Tribune called him last week.

At first nod, though, Thomson said there might be lawmakers who would be concerned about the state's land-grant university providing benefits to same-sex couples, a policy that wouldn't necessarily represent conservative leanings in parts of the state.

"I think there would be discussion of it, not necessarily from the higher education committee, but informally," he said.

Schaefer, a member of the Senate's Education Committee, said he's not sure the General Assembly would take any sort of retaliatory action if the UM System were to adopt the benefits, though.

"There are people in the General Assembly who, arguably, would be on both sides of that issue," he said. "It's a very polarizing issue."

But, Schaefer said, the House and Senate each have lots of members who don't agree on a number of issues.

"Certainly, we have members in the General Assembly with strong opinions on a myriad of issues who might like to take certain actions," he said. "The question is: Does the body as a whole take an action?"

The UM System is no stranger to standing up to state lawmakers, Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said. He pointed to the Board of Curators' decision this year to raise tuition higher than Gov. Jay Nixon wanted. That move cost the board some funding when Nixon later withheld state money from the university.

"There was plenty of backlash on the tuition" decision, "but they stood up to that," Kelly said. "Which was, by the way, very courageous on their part."

And that's exactly what the system needs in this case, said Candace Galen, a professor of biological sciences at MU. "It takes courage. That's what it comes down to."

RECRUITMENT REASONS

Galen has been with her partner for 15 years, and they are raising two children. Conservatively, she estimates, having to pay out-of-pocket for her partner's health insurance costs the family \$5,000 a year, and that's for a policy with a high deductible.

"It impacts our bottom line every month," Galen said. "Anyone who has to pay for his or her own health insurance knows it's not trivial."

And those extra expenses might be keeping other top-notch professors and administrators from applying for open positions at MU. Although it's mostly based on anecdotal evidence, campus leaders say the absence of benefits for gay and lesbian partners is hurting recruitment.

Between 2008 and 2010, at least four potential faculty members and three administrative-level candidates have passed up jobs on UM System campuses because of the lack of domestic partner benefits. That's from the preliminary report the Intercampus Faculty Council is preparing for Owens.

In one case, a woman who might have been a fit for a chair position did not apply to a UM school and instead was recruited to be an associate dean at a Big Ten university with domestic partner benefits.

In another testimony, someone who took on a leadership role within the UM System had hoped to recruit a "strong colleague from my previous institution" to Missouri, but the person declined an interview because his partner persuaded him not to apply to a "hostile institution."

"We know that it's a critical part of being able to recruit, especially at the faculty level," said Noor Azizan-Gardner, interim chief diversity officer at MU. "To get the best candidates out there, you must have an inclusive benefits package."

IFC, which includes members from all four UM campuses, estimates nearly 400 institutes of higher education offer same-sex partner benefits, including all Ivy League schools.

In Missouri, a handful of private schools in Kansas City and St. Louis — including Washington University — offer domestic partner benefits, as well as Drury University in Springfield.

Several local liberal arts colleges also extend benefits to gay and lesbian couples, including Stephens College, Westminster College and William Woods University.

Although MU typically doesn't compete with small liberal arts schools for faculty, offering domestic partner benefits has given Stephens College a competitive edge in its peer market, said Richard Enyard, director of human resources.

"I do know with a few of the hires we made, they inquired about whether we had domestic partner benefits," he said. "It's a good benefit for those who have significant others who may or may not have health insurance. It's a good benefit to offer when competing for top-quality talent."

Westminster College in Fulton began offering same-sex partner benefits two years ago, spokesman Rob Crouse said. "We pride ourselves on being a family-friendly workplace and environment with family-friendly benefits," he said.

Representatives from all three area schools said their respective institutions have not had problems with anyone trying to abuse the benefit by adding a same-sex friend who wasn't actually a partner.

Kathy Groves, director of human resources for William Woods, said it's fairly obvious when someone is a significant other. "Generally, that person is their beneficiary on life insurance or on their checking account," she said. "We haven't seen abuse."

The lack of benefits to same-sex partners also is hurting staff recruitment, the faculty report says. MU competes for IT workers, administrative assistants and other nonfaculty positions with local companies that do provide domestic partner benefits, including State Farm Insurance, 3M and major department stores.

MU, the report warns, is soon to be in a "very small minority of employers" that don't provide domestic partner benefits.

QUIET DISAPPROVAL

With faculty members, top administrators and an athletics director on board, you'd think support for domestic partner benefits is unanimous.

It's not.

In a survey given to faculty and staff last year, 34 percent of respondents agreed same-sex partner benefits should be a high priority for the system — but 34 percent also disagreed.

Another 21 percent said they didn't have strong feelings, and 1,200 of the 7,000 survey respondents skipped the question.

Those on campus who oppose benefits for same-sex couples aren't exactly shouting it from the rooftops, though. Some faculty members contacted by the Tribune weren't interested in opining. One did provide an alternative view but only on the condition of anonymity.

"From a Christian point of view, you're kind of torn because you know that everybody is a sinner, including yourself, and you don't want to pick out one group," the person said. "On the other hand, you feel by allowing domestic benefits, you're encouraging people to go into a lifestyle that is against what you believe people should do."

Were the issue to go to a faculty vote, it's anybody's guess what the outcome would be.

Case in point: Last year, MU Faculty Council members were stunned when the faculty as a whole voted down a plan to require students to take a diversity-focused course. The requirement seemed to be a sure thing with support from administrators, vocal professors and student leaders.

Anyone who opposed the plan hadn't said a peep before the vote, at least publicly, likely for fear of being seen as anti-diversity.

That failed diversity course requirement, along with two back-to-back racially charged incidents on campus, has student leaders and administrators rallying for a public perception that MU is "One Mizzou," an entity that embraces all.

The catchphrase is well-intentioned, Galen said, but "there's a difference walking the walk and talking the talk."

Historically, she said, higher education institutions have taken the lead on advancing social causes. In Missouri, though, corporations and private businesses are the ones adopting benefits for gay and lesbian couples.

"I'd like to see" the university "take the lead on this and not hide behind industry's coattails," Galen said. "There will come a time when most big businesses and independent companies will have partner benefits, and the university will look like the odd duck out."

STUDENTS' SIDE

Those same industries are going to want future employees to be comfortable in diverse situations, Galen said.

"We're supposed to be training people those businesses want to employ," she said. "Instead we're, by example, giving our students the idea it's OK to be intolerant. I don't think that's a good employee."

In the draft report to Owens making a case for domestic partner benefits, IFC members cite several quotes from CEOs of major employers stressing the importance of diversity.

Hallmark Cards, for instance, has an "ongoing commitment to diversity in our workforce and to creating a workplace where our employees feel comfortable bringing their full selves to work," wrote Bob Bloss, senior vice president of human resources, in a statement after the company was awarded "Best Place to Work" by the Human Rights Campaign.

IFC's greatest concern, the report says, is the university will have a reputation as an institution that discriminates, and that "will reflect negatively on our students and employers."

Missouri Students Association members, in their letter to Owens, say students are the primary stakeholders of the university, making it important that students take pride in all aspects of campus.

"The present situation, which discriminates against individuals on the basis of sexual orientation (a practice expressly prohibited by the University of Missouri non-discrimination policy), is nothing to be proud of," they wrote.

The letter goes on to say not having domestic partner benefits is a "stain on our good name" that has an adverse effect on the educational experience of students.

George Justice, dean of MU's Graduate School, also is worried about the impact on his older student population.

"Even if the benefits are not relevant to graduate students who come here with different kinds of offers, the tone is important to highly recruited students, particularly doctoral students, who are deciding between universities on cultural as well as academic grounds," Justice said in an email. "I strongly support same-sex partner benefits for faculty and staff as a graduate student recruiting thing, even if students themselves wouldn't benefit."

CHANGING ATTITUDES

Since Missourians defined marriage in 2004 as only between a man and woman, perceptions and attitudes have been changing, at least nationwide. More states are allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry or join through civil unions.

A 2010 study from the Pew Research Center indicates 63 percent of people surveyed consider same-sex couples with children a "family."

"Clearly opinions are changing regarding the definition of 'family' and most public and private sector businesses are recognizing the need and advantages of offering benefits without the stipulation of a marriage license," the IFC report says.

And UM System administrators — who have mostly been silent on the issue — now say they're listening.

"We provide generally competitive employee benefits and recognize that the expansion of benefits to domestic partners is a significant issue for some of our employees," Owens said in his statement. "As with other topics of importance, the university welcomes employee input, engagement and diversity of thought."



MU team takes long-term look at smoking patterns

College students tracked for years.

By CYNTHIA BILLHARTZ GREGORIAN St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Sunday, October 2, 2011

Mike Johnston has no idea what he was thinking when he took up cigarettes at age 15.

"I was definitely more impulsive back then than I am now," said Johnston, 39, of Oakville as he puffed away on a downtown St. Louis sidewalk during a work break. "I was young and had no responsibilities. Now I have a wife and two kids."

Charlie Condor, 49, of St. John was smoking with co-workers when he admitted his lifestyle and woeful views about life might have played a role in his decision to start smoking 28 years ago.

"Just kid stuff, you know? I was coming up through adulthood, and it seemed like life was against me," he said.

The way Johnston and Condor assess their younger selves mirrors recent findings of two researchers at the University of Missouri.

By analyzing data collected during a long-term study, Andrew Littlefield, doctoral student in psychology, and Kenneth Sher, professor of psychology, have found that people who smoke at age 18 have higher rates of impulsivity than nonsmokers at that age. They've also found that those who quit between ages 18 and 25 show the biggest decreases in impulsivity during that time period.

The study, which began in 1987 with one group of 489 MU students and has continued with several more groups, is intended to assess substance use in general, not just smoking, Littlefield said.

Among other things, subjects are asked to rate how well two statements describe their behaviors on a scale of one to 10. The statements pertain to whether they tend to think through facts, details and consequences before deciding to do something and whether they tend to worry a lot.

They are surveyed seven times — once a year during college then at about age 25, 29 and 35.

"We see the biggest changes in impulsivity and neuroticism between age 18 and 25," Littlefield said. "After age 30, most personality traits are usually set in plaster, and they're not changing much."

Changes in people ages 18 to 25 begin happening when they leave their families, go to college, enter the workforce, get married and have children. Logic would dictate that becoming less impulsive and neurotic are a part of maturing, which causes many smokers to quit.

But Littlefield and other scientists aren't ready to draw that conclusion yet.

Quitting smoking might be prompting the changes in personality traits, he said. He stressed, however, that he means personality changes over a long time frame, not short-term ones such as nervousness and lower self-regulation that come from nicotine withdrawals.

Littlefield and Sher also have concluded that, by the time a person is 35, smoking is usually no longer related to neuroticism and impulsivity.

"Now, it's moving from those traits to addiction and compulsivity, which is when your behaviors are patterns," Littlefield said. "You're on autopilot, lighting up without thinking when you get out of bed or on the way to work."

He believes the findings of his study could be useful in figuring out ways to help people quit smoking before it becomes addictive and compulsive.

Studies have shown, he said, "there are residual effects when you follow up with students after they've taken a money management course. You find that many of them reduce drinking and either quit or reduce smoking. They not only spend less, but they reduce behaviors associated with high impulsivity."

He urges people to think of self-regulation as a muscle. It can become fatigued if you use it too much, or it can grow stronger when exercised.

"Likewise," he added, "if you can target internal thoughts, you can make them more positive and reduce the impact of being neurotic."

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU students, alumni prepare for centennial Homecoming

By [Chantel O'Neal](#)

September 30, 2011 | 12:16 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU students and alumni will begin centennial Homecoming celebrations with a day of service from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday.

On campus, students and volunteers will help with weeding flower beds, clearing bulletin boards, painting railings and cleaning the Rollins Street bus stops. Participants will meet at 8:30 a.m. at Reynolds Alumni Center; anyone is welcome.

MU regional alumni chapters will participate by hosting service projects in their respective communities. The Gateway Tigers in St. Louis will sport black and gold as they clean the garden center at Soulard Market, while the Tampa Bay Tigers will be volunteering their time at a nonprofit sanctuary, Big Cat Rescue.

Groups are encouraged to share photos on the [Homecoming Day of Service Facebook page](#).

Other Homecoming events include:

- **Homecoming blood drive** — 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, Hearnes Center ([Make an appointment online.](#))
- **Nightly talent competition** — 6:30 p.m. Oct. 10-12, Jesse Auditorium
- **Campus decorations and spirit rally** — 6 to 10 p.m. Oct. 14, Greektown
- **Homecoming parade** — Oct. 15 ([View a live stream on the MAA U-stream website.](#))

For a complete list of events and details, go to [mizzou.com](#). To view a photographic history of MU Homecoming, download the [new free iPad app from Vox Magazine](#) at the iTunes app store.



MU researcher finds pill holds promise for autism

By Janese Silvey

Friday, September 30, 2011

A University of Missouri researcher has found that a drug already on the market might improve language skills for people with autism.

In a preliminary study, adolescents and adults with autism were better able to complete verbal tasks after taking propranolol, said David Beversdorf, an associate professor in the Department of Radiology.

“We can clearly say that propranolol has the potential to benefit language and may help people with autism function appropriately in social situations,” said Beversdorf, who is the Thompson Endowed Chair at the MU Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment Disorders, which funded the study.

Pilot evidence also indicates the medicine helped autistic individuals make and keep eye contact, he said.

Propranolol is a beta blocker approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat conditions such as high blood pressure and anxiety. It has some side effects and isn’t recommended for people with a low heart rate, asthma or depression.

The medicine is available by prescription in generic form, “so it’s not going to break anybody’s bank,” Beversdorf said. “There’s no profit motive.”

Before parents of autistic children rush out to purchase the pills, though, more work needs to be done, he stressed.

“It’s promising, but we don’t know if this benefit in language is offset by something else,” he said.

Beversdorf is in the process of applying funding to conduct clinical trials.

He would not speculate when those tests might lead to a conclusion. "Clinical trials are not a trivial thing," he said.

Propranolol already has been used or tested as a treatment for other conditions such as hemangioma, an abnormal buildup of blood vessels.

It's also commonly used by people who have anxiety when taking tests, MU spokeswoman Emily Martin said.

In an earlier test, Beversdorf tracked the effects of the medication on healthy adults who don't have a history of anxiety to better understand how it interacts with receptors. They, too, performed better on cognitive tasks that required complicated verbal tasks.



Study of mice provides insight into fatal disease

By Janese Silvey

Saturday, October 1, 2011

University of Missouri researchers have pinpointed a communication breakdown between nerves and muscles in mice that might shed some light on the fatal human disease known as spinal muscular atrophy, or SMA.

SMA is caused by a protein deficiency present in all cells, including motor neurons.

“Moving involves an intricate system of communication between the brain, peripheral nerves and muscles,” said Michael Garcia, an associate professor of biological sciences in the College of Arts and Science and Bond Life Sciences Center.

“Motor neurons facilitate this communication through a complex series of chemical signals. If the communication system breaks down, the motor neuron will stop working, and muscle activity ceases.”

Nerves and muscles normally work together by communicating with one another. In the recent study, the research team found that the delivery of signals from nerves was disrupted before they got to the nerve ending, preventing that communication.

“By learning where the system breaks down, perhaps we can target treatments that prevent the breakdown in the system,” Garcia said in a statement.

The work also could lead to treatments for similar diseases, such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig’s disease, or Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Results from the study are reported in the September issue of the journal ACTA Neuropathology.

Garcia co-authored it with Christian Lorson, professor of veterinary pathobiology, and graduate students and research assistants Jeffrey Dale, Devin Barry, Virginia Garcia and Ferrill Rose Jr.

UM System employees can receive \$100 in new health incentive

By Jesse Bishop

September 30, 2011 | 12:50 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA – University of Missouri System employees will soon have a new incentive to play a more active role in their health. Beginning in 2012, health plan subscribers who complete a personal health assessment and health screening will receive \$100.

The required health assessment consists of an online questionnaire about personal health choices. The 15-minute questionnaire is designed to help subscribers identify areas in which they could improve their own health. A health screening consisting of basic lab draws and other health measurements will follow the questionnaire.

When subscribers have completed both the assessment and the screening, they will receive a \$100 health reimbursement account or health savings account credit. This can be used toward any qualified medical expenses in 2012.

There are about 19,000 benefit-eligible employees in the UM System. Of those, more than 17,000 subscribe to the health plan, said Jennifer Hollingshead, assistant director of publications and marketing for the UM System.

Health plan subscribers must complete both the personal health assessment and the health screening by April 30, 2012, to receive the \$100 credit.



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Innovation comes from universities

By JAKE HALLIDAY

Saturday, October 1, 2011

When the answer to a question is complicated or uncomfortable to explain, it is tempting to just make stuff up. My granddaughter Ella is only 3, but she knows babies do not come from the cabbage patch or watermelon seeds and that no storks are involved.

Ever wonder where new products come from? Let's explode some myths about the source of new products and technologies and uncover some good news for Columbia and Mid-Missouri.

It would seem reasonable to assume new drugs originate in the research labs at Pfizer and other pharmaceutical companies; new medical devices at Johnson & Johnson; new software at Microsoft, and so on. This notion is reinforced by visible examples of companies that innovate in-house: Apple's iPod, iPhone, iPad, etc., and 3M's Post-it Notes, Scotch tape, etc. But Apple and 3M are true exceptions.

These days, fewer and fewer new products are discovered in the R&D labs of large corporations. CEOs are under constant pressure to increase shareholder value, measured as an increase in share price in the short term. Sustaining a critical mass of top research scientists and engineers is expensive. Equipping research laboratories is capital-intensive on a recurring basis. While research used to be regarded as a worthwhile investment, many CEOs now perceive research as a burdensome expense that erodes profitability and share price. The result?

Corporations are getting out of the research business and looking to universities as a source of innovations to be harvested at the right time and incorporated into their product-development pipelines.

Increasingly, the innovations that improve our lives in areas such as health care, food and energy will originate at universities but will be commercialized and brought to us by companies.

Universities that find ways to work effectively with private companies will have the largest role in benefiting society through new products and processes that make our lives better. The University of Missouri understands this and has been evolving its policies over the past several years.

MU's commitment to this path is gaining national recognition. MU was invited this summer to become a member campus in the Coulter Foundation Translational Research Partnership Program. This initiative is putting \$5 million to work over a five-year period and identifies MU as one of 15 powerhouses of biomedical innovation in the nation, with processes in place to advance innovations from the bench to the bedside for the benefit of patients and for transitioning technology from universities to the private sector.

While these trends strengthen our economic development strategy, let's not forget the benefits to the educational mission of the university and how rewarding it must be for MU students when they participate in projects that help patients and benefit society.