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MU, Truman land on best-value colleges list

By Janese Silvey

Wednesday, January 4, 2012

The University of Missouri is one of the best-value colleges in the country, according to a national financial magazine.

MU ranked 79th out of 100 and was one of two Missouri universities on Kiplinger's 2012 "Best Values in Public Colleges" list. Truman State University in Kirksville snagged the 23rd spot. The magazine took into consideration costs, retention and graduation rates and student debt.

It's tough to say whether the national recognition will help MU when lawmakers are deciding how to allocate limited state resources.

With the state facing a budget shortfall, it's unlikely the ranking will result in any funding increases, said Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia. Still, he said, "it's another small building block in appreciating what a good university it is despite the state's failure to fund it."

Historically, lawmakers have taken note when schools are recognized, especially for being good values, said Wayne Goode, a UM System curator and former state senator.

"I think it helps them in the long run, depending on how the fiscal situation turns out," he said. "Overall, it could be fairly significant."

Goode's observations were based on Truman State, which has been on the Kiplinger's list for 11 years.

"Going back a number of years, when Truman State was on the rise and had lots of national recognition — it still does to a great extent — it received some favorable financial support from the state to continue that," he said. "In the past, and I think continuing, the legislature generally has looked at this kind of progress ... and tries to help make it even better."

Annual costs at MU considered for the Kiplinger's report — including tuition, fees, books, and room and board — totaled \$19,210 for in-state students. The cost after need-based financial aid is taken into consideration drops to a total of \$12,070 for Missouri students. MU graduates leave with an average debt of \$22,145, according to the report.

“We are gratified that Kiplinger’s magazine recognized MU’s status as a major national university that makes every effort to remain accessible and affordable to any student who qualifies for admission,” spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said in an email.

Last year, she said, four out of five students received some sort of financial assistance, such as scholarships, grants, and tuition and fee waivers.

Additionally, MU paid student workers a total of \$51.8 million in wages last year.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill took Kiplinger’s No. 1 spot, with in-state students paying an annual \$17,628 and leaving with an average debt of \$16,165. The University of New Hampshire-Durham, which ranked 100th, charges \$25,902 a year, and graduates have an average of \$35,671 in debt.

Truman State’s annual charges are \$14,998 for in-state students, and graduates’ debt averages \$19,118.

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Boone County legislators discuss their plans for 2012 General Assembly

By Kile Brewer

January 4, 2012 | 6:31 p.m. CST

JEFFERSON CITY — It was the Wednesday after the first Monday in January, and the Missouri Capitol Building was abuzz with the sound of legislators back at work and political discussions under way.

With the start of the Missouri General Assembly, Boone County legislators have plans for 2012. The state's budget tops the priority list of most of the delegation.

Chris Kelly

In support of higher education, Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, wants to implement capital improvement bonds to provide more funding to colleges throughout the state.

Kelly will also support legislation that would give the nonvoting student curator a vote on the UM System Board of Curators.

Mary Still

State Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, said that she will be supporting the Main Street Fairness Act, which has been co-sponsored by Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Missouri, in the U.S. Senate. It would allow states to impose the state sales tax on Internet purchases, generating an estimated \$23 billion on the national level that now goes uncollected.

She will also be fighting to reduce interest rates on payday loans, which now have an average interest rate of 450 percent. Still hopes to propose legislation that would reduce the rate to 36 percent, the rate recommended by the FDIC.

She also hopes to raise the cigarette tax in Missouri, which would result in a 70-cent increase. Another goal is to put a cap on campaign contributions to limit the "influence of the wealthy special interest."

Payday loan interest reform and the increase in cigarette taxes are issues Still has been pushing for the last couple of years.

Paul Quinn

State Rep. Paul Quinn, D-Monroe City, whose district includes a section of northern Boone County, is focusing on the state budget.

He sees the possibility of dipping into the state's Rainy Day Fund because projections for the budget is \$450 million to \$500 million short. He will be looking at the overall financial situation of the state of Missouri, specifically where to make the cuts.

Quinn said he would also support looking into the possibility of changing the current school funding formula, which he said leads to bigger schools getting more money and hurts smaller schools.

He also said he would support Still's payday loan legislation.

John Cauthorn

"Maybe it'll be a better year," said State Rep. John Cauthorn, R-Mexico. Cauthorn, like most Missouri legislators, said he would focus on the state budget.

He said he would also work to increase the punishments for thefts of gasoline and scrap metal from farms. Cauthorn said he wants the punishment for gas theft to be the same as for a theft from a filling station, which includes losing one's driver's license for a year.

Cauthorn will also back legislation that would support veterans through a one-eighth percent sales tax.

He also wants to work toward getting the Missouri Blue Book back in print this year. The book was taken out of print as a cost-cutting measure.

Stephen Webber

State Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia, did not return several phone calls.

Kurt Schaefer

State Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, will be working mostly on the state budget.

Aside from his committee work, Schaefer hopes to increase funding for both K-12 and higher education. He said the current formula needs to be tweaked because it hasn't been funded the way it was intended since 2008.

Schaefer has also pre-filed legislation to extend the food pantry tax credit.



Earmarks

A McCaskill dilemma

By Henry J. Waters III

As Sen. Claire McCaskill pursues her treacherous path to re-election, part of the minefield will be littered with allegations regarding the contentious issue of earmarks.

For the uninitiated, earmarks are items in general congressional appropriations bills solely under the control of individual members. Former Sen. Kit Bond used earmarks to spend millions of dollars on local projects, including projects bearing his name at the University of Missouri.

Although she has opposed earmarks ever since attaining office, McCaskill wisely refrained from opposing large appropriations measures including such funding. "I decided I was going to crusade against the process of earmarking, but I wasn't going to sit out my entire Senate career by refusing to vote on anything that had one," she said recently in answer to critics who accused her of hypocrisy.

As she began her argument against earmarking early in her first term, I gave similar advice in this column: Let her preach against the very practice, but as long as it exists, let her bring her share of the bacon.

Now a chorus of demagogic illogic rains down on the practice of earmarking, most of it fomented by challenging Republicans searching out every fault of former status quo politicians, including their own brand. But for the anti-earmark crowd, McCaskill will be a slippery target. She has co-sponsored a bill to outlaw the practice in the Senate.

Like all public funding decisions, earmarking sometimes deserves criticism. The poster error is the "bridge to nowhere" in Alaska, but for every such mistake, a flood of good outcomes can be found. Columbia officials tout earmarks as an important source of funding for local projects. Consider the advantages of the earmarking system.

To start with, earmarking involves a very small part of federal appropriations with no implication for the federal deficit.

Earmarking is the best way to funnel federal money wisely and efficiently to local projects. Funds can be allocated with minimal red tape for uses vetted directly with local officials and citizens, projects that can be well aimed and that never would survive if they had to be included in general appropriations.

Earmarking is a good way to do federal budgeting. Setting aside small amounts of money for locally determined projects does not change the overall amount of federal money spent. The idea that earmarked money will be put to superior use if sent to disappear in the general budget is a myth. Who knows where the money goes? All we know is the well-documented state and local spending is gone.

Lack of transparency was the best criticism of old-fashioned earmarks, and as the debate went forward everybody agreed. That was not enough to head off the flood of demagoguery outlawing earmarks. Now, instead of tweaking a superior system, opponents want to throw it out.

McCaskill will run her campaign on a well-founded argument that she has been a watchdog over government spending. This will mean nothing to determined opponents who believe the only way to save the nation is to throw out Democratic incumbents.

Students of Missouri's current political demographic think this certain bloc of opposition amounts to about 45 percent of likely November voters, and McCaskill has about the same percentage of built-in support.

The remaining 10 percent represents enough undecided voters to swing the election. Presumably they will be moved largely by whom the Republicans nominate. Sadly, none of these potential candidates stakes out middle ground. It will be interesting to see whether McCaskill's opponent thinks the winning strategy is to soften or continue to harden right-wing positions. Given Missouri's recent migration away from the center, I don't know what advice I'd give.

HJW III

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Missouri Legislature opens with no-tax-hike pledges

BY VIRGINIA YOUNG • vyoung@post-dispatch.com > 573-635-6178 | Posted: Thursday, January 5, 2012 6:00 am

No MU mention

JEFFERSON CITY • Missouri's top Republican lawmakers pledged Wednesday to use their final legislative session to pass an austere state budget and provide innovative alternatives for schoolchildren in failing urban districts.

Their speeches, however, lacked any details on how they'll accomplish those goals. And while they promised to set aside past feuds and cooperate, their priorities embraced several divisive issues, such as furthering school choice, giving employers more clout in civil lawsuits and passing a state constitutional spending lid.

"We've got an aggressive agenda," said House Speaker Steve Tilley, R-Perryville.

Tilley and Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, are both serving their final year because of term limits.

The state faces a budget shortfall of \$425 million to \$500 million, mainly because Missouri used federal stimulus money to balance the \$7.3 billion general fund and that source of revenue is ending.

Tilley and Mayer pledged to balance the budget without raising taxes. While the state has the lowest cigarette tax in the nation, legislators won't look at increasing it, Mayer told reporters.

"Now's not the time to be talking about increasing the tax burden on any segment of our society," he said.

The Senate's Democratic leader agreed. Sen. Victor Callahan, D-Independence, said legislators must rein in state tax credits that go to developers before considering any tax increases.

However, Republican House and Senate members deadlocked on a tax credit overhaul last fall, and no consensus has yet emerged. So that issue — which included a potential subsidy for a China trade hub in St. Louis — won't command attention this year, the GOP leaders said.

Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, will lay out his budget plan in his State of the State speech on Jan. 17.

Even if the state meets its projections for 3.9 percent growth in revenue during the budget year that begins July 1, legislators still must make deep cuts to stay out of the red.

"I just think it's cut, cut, cut," said veteran lobbyist Samuel Lee, who hopes to protect \$1.5 million that goes toward alternatives for abortion. "Everybody is going to be saying: 'Cut anybody else but me.'"

While the talk Wednesday focused on working together, that could prove difficult because of election year politics, especially because redistricting maps threw dozens of legislators into districts with fellow incumbents.

All 163 House members and half of senators are up for election in November. So are the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer and attorney general.

Because of term limits, nine senators won't be back next year, Mayer noted. That makes it tough to form coalitions, he said, because outgoing legislators are focused on what they'll be doing next.

Lobbyist Terry Schlemeier, who represents the city of Columbia, AmerenUE and several other businesses, said term-limited legislators don't have an incentive to tackle the tough problems.

"It's like when you're leaving your house. Why do you want to go clean up the toilet?" Schlemeier said.

Senate Majority Leader Tom Dempsey, R-St. Charles, acknowledged that Republicans "do have some stress and strain on particular issues, but that's because they're difficult issues. I believe it's going to be a productive session."

The GOP hopes to start the session on a unified note by passing several business-backed bills that would revamp the state workers' compensation system and reduce civil lawsuit costs for employers.

Of that effort, House Minority Leader Mike Talbot, D-Kansas City, said, "We need to make sure we don't become anti-worker, which means you have less money to buy goods, which then doesn't create as many jobs."

While Republicans have huge majorities in the Legislature, the GOP is split on many issues.

Education policy is one example. All agree on the need to fix the school aid formula, which distributes money to the state's 525 public school districts.

But Tilley said the House will demand other changes as well, such as tuition tax credits and expansion of charter schools.

Senators said they are working on a plan for unaccredited Kansas City schools that would allow surrounding school districts to take over parts of the Kansas City School District.

A solution for St. Louis Public Schools is "not as far along," Mayer said, but options — such as letting other groups or districts contract to handle some of the district's students — are being developed.

Current law allows students in failing districts to transfer to bordering suburban schools at the home district's expense, but that law is tied up in court.

The transfer law's critics say it would bankrupt urban schools and overcrowd outlying ones. Tilley emphasized that fixing the law would be tied to passage of school choice legislation.

"The edu-crats who just say no to everything keep saying no," Tilley said. "This may present a window" where school choice bills have leverage, he said.

The House also will push a spending lid, which would cap the amount of money appropriated for state programs by tying the total amount spent to inflation and population growth. If tax collections brought in more money, some of the excess could be stockpiled in reserve funds.

Opponents have said that such a move would lock in recent budget cuts and that Missouri already is a low-tax state that doesn't need more fiscal handcuffs.

But Tilley noted that Republicans hold a historic 106-56-1 majority in the House.

"Part of the reason is, we don't go crazy spending money," he said.

The four newest legislators will be sworn in on Jan. 10. They include the lone independent, Rep.-elect Tracy McCreery of Olivette, who broke from the Democratic Party to seek the seat when she wasn't picked as the special election nominee by the district's party committee.

McCreery said Wednesday that while she plans to keep her independent status, she will caucus with the Democrats. Her dispute with the party "was more of a political rules kind of thing rather than issues," said McCreery, who noted that she has worked for several prominent Democrats.

The four new House members — who include Republican Chrissy Sommer of St. Charles — decided to wait until Jan. 10 to be sworn in. Sitting out a week allows them to serve less than a year of the unexpired terms they are filling. That way, this year won't count toward the four-term limit.

Study finds drunken people aware of poor decisions

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A new study says that people who commit blunders while under the influence of alcohol know they're doing it; they just don't care.

This means buzzed or drunken people who engage in embarrassing or harmful behaviour can't blame it on not having control, said researcher Bruce Bartholow, associate professor of psychology at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

While this isn't the first study that shows alcohol alters the behaviour of those who consume it, "it's the first to show they don't care that they're making mistakes," said Bartholow, chief researcher on the study.

Brain tests during the study of 67 people in Columbia, Mo., showed that alcohol dulls a mechanism in the brain that tells an individual to put on the brakes when they realize they're making mistakes.

When the mechanism is working, "They slow down and try not to make the mistake again, or they take corrective action," Bartholow said.

Introduce alcohol and someone is more likely to disregard the moral stop sign, he said, even though they know what they're doing.

The study involved people between the ages of 21 and 35, students and nonstudents.

- Researchers gave a third of the participants drinks with enough alcohol to raise their blood levels to just under the legal driving limit of .08 per cent, Bartholow said. They all got the same amount so researchers didn't measure if the effect was gradual.
- Researchers gave a third of the participants placebo drinks; they didn't know if the drinks contained alcohol.
- A third consumed drinks they knew contained no alcohol.

Then, the groups were given tasks designed to elicit mistakes. Researchers measured changes in participants' mood, their accuracy in computer tasks and how they perceived their accuracy in the tasks.

Bartholow said the researchers used devices on the participants to measure brain activity as the subjects took the tests. Medical technology exists to measure brain activity for impulse control, emotion, mood and other functions.

Non-drinkers had normal activity in the part of the brain that regulated recognizing mistakes. Drinkers had less activity, he said.

Non-drinkers who made mistakes slowed down and tried to correct the errors, he said. Drinkers made less of an effort or simply moved past their errors, the researcher said, even though they knew they'd made errors.

Researchers also interviewed participants after the tests, which helped affirm the findings in the computer tests, he said.

The dulling of the brain's mistake alarm only occurred among people who had alcoholic beverages, he said.

"Normally, someone who makes mistakes is aware and makes an effort not to make that mistake again," Bartholow said. The people in the alcohol group were less likely, however, to slow down and be more careful, but they realized they had made errors.

"Using alcohol doesn't allow someone to escape culpability," he said.

Dr. Douglas Schuerer, a trauma surgeon with Barnes-Jewish Hospital, said the findings aren't a surprise. "This says that people should think before they drink," he said.

That advice goes beyond New Year's Eve and its tradition of drinking: "It's something that needs to be considered 365," he said.

Many of Schuerer's patients are people from the hospital's emergency room who need surgery.

"About 50 per cent of patients we see from traffic accidents, alcohol was involved," he said. "That doesn't always mean they were drinking; sometimes they were hit by a drunk driver."

In addition, he said he sees more personal injury accidents involving people impaired by alcohol.

The findings have a flip side, Bartholow said. A small amount of alcohol may help people with anxiety disorders or those who are hypersensitive to making errors, Bartholow said.

But he warns that "consistently drinking as a way to reduce anxiety can lead to serious problems, including alcoholism."

Bartholow's study, *Alcohol Effects on Performance Monitoring and Adjustment: Affect Modulation and Impairment of Evaluative Cognitive Control*, has been accepted for publication in an upcoming edition of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the University of Missouri Research Board paid for the study.



Stinky bug finds its way into state

Aggressive pests get into homes.

By Janes Silvey

Wednesday, January 4, 2012

A smelly and more menacing variety of stink bug is finding its way into Missouri and could cause problems for homeowners, gardeners and farmers, a University of Missouri entomologist warns.

The brown marmorated stink bug has been spotted in Kansas and Illinois, and last year, dead specimens were found in a stored travel trailer in Columbia, said Wayne Bailey, an associate professor in MU's plant sciences division.

"They hitchhike on a lot of different products," he said. "They're around us, and I think we will have them soon."

Missouri already is home to a variety of stink bugs — they're the small brown bugs that have a shield-shaped exterior — but this particular kind is more aggressive than most. And unlike its peers, the brown marmorated stink bug likes to hang out in houses. Bailey suspects that homeowners will be the first to notice their arrival.

"Usually the first indication that we have them is that homeowners will say they have a stink bug in the house that smells bad," he said. "It takes two to three years before they become a problem."

Once they're here, though, they could make the annual invasion of Asian ladybugs "look like pets," Bailey said.

They don't bite or cause damage to buildings, but they are a nuisance. The bugs enter homes in large numbers seeking warm shelter during cold months. Those who spot them in their house should resist the urge to smash one.

"The smell is very repulsive," Bailey said, describing it as a strong musky odor. "If you bother them, they signal each other chemically and release a deterrent at the same time. Most people have to leave the room for at least an hour."

He recommends vacuuming them up and taking the bag outdoors.

Brown marmorated stink bugs are native to Asia and were introduced to the United States in the mid-1990s likely through a shipping container, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. They've been found in 36 states, including Pennsylvania, where the insect is considered a significant agricultural pest that causes severe losses in apple and peach orchards.

Penn State University this past spring launched an online tracking system to better monitor their habits. Through the mapping tools at stinkbug-info.org, researchers are finding that the bugs tend to flock to homes near agricultural enterprises, said Douglas Miller, an associate professor of geography at Penn State.

"The other piece to this is that homeowners who have gardens are also at risk," he said.

Miller said researchers still are trying to figure out which vegetables the bugs prefer, say lettuce over tomatoes, to help them better determine where they'll show up.

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Invasive stink bug is expected to travel to Missouri this year

By Lauren Schad

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COLUMBIA — A new species of stink bug is crawling closer to Missouri's borders, and this one stinks worse than the ones already here.

The brown marmorated stink bug, or "Halyomorpha halys," has been making its way across the U.S. for the past several years, damaging fruit and vegetable crops and finding its way into homes along the way.

MU Extension has been monitoring its progress and keeping an eye on when it will cross into Missouri. The concern is that this species of stink bug causes more damage than native species and is hard to control, said Pat Miller, an agronomy specialist with MU Extension.

"They have no natural controls to help moderate the numbers," Miller said.

MU entomologist Wayne Bailey said this stink bug packs a more potent olfactory punch — a "musty and repulsive" odor.

"It's made to smell bad, and it does," he said.

The stink bug gets its name from one of its defense mechanisms. When a stink bug feels threatened, it releases a chemical through its abdomen. And the feeling is contagious.

"When one goes off, they all go off," Bailey said.

Miller, who also mentioned its greater stink factor, said the invasive stink bugs hitchhike on produce. They also feed on fruits and vegetables, as well as field crops such as corn and soybeans, more so than their native cousins.

Bailey said the stink bugs target the pods of soybean plants, causing the beans to shrivel up. The bugs have the same effect on ears of sweet corn.

"We are vigilant because it's such a good hitchhiker," Bailey said.

This stink bug came from southeast Asia and is thought to have been brought over on shipping crates.

Bailey said he expects it will enter Missouri on firewood or pallets of plants. There have been two confirmed locations of live stink bugs in Illinois and one in Iowa, he said. Given that they are in neighboring states, Bailey expects Missouri will have "low-level" populations of them in the next several years.

Nine dead brown marmorated stink bugs were found in a travel trailer in Columbia this past spring, Bailey said. A couple had brought the trailer back from the East Coast during the winter, and the Missouri cold killed the stink bugs.

Bailey said these bugs might be noticed first by homeowners instead of by farmers looking through their crops. Brown marmorated stink bugs behave like Asian lady beetles trying to find someplace warm to live during the winter months. Infestations often occur when the insects live in a garden or orchard near a house and then come inside for the winter.

Bailey said the bugs often like houses with wood siding and those that use wood heat. The insects have an aggregation pheromone, and when one stink bug finds a nice, warm spot to hibernate for the winter, it lets out the pheromone inviting other stink bugs to join it.

The bugs won't harm homes as they do crops, but they will stink up the joint if bothered. The smell is sometimes potent enough to require vacating the room, Bailey said.

An adult brown marmorated stink bug is roughly the size of a dime. It can be identified by its shield-shaped shell and is differentiated from other stink bugs by white markings on its antennae, legs and stomach.

The stink bug produces one generation of offspring each year in mild temperatures. In tropical climates, it can produce as many as six generations in a year. The eggs are laid from May to August, and adults appear in the spring after going through five stages of molt.

The first brown marmorated stink bugs were collected in 1998 in Allentown, Pa., according to the National Invasive Species Information Center.

As of February 2011, this bug has been identified in 36 states and in Washington, D.C., according to an Environmental Protection Agency report.

Bailey said he thinks eventually a DNA test will be done on the bugs to find out where they came from.

He said brown marmorated stink bugs are relatively difficult to kill because of their piercing and sucking mouths. Most insecticides only kill pests with chewing mouths because the bugs chew and digest the plants that have been sprayed.

An effective method hasn't been developed yet to eliminate the population of the bug. Bailey said remedies being researched include covering the plants with a netting that the bugs cannot permeate and using insecticides previously taken off the market.

Missouri is not currently doing testing to eliminate the stink bugs because live samples haven't been found in the state. Bailey said he hopes someone finds a solution before large populations take up residence.

Miller said if people find the stink bugs, they should contact their local Extension office or the state entomologist office in Jefferson City, 573-751-5505, as soon as possible.