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MU considers NSEI feedback

Nuclear program is facing overhaul.

By JANESE SILVEY

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Dismantling the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute on the University of Missouri campus is part of a bigger plan to ultimately improve the field of study, Provost Brian Foster said.

But after hearing from students, Foster acknowledged there could be some immediate consequences of pulling the plug on NSEI. There will be "some tweaks in the implementation of all of this," he said, declining to provide details.

Graduate School Dean George Justice announced March 12 that NSEI would close in four days as part of a Graduate School reorganization. The plan is to create a new graduate-level nuclear science program. Justice spent an hour last week telling students they won't be affected by the changes, but many were still concerned.

Foster "did not do that," graduate student Jenny Schutte said. "He seemed like he was listening. ... I do feel like — and maybe I'm being overly optimistic — we're raising some eyebrows. We are getting some people thinking about the nuts and bolts of this."

One immediate change was the disappearance of NSEI's website, which included faculty and student profiles, course information and other resources. There is no interim website providing that information, Schutte said.

Students also are worried about the future of grant funding awarded to NSEI. Justice has said faculty members can still apply for grant funding, but an outside expert agreed that closing NSEI could affect future funding.

Dale Klein, former chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, has a nuclear engineering degree from MU and is associate vice chancellor for research at the University of Texas system. He said MU will still be accountable for obligations of current NSEI grants but that closing NSEI would affect whether those grants get renewed.

Klein said he saw it as "unfortunate" that faculty members are in this situation. "The reputations of the faculty members are high, and I'm sure this is a distraction from what they typically want to do — which is teaching and research. I hope it gets resolved in a timely manner."

Alumni aren't the only outsiders paying attention. Tracey Boraas, a Minnesota mom with a son pursuing a master's degree in nuclear engineering, said she sent a letter to Gov. Jay Nixon expressing her concerns.

Having the NSEI entity, she said, was the reason her son chose MU over other programs. "He had many options," she said. "It came down to the NSEI community. That was key."

Once an out-of-state cheerleader for MU, Boraas said the decision to dismantle NSEI in the middle of her son's career reflects poorly on the university, where her two younger sons were considering undergraduate degrees.

"If things fall apart and they continue on this path, we will direct them somewhere else, without question," Boraas said. "The integrity issue is big for us, our family and friends. It doesn't look like a fair deal. I cannot encourage anyone to go into that kind of environment."

Foster was expected to meet with the four core NSEI faculty members this afternoon.



MU researchers develop way to double cartilage storage time

By JANESE SILVEY

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

University of Missouri researchers have developed a way to store cartilage for longer periods of time than current methods — good news for those suffering from knee, elbow or other joint injuries and for the university's future licensing income.

Right now, cartilage can be stored for as long as 28 days before it becomes too degraded to transplant. A team led by MU researcher James Cook has developed a system that lets cartilage be stored for as long as 63 days.

Timing is critical when it comes to cartilage grafting, an FDA-approved practice that uses cartilage taken from deceased donors to patch joints that have partial tissue loss.

The cartilage doesn't have to match a recipient's blood type, but it must be the right size, said Cook, a researcher in MU's College of Veterinary Medicine and a professor of orthopedic surgery.

Those needing cartilage have to wait until a match is found. It takes another two weeks to test the tissues for bacteria and diseases.

Aaron Stoker, a researcher in MU's Comparative Orthopaedic Laboratory, knows firsthand how longer storage capabilities will help patients. He had a knee injury that made it difficult to run or even walk.

When Stoker opted for a graft surgery, he waited three months before a match was found. By the time it went through the proper testing, the tissue was almost too old to use.

"It was almost beyond the time frame I was willing to use the graft," he said. "Even then, I don't know for sure how viable the graft was."

The new patented storage system — made of a special formula and container — includes a test to make sure the tissue is in good shape before the operation.

Cook has been using the storage method for about five years in veterinary medicine and said it has proved successful.

"I feel very comfortable with the safety and am anxious to get it into the human world and help the two-leggers, too," he said.

The university is working on striking a licensing deal with a major tissue bank, Cook said. Once an agreement is made, he expects to turn over the recipe to let the company manufacture it, paying royalties to the university.

The new storage system could be in use within a year.



House plan prevents higher ed cuts

By RUDI KELLER

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

JEFFERSON CITY — Spending on state colleges and universities escaped cuts in the House budget plan for the first time in three years as the lower chamber finished work on a \$24 billion spending plan for state operations.

The University of Missouri would receive \$397.9 million in the coming year, which would represent an increase of more than \$4 million over this year's funding level. The university is slated to receive the extra money to make up for cuts imposed by Gov. Jay Nixon last year as punishment for tuition increases he deemed excessive.

Nixon had proposed cutting \$66 million from colleges and universities, but lawmakers refused to go along. They had agreed to cuts in each of the past two budget years as the state struggled with revenues shrunken by a deep economic slump.

The House found much of the money to restore Nixon's proposed cuts by eliminating a \$28 million program that provided health care for 2,858 people receiving stipends from the Blind Pension Fund.

House Budget Committee Chairman Ryan Silvey, R-Kansas City, said the program should be eliminated because it provides benefits that are not available to other disabled Missourians. Those receiving the medical coverage have incomes that exceed \$9,495 annually for a single person, the maximum income for Medicaid eligibility among the disabled.

"Who in this room would file the bill to spend \$30 million and create this program today?" Silvey said.

Rep. Terry Swinger, D-Caruthersville and an optometrist, said his experience showed that blind people have great difficulty finding private health care coverage. He criticized the decision to end the program. It is wrong to take away the decades-old benefit, he said.

"I hope" the Senate "will have the vision to restore this health care coverage to the blind," he said. "There are many many reasons to do it, and I hope we concur on this side. I can't vote for it until I get the medical coverage in for those who can't see."

Nixon had made several public appearances calling on the House to preserve the medical program, but Silvey said Nixon had done nothing to persuade him to change his mind or help the House reach its goal of preserving education at current funding levels.

“He is fighting us to cut education,” Silvey said.

The appropriations, in 13 spending bills, were approved in a series of voice votes after more than six hours of debate. Formal roll call votes will be held Thursday to send the budget to the Senate.

House budget proposal comes with no higher ed cuts

NO MU Mention

By Jordan Shapiro/Missouri Digital News

March 20, 2012 | 10:40 p.m. CDT

JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri's House gave initial approval to the state's \$24 billion operating budget Tuesday with level funding for higher education and cuts to health care for people who are blind.

House Budget Committee Chairman Rep. Ryan Silvey, R-Kansas City, said the House should be proud of the budget they passed.

"We have produced another balanced budget for the state of Missouri," Silvey said.

Missouri started the budget process with a \$500 million shortfall from last year because of the expiration of federal stimulus funds and a decrease in the federal government's reimbursement rate for Medicaid costs.

The cuts left some Democrats calling for more revenue as the budget was debated.

Rep. Sara Lampe, D-Springfield, said this budget reflected a choice between higher education and social services programs caused by a reluctance to raise taxes.

"We are making false choices because we have not addressed the revenue stream," Lampe said.

Silvey said the House did the best they could with a certain amount of money.

"A lot of people in this chamber wish we had more money, but the fact of the matter is that we don't ... we have to deal with the now," Silvey said.

Gov. Jay Nixon originally proposed a 15 percent cut to public universities from the last fiscal year in his budget plan. The House was able to reverse those cuts

with money from a national mortgage settlement, an action Nixon proposed, and cuts to state welfare programs.

One of the major cuts used to boost higher education came from a program called the Supplemental Aid to the Blind. The program pays the health expenses for 2,800 people who are blind and make too much money to qualify for Medicaid. Blindness is the only condition to have such a fund. The program costs \$28 million per year, or \$10,000 per person.

Democrats made one attempt to restore money to the program for the blind. Lampe offered an amendment to take \$2 million away from a program to drug test welfare recipients and put those funds into the program to help the blind.

In 2011, Nixon signed a bill requiring Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients to take a drug test if they were suspected of using controlled substances by a social worker.

"This is our opportunity as a body to turn around somewhat on the cuts to the blind," said Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia.

The amendment was defeated with a bipartisan vote. Silvey said the people in the program for the blind would now be treated like any other person with a disability and would still receive an additional \$700 a month from the Blind Pension Fund, which is paid for with the only statewide property tax.

While the House gave initial approval to the budget with the cuts to the program for the blind, Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, said the Senate does not approve of cutting funds for the program. Nixon also has publicly campaigned against the cuts and released a statement calling the program's elimination "just plain wrong."

Silvey said the governor's rhetoric on the cuts to the program for the blind were "inflammatory" and said the effects of eliminating the program have been "wildly exaggerated."

Silvey and Kelly added at least \$6 million in another fund that provides services to the blind during the budget committee mark-up process. Some of those funds are contingent on the passage of a bill eliminating a sales tax exemption for newspapers.

Democrats also offered an amendment to allow the Department of Social Services to accept a \$50 million grant to upgrade the state's computer system to determine Medicaid eligibility. Silvey said this amendment was an effort to "pave the way" for the implementation of the

federal health care in Missouri by upgrading computers to accommodate a health insurance exchange.

"This would enact Obamacare through the back door and call it a computer upgrade," Silvey said.

Kelly supported the amendment and said this was the "greatest tragedy we are not doing this year." He said there is nothing in the grant's regulation that requires the state to set up a health exchange, which allows people to compare prices of different insurance providers. The exchange is mandated in the federal health care law's Affordable Care Act.

The amendment to accept the grant upgrading the computer system failed by a vote of 92 to 58, along mostly party lines.

The \$24 billion total for Missouri's fiscal year 2013 budget is \$1 billion more than the fiscal 2012 budget. This number, however, does not reflect an increase in state spending. Silvey and the House Budget Committee removed most of the "estimated" appropriations from the budget and inserted more accurate numbers of government spending.

"It increases transparency for what we were already spending," Silvey said.

In previous years the estimated figures, usually used for federal grant money, only accounted for \$1 in the state's total budget. Now, those numbers reflect the actual amount of money the state department spends, leading to the appearance of a \$1 billion total increase.

The budget needs one more vote in the House before it is considered by the Senate. The budget must be sent to the governor's desk by May 11.

Scientists working on meat-mimicking foods to tempt carnivores

By *JEREMY BERNFELD*

Harvest Public Media

When Bob Sholar sits down for Easter dinner, he might stick his fork into a nice ham. But that's only because it's a special meal.

"We don't go out of our way to eat meat," Sholar said.

The Parkville resident considers himself a "flexitarian," part of a growing cadre of consumers cutting back on meat in their diets — even if just a little.

Flexitarians — health conscious and mostly younger consumers — are drawing the attention of the food industry, which is developing new meat-mimicking products. One of the latest innovations is soy chicken from the research laboratories at the University of Missouri.

The market potential is huge. Only 2 to 3 percent of Americans consider themselves vegetarians, but 4 percent of American eaters aged 18 to 29 choose to eat a meatless meal at least once a week, according to market research firm Innova Insights.

The Vegetarian Research Group, meanwhile, estimates that 13 percent of Americans over 20 eat meat with fewer than half of their meals, and 25 percent say they are "working to eat less meat."

For Sholar, the driving force was concern about cholesterol. Though the change wasn't easy here in barbecue country, after seven years living the flexitarian life, he's pretty used to it.

"Sometimes you're looking to make something taste a bit like meat, a lot of times you're not. You're just realizing you just don't eat meat," Sholar said.

High-end supermarket chain Whole Foods is seeing more demand for meals that aren't based around meat, according to Sarah Morgan, a healthy eating specialist for the Rocky Mountain region of Whole Foods.

"A lot of our customers tell us that they're looking for some alternatives, and they're looking for new ways to think, instead of this standard American diet that's very animal-protein focused," Morgan said.

Many of those customers haven't had to live without the foods they grew up eating.

Enter the new Holy Grail for some food companies: vegetarian foods that replicate the carnivore's food experience so they don't feel that they're sacrificing while giving up meat.

Longtime vegetarian options such as Boca Burgers and Tofurky now tout their "flame grilled" taste and a new, juicier faux frankfurter. And even in the heart of the meat and potatoes Midwest, food scientists are all over the trend.

Fu-Hung Hsieh, a professor at MU, and his research scientist colleague Harold Huff have worked for years to develop a plant product that mimics real chicken.

They recently settled on a soy-based strip that they're hoping to convince consumers is just like any old chicken strip you'd find in your supermarket's refrigerated section.

"The trick is the fine-ness of the fiber," Huff said. "The mouth-feel and appearance in a product is sometimes just as important as the taste. If it looks bad, people do not want to eat it. If you can make it look like something they've already accepted, you've got a winner."

Flexitarians just won't flock to rubbery meat forgeries.

"That's why you're seeing people focus on replicating meat," said Ethan Brown, president and chief executive officer of Maryland food production company Savage River Farms. The company is working with the University of Missouri and hopes to bring the veggie chicken product to market beginning next month.

"Initially, we're going to be selling through wholesale channels, just to get some initial product out in the market," Brown said.

He expects the strips to be incorporated into Whole Foods' prepared foods section and said he is looking for large accounts like hospitals and universities.

The soy chicken strips come refrigerated, like a Purdue chicken strip. They're not available in grocery stores just yet, but Brown said he hoped get them on store shelves by the end of the year.

Humans have eaten meat for thousands of years, Brown said, so there's no reason to throw out that accumulated knowledge, even if you're trying to be more of a vegetarian.

“Why not create something from plants that mimics the taste, texture and appearance of meat to allow us the terrific culture and recipes, etc., that we’ve so come to enjoy?” Brown said.

Even with the product’s launch imminent, Brown is having trouble settling on a name for the veggie strips. On the one hand, he wants it made clear they are fully vegan. On the other, he wants to attract meat eaters.

Sholar, the flexitarian in Parkville, said he’s skeptical that any vegetarian product can truly have the taste, feel and look of meat.

But like any good Midwesterner, he wouldn’t mind if they kept trying.

“Barbecue — you just can’t find a replacement for barbecue,” Sholar said, longingly. “You can put barbecue sauce on lots of things, but you haven’t replaced the barbecue, so that’s a tough one. If they can come up with a good barbecue sandwich, then I think that’ll sell.”

Half a slab of soy ribs? Maybe one day.

Jeremy Bernfeld reports for Harvest Public Media, an agriculture reporting collaboration of six Midwest public broadcasting stations, including KCUR in Kansas City. Harvest is supported through a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Go to Harvestpublicmedia.org for more information.

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Video games scrutinized, new bill seeks "violent" warning labels

A new bill has been submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives that will require most video games to include a warning label that states: "WARNING: Exposure to violent video games has been linked to aggressive behavior."

Introduced by Rep. Joe Baca and Rep. Frank Wolf, H.R. 4204 would require any game rated "E" (Everyone), "Everyone 10+" (Everyone 10 and older), "T" (Teen), "M" (Mature) or "A" (Adult) by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB). That only leaves games rated with "EC" (Early Childhood) unaffected by the bill.

If passed, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) would have 180 days to make sure that the ESRB include the new labels on games - violent or not.

"The video game industry has a responsibility to parents, families and to consumers - to inform them of the potentially damaging content that is often found in their products," Baca told The Hill. "They have repeatedly failed to live up to this responsibility."

Violence in video games has been a contentious issue for decades. Video game opponents attribute aggressive behavior to exposure to violent games. On the other hand, not all games are violent and studies have shown they can improve cognitive skills.

A recent study published in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology concluded violent video games desensitized players to violent imagery. Further testing showed that subjects who played games like "Killzone" or "Grand Theft Auto" showed more aggressive behavior against opponents.

"A single exposure to a violent video game won't turn someone into a mass murderer," Dr. Bartholow, associate professor of psychology at the University of Missouri, told CBS News. "But if someone has repeatedly exposed themselves, these kinds of effects in the short term can turn into long-term changes."

On the flip side, there have also been studies that video games can improve cognitive skills. Daphne Bavelier, professor of brain and cognitive sciences at the University of Rochester, discussed the conclusion of 20 studies conducted on the topic with the National Public Radio show "Morning Edition" in 2010.

"Her studies show that video gamers show improved skills in vision, attention and certain aspects of cognition," said "Morning Edition" correspondent Michelle Trudeau. "And these skills are not

just gaming skills, but real-world skills. They perform better than non-gamers on certain tests of attention, speed, accuracy, vision and multitasking."

Pew: Tablets increase news consumption, not necessarily profits

MU mention page 2

By **DAVID BAUDER**

Mobile technology appears to be increasing the public appetite for news but it's far from clear whether the news industry will profit from that, a study issued Monday concluded.

The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, in its annual state of the news media report, found encouraging signs within the 27 percent of Americans who say they get news on their smartphones or tablets.

These consumers are likely to seek out traditional news sites or applications, strengthening their bond with old newspaper or television news organizations. People with tablets tend to read longer articles and spend more time with news sites than they do on phones or desktop computers, said Tom Rosenstiel, Project for Excellence in Journalism director.

Many people already make it a habit to check their tablets before going to bed to see what is going to be in a newspaper the next day, he said.

Unique visits to online news sites jumped 17 percent from 2010 to 2011, similar to the increase from the year before, the report said.

"The demand for conventional journalism endures and in some ways is even growing," Rosenstiel said. "There were many people that didn't predict that. The content is still coming from traditional news companies."

Yet technology companies, rather than news companies, are better set up to take advantage of online revenue opportunities. The report found that five companies – Microsoft, Google, Facebook, AOL and Yahoo! – generated 68 percent of digital ad revenue in 2011.

News companies are generally not as able to provide the specific consumer information that digital advertisers seek, and they certainly have not been as aggressive in this area as the technology companies, said media critic Jeff Jarvis, who writes the Buzzmachine.com blog.

Jarvis also criticizes news organizations for not being more creative with their websites and applications, and not encouraging users to link information.

“I fear the iPad is a siren call to news organizations, seducing them into thinking they can maintain their old models and old controls, not just maintain but regain them,” he said.

For news organizations, “there’s a lot of work that needs to be done,” said Roger Fidler, program director at the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri. “But it needs to be done very quickly.”

Rosenstiel noted the trend of technology companies working with news organizations on new ventures announced within the past year: Yahoo! reaching a deal to stream ABC News reports; YouTube launching original programming channels, including one operated by the news service Thomson Reuters; The Washington Post developing a news aggregator, Trove.com, available through Facebook.

The Associated Press has begun providing some of its election coverage to the popular tablet app Flipboard, entered into a partnership with WhoSay.com over use of celebrity photos and also worked with Twitter on release of Nevada Republican caucus results.

The PEJ report noted how social media is increasingly driving news, through people who pass along recommendations to read articles to their friends through Facebook and Twitter. Still, only 9 percent of adults say they follow such recommendations regularly, compared to 36 percent who say they go directly to a news organization’s app.

Most media sectors saw audience growth in 2011, with the exception of newspapers, the report said. The television network news audience grew for the first time in a decade and local stations also saw news growth in the late evening and early morning, the PEJ said.

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COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Police urge Columbia residents to prevent spring break burglaries

By Karee Hackel

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COLUMBIA — As residents leave for spring break, Columbia police remind them to take precautions, as extended absences create a greater risk of burglary.

According to a previous Missourian article, spring break burglaries during MU's spring break in 2011 totaled 16 — one more than 2010. Much like in previous years, the Police Department has plans to deploy additional resources during spring break.

Preventing burglaries and break-ins includes the use of:

- Uniformed and plainclothes personnel
- Marked and unmarked police vehicles
- Additional targeted neighborhood patrol in areas identified as higher targets

Citizens are encouraged to be attentive in their neighborhoods and advise police of any suspicious activity, vehicles or people. When contacting police, it is helpful to include:

- Descriptions
- License plate numbers
- Last locations observed

The Police Department urges residents to take the following precautions when leaving for a prolonged time period:

- Leave ample exterior/interior lights on, or use timers.
- Arrange for pickup of mail, newspapers and packages.
- Ensure all doors and windows are secure.
- Disable automatic garage doors.
- Travel with expensive items, such as laptops, cameras, televisions or jewelry.
- Give the residence the appearance that someone is home.