

KU looks to thin ranks of its teachers, offers hundreds of buyouts

By **MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS**

The Kansas City Star

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There soon may be fewer teachers for University of Kansas students such as those passing by the student union Tuesday in Lawrence. The university is offering buyouts to hundreds of its professors and staff members.

Public universities in Kansas and Missouri have spent a decade cutting costs, eliminating programs, leaving vacant positions unfilled and letting campus repairs pile up.

Now the University of Kansas is taking a step it's never taken before: Offering a buyout to 540 staff members and professors.

KU hopes the move will allow the university to focus on the goals of its five-year strategic plan, which include a greater emphasis on research.

KU has no idea how many people will accept the offer and isn't saying what its reduction target is. The university said it won't necessarily accept every application for a buyout.

"My prediction is the number eligible far exceeds the number who will take it, because we actually like our jobs," said Chris Crandall, a psychology professor and president-elect of KU's faculty senate. "Money is not the largest incentive for faculty members."

But, said Crandall, who at 52 is not eligible for the buyout, "a year's base salary is a very nice incentive for someone who may already be considering whether now is the time to leave."

KU Provost Jeff Vittner announced the buyout offer Monday afternoon in an email to university employees.

Eligible employees who accept the offer, and whose applications are approved by the university, would get a cash payment equal to one year's salary, up to \$100,000.

The KU buyout offer, which does not involve KU Medical Center faculty or the hospital staff, is the latest in efforts by universities facing cuts in state support and tighter budgets. Across the country, more schools are offering buyouts both to save money and to “refresh” their faculty, one national expert said.

Gerald Mikkelson, a KU professor for 45 years, did not view the announcement as good news for the university.

He predicted a decline in academic rigor with more students being taught by younger, less-experienced teachers who are not on track to be tenured.

“But the university gets by cheaper,” Mikkelson, 74, who teaches Russian, East European and Eurasian studies, said Tuesday on campus.

The university will be glad, he said, to get rid of older professors who are no longer considered vital.

Gavin Young, spokesman for KU’s provost, said the offer to more than 11 percent of the university’s more than 4,800 staff and faculty in Lawrence and Overland Park does not focus on any particular area or department.

“We just identified a pool of eligible employees,” he said. “They are spread across the campus from facilities and maintenance staff to tenured professors and administrators.”

To be eligible for the buyout, employees must be at least 62, or their age plus years on the job must total at least 85. They also must have at least 10 years of service at an institution governed by the Kansas Board of Regents, or in a Regents office.

Shrinking state support of public higher education has led colleges and universities across the country to cut spending and rethink the way they do business, and KU is no different, Young said.

“We need to prioritize our funding toward our aspirations and find ways to operate more efficiently,” he said.

Changing the way a university operates often results in a staff shakeup.

Young said KU’s buyout offer fits in with a strategic plan called “Changing for Excellence” (online at cfe.ku.edu) designed under Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little’s leadership as a five-year directional guide. Young said the plan makes research a priority and highlights areas that would help KU win recognition nationally and internationally.

Young said the offer would “give deans flexibility to prioritize and repurpose some faculty duties. And ultimately, it will result in a reduction in staff.”

Linda Lulli, associate vice president of human resources at Bryant University in Smithfield, R.I., said the recent trend is to offer buyouts to faculty around age 60. That solves both a financial problem (larger salaries) and encourages the retirement of older professors who aren’t comfortable with new teaching methods or aren’t keeping up with developments in their field.

Buyout offers like KU's have become very common in higher education, especially in public universities losing funding, said Lulli, who serves as a media source for the Society of Human Resource Management. She said she is seeing \$80,000 to \$100,000 maximums across the country.

Young said KU has put no cap on the number of applications it will accept.

"We want to be very careful to evaluate each application carefully on a case by case basis," he said. "We want the offer to be of benefit to the employee, but we also want it to be a benefit to KU. We have to be sure each application represents a positive move forward. Everyone who applies may not get it."

Employees can apply through May 15 and must leave the university between July 24 and Dec. 31.

KU is not the only major institution that has offered lump-sum payouts to reduce staff.

The University of Missouri offered an early retirement incentive program in the early 2000s. In addition, staff members have been laid off during the past 10 years, but not on a large scale, said Mary Jo Banken, university spokeswoman.

"When we have had to reduce employee numbers, we have often employed attrition to avoid people actually losing their jobs," Banken said.

She added that as far as she knows there has been no new talk of offering buyouts to faculty or staff.

In February, Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville announced the layoffs of 20 faculty members and staff effective July 1. The layoffs, part of a plan to realign university departments and reduce administrative overhead, came along with a downsizing from 19 to 11 academic departments.

Several faculty members, serving at the time as department leaders, moved to full-time teaching positions, and the number of adjunct instructors was reduced.

Kansas State University hasn't laid off any employees in at least five years and has no planned layoffs or buyouts in the near future, said Bruce Shubert, vice president for administration and finance.

The last move K-State made involving jobs was in 2009-2011 when vacant positions across campus were reviewed to determine which to fill, but no individual lost his or her position as a result, Shubert said.

"K-State did not fill a number of positions as they became vacant — some staff positions remain vacant," he said.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

State calls it quits on Imagine schools

Vote to close venues here will affect more than 3,500 students.

BY ELISA CROUCH • ecrouch@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8119 |

MU MENTION P. 2

JEFFERSON CITY • The Missouri Board of Education put underperforming charter schools statewide on notice Tuesday by voting to close all Imagine charter schools in St. Louis.

The move likely means more than 3,500 students in the city will be looking for new schools before fall. A transition office staffed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is being set up to help families through the process. A letter to every parent with a child at an Imagine school is to go out today informing them of options. And already, St. Louis Public Schools is determining how to take on the expected influx of children.

"The sole objective here is to make sure we transition the children successfully and that there's no break or interference in their education," Education Commissioner Chris Nicastro said after the vote.

The move follows months of increasing scrutiny of the schools' financial, leadership and academic problems. The schools are operated by Virginia-based Imagine Schools Inc., a for-profit charter school management company. Students enrolled at the schools make up about one-third of the city's charter school population.

State test results from 2011 showed that nearly all students at the city's Imagine schools were performing below grade level in reading and math, prompting St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay and Nicastro to call for the closure of the schools.

In December, their sponsor, Missouri Baptist University, announced it would close two of them — Imagine Academy of Academic Success and Imagine Academy of Cultural Arts — this spring, and place the other four on probation.

On Monday, Missouri Baptist University relinquished its sponsorship of the six charter schools, handing all regulatory authority over to the state. And one day later, the Board of Education voted to close them.

But even as the state moves toward shuttering all schools by June 30, some have discussed a long-shot option of keeping some version of the schools open.

St. Louis Superintendent Kelvin Adams said one such plan would have the district sponsor the schools without the involvement of Imagine Schools Inc.

"We have had some conversations with individuals," he said, "but nothing has been submitted to us."

Under the law, the schools could conceivably remain afloat so long as they have a state-approved sponsor.

Wayne Harvey, an attorney for the governing boards at the Imagine schools, said the boards plan to "move to acquire a new sponsor," he said. "There are ongoing negotiations with that now."

Tuesday marked the first time the Board of Education had taken such a step, signaling a growing intolerance by the state for charters that don't perform at least as well as their home school districts.

State school board member Michael Jones said the children at the Imagine schools "don't get these years back. We have a legal and moral imperative to act on their behalf."

Also on Tuesday, the state board voted to allow the University of Missouri-Columbia to sponsor Carondelet Leadership Academy on the city's south side. The school had been sponsored by Missouri Baptist but is not operated by Imagine.

Charter schools are public schools that operate independently of school districts. State law allows them only in St. Louis and Kansas City, though some Missouri legislators are pushing to allow them statewide.

The expected closures would mean that Imagine Schools, the largest charter school management company in the nation, will no longer have any charter schools in Missouri. Last summer, the governing board at Imagine Renaissance Academy in Kansas City severed its ties with Imagine and will close the school this year.

The state board's vote was "abrupt," said Ed Hayes, attorney for Imagine. "We've had school closings before, but nothing like this."

Officials from Imagine will be working with the state's transition office to get children into other schools, he said. The company is still responsible for paying rent on five of the six buildings it has been using. Imagine officials haven't ruled out legal action.

The vote by the seven-member board was taken without debate or public discussion. Imagine officials said they had hoped to show state educators the progress made at its St. Louis schools this year.

"The voices of over 2,500 St. Louis families who have chosen Imagine charter schools have been ignored," said Jason Bryant, executive vice president for Imagine, in a news statement.

Imagine has received criticism for spending millions of dollars in state money that came into the schools on rent and administrative costs, rather than on teachers, textbooks and other classroom support.

But they have remained popular with some parents. "I compare these academically to the Montessoris," said Beverly Jackson, the grandmother of a kindergartner at Imagine Academy of Environmental Science and Math, 1008 South Spring Avenue.

She'd heard earlier in the day that the school would be closing. "It's devastating."

Parents at Environmental Science and Math had received conflicting messages about the school's fate. A banner outside the school announced it was still enrolling students.

One parent shared a "voice mail blast" sent from the school Tuesday morning. In the message, an administrator warned not to listen to the "inaccurate press" and assured them that "our school will remain open."

Adams said the city school district has enough room for every Imagine student if all were to transfer, though that could include reopening unused classrooms.

On average, children at Imagine perform worse academically than those in the city's school system, which has shown steady gains in the last three years. Adams said he's not concerned that the Imagine students might hurt his district's attempts to regain accreditation.

"I don't want to label the kids by a score," he said.

If Imagine students cause any school to experience an enrollment increase of 10 percent or more next year, the test scores of the Imagine students would not count against that school for one year, Nicastro said. On the second year, school officials could either keep or throw out their scores. By the third year, the scores would count, she said.

"The last thing we want to say is these children don't count," Nicastro said.

In addition to empty spots in city public schools, the city's other charter schools have room for about 500 students, said Doug Thaman, executive director of the Missouri Charter Public School Association.

In the past two years, charter schools in St. Louis have begun to show improvement, with several outperforming St. Louis Public Schools, as well as the state, on last year's standardized tests.

The public is less likely to judge charter schools as a group as in the past, he said.

"The longer we see charter schools provide positive results," Thaman said, "the more likely the community will judge charters individually."

THE ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

State revokes charters of all Imagine schools

By Dale Singer of The Beacon | [0 comments](#)

The Missouri State Board of Education voted unanimously Tuesday to revoke the charters of all Imagine schools in St. Louis, closing them by the end of the current school year.

The vote came after the board became the sponsor of the schools because Missouri Baptist University gave up its authority to sponsor charters in the state.

Sponsorship of the other charter school that had been sponsored by Missouri Baptist, the Carondelet Leadership Academy, was transferred to the University of Missouri at Columbia.

At its height, enrollment at the six Imagine campuses in St. Louis had been nearly 4,000. Missouri Baptist revoked the charters of two of them last year and put the rest on probation.

On Monday, the State Board of Education voted to accept Missouri Baptist University's surrender of authority to sponsor charter schools in Missouri. Under the terms of the agreement, the university will not be allowed to sponsor charters for another five years.

In December, the university revoked the charters of the other two Imagine schools – the Imagine Academy of Academic Success and the affiliated Academy of Cultural Arts – affecting about 850 of the 3,750 students enrolled at Imagine. Those schools will close at the end of the current school year.

Last month, Missouri Baptist officials were summoned to a hearing before the state board this week to talk about its sponsorship of charter schools. But shortly after board members voted to call the hearing, the university announced it would voluntarily give up its power to sponsor the charters.

In a letter to state education officials, the university said it would not apply again to sponsor charter schools before March 30, 2017, and was waiving its right to a hearing. At that time, attorney Douglas Copeland, speaking for the university, said it was doubtful Missouri Baptist would ever return to sponsoring charter schools and would focus instead on educating students at the university.

At the same time, Jason Bryant, who is now the newly named executive vice president for Imagine Schools Missouri, expressed disappointment at the university's move. He said Imagine

had made progress in improving the poor academic achievement that prompted Missouri Baptist to put the schools on probation in the first place.

That move had come after officials from Mayor Francis Slay to Chris Nicastro, commissioner of elementary and secondary education for Missouri, had called on Imagine to shut down its schools in St. Louis. They cited poor scores by the school's students plus questions about its financial operations.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

International Engagement Awards honors contributions to MU's internationalization

By [Anli Xiao](#)

April 17, 2012 | 10:13 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU held its [2012 International Engagement Awards Ceremony](#) on Tuesday afternoon.

The awards honored faculty, staff and students with outstanding contributions to the internationalization of MU and are sponsored by MU's Council on International Initiatives, International Center and Office of the Vice Provost for International Programs.

A subcommittee of the council for International Initiatives evaluated the nominees and determined the winners, according to MU's [International Center](#).

Outstanding Staff Contribution: Jill Ford

Jill Ford is the director of International Student Programs in the College of Engineering at MU.

She developed the Engineering Peer Mentoring Program in the fall of 2009 to help international students from China transition to life in Columbia. In addition, the program also exposes MU students to other cultures, according to her biographical sketch in the awards program.

Outstanding Student Contribution: Angellar Manguvo

Angellar Manguvo is a graduate student in the College of Education at MU.

Through research and service, Manguvo has worked to improve the social and academic welfare of international students at MU. She also serves in leadership positions on the

Missouri International Student Council and the Association of Black Graduate and Professional Students, according to her biographical sketch in the awards program.

International Scholar- Outstanding Faculty Contribution: Puncy Heppner and Xinhua Zhuang

Puncy Heppner is a curators' professor in the College of Education.

His research in problem-solving strategies has been translated into many languages. He works to increase international student representation in counseling psychology programs, according to his biographical sketch in the awards program.

Xinhua Zhuang is the C.W. LaPierre Professor of Computer Science in the College of Engineering at MU.

He has been involved in developing educational relationships between MU and Chinese universities. He has also helped to develop a mentoring program for international engineering students, according to his biographical sketch in the awards program.

Zhuang is now working to further bridge federal research and industrial collaborations between the U.S. and China.

At the ceremony

Jim Scott, director of MU's International Center, hosted the ceremony. He emphasized MU's long and rich history of international engagement and said the internationalization of MU requires individual participation.

Peter Gardner, a professor emeritus of anthropology, congratulated the winners and nominees in a speech and said that he is pleased to witness the cultivation of truly active international engagement on MU's campus.

Corinne Valdivia, associate professor of agriculture and applied economics, said international engagement also is helpful to research.

"It will force you to step outside the box and think of different ways of using your disciplines," she said. MU enrolled 1,948 international students from 103 countries in fall 2010. More than half of the them come from China, South Korea and India. In the 2009-2010 school year, 1,146 students joined MU's study abroad program, and Italy, Spain and UK are the top three destinations, according to the International Center of MU.



Canadian senator will speak at MU

Tuesday, April 17, 2012

A Canadian senator will speak on the University of Missouri campus next week as part of a three-day symposium on genocide in Rwanda.

On April 28, Romeo Dallaire will present "Are all Humans Human?" at 3 p.m. in Bush Auditorium at Cornell Hall.

He also will provide the keynote address on the casualties of humanitarian intervention at 6 p.m. as part of a Step Up fundraiser banquet to raise money for a trauma counseling center in Rwanda. Tickets for that event are \$50 and can be reserved online at stepuprwandawomen.org.

The symposium starts April 26 with a screening of the film "Brussels-Kigali" at 7 p.m. in Mumford Auditorium.

On April 27, Carl Wilkens will speak at 7 p.m. in Ellis Auditorium about why he chose to stay in Rwanda.

The event is sponsored, in part, by Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women, the Afro-Romance Institute in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and the Canadian Consulate in Chicago.

Photos describe life with HIV/AIDS in mid-Missouri

MU Mention on Pg. 2

By [Jake Kreinberg](#)

April 17, 2012 | 10:50 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — For Keith Martin, a stuffed dog from his sister provides hope for the future.

HIV-positive since 1987, he recently participated in a research project by taking photographs to create a visual narrative of his life with HIV, which stands for human immunodeficiency virus and causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Martin, 53, along with seven other HIV-positive mid-Missouri men, met in groups of four during a three-week period to discuss what each picture meant to him and how it related to the disease. The number of years participants have lived with HIV range from newly diagnosed to more than 25 years. Eight displays, containing three to five images each, were featured in the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services on Tuesday afternoon. All of the displays were made by the project participants.

Martin shared three pictures, including "Hope," the image of the stuffed dog. Another photograph, titled "Out of Hiding," showed teddy bears of various colors. In the project, a quote from Martin accompanies the image: "Being gay is a part of who I am....It isn't always easy being gay....We have to hide who we are, if they find out, they go after you....It's getting better though....I don't care what anybody else thinks is important. I don't feel like I have to hide it anymore." Martin's third picture, "Best Friends," showed two parrots and a cat. The importance of having friends and family helping you through the process of living with HIV is vitally important, Martin said. One of the closest people in his life, his partner, Gerald Garner, also participated in the project and attended the unveiling with Martin. Garner, 40, has lived with HIV since 1995.

Katrina Kline, 30, a friend of one of the eight photographers, visited the exhibit Tuesday and thought the pictures could keep the public educated and informed about staying healthy.

"It was nice how they're all different pictures but contain the same hopeful message," she said.

Michelle Teti, an associate professor in the MU Department of Health Sciences, helped organize the project, titled "Pictures that Speak: A Photographic Display on Living with HIV/AIDS in Mid-Missouri."

After conducting three related research projects — all with female participants — Teti collaborated with the Health Department in the six-month venture.

Dustin Hampton, an HIV-health educator with the Health Department, originally inquired if Teti was interested in performing another project with male participants, and she agreed. The department offered space for the group interviews and provided funding through a grant from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

"Through my work with people living with HIV, they wanted a space to share their lives, and it was a very rewarding experience for them," Teti said. Teti found the participants via Rain-Central Missouri, an organization dedicated to providing non-medical care for people living with HIV and prevention education for the community. Rain-Central Missouri forwarded information about the project to individuals it serves, who could then contact Teti, Executive Director Cale Mitchell said.

"It's a wonderful project that gives a still-marginalized population a voice they wouldn't otherwise have," Mitchell said. "They are still very much a part of our community and (HIV is) something everyone should be aware of."

In the past, Teti found the projects helped women gain more control in their lives through expression "in the hope that they could learn something about themselves as well as educating the community." Through her latest project, Teti hopes to learn whether the process affects men and helps them better express themselves and improve their well-being. Teti said she must still interview participants individually to gauge what they learned during the project. Martin thought the displays turned out well and that they will help raise awareness in Columbia, although he said he doesn't plan on taking pictures as a hobby. He also made new friends.

"We're still here," he said. "We're not going anywhere. We're human just like anyone else."

The displays will be available for public viewing at The Center Project, 300 Saint James St., Suite 104, for one month starting Friday.