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Missouri engineering professors to work in Iraq

The Associated Press

Engineering professors from the University of Missouri are headed to Iraq to help train their counterparts in the rebuilding nation.

The school's College of Engineering has received a U.S. State Department grant to work with professors at Iraq's University of Technology while it seeks accreditation. The school is located in the northern Iraq city of Erbil.

The Missouri contingent will work on course development in the Iraqi school's industrial engineering program. The professors will also help with training in the fields of nanotechnology and renewable energy.

The Iraqi scientists will visit Columbia later this summer.

Missouri is one of eight American universities participating in the program through the International Research and Exchange Board.



Bill calls for higher education funding formula

By Rudi Keller

After a session that saw debate over a \$2 million budget line for Southeast Missouri State University, lawmakers have given themselves the task of writing what would be the state's first funding formula for higher education.

Gov. Jay Nixon yesterday signed a bill giving the Joint Committee on Education until Dec. 31, 2013, to come up with "a comprehensive funding formula" for distributing state aid to higher education.

The provision was part of a bill setting aside casino boarding fees for veterans programs. The debate during the session was sparked by concerns from House Speaker Steve Tilley, R-Perryville, that SEMO was falling behind other schools in per-pupil funding.

A formula based on attendance, poverty and other factors has been used to fund elementary and secondary schools for many years. The factors to be included in a formula for higher education were not defined in the bill.

"It depends on what they mean by a formula," said Assistant Commissioner of Higher Education Paul Wagner. "I helped write the K-12 formula, which is a mathematical formula in law. I don't know if that is what they mean by a higher-education formula."

In this year's debate, the Senate gave SEMO no additional money. In the end, the two chambers compromised by providing \$3 million extra, but not all to SEMO, which did receive the largest share. The University of Missouri, which gets just less than half of all direct aid to public higher education, did not get a slice of the additional funds.

"Looking at it on a strictly per-student funding basis is way oversimplified," Wagner said.

In the school year that just ended, state funding for each student at the University of Missouri was \$7,078, down \$667 from the year before. The decline was caused by state budget cuts and increased enrollment.

The same dynamic played out at all of the state's four-year schools. At the smallest, Harris-Stowe State University, per-student funding increased despite the cut in funding because enrollment also fell. The decline at other schools ranged from \$23 to \$509 per student.

Alden excited about changes at Missouri

By TEREZ A. PAYLOR

DESTIN, Fla. -- It is Tuesday, the first day of the Southeastern Conference's spring meetings, and Mike Alden was in a cheerful mood. The first session in his school's new league has come to an end, and Missouri's athletic director now sits in a quiet room at the Sandestin Hilton, various media members flanked around him.

Before he starts the interview, ironically enough, he offers a question of his own.

"Have you guys been checking out the progress of our football field?" Alden asked cheerfully, before sliding his phone across the table. "Have you seen it?"

Alden, of course, was referring to the new FieldTurf at Memorial Stadium. It is noticeably different from last year's artificial surface in appearance, which, of course, is not a coincidence.

Times are changing at Missouri, which is about to dive head-first into its first season in the SEC. And Alden believes excitement couldn't be higher, even with the school's decision to raise ticket prices, parking and Tiger Scholarship Fund donations by 10 percent to 20 percent each a few months ago, all of which was done with the expressed goal of raising the funds necessary to compete in their new conference.

"Right now, our season-ticket sales are as high as they've ever been in our history," Alden said. "We think we have a good shot at selling out our season-ticket base, and if we can get that done, it will be the first time in our history we've ever done that"

And to Alden, the new field, while a minor component of the sweeping change headed to Columbia, is representative of the changing era, nonetheless.

"That's the new font, the new gold," Alden said, referring to both the style of the numbers and the colors of the logos on the field. "It's got the SEC logo on it.

"It really pops."

Alden then proceeded to explain the thought process behind several aspects of the noticeably-greener field, including the end zones, which again display diamonds but now features the word "Mizzou" in gold and black instead of "Missouri" in white and gold.

This, in addition to the phrase “Mizzou football” extending between the 20s on the west side of the playing field, is part of an increased emphasis on the word “Mizzou,” which coach Gary Pinkel has repeatedly said is identified with Missouri’s brand more than any other.

Interestingly enough, it turns out the decision to feature a black background in the end zone instead of the traditional green can be traced back to a previous bowl — perhaps the 2009 Texas Bowl — where the grounds crew painted Missouri’s end zone in a similar manner.

“We really liked the look,” Alden said.

“It gives (the field) some contrast too,” added senior associate athletic director for operations Tim Hickman, the man Alden credits for overseeing the design.

Another noticeable change is the giant Tiger head logo in the middle of the field, which Missouri believes is tied to its national identity. Turns out it would have been even larger had the school they not been discouraged by the powers that be from having it extend beyond the hash marks.

“We wanted that thing to be really big,” Alden said. “But both the NCAA and SEC, the (the current size is) more of what they preferred.”

And the field isn’t the only thing changing at Memorial Stadium. Alden said the parking lots surrounding the stadium will also be resurfaced (starting this week), and the visitor’s locker room will also feature some cosmetic changes in the fall, including new flooring.

“We’ve painted it and cleaned it up and made it look really sharp for the visiting team,” Alden said.

But really, this is just the start of massive stadium upgrade that is expected to take place over the next few years. On June 26-27, Alden, Hickman and others will present a master plan for the renovations to the school’s board of curators.

Once the plans are approved (and Alden is admittedly optimistic they will be) they will reveal the details of what they have in store.

And while some Missouri fans have been clamoring for changes for years (ranging from things like removing the track to improving the sound system) when asked about those changes, Alden would only say that the plan has been devised with the purpose of not only improving revenue, but also being more in line with some of the glorious stadiums in the tradition-rich SEC, including LSU’s Tiger Stadium or Florida Field.

“That’s all been considered,” Alden said. “You’ll see that come together at the end of June.”

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

SEC renegotiates TV deal, own network possible

DESTIN, FLA. • The Southeastern Conference saw fit to reward commissioner Mike Slive with a \$1 million bonus in 2009 after he oversaw a new television deal with ESPN and CBS that launched the conference into a new tax bracket.

So, it's not a surprise that confidence is brimming as the league digs into a renegotiation with the networks in the wake of adding Missouri and Texas A&M. The talks are reported to include a discussion to start an SEC network that could launch as early as 2014.

Slive is saying little this week about the TV possibilities, but all indications point to something bigger.

"I would term it enthusiastic optimism, based on the leadership we have in our league," Mizzou athletics director Mike Alden said.

SEC schools realized a 50 percent increase in distributions from the league in a two-year period after the TV deal was struck, jumping from an average of \$13 million in 2009 to \$19.5 million in 2011, according to tax documents.

Not only is the SEC working on new contracts but discussing the possibility of a conference network along the lines of the Big Ten Network.

The league already has a digital network, but a spot on cable could be a major step with markets in Florida, Texas, Georgia and Missouri, among others.

"When we did our (ESPN/CBS) deal, we sort of changed the game," said Florida president Bernie Machen, a St. Louis native. "Then the Big Ten came along and did a channel. So, we're looking at how to package things. We think there's a lot more demand for our stuff than is being accessed. From talking to media people, we think it's going to happen."

Although the ESPN/CBS deal was for 15 years at more than \$3 billion, the league is able to renegotiate because of a provision in the contract that kicked in with expansion.

Slive has been tight-lipped at the spring meetings about the TV discussions but acknowledged that Missouri and Texas A&M bring added value for future media rights.

"I'll let you know when we're finished," he said. "We're in discussion with both TV partners and believe there is significant added value for a lot of reasons with these institutions."

The league acknowledged that a network is one option under consideration. The success of the Big Ten's venture, now in its fifth year, is reason enough.

Big Ten schools received about \$27 million each from the network from 2008 to 2011 and are expected to pocket \$7.2 million this year. The BTN has seen its revenue grow every year, hitting \$242 million in 2011 with a profit of \$79.2 million, according to figures from SNL Kagan, which does analysis on the media and communications industry.

"I look at the Big Ten Network and what it's done for my colleagues," Alden said, "and I know it's provided tremendous growth as far as exposure, recruiting around the country, ability to promote other content other than athletics, and obviously the revenue side has been significant.

"If you look at that model and knowing the SEC has a footprint as big, if not bigger, than the Big Ten, it would seem if there is anything like that it would have a tremendous impact on a league as strong as the SEC."

Although Missouri is not going to receive a full revenue share from the league for some time, Alden said what he sees "in the tea leaves" will make the wait worthwhile.

South Carolina president Harris Pastides, on the other hand, said there could be a downside to a conference network.

"Certainly financially, looking at the viewers and giving the viewers more flexibility would be a good thing," he said. "What are the negatives? Overexposure, maybe. I don't think any of us would claim that our universities aren't seen enough now."

An SEC network could take on several forms. The BTN partners with Fox, which owns 51 percent. The Pac-12 network, which will launch in August, will be fully owned by the league.

The SEC may have added to its TV bargaining power with the recent news that its champion will face the Big 12 champ in a bowl game starting in 2014.

"There are a lot of people interested," Slive said. "I was a little surprised. The interest was overwhelming and there was a sense this was something new and different."

Reporter Vahe Gregorian contributed information for this story.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: University of Missouri Press should remain a priority

By Robert Root

June 1, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — I'm dismayed by the shortsightedness of the decision to close the University of Missouri Press and by the values it exposes in the administration of the university.

Having read the excellent book by Ned Stuckey-French, "The American Essay in the American Century," in recent months, and being in the middle of Lisa Knopp's marvelous "What the River Carries," my respect and admiration for the University of Missouri Press has grown considerably in the past year.

If the work being published were not so outstanding, it might possibly be less upsetting. But a university that doesn't value astute thinking and literary craft and surrenders the chance to promulgate them is simply contributing — eagerly, in this case, it would seem — to the continued decline of the culture.

If the university will not stand up for literature and scholarship, what can we assume it values in regard to literacy, intellectual development and learning? I urge reconsideration of this decision and realignment of the priorities being established for the university system.

Robert Root is professor emeritus of English at Central Michigan University and honored visiting faculty in the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing at Ashland University. He lives in Waukesha, Wis. Questions? Contact Opinion editor [Elizabeth Conner](#).



Columbia woman target of scam, BBB says

By Janese Silvey

A Columbia woman hoping to return to the University of Missouri this fall is out more than \$2,000 after being scammed through an online baby-sitting service.

The Better Business Bureau reported the case yesterday, warning people to be cautious when dealing with anyone they meet through the Internet.

"A lot of Craigslist and sweepstakes scams are like that, but this one was a little more complicated in that the scammer developed a relationship with this woman," said Bill Smith, a trade practice investigator with the BBB.

In this case, the woman, identified only as originally being from Florissant, signed up on Care.com, an online resource that connects families with would-be baby sitters. Through the site, a woman identifying herself as Amanda Smith contacted her saying she could only correspond through email because of a hearing disability.

Amanda Smith said she was a single mother living with her son in Portland, Ore., but was planning to move to Columbia this month and needed a baby sitter.

According to the BBB, Amanda Smith then sent a \$2,775 deposit to the victim's bank account, saying \$375 should be used as advance payment and the rest should be used to pay for the delivery of a wheelchair for her son, who had been involved in an accident. Later, though, the mother said she'd made other arrangements for the chair and asked the woman to return \$2,400 via MoneyGram.

The original \$2,775 check cleared quickly, said the victim's father, who identified himself only as Tom because he said he wanted to protect his daughter's privacy. "It was cleared for distribution, and then it came back a day later as bounced," he told the Tribune.

Bill Smith said the victim now acknowledges that the emails sounded fishy and used broken English. "But a lot of correspondence went back and forth between the two of them, so she felt comfortable doing this," he said. "They had developed a relationship."

The woman lost all of her savings, and her parents had to chip in as well to cover the bank's loss, Tom said. The scammer has not been identified.

In hindsight, Tom said, he realizes he should have intervened but said he wanted his 21-year-old daughter to make her own decisions. She had worked hard to raise money to return to MU after transferring to a St. Louis college and otherwise has been responsible, he said.

"Parents, sometimes against your better judgment, you need to step in," he said. "She worked really hard to get it all together. It's a pitiful shame she got beat so badly. ... She's devastated by it financially and emotionally."

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Report says wealthy farms get more taxpayer cash

MU MENTION PAGE 2

As lawmakers prepare to hash out details of the \$970 billion Farm Bill — the sprawling legislation that sets the agenda for the nation's food and farming policy — a report issued Thursday says taxpayers are paying billions to protect profitable farms and crop insurance companies.

The Washington-based Environmental Working Group, a group critical of farm subsidies, found that 10,000 or more farming operations received crop insurance support ranging from \$100,000 to \$1 million, with 26 operations — including one in Missouri and one in Illinois — getting more than \$1 million apiece.

The group's analysis was based on more than 1 million government records, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

"This is a first-ever look at the crop insurance program at this level of detail, and what we've found should really give us pause," said Scott Faber, vice president of government affairs for the group.

The group's analysis found that agriculture's largest policyholders get the bulk of the taxpayer-funded subsidies for crop insurance, while the bottom 80 percent get a little more than \$5,000 each. However, because federal law requires that the names of the beneficiaries not be released, it's unclear who the beneficiaries are. The group said it would call on lawmakers to reveal the names of recipients.

"The big dogs in the [agriculture] world reap the big benefits," said Ken Cook, the group's president. "No senator should feel comfortable voting on this ... without knowing who's getting the benefits."

The group said that insurance companies are among the largest beneficiaries.

"Should extremely profitable companies be receiving any support?" Faber asked. "Should there be a limit?"

The crop insurance industry said Thursday that the report was a "huge mischaracterization" of the program.

“They’re calling it a subsidy, but that’s a play on words,” said David Graves, manager of the American Association of Crop Insurers. “Farmers get a discount; that’s how the program is structured. No farmer, anywhere, is getting a check for a million dollars.”

The issue of crop insurance subsidies has come to the fore in recent months as lawmakers debate the Farm Bill. The Senate last month passed a version of the bill — officially called the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012 — out of committee, and the full Senate is poised to take up the bill next week.

The Senate version of the bill calls for an end to controversial direct payments — \$5 billion in annual payments that go to farmers regardless of economic or crop conditions. Replacing direct payments would be a suite of revenue-guaranteeing products, including a supplemental insurance option.

Over the past several years, more farmers have purchased larger government-subsidized insurance policies to protect against crop losses from poor weather or drops in prices.

According to a recent General Accountability Office report, the cost of subsidizing these policies shot up to \$7.3 billion last year from around \$1 billion a decade ago. One government estimate puts the projected cost over the next 10 years at about \$90 billion. (The overall cost of the Farm Bill is estimated to be \$970 billion over that period.)

These crop insurance payments have no restrictions, caps or means testing. According to the GAO report, about a third of the premium subsidies went to large farming operations.

Most Midwestern commodity crop farmers, and the groups that represent them, have said they support the Senate version of the bill and don’t want any caps or cuts to crop insurance subsidies. They call them a critical protection, especially given the pending loss of direct payments.

“Crop insurance is the foundation of risk management tools for farmers, and the program works well,” said Steve Wellman, president of the west St. Louis County-based American Soybean Association. “As we move away from direct payments, we believe crop insurance is even more important. Ninety-eight percent of farms in the U.S. are still family owned, and those farms produce 88 percent of the crops. It’s still a family industry.”

According to a Congressional Budget Office report, the Senate version of the Farm Bill would cut direct program spending by \$23.6 billion, with nearly 75 percent savings from reduced commodity subsidies over a 10-year period. One of the provisions of the bill would guarantee payments to farmers if crop prices fall, with payments capped at \$50,000.

This week, the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri released an analysis of the proposed bill, saying it believes it would meet lawmakers’ goals of cutting spending — if crop prices stay relatively high.

“Our bottom line is we agree with CBO that, on average, we expect lower costs,” said Pat Westhoff, the institute’s director. “But these new programs are much more sensitive to market conditions.”

An analysis, also released this week, by the American Enterprise Institute, the conservative think tank, said that if commodity prices decline to normal levels, the Senate bill’s payment guarantee could end up costing more than the direct payments it was designed to replace.

Most analysts don’t expect prices to sink, however, particularly with growing demand for commodity grains from overseas. And with net farm income hitting a record of more than \$100 billion last year, critics believe the farm sector can afford to take more cuts and give up some of its taxpayer-funded protections.

“I don’t think anyone’s saying there shouldn’t be a safety net for farmers,” Faber said, adding, “It’s fair to ask: How much should the government provide?”

Media groups to argue for release of evidence in Trayvon Martin case

By **FRANCES ROBLES**

MU mention page 2

MIAMI -- Attorneys will square off in a courtroom Friday over whether more evidence in the George Zimmerman case should be kept out of the public eye.

At issue is whether personal information about Zimmerman and the teenager he killed, such as phone records, autopsy photos and statements to police, would be so damaging if made public that they'd ruin a chance for a fair trial.

Assistant State Attorney Bernardo de la Rionda and defense attorney Mark O'Mara have filed motions to the court to seal things such as Zimmerman's statements to police, his text messages and the names and addresses of 22 witnesses who saw or heard the fighting between Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin.

They also seek to deny access to audio tapes of interviews with a woman who made an unrelated allegation against Zimmerman.

"Should the entirety of a person's private life be disclosed to the public because he or she has been accused, rightfully or wrongfully, of a crime?" O'Mara wrote on his website. "We understand that there is strong public interest in the Zimmerman case, and our motion is not meant to deprive the public of their right to know relevant information."

Zimmerman is a neighborhood-watch volunteer who got into a fight with Martin, an unarmed Miami Gardens high school junior. Zimmerman claims he shot Martin in self defense, but a special prosecutor brought in to investigate the case charged him with second-degree murder.

The attorneys say intense media interest in the case is cause for Circuit Judge Kenneth Lester to hold back certain evidence, which under normal circumstances would be public record as soon as it is made available to the defense. Lawyers representing media companies seeking access to the records say the prosecution and defense have not met the legal burden to withhold the records.

"Florida has a strong commitment to open records, and it's supposed to be difficult to withhold them from the public," said Scott Ponce, an attorney for the Miami Herald and 15 other media companies.

The broad secrecy the prosecution seeks is "not supported by statute, constitution or case law, and it certainly cannot be justified in this prosecution, which involves matters of the highest public concern," Ponce wrote in a court filing.

He added that keeping records closed is warranted only if it's established that it's necessary to "prevent serious and imminent threat to the administration of justice."

His court filing said the state can withhold the names of witnesses only if their safety is in jeopardy or if it keeps investigators from locating a co-defendant.

The media companies agreed not to publish Martin's autopsy photos, but asked that a designated media representative be allowed to review them.

The media motion argues that while confessions are not generally considered public record, Zimmerman's statements to police can't be considered confessions unless he admitted to every material element of the crime he's charged with.

Ken Bunting, the executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, said the quest to keep information from the media is ironic, given that it was media interest in the case that caused law enforcement to take a second look at the investigation.

"I think it's overreaching," Bunting said. "I know it's fashionable to demonize the media, especially in high-profile cases like this, but nothing does more to ensure a fair trial and the fair administration of justice than sunshine itself. Excessive secrecy is never the right answer."

He noted, however, that he would not be surprised to see witness names sealed, on the argument that they need to be protected from harassment.

An attorney for the Orlando Sentinel and WFTV in Orlando will also argue against the defense and state motions. A hearing will take place Friday in Seminole County.