At heartfelt reception, MU Provost Stokes bids farewell to university

BY KATHRYN PALMER 11 hrs ago (0)

It was standing room only Tuesday afternoon for most of the nearly 200 faculty, staff and students that packed into Stotler Lounge at Memorial Student Union to say goodbye to MU’s provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs, Garnett Stokes.

Stokes, who served as provost for three years, and briefly as interim chancellor over the summer, is leaving MU at the end of this week for the University of New Mexico, where she will become the school’s first female president.

“You can actually see how popular Garnett is,” said MU Chancellor Alexander Cartwright. “We have way more people than we have chairs.”

And while the many university officials, including Cartwright and UM System President Mun Choi, who took the podium before Stokes’ farewell speech attempted to maintain a lighthearted mood, their focus on the outgoing provost’s ability to lead MU during a time of immense change highlighted her significant role in reshaping MU’s campus culture.

“Since her arrival, I think it’s fair to say that the campus has undergone considerable transition,” Cartwright said to the crowd. “Her steady leadership throughout is much appreciated. She’s thoughtful; a thorough administrator who has worked to create a positive environment.”

Soon after taking her post as provost in early 2015, Stokes led Missouri’s flagship university through nationally-watched protests over racial discrimination and graduate student rights, created the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX and hired nine new deans during a period of high administrative turnover. Five of those deans were females, making women a majority of MU’s Council of Deans for the first time in the school’s history, said College of Arts and Science Dean Patricia Okker.

When Okker, one of the new deans, stood to deliver her goodbyes, she opened with a joke about how few people really know what a provost’s role is, but soon turned to praising Stokes’ ability to not only manage MU’s many academic deans amid administrative instability, but make a series of strong new hires in “anything but the best of circumstances.”
“If she were a typical provost I might be up here saying, ‘You survived. Good luck. Move on,’” Okker said. “But that is in fact not what we are saying here. In a very short time she has had an extraordinary impact on this campus,” Okker said.

Missouri Students Association President Nathan Willett, who is serving with Okker on the 21-member committee that will recommend Stokes’ successor by May, also spoke, emphasizing her “strong leadership was not just needed ... but was completely essential to the future of this institution.”

Before the ceremony, Willett, who said he has formed a working relationship with Stokes through his role with MSA, expressed admiration for her willingness to connect and communicate with students. Willett said the committee will be looking for similar qualities in the next provost.

Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies Jim Spain will serve as MU’s interim provost.

After spending the first 30 minutes of the reception greeting individual colleagues with hugs, handshakes and warm goodbyes, Stokes stood up to give a formal farewell, the final speech of the afternoon.

“When I started here in February 2015, a lot of people said, ‘How could you move to Missouri from Florida?’” said Stokes, who served as provost of Florida State University before coming to MU. “It was easy.”

Stokes also offered onlookers a glimpse into her personal life as she thanked her husband, Jeffrey Younggren, a psychology professor at MU, whom she said refers to himself as “arm candy.”

“The sense of humor that he displayed in my office and with my colleagues — that also sustained me over these three years,” Stokes said as she mused about what Younggren’s honorific title might be as the husband of UNM’s president. “First fellow? We don’t really know.”

But as Stokes continued to reflect on her service at MU, her remarks took on an increasingly sentimental tone.

“It has been an incredible three years,” Stokes said. “There’s so much great history here, but there is a future that I regret that I won’t be here to be such a substantial part of it.”

Before the start of the official ceremony, Stokes said in an interview that hiking the trails near Columbia ranks high on her list of things she will miss most about living in Missouri.

But, as she pointed out toward the end of her speech, “the Santa Fe Trail starts here in Missouri.”
“Celebration of leadership” held for Provost Garnett Stokes before she takes presidency at University of New Mexico

By LAUREN BISHOP

Provost Garnett S. Stokes received warm wishes at her farewell reception Tuesday, as she will take office as president of the University of New Mexico on March 1.

After a 10-month search headed by 22 committee members, Stokes was chosen to succeed interim President Chaouki Abdallah as the new president of the University of New Mexico, according to a press release from UNM.

Stokes has served MU since February 2015. In that time, she has appointed multiple deans and a vice provost, served as interim chancellor and helped create the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX on campus.

MU hosted a “celebration of leadership” in Stotler Lounge to acknowledge Stokes’ efforts during her time here.

Chancellor Alexander Cartwright was the emcee for the event as he introduced the faculty speakers and made his own remarks about Stokes’ departure. Cartwright said Stokes has left an impression on MU that the community will continue to see.

“She has put new policies and personnel in place that helped ensure Mizzou can continue to achieve our missions of teaching, research, service and economic development,” Cartwright said.

UM System President Mun Choi attended the reception and said Stokes has been a constant at MU during trying times. He also said Stokes’ qualities as a leader have created a path to continue improving MU.

“Her credibility with the faculty [and] with a community was built on her belief in the principles of being sincere, genuine, honest, caring and collaborative and really developed the foundation that [Cartwright] and I are now building on,” Choi said.

After her colleagues expressed thanks and well wishes, Stokes was the last to speak during the reception. She spoke of how she will be watching MU grow after she is gone and said how important land-grant universities are for students and their communities.
“I think that I've come to appreciate, even more with my experience at Mizzou, the value of relationships at every level of the university,” Stokes said. “That's something that I've really learned here and I will take it with me.”

Nathan Willett, Missouri Students Association president, said he was grateful for Stokes’ respect for and commitment to students and the MU community.

“On behalf of the students, I cannot thank you enough for your dedication to all stakeholders and always being willing to communicate what you truly meant and treating us, not just as students, but as equally important stakeholders, making Mizzou the strongest university it can be,” Willett said.

Stokes said she does not “regret for a minute” that she has spent three years of her life here, and that there are remarkable people at this university.

Donations were taken before and during the event for a contribution to the Heart of Missouri United Way, which Stokes is involved in as a board member.

COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE

University leader: Higher ed warned not to seek tuition hike waivers

By Rudi Keller

JEFFERSON CITY — State colleges and universities considering tuition increases greater than the rate of inflation are being warned not to do it despite proposals from Gov. Eric Greitens to cut appropriations by 10 percent in the coming fiscal year.

Missouri law limits tuition increases to the general increase in consumer prices unless the Department of Higher Education grants a waiver. This year, the limit would be 2.1 percent.

“We have been discouraged from submitting waiver requests,” Missouri State University President Clif Smart told the House Appropriations-Education Subcommittee on Tuesday.

Smart did not say in his testimony where the discouragement was coming from and declined to do so afterward.

The department will consider waiver requests from the higher education institutions, spokeswoman Liz Coleman wrote in an email.
“The department has asked institutions interested in seeking a waiver to provide market-based information related to specific program needs and the institution’s plans for meeting those needs,” she wrote.

The cuts have cost Missouri State $24 million over the past two years, he said.

“It is hard to absorb these 8 to 9 percent cuts year after year without affecting the price,” Smart said.

Smart was one of six university presidents to appear before the subcommittee, which gets the first look at education appropriations. Each detailed how their institution has handled budget cuts over the past two years — 7 percent in fiscal 2017 and 9 percent in the current fiscal year — and the impact of Greitens’ plan for additional cuts.

The cuts have meant larger classes, caused schools to create early retirement programs and led to closing buildings to reduce maintenance costs. Many schools are working with fewer dollars from the state than in the fiscal 2001 school year. At Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, this year’s funding is less than the school received in fiscal 1998, President Carlos Vargas said.

Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph has used early retirement incentives, left 20 jobs unfilled and is asking faculty to take a voluntary pay cut by converting to a 10-month contract rather than a 12-month contract, President Bob Vartabedian said. There is little left to cut, he said.

“If cuts continue, we would have to consider significant tuition increases, which we would rather not do,” he said.

**University of Missouri System President Mun Choi is scheduled to testify Wednesday on the proposed appropriations.**

Greitens’ proposed cuts got a hostile reception in the General Assembly, with Senate President Pro Tem Ron Richard saying they would not be approved and House Speaker Todd Richardson, R-Poplar Bluff, saying the House would restore at least some of the funding.

That’s not likely to happen in the subcommittee, where Chairman Lyle Rowland, R-Cedar Creek, said he can only move money between public schools and higher education. He said he will try to grant a request made by every president who testified Tuesday — put off implementing the performance funding plan that puts another 10 percent of each college’s allocation in jeopardy.


“There will definitely be a very strong effort to restore as much as we can,” Kendrick said.
The performance funding system in higher education was created as a way to reward schools meeting benchmarks with additional money. As originally designed, 90 percent of any increases in state allocations were awarded through the performance funding system.

Last year, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education revised the system, changing some of the benchmarks and, because no additional money is available, setting 10 percent of existing appropriations aside and releasing the money based on performance. Greitens adopted that as part of his budget plan, cutting 10 percent overall and making 10 percent of the remainder contingent upon performance.

The benchmarks changed and schools are being judged on performance for measures they didn’t know would be used, said Susan Thomas, president of Truman State University in Kirksville. While her school would meet the benchmarks, she said, others would not and it is unfair to impose without some time to prepare.

“It makes it very difficult to do any kind of strategic planning and have any impact on those measures,” she said.

Smart, who said Missouri State would make its goals, also said implementing performance funding as a way to cut budgets is unfair.

“It is designed to reward success and excellence, not as a punishment mechanism,” he said.

Hyperloop feasibility study planned for St. Louis to Kansas City route

By: Marissanne Lewis-Thompson

A proposed hyperloop would transport people between Missouri’s two major hubs in under 30 minutes.

A feasibility study will get underway in February to look at whether it makes sense to go forward with the route. The Missouri Hyperloop Coalition, comprised of public and private groups, raised the $1.5 million funding for the study and made the announcement Tuesday.
Black & Veatch, a Kansas City-based engineering, consulting and construction company, will lead the feasibility study in partnership with the University of Missouri System and Virgin Hyperloop One, the private company spearheading the new mode of transportation.

The technology uses a pod that transports passengers and cargo by electric propulsion through an underground vacuum tube, at speeds as high as 640 miles an hour.

Steve Edwards, Black & Veatch chairman and CEO, said the project would take transportation in Missouri to the next level.

“We believe our experience in next-generation transportation and large scale infrastructure development will play a key role in moving the project forward,” Edwards said.

The study, which is expected wrap up in the summer, will focus on several aspects including: funding for the project, economic impact, benefits of the hyperloop route along the I-70 pathway, as well as a project timeline.

Virgin Hyperloop One chose several other routes in the U.S. among its “winners” in September 2017, and included the St. Louis/Kansas City route among its finalists. It would likely be privately funded and operated, if the route becomes a reality.

Andrew Smith, vice president of entrepreneurship and innovation at the St. Louis Regional Chamber of Commerce, said a hyperloop would be a game changer for Missouri. Smith said allowing people to move between St. Louis and Kansas City so quickly would create a mega region.

“Now you’re talking about a region of 5 million people on the workforce, which is larger than San Francisco, than Seattle, than Boston, and we become the ninth biggest economic development region in the country,” Smith said.
University of Missouri System President Mun Choi said the route would also benefit the system in potential academic ventures. The proposed route would include a stop in Columbia, Missouri.

“This project has enormous economic potential for our state and could improve collaborative efforts of our researchers with colleagues throughout the state in ways we can only imagine right now,” Choi said.

Current plans project the first leg of the first route of the hyperloop could be built in 2021.

Forbes

Plains Are Moving Forward To Bring A Hyperloop Route To Missouri

By: Alex Knapp

On Tuesday, the Missouri Hyperloop Coalition, a public-private partnership, announced an agreement to produce a feasibility study of a hyperloop route connecting Kansas City to Columbia to St. Louis. The proposed route would be built in the corridor of interstate I-70, and constructed and operated by Virgin Hyperloop One. The feasibility study will be conducted by Black and Veatch, an engineering firm headquartered in Kansas City, in partnership with Virgin Hyperloop One and the University of Missouri system.

If the route were built as planned and the technology works as promised, a hyperloop route connecting St. Louis and Kansas City would only take about 31 minutes to complete its journey, according to Virgin Hyperloop One. That's compared to about a four-hour drive in a car.

The announcement of this study might come as something of a surprise, as the Kansas City to St. Louis route is not one of the routes that Virgin Hyperloop One had selected as one of its 10 finalists for a hyperloop route last Fall. But the company's views have changed since then, according to Dan Katz, Director of Global Public Policy and North American Projects at Virgin Hyperloop One.

"The game changer was seeing the business-tech-government coalition that formed around the project," said Katz. "When we originally selected the winners, the coalition had not formed. With these partners all in place, it changed the equation for us."
The feasibility study will take about 7 to 9 months to complete, according to David Leligdon, VP at Black and Veatch. The report will be a collaborative effort, taking advantage of electronic data available as well as data gathered by both drones and "putting boots on the ground." The study would provide alternative options for the route and focus on both the engineering aspects of the route as well as the economic advantages.

The Missouri Department of Transportation, which is part of the Coalition, will also participate in the study in a strategic aspect, by making its data available to Black and Veatch. The department has numbers available for both passengers and freight currently using the I-70 corridor.

Data on both potential cargo and passenger transportation are of interest to Virgin Hyperloop One, says Katz. "We anticipate a mix of passenger pods and cargo pods," he said.

There's plenty of opportunity for both - according to the Missouri Department of Transportation, Missouri's I-70 corridor carries more than 31,500,000 tons of freight every year. The value of that freight is estimated to be over $59 billion. And the highway itself sees a lot of use - between 2 to 5 times the number of vehicles per day that it was designed for, according to the DOT.

One major supporter of the proposed Hyperloop Route is the Kansas City Tech Council, an organization geared towards building up the tech industry ecosystem in the Kansas City area. The organization has been involved with the route since its first proposal to Virgin Hyperloop One, according to Ryan Weber, the organization's President. He considers building a hyperloop route a key part of building up the area's tech business.

"We need assets like this to attract a tech workforce to Kansas City," said Weber.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Feasibility study announced for futuristic Missouri hyperloop tube-travel system

By Mark Schlinkmann

Black and Veatch, a Kansas City-area engineering company, will lead a study of the feasibility of a futuristic “hyperloop” tube-travel system aimed at moving passengers and cargo across Missouri in less than half an hour.

The study of the St. Louis-to-Kansas City route, which will take six to nine months, was announced Tuesday by the Missouri Hyperloop Coalition. The coalition is a statewide public-private alliance that formed in October.
Black and Veatch is donating staff time and services valued at $400,000. It will work with Virgin Hyperloop One, which will contribute an unspecified amount of time and services to the study. That company, based in California, last fall added Missouri to its list of top candidates for its initial projects.

“It’s going to look at routing, infrastructure requirements, the environmental impact, locations and connections,” Drew Thompson, a Black and Veatch executive, said of the feasibility review.

The study also will analyze the potential economic impact and develop a construction cost estimate and recommendations on how to pay for it.

“The fact that the broader business community has embraced this opportunity sets Missouri apart,” said Andrew Smith, a vice president with the St. Louis Regional Chamber, an alliance partner.

The hyperloop system would use electric propulsion to move travelers in pods through a low-pressure tube. Magnetic levitation is used to lift the pods above the track, gliding at airline speeds because of low aerodynamic drag.

The Missouri Department of Transportation first proposed the Missouri route along Interstate 70 three years ago. MoDOT and the regional chamber formed the alliance with the KC Tech Council, the University of Missouri system and the Columbia-based Missouri Innovative Center.

An alliance spokeswoman said UM will be the contracting entity for the study but that no tax money will be spent on it.

Backers haven’t disclosed a potential price tag for building the Missouri system but officials in Colorado say their proposed 360-mile system would cost about $24 billion.

Ryan Kelly, a Virgin Hyperloop One official, did note that the proposed Missouri route is relatively flat compared with mountainous Colorado.

Last month, Hyperloop One added Virgin to its name as British billionaire Richard Branson became its chairman. Branson, whose Virgin Group runs various enterprises, invested in the hyperloop firm and joined its board in October.

Hyperloop One in September had unveiled its list of 10 prime candidates for eventual construction, including four in the United States.

Company officials said Missouri fell just short but that creation of the new statewide coalition resulted in the state being added to the list of contenders. Only Missouri and Colorado have begun feasibility studies, they said.

Others on the company’s list would link Chicago to Pittsburgh, Miami to Orlando and Dallas to Houston. The company also is looking at proposed routes in Canada, Mexico, Britain and India.
A separate hyperloop effort begun by billionaire inventor Elon Musk has been eyeing an underground hyperloop linking New York City to Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington.

Missouri Hyperloop Coalition announces feasibility study along I-70 route
By: Lindsay Shively

*KANSAS CITY, Mo.* -- Travelling from Kansas City to St. Louis in less than 30 minutes might sound like science fiction, but the possibility of bringing a hyperloop route to Missouri took a big step forward Tuesday.

The Missouri Hyperloop Coalition announced they are moving forward with a feasibility study of a hyperloop route along I-70 that would connect Kansas City, Columbia, and St. Louis.

“It is one of the best we’ve seen,” said Dan Katz from Virgin Hyperloop One.

Katz was in Kansas City for the announcement. He added that the existing and relatively straight I-70 corridor is a big plus.

“It is really a common sense route. You’ve got a state with two very large cities and a university in between and a very straight, nice alignment,” he said.

**What is Hyperloop?**

Virgin Hyperloop One officials said passengers would travel in a pod through a low pressure tube and could reach speeds of more than 600 mph.

Virgin Hyperloop One recently left the Kansas City to St. Louis route out of their top contenders worldwide but now they are taking another look.

“What we’ve seen in Missouri has just been incredible between the government, the business community, and the tech community coming together to say ‘Hey, we’re ready to make this a reality.’ It got our attention,” Katz said.
Engineering firm Black & Veatch, headquartered in Kansas City, will lead the study.

“We’re looking forward to bringing our experience from doing large projects all over the world to something right here in our back yard,” said David Leligdon of Black & Veatch.

One of the factors the study will focus on is estimating cost.

“There are certainly times when tunneling may make sense, so looking at the cost of tunneling,” Leligdon said.

“That the power consumption needs can be met, that you can actually fit the infrastructure along the highway in a safe way,” Katz added. “You also want to make sure that there’s going to be appropriate demand for the system, that people would use it.”

Katz said Virgin Hyperloop One is taking part in three feasibility studies this year in the U. S., as well as some others around the world.

The coalition said it hopes the seven- to nine-month study will be done around Thanksgiving 2018.

Katz said Virgin Hyperloop One could choose their top three routes as early as 2019.

The Missouri Hyperloop Coalition includes partnerships between Virgin Hyperloop One, Black & Veatch, the University of Missouri System, the Missouri Department of Transportation, St. Louis Regional Chamber, and the KC Tech Council.

**Feasibility study to examine Missouri hyperloop system**

By Tribune Staff

A feasibility study announced Tuesday will look at the value and cost of an ultra-high-speed hyperloop system across Missouri, potentially moving people between St. Louis and Kansas City in a half-hour’s time.

Kansas City-based Black and Veatch will conduct the study in partnership with the University of Missouri System and Virgin Hyperloop One, a company working to develop the world’s first hyperloop system.
The study will consider technical issues, the potential economic impact and other benefits of a hyperloop along the Interstate 70 corridor. It will develop a cost estimate and funding recommendations. The study will take six to nine months.

Hyperloop technology involves a tubular track through which a train-like pod carries passengers at speeds up to 640 mph. Feasibility studies also are under way in Colorado and Texas.

(AAU science news website)

Contracts with landowners could prevent deforestation

Generated from News Bureau press release: Forest conservation can have greater impacts by allowing sustainable harvesting

Forest owners at greater risk of illegally cutting trees on their land prefer to join conservation programs that allow sustainable timber harvesting, a new study suggests.

The findings could be used to craft conservation contracts that are more likely to be accepted by forest owners and might succeed in preventing deforestation and forest degradation.

Ecuador contains approximately two percent of the Amazon basin, but hosts 44 percent of the Amazon’s bird species and enormous tree diversity. To prevent deforestation and degradation, Ecuador’s national government developed the Socio Bosque program, a conservation program that pays private forest landowners to protect their forests.

“Money has an effect, but it’s not everything,” says Francisco Aguilar, associate professor of forestry at the School of Natural Resources in the University of Missouri’s College of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources. “We found that among high-risk forest owners, long-term contracts that allow sustainable timber harvesting are more agreeable. On the other hand, forest owners at lower risk preferred programs that have short-term contracts and offer greater financial incentives.”
In 2016, a report by the Brazilian government found that the rate of deforestation in the Amazon had increased by 29 percent on top of a 24 percent rise the year before, indicating a rapidly accelerating pace of forest loss. Still, the rate remains lower than it had been more than a decade ago, before anti-deforestation policies were introduced. In spite of these laws, primary forests continue to be logged illegally, causing forest degradation.

The researchers administered surveys to owners and surveyed forests in Ecuador over the course of nine months. They presented participants with hypothetical contracts based on the Socio Bosque program.

Landowners preferred contracts with longer durations and allowances for controlled timber harvesting, even if those contracts offered less monetary compensation. They also preferred contracts issued by local governments or non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) compared to those issued by the Ecuadorian national government.

An important aspect of the study was its focus on forests at a high risk of deforestation, as owners of these forests are traditionally less likely to participate in conservation programs.

“Conservation programs often are biased toward protecting areas that are ecologically important, but have lesser economic value in alternative land use options,” says Phillip Mohebian, who worked on the research while completing his doctorate at the University of Missouri.

“Low-risk forest owners often are more willing to receive money in exchange for enrolling their forests in conservation, because they would have conserved their forests even without the additional incentives,” he says. “We wanted to evaluate how a conservation program could reverse that bias, so we looked at the design of conservation contracts that appeal to forest owners who are most likely to cause deforestation or degradation in the future.”

Based on the results of the study, Aguilar suggests more private funding from corporations and international organizations would help ease the financial burden on the Ecuadorian government, especially since landowners often view outside organizations as more economically reliable than the central government. This likely accounts for their preference for contracts administered by NGO’s and local governments.

The study appears in the journal Land Use Policy.

Funding for the research came from the University of Missouri’s Research Board and Research Council, its School of Natural Resources, and a Dorris D. and Christine M. Brown Fellowship, as well as from the US Department of Agriculture National Needs Fellowship and the USDA International Science and Education program. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the funding agencies.
Trump isn’t benefiting from economic growth. But he’s not unusual.

By: Mary Stegmaier and Helmut Norpoth

Mary Stegmaier is an assistant professor in the Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri. Her research focuses on voting behavior, elections, forecasting and political representation in the United States and abroad.

As President Trump begins his second year in office, observers have noted how unusual it is for a president to be unpopular in the face of a strong economy. Unemployment is low and the stock market is at record levels. And although a strong economy usually gives presidents a boost, Trump did not benefit from the favorable economic winds during his first year in office. Our research shows, however, that in this respect, Trump is not unusual. To be sure, he is historically unpopular for a president at this point in his term. But the fact that economic growth did not translate into political support during his first year is fairly common — that relationship typically does not kick in until later in a president’s term.

Presidents often do not benefit from economic growth in their first year

We determined this by looking at the relationship between unemployment and presidential approval over the first 12 months of each presidency, going back to Harry S. Truman. If economic conditions give presidents a bump in their first year, we would expect to see unemployment rates and presidential approval move in tandem — when unemployment goes down, approval goes up (and vice versa).

But in fact, we find no consistent relationship. For some presidents — including Barack Obama, Ronald Reagan and Truman — approval ratings during the first year moved in tandem with the unemployment rate. But we found the opposite pattern for others, including George W. Bush,
Jimmy Carter and Lyndon B. Johnson. Trump is also in that category — his approval declined through 2017, even as the number of unemployed Americans also fell.

When we average across all 13 presidents, the correlation — a measure of how strongly two phenomena are connected — between unemployment and approval during the first year is virtually zero. Specifically, the correlation is -0.02, which basically means the two things are unrelated. (If we exclude Trump, it’s about the same, -0.08.)

**The honeymoon effect means most presidents become less popular in Year 1**

We think there are at least two reasons that presidents do not benefit from economic growth in their first year. The main reason is that the presidential “honeymoon” wears off, leading to a general decline in approval over the first year.

Of the 13 presidents from Truman to Trump, nine, including Trump, saw a decline in approval in their first year. For instance, Trump’s approval rating peaked during his first week in office and has not returned to that level. A new president often comes into office with an energized base and, at least historically, a modicum of the goodwill offered to a new chief executive, but support for him wanes as he makes hard decisions and faces criticism. This decline is rarely smooth, but it is observable over the year.

Only John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush saw their popularity rise or remain steady during their first year. Those presidents were different in part because of foreign policy crises that prompted a “rally” in presidential popularity. The most dramatic example occurred in 2001, when George W. Bush’s approval surged from 55 percent in August to 90 percent in September after the 9/11 attacks.

The upshot is that when the more typical “honeymoon decay” in the first year coincides with an improving economy, that disrupts the typical relationship between economic conditions and presidential approval. This is exactly what has happened with many presidents, including Trump.
**First-year presidents also operate in the shadow of their predecessors**

First-year presidents are also less likely to get credit (or blame) for the economy in their first year than they are later in their term. That’s because at least a portion of the public typically holds the previous president responsible for economic conditions.

For example, Obama came into office in the midst of an economic crisis, one that began on George W. Bush’s watch. At the end of Obama’s first year, a [Quinnipiac Poll](https://www.quinnipiac.edu/) showed that 55 percent of Americans blamed Bush for the state of the economy, while only 20 percent blamed Obama.

Over the course of Trump’s first year, [Quinnipiac](https://www.quinnipiac.edu/) asked Americans who they believe is responsible for the condition of the economy. Throughout that time, the public consistently assigned responsibility to Obama over Trump. Even by January 2018, nearly a full year after Trump had assumed office, 49 percent said that Obama was more responsible for the economy, while just 40 percent said Trump was.

All of this suggests that presidents typically do not “own” the economy until they’ve been in office for more than a year, making Trump much less unusual than many observers have claimed. Presumably, Trump is hoping that 2018 is the year Americans will give him credit for the economy — unless, of course, it begins to go south.
MU professor creates online program to enhance social skills among children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder

Story generated by MU News Bureau release: MU online curriculum helps children with autism develop better social skills

By REGAN MERTZ

MU researchers have recently introduced an online program called iSocial that targets children who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Individuals with this disorder have a difficult time cooperating and socializing with others their own age.

The purpose of iSocial is to give children with autism new opportunities to socialize with peers in a virtual world while learning to enhance already existing social skills as well as learn new ones through an online curriculum.

“The virtual world provides an opportunity for youth to get together, interact and practice their skills in enjoyable and engaging ways,” Janine Stichter, professor of special education and innovator of the new curriculum, said.

Stichter describes the new curriculum as “current and innovative.” Today, people of all ages, especially youth, are constantly engaging online.

“Currently we are updating the model since technology evolves so fast. It’s exciting to see what we can create and how easy and rich we can make the interface,” Stichter said.

In order to develop iSocial, the pre-existing program called the Social Competence Intervention (SCI) Suite that was available as a classroom course had to be translated into an online platform.

Jim Laffey, professor emeritus in the College of Education, led the team that originally transformed the traditional curriculum into a virtual world to make it more accessible to kids at a distance. Stichter, her team and Laffey worked to make sure that the preliminary program’s educational content remained just as effective online.

The effectiveness came through trial and error. Laffey recounts an instance when one of the initial prototypes was built and then tested.

“As soon as the kids entered the world they started running around exploring all the aspects of their new world,” Laffey said. “The online teacher was unable to round them up and conduct her
lesson. That taught us that we needed to build in some structures like pods (that stimulated school desks) so that for some activities the kids could be asked to stand on the pods if needed.”

This was just one of the corrections made to iSocial. In addition to the standard lessons, iSocial encompasses a variety of activities and environments that required invention and engaging ideas that would keep children interested.

In addition to maintaining a current platform, Stichter also wanted to expand the program to as many families as possible. Stichter and her team were given a start up grant from the Thompson center in 2007. Following the start-up grant, the team received their first federal grant for the larger online translation in 2008.

As a result of these grants, families residing in locations or attending schools that do not offer or do not have the funding for a program such as iSocial now have much more access to the online version.

“There are many areas in the world and right next door that do not have the funding or human resources to use some of the evidenced based programming that exists. We wanted to bridge that divide,” Stichter said.

It is often difficult for children diagnosed with autism to be provided with the opportunities during the day to learn and engage in traditional classroom and home settings due to lack of funding or accessibility to the original program. iSocial provides a platform where these children can create their own avatars and exist in a virtual world while learning new social skills and enhancing ones they already possess.

Stichter said that the social skills they acquire are “critical for the maintenance of friendships and post secondary activities like getting and keeping a job.”

iSocial is not just geared toward building upon pre-existing sociability at a young age but also building communication and relational skills into adulthood that will help with careers and friendships in the future.

“The activities and structured lessons in iSocial provide a scaffolded approach to enhance existing skills while layering on new, more advanced skills that will be critical for the maintenance of friendships and post secondary activities like getting and keeping a job,” Stichter said.

Evidence-based strategies are a vital aspect to the development of iSocial. The original purpose of these strategies, backed with actual experiences, was to create an entire curriculum that was supported by effective experiences.

The next step was to integrate the strategies and effectiveness back into the initial settings such as personal interactions and schools.

“We could then use [the curriculum and activities] to build the virtual world and not lose any of the important learning and development for the youth,” Stichter said.
In one lesson simulation, the goal was to persuade the children into sharing and communicating ideas as well as listening to one another. In order to create an environment where this type of interaction is welcomed, a restaurant was invented.

“Kids had to make decisions about what type of restaurant, what decor, what menu, etc…and then see the restaurant take shape in front of them,” Laffey said.

Currently iSocial is available for people starting at age 8 into young adulthood, so the traditional SCI Suite program is the only option to current MU students. Stichter says that this age group can expect to be included in the roll out in the future, and all that is left to be done is translate the young adult traditional curriculum into the online version.

### University of Missouri accused of using flawed data for cuts

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — A faculty group says the task force that recommended closing nearly 30 graduate programs and consolidating others at the University of Missouri’s flagship campus used information from a flawed source criticized as unreliable and inadequate.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports that members of the university’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors released their statement Sunday. The statement focuses on the data from Academic Analytics, a North Carolina-based company that compiles data on faculty productivity.

The Task Force on Academic Program Analysis, Enhancement, and Opportunities cite low enrollment and low research output as reasons for some of the recommended program cuts.

The faculty statement says the task force’s report missed differences between academic disciplines while pursuing a “one size fits all measurement” to determine the future of some programs.
Randolph County re-funds 4-H club, MU Extension Office

By ZARA MCDOWELL


MOBERLY - Randolph County commissioners reversed themselves by deciding to re-fund the county's MU Extension Office Tuesday, a move that will save the local 4-H.

The commissioners' vote last week cut the extension office's budget from $30,000 to $10,000.

Dozens of people complained.

The commission's office said in a statement Tuesday, "News of the action spread quickly and Presiding Commissioner Truesdell faced about 100 citizens, including four state representatives and Director of Missouri Agriculture Chris Chinn, at a meeting of the Randolph Area Pachyderm Club last Tuesday night.

Vickie Trower, Randolph County's 4-H youth program assistant, said she was, "very hurt, very disappointed and just very upset about it, because Randolph County 4-H has been here for over 50 years."

Truesdale said some commissioners capped extension office funding to $10,000 because it was lumped in with a budget for another program.

The extension's office rent alone is $9,000.

MU's helps pay for the computers in the office, pamphlets and specialist's salaries. The extension's budget is used for employee's salaries, office rent and all expenses MU does not cover.
Randolph County Council Member Roy Morales said "it was quite a shock going from $30,000 down to $10,000, which meant this office was going to close."

Trower said the budget cut would have ended the 4-H program.

"When this office closes, everything would be gone," she said.

Trower was a part of 4-H during her childhood, along with all of her family members.

Trower said news of closing as traumatic.

"Why did it take everyone being so upset, not knowing what was going to happen," she said.

The extension committee said it will be looking into grants for future funding, but it does not have a promised budget.

**the maneater**

**MSA outlines goals for new semester**

By JACOB ROBINSON

The Missouri Students Association is already in full swing this semester as it begins to outline its plans for the rest of the year.

Between unfinished projects from last semester, changes in leadership and the looming presidential election, MSA senator Dylan Cain believes the semester holds a lot of potential.

“There’s a number of projects, especially in the Social Justice Committee, where I’m sure a lot of relationships could be built,” Cain said. “I think that’s something we need to do as an organization a lot more, to branch out to other non-student governments. I feel like a lot of those places can be more efficient.”

Forming more relationships is one of the biggest goals MSA has this semester, as strategies like bringing in guest speakers proved helpful with projects last year.

“We established those relationships last semester,” Cain said. “It makes it 10 times easier to start new projects. Having that mindset, having that knowledge of what’s going on in the community is going to be incredibly helpful.”

An ongoing project for Cain and MSA is battling Columbia’s food insecurity problem, something Cain believes could be solved by making more outside connections.

“We’re still having a lot of our meetings for the food insecurity task force,” Cain said. “We are, again, forming those relationships. Relationships are key on a lot of this.”
A strategy Cain has been exploring to reach out to more people in the community is a brochure outlining the city’s lack of fresh and affordable produce, as well as the consequences food insecurity can lead to.

“It gives our students and potentially, in my mind, legislators or changemakers in the community, it can give them kind of the pitch as to why food-insecure communities in particular impact students and what a food desert status means for the student body,” Cain said. “That is a segway for another goal, which is to talk to our legislators, talk to public officials. These are the people that really have the resources and the contacts to make serious change.”

Although food insecurity is still a big problem in the community, MSA senator Tim Davis said the organization made big strides last semester.

“Where we really capped off last semester with is the student’s ability, if they’re having financial trouble, to still have access to food on campus,” Davis said. “They can either do that through Tiger Pantry or they can do that through financial aid.”

Last semester also involved maneuvering around budget cuts, as the organization proposed $103,000 in cuts for the 2019 fiscal year. Fiscal year 2018 included the cut of the Craft Studio, saving MSA $53,000 from the nearly $1.5 million budget, according to MSA’s 2018 budget. The cuts from last year and the work done by the budget committee last semester has pulled MSA out of its $180,000 projected deficit.

MSA has also been working with the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, a student-based political advocacy organization, on student consent education. ASUM recently filed two bills in the Missouri Senate, one of which outlines consent education requirements, a cause Davis hopes to get behind.

“The ASUM legislation going through includes consent education in high school, which I know doesn’t directly affect us, but it does if you look at how high school students will transition to college with a better knowledge base of what consent is and what sexual assault is,” Davis said.

Other goals Davis wants to work toward include education funding, working with Tiger Pantry and campus safety, which MSA focused on last semester with the East Campus Safety Walk. What Davis really wants to put emphasis on, however, is getting out into the community.

“I’m less worried about projects with this committee and more worried about taking student issues to the people that can help us solve them,” Davis said. “I think that these meetings are great. They provide updates for us internally, and we always talk the talk, but I think that we need to get out there and do it.”

Leadership changes will also be a focal point this semester, with the sudden and unexpected resignation of former senate speaker Hunter Windholz. Taylor Tutin was elected senate speaker in an emergency senate meeting on Jan. 16, but Davis believes the change will not affect the organization’s goals.

“She’s always been a ‘if you have something, run with it,’ nothing-ever-gets-in-the-way type of person,” Davis said. “She’s always there by your side to help you out if you need it.”
Another shift in leadership will come later in the semester with the presidential elections, a process Davis hopes leads to a smooth term and a guarantee that projects get finalized.

“I think the biggest goal is the transition period has to be smooth, and we have to ensure that our projects continue because it feels like every year we’ll hit summer break and we come back in August and it’s like we totally wiped the slate clean,” Davis said. “We just take up new things. I think that as the semester ends, we’ll be having projects that might be almost at their apex, but they just need to be brought to the finish line. We need to make sure we are continuing to do that.”

Claire McCaskill speaks about college affordability, DACA, and other issues at student forum

By NATASHA VYHOVSKY

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., spoke at Memorial Student Union Friday afternoon to a room filled with nearly 200 students and community members as part of her reelection campaign, answering questions about her work and goals on various issues. The forum was hosted by Mizzou College Democrats.

She began her forum with a short speech about her position on college affordability, refinancing student loan debt, net neutrality and campus sexual assault.

McCaskill then opened the event up to questions attendees submitted on forms. Questions she answered related to climate change, regulations relating to the war on terror, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and DREAM Act status, gun violence in schools, Medicare, foreign policy and government spending on education.

During the forum, a dozen people stood dressed in black for solidarity while they took turns asking McCaskill questions about her work with immigration. They wanted to know how she would ensure immigration reform that included protections for DACA recipients and their families.

One of these people, Brayan Mejia, a 23-year-old undocumented St. Louis resident, human resource manager and member of MO Dreamers, travels around the state and the country to advocate for protections for DACA recipients, DREAMers and undocumented residents. He has been in the U.S. since fifth grade, but he and his family face potential deportation.

“I want it to be heard because it’s important for me; it’s important for my life,” Mejia said. “There’s a lot at risk right now … so it’s really important to me that the DREAM Act gets passed so that I stop worrying about what’s going to happen tomorrow.”
McCaskill reassured the DREAMers and their allies that the recent government shutdown guaranteed the passage of a bill protecting DACA recipients. She said to hold her accountable if nothing was done by March 5, the DACA reapplication deadline.

“We ended the [government] shutdown, but we ended it with an agreement that for the first time in four years, a bill will go to the floor for debate and decision in the U.S. Senate for DACA protections,” McCaskill said. “And, more importantly, it will start with a neutral shell.”

In response to the issue of sexual assault on college campuses, McCaskill said she wants to make sure law enforcement is working together with universities and that there is information available to both victims and people who have been accused. She said there is a general lack of understanding about the ramifications of Title IX complaints.

“I know one of the biggest challenges we have is a memorandum of understanding between law enforcement and college campuses,” McCaskill said. “If someone is assaulted on a Friday night, they’re not sure [if] they tell campus police [or if] they tell anyone and what the difference is between going to the university or the police.”

Sophomore Sarah Schlote, a member of Mizzou College Democrats, came to the forum in support of McCaskill. She encourages students to come to political events regardless of affiliation in order to be informed voters.

“I think people our age should be involved in politics and know what’s going on,” Schlote said. “And I think the best way to do that is to actually get involved when there are opportunities like this so they continue to happen. Not just Democrats, but whoever.”

McCaskill is up for reelection for her third term in November. Her reelection bid follows President Trump’s 19-point margin of victory in Missouri in 2016. McCaskill wants to ensure Democratic representation for the state and encouraged students to register and to vote, volunteer on her campaign and enable her to speak at more events on campus.

“I don’t need to tell you that 2016 was not a great year for the Democrats in Missouri,” McCaskill said. “It was a year that the pendulum swung, and frankly Missouri has always had a little of both in statewide office. We’ve always had a few Republicans, and we’ve always had a few Democrats … I hope that we don’t change so that everybody is of one party. I don’t think that’s healthy for our government.”
Grad student to launch campaign for Congress

By Rudi Keller

Democrats will have a contested primary in the Fourth Congressional District, with Hallie Thompson, a student finishing her doctoral program in plant science at the University of Missouri, making a bid official Wednesday in her home county.

Thompson, who grew up on a farm near High Point, will launch her campaign at 4 p.m. at the Moniteau County Courthouse in California. She’s jumping into a race against Columbia businesswoman Renee Hoagenson, who began her campaign in March, in hopes of being the Democratic nominee against incumbent U.S. Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Harrisonville, in November.

“My reasons for running for Congress are really pretty simple,” Thompson said. “I have met a lot of people and spent a lot of time advocating for people while pursuing my degree and at other times. Citizens aren’t given a hearing by their elected officials and oftentimes the citizens are invisible. Obviously, that is really frustrating, to not be seen or heard or served.”

Thompson, 28, is about five years younger than any current member of Congress. She’s a former president of the Graduate Professional Council at MU.

A primary will be good for Democrats in the district, Thompson said. The Fourth District covers 24 counties from the Kansas border to Central Missouri, including Boone, Audrain, Randolph, Howard, Moniteau and Cooper counties.

“I am really excited about the primary and the prospects of what a primary could do in this district,” she said.

Hartzler won her seat in 2010 by defeating veteran incumbent U.S. Rep. Ike Skelton. In three subsequent elections, Hartzler easily defeated her Democratic rival, winning all or almost all of the district’s counties each time. A transgender candidate who originally planned to run as a Democrat, Jenna Bourgeois, has now decided to challenge Hartzler in the Republican primary. John Webb, who has run unsuccessfully against Hartzler in the GOP primaries of 2014 and 2016, is also seeking the nomination again.

Year-end campaign finance reports were due Tuesday at the Federal Election Commission but neither Hartzler nor Hoagenson had filed by press time. Through Sept. 30, Hartzler had raised
$379,561 for her re-election bid and had $498,916 on hand. Hoagenson raised $63,644 through Sept. 30 and had $33,193 on hand.

Hoagenson said Friday that her year-end report would show more than $100,000 raised in 2017. She said she is selling her publishing business, Showcase Marketing LLC, to focus on the election.

“Things are going great,” she said, adding that she had met with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in hopes of getting additional support. “They really like what I am doing.”

Through town halls and local news coverage, Hoagenson said she is becoming known in the district.

Thompson said she knows she is starting late but feels that she can better lead the Democratic campaign in the district.

“I have heard her speak and talked to her and I haven’t heard a lot about national security,” Thompson said. “We need to modernize our idea of national security, to include cyber security, personal security and climate change.”

The real foe, however, is Hartzler, Thompson said. Hartzler doesn’t take climate change seriously, she said. Farming is the top industry in the district and the effect of longer droughts and other changes because of an altered climate deserve attention, she said.

One of Thompson’s specialties is studying the impact of drought on corn.

“Climate change and climate science are not a joke to people who have to deal with the implications in their lives and that is concerning in a lot of different ways,” Thompson said.

The fundraising lead of her opponents, especially Hartzler, is a concern, Thompson said. The way to counter it is to develop new sources of campaign cash from unlikely places, she said.

“I am confident I am going to be able to fundraise,” she said. “I can’t tell you accurately where the money is coming from. I am going to be trying to find places to fundraise and have conversations that are not traditional.”
State lawmaker pushes for mandatory civics test before graduation

By ABIGAIL SHAW

A Missouri lawmaker has proposed a bill that would require all college students in the state to pass a civics test before graduating.

Students would have to receive at least a 70 percent to receive their associate or bachelor’s degree. If passed, the bill would go into effect on Aug. 28.

House Bill 1528 is sponsored by Higher Education Committee vice chairman Dean Dohrman, with the intent of making students more informed citizens.

"I hope to accomplish better civic education at the higher education level," he said in an interview with the Kansas City Star. "...It's always good for us to learn more about our government."

Individual universities would be responsible for creating their own exams, as well as working the material into existing curriculum. Schools will also choose when the tests will be administered.

According to the bill’s fiscal note, this could have an impact of over $100,000 across universities in the state in the creation and implementation of the exam. The UM System says the exact fiscal impact is currently indeterminable, but would be significant.

"I know a lot of people in college, me being one of them, want to know more about the government and how it works, but don’t know how or where to learn,” junior Madaline Niemuth said. “But I don’t think an exam is the right way to inform them.”

The exam would be known as the “Missouri Higher Education Civics Achievement Examination” and would include 50-100 questions. According to the bill, exams could fold into existing curriculum and courses.

According to the bill, proposed exam questions would cover topics including the Constitution and Bill of Rights, government institutions and federalism.

Colleges would be able to offer the exams online, as well as using any exams from courses that already cover all relevant topics.

“I think it would be interesting,” junior Elizabeth Ronecker said. Ronecker is projected to graduate after the bill goes into effect. “If the materials are given to me then I don’t see a problem studying and taking the exam.”
Dohrman told the Kansas City Star many citizens do not fully understand the federal government outside the role of the presidency.

“We have one of the most, if not the most, complex government systems in the world,” he said in an interview with the Kansas City Star. “So I think it’s a lifelong learning experience for all of us.”

Ronecker believes this bill would help ensure students are properly educated and informed.

“This bill is important because it means that people have to have a basic understanding of how the government works,” she said. “To be a good citizen, it’s important to know why and how different aspects of the government work.”

She also believes the bill would help college students learn more about voting.

“We are the new generation voting on different things,” Ronecker said. “It’s important for people to know how things work when they are voting on different topics.”

Tracy McGrady, provost and vice chancellor of academic affairs at Ozarks Technical Community College, found the proposed exam seems redundant. McGrady said students in Missouri are already required to take a civics and government class before graduating.

"We already have something like that existing.” McGrady said in an interview with the Kansas City Star.

Niemuth, a special education major, only has two semesters left and is worried about the potential impact on her course load.

“I have to take certain classes for graduation,” Niemuth said. “I could definitely see this causing scheduling issues and stress in my last semesters.”

The bill was recently referred to the House Higher Education Committee and was heard in the committee on Wednesday. Action has been postponed on the bill, and no future hearing has been scheduled at this time.

Terrence Phillips investigated by Office for Civil Rights & Title IX

By BENNETT DURANDO

Missouri basketball was dealt another personnel blow Friday when it was announced that junior guard Terrence Phillips was suspended from the team indefinitely.
Things took another turn Sunday when it was reported that Phillips is under investigation by MU’s Office for Civil Rights & Title IX, as first reported by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch’s Ashley Jost.

Multiple people have spoken out on social media in the last two days about alleged mistreatment and even potential physical abuse of women by Phillips. The Missouri Students Association encouraged Phillips to step down from his role on the Missouri Unions Committee as the investigation proceeds.

Phillips will remain on scholarship for now but is prohibited from participating in games or practices, head coach Cuonzo Martin said in a press conference Tuesday afternoon.

“It was a surprise, but I really don’t know much about it — just about as much as everyone else,” junior guard Cullen VanLeer said at a press conference.

VanLeer will be in the spotlight now, as he becomes Mizzou’s most relevant guard off the bench. The diminishing Tiger backcourt will mean increased minutes for him as well as a heavier load for the already-worked Kassius Robertson and Jordan Geist.

Phillips has averaged 10.6 minutes per game with 2.5 points and 1.1 turnovers per game. He is an 81 percent free throw shooter.

Phillips has been the SEC Men’s Basketball Leadership Council chairman and was a member of the 2017 SEC Community Service Team.

Though the precedent for Title IX investigations on student-athletes is completion by the end of the semester in which the investigation is opened, Saint Louis University carried a similar investigation of four men’s basketball players that started last September and carried into the spring semester.