

**During a Museum of Anthropology tour, Suzanne Metzner, left, of Rolla and Amanda Blankenship of Edgerton explore how measurements of skulls are taken.**



# LEARNING FOR THE FUN OF IT

By KAREN WORLEY  
Photos by LARRY BOEHM

## NO BELLS. NO TESTS. NO GRADES.

Just pure learning punctuated the first Missouri Scholars Academy, a three-week, all-expense-paid summer camp at Mizzou for 308 gifted high schoolers between their sophomore and junior years.

"They offer things we haven't been able to do before," says Heather Hogan of Deering. "Nobody's pushing you. We can use our minds anyway we want to," says Shara Clevenger of Peculiar.

"There's no competition. We're all on the same level," says Mike Wickey of Fenton. "We're all good writers, just different styles."

This wasn't "sausage stuffing" education, the cramming full of facts and figures, economics Professor John Kuhiman told the scholars, but rather "light-bulb testing."

"It's not so much the knowledge, but the experience," explains Cheryl Tucker of Senath. "If you can learn to think, you can learn the rest."

**June 16 marks the opening of three weeks filled with stimulation for 308 gifted juniors-to-be.**



**"Give it your best shot," urges Gov. John Ashcroft. President Peter Magrath and Chancellor Barbara Uehling are at right.**



Some 500 high-school sophomores, nominated by their schools, vied for the student slots based on test scores, grades and essays. "Think of the unwritten sonatas and undiscovered cures that are out there in these minds," says Bev Hopkins, an English teacher at McCluer High School in Florissant. She was one of 22 high-school and college teachers selected from more than 100 applicants for the academy faculty.

**MIZZOU WAS CHOSEN** as the site for this first, statewide program because of its location, diversity and tradition, says Ted Tarkow, academy co-director and associate dean of the College of Arts and Science.

For years there have been programs for the disadvantaged and mentally handicapped. Now the Missouri Legislature has attempted to fill the void at the top by allocating \$345,000 for this special program.

"Gifted students are as different from

the norm as handicapped students are," says Bob Roach, academy co-director and state director of gifted education programs with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In Missouri, 40,000 students kindergarten through 12th grade are gifted, but only 15,000 are being served by a state-assisted gifted education program.

Since teachers gear the curriculum to the middle of the road, gifted students aren't challenged; they make top-dog grades without studying. "When they enter college, they have the capacity of learning, but don't have study habits," Roach says.

At the June 16 to July 6 academy, scholars raced through mounds of material in their choice of 12 morning classes, six days a week. In Ed Grooms' and Bill Heyde's On Trial—Different Places, Different Times, students chose three trials to re-enact, then debated whether justice was done. Grooms, MA '71, is a speech, drama and gifted

education teacher in Nevada. Heyde teaches English and American studies at Horton Watkins High School in Ladue.

**IN ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES** in Scientific Research, taught by Bill McLaughlin of Central High School in St. Joseph, and Mark Blount, AB '79, MS '83, of Hickman High School in Columbia, students compared the amount of pain reliever in different priced aspirins and analyzed the hardness of Columbia's water.

In three weeks filled with firsts, students taste-tested from a smorgasbord of academic and social delights. One girl who never played an instrument joined the academy band. A Lutheran minister's daughter roomed with an atheist.

A first for scholar Christine Bellomy in the Patterns, Designs and Math Influence class was a less than complete understanding of trapezoids and trigonometry. Back

**Front to back,  
Dean Fowler, O'Fallon;  
Tony Smee, Bernie;  
and John Zeigler, Mexico,  
tune into the band.**

home in Willard, it'd be a catastrophe, but here, "I like being a little confused once in a while. It's making me reach."

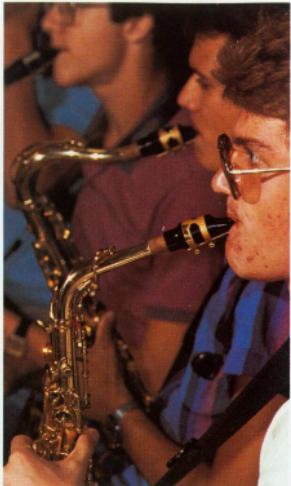
**SOME GIFTED STUDENTS** feel like "normal" kids, only brighter. Others knock the end off the curve and may have few, if any, peers. They may be ostracized for being "teacher's pet" or rebuked by classmates for reading a book by Thoreau, much less having the audacity to admit enjoying it. Some parents exert pressure; some students impose it on themselves to make straight A's, always have the right answer and never make mistakes.

One of the academy's goals was for students to realize "they can make mistakes and they're going to make mistakes," says Grooms, the teacher from Nevada. "They already know they're smart, but don't admit

they're human." By unleashing students' wealth of intelligence, creativity and task commitment, "they're going to be able to solve problems we as yet haven't even anticipated."

Teachers didn't pretend to have all the answers. "I'm not a great sage," Grooms admits. "In 15 years of teaching, I've never worked harder, nor had more fun." He and the other teachers dispensed with their egos, forming an energized team.

**JUST AS TEACHERS** supported each other, they also gave high marks to the academy administration: co-directors Roach and Tarkow; and program coordinators Lee Mosley, UMC curriculum and instruction doctoral candidate; and Ginny Booker, UMC residence hall program coordinator. "They pay as much attention to the concerns of one



**In the Computer Club,  
Jeanette Fulmer of Kansas City, right, and  
Carol Renze of St. Peters discover  
a software program  
on an IBM personal computer.**

student as they do to planning an event for 300 students," says McLaughlin, the science teacher from St. Joseph. "They see the big and the little picture." He also commended the support of UMC's faculty members.

**AFTER ACADEMICS** in the mornings, teens spent afternoons in philosophy and personal and social development sessions. Topics of the freewheeling discussions included reality, infinity, decision making and coping with peer pressure concerning drugs, alcohol and sex.

"I'm not going to be the same teacher," says McLaughlin of his small-group discussions. "What we're asking students to do is to discover who they are and therefore who everybody else is. If they can't develop who they are, all of society will lose."

Lectures, movies, plays, sports and con-

certs filled evening hours. The computer club even devised a dating service, debunking a fear of one girl who thought "that the guys would be nerds."

The hectic schedule delighted Marcus Dukes of St. Louis. "I always have about 10 things to choose from at one time." He enjoyed being on a college campus and the freedom of choosing his own activities, including doing his own laundry. "I love it, minus the food."

Despite the ribbing on Chicken McFrisbees, as the students dubbed chicken patties, the cafeteria staff made eating an educational experience by posting daily food and nutrition questions and serving unusual foods. In three weeks, the 308 teenagers consumed as much yogurt as 1,000 college students, according to the academy's student-operated newspaper, *MSA Today*.

**DID THE EXPERIENCE** change participants' lives?

"I loved school before, but I think I'll love it even more," says Dukes, a student from St. Louis. "I think I'll work a little harder and study a little more."

Says Bellomy, the scholar from Willard, "I'm going to be more open to what other people think."

Says science teacher McLaughlin, "When I go back, everything will be the same, but I won't." □



**Steve Cruse of Florissant, left, and Mike Wickey of Fenton proofread stories and check page layouts for *MSA Today* in the Columbia Missourian backshop.**