



MIZZOU

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[Home](#) » [Fall 2010](#) » [Around the Columns](#) » [Advantage Mizzou](#)

Around the Columns

Advantage Mizzou

Known to generations of Mizzou students as “the strip pits,” dozens of small lakes that dot Rocky Fork Lakes Conservation Area north of Columbia are remnants from decades of coal mining that lasted well into the 1970s. These swimming holes are favorite getaway spots to beat the summer heat, but one — called Red Lake — doesn’t draw many swimmers. That’s because high levels of iron and sulfates that leach from old coal seams have dyed the water a bright red.

As one of the first projects to be funded through the new Mizzou Advantage program, MU researchers and colleagues from the Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla will explore Red Lake for unusual microorganisms that thrive in the icky water. They’ll hunt for novel enzymes the microorganisms produce that can be used to break down cellulose in biomass crops, such as switch grass, and convert them into alternative fuels.

After several years of planning, Mizzou Advantage was rolled out this spring with the announcement of an initial \$900,000 in funding for 26 proposals. They will strengthen existing and create new faculty networks and propel MU’s research and instruction to the next level. The program’s purpose is to identify unique strengths at Mizzou and provide additional



support in the five Mizzou Advantage initiatives: disruptive and transformational technology; food for the future; media of the future; one health, one medicine; and sustainable energy.

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