

Mizzou Weekly

March 18, 2010 Volume 31, No. 24

A banner evening



Students from KU present MU students with a unity banner commemorating a commitment to diversity at a March 11 town hall meeting held at the Bond Life Sciences Center's Monsanto Auditorium. From left are Arooj Zafar, Drew Case, Kelsey Murrell, Marcus Mayes, Marcus Ferguson, Tasha Wells and Jasmine Arnold. Clay McGlaughlin photo

Choosing unity

KU students travel to Mizzou to promote diversity

Given Mizzou's longstanding rivalry with its nemesis to the west, the sentiment expressed on a banner last week was more than a little unusual: "KU supports MU."

The banner was presented to Mizzou by a delegation of five University of Kansas students during a March 11 town hall meeting in the Life Sciences Center's Monsanto Auditorium.

The meeting, dubbed "Courageous Conversations," was held to promote diversity on campus and to allow the university community to discuss an earlier incident in which cotton balls were scattered in front of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center.

That incident prompted KU student Kelsey Murrell, a residence hall assistant on the Lawrence campus, to organize a grass-roots response to show solidarity with Mizzou. She and her Kansas cohorts delivered a banner inscribed on a double-sized sheet that read, "We choose unity. KU supports MU in the promotion of diversity." The banner was signed by dozens of Kansas students and was presented to the Black Culture Center.

In an earlier letter to Mizzou deans and department chairs, Chancellor Brady Deaton charged those university leaders "to seize this opportunity to take bold steps toward engaging your faculty, students and staff to consider such issues of diversity, to strengthen our commitment to diversity and to improve the level of respect and the celebration of differences among us."

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Gov. Jay Nixon announces plan to rescue state's 2010-11 budget

Finding savings

Governor rejects tax hike, across-the-board cuts

State tax revenues continue to plunge and are causing major uncertainty as Missouri legislators work on a spending plan for the 2010-11 fiscal year that begins July 1. In a March 11 speech to the Springfield, Mo., business community, Gov. Jay Nixon announced a plan to “right-size state government by cutting programs, trimming the workforce and consolidating departments while maintaining excellence in our services.”

A key element of those consolidations, he said, would be to meld the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the Department of Higher Education.

Nixon said that \$500 million must be cut from the state budget that he proposed in January. One area he proposed cutting is the portion of the state's Access Missouri college scholarship program that goes to support students enrolled in private colleges and universities.

“Currently many of our state college scholarship programs — both for merit and for need — provide financial support to students whether they choose to attend public or private colleges,” Nixon said. “In some cases, students at private schools actually get larger scholarships than students at public institutions.”

“Missouri has wonderful colleges and universities, both public and private. But in times like these we simply can't continue to subsidize the choice to attend a private school.”

Two options that he will not consider, Nixon said, are tax increases and across-the-board cuts to state government. “Every state is grappling with this downturn, and 29 states have raised taxes. But one thing is off the table here in the Show-Me State. We will hold the line on taxes.”

Across-the-board cuts may seem appealing, he said. “But that's simplistic and short-sighted. It wouldn't solve the problem, and it would hurt the people of Missouri.”

Nixon said his “right-sizing” plan would consolidate the state's two education departments into one Department of Education “that prepares students from the day they walk into pre-school to the day they walk across the stage with their college diplomas.”

That consolidation, if approved, would affect the state's 1.2 million students in kindergarten through graduate school. Robert Stein, Missouri's commissioner of higher education, says he applauds the governor's bold steps to address the extraordinary economic challenges facing Missouri.

“Unprecedented problems call for creative, innovative solutions,” Stein said in a statement following Nixon's speech.

“Centralization of administrative functions — such as equipment, vehicles and data gathering — could certainly result in savings. We will use our expertise to bring value to the discussion and explore all options for making the delivery of education to Missouri citizens more efficient.”

Stein said that interest in the concept of aligning pre-school through higher education — the so-called P-20 approach — is growing across the state and nation and deserves consideration by legislators and the public.

He noted that the debate over state-based financial aid being used by students to attend a private school has heated up during the past two legislative sessions, with bills introduced both years to reduce the amount available to students who choose higher-

tuition private institutions. Currently, almost 50,000 students receive merit and need-based scholarships financed by the state and administered by the Department of Higher Education.

Stein planned to help facilitate a discussion among public and private institution presidents March 16 regarding how best to provide financial aid to Missouri students. He said as the governor's proposal moves forward, the Department of Higher Education will provide data to help inform future decisions about student financial aid.

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Staff Council gets benefits update

Placement

39 percent of staff took benefits survey

At the March 11 Staff Advisory Council meeting, Lisa Wimmenauer briefed the group on recent activities of the University of Missouri retirement and staff benefits committee. Wimmenauer, associate director of business services, represents the MU campus staff on the committee.

The committee's primary charge is to administer the University retirement program, she told Staff Council. In addition, it serves in an advisory capacity with respect to other benefit programs. Membership is composed of two faculty and one staff member from each of the four campuses, an Extension representative and two retiree representatives. Members are appointed by the UM president.

One recent committee recommendation is to extend the educational fee reduction for dependents to retirees and to employees on long-term disability. "This recommendation would impact a small part of the population, but is still an important message to send to all staff," Wimmenauer said. If approved by University leadership, this proposed change would need to be presented to the Board of Curators for approval.

She told the council that in addition to looking at the University's plans and options, the committee also looks at competitive plans offered by peer institutions "to see how we stack up and what are the latest trends," she said. "Our goal is for the University's benefits plans to be in line with or surpass these institutions."

The committee is awaiting results of the recent UM system online benefits survey. "We had stellar response from staff members, with 39 percent responding," Wimmenauer said. The purpose of the survey is not to cut benefits but to provide useful data to inform future decisions, she said. "The committee, along with UM Human Resources, really wants to know what our employees want; what people value more."

Survey results, tabulated by an outside firm, should be available sometime in April and will be reported to employees. "We hope to get some good data," she said.

In other business, Marijo Dixon, council chair, encouraged each committee chair to develop a manual that consists of the history, purpose, successes, failures and procedures of the committees. The information, to be archived electronically and on paper, will be passed down to new chairs.

Staff Recognition Week is May 17 through 21. More information about events will be published in April in the council's newsletter and at staffcouncil.missouri.edu (<http://staffcouncil.missouri.edu>).

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Tax aid is available

Finding help

Online tool lowers the barrier between people and information

With the deadline for filing federal income tax returns rapidly approaching, many people nationwide are searching for help with filing their taxes. Tax experts at University of Missouri Extension have created a new Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) online search tool that allows those in need of tax assistance to find it anywhere in the country.

The new search tool is the only comprehensive nationwide VITA search source on the Internet. Andrew Zumwalt, an associate state specialist for financial planning and an Extension faculty member in the College of Human Environmental Sciences, says this search tool will make tax assistance more readily available for everyone.

“It will lower the barrier between people and information,” Zumwalt says. Zumwalt believes this new Web site will allow VITA sites to become a little more accessible. “Currently, calling the IRS involves a long wait, especially during busy tax season,” Zumwalt said. “Our search site has provided a simpler way to present the information. Not only is it more simple; it is much quicker as well.”

Zumwalt has been instrumental in founding and growing the Missouri Taxpayer Education Initiative. MoTax sites have prepared more than 20,000 returns during the past six years. To view the MU Extension search tool, visit extension.missouri.edu/hes/taxed/vitasites.htm (<http://extension.missouri.edu/hes/taxed/vitasites.htm>).

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Weight loss benefits can outweigh bone loss

health benefits

Aerobic exercise is still recommended

While there are many benefits of losing weight, weight reduction also might negatively affect bones in the body. During weight loss, bones are being remodeled – breaking down old bone and forming new bone – at an accelerated rate. As a result, bone density is reduced, causing increased fragility.

In a new study, MU researchers found that weight-bearing exercise, in this case, fast walking or jogging, did not prevent the increased bone turnover caused by weight loss.

“Accelerated bone turnover is not favorable, but the potential negative consequences of increased bone turnover do not outweigh the numerous other health benefits of weight loss,” says Pam Hinton, associate professor of nutrition and exercise physiology in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. “Adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D may minimize the reduction in bone density during weight loss.”

In the study, Hinton examined bone turnover markers in the blood of overweight, premenopausal women. These bone markers are used as indirect indicators of bone remodeling. After six weeks, women who lost 5 percent of their body weight by adhering to a calorie-restricted diet and participating in weight-bearing exercise experienced an increase in bone turnover markers.

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Gender impacts how babies' genes are expressed in the womb

Maternal diet

Research might help mothers tailor nutrition during pregnancy

Most mothers are conscious of their diets while pregnant, knowing that diet can influence the development of their babies. According to a new study, certain foods might alter how certain genes are expressed in the placenta in mid-pregnancy. The extent to which these alterations occur depends on the babies' gender.

MU researchers found that the placentas of developing female mice are better able to adapt to the mothers' diets than those of developing male mice — even before the fetus begins producing sex hormones. This finding might explain why adult males appear to suffer more from the effects of nutritional stress they experienced while in the womb.

In her study, Cheryl Rosenfeld, assistant professor of biomedical sciences, examined gene expression in mice that were fed high-fat, high-carbohydrate diets versus nutrient-balanced diets.

"From previous animal studies, we know that maternal diet affects all offspring, but that males are more affected," Rosenfeld says. "In our recent study, we examined how genes might be altered based on the type of diet a mother consumes while she is pregnant. In this case, we found that many genes are affected by diet and that male and female placentas respond differently. Curiously, some of these genes also affect the kidneys, as well as control water and salt movement in the body. Other genes that could be affected are responsible for olfactory function, or ability to smell."

Rosenfeld suggests that findings such as these might help physicians and mothers tailor prenatal nutrition regimens to improve fetal health, thereby reducing a child's risk of diet-related, late-onset diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes.

The researchers were surprised to find just how many genes were regulated by maternal diet. Rosenfeld says that the noticeable increased sensitivity of the female placenta might serve as a buffer to protect the female against disturbances to compounds absorbed from the mother's intestine after a fatty meal. She says this might explain why females have a decreased risk for adult diseases compared to males who are born to women who eat a high-fat diet or are obese at the time of pregnancy.

The study, "Contrasting Effects of Different Maternal Diets on Sexually Dimorphic Gene Expression in the Murine Placenta," was published online in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) in March.

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Improving science education

Long before President Obama's "Educate to Innovate" campaign focused on improving students' performances in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, MU professor Sandra Abell worked to improve science education and decrease science teacher shortages in the United States.

For her contributions and dedication to science education, Abell was presented with the National Science Teachers Association Fellow Award at their national conference earlier this month.

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MU hosts Twain tribute

Missouri holds a special claim to the internationally loved author Mark Twain, and MU is in the middle of a weeklong event, “Marking Twain: A Centennial Celebration of the Life and Legacy of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910,” to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Mark Twain’s death. The event will feature Twain scholars from around the country and MU alum and Twain biographer Ron Powers.

Twain’s long-lasting cultural influence and why people still care about him is the subject of the celebration’s first roundtable on March 20. Other lectures will discuss the American musical landscape during the time of Twain, Twain’s birthplace and his literary influence. There also will be a Twain art exhibition at the State Historical Society of Missouri and several events at the Daniel Boone Regional Library, including a reading discussion, a presentation by a Mark Twain impersonator and a Twain documentary film showing.

Powers also will present three lectures on Mark Twain during the event. For a full schedule and more information about the events, visit coas.missouri.edu/events/markingtwin10.html (<http://coas.missouri.edu/events/markingtwin10.html>).

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Who you gonna call?

An established, stress reducing program is being introduced to MU students this semester by the MU Student Health Center (SHC).

Stressbusters are professionally trained, volunteer teams of undergraduate and graduate students who give free 5-minute backrubs and health information to Mizzou students through planned and requested events.

“Stress is recognized as the No. 1 impediment to academic success,” says Terry Wilson, the center’s health promotion director. “In addition to improving circulation and loosening tight muscles, backrubs get the recipients focused on their bodies instead of the busyness in their heads that creates the stress in the first place.”

Since starting this semester, the program has trained 50 Stressbusters who will start holding regular events from noon to 1 p.m. on March 18 and 25, April 22 and from 3 to 4 p.m. May 5 in Stotler Lounge at the Memorial Union. Appointments aren’t necessary.

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