

Mizzou Weekly

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Model classroom goes online



TEACHING & LEARNING

Survey, task force findings guided 117 Strickland renovations

The growth of online courses offered by the University of Missouri proves you can take education out of the classroom. But for most of the more than 30,000 students enrolled at MU this semester, you can't take the classroom out of education.

That's a problem for faculty, as well. An online survey of instructors last year found that many classrooms on campus lack the tools and flexibility needed to support new teaching methods, such as small-group learning and the integration of technology.

The university took a first step to address those concerns this fall, when the campus' first "model classroom," in 117 Strickland Hall, opened for classes.

The classroom was designed to lower the physical and social barriers that inhibit interaction between student and teacher. With more of today's classes incorporating multi-media presentations, 117 Strickland is outfitted with two retractable video screens and an Eno board, an electronic whiteboard used with a projector that allows instructors to save notes directly to an in-room computer.

Students can follow the action from 44 moveable desks, called Node chairs. A design that just hit the market this summer, the Node has a swivel seat and a 12"x22" fully adjustable tabletop (lefties that struggled with the traditional "one-armed bandit" will be especially pleased). The desks allow students to follow the instructor's movements around the classroom. The carpeted floor makes it easier for students to quickly, and with less disruption, arrange themselves into small groups.

The renovation also extends outside the classroom to a nook with stand-up tables and a padded bench. "We were able to take some of the space in the classroom and return it to the hallway," said Heiddi Davis, director of Campus Facilities-Space Planning

and Management.

Before taking on the project in Strickland Hall, classroom updates were “pretty standard renovations,” Davis said. But while MU’s classrooms are in large part clean, functional and well maintained, faculty wanted upgrades that encouraged a more interactive and less-disruptive relationship with their students.

“Faculty like tables, because they provide more working space and ability to reconfigure the room,” Davis said. “But when we renovate classrooms with tables, we lose a lot of space. Faculty wanted more flexibility for collaboration, but they wanted it to be easy.”

The ideas for 117 Strickland emerged from the findings of a task force created by Jim Spain, vice provost for undergraduate studies. With help from Campus Facilities and Educational Technologies at Missouri, or ET@MO, Spain’s office launched an online classroom quality survey that collected data from faculty for two semesters.

The model classroom is intended to be something of a template for future class renovations. However, centrally scheduled classrooms present challenges that discourage a one-size-fits-all approach, Davis said. Some faculty members lecture from a podium, others prefer to interact with small groups of students. Still others use a combination of the two.

Moreover, designers can anticipate the educational content of departmental classrooms and include certain design and technological features accordingly. That’s not the case for classrooms like 117 Strickland, which will host a dozen instructors this fall teaching subjects as varied as math and theatre.

“These rooms are used by a lot of different classes,” Davis said, “not all of which require the newest technology.”

The final tab for the renovation of 117 Strickland isn’t available yet, but Davis said the cost will likely be less than the \$100,000 that was originally estimated. Feedback collected from faculty and students over the next few semesters will be used to guide future renovations, including the work that’s under way on Tate and Switzler halls.

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Employee health insurance premiums will likely go up next year

PAY & BENEFITS

Reserves helped keep rates steady in recent years

Between pay freezes and a new mandatory contribution toward their retirement, many University of Missouri employees are seeing less money in their paychecks this year.

The fiscal news is about to get a bit worse: Health insurance premiums will likely go up in 2011, said Betsy Rodriguez, UM's vice president of human resources.

Rodriguez said the use of reserve funding kept premium increases relatively small in recent years. "But the reality is, the plan was still going up in cost. We will continue to use reserves to offset increases, but we'll still have to raise premiums."

It may be small consolation, but unlike most employers, UM will continue to shoulder its share of rising health care costs, which are increasing much faster than inflation. According to a recent report by the Kaiser Family Foundation, more employers are choosing to keep their health costs steady by passing the increases onto workers. Employee contributions to a family plan rose 14 percent in the last year, according to the report, and have increased 47 percent since 2005.

Rodriguez said UM will continue its traditional "split" with employees, in which it pays about 73 percent of the cost of health premiums, retirement and other benefits for faculty and staff. "When the costs go up," Rodriguez said, "they go up proportionately for both employees and the university."

Perhaps few people are as in touch with the economic anxiety felt by UM employees than Rodriguez. Over the summer, she has visited the system's four campuses to discuss pay and benefits with faculty and staff. Turnout has varied from campus to campus, but the message is the same everywhere: With employees paying more for benefits, system administrators must find a way to increase salaries, which are the lowest of the 35 schools in the American Association of Universities.

That won't be easy. The system is bracing for significant budget cuts in fiscal year 2012, which begins July 1, 2011. The issue is further complicated by investment losses suffered by the system's pension fund, the result of the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. Despite instituting a requirement last year that all employees pay a percentage of their wages toward retirement, the university will have to increase its share of contributions to meet obligations to current and future retirees.

The tension between its pension obligations and the need to increase pay is one reason why the system is considering switching from the current retirement plan, known as a defined benefit, to a defined contribution plan for new employees. The defined benefit plan guarantees each worker a pension upon retirement, as long as UM fully funds the plan. Rodriguez said that UM has never failed to set aside every dollar it needs to meet its retirement obligations — and administrators want to keep it that way.

"We're in good financial shape on the current plan," she said. "But that plan will always be subject to investment risk, and it might make sense in a public setting to shift that risk off the public and put it on the employee."

A defined contribution plan would do just that. It would require employees to contribute a percentage of their wages into a retirement fund of their own choosing and that they would manage themselves. Under a defined contribution plan, employees who leave the university would take their retirement savings with them.

Rodriguez stressed that the switch would only impact new employees. "Our plan is absolutely valuable to the people who are here," Rodriguez said. "That's why it would be crazy to do something to disrupt that."

Leona Rubin, chair of MU's Faculty Council, said the current plan is attractive to prospective new hires. With salaries lagging behind other universities, she said faculty would like to find a way to keep the defined benefit, perhaps by temporarily increasing the mandatory contribution, currently two percent for those making more than \$50,000 a year, for higher-salaried professors.

"When the market is good and the returns are better, maybe the university can say, 'You don't have to put in more.'" Rubin said. "That's like a raise for faculty and we get to keep the defined benefit."

That's likely to be one suggestion Rodriguez hears when she continues to meet with faculty groups this month.

"A lot of people are getting very discouraged," she said. "The consequences of doing nothing are very serious."

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City biking coalition wants residents to try a no-car September



TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGE

More than 100 people have signed up to walk or bike

Think you could live without your car as a primary mode of transportation for a whole month? David Schenker, associate professor of classical studies, could. He's been biking instead of driving for 40 years.

"It's so much easier," Schenker says. "If I bike to work and leave at the same time as my neighbor who drives to campus, I get to my office first. My parking spot is right outside my building."

Schenker's commuting style is what the PedNet Coalition wants you to try this September as it kicks off its No Car, Low Car and Whoa! Car Challenge.

"We're really trying to get people to make a commitment to themselves to find a way around the hurdles that keep them going back to their car," says Gina Overshiner, the event's organizer and PedNet education coordinator.

The PedNet Coalition is an advocacy group for integrating a network of roads and trails to make walking and biking just as easy as driving. The group draws funding from multiple grants, and was instrumental in securing the \$25 million federal grant for GetAbout Columbia.

Now in its fifth year, the No Car Challenge has more than 100 participants registered — up from the 80 people that took part in the challenge last year. Those that take part in the challenge get a participant card that is good for discounts and freebies in some local businesses.

The No Car Challenge is open to everyone. There are four levels of participation, ranging from the hardcore “no cars allowed” to the lighter Whoa! Car Challenge that allows people to gradually transition to a car-less way of getting around Columbia.

While cars still occupy the six MU parking garages and two commuter lots, the bicycle culture is embedded in campus with some faculty, staff and students choosing two wheels instead of four.

During the commute from his home in the old South West neighborhood, Schenker has noticed more bikers than ever, especially once he reaches campus. The bike rack he uses outside Strickland Hall is always full.

“If our bike racks are overflowing, I think that’s a great problem to have,” he says.

People new to biking can get some pointers in a Sept. 13 class about bike skills hosted by the MU Sustainability Office. Overshiner, a certified League of American Bicyclists instructor, will lead the three-hour class. For more information on the class, contact Kevin Petersen at kjpb78@mail.missouri.edu.

For more information about the No-Car Challenge, visit pednet.org or contact Overshiner at gina@pednet.org.

— *David Wietlispach*

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Wait is over for consolidation of Children's Hospital

Patient transport is scheduled for next week

University of Missouri Health Care will celebrate the opening of the new Women's and Children's Hospital with two events this week. Then comes the hard part: moving patients from University Hospital and getting them comfortable in the new facility, the former Columbia Regional Hospital at 404 Keene St.

A ribbon cutting and ceremony for MU Health Care faculty and staff is scheduled today, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Patients, families and the public are invited to a grand opening celebration Sunday, September 12, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Refreshments, family-friendly activities and tours of the new hospital are planned.

The \$12 million project, which began in June 2009, consolidates children's services that have been housed on two floors of University Hospital and at about a dozen other scattered locations. For the first time, pediatric and adolescent inpatient units, a 13-bed pediatric intensive care unit and a pediatric cardiology clinic will be under one roof. The Children's Blood Disorders and Cancer Unit will also make the move from University Hospital, joining the newborn intensive care unit, which moved to Columbia Regional, along with women's services, in 2003.

The new facility becomes one of only 50 free-standing children's hospitals in the country. Features include private rooms for 27 children and 16 adolescents, a jungle-themed playroom and a game room. Tim Fete, medical director of Children's Hospital and chair of MU's Department of Child Health, said the move to Columbia Regional is not only a consolidation of existing units. It also represents a "dramatic growth" in services for children and their families.

"In the six months between April 1 and October 1, we will have added 14 new faculty just to the Department of Child Health," Fete said. "We've added a number of pediatric specialists that will increase the availability and access to care in mid-Missouri and rural Missouri in a number of pediatric subspecialties."

Fete said specially trained transport teams are scheduled to begin moving patients to the new hospital Tuesday, Sept. 14. Two pediatric teams will transport critically ill newborns and children, while two Flight for Life crews will move the children with less serious conditions. The teams have been planning the move for 20 months, Fete said, and have been meeting weekly in the run-up to the move to establish the "absolute paths" they will follow en route to the new hospital and to set up an electronic tracking system to monitor the patients' conditions.

"This time of year is a good time for making the move in that there's a relative nadir in the number of kids admitted to the hospital in the fall," Fete said. "We haven't hit our traditional sick season, so the time is right. We should be a relatively low census of patients to be moved."

The amount of excitement that surrounds the long-awaited opening of the new hospital is "great and well deserved," Fete said. The location — at I-70 and Highway 63 — is "fantastic," and will make it easier for families who live in rural communities to get the best care for their children.

"Columbia is a warm, welcoming community that people are comfortable coming to, as opposed to some potential fears people have about going to St. Louis and Kansas City for their care," he said.

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Diversity initiative receives grant to develop peer programs

DIFFICULT DIALOGUES

Funds will help MU create “national movement”

The University of Missouri has received \$30,000 to help faculty at other universities handle opposing viewpoints on religion, culture and politics that can arise on campus.

The funding from the International Institute for Education will allow MU to expand the Difficult Dialogues Initiative, or DDI, which promotes diversity in higher education by encouraging the discussion of controversial topics. Eryca Neville, a former DDI faculty fellow who was recently named coordinator of MU’s initiative, said fostering civil discourse on sensitive issues is essential to democratic citizenship in an increasingly diverse society.

“Facilitating difficult dialogues is an important tool to include various points of view across the wide range of perspectives in the wide variety of functions needed to sustain a university’s function as well as a productive society as a whole,” Neville said.

MU was one of 27 recipients of \$100,000 grants from the Ford Foundation Difficult Dialogues Initiative in 2005. Phase I of the program explored issues that can divide students in classrooms and on campus, and to teach faculty how to handle those issues by bringing them into the open. Phase II included hosting a summer institute for other universities to develop difficult dialogues programs on their campuses. Designed in collaboration with DDI awardees from the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Alaska-Anchorage, the institute, held in summer 2009, attracted teams from 10 universities to learn about the faculty development and interactive theatre elements of the DDI.

Roger L. Worthington, assistant deputy chancellor and chief diversity officer at MU, said the new funds will allow MU’s program to “expand the reach” of Difficult Dialogues to six schools that participated in the institute. “Our new goal is to help other campuses around the country develop their own difficult dialogues program,” Worthington said, “and to establish a national movement for the advancement of difficult dialogues pedagogy in higher education.”

MU has received a total of \$230,000 in grants to support its DDI, including an additional \$100,000 grant from the Ford Foundation and its partner organizations in 2008. The DDI is part of the Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative, which is committed to creating a more inclusive learning and research environment at MU.

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Single males, educated, seek tornadoes

STORMCHASING

Research finds a niche market with room to grow

Since the hit movie *Twister* opened a window on the world of recreational storm-chasers in 1996, a growing number of companies have been offering tourists an up-close look at tornadoes. Data collected by researchers with the University of Missouri's School of Natural Resources suggests that the market for so-called tornado tourism will continue to grow.

The research, by Sonja Wilhelm Stanis and Carla Barbieri, both assistant professors, was collected from tours conducted along Tornado Alley, an area from mid-Texas northward through Kansas and Minnesota and into Canada, in 2009.

The research found that tornado tourists are primarily middle-aged, single and highly educated. Sixty-two percent were male. Slightly more than half of the storm tourists lived in North America, about one-third were from Europe, 13 percent traveled from Canada and almost 11 percent from Australia.

Most chasers had higher than average incomes – almost a third earned \$50,000 to \$75,000 annually. Almost 20 percent had incomes of up to \$100,000 and 13 percent earned \$150,000 or more.

The research team, which included Jiawen Chen and Shuangyu Xu, presented their findings at the 2010 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium in Sagamore, NY. A gathering of recreation managers and researchers

Wilhelm Stanis noted that recreational storm chasers are not mere thrill-seekers, as they are commonly portrayed on TV and in the movies. More than 90 percent of respondents said they took a tornado tour to enjoy nature's beauty and to learn more about storm dynamics. The vast majority said they like to explore unconventional places and have exciting experiences rather than participate in risky behavior, Barbieri continued.

The MU research team worked with five companies offering the tours. Most use experienced meteorologists and trained storm chasers, armed with sophisticated weather-tracking equipment. The companies charged \$3,000 to \$5,000, not including meals or accommodations, and the tours attracted three to 15 customers per tour. The tours typically involve long hours on the road between tornado watch areas and last one to two weeks, with camera operators recording the event as part of the package.

Most tours accommodate seven people in a van, although one enterprising operator uses an armored Humvee equipped with Doppler radar, a lightning detector and weather recording instruments. More than 95 percent of tourists reported seeing at least one significant weather event – with half seeing a funnel cloud and a third experiencing at least one tornado, Wilhelm Stanis said.

The chasers reported that they enjoyed their experiences and are inclined to spend more money on future tours. "Importantly for the continuity of this type of niche tourism, the majority of respondents recommend tornado chasing to others, such as their friends," Barbieri said.

Wilhelm Stanis and Barbieri said that the level of satisfaction is important because word-of-mouth is the most important form of marketing for storm-chasing companies. Barbieri and Wilhelm Stanis said that the data will give tornado tour operators and communities a better understanding of these clients, and they expect tornado tourism to continue to develop as a sub-part of the Midwest's tourism scene.

"Many of these tours fill up as much as a year in advance," Barbieri said.

— *Randy Mertens*

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As the woodpecker flies

AERIAL BOUNDARIES

Man-made development affects bird flight patterns and populations

It may seem like birds have the freedom to fly wherever they like, but researchers at the University of Missouri have discovered that what's on the ground can determine where a bird flies.

Dylan Kesler, assistant professor in fisheries and wildlife at MU's School of Natural Resources, said movement of individual members of a species can teach scientists everything from how smaller populations exist to how they interact with other species. With that knowledge, foresters and urban planners improve bird habitats and maintain strong, healthy populations.

"Movement determines where individual birds procreate," Kesler said. "How they spread across the landscape affects who meets whom, which in turn dictates how genes are spread."

Kesler's research involves radio-tagging juvenile red-bellied, red-cockaded and black-backed woodpeckers to track their movements. Kesler chose to study the red-bellied woodpecker because the bird lives in the same area year-round and is very loyal to specific sites. The tags, which are designed to fall off after four months, allow researchers to track the birds' daily flights using radiotelemetry and GPS technology.

In the first systematic analysis of how these birds fly, feed and fight predators, Kesler confirmed what conservationists have suspected since the 1990s – that birds make landscape-influenced flight decisions along paths where they can immediately dive into tree cover to escape predators and readily find food.

Kesler has found that non-migrating resident birds tend to travel over forest "corridors," which are areas protected by trees and used by wildlife to travel. Birds choose to travel over forests because they can make an easier escape from predators as well as find food.

Man-made features, such as roads and gaps in forested lands caused by agriculture or rivers, can restrict birds to certain areas. When forests are removed, bird populations become isolated and disconnected, which can lead to inbreeding and weaker, more disease-prone birds.

This summer and fall, Kesler and his team hope to see if the woodpeckers return to their originating home site after searching for food or if they sleep in any place that is convenient. The earlier research suggested that the woodpeckers flew almost two miles away, where they stayed for several hours, before they returned to their permanent home base. It appears that birds mapped the landscape and evaluated their breeding options through these repeated forays and explorations, Kesler said.

The research team hopes to discover more about natal dispersal, the time interval between when a bird moves from where it is hatched to an area where it will breed. Very little is known about what influences natal dispersal.

"In many territorial resident birds, natal dispersal is the only time an individual bird makes a substantial movement from one location to another," Kesler said. "Natal dispersal is, therefore, integral to gene flow among populations, colonizing vacant habitat, inbreeding avoidance and maintaining optimal population densities."

This year's work builds upon research Kesler has been conducting since 2005 on three species of woodpeckers and two Pacific island kingfishers. Results will be published this fall in conservation-oriented science journals. Results from Kesler's previous research about dispersal appeared in the nation's top ornithological journal, *The Auk*, and another paper will soon be published in *Behavioral Ecology*.

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Trulaske advisors win INROADS awards

Two MU Trulaske College of Business academic advisors have been named 2009-10 Educators of the Year by INROADS, a multicultural career development organization.

Marvin Burns, a senior advisor and the college's Vasey Academy director, and Susan Klusmeier, an advisor and the college's coordinator of student diversity, received the 31st annual award from INROADS Midwest Region, Inc. during a ceremony in Kansas City. INROADS, a St. Louis-based not-for-profit group, honors people who consistently support its mission to train multicultural students for careers in business. The organization cited the work Burns and Klusmeier have done to help arrange student training sessions at the college's Vasey Academy and to include the career development group in corporate showcase events. Burns, who for years has encouraged MU students to take advantage of INROADS resources, continued building those relationships when he stepped into the Vasey Academy director's post in October 2009.

Burns said students benefit greatly from the personal touch INROADS provides to professional development programs. The academy was established in 1997 to introduce minority students to business career paths and opportunities. Funded by gifts from MU alumnus Roger Vasey and his wife Sandy, the academy served 55 students during the 2009-10 school year.

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Scheer brings home international marketing honor

A groundbreaking paper co-authored by University of Missouri marketing professor Lisa Scheer has won a prestigious international award for its long-term impact on the field.

Scheer, the Emma S. Hibbs Distinguished Professor of Marketing at the Robert J. Trulaske, Sr. College of Business, was among four academics to receive the 2010 Jan-Benedict E.M. Steenkamp Award for Long-Term Impact in early June.

The European Marketing Academy and its scholarly publication, the International Journal of Research in Marketing (IJRM), awarded Scheer and three co-authors for the 1996 IJRM article entitled "The effects of trust and interdependence on relationship commitment: A trans-Atlantic study." The paper, which has been heavily cited by other scholars, found that interdependence between companies builds commitment, but that trust determines whether that commitment is based on preference or necessity. The authors were the first to simultaneously study commitment, interdependence and trust in relationship since.

Scheer joined the MU College of Business in 1989 after receiving her doctorate in marketing from Northwestern University in Illinois. She has focused on business inter-organizational relationships throughout her career. Scheer's co-authors on the award-winning paper were Jan-Benedict Steenkamp, of the University of North Carolina; Inge Geyskens, of Tilburg University in the Netherlands; and Nirmalya Kumar, of the London Business School.

Papers published in the IJRM from 1995 to 2000 were eligible for the 2010 award, and 34 were nominated. A four-member award committee ranked the papers based on overall quality, their ISI academic journal citations and votes from the IJM Editorial Board.

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Fulbright Scholar Morgan headed to Vietnam

Mark Morgan, associate professor in the University of Missouri School of Natural Resources' Parks, Recreation and Tourism program, has been selected as a Fulbright Scholar to teach a semester at Vietnam National University and organize a study of Cuc Phuong the oldest national park in Vietnam.

Established in 1962, it is located approximately 70 miles southwest of Hanoi. The park is famous for its natural resources, including the rare and endangered Delacour's langur primate. The karst topography has produced a very scenic landscape, attracting visitors from around the globe. Of particular interest to Morgan are the 60,000 indigenous people, mostly from the Muong tribe, who live inside Cuc Phuong. Many visitors spend a night at the park's culture village to learn more about this ethnic minority.

Morgan earned his doctorate in 1987 from Texas A&M University. He teaches classes in outdoor recreation management and conducts research on the human dimensions of natural resources, especially as it relates to environmental education.

The Fulbright Scholar Program sends 800 U.S. faculty and professionals abroad each year. Grantees lecture and conduct research in a wide variety of academic and professional fields.

The Fulbright Program is one of the most prestigious awards programs worldwide, operating in more than 155 countries. More than 300,000 students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists and artists have participated in the program since it began in the aftermath of World War II. Candidates recommended for Fulbright grants are people with outstanding achievements in their fields.

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