

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Accreditation group visits MU medical school to re-evaluate probation status

By Kelsey Miranda

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COLUMBIA — After putting the MU School of Medicine's resident education program on probation last spring, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education visited the school on Tuesday to re-evaluate its accreditation status. School officials think the council will meet in January to evaluate the site visit and reach a decision shortly after.

"The University of Missouri is taking steps to significantly improve its education program for resident physicians. These steps resolve issues identified by the ACGME," School of Medicine spokesman Rich Gleba said.

The council placed the institutional administrative component of MU's resident education program on probation in April. The action is not associated with accreditation of individual residency and fellowship programs in MU medical departments and divisions, and it is not associated with the education of medical students, Gleba said.

"MU has an internationally admired education program for medical students, which recently received the maximum level of reaccreditation possible from the Association of American Medical Colleges," Gleba said. "Furthermore, every component of MU's resident education program remains fully accredited."

The decision, made after the council's last visit to MU in February 2008, involved the proper referencing of policy language in manuals, resident representation at meetings on campus, processes for reviewing and disseminating internal reports, and the level of resources and oversight associated with institutional administration of the residents' daily work.

Since the council's previous visit, developments to MU's graduate medical education program have included reassigning tasks to nurses, social workers, pharmacists and other staff members so resident physicians can focus on other duties with higher educational value, Gleba said. Also, new staff members are being hired when necessary, and the school has increased its investment in faculty time devoted to the administration of graduate medical education.

The Tribune's View

UM funding

More money or less spending?

By Henry J. Waters III

Tuesday, October 27, 2009

As higher education in Missouri faces a bleak fiscal future, you can make a good case for increased state funding. Missouri ranks low among the states in this effort.

You also can make a case for more strategic use of revenue at the University of Missouri campuses, particularly at MU, where the most comprehensive programming is offered.

Obviously, these are the two sides of the budget equation, but university officials understandably focus first and foremost on the revenue side. Lobbyist Jim Moody, a former state budget director, says legislators just don't grasp the problem. Another way to put this is they don't regard restraints on the UM budget as a problem because it commands a fairly large share of their budget at a time when money is short.

President Gary Forsee says UM wants to partner with the General Assembly to find ways to work through the challenge, and he has some reasonable ideas for cost saving — more electronic teaching, no-frills three-year degrees using college credits earned in high school and more flexible use of summer, weekend and evening hours. MU Chancellor Brady Deaton says it's no time to go wobbly, urging renewed efforts to persuade lawmakers to maintain state funding.

As Forsee promotes the idea of partnering with the state, he might consider reinventing the approach used during a previous budget crisis by former President George Russell, who made a deal with the legislature. To close the UM budget gap, the university would provide one-third of the proposed financial effort with higher tuitions and one-third with internal financial reallocation if the state would provide the remaining third in an appropriation increase.

The legislature was surprised and happy to hear a university lobbyist suggest such contributions and readily approved the deal.

This year state budget makers might say they can't come up with even a third of requested university funding. More likely is a withholding. But the other two legs of Russell's plan might stand.

Last year UM made a deal not to raise tuition if the legislature would not reduce appropriations below the previous year. This year the university plans tuition increases, and it could use some serious internal reallocation of spending, too.

Of all the options floating around, reallocation will be avoided most diligently. Given the hundreds of programs in the course catalogs, it would be possible to produce a fine educational menu without a few of them — perhaps even a better menu because resources could be concentrated on priority programs. But the politics of reallocation are deadly. Courageous campus leaders who have tried in the past — the names of UM President Brice Ratchford and MU Chancellor Barbara Uehling come to mind — got their heads handed to them after UM curators, pandering state legislators and other necessary supporters did indeed go wobbly in the face of lobbying from managers and alumni of the threatened programs. Sparse funds remained stretched.

In the face of salary and hiring freezes, layoffs and seriously scarce funding, would it be possible to find a couple of lowest-priority programs to phase out? Finding is not the problem; doing the deed is.

University planners will pursue new programs in areas they deem lacking, such as performing arts. But every new or expanded program dilutes budget focus. Funding is tight in Missouri even for static programming. How will bold new areas be contemplated without thinking about marginal areas to abandon?

HJW III

One half of knowing what you want

is knowing what you must give up before you get it.

— SIDNEY HOWARD

theman eater

Debate between MU, Tan Time nears conclusion

A hearing will decide if The Spa will stay on campus.

By David Conway

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The long-standing battle over the tanning beds at the Student Recreation Complex drew closer to a conclusion Friday when a hearing was held to decide whether The Spa, which is owned by Tan Time LLC, would remain open for the immediate future.

Tan Time's lawyer Thomas Schneider said the hearing would determine the eventual closing date of The Spa.

"It was a hearing on a permanent injunction," Schneider said. "The judge is deciding when the lease can be terminated."

Although the hearing was one of the last steps toward a ruling, MU lawyer Kelly Mescher said it's hard to determine when that ruling will come in.

Mescher said both parties were given 15 days to file their own proposed findings of facts and conclusions, which are summaries of the case's facts and the legal conclusions to be drawn from those facts. The judge will choose between the two sides' findings or, if neither proves to be satisfactory, write his own.

"We won't have a result until the judge files findings of facts and conclusions," Mescher said.

The debate over when the lease can be terminated stems from a contract dispute. Both sides insisted their reading of the contract was accurate.

Mescher said a clause in the university's contract allows for the canceling of the contract with 60 days written notice at the end of any lease year.

"The university has maintained that they have the option to terminate the contract with Tan Time, the limited liability company that runs The Spa, with proper notice," Mescher said.

Schneider said the lease could not be terminated until the lease's first renewal date, which falls at the end of next year.

"We are going to propose a finding that the lease can be terminated Dec. 31, 2010," Schneider said.

In addition, Tan Time will be requesting \$32,000 from the university in lost profits due to an attempted closure of The Spa in August 2008, Schneider said. The Spa was reopened after the corporation obtained a temporary restraining order against the university. An additional \$158,000 from MU will be requested for the money Tan Time has invested into a location it will be forced to vacate early.

"We made two claims for damages," Schneider said. "One is for lost profits stemming from the attempted closing of The Spa in the summer of 2008. The second is for the depreciation of the value of the lease we're leaving behind."

When a ruling is issued, the debate will not necessarily be settled. Although reluctant to speculate on the future of the case, Mescher said continuing the legal dispute after the judge decides on a result is a possibility.

"There would be the opportunity to appeal the decision," Mescher said. "With no ruling in, it's hard to say what will happen."

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

AP Associated Press

MU mention page 2

Michael J. Crumb

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After burning through \$1-million (U.S.) in savings and seeing no end to their losses, dairy farmers Jake and Lori Slegers figured they didn't have much choice - they had to kill the cows.

So one day last summer their sons tagged all 1,571 cows, loaded them onto trailers at their farm south of Fresno, Calif., and watched them rumble away to a slaughterhouse.

Lori Slegers said her husband came into the house and broke down.

"He said it was the hardest thing he ever had to do," she said. "Luckily, my boys could do it."

Growing demand in developing nations drove up milk prices when times were good, and dairy farmers expanded their herds. But the global recession hurt exports and left farmers with too much milk on their hands. Milk processors cut the price they were willing to pay farmers, in many cases below what it cost to produce milk.

In the past year, hundreds of farmers have come to the same conclusion as the Slegers: The only way to raise prices is to reduce the supply, and that means killing cows. In some cases, whole herds have been turned into hamburger. In others, farmers have kept their best producers and sent the rest to slaughter.

The Slegers turned to an industry-run program called Co-operatives Working Together, or CWT, which pays farmers going out of business to kill - rather than sell - their cows and help remaining dairy operations by reducing the milk supply. Until this year, the 6-year-old program had paid for about 275,000 dairy cows to be slaughtered. This year alone, it has paid for more than 225,000 to be killed.

In addition, individual farmers are sending cows to slaughter at a pace of about 55,000 per week, said Robert Cropp, a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin. At that rate, about 3 million cows could be killed in a year.

Lifelong dairy farmers Keith Sammon, 55, and his brother, Mark, 53, decided to sell their herd to CWT last summer after considering the low milk prices, the cost of modernizing their operation and some personal health issues.

Keith Sammon recalled the sombre mood as he loaded the 80 cows onto livestock trailers one Sunday morning at their farm in Faribault, Minn.

"As we milked the cows ... it was pretty quiet, but then my son came out with my granddaughter, who was 10 months old and she was just beginning to walk around. Just having her around made it easier," Keith Sammon said. "We would load the cows for a while and then go back and play with her for a while. It kind of took your mind off of it."

The slaughter has helped some. Dairy farms pay CWT 10 cents for every hundred pounds of milk they produce. As the cows have been killed, the price processors pay for milk has gone up an average of 66 cents per hundred pounds of milk, said Scott Brown, an assistant research professor for dairy livestock at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Consumers haven't seen prices go up because processors still pay dairy farmers much less than the retail price, Mr. Cropp said. In fact, grocery store prices may still drop because the milk supply remains much greater than the demand, he said.

That's because even as thousands of cows are killed and many farmers call it quits, others are increasing their herds. In Wisconsin, the nation's second-largest dairy producer after California, the number of cows increased to about 1.25 million in August, up about 5,000 from the year before, according to state figures.

Most of the growth was the result of state tax credits and grants approved a couple of years ago to help the industry modernize and expand. When those credits were approved, the industry was booming.

Also, Wisconsin farmers haven't been hit as hard as those in western states such as California, where farmers must buy more of their feed. High feed, utility and other costs have compounded the losses created by the drop in milk prices.

CWT spokesman Christopher Galen said most of the cows slaughtered in the program have come from western farms.

For the Slegers, the future is cloudy. They are still farming corn, sorghum and winter oats this year but are looking at moving away and starting over. They're not sure what they would do.

"We still don't know if it was the smartest move we ever made," Lori Slegers said. "One day, when the dairy business turns around, will we kick ourselves? We promised we wouldn't do that."