

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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Fierce advocacy is surest way to improve college access

By Editorial Board

Mark Wrighton of Washington University, Elizabeth Stroble of Webster University, Zelema Harris of the St. Louis Community College system, and **Brady Deaton of the University of Missouri-Columbia** discuss college affordability at a conference organized by the Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis. Photo by Dan Donovan.

Raise the subject of how much it costs to go to college and be prepared to hear a lot of excuses.

For decades, increases in tuition "sticker price" been staggering. According to a 2008 report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, tuition and fees have risen 439 percent over the past 25 years. That's more than four times the rise of the consumer price index and nearly three times the increase in median family income. Tuition and fees have risen even faster than the cost of health care, up 251 percent in the same 25 years.

But leaders of universities and colleges, public and private alike, claim that they're doing everything in their power to help to make college affordable.

That was the message at a public forum Sunday from chancellors Mark Wrighton of Washington University, **Brady Deaton of the University of Missouri-Columbia**, Elizabeth Stroble of Webster University and Zelema Harris of the St. Louis Community College system. The forum was organized by the St. Louis Scholarship Foundation and held at the Center of Creative Arts.

Faith Sandler, longtime director of the St. Louis Scholarship Foundation, argues that no category of social investment is capable of transforming a person or family in a more profound and lasting way than investment in higher education.

No one doubts that. But now, only one in every four people in the St. Louis region 25 years old or older holds a college degree. For the good of the region, that must change.

But how do we pay for it? State lawmakers are staring at dwindling revenues, forced to choose between paying for higher education at public colleges, elementary and secondary public education, prisons, social services and health care for the needy. At private universities, tuition and fees sometimes exceed \$40,000 a year, well out of the reach of all but a privileged few.

Advocates for higher education argue that politicians have been unreliable partners even in good times. But many of these same educators are less interested in cost controls at their institutions or talking about salaries paid at universities and colleges.

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, the number of college and university presidents earning more than \$1 million a year grew to 23 in 2007-08, twice as many as in the preceding year. Webster University's former president Richard S. Meyers was fourth on the private college list at \$1.43 million, including a retirement package.

There's plenty of blame to go around. But blame won't educate the future work force. If we delay action on college access until the economy improves, legions of college-capable students will be left behind.

Even in the current economic climate, much can be done to dramatically improve college access.

- The St. Louis region could start by trying to figure out why college completion rates are so low — especially in Jefferson, Franklin and Warren Counties and parts of St. Charles County, where high school graduation rates are solid. This should be a major focus of the business community.
- Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education should better track students' progress after they've graduated from high school. This would allow the state to gauge how well school districts are preparing students for college and how colleges and universities are doing once they get there.
- Colleges and universities must become advocates for prospective students. Too often they have other priorities — new facilities, building national reputations, angling to become players in major economic development projects and cutting-edge research. These are valuable. But getting students in and keeping them in should be Job 1. Job 1-A should be helping them pay for it. Too often, administrators leave students and families to navigate a brutally difficult financial aid system on their own.
- Parents, meanwhile, should insist on effective, individualized college counseling services. Students and their parents should be prepared to be aggressive and reach out for help.

Consider the work of the St. Louis Regional College Access Pipeline, a project led by Jane Donahue of the Deaconess Foundation and Ms. Sandler at the Scholarship Foundation, along with representatives from local philanthropies and student service organizations. Their 10-year goal is for at least half of the 25-and-older St. Louis population to have at least a two-year associate's degree.

Their message to younger students is that college is attainable. They push hard on academic preparation, creating a "college-going climate" at local high schools. They work to streamline the financial aid process. And once a student has enrolled, they work to remove barriers to completing college.

Alumni and philanthropic contributors could have a huge impact. If they focused their giving exclusively on needs-based scholarships — even for just a year or two — it would send an unmistakable message that colleges and universities need to recalibrate their priorities.

Missouri's economic future depends on getting more students into college and making sure they finish. Students need fierce advocates in their corner, people who won't be steamrolled but who persistently and pointedly can insist that colleges and universities, school districts and policymakers do better.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

UM admissions don't appear tainted

By Kavita Kumar

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Monday, Nov. 04, 2008

The University of Missouri admissions system appears to be more resistant to political pressure than the University of Illinois, where a recent scandal sparked policy reform and caused trustees and top administrators to resign.

In some ways, it's not surprising that the University of Illinois' admissions system received so much outside pressure, because the competition to get in there has stiffened in recent years. Last year, the campus received a record 26,000-plus applications for 7,100 spots in the freshman class.

Contrast that to the University of Missouri-Columbia, which has no cap on enrollment and generally accepts about 85 percent of students who apply for the freshman class. Last year, about 16,400 students applied. On top of that, MU has fairly transparent admission standards for undergraduates. If applicants meet the requirements, they are in.

Ann Korschgen, MU's vice provost for enrollment, said she can't recall receiving phone calls or inquiries from legislators about specific students in several years.

"This isn't an issue for MU," she said. "We are trying to admit students rather than deny them."

The university's assertion that it does not receive much outside interference in admissions was substantiated by the results of an open records request. The Post-Dispatch asked the university for all correspondence in the past year and a half between board members or elected officials and top university officials regarding individual applicants.

The university said it found only two e-mail inquiries — one from a legislator and another from a university board member — regarding applicants they knew who

landed on the wait list for the law school in Columbia.

State Rep. Brian Yates, R-Lee's Summit, and university curator Doug Russell, both said they were not trying to use their positions to influence the admissions process. But even if that was their intent, they were unsuccessful. In both cases, the students they inquired about were not admitted.

"This is not Illinois," said Lawrence Dessem, the dean of MU's School of Law. "I think this would confirm the fact that we have a good process. We are a state-assisted university and law school and our duties are to every citizen of the state."

But in neighboring Illinois, legislators and trustees successfully pushed University of Illinois officials to admit certain applicants. The Chicago Tribune reported earlier this year that 114 elected officials logged 481 admission inquiries in the past five years. In some cases, this political pressure led university leaders to overrule admissions officers who thought the students should be denied.

The revelations prompted Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn to form a commission to investigate the university's admissions policies. In the wake of the scandal, six university trustees resigned. And in recent weeks, university President B. Joseph White and campus Chancellor Richard Herman have announced they will step down.

The public scrutiny also led to new procedures. The school has eliminated the category for politically connected applicants, made available an appeals form for any applicant to contest an admissions decision, and will make a public record of any admissions inquiries by third parties.

COMPETITION AT MU

Some MU graduate programs are more competitive to get into, such as its law school, which receives 900 to 1,000 applications annually. Last year, the school accepted about 400 students for 150 spots. And about 100 other applicants landed on the wait list.

One of them was a good friend of curator Doug Russell's sons. Russell, president of a manufacturing company in Lebanon, Mo., is one of nine appointed members of the university's governing board.

Russell e-mailed MU Chancellor Brady Deaton about this applicant in February. He followed up in April when the student ended up on the wait list. Russell told Deaton that the man had been accepted to the university's law school in Kansas City but that his first choice was MU. He asked Deaton to forward his comments to the law school.

"I have known (name deleted) all of his life," Russell wrote. "He has always been a very organized and disciplined young man, and I am confident he will put the effort required to be successful."

This set off a flurry of e-mails among Deaton, Dessem and an admissions official.

Dessem e-mailed Deaton confirming that Russell's letter of recommendation was added to the applicant's file and noting the number of students on the wait list.

"As you know, this is a particularly unpredictable year for admissions," Dessem wrote. "...Russell should know, though, that (name redacted) is being given every consideration in the admissions process."

Russell said in a recent phone interview that he was just acting on the student's request.

"As a board member, he had asked if I would submit additional information," he said. "But there was no expectation that because I was inquiring that he would get off the wait list."

In the second case, Yates sent an e-mail to Kenneth Dean, assistant MU provost, about the wife of a cousin who had applied to the law school. Yates, a graduate of the law school, had taken classes from Dean. Yates told Dean that the woman was committed to attending MU if accepted and asked whom he could speak to on the admissions committee on her behalf. He copied the university's lobbyists —

Steve Knorr and Marty Oetting — on the e-mail.

The relative landed on the wait list, prompting Yates to e-mail Dean again in July.

Yates was adamant in a phone interview that he was not trying to use his position as a legislator to curry favor for his relative. Rather, he said, he was making the recommendation as an alumni of the school.

In any case, Yates said Dean told him that his relative's chance of admission was slim, judging by movement off the wait list in previous years. So, Yates said, his relative decided to attend law school in Oregon.

MU Student Health Center cancels seasonal flu clinics this week

By Larissa Dalton

November 4, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The MU Student Health Center has canceled its scheduled seasonal flu clinics this week because of a shortage of the vaccine.

According to the health center's Web site, it has a limited supply of the seasonal flu vaccine, so students are encouraged to call the center and schedule an appointment to get vaccinated.

Pamela Roe, a student health center spokeswoman, said they have about 100 doses left.

"There was no need to go out and set up an outreach clinic," she said.

She said the health center ordered more doses than last year. It isn't ordering seasonal flu vaccine anymore because production has stopped, Roe said.

The seasonal flu vaccine costs \$25 for students with a valid student ID. The fee can be charged to student accounts.

Next week's clinics have not been canceled yet, but they'll be canceled if the H1N1 vaccine isn't available to students by then.

"We have our fingers crossed that we will have H1N1, but we don't know until Friday," Roe said.

Students can check the health center's Web site for updates about the clinics and about H1N1 vaccine information.

There is not an estimated time when students will be able to get the H1N1 vaccine. It is limited to narrow target groups, including pregnant women, young children and people with chronic illnesses.

Geni Alexander, a spokeswoman for the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services, said restrictions will be lifted when the department believes it has done a good enough job with the narrow groups.

“When we do expand to those broader priority groups, students will be able to get the vaccine,” Alexander said.

The student health center will give the H1N1 vaccine for free when it becomes available.



Trial again delayed in spam e-mail case

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

The federal trial of **two University of Missouri graduates accused of spamming college students** has been reset to give defendants more time to prepare.

The trial of brothers Osmaan Shah and Amir Shah was postponed from yesterday to April 26, according to court documents.

It had previously been delayed in June.

The Shah brothers were indicted on 51 counts of fraud and conspiracy in late April.

According to the indictment, they are accused of sending spam e-mails to some 8 million students at roughly 2,000 colleges and universities, making more than \$4 million by selling products under false pretenses.

Osmaan Shah also is charged with using MU equipment to send the spam messages.



MU program listed as No. 4 nationwide

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

The University of Missouri's agricultural education program ranks fourth out of 82 universities offering similar degrees, according to a recent study.

Robert Birkenholz and Jon Simonsen of Ohio State University authored the study, which asked professionals in the field to rank agricultural education programs based on research, faculty and program characteristics. Ten universities, including MU, emerged as having "distinguished programs."

"We're really proud of that," said Rob Terry, department chairman. "We were one of the smaller departments among the top 10, so we're very pleased."

In a follow-up ranking, Terry, along with Bryan Garton, now associate dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, and Professor Robert Torres, were named among the 15 most distinguished agricultural education faculty members in the country.



Open Column

Nabobs bear blame for Texas trampling

Monday, November 2, 2009

Editor, the Tribune: Who is responsible for the pitiable Sunday morning mood of the grief-stricken public after the massacre of the Tiger innocents?

I cannot but suppose the fault lies with the University of Missouri scheduling sachems.

It was a disgrace owing to the expense of a limited mentality. What with expert reams of preseason stats, what possessed these officials to ruinously schedule the Homecoming game of our likable Tigers to oppose the bloodletting Longhorns.

It was an unmitigated blunder.

Is it too much to ask that a Homecoming game be scheduled when team rankings are on a par? Surely the fans wouldn't mind even if a Homecoming matchup pitted the Tigers against a lower-tier college — trusting that the odds of a lopsided defeat are curtailed — and noncelebrants would not suffer cognitive whiplash nor be bewildered and abashed by the hideous spectacle of fanatic impulses in a lower-tiered depth of decrepitude.

To be sure, the Ninth Street parade delirium pictured on the front page of your sheet's day-after edition could not but be likened to the giddy spirit of the public's disposition on this end of town. What an incomparable moment! Then — what a difference a day makes! — to observe the ecstatic exuberance melt to foundering and sobbing is ... well, it's just unspeakable.

It's the "responsible" MU board who ought to be gored for this faux pas, not our Tigers or their underlings. But the nabobs will undoubtedly and incredibly continue to receive eye-popping raises or bloated bonuses for such decisions.

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