



Missouri Department of Higher Education

Higher Education Headlines

July 20, 2016

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St. Louis Public Radio

July 20, 2016

A matter of degrees: Regional Chamber wants to boost college completion

By Dale Singer

When it comes to education, Missouri has no shortage of goals.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education wants the state to be, as its slogan says, in the Top 10 by 20 – among the leaders in a variety of school measures by the year 2020.

Not to be outdone, the state's [Department of Higher Education has its sights set a little further out](#), on 2025. Nine years from now, it wants Missouri to have 60 percent of its working-age adults with postsecondary credentials, to be in the top 10 for investment in academic research and to rank among the 10 most affordable states in which to obtain a postsecondary degree or certificate.

Now, you can add the St. Louis Regional Chamber to the list of goal setters. It's working on a plan to have St. Louis be among the top 10 most educated metropolitan regions by 2025.

Such a status would help more than the newly minted graduates with bachelor's or associate's degrees, said Greg Laposa, the chamber's vice president for education strategies. It would also give a boost to companies that want to attract and retain the skilled workforce they need.

"It's fundamentally about making sure that people have education that allows them to have economic opportunity," Laposa said in an interview.

"We know that there are significant benefits for the region when you have more educated people who are able to purchase goods and are able to find jobs that meet the needs of our employers."

The chamber's efforts began about five years ago and have evolved since, with leaders in business and education working together to develop goals and strategies to reach them. Plans will be further refined through the summer and fall.

At this point, reaching the top 10 would require 75,000 more people beyond current trends to earn a bachelor's degree by 2025, plus another 10,000 people getting their associate's degree.

Those degrees can be in specific fields, like the STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering and math, that certain companies need. But Laposa said the effort is trying to think more broadly, so that new graduates have not just specific knowledge but the ability to master unforeseen challenges.

“Employers are focused on finding talent that is able to learn and relearn new skills,” he said. “Our economy is changing as we become more global. You can’t anticipate exactly what talent needs companies will have looking out 10 to 20 years.

“Skill sets might emerge that aren’t currently specific, so to be able to have students think broadly and be able to learn skills is an important priority for employers.”

And, Laposa added, the chamber wants to make sure that the St. Louis area is a place where people will want to come and stay.

“Young people who are graduating our colleges and universities in the region are interested in finding places with other highly educated people,” he said. “They’re looking for places that are more diverse, that are more welcoming, that are offering opportunities to be open to new ideas.

“So they look to those cities that have that kind of innovative spirit or that educated population, where they feel like they can connect. So certainly as a talent attraction and retention strategy it’s a priority for us, but it’s also obviously beneficial for employers that are looking for the talent to meet their current needs and their needs of the future.”

Laposa said that at this point, the effort plans to target specific groups, including working adults with some college credits but no degree, as well as the unemployed and veterans.

“Rather than be broad and say we’re trying to serve the needs of all students,” he said, “we’ve looked at how we can better support students with unique needs. The needs of returning adults, or the working adults who may consider going back to school, are slightly different potentially, or at least they are unique in certain ways.

“So how do we tackle strategies for supporting working adults and veterans? And the unemployed students, how do we make sure we are making St. Louis an attractive place for talent when they graduate?”

St. Louis has already attracted attention nationwide as a good place for startups. But it also has a less-rosy reputation since the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014 and the race-based disparities that came to light after that.

Laposa acknowledges that such publicity may not be the best. But he says it can have a positive side as well.

“We’re finding that a lot of college graduates are looking for places where they feel like they can make a difference,” he said.

“So for some of the social issues that we find challenging in our community right now, that we’re working toward improving, this is a very attractive place for young talent. They may find it to be a place where they can connect, because it is a smaller.”

From the viewpoint of educational institutions, Laposa said the chamber wants to make sure that barriers to degrees are as low as possible, including cost. State support for public colleges and universities has been dwindling for some time, but he said that doesn't necessarily mean that the only way to help make schools more affordable is to provide more public dollars.

He emphasized that the chamber's plan is still evolving, but it will try to involve public and private institutions, both two-year and four-year.

"We can look to increase state funding," he said, "but we have to be more creative. There are changes we can make at the institutional level, getting the business community more engaged to support the overall initiative."

Kansas City Star

July 14, 2016 5:19 PM

Despite a year of turmoil, University of Missouri is making progress

Highlights

Fiscal year 2016 brought in a record \$171 million in contributions for the University of Missouri

Even though a year of turmoil has damaged MU's reputation, alumni support proved to be resilient

The Editorial Board

Adversity can compel people and institutions to accomplish great things. That apparently has been the case at the University of Missouri.

Despite a year of racial tension, campus unrest, the resignation of top academic officials and threats from the Missouri legislature, MU raised a record \$171 million in fiscal year 2016, running through June 30.

That amount eclipses the 2014 record of \$164.5 million and helped swell the Mizzou: Our Time to Lead campaign to \$762 million toward a goal of \$1.3 billion.

"It was a great show of support by our alum," said Todd McCubbin, executive director of the Mizzou Alumni Association and its 44,000 members.

That's quite a turnaround considering that the university in October feared it might lose \$5 million in gifts after months of turmoil on campus — which continued this week when Mack Rhoades abruptly resigned as athletic director.

MU graduates and supporters would have had to live in one of Missouri's deepest limestone caves with no cellphone or internet service to miss the national news the university made in the 2015-2016 school year.

At the start of it, graduate students and the university administration were at odds over health care benefits.

Later in the fall, black students protested ongoing incidents of racism on campus, the need for more black faculty members and the inaction of university officials. Black football players threatened to boycott a regular season game.

That broke the logjam, resulting in the resignations of the MU system president and Columbia campus chancellor. An interim president and chancellor have been appointed.

Piling on, the Missouri General Assembly threatened to cut MU's funding over its handling of the disputes but correctly backed away from doing so.

The turbulence has contributed to an alarming 2,600-student drop in enrollment this fall, ending at a projected 32,400. University officials proactively have cut budgets and frozen hiring and wages to offset the tuition revenue decline of more than \$36 million.

Republican candidates for Missouri governor also have made criticism of MU part of their campaigns.

Businessman John Brunner said at a debate this week that the board of curators should end the search for a new MU system president until the next governor can appoint a new board. But that could postpone such a hiring until early 2017, at least another six to nine months.

Former House speaker Catherine Hanaway added her voice to calls for MU football players' scholarships to be revoked for their threatened boycott.

That is political nonsense. College students are supposed to learn and be fully engaged on campus, and that includes social activism.

Even with all the strife on campus, university officials were right to turn to loyal donors for more support of MU's goal to continue its role as a first-class institution of higher education.

The alumni came through, providing donations ranging from \$1 to a \$25 million gift from the Kinder Foundation to create the Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy.

The spring Mizzou alumni association magazine also openly explained the campus controversies to MU graduates receiving the publication. It notes that the university has a lot of work to do to meet the challenges that the increasing diversity of students raised.

In one recent success, summer enrollment was up 2.2 percent to 13,697 students, an all-time high.

With the alumni's help and a more responsive and inclusive administration and faculty, the University of Missouri can overcome its many challenges and better serve its students.