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## Truman receives \$400,000 grant for competency-based learning program

The U.S. Department of Education describes competency-based learning as transitioning away from seat time in favor of a structure that creates flexibility and allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content.

Competency-based learning systems help to save time and money, can make better use of technology and take advantage of learning opportunities outside school hours and walls.

Competency-based learning strategies can include online and blended learning and dual enrollment courses taken through high schools.

Source: U.S. Department of Education

# Truman awarded \$400,000 grant

BY AUSTIN HORNBOSTEL

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Truman State recently was awarded a \$400,000 grant to implement a competency-based education program between the University, a high school dual-credit course and a course through Truman's Joseph Baldwin Academy.

Competency-based learning is a learning strategy that requires mastery of a subject be demonstrated, rather than just the completion of a set amount of credit hours. The grant was awarded to Truman after administrators and faculty from Academic Affairs, the Institute for Academic Outreach and the School of Science and Mathematics collaborated to write and submit a proposal to the Missouri Governor's office. The grant, named the Data Mastery Initiative, aims to apply competency-based learning methods to different levels of education, including a new online data science graduate certificate from Truman. The grant's timetable asks Truman to implement the programs during fall 2016.

Diane Richmond, Director of Learning Technologies, said her role at Truman is to support how the faculty teaches students, be it through face-to-face learning or online hybrid classes. She said this translated to her role in the grant proposal process because the committee wanted to find new approaches to help students work with this relatively new subject of data science.

Richmond said the proposed certificate could open the door for those who complete it to find a full degree program or a job that might use those skills. She said Truman is not interested in making a cookie-cutter experience for students, but instead helping students engage with faculty, fully understand the topic and have a unique experience compared to other institutions.

Richmond said students taking a competency-based learning program cannot progress with-

out mastering each learning objective set before them, rather than a typical time-based residential college experience chosen by students at whatever level they want or are able to complete. She said in this case, the certificate Truman will offer would have students progress through each course and emerge with a package of skills and a portfolio or transcript that signifies the specific set of skills they mastered.

Richmond said during the next 18 months, Truman will look at what software, teaching models and coursework would best help students progress in a competency-based learning program. She said members of the team working with the program soon would attend various conferences to learn about different aspects of how it will work and be constructed.

"We have, of course, applied for the grant and gotten it now, but we are just getting started

**"Some other schools have experimented with it, but Truman is Truman and we need to do it in a way that works for us."**

Jon Beck, computer science department chair

on mobilizing to actually make this grant take place," Richmond said.

Richmond said she hopes this new learning model eventually will be shared and incorporated with classes outside the data science certificate at Truman. She said the program could bring more people to Truman, be they traditional college students or non-traditional students, such as corporate employees who seek to learn more, because data science is a relatively new field. Richmond said she hopes the program becomes something that can be beneficial to anyone at any skill level, to help them learn and work more efficiently.

Jon Beck, computer science department chair, said from his standpoint, the project started last

week with the addition of a new computer science faculty member. Beck said this would allow some of the existing faculty to free up their schedules to start working to implement the program. He said three faculty members have given up teaching one course each so they can work on new courses for the project.

"The first three courses that we're working on are two in the new data science area, and then one is the high school [dual-credit] course," Beck said.

Beck said this preparation involves the course itself, the framework of competency-based education. He said so far, Truman mostly has had experience with this learning model at the MATH 156 College Algebra/157 Plane Trigonometry level, which are much lower-level courses than those being built by the computer science faculty.

"Some other schools have experimented with it, but Truman is Truman and we need to do it in a way that works for us," Beck said.

Beck said the computer science department has set a target of building five courses for the certificate program. He said the speed with which the program is developed remains to be seen, and the grant only will serve to kickstart the process, since the money likely will not fully fund all five courses.

Beck said he hopes the grant will benefit current undergraduates by allowing them to take the new courses being developed in highly-employable areas. He said he thinks the graduate certificate program will be successful, generate money for Truman and allow a new segment of the population to get involved with Truman.

"For the high school dual-credit one, hopefully that will increase the pipeline of future undergraduates coming into Truman," Beck said.

Kevin Minch, Director of Truman's Institute for Academic Outreach, said there are a lot of individuals working together to implement the competency-based learning program, especially given **See GRANT, page 3**

# Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce to host seminars

BY JOHANNA BURNS  
Staff Reporter

U.S. Bank is partnering with the Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce to host a series of free financial seminars during February at the Adair County Annex Building.

The Money Smart Financial series is a collection of lectures created by U.S. Bank to teach the basics of borrowing, saving, credit and purchasing a home. The series is split into four separate presentations. U.S. Bank also will partner with Truman State to provide a similar lecture to Truman students at 5:30 p.m. Feb. 23 in the Student Union Building.

Millena Marler, a banker for U.S. Bank, said she had the idea to organize these lectures when she noticed a lack of education in the community about certain financial

topics. She said U.S. Bank offers free financial seminars to students and community members across the country. Marler said U.S. Bank creates the presentations but does not sponsor them.

Marler said professionals within the community will give the lectures. The lecturers will include local bankers, branch managers and a mortgage lender. Marler said participants will receive a guide to take home that includes various pieces of valuable financial education information.

Marler said the goal of the series is to provide individuals in the community with the information they need to be successful at personal and business finance. Marler said if someone is serious about building their credit and achieving financial success, these lectures will provide a detailed way to do so. She said she chose the four lec-

ture modules from a larger 11-week course.

The first presentation is called "Borrowing Basics." Marler said this module introduces people to what credit is, why it is important to have good credit, why you should build your credit and the advantages of doing so. Marler said she thinks some people aren't well-educated about credit or don't see a need for it. She said those are the people who tend to use credit poorly. Marler said she hopes a wide variety of individuals from different backgrounds will attend the presentation.

The second seminar is titled "Pay Yourself." This seminar is about the importance of saving money and how it will help you reach your financial goals. Marler said many people put off saving money until they are in a better financial situation. **See SEMINARS, page 3**



Trevor Stark/Index

The Adair County Annex Building is located at 300 N. Franklin St. The building will be the venue for a series of free seminars hosted by the Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce and U.S. Bank, which aim to educate the community about various aspects of business and personal finance.