A Lawrence herpetologist is among those who've found a new frog species — the North American Cajun Chorus Frog.

The frog was discovered recently by Joseph T. Collins, a herpetologist with the Kansas Biological Survey at The University of Kansas; Lawrence native Emily Lemmon and her husband, Alan Lemmon, who both earned doctoral degrees at the University of Texas; and David Cannatella, a KU alumnus and professor at the University of Texas.

"This was probably the most significant discovery of my 55-year career as a herpetologist," Collins wrote in an e-mail to The Topeka Capital-Journal.

The chorus frog is about 1 inch long and has been seen in western Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, eastern Texas, southern Missouri and Oklahoma, particularly near the Kansas border in the eastern part of the state.

The last new frog species was the Florida Bog Frog, discovered in the United States in 1985.
Let's be clear

Topeka council has proved that a bill putting spirit of the law into words is worth discussing

In a perfect world, there would be no need for proposals like the one introduced by Sen. Tim Huelskamp to clarify the Kansas Open Meetings Act.

But an action by some members of the Topeka City Council — an imperfect group if ever there was one — provides ample reason why Huelskamp's bill deserves consideration.

The proposal by Huelskamp, a Republican from Fowler, would prohibit members of governing bodies from engaging in "serial communications." That term has become part of the Topeka lexicon since last December when the city council made its end run around Mayor Bill Bunten's veto of the purchase of a backup police helicopter.

To recap, the open meetings flap came to light after five members of the council voted in favor of another type of a "communication" — this one a governing body procedure — to approve the helicopter purchase.

Later, it was revealed Deputy Mayor Brett Blackburn had contacted four members of the council — Jack Woelfel, Jeff Preisner, Deborah Swank and Lana Kennedy — by phone to seek their support of the "communication." Some other members of the governing body hadn't been made aware of the action.

And who were the five who voted for the "communication"? Blackburn, Woelfel, Preisner, Swank and Kennedy.

Enter Shawnee County District Attorney Robert Hecht, who investigated the discussions between the five council members.

Hecht determined there was no violation of the law. However, he ruled Blackburn may have violated the spirit of the law in contacting his four fellow council members.

And that's where Huelskamp has stepped in.

With help from Mike Kautsch, a professor of media law at The University of Kansas, Huelskamp drafted a bill aimed at barring individual communications "that collectively involve a majority of a quorum and that share a common topic of discussion."

Kautsch summed up the need for the bill this way: "One should not be using the exception for meetings of fewer than a majority of a quorum to generate a consensus on a single issue that ought to be discussed before the public."

We couldn't agree more.

Blackburn also welcomed the proposal, saying he believed any clarification in the open meetings law is a good thing.

There's definitely a fine point to be determined here. In ruling the "communication" caper wasn't a violation of the law, Hecht cited prior court rulings saying serial communications had to be interactive — in other words, that each person Blackburn called had to understand they were part of the majority of a quorum.

The four council members who spoke with Blackburn contended Blackburn had asked only about their support of the "communication." They said Blackburn didn't mention others to whom he was talking about the issue.

What the issue proved, though, is that there is wiggle room in the open meetings law.

Here's wishing Huelskamp the best of luck in tightening the rules.
Future can’t be summed up in answer to one question

Each year, as I’ve dutifully served my four years in high school, I’ve watched as the seniors march off to college, work, or the military.

Last year I observed moments when my normally placid senior friends would turn into irritable monsters. I never really understood what their problem was.

Now, a year older and a senior myself, I do.

There is simply too much pressure placed on you as a senior. There’s college applications, scholarship applications, housing applications, application applications.

One simple question, however, trumps them all.

“Where are you going to college?”

It seems that I answer this question five times every hour. At any public event that I go to this question invariably gets asked during every conversation. I don’t mind this question - it’s a very important question, and one I answered several months ago - but for others it’s a potentially loaded question.

The question itself assumes you’re going to college. The question isn’t “What are your plans” or “Do you have plans?” No, it’s “Where are you going?”

Think about how this question could hurt someone.

What if you’re a senior who’s trying to figure life out? What if you’re someone who doesn’t know what you want to do with your life?

It’s no wonder that taking a year off is uncommon in the U.S. compared to other countries. Imagine the pressure put on seniors from an attitude that says anything other than college isn’t perfection.

How many of us can honestly say we would not look down upon someone who said they planned to go directly into the workforce after high school? And yet the majority of us would have no idea about the circumstances and conversations that went into that decision.

Even if you are going to college, the question still holds the potential to injure.

Too often we draw grossly overstated stereotypes about someone from what institution of higher learning they plan to attend.

Even though we know these conceptions aren’t true, we hold onto them. I believe it’s because we need a quick way to categorize and deal with people. Asking a teenager where he or she plans to go to college is an easy, pain-free way of peering into their identity.

It’s also one of the few socially acceptable ways to start a conversation with a teenager you haven’t talked to since they were five.

Maybe the next time you’re standing next to a high school senior and there’s an awkward pause, have a normal conversation - maybe one that has nothing to do with college. Talk about sports or American Idol. Once you get to know us we’ll open up about our future plans and dreams.

You don’t walk up to an adult and immediately say “What’s your five-year plan?” So don’t do it to us.

Then maybe you’ll see that our value comes from our individuality and not whether we’re wearing a purple, yellow, or black and gold T-shirt next fall.

I do like that crimson and blue, though.

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Jonathan Shorman is editor of the McPherson High School High Life and an intern for The McPherson Sentinel. He will be sorely missed when he goes wherever he’s going after high school.
Tough decisions aplenty when it comes to tuition

Twice a year, a $60 million deposit is made into Kansas University’s bank account.

It’s not really one big deposit, but rather many smaller deposits — deposits from students and families in Kansas, across the nation and even around the world.

They’re also deposits that are getting bigger. In the past five years, in-state tuition at KU has doubled. Almost exactly, in fact.

Tuition was $2,921 in 2002 and has risen by $2,923 in the past five years. In the past 20 years, tuition has increased more than fivefold.

Tuition also is rising much faster than inflation, which has a 20-year rate of about 80 percent. And it’s far outstripped the increase in per capita income in Douglas County, which has roughly doubled since 1987.

Numbers, however, tell an incomplete story.

They don’t tell the story of the KU professor who is doing potentially life-changing research in a job funded by tuition revenues.

And numbers don’t describe the difficulty a Lawrence family faces, having lived through large, annual tuition hikes, in putting three children through Kansas universities.

On Wednesday, the Kansas Board of Regents once again will wrangle with the tuition issue. As they do, they’ll focus on stories they’ve heard from friends and acquaintances who struggle to pay for college — and on the stories of people who’ve determined college is financially out of reach.

Last month, several regents said they want a thorough discussion about this year’s tuition proposals. On Wednesday, they will meet and decide whether there is to be a rate freeze or a rate cap. Or perhaps they’ll decide that while desirable, it’s just not possible to limit tuition.

The discussion

Regent Gary Sherrer, who questioned tuition increases last month, wants a tuition cap. That limit would be set before universities take their proposals to regents this spring.

“I just happen to believe the more expensive it gets, the more doors that get closed to people,” Sherrer said.

Six consecutive years of large tuition increases and a slowing economy combined to persuade Sherrer it’s time to hold the line — at least for a year.

“If the economy changes, the issues may change,” he said.

It’s not just KU that has seen major cost increases. Kansas State has virtually matched KU’s increases percent for percent, and the other state universities have enacted hefty increases of their own.

Regent Jill Docking, who also works for an investment firm, said she wants to know — specifically — what the universities must cut if tuition were capped. She also wants information on just how much of a problem rising tuition is for students and their parents.

“I don’t think it’s fair to have a decision made . . . without hearing from the universities, and we really haven’t heard from the schools,” Docking said.

Even the best-laid plans...

As a certified financial adviser, John Oberzan started saving for his children’s college education when they were toddlers. He put aside money, anticipating education costs rising twice as fast as inflation.

Still — with a son finishing his fifth year at KU, a daughter who is a KU sophomore and another daughter who is a high school senior — the Lawrence dad is suffering a bit from sticker shock.

“You try to plan for their education when they were
small. "Oberzan said, "But yet when you have a series of increases that close together, it can throw a wrench into the best planning. You have to make adjustments."

His son works while going to school. His daughters have earned scholarships.

And Oberzan has dipped into investments he'd hoped to spend in retirement.

Today's costs are a far cry from when Oberzan went to KU in 1965 on what he jokingly refers to as the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant Scholarship. In actuality, he spent his summers working there, and it was enough to pay his way.

Faced with at least four more years of college bills, Oberzan said, he just hopes tuition increases will slow down.

"It seems disappointing to me that the state Legislature hasn't seen the importance of education and providing more funding for universities. So therefore (the universities) turn around and have to increase tuition and they put it on the backs of students, making them borrow more money, or their parents who have to pay tuition," he said.

The payoff

All those higher tuition payments don't just go up in smoke. Kansas State President Jon Wefald said last month that Kansas universities had to make a choice between mediocrity and excellence.

"We've chosen excellence," he said.

That was the same refrain when KU started its "Tuition Enhancement Plan" more than five years ago, a plan that accounts for the lion's share of the large increase.

And it's a plan that brought Paulette Spencer to KU. Spencer, a university distinguished professor and director of the new bioengineering research center, wants to determine why artificial tissue fails so much more quickly than natural body tissue.

"Anytime we put a synthetic or a tissue-engineered material against the normal, biological material, where the failure occurs is at the interface between those two constructs," she explained. "It's the same as all the roadway surfaces, actually. As soon as they start a repair, where does the next pothole form? Right there."

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Working overtime

When it comes to tuition, Andrea Cassell has two goals: She doesn't want to go in debt, and she doesn't want her freshman daughter at KU to work while going to school.

Those two objectives have Cassell putting in long hours as a tutor for special-needs students, skipping the coffee shops and nail salons and budgeting every dollar she has.

"Education is key to everything in life," she said.

Divorced from her daughter's father, the Wichita mom must pay for her youngest daughter's education.

Seven years ago, Cassell started saving. And when she realized she wasn't going to be able to put enough money away as a special education elementary school teacher, she quit her job and started working as a private tutor. She doubled her salary by working far more than 40 hours each week.

Still, Cassell is struggling and doesn't have four years of college covered. And it's not just tuition. Books, housing..."
JUST TUITION, BOOKS, HOUSING and groceries also have Cassell scrambling.

“I do think there comes a time when the system has to say, ‘OK, we need to cap this for all the universities and make it affordable until things change,’” she said.

Stuck in the middle

The Kong family is stuck squarely in the middle class — and smack in the middle of paying for their three children’s college education.

Man Kong is an electrical engineering and computer science professor at KU. Sue Kong is a medical technologist at the Internal Medicine Group. They have three children; Andrew, a junior at KU; Amanda, a senior at Free State High School; and Alex, a freshman at Southwest Junior High.

They earn too much money to qualify for significant financial aid, but not enough to have set aside money for tuition.

“When you are in the middle, it is just really difficult,” Sue Kong said.

The Kongs had started saving accounts for each of their children, but, as the children grew, the money was needed for more urgent bills.

And the couple haven’t factored in the ever-increasing price tag of a college education.

“I hadn’t thought about how expensive it would be and how much of a tuition hike (there was) from the time I graduated,” Sue Kong said.

So far, much of the money they have saved has gone to Andrew. So they are crossing their fingers that scholarships — maybe even a full ride — will come in, especially for the youngest. The other alternative is taking out loans.

“We are trying to help each kid along and hope that they could get through the first four years without having them carry much loan,” Sue Kong said. “It would be a great stepping stone for them to come out of college and just go into a job without having to pay all these college debts.”
University of Kansas students to raise money for and awareness of Darfur

University of Kansas students will hold a fundraiser Saturday, Feb. 16, at Liberty Hall. "Dates for Darfur," presented collaboratively by KU Hillel, the University of Kansas Political Posters Class and the Serigraphy Club, begins at 6 p.m. Simon Deng, president of the Lost Boys and Girls Association, will speak, and there will be a short documentary.

A Darfur native, Deng founded the Lost Boys and Girls Association of Kansas in 2005 with the goal of raising scholarship funds for current and prospective Sudanese students.

"I believe it's our responsibility as Jewish people to ensure that nothing like the Holocaust happens again, and Darfur is suffering," said Max Stettner, event planner.

Following Deng's talk, KU athletes and well-known students will be auctioned off on dates, with amenities provided by local Lawrence businesses. Student participants include Student Body President Hannah Love, KU football player James McClinton, Lazer 105.9 radio morning co-host Scott McCann and former KU Hillel president Liz Cohen. Dates will go to the highest bidder, with all proceeds going to ACT-Caritas Darfur Emergency Response Operation.

"I am excited to help raise money for something as overlooked as the crisis in Darfur," Cohen said.

Students pay $5 to attend; the general public may purchase tickets for $7. Admission includes cocktails and food provided by In- gredient, as well as entertainment from a jazz ensemble.

For more information, contact Max Stettner, (913) 375-6844, or Lindsay Major, (847) 287-7676.
(KU tuition doubles, but numbers don’t tell the whole story)

JONATHAN KEALING & CHRISTINE METZ
DEANING@THEWORLDONTO
KU/THEDOUBLEDUNLO

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Grant wins award

Mary Jo Davis-Grant of El Dorado, recently given the 2007 Literary Excellence Award for her book “Dream Power: Can Our dreams Make Us Well?” gave background of her story and signed books at Watermark in Wichita for over 30 people turning out in a winter storm.

“I was absolutely flabbergasted,” Davis-Grant said. “I had no idea there would be that many people who would brave the elements.”

The award came from literary Web site booksandauthors.net, calling “Dream Power” the top book in psychology last year.

“IT was stunned,” she said. “It’s not very often that I’m speechless, but I went around saying ‘I can’t believe it.’ I didn’t expect this kind of award.”

Davis-Grant received her bachelor’s from the University of Kansas and her master’s from Emporia State and her Ph. D. in archetypal psychology from Holos University Graduate Seminary. She has been an educator in higher education for 20 years, and CEO of EmPower, Inc., an Advocacy Center.

Davis-Grant has also has a private counseling practice and is a facilitator of growth groups.
Her book is the culmination of her personal experience of over 500 dreams, which assisted her in recovering from a seven-year bout of chronic pain which had defied all that conventional medicine had to offer.

She developed remarkable waking dreams, spontaneous imagery that led her to recovery. She had become her own therapist.

"Dream Power" is a true story of the benefits of the holistic approach to all illness," said her mentor, C. Norman Shealy. "In many respects this is a story of self-therapy at its finest," Shealy said.

Grant is a founding board member of the Family Life Center Safehouse. She is also a member of the United Methodist Church and married to local attorney, Ervin Grant. She has two grown children and four grandsons.

Because of the bad weather, Watermark will likely hold another book-signing for her sometime in March.
University officials seek more funds

School leaders say future tuition hikes linked to funding

By CHRIS GREEN
Harris News Service

TOPEKA — To hold the line on future tuition increases, state university leaders say they’re going to need some more help from the Kansas Legislature.

Higher education officials generally agreed during Wednesday’s state Board of Regents meeting to limit next year’s round of increases to less than 6 percent.

However, the effort to slow steep increases in tuition charges will hinge heavily on how much lawmakers choose to increase higher education funding in the future, school leaders say.

Several Regents, state university officials and even student leaders emphasized this week that schools are trying to keep tuition hikes down but can’t do it alone.

“We need additional funding from the state Legislature or else we’re going to keep seeing tuition going up,” Matt Wagner, Kansas State University’s student body president, told board members.

In fact, several board members said this past week they were against setting a formal cap on tuition because it might reduce accountability for lawmakers.

Soaring prices

Since 2002, the basic charges for attending the University of Kansas and Kansas State University have more than doubled. Tuition and fees at other schools have jumped by an average of more than 10 percent a year, except for Fort Hays State University, which has averaged an 8.5 percent annual hike.

Over the same period, though, lawmakers have bolstered the state’s share of university funding by an average of about 2 percent a year.

Yet, legislators remain divided over how much blame lawmakers should take for tuition increases.

“It’s impossible to give the Regents everything they want,” House Speaker Melvin Neufeld, R-Ingalls, said. “so they will always be able to justify increasing tuition.”

However, Senate budget Chairman Dwayne Umbarger, R-Thayer, said university leaders can make a “very good case” that the state hasn’t put enough aid into the system.

“That is a very legitimate concern that they have,” Umbarger said.

Recent uptick

State universities absorbed a 5 percent cut in state funding during fiscal year 2003 because of the state’s financial difficulties, according to Regents data. But over the past four years, the annual increases have ranged from 3 percent to nearly 6 percent.

In addition, universities also are set to receive $80 million during the next two years to start up long-delayed building repairs as part of a deferred maintenance plan.

This year, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius proposed a nearly 4 percent jump in state general fund support for universities. Rep. Eber Phelps, D-Hays, said that if the Legislature needs to provide additional help for universities to stabilize tuition, then that’s something he’d favor.

However, he also noted that lawmakers are again facing a tight budget year and are having to prioritize their spending in the face of numerous requests.

“There’s not a lot of wiggle room in there,” Phelps said.
Kincaid resident participates in KU pharmacy road trip

LAWRENCE — Eleven members of the student chapter of the National Community Pharmacists Association at the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy visited 16 independent pharmacies in central and southwest Kansas during their semester break.

Emily Colby Adams, fifth-year PharmD student from Kincaid, was among the eleven KU-NCPA students who participated in the road trip. She is the daughter of Thomas and Sandra Adams. She is a graduate of Crest Senior High School in Colony and earned an associate’s degree from Allen County Community College in Iola.

KU Pharmacy Dean Ken Audus and Associate Dean Gene Hotchkiss accompanied the KU-NCPA members on the January 9-11 road trip as part of a KU initiative to enhance student awareness of the career opportunities within Kansas in independent pharmacy.

The KU-NCPA Student Chapter is a professional pharmacy student organization that promotes independent pharmacies as a career pathway option for pharmacy students at KU. Established in 1998, KU’s chapter has been honored as the national Chapter of the Year by the NCPA parent organization at their annual meeting four times in the past 10 years and was first runner-up in 2007.

KU-NCPA students have participated in more than 100 visits to independent pharmacies from Hiawatha to Hugoton, Atwood to Baxter Springs and destinations in between.

The KU-NCPA students participating the recent road trip are upper-level students in KU’s Doctor of Pharmacy of PharmD program, a six-year professional degree similar to a law or medical degree.
More than 4,540 undergraduate students at the University of Kansas earned honor roll distinction for the fall 2007 semester.

From Maize: Shea D. Fairchild, daughter of Don and Pam Fairchild, Education Undergraduate, Senior, Maize High School; Emily Diane Hooker, daughter of Sheila Hooker, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Freshman, Andover Central High School; Erika Lian Schnittker, daughter of LaDale Schnittker, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Freshman, Maize High School; Nicole M. Witt, daughter of Bruce and Janice Witt, Business Undergraduate, Junior, Maize High School;