LAWRENCE | Fake salesmen

At least two University of Kansas students lost money to fake magazine salesmen seen working Tuesday afternoon in Lewis and Templin residence halls, campus police said. KU officials said solicitation is not allowed in residence halls.

| Benita Y. Williams, bwilliams@kcstar.com |
KU developing autism center

The goal is to provide support for parents and service providers and unify research efforts.

By KAREN UHLENHUTH
The Kansas City Star

For parents of children with autism-spectrum disorders, many of whom find it a lonesome struggle, help is on the way.

The University of Kansas is preparing to establish what it's calling the Kansas Center for Autism Research and Training. Planning began a few weeks ago. An effect on services for autistic people could be felt in the next year or two.

Kirsten Sneid of Leawood, for one, is thrilled. "It's very exciting, and for many of us, it's prayers finally being answered," she said. She's an activist in the local autism community and the mother of two boys with autism-spectrum conditions. "You're talking about a community now that has nothing but diagnostic services."

"It's very exciting, and for many of us, it's prayers finally being answered ... This entity will be a beacon and a leader in the state of the science, education and training that we require."

KIRSTEN SNEID OF LEAWOOD, MOTHER OF TWO BOYS WITH AUTISM-SPECTRUM CONDITIONS
Just getting a diagnosis often entails a wait of three to six months, she said.

"This entity will be a beacon and a leader in the state of the science, education and training that we require," she said.

The center will provide training and other support to parents and a variety of professionals who provide services to children and adults. In addition, it is expected to spur and unify research in Kansas City and Lawrence into various aspects of autism.

Initially, it will be a "virtual" center, based on bringing people together and getting the latest research out to those who provide direct services to people on the autism spectrum.

"At this point, there are probably a dozen research and training projects at the University of Kansas that have made contributions in the area of autism," said Debra Kamps, associate director of the Juniper Gardens Children's Project in Kansas City, Kan., and a member of the working group. "But there's no real cohesive unit. That's one of the primary goals."

The center will also provide guidance and the latest know-how to parents, teachers and other members of the teams that work with autism-spectrum children and adults.

When children are diagnosed, and even for years afterward, their family members "are so lost and don't know where to go," said Linda Heitzman-Powell, an associate research professor at Juniper Gardens and a member of the working group. For 11 years, KU operated a resource center at the medical campus in Wyandotte County. It closed a year ago because of a lack of funds.

Because services now tend to focus on very young children, the people planning the center intend to direct substantial resources toward older autistic children and adults.

"There are a lot of different critical points," Kamps said, such as the transitions into elementary and high school, and into the work force.

The center also will focus on helping people on the autism spectrum develop social and communication skills, the primary deficits that define the condition.

Many disciplines and types of expertise, supporters say, will come together to address the problems of people with autism disorders.

"The more we can share ideas," Heitzman-Powell said, "the more we have an opportunity to develop effective early identification and diagnostic procedures, as well as more comprehensive intervention programs."

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Study seeks answers

SACRAMENTO, Calif. | Researchers have long suspected that autism’s causes are rooted in one’s genes, combined with some kind of a hit from the environment. But pinpointing the interplay of these factors has been daunting, in part because the probing tends to come after a child is diagnosed. A new study at the University of California-Davis will examine potential clues pointing to the neurodevelopmental disorder before it occurs — before birth and during a baby’s earliest years.

“We are quite concerned about the role that environment might play in autism,” said Nigel Fields, a scientist at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, one of two federal agencies to fund the $7.5 million research. “We would like to understand the complex interaction of genes and environmental factors as early in the developmental process as possible.”

Autism, once a fairly rare disorder, is now the fastest-growing developmental disability, increasing at astronomical rates. Autistic children often have trouble talking, exhibit repetitive behaviors, and are unable to connect with other people.

Researchers in the new study will look at the mother before, during and after pregnancy, and at the baby throughout its first three years. The goal is to learn how to identify children most susceptible to environmental exposures that may lead to autism.

The project, Markers of Autism Risk in Babies — Learning Early Signs, is the first of its kind to look in real time at environmental exposures. They could include a mother’s infections during pregnancy, an infant’s routine childhood vaccinations, and other potential contaminants such as mercury, flame retardants and common, chlorinated chemicals such as those found in pesticides.

The study is an extension of a project examining the influence of genes and environmental factors in more than 800 families in which a child is already diagnosed with the disorder.

That study, Childhood Autism Risks from Genetics and the Environment, has found that autistic children’s immune systems respond differently to certain substances, leading experts to suspect that autism is an immune function disorder as well as a neurological disorder.

“But if you really want to get at causes, it’s crucial to go back in time,” said Irva Hertz-Picciotto, a University of California-Davis environmental epidemiologist, one of the project’s principal investigators.

Markers of Autism Risk in Babies — Learning Early Signs will enroll more than 200 pregnant women who have had at least one child diagnosed with autism, because mothers of autistic children are at least 10 times more likely to have another child with the disorder.

Dorsey Griffith | McClatchy Newspapers
BUILD SENSE OF SACRED WITH THE RIGHT

A certain religious “liberal” who writes “a popular column for a mainstream daily newspaper” was “no ... match” on a local public TV station against a “right-wing minister of a suburban megachurch (who) had grabbed the (local and national) spotlight by pushing a successful amendment to his state’s constitution to ban marriage equality for gay citizens,” writes Robert N. Minor, professor of religious studies at the University of Kansas, in his new book, *When Religion Is an Addiction.*

Minor says the columnist had his facts straight, his arguments were cogent, and his preparation included biblical material.

The columnist “was polite, reasoned and inoffensive to everyone. And, as a progressive friend of mine commented, the right-winger ate him alive,” Minor reports.

I’m not sure I have the objectivity to judge whether what Minor calls the “arrogant and condescending” authoritarian tone of the “right-winger” was more appealing to the viewers than the “nice” tone of the columnist.

What I do know is that Minor raises questions that trouble many people of many faiths. How can a tolerant person accept intolerance? How does one respond to those who want to use government to enforce their own religious views on everyone else?

In beginning his answer, Minor quotes Robert Frost: “A liberal is a man too broadminded to take his own side in a quarrel.”

Minor says that liberals eschew the sound-bite type of communication he associates with “right-wingers” and doubts that liberal attempts at nuance often succeed in such contests.

Minor intensifies his criticism of liberals by calling them “enablers” of those addicted to the high that comes from thinking one is absolutely right in matters of faith.

He draws a parallel with family and friends of alcoholics who cover up or excuse the problem, enabling the alcoholic to deny the addiction.

A liberal who declines to point out religious addiction because of respect for all religious perspectives is an “enabler.”

Minor’s work continues an important examination of addictive believers in such earlier books as Leo Booth and John Bradshaw’s *When God Becomes a Drug: Breaking the Chain of Religious Abuse and Addiction,* Matthew, Sheila and Dennis Linn’s *Healing Spiritual Abuse and Religious Addiction,* and Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton’s *Toxic Faith.*

As for that columnist, well, would it be too liberal for him to write that while he respects Minor’s viewpoint, the columnist thinks it is possible to build upon a sense of the sacred even with “right-wingers”?

Vern Barnet does interfaith work in Kansas City. Reach him at vern@res.org.
Dole Institute names interim chief

Associated Press

LAWRENCE — Jonathan Earle, an American history scholar, was named Friday as interim director of the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas.

Earle, associate director for programming at the institute, steps in for director Bill Lacy, who has taken a leave of absence to manage former Tennessee Sen. Fred Thompson’s exploratory presidential campaign committee, KU chancellor Robert Hemenway said.

"In Jonathan, the Dole Institute is in exceptionally capable hands," Hemenway said. "He is fulfilling Sen. Dole’s mission to attract young people to become involved in civic affairs."

Earle, an associate professor of history who joined the Dole Institute staff in 2003 on a part-time basis, recently returned to the University of Kansas after a year as a visiting chair in U.S. history at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Earle, who joined the University of Kansas faculty in 1997, is an expert on the early American republic and the period leading up to the Civil War, and recently was named one of eight top young historians by the History News Network.
Washburn again cracks top 10

U.S. News ranks
WU sixth among public Midwest master’s schools

By James Carlson
THE CAPITAL-JOURNAL

Washburn University has been ranked sixth among the Midwest’s 52 public master’s-level universities by U.S. News and World Report.

The distinction marks the eighth time Washburn has made the top 10 of the magazine’s America’s Best Colleges.

“Does it matter that we’re sixth instead of third or seventh?” Jerry Farley, president of Washburn, asked during an interview Friday. “No, it doesn’t. But some of the criteria they used to rank us tells us that we’re doing a good job.”

The list is composed of schools that offer master’s degrees but not any major doctorate programs. The University of Kansas and Kansas State University would be considered major national research schools and are listed in another category.

Farley said trying to rank schools is nearly impossible. But he pointed to some of the specifics of Washburn’s evaluation that pleased him. The school ranked high in what others thought of its academic prowess. It also had a graduation rate of 62 percent, the third highest of the schools in the top five in the Midwest.

The other criteria judged by the magazine that Farley noted was the ratio of students to teachers. At Washburn, that ratio is 16 to 1.

“You won’t find private schools with a ratio much better than 13 to 1,” he said.

The one knock on the school, Farley said, is that it “basically takes any Kansas graduate of high school.”

The two public master’s-level schools that are always placing No. 1 and No. 2 are Truman State University and the University of Northern Iowa. Truman State ranked eighth among public and private schools in the Midwest category.

Overall, Washburn ranked 33rd out of the Midwest’s 146 public graduate-level universities, the highest of any similar public institution in Kansas.

The Topeka school has placed in the past eight years no lower than seventh and as high as third.

“You expect me to boast about Washburn,” Farley said. “But when somebody else says something good about Washburn, that feels good.”

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Interim director of Dole Institute named

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From Staff and Wire Reports