



This meeting of *Bradyrhizobium japonicum* will now come to order

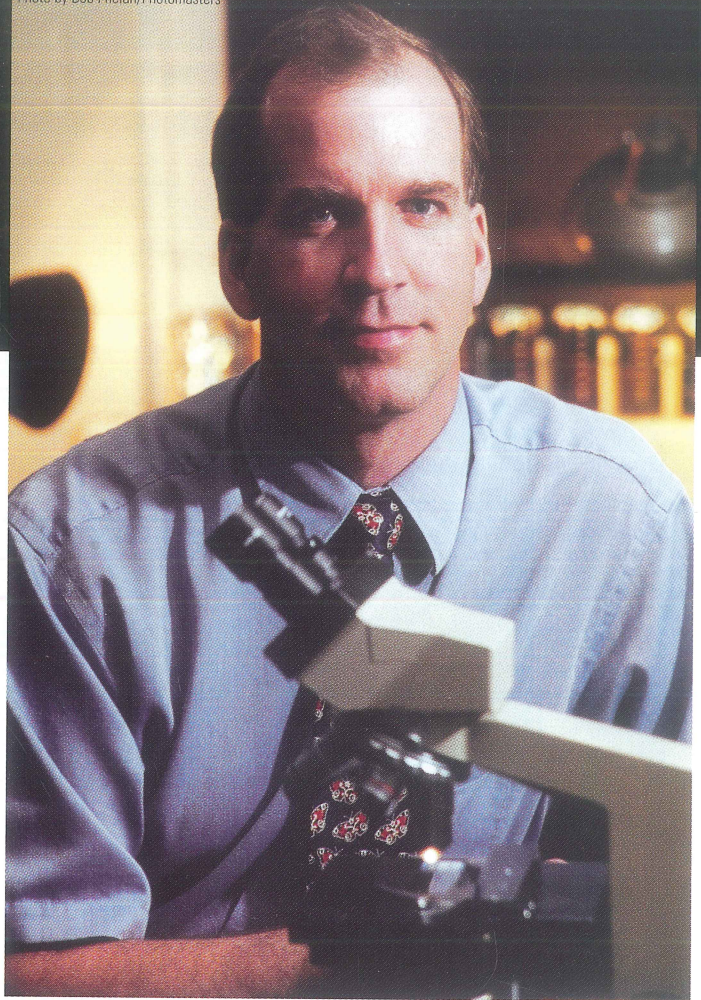
By Jeremiah Bryant and Thomas Partyka

City councils aren't the only groups of organisms that require a quorum to get anything done. Down beneath the surface of cropland everywhere, the bacteria *Bradyrhizobium japonicum* hold regular meetings on the roots of soybeans, where they work to convert nitrogen to fuel growth in soybeans. But before the critters can get to work, they must form a quorum — just like the city council.

Something else happens when the bacteria form a quorum: they emit a signal that causes them to change their bacterial structure. With funding from the Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council, **David J. Westenberg**, an assistant professor of biological sciences at UMR, is studying the bacteria's "quorum sensing" function in hopes of identifying the signal. From there, he hopes to develop a strain of the bacteria that doesn't recognize the signal. This type of strain will be more efficient at helping convert the nitrogen, and in turn will lead to greater crop yields for soybean farmers.

UMR students Jeremiah Bryant of Rolla and Thomas Partyka of St. Charles, Mo., wrote about Westenberg's research as part of a technical writing course at UMR. ■

Photo by Bob Phelan/Photomasters



David J. Westenberg, assistant professor of biological sciences.

The story of a "self-taught intellectual"

Kenneth Burke isn't a name typically dropped by literary types at modern-day cocktail parties. Yet in his day, Burke stood alongside such literary lions as William Carlos Williams, Ralph Ellison and Sinclair Lewis. In 1929, Burke even won the prestigious Dial Award for literature, an award previously won by writers T.S. Eliot and Sherwood Anderson.

David Cratis Williams, the newest faculty member in UMR's philosophy and liberal arts department, first became interested in Burke while a graduate student at the University of North Carolina. In 1996, while planning a Kenneth Burke Society conference to celebrate the centennial of Burke's birth in Pittsburgh, Pa., Williams and fellow Burke scholar Greig Henderson of the University of Toronto decided to write a book about the little-known philosopher and literary critic. The result is *Unending Conversations: New Writings By and About Kenneth Burke*, co-edited by Williams and Henderson. The book was published earlier this year by the Southern Illinois University Press (www.siu.edu/~siupress/).

Unending Conversations contains portions of two previously unpublished pieces of Burke's writing, as well as essays by noted Burke scholars. The first piece in the book is Williams' own essay, "Toward Rounding Out the 'Motivorium Trilogy,'" which provides a historical perspective for Burke's manuscripts.

"Burke was a self-taught intellectual so he doesn't fit neatly into any niches," says Williams. And while Burke's name still may not be worked in to many cocktail party conversations, at least Williams has helped keep Burke's name — and ideas — alive among scholars. ■