Faculty leaders mixed on Forsee

UM president starts third year on the job.

University of Missouri System President Gary Forsee, right, with Gov. Jay Nixon in November, has received satisfactory marks from faculty members interviewed by the Tribune at the beginning of his third year in office.

By Janese Heavin

Saturday, February 20, 2010

Gary Forsee is getting satisfactory marks from faculty leaders as he begins his third year as president of the University of Missouri System.
Asked to grade Forsee as he celebrates his second anniversary at UM this week, faculty members gave him everywhere from an A- to a passing mark.

No grade inflation going on here: These are the same faculty members who were skeptical of the former Sprint CEO with no academic experience when he became president of the state’s largest university system. Turns out, Forsee’s business background is making him the “right guy at the right time,” said MU biology Professor Tom Phillips.

“The job he has isn’t the one he accepted,” Phillips said. “The fiscal crisis made it a whole different game. He got the short end of the stick but, in reality, he’s probably better for us in that sense. He’s a guy who can make tough business decisions.”

Despite his image as a corporate executive, Forsee said he spends much of his time focused on the educational mission of the university, whether he is meeting with academic leaders and students to ensure each campus is providing a relevant education or fighting to make college more accessible.

On his watch, the university formed a P-20 task force to review whether the educational pipeline is preparing younger generations, and this year Forsee directed administrators to study expanded e-learning options and three-year degree programs.

But Forsee’s messages related to economic development are what faculty members say they hear the loudest. Perhaps that’s because the system has seen drastic increases in invention disclosures, patents, licensing income and research park development since Forsee arrived, and he’s quick to tout those numbers.

Some faculty leaders say they’re fine with Forsee’s focus on economic development. After all, Phillips noted, early critics were more concerned that he would become too involved in what goes on in the classroom.

“A major concern amongst faculty when someone without a track record in academics was hired was that he might be tempted to insert himself into academic matters outside his scope of expertise,” said Phillips, a former MU Faculty Council chairman. “He has kept away from these types of issues.”

Biochemistry Professor Frank Schmidt agreed, saying immediate academic decisions “are coming back to campuses, and that’s where they ought to be.”

But some wonder whether Forsee is too far removed from the educational mission of the university.

“I would like it if he tried to help us a little more,” said MU Faculty Council Chairwoman Leona Rubin, specifically pointing to his recent decision to allocate $5 million to economic development compared to a smaller allocation of $700,000 for e-learning.
After all, Rubin said, faculty members are shouldering much of the budget crunches. Research might generate funding, she said, but “the enrollment surge has been holding up the budget. When push comes to shove, increases in class size made the difference.”

Spanish Professor Michael Ugarte said he thinks the educational mission has been pushed too far on the back burner.

“I understand universities have to function so they’re economically solvent and we’re in an economic crisis now, but we can’t lose sight of what we’re here to do,” Ugarte said. “Clearly, he shouldn’t be meddling in departments, but at the same time he should be a voice, a spokesperson for the university and what we do here. And I don’t hear my ideals in education being voiced by him at all. I feel excluded from what he wants to do.”

Forsee has been an advocate when it comes to voicing support for more state funding. He has verbally endorsed a proposed state bond package to improve public university facilities, and he has repeatedly criticized the state’s Access Missouri scholarship program for awarding more dollars to students who go to private schools than to public college students.

“He’s the first president to have spoken out vocally and aggressively, saying: ‘No, we’re not getting a fair deal here,’” Phillips said. “I admire him for that. ... He’s a guy who’s willing to stand up for what he thinks is right for our university.”

In existing economic conditions, Forsee said, that means partnering with the state to turn the economy around.

By turning research and ideas into products and start-up companies, the UM System isn’t simply a public entity asking for more state funds but rather part of the solution to generate new revenues. “If we can do that, this university will be fine,” he said, “and the state and country will be fine because of that.”

Although some faculty members seem to have warmed up to Forsee in the president’s seat, a few remain skeptical. Ugarte said he couldn’t give Forsee a letter grade because the president hasn’t made his specific goals clear.

Schmidt continues to take a “wait-and-see” attitude.

“I don’t think any president will win over all faculty members, at least while he’s still in office,” Schmidt said. “He certainly gets a passing grade at this point, but I’m not ready to chisel his name in the base of one of the Columns.”

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Faculty mull benefits extension

Question of who can qualify as partners at issue.

By Janese Heavin
Friday, February 19, 2010

University of Missouri Faculty Council members will vote next month on whether to pledge support for domestic partner benefits. But first members must decide whether those benefits should apply to same-sex couples only or if opposite-sex unmarried couples should qualify as well.

The council’s diversity enhancement and faculty affairs committees recommend that only same-sex couples be eligible for domestic partner benefits.

“Opposite-sex couples have the possibility of legally marrying” and qualifying for traditional benefits, diversity enhancement committee Chairwoman Leah Cohn said. “With same-sex couples, the law forbids them from taking that option.”

Other groups, including members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community on campus, support domestic partnership benefits for all couples.

“Domestic partner benefits are a way to achieve equal rights in the workplace, not meant to provide ‘special rights’ to a minority group,” LGBT members wrote in a letter to faculty. The letter was signed by biology Professor Candace Galen, LGBT Resource Center coordinator Ryan Black and assistant teaching professor Carol Snively.

Providing domestic partnership benefits would increase the UM System’s overall benefits costs by 2 percent, or $3 million, Cohn said. Of that, employees would pay about 27 percent, meaning the system’s costs would be about $2.2 million.

More than 300 higher-education institutions in the country provide domestic partner benefits, including all members of the Big 10 and most Big 12 universities, Cohn said. By not offering those benefits, MU might be less competitive for the best faculty and staff, the resolution says.

Cohn said providing benefits to all life partners, not just traditional married partners, also is a matter of “basic human fairness.”
The committees envision the university setting up a system in which couples could prove their relationship status by showing joint bank records or other documents verifying that they share financial responsibilities. Employees would be required to notify the university when a relationship ended. Cohn doesn’t think getting employees to do so would be a problem because domestic partnership benefits are considered taxable income. “You wouldn’t want to keep paying taxes for a partner who left you,” council Chairwoman Leona Rubin said.

The committees also are exploring the idea of an “employee plus one” option that would allow employees to add other relatives, such as disabled adult children or aging parents, to their benefits package. Such a plan would come with a significantly higher price tag, Cohn said, so getting administrators on board might be tough.

“We’re not ignoring that, but it’s something separate from the” domestic partnership resolution, she said.

Faculty Council members also are considering forming a task force to deem how MU could become a more family-friendly campus. The group would look at current policies that allow students to miss class because of family illnesses and facilities where new mothers who work at or attend MU could pump breast milk and child-care options on campus.

The goal, Cohn said, is to “make the University of Missouri a better place for people with family obligations.”

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UM System's Accountability Measurement System provides transparency, focus

By Bryan Richardson
February 21, 2010 | 5:36 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The University of Missouri System wants to show transparency while its universities work toward three-year goals, which could extend to a longer period of time.

In an attempt to promote accountability and transparency, the UM System has developed the three-year Accountability Measurement System, a document that lists 80 of the system's goals and will show how far it's gotten in completing them. It is scheduled to go online in December.

Not all of the accountability measures have a specific target to hit, such as measures concerning affordability and faculty and staff diversity.

"Those measures allow us to evaluate and analyze trends over time," MU Deputy Provost Ken Dean said. "For some measures, goals are not appropriate, but the direction is more important."

Based on progress, each measure will receive a rating based on a familiar item: traffic lights. Green means the university has reached or exceeded its target, yellow means progress is being made and red means no progress has been made.

Nikki Krawitz, the UM System's vice president for finance and administration, said the system will keep issues that need to be addressed on the forefront.

"The Accountability Measurement System is designed to keep the university system and its campuses focused on a mission and the important outcome it wants to achieve," Krawitz said.

The measurement system is organized into five themes: teaching and learning, research and discovery, community service and engagement, economic development and developing and managing human, financial and physical resources.
Each measure, if met, will provide nothing extra for the individual universities.

"Currently, there is no incentive in place other than the desire to meet performance goals," Krawitz said.

The initial run of this management system will last three years, but there is potential for it to last beyond that. Krawitz said new measures could be added and some could be replaced if the UM System decides to take this further.

In the event of not excelling in the manner expected, Krawitz said each chancellor would be held accountable and would have to speak with Forsee.

The glimpse of progress is also for the people affected by university actions: students, parents and those in the surrounding community.

"It is merely a way for us to be accountable to our main constituents and a system whereby we may set goals and measure outcomes," Dean said.

The system sets the overall goal, but each university decides its own target for those goals. For example, the first-year retention rate targets for each university are:

- MU: 86 percent
- University of Missouri-Kansas City: 75 percent
- Missouri University of Science and Technology: 90 percent
- University of Missouri-St. Louis: 71 percent

Dean said MU officials discussed the targets extensively before presenting them to Forsee.

"Targets were made based on an analysis of past history, evaluation of current conditions and an informed realistic project into the future," Dean said.

Overall, Dean said he thinks all of MU's targets can be reached within the three-year time span of the initial run.

However, Krawitz said some goals might never be reached, but some might be met before 2012.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

$800 million bond measure in Missouri House likely tabled

By Bryan Richardson
February 19, 2010 | 9:55 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA - A proposed $800 million bond issue to fund construction and maintenance of state higher education buildings has run into trouble in the House and is likely to be tabled before it reaches the Senate.

House Speaker Ron Richard, R-Joplin, said Thursday he doesn’t plan to assign a committee to consider the measure. Richard said he has concerns about the additional amount of debt the state would take on and how that would affect the state’s AAA bond rating, which is the highest possible rating.

The bond issue was proposed by Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia.

Richard was one of the 131 House members that easily passed Kelly’s previous bond proposal in a 131-28 vote last April. That proposal made it to the Senate last year before being tabled because of similar financial concerns by state legislators.

“The question is one for the voters of the state to decide,” Kelly said. “I don’t understand why these people won’t allow for a vote. It is important for the House to let the voters decide what they want to do with their money.”

Kelly said the bond proposal isn’t big enough to hurt the state’s AAA rating, and the concern of the credit rating is being used as a “red herring,” a tactic to distract from the issue at hand.

Senate President Pro Tem Charlie Shields, R-Kansas City, and House Minority Leader Paul LeVota, D-Independence, also supported Richard’s stance.

When speaking of LeVota’s support for tabling of the measure, Kelly said LeVota’s stance doesn’t match the needs of LeVota’s and Shields’ constituents, which includes the University of Missouri-Kansas City’s need for a new medical building.
In a report conducted by the Missouri Department of Higher Education last summer, the department said the medical school on the Hospital Hill Campus stood out as one of the buildings most in need of renovation, repair or replacement at UMKC.

“All of the state’s universities and business community will have to convince the Republican caucus to let the issue be voted on instead of killing it,” Kelly said.

The bond proposal has received support from the state’s higher education community, including the University of Missouri System.

In a statement Thursday night, UM System President Gary Forsee said the UM System continues to advocate and support bonding legislation.

“The state has a high AAA credit rating that we should leverage, and its current 35-year bond issue is about to expire. As the state and national economy improve ever so slightly, there is no better time for the state to move forward with this being part of our important economic recovery agenda.”

With interest rates currently low and the hunger for work displayed by construction workers and Missourians in general, Paul Wagner, deputy commissioner of the state’s higher education department, said this is a good time to invest in higher education.

“The state is never going to have the cash to fund these projects and it is always going to have to borrow to make major capital improvements,” Wagner said.

Wagner said with the stance taken by Richard, capital improvement needs for the state’s colleges and universities will be neglected for another year.

Kelly said he remains hopeful that the bond issue will get through the House.
Jefferson City -- Missouri lawmakers and university presidents are painting a bleak picture of future higher education funding as student enrollment rises across the state.

Federal stimulus funds targeted for education are expected to run out in 2012, meaning states may have to make deep cuts to higher education if tax revenues do not rebound quickly.

"As bad as 2011 looks for us, in 2012 we're going over a cliff," Rep. Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood, told education officials at a House appropriations committee this week. "Look ahead 16 or 17 months and plan now for what you're going to do when you get less money."

Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon struck a deal with higher education leaders last fall that calls for tuition to remain flat at Missouri's public colleges and universities for the second consecutive year, so long as the state cuts no more than 5.2 percent from their budgets. The pact is subject to approval by state lawmakers.

University officials said their institutions are dramatically curbing repairs and maintenance, changing class sizes and availability, and becoming more energy-efficient in anticipation of the expected 5.2 percent cut for the next school year and the potential for greater cuts in the future.

Deputy Education Commissioner Paul Wagner told The Associated Press on Friday that federal stimulus funds have largely shielded higher education institutions because states are limited to budget cuts of about 7 percent to receive those funds. But soon that money will be spent, the restriction will be lifted "and then," he said, "all of that is gone."
Once the cuts are expanded, the tuition freeze will probably be lifted, he said.

Wagner said larger cuts could mean big changes on some campuses. Students are going to face larger class sizes and classes being offered less frequently, he said.

"It's hard to keep cuts of that magnitude out of the classroom," Wagner said.

Missouri Southern State University, like most state schools, has eliminated jobs and reduced waste, said school president Bruce Speck.

"We've already done a lot of the things you're asking us to do," Speck told the legislative committee. "There's not a whole lot of fat."

He said his university is considering increasing student fees, closing computer labs, consolidating departments and moving to a four-day work week. Other schools said they're renting space to other institutions, reducing maintenance and not replacing broken equipment.

"We know with some of these changes being made, quality will not be easy to sustain in the long run," University of Central Missouri President Aaron Podolefsky said.

With enrollment at Missouri State University at an all-time high with 23,000 students, the school is trying to balance immediate budget needs with long-term goals.

"Students and their families are obviously concerned about their tuition costs, but they also want their level of education maintained," Missouri State president Mike Nietzel said.

Many state universities cited concerns over growing enrollment as people return to school to learn new job skills.

University of Missouri vice president Nikki Krawitz said enrollment at her school has increased 26 percent in the last decade while state funding has declined.

Committee members asked why universities haven't limited enrollment.

"I sure hope it doesn't come to that, that we have to turn away young ambitious people who want to learn," Wagner said.
Man reports assault near MU quadrangle

Saturday, February 20, 2010

A man told University Police he was assaulted Thursday night on the University of Missouri campus while walking near Pickard Hall.

MU police responded to the incident at about 9 p.m. where the victim was pushed from behind, fell to the ground and was kicked by assailants, campus police said in a news release. The victim told officers the assault occurred near the southwest corner of Pickard Hall as he walked west on the sidewalk toward Francis Quadrangle.

Two possible suspects fled east toward a Domino's Pizza shop near Ninth Street, police said. No additional suspect details were available. The victim reported no property theft in the assault.

He was treated for minor injuries at University Hospital.

Anyone with any information may contact CrimeStoppers online at 875tips.com or 875-8477.
Man injured in assault near Pickard Hall

By Ally Anderson
February 19, 2010 | 2:20 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

COLUMBIA – Shortly after 9 p.m. Thursday, an assault occurred near the southwest side of Pickard Hall at MU, according to an MU Police Department press release.

The victim said he was pushed from behind and fell to the ground as he was walking toward the Quadrangle. He was then kicked while on the ground. MU Police Chief Jack Watring said there could have been multiple suspects involved, and police are still investigating. The suspect or suspects fled the scene toward Domino’s Pizza and Ninth Street. No personal property appeared to have been taken.

The victim was transported to University Hospital to receive treatment for minor injuries and has since been released, Watring said.

No new information has been reported and the investigation will continue.

The MU Police Department requests anyone with information to call CrimeStoppers at 875-8477, or submit tips at 875tips.com.
MU science series gets a boost
Corporate donor likes 'fun' lectures.

By Janese Heavin
Sunday, February 21, 2010

Professor Jim Keller talks about making ambiguous human language clearer for robots during a Saturday Morning Science event yesterday in the Monsanto Auditorium at Bond Life Sciences Center on the University of Missouri campus.

A weekly science series at the University of Missouri recently received a financial boost that will allow organizers to expand the series and take the show on the road.

Monsanto Co. of St. Louis donated $11,600 to Saturday Morning Science, a series of hour-long lectures aimed at educating students and the public about current research and scientific advancements. The program, held on Saturdays during the school year in Monsanto Auditorium in the Bond Life Sciences Center, is run by volunteers and funded primarily through MU’s Office of Research and the University Bookstore.

In a prepared statement, Monsanto Chief Technology Officer Robert Fraley said company officials decided to donate the gift because they liked the idea of delivering science programs in a “fun and engaging” way.
“Saturday Morning Science helps demystify science for the public by talking about it in relationship to things that are relevant to people who care about their communities and their world,” he said.

The Monsanto money will allow organizers to host more out-of-town speakers during the series, said Bruce McClure, a biochemistry professor and one of three program organizers. And the funds will allow Mizzou faculty members to take the series to other parts of the state. That’s important, McClure said, because most outstate Missourians don’t have access to interactive science venues.

“These are excellent forums,” he said. “I would love for more people to have a chance to attend.”

The trips will not only promote science, they also should help citizens better understand what goes on at MU, McClure said. “They get a chance to see what faculty members think about, to see what the university is really about,” he said.

And the programs provide face-to-face interaction between citizens and scientists. “You don’t get that from the Discovery Channel,” McClure added.

Saturday Morning Science has been evolving since it started in 2003. Not only has attendance grown, the demographics of the audience has changed, too, McClure said.

Yesterday, for instance, more than 150 attendees showed up to hear engineering Professor Jim Keller talk about ongoing efforts to get robots to understand fuzzy logic. Of those in attendance, more than half were community members and the rest were either college students on assignment or high schoolers seeking extra credit for class.

That’s a change from the early years when graduate students made up about 90 percent of the audiences, McClure said. “Different people get different things out of it,” he said. “Some are here for their careers, others just want knowledge. A lot of people come regularly regardless of what the topic is.”
Hip-hop tour touts climate change issue

By Janese Heavin
Sunday, February 21, 2010

A national clean energy tour bus rolled through Columbia yesterday, uniting different segments of the community who share similar concerns about the climate change.

More than 50 people gathered outside the Fifth Street Christian Church to welcome the Hip Hop Caucus's Clean Energy Tour 2010, which stopped in Columbia en route to Indiana. The caucus teamed up with Climate Protection's Repower America campaign in an effort to get a diverse group of young people involved in the clean energy movement.

The integrated crowd included University of Missouri athletes, members of the Mizzou Black Men's Initiative, state Reps. Chris Kelly and Stephen Webber, both Columbia Democrats, and students and citizens concerned about the environment.

Firing up the group was the Rev. Lennox Yearwood Jr., president of the Hip Hop Caucus, who told young people that their role in fighting big oil and special interest groups will be as important to future generations as what civil rights activists did for them.

"The civil rights movement was such an important movement. They fought for equality so it could look like this beautiful audience," he said. "But as important as that movement was for the 20th century, fighting for equality, the clean energy movement of the 21st century is fighting for existence. ... This is our movement. This is the clean energy movement, and it's serious. It's not about equality, it's about existence."

Terry Dennis, a wide receiver for the Missouri Tigers, said he considers climate change the "biggest issue" affecting his generation. "Climate change is real," he said. "It's happening."

After the roughly 30-minute rally, participants delivered 95 weatherization kits to residents of the First Ward. The packages contained compact fluorescent light bulbs, window insulation kits, water-saving showerheads and other products aimed to make households more efficient.

AmerenUE and Clean Energy Works, a partner organization of Repower America, teamed up to donate the items.

Helping residents cut utility costs will help them better understand the importance of large-scale climate issues, Webber said.
"The most compelling reasons" to take action "are the personal reasons," he said. "I like that we're talking about a big issue, but we're also taking some on-the-ground, immediate actions."

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After decades of digging into the Church of Scientology, reporters and editors at the St. Petersburg Times are accustomed to being denounced by its leaders.

But they find it unsettling that three veteran journalists -- a Pulitzer Prize winner, a former "60 Minutes" producer and the former executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors -- are taking the church's money to examine the paper's conduct.

While the journalists have promised an independent review, the Times has refused to cooperate, saying their work will be used to fuel the church's ongoing campaign against the Florida paper.

"I ultimately couldn't take this request very seriously because it's a study bought and paid for by the Church of Scientology," says Executive Editor Neil Brown. "Candidly," he adds, "I was surprised and disappointed that journalists who I understand to have an extensive background in investigative reporting would think it's appropriate to ask me or our news organization to talk about that reporting while a) it's ongoing, and b) while they're being paid to ask these questions by the very subjects of our reporting."

Steve Weinberg, the former IRE executive who has taught at the University of Missouri's journalism school for a quarter-century, says he was paid $5,000 to edit the study and "tried to make sure it's a good piece of journalism criticism, just like I've written a gazillion times... For me it's kind of like editing a Columbia Journalism Review piece."

He says their agreement requires that the church publish the study in full, if it decides to make it public, but that "the contract says the church has the right to do nothing with it except put it in a drawer." That means Scientology leaders have an out if the recently completed study isn't to their liking.

Weinberg acknowledges that the "unusual situation" gave him pause, saying: "It certainly wouldn't be something just any reporter would do. My role was more limited, and I can certainly use the money these days."

Church spokesman Tommy Davis says he recently received the approximately 20-page study and that it will not necessarily be made public. It was commissioned, he says, because "we wanted to get an outside view" of the situation. Davis, who would not disclose how much the reporters were paid, calls the report highly critical of the Times stories on the Church.
Asked about Brown's view that the study could not possibly be objective, Davis says: "It's easy for the St. Pete Times to pop off and say that, but oh, please. It's a normal thing. It's done all the time." He likened the effort to CBS hiring an outside panel to investigate Dan Rather's 2004 story on George W. Bush and the National Guard, which the network later retracted. That report was a self-examination, however, and was made public.

The reporters hired for the study are Russell Carollo, who won a 1998 Pulitzer for Dayton, Ohio's Daily News for a series on medical malpractice in the U.S. military, and Christopher Szechenyi, an Emmy-winning former television producer who has worked for the Boston Globe's Web site.

Asked about taking on the assignment, the two chose to respond in a joint statement Sunday. "We were hesitant," they said. "That's why we insisted on being paid in full before we started our work, total editorial independence and having someone with the reputation of Steve Weinberg involved. Every entity has the right to receive fair treatment in the press."

As for accepting payment from the church, they said: "We were as objective in doing this job as we were in pursuing all the other assignments we've done for news organizations during the past 25 years."

It's been three decades since the Times won a Pulitzer for its reporting on the church, based in nearby Clearwater. In the latest chapter of this long-running battle, the paper began reporting new allegations last summer, using on-the-record interviews with former high-ranking Scientology officials. The Times quoted the defectors as charging the church's leader, David Miscavige, with "routinely attacking his lieutenants" and saying that he once "out of nowhere slapped a manager," while also acknowledging that they participated in violent acts. The Times said that the church pursued former staff members and subjected them "to months of interrogation, humiliation and manual labor."

Davis says the paper "relied on sources that had not only been removed by the person they were attacking, but . . . admitted to having engaged in the same behavior they accused others of. These guys got removed for gross malfeasance." He and the church's lawyer told the paper that some staffers were beaten up but that Miscavige never engaged in violence. The Times included excerpts of Davis's statements accusing the paper of "naked bias" against "the fastest-growing religion on earth."

During 25 hours of discussions with the Times reporters, Davis says, church officials offered a rare, exclusive interview with Miscavige -- who last spoke to the paper in 1998 -- but the paper launched its series on June 21, about two weeks before the proposed July 6 sitdown. Miscavige was busy preparing for an annual international event and attending church openings in Dallas, Nashville and Sweden, Davis says. "I think they handled it totally irresponsibly," he says.

Brown says the Times first asked to talk to Miscavige on May 13 and that the church had sent lawyers to talk to the ex-officials being interviewed. "They were already confronting some of our sources. We felt we had given them plenty of time," Brown says.
The church's magazine, Freedom, has repeatedly assailed the Times, and other properties owned by its corporate parent, under the rubric "Merchants of Chaos." Freedom has noted that a cardiologist won a $10 million libel verdict against the paper last year over reporting on his transfer from a local hospital post; the paper is appealing.

Whether the journalists' report is released or not, Davis says the church plans more scrutiny of its media adversary -- which comes as no surprise to Brown. "I counted up something like six or seven journalists the church has hired to look into the St. Petersburg Times," Brown says. "I've just got two looking into the Church of Scientology."

**Connecting on campus**

The Harvard Crimson has signed up. So have the Yale Daily News and Stanford Daily, along with the student papers at Georgetown, George Washington and Towson universities.

They are among the 55 publications who will share their content on a new College section at the Huffington Post, which is hoping to gain a foothold among the nation's 19 million college students. The section, which launches Monday, will include a batch of bloggers, ranging from faculty members writing on meaty subjects to a sex-and-dating columnist at Cornell University.

"This is a serious undertaking, but it has to be fun," says Jose Antonio Vargas, who already runs the HuffPost's technology section. "I want to create a virtual hub for college life in America."

Vargas, 29, a former Washington Post reporter, is sharing the workload with an intern, Leah Finnegan, who he says has greater campus cred because she's 23 and recently ran the student paper at the University of Texas at Austin.

Along with plans to create a Facebook group for college editors, Vargas has tapped nine students and graduates to write or make videos on the impact of taking out big loans. (A Tulane undergrad says it is "humiliating" that she is $100,000 in debt.) The site has also lined up blogging contributions from Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Beverly Tatum, president of Spelman College, the nation's oldest black college for women.

At the same time, Vargas says, "of course we're going to have silly slide shows on college dating."

For some editors, Huffington Post College seems a natural fit. "There are stories in college newspapers, certainly in ours, that have broad appeal," says Paul Needham, editor of the Yale Daily News. "This is one more way we can reach people who wouldn't otherwise be inclined to go to our Web site. . . . We're no longer just writing for people in the dining hall."

But others have rejected Vargas's invitation. Andrew Dunn, editor of the University of North Carolina's Daily Tar Heel, says he was concerned that "the Huffington Post is a left-leaning Web site, and what sort of message that affiliation would send." Plus, "we really didn't want Huffington Post links" showing up in Web searches "instead of our links."
Vargas eventually hopes to add more papers. "This can't feel like talking down to our audience," he says. "This is a site for college-age kids, written and driven by college-age kids."

**Dissing Obama**

Detractors are circulating a photo that shows him--gasp--with his feet on the Oval Office desk. "Keep your feet off the furniture," the missive says.

"It's a good slam," says Jonathan Chait in the New Republic. "But why must it be accompanied by an accusation of racism? Oh, sure, it's entirely possible that many of the people forwarding this email have created a double standard based on racism. But isn't it more likely that they've created a double standard based on partisanship? It's not as if racial animus is the only explanation for wildly hypocritical right-wing attacks on a Democratic president. I could certainly imagine the same outraged emails being circulated if Bill Clinton were president.

"In general, it seems to me that the right and left treat accusations of racism and anti-Semitism in completely parallel ways. The right casually flings around accusations of anti-Semitism in discussions of the Middle East, and is interested in racism primarily insofar as it is a false accusation by the left intended to intimidate Obama's critics. The left, by contrast, casually flings about accusations of racism, and is interested in anti-Semitism primarily insofar as it is a false accusation by the right intended to intimidate Israel's critics.

"If I can get earnest for a moment, I think the public discourse would improve if more people would refrain from inferring bigoted motives in their opponents."

**Gauging Gridlock**

The right is trying to punch holes in the liberal argument that D.C. is paralyzed because of excessive filibusters and other systemic roadblocks. Not true, says National Review Editor Rich Lowry:

"It's not that nothing can get done in Washington; it's that Obama wouldn't settle for what could get done. He turned his back on what history has shown to be the best template for liberal action on health care: salami-slice steps toward ever more government.

"We've heard how it takes 60 votes to get anything done in the Senate. But prior to Scott Brown, Obama had 60 votes. He couldn't forge a consensus within his own party because he never convinced his base to settle for anything less than the outer edge of the possible.

"Obama wouldn't tame the impatient Left because he's part of it. After he won in 1964, Lyndon Johnson told his aides he'd won by 16 million votes and would lose a million votes' worth of support every month, so he had to act fast.

"Obama made the same calculation, but on behalf of an agenda that wasn't popular. If people had been persuaded of its merits, Obama could have made Republicans pay the price for obstruction."
The Nation's Katha Pollitt blames the Hill's ways, but doesn't let the president off the hook:

"I'm still glad I supported Obama over Hillary Clinton. If Hillary had won the election, every single day would be a festival of misogyny. We would hear constantly about her voice, her laugh, her wrinkles, her marriage and what a heartless, evil bitch she is for doing something--whatever!--men have done since the Stone Age.

"I'm not even sure how much of it you can blame on Obama. We've had ample evidence of how little power he has over the Democratic barons of the Senate--so little that he had to bribe Ben Nelson and Mary Landrieu with great big haunches of pork to get their votes on a healthcare bill that would benefit millions of their constituents.

"But let's not go overboard. . . . He is, after all, the president. He can propose, he can set forth an agenda, he can demand. He can ask for more than he knows he can get, he can push the boundaries. He doesn't have to do the Republicans' work for them--by asking for a smaller stimulus than necessary. by having the bulk of healthcare reform not kick in until 2014 to keep costs down, by praising obscenely rich bankers as 'very savvy businessmen' to a nation with a 9.7 percent official unemployment rate. It's as if the Blue Dogs have gotten into his head, and instead of thinking how to push the possibilities to the max, he's thinking how he can placate his opponents in advance."

The Age of Distrust

Why are the media so unpopular these days? Well, says David Brooks, it turns out we've got plenty of company:

"As we've made our institutions more meritocratic, their public standing has plummeted. . . . Fifty years ago, the financial world was dominated by well-connected blue bloods who drank at lunch and played golf in the afternoons. Now financial firms recruit from the cream of the Ivy League. In 2007, 47 percent of Harvard grads went into finance or consulting. Yet would we say that banks are performing more ably than they were a half-century ago?

"Government used to be staffed by party hacks. Today, it is staffed by people from public policy schools. But does government work better than it did before?

"Journalism used to be the preserve of working-class stiffs who filed stories and hit the bars. Now it is the preserve of cultured analysts who file stories and hit the water bottles. Is the media overall more reputable now than it was then?"

The question answers itself.

But Commentary's Jennifer Rubin asks a different question, taking the Brooks column in a different direction:

"We elected a president who was indisputably a member of the educated elite in America. It matters not at all that he wasn't rich growing up. He spent his adult life at Ivy League
institutions, chalked up the résumé entries (Harvard Law Review), and thoroughly adopted the intellectual bent and attributes of the academic Left in America.

"What did all this have to do with being president? It turns out not all that much. But other elites -- New York Times columnists, for example -- swooned and vouched for him. They confused literary finesse with presidential timber. They mistook fluency in philosophy with grounding in common sense, moderation, and wisdom."

It's all your fault, elitists! (Unlike those who write for the non-elite Commentary.)

Howard Kurtz also works for CNN and hosts its weekly media program. "Reliable Sources."
Gov. Jay Nixon has appointed Columbia lawyer Craig Van Matre to the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education, a nine-member panel that oversees the operations of the state Department of Higher Education.

If Van Matre is confirmed by the state Senate, he will succeed Helen Washburn, also of Columbia, and serve a term ending June 27, 2015. Washburn’s term has expired. Van Matre, 64, is president of Van Matre, Harrison, Hollis, Pitzer & Taylor. He grew up in Mexico, Mo., and earned his law degree at the University of Missouri. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of Stephens College.