Hundreds gather for town-hall diversity chat

By Janese Heavin

Monday, March 1, 2010

A couple of bags of cotton balls dumped out in front of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center last week sparked a two-hour discussion this evening about diversity on the University of Missouri campus.

At least 300 students, faculty members, community members and administrators attended the town hall forum, sponsored by the Legion of Black Collegians. The organization's president, Anthony Martin, began the meeting by explaining the significance of cotton in black history.

"We must take immediate action," he said. "We can no longer let little acts of racism continue."

For nearly an hour, student and campus leaders took turns denouncing the act, including Tim Noce, president of the Missouri Students Association, who vowed to stand united with the black community against hate crimes.

"Any event that looks to divide our student body will not be tolerated," he said.

Cotton balls thrown on a lawn might seem minor compared with the physical violence blacks experienced in the 1950s and 1960s, said Deputy Chancellor Mike Middleton, but is nonetheless an act of social violence.

"The entire Mizzou family has been offended by the acts that occurred the other night," Middleton said. "Administration is totally offended by what happened and totally committed to making sure it does not happen in the future."

Middleton sparked laughter when he suggested there's a slight chance someone carrying multiple bags of cotton balls accidentally dropped them on the lawn of the black culture center. If that wasn't the case, he warned, those who dumped the cotton — regardless of the reason — "made a very serious mistake."

The MU Police Department is treating the incident as a hate crime, even though such charges would have to meet certain criteria to be attached to a criminal offense, Chief Jack Watring said. His department is taking the situation seriously, he stressed. Watring said he's been in touch with the civil division of the FBI, the Department of Justice in Kansas City and other university law enforcement agencies for advice on how to proceed.
Roger Worthington, chief diversity officer, outlined ongoing efforts MU is making to improve race relations on campus, including trying to hire more minority faculty members. And MU's Faculty Council continues to review whether a diversity class should be part of the general education requirements. Chairwoman Leona Rubin said.

Some students, however, questioned whether those efforts have resurfaced only as a response to Friday's cotton ball incident. One student accused the council of trying to "save face," and said "it's sad it took cotton balls" to get the council to continue to review the requirement.

Rubin clarified that the general education task force is looking at a number of changes to general education coursework, not just the diversity requirement, and it's a lengthy process.

Other students were critical of Chancellor Brady Deaton's e-mail response Friday evening, which some thought didn't convey enough anger over the situation. Deaton, who was out of town Friday, issued a statement just after 5 p.m. calling the act despicable and asking for students with information to call police.

"The e-mail was so watered down, some people in my class couldn't even connect cotton balls to African Americans," said Jasmine Richmond, a freshman.

Deaton told the students he was not only angry but "deeply disappointed and hurt — hurt for all of us."

"We will never tolerate this," he said. "We will not let this divide us."

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
Heartfelt views aired as MU addresses cotton ball incident

By Bryan Richardson  
March 1, 2010 | 9:25 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The reaction coming out of a town hall meeting at MU's Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center was to not let a revived conversation about campus racism die. The two-hour meeting was a response to an incident on Friday in which cotton balls were scattered in front of the center, read by many as a hurtful, hateful gesture.

"We can no longer let these little acts of racism go on because it doesn't threaten anyone's life," said Anthony Martin, president of the Legion of Black Collegians, a student group at MU that hosted the meeting.

A crowd of what appeared to be more than 100 people stretched from a conference room into the hallways. Many people stood, and news cameras recorded the meeting from the sides of the room.

Martin explained the significance of the cotton ball incident when he detailed the history of cotton for African Americans. The act was important, he said, even if it was nonviolent. The center's director Nathan Stephens agreed, calling it symbolic violence.

Regardless of the intent of the people behind the act, Deputy Chancellor Michael Middleton said they "made a very serious mistake."

Police think the cotton balls were scattered between 1:30 and 2 a.m. Friday. MU Police Chief Jack Watring told the gathering he thinks the two people who did it ran between Wolpers and Johnston residential halls toward the MU Student Recreation Complex. The Black Culture Center, 813 Virginia Ave., is near the dorms.

MU Police Department officers have reviewed footage from video cameras in the area, but none of the footage is focused directly on the center. Potential leads could come
from looking at cotton ball purchases in the area and the use of cards to enter residence halls at about the same time as the incident.

Watring said the department was doing everything it could but needs help from the community. The department can be reached at 882-7201.

**Questioning the MU administration**

Friday's incident was the reason for the meeting, but during a question-and-answer session, participants raised other concerns: the lack of cameras at the Black Culture Center; not making the center a stop on campus tours; hate crimes not being defined in the university's code of conduct; and a perception that top administrators responded slowly to the incident.

Some criticized the mass e-mail sent at about 5 p.m. Friday by Chancellor Brady Deaton as too slow in coming and too soft in language.

"We were just trying to make a responsible statement at the time," Deaton said after the meeting. He said the administration had to deal with explaining an issue about which they had no confirmed information to a broad range of people in a few hours.

Repeatedly, speakers and questioners broached the need for a diversity course general education requirement. The first mention of it by MU Chief Diversity Officer Roger Worthington sparked applause.

In the Q & A, Yantezia Patrick, co-chairwoman of Four Front Minority Presidents Council, expressed the frustration she felt when trying to go to an MU Faculty Council task force with a proposal for a diversity course.

"When we came to y'all three weeks ago, y'all shot us down," Patrick said, adding that she thinks it's sad the incident had to happen for the proposal to get public attention.

After the meeting, Patrick, a journalism student, said the administration has given promises year after year with no progress.

"I understand it's a bureaucratic system, but I feel oftentimes the views of minority students are low on the totem pole," she said.
The Legion of Black Collegians submitted a list of demands to Deaton in March 2005, which included academic demands such as turning black studies into a major and the addition of a diversity course to the general education requirement.

**Importance of diversity**

Most people at the meeting were African Americans, and, at one point, an audience member noted the absence of other races there even though the meeting was publicized over the past couple of days as open to everyone.

Yve Solbrekken, a science education doctoral student, said via a telephone interview that as a past member of Difficult Dialogues, a program designed to help educators facilitate open-minded discussion, she believes it is important for those from different races and cultures to interact more often.

"We need to become friends with one another," said Solbrekken, who sent a letter to the editor at the Missourian on Monday afternoon. "I don't see how we can understand each other if we don't hang out more."

Lakeisha Williams, a sophomore senator in the Missouri Students Association, said many were in disbelief of the cotton ball incident because they thought things were different after the election of Barack Obama.

"So many people feel we live in a post-racial society, and we don't," Williams said at the meeting.

Discussions of this nature require everyone, Williams said.

"How are you going to have these conversations on diversity and only include diverse individuals?" she asked.

Josh Travis, former MSA operations committee chairman, said it is time for a "yes, we will" attitude and encouraged the audience not to let the conversation die when the meeting ended.

"We have to redefine diversity," Travis said. "Diversity is more than numbers — it lies in each and every one of us."
Taking the initiative

Martin said the issues brought up during the forum were far from over.

“IT’S our job to take the initiative,” he said. “Any organization you’re a part of can have an impact.”

Deaton said the university will stand strong. “We’ll never allow a situation like this to divide us,” he said.

Solbrekken said the next steps won’t be easy.

“We shouldn’t lay it at the feet of the chancellor, the people at university or the organizers of the town hall meeting,” Solbrekken said. “The responsibility rests within each of us.”

Missourian reporter Katy Bergen contributed to this article.
Town hall meeting responds to BCC tampering

The meeting sought to create dialogue about diversity issues on campus.

By Luke Udstuen

Published March 2, 2010

The Legion of Black Collegians hosted a town hall meeting Monday night at the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center in response to the cotton strewn in front of the center Friday.

Deputy Chancellor Michael Middleton explained how the cotton used in the crime represented an act of violence — not necessarily physical violence but symbolic violence.

"While this wasn't done to anyone specifically, it wasn't even done to the facility itself, it undid progress that has been made at the University of Missouri-Columbia," Middleton said.

Middleton referenced Lloyd Gaines, the black student who won a Supreme Court case in 1938 to gain entry into the MU School of Law and disappeared the following year.

"It undid the progress we have made, that we have fought for, the progress that Lloyd Gaines died for," Middleton said.

The MU Police Department is classifying the crime as tampering, MUPD Capt. Brian Weimer said.

"It is being investigated as a crime," Weimer said. "People are calling it vandalism, but the charge is tampering." MUPD offers a Crime Stoppers reward of up to $1,500 for information about the crime, Weimer said.

"If anyone knows anything, they need to call us because this is affecting our whole community," Weimer said.

Although many students at the town hall meeting referred to the crime as a hate crime, the incident might not qualify as one, according to legal classifications.

"I personally would call it a hate crime," MUPD Chief Jack Watring said. "We've looked at it several times over the last couple of days, over the weekend and today."
Watring said the incident could be called a hate crime in the police reports but might not be counted as one statistically.

MUPD has accessed nearby security cameras, such as those on the Virginia Avenue Garage and the Life Sciences Center. Watring said a camera on the Student Recreation Complex might indicate in which direction the suspects ran. MUPD believes the two people ran between Wolpers and Johnston residence halls toward the recreation center, Watring said.

A witness saw two people running from the area around the time of the event.

MUPD is also retrieving swipe card information from residence halls to examine those who left or entered halls around the time of the event, Watring said.

In addition to those efforts on campus, MUPD has also contacted local retail outlets, such as Walmart, Walgreens and Mizzou Market.

Watring said MUPD has also retrieved video from Mizzou Market.

"We're reviewing those tapes there," Watring said. "There is a camera there all the time. We think we may have a fairly good lead there that was provided to us."

Last year, Faculty Council created a task force to address general education requirements regarding diversity, Faculty Council Chairwoman Leona Rubin said.

"The first item on that agenda was to address the need for a diversity course on campus," Rubin said.

Rubin will address the council Thursday with a resolution stating faculty in all courses would consider tolerance of all topics their primary concern, Rubin said.

Graduate assistant Jennifer Correa addressed the e-mail Chancellor Brady Deaton sent to students and staff regarding the BCC vandalism last Friday.

"In sociology, we teach about diversity," Correa said. "Nowhere in that e-mail was anything about race or racism."

Chief Diversity Officer Roger Worthington said as an administrator, he's found a more effective way to approach an issue is working collaboratively with faculty.

"We can continue to improve the curriculum by identifying courses that don't include diversity when they should," Worthington said.

Outside the BCC on Friday, as students discovered the vandalism outside the center, reactions ranged from laughter to disbelief and to tears.
"This isn't just about the BCC," freshman Ashley Hatcher said. "Racism has never gone anywhere. I don't even have the words to explain how I feel right now. I'm fighting back tears. This is ridiculous."

LBC President Anthony Martin said racism occurs in a more frequent but often unnoticed basis.

"This was just such a blatant outright act of racism that it couldn't go unheard," Martin said. "But there are issues that happen every day on campus that are racism under the table. They need to be publicized just as much as this. LBC's stance on this and what we're going to do is to make sure that happens from now on."

Freshman Gabriel Tyler said the incident needed to happen in order to spark the desire for change.

"Because I feel a lot of times we are acquiescent about certain events, and we just say, 'Oh, we're not going to do something about it,'" Tyler said.

Deaton gave closing remarks at the town hall meeting.

"Fear has no place in a citadel of learning," Deaton said. "We are happy to see the community of Columbia work with us to eradicate these acts, knowing we will never perfect the human condition."
Racially charged incidents continue
University of Missouri police are investigating vandalism at the school's black culture center, The Maneater reports. Sometime early Friday morning someone spread cotton balls in front of the center. Police are still trying to determine if it was a hate crime.

A University of California, San Diego, student has admitted to police that she hung a rope noose from a campus library bookcase, an act that triggered more protests at a school already roiled by other recent racially charged incidents, the LA Times reports. Angry students stormed and occupied the chancellor's office for about six hours on Friday, and University of California, Los Angeles, held a sympathy protest.
GUEST COMMENTARY: Cotton balls at Black Culture Center show racism still very much alive at MU

By Jennifer M. Wilmot
March 1, 2010 | 12:55 p.m. CST

I usually get the most out of them when I feel like changing my nail color. Sometimes if I want my eye shadow to pop, I'll use one to dab a little Vaseline on my eyelids first. However, I never thought something as simple as a cotton ball could be used in such a menacing, hateful manner.

In the early morning hours on Friday, when some person or persons chose to scatter cotton balls across the front entrance to the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center at MU, it became evident that there's a conversation to be had that's long overdue.

To say the least, I, like many students at Mizzou, were disgusted by this act and more so disappointed in the lack of a timely response by our administration. The first text messages, Facebook status updates and pictures began circulating at 8 a.m. as classes got under way and droves of students passed the Black Culture Center.

Sadly, Chancellor Brady Deaton didn't issue a public statement until 5:10 p.m. Even at that point, it wasn't enough for him to simply express "individual concern and support to the members of our community who were the apparent targets." It seemed that people were attempting to categorize this event as minor or isolated. In the year 2010, in our beloved country ran by a man of African descent and at a university that recorded its highest minority enrollment to date in August, the silence of our leaders pained me almost as much as seeing the cotton balls in person.

It's necessary to remember that the "Father of the University of Missouri," James Rollins, was a slave owner with at least 30 slaves before the Civil War. We should also remember the young black man lynched in town in 1923 after falsely being accused of sexually assaulting a white woman. And we mustn't forget for whom the beloved Black
Culture Center, "where the contributions of Blacks to world history are explored, celebrated, taught and shared" is named after Lloyd Gaines was denied admission to our Law School by the Board of Curators because of his race and was later responsible for the Supreme Court's landmark decision forcing the Law School to desegregate or provide a facility of equal status for blacks within state borders. Marian O'Fallon Oldham, was also denied admission to MU because of her skin color but went on to become our first black female curator appointed to the board in March 1977.

No, this isn't a noose hanging in the library nor is it an off-campus "ghetto-themed" party with 40 oz. beers and gold chains. No, I don't feel the need to protest Jesse Hall or take over some other academic building. I do, however, feel compelled to blatantly state that racial tensions exist on this campus and are heightened daily — this event has just taken it to another, more public level.

I'd be lying if I said every day when I walk into a classroom, whether as an instructor or as a student, I don't think my skin color is evident or matters to my colleagues or students. I'd be lying if I said as a minority I feel accepted, respected and equal in this space. I'd also be lying if I said cotton balls in front of the Black Culture Center didn't frighten me.

It worried me to think of the deliberate racism so freely and effortlessly expressed with no qualms. It petrified me to think how easily some could and did (wrongly) misinterpret such racism as just basic ignorance to be ignored. And finally, it scared me to think of the environment Mizzou might become if we don't begin an open and honest conversation about the state of race and ethnicity here.

This conversation should be orchestrated by the administration, fueled by the voices of the students and heard by all — campus and Columbia communities alike. If anyone thinks this is an excessive action, I'd ask them how they felt the first time someone here called them them chink, cracker, nigger, oreo, spic, towel-head, etc. If they can't relate, I'd urge them to ask anyone of us who has been, and then tell me a dialogue isn't necessary.

Jennifer M. Wilmot is a Graduate student at Mizzou and resident of Columbia
Letter to the Editor:

LBC speaks about Black Culture Center crime

By Anthony Martin, Legion of Black Collegians president

Published March 2, 2010

On behalf of the Legion of Black Collegian Black Student Government I would like to say that we are completely disheartened by the events that have taken place early this morning. For those who are unaware cotton balls were scattered throughout the front area of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center. Reports of the cotton balls were sited as early as 8 am this morning. Some students claim to have seen two white males running around that Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center suspiciously, as early as 1:30 am. This statement has not been confirmed fact yet. The coordinator of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, Deniece Christian has notified the MUPD. They and staff of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center are doing their best to get to the bottom of this terrible event. We don't know much, but what we do know is that this type of prank or whatever it may be will not be tolerated and we as the Legion of Black Collegian, Black Student Government do not find this at all amusing. We will do all in our power to find out who is responsible. We also will make sure that this event does not go unheard. Our Mission as LBC is to be the leading Black voice on campus by eradicating ignorance and promoting positive change through education, motivation, and advocacy for black students at Mizzou. We will not let our mission statement be spoken in vain, especially during the event that took place today. We as the Legion of Black Collegian will take immediate action on this event by first calling a town hall meeting for EVERYONE to attend. This meeting will be designed to express our feelings and create a plan of action. This Meeting will be held Monday March 1st, 2010 at 5:00pm Sharp. We are also thinking of some type of protest beginning early Monday so please keep your eyes open for that. It seems to us that the campus that we call home to all our academic endeavors has students that still do not respect their fellow students, and this is not just a problem for minorities on campus, this is a problem for our campus as a whole. I, as President of the Legion of Black Collegians Black Student Government, have taken these actions personally, and will not stop asking questions, questioning administration, and protesting until a solution has been created. We are too progressive of a nation and a university to still see issues of this nature taking place. If not settled by this message, be settled by the fact that this incident will be resolved. I give you my word. Just keep high hopes, and remember do not act out in initial anger. Be upset, be disgusted, but keep your composure and react to this situation as the outstanding men and women that you are. I would also like to say that I am extremely pleased by all the support we have been given by our senate, umbrella organizations, and students of the
University of Missouri. This is a time where we must throw our past differences away and attack the issue at hand. I am happy to see we all have our priorities in order.
Letter to the Editor:

NAACP says African-American voices will be heard

By Bryan Like, NAACP president

Published March 2, 2010

In the year 2010 most students go about their day as if racism has been dispelled from the University of Missouri's campus. Placing cotton on the steps of the Black Culture Center is a blatant act of racism. In the past the University has had its issues with racism and equal rights. At times the change we have asked for would not come. It would die at commencement when the student leaders were gone. Now is not a time for our voices to be drowned out with time. We will see action from this egregious act. We will not be discouraged by the ignorance of a few. This person wanted to make a statement. So do we. We will not sit back. We will not wait. We will not take this on the chin and say "It happens." We will not hide in the shadow's and darkness of the night. We will bring our fight to the public. We will be seen and our voices will be heard!
Racist acts need to stop

By Jordan Stein

Published March 2, 2010

An open letter to the cotton ball bandits:

Hey there, whoever you are. I'm not sure if you're one person or many. I don't know if you're white, black, male, female, whatever. Frankly, I don't care.

I don't know if you were drunk, trying to pull a harmless prank or if you truly have an awful amount of ignorance and hate in your hearts. Again, I don't really care.

The only things that matter are the repercussions of your actions. You have mightily offended a lot of people, including an organization on this campus that does important work. You've marred the reputation of the students of this university and made this campus out to be one that discriminates and hates.

Unfortunately, you've also helped to expose other idiots who think the same way you do. In the comments section of the coverage of the incident by the Columbia Daily Tribune, plenty of ignorant and pigheaded citizens were advocating "White History Month" and warning of the dangers of "reverse racism."

Others still are trying to excuse your actions by saying, "What's the big deal?" That is the stupidest part of the whole ordeal. A lot of people are writing you off as a moron (or morons), but the fact is not everyone feels that way, and the idea some are willing to forget or ignore such an exploit is just jarring.

Granted, it was a dumb prank and no one got hurt, but when a stunt like this opens up discussion instead of garnering a universal nomination for the Darwin Award, it's telling.

How are our minority students supposed to feel? Do you realize this is an assault on everyone, of every color? I find it inexcusable to treat our fellow students this way, especially during a time when we try to honor their history.

I read the Legion of Black Collegians' response to this mess, and I echo President Anthony Martin's sentiments.
"We are too progressive of a nation and a university to still see issues of this nature still taking place," he said.

We students are supposed to be the future leaders of this country, but you've proven a college education doesn't necessarily keep you from being or acting stupid.

What were you thinking? What did you think you could accomplish with this little stunt? Because what's actually happened is everyone thinks that you (however many of you there are) are complete idiots. You've opened up a forum for discussion of race issues, which will hopefully allow this wound you've inflicted to heal.

Hopefully, by the time of publication, the events planned to give people a forum to speak with have alleviated the tension your dumb prank has created.

All I can say is this: Next time you feel like demonstrating your ignorance, do everyone a favor and just stay home and shut the hell up.

P.S. — Everyone else, I do hope you can find the time to attend some of the forums hosted by the Legion of Black Collegians. Also, when these idiots are eventually caught, I hope we can all display the grace and dignity befitting young people of our intelligence instead of giving them more reasons to hate.

Jordan Stein is a senior political science major and a campaign volunteer for Columbia mayoral candidate Sid Sullivan. She can be reached at jesf25@mail.mizzou.edu
Editorial:

MU must be progressive after cotton ball incident

Published March 2, 2010

Throwing cotton balls on the grounds of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, as happened Friday morning, is disgraceful, both to MU and the community at large.

It's embarrassing and offensive to a multitude of people in the community, not just to those directly associated. The black students the act targeted were rightfully appalled, even questioning their safety. What does this say about MU, Columbia and society today?

The crime has gone further than the BCC. It has transgressed past the bureaucratic offices of the MU administration. That one act of "tampering," as the MU Police Department calls it, has gotten attention from the outside world, and suddenly, the administration is ready to do something.

MUPD said it cannot yet classify this act as a hate crime, but many see the act as it is: an act of hate. Fortunately, MUPD is pursuing the criminals, even if it can only call the crime "tampering" at this point. It has pulled cameras from the Student Recreation Complex and Virginia Avenue parking garage in hopes of seeing something useful, but the department has yet to make much progress.

In response, the MU chapter of the Legion of Black Collegians hosted a town hall meeting Monday to discuss the crime and its effects with those interested.

Many came to discuss what could be done to make sure it doesn't happen again. Some called for a camera to be installed directly outside the BCC, saying if this had been a violent crime, there would be more serious implications of not catching the perpetrator.

Others said MU could do more for diversity on campus and criticized MU for not responding quickly enough Friday. Most students found out from Twitter, Facebook or word of mouth before the chancellor released his statement.

Some in attendance brought up requiring a diversity course as part of the general education requirements. Various student groups have been pushing for this for years. Now, perhaps it will actually happen. To make it happen is simple; the administration simply needs to evaluate which
courses we have would work as a diversity course, similar to humanities or writing intensive courses. No new courses need to be created; they simply need to be evaluated as teaching diversity. In fact, the administration could basically mirror the courses available for the Multicultural Certificate. It could work in a short amount of time.

Other ideas were discussed. For instance, the Chancellor's Diversity Initiative hosts dialogues, events and other miscellaneous programs in an attempt to create a more accepting, diversity climate at MU. Unfortunately, it's often preaching to the choir. The students, faculty and community members who attend those events already care about diversity issues. They're not the people who need someone to explain the importance of accepting other cultures. They're the people who already understand.

Simply hosting events for those who are somehow stakeholders in an issue is not a valid solution. MU needs to think of more creative ways to improve the diversity climate on campus. Likewise, Columbia needs to stop resting on the fact it is a college town, more liberal than much of Missouri, and act to create less racial tension in town as well.

The methods brought up to help the climate on campus aren't new; they aren't profound. And the cop-out excuse the administration gave as to why more hasn't been done already is bureaucracy. Really? Are there too many governing bodies on campus to get things done in a timely manner? If true, that sounds like a problem in and of itself, but it's not one that we're accepting as an excuse.

News flash, MU: Too many governing bodies on campus isn't an excuse for slow action. We've all seen you act quickly. We've all seen things get done in a timely manner. And we're sure things will begin to get done quickly now that the rest of Missouri is tuning in.

It's necessary for MU to move forward. It's necessary for MU to educate its community and work to hire a more diverse staff, keeping in mind diversity is much more than a color.

Be swift, effective and transparent with actions taken to correct this problem. Keep students and stakeholders in the loop, whether it's the arrest of those who vandalized the BCC or progress being made toward a more diverse campus. The students, faculty and community members who showed up to the town hall meeting proved the MU campus cares, and the MU campus wants to be updated on progress made.

MU is now in the public light as a university that needs to react to a problem. Rather than being the proactive university we could have been had the administration taken calls for diversity more seriously in the past, MU is now a reactive university solving a problem under public scrutiny. Way to be behind the times, MU.

To the cowards who vandalized the BCC, congratulations because you've sparked a fire to further diversity at MU. Perhaps in the near future, those with your complete lack of cultural understanding would benefit from what you've done.
MU needs to condemn racism, open discussion

By Jennifer M. Wilmont, MU Black Studies Students' Association treasurer

Published March 2, 2010

I am writing to call attention to a hateful event that occurred on the University of Missouri's Columbia campus Friday morning. As classes got under way, students noticed some person or persons, scattered cotton across the front entrance of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center. This place serves as the campus-wide locale "where the contributions of Blacks to world history are explored, celebrated, taught and shared. The GOBCC provides intellectually stimulating and socially distinguishable programming by sponsoring an array of special lectures, performances, workshops, forums and social events that enhance the experience of Black students on the University of Missouri campus."

To say the least, I am disgusted by this action, I am frightened for my safety as an African-American student in such an environment, and I am repulsed by the lack of attention being paid to this event by our administration.

In the year 2010, during the month we collectively celebrate Black heritage, and when our country is currently ran by a man of African descent, I am ashamed to say I attend the University of Missouri alongside others who are attempting to categorize this as minor or isolated. Unfortunately, racial tensions exist at this campus and are heightened daily; this event is has just taken it to another, more public level.

I urge the University of Missouri to take swift and public action through campus-wide statements condemning this experience, seeking out the culprits, and hosting campus-wide town hall meetings to assure students that the University will not tolerate such incidents, hate, or discrimination. Finally, I urge you to publicize what is really going on here before it's covered up (or at least attempted to be).
Letter to the Editor:

NAACP says African-American voices will be heard

By Bryan Like, NAACP president

Published March 2, 2010

In the year 2010 most students go about their day as if racism has been dispelled from the University of Missouri's campus. Placing cotton on the steps of the Black Culture Center is a blatant act of racism. In the past the University has had its issues with racism and equal rights. At times the change we have asked for would not come. It would die at commencement when the student leaders were gone. Now is not a time for our voices to be drowned out with time. We will see action from this egregious act. We will not be discouraged by the ignorance of a few. This person wanted to make a statement. So do we. We will not sit back. We will not wait. We will not take this on the chin and say "It happens." We will not hide in the shadow's and darkness of the night. We will bring our fight to the public. We will be seen and our voices will be heard!
Campus hosting race talk

No arrests in cotton prank.

By Janese Heavin

University of Missouri administrators will join students at a town hall meeting today to discuss how the campus can move forward after a racist display outside the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center last week.

Cotton litters lawn at black culture center [Friday, February 26, 2010]

Meanwhile, MU police are continuing to investigate the incident and search for suspects but said it’s too early to say whether the incident qualifies as a “hate crime.”

Today’s forum starts at 5 p.m. at the black culture center, at 813 Virginia Ave. The event is “an opportunity for the entire university to come together to condemn this act and to show their support for people who were targets of this incident.” said Roger Worthington, MU’s chief diversity officer.

The meeting was called by the Legion of Black Collegians after students and staff awoke Friday to find cotton balls strewn across the lawn in front of the black culture center. The overt reminder of slavery came on one of the final days of Black History Month.

MU police were told that two people dressed in dark clothing were seen running from the area between 1:30 and 2 a.m. Friday. Officers continue to review footage from nearby surveillance cameras and are hoping those who have information about the incident will come forward, Capt. Brian Weimer said.

“Obviously, someone is going to know who did this,” he said. “We’re hoping they will call and give that information up when they realize what these people have done.”

Weimer said the suspects likely would be charged with tampering with property. It’s too soon to know whether that charge will be enhanced with a “hate crime” status.

Worthington said he isn’t sure how the racist display might affect recruitment of minorities at MU, but he said the act does not reflect the campus as a whole.

“This is a hostile act against the entire university community,” he said. “I believe the university has worked very hard to be a welcoming environment for people from all backgrounds, and we
have achieved a great deal through a variety of different means to increase the numerical diversity on campus as well as create a positive campus climate for diversity.

"This does degrade our image. But I hope this can be viewed as a single act of cowards in the middle of the night. ... This should not be a reflection of our total image."

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UM System employees object to proposed state health care plan

By Marty Swant
March 1, 2010 | 8:45 p.m. CST

JEFFERSON CITY — Representatives from the University of Missouri System opposed legislation Monday that would consolidate all the state government employee health care plans.

Betsy Rodriguez, vice president of human resources for the UM System, said one of the system's main reasons for opposing the bill was the legislation's "involuntary nature." The system, along with the Transportation Department and Conservation Department, would be required to merge into the health care plan known as the Missouri Consolidated Health Care Plan.

"We don't want to be forced into a plan that would immediately raise premiums," she said.

Rodriguez said that in order for the four-campus system to remain competitive in attracting prospective employees, it must keep costs low. But if consolidated under the proposed plan, she said, those costs would rise.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, said he didn't believe the system's claims. He doubted consolidating health care plans would raise costs. Officials from the UM System estimate the increase to be from $55 million to $62 million.

That estimate "defies simple logic," he said, because by merging administrative roles, costs would decrease. He said the UM System doesn't want to concede control. However, he said, because the system gets hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, they should join the state employee health care plan.
"They want control over their little special systems, with their little special breaks, with their little special packages," he said. "It defies logic that then they should be able to just present to the General Assembly a bill for all of that."

A document presented by the system to the Senate Financial Committee reported that premiums are almost $100 lower for UM System employees than those under the state's health care plan. Rodriguez said they don't know why premiums are lower for the system compared to the state's, but they want to keep them that way.

Sen. Jim Lembke, R-St. Louis County, said the costs for state employees listed by the system's document looked high compared to what he's researched in the past about the current consolidated health care plan used by the state.

Sen. Joan Ridgeway, R-Smithville, said she has her own doubts about the state's health care plan.

"The Missouri Consolidated Health Care Plan's health savings account is failing miserably," she said.

No one from the state's health care plan was present to testify at Monday's hearing, and no date for a vote on the bill has been set.
Stein resigns as MU women's basketball coach

By David Briggs

Cindy Stein resigned Monday night after 12 seasons as Missouri's women's basketball coach, the school announced in a release.

She will continue to coach through the end of the season.

"The University of Missouri and I have mutually agreed that it is in the best interest of the program to announce at this time, that I will not be returning as the head women's basketball coach past this season," Stein said in the release. "I will actively coach up until our final game of the season, whenever that might be."

When reached by the Tribune, Stein said she would not comment before a Tuesday morning press conference at Mizzou Arena.

"I've got some recruits to call," she said. "I'm just going to take the rest of the questions in the morning."

Athletic Director Mike Alden will also address the media Tuesday.

Stein, who came to Missouri in 1998 after three years at Emporia State, enjoyed early bursts of success in Columbia. She led MU to the Sweet 16 in 2001 and the NCAA Tournament in 2004 and '06. But the program has since been on a steady decline in an increasingly challenging Big 12 landscape.

The Tigers (11-16, 1-13 Big 12) have won just 12 conference games over the past four seasons, and are nearing the end of one of the worst seasons in program history. They have lost nine straight since an upset win over then-No. 10 Baylor last month.

Stein's uncertain future - her contract was set to expire in April - hung over the program.

"No one should be in the position I'm in from a professional standpoint," Stein said last week. "I accepted it and I knew what I was getting into, but from a professional standpoint, I shouldn't be in this position and nor should the kids. We just have to make the best of it."

Stein will be on Missouri's bench for at least three more games. MU visits Texas on Wednesday before closing the regular season at home against Texas Tech. The Big 12 Tournament is the next week.
“Cindy has been an outstanding representative of the University of Missouri, and for Mizzou Athletics, over the years,” Alden said in the release. “She and her staff have worked hard and have produced achievements which will be remembered fondly. With that, we do accept Cindy's resignation, and believe this is the right time for us to go a different direction with our women's basketball program.”

Reach David Briggs at dbriggs@columbiatribune.com.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Statewide college access conference Tuesday at MU

By Bryan Richardson
March 1, 2010 | 5:13 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Key state officials in college access will gather at MU to address college readiness among underrepresented, low-income and first-generation students.

"Focus on Missouri: A Dialogue on Barriers, Strategies and the Future of College Access" will be held from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday at Memorial Union.

Goals of the conference include raising awareness of the need for greater college access and bringing together officials for dialogue.

Beth Tankersley-Bankhead, executive director of the Missouri College Advising Corps, said it is important for college access stakeholders to start a statewide dialogue.

"The entire discussion of the conference is how we may collaborate across Missouri to increase college access," said Tankersley-Bankhead, one of the conference organizers.

The conference will have workshops on the challenges facing college access to facilitate the collaborative effort. At the end of the conference, these discussions are expected to produce some resolutions.

"We will produce a summary of the conference, which will have some actions to take at both the state and university level," Tankersley-Bankhead said.

Expected attendance for the conference has reached 240, the number of people who can be comfortably accommodated, according to Tankersley-Bankhead.
Access Missouri task force debates scholarship division

The task force includes UM system President Gary Forsee.

By Abbev Sussell

Published March 2, 2010

Representatives from public and private universities will gather as part of a newly formed task force to seek a consensus on Access Missouri scholarships.

Robert Stein, Missouri Department of Higher Education commissioner, invited representatives from 10 universities to review the policy for the distribution of need-based Access Missouri scholarships.

The controversy regards whether Missouri students attending private universities should receive the same amount of scholarship money as students attending public universities. The scholarship money offered to private school students is more than double the money offered to public school students. The maximum amount available to public university students is $2,150 and $4,600 for private school students.

The task force will debate alternative methods of distributing the scholarships, said Kathy Love, Missouri Department of Higher Education spokeswoman.

"The task force aims to get parties together to see whether maybe there is a better way to make graduated award amounts rather than public and private," Love said. "One idea is to base it on college graduation rates. (so students will receive more aid if they attend) institutions that show they moved their students through college most efficiently."

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, and Gov. Jay Nixon support legislation that would equalize the scholarship amounts to $2,850, according to their Web sites. The Coordinating Board for Higher Education voted in agreement of the scholarship distribution policy, Love said.

Before Access Missouri scholarships, there was no scholarship program in Missouri based solely on financial need. Students are eligible for the scholarship if their expected family contribution is $12,000 or less.

Representatives from public schools argue the $95 million budget for Access Missouri scholarships is not divided fairly between private and public institutions. UM system
spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said in a news release the state has an obligation to its public institutions and aid for students should be equalized.

"All schools are facing the recessional economy and financial challenges just as the state is facing financial challenges with their budget," Westminster College spokesman Rob Crouse said. "The economic climate is different now from when Access Missouri first was established. Now they have to come back and sit down in a different financial climate today and revisit the issue to see if they can financially agree on something that everyone is comfortable in supporting."

Private universities support the scholarship program as it is funded, Central Methodist University spokesman Don Cullimore said.

"Higher amounts are awarded to students at private universities because the cost of independent schools is considerably more than the cost of public schools," Cullimore said. "The student may also prefer to be on a smaller campus. Public schools are already tax supported by the state."

The task force includes UM system President Gary Forsee, Westminster College President Barney Forsythe and Central Methodist University President Marianne Inman, along with seven other representatives.

The scholarship distribution policy expires in 2013, Love said. Proposed legislation would go into effect no earlier than 2014.
How and Why

Sensing devices are becoming more adept at detecting toxins and pollutants

By Curt Supplee
Tuesday, March 2, 2010

Local boozers were breathing a bit easier yesterday following news reports that an audit by the Washington Metropolitan Police Department found some 80 percent of its "breathalyzer" alcohol monitors may have been giving faulty readings.

The impact on current and past DUI cases is uncertain. But one thing is for sure: Breath analysis devices are society's front-line weapon against drunken driving, and they need to be unassailably accurate. Many well-calibrated units are, and the technology has improved dramatically since the original "drunkometer" made its highway debut in 1938.

But even today's most impressive devices may soon seem downright primitive, thanks to relentless progress in microsensor science. In the fast-growing, fast-shrinking field of single-molecule detection, some gizmos are now able to spot substances in the parts-per-trillion range. Sensors known as "e-noses" function as artificial snouts that can identify the barest trace of compounds in the air, while microfluidic "lab on a chip" sensors can flag individual DNA strands and other entities in liquids.

Few of them are commercialized as yet. But the trend portends a revolution in public safety, according to Stephen Semancik, who heads the Chemical Microsensor Program at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. "What we can't smell can hurt us," he says, citing dangers from carbon monoxide to spoiled food, low-level industrial toxins, water contaminants and building fires where "five minutes can be life or death." The smaller the amount you can detect, the earlier your warning.

For example, to be perfectly morbid, in the event that terrorists use chemical weapons, you really don't want to wait until concentrations reach levels at which your Metro seatmate says, "Hey, what's that funny odor?" At that point, even if you just got on the train, you're probably at the end of the line.

In medical applications, Semancik says, "smelling other kinds of molecules might be able to help us in early disease detection." He foresees breath-type detectors deployed to detect a host of maladies, including skin cancer (recognizable now by trained dogs), diabetes (whose sufferers
exhale a telltale scent of acetone, the working ingredient in nail-polish remover) and cystic fibrosis (where breath is abnormally acidic and rich in sulfur compounds). If sniffer diagnostics could be used for initial screening in lieu of a battery of expensive and invasive tests, both patients and the health-care system would benefit.

Whatever their uses, the next of microsensors will be small, highly automated and sufficiently sensitive to operate in the chemical cacophony of the real world. There are numerous designs.

In a typical mechanical system, airborne molecules stick to the end of a microscopic cantilever. Just as a diving board vibrates differently if it's occupied by your 6-year-old or your double-wide neighbor, the vibrational frequency of the tiny cantilever changes in response to the mass of the molecule trapped on it and sounds the alarm when its target compound shows up. Other mechanical systems use nanoscale tubes (that is, with dimensions in the range of billionths of a meter) to snag pathogens by size. For example, University of Missouri scientists recently created a glass "nanopore" system custom-tailored to trap single molecules of ricin, a nasty little poison extracted from castor beans.

Optical systems sense changes in the properties of transmitted or reflected light that occur when the molecule of interest binds to another molecule or undergoes a chemical reaction. David Walt of Tufts University devised a novel variation: "My lab recently demonstrated that we could isolate single molecules into very tiny wells etched into the end of a fiber optic bundle," Walt said in an e-mail. The bundle had tens of thousands of such wells, each just big enough for one target DNA molecule coated with special compounds that would react with the DNA to produce fluorescence. When a solution containing the molecules flowed across the bundle, wells that trapped the molecules lit up. Counting the ratio of dark to light fibers in the bundle, Walt's team was able to determine the concentration of molecules in the solution to unprecedented accuracy.

But the ultimate goal is to get out of the lab. "I believe that the focus of this field is moving from 'sensors' to 'point of care technologies' (POCT) that bring bioanalytic methods from the laboratory to the point of need, whether it is the bedside, emergency room or for preventative medicine such as cholesterol monitoring," Jerome Schultz, chair of the Department of Bioengineering at the University of California at Riverside, said in an e-mail. "This type of device would have wide applications for water quality, especially for third world countries, food contamination and bioterrorism."

If such sensors can be made sufficiently small, sensitive and cheap, the public could become a giant roving detection system. "We all have cellphones now," Semancik says. "Suppose we put a chemical sensor in every phone?" If it encountered a threat, it would send out a signal. If the monitoring system started getting lots of the same signals from one place (as determined by the phones' GPS locators), responders could home in on the threat.

Boozers, beware. Before you know it, the old cliche will become the new reality: They can smell you coming a mile away.
Students get involved in campus parking debate

Under the system, commuter students struggle to find spots.

By Rachel Allred

Published March 2, 2010

As the university becomes more crowded, some students have to park farther away from campus and search for available spots. But the Department of Parking and Transportation said there is an ample amount of room.

Junior Paula Chapman is one of thousands of students who commute to the university. Chapman said she drives about five minutes from her house at Copper Beech Townhomes off Old 63 to her parking spot at Hearnes Center, located near Faurot Field.

After parking, Chapman waits for a bus to take her to class at Townsend Hall, which usually takes another five minutes, which isn't an unfair amount of time to wait, she said.

But Missouri Students Association President Tim Noce said some students face a longer process.

"Some students who live off campus have to drive 15 to 20 minutes to park 15 or 20 minutes away from campus," Noce said. "Then you have people who live in residence halls who don't have to drive to class, and they get to park in the garages."

One of Noce's goals as MSA president is to change the way permits are allotted.

"What we're looking to do is make it more seniority-based," Noce said. "The way it is now, there are second-year seniors who get priority after all the people who live in residence halls."

Parking and Transportation Director Jim Joy said there are various groups students are placed in to determine where they park.

"Students living in residence halls have highest priority, and the longer they've lived in the residence hall gives them the higher priority for the spaces available to residence hall students," Joy said. "Then you come to students who don't live on campus. Out of those students, graduate TAs and RAs have highest priority, then graduate students, then seniors, juniors, sophomores and freshmen."
Joy acknowledged some upperclassmen don't like how freshmen are often able to park on campus.

"There are many students who don't think it's right that a freshman living in a residence hall is taking a space in a garage when they, as a senior, are having to park at Hearnes or someplace else," Joy said. "In fact, the residence hall situation is a whole different discussion. You really get into apple and orange business when you start trying to compare those."

Chapman said though she would like to be able to park on campus, she understands why students living in residence halls take precedence.

"It makes sense that if you're living on campus, that's where you should be given priority to park," Chapman said. "Naturally, I wish there were lots that commuters could park in that would be more in walking distance to campus."

Joy said people who park on campus also sometimes don't receive a spot as close as they would like to where they live or have classes. The system isn't perfect, but it works, he said.

"One of the biggest complaints from commuter students is that they're having to park in commuter parking lots, and they don't want to do that," Joy said. "The truth of the matter is there is a commuter lot that has spaces for them to park and a community bus system that will bring them to campus. Convenient? No. Functional? Yes."

There are about 24,000 parking spaces on campus, but Joy said the maximum capacity exceeds that number.

"Capacity doesn't mean spaces," Joy said. "It's how many permits we can issue. If a 1,000-car commuter lot will hold 3,000 commuting students, the capacity is 3,000. That doesn't mean there are 3,000 spaces. It means 3,000 people can come and go from there, and it will function OK."

Joy said a lack of capacity, even in spite of increased enrollment, isn't a problem.

"Quite frankly, we think we can weather this increased enrollment that's taking place," Joy said. "From a capacity standpoint, we're OK. It's just the students who don't want to park there who feel like we don't have enough parking."

Chapman said empty spaces might be available but they aren't always easy to find. One solution considered by MSA and other student leader groups is to prohibit freshmen from having cars on campus. Noce said he wants to avoid implementing that.

"That's not a place I want to go quite yet because that's an extreme change," Noce said.

Joy said he doesn't think the university will resort to this anytime soon.
"I have the authority to do that, but I can't tell them they can't bring a car to Columbia," Joy said. "I know a couple campuses where they said freshmen can't have cars on campus, and now there are private businesses where they park their cars. I'm not sure what is gained by that."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Campus winery taste tests experimental varieties

By Taylor Combs
March 2, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The first bottles of wine produced by an experimental winery at MU were put to the test Monday: How do they taste?

"The white ones were all quite nice," hobbyist winemaker Jerry Judson said. The tasting was conducted by the new campus institute dedicated to researching the best grape-growing and winemaking practices in Missouri.

"The red ones were all pretty young, so they were more harsh," he said.

"They were great," vineyard owner Larry Frichtel said about the wine collection. "I learned a lot. I had presumptions of some of the wines that changed."

The Institute for Continental Climate Viticulture and Enology held the tasting seminar to gauge interest in the new cultivars, or grape varieties. The institute wanted to know whether the trial varieties would be accepted by the wine-producing community.

Crops that yielded the grapes were grown during the 2009 season.

The industry in Missouri is growing, with more than 100 wineries across the state, according to Marco Li Calzi, enology program leader. The institute studies enology, or winemaking techniques, as well as the viticulture, the science of growing wine grapes.

On Monday, guests blind-tasted 33 different varieties of dry red and white wines and rated them on score cards. The institute hoped to use the feedback to determine which varieties would be best-suited to the Missouri market.

The tasters tried whites in the morning and reds after lunch. They rated the wines on clarity, color, bouquet, acidity, body and finish.
Jennifer Putnam, manager of Crown Valley Winery in St. Genevieve County, said she could not tell which were commercial, the control group and which were experimental.

When the wines were revealed, she found she had scored traditional varieties higher than the experimental ones.

Sixteen of the white varieties were the fruits of labor of Eli Bergmeier. The viticulture specialist is studying different mechanization techniques — thinning shoots and picking grapes by machine — to find how they affect Missouri-grown Chardonel grapes.

The machines are used in other wine-producing states, but Bergmeier is interested only in their application to Missouri conditions. His wines include combinations of crops processed both mechanically and manually.

Bergmeier said his research is attempting to determine the ramifications for fruit quality and wine taste.

If Missouri producers adopted mechanization, it would mean lower costs of production and a better price point for consumers.

“You can farm a lot more acres faster by machines than you can by hand,” Bergmeier said.

You can taste the difference too, according to Danene Beedle, marketing director for the Missouri Wine and Grape Board. She said all the varieties were similar, but once she knew the wines produced by each technique, a favorite emerged.

“I liked the machine-picked, hand-thinned variety,” she said. “Chardonel is already a mainstream grape. This was simply to show the differences in production techniques.”

The changing climate in Missouri makes research like this important to producers, Beedle said.

Missouri has a continental climate, which means it gets the full blast of cold air from Canada, with no coastline to moderate it as it does in California, said MU viticulturist Keith Striegler.
"Our challenges are that we have a fluctuating temperature," he said. "Varieties that we grow have to be successful under those types of conditions."

The institute hopes its research will help Missouri growers make smarter decisions about which types of cultivars to use and whether they will be commercially successful.