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MU student arrested over racist graffiti at dorm

Associated Press - February 14, 2011 8:34 PM ET

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) - Campus police say an 18-year-old University of Missouri student suspected of spray-painting racist graffiti told an officer he was drunk at the time and doesn't remember the incident.

A racial slur was discovered Saturday morning on a sculpture outside Hatch Hall, a residence hall on the Columbia campus. The student lives in Hatch and was arrested Saturday night.

The Columbia Missourian reports that a campus police sergeant wrote in a probable cause statement that surveillance cameras caught the student in the act.

The student was released on bond following his arrest on suspicion of second-degree felony property damage. No charges had been filed as of Monday night.

Racial slur painted on sculpture at MU

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS

Mon, Feb. 14, 2011 11:02 PM

Another racially motivated incident occurred Saturday on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia.

In the early morning hours, a student painted a racial slur on a sculpture outside of Hatch residence hall.

“A resident of the dormitory was the first person to discover it and immediately tried to cover it so no one else would have to see it,” said Mary Jo Banken, MU spokeswoman.

Campus police arrested Benjamin Elliott, 18, that night after surveillance video and witnesses tied him to the defacement. A campus police sergeant wrote in a probable cause statement that surveillance cameras caught the student in the act. The teen reportedly told police he was drunk at the time and didn’t remember the incident.

Elliott was released from jail on \$4,500 bond. He faces a charge of second-degree property damage, raised to a Class D felony because of possible racial motivation.

Chancellor Brady Deaton placed Elliot on temporary suspension, pending the outcome of a student conduct judicial process.

Banken said: “We all are depressed about this because we have all these training programs and we feel like we are doing a good job with that. MU has the best diversity among its student body and faculty in its history.”

Roger Worthington, chief diversity officer at MU, said: “It seems as though what happened this weekend was a relatively random incident.”

Last year, two students were caught after scattering cotton balls on the lawn of a black student center.

Students were not so quick to separate the incidents, though.

“We saw this happen just a year ago. We thought we had made strides to move past this,” said Eric Wood, student body president.

He said last year’s incident made students angry.

“This time, I think, students felt something more along the lines of disgust and frustration as if to say, ‘Really? We are still doing this in 2011?’”



MU suspends graffiti suspect

By **JANESE SILVEY**

The student suspected of painting a racist slur on **University of Missouri** property this weekend has been temporarily suspended from school, Chancellor Brady Deaton said in a statement released Monday afternoon.

Benjamin Elliott, 18, was arrested at 9:30 p.m. Saturday after surveillance video and witnesses tied him to an incident at Hatch Hall where the graffiti was discovered Saturday morning. Elliott, who posted bond and was released, is facing a charge of second-degree property damage, a Class D felony because of hate crimes sentencing provisions, MU police Capt. Brian Weimer said.

Elliott, a freshman biological science major from Rolla, will go through a student conduct judicial process, after which his suspension will either be lifted or a final sanction imposed.

The Columbia Police Department is also trying to determine whether the MU vandalism had any connection to a second incident.

Sgt. Jill Wieneke said police were called to 1517 Ross St. near campus at 8:50 p.m. Saturday where a victim reported his 1991 Toyota had been spray-painted with an anti-Jewish message sometime between Thursday and the time of the report.

"The investigation revealed some similarities to the case MU had at Hatch Hall," Wieneke said. "Evidence was collected and photographed, and police are waiting for lab results."

There were no witnesses or video surveillance in that case, she said.

Wieneke said she was not sure what religion the victim was and that another car at the address also was vandalized, although that case did not appear to be related to race.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com

MISSOURIAN

UPDATE: Hate-crime suspect told police he was drunk during incident

Monday, February 14, 2011 11:06:35 p.m. CST updated 8:53 p.m. CST Monday, February 14, 2011

BY ALAHANDRA JONES

COLUMBIA — The **MU student** arrested in connection with racist graffiti outside a campus dormitory told a police officer he was drunk at the time and didn't remember what he did.

In a probable cause statement, MU Police Sgt. Shawn Spalding wrote that the suspect, Benjamin Elliott, was seen by surveillance cameras spray-painting both the sidewalk and sculpture.

After checking Elliott's key card to determine when he entered his residence at Hatch Hall, the freshman was identified as the suspect by a Hatch Hall coordinator, according to the statement.

The probable cause statement reported that Elliott was alone during the time of the vandalism. He was arrested on suspicion of second-degree property damage, according to an MU Police news release. According to section 557.035 of the Missouri Revised Statutes, the penalties of a crime may be enhanced if it is found to be motivated by race.

The Legion of Black Collegians, MU's black student government, will discuss the racist graffiti on Wednesday during its Senate meeting. The group has invited presidents from various campus organizations to brainstorm ideas to help bring more diversity to MU's campus, Vice President Sidney King said.

MU Assistant Deputy Chancellor for Diversity Roger Worthington may be in attendance, Lisa White, president of the Legion of Black Collegians, said.

In reaction to an incident last year in which two MU students scattered cotton balls outside the Black Culture Center, the Legion of Black Collegians held a town hall meeting where some students advocated for adding a diversity class to graduation requirements.

White said her organization would like an update on efforts the campus has made to add such a class. The meeting on Wednesday will not be open to the public, but discussion from the meeting will be posted at <http://lbc.missouri.edu>.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Student suspended following incident of racist vandalism at Mizzou

TIM BARKER ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH | Posted: Monday, February 14, 2011 3:28 pm

COLUMBIA, MO. • A University of Missouri student was suspended Monday following his arrest related to an incident of racism on the Columbia campus.

The university announced the student's "temporary suspension" pending the outcome of a student conduct judicial process.

University police arrested Benjamin A. Elliot, 18, Saturday night after racist messages were spray painted on the outside of a residence hall. He was booked into the Boone County Jail on suspicion of second-degree property damage, a felony. He was released after posting 10 percent of a \$4,500 bond. Extra penalties could be applied if the case is construed as a hate crime.

A slur, spray painted in black on the base of a sculpture in front of Hatch Hall, was discovered about 9:15 a.m. Saturday, said MU Police Capt. Brian Weimer. It included the n-word.



School graffiti includes N-word

Published: Feb. 14, 2011 at 11:33 AM

COLUMBIA, Mo., Feb. 14 (UPI) -- An 18-year-old University of Missouri-Columbia student who allegedly sprayed racist graffiti on school property could be prosecuted for a hate crime.

Benjamin A. Elliot is charged with second-degree felony property damage for allegedly spray-painting graffiti that included the N-word on a sculpture in front of the school's Hatch Hall, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported. The case could be prosecuted as a hate crime, which would mean he would face stiffer penalties if convicted, the newspaper said.

Another student discovered the graffiti Saturday morning. Elliot was arrested that evening and released after posting a \$4,500 bond.

University Chancellor Brady Deaton said he was "dismayed and deeply offended" by the incident.

Two students were charged with littering for spreading cotton balls across the lawn of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center last February.



Kansas City

Benjamin Elliott accused of spray painting the 'n-word' on Mizzou statue

By Justin Kendall, Mon., Feb. 14 2011 @ 12:00PM

Categories: Law, News

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Benjamin Elliott: The latest guy to be accused of racism at Mizzou.

The University of Missouri seems to have a problem with racist pricks. In the latest incident, an 18-year-old student was arrested for allegedly spray painting racist graffiti -- including the "n-word" -- on a campus statue outside of Hatch Hall.

Benjamin Elliott is facing charges of second-degree property damage, but the charges could be upped to a felony hate crime. Our sister paper, the *Riverfront Times*, reports that Elliott allegedly spray painted the slurs outside a dorm Friday night. A student discovered the graffiti around 3:15 a.m. and sent a text message to a residential coordinator, who didn't get the message until the next morning.

Authorities watched surveillance video and interviewed students before arresting Elliott.

Of course, this has upset many, including Missouri chancellor **Brady Deaton**. In a statement, Deaton said:

"I speak for our university community when I say we are dismayed and deeply offended and have zero tolerance for this type of hurtful and destructive behavior.

"I ask that we come together as a Mizzou family to deplore this action and to celebrate the diversity of our community as one of MU's greatest strengths."

The university has been here before. Last February, two students dropped cotton balls outside of the Gaines Oldham Black Culture Center. Zachary Tucker and Sean Fitzgerald pleaded guilty to littering and left the university.

THE ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

Arrest made at Mizzou for racial slur graffiti

Posted: Monday, February 14, 2011

A suspect was taken into custody after racial slurs were found on Mizzou's campus Saturday. The University Police Department arrested Benjamin Elliott, 18, on Saturday around 9:30 p.m.

For the second time in as many years The University of Missouri - Columbia campus has fallen victim to a hate crime during Black History Month.

Last year cotton balls were sprinkled throughout the black student building...and this year Elliot stands charged with spray painting "[n-word expletive] History Month" on a campus statue.

Elliott was arrested for Second Degree Property Damage, but enhanced penalties could be added since this can be considered a hate crime. Elliott was released to Boone County Jail on a \$4,500 bond.

Information from KMOV.com contributed to this report.

MISSOURIAN

Lawmakers to alter makeup of UM System Board of Curators

Monday, February 14, 2011 | 6:07 p.m. CST; updated 6:02 p.m. CST, Monday, February 14, 2011

BY JORDAN SHAPIRO

JEFFERSON CITY — As Missouri braces to lose a congressional seat, state lawmakers are forced to consider changing the current makeup of the **UM System Board of Curators**.

Current state law requires that each of the nine voting curators reside in a separate congressional district. In 2012, Missouri will lose one of its congressional seats.

Missouri will lose a congressional district because, according to the 2010 Census, Missouri's population has not grown as rapidly as the rest of the nation's.

Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia, said lawmakers have no choice but to change the law.

Two proposals have emerged to compensate for the lost seat.

One would simply allow two curators to reside in the same congressional district. The other approach would make the ninth member of the board a student with full voting privileges. The current student curator, a 10th member, does not have voting powers under current law.

The voting-student approach is opposed by the chairman of the House Higher Education Committee — Rep. Mike Thomson, R-Maryville — who filed a bill to allow more than one curator to be from the same congressional district. Thomson's bill would include provisions allowing no more than two members to be from the same district.

"Students have the responsibility to go to school and not worry about making these big decisions," Thomson said.

Laura Confer — the current student, non-voting member of the board — disagreed.

"Students are the constituency of the university and would represent the interests of the whole student body instead of a member representing their own district," she said.

Thomson cautioned that allowing a student to vote on the Board of Curators would create a slippery slope.

"If they allow a student, why not allow a member of the faculty? ... Before we know it we will have a 25-member board," Thomson said.

He also reiterated his support to continue to have a non-voting student member on the board.

Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, filed an opposing bill that would give a UM System student the power to vote on the Board of Curators. Her bill would allow the student member to be selected using the same mechanisms as the current non-voting member. The bill would allow the student member to vote on all matters except the hiring and firing of teaching faculty and staff.

Webber, an MU law student, said he also supports having a student voice on the board.

"I think it's important to have a university perspective on the board," Webber said.

Other lawmakers expressed concerns about the prospect of a student having a vote on matters such as the hiring and firing of a university administrator.

"People are chosen (for the Board of Curators) because they have expertise, knowledge and background," said Rep. Wayne Wallingford, R-Cape Girardeau.

Wallingford said he still believes students should be represented but not as a voting member.

The House Higher Education Committee is expected to take action on Thomson's bill by the end of the week.



The★Star.
THE KANSAS CITY STAR

MISSOURIAN
COLUMBIAS MORNING NEWSPAPER

COLUMBIA DAILY
TRIBUNE

University of Missouri creates Carnahan award

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA | The University of Missouri is honoring former Gov. Mel Carnahan with a new award that promotes public service.

The university's Truman School of Public Affairs announced on Friday that it would present the award to those who follow the example of Carnahan, who spent years in public service before dying in a 2000 plane crash while campaigning for the U.S. Senate in 2000.

The Mel Carnahan Public Service Award will be given annually to a Missourian in paid or volunteer public service. Candidates will come from government, education, nonprofit and legal sectors.

The Truman School said in a news release that one or more University of Missouri students also will be awarded a graduate fellowship for public service work.

The first Carnahan Public Service Award will be made this spring.



Bill could limit issue of bonds

MOHELA would gain authority.

By **JANESE SILVEY**

Proposed legislation that would require universities to get permission from the state before issuing revenue bonds could become a power struggle if passed.

Sen. Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, filed a bill that would give the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, or MOHELA, the authority to approve or deny university bond projects. Right now, public universities have the power to issue their own bonds without needing the OK from the state.

The bill says nothing about exempting the University of Missouri System, but system administrators have decided they would not be subject to the law.

"We believe that our Board of Curators has the constitutional authority to issue revenue bonds," said Nikki Krawitz, vice president of finance and administration. "So it wouldn't apply to us."

Crowell ignored multiple Tribune interview requests seeking to clarify his intent.

Other bills that have put restrictions on universities — such as the law that punishes institutions that raise tuition beyond inflation — have applied to the UM System.

Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said he thinks Krawitz is right in this case. To take away the university's right to issue bonds, he said, is "a very serious infringement."

The UM System has relied heavily on revenue bonds to fund building projects the state has not supported. Most recently, a law requiring MOHELA to pay for university projects has been shelved, leaving about a dozen UM projects unfunded.

In the past two years, curators have issued more than \$620 million in bonds to plug those holes, issuing bonds for buildings that generate their own funding, such as residential halls and health clinics.

"The senator wants it both ways," Kelly said. "He wants to not meet our responsibility to repair and maintain buildings, and he wants to prevent" universities "from doing it. You just can't have it both ways."

MOHELA didn't ask for the power to regulate bond issues nor is it a business the loan agency wants to get into, Paul Wagner, deputy higher education commissioner, told the Coordinating Board for Higher Education last week.

Dave Rector, executive director of institutional research and budgets at Truman State University, said he's not sure what the bill is trying to solve.

If the question is whether universities are carefully borrowing money, he said, "I think the answer is yes."

Rector explained the steps Truman goes through to issue bonds, a rigorous process that requires a lot of legwork before the board actually approves the sale of bonds. Although the process isn't a quick one, the final step requires delicate timing, he said, adding he's not sure how an extra layer of permission would affect that process.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.

Letter to the Editor: Missouri's higher education needs more money

For decades, the state of Missouri has fallen behind other states in funding for higher education. We have dug ourselves a hole that we may never be able to climb out of. The state of Missouri currently ranks 45th in per capita state funding for higher education. We are, however, first in one category! At 17 cents per pack, Missouri has the lowest cigarette tax in the nation. (It is 98 cents per pack in Illinois).

Every Missourian should be embarrassed that our state supports smokers but not students. The University of Missouri System currently receives less state funding than it did in 2001, even though enrollment at the University of Missouri's four campuses has grown by more than 10 percent since that time. In addition, faculty salaries have not increased in years, and many of the university's buildings are in desperate need of repair, maintenance and renovation.

Mizzou ranked 75th in this year's Kiplinger's rankings of the top 100 Best Values in Public Universities. It has done more with less every year since 2001. Like all public universities in the state, Mizzou is facing a 7 percent cut in state funding for the next fiscal year. Regrettably, increasing tuition appears to be the only way to offset this shortage. Higher education in Missouri has taken a back seat for decades. Our state universities (and our students) are suffering from the consequences. When will our elected officials understand this and do something about it? The time is now.

W. Dudley McCarter lives in St. Louis.



Public station pleads for listeners to lobby Congress

By **RUDI KELLER**

In recent days, listeners of KBIA radio, the University of Missouri's public radio station, have heard repeated messages asking them to call Congress and "politely express your opinion" about federal funding of public broadcasting.

On the station's website, a large amount of space is devoted to the issue as well. The page features an alert about the pending cut and an ad for an advocacy group called 170 Million Americans that urges individuals to lobby Congress.

"Tell Congress funding for KBIA and other public broadcast is important to you," the site reads. The site provides the telephone number of the congressional switchboard.

Ninth District U.S. Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer, a Republican from St. Elizabeth, said the station's efforts are an inappropriate use of tax money to lobby. Luetkemeyer supports efforts to eliminate the \$430 million budget for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

"I don't see anything in the Constitution that says we need to fund public broadcasting," he said today.

Congress this week will debate a bill to fund the government through September. The cut to public broadcasting is among \$100 billion in cuts approved by the House Appropriations Committee.

"I really don't feel it is appropriate from the standpoint that those are tax dollars being used to lobby to support more tax dollars," Luetkemeyer said. "It is a unique way to lobby because they are able to access the airwaves for free in that they don't have to pay for their own advertising."

KBIA General Manager Mike Dunn defended the effort. He said announcements asking listeners to contact Congress and visit the 170 Million Americans website only ask that listeners express their opinion about public radio.

The 170 million is the number of people who watch public television or listen to public radio each month, according to rating agencies, the organization's website said.

"Frankly, people can call and say they hate us and take the money away," Dunn said.

In November, Luetkemeyer supported an attempt to end funding of National Public Radio after the news division fired commentator Juan Williams for remarks he made on Fox News.

The firing "showed a liberal bias to their entity," Luetkemeyer said, but he added that enormous deficits are also forcing the decision to cut the money.

"Whether it is a conservative or liberal radio station, that is not a good use of public dollars," he said.

Without federal funding, KBIA would survive, but many public broadcast stations would not, Dunn said. He's already expecting budget cuts from MU, and loss of federal dollars would mean personnel cuts and perhaps elimination of a low-power repeater station in Mexico, Mo., he said.

KBIA provides in-depth local news that isn't available on commercial radio in the local market, he said.

And public television stations provide services, especially educational programs for children, that aren't equaled elsewhere, he said.

"I understand reducing the budget, but I think the reduction can be done without eliminating a lot of things," Dunn said.

The impact of KBIA's campaign is uncertain. So far, Luetkemeyer said, "it hasn't been brought to my attention" that any calls have been received.

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