Fox News attack on MU religious tolerance is insulting

Did you know that, as a University of Missouri student, you are entitled to skip class and blow off any assigned work or exam whenever there is any sort of religious holiday, be it Christian, Jewish, Hindu, even Wiccan or pagan, without any sort of repercussion from your professors?

We didn’t either, until Fox News published an enlightening investigation about MU’s “Guide to Religions: Major Holidays and Suggested Accommodations.” The story highlighted how the university’s guide, which is distributed to faculty and staff and available online, lists dozens of important holy days and celebrations for a handful of religions and advises professors to avoid scheduling major events (such as exams) on many of these days.

“Students at University of Missouri don’t need to cram for exams that fall on Wiccan and Pagan holidays, now that the school has put them on par with Christmas, Thanksgiving and Hanukkah,” the article begins, before expanding on the guide and ending with quotes from Fox News radio host Tammy Bruce attacking MU for acting “beyond politically correct.”

Apparently, as college students, we love taking advantage of every possible opportunity we can get to shirk our academic responsibilities. This groundbreaking Fox News report has opened up a treasure trove for us: Our university is just handing us the ability to skip classes and tests whenever we’d like, as long as we claim religious privilege!

Of course, this is incredibly dumb, not to mention insulting to the hardworking students, faculty and staff of MU. The Guide to Religions is meant to be a handy reference for professors to be as accommodating and aware as possible. It is not intended to “absolve” us of doing work, or to let students skip class (newsflash: many of them already do on occasion — that’s their choice and responsibility as adults). Even for students who may miss class or request special accommodation for religious holidays, that’s not a free pass — they must still complete their work or risk hurting their grade.

In fact, the university should be commended for promoting our First Amendment freedom of religion, encouraging a healthy spiritual life for those who choose such, and being accepting of religions and lifestyles that aren’t necessarily widely practiced on campus. A culture of religious diversity in our university’s administration isn’t hurting anyone, even if some in our state and our country may disagree, and we’re proud of our university for actively working toward a more inclusive climate for students of all spiritual persuasions.

It’s insulting for Fox News to use our university’s Guide to Religions as a hit piece to rile up its readership and add fuel to the fire of some fabricated “War on Christmas” or Christianity in general. The article derides MU for equating Wiccan and pagan holidays with Christmas and Hanukkah. That’s because, to students who practice Wicca or any of the “other” religions in the guide, such holidays may be just as important as those celebrated by the “mainstream.”
At the core of religious diversity is the recognizance that religion deals with the most sacred and sensitive parts of human life — the way one sees the world and how that influences their thoughts, feelings and behaviors — and the understanding of just how important religions and spiritual movements are to their adherents.

With this in mind, it is inexcusable to ridicule students for following a certain religion or for requesting special accommodation from professors in order to fully practice their beliefs, especially using the stereotype of the lazy college student. We would like to suggest to Fox News and other media organizations to refrain from attacking our university’s religious tolerance and diversity. It isn’t just part of what makes Mizzou great — it’s part of what makes our country great.
With review of NCAA complete, Haith’s fate uncertain

February 18

By TEREZA. PAYLOR

The Kansas City Star

COLUMBIA — Three weeks after acknowledging unprecedented improper conduct by its enforcement staff, the NCAA announced Monday that an external review had uncovered a messy trail of missteps and insufficient oversight during its botched investigation of the University of Miami.

The review, conducted by the law firm of Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft at the request of NCAA President Mark Emmert, found that members of the NCAA’s enforcement staff overstepped their authority in building a case that involves former Miami men’s basketball coach Frank Haith, who now coaches at Missouri.

About 20 percent of the information gathered during the Miami investigation was tainted and will be abandoned, said Kenneth Wainstein, who led the review.

“This is an outcome no one wants to see on their watch, or anyone else’s,” Emmert said in a teleconference Monday. “This is something that is an embarrassment to the association and our staff.”

Where Monday’s findings leave Haith is uncertain. Imprisoned Miami booster Nevin Shapiro has said that Haith was complicit in a $10,000 payment to DeQuan Jones, an athlete Haith had recruited.

Citing an anonymous source, CBSSports.com reported last month that Haith was expected to face NCAA charges for unethical conduct and failure to promote an atmosphere of compliance while at Miami.

Haith has denied knowledge of an illicit payment, as has Jones’ family. It is unclear how much, if any, of the evidence that remains in the Miami case relates to Haith.
On Monday, Haith said the NCAA has not contacted him since the end of the external review. But The Associated Press reported that Miami officials expect to receive their notice of allegations as soon as today.

“It’s certainly not the position the NCAA wants to be with in regards to an active investigation,” Jo Potuto, the faculty athletics representative at Nebraska, said of the situation.

“It’s not a happy day for the NCAA. There is no silver lining in this,” said Potuto, who served three terms on the NCAA’s infractions committee.

The NCAA has disclosed that enforcement staffers, who have since left the organization, paid Maria Elena Perez, Shapiro’s defense lawyer, more than $19,000 to improperly obtain information through two depositions taken as part of federal bankruptcy proceedings.

The NCAA does not have subpoena power, and the information it received through the bankruptcy case would not have been available to its staff if it hadn’t enlisted the help of Shapiro’s lawyer.

Wainstein said his firm’s review included interviews with 22 people, including former enforcement staffers and Shapiro, who is serving a 20-year jail term for organizing a $930 million Ponzi scheme. Shapiro is accused of giving hundreds of thousands of dollars and other benefits to Miami student-athletes.

As a result of the investigation, Julie Roe Lach, the NCAA’s vice president for enforcement, was fired Monday. Lach was dismissed for helping NCAA staffers pay off Shapiro’s lawyer. Emmert would not comment on Roe Lach’s dismissal but has appointed Jonathan Duncan to fill her position on an interim basis.

“For an organization with an oversight function like the NCAA, its credibility and reputation for fair dealing are always more important than its ability to prove the allegations in any particular case,” Wainstein said in a statement. “This episode is a reminder of the problems that arise when investigators resort to expedient but questionable tactics.”

According to Wainstein’s report, Perez offered to help the NCAA by “using bankruptcy subpoenas to compel depositions from witnesses who had refused to cooperate.” The NCAA, in turn, gave Perez specific questions to ask.

Perez billed the NCAA for $57,115 worth of work performed from October 2011 through July 2012, the report and other documents show, though NCAA officials were expecting the amount of her work to cost roughly $15,000.

The report also stated that Rich Johanningmeier, then the NCAA’s associate director of enforcement, bought a prepaid cellphone and paid for Shapiro’s prison calls. The NCAA spent about $8,200 “to fund communications with Mr. Shapiro, including transfers of approximately $4,500 to his prison commissary account.”
Calling the NCAA’s investigation “unprofessional and unethical,” Miami President Donna Shalala lashed out Monday at the governing body for college athletics, insisting that its long investigation of the Hurricanes should end with no other penalties against the university.

Miami had already voluntarily forfeited the right to appear in two bowl games, along with one trip to the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game, up to 30 practices and an undisclosed number of scholarships.

“We have been wronged,” Shalala said in a statement.

“Sadly the NCAA has not lived up to their own core principles. The lengthy and already flawed investigation has demonstrated a disappointing pattern of unprofessional and unethical behavior. By the NCAA leadership’s own admission, the University of Miami has suffered from inappropriate practices by NCAA staff.”

Yet despite the apparent warts in the NCAA’s investigation — and based on Wainstein’s review, there were plenty — Emmert made it clear that those implicated in the Miami inquiry weren’t out of the woods yet.

“The intention is to move forward with this case,” Emmert said. “There is still a lot of information that’s available that has in no way been tainted by this incident.” If Haith and others implicated in the Miami investigation receive notices of allegations, they would have 90 days to respond in writing before a hearing is set before the NCAA’s infractions committee.

“It will be up to the Committee on Infractions … to determine the validity of the arguments that will be put in front of them,” Emmert said.

Emmert was asked multiple times in Monday’s teleconference whether he should bear any personal accountability for the enforcement fiasco, considering the NCAA holds coaches responsible for improprieties that occur on their watches.

The NCAA has dealt with a number of sticky situations recently. Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett last month sued the organization over its handling of the Penn State sex-abuse case and subsequent punishment of the university. Criticism also followed cases involving UCLA, the University of Southern California and the University of North Carolina.

“I report to the executive committee,” Emmert said. “They have received this report. If they believe actions should be taken toward me or anyone else in the organization, they are free to do that.”
NCAA throws out a big chunk of Miami evidence

A significant chunk of information gathered in the NCAA’s investigation of the University of Miami has been eliminated from the record because of the NCAA’s missteps in the process.

An attorney who was part of the outside review of the NCAA over the past month said Monday that about 20 percent of the case has been expunged in light of the NCAA’s improper tactics in collecting evidence.

“They went overboard to omit or extract things if there was a close call,” said Kenneth Wainstein, a partner with Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft. “There’s a significant amount no longer in the record.”

Mizzou coach Frank Haith is awaiting word on whether he will face allegations stemming from his days at Miami. Former Miami booster Nevin Shapiro has alleged that Haith was aware of a payment made to a prospective player. Haith said he has not received any updates from the NCAA.

Wainstein said his firm’s review of the NCAA revealed several improper decisions related to the payment of Shapiro’s attorney to gain information from depositions in a bankruptcy case.

A 52-page report revealed that some members of the NCAA enforcement staff disregarded legal advice and proceeded with plans to work with Shapiro’s attorney. NCAA President Mark Emmert said all information gleaned from the depositions has been reviewed and removed from consideration of allegations.

“We now have confidence in our data to move forward with the Miami investigation,” Emmert said without providing a timeline for release of the notice of allegations.

The NCAA noted problems with the case in October 2012. Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft followed with its own review of the Miami investigation to assure that all improperly collected information was removed.

Former Miami equipment staff member Sean Allen was one of two people interviewed by Shapiro’s attorney, Maria Elena Perez, in exchange for $20,000 from the NCAA. All statements by Allen have been excluded.
Subsequently, 13 interviews that were conducted as a result of Allen’s deposition were eliminated. Portions of 12 other interviews that made reference to interviews with Allen also were eliminated.

It remains unclear whether any of the information dealt with Haith.

“By excluding the use of the information … the Enforcement Staff significantly revised the potential allegations in the U. Miami Investigation Record,” the report read.

When Ameen Najjar, the NCAA’s former director of enforcement, proposed the relationship with Perez, he was advised not to proceed by Naima Stevenson, deputy general counsel of the NCAA.

Part of her email response concluded: “Any information obtained through such a manner for use in the NCAA process would be subject to significant scrutiny to the extent any decisions were based on that information if those decisions were to be subsequently challenged.”

In the days before the NCAA disclosed problems with the investigation in January, a report surfaced that Haith would be charged with unethical conduct. But it is unclear whether the report stemmed from evidence that has been tossed out.

Wainstein said his firm’s review of the NCAA did not reveal that any laws had been broken. However, the enforcement staff did disregard legal advice from within the NCAA and internal policies were violated.

“This is an outcome that nobody wants to see on their watch,” Emmert said. “This is something that is an embarrassment to the association and our staff.”

He added, “If the executive committee feels disciplinary action against me needs to be taken, I’m sure they will.”
The NCAA’s investigation of the University of Miami is moving forward after an external review found that approximately 20 percent of the information gathered was tainted. For Missouri basketball Coach Frank Haith, that means the wait continues to learn whether the NCAA believes he committed major violations while coaching the Hurricanes.

“The committee will now move forward. I won’t set a timeline on that, but they will move forward with dispatch,” NCAA President Mark Emmert said Monday on a teleconference when asked when a notice of allegations would be delivered to Miami.

Emmert said there was never any thought of giving up on the case.

“There is a lot of information that’s available that has in no way been tainted,” he said.

Last month, the NCAA was reportedly close to releasing its findings, but that was put on hold when Emmert said on Jan. 23 that the lead investigators in the case gathered evidence improperly.

The NCAA doesn’t have subpoena power. Investigators tried to work around that by hiring the attorney of former Miami booster Nevin Shapiro to ask questions related to the NCAA investigation to former Miami equipment manager Sean “Pee Wee” Allen and other uncooperative witnesses during Shapiro’s bankruptcy trial.

Emmert hired a law team led by Ken Wainstein to review the NCAA’s conduct in the case. Wainstein said yesterday in a teleconference that the information gleaned from Allen’s deposition and 13 subsequent interviews that related to his testimony would be stricken from the record. Wainstein said portions of 12 other interviews that touched on Allen’s testimony also would be excluded. He estimated the tainted evidence made up about 20 percent of the case.

It is unknown how much — if any — of that testimony pertained to Haith. The bulk of the investigation centers on allegations about the Miami football program made by Shapiro, who is
in prison for running a $930 million Ponzi scheme. The investigation began in February 2011 after Shapiro contacted the NCAA and started talking. He also spoke with reporters at Yahoo.com, who broke the story in August 2011. Shapiro’s most serious accusation against Haith is that he approved a $10,000 payment to the family of recruit DeQuan Jones.

Haith has denied that allegation.

Haith said Monday afternoon that he hadn’t heard anything new from the NCAA. The concern for him is that investigators didn’t believe his testimony. Right before the external review was ordered, CBSSports.com quoted an anonymous source saying Haith could be accused of unethical conduct in the notice of allegations and that he might face the dreaded show-cause penalty that often ends a coach’s career.

Missouri officials have said they did not realize Haith was one of the figures in an NCAA investigation when he was hired in April 2011. In discussing the vetting process, MU Chancellor Brady Deaton said in August 2011 that the school spoke with more than 20 sources “and everything came back very, very clear, very positive.” One person close to the search told the Tribune that Missouri contacted a representative of the NCAA before Haith was hired and was not warned of any problems.

As for how NCAA’s breach of ethics in the investigation happened in the first place, Wainstein’s report described the details.

The report said NCAA enforcement officials Ameen Najjar and Rich Johanningmeier frequently spoke with one of Shapiro’s criminal attorneys, Maria Elena Perez. The NCAA’s attempts to interview Allen, former Shapiro bodyguard Mario Sanchez and former Shapiro business partner Michael Huyghue were going nowhere. So, in October 2011, Najjar and Perez devised a plan in which the NCAA would hire her for approximately $20,000 and she would depose the reluctant witnesses and ask them under oath questions submitted by the NCAA.

Najjar sent an email explaining the proposal to his bosses, Vice President of Enforcement Julie Roe Lach and Managing Director of Enforcement Tom Hosty. Hosty replied in an email that the plan was “most intriguing,” but he and Lach weren’t sure whether the $20,000 payment would be approved. So Lach sent an email to her boss, NCAA Chief Operating Officer Jim Isch, who told her the money wouldn’t be a problem.

The other pertinent issue, whether this was acceptable behavior for NCAA investigators, was posed to Naima Stevenson of the NCAA’s legal staff. She rejected the idea, saying in an email to Najjar: “Our advice would be to not use a source’s criminal attorney in this manner. Any information obtained through such a manner for use in the NCAA process would be subject to significant scrutiny.” In a follow-up meeting, members of the legal staff again told Najjar he should not hire Perez.

But, the report said, Najjar informed Perez he had a “way around” the legal team’s objections by paying her costs and fees rather than retaining her. The report said Najjar told Lach and Hosty
that the NCAA legal staff had cleared this approach. Allen and Huyghue were asked NCAA-related questions at their depositions in December 2011.

Najjar was fired by the NCAA last spring and was replaced by Stephanie Hannah as the lead investigator of the Miami case. In August, Perez submitted her invoices to the NCAA for $57,115. The report said when that surprisingly large invoice reached the desk of the legal staff, Stevenson and her bosses were surprised to learn that Najjar had proceeded to work with Perez after he was advised against it. The NCAA reviewed the case internally before hiring Wainstein’s firm to conduct the external investigation.

Lach was fired for her role in what Emmert called a “debacle.” Whether Emmert ultimately survives the scandal remains to be seen.

“I report to the executive committee,” Emmert said. “They have received this report. If they believe that action should be taken toward me or anyone else in the organization, they are free to do that.”
MU softens decision to move nuke engineering team

COLUMBIA — A nuclear engineering research team at the University of Missouri receives a modest reprieve after it was targeted by administrators for elimination.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports that Chancellor Brady Deaton has opened admissions to the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute. The graduate-level program stopped accepting new students last year as it prepares to move under new oversight in the College of Engineering.

Deaton told the campus Faculty Council and nuclear engineering professors that the “dysfunctional” program was “less than what we should offer to aspiring students.”

Critics of the move suggested the university wants to recruit more high-paying foreign students to its engineering school. But administrators counter that the program’s problems go back more than a decade.
Letter to the Editor: James editorial was overblown

By William G. Matis

I found myself disappointed by the editorial on the possible hiring of Larry James. Here are my three major opinions.

This man is not only qualified to educate students on psychology, he is overqualified. Being unanimously referred to as “one of the top military psychologists” is not something to dismiss. James has seen some of the darkest and most serious aspects of psychology. His knowledge and experience are invaluable to all students, especially students interested in psychology. Besides that, it was pointed out that he was assigned to Abu Ghraib in response to the abuse scandal. He did not cause, support or endorse the abuse. Additionally, he has not been sentenced or even charged for any crimes or abuses. What ever happened to presumed innocence? Two separate boards could not find any reason to follow through with any charges. And if he is charged, then he will be charged. The University of Missouri will not be charged or suffer any liability.

Additionally, how many people will actually choose to not come to Mizzou because of a single hire? On the other hand, how many psychology students will come to Mizzou to study under this top psychologist? What about Wright State, where James is currently the dean of the psychology school? Have their admissions declined or donations fallen since he has been there? My point is that James has already been employed at a university — what major damages has that university suffered? If his presence was truly damaging and detrimental to a university’s reputation, why have we not seen Wright State fire him or suffer as a result of his presence?

Besides that, look at the “outrage” that is constantly referred to as the reason not to hire James. There was a 30-person march out of 34,000 students, 30 people (not all students) marched. Only 30. In the article covering the protest, the photos depicted some of those protestors carrying signs with scenes of torture and abuse from Abu Ghraib attached to them, and several of the protestors spoke to (Maneater staff writer Beatriz) Costa-Lima about people they know who were harmed or killed in Abu Ghraib. As we have established, James was not involved in Abu Ghraib, he was moved there after that scandal broke to analyze it. It is as reasonable to blame James for the abuses
that occurred there as it is to blame a random Iraqi or Afghani for terrorism. You cannot place the crimes of others and organizations on a single man without any proof. As for Guantanamo, he has written about his guilt and admitted his fault in being complacent with abuses there. So the only people protesting were those who only reacted out of blind anger with only assumptions, not research. Thirty blindly angry people hardly represent a legitimate outrage.

More importantly, the march could have been 30 or 3,000. It does not matter. The university does not exist to bend to the whim of the blind masses. The university exists to encourage and further education. If James is the most qualified candidate, he deserves the job. Period.

My main point is that there are only valid reasons to hire Mr. James. He is extremely qualified in his field, he is familiar with working at a university, he poses no threats or liabilities and a few blindly upset people do not represent the best interests of the university.

I look forward to welcoming James as a fellow member of the Mizzou family.

-William G. Matis

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SEC Symposium features MU research

Two from MU presented work.

By Karyn Spory

Monday, February 18, 2013 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri found a fit academically in the Southeastern Conference last week through participation at an inaugural symposium at the University of Georgia.

The conference held its inaugural SEC Symposium on the impact of the Southeastern United States on the future of renewable energy worldwide. It featured faculty presentations from each of the 14 SEC institutions, including two researchers from MU.

Shibu Jose, an MU agroforestry professor and director of the Center for Agroforestry, gave a presentation on developing a biomass/biofuel corridor using the Mississippi and Missouri rivers floodplain. It's a project he has been working on for three years.

"We put together a large consortium with 10 states bordering the Mississippi River," he said, referring to the Mississippi/Missouri River Advanced Biomass/Biofuel Consortium. In his presentation, Jose talked about how researchers can come together and use the strategic advantages in this area.

"The symposium was, at least in my opinion, a big success," he said. "There were about 400 people coming from all the SEC universities, but they also had some from private-sector and federal programs."

Students from the various universities also attended.

"I got a better appreciation for the strength of the SEC," Jose said, "as not only an athletic conference, but also as an academic conference and what we can accomplish if we put our minds together as a group to work together on some of these challenging issues."

He said he was happy with the diversity and importance of topics. "I was really pleased that they chose renewable energy as the topic for the conference because of how timely that topic is."
The world's population has been estimated to reach 9 billion by 2050. Jose said that by then, energy production will have to increase by 50 percent to keep up with demand and that renewable energies are at the forefront of that drive.

"I'm quite confident that we, as a major university in the conference, are leading some of those projects and particularly in the biomass and biofuels," Jose said.

MU received two awards at the symposium after graduate student Chris Bobryk received first place for his graduate student poster and Sougata Bardhan received second place for his postdoctoral poster.

Also speaking at the symposium was Hank Stelzer, associate professor of forestry extension and department chairman. Stelzer's presentation covered establishing guidelines for sustainable harvest from Mid-Missouri forests. Stelzer has helped landowners with management plans as well as making sure loggers are trained and follow harvesting standards.

"The University of Missouri has the biggest biomass" boiler "of any university," Stelzer said. The biomass has capacity for 100 tons of woody biomass. "A number of universities in the SEC conference were looking at refitting their power plants or building new facilities. They were interested and kind of envious of us."

This article was published in the Monday, February 18, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Symposium features research across SEC: Two from MU presented work."

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Posted in Education on Monday, February 18, 2013 2:00 pm.
Lexington hopes for survival as an art center

23 hours ago

The northwest Missouri town of Lexington is banking on art to help reignite its economy.

Lexington recently won a competition with four other towns to be chosen to receive two years of help from the University of Missouri to start the art effort.

Supporters of the project say they hope the town about 50 miles east of Kansas City will eventually attract artists from Kansas City, St. Louis and elsewhere. They hope those artists' work will attract visitors for art fairs and music festivals, and that some people might choose to move to the town.

The Kansas City Star reports if the competition led by the MU Extension service is successful, it might be repeated in other small struggling towns.

JEFFERSON CITY — Local University of Missouri Extension councils could levy property taxes under legislation passed by the Missouri Senate.

The Senate voted 23-7 Monday to send the measure to the House.

The bill would allow existing extension councils to form single or multi-county districts. The council would then be able to put a property tax — no more than 30 cents for every $100 assessed valuation — on the ballot in its district.

The measure applies to every Missouri county and extension district except St. Louis County, where local senators were concerned about adding another taxing authority.

Extension councils already exist in each county and are charged with bringing education and research to all parts of the state.
Post-party assault results in arrest

Monday, February 18, 2013 at 2:00 pm

A University of Missouri student is suspected to have severely injured a fellow partygoer early Sunday in an assault at a residence hall.

The incident occurred around 2 a.m. in Jones Hall after a party at a fraternity house, said Capt. Brian Weimer of the MU Police Department. The suspect allegedly confronted a 19-year-old man about disrespecting him at the party and punched him in the face, he said.

The assault resulted in stitches and surgery to the victim's face, Weimer said.

Officers arrested Bradley D. Zaucha, 18, of 800 Hitt St. on suspicion of first-degree assault. He was released from the Boone County Jail on $10,000 bond.

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Posted in Crime on Monday, February 18, 2013 2:00 pm.