BUFFALO, N.Y. • Targeting the soaring cost of higher education, President Barack Obama announced on Thursday a broad new government rating system for colleges that would judge schools on their affordability and perhaps be used to allocate federal financial aid.

But the proposed overhaul faced immediate skepticism from college leaders who worry the rankings could cost their institutions millions of dollars, as well as from congressional Republicans wary of deepening the government’s role in higher education.

The president, speaking to a student-heavy crowd of 7,000 at the University at Buffalo, said he expected pushback from those who profited from the ballooning cost of college. But he argued that with the nation’s economy still shaky and students facing increasing global competition, making college affordable is “an economic imperative.”

“Higher education cannot be a luxury,” Obama said in his first stop on a two-day bus tour through New York and Pennsylvania. “Every American family should be able to get it.”

Republicans on Capitol Hill weighed in quickly with criticism. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, the top Republican on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, cast the proposal as government overreach and suggested a state-by-state approach would be preferable.

“Washington needs to be careful about taking a good idea for one state and forcing all 6,000 institutions of higher education to do the exact same thing, turning Washington into a sort of national school board for our colleges and universities,” Alexander said.

For colleges and universities, millions of federal aid dollars could be on the line if schools are downgraded under the government rating system. However, if colleges line up against the idea of tying ratings to federal aid, the proposal would face nearly impossible odds. Almost all members of Congress have colleges or universities in their districts, and a coordinated effort to rally students and educators against the plan would probably kill it quickly.
“This is extraordinarily complicated stuff, and it’s not clear we have the complete data or accurate data,” said Molly Corbett Broad, the president of the American Council on Education, which represents colleges and universities in Washington.

From Buffalo, Obama climbed aboard his armored black bus for a road trip that was to take him through western and central New York as well as northeastern Pennsylvania over two days. The education-focused trip underscores the degree to which the White House is seeking to keep the president’s public agenda focused on domestic issues, even as international crises flair in Egypt and Syria.

“As we’re weighing these domestic policy positions and foreign policy decisions, the president puts the interests of the United States of America first,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. “The fact that we are doing this bus tour is an indication that the president has his priorities straight.”

BROADER ECONOMIC AGENDA

The education proposals are part of the broader economic agenda Obama has been pitching across the country this summer. The tour is aimed at building public support for his economic policies ahead of fiscal fights with Congress this fall.

The rising cost of college has increasingly become a burden for many Americans. According to administration figures, the tuition costs at public, four-year universities has tripled over the last 30 years, and average student loan debt stands at $26,000.

Over the past five years, the tuition sticker price at public four-year colleges is up 27 percent beyond overall inflation, according to a College Board survey. At private schools, the average student’s cost has risen 13 percent beyond overall inflation.

There has been little consensus among policymakers on how to curb college costs. While Obama’s proposal could give colleges an incentive to slow increases, it could also add massive reporting requirements that could be a burden on schools already struggling to make ends meet.

The new rating system does not require congressional approval, and the White House is aiming to have it set up before the 2015 school year. But Obama does need support from Congress to use the ratings as a basis for parceling out federal financial aid. In addition to tuition, schools will also be rated on average student loan debt, graduation rates and the average earnings of graduates. Under Obama’s proposal, students attending highly rated schools could receive larger grants and more affordable loans.

The president is also seeking legislation to give colleges a “bonus” based on the number of students they graduate who received Pell Grants. The goal is to encourage colleges to enroll and graduate low- and moderate-income students.

Obama’s other proposals include a requirement that colleges with high dropout rates distribute student aid over the course of the semester rather than in a lump sum. The aim is to ensure that students who drop out do not receive funds for time they are not in school.
The president also renewed his call for a $1 billion college “Race to the Top” competition that would reward states that make significant changes in higher education policies while also containing tuition costs.

For Obama, who has made no secret of his desire to get out of Washington when he can, the bus tours have become a favorite method for reconnecting with the public. Beyond his official events, the president often makes unscheduled stops at local restaurants and businesses, and sometimes pulls off on the side of the road to greet cheering crowds.

As his motorcade made its way from Buffalo to Syracuse, N.Y., on Thursday, Obama stopped off in Rochester to have lunch at a restaurant with a small group of college students, recent graduates and their parents. He was to speak again Thursday afternoon at Henninger High School in Syracuse.

On Friday, Obama plans to hold a town hall meeting at Binghamton University, then travel to Scranton, Pa., for an event at Lackawanna College. Vice President Joe Biden, a Scranton native, is to join Obama in his hometown. Biden has spent much of the week in Houston, where his son Beau underwent a medical procedure at a cancer center.

The president’s highly secure bus was purchased by the Secret Service in 2011 for $1.1 million. The bus — referred to by some of Obama’s staff as “Ground Force One” — has dark tinted windows and flashing red and blue lights.
Obama targets college message to Pa.

6 hours ago • Associated Press

President Barack Obama will visit Pennsylvania for the first time in more than a year as he brings his plan for college affordability to Scranton, a city that's friendly to the Democrat.

The Friday evening visit to Lackawanna College is also Obama's first to Pennsylvania since he won the state on his way to a second term.

Obama will appear with two Scranton natives, U.S. Sen. Bob Casey and Vice President Joe Biden, as he delivers his message to one of the nation's biggest college states. If Obama is trying to apply pressure to Republicans ahead of the September debate with Congress over the budget, he's come to a good place: Pennsylvania's congressional delegation is heavily Republican, 14-6, in a state where registered Democratic voters outnumber Republicans.

The White House bills the visit as part of Obama's efforts to boost the middle class, and the latest in a series of speeches he's delivering around the country.

He is arriving at a time when one recent poll showed Pennsylvanians are closely divided over his job performance.

During a bus-tour stop in Buffalo, N.Y., on Thursday, Obama called higher education an "economic imperative" and touted his plan to tie federal financial aid to schools' affordability and performance.

For their part, Pennsylvania Republicans issued various fundraising appeals around Obama's visit and are trying to pick away at his message by focusing on what they call his various scandals and failures.

Republican Gov. Tom Corbett, a frequent critic of Obama's, has pressed Pennsylvania's 18 state-supported universities to minimize their tuition increases and reorganize diploma programs around growing industries. However, his campaign is using the visit to try to persuade potential contributors that he is a better steward of the economy than Obama and the more appropriate champion of the middle class.
Corbett, a conservative who keeps a low profile and is beset by lagging public approval ratings ahead of his re-election bid next year, is viewed by Democrats as vulnerable.

The event with Obama is free and open to the public, although a limited number of tickets were to be available. A 2008 U.S. Census report, the latest available, showed Pennsylvania to be fourth among states in degree-granting institutions with 257 and sixth in enrollment with 740,000.
Obama unveils plan on college affordability

BUFFALO — President Obama opened a two-day bus trip Thursday by outlining a revamped education plan that seeks to tie federal aid to college costs.

"We can't price the middle class — and people working to get into the middle class — out of a college education," Obama said during a speech at the New York state university in Buffalo.

Obama proposed a ratings system to assess how hard colleges are working to keep down costs; federal aid would be based on a school's frugality ratings under a proposal that would require congressional approval.

A higher education is the single best investment you can make in your future," Obama told students in Buffalo, but the high costs and debt have become "a barrier and a burden for too many American families."

In addition to pressuring colleges over costs via a new ratings system, Obama said his plan has two other goals: encouraging schools to innovate and compete for students, and helping students manage their loan debts.

The plan calls on colleges to disburse student aid over the course of a semester, rather than as a lump sum at the start. Colleges would receive bonus money for the number of Pell Grant students who graduate.

As for the ever-growing levels of student debt, the plan calls for expansion of a "Pay As You Earn" program that would cap loan repayments at 10% of income.

The plan also says that colleges should offer a greater range of "affordable, high-quality options" that will generate competition with other colleges and drive down prices.

Obama pointed out that much of his plan — including the proposal to tie federal funding to the new ratings — would require congressional approval, and "we're going to have to work on that."
Rep. Ron Kline, R-Minn., who chairs the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, said he is “concerned that imposing an arbitrary college ranking system could curtail the very innovation we hope to encourage, and even lead to federal price controls.”

The college speech was the latest in a recent series on the middle class that Obama has delivered in recent months. Obama said that the rising costs of colleges — and the accrued debt needed to finance them — are hurting efforts by graduates to enter the middle class.

The average tuition cost at a four-year public college has increased by more than 250% over the past three decades, according to the White House. Meanwhile, incomes for typical families grew by 16%.

The federal government provides about $150 billion per year in student financial aid, the administration said, while states contribute $70 billion to public colleges and universities.

Obama speaks later Thursday at a high school in Syracuse, N.Y.

The latest presidential bus tour takes place amid turmoil in foreign affairs, including calls on Obama to take forceful action on the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria and the crackdown on protesters by the military government in Egypt.

Obama is also gearing up for a major budget battle in September with congressional Republicans, one that could lead to a government shutdown.

During his Buffalo speech, Obama said college students, parents and other middle-class Americans can't afford "the usual circus of distractions and political posturing" over the budget, health care, and other issues.

"That won't grow our economy," Obama said. "That won't create jobs. That won't help our middle class."

The Republican National Committee branded Obama's latest trip as a "Lame Duck Bus Tour" with little substance to talk about.

"Obama's record with youth is wrought with failures from college costs to student loan debt, and his economy has made it difficult for young Americans to prosper," said RNC spokeswoman Kirsten Kukowski.

The bus tour wraps up Friday with a town hall in Binghamton, N.Y., and a speech at a college in Scranton, Pa. The latter event will feature Vice President Biden, a Scranton native.
3 things to know: Obama's higher education plan

Sean McMinn, USA TODAY 1:22 p.m. EDT August 22, 2013

Obama left little doubt on his intentions to push for more federal oversight of how much colleges charge their students — and what students should receive in return.

NO MU MENTION

In a letter to his supporters earlier this week, President Barack Obama hinted that his plan to change higher education could be a controversial one.

America found out exactly what he meant Thursday.

"These reforms won't be popular with everybody," he said, "especially those who are making out just fine under the current system."

He unveiled details of those reforms to a packed arena at the University of Buffalo, leaving little doubt as to his intentions to push for more federal oversight of how much colleges charge their students — and what students should receive in return.

Here are three notable proposals from the speech:

1. Look closer at the value of schools' tuition for financial aid assistance

The president announced an initiative to more closely examine colleges' affordability, aiming to create a federal standard they can be ranked by. Criteria will include measurements such as student debt and default rates, how many students graduate on time, what kinds of salaries those students earn and the number of low-income students who graduate using Pell Grants.

The president said he want to use these affordability rankings to determine each school's financial aid funding at both the state and federal levels.
"We want to rate them on who's offering the best value, so students and taxpayers get a bigger bang for their buck," he said.

That financial aid money is now mostly distributed by schools' enrollment, but the president said he wants to shed that model in favor of the new ranking system.

2. Grow the "Pay as you Earn" program for student loan debt

Obama wants to expand the eligibility for his Pay as you Earn program, which allows some low-income graduates to cap their student debt repayment at 10% of their discretionary monthly income. He said the program's current structure has two problems: not enough people are eligible — and many who are eligible don't know it.

He announced Thursday an information campaign to teach more students and graduates about Pay as you Earn, and he called on Congress to expand the option for more college graduates.

"Government shouldn't see student loans as a way to make money, it should be a way to help students," he said.

3. Require more from students to keep receiving financial aid

Though much of Obama's speech focused on what he expects from colleges, he also addressed students' accountability.

"We're going to make sure students who receive federal financial aid complete their courses before receiving grants for the next semester," he said. "We need to make sure if you're getting financial aid, you're doing your part to make progress to a degree."

Under his plan, federal financial aid would not be disbursed in one lump sum in the beginning of a year or semester, but would instead be spread out over the term.

Much of Obama's remarks — which kicked off the beginning of a three-campus, two-state bus tour to tout his ideas on higher education — demonstrated a more aggressive strategy on ideas he's already outlined in previous speeches.

The president's address Thursday came less than a month after he hinted at a plan to reform higher education at Knox College in Galesburg, Ill. He promised there to "shake up" America's higher education system, and he touched on trends of online learning and grading based on competency, not strictly testing.

The goal of these types of programs, Obama said, would be to maximize the efficiency of students' college progress, essentially saving them — and the government — money.

The cost of college for in-state students at four-year public universities has increased 257% in the past 30 years, according to the College Board. Federal aid has also increased during that time and offsets some of the cost for many students, but the president expressed concern Thursday
that if tuition continues to rise, the government will "run out of money" for financial aid and loan programs.

Obama's higher education plans in the past have seen varying degrees of success, and a gridlocked Congress could make it difficult for the president to make much real progress on his new proposals.

Judging by his remarks at Knox College last month, this is a scenario he sees coming.

"Whatever executive authority I have to help the middle class, I'll use it," Obama said. "Where I can't act on my own and Congress isn't cooperating, I'll pick up the phone. I'll call CEOs; I'll call philanthropists; I'll call college presidents; I'll call labor leaders. I'll call anybody who can help and enlist them in our efforts."
Disappointed, Not Surprised

August 23, 2013

BY
Colleen Flaherty

NO MU MENTION

Faculty members overwhelmingly supported President Obama in his candidacies. To many, his academic background and intellectual bent were welcome relief after his predecessor. Obama – a former law professor at the University of Chicago – was one of them.

But in reacting to Obama’s higher education policy speech at the State University of New York at Buffalo Thursday, in which the president proposed a ratings system for institutions to be tied to federal aid, faculty members expressed disappointment. While emphasizing that access to college is a good thing, they said, the speech failed to address deeper problems facing higher education -- such as lack of funding, skyrocketing tuition and the increasing employment of adjunct faculty -- and was too enthusiastic about massive open online courses (MOOCs), whose pedagogical effectiveness remains largely untested.

Many faculty advocates said they weren’t surprised, however, and said that other choices in Obama’s presidency reflected what they saw in his plan for higher education: a patchwork of conservative and liberal policies that fell far short of pleasing everyone – or, depending on one’s opinion, anyone.

More importantly, they said, the plan focuses on certain measurable student outcomes – such as graduation rates – but would do little to ensure actual student learning.

More on the Obama Plan

Performance Funding Goes Federal: Obama gets aggressive in proposing college rating system. Making it happen won't be easy, but higher ed leaders said they'll play ball.

Enjoying White House Attention: For colleges and other organizations promoting alternative paths to degrees, the president's speech was validation they have wanted.
Ratings Are Not So Easy: It's hard to argue with President Obama's analysis of higher education's problems, writes Karen Gross, but his solution -- a system for rating colleges -- must be crafted very carefully.

The Problematic Pell Plan: The president's approach is likely to spell trouble for community colleges, Matt Reed argues.

That led some to dub it a kind of “No Child Left Behind” for higher education.

“This doesn’t really surprise me – I didn’t really have any illusions as to the positions he had,” said Rudy Fichtenbaum, president of the American Association of University Professors and a professor of economics at Wright State University. “When he picked Arne Duncan [a proponent of the controversial Common Core initiative to standardize K-12 education] to be the secretary of education, that sort of set the tone for where his educational policy would be headed.”

Fichtenbaum said he found Obama’s speech troubling, and said it would inevitably force non-elite universities to move toward a more standardized curriculum suited to quantifiable outcomes in order to court funding.

“I think that colleges will be looking at ratings – looking at who’s getting the highest rating – and that will begin to drive [where they invest] their money,” he said. That could mean diverting funds away from full-time faculty positions, among other actions linked to negative student learning outcomes.

Robert Samuels, lecturer of writing at the University of California at Los Angeles and president of the University of California’s American Federation of Teachers faculty union, called Obama's plan a “Band-Aid approach,” one that appropriates liberal think tanks ideals – such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s “obsession” with access – and notions supported by many conservative groups, such as increasing dependence on MOOCs and competency-based initiatives.

Samuels, author of Why Public Higher Education Should Be Free: How to Decrease Cost and Increase Quality at American Universities, said he’d traveled to the White House several times to meet with policymakers, and wasn’t surprised by the plan. Obama seems much more invested in controlling student debt through Pell Grants than reprogramming the system because, ultimately, the system worked for him, Samuels said.

Instead of his being a former professor, Samuels said, the president’s approach to higher education is likely more informed by his own experiences as a student from a lower-income family who found success at two Ivy League institutions – Columbia University, where he earned his undergraduate degree, and Harvard University, where he attended law school. That could blind him to the possibility that what has traditionally been a "meritocracy" has become an "aristocracy." where only some can afford tuition costs that have greatly outpaced the growth of household income, he said.
Aaron Bady, Ph.D. candidate in African literature at the University of California at Berkeley and a higher education blogger, said he didn’t think the plan seemed “serious.”

“The idea that ranking universities according to new metrics will do anything to lower costs seems delusional; a lack of information is simply not the problem,” he said in an e-mail. “The problem is the lack of good choices, the fact that cutbacks to higher education funding have so degraded the ability of public universities to provide a low-cost quality education; the lack of good public options as an alternative to private and for-profit education is what makes a degree so expensive.

He noted numerous references to educational “value,” in Obama’s plan, including consideration of graduates’ salaries: “Shifting Pell Grant money to colleges that provide good ‘value’ (however he plans to define it) is unlikely to do anything but create perverse incentives in the system.”

James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association, was less critical, acknowledging that Obama has a “tough job.”

“I am pleased that President Obama considers the state of American higher education to be a high priority for his administration, and that he has placed access at the center of his agenda,” he said in an e-mail. “He has spoken frequently and eloquently about the importance of broadening access to higher education, and all of the opportunities implied by that access.”

However, Grossman said was concerned by the apparent “narrowing” definition of those opportunities.


Grossman continued: “I'm not seeing the value of a college education in terms of participation in public culture, or a graduate's acquisition of the skills and curiosity essential to ‘learning how to learn.’ … Do we really want to say that an elementary school teacher has had a less successful college education than a hedge fund manager? I hope not.”

Carol Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, said via e-mail: "I certainly believe that encouraging innovation designed to provide more students with quality learning outcomes at lower cost is worth doing from the federal level. However, taken as a whole, the proposals seem at cross purposes at best and potentially damaging to the pursuit of quality at worst. How can you call for learning centered innovation, on the one hand, and then propose a federal rating system that leaves quality learning indicators off the table? The invocation of quality seems like pious rhetoric while the measures that will have teeth are all about narrow indicators such as earnings and completion rates."

Marianne Hirsch, president of the Modern Language Association and professor of English at Columbia University, had a similar reaction, applauding Obama’s emphasis on access and addressing student debt through a renewed commitment to Pell Grants, but criticizing the plan's emphasis on outcomes rather than on learning.
“I worry about the over-reliance on ratings and test results in the plan, the way it risks encouraging colleges to admit good test takers, and prepare students for easily measurable outcomes,” she said. “Instead, we need to be attentive to the complex process of learning and deepening knowledge and recognize that studying fields such as the humanities pay lifelong career benefits.”

Hirsch also pointed out what she saw as an overreliance on massive open online courses (MOOCs), still in their infancy, as the primary vehicle of innovation.

Bady said that was the most troubling part of the plan.

Obama “is putting all his chips in the MOOC basket,” he said. “No part of the plan is grounded in the reality-based community; it's all buzzwords and fantasies that some future technology will magically lower costs. But none of these projects have really advanced beyond the ‘maybe someday it'll lower costs’ stage; right now, it's all speculation.”

The president’s reference to “offering colleges regulatory flexibility to innovate” is worrisome, he added, in that Obama may intend to extend online and MOOC programs a special exception from having to prove or demonstrate their value with actual results, “forcing colleges to defund tried and tested programs in favor of flavor-of-the-month Silicon Valley start-up partnerships.”

Like Fichtenbaum and Samuels, Maria Maisto, president of the New Faculty Majority, an adjunct advocacy group, said the plan encouraged increased “adjunctification.”

In an e-mail, she said, that’s been “the preferred ‘high quality/low cost’ strategy used by higher education for the last several decades, [so] it stands to reason that this plan will be used to justify its perpetuation unless people start coming to their senses and start confronting the documented effects of having a majority contingent faculty work force.”

But such measures are only low-cost up front, she said, citing the University of Southern California’s Delphi Project and other research linking overemployment of adjunct professors to decreased student success.

Maisto said the organization expected more from Obama – and still does.

“We expected him -- and still expect him -- to be able to apply some critical thinking to the strategies that have been brought to him by groups that have deliberately excluded faculty,” she said. “What is so disappointing about this plan is that it was devised without any significant input from faculty, and certainly not with input from the majority. ….This plan would create tiers, pitting schools against each other and rewarding those resource-rich schools with well-supported students while further punishing the ones that do not ‘perform’ as well according to metrics which, as we've already seen from the experiments in K-12, are arbitrary and quite contested.”
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU Faculty Council addresses communication breakdown in MU museum relocation

By Molly Duffy
August 22, 2013 | 8:36 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — At the first meeting of the school year, the MU Faculty Council discussed its distance from the decision to relocate two university museums.

Members of the council commented on their lack of involvement in the administrative decision to move the Museum of Art and Archaeology and the Museum of Anthropology with Michael Sykuta, a representative for the Campus Planning Committee.

The CPC is a group of faculty and staff charged with advising Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Jacquelyn Jones "on the facility needs of the campus," according to its website.

Sykuta said he believed faculty on CPC did not have enough direct input in the decision to renovate Jesse, Swallow and Pickard Halls. The Museum of Art and Archaeology in Pickard Hall and the Museum of Anthropology in Swallow Hall had to relocate during renovations.

He said the decision to move the museums was not brought up in any meeting he attended, although he said he was not present at every meeting. CPC meets at least three times per year.

"This is kind of a difficulty of how you marry a committee of people who serve for three years with a 30-year planning process," Sykuta said. "It's difficult to trace immediate results to anybody who has any institutional memory of the organization."

Sykuta and the council members' discussion revolved around the lack of communication between the administration and the committees that should have been involved in the
decision. The Museum of Art and Archaeology has already moved to the former Ellis Fischel Cancer Center on Business Loop 70 West and the Museum of Anthropology will join it in the spring.

"I'm a little bothered that you're saying that this move, which discomforted a number of people, is out of the purview of your committee," Faculty Council member Harry Tyrer said. "If that's the case, then we've got to fix something in the committee structure."

Faculty Council Chairman Craig Roberts said he was disappointed that the CPC was given little opportunity to weigh in and was informed only after the decision was final.

"This is a committee that is supposed to be involved in the decision process, particularly when the decisions involve curriculum, and this involved curriculum," Roberts said.

Council members expressed some confusion about whether other campus committees were involved in the decision. Members said they want Faculty Council to look into the issue further.

*Supervising editor is Stephanie Ebbs.*
Police investigate possible sex assault

Thursday, August 22, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Columbia police are investigating the possibility that a sexual assault occurred early Tuesday at a fraternity house on Providence Road, Officer Latisha Stroer said.

Officers responded to University Hospital at 4:22 a.m. for a report of an 18-year-old woman who said she might have been drugged and sexually assaulted, Stroer said.

Police have not determined whether a crime took place and are awaiting the results of a sexual assault kit that was administered at the hospital and sent to the Missouri State Highway Patrol crime lab, Stroer said.

The woman was otherwise unhurt and was unable to provide information on a possible suspect. The University of Missouri Police Department issued a campus email alerting the community about the report.
FAA hampers MU J-School drone classes

Program needs certificate to fly.

By Rudi Keller

The University of Missouri's Drone Journalism Program has learned that it takes more than an aircraft, a camera and some open space to experiment with new newsgathering technology.

The Federal Aviation Administration sent a letter in July directing the program to stop flying until it obtains a Certificate of Authorization to use drones. A similar letter was sent to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln drone program.

"I wouldn't say we are grounded, but I would say we are not flying outdoors," said Scott Pham, director of the MU program. "Indoor flying is still legal, and we will do that for testing."

The program had based its flight operations on the rules that govern amateur use of remote-controlled model aircraft. But the FAA considers the journalism drones to be "public aircraft" and the university to be a public operator, which places it in a more restrictive category than amateurs.

"Based on your university website, you are currently operating a UAS" — unmanned aircraft system — "without proper authorization," the July 10 letter says. "Operations of this kind may be in violation of the Federal Aviation Regulations and result in legal enforcement action."

Under amateur rules, unmanned aircraft must stay under 400 feet and conduct flights away from populated areas. Under the more restrictive rules, Pham said, the program must designate a small area — up to 2 square miles — and provide proof of the airworthiness of each vehicle.

Winning approval for an application can take several months, Pham said. "If you want to fly in another location, it is the same long process," he said. "There is a process for flying over a natural disaster zone, one of the obvious positive uses, but it is a lengthy, difficult process that is not well-suited to journalism."
Since its inception, the program has produced stories on bird migration, archaeological excavations and the use of Missouri River water for fracking operations in North Dakota. Fewer than 10 students had signed up for the fall course, Pham said, and they were warned it might be canceled.

Drones have evolved from battlefield use to civilian applications with a wide array of aircraft types. Some are radio operated and some can fly preprogrammed patterns with GPS tracking. Congress last year directed the FAA to write rules governing commercial drone use by September 2015.

Until then, the certificate is the only path open to the drone journalists to use the aircraft, and the "very straightforward letter" is intended to make MU aware of the rules, FAA spokeswoman Elizabeth Cory said. "They have to comply with the same rules as everyone else," she said.

The journalism program worked in partnership with the MU Information Technology drone lab, but the lab has not received any similar letter, Pham said.

Even if the certificate is granted, the area chosen is likely to produce little in the way of news, Pham said. "It may be possible we can find a space where there is at least one story that could be done."
A Much-Needed Treat, and a Welcome Surprise

By GERARDO MENA

Note: Gerardo Mena is an alumnus of MU. This appeared in the military blog section of the New York Times website.

It was an uneventful Saturday afternoon, the day I ended up crying in the drive-through at my local Starbucks. It was my turn to do the grocery shopping, and I had just completed my wife’s book-length shopping list at the Walmart across the street when she sent me a text message:

Starbucks. Tall Caramel Latte.

I became excited. Not the kind of adrenaline-pumping, life-or-death excitement of those days six years ago when I was in Special Operations and hunting insurgents in Iraq. But there was still a small tingling in my gut that stemmed from the excitement of getting a now-rare caffeinated treat full of sugar and awesomeness.

I should explain.

Over my military career, I learned I had a knack for teaching war fighters tactics like close-quarters battle, marksmanship and combat field medicine. After getting out of the military, working with students seemed the logical crossover job for a kinder, gentler me in the civilian world. So I became a high school wrestling coach and English teacher. I’ve spent this last year attempting to teach sophomores about grammar and essay writing, which were things I didn’t particularly enjoy in high school. The jury is out on whether I have taught them anything or ruined them for the rest of their lives.

My wife, a pediatric physical therapist, spends her days caring for wounded and disabled children. We both put in heavy hours that lead to exorbitant child care costs for our two young children. Did I mention that we bought a house?

Our pocketbook has taken a beating.

We decided to cut down on our expenses in an attempt to reduce our debt. We switched from a full cable-television package to just Netflix (yes, goodbye, SportsCenter), cut back on eating out and switched to a cheaper phone plan. So, a beautifully large Starbucks coffee was one of the first luxuries to go. Hence, my excitement.
I rolled up to the ordering display at the drive-through in my midnight blue 2011 Hyundai Sonata — which, of course, screams middle class — with my Eco-Boost button on to increase gas mileage. I ordered my wife’s tall caramel latte, a coffee size meant for children, while I ordered a man-size venti caramel latte for myself.

I approached the window to pay, and then quickly consume, my beautiful afternoon treat. And here’s where things got interesting.

I pulled up to the cashier window and fumbled for my wallet. When I looked up, I saw a slightly plump, sandy blond barista ready to hand me my coffees.

Her: What war did you fight in?

Me: What?

Her: Your hat. What war was it?

Oh yeah. My hat. The one that said, “Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran.” I forgot I had it on. It was Saturday, after all, and that hat was my go-to “refuse to comb my hair” headpiece. It was also quite the conversation starter.

Here’s some more much-needed background information: my family and I live in the heart of the Midwest. We reside in a city that is home to two liberal arts colleges and a large public state university. As you can imagine, we have more than our fair share of twenty-somethings who love to protest any popular current trending issue in order to flex their intellect. In this town, somehow, furious yelling demonstrated intelligence and proactiveness — like that skinny guy who always sat three seats away from me in the anthropology class I was forced to take during my post-military “freshman” year. And the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were easy targets to shout about. For my part, I tried to hold my tongue when the subject came up.

Back at the window, I braced myself to receive some protest rhetoric for some things I did that now felt like a lifetime ago. Was this her way of drawing me into a political debate about right and wrong and why we were over there? The reasons for which at times still confused me, but hey, my friends were going, and they sure as heck weren’t going without me.

Needless to say, I was unprepared and felt sucker-punched by what happened next.

Me: Iraq. I fought in Iraq a few years ago.

Her: Oh. O.K. Well … thank you.

Me: Oh. Well, thank you. Thanks for thanking — I guess. I’m sorry. I’m not good at this whole thing. Here’s my credit card.

Her: Nah, it’s O.K.
Me: What?

Her: Your drinks. No need.

Me: Wow. Thank you. No one’s ever done that before. Wow. Thank you.

And then the window closed. Our brief emotional connection was severed by the closing of a single pane of sliding glass. And then I sat there, in the drive-through, clogging up the line and most likely annoying the cars behind me. I was bewildered at what had just happened. At what never happens here, especially with young college students, liberal or otherwise. I’m not sure if she paid for those drinks herself, but if she did, I assume it cost her nearly an hour’s worth of work.

And then I was overcome with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I wanted to thank her, obviously, for not only buying coffee for my wife and me, but also for validating my service, my six long years away, deploying and fighting and being proud of my country.

And I wanted to thank Starbucks. And yes, Starbucks now has a customer for life, or at least until I receive an opposite reaction to my veteran hat from that very same single-pane sliding glass window.

I contemplated all of this while still holding up the drive-through line. My eyes started to water as the car behind me gave a gentle honk. It wasn’t a rude and lengthy honk. It was just a little reminder that while I was having an existential moment about the choices I had made in life and how I finally had confirmation that the ideals and values I held so dear were actually held dear by others, too, the people behind me still had places to go and caffeine to consume.

So, I dried my eyes, drove home, explained to my wife what had happened and we both smiled. I was happy that I was appreciated by someone from a younger generation. Then, I was sad that I had grown into a jaded and narrow-minded guy who stereotyped college-age people as angry liberals, and that I, a decorated Special Operations veteran, was actually afraid of having my past life protested.

Then, I was happy again that we saved a little money.

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Missouri's student paper, The Maneater, will print only once a week

56 minutes ago  •  Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. • The University of Missouri’s independent student newspaper, The Maneater, says it will produce only one print publication per week to allow the staff to concentrate on the paper’s website.

The paper will now publish only on Wednesday, rather than twice a week. The Maneater began as a twice-a-week publication in 1955.

Noelker says the new schedule will allow staff to cover daily breaking news online while improving the quality of features and in-depth coverage in the print edition.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports that publications coordinator Becky Diehl said finances did not cause the decision to become a weekly newspaper.

Diehl says the staff makeup likely will remain the same, and the print publication will be about the same size.
Media law expert: Pujols faces long odds if he sues Clark

7 hours ago  •  Dan Caesar  •  dcaesar@post-dispatch.com  >  314-340-8175

Sandy Davidson teaches communications law at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and is an adjunct professor at the university's law school.

If Albert Pujols follows through on his threat to sue over Jack Clark’s allegations that “I know for a fact” that Pujols took steroids, he will face a steep uphill battle to win according to a University of Missouri School of Journalism communications law teacher.

Sandy Davidson, who also is an adjunct professor in MU’s law school and who has a law degree, said this week that U.S. Supreme Court rulings make it extremely difficult for public figures such as Pujols to win a judgment for libel.

“Jack Clark is clearly on the hot seat on this but because of the way American law is, he’s got a lot of padding between him and a big libel judgment,” she said. “All the cards are stacked against you if you’re a public figure.”

Clark said at least twice early this month on WGNU (920 AM) that he was told in 2000 by Pujols’ onetime trainer that the player had used steroids. That led to a vow of legal action by Pujols “against Jack Clark and his employers at WGNU. I am going to send a message that you cannot act in a reckless manner, like they have, and get away with it,” he said. in a statement issued by his representatives

Clark and Kevin Slaten were terminated by insideSTL.com, the company that put them on the air.
But Davidson said public figures such as Pujols rarely win a libel case, and the Supreme Court in the
1960s “revolutionized” the way prominent people are viewed under libel law.

She said that before then Pujols “would have had a clear winner. But now the Supreme Court of the
Unites States has made it very difficult to win. Mr. Pujols is going to have to show that Mr. Clark knew
that what he was saying is false, or that he acted with reckless disregard — meaning he entertained
serious doubts as to if (what he was saying) is true or false. ... In one of Mr. Pujols’ statements he used
the term ‘reckless.’ But I think that kind of recklessness is just extreme negligence. If you’re negligent as
a reporter or a commentator and the target is public figure, negligence is not enough.”

She said the Supreme Court has made it much more difficult for a public figure to be victorious in such a
case than a regular citizen.

“All (an average citizen has) to do is show by a preponderance of the evidence — anything over 50
percent — that your side is correct,” she said. “The Supreme Court said that’s not good enough in actual
malice cases involving public figures. You have to show clear and convincing evidence. So that means
Mr. Pujols could show by a preponderance of the evidence (that Clark acted with) actual malice and still
lose because you have to go that further step. If you’d want to put a percentage on it, at least 70, 75
percent. It’s steep.

“... So to prove by clear and convincing evidence that Mr. Clark either knew what he was saying was
false, or entertained serious doubts about whether it was true or false, that’s the burden of proof for
Mr. Pujols. The Supreme Court has made it very clear that it knows this bar is so high that there are a lot
of (public figures) who have been intentionally libeled who will not be able to meet that bar. ... Basically
what the Supreme Court is saying to public figures and public officials is what President Truman said —
‘If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.’”

burden of proof

Davidson said that if Pujols does file suit, his side will have to be the aggressor, that it wouldn’t be up to
Clark to go on the attack.

“In general, the person who is suing is going to have to show that what was said is false,” she said.

In fact, if Pujols sues his entire life could become under scrutiny.

“You get into a bit of a dicey area when you’re trying to prove a negative,” he said. “Prove to me you
never have used dope. Absent of videotape of your entire life, that’s going to be very difficult to do.”

Clark has hired prominent St. Louis attorney Chet Pleban to represent him if any legal activity is
generated over his Pujols remarks. And Pleban has alluded to Pujols possibly turning the focus of an
investigation on himself, rather than Clark, if he sues.

“I think a lot of this stuff is going to play out if Albert Pujols decides to litigate,” he recently told KTRS
(550 AM) host McGraw Milhaven. “... A lot of questions will have to be answered.”
Davidson says that is possible.

“In our legal system, truth is an absolute defense to a libel claim,” she said. “Plaintiffs (Pujols, in this case) do take the risk of opening up that issue to much greater scrutiny. If a plaintiff files a suit then the defendant (Clark, in this case) ... can use interrogatories and depositions to gain information to later introduce ... during the trial.”

Numerous attempts to reach Pujols agent, Dan Lozano, to comment about any possible suit have been unsuccessful. On Thursday, Pleban said he hasn’t heard anything from Pujols’ camp.

Other angles

Slaten has threatened to sue over his termination, saying he did nothing wrong, and Davidson said she could not offer an informed opinion of his chances of winning without having more knowledge of his contractual arrangement.

Officials at insideSTL.com contend Slaten and Clark were independent contractors who did not directly work for either their company, which was buying the airtime on which their show appeared, or the station.

So there are five possible parties that could be involved in either initiating legal action or defending themselves in court over the entire matter — Pujols, Clark, Slaten, insideSTL.com (run by Tim McKernan) and WGNU (run by Burt Kaufman).

But Davidson did have an opinion about Slaten’s stance that he merely was offering a personal opinion when he said he long has believed that Pujols “has been a juicer,” which prompted Clark to say, “I know for a fact he was” before relating what he said he was told by the trainer.

The trainer, Chris Mihlfeld, has denied the allegation.

“When you say it’s your belief, you get into the question of opinion protection,” Davidson said. “The Supreme Court has had some interesting case law on that. If you say, ‘In my opinion Jones is a liar,’ the Supreme Court says that’s just as defamatory as saying, ‘Jones is a liar.’ Think about it, you could drive a Mack truck through an exception in libel law if you said ‘it’s my opinion’ or ‘in my belief.’ You can’t say, ‘In my opinion X is a murderer,’ and expect opinion protection.”

the bottom line

Davidson said Clark seems to be in good stead from a legal stance.

“Everything that I have seen or read makes me think that Mr. Clark truly believed that the trainer had said that,” she said. “Now the question of course arises, ‘Was he mistaken or not?’ But back to our standard of actual malice, we talk about the state of mind of Mr. Clark. The Supreme Court is giving protection to journalists even when they make errors that defame. They can still have First Amendment protection. The law is on the side of the journalist when you are talking about libeling a public figure. It’s a much different game if we are talking about a private individual.”
She said there are two major reasons the Supreme Court “says you just have to be tough” if you are a public figure.

The first: “You have voluntarily assumed that risk, you have invited scrutiny and when you invite that scrutiny, along with that comes the risk that somebody gets the story wrong,” she said. “Private individuals have not voluntarily assumed this risk.”

The second: “Ready access to the media,” she said. “Mr. Pujols has ready access to the media to get his side of the story told. If any private individual tries to get the story forward, they don’t have the ready access to the media, they don’t have the voice, the platform. Mr. Pujols certainly already has gone to the media and his side of the story is certainly getting out.

“The problem I see for Pujols (is that) because he is clearly a public figure, he is going to have to prove actual malice by clear and convincing evidence.”