White House Summit Gathers College Leaders Who Pledged to Expand Access

NO MU MENTION

Note from the MU NEWS BUREAU: Deputy Chancellor Mike Middleton is attending the summit on behalf of the University of Missouri.

By Kelly Field

The White House won't say who is coming to its higher-education summit on Thursday, but it looks as if elite institutions and state flagships will be well represented, and for-profit colleges will be scarcer.

On Tuesday the leaders of several selective institutions and large public universities confirmed to The Chronicle that they planned to attend the event, which will focus on expanding college access for needy students.

Roughly 140 colleges are expected to attend. To get in the door, they had to commit to taking concrete steps to help more low-income students enroll in and complete college.

The White House has maintained tight control over the guest list and agenda for Thursday's summit, asking attendees to wait until Tuesday to announce that they will attend, and until Thursday morning to reveal the "commitments" they'll make at the event.

The final list may still be taking shape, with additional invitations sent to college leaders in recent days, according to a college lobbyist.

But Steve Gunderson, president of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, the main lobbying group for for-profit colleges, said that his member institutions—which collectively enroll four million students—had not been invited. He called their exclusion "unfortunate."

"Today postsecondary education reaches beyond traditional liberal-arts programs at four-year institutions," he said.

A representative of the Apollo Education Group, the parent company of the University of Phoenix, said the company had not been invited either.
A White House official declined on Tuesday to release the list of attendees, but said that for-profit institutions were expected to attend.

The summit will be jointly led by the first lady, Michelle Obama, and officials of the National Economic Policy Council and the Department of Education. In December the White House spokesman Jay Carney described the event as an effort to ensure that "we reach disadvantaged students early enough so that they are on a path to succeed in college and in their careers, and to help them wherever possible to match to the colleges where they are most likely to succeed."

*The Power of the 'Bully Pulpit'*

The gathering comes on the heels of a series of smaller meetings between the White House and college presidents, and as the Obama administration is crafting a college-rating system that will judge institutions based on measures of access and affordability.

James R. Kvaal, deputy director of the Domestic Policy Council, told attendees in November that the goal of the summit would be "not simply to have a conference" but "to mobilize new action that makes significant, meaningful progress."

The administration hasn't said what role it will play in that mobilization, beyond Thursday's convening. But participants said they don't expect officials to propose any major new spending on college-access programs or federal student aid.

Even so, they welcomed the White House's interest, saying the summit could focus the nation's attention on persistent gaps in college access and could spur colleges to do more to deal with them. As Marvin Krislov, president of Oberlin College, put it, "there's no more powerful bully pulpit than the White House."

"Symbolically, it's huge," agreed David Maxwell, president of Drake University. "Elevating it to the level of a White House summit has a great deal of power."

Robert M. Shireman, a former Education Department official who now leads an organization called California Competes, said he hoped the event would put pressure on "a wider set of colleges" than those attending "to make this a major priority."

"While the federal government plays a big role in access and success, there are pieces of the puzzle that only colleges can address," he said. "We need our more-selective colleges to be reaching into low-income communities and providing that opportunity, taking a chance on people. They don't do that enough."

Jimmy G. Cheek, chancellor of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, said he hoped the event would send a message to low-income students as well, telling them higher education is critical and within their reach.

"During the campaign, the president said, 'Yes, we can,'" Mr. Cheek said. "Now, he should say, 'Yes, you should.'"
Looking for Friends With Funds

One goal of the event appears to be connecting colleges to foundations that could support their access efforts. Randy Woodson, chancellor of North Carolina State University, said that at a meeting with public-college leaders last fall, White House officials made clear that they were trying to attract philanthropic attention to the cause.

"My sense is that the White House will be looking to the philanthropic sector to rally around programs that have the potential to help students advance through high school and get to college," he said.

But some participants in Thursday's summit said they were skeptical the president could achieve his college-access goals without a significant expansion of federal aid.

"At some point, we have to decide as a country whether we are willing to make the kind of investments that we made in 50s and 60s, with the GI Bill and the Higher Education Act," said Philip A. Glotzbach, president of Skidmore College. "Today we spend a lot more money, but proportionate to the cost of higher education, federal support has not kept pace."

Oberlin’s Mr. Krislov said he hoped that the event would lead to lasting collaborations among participants, and not just be a "one-shot meeting."

"This is a very significant challenge," he said, "and it will take more than one meeting, or even a few meetings, to address."

Behind Summit, Access, Affordability, and Completion Pose Conflicting Goals

By Beckie Supiano

NO MU MENTION

The policy goal at the heart of this week's White House summit—college access—has become more complex as it has evolved. While increasing college access remains a key national goal, it must now compete with two other higher-education priorities: completion and affordability.
While higher education is now the only reliable way to enter and stay in the middle class, that wasn't always the case. Our national focus on expanding college access dates to a time before anyone thought everyone should go to college.

Expanding access became a major policy concern in the 1960s, says Michael S. McPherson, president of the Spencer Foundation and a higher-education economist.

"We as a nation were thinking at that time expansively about how we could solve social problems with federal policy," says Mr. McPherson, who is also a former president of Macalester College.

When the Higher Education Act of 1965 was signed, its first two goals were access and choice, says Anthony P. Carnevale, director of Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce.

At the time, "whenever you said 'access,' you said 'choice,'" he says. Those terms were paired partly for political reasons, Mr. Carnevale says. Private colleges could get behind a student-aid system that allowed students to carry their money to whichever institution they liked.

That was also an era before soaring costs and other concerns dimmed higher education's luster. Back then—really until 15 or 20 years ago—higher education was seen in a much more positive light, says Thomas R. Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College.

When people thought of college, they thought of the country's elite colleges, the best in the world. So it was only natural, Mr. Bailey says, for the focus to be on "who got access to these wonderful institutions." No one was thinking much about whether those who got access graduated.

Success

When Robert M. Shireman started the Institute for College Access and Success, in 2004, he was deliberate in choosing its name. At the time, he recalls, student success was not yet the hot topic it has become, and he wanted to raise its profile.

Questions about success were becoming more pressing on the ground. When the National College Access Network began tracking what happened to students it had helped send to college, it was
surprised at how many of them weren't graduating. For the last seven years or so, the group has expanded its focus to include students' time in college, says Kim Cook, its executive director.

Others were paying more attention, too. College had become the main steppingstone to a middle-class life, raising the stakes for a wider spectrum of individuals. The federal commitment to higher education grew tremendously, raising the stakes for society. (Total federal student aid stood at $170-billion in 2012-13, up from $1.7-billion in 1963-64, in 2012 dollars.)

Attention began to turn to what happened to students after they arrived on a campus. Once graduation-rate data became available, it became clear that there was "tremendous variation" among colleges, Mr. Bailey says.

The Lumina Foundation announced in 2008 its "big goal": to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Soon after, President Obama announced a similar goal: for the United States to have world's highest proportion of college graduates by 2020.

**Affordability**

Conversations about access didn't die off when completion became the big issue, but they did change. The goals of access and success are in tension. If getting students to graduate is the overriding concern, many observers worry colleges will avoid taking a chance by admitting students who might struggle.

Affordability has long been seen as a barrier to college access. After all, the federal government's approach to improving access centers on offering students grants and loans.

But as college has gotten more expensive, and family incomes have leveled out, paying for college has become a more pressing worry for families who are relatively well off. That has made college affordability an issue that resonates with the middle class, and many of the policies intended to improve it are designed with them in mind.
It's certainly possible for the government to care about access, affordability, and completion all at once. But in a world of limited resources, those goals do compete with one another. If nothing else, that should make a White House meeting about college access in 2014 a little more interesting.

January 15, 2014

What They'll Be Talking About: The Skinny on Some White House Proposals

By Andy Thomason

NO MU MENTION

When dozens of college presidents visit the White House on Thursday to discuss improving college access for low-income students, they will be armed with success stories and lessons from projects on their own campuses. But just in case they lack ideas, the Obama administration has circulated an agenda of its own.

Calling on the attending presidents to make one new commitment in the spirit of improving access, the administration sent out a list of 20 proposed commitments in November. In an email accompanying the list, James R. Kvaal, deputy director of the White House's Domestic Policy Council, wrote that it was "certainly not comprehensive."

But the choice of items may shed some light on the administration's priorities in higher education, as education-policy analysts and college and university leaders continue to debate the White House's higher-education plan, including its controversial ratings system.

Some of the proposed commitments are familiar ways to increase access that have been tried nationwide, while others are less prominent.
'Specific Targets for Low-Income Enrollment'

This commitment proposes, as an example, "setting a specific goal around increasing the share of Pell-eligible students." It is rare for colleges to publicly set a target for an exact percentage of low-income enrollment. Instead, colleges have largely opted to increase recruitment and to make financial-aid programs more generous.

But a 2011 analysis of Department of Education statistics found that, among the nation's most selective colleges and universities, those steps had generally failed to increase the share of low-income students. The data showed that, in 2008-9, 15 percent of students at the 50 wealthiest colleges received Pell Grants, relatively unchanged from 2004-5. At public nonprofit four-year colleges, the comparable figure was 26 percent.

Some higher-education officials pointed out that, instead of resolving to recruit more aggressively from the same small pool of high-achieving, low-income students who apply for college, universities should try to expand that pool by combating the notion that the most selective colleges and universities are financially out of reach. That idea is echoed in the first commitment identified by the White House, which recommends expanding recruiting of low-income students.

'Using Cohort-Based Models'

This commitment proposes that colleges create programs, or expand existing ones, that "use 'cohort-based' models that identify, recruit, and enroll groups of low-income students together." The idea of enrolling students as groups might be most visibly modeled by the Posse Foundation.

The 25-year-old Posse Foundation recruits low-income students and sends them in "posses" to prestigious colleges across the country that admit them. Supporters of the program extol the value of the cohort in keeping participating students enrolled. The organization has offices in nine cities, a multimillion-dollar endowment, and 48 partner colleges and universities.

The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs enrolls cohorts—while also granting free tuition, textbooks, and extensive career advising—in an effort to improve completion rates at the system's community colleges. The results, which include much-improved graduation rates, have been widely celebrated as a success story worth duplicating.
"Improving the Transition of Low-Income Students to Campus"

This proposed commitment stresses the importance of preventing "summer melt," which occurs when low-income students who have been admitted to a college do not end up enrolling. Such melt can be averted through "summer bridge" programs, which are common nationwide, but the University of Nebraska has taken the concept one step further with first-generation students.

The university's Lincoln and Kearney campuses have teamed up with local high schools to accept high-achieving students early and to provide extensive college preparation after they have been accepted. For some students, this begins as early as ninth grade. Such early action is echoed in another commitment proposed by the White House—intervening with prospective students in low-income areas years before enrollment.

"Improving STEM Outcomes for Low-Income Students"

President Obama has set a goal of increasing the number of graduates in the STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—by one million in the next decade. This commitment suggests also setting goals for increases in the number of low-income STEM graduates at an institution, or exposing low-income students to STEM research as freshmen.

The idea that the United States needs more STEM graduates to maintain global economic competitiveness is popular, finding voice in many a Congressional hearing and at universities far and wide. But some dispute the notion that there is a STEM crisis. They point out that wages in the STEM fields have remained flat, indicating no shortage of workers.

"Early Intervention Efforts"

Colleges and universities in states that have effectively ended affirmative action in the college-admissions process have been particularly eager to expand the pool of low-income and first-generation college students. And the issue has moved further to the forefront following the Supreme Court's ruling last year in Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin, which may herald more limits on affirmative action in the future.

For instance, the University of California at Berkeley offers advising for prospective transfer students at 30 community colleges across the state. The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor sends groups of students and faculty and staff members to speak at low-income high schools throughout the state.
'Investing in Remediation'

The White House list provides five commitments that involve increasing the success rate for remedial students seeking college credit. Among them: better aligning remediation to programs of study, providing more remediation support, and offering more accurate assessment of the need for remediation.

The suggestions, taken together, differ from a national trend—embraced by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—that calls for remedial courses to be streamlined or eliminated. The foundation helped create Complete College America, a nonprofit group that has lobbied states across the country to overhaul remedial education by replacing such courses with credit-bearing ones, among other steps.

Connecticut, Florida, Tennessee, and other states have, in some cases at the urging of Complete College America, passed laws that directed more students away from remedial education and toward credit-bearing courses.

The White House Summit

January 15, 2014

BY
Michael Stratford

NO MENTION

WASHINGTON -- President Obama will convene a meeting with more than 100 college and university presidents Thursday -- a chance for his administration to pivot away from its stalled legislative agenda to executive actions and also a rare opportunity for White House-level attention for a large group of academic leaders.
“I’ve got a phone that allows me to convene Americans from every walk of life -- nonprofits, businesses, the private sector, universities -- to try to bring more and more Americans together around what I think is a unifying theme: making sure that this is a country where if you work hard, you can make it,” Obama said in remarks at the White House on Tuesday.

Not only is such a large gathering of college leaders by the U.S. president unusual, but it also comes as the administration’s push on accountability in higher education has rankled many of very same leaders with whom Obama will share space with at the summit on Thursday. Private college presidents have been among the most vocal critics of the administration’s proposed, but still largely undefined, college ratings system.

Administration officials have said in planning meetings with college presidents that Thursday’s event, however, is unrelated to the work the Education Department is doing to develop metrics for its ratings system.

The summit Thursday will focus instead on improving college access for low-income students -- a cause that aligns with the focus of the First Lady Michelle Obama’s new outreach to underprivileged students to encourage them to apply for and attend college. Both President Obama and the First Lady will address college leaders in the daylong summit, according to an email sent to invitees.

One of the topics that administration officials have focused on in planning meetings with college presidents -- and have discussed publicly -- is the issue of undermatching: a phenomenon education researchers have said occurs when high-achieving low-income students fail to apply to or enroll in the college to which they are best-suited.

The administration has specifically been interested, officials have said, in the academic scholarship on the undermatching issue completed by Caroline Hoxby, Sarah Turner and Christopher Avery. For instance, Hoxby, a Stanford University economics professor, and Avery, a Harvard University public policy professor, have found that many highly talented low-income students never apply to top colleges. Turner, a University of Virginia economics professor, and Hoxby have also found that sending high-achieving poor students information about their college options earlier in the admissions process can help reduce the under-matching problem.

The presidents attending the summit have agreed to make voluntary pledges to do more to help low-income students enroll in and complete college. The White House is expected to highlight those initiatives Thursday, but in planning documents the administration had been eyeing “dramatic achievements” by colleges -- such as double-digit increases in remedial course pass rates.

Another suggestion the White House has floated in the past is for colleges to pledge to substantially increase the proportion of enrolled students who are eligible to receive Pell Grants, a key indicator of socioeconomic diversity.

Many college presidents involved in the event and other advocates for low-income students praised the White House for using its bully pulpit to address an issue they feel has not drawn enough attention.
“We think that it’s great that the White House is focusing on this issue,” said Emily Froimson, vice president of programs at the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. “There’s an assumption that high-achieving low-income students are fine on their own and don’t need extra support, and that’s just not the case.”

Froimson said that some view the undermatching problem for the highest-achieving low-income students as an elite issue because it involves the nation’s most selective institutions.

However, the involvement of elite colleges and universities in the problem can also benefit the conversation about college access, she said.

“Because elite institutions are involved, the issue attracts more attention,” she said. “They’re leaders in higher ed. They have the brand name.”

Still, she said, “the problem cannot be solved by a handful of elite institutions.”

**Political Stunt?**

While most college presidents interviewed praised the administration’s efforts and said they appreciated the White House-level attention on their institutions’ missions, not all college leaders said they were on board.

Some college presidents, none of whom agreed to speak on the record, declined the administration’s invitation to attend the summit, arguing that they were already pursuing many efforts to boost low-income enrollment and couldn't make additional commitments.

One liberal arts college said his institution is “already doing a lot in terms of low-income access” and criticized the event as “superficial” and “window-dressing.”

He said his institution was “probably at the limit of what it could offer” in terms of aid to low-income students.

“This is something we all agree on, but without addressing the cost, this can’t be serious,” he said, adding that he did not want to gather with other college presidents to “sing kumbaya” without addressing the cost implications of filling more of his student body with low-income students since the associated “cost implications are substantial.”

Catherine Hill, the president of Vassar College and a scholar of the economics of higher education, had a different perspective, praising the summit -- which she will be attending Thursday -- as important.

Hill said that focusing only on expanding the applicant pool of qualified low-income students at selective colleges like Vassar would not be productive in solving college access issues.

“You’re always making these tradeoffs between finding revenue and providing access,” she said. “It’s not just a question of getting talented kids into the applicant pools of these schools, because many of these schools still are not need blind or meeting full need.”

But she said the White House attention to the issue is a good thing.
“The administration can encourage us to do things,” she said. “Our sector has the resources and ability to have a serious conversation about this.”

Expected at the daylong event at the Executive Office Building on the White House campus Thursday are the leaders of a range of institutions, including small liberal arts colleges to major research universities. For-profit college leaders appear to have been excluded from the event. The trade group representing the sector, the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, issued a statement Tuesday saying it was "unfortunate" that the Obama administration had not extended an invitation to its members.

The following is a partial list of the institutions and organizations whose leaders have said in interviews or public statements that they will be attending: Achieving the Dream; American Association of Community Colleges; American Council on Education; California Community College System; California State University; Chegg; Claremont McKenna College; College Board; Complete College America; Drake University; Hamilton College; Harvey Mudd College; Morehouse College; National Association for College Admission Counseling; Nebraska Wesleyan University; North Carolina State University; Northeastern University; Northwestern University; Pitzer College; Pomona College; Scripps College; Smith College; State University System of New York, Stony Brook; SUNY System; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; University of Virginia; University System of Maryland; Vassar College.

Cultural commission supports general idea of Columbia museum district

Motion doesn't get into the specifics.

By Andrew Denney

Tuesday, January 14, 2014 at 2:00 pm

The city of Columbia's Cultural Affairs Commission passed a motion Monday expressing its support for the establishment of a museum district in downtown Columbia, an idea proposed by the State Historical Society of Missouri board of trustees, to be established just north of the University of Missouri campus.

The board of trustees proposed the district be located on the downtown block bordered by Sixth, Seventh, Elm and Locust streets and that it contain a new building for the historical society and new buildings for MU’s Museum of Art and Archaeology and Museum of Anthropology.
The historical society is now housed on the ground floor of Ellis Library, and the board of trustees has proposed a conceptual design for a new, four-story building in the museum district. The proposed location now contains a large university-owned parking lot and MU's Heinkel Building.

Aaron Krawitz, a member of the Cultural Affairs Commission, proposed that the commission endorse the establishment of the museum district, saying its endorsement "would keep the momentum going." He also noted that it is within the purview of the Cultural Affairs Commission to act as an advisory commission to the Columbia City Council on issues pertaining to the cultural environment of the city.

Moving the historical society "out of the bowels" of the library and into a museum district would be a better way to showcase the artwork in the society's collection, Krawitz said, which includes pieces by George Caleb Bingham and Thomas Hart Benton.

The Museum of Anthropology will be moved this spring from Swallow Hall on the MU campus to make way for renovations, and the Museum of Art and Archaeology is being moved from Pickard Hall, which is being decommissioned because it is contaminated with radiation. The latter museum is expected to open this spring.

Both museums are being moved to Mizzou North, at 115 Business Loop 70 W., the former site of the Ellis Fischel Cancer Center. MU officials said they would like to bring the museums back to campus at some point, but no timeline has been set.

Scott Southwick, president of Museum Associates Inc., a not-for-profit group that supports the Museum of Art and Archaeology, told commission members that Museum Associates has not met to discuss the relocation idea, saying the museum is still dealing with its move to Mizzou North.

"It seems too early to be thinking about our final location," Southwick said. After Southwick's comments, the board agreed to pass a motion to support the general idea of establishing a museum district downtown without specifying where it would be and which museums the district would contain.

The Downtown Leadership Council voted last month to endorse the museum district concept. Moving the historical society or a museum to the block bordered by Sixth, Seventh, Elm and Locust was suggested in the Sasaki planning document for downtown Columbia, which was presented in 2007.

This article was published in the Tuesday, January 14, 2014 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Commission likes museum district idea: Motion doesn't get into the specifics."
Open Column

Museum district is a grand idea for university collections

Tuesday, January 14, 2014 at 2:00 pm

Editor, the Tribune: Recently I received a note from a friend that enclosed a clipping of Hank Waters' Dec. 20 editorial, "Museum pledge," which said the University of Missouri's Museum of Art and Archaeology has been "banished." I was absolutely shocked.

Since I was formerly employed by the Museum of Art and Archaeology in various positions before retiring in 1984, I have had little contact with the university. My husband, Arthur, (professor of fisheries biology and assistant director of forestry, fisheries and wildlife) also retired, and we traveled.

After he passed away, I moved to northern Wisconsin at the behest of my daughter and her husband, where I now live.

Reading your editorial, I am convinced that a "museum district" would be a wonderful idea. The Museum of Art and Archaeology has long been considered a gem on the campus. In addition to the Museum of Anthropology, there are other sizable collections on campus that are worthy of consideration; I know of several. They are not necessarily display material but really need to be saved for study purposes. After all, isn't that what a university is all about?

Now, at the age of 91, I look forward with interest, from here in northern Wisconsin, to developments on campus that will convince me that my alma mater is a first-class institution.

Ruth E. Witt 30235 S. Glass St., Danbury, Wis.

© 2014 Columbia Daily Tribune. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Posted in Letters To The Editor on Tuesday, January 14, 2014 2:00 pm.
5 things you don't need to know but might want to

Recharged? The Hazelwood City Council is expected to vote tonight on a contract between the city and Emerald Automotive, the electric van maker that had promised to build its $175 million manufacturing plant there. The vote, originally scheduled for December, was delayed.

In the market for a new home? Oprah Winfrey has listed her Water Tower condo in Chicago for $7.75 million.

Speaking of leading Chicago figures, the Cubs have pledged to stand by their newly unveiled mascot "Clark" despite a flurry of criticism on social media.

Making the list: The University of Missouri's Francis Quadrangle was recognized as one of America's 'most beautiful and iconic' college quads in a recent ranking by Business Insider. The Main Quad at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign also made the list.

Blow me down: Global pirate attacks fell to a six-year low of 264 in 2013, down from a peak of 445 in 2010.

Brady Deaton, Rep. Mike Thomson receive Geyer Award from Mizzou alumni

By Ashley Jost
Tuesday, January 14, 2014 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY – The Mizzou Alumni Association's annual public service award, the Geyer Award, was given to Chancellor Emeritus Brady Deaton and Republican Rep. Mike Thomson during a ceremony Monday night in Jefferson City.
The award is given each year to one legislator and one public citizen who have had a significant effect on higher education and the University of Missouri.

Deaton, who retired from his post as chancellor at MU in November, was honored for successes on campus during his tenure. During his introduction, Deaton was recognized for MU athletics' transfer into the Southeastern Conference and for his expansion efforts, which included the opening of 21 new buildings on campus and at satellite locations.

Deaton was also recognized for his work with the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, among other positions outside of the university.

During his acceptance speech, Deaton thanked his former colleagues and recalled the work of the award's namesake, Henry Geyer, a former state representative who introduced the bill that established MU in 1839.

Thomson, who represents Maryville, called the award "an incredible honor" and said he was humbled to be a recipient.

Thomson was commended for his work on legislation to equalize Access Missouri grants and Bright Flight scholarship awards and legislation establishing the Missouri Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Initiative, among other bills.

The most recent effort Thomson was honored for was his work on creating a funding formula for all public higher education institutions in the state.

Candidates for the Geyer Award are nominated by different sections of the Alumni Association and ultimately chosen by members of the Legislative Network Committee within the association.

Deaton's nomination came from the Nursing Alumni Association, and Thomson's came from the Agricultural Alumni Association.

Nominations for the 2014 award will be accepted until Aug. 8. Forms are available at www.mizzou.com through the "Advocate" tab at the top of the page.

This article was published in the Tuesday, January 14, 2014 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Mizzou Alumni hand out awards: Group honors two each year."

© 2014 Columbia Daily Tribune. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Posted in Education on Tuesday, January 14, 2014 2:00 pm.
Using Twitter, Lady Gaga encourages fans to better embrace differences, MU study finds

Wednesday, January 15, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CST
BY YUTING JIANG

COLUMBIA — With more than 41 million twitter followers, Lady Gaga has more followers than President Barack Obama. But the pop musician is doing more than sharing her daily thoughts — she's created her own culture.

Through her well-read Twitter and popular songs, the musician has influenced her fans to better accept differences and love themselves, according to an MU study.

**MU researcher Melissa Click, an assistant professor of communication, and her team published a study in Popular Music and Society in July 2013.** The study found that by using Twitter to communicate with fans, Lady Gaga has significantly inspired her fans, especially those who considered themselves "different" from the mainstream culture, to better embrace their differences and gain self-confidence.

Click said that the study has three main findings: Lady Gaga fans' embrace of the word "monster," Lady Gaga's role as "Mother Monster" in her relationships with her fans and social media's ability to amplify a relationship.

The research team conducted anonymous one-on-one interviews with 45 fans around the world, Click said. The team heard many stories about how people were happier with themselves due to Lady Gaga's music and tweets, Click said.

"I had an interview with a woman who said she had been bulimic and really hated her body and, after listening to Lady Gaga, she was able to appreciate who she was and to stop her eating disorder," she said.
**Little Monsters, Mother Monster**
Lady Gaga describes herself as "Mother Monster" in her Twitter biography and her fans with a strong bond to the musician called themselves "Little Monsters," according to the study.

"Fans embraced the title 'monster,' which generally has a negative connotation," Click said. "They embraced it and filled it with a positive meaning."

By re-articulating and flaunting the word "monster," Lady Gaga encourages her fans to face their own dark side, embrace and love themselves, according to the study.

Click said the group was especially interested in why "Little Monsters" regarded Lady Gaga as their "Mother Monster." Some fans think of Lady Gaga as a "mother" who protects and cares for them, especially younger fans with damaged family relationships, according to the study.

Others perceive her as a leader and a role model because she is fearless about her own differences, Click said. Lady Gaga encourages her listeners with song lyrics such as "Don't hide yourself in regret/ Just love yourself and you're set."

"She is not afraid to look weird, act weird or talk about her own experiences with bullying," Click said.

**Functions of social media**
The study also found that social media, specifically Twitter, enabled and amplified fans' identification with the star. It allows more direct and intimate interactivity between fans and celebrities.

When using traditional media, such as TV, fans feel that it's difficult for the stars to hear their voices. Social media, however, allows fans to feel that they have a two-way communication, Click said.

"You may have been able to write them the 'fan mail' in the past, which they may or may not respond — who knows if they ever got it," Click said. "But on Twitter you can see celebrities interact with fans."

"Fans felt that lady Gaga used Twitter not only to promote herself and her music but to really talk to them about who she was," she said.
Twitter encourages fans to embrace their differences in two ways, Click said. Fans feel that Lady Gaga protects and cares about them. Little monsters can also find and support each other through social media.

The study also revealed that social media can have positive social influences, Click said. For example, Lady Gaga uses her Twitter account to battle bullying.

"Jamey Rodemeyer, 14 yrs old, took his life because of bullying. [link]

Bullying must become be illegal. It is a hate crime."
— Goddess of Love (@ladygaga) September 21, 2011

"In a culture where bullying continues and suicide is the major cause of teen death, calling attention to the fact that difference can be positive and should be celebrated is important," Click said.

Using the same interviews, Click plans to publish a paper about Lady Gaga’s political actions. The musician lobbies for gay rights and created the Born This Way Foundation to create a more accepting society.

"We are curious about how her political positions impact her fans," Click said.

Missouri's 2013 corn harvest exceeds expectations
Tuesday, January 14, 2014 | 4:56 p.m. CST
BY JOE GUSZKOWSKI

COLUMBIA — Missouri’s corn harvest was up in 2013, exceeding early forecasts and bouncing back from a drought-withered 2012.

Farmers produced more than 435 million bushels of corn at an average of 136 bushels an acre last year, up from 75 bushels in 2012, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The numbers exceeded the department’s August forecast, which predicted an average yield of 130 bushels per acre for Missouri.
Elsewhere in the region, Arkansas, Kentucky and Tennessee also were estimated to have record yields.

The results came as a surprise to some experts after a wet spring and dry summer. The wet start caused many farmers to plant late.

"We expected dryness and heat to really hurt the crop, but with the yields we saw, that didn't really pan out," said Steve Maliszewski of the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

**MU agronomy professor Bill Wiebold also said he was surprised by this year's harvest. He attributed the corn's success to timely rain and the resiliency of the plants.**

"It doesn't take a lot of precipitation, but it has to come at the right times," Wiebold said.

The corn responded much better to conditions in 2013 than in 2012, which was ravaged by drought.

"It just shows that the crops that we grow — breeding has made them a little more resistant to short-term kinds of stresses," Wiebold said.

Although the increased production was a pleasant surprise, it coincides with a predictable and significant drop in corn prices. In December 2013, corn sold for $4.40 per bushel, compared to $7.41 per bushel in December 2012, Maliszewski said.

Wiebold said that although farmers were happy about the unexpectedly strong harvest, they were disappointed to see prices fall.

"I'm sure all of them are hoping for a little better price structure in the coming growing season," he said.

Nathan Oglesby, a grain originator at the MFA Agriservice elevator in Glasgow, said some elevators found it difficult to move corn that contained more moisture than usual. That extra moisture is a result of farmers planting late after a wet spring, he said.

Corn at the Glasgow MFA was shelved at 17 percent to 20 percent moisture levels, Oglesby said. Fifteen percent moisture is considered dry.