White House praises Michael Sam's announcement

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The White House is applauding a University of Missouri football player's decision to announce that he is gay, with President Barack Obama's spokesman, first lady Michelle Obama and Vice President Joe Biden all portraying him as a courageous and inspirational athlete.

Biden and the first lady took to Twitter on Monday to comment on Michael Sam, the all-American college player who declared publicly on Sunday that he is gay. Mrs. Obama says she "couldn't be prouder" of Sam's courage, both on and off the field.

The tweet was signed "-mo," which is how the White House marks messages personally sent by the first lady.

"Your courage is an inspiration to all of us," Biden said. The message was signed "-VP," which designates that the vice president sent it personally.

Sam could become the first openly homosexual player in the NFL. He's scheduled to participate in the league's weeklong scouting camp, where potential draftees are evaluated, later this month in Indianapolis. He is currently projected to be a mid-round draft pick in May.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the president "shares the sentiments expressed by the first lady and the vice president and so many others in marveling at his courage and congratulating him on the decisions he's made, on the support he's had from his team and wishing him well in the future, including in professional football."

Carney said Sam's announcement should not affect his standing on the NFL draft and that his abilities should be measured by his performance.
"And in this case, his performance has been exceptional," Carney said.

Pinkel to ESPN Radio: 'I’m really proud of Mike and really proud of our football team'

By David Morrison

Monday, February 10, 2014 at 9:04 am

Missouri Coach Gary Pinkel went on ESPN Radio's "Mike & Mike" show with hosts Mike Greenberg and Mike Golic this morning to talk about former Tiger defensive end Michael Sam coming out publicly last night.

Pinkel released a statement after Sam's announcement last night.

Here's a transcript of Pinkel's appearance on "Mike & Mike":

How did you first hear Sam was gay?

“We do a lot of things with team building. And one thing a lot of players, even ones who leave our program and reflect back and encourage me to do even more, is to do what we call ‘crossover dinners’ or ‘crossover meetings,’ where we get our staff, and I’ll take like 15 players to my house for dinner, they’ll be randomly chosen from different positions, guys that don’t normally sit in meetings together, a cross section of our team, and every coach does that at the same time and have their own dinners.

“Then they’ll come over, have dinner at my house and I’ll stand up and say, ‘I’m Gary Pinkel. I grew up in Akron, Ohio,’ and I start talking about my family, everything about my family. And everybody unloads everything about themselves. It’s remarkable. Michael Sam was not with my group this past August when we did it -- we do it two or three times a year -- but he was in another group and I got a phone call from the coach right afterwards that ‘Michael told the whole group that he’s gay.’ That’s when I first heard of it."
“I’m really proud of Mike and really proud of our football team. They’re great kids, good people and they’re understanding. That’s kind of the environment we have and the family atmosphere we have at Mizzou.”

**Did you have any conversations with him about coming out publicly?**

“The next morning he came into me, and the first thing I did was give him a hug, told him I loved him, said ‘you’ve got our 100-percent support. And we have to talk about, now, what do you want to do? Do you want to come out now? Do you want this after the season? After the NFL Draft? What are you thinking here, Michael?’ I talked to him about that and Chad Moller, who’s with our media relations in the athletic department, football, does a great job. We all sort of talked about the ramifications of what would come up, of anything he might say.

“We told him to think about it that night. The next day he came in and said, ‘I do not want to have any distractions for our football team. We’ve got to focus on football, and I’ll do it another time.’ I said, ‘OK, that’s fine.’ After the season was over, I talked to him briefly about it, and he said he wasn’t sure yet. I talked to him again last week. He came into my office and told me that most people know, were aware of it.

“I think one of the great things about Michael is he wants to tell his story. I told him this is going to be big, which is an understatement. He’s a great young man, and we’re very, very proud of him.”

**How were his teammates able to keep it to themselves all season?**

“The culture of our team, what we’re about, when players first get into our program, we have standards we cater to. This isn’t just we hit on a lucky year and it came out the way it did. We have a thing called ‘core values’ that are part of our standards. And our core values, there are four of them. One is honesty. You can’t have a team, a family and be close to one another unless you’re honest with one another. Two is no drugs. We have a drug education program, we randomly drug test every week. We do not want a drug culture here at Missouri and how destructive drugs are. Three is respect for women. We talk about that, the proper way you treat women. We have various things throughout we talk about.

“Our fourth one is being respectful of the cultural differences of people. Our team comes from a wide variety of religion, race and cultures and sexual orientation. At the end of the day, at the very end of the day, we have to have respect for one another in our program. We have respect for people. And I think it’s real important that we have tolerance and respect and understanding of people, and we embrace one another. That’s what we do, and that’s what we’re about at Mizzou.”

**Did you ever hear of a player or coach who had a problem with it?**

“Not really. But I’m not naive enough to think that certain players had different opinions on this. Not only this, but on other social issues. I’m sure there are. But at the end of the day, it’s about
the team. It’s about the family. We accept one another. We accept our differences. That’s where respect and understanding is important.”

**What kind of player is he?**

"He had a great year, which is an understatement. He has great speed, explosiveness. He’s obviously a very active player on the defensive end. We could do a lot of different things with him. He’s strong, explosive, very tough, mentally and physically. He can make plays. He has a great future."

**Will this affect his draft status?**

“I don’t know. I would hope that it wouldn’t. I really do. I don’t know. Like the incident that happened down at the Miami Dolphins -- and I know none of the people that were involved there, so I’m not really judging them -- but when you have a locker room atmosphere like that where people are being verbally destructive to one another and call it fun, there’s a fine line here.

“I’m not one of the Righteous Brothers here, I’m not trying to say that either, but we talk to our team about how locker rooms are great. It’s a great thing about being a member of a team. Guys like to bust each other and get after each other verbally all the time, and that’s fine, but there’s a certain point where what you say is hurtful. It doesn’t help the team, it hurts the team. If you that sort of environment where people say what they want, say mean, awful, degrading things to people, it’s probably not going to work very well. But if you have a team that respects one another, maybe you might say I’m a little naïve, but that’s what we work hard to do at Mizzou.”

*(For the record, Richie Incognito, the center of the Dolphins saga to which Pinkel was referring tweeted at Sam on Sunday night, saying "respect bro. It takes guts to do what you did. I wish you nothing but the best.”)*

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**A big step forward for America’s gay athletes**

Editorial

It is extremely encouraging to see people in all walks of life send congratulatory messages to University of Missouri football player Michael Sam after he courageously revealed Sunday night that he’s gay.
This outpouring of support from teammates, coaches, fans, celebrities and politicians shows that much of America has progressed on this social issue.

Sam’s announcement is a watershed moment in the march toward equal rights for gay and lesbian Americans. He is poised to become the first openly gay player in one of the nation’s great pastimes, the National Football League.

However, the national blitz of mostly positive attention for Sam can’t block out some ugly realities.

Open prejudice still exists against gay athletes in football and other major league sports. Intolerance manifests itself in other arenas, too; witness attempts in state legislatures to prevent same-sex couples from having their marriages recognized.

The most important next step for Americans to watch regarding Sam will arrive at the NFL draft in early May. That’s when we’ll find out whether some evolution on gay athletes has occurred in the workplaces of the older, too-often-bigoted NFL officials who will decide which team will draft him.

In a chilling article Sunday, Sports Illustrated gave anonymity to NFL officials, all of whom predicted various troubles for Sam. He would lose money by being picked lower in the draft, meaning coming out was “not a smart move” for him. He would “chemically imbalance an NFL locker room and meeting room,” becoming a big distraction for his team.

These NFL officials need to examine what happened at MU this year: The entire team knew about Sam’s orientation, yet the Tigers went on to have an extremely successful season.

Maybe the young men and women who play sports these days have a different, more enlightened take on this matter. So do some college coaches. As University of Kansas basketball coach Bill Self said Monday, “I don’t think anybody should ever have to live or hide behind who they are or how they feel.”

Michael Sam finds himself in a unique situation, given the mega-attention that the NFL receives. And that makes his story extra compelling.

Sam — and the other gay men who will follow him into the league — should have the opportunity to open people’s eyes while playing on the biggest stage for sports in America.
Teammates supported Michael Sam

Missouri coach Gary Pinkel says he's proud of his team for accepting Michael Sam, who said Sunday that he is gay during an interview with ESPN's "Outside the Lines."

On ESPN's "Mike & Mike" on Monday, Pinkel recalled a team-building exercise in August that set the stage for Sam to reveal his sexual orientation to his teammates.

Periodically throughout the year, Pinkel said, each Missouri coach will invite about 15 players from different position units to his home for "cross-over dinners."

"They'll all come over, having dinner at my house, and I'll stand up and say, 'I'm Gary Pinkel, I'm from Akron, Ohio,' and I start talking about my family, everything about my family. And everybody unloads everything about themselves. It's remarkable."

Sam was at an assistant coach's house when he told his teammates he is gay.

"In August he was in another group, and I got a call from the coach right afterward that Michael told the whole group that he's gay," Pinkel said. "That's when I first heard of it."

Sam had already come out privately to wide receiver L'Damian Washington, who happened to be at Sam's dinner that night.

"I knew that something was about to come because of the way he was balling up the paper in his hands," Washington told the New York Times. "He kept rolling it up. So I kind of knew something was coming, but I didn't think it was that."

The next day, Pinkel asked Sam how he wanted to handle coming out to the rest of the world, asking him, "We have to talk about, 'Now what do you want to do? Do you want this to come out now? Do you want to after the season? After the NFL draft? What are you thinking here, Mike?'"

After discussing the ramifications of Sam's decision with the athletic department's public relations staff, Sam thought about it overnight before deciding to postpone any announcement until after the season, Pinkel said.
Pinkel said Sam told him, "I do not want to have any distractions for our football team. We've got to concentrate on football, and I'll [come out] at another time."

Sam said he was thrilled with the show of support within the program.

"Just to see their reaction was awesome," he told ESPN. "They supported me from day one. I couldn't have better teammates. ... I'm telling you what: I wouldn't have the strength to do this today if I didn't know how much support they'd given me this past semester."

Missouri tweeted a photo of Memorial Stadium from Monday where the letters "S" and "A" were etched out in the snow, to go with the M in a show of support for Sam.

Pinkel said no players came directly to the coaching staff with concerns after Sam revealed his sexual orientation to the team, but he suspects that there was initially a mixed reaction.

"There are certainly players that have differences of opinions, not only on this but other social issues," Pinkel said. "I'm not naive enough to believe that [there is not], I'm sure there are. But at the end of the day, it's about the team, it's about the family. We accept one another, we accept our differences, and that's where respect and understanding is important."

A respect of cultural differences is one of Missouri's four core values, Pinkel said, and he was proud of how his team stuck together after Sam came out.

"I'm really proud of Mike and really proud of our football team," Pinkel said. "We have great kids and good people, and they're understanding. That's kind of the environment we have and the family atmosphere at Mizzou."

Without the extra attention of being a publicly gay athlete, Sam had a standout season for the Tigers, leading the SEC with 19 tackles for a loss and 11.5 sacks, which tied the school's single-season record.

He was named co-defensive player of the year in the SEC and helped Missouri finish 7-1 in the conference, winning the SEC East division. He also forced a fumble on a sack late in the fourth quarter to secure Missouri's victory over Oklahoma State in the AT&T Cotton Bowl.

But throughout Sam's success, Missouri declined all interview requests for him during the season, multiple media outlets reported Monday. He finally spoke to reporters after the Cotton Bowl, saying he was focused on football and graduating and didn't want any outside distractions.

Missouri running back Henry Josey told the Kansas City Star that postponing his announcement allowed Sam to have a successful season.

"I think that helped him a lot, because he was under pressure," Josey told the Star. "That comes with anybody that's hiding something, so I'm proud that he had the courage to come out -- and now to tell the world that he's gay and he's comfortable with it."
Sam came to Pinkel's office last week when it was time to make his announcement, saying he was aware that most people knew he was gay.

"I think one of the great things about Michael is that he wanted to tell his story," Pinkel said. "I told him this is going to be big, which is an understatement, but he's a great young man and I'm very, very proud of him."

Sam aims toward true mission: NFL job

By Dave Matter

COLUMBIA, Mo. • Missouri football coach Gary Pinkel woke up Monday with a clear conscience. Then he said a prayer.

Coaches aren’t trained for the situation he faced the last 24 hours — or the last six months. His most decorated player had just become an overnight worldwide celebrity, and his Mizzou program was in the national cross hairs of the biggest story in college football, the NFL and perhaps all of sport. Within that larger frame, a complicated fabric layered with cultural, social and political threads, lies a simpler story about an athlete whose sole pursuit is to play in the NFL.

But Pinkel knew much more was at play when Michael Sam, a unanimous All-American defensive end, told the world Sunday what he shared with his team last August. Sam is gay.

Reluctant as Sam may be to take on labels — ground-breaker, pioneer, trailblazer — he’ll forever be remembered as the sport’s first openly gay NFL draft prospect and, eventually, the first openly gay NFL player. And Missouri will be known as the college program that, by most accounts, supported him and protected his privacy.

That much Pinkel could appreciate Monday when he met with a throng of local and national media inside the Memorial Stadium press box.

“Maybe it was meant to be,” Pinkel said. “I don’t know. I’m proud to be Michael’s head coach. I think it can have a huge positive influence on our society. I think over time it will.”

In the wake of Sam’s announcement Sunday — revealed in interviews with The New York Times and ESPN — Sam now wants to focus on his true mission, one he doesn’t want defined by his sexuality.
“He gets it’s a big deal, but Mike’s a person who’s all about living in the moment,” said Cameron Weiss, one of Sam’s two Los Angeles-based agents from the firm Empire Athletes. “That’s his mantra. Right now, he’s glad to be done with the interviews and he just wants to put his head down and play football.”

“Michael Sam loves football,” Weiss added. “He wanted to be honest. And he wanted to live his life the way he saw fit.”

For now, Sam is “100,000 percent” devoted to training for the NFL combine and his pro scouting day at Mizzou next month. Sam, last season’s AP Southeastern Conference defensive player of the year and the league leader in sacks and tackles for loss, is projected as a mid-round prospect by most draft analysts.

Weiss has heard from several NFL team representatives about Sam’s draft potential. The feedback, he said, has been “all over the board.”

“I’ve talked to some people who have said, ‘I don’t think it’s a big deal at all,’” Weiss said. “I’ve talked to some people who think it’s going to negatively affect him … and that they wouldn’t touch the situation with a 10-foot pole.”

Pat Ivey, though, knows one certainty: Sam will handle any challenges he faces during the draft process and once he joins an NFL franchise.

“There are people assuming Michael Sam is not a tough person. That would be a huge mistake,” said Ivey, a former NFL defensive lineman who serves as Mizzou’s assistant athletic director for athletic performance. “He is mentally tough. He is physically tough. … He will adapt.”

Weiss agrees, if for no other reason, because Sam’s rocky childhood taught him about perseverance. Up until his weekend interviews, Sam, a native of Hitchcock, Texas, had not revealed to local media the stories of his upbringing: The seventh of eight children, Sam lost his oldest brother to a gunshot wound. His oldest sister died as a child. Another brother disappeared from home. Two more are in prison.

“Telling the world I’m gay is nothing compared to that,” Sam told ESPN.

“I personally think that is the more moving part of this whole thing, more than his sexual orientation,” Weiss said. “For a person to come up through what he’s dealt with in his childhood, he’s a hero for just being a productive member of society after all of that.”

Some Mizzou teammates have known Sam was gay for several years, but for the rest, plus his coaches, he confirmed their suspicions at a team-building exercise in August. Every year, Pinkel and his assistants take a randomly selected mix of players to each of their houses for dinner, after which each one takes a turn sharing stories about themselves. Sam attended dinner at the house of defensive line coach Craig Kuligowski.
“He stood up,” Kuligowski said, “and said, ‘My name is Michael Sam. I play defensive end. I’m gay.’ It was that easy. And that was that.”

Pinkel heard about Sam’s revelation later that night. Pinkel said he had been aware of rumors about Sam’s sexuality.

“But that’s private stuff,” Pinkel said. “We don’t ever get into those things.”

The next morning Sam met Pinkel in his office. Pinkel hugged his player, told him he was proud of him and that he loved him. And then they discussed strategy.

“What do you want to do?” Pinkel said he asked Sam. “Do you want to announce this? What are you thinking?” We discussed scenarios.”

Pinkel insisted he let Sam decide whether he wanted to publicly announce he was gay. “That was 100 percent his choice,” Pinkel said. “Whatever he decided we were going to do. That’s fact.”

Pinkel asked Sam to sleep on the decision. They’d revisit it the next morning.

The next day, Sam made up his mind.

“He said, ‘Coach, I don’t want a distraction here. I want to focus on winning football games. I want our team to have its best year and me to have my best year,’” Pinkel said. “I said, ‘You sure you want to do that?’ He said, ‘Yeah.’ We honored that. I told him, ‘When you decide to do it, whenever it is, just let me know. I one hundred percent support you.’”

Missouri went on to match a school record with 12 wins and captured the SEC Eastern Division. Sam became the program’s first unanimous All-American since 1960.

Ivey is convinced Sam’s breakthrough season was related to his August revelation.

“I know some of his teammates told him, ‘Mike, you know what, we like you a lot better since you came out,’” Ivey said. “What I think that meant was he was able to be himself 24 hours a day, seven days a week and didn’t have to worry about who was thinking something or who was knowing something.”

Last week, Sam let Pinkel know he was ready to make his announcement. Initially, Sam and his agents planned to share the news after the NFL combine. Instead, reporters and team personnel at last month’s Senior Bowl had already begun asking questions about Sam’s sexuality.

“The story was imminent,” Weiss said.

They moved the announcement to Sunday, letting Sam get a head start on preparing for his football future. He’ll work out with Ivey in Columbia as part of his training.
While Sam lives in the moment, geared toward May’s NFL draft, a wider lens will capture the bigger story, the one Pinkel watched begin to unfold the last few days.

“This is going to have a profound effect on sport, certainly initially, and hopefully it’ll trickle down to everyone,” he said. “Hey, we’re all different. We’ve got to respect each other. Hopefully, that’s what’s going to happen.”

**Stories about Missouri football player Michael Sam’s announcement have appeared in hundreds of media outlets.**

**In addition to the clips above, links to a few selected stories are below:**


**Lawmakers, Nixon differ on higher ed**

Both favor a funding boost.

**Monday, February 10, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (2)**

JEFFERSON CITY (AP) — Missouri lawmakers appear to agree with Gov. Jay Nixon that public colleges and universities should get more money next year. But some lawmakers want to
direct part of that money toward building improvements instead of devoting it to larger operating budgets as proposed by Nixon.

Funding cuts during the recession have left colleges and universities with smaller core budgets than they had a decade ago. And many campuses also have a backlog of building maintenance and construction plans.

Nixon has proposed more than $120 million in new higher education funding for the 2015 budget, about one-third of which would be distributed as a performance-based increase to the institutions' core budgets. Other money would increase scholarship funding and expand the number of classroom slots available for certain professions, such as mental health workers.

But House Budget Committee Chairman Rick Stream prefers to spend more on building projects, with less of an increase for operations. He wants to take advantage of a 2012 law that authorizes the state to fund half of the cost of campus building projects that generate a 50 percent match through private donations.

Over the past several months, five universities have submitted a total of eight applications for projects seeking an aggregate of nearly $43 million in state funding to be matched with private donations.

Nixon didn't include any money for the projects in his budget.

"If we passed the bill, and then the universities went back and took our advice and guidance and actually followed through with it, I think they ought to be rewarded," said Stream, R-Kirkwood.

Missouri law allows the state funding to go toward new construction, renovation and maintenance at public colleges and universities, so long as the projects aren't for athletic facilities, parking garages or student housing.

Colleges and universities are barred from using their operating budgets, bonds or student tuition and fees to come up with their half of the money.

"To me, this is a good way to encourage private donations," said state Sen. David Pearce, R-Warrensburg. "And it's a way the state can get some much-needed projects done without having to fund 100 percent of it."

Pearce is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee that helps write the budget and also was chairman of the Senate Interim Committee on Capital Improvement Assessment and Planning, which released a report in December recommending use of the matching-grant program.

The state Coordinating Board for Higher Education has received applications from all four campuses of the University of Missouri system plus one from Missouri State University.
The biggest is an $11.1 million request from MU to help construct a 70,000-square-foot "Applied Learning Center" for the business college. The Columbia campus also is seeking $6.1 million for renovations to an engineering building, $2.8 million to design plans for the music school and fine arts facilities and $1.5 million to help construct a "teaching winery" that would include movable winemaking equipment and walk-in coolers.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said he doesn't believe the state has enough money for all of the projects but could fund some. His preference is to put the money toward buildings that could be completed instead of developed in phases.

Schaefer also is weighing Nixon's request for increased operating budgets.

"When we have a little bit of extra general revenue," he said. "I think that's the appropriate time to look at deferred maintenance, to look at capital issues. ...The problem with expanding the operating budget is once you do it, you're doing it in perpetuity."

Posted in News, Wire on Monday, February 10, 2014 2:00 pm

Rubio proposes higher education overhaul

By MICHAEL J. MISHAK

Possible presidential contender Sen. Marco Rubio called Monday for overhauling the nation's higher education system to close an "opportunity gap" between Americans with and without advanced degrees.
The Florida Republican said the reforms should include state-accredited alternatives to four-year colleges, income-based terms for repaying college loans and new standards for accrediting free Internet courses.

"Those with the right advanced education are making more money than ever. But those who are not are falling farther and farther behind," Rubio said at an education forum at Miami Dade College. "The result is an opportunity gap developing between haves and have-nots, those who have advanced education and those who do not. And if we do not reverse that trend, we will lose the upward mobility that made America exceptional."

Rubio's proposal comes as Republicans seek an alternative to President Barack Obama's agenda to bolster the middle class, some of which touches on the same higher education issues.

The affordability and access plan also is part of the GOP's effort to step past the elite-sounding tone of some of Mitt Romney's statements during his 2012 presidential bid. At the height of that race, footage was released showing Romney suggesting that 47 percent of Americans view themselves as victims who won't take responsibility for themselves.

The price tag for tuition and fees at public four-year colleges is up 27 percent beyond overall inflation over the last five years, according to the latest figures from the College Board. The average annual cost for a full-time student at a four-year public college is now $18,390, including room, board and tuition. Subtract grants and tax benefits, and it drops to $12,620.

More than 70 percent of the national college class of 2012 had loan debt at graduation, and their debt averaged $29,400, according to the most recent figures from the California-based Institute for College Access and Success.

Rubio is touting several private-sector solutions.

At the heart of his proposal are alternatives to a four-year college degree. Free online courses _ evaluated and overseen by an independent accrediting board _would be transferable to traditional schools and eligible for federal aid. Workers could also use their skills to earn certifications or degrees outside traditional institutions by passing new standardized tests.

"I want to add more options to the menu. And the more options we have, the more affordable it will be and the more people we're going to be able to empower," he told the AP in an interview before the conference, presented by National Journal.

Education experts have raised questions about the credibility of free online courses and for-profit colleges.

Rubio, who often notes that he still owed more than $100,000 in student loans when he became a senator in 2011, said college students should be offered cost-benefit analyses comparing how much they can expect to earn in a particular field to how much they will owe after earning a degree in the subject.

The Obama administration is also exploring whether to include salary data in a new ratings system of colleges that it wants to tie to financial aid. Critics in the higher education community say such evaluations are unfair and compromise schools' autonomy.
In addition to federal loans, Rubio called for the creation of "student investment plans." Private investment firms would cover tuition costs that could be repaid later as a fixed percentage of a graduate's income for a set number of years, regardless of whether that amount covers the total debt.

The Republican lawmaker also called for simplifying the federal aid process and making income-based loan repayment mandatory.

Forbes

An English Class Devoted To Jay-Z And Kanye West At The University Of Missouri

In an interview with English Professor Andrew Hoberek at the University of Missouri, we discussed a very unique class that puts Jay-Z and Kanye West at the center of hip-hop history, contemporary art and the American dream. We discussed the origins of the class, academic recognition of hip-hop expression, historical parallels to both artists, and much more.

Last fall, Professor Hoberek taught “Major Authors: Jay-Z and Kanye West”, which looks at the career and work of these performers from three perspectives: (1) Where do they fit within, and how do they transform, the history of hip-hop music? (2) How is what they do similar to and different from what poets do?, and (3) How does their rise to both celebrity and corporate power alter what we understand as the American dream? In addition to listening to music and watching videos, the class reads Jay-Z’s Decoded; histories of and critical works on rap music by Jeff Chang, Adam Bradley, and others; and several studies of English poetic form. After much success the first time around, Hoberek will teach this course again during the Fall 2014 semester.

Hoberek is the author of the book The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work, as well as numerous essays on American writing since the mid-twentieth century.

Rahim Kanani: How did you first become interested in Jay-Z and Kanye West, particularly from the standpoint of being a professor of twentieth-century American literature and culture?

Andrew Hoberek: For the past few years I’ve been writing about and teaching very recent fiction. In my classes on contemporary novels we often face the question of whether the books we’re reading will last and achieve recognition as art. I find this both challenging and invigorating from a pedagogical standpoint: it’s one thing to give students works that are established as art, and try to explain why this is so; another to give them works that may or may not make the grade, and ask them to wrestle actively with what it means to label something
art. When it came time to propose courses for the Fall 2013 semester, it seemed natural to extend this process to a whole contemporary art form that had started out as mass culture but was, in my opinion, coming of age.

**Kanani:** Do you believe we are at the point now where hip-hop culture and vernacular is being recognized from an academic perspective as a form of literary art and expression?

**Hoberek:** It’s starting, but these things take time. Academics are cultural gatekeepers, and so in a case like this our task involves a complicated combination of identifying the winds of change and upholding existing standards. But the history of modern culture is a history of popular entertainments evolving into art. When the novel first came on the scene no one considered it art, a status that was reserved for poetry; similarly, film required a long time, and the unstinting support of an initially small group of dedicated supporters, to achieve academic and critical respectability. Personally, I’m drawn to such art forms—I’ve also been doing work recently on graphic novels—because in achieving the status of art they transform our definitions of what art can be. There’s a great passage in the novelist Colson Whitehead’s 2009 book Sag Harbor in which the protagonist’s friends get angry at him because he tells them, in 1985 when rap was still relatively new, that Afrika Bambaataa and the Soulsonic Force’s pioneering 1982 record “Planet Rock” samples Kraftwerk’s 1977 song “Trans-Europe Express.” As Whitehead recognizes, the art of sampling requires us to rethink our standard understanding of art as solely the product of individual creativity and originality.

**Kanani:** What are some of the themes or ideas you cover in your class, and how do you draw parallels between their expression today and historical works?

**Hoberek:** I have four main things I want to teach students: 1) the history of English poetic form and how it does and does not apply to rap; 2) the emergence of rap as a major new art form; 3) how to perform research into popular culture; and 4) how to become more knowledgeable listeners to rap music. Of these, I think the students are most surprised—at least initially—by the fact that the class functions as a sort of sneaky introduction to the history of English poetry. Rap isn’t poetry, not least because it involves music and often other elements that aren’t words. But we discuss the way poets in English use things like rhyme and meter, and the ways these conventions both do and don’t apply to rap. Then, with the help of Adam Bradley’s great Book of Rhymes, we try to lay out the rules for rap, in order to understand the techniques that artists like Jay-Z and Kanye employ.

**Kanani:** What surprises you the most about these two individuals, and who would you liken them to from the past in terms of their talent, uniqueness, consistency and impact on the world?

**Hoberek:** During the semester in which I first taught the class I was also teaching a very traditional course in modernist fiction, involving authors like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner, and I was continually surprised by the way both classes kept coming back to the subject of artists driven to reject the conventions they had inherited. Both Jay-Z and Kanye frequently invite comparison of their work to other kinds of art, and call for overthrowing hip-hop conventions in ways that invite comparison with early twentieth-century literature and painting and mid-twentieth century jazz. I think both artists are fully aware of this element of
their work. Jay’s song “D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune),” for instance, begins with Jay—who is no singer—performing an intentionally out-of-tune version of the Band Steam’s 1969 song “Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye.” To my ears this sounds a lot like the way modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf produced intentionally difficult poems and fiction to counter writing that they thought had become (like auto-tuned pop vocals) too smooth and pretty. And the video shows Jay performing the song with a small jazz band, harkening back to similar experiments by bebop musicians in the mid-twentieth century.

Kanani: To all those critics—academic and otherwise—who dismiss the notion that Jay-Z and Kanye West should be genuine reference material for teaching students about literature and culture, what do you say to them?

Hoberek: I would say two things. First, there’s a long history of innovative art that challenges conventional standards and creates controversy. When Walt Whitman’s book Leaves of Grass was published in 1855, one reviewer wrote, “Walt Whitman is as unacquainted with art, as a hog is with mathematics”; now, of course, we understand Whitman as one of the creators of modern poetry in English.

Second, one of my goals as a professor of English is to teach students to recognize and think critically about what makes something art. It was very productive in this case, as I’ve suggested, to present them with something that challenges the definition of art (and about which they’re already enthusiastic), and to ask them to think about the social and aesthetic judgments that go into this designation. Students came into the class already critics: people who discuss particular works passionately, and make judgments about them. Working from that point, I wanted to teach them that what we do in English classes isn’t about “reading into” things, or ruining what makes them pleasurable; on the contrary, studying works of art closely and learning about their history can make them even more pleasurable.

Kanani: Finally, what is it about these two individuals that the public may not know, or may not understand?

Hoberek: Those who dismiss rappers as vulgar outsiders miss the way that Jay-Z and Kanye embody the American dream: starting from humble beginnings, both rose by dint of hard work and talent to wealth and success. Jay embraces this role, styling himself as much a CEO as an artist, and he and Beyoncé have become, in a significant way, more fully America’s first couple than their friends the Obamas. Yet he can be ambivalent: his frequently quoted line “I’m not a businessman, I’m a business, man!” seems like a simple boast, but upon closer inspection it might be read as reflecting a concern that rather than running his own enterprise he remains a product. Kanye is more ambivalent still. His first record, The College Dropout, is one of the great twenty-first-century works about the intersections of personal and economic insecurity—think of a song like “All Falls Down”—and his public persona continues despite his success to embrace such insecurity: hence his recent efforts, puzzling to some, to move into fields like fashion and design where his name doesn’t automatically open doors. Along with everything
else they do, these two men tell us volumes about both the potential for and barriers to success in twenty-first-century America.

FAFSA Frenzy gives local families financial aid tips

By Ashley Jost

Monday, February 10, 2014 at 2:00 pm

Sunday's Department of Higher Education FAFSA Frenzy event at the Columbia Area Career Center brought in 27 families that wanted to learn how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Financial Aid to prepare for college.

Most were the families of incoming college freshmen filling out the FAFSA for the first time. Last year, CACC site helped 41 families. Snow caused the dip in numbers this year, Christian Vachaudez, financial aid administrator of CACC, said.

Students must fill out a FAFSA each year to be eligible for grants, loans and scholarships from federal and state governments and most higher-education institutions. At the FAFSA Frenzy events, families get free assistance from financial aid coordinators with the University of Missouri, Columbia College, Stephens College, CACC and Moberly Area Community College.

Parents and students started by watching an educational video about the FAFSA, then went to one of several computer labs to fill out the FAFSA, where 16 volunteers were able to help answer their questions.

At the end, families learn about and apply for a $500 scholarship that all of the students were eligible for by participating in the event. One scholarship will be given out to a student who attended one of the 81 statewide FAFSA Frenzy events.

Danielle Douglas, financial aid coordinator at Columbia College and FAFSA Frenzy volunteer, said most families who were overwhelmed, "but once they sat down and looked at it, they realized it's not nearly as bad as they made it out to be."
Kevin and John Gillis were among the families who took part in Sunday's event. John, a high school senior, said he and his dad, Kevin, had no trouble with the application, and the event was a motivational tool for them to finish the application. John said for priority acknowledgement for scholarships at some schools, the FAFSA has to be filled out by Feb. 15.

The final local event is from 6 to 8 p.m. tomorrow at Hickman High School, 1104 N. Providence Road. Last year, Hickman's event brought in more than 70 families.

Students and parents are encouraged to bring all household 2013 W-2 forms and tax forms, if those forms are ready. If a family hasn't filed their taxes yet, they should bring any statements of interest earned for the year, 1099 forms and other tax forms. FAFSA data can be updated after taxes are filed. Families also should apply for a PIN number at www.pin.ed.gov before attending the event and have their PIN number ready.

There is no solid deadline on filing the FAFSA, but officials suggest it be completed as early as possible. To qualify for the Access Missouri need-based grant program, students must file the FAFSA by April 1.

To see a list of FAFSA Frenzy events, go to www.dhe.mo.gov/ppc/afafsa_completion.php.

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Posted in Education on Monday, February 10, 2014 2:00 pm.

Students learn lab skill through Google Glass demonstration

By Ashley Jost

Monday, February 10, 2014 at 11:00 am

Lea Wood did not want her students to miss out on the important demonstration last week because of the snow day.
Wood is an instructional lab specialist at the University of Missouri School of Nursing. In the last few months, said MU Nursing received a donation that helped them purchase two pairs of Google Glass. You know, the ones that are not on the market yet.

So, to help prevent a total loss of a lab day, Wood filmed herself setting up a sterile field using one of the Google Glass pairs. This means that students got to see the entire demonstration from a first person perspective.

“Technology is my thing,” Wood said. “I’m always looking for ways to engage students and make things more interesting.”

It took Wood the better part of last Tuesday to get the video together. As soon as she heard school was cancelled for Wednesday, their lab day, she got moving.

The video was filmed in one take, using all of the materials that students have available in their homes or in their take-home supply totes. The audio gets a little wonky at times, but you can still hear her voice throughout the video.

“I told them they can watch the video, try it at home and reflect on what parts they excelled at and what they can improve on,” Wood said, adding that the lab class will discuss what they learned in class today.

The students in Wood’s lab are juniors at MU, but first year students at the School of Nursing.

Kelsey Ortmann, one of Wood’s students, said the videos were helpful, especially since they were filmed in the first person perspective.

“When you’re actually looking through her eyes, you’re getting the exact motion of what you’re supposed to be doing,” she said.

Wood said she has gotten such positive feedback from her students that she plans to continue taping her demonstrations.

Wood’s next Google Glass adventure is a two-day simulation event where she will have "patients" (actors) come in and work with students who are learning how to conduct an intimate partner violence screening - a program Wood created.

The “patients” will wear the Google Glass and film the students as they conduct the screening so students can watch and analyze their performance.

Neat, huh?
Drone use highlights questions for journalists

By MICHAEL MELIA

As police responded to a deadly car crash, they noticed an increasingly familiar sight: a remote-controlled aircraft, equipped with a video camera, hovering over the wreckage.

The Federal Aviation Administration has opened an investigation of the drone, which was used by an on-call employee for a Connecticut television station. The FAA is developing new rules as the technology makes drones far more versatile, but for now operators can run afoul of regulations by using them for commercial purposes, including journalism.

The case of the Hartford crash, in which the victim's body was left hanging out of a mangled car, highlights some of the safety, privacy and ethical issues that journalists will wrestle with as interest grows in using drones for newsgathering.
"Here was a dead body still on the scene. We had covered it the best we could," said Lt. Brian Foley, a Hartford police spokesman, who said drones have been appearing more frequently at crime scenes. "You don't want the family to see that."

Hartford officers questioned the man operating the drone on Feb. 1, but did not ask him to take it down, Foley said. The man identified himself as an employee of WFSB-TV but said he was not working for them that day.

The station's general manager, Klarn DePalma, said it constantly evaluates new technology and is eager to see regulations spelled out for drones, but he said the temporary employee in question was not on assignment for them and has never been paid for drone video.

"We don't even own a drone," he said.

The FAA said Monday that it has issued 12 warning letters to drone operators, which can include orders to stop operations. It said in a statement that its investigations are intended to determine whether operators violated FAA safety regulations.

A law passed by Congress two years ago requires the FAA to integrate unmanned aircraft of all sizes into the domestic airspace by late 2015, but it's clear the agency won't meet that deadline. The FAA has been working for more than four years on regulations to permit small drones _ those weighing less than 55 pounds _ to be used for commercial purposes, but has missed deadline after deadline for proposing those regulations.

Last month, the FAA again moved back the date it expects to propose those regulations to November of this year. Even then, it will be just a proposal. It takes months and often years before proposed regulations become final.

The FAA is tackling small drones that are flown under about 400 feet _ below where most manned aircraft fly _ first because they're the easiest. Regulations to permit commercial use of larger drones are even farther behind.

Drones hold appeal for journalists because they would allow new perspectives and access, particularly in areas that are not reachable by helicopter or could pose dangers to people. New models can cost as little as $500. But regulators have to weigh free-speech considerations against concerns for safety and invasion of privacy.

**A small handful of media organizations have received warning letters since 2011, when an iPad newspaper owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. was flagged for using a drone to film tornado damage around the country, according to Matt Waite, a journalism professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Last July, the journalism schools at Nebraska and the University of Missouri-Columbia were ordered to stop flying drones outdoors until they obtain government authorization.**

Waite, who founded the university's Drone Journalism Lab in 2011, said that once permission for commercial drone use is granted, journalists will need to consider psychological distress that a dozen or more drones buzzing overhead could cause people who become targets of media attention. Another issue,
he said, will be the safety risks in deploying devices, each weighing several pounds, with rapidly spinning blades.

"What is a permitted risk? What is a responsible risk? Those two may be two different things," Waite said.

Aerial drones, long associated with the military, increasingly have been adapted for civilian use. They have been deployed widely to document the scale of disasters and, at the Sochi Olympics, they are being used to help broadcast the events.

Waite said film companies also use drones extensively on closed sets, but because the work of journalism is so public, it stands to face more government scrutiny.

"This is why you're going to see journalists getting in more trouble," he said. "As a journalist, what's the point of going to the trouble and getting pictures if you're not going to publish?"