EDITORIAL: UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI STILL DRAGGING ITS FEET ON SEX-ASSAULT POLICY

15 hours ago • By the Editorial Board

University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe, left, listens to questions, Wednesday Jan. 29, 2014 during a news conference about the university’s plans to appoint an outside independent counsel to investigate the handling of an alleged rape of MU swimmer. The former swimmer Sasha Menu Courey committed suicide in 2011 after she allegedly was raped off-campus by as many as three football players in February 2010. (AP Photo/Columbia Daily Tribune, Don Shrubshell)

More than two months after University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe gave an impassioned response to the rape allegations that rocked the flagship campus, the university still lacks an employee policy for reporting suspected sexual violence.

Along with not having a reporting requirement, the university system offers no training to faculty or staff on how to handle possible violations of Title IX, the federal education anti-discrimination law that covers (in addition to women’s sports) sexual harassment or violence. The story was reported last week in the Columbia Missourian by reporter Caroline Bauman.

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights recommended in April 2011 that universities adopt a reporting requirement. Even for a university bureaucracy, three years ought to be enough time to comply.

An ESPN investigation into the alleged sexual assault of former MU swimmer Sasha Menu Courey drew attention to the system’s lack of a formal policy for reporting Title IX violations.
ESPN’s investigation said that Ms. Menu Courey killed herself 16 months after she told campus personnel — including a rape crisis counselor, a campus therapist, a campus nurse and two doctors — that she had been raped off campus by as many as three football players.

The sports network said Mizzou disputed that Ms. Menu Courey also told an athletics department administrator, although she had written in her journal that she had done so.

MU said at the time that it did not pursue criminal charges upon learning of Ms. Menu Courey’s rape allegations in late 2012.

“There needs to be clear guidelines for what we as faculty do when this happens,” Joan Hermsen, chair of the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at Mizzou, told the Missourian last week.

Noel English, the campus Title IX coordinator, said the Columbia campus is finalizing a policy that mandates certain faculty and staff, known as “required reporters,” to inform the university of student complaints alleging sexual violence, harassment or other discrimination prohibited by the federal law.

Ms. English said university leaders are “doing our best to come up with a policy that fulfills the institution’s obligations under Title IX while not deterring individuals from seeking assistance from those they trust.”

She added that the university was “concerned about the possibility that students will feel less inclined to seek help because of the reporting requirement.”

Many universities have navigated that narrow line to come up with reporting policies that reassure students about both their safety and their privacy. It is shameful that the state university system’s crown jewel is still wringing its hands of the matter, three years after being told by the federal government to do something and four years after a young woman alleged she was attacked and then committed suicide.

Mr. Wolfe came to the university system from the business world where presumably this sort of foot-dragging would not occur. He needs to put his business background into play and stop the bureaucratic buck-passing. Missouri students and their families need to be reassured that the culture of the universities does not allow discrimination to be hung up while policy is nitpicked.

GUEST COMMENTARY: Funding public education has always been the American way

Tuesday, March 25, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

BY BRAD DESNOYER

Two of our greatest Founding Fathers, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, were fierce political adversaries. But in the first years of our nation, these rivals — with vastly
different backgrounds and disparate political views — shared common ground. They both believed in the importance of funding public education.

Rather than squabbling, Adams and Jefferson knew that public education was at the heart of democracy.

“The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it,” wrote Adams. “There should not be a district of one mile square, without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves.”

Jefferson, witness to the Revolution, drafter of the Declaration of Independence, and founder of the nation’s first public university, rightfully believed that it was the government and citizenry’s duty to invest tax dollars in public education:

“[T]he tax which will be paid for this purpose [education] is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance.”

More than 200 years later, Missouri currently underfunds education based upon the very funding formula our fiscally conservative Legislature created. And the school year has been bizarre at best: Unaccredited Normandy and Riverview Gardens are busing students to neighboring school districts.

The entire Kansas City School District is unaccredited, and current proposals call for the dissolution of the KCSD so that it may be replaced by private entities.

Gov. Jay Nixon recently proposed increasing state spending for K-12 education, moving us closer to meeting the state’s education funding formula. And yet certain members of the Legislature are resisting. Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, called the budget proposal “bloated” and questioned the need for more spending.

There has always been fear of bloated government. There will always be concerns of over-encroaching authority. Rightfully so. And there is a valid argument that our modern schools have failed at their mission, with high dropout rates and graduates who are barely ready for college.

There is some truth to this: In recent years, American schools have been surpassed by other nations’. But a big reason for this is inequality — the wealthiest students from the
wealthiest school districts still perform well. The poorest students from the poorest school districts — and there are a lot more of them — bring the average way down.

The distress of our underfunded districts does not dismiss our Founding Fathers’ call for public education. Rather it highlights the need for citizens at every level to revitalize public education. This includes parents and lawmakers, teachers and students. It includes taxpayers. And it is in everyone’s self-interest.

As Adams wrote, “[E]ducation of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.” Benjamin Franklin put it more succinctly: “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

Public schools by their nature require tax dollars. Spending money on public schools does not inherently make them bloated, it makes them public. And while money is not the sole solution, funding will benefit our children.

Any time an issue requires tax dollars, the Legislature instinctively screeches, “Money won’t help!” They are right that money alone will not miraculously fix our schools. It is not the magic cure. But necessary public funds will help our students to receive the education they, as American citizens, deserve.

Sadly, lawmakers favor talking points to wisdom. They seek arguments with their supposed rivals, even in matters that great adversaries like Adams and Jefferson would never spar over — not when our children’s future is the collateral damage of their political battles.

So let me end with a few talking points in hopes of reaching wary lawmakers: Funding our public schools is the duty of our state. At the founding of this nation, the Framers of the Constitution believed in publicly educating our children.

Those wise men knew funding public education was an investment in our democracy and in our future. To argue against adequately funding our schools rejects Adams and Jefferson and Franklin. Failing our students in this way is simply un-American.

**Brad Desnoyer is a law professor at the MU School of Law, a former attorney for the Missouri Supreme Court, and a graduate of the Francis Howell district in St. Charles County.**
A press release states that researchers at the University of Missouri have developed a Material Point Method (MPM) for creating and analyzing blast scenarios. The method, which was created more than 20 years ago, was also used in creating some of the animation for Disney’s most recent Oscar-winning film, Frozen.

A five-year CAREER grant from the National Science Foundation totaling $400,000 dollars has allowed researchers to continue advancing this technology. The initial study on the MPM has been cited more than 400 times and many global research teams have applied the method, said Zhen Chen in the press release. Chen is a C.W. LaPierre Professor of civil and environmental engineering at the College of Engineering at MU.

The MPM is an example of simulation-based engineering science (SBES). These kinds of programs allow researchers to obtain useful information about the effects of fires, explosions, and other real world situations. It gives them an idea of materials and structural designs that are best equipped to handle such impacts. The findings can be validated through laboratory testing before they are employed in full-scale construction.

Disney utilized the Material Point Method to simulate snowball drops, smashes, and effects of people walking through snow.

Chen points out that SBES is considered an indispensable tool for finding solutions for scientific and technological challenges. He hopes that the crossover use of SBES in animation will attract children and inspire them to become the next generation of science, technology, engineering and mathematics professionals.
Appellate court to hear cases at MU

Monday, March 24, 2014 at 2:00 pm

A three-judge panel from the Missouri Court of Appeals Western District is coming to the University of Missouri School of Law on April 3 to hear oral arguments on four cases.

Judges Thomas Newton, Mark Pfeiffer and Cynthia Martin will begin the hearings at 9:30 a.m.

The appellate court, which has jurisdiction in 45 counties that include all of northwestern and most of Mid-Missouri, is based in Kansas City but on occasion will hear cases elsewhere and has previously visited the MU law school, according to a news release.

The court also has heard cases in Fulton, Independence, Jefferson City, Kirksville, Macon, Marshall, St. Joseph, Tuscumbia and Warrensburg, among other cities across its jurisdiction.

The four cases include one out of Boone County in which a couple who were injured in a 2008 car accident want a $3 million total settlement from an insurance company reinstated.

The three other cases are a child custody battle, a dispute between two trucking companies and a man fighting the state to have his conviction for being a persistent driving while revoked offender overturned.
“To the Trib Talk caller who called in saying it was unbelievable that Gary Pinkel gets a raise and is making $3.1 million and that she and her husband worked and taught at Mizzou for 20 years and he’s making 31 times their annual combined salary and when would the university do something about inequity. Inequity about what? He’s being paid by the athletic department, which has nothing to do with the University of Missouri, and he brings in hundreds of thousands of people every year who come and spend millions of dollars for our economy. He’s watched by the media all the time, every little thing he does, and he does a good job and has a great team. He’s good for the $3.1 million.”

“Well, now in today’s Trib Talk somebody is comparing the University of Missouri’s student housing and building with the salary of the football coach making $3.1 million a year. … I know people know, but these people calling in need to learn that the athletic department runs its own budget, generates its own money and has nothing to do with the university’s schools or housing budget. I would like for people to understand that and quit bashing Gary Pinkel’s salary because he deserves it. He generates a lot of money for our community. He has built our football team up, giving it a good name around the country. It’s ridiculous. It’s like an apples-and-oranges comparison.”

“I’m calling about the person who thinks MU should have never joined the SEC. He says the small crowds at Mizzou Arena and at basketball games on the road are an indicator of what the MU basketball team is going to be in the future. I think the Mizzou Arena is a terrible arena anyway. I don’t like going there. … Plus, the economy is bad, so who’s going to spend money to go places when there’s no money to spend?”