MU News Bureau

Daily Clips Packet

May 15, 2014
Report details engineers’ study of properties on MU campus

By Ashley Jost

Wednesday, May 14, 2014 at 2:00 pm

Structural engineers have wrapped up a report detailing the inspection of all University of Missouri buildings on campus and found just under 20 sites had immediate concerns, which were immediately addressed by the university.

After a partial walkway collapse at University Village apartments in February, University of Missouri Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin brought in structural engineers to inspect all campus facilities.

All of the issues identified by the engineers were addressed by MU as they were found, MU spokesman Christian Basi said. The report shows every issue has been addressed at least temporarily, and several have been permanently addressed.

Among the issues found was a deteriorated part of the roof as well as "substandard" walkways, both in the MU Power Plant. Access is closed to the areas while repairs are in progress, according to the report. Campus Facilities staff members are working on a permanent solution.

Ten of the 18 concerning sites were decks at Tara Apartments, which were closed off to residents March 20.

The decision to seal off the Tara Apartment decks came after a suggestion from the engineering firm Trabue, Hansen & Hinshaw Inc., or THH, Basi said in March.

For many of the Tara-related items on the report, engineers cite deterioration to the cantilevered decks.

Basi said there is no timeline for when the next action could be taken on the decks. Engineers and campus staff are considering the options, which Basi said might mean increasing support for
the decks, modifying them or removing them altogether. He said the options aren't limited to those three ideas.

THH, Structural Engineering Associates, Alper Audi Inc. and EDM Inc. are the companies that have signed off on the initial report.

Basi said the current plan is to have outside consultants come in every five years to evaluate buildings, looking at structural issues and functionality. The university previously had consultants come in for inspections, but the number of years between inspections is unclear.

John Smith, an engineer with THH, said the university's response to the issues has been "very proactive."

Engineers also evaluated MU-owned buildings off campus, but that report is not yet available. Smith said of the issues that were found, many included old farm properties, some that aren't used anymore. The next "round" of inspections includes follow up and discussions with the university about maintenance, Smith said.

Lawmaker unhappy with changes made to bond bill

By Rudi Keller

Wednesday, May 14, 2014 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY — The sponsor of a bill authorizing new debt for construction said Tuesday he wasn't pleased that the House cut his proposal by $450 million and dedicated the remaining money to new buildings rather than repairing existing ones.

Sen. Mike Parson, R-Bolivar, sent the House a bill allowing up to $600 million in bonds, issued by the Board of Public Buildings, to fund a list of 303 deferred maintenance projects named in a Senate resolution. It returned allowing only $150 million in new debt, enough to finance $141.5 million in new construction included in a spending bill passed last week.
The projects funded with bonds include two Columbia projects, $38.5 million for Lafferre Hall at the University of Missouri and $25 million for a new research center and museum for the State Historical Society of Missouri. It also includes $40 million for a life sciences building for Missouri State University in Springfield, $19 million to support the Cortex project in St. Louis and $19 million for a new medical school building at the University of Missouri Kansas City.

"It is a little hard for me to go around and say, hey, you are going to build new buildings, new construction when we can't maintain what we've got," Parson said.

The biggest project on Parson's list, $200 million to replace the obsolete building housing Fulton State Hospital, is funded in a separate spending bill. That still leaves a gap of $250 million between the amount Parson wanted and the amount his bill, as passed 123-20 yesterday in the House, allows.

Parson said he's not ready to kill his bill, which also would kill the building projects, but he is disappointed that only the borrowing remains of his original idea.

"I will meet with House leaders and discuss it with them to see if there is a solution at the end of the day, what I can get out of the Senate and what I can get completed," Parson said.

If Parson wants the bill to authorize more debt, that is an easy issue, said state Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia. Securing an agreement to use the extra authority next year to finance repairs is a separate issue, he said.

"We cut it down primarily because we thought that would be more palatable in the Senate," Kelly said.

The bill would grant the new bond authority to the Board of Public Buildings and add the Senate president pro tem and speaker of the House as voting members. The board currently is the governor, the lieutenant governor and the attorney general, with the speaker and president pro tem as nonvoting members.

The key to overcoming Parson's reluctance will be the political pull exerted for the Springfield and St. Louis projects, Kelly said. "Those are the two things that will change the dynamic," he said.
MU graduation speakers set

Ceremonies are this weekend.

By Ashley Jost

Wednesday, May 14, 2014 at 2:00 pm

Among the people set to speak during University of Missouri graduation ceremonies this weekend are a co-founder of mobile payment company Square, a White House correspondent and two members of Congress.

From Friday through Sunday, 5,300 students will receive 5,452 degrees, with some students earning more than one degree. About 270 of the students are receiving their degrees after finishing an online program.

This year's honorary degree recipient is Jim Held, owner and founder of Stone Hill Winery in Hermann. Held will receive his degree during the honors commencement ceremony at 8:30 a.m. Saturday at Mizzou Arena, 1 Champions Drive.

"We're very pleased to present an honorary degree to Jim Held at this year's honors convocation," MU spokesman Christian Basi said in an email. "Not only has Mr. Held helped revive the wine industry in Missouri, but he has become a partner with the university as we educate future wine experts. His work at Stone Hill, along with his willingness to help train MU students, demonstrates his dedication to the future of Missouri. We're very appreciative of his support."

The recipients of honorary degrees are approved by the Board of Curators after they are nominated by a campus committee.

Also during the honorary degree ceremony, the co-founder of Square will speak to graduates. Jim McKelvey, a St. Louis native and alumnus of Washington University in St. Louis, started Square in 2008 along with Jack Dorsey, another St. Louis native who is most well-known as the co-creator of Twitter.
The MU School of Journalism has another one of the more well-known speakers this year with Angela Greiling Keane, White House correspondent for Bloomberg News and MU alumna. Last year, Keane served as the president of the National Press Club, a historic organization in Washington, D.C., that focuses on the promotion of free speech. The journalism school's commencement is at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Mizzou Arena.

Two members of Congress also will speak during a few of the weekend's events. U.S. Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Mo., will speak to graduates at the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources ceremony at 10 a.m. Sunday at the Hearnes Center. MU alumnus and U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., is set to address the College of Engineering commencement at 1 p.m. Saturday at the Hearnes Center. Heinrich serves on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee, among others.

MU and the Missouri Department of Transportation are encouraging incoming travelers to avoid certain areas ahead of commencement weekend to avoid traffic delays caused by construction.

Visitors might experience delays traveling north on Highway 63 between the Grindstone Parkway and Stadium Boulevard exits as northbound traffic will be limited to one lane, a news release said. MoDOT officials encourage drivers to take the AC/Grindstone exit instead of Stadium to get to campus.

For a full list of commencement events and speakers, visit commencement.missouri.edu.

Uncertain futures bring anxiety, excitement to MU graduates

Thursday, May 15, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CDT; updated 6:32 a.m. CDT, Thursday, May 15, 2014
BY MISSOURIAN STAFF

COLUMBIA — **Peyton Higgins, who is graduating from MU on Saturday, has been offered a job as a respiratory therapist at a Kansas City hospital.** But first, he has to pass the National Board exams.

**Leah Sandler, graduating with a master's degree in plant sciences,** is anxious about leaving her family and friends to head to Liberia for a year to teach and help farmers find solutions to their problems.
Rob King, graduating with a bachelor's degree in information technology, isn't sure where his freelance work as a mobile app designer will come from, and he's worried about paying off student loans.

Ben Simon, graduating with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, wonders how he'll fill his hours after he gets off work at Monsanto's headquarters in St. Louis.

Up until this point, things have been fairly structured for the more than 5,300 students participating in commencement ceremonies this weekend. A good 16 or more years of their lives have been focused on investing in their human capital — studying at one educational institution or another, usually with the end goal of finding a career and a job.

Graduating senior Phillip Simpkins said he didn't have a choice about going to college.

"It wasn't like it was anything that was discussed," he said. "I was told as soon as I was a junior in high school, 'Oh, by the way, you're going to college.'"

Now, though, his destination isn't so certain and gray haze clouds his future.

"If I'm sitting in class and I'm bored, all I can think about is what lies ahead for me," Simpkins said. "A lot of people are real nervous because they don't know where their lives are headed. I know what I want to do, and I know the different avenues I'm going to use to possibly make my dreams come true, so that's all I got."

In December 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, the unemployment rate for 20 to 29-year-olds who earned a bachelor’s degree in May 2011 was 13.5 percent. The unemployment rate for those who earned an advanced degree that same year was 8.6 percent. Women who earned a bachelor’s degree in May 2011 had a
slightly lower unemployment rate than that year’s male graduates.

**First steps**
As a communications and English major and a host of KCOU’s "Damn Good Jams" at 10 p.m. every Thursday, Simpkins wants to leave his mark on the world through radio.

On "Damn Good Jams," he said, he tries to get listeners to drop their preconceptions about hip-hop and understand how he sees it, as a means of expression.

Off the air, Simpkins reaches out to the community by participating in mentorship programs in Columbia schools and talking to high school students, some of whom he has had as guests on his show.

"I've seen some of the things that go on in Columbia in terms of some of the areas people consider impoverished," Simpkins said. "They just really need someone to like, encourage them and spawn their interest and creativity instead of doing stuff ... that can get them locked up. I feel that if I could pretty much break in here, I could implement programs that will keep those kids on the right path."

Simpkins dreams of taking the community-centered program worldwide and having a nationally syndicated show like on-air talents Tom Joyner and Rickey Smiley, whose shows he listened to back home on Chicago's south side.

But with no job lined up, these first few steps after graduation are uncertain. He is considering two job offer, though.

"It does make you a little nervous because the real world is waiting outside those doors as soon as I'm done," he said. "But at the same time, that fear is what gives me confidence. ... As much as I'm sitting here on pins and needles and trying to keep my cool, I'm actually very giddy to see what life has in store for me."

Simpkins said he finds confidence through his religious faith and by being a rock for his girlfriend and an example for his little brothers.

"There were a lot of times, especially growing up where I grew up, where it just — I guess I just wasn't supposed to make it this far," he said. "And to think I actually got here, I'm like, if I could do this, everything else after the fact will be doable."

"I'm just going to tell my story, and the rest is going to be beautiful, for real."
Collective worrying
Regardless of what they will do or whether their plan is more or less certain, everyone seems to be worrying. **Connor Wangler, graduating with a bachelor's degree in international studies and geography**, bemoans this collective worrying.

"I think it's bad," he said. "It was a few weeks ago that I finally had everything done and I was like, 'All right, I'm good,' and all my other friends were worrying about health plans and 401(k)s. And I was like, 'Maybe I need to worry about more things.'"

Wangler is among those extending his formal education by pursuing a master's degree in public and international affairs in security and intelligence studies, so his worries are different.

"I think the end of your senior year is marked by just always worrying about something," he said. "It's a big transition in life from school to a career, but it's how you approach that transition that's kind of different."

'Life happens'
**Keisha Greene, a health sciences graduate who has been accepted into MU's nursing program**, admits she doesn't handle the uncertainty well. She hates not
knowing what will happen, as her plans for graduate school are contingent on whether she passes her pharmacology course.

"I plan my life out — like, every step," Greene said. "I have friends who don't know what they want to do when they graduate — that would freak me out. I have to have some idea of where I'm going. I couldn't not."

Greene said in that sense, she takes after father, who always told her she needed to have a plan. Her mother and little brother, on the other hand, are more carefree. They all bump heads as a result, she said, but they're the reason she wants to be successful.

"I feel like I've been motivated because I want to do well for other people, not necessarily always for myself," Greene said. "I feel like I'm kind of living for my little brother, doing things he won't get to do because of his mental disability. ... I want to break stereotypes of being a black female in college ... not only for my brother, but also for me and the people that don't have the same opportunity."

Until she finds out her pharmacology grade, Greene is trying to keep these motivating factors in mind so she won't freak out. She said she's learning to adopt her mother and brother's "life happens" philosophy.

"It's hard to think like that," she said. "Once I'm thrown into the real world, I feel like the only option I have is to have that mentality. Because if not, I'm going to basically be miserable when life hits me, so I'm trying to work on that now."

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**Percentage of students graduating with debt**

- National average: $29,400
- Missouri's average: $23,030

Source: THE PROJECT ON STUDENT DEBT
Forward movements
Greene said her older friends who have gone through the transition out of undergraduate schooling share this "life happens" outlook.

**Chima Nwora, who studied biology as an undergraduate at MU and is graduating with a master's degree in public health**, said he has always thought like that. When he reflects on his transition from undergraduate to graduate, though, he understands the worrying.

"It is kind of crazy to think about," Nwora said. "You go through high school, college, and then you are expected once you leave college to have enough of an education to go do something with your life. You have a life now that you must live. ... When you think about that, it is kind of daunting."

Nwora said he can't have a worry-filled mindset. His path to medical school is still unclear, but he finds solace in moving toward his end goals.

"Complaining isn't conducive to figuring it out," Nwora said. "The world is an uncertain place, and there are legitimate worries you should have. But if you want to become something outside of college, you'll figure it out as long as you take the necessary steps to get there."

"If that's called worrying, thinking about the future, however you want to describe that thought, then do that," he said. "But you'll cross that bridge when you get to that bridge. You'll figure it out."

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**Traffic delays expected on U.S. 63 during MU's graduation weekend**
Wednesday, May 14, 2014 | 4:11 p.m. CDT; updated 8:58 p.m. CDT, Wednesday, May 14, 2014
BY CHRISTA CORRIGAN

COLUMBIA — **Ongoing bridge repair maintenance on U.S. 63 could cause traffic delays during MU's commencement weekend.**
Northbound traffic on U.S. 63 between the Grindstone Parkway and Stadium Boulevard exits will continue to be narrowed to one lane, according to information about the project on the Missouri Department of Transportation website.

MoDOT officials advise visitors traveling north on U.S. 63 to Columbia to take the Grindstone exit to get to MU’s campus, or allow extra travel time, according to an MU news release.

The MoDOT traveler information map will be updated with information on traffic delays over the weekend, and visitors can use the MU campus map to plan alternate routes to campus.

Resurfacing and repair work on the bridge over Grindstone Creek began May 1, and work on the northbound bridge over Stadium Boulevard began May 5, according to a MoDOT news release. The lane will reopen May 23 when road maintenance on both bridges is completed, according to MoDOT's website.

The repairs are part of a rehabilitation project on several bridges in mid-Missouri. The repairs began in April, and work on all of the bridges is expected to be completed by November.

May 15, 2014

Ads Urge Students to Think Twice About Colleges With a ‘Rape Problem’

By Robin Wilson

NO MU MENTION
At a gathering last month for students admitted to Dartmouth College’s Class of 2018, a father asked Lorelei Yang, a junior there, whether the campus was a dangerous place for women. He’d heard about sexual assaults at Dartmouth, says Ms. Yang, and wondered if the campus’s problems were unique.

Dartmouth is the primary target in a hard-hitting new advertising campaign by the national gender-equality group UltraViolet. "Accepted to Dartmouth?" reads one of the ads that appeared last month on Facebook and other websites, drawing more than 200,000 views. "You should know about its rape problem."

The campaign comes as colleges are under increasing pressure from students and the federal government to improve their response to reports of sexual assault. In personal accounts and in complaints filed with the U.S. Department of Education, students and alumni have alleged that their institutions brushed off or mishandled their reports. And dozens of investigations have ensued, along with much media attention and strong assurances from college presidents that they are committed to this important issue.

This month UltraViolet dialed up the intensity, expanding its ad campaign to Occidental College; American, Brandeis, Harvard, and Florida State Universities; and the Universities of California at Berkeley and of Michigan at Ann Arbor. With the exception of American and Brandeis, the targeted institutions are among 55 colleges and universities now under federal investigation for possible violations of the gender-equity law known as Title IX, which requires campus officials to investigate and resolve reports of sexual harassment and assault whether or not the police are involved.

UltraViolet’s online ad campaign is an in-your-face attempt to get prospective students and campus officials to recognize the severity of sexual assault, says Karin Roland, the group’s organizing director. "The goal is to make sure that students considering these schools know what they’re getting into," she says. "And it’s to make sure administrators know they can’t hide from this problem. Universities can either take student safety seriously, or we’ll bring the grass-roots pressure to push them over the edge to do it."
Ms. Yang, a government major and member of a campus group at Dartmouth that educates students about sexual misconduct, believes the ad campaign is more about fear-mongering than about fixing the problem. In response to the concerned father at the Class of 2018 gathering, she recalls saying that while Dartmouth does have a sexual-assault problem, it isn’t alone. "I said, ‘It’s a problem at every university campus.’"

Dartmouth, meanwhile, created its own ad campaign last month. Its ads refer people to a "sexual-assault awareness resource page," which says the university is poised to institute tough new sanctions for students found responsible for rape, to open a resource center for victims, and to host a national conference in July.

"We think we’re on the leading edge of where higher ed is right now in terms of ways to prevent sexual assault and punish students," says Justin Anderson, a Dartmouth spokesman. "UltraViolet is ignoring the actions Dartmouth is taking."

‘If Bad PR Is What It Takes …’

UltraViolet prefers to be pointed. Like other staff members there, Ms. Roland used to work for MoveOn.org, a nonprofit group that backs Democratic politicians and is known for its early use of email and online communication to spread information and raise money.

UltraViolet, which also speaks out on abortion, pay equity, birth control, and gender discrimination, took aim at Dartmouth and the seven other campuses, Ms. Roland says, either because they were the site of high-profile sexual-assault cases or because students there were pushing administrators to step up their response to sexual assault.

At Dartmouth this year, a first-year student came forward and said that her name had appeared in an online "rape guide," in which a male classmate gave tips on how to persuade her to perform oral sex. The student said she was later assaulted at a fraternity party. In April of last year, the college canceled classes for a day of dialogue after students protested at an event for prospective students, decrying incidents of sexual assault, racism, and homophobia on the campus. And last May, Dartmouth students filed a federal complaint over the college’s alleged mishandling of sexual-misconduct cases.
"Dartmouth has one of the most rampant sexual-assault problems in the country," says Ms. Roland. And UltraViolet wants to get that message out. "If bad PR is what it takes to get these schools to act," she says, "we’ll bring them bad PR."

Florida State is part of the ad campaign, says Ms. Roland, because in 2012 an undergraduate woman accused the university’s high-profile quarterback, Jameis Winston, of rape. Critics have said university officials did nothing to deal with the allegation. A local prosecutor, meanwhile, said he lacked evidence to charge Mr. Winston.

Florida State can’t comment on the case, a university spokeswoman says. But "the university agrees with UltraViolet," she adds, "on the importance of shining a light on the issue of sexual assault."

‘What’s the End Goal?’
It’s unclear what effect the UltraViolet campaign may have. Spring is when admitted students decide where to enroll, but many factors influence their college choices.

During a program for prospective students this year at Dartmouth, students and parents asked questions about sexual assault, Mr. Anderson says. The university’s applications dropped 14 percent this year over last year, to 19,235, a decline officials there are studying. But at the same time, its yield, or the proportion of admitted students who enroll, hit an all-time high of 54.5 percent. "For the first time in seven years," says Mr. Anderson, "we won’t have to go to our wait list."

Susan Struble, a 1993 Dartmouth graduate, applauds the UltraViolet campaign and any additional attention and resources the college may commit to the issue. Two years ago she started a group of faculty members, students, and alumni called DartmouthChange.org to persuade the university to pay more attention to sexual violence. "It was bad when I was on campus," she says, "and it’s bad now." Ms. Struble was sexually assaulted by a male undergraduate when she was a prospective student visiting Dartmouth, she says, and then again after she enrolled. She never filed a report.
To put more pressure on campuses and further raise awareness, UltraViolet has also asked Princeton Review Inc. to survey students about sexual assault on their campuses and include that information in its college rankings. But while the company added a page on its website last month devoted to student safety, it does not plan to ask students to rank campuses specifically on sexual assault, says Robert Franek, senior vice president there.

"The creation of a student-opinion ranking based on sexual assault," he says, "is not the ranking list we can create at the Princeton Review." Any information it provides about sexual assault, he believes, should be based on quantitative data, not students’ opinions.

Alison Kiss, executive director of the Clery Center for Security on Campus, thinks UltraViolet’s "scare tactics" may be counterproductive. The Clery Center, a nonprofit group created to lobby for consumer information on campus crime, continues to monitor and advocate for student safety.

"What’s the end goal?" Ms. Kiss asks about the ad campaign. "It sounds like it is to shame the institution," she says. "How is that improving the community or the culture for students there now? I don’t think it takes an evidence-based approach to eradicate sexual violence on campus."

**Sexual Assault Vigilantes**

May 15, 2014

BY Cory Weinberg

NO MENTION
Students who walked into women’s bathroom stalls at Columbia University this week could see the frustration about how colleges judge and punish accused rapists scrawled on walls and fliers.

 Whoever listed the four male student names under the heading “rapists on campus” – written on bathroom walls and fliers tucked on top of toilet paper dispensers – mounted a brief awareness campaign that seemed to combine aspirations of strengthening public safety with inflicting public shame. Twenty-three students at Columbia and Barnard College have already filed a federal complaint accusing the university of running flawed sexual assault hearings and letting alleged perpetrators off the hook.

Emma Sulkowicz, a junior and one of the federal complainants, said “everyone’s talking about” the incident at Columbia, which was first reported by the student-run Columbia Lion blog. Sulkowicz said while the act may strike some as extreme, it will help protect women during a time when several of her peers believe their rapists have been allowed back on campus.

The male student who allegedly attacked her and other students was among the four names listed. Sulkowicz said a university panel dismissed her accusation after a hearing and urged her to keep quiet about the man’s name. She said she filed a formal police report against her attacker this week.

“I watched one of these people hit on another woman and I wasn’t able to say anything because of the confidentiality restrictions the school put on me,” she said. “But now I can feel a little bit safer knowing that there will be a little more awareness. Otherwise what are we supposed to do? I feel like the school has backed us into a corner. Whoever did this is willing to take risks.”

Sulkowicz said she was not one of those who organized the public campaign.

The names were scrubbed off the bathroom wall of Hamilton Hall, and the fliers identified three undergraduate male as being found “responsible” by the university for rape. Bwog, a news website run by Columbia students, announced Tuesday that it dismissed one its reporters this week after he was accused of rape in an anonymous tip.

A Columbia spokesman declined to comment on its handling of the cases “to avoid chilling complainants from coming forward and to respect all parties involved.” He said the college does not impose confidentiality agreements on students, and that the college’s public safety office started investigating the “graffiti” incident.

Columbia is among the 55 colleges under investigation by the Department of Education for their responses to sexual violence cases.

Christopher Mallios – a lawyer adviser at AEquitas, an organization that provides support for sexual assault prosecutors – said that distrust of campus judicial systems seemed to boil over in this case. “These schools are really being called out for how they’re handling these cases. There’s a lot of frustration all over the country because sexual assault is so prevalent. This may be some way of people addressing that frustration,” Mallios said.
The tactic isn’t new. A College of William and Mary student hung posters in a main campus building in 2002 detailing how her attacker raped her after he was found guilty by the college but eligible to re-enroll. Students at American University and Portland State University have taken to Twitter and Facebook to call out their alleged rapists.

A list of about 30 students accused of rape appeared on bathroom walls at Brown University in 1990, garnering national outrage.

But the new frustration also stems from the struggles colleges face in adjudicating these cases – and ensuring fair treatment for both the accused and the accuser. The Department of Education and the White House have recently issued guidance and research to help colleges improve their practices.

Brett Sokolow, president of the NCHERM Group, a law firm that handles campus sexual assault cases for students and colleges, said colleges have become too prone to pressuring students to enter into confidentiality agreements between the two sides, even though doing so is a violation of Title IX. But, he said, if the rape accusation listed on the bathroom walls includes students found not guilty by Columbia, the writer is “vulnerable” to defamation.

“This is one of those tough cases where there’s a difference between what a victim knows happens to them and what a college can prove,” he said. “There’s dissatisfaction where there may have been an assault, but evidence isn’t there so the victim feels like the college hasn’t sided with them.”

Some colleges have also had to fight off reputations for being too favorable to accusers. In 2011, George Washington University settled a case in which a former student accused the college of unfairly convicting him of sexual assault. The same year, a jury found the University of the South negligent in a case that convicted a student of sexual assault, saying the university did not follow its own published procedures.

Currently, colleges are facing intense pressure from politicians who have been moved by stories of survivors of sexual assault.

But is the it ethical to take those concerns to bathroom walls? Richard Dean, an associate professor of philosophy at California State Los Angeles who has written on the shunning of sexual harassers, said sexual assault survivors may have valid ethical reasons to take the situation into their own hands.

“There are good reasons to have libel laws, but on the other hand, if somebody knows from individual experience that a person is guilty of sexual assault – especially serial sexual assault and seems to be getting away with it – from the standpoint of the individual it seems justified for practical reasons to make it public,” he said. “It’s a case where there’s real conflicting moral considerations from the general and some individual standpoints.”
Wealth gap shows in latest NCAA academic numbers

NO MU MENTION

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The money gap at Division I colleges is continuing to show up on the playing fields and in the classrooms.

Thirty-six teams will be banned from the 2014-15 postseason because of sub-par scores on the newest Academic Progress Rate, which was released Wednesday. Not one of them comes from a power conference. Of the 17 football and men's basketball teams, eight are from historically black schools. Alabama State and Florida A&M made the list in both sports.

Even the NCAA recognizes the disparity.

"While the low-resource institutions are overrepresented among the population (postseason bans) we're talking about today, they've made improvement, they've made significant improvement as a group," said Walter Harrison, chairman of the NCAA's committee on academic performance. "They're just starting at a lower spot. We're trying to help them with some advice and some financing."

The NCAA has awarded approximately $4.3 million over the last three years to low-resource schools, defined as those ranking in the bottom 15 percent in funding. The money is to be used for extra tutoring or other academic resources for student-athletes.

Historically black colleges and low-resource institutions have seen a 15-point improvement in one-year APR scores over the past three years, from 947 to 962, and their four-year average has jumped 23 points, from 930 to 953, in the last three annual reports.

Despite the improvement, the hardest hit league was the Southwestern Athletic Conference.

Five of the league's 10 football teams could be banned from the postseason. Alabama State, Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Mississippi Valley State and Prairie View A&M all made the NCAA list. All of Southern University's athletic teams have been ineligible for postseason play since Dec. 2 because of questions about the school's APR data. NCAA spokeswoman Michelle Hosick said
Southern was not included on the banned list because the school's teams could still regain their eligibility, pending a review.

"Obviously, it's a tough situation. If I knew the answer, we wouldn't be standing where we are right now," Alabama State interim athletic director Melvin Hines said. "But I do believe the NCAA has recognized the problem with some of the lower resource schools and is addressing the problem with these grants. It can really help kick-start a program."

Hines said Alabama State applied for money from the NCAA last year but was not selected.

The APR is billed as a real-time measurement of academic success. Each player on a team receives one point each semester if they remain academically eligible and another point each semester if they are still enrolled in school. The NCAA says a 930 score correlates to a 50 percent graduation rate. A perfect score is 1,000.

When broken down, the five power conferences — the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and SEC — have outperformed all other Division I leagues by at least four points in every one-year measurement since 2007-08. And teams in those five leagues have cut the percentage of teams falling below the 930 cutline that trigger penalties from 6 percent to 3 percent over the last two years. The percentage of teams in all other conferences, meanwhile, stands at 8 percent. Two years ago, the non-power conferences schools had 11 percent of teams below 930.

And while 9 percent of FBS teams haven't hit 930, 16 percent of FCS teams are below the mark.

That means even more teams from smaller conferences could be in jeopardy of postseason bans when next year's numbers are released.

"We've seen APR scores of HBCUs and low-resource schools improving, so we feel good about that," NCAA President Mark Emmert said. "But you never feel good about restricting postseason play."

While acknowledging money disparities as well as the difference in school goals, Emmert pointed out that the UConn men's basketball team proved all teams are capable of making the grade. Two years ago, UConn was banned because of poor APR scores. This year, the Huskies had a perfect score and won the national championship.

"I think they were the only BCS basketball team to miss that mark the first time out," Emmert said. "But I think when everybody recognizes what the real task is (academics), they can buckle down and they can get it done."

Overall four-year APR scores, which cover the years 2009-10 through 2012-13, went up 2 points to 976. The four most-watched college sports — baseball, football, and men's and women's basketball — all showed improvement over last year's four-year average. Men's basketball made the biggest jump, from 952 to 957.

One final concern — transfers. The report the percentage of college basketball players moving from one Division I school to another has increased significantly each of the past four years. It's
gone from 10 percent in 2009-10 to 10.6 percent in 2010-11 to 11.9 percent in 2011-12 and is now 13.1 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage of college football players changing four-year schools was just 3.7 percent in 2012-13.

Philadelphians have strong opinions about poverty

PHILADELPHIANS have strong opinions about the issues facing Philadelphia as well as poverty's causes and solutions.

With support from Temple University's Center for Public Interest Journalism, we commissioned a citywide survey from the Insight and Survey Center, a survey-research unit associated with the School of Journalism of the University of Missouri-Columbia and the Reynolds Journalism Institute. Nearly 350 randomly selected people from across the city were phoned. The results of this survey demonstrate that an economically, racially and educationally diverse cross-section of Philadelphians see poverty as one of the most important issues that the city must address to move forward. More than 70 percent of respondents rated the related issues of crime, poverty and the public schools as "very important" for Philadelphia.

The surveyed Philadelphians see the role of government and society as key causes of and solutions for poverty. More than 50 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that a lack of well-paying jobs and a failure of society to provide quality schools are the most important causes of poverty. Nearly 70 percent strongly agreed that a solution to poverty is increasing the minimum wage, while nearly 60 percent strongly agreed that a solution is to increase the number of government-sponsored job-training programs.

Philadelphians don't just have opinions about poverty; they talk about the issue. More than 70 percent of survey respondents reported discussing poverty issues with someone in the past two months.
STEM Degrees In Hand, International Students Face Uncertain Future

BY TIM LLOYD

NO MENTION

Yinzi Liu sat in the café at Washington University’s Medical School and nervously fiddled with the sleeve on her coffee cup.

The 28-year old will graduate tomorrow with a doctorate in developmental, regenerative and stem cell biology. While earning her degree she spent countless hours glued to a microscope, peering into zebrafish embryos for clues that could one day lead to the early detection of human birth defects.

By most accounts she should be brimming with excitement. Instead she’s loaded with anxiety.

“The clock is ticking,” Liu said.

Like many international students graduating from area universities with science degrees, earning a diploma will be followed by a series of hurdles if they want to live and work in America. Almost a year after a sweeping bipartisan immigration reform package cleared the U.S. Senate and later stalled in the House, plans are being drawn to help keep them in St. Louis.

“St. Louis is definitely one of my top options,” Liu said. “I really want to stay.”

With that in mind, Liu will enter into something called Optional Practical Training (OPT), which allows all international students to stay in the country for 12 months to pursue employment training, which can include an unpaid internship.

“I realize that St. Louis is really promising in terms of this entire bio-tech and bio-science sector,” Liu said. “And I really want to be a part of it, to make this technology blooming happen.”

Because Liu will have a degree in a STEM field – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – she could receive a 17 month extension. During that time she can go no more than 120 days without an internship, for students without STEM degrees that allowance is reduced to 90 days.

But if she doesn’t find an employer who wants to sponsor her visa, she’s headed back to China.
That brings up a string of practical worries, not the least of which is whether she should sign another lease on that apartment she’s come to love in the Central West End.

So to get a jumpstart on an American career, Liu along with other Washington University students joined the nonprofit Biotechnology and Life Science Advising Group (BALSA). It functions like a consulting agency and that’s put Liu in touch with movers and shakers in the region’s burgeoning biotech startup scene.

Even though she’s been rubbing shoulders with upstarts looking to reimagine entrepreneurship in the region, Liu said finding one with the resources and legal backing to sponsor her work visa seems out of reach.

“To be honest I never initiated that conversation with any of the startup companies I interacted with,” Liu said. “They know and I know, clearly, it’s not going to happen.”

Despite the long odds and concerns, Liu just finished working on a marketing campaign promoting the region as the ideal place for biotech companies to put down roots.

Donn Rubin heads BioSTL, a nonprofit that advocates for bioscience in St. Louis. He said hanging on to international students like Liu is about more than bolstering the region’s skilled workforce.

“It’s keeping the ideas,” Rubin said. “Keeping the intellectual capital, the intellectual property and the inventions. We want the ideas that can be the basis of successful companies to stay here, as well.”

‘They’re already here’

In June of last year, a who’s who list of local business leaders and public officials gathered at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center to unveil a new initiative geared toward attracting more foreign-born people to the region.

The St. Louis Mosaic Project’s mission was to stitch together a welcome mat large enough to turn the St. Louis region into the fastest growing metro area for immigrants by 2020. They had a long road in front of them. Foreign-born residents make up less than 5 percent of the metropolitan area, which puts St. Louis near the bottom of the list when compared to other major American cities.

Armed with a report showing the value immigrants could bring the regional economy, organizers planned to kick start their effort in part by keeping foreign students in town after they graduate.

“The study had said international students were low-hanging fruit,” said Betsy Cohen, who directs the Mosaic project. “What I’ve learned is that it is very ripe, plump, valuable fruit. But it’s at the top of the tree. It is not low-hanging.”
She said organizers quickly ran into a complicated immigration system that requires sophisticated, and often expensive, expertise to navigate.

“It’s a multi-year dance that happens,” Cohen said. “Between internships and other types of shorter-term visas until ultimately a company can sponsor an international student who could transition into becoming an employee.”

There are other hurdles, too. Some international students sign agreements with their countries of origin to return after graduation. It’s a deal they make in exchange for tuition money. And with immigration reforming stalled on Capitol Hill, area universities have launched a collaborative effort to keep their international students in the region.

“There is a very strong common agenda that we could and should do more to help our graduating international students find employment in St. Louis,” said Joel Glassman, director of the Office of International Studies and Programs at the University of Missouri St. Louis.

Glassman sits on the steering committee for the Mosaic Project, and said it’s the first time local leaders in higher education have worked together to retain international students. While area universities recognize how their efforts could bolster the regional economy, Glassman cites an added motivaiton.

“Frankly, with a better outcome for our international students, there’s increased ability to recruit high quality international students to come here,” Glassman said.

Along with the University of Missouri St. Louis, representatives from Washington University, Saint Louis University, Webster University and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville are drawing up plans.

So far, Glassman said they’ve committed first to decode how some international students were able to find jobs and ultimately stay in St. Louis. They hope then they can replicate best practices. Next, administrators want to funnel that knowledge toward career services departments at the five schools.

The schools are also considering collectively offering a “finishing school” for international students who are searching for a pathway into the American workforce.

“We’ve heard from some prospective St. Louis employers that many international students, while technically qualified for jobs, don’t have the social skill to fit in well with U.S. companies,” Glassman said.

In addition to focusing on students themselves, Glassman said representatives from the five universities are discussing ways to encourage local companies to hire international students. There’s also been talk of a creating a community-wide legal resource to help them navigate the regulatory intricacies of hiring an international student. While the center wouldn’t cover legal costs, Glassman said it could provide advice to companies seeking clarity in what can be murky immigration policy.
“They’re already here,” Glassman said. “We don’t have to lure them from a foreign place. We don’t even have to lure them from another city in the United States. These are people in St. Louis who tell us they want to stay here.”

A Focus on the H-1B

Corey Lohnes, a Canadian native who earned his Ph.D. in human movement from Washington University two years ago, is nearing the end of his lengthy immigration story.

Like Liu, he too participated in BALSA to make connections with local employers.

Federal spending on scientific researcher has fallen by roughly $24 billion since 2010, according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Lohnes said fewer federal dollars on campus has more international students like him with STEM backgrounds looking to the private sector.

“A lot of students want to leverage their scientific background into industry jobs,” Lohnes said. “But if they’re international, the visa issue is a large barrier.”

He was eventually scooped up by Grant Cooper, a health-care recruiting company that liked his ability to mix technical know-how with business smarts. While wading through the immigration process, Lohnes can clearly remember his future hinging on the results of a little known government lottery.

“I was freaked out,” Lohnes said.

Even if a foreign student like Lohnes does land a job with an employer willing to sponsor his or her work visa, the future is far from certain. The number of H-1B visas, which allow foreign-born people with STEM training to stay and work in America, exceeded its cap of 65,000 spots in five business days this year. The same went for 20,000 slots available for students who get an exemption because they’ve earned advanced degrees from an American university.

The rush of applications, which cost between $1,575 and $2,500, meant that international students and foreign workers were put into a lottery that would ultimately determine their fate.

“I didn’t have an appreciation when I left academia how many things had to fall into place to move the immigration process forward,” Lohnes said.

It’s not over yet for Lohnes. The next step is for the company to advertise the job he currently has as evidence that an equally qualified native worker is not available to fill his position. Because H-1Bs expire after three years, the company will then need to help him earn a green card.

It’s estimated that more than 1 million international students are in America, more than a third of whom are working toward STEM degrees. The bipartisan immigration plan that passed the U.S. Senate last year was engineered to ease the flow of foreign workers in STEM fields by increasing
the maximum number of H-1Bs for all workers up to 180,000 in a given year. The exemption that goes specifically to students with advanced degrees would increase from 20,000 to 25,000.

David Robertson, a political scientist at the University of Missouri St. Louis, said that both sides of the aisle are interested in legislation that targets foreign STEM workers. At the same time, members of Congress are concerned that addressing the H-1B cap would derail efforts to fix the immigration system as a whole.

“They have reason to be concerned about that, but it’s also going to be the part of the puzzle that’s easiest to solve in the short term,” Robertson said. “Having said that, I don’t expect this Congress to do anything on immigration, no matter who’s involved with it.”

Last week the Obama administration attempted to free up some skilled foreign workers by proposing a rule change to allow spouses of current H-1B holder to seek employment. Proponents say spouses of these workers often have equal training and the policy change is now subject to a 60-day public comment period.

Some states are looking for a fix, as well.

Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick has unveiled a first of its kind program intended to exploit a loophole that allows colleges and universities to offer an unlimited number of H-1Bs during the course of a year. Deval wants to create a public-private partnership that keeps international students employed at Massachusetts colleges or universities while they work for startups or create new businesses.

But whether the nation needs international students and foreign workers to take STEM jobs that would otherwise go unfilled continues to be the subject of debate.

A study by the Economic Policy Institute found that the need for foreign-born people to fill STEM jobs has been overstated. The research was conducted by Norman Matloff, a professor of computer science at the University of California Davis.

“The lack of evidence that the foreign students and workers we are recruiting offer superior talent reinforces the need to assure that programs like H-1B visa are used only to attract the best and the brightest or to remedy genuine labor shortages—not to serve as a source of cheap, compliant labor,” Maltoff wrote.

Others worry pumping in foreign STEM workers will discourage American students from pursuing those careers. Concerns have also surfaced that outsourcing companies abuse the H-1B system by using the visas to undercut skilled American workers.

In contrast, an analysis by the Brookings Institution disputed those criticisms and echoed a call by leaders in the tech industry to raise the number of H-1Bs the government offers every year.

“Overall, there is compelling evidence that the H-1B visa program is helping to alleviate acute shortages in various occupations,” the researchers concluded.
Meanwhile, President Barack Obama indicated this week a small window could open up this summer to move immigration reform forward before November’s midterm elections.

**As college students walk, speakers walk away**

By The Associated Press

**NO MENTION**

Forget about their students not making it to graduation. Now colleges have to wonder whether their speakers will.

From Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the head of the International Monetary Fund and the former chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, the list of commencement speakers backing out following student and faculty protests continues to grow.

Former UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneau, a champion of students in the country illegally, had been scheduled to speak at Haverford College’s ceremony in the suburbs of Philadelphia, but was opposed over the use of force by university police during the Occupy movement. He backed out of the speech on Monday.

Rice canceled her speech at Rutgers University earlier this month and International Monetary Fund Director Christine Lagarde pulled out of the Smith College Commencement, also on Monday.

Brandeis University, meanwhile, withdrew its offer of an honorary degree to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Muslim women's advocate who has made comments critical of Islam.

"We refer to it as disinvitation season," said Robert Shibley, senior vice president at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, who sees the move toward getting — or trying to get — controversial speakers kicked off programs intensifying.

Even first lady Michelle Obama stayed away from a high school graduation in Topeka, Kansas, after a petition begun by parents and students worried about having enough seats for family.
"The students absolutely have the right to protest decisions," Shibley said, "but given how often this happens, you start to worry that this is going to make it very difficult to ever invite anyone who’s even the slightest bit controversial to speak on a college campus."

North Central College President Emeritus Harold Wilde, who booked more than 20 commencement speakers while at the helm of the Illinois college through 2012, said that his decisions weren’t necessarily driven by a fear of protests, but he felt the pressure of competing expectations from students, parents, faculty, alumni and trustees.

"Of concern to me in a way is that no one who is interesting is going to be perfect," Wilde said.

At Rutgers, Rice was opposed over her role in the Iraq War while she served in the administration of President George W. Bush. At Smith, many of those who opposed Lagarde said they were attacking the IMF for being "a corrupt system" that fuels the oppression of women.

Nearly 500 people signed an online petition objecting to the IMF. William Ward, social media professor at the Newhouse School of Public Communication at Syracuse University, said negativity tends to become amplified online, but that universities act when it begins to jeopardize the event.

"The irony," said Wilde, "is that for most graduates, if you can remember who your commencement speaker was it’s a miracle. And if you can remember what they said, that's really extraordinary."

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**TELEVISION**

**Oprah's network plans series on NFL's Michael Sam**

May 14

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Oprah Winfrey Network says it plans to produce a documentary series following the life of Michael Sam, the first openly gay player drafted by an NFL team.
The series will take an up-close look at the man recently drafted by the St. Louis Rams in a groundbreaking moment in professional sports. Cameras will follow the former University of Missouri football player as he works to earn a spot on the Rams while under a media microscope.

Sam says it would be great if his story can lead others to accept who they are and go for their dreams.

OWN did not specify a premiere date for the as-yet-untitled series or how many episodes it will be.

Read more here: http://www.kansascity.com/2014/05/14/5024031/oprahs-network-plans-series-on.html#storylink=cpy

UPDATE: Oprah, Michael Sam agree to documentary deal over lunch
Wednesday, May 14, 2014 | 8:08 p.m. CDT
BY ERIK HALL, PAIGE BLANKENBUEHLER

COLUMBIA — Thousands of people have sat on Oprah Winfrey’s couch in her studio, but Michael Sam got to eat lunch in her home.

That meal with Winfrey convinced the former Missouri football player that The Oprah Winfrey Network is the right place to document his preparation for the NFL, according to Sam's spokesman Howard Bragman.

OWN announced Wednesday it is producing a multi-part documentary about Sam.
"Michael felt safe and comfortable, and knowing the network's so much about empowerment and positive change, he feels like it's a good place to be," Bragman said in a phone interview with the Missourian.
The St. Louis Rams selected Sam in the seventh round of Saturday's NFL draft, making him the first openly gay player drafted into the league. Sam publicly came out as gay on Feb. 9.

Multiple networks approached Sam when he first announced he was gay, but he felt most comfortable with the former daytime talk-show host, Bragman said.

The series will "follow Sam as he works to earn his spot on the St. Louis Rams — all while under the intense scrutiny of being the first openly gay player in the NFL," according to an OWN news release.

Bragman emphasized the documentary will not interfere with Sam’s NFL pursuit.

"Be advised: Michael's No. 1 job is to make the football team," Bragman said. "If it comes to a choice between the doc and football, we're always going to err on the side of football."

"I am determined. And if seeing my story helps somebody else accept who they are and to go for their dreams, too, that's great. I am thankful to Oprah for her support and excited to work together," Sam said in the network's news release.

A camera crew has already been following Sam's recent events, including Tuesday's Rams press conference and Saturday's reaction by Sam that included kissing his boyfriend, Vito Cammisano.

"As we get closer to announcing an air date, we will have more information on what the pilot episode might contain," OWN spokeswoman Wendy Luckenbill said.

Winfrey said in the news release, "We are honored that Michael is trusting us with his private journey in this moment that has not only made history but will shape it forever." The working title of the series is "The Untitled Michael Sam Project," according to the release. There is no official date scheduled for airing of the series, and the amount of episodes to be shot has not been announced, according to Bragman and Luckenbill. Bragman said the documentary should not be confused with a reality TV show.
"It's more respected. It's more historical, it's more appropriate for this case," Bragman said. "We didn't want to do a silly reality show — this is not silly."

The Rams begin offseason training Friday with a three-day rookie minicamp.

"He'll meet his responsibilities," Bragman said. "We've looked at his calendar. We've talked to the team. We're not taking on anything we can't handle."

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Oprah is turning Michael Sam's journey to the NFL into a documentary

By NICK SCHWARTZ 14 hours ago

After becoming the first openly gay player selected in the NFL Draft, former Missouri star Michael Sam now faces the difficult task of making the Rams’ final roster and becoming the first openly gay active player in the history of the NFL. Fans will get an up-close and personal look at the process, as the Oprah Winfrey Network has announced that it will produce a documentary series following Sam as he prepares for the season.

Sam, who will wear number 96, said Tuesday in his introductory press conference that he’s confident he will be a part of the 53-man roster.

“I’m determined to be great. I’m determined to make this team. I have every confidence in myself that I’ll make this team. When I do make it and put my pads on, if someone wants to say something, you will see number 96 running down that field and making big plays for his team."

In a statement, Oprah Winfrey said she hopes the series sparks positive discussion.
“We are honored that Michael is trusting us with his private journey in this moment that has not only made history but will shape it forever…. The next real-life story we follow in ‘The Untitled Michael Sam Project’ promises to spark valuable, important discussion on life in America today. Acceptance and illumination start here.”

No air dates for the series have been announced.

MU storm chasers seek twisters, often find disappointment

Wednesday, May 14, 2014 | 12:00 p.m. CDT; updated 3:57 p.m. CDT, Wednesday, May 14, 2014

Peter Speck stands in the Weather Analysis and Visualization Lab in the MU Agricultural Building. Speck, a member of the Mizzou Storm Chase Team, has been chasing storms since 2011. | KATIE BELL

BY ALOYSIUS BOH

CLINTON — It’s 1:03 p.m. April 27. Three members of the Mizzou Storm Chase Team sit in a parked Chevrolet sedan. A vicious thunderstorm rages outside. Dime-size hail hammers the windshield, and lighting arcs across the angry, gray sky. Trees bow to 60 mph wind. On the wind’s command, a lone shopping cart dashes across the parking lot and strikes the rear of an SUV.

**Wearing a buzz cut and Walmart sunglasses perched on his head, driver Peter Speck stares at his Samsung smartphone’s screen. In the passenger seat, Seth Colston stares at his tablet PC. Both storm chasers monitor RadarScope like hawks, waiting to pounce at the slightest hint of tornadic activity. In the back of the car, Trevor Rice reads "Beloved" by Toni Morrison to pass the time.**
The trio has been chasing storms for four hours. No luck spotting a tornado so far. But Speck spots a potential twister on the radar and reports it to his base team in the MU Agriculture Building. Then he drives south on Highway 13 to catch the storm. About 15 minutes later, disappointment sets in: another dud.

Soon, the swirling colors on the weather map indicate another possible tornado. Speck drives toward El Dorado Springs because a storm there might start rotating. Eighteen minutes later, the trio spots a huge gray rotating mass in the sky, forming what looks like a funnel. But then the rotation stops. Disappointment. Again.

Speck stops at a Casey’s General Store and calls base team member Luke Victor.

“Urgh. I have a feeling it’s going to be a big bust of a day,” Speck says. “The only tornado that’s happened is in Nebraska.”

Whether dangerous or serene, storm chasing isn’t for those seeking cheap thrills. It’s hit-and-miss. Frequently, a chase ends as a hybrid of a countryside road trip and a tour of gas stations.

“Well, I guess it turned out to be a lightning show.” Speck says.

Little did Speck know that he would get to see more than just lightning on this trip.

**A love for weather**

An average storm chase lasts about 12 hours and starts early. On April 27, Speck and his companions left Columbia at 8 a.m. The routine involves picking a city where tornado-conducive weather will exist, then driving there and waiting for his base team at the office to update him.

Electronic gadgets are vital to chases, so the night before, the team makes sure it has extra batteries, antennas that are hooked up properly, a mobile hotspot, extra cameras and flash cards for pictures.

Speck is aware of the absurdity of choosing to drive toward tornadoes, while most people drive away from them. He justifies doing so because of his love for weather. As someone who chases tornadoes in the name of academia, Speck differentiates himself from what he calls amateur chasers.
Amateurs "are just going for the thrill of it," the atmospheric sciences graduate student says. “They are not going for any kind of special research or class like we are. There’s a lot of potential for fatalities because of these amateurs being on the roads.”

Speck always takes photographs during storm chases for educational purposes. He thinks amateur chasers take pictures for glory.

“You know how you want to ride a roller coaster that looks really scary? That’s a comparison,” Speck says. "(Amateurs) do it to be a part of history. They will be history if they get killed in (a tornado like) El Reno.”

On May 31, an erratic tornado in El Reno, Okla., which ranked EF5 on the enhanced Fujita scale, killed three professional storm chasers and one amateur. The deaths of the professionals were the first in history. At 2.6 miles, the twister was the widest known to date.

“Originally, it was moving east-southeast, and as it was going along, it just suddenly turned and hit them,” Speck says.

Amateurs vs. pros
The difference between professional and amateur storm chasers is fuzzy. Zach Paul, chief meteorologist for KRCG/CBS, Jefferson City, said in an email that there is no official distinction.

“The unofficial distinction, as thought of by meteorologists, is that professionals are those ‘trained’ persons who are actively trying to save life and property,” Paul said. “This could be by acting as a spotter for a community to activate outdoor warning sirens. It could also be those in academia doing research on storm environments.

“Amateurs would be those individuals who are not trained. This is going to include most individuals who see a storm nearby and decide to go chase it. They bring no real value by being in the field following those storms.”

There also are “storm spotters.” Jim Kramper, a warning coordination meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said in an email that a storm spotter is not the same as a storm chaser.

“A storm spotter is someone who has attended a NWS storm spotter training class,” Kramper said, referring to the National Weather Service. “They agree to voluntarily
contact the local NWS office when they see or experience certain types of severe weather. They are performing a public service by assisting the NWS.”

On the other hand, a storm chaser is “someone who goes out and chases storms in hopes of seeing a tornado or some other weather phenomena,” Kramper said. “For the most part, they do it for fun, the thrill, or to capture video they later try to sell. Some storm chasers have attended NWS spotter training classes. Some have not.”

While dangerous and unpredictable, tornadoes are short-lived creatures. Most last less than 10 minutes. In contrast, storm chasers are durable; they can be on the road for hours on end.

Generally, chasers prefer hunting tornadoes from 2 to 5 p.m., the warmest time of day when most storms form. Heat, however, is not the determining factor in tornado formation. Four ingredients — moisture, wind shear, atmospheric instability and a trigger such as a cold front or dry line that will cause vertical motion in the atmosphere — are necessary. Storm chasers are always on the move, looking for the right mix; they're also prepared for disappointment.

'That's a funnel'
At 6:04 p.m. on chase day, Speck cruises along a hilly road toward a gigantic wall of dark clouds. He's excited because the weather radio has just announced a tornado warning for the area.

“Yeah, we’re on the wall cloud right now. We’re directly southeast of it. I’ll put up a picture of it once we stop somewhere. This is nuts,” Speck tells Victor over the phone.

“We’re directly west of Rich Hill, it.... Oh my goodness!”

“Is it dropping?” Rice asks.

“Yeah. ... We’re in a perfect spot. We’re not moving. We’re in a flat spot,” Speck says.

Looking at the plain ahead, Speck remembers a similar but more fruitful chase. On May 28, he watched the formation of a violent but oddly stationary tornado in Bennington, Kan. With a dangerous rating of EF4, the monstrous tornado began as a deceptive cumulus cloud before it sprouted multiple vortexes that eventually combined to form a single large vortex.
“The fact that we were able to observe it as it started out and follow it as it produced the monster tornado was amazing,” Speck says. Storm chasers seldom have such good days.

At 6:08 p.m., Speck pulls to the side of a deserted gravel road. No trees or houses block his view of the black sky. Speck quickly gets out to snap photographs of the wall cloud extending from the main thunderstorm.

The strong, cold wind howls, as if warning Speck not to move any closer. A minute later, a heavily armored SUV known as an urban tornado assault vehicle bearing the name “ExtremeStormChasers.net” catches up with Speck’s sedan. It turns right and heads onto a long, straight road that leads to the raging wind.

“Oh geez, look north! Look north!” Speck shouts as he spots a funnel cloud. Victor calls again and suggests the team head north on Interstate 49 to get a better look at a new wall cloud that's producing the funnel.

Speck drives to a gas station for a better view.

“Ooh! Do you see it?” Rice says. “You see that lower ring in the cloud right there where my finger’s at?”

“Right there! Oh my goodness. That’s a funnel,” Speck says before checking the storm radar again. “Yeah, there’s a hook!” He’s referring to the hook echo on the radar that indicates a tornado is likely forming.

Speck stands in the chilly wind, staring at the colossal cloud about 3 miles away, near the town of Prescott. It is nearly 500 miles north of Little Rock, Ark., where a tornado about an hour later would drop and kill 17 people.

To his trained eye, Speck easily spots the funnel, a dip in the floating dark gray mass. A minute passes with no tornado. Like a defiant child, the funnel seems determined to avoid getting grounded. Still hopeful, Speck asks his teammates whether they want to go north.

“Yeah, it’s going to Kansas City, isn’t it?” Colston asks. “There’s one south and west in Butler right now. It’s still in Kansas.”

“Yeah, that one’s looking good, too. There’s a whole bunch of them,” Speck says.
A brief silence fills the air as Colston becomes irritated.

“There’s a freaking tornado in Nevada (Mo.) right now.”


Just 35 minutes earlier, the trio had left Nevada in search of windier pastures. They were too impatient.

As much as Speck wants to catch the Nevada twister, he decides it’s too late. Night will soon blanket the countryside, and no reasonable storm chaser chases a tornado in the dark.

The trio is more than 100 miles from Columbia, too. Speck has to start driving back if he wants to get home before 10 p.m.

The chase is over.