MU student government to tackle sexual assault issue

By ASHLEY JOST

Thursday, July 10, 2014 at 10:15 am Comments (3)

The Missouri Students Association is tackling the issue of sexual assaults on college campuses.

MSA President Mason Schara said the organization is moving forward with a campaign that will promote why MU students, faculty, staff and administrators take a collective stand against sexual assault. The campaign is called “#EnoughIsEnough.”

Shara said the motivation for the campaign came from the heightened conversation about campus sexual assaults and increased numbers of assault reports across the country.

“We wanted to battle that,” Schara said.

The team of students decided to start the campaign with a video, which will be released later this month. The video documents 37 students, faculty and staff explaining why “enough is enough.” Schara said the video also includes administrators like Cathy Scroggs, vice chancellor of student affairs, Jim Spain, vice provost for undergraduate studies and, potentially, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

In the fall, the student government organization — in conjunction with the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center, Women’s Center and LGBTQ Resource Center — will also roll out a series of posters with a “my story” theme, Schara said, giving students the chance to write on the poster why “enough is enough.”

Schara said the hope is for other student organizations to chip in their own ideas for the campaign in the fall so it can expand.

“We need to address it as a unified campus rather than a bunch of different groups,” Schara said. “If we can pull together a whole front, we can make more of a difference.”

The national conversation about campus sexual assault accelerated yesterday after U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., announced the results from a survey of 440 private and public four-year
institutions of varying sizes by her office. The survey prompted the schools to respond to how they address sexual assault reporting and investigations.

The results were less than favorable, showing that more than 40 percent of schools in the sample have not conducted an investigation of reported sexual violence issues in the past five years.

“Federal law requires every institution that knows or reasonably should have known about sexual violence to conduct an investigation to determine what occurred,” the report said. Additionally, more than 20 percent of the largest private colleges surveyed conducted fewer investigations than the number of incidents reported to the Department of Education.

The results also show that more than 20 percent of the surveyed institutions provide no training for faculty and staff for sexual assault response efforts. About 30 percent of schools fail to provide similar training to students.

Training for MU employees is in the works. After an executive order from UM System President Tim Wolfe declared all employees mandated reporters in the event of an assault case, Loftin has expressed interest in training the Columbia campus employees to better understand their new roles.

Loftin is hiring a full-time Title IX coordinator that would handle reports of sexual assault as well as training for mandated reporters. He hopes to have that person in their post before the start of the fall semester.

MU receives grant to remediate, replace books affected by mold

By ASHLEY JOST

Thursday, July 10, 2014 at 8:02 am
The University of Missouri has received a grant to help with remediation or replacement of the books damaged by mold last fall.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a higher-education-centered foundation, gave $400,000 to the MU Libraries to support the remediation process of the university’s 600,000 books affected by mold.

In addition to the grant, the university also announced a partnership with Washington University in St. Louis and Missouri State University in Springfield that will allow MU to access replacement copies of federal government documents and interlibrary loan access to state documents, according to a news release. Some federal documents from Washington University will be transferred to MU at a later date.

The partnership between the three universities is part of the Mellon grant. Libraries Director Jim Cogswell said MU’s grant will fund the transportation of documents and volumes from the two other universities.

Cogswell announced the mold problem in December, a few months after library staff discovered the mold on books stored in Subtera, an underground storage facility off Stadium Boulevard in north Columbia.

With the help of the grant and $600,000 from a self-insurance fund, more than 400,000 books will be saved, Cogswell said. Cogswell said at least 100,000 books will be destroyed, most of which will be duplicates or copies of documents the university will receive from the other schools. The cost for remediation is $2 per book.

Belfor, a St. Louis-based property restoration company, is conducting the remediation. MU has leased the former Rust & Martin design showroom at the Midway exit to store the affected books. The books will be sent to one of Belfor’s Texas locations for actual remediation before being brought back to the former showroom for storage.

The remediation process is expected to last until at least next June.

In addition to applying for grants, library administrators started a fundraising effort that has netted $10,025 of the $50,000 goal, according to MU’s donations website.
MU Libraries awarded $400,000 to aid recovery from mold damage

By Victoria Trampler
July 10, 2014 | 6:33 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A $400,000 grant will help pay for remediation and content replacement of some 600,000 books and materials presumed to be damaged by a mold outbreak in October, according to a news release from MU Libraries.

The grant comes from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The funding began July 1 and will continue for a year.

"It's wonderful that we received the grant," Jim Cogswell, director of MU Libraries, said Thursday. "It's just been the greatest sort of news."

Also, MU is partnering with Washington University and Missouri State University to acquire replacement documents of some of the lost texts.

In addition to the grant, as much as $600,000 will be taken from the MU Libraries' self-insurance fund to help pay for the damage.

Some of the money will be used to retrieve and prepare materials from Missouri State and Washington University to be shared with MU Libraries as needed.

In addition, funding will help MU Libraries review the availability of needed replacements from library and service organizations.

The mold outbreak occurred in a limestone cavern MU rented from Subtera underground warehousing. The warehouse contained about 20 percent of MU's three million books.
Originally, MU expected to discard half of the contaminated books, but the latest information provided by MU Libraries places the number at about a third or less.

Library staff, however, has decided upon a set of guidelines to ensure that any irreplaceable books are saved and all discarded materials will be of little value.

"They are books that are literally available in provisions all around the state," Cogswell said.

About 100,000 materials will have to be permanently discarded, said Shannon Cary, communications officer for MU Libraries. They will be pulped to prevent them from contaminating any other collections.

Some of the funding will go to hiring library staff to sort through all the material and decide what's worth salvaging. Cogswell said he hopes to have a discussion with MU faculty members in case they feel certain books set to be destroyed should be saved.

"I am hopeful that we will be able to have very few books that will have to fit in the category of discard," Cogswell said. "We're trying to salvage as much as possible."

Although not all books showed signs of mold, they should all be treated as such, said Scott Campbell, industrial hygienist for MU Environmental Health and Safety, in a report of his analysis of the mold.

To prevent further contamination, MU Libraries has rented a storage space that is divided, Cogswell said. The larger part of the space is for cleaned books; the smaller space is more of a holding area for items awaiting decision on whether they will be remedied or discarded.

The books are being treated in Texas, and some have already been moved to remediation, Cary said. The whole process is expected to take about a year.

"It may take slightly less than that time, or more," Cogswell said. "We expect to do a lot of this transfer work over the summer."

Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.
Engineering school building dependent on sustaining tax vetoes, Kelly says

By RUDI KELLER
Thursday, July 10, 2014 at 11:29 am

When lawmakers return to Jefferson City to consider Gov. Jay Nixon’s vetoes, area legislators will have to choose between sales tax exemptions and funding the renovation and expansion of Lafferre Hall on the University of Missouri campus, state Rep. Chris Kelly said yesterday.

Nixon, a Democrat, yesterday signed a bill granting the Board of Public Buildings authority to borrow up to $500 million for repairs and renovations of state buildings. But he is withholding appropriations that would spend that money, including $38.5 million for Lafferre Hall.

The money, along with all operating budget increases for public schools and higher education, is withheld in part because of 10 tax exemption bills Nixon estimates will cost the treasury $425 million. Kelly, D-Columbia, said he is certain Nixon will release the money if the vetoes are sustained.

Lafferre Hall houses the College of Engineering, and finding money for a major renovation and expansion has been the university’s top priority capital improvement project for several years.

“I am delighted, and I appreciate his support for engineering at the university, and there is only one more step, and that is we prevent any overrides of those tax giveaways,” Kelly said.

Kelly voted for three of the bills and was absent on three others. The three Columbia Republicans in the Boone County delegation — Sen. Kurt Schaefer, Rep. Caleb Jones and Rep. Caleb Rowden — supported most of the bills but were absent for votes on some of them.

Rep. John Wright, D-Rocheport, voted for four of the bills and opposed six. Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia, voted for four, opposed five and was absent on one.

Schaefer was not as certain as Kelly that sustaining the vetoes would have any effect on whether Nixon will allow the Lafferre Hall renovation to move ahead.

“I think it is a hollow victory that he signed the bill,” Schaefer said.
Nixon uses withholdings for political leverage and has since he became governor, Schaefer said. “I don’t have any reason to believe that if somehow we don’t override certain tax bills that he will somehow do something cooperative,” he said.

Webber, however, said he will not support any of the bills because of their total impact. Even a small exemption for food sold at farmers markets isn’t attractive enough to jeopardize education funding, he said.

“The farmers market exemption in and of itself is not enough to put the state educational system at risk,” he said. “But the sum of all those issues can be catastrophic to education.”

Wright, Rowden and Jones could not be reached for comment.

The Board of Public Buildings is composed of the governor, lieutenant governor and the attorney general. The appropriations bills included $141.5 million for projects funded by the board’s bonds, including $25 million for a new research center and museum for the State Historical Society of Missouri.

All of that money is being withheld by Nixon and new construction may not fit the provisions of the law signed yesterday. But the bill clearly allows for renovation projects.

Kelly said he is confident that Nixon will call a meeting of the board to issue the bonds if the vetoes are sustained.

Editorial: Colleges have some learning to do in protecting sexual assault victims

By the Editorial Board

NO MU MENTION

If they’re interested in keeping women on their campuses safe from sexual assault, the nation’s colleges and universities should be grateful for the work of Sen. Claire McCaskill. Some of the institutions no doubt are. Others wish she would just go away.

But the women on campus, their parents and anyone who cares about the safety of women know that problems usually don’t get solved in the shadows. The Missouri Democrat has turned a spotlight on sexual violence at
colleges and universities, a problem that has existed for too long. She is working to develop legislation to help clarify overlapping sex-crime laws as they now exist and strengthen campus disciplinary proceedings.

She wants to ensure that the victims of sexual assaults feel safe reporting the crime and that the accused are treated the same as those outside the academic environment.

“If we’re going to turn the tide against sexual violence, survivors must be protected, empowered, and given the confidence that if they make the difficult choice to report a crime, they will be treated with respect and taken seriously,” Ms. McCaskill said in a report released Wednesday.

In gathering information for the legislation she is crafting with a bipartisan team that includes senators Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., Ms. McCaskill sent surveys a few months ago to 440 schools asking how they handle rapes and sexual assaults.

The results from more than 300 schools that responded are disturbing. Among the findings:

• Lack of knowledge about the scope of the problem.

• Failure to encourage the reporting of sexual violence.

• Lack of adequate sexual assault training for faculty, staff and students.

• Failure to investigate reports of sexual violence.

• Lack of adequate services for sexual violence survivors.

• Untrained and uncoordinated law enforcement efforts.

Ms. McCaskill is a former sex crimes prosecutor in Jackson County and a Senate leader in the fight to reduce sexual assaults in the military. When she launched her efforts in the academic arena, she noted that military and university settings are similarly closed environments where people fear repercussions if they come forward with allegations of sexual violence.

Ms. McCaskill labeled the survey results a “wake-up call” for schools, saying they need to recognize sexual violence as the crime it is, work to prevent it and effectively address it when it does occur.

Unfortunately, there is ample evidence that not everyone understands what rape is and that some people do not recognize it as a crime. Not everyone has gotten the White House report saying that one in five female college students has been assaulted, and that just 12 percent have reported the attacks.

Among the more alarming findings from the Senate survey is that more than 20 percent of institutions that responded give their athletic departments oversight of sexual violence cases involving student-athletes, a
finding Ms. McCaskill said was “bordering on the outrageous.” Given the investment that universities have in their athletes, how is a victim to feel protected and safe in reporting sexual assaults or that their assailants will not be coddled by the institution?

The survey was criticized by the American Council on Education, which represents more than 1,700 college and university presidents. Ada Meloy, general counsel for ACE, told the Post-Dispatch’s Chuck Raasch that the report was unfair and “ignores how hard colleges and universities are working to address a serious and complex societal issue.”

Ms. Meloy also said the survey “treats the rights of the accused as an afterthought, which colleges and universities clearly cannot do.”

This, too, is outrageous. No one is calling for a presumption of guilt, only that victims’ rights are equal to those of the accused.

The ACE should be working with Ms. McCaskill, not getting in the way. All parties should be trying to develop best practices for handling these significant crimes.

Campuses must not be stalking grounds. No means no, and a drunk or drugged woman is not fair game. If it takes expulsion and/or criminal prosecution to get the message across, let the education begin.

Punishments should be swift and sure and serve as deterrents to others. Women must also be educated to keep out of harm’s way and to not become easy prey. Schools and law enforcement need to work together to make colleges and universities places for learning and not for making sexual conquests.
Gov. Nixon signs bill requiring meningitis vaccinations for college students

07/10/2014 6:44 PM

NO MU MENTION

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon signed into law Thursday a bill requiring public college students in the state to be vaccinated against meningitis.

The law, which takes effect on July 1 next year, applies to all students attending a public institution of higher education who live in on-campus housing. The law has provisions for medical and religious exemptions.

Bacterial meningitis, which affects the lining of the brain and spinal cord, can damage the nervous system, causing hearing loss, epilepsy or cognitive impairment. It also can lead to the loss of limbs. About 1,000 to 2,600 people contract the disease each year in the U.S., and about one in 10 dies.

The disease is most common among infants and young adults, ages 16 to 21. College students living in communal situations, such as dormitories, are at particular risk. There were outbreaks of bacterial meningitis last year at Princeton University and the University of California, Santa Barbara, with a combined total of more than a dozen confirmed cases at the two campuses.

Alan Bavley, abavley@kcstar.com
WASHINGTON -- The U.S. House education committee on Thursday advanced a package of legislation that would boost federal support of competency-based education, overhaul how cost information and other data is provided to prospective college students, and require more counseling for federal student loan borrowers.

Lawmakers approved three bills that are part of House Republicans’ piecemeal approach to rewriting the Higher Education Act, which expires at the end of this year but isn’t likely to be reauthorized by then.

The measures all garnered bipartisan support Thursday, but many Democrats on the committee said they were concerned the bills did not go far enough in directly addressing the rising price of college and providing student loan borrowers with needed consumer protections.

Representative George Miller, the top Democrat on the panel, said it was “unconscionable” that lawmakers would not take action on the problem of student debt.

“We must move quickly and decisively to make college more accessible and affordable, to increase oversight and quality assurance of colleges and loan servicers, and to promote new and innovative practices that can reduce student loan debt,” he said. “And this can only happen through a full-scale rewrite of the
Higher Education Act.”

Representative John Kline, the Minnesota Republican who chairs the committee, defended his approach to putting forward a series of smaller-scale proposals, which he said was helping to increase bipartisan work on rewriting the law.

“No doubt there is some skepticism about moving forward in what might be described as a piecemeal approach, but remember these are complicated issues,” he said. “A step-by-step approach will better-inform members and the public about the policies we are pursuing.”

The first bill approved Thursday was legislation that would create a more robust experimentation program for competency-based education at the Education Department. The Obama administration is currently using its existing authority to grant some colleges regulatory flexibility to experiment with innovative educational models, including competency-based education. The department is evaluating which applications to accept through that "experimental sites" program.

Lawmakers also advanced legislation aimed at simplifying and streamlining the information the federal government publishes about colleges for prospective students. It would also eliminate the Education Department’s annual lists of the most and least expensive colleges as well as the institutions with the highest and lowest average net prices.

In addition, the committee approved a bill that would boost annual counseling for student loan borrowers, including borrowers receiving Parent PLUS loans.

The American Council on Education in a letter Wednesday generally supported the package of legislation, calling it “a welcome step towards reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.”

Still, Molly Corbett Broad, the group’s president, wrote that ACE had concerns about the way graduation rates would be calculated under the consumer information bill and that some provisions in the student loan counseling legislation would add unnecessary complexity.
Failed Democratic Proposals
House Republicans also rejected several efforts by Democrats Thursday to more aggressively change the Higher Education Act.

Representative John Tierney proposed a new program that would have allowed students to refinance their existing student loan debt at lower interest rates. That proposal, which is part of Democrats’ election-year agenda, failed to advance in the Senate last month.

Tierney, who is locked in a tight re-election race in Massachusetts, said that lawmakers had to choose between helping struggling student borrowers or millionaires. Under the proposal, the debt relief for students would be financed by ending tax breaks for high-income Americans.

Republicans on the panel shot down Tierney’s amendment on procedural grounds. They similarly stopped an effort by Representatives Susan Davis and Mark Takano, both Democrats from California, to restrict the flow of federal dollars to for-profit colleges. That amendment would have included veterans’ benefits in the 90 percent cap on the share of their revenue that for-profit colleges may derive from federal government sources.

Kline, who has been a supporter of for-profit colleges, said he opposed such a change to the so-called “90/10 rule” because it would have the effect of cutting off student access to some of those institutions.

A third Democratic proposal that failed to garner enough support would have required the Education Department to include information on its website about how well a college’s former students are repaying their loans.

Representative George Miller of California, the top Democrat on the panel, said that his amendment was needed because prospective students deserved to know whether a college was graduating students who are able to pay back their loans.

Kline said he opposed the including the repayment rate because he said that it would be unfair to institutions that educate students who are more likely to default on their loans. He cited the 2012 federal court decision that largely struck down the
Obama administration’s “gainful employment” rule on the basis that the repayment rate metric in that regulation was arbitrary.

The three pieces of legislation approved Thursday now move to the full House of Representatives for consideration. Kline previously said he expects that House leadership will bring some Higher Education Act bills to a vote before the November elections.

Meanwhile, Senator Tom Harkin, the Democrat who leads the Senate education committee, has put out his own sweeping plan to change the Higher Education Act. Harkin is accepting public comments on his draft proposal through the end of August.