Mid-Missouri peace group calls for end to Mideast violence

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BY LAUREN KASTNER

COLUMBIA — Members of the Mid-Missouri Fellowship of Reconciliation spoke out Monday against the current round of fighting in the Mideast.

Area religious leaders and experts on the Middle East made their feelings known during a press conference at the Missouri United Methodist Church.

"This is not struggle of religion; it is not an armed conflict over two sides," George Smith, an MU professor of biology who has studied the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, said.

"This is a struggle of human rights."

Leaders urged the U.S. to come to the table and call for a cease-fire. The fighting, which has been ongoing for 21 days, has been the cause of death for 1,050 Palestinians, 52 Israeli soldiers and three civilians on the Israeli side, according to AP reporting on Monday.

"I come here to say let's stop the conflict," the Rev. C.W. Dawson Jr. said. "We need a truce. We need to quit killing our babies."

There were 11 people in attendance at the conference. The leaders agreed that though this conflict is distant from U.S. borders, it's imperative that citizens pay attention as the grief it causes may be closer to home than some think.

"We know people, they're your neighbors, they're your colleagues, you meet them at the grocery store, you see them at the coffee house, they are professors at the university," the Rev. Carl Kenney, interim associate pastor and adjunct journalism professor at MU, said. "They live here; they're from there. This is our story."
Since Ohio State University fired the director of its marching band last week for tolerating routine sexual harassment and hazing among students, current and former band members have rallied around him in support.

The firing followed an internal investigation that found that the director, Jonathan Waters, did not do enough to stop the sexualized culture of the marching band, including students’ annual practice in their underwear; the expectation that first-year members would perform "tricks" on command, such as pretending to have an orgasm; and the performance of sexual poses on bus trips.

On Monday a group of mostly female band alumni held a march on the campus to press for Mr. Waters to be reinstated. "We don’t believe it’s a sexualized culture, we believe it’s a college culture," Lori Cohen, one of the march organizers, told The Columbus Dispatch. As of Monday morning, the newspaper reported, more than 5,000 people had signed an online petition urging the university’s president, Michael V. Drake, to rehire Mr. Waters. Supporters have also created a Twitter account, We Stand With Jon Waters, and website to defend the former band director.

To better understand the Ohio State case and band members’ response, we spoke with Elizabeth J. Allan, an associate professor of higher-educational leadership at the University of Maine at Orono, who directs the National Collaborative for Hazing Research and Prevention. She described why few hazing victims identify themselves
that way and what might help prevent hazing. Following is an edited transcript of that conversation.

Q. The stereotype is that hazing only happens on sports teams and in Greek life, and so the case of the Ohio State University band seems to have surprised a lot of people. What has your research shown?

A. Since our national study, in 2008, we continue to find that hazing is more pervasive than what stereotypes suggest. We know that students who participate in a range of organizations have experienced hazing, even though they don’t necessarily identify it as hazing. High percentages of students who are involved in performing-arts groups, including marching bands and a cappella groups, have been hazed. We also see hazing among intramural teams, outing clubs, and even prestigious honors societies at various campuses.

Q. Why do students haze?

A. When we do our research and interview students, we always ask that question. For some people, they’re doing it because they really feel it’s worth it. It’s worth the cost or the potential risks to become a member of that group—or students don’t perceive the potential risks ahead of time. Everyone has a desire to belong, to be part of something bigger than themselves. It’s a human need.

Impaired judgments from drugs and alcohol are sometimes but not always the case. Some students fear retribution for not going along with it—or they feel coerced because they admire the members of the group, or the group is considered to be prestigious on campus. The other thing students say is that they feel like they are proving something, proving their worthiness. They often think, "This isn’t hazing, it’s just a tradition. I’m helping to maintain a tradition."
Q. In the 2008 report you said nine in 10 students who had experienced hazing behavior in college did not consider themselves to have been hazed. Why do you think that was?

A. When we ask students to define hazing, they can often articulate the key components: That it’s doing something that could be potentially harmful emotionally and/or physically in order to become a member of the group. But then there’s this disconnect between defining it and recognizing it when it happens to them. They have an image in their heads that hazing is something bad, and so if they perceive what they were doing to have had good intentions or potential outcomes, then it doesn’t equate with hazing. So you’ll often hear, "No, that wasn’t hazing, that was just a tradition." Or "No, that wasn’t hazing, that was just trying to get everyone to bond as a group." It’s going to require a lot of further awareness and understanding for students to be able to effectively recognize it when it happens.

Q. In the Ohio State case, both students and alumni have come forward saying that they stand by the band and its leader. Is that a common reaction?

A. Absolutely. I’m not surprised at all by that. It happens time and time again in hazing situations when people are very invested in the group, its leadership, and the group’s future.

Q. You have also found that 25 percent of coaches and organizational leaders are aware of their groups’ hazing behavior. Tell me more about that.

A. A lot of what I have already mentioned applies not just to students but to parents, the general public, and those who work with students as coaches or advisers. We still have a long way to go in promoting awareness and understanding of what hazing is, why it’s problematic, and how we can still accomplish the same positive goals of hazing without hazing.
We have to move beyond "Just say no to hazing." We have to find alternatives to effectively replace it because the perception is there that hazing is working in some positive ways. Not everyone shares that perception, but it’s hard for some people to understand that you can still achieve the positive goals and not have to do so through humiliating and degrading tactics.

Q. Did anything stand out for you in the Ohio State case?

A. We should certainly recognize the leadership that the university is taking in saying, This kind of behavior is not in alignment with our values as an institution. That’s important.

Q. Is it rare for a university to respond as they did?

A. That kind of response seems to be becoming more frequent, which is a good thing. But certainly we could see more of it.

Q. What tactics can you recommend to prevent hazing?

A. We are working on that right now. I’m in the midst of a three-year study with eight universities from coast to coast called the Hazing Prevention Consortium. The reason we are doing it is that we don’t yet have an evidence base to draw from. There’s no empirical data to say, This works for prevention.

So we’re borrowing from other fields—sexual-violence prevention and high-risk-drinking prevention—and saying, OK, how do we translate this for hazing? We are working with experts to help us design bystander-intervention programming and training specific to hazing. And we are gathering and evaluating data, so by the end of the project we will be able to begin to build the evidence base.
NO MENTION

Americans who attended college for a while but never earned a credential might be the key to achieving the ambitious college completion goals the White House and influential foundations have set.

It’s a big group. More than 31 million people enrolled in college during the last two decades but left without earning a degree or certificate and have not returned to higher education for at least 18 months, according to new data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Many dropped out quickly. Roughly one-third -- or 10 million -- of the identified noncompleters left college after enrolling for just a single term, according to the study, which the center released on Tuesday.

Among the remaining 21 million former students who attended college for more than a term, about 17.5 million failed to get beyond two years of academic progress. The remaining 4 million moved past the two-year mark.

This group, which the report calls “potential completers,” should be the most relevant to policy discussions around the national college completion push, the center said.

For example, the report cites Project Win-Win. The Institute for Higher Education Policy conducts the project, which has tracked down 6,700 former students who had either earned enough credits for a degree or were within
striking distance. As of last fall 4,500 students had received degrees through the program.

The most common type of potential completer is 24 to 29 years old and has been out of higher education for two to six years, the report found. About 600,000 women and 630,000 men fit this description. *(Note: this paragraph has been changed from an earlier version to reflect corrected data from the center.)*

More than one in four potential completers enrolled in college continuously or intermittently for seven years or longer. And the study found that about 36 percent spread their enrollments over four to six years.

“These results suggest that standard cutoffs for measuring student graduation rates (typically 150 percent of program length) are inadequate,” said the report. “Significant numbers of students continue to make substantial progress toward a credential for many years longer.”

**More Data, More Questions**
The new report advances what is known about the some-college, no-degree population. Until now the U.S. Census has been the primary data source on the group. The Census found that roughly one-fifth of working-age Americans have attended college at some point but do not hold a degree.

The Lumina Foundation has cited that number in its call for increased degree completion. But the center’s report, which Lumina funded, goes beyond that raw figure by showing more detail about former students’ experience in higher education.

The clearinghouse has access to student records for 96 percent of the total U.S. student population. More than 3,600 institutions provide information on enrollments and degree production to the nonprofit group, which conducts transcripting and research services for its member colleges.
As a result, the center was able to use the clearinghouse database to track virtually all students who had at least one enrollment record at a U.S. college during the last 20 years.

Ensuring that students complete their degrees or certificates should be a national priority, said Joni Finney, a professor the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education.

“These students represent a vast resource of untapped educational capital that the country can ill afford to overlook,” Finney said in a written statement. “This report represents the most comprehensive data available of students’ attempts to navigate their path toward a college certificate or degree.”

One surprise the report found was that so many of the potential completers attended four-year institutions only, said Afet Dundar, the center’s associate director and a co-author of the report.

The same proportion -- 35.6 percent -- of potential completers attended four-year institutions exclusively as completed two-year institutions exclusively. About 30 percent attended both types of institutions.

Dundar said one might have predicted that former community college students would dominate the potential-completer category -- despite the fact that a two-year degree requires fewer credits and should take less time to finish. The reason, she said, is that community colleges enroll most of the nation’s lower-income and less academically prepared students, who are more likely to drop out of college.

That was the case for multiple-term enrollees (more than one term but less than two years). About three-quarters of this group attended two-year institutions exclusively, or before or after attending a four-year institution, the study found.
The report compared characteristics of potential completers with those who successfully earned a credential. Not surprisingly, potential completers "stopped out" -- meaning they took a break from college before returning -- more often than completers. They also spent more time along their pathway.

The center didn’t try to explain why so many Americans had short, failed stints in higher education -- such as why 10 million left after a single term or less. But the report laid out two opposing interpretations of those findings.

“This population may be viewed by some as representing the inefficiencies of a poorly aligned educational system that does not adequately prepare students with the academic skills or resources necessary to succeed,” the report said. “Others might argue that these students are a reminder of the immense opportunity offered by postsecondary institutions to students of all types, even those whose optimism and ambition may later turn out to have exceeded their determination or academic preparation.”