Right to Know Why Not

By Colleen Flaherty

Some 28 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, $1.4 million in research funding and strong evaluations along the way – but still no tenure. The only thing more disturbing to Dylan Kesler, an assistant professor of wildlife sciences at the University of Missouri at Columbia, than his failed bid this summer is that he still hasn’t been told why. Kesler thinks he’s being retaliated against for blowing the whistle on alleged misuses of federal research funds in his department. But he says can’t confirm that or appeal the university’s decision without a formal reason for his denial.

While admittedly more complicated than most tenure disputes, Kesler’s case raises a basic question: Does a professor have a right to know why he or she didn’t earn tenure?

The American Association of University Professors says yes. Its Statement on Procedural Standards in the Renewal or Nonrenewal of Faculty Appointments recommends that “in the event of a decision not to renew an appointment, the faculty member should be informed of the decision in writing, and, upon request, be advised of the reasons which contributed to that decision.” The statement also says that the faculty member should be able to request reconsideration of the unsatisfactory decision.

Most colleges and universities have incorporated the AAUP’s stance into their own faculty policies, and Missouri is no exception. The university system’s rules and regulations say that in the case of nonrenewal of regular or temporary appointments, “the faculty member shall be informed and, upon request, shall be furnished with an explanation of that decision.”

Anita Levy, who is associate secretary at the AAUP and has been involved in Kesler's case, said the issue is one of “minimum decency” and “elementary fairness.” She cited an article on the topic prepared for the AAUP by William Van Alstyne, now a professor emeritus of law at the College of William and Mary.

Alstyne says that some institutions may think offering reasons for non-reappointment and tenure denials makes them vulnerable to legal challenges. But he calls that line of thinking flawed, and argues that not providing rejected candidates with reasons is more likely to push them to file lawsuits – if only to force transparency.

“For an academic community to operate in any other way is regrettable and a distressingly poor example to set,” Alstyne says. “It may be a ‘nuisance’ to have to explain to a student the basis on
which we assessed his work as ‘F,’ but most of us have long since accepted that obligation as a part of our commitment.”

He continues: “That a colleague should be treated with less compassion in circumstances where our collegial judgment terminates his career is something I can no longer defend or justify.”

It's not just faculty advocates who say institutions should share why they denied a professor tenure. The National Association of College and University Attorneys referred a question about the topic to Barbara A. Lee, a lawyer and professor of human resource management at Rutgers University, and co-author of the *The Law of Higher Education*. Lee said offering feedback about such decisions is a best practice.

"I think any employee, whether it's a faculty member or a staff member, deserves to know why they did not get tenure or promotion, or why they're losing their job,” she said. "I assume generally institutions do have reasons for denying people tenure or firing them, and if they're justified in those reasons I don't see why they wouldn't share them."

**Charges and Countercharges**

For Kesler, who believes that he should have earned tenure based on his qualifications but was retaliated against by select colleagues and his provost and chancellor, the question is even more technical. He said Missouri faculty policy allows for a grievance against the chancellor’s ultimate determination, but only in certain circumstances: inadequate consideration, violations of academic freedom and violations of equal employment opportunity. Without a reason, he said, he doesn’t know whether his case qualifies for appeal. So he's in limbo.

Kesler, a Missouri native who studies bird populations, wants to stay at the university if he’s able – that is, if the chancellor were to reverse his decision after a successful appeal. But even if not – and in the meantime, given that his appointment is over at the end of this year – potential future departments will want to know why he didn’t earn tenure.

“I’m applying for jobs right now, and the first question someone [at another institution] asked me is, ‘So, what’s going on in your department?’ ”

According to additional court papers recently filed by Kesler, he asked Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin no fewer than seven times why Loftin rejected his tenure bid. That happened this summer after a department-level committee endorsed Kesler’s bid; a college-level committee recommended against him; and a campus-level tenure and promotion committee advised the chancellor to promote Kesler to associate professor with tenure.

Kesler alleges that the second level of review resulted in a negative recommendation due to inconsistencies in the selection process for committee members, and significant administrative interference in his tenure bid. Kesler says he believes that Mark Ryan, his academic division director, placed select student letters in his portfolio that disparaged his teaching and mentoring – even though student letters are not supposed to be included in the tenure dossier.
Kesler also alleges that Kenneth Dean, the interim provost, talked to faculty reviewers about the fact that he was being investigated for research misconduct, in violation of the university's confidentiality policy. He was cleared of those charges after five days of hearings before a faculty body, but he thinks Dean’s sharing details of the case hurt his bid anyway.

The professor also alleges that in one of his conversations with the interim provost, Dean said he was not recommending him for tenure because of “those issues” – presumably the research misconduct allegations. But he can’t say for sure, since Dean and Loftin allegedly declined to elaborate.

Kesler says that the chancellor, interim provost and a small group of faculty colleagues fanned the misconduct story in retaliation for his having filed a federal whistleblower lawsuit last year. The professor said he “wasn’t looking for trouble” in filing the suit, but was disturbed to learn that two professors in his department allegedly misused part of large grants from the U.S. Department of Agricultural to continue to pay their wives -- who were both employees of the department -- when they stopped coming to work to care for small children at home. In one case, Kesler said, a wife was paid as an assistant for four years, although she was not doing any academic work.

Kesler said it was common knowledge around the department. But around the same time he indicated he might report it, he said, misconduct charges against him surfaced. He said that a master’s degree student who had graduated several years earlier, and who had previously expressed dissatisfaction with his expectations, suddenly appeared again on campus and informally complained that Kesler had not included her name on a paper that contained data from her thesis. This time, though, Kesler said, she was working for one of the professors he had fingered for fraud.

Soon, Kesler's computer was confiscated and he was being formally investigated for research misconduct. In part to protect public funds and in part to protect himself, Kesler filed his whistleblower suit last spring. The suit also alleges retaliation for bringing the fraud allegations to light.

Since that time, the Department of Justice has declined to take up the fraud case. Federal investigators met with Missouri administrators about the case and, eight days later, some $59,000 in state funds – less than half of what Kesler estimates was paid out to the two professors’ spouses – was transferred into the federal research account. Soon after, both the department and the university said they were dropping their fraud investigations. A university spokeswoman told the Associated Press last month that the timing of the transfer was a coincidence, and related “to a separate issue that was identified during the investigation.”

“We did not want there to be any question about the funding of her salary,” Mary Jo Banken, the spokeswoman, said of one of the implicated spouses, “so we decided to shift the funds so her salary would be covered by the university.”

Kesler’s attorney, George S. Smith, a former Missouri professor of law who is representing several other faculty members in similar but unrelated suits against the university, said the
whistleblower suit is still pending. But he and Kesler are deciding how to proceed in light of the news that the federal government will not be taking up the case, he said.

Late last month, Kelser filed additional writs asking that the university write him a letter saying that the research misconduct charges against him had been cleared, in an attempt to repair his reputation. Kesler also wants a written explanation as to why he didn’t earn tenure.

“Professors are always given a written explanation,” Smith said. “I have no idea why they won’t send him a simple letter.”

In a statement, Banken, the university spokeswoman, said she couldn’t comment on specific personnel cases, according to university policy.

But in relation to the whistleblower suit, she said, “[W]e are gratified that after a review of the case, the federal government decided not to intervene and that we do not agree with the claims of the lawsuit.”

She added: “Speaking generally, we always investigate any complaint of research misconduct and follow the process in the university’s research misconduct procedure before coming to any conclusion or decision. It is important to note that the allegations were not initiated by university administrators; they only carried out the research misconduct procedure based on a complaint.”

Regarding communications surrounding tenure decisions, Banken said that every faculty member who applies “is sent a personal letter informing him/her if his/her application for tenure status has been granted or denied.” But she did not say whether that letter should contain information about why the bid failed.

She said that no faculty member is ever penalized for launching complaints against the university.

It’s not only Kesler who’s curious about why he didn’t get tenure. In July, as the chancellor allegedly had indicated that he was going to reject the professor’s bid but had not yet offered a final decision, seven professors in the department of fisheries and wildlife sciences – the majority of full-time faculty – urged him to reconsider.

“[W]e wish to articulate our support [for Kesler’s] application for tenure,” the letter says. “We are deeply disturbed that he may be denied such. It is our shared opinion that Dr. Kesler’s research (publication and grantsmanship), teaching (undergraduate and graduate), and service (departmental, university and disciplinary) have met the expectations for tenure in our department/school.”

The letter continues: “We respect Dr. Kesler’s mounting of a vigorous defense of his case, especially given indications of there being iniquities in and procedural breaches of the evaluative procedures that have brought Dr. Kesler to this point: defense of oneself does not render one a wholly undesirable associate.”
The campus AAUP chapter has also asked for more transparency regarding Kesler's case. In a letter to Loftin, Stephen Montgomery-Smith, professor of mathematics and vice president of the chapter, said: “It is not at all clear to us as to why he was not provided all documents in his dossier and written explanations with specificity of negative recommendations and decisions at all levels as the dossier progressed.”

**Understanding the Standards**

Trish Roberts-Miller, a professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Texas at Austin, did earn tenure at Missouri earlier in her career. But that wasn’t her first go-around: she had a failed bid at a third institution even earlier on. She’s compared that experience to a “car crash,” including in an essay for *Inside Higher Ed*.

“Sometimes a car accident happens because you did something really stupid,” she wrote. “Sometimes someone else did something malicious or stupid. Sometimes it really was just an accident. Even if you're absolutely blameless, it's hard not to feel that it happened because you suck, and because you did something wrong, and it's all your fault.”

In any case, she said recently via email, a professor should always know why it happened.

“The promotion and tenure process is supposed to ensure a stellar faculty; like any other personnel issue, for it to have a beneficial impact, it has to establish standards for which people can strive,” she said. “If people don't know what the standards are, they can't possibly try to meet them.”

If a university won’t make public its criteria, she said, “then it's admitting that promotion and tenure isn't about establishing a culture of excellence. And if a university won't say why someone was denied tenure, then they’re saying there are hidden criteria.”

Karen Kelsky, a former tenured professor of anthropology at the University of Oregon and at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is a now a career adviser for graduate students and moderator of the blog *The Professor Is In*. She also said that professors are “entitled” to know why their bids failed, given the “weight of history” of seven years building relationships with colleagues.

She said that’s particularly true since there were presumably annual reviews during each of those seven years, plus a formal third-year review. There should be no “secret criteria,” she said.

“But if the public and published criteria are all met, then that exposes the existence of other agendas.”
Colleges’ Wider Search for Applicants Crows Out Local Students

State Schools Look to Higher-Paying Out-of-State Students to Fill Budget Holes

Last spring, Nicholas Anthony graduated as co-valedictorian of Malibu High School with a résumé that included straight A’s, top marks on nine advanced placement exams, varsity quarterback and baritone horn in the wind ensemble.

But Mr. Anthony didn’t get into the top two public schools in his home state: the University of California, Berkeley or the University of California, Los Angeles. Instead, he is going to Brown University, an Ivy League school which will cost over $100,000 more during four years.

Mr. Anthony’s experience is an example of an aftershock still reverberating across higher education in the wake of the recession: Qualified residents are getting crowded out of their state universities by students paying higher tuition from out-of-state and foreign countries.

“If I had been born five years earlier, I would have gotten in,” said Mr. Anthony.

State funding for public universities fell by 23% in real dollars between 2008 and 2013, according to the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.

To backfill the billions that evaporated from their budgets, public schools around the nation raised tuition and fees. When public outcry forced them to moderate those increases, scores of universities turned to out-of-state students who pay two to three times as much in tuition as their in-state counterparts.

But that out-of-state windfall is coming at a cost that is now being paid by people like Mr. Anthony: fewer seats for in-state students, even the most highly qualified.

A Wall Street Journal analysis of 559 public four-year colleges and universities showed that between the fall of 2008—the last year before school budgets were affected by the recession—and the fall of 2012, 54 schools decreased enrollment of freshman in-state students by 10% or more, while increasing enrollment of nonresident freshmen by 10% or more. An additional 35 showed swings of at least 5%.

The phenomenon was most prevalent at flagship universities. Nearly 600 fewer Californians enrolled as freshmen at Berkeley last year than in 2008. At the same time, the number of out-of-state and foreign students each climbed by about 500.
“Part of the driver for the increase in out-of-state students is to make up for lost state support,” said Janet Napolitano, president of the University of California system, which includes 10 campuses. “The chancellors and I are talking about what is the right balance and that should be looked at systemwide but also campus by campus.”

According to the College Board, a nonprofit organization that promotes college access, in-state students across the country pay an average of about $9,000 to attend university while out-of-state students, including those from overseas, pay more than $22,000.

To find those out-of-state students, universities are investing heavily in recruitment. In 2002, the University of Alabama employed six recruiters in all. Today, it has 30 looking for out-of-state students alone.

Last year, the freshman class included about 600 fewer students from Alabama than it did five years earlier and well over 1,500 additional students from out of state. This year, the percentage of students from out of state ticked past 50%, sparking a debate about the school’s priorities.

“You have to ask what is the school’s mission?” said Margaret Peacock, a professor of history at U of A. “To make money or to educate students in the state of Alabama?”

School officials say they have little choice. “The increased revenue from enrollment growth and tuition increases has enabled the university to provide the high-quality education that our students and their families expect despite the cuts in state funding,” said Mary Spiegel, UA’s associate provost and executive director of undergraduate admissions.

In-state low-income and minority students are two of the biggest losers when flagship public research universities increase out-of-state enrollment, according to research by University of Arizona Professor Ozan Jaquette and University of Missouri Professor Bradley Curs.

Amid complaints from parents and students who didn’t get into the school of their choice, state politicians as well as trustees of universities have called on leaders in places such as Wisconsin, North Carolina and Colorado to cap the number of out-of-state residents their state schools can enroll.

Many universities say they find themselves caught in the middle. In the years after the recession, the state legislature cut the annual appropriation for the University of Washington in Seattle, for example, to $200 million from $400 million. The university responded by raising tuition for in-state residents by 55% over the next three years. In 2011, they cut 150 slots given to in-state students and filled them with out-of-state and international students.

“People woke up and started paying attention,” said Norm Arkans, a spokesman for the school. “But we had to send a message that if the state couldn’t find a way to reinvest, we were going to be forced to reduce the number of spots for residents.”

The state has since increased the state’s subsidy to $246 million, and the school restored the spots for in-state residents.
Still, Mike Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, said, “I don’t see this trend of recruiting out-of-state students turning around any time soon.”

A survey of higher-education leaders by KPMG said 85% of schools were either very or somewhat concerned about their ability to maintain current enrollment levels, an increase of 19 percentage points since 2012.

In California, where the cuts to the UC system have been especially deep, UCLA administrators kept the number of in-state slots steady, while ramping up out-of-state and international slots dramatically. The number of international freshman at UCLA grew to more than 1,000 in the fall of 2012 from just 138 in fall 2008. Last year, the number of freshmen students from other states was more than double what it had been in the fall of 2008.

“This was a difficult conversation for the public to understand,” said Yolanda Copeland-Morgan, UCLA’s associate vice chancellor for enrollment management.

Even though the number of in-state slots didn’t fall at UCLA, the number of California students applying to the school has been soaring amid a growing population and more students graduating from high school. Resident applications topped 55,000 last year, up from under 47,000 in 2008. The drop at Berkeley, which also saw increasing resident applications over those years, meant competition for top slots in the state system overall was heating up.

“It’s pretty ridiculous how hard it is to get into our state system even if you’re really well prepared,” said AhYoung Chi, who has noticed a growing frustration in the tone of conversations with students in her six years as a guidance counselor at Malibu High School and later Beverly Hills High School.

John Wilton, UC Berkeley’s vice chancellor for administration and finance, said the new mix of students at the school had boosted diversity of the student body and created an “increasingly globalized” campus.

Still, he described the 55% decline in state funding over 10 years as “massive,” adding: “We would like nothing better than to have a resuscitated partnership with the state whereby the funding we receive would go back to where it was historically.”

As for Mr. Anthony’s parents, they are shelling out an additional $120,000 to get their middle child through Brown instead of Berkeley.

“I believe the UC needs to be more accessible to the students of California,” said Mr. Anthony’s mother, Elizabeth Anthony. “Especially those outstanding students who are really qualified, they shouldn’t just be given the left over spots available. They deserve better.”
Sen. Claire McCaskill’s campus tour on sexual violence comes to Kansas City

BY MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS | 10/08/2014 9:29 PM

NO MU MENTION

There is a disconnect between the programs colleges and universities in Missouri offer to help victims of sexual violence on campus and what students know exists.

That’s been the biggest surprise that U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill found during visits this week to schools across the state on a tour taking aim at sexual violence on campuses.

“I found that many of the colleges and universities are working hard to get the process for reporting and investigating sexual assault on their campus right, but students don’t have the information they need to access the process,” said McCaskill, a Democrat.

It’s up to the universities to get the word out, she said. McCaskill mentioned that at Missouri State University, students aren’t allowed to register for classes until they take an online survey ensuring they know where to get help if they are sexually assaulted.

McCaskill began her mission for legislation that would change how campuses handle sexual assault when her office surveyed nearly 500 schools and found that 40 percent hadn’t investigated a sexual assault on campus in five years.

On Wednesday, she visited the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg and Avila University in Kansas City, discussing her latest legislation with students, administrators and faculty from eight area campuses, including the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley and Park University.

Walking around the audience of fewer than 100 people at Avila University, McCaskill asked how many students in the room knew where to go on campus to report sexual
assault. Only two of about 15 students raised a hand. She asked how many knew what
Title IX does, and no hands went up.

McCaskill said she would consider what she learns from audiences on the tour as she
and other senators tweak their legislation. Issues include mandating better cooperation
between Title IX offices and police departments, and waiving penalties for underage
drinking when a sexual assault occurs.

“I’m glad I came,” said Joycelyn Jones, a senior and president of the Black Student
Union at Avila. “This educated me on Title IX and sexual assault and led me to ask
myself questions about where do we go here and who do we tell? I don’t think that those
are things students know.”

Her friend Karis Pruitt, a sophomore at Avila, said, “That kind of information has to be
presented to students on a more regular basis. It can’t just be given to them once at
orientation.”

The two said they wanted to hold a 12-hour lock-in at Avila and invite student leaders
from surrounding schools to learn more about the proposed legislation, Title IX policies
and the process for reporting sexual assault. “Then we are going to challenge them to
host the next lock-in on their campus,” Pruitt said.


COLUMBIA DAILY
TRIBUNE
COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

MU students hold 'die-in' demonstration
spurred by events in Ferguson

By Ashley Jost | Wednesday, October 8, 2014 at 3:46 pm Comments (7)

**Holding up sheets with names of black teenagers and young adults who were killed while
unarmed, dozens of students at the University of Missouri participated in a “die-in”
demonstration Wednesday afternoon at Speakers Circle.**
The demonstration included slam poetry, most of which was written by students, and the reading of names of black men and women who have been killed during the last decade by police.

Students representing the dead collapsed to the concrete, with more students following suit as the hour-long demonstration progressed. After the readings, other students drew outlines around the collapsed bodies on the pavement with chalk.

“This is bigger than Ferguson,” Jennifer Pagan, an MU student and demonstration organizer, told the more than 200 people at the event. “This is a human rights issue.”

Pagan said she and other organizers with the MU 4 Mike Brown student coalition drew inspiration from a similar demonstration by Kansas State University students.

Wednesday's "die-in" is one in a string of events the coalition has organized to get students to discuss concerns and express opinions about the shooting of Ferguson resident Michael Brown, 18, who was shot and killed by a police officer Aug. 9. A grand jury is still investigating the north St. Louis County case.

Pagan said organizers kept the event quiet until Wednesday while gathering an audience from black student organizations and campus social justice groups.

Students representing all races participated. Almost everyone wore solid black outfits. The students held handmade signs that said “We will not be silent” and “Black lives matter.”

Several students read their original slam poetry. Among the poets was Marshall Allen, who wrote his poem, "Reincarnation," less than a month ago.

“I might not look like it, but I assure you I have died more than 100 times,” his first line read.

Allen said the poem captures the pain he carries because of the trials other black men have faced. He named famous black figures of the past like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., and the present, like Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown.

“I usually wrote my poems from a place of anger,” Allen said. “The anger is not a hatred, though. It’s a pain that I portray in my words. I’m not a person who does tears — that’s my substitute, my words.”
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Demonstrators 'die' for Mike Brown in Speakers Circle

Wednesday, October 8, 2014 | 2:08 p.m. CDT; updated 12:17 a.m. CDT, Thursday, October 9, 2014

BY SHIVIA HARDIMAN

COLUMBIA — Over 30 people lay still with limbs askew like corpses Wednesday in Speakers Circle.

The demonstration by MU students was intended to symbolize the African-Americans who have died in violent crimes since Emmett Till was lynched by two white men in 1955.

The event was organized for just before noon by MU for Mike Brown, a group that aims to bring awareness of the "unjust killing of black bodies," according to its Twitter feed.

Michael Brown, 18, was shot to death by police officer Darren Wilson on Aug. 9 in Ferguson, Missouri. A grand jury is investigating whether unlawful force was used and if Brown's slaying was a civil rights violation, according to a story by the Associated Press.

A crowd of spectators gathered to watch and listen at Wednesday's demonstration. Protesters wearing all black spoke one-by-one into a microphone about a black person who had been unjustly killed — Till, Brown, Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin — before falling to the ground.

Spectators were asked to participate by outlining in chalk the students' bodies where they fell.

Event organizers said the event took quite a bit of planning to get underway.

"We had several meetings; they started off very word-of-mouth," said MU junior Brianna Coleman, who is a member of MU for Mike Brown. "It was just a group of students on campus that wanted to do something, have some form of impact and let people know that our lives matter."
MU junior Eunice Onyelobi said she came to watch when she heard via email there would be an event that would unite black students. "It's just another step further to gaining justice for our people," she said.

Organizers asked the crowd to chant with them: "Our lives matter" to, symbolically, wake up the campus.

"It was necessary. People, because they're on campus, kind of live in this bubble," said MU senior Naomi Daugherty, co-organizer of the demonstration. "We are the University of Missouri and this is happening in Ferguson, Missouri."

Supervising editor is Katherine Reed.

Student-run business Interlude Music opens in Student Center

Interlude’s mission is to support student musicians and give them a way to reach a larger audience.

After being delayed more than a month, Interlude Music opened its doors last week. The music store promotes student musicians and sells artists’ merchandise and used instruments.

Founded by senior Megan Monfreda, Interlude is a part of the Missouri Student Unions Entrepreneurial Program, which leases a space in the Student Center each year to a student-run start-up business.

The store was originally scheduled to open Aug. 25 and then again Sept. 8, but due to various legal issues, the date was set back a second time.

“The department we sent our paperwork through said they were five weeks behind, and then once that went through, we didn’t want to open until the majority of our musicians had been signed," Monfreda said.

Regardless of adversities, Interlude had a big turnout for opening day, showcasing artists and introducing customers to the new business on campus.

Monfreda said she decided to pursue Interlude when she was thinking about potential new student start-up businesses with a friend.
“I’m a big, big fan of music, so I thought about what I could do for it,” she said. “I started bouncing ideas off of one of my friends, and through a long process of meetings and charts, we came up with Interlude Music.”

The presentation to the entrepreneurship program consisted of quite a bit of work on the team members’ parts, according to social media strategist Lauren Garvey.

“There’s a new business in the Student Center every year, and we had to make a big conference call to the people heading the program to try to pass ours through, along with a lot of other work,” she said.

After the proposal was accepted, an array of team members had to be hired to help with various tasks, including music analysts, social media strategists, music managers and business advisers.

Interlude operates as a business but will also be working like a recording label. It is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Fridays.

“(Interlude) has what other businesses didn’t necessarily have,” Monfreda said. “For example, Quirks, last year’s student start-up business, was very successful, but it seemed to target a specific area, whereas Interlude isn’t like that. It has something for just about anyone. I haven’t met one person who doesn’t like music, and we’ll have all different kinds.”

Monfreda said the wide array of music will enhance Interlude’s quality as a store.

Music managers, such as senior Chantel George, are in charge of overseeing the artists and recruiting all different kind of talent, from rap and hip-hop to folk singers.

Because of the time and effort exerted by the musicians, Interlude is aiming to help the artists benefit financially from their experience.

“Our goal is for the artist to expose their talents and provide them with opportunities to possibly make a profit from their music,” George said. “We’re still working on the logistics in hopes they will get a profit.”

Beginning this semester, the business will be hosting shows at different venues on campus, in Columbia and potentially in other cities.

“We will be having a Fall Fest this semester and another main event in the spring, along with a couple different events every month,” Monfreda said.

Monfreda said Interlude’s mission is to support student musicians and give them a way to reach a larger audience.

“Our goal is to scout talent at Mizzou and find talent that might otherwise go unnoticed,” Garvey said. “We want to help shape musicians into who they have the potential to be, help them showcase their talents and promote them to a wider audience.”
George said she sees bigger opportunities for musicians through this business.

“We’re hoping this company will bring new ideas and a fresh perspective to Mizzou,” she said. “Long-term, we aim to expand musical talent at Mizzou and hope that students get recognized and exposed to bigger companies, such as Warner Brothers.”

Even though Interlude Music is brand-new, Garvey said she believes that students will still able to be successful.

“We’re always looking for new musicians,” she said. “I just hope that through this business, students are able to further their dreams.”

Extreme case of brown recluse spiders drives owners from Weldon Spring home

WELDON SPRING • A home with prime views of the third and fourth holes at Whitmoor Country Club has been vacant for two years because of a creepy crawly problem.
The home was infested with between 4,500 and 6,000 brown recluse spiders, according to one estimate.

The previous homeowners abandoned the 2,400-square-foot atrium ranch after years of pesticide treatments couldn’t curb the invasion.

The home went into foreclosure and hasn’t sold, apparently because no one wanted to live with its history.

Blue-and-orange striped tarps covered the house this week as an exterminator blasted the spiders and eggs with 200 pounds of sulfuryl fluoride gas, pumped in at 67 degrees below zero.

The spider problem started in October 2007, shortly after Brian and Susan Trost bought the home at 84 Gillette Field Close, according to testimony at a civil trial. The Trosts had bought purchased the home, built in 1988, for $450,000.

Susan Trost testified she was walking through her new home, exploring it on her first day there, when she noticed a large, stringy web wrapped around one of the light fixtures.

It hadn’t been there on the walk-through date.

Neither had the webs in the bar area in the basement. In the kitchen, she tugged on a piece of loose wallpaper, and a spider skittered behind it.
She thought the home probably just needed a thorough cleaning, so she got to work.

In the following days, she saw spiders and their webs every day. They were in the mini blinds, the air registers, the pantry ceiling, the fireplace. Their exoskeletons were falling from the can lights. Once when she was showering, she dodged a spider as it fell from the ceiling and washed down the drain.

A month after living in the home, her 4-year-old son screamed frantically from the basement, and Trost saw a spider, about the size of a half dollar, inches from his foot.

Instead of smashing it, Trost trapped it in a plastic bag and looked it up on the Internet. It was a brown recluse.

Trost testified she contacted a pest control company that came in on a weekly basis, spraying the interior and exterior and setting down sticky traps.

Since brown recluse spiders often live behind walls, she hired someone to come in and remove drywall so the exterminator could spray behind it.

She hired another company to remove the insulation from the attic and put down a pesticide powder.

“After the attic treatment, it seemed to help for quite a while, although we were still capturing them,” she testified. “It just was a decline; they weren’t gone.”

CLAIMS DENIED

In 2008, the Trosts filed a claim with their insurance company, State Farm, and a civil lawsuit against the home’s previous owners, Tina and David Gault, for allegedly not disclosing the brown recluse and other problems with the home.

At a jury trial in St. Charles County in October 2011, Jamel Sandidge, a biology professor at the University of Kansas, described the brown recluse problem at the Trost home as “immense,” between 4,500 and 6,000 spiders.

Most troubling was the fact, Sandidge testified, that those calculations were made in the wintertime, when the spiders are least active.

Jurors found in the Trosts’ favor and awarded them $472,110, but they have never collected.

The Gaults had their defense provided by their insurers, also State Farm. But when the verdict was entered, State Farm claimed the Gaults’ policy had no coverage and refused to pay, according to the Trosts’ attorney, Thomas J. Magee.

Scott Harper, attorney for State Farm, could not be reached for comment.
State Farm filed an appeal of the judgment, but it was withdrawn in April 2013. The Gaults filed for bankruptcy about the same time. They could not be reached for comment.

The Trosts have since filed another lawsuit, this one against State Farm for failing to pay the claims they initially filed regarding the spider damage.

The couple declined to be interviewed for the story.

Magee said State Farm claims the policy doesn’t cover spiders. However, Magee said the exclusion is for insects, and courts in other states have held that spiders are not insects.

In addition, State Farm is claiming that even though the house has thousands of spiders, that does not amount to “physical damage,” he said.

After the trial, when the spiders got worse, and State Farm refused to make any payment of any kind, the Trosts felt they had no choice but to move out, Magee said.

Today the home at 84 Gillette Field Close is owned by the Federal National Mortgage Association.

A spokesman for Fannie Mae said having an exterminator treat a home is standard procedure before putting it up for sale. Tim McCarthy, president of McCarthy Pest Control, said he was contacted by the agency to take care of the brown recluse spiders.

**SPIDER FEAR**

Missouri is home to more than 300 kinds of spiders, but according to experts, only two are potentially harmful — the brown recluse and the black widow. Both can inflict bites that can cause severe pain and infection.

Deaths from black widow bites are extremely rare, and are even less likely from brown recluse bites.

But that doesn’t stop people from being fearful.

“A lot of the fear is overdone,” said Matt Ormsby, naturalist with the Missouri Department of Conservation. “Sure, you need to respect the spider, but a brown recluse doesn’t have the bite pressure to make it through our skin, and they are not aggressive.”

The spider must be pressed against a person to be able to pierce the skin and get any venom in, he said.

Since brown recluses like to hide in places where humans don’t go frequently, like storage boxes kept in the basement, people can get bit if they put on clothes or shoes they’ve been storing.

“The best way to prevent getting bitten is to shake out your stuff and just frequent cleaning of the house,” Ormsby said.
Dr. Alok Sengupta, chair of emergency medicine at Mercy Hospital St. Louis, said the hospital treats spider bites every year, and people are always concerned about whether it came from a brown recluse.

Even if it did, Sengupta said the amount of venom injected is so small, people don’t usually have any complications. Severe reactions are rare.

Ormsby said a lot of spiders are misidentified as brown recluses. The spider has a distinctive violin-shaped patch on the back of its head, where the legs are attached.

“Missouri has a couple of other species of spiders that also have a violin on their back, but it’s facing a different direction,” Ormsby said. “On the brown recluse, the main part of the violin is where the head is, and the neck of the violin goes towards the back.”

**TENTING TREATMENT**

For the past two years, McCarthy has been using tenting and fumigating — a method popularized in the South for eradicating termite infestations — to handle brown recluses, beetles, bed bugs and other pesky problems.

The treatment costs between $5,000 and $30,000, depending on the size of the home. They’ve used the technique about 20 times and say it has had excellent results.

“We create a very hostile environment temporarily inside the home to kill the desired target,” said Bob Richardson, staff entomologist with McCarthy.

Spiders are not good subjects to kill with pesticides, Richardson said, because of their body makeup.

“You almost have to contact them with it to get the best results because they do have collagen on the tips of their feet, and they don’t absorb pesticides that you lay down.”

This week, workers used nine tarps — 15,000 square feet — to cover the home at Whitmoor. They rolled edges of the tarps together and attached them with heavy duty clamps.

They filled the home with sulfuryl fluoride gas that permeated the walls to kill not only the spiders, but their eggs. “There’ll be nothing alive in there after this,” Tim McCarthy said.

The tent attracted the attention of neighbor Greg Shockley, who said he has never seen a brown recluse in his home.

*James Carrell, professor emeritus of biological sciences at the University of Missouri, said he is not aware of any study ever done about the prevalence of brown recluses in Missouri homes.*

“But my experience is that most buildings or houses that are over 40 years old have brown recluses in them — particularly upstairs if there’s a second story or in the attic — and new houses that are only 10 to 20 years old may not have them at all,” he said.
Carrel said improved construction methods don’t allow for many cracks and crevices for the brown recluses to hide in during the daytime.

Other than that, it’s a mystery why the spiders inhabit some homes and not others. Picking a fairly new, upscale home as a place to reproduce is “just weird,” he said.

“I don’t know what to make of it,” he said.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

FROM READERS: MU student finds tweeting a lucrative business

Wednesday, October 8, 2014 | 3:12 p.m. CDT

Elijah Solidum is an MU junior studying management. In his spare time, he manages a multitude of parody accounts on Twitter, totaling more than 2 million followers that pay him indirectly through advertising revenue.

Whether you like it or not, social media has taken over the world. Unfortunately for some of us, it has also taken over our lives. Fortunately for few of us, it has taken over our lives.

Last year, online advertising revenue surpassed broadcast television and cable television ad revenue for the first time. That same year, I became engulfed in the insanely competitive and ruthless industry of online advertising. I entered the industry by accident, as many people do. However, remaining relevant and profitable in any field is never an accident.

About three years ago, I thought it’d be super-cool to make a Twitter account and be Twitter-famous (but really, who didn’t try to be Twitter-famous at some point?). @BrickCh4News gained a measly 4,000 followers in about two years. That was a little over a year (and two million followers) ago before I discovered the insane potential in social media marketing. I was late to the scene, but once I found out about Twitter’s own little economy, I was relentless with trying to make it big. Cooperating with like-minded peers spanning across the world, a hobby became a blooming business.
Social media has made the world a much smaller place, allowing things to spread across the globe in a matter of seconds. Imagine the influence and reach someone with millions of followers could achieve. Those hobbies and jokes that I once thought nothing of had turned into valuable assets. Those “assets” ranged from satire (@DangItObama) and crude humor (warning: that link is adult themed) to cute dogs (@EmergencyPugs) and positive quotes (@ChiItestVibes).

Many different demographics could be targeted and specific audiences could be catered to, making the possibilities limitless. In the past year, I took advantage of opportunities I never even imagined being able to have. I found myself advertising for businesses ranging from the well-established like Google and ESPN to up-and-coming companies just wanting to make their presence known.

The money was there for those who were hungry enough to find it. I started promoting lesser-known websites for a cut of their ad revenue, before venturing out and making my first website (BlurredMinds.com) in October 2013 to earn money for myself. With no web design experience, a shoddy site was up and running. A few months later, I made another website, Profascinate.com. This time, I had more experience and a dedicated group of ambitious peers. They would promote my website to gain ad revenue and I would get a cut of their earnings for hosting, writing, and managing everything behind the scenes. This site has been afloat for six months, and I’ve employed influential people from across the country, and even a few from Canada and England. In six months, 3.5 million people representing nearly every country in the world have spent some time on the website.

However, the social media marketing industry, like I said earlier, is ruthless. One must constantly move forward in order to avoid falling behind. Everyone automatically assumes that it is an easy job, but I’d estimate that about 90 percent of people who try to enter the industry fail or struggle to find longevity. It takes creativity, resourcefulness, relentless hard work and an insatiable ambition for success in order for one to even begin to think about joining the industry. Like me, the majority of social media marketers are college-aged, business-minded entrepreneurs. Sometimes we cooperate, but it’s a guarantee that we’re also competing.
In the future, online advertising will only continue to grow and it is crucial for businesses to adapt or else they’ll fall behind. Adaptability in a rapidly changing landscape is an invaluable quality to have, and with my relative inexperience and “learn-as-I-go” approach, who knows what will happen.

This story is part of a section of the Missourian called From Readers, which is dedicated to your voices and your stories. We hope you’ll consider sharing. Here’s how. Supervising editor is Stephanie Ebbs.