Teens with autism need help on path to adulthood

As the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders continues to rise, there has been an emphasis on early diagnosis, intervention, and treatment.

However, less attention has gone to children with autism once they reach their teen years and adulthood.

Researchers say these young people and their caregivers need more support so the teens can transition into adulthood successfully and independently.

“We need to focus our efforts on addressing the needs of young adults with autism in a much bigger and broader way,” says Nancy Cheak-Zamora, assistant professor in the School of Health Professions at the University of Missouri and a researcher at the university’s Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

“As health care providers, we cannot only help them take care of their health care needs; we also need to assure they’re connected to resources necessary to live independently and succeed in employment and education.”

Researchers conducted two focus groups with youth with autism and two focus groups with the teens’ caregivers to explore the teens’ experiences transitioning into adulthood and their plans for the future. Specifically, researchers wanted to know the teens’ and caregivers’ needs, beyond health care.

The findings, published in the Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, show that both teens with autism and their caregivers felt fearful and anxious about the teens becoming adults. Caregivers also reported lacking social, educational, and vocational resources to help their children prepare for their futures. The caregivers said they were struggling to fill those gaps in resources themselves.

“Some parents get apartments for their young adults and then maintain two households,” Cheak-Zamora says. “The mom, in most cases, is taking care of her house and her young adult’s home.
It’s wonderful that the adult with autism is getting independence, but it can be unbelievably burdensome for the family and the parents.”

Caregivers should start talking to their children with autism early about their plans for their future, Cheak-Zamora says.

“A lot of the young adults in our study told us about their goals for their future, but few had ever communicated these goals to their caregivers,” Cheak-Zamora says. “Our young adults with autism really want to be able to socialize and succeed in higher education, but sometimes they don’t know how to go about doing that.

“Caregivers need to start saying to their children at the age of 12 or 13, ‘What do you want to do? We’ve got 5 years, so let’s make a plan.’ They can even do that in the doctor’s office and with a school counselor.”

Finding ways to facilitate independence for the young adults with autism is important, and it doesn’t have to be expensive. However, it does take some creativity and help from others, Cheak-Zamora says.

“Care coordination should be in the health care setting, and this is a part of the medical home model—making sure that the family isn’t just meeting with the doctor for 15 minutes—that somebody else is following up with them to again think about what resources and unmet needs they have and how to connect them with resources. It would also be an opportunity for the family to feel supported.”

**MISSOURIAN**

Columbia takes off as a progressive city that understands autism

MICHAEL MANDELL, 2 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Karen O’Connor remembers why she came to Columbia. Almost a decade later, she feels vindicated.

O’Connor, now a member of the training and outreach division at the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders at MU, moved to mid-Missouri from Cleveland in 2006. She wanted a place where she could teach and belong to a community that specialized in helping with disabilities.
As others have found in recent years, O’Connor found Columbia to be that place. While the city provides a variety of resources for individuals with various disabilities, its growth as an autism-friendly community has become particularly evident.

“I don’t think there are many places out there that can provide as much as Columbia can when it comes to our efforts and what we can offer,” O’Connor said. “There are so many more opportunities and ways people with autism can get the help they need.”

Although a number of factors have led to Columbia’s newfound status as a prominent autism community, three general themes tie everything together: the Thompson Center, new business practices that accommodate people with autism and the city’s overall appeal.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder of which understanding is still new and public perception hasn’t yet developed into fully nuanced opinion. The disorder is characterized by compulsive behavioral patterns and difficulties with social interactions; those who have it typically display intense passions in specific interest areas.

In 2014, approximately one in 68 Americans fell somewhere on the autism spectrum. That spectrum works on a scale that ranges from severe autism on one end to high-functioning conditions such as Asperger Syndrome on the other.

Regardless of where an individual with autism appears on the spectrum, anyone who does is considered to have an autism spectrum disorder.

Like most widespread conditions or diseases, the public is aware of autism. They have a general idea of what it is, and they know people with autism or autism spectrum disorders need assistance and are a growing voice.

They don’t, however, always know how to provide assistance to those who need it.
“There’s been some hesitance in the past because people don’t know what they can do to help others,” said Anna Laakman, a team member of the Thompson Center's training core and outreach division.

“That’s where we’ve come in. … We want to help Columbia and Mizzou become places people turn to and can look to for the resources they need.”

Despite its enlightened reputation, Columbia wasn’t particularly involved in autism research and development until 2005. Then, a gift from MU graduates Bill and Nancy Thompson helped establish the Thompson Center.

The center’s mission is to “improve the lives of individuals and families affected by autism and neurodevelopmental disorders through world class programs that integrate research, clinical service delivery, education and public policy.”

Its existence has been a starting point for research and autism-related programs that have helped Columbia accommodate those affected by the disorder on a daily basis.

“It all starts with research,” Laakman said. “So many people think of autism as this scary thing that we don’t know much about yet.

"Making a community better for those with autism will always be an important goal, but we also want to find out more about how autism affects the brain and development.”

Close affiliation with a well-funded research university has helped the Thompson Center. In addition to the center’s own staff and faculty members, it also has a wide variety of university professors as collaborators.

For example, Thompson Center staff member Judith Miles and biological engineering professor Gang Yao have been working for years with children to track eye pupil movement — individuals whose pupils take longer to react to specifically designed flashing lights are more likely to exhibit autistic tendencies.
Through his professional expertise, Yao recently developed a device that can track eye movement in ways that don’t require children to sit still throughout the testing.

Conducting such research, however, comes down to more than spending money and developing research strategies or equipment. It also requires a staff that can find willing children to participate in such research efforts, and that can be a difficult subject for parents.

“It’s the question of how we can get people to believe in what we’re doing,” Laakman said. “Some parents don’t know much about autism, so how do you come across them and say, ‘Hey, we think it would be beneficial if we tested your son or daughter?’

"That’s not always an easy sell, but the fact we’re able to do it says a lot about Columbia and the staff we have (at the Thompson Center).”

Although those on the spectrum face lifelong battles with social skills and other difficulties, being able to diagnose it at a young age can help them develop the proper skills.

For O’Connor, Columbia is the ideal place to do so. She knows countless families who have moved to the city from near and far, many citing the Thompson Center’s reputation for working with and accommodating children.

“When you’re dealing with any disability, that’s (children) often going to be what you focus on most,” O’Connor said. “Autism is no different. If you can identify and really get a plan to how you approach the problem, it makes the process so much easier.”

Autism and Columbia’s business environment

One of the Thompson Center’s newer initiatives trains local businesses to accommodate those on the spectrum. In July, the center took a big step when it launched its Autism Friendly Business program. Four businesses have completed the program’s training — MU Athletics Department, KCOU, Focus on Health Chiropractic and The Broadway Hotel.
For businesses, autism-friendly practices train employees to help patrons with autism by creating courses of action for various situations. Although O’Connor and Laakman, both involved in training and outreach, believe such efforts have been successful, they know the program still a work in progress.

“As time goes on, you’re probably going to see more demand for this type of training,” O’Connor said. “We’ll also have to take a look at the methods we use as we learn more about autism.”

The Broadway, a DoubleTree hotel owned by Hilton downtown, completed the training in October. Although Chesterfield Hotels, its parent chain, owns other hotels throughout Missouri, it chose Columbia as an autism-friendly location because of medical opportunities and progressive approaches.

“It’s a city that really keeps up from a medical and disability standpoint,” Chesterfield Hotels General Manager Bob McDonald said. “There are so many hospitals and people here who can give you the opportunities you need to this.

"It’s also a community that’s forgiving and gravitates toward sensible people, which is what you need to make this work.”

Under the Thompson Center’s training guidelines, The Broadway has taught its staff members to accommodate people with autism and their families. This includes suggesting locations for visitors who are unfamiliar with the city or looking for specific social environments.

Employees know that certain rooms and areas throughout the hotel are better suited to meet the needs of those with autism. Noise might be an issue, for example.

“If a parent says they have a child with autism that could be at risk of a tantrum or might be uncomfortable, the staff is able to accommodate and suggest a different room,” McDonald said.
In hotels, where it’s easy to find privacy and develop a staff that can help people seeking a particular environment, the task may not be difficult. In larger environments, such as sports venues, for example, that’s not necessarily the case. Football and basketball games have thousands of people concentrated in a large, rowdy crowd, a setting where people on the spectrum may not feel comfortable.

In early October, the athletics program at MU announced a business partnership with the Thompson Center to bring autism-friendly practices to Mizzou Arena for the 2015-16 men’s and women’s basketball seasons.

The objective is to prepare those with autism for the arena’s atmosphere on game days. As does The Broadway, the arena offers tote bags to help those with autism feel more comfortable. Among the items are earbuds and a three-ring booklet that explains where to go for assistance, what happens during games and when to expect loud noises.

“There’s a lot that can catch people by surprise at a basketball game, and our goal is to make sure that nobody with autism feels like they’re discriminated against for any reason,” MU Associate Director of Event Management Krissy Ellis said.

“If we can take places with so much commotion and turn them into positive places for people with autism, there’s really no place that can’t be done.”

That change is something many autism awareness activists hope to bring to other businesses in Columbia. Al Eberhard, a former Missouri basketball player who is now on the Thompson Center Foundation Board, said the center hopes to engage more local businesses.

“When a place or atmosphere or something else you love takes on added meaning like that, it’s special,” Eberhard said. “Everyone should be able to enjoy those games, but that’s harder for people with autism sometimes. This can really be the start of something.”

An aware and growing community
Other factors have helped Columbia become a haven for those on the spectrum. The Columbia Public Schools has taken a step forward, for example, by giving its students with autism a better chance to succeed.

Lukin Murphy, an autism support specialist for Columbia Public Schools, said the district has more than 100 students with autism. The district offers classrooms designed for middle-school students who have autism-related communicative skills and students who have a combination of autism and other learning disabilities.

“I’ve done autism work in tons of different cities, five different states and even internationally in India and Bulgaria, and none of them compare to here,” Murphy said. “In terms of education, this is the best and most well-rounded support system I’ve been around.”

Elsewhere, the city’s demographic composition has also played a major role in developing its newfound reputation as an autism-friendly community. With at least 35,000 college students living in the community, Columbia’s median age (27.2 years) is nearly 11 years younger than the state average (38.1 years).

Since many autism awareness efforts and cultural advances have taken place within the past 15 years or so, younger generations are growing up with a stronger grasp of what autism is and what they can do to support those on the spectrum.

“I think college students and other young people, they’re really learning to understand things more and be more open about them,” Laakman said. “That’s not only true with autism, but it’s also true with depression and mental illness. It’s a benefit that comes with being in a place where people are younger.”

One of the next frontiers in Columbia’s quest for an autism-friendly atmosphere could be the city's involvement.

Although O’Connor said Columbia has worked well with organizations such as Special Olympics and has emphasized autism programs through Boone County’s family resources and
case management opportunities, she feels more can be done to help the city accommodate those on the spectrum.

“That’s probably our next step, it’s working with the city closer and helping Columbia to become even more inclusive than it already is,” O’Connor said. “We’re learning more and more about autism every day, and we owe it to people with autism to help them in any way we can.”

GOP lawmakers call for firing of Mizzou professor who called for 'muscle'

Aamer Madhani, USA TODAY 5:53 p.m. EST January 5, 2016

More than 100 Missouri Republican lawmakers are calling for the firing of a University of Missouri assistant professor and a staff member who received nationwide attention after a video captured the two women attempting to intimidate student journalists at the site of a campus protest in November.

Eighteen state senators and 99 House members signed letters to top administrators of the University of Missouri System and its flagship campus in Columbia, charging that communication assistant professor Melissa Click "failed to meet the obligations she has to her supervisors, fellow professors, University students, and the taxpayers of Missouri" when she called for "muscle" to help her remove a student journalist from the protest site.

In addition to calling for Click's ouster, the senators also called for the firing of Janna Basler, the university's assistant director of Greek Life, who appears in a video to have physical contact with a student photographer. In that same video, Click appears to grab at a camera carried by student journalist Mark Schierbecker and calls for help to remove him from a protest site on campus.

The protests, which were triggered by African-American students' concerns that administrators were doing too little to address racism on campus and included a strike by
Mizzou's football team, led to the resignations of UM system president Tim Wolfe and chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

"The fact that, as a professor teaching in the communication department and school of journalism, she displayed such a complete disregard for the First Amendment rights of reporters should be enough to question her competency and aptitude for her job," the lawmakers wrote. "It should be evident that these actions are inappropriate, illegal and unacceptable for a faculty member of the University of Missouri."

In response the Republican lawmakers, colleagues of Click released a letter on Tuesday that was sent to university officials last month in which they expressed support for Click. The letter, which was signed by more than 100 university faculty members, notes that Click expressed remorse for her actions soon after the incident. They added that her actions "constitute at most a regrettable mistake."

"We believe that Click has been wronged in the media by those who have attacked her personally and have called for her dismissal," the letter said. "We affirm our support of her as a colleague, a teacher, and a scholar, and we call upon the University to defend her First Amendment rights of protest and her freedom to act as a private citizen."

State Rep. Caleb Jones, a GOP lawmaker from Columbia, said that he and colleagues began gathering signatures last month but decided to make their effort public on Monday after gaining support from more than 100 lawmakers.

"It's imperative that the university act swiftly to remove her from her position," Jones said.

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, said he doesn't agree with the intent of the letter, because it attempts to "micromanage" the university. But he said he does agree that Click’s behavior was outrageous.

“Anybody who saw that video… I can understand how completely unacceptable her behavior was. The fact that people are upset, I’m okay with that," Nixon said.

Click, who does not have tenure, resigned her courtesy appointment in the journalism school the day after the incident but remains an assistant professor of communication at the university.

In the letter, the GOP lawmakers also raise questions about Click's research. According to a university bio, Click's "current research projects involve 50 Shades of Grey readers, the impact of social media in fans' relationship with Lady Gaga, masculinity and male fans, messages about class and food in reality television programming, and messages about work in children's television programs."
"While we recognize there may be some value in pop culture studies, her behavior has the public questioning her ‘research’ and her unacceptable actions during the protests," the lawmakers wrote.

In the faculty letter, Click’s colleagues praised her, writing she has "earned her position through an outstanding record of teaching and research."

Basler and Click did not respond to requests for comment. Christian Basi, a spokesman for the university, declined to comment on the letters.

Lawmakers Want Mizzou to Fire Professor Who Blocked Journalist in Viral Video

Lawmakers are demanding the University of Missouri fire Melissa Click, the professor featured in a viral video in which she calls for “some muscle” to remove a student journalist filming an anti-racism protest.

Click already apologized and resigned from a courtesy appointment at the Missouri School of Journalism. The Kansas City Star reports that in a letter sent to the school’s Board of Curators on Monday, more than 100 Missouri House members and senators said her resignation isn’t enough.

The letter said Click’s actions amounted to a disregard for the First Amendment rights of reporters, and “served to inflame an already caustic situation that was clearly out of line.”

“As a professional representing our university, Click failed to meet the obligation she has to her supervisors, fellow professors, university students, and the taxpayers of Missouri,” the letter said.

The school said the issue is a personnel matter and declined to comment to local media.
University of Missouri faculty support professor whom Republicans want fired

MU has no comment on the lawmakers’ demand against Melissa Click

BY STEVE KRASKE
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University of Missouri faculty members on Tuesday came out in support of Melissa Click, the embattled MU professor who famously asked for some “muscle” to move a student journalist away from protesters during anti-racism protests on campus in November.

On Monday, a group of more than 100 Republicans in the state General Assembly demanded, in a letter to the MU Board of Curators, that the university immediately fire Click, an assistant communications professor at the Columbia campus.

As a counter to the lawmakers’ letter, MU faculty made public a letter that had been sent in December to university department deans, top administrators and the Faculty Council chair. The letter was signed by more than 115 faculty members.

“We wish to state in no uncertain terms our support for Click as a member of the University of Missouri faculty who has earned her position through an outstanding record of teaching and research,” the faculty letter stated.

“We believe that her actions on November 9 constitute at most a regrettable mistake, one that came, moreover, at the end of several weeks during which Click served alongside other faculty and staff as an ally to students who were protesting what they saw as their exclusion from and isolation at the University,” it said.
The lawmakers, in their letter, accused Click of grabbing the student journalist’s camera and calling on those around her to bring “some muscle” to remove the photographer and other reporters from the area. Video featuring her went viral and garnered nationwide attention.

“As a professional representing our university, Click failed to meet the obligation she has to her supervisors, fellow professors, university students and the taxpayers of Missouri,” the lawmakers’ letter said.

Instead of promoting a safe and stable learning environment, Click’s actions “served to inflame an already caustic situation that was clearly out of line.”

Click already has resigned a courtesy appointment at MU’s School of Journalism. But the lawmakers want her gone altogether.

Her actions amounted to a “complete disregard for the First Amendment rights of reporters,” the lawmakers’ letter said.

It was signed by more than 100 House members and 18 senators.

Last month a Columbia prosecutor said he was considering whether Click should be charged with assault for grabbing a student photographer’s camera. MU student and videographer Mark Schierbecker filed a report against Click in November the same day the video was taken.

Click did not respond to messages and a call to her office, and a Mizzou representative said university administrators were not commenting, referring to the matter as a personnel issue.

Pamela Henrickson, who chairs the university’s Board of Curators, said she spent time at the Capitol on Tuesday talking to legislators. But she did not say whether she went specifically to discuss the Click letter.

In an email to The Star, Henrickson said that “the leadership of the UM System is committed to listening to legislators and considering their input as we move the university forward. We appreciate the support that the University System has long received from the General Assembly and we look forward to working closely with legislators to ensure that the UM System remains one of the state’s most valuable assets.”

University faculty said they hope their letter has weight as a public statement showing support for Click’s continued employment at MU.

“One of our main concerns in writing is to uphold the University’s standard procedures for evaluating faculty performance and conduct,” said Andrew Hoberek, an MU English professor. “These procedures rely on a range of material that goes beyond that presented in either letter. As
our signatures attest, we do believe that our respect for Professor Click and her work is supported by her record.”

**Governor slams Mizzou professor**

**JEFFERSON CITY** • Gov. Jay Nixon said he doesn’t blame people for being angry about the behavior of a University of Missouri communications professor during protests in Columbia in November.

On Tuesday, the governor was asked if he supports a legislative attempt to oust assistant professor Melissa Click, who helped activists trying to block reporters from interviewing protesters at his state’s flagship university.

Nixon said he doesn’t agree with the intent of a letter from 100 GOP lawmakers in the Missouri House and Senate, but he does agree that Click’s behavior was outrageous.

“Anybody who saw that video... I can understand how completely unacceptable her behavior was. The fact that people are upset, I’m OK with that,” Nixon said.

Click was seen on video during the protests calling out for “muscle” to help remove a student journalist from a gathering place on Mizzou’s Carnahan Quadrangle.

The video sparked a national wave of criticism against Click and other activists.

In their Dec. 18 letter to the university, members of the House and Senate wrote, “The fact that, as a professor teaching in the communication department and the school of journalism, she displayed such a complete disregard for the First Amendment rights of reporters should be enough to question her competency and aptitude for her job.”

In explaining why he doesn’t support the letter, Nixon said he does not want to “micro-manage” the university.

**MISSOURIAN**

**Letter of support for Click released after lawmakers call for dismissal**

HANNAH STURTECKY, 13 hrs ago
COLUMBIA — A letter signed by more than 100 MU faculty members was released Tuesday in support of a colleague a day after Republican lawmakers called for her dismissal. The Republican legislators were critical of Melissa Click’s role in campus protests in November.

The letter in support of Click, which was dated Dec. 14 and carried the signatures of 116 faculty, was initially meant to remain internal, Andrew Hoberek, an English professor at MU who signed the letter, said.

"We have decided to make this letter public in response to the recent letter from Republican legislators calling for Click’s dismissal," Hoberek said. He declined to discuss the origin of the letter or how the signatures were collected.

The letter included signatures from faculty in the departments of communication, theatre, religious studies, English and others.

UPDATED: Faculty support Melissa Click after state lawmakers call for her dismissal

By the end of Tuesday, Gov. Jay Nixon and student organizations have weighed in on the issue.

Faculty are supporting assistant professor Melissa Click after Republican state lawmakers released their letter calling for her immediate removal for her “inappropriate and criminal actions” during campus protests in November, according to a Jan. 4 news release.

Click’s actions “constitute at most a regrettable mistake,” according to a letter of support released Tuesday by the faculty of MU. The letter is dated Dec. 14 and was signed by more than 100 faculty from different departments and schools.

The faculty credited Click with serving as “an ally to students who were protesting what they saw as their exclusion from and isolation at the University.”

Two letters from state lawmakers were sent to the UM System Board of Curators on Dec. 18. More than 100 House Republicans signed one letter, and 18 Senate Republicans signed the other.
letter. The senators also called for Greek Life and Leadership assistant director Janna Basler’s removal. Basler was placed on administrative leave but returned to work in December.

On Nov. 9, Click and Basler were involved in an altercation with student journalists on Carnahan Quad where students had set up camp in support of graduate student Jonathan Butler’s hunger strike. Butler and the campers were seeking UM System President Tim Wolfe’s removal from office.

In the viral video, Click is seen calling for “more muscle” to get a videographer out of the campsite. The campers asked for members of the media to stay away from their tents. The video was taken after Wolfe resigned.

On Tuesday, Gov. Jay Nixon said he didn’t agree with the intent of the Republicans’ letter, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

“Anybody who saw that video… I can understand how completely unacceptable her behavior was,” Nixon told the Post-Dispatch. “The fact that people are upset, I’m OK with that,”

Click apologized a day later. However, the faculty’s letter notes that the apology didn’t end the controversy, and the criticism then shifted to a more personal nature.

“Much of the commentary in the press and on social media has gone beyond legitimate debate to ad hominem attacks on, and harassment of, Click personally, and has even included calls for her dismissal from the University,” the letter read. “In many cases, we believe, this commentary has been driven by outside groups with agendas external to that of the University.”

Thomas Bradbury, president of the MU Young Americans for Liberty chapter, said in an emailed statement that Click and Basler hurt MU’s image, and their continued employment continues to damage it.

“Melissa Click and Janna Basler’s abhorrent attempt to stifle speech and restrict first amendment rights last semester should prove these individuals too incompetent to be employed at the University of Missouri,” Bradbury said.

The lawmakers wrote that Click’s actions weren’t in line with her job as a professional representing MU and as an academic professional.

“Instead, Professor Click’s comments served to inflame an already caustic situation that was clearly out of line,” the letter read.

Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia, signed the letter and said it’s imperative that MU remove Click from her position quickly.

"At every turn, Click's actions were unacceptable and inflammatory in a situation where the students and the public needed and expected university employees to serve professionally and as a calming influence," Jones said in the news release.
Jones could not be reached for additional comment.

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said in a statement that he expects more out of MU’s faculty and staff.

“The actions of both Basler and Click were unacceptable and inflammatory in nature, the university needs educators who display civility and patience even during emotional moments,” Schaefer said.

In the letter, the lawmakers questioned Click’s teaching aptitude, citing the fact that she was a professor in the journalism school but seemed to obstruct a journalist’s First Amendment right.

Click, a professor in the communications department, held a courtesy appointment with the School of Journalism, which she resigned from on Nov. 10. Journalism school Dean David Kurpius said in a Nov. 10 statement that Click didn’t teach courses at the school.

Despite resigning from her appointment, the lawmakers wrote that “it is exceedingly difficult to justify her continued service at the University of Missouri.”

The lawmakers also addressed Click’s research in their letters.

“Our constituents have expressed outrage at the fact she is using taxpayer dollars to conduct research on ‘50 Shades of Grey,’ ‘Lady Gaga,’ and ‘Twilight,’” the letter read.

Click has taught at MU since fall 2003, and her staff page describes her research interests as pop culture texts and audiences. The faculty wrote that Click “has earned her position through an outstanding record of teaching and research.”

Mizzou Democrats released a statement Tuesday night in support of academic freedom at MU. They said the Republican’s letter was a “gross overstep” as faculty employment is a university issue.

They also took issue with the critique of Click’s research.

“Unfortunately for our legislators, it is once again not under their domain to decide what can and cannot be researched at Mizzou or at any other university,” the statement read. “Academic freedom means that students and professors may pursue knowledge in whatever form it may take, 50 Shades of Grey included.”

In the letter, the lawmakers wrote that while they recognized there “may be some value in pop culture studies,” Click’s actions have led to increased public scrutiny.

The lawmakers called on the university to send a strong message and “decisively to root out bad behavior.”
On the other hand, the faculty asked the university to support Click and defend “her first amendment rights of protest and her freedom to act as a private citizen.”

Click has not responded to requests for comment.
Click was unprofessional and wrong. She called for “some muscle” to help her confront one journalist, while ignoring the fact that the university quad, where the protests were ongoing, is a public space and therefore open to the media and others.

Maybe she should be fired. Or maybe the greater body of her work argues in favor of her remaining on the faculty. I really don’t know. Neither do most of the legislators who signed the letter.

But the purpose of the letter isn’t just to get Click fired. It is to tell the University of Missouri system that the state legislature is prepared to meddle in personnel matters and other internal affairs that shouldn’t be the jurisdiction of politicians.

And the not-so-implicit threat is always this: We fund you, so do what we say.

The second woman to have incurred legislative ire is Mary Kogut, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri.

Along with James Miller, owner of Pathology Services, Inc., of Brentwood, Mo., Kogut ignored subpoenas to produce documents and witnesses for a state Senate committee initiated over the summer to investigate Planned Parenthood.

Committee chairman Sen. Kurt Schaefer, a Republican from Columbia, and other GOP members have recommended the full Senate issue sanctions against the two.

The committee was much more a witch hunt than a fact-finding venture. Kogut undoubtedly recognized that she was being called to Jefferson City to be berated and entrapped. Miller, who actually did testify before a similar House committee, opted out of a repeat performance.

Planned Parenthood has questioned the committee’s validity and subpoena power and said the documents requested would present a violation of patient privacy.

If the full Senate approved sanctions, Kogut and Miller could face up to 10 days in jail, a $300 fine, or both. Given the ugly “gotcha” atmosphere of the committee, those might actually be preferable to an appearance. But the actual sanctions are less likely than a legal fight over whether they could be applied.

In any case, lawmakers’ actions this week have signaled that Planned Parenthood and the University of Missouri system might be in for a long, difficult legislative session.
Ethics, voter ID among measures to watch in Missouri session

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Missouri lawmakers will arrive at the Capitol on Wednesday to start the 2016 legislative session, during which they are expected to discuss how to come up with the money to fix aging roads and bridges, changes to laws on abortion and whether to require photo identification for voting.

Here are some of the top issues to watch:

ABORTION

Proposals so far in the GOP-led Legislature include a ban on fetal tissue donation from abortions, which comes amid a backlash over undercover videos released last summer showing Planned Parenthood officials discussing the transfer of aborted fetal body parts.

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ELECTIONS

At least seven lawmakers are running for either U.S. Congress or a statewide elected office in 2016, which some legislative leaders have said could mean longer debates and more speeches.

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ETHICS

Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon, who will leave office after this session, and the Republican legislative leaders all say tightening state ethics laws is a priority. The push follows the resignations in 2015 of two former lawmakers accused of inappropriate behavior toward interns.

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FERGUSON

Missouri’s 2015 legislative session ended with little action on bills proposed in response to black 18-year-old Michael Brown’s shooting by a white officer, although Republicans and some Democrats touted the passage of a measure limiting the powers and revenues of municipal courts. Bills to require police to wear body cameras and measures to revamp the state’s laws on police use of deadly force were proposed again this year.

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GUNS

Bills on firearms include measures that would allow guns on college campuses. One would allow for schools to apply for waivers if they have security guards and weapons-screening devices at every entrance to every building on campus.
LAWSUIT LIMITS

Though they passed limits last year on how much victims could win in medical malpractice cases, Republican leaders are still pushing for additional restrictions on liability lawsuits. That's after the state Supreme Court overturned previous limits.

RAMS

Lawmakers upset by efforts to lure the Rams to stay in St. Louis by building a new football stadium without a public or legislative vote likely will continue to vent frustrations if such plans move forward. One proposed bill would require approval from the Legislature for the St. Louis Regional Convention and Sports Complex Authority to extend or issue new bonds that would financially obligate the state.

TRANSPORTATION

Lawmakers will again try to find additional funding to help repair the state's aging roads and bridges. One potential fix that's been proposed is a measure to raise the gasoline tax by 1.5 cents per gallon and the diesel tax by 3.5 cents.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

Primarily Republican lawmakers already have criticized how leaders handled student protests at the Columbia campus over the former administration's perceived indifference to issues of racial discrimination. Protests that drew national attention to Mizzou, along with administrators' response, likely will come up again in the Legislature.

VOTER PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

Proposals would require voters to present a form of government-issued photo identification at the polls in order to vote, with exceptions.

Ethics reforms at top of agenda for state lawmakers

TIM TAI, 2 hrs ago
COLUMBIA — When Missouri lawmakers convene in Jefferson City on Wednesday, they will once again try to pass a series of reforms to toughen the state's ethics laws, some of the loosest in the nation.

Missouri House of Representatives Speaker Todd Richardson R-Poplar Bluff, said he would quickly refer all ethics bills to the Government Oversight and Accountability Committee once the 2016 session begins. Over a dozen ethics bills have already been filed in the House and Senate.

Missouri is the only state without limits on both campaign contributions and lobbyist gifts and does not mandate a waiting period before a legislator can become a lobbyist. Efforts to toughen laws in these areas have failed repeatedly in recent years, including last year.

But there are signs this year could be different.

Richardson and Senate Majority Floor Leader Sen. Mike Kehoe, R-Jefferson City, said they will try to pass separate bills addressing specific issues rather than pushing for a bigger ethics reform package. They hope it will help largely-agreed-upon measures pass without being stalled by more controversial bills.

There is also pressure on the legislature to rebuild public trust after two lawmakers resigned amid scandals last year. Former House Speaker Rep. John Diehl, R-Town and Country, resigned in May after being accused of sending sexually charged text messages to an intern, and former Sen. Paul LeVota, D-Independence, left two months later amid accusations of sexually harassing an intern.

Richardson said his goal is "to improve the environment here in Jefferson City" and said ethics reform is one way to boost the public's perception of the legislature.

Which reforms are necessary is still up for debate.
House Majority Floor Leader Rep. Mike Cierpiot, R-Lee's Summit, said he was hopeful that limits on lobbyist gifts would help improve public perception and said, "We're going to take a serious run at passing (a) revolving door" law that limits how quickly a legislator can become a lobbyist.

Rep. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia, has filed four lobbying-related bills for the upcoming session. His proposals would require a person to dissolve all candidate committees before becoming a lobbyist; prevent legislators and elected state officials from becoming lobbyists until one year after leaving office; require officials to disclose travel expenses paid by third parties; and ban elected officials from accepting gifts from lobbyists.

A limit on campaign contributions might be less likely to pass, Rep. Kip Kendrick, D-Columbia, said. He believes contribution caps, which the Republican-led legislature repealed in 2008, are a key part of ethics reform.

"I just do not believe that any one person should be able to give an unlimited amount to ... any one person running for office," Kendrick said. "I'm uncertain that the legislation that will be passed will be meaningful."

This session, legislative leaders may have to concede defeat on the controversial "right-to-work" measure vetoed by Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon last year. Because a number of Republican lawmakers opposed the law, which would have prevented employers from forcing workers to join a union or pay union dues as a condition of employment, Nixon's veto survived the veto session in September.

"I'm not sure we want to go down that same path again," Cierpiot said. He said labor reform was still a key discussion and that the legislature would focus on topics such as the prevailing wage. Still, at least half a dozen right-to-work bills have been filed so far.

Another measure to resurface this session will be a gas tax hike that would boost funding for the Missouri Department of Transportation. A proposed 2-cent increase failed to pass last year and a
handful of lawmakers have proposed raising the tax on gasoline anywhere from 1 1/2 cents to 7 cents higher than the current 17 cents.

Rep. Chuck Basye, R-Rocheport, acknowledged MoDOT’s need for more funding but said he thinks a tax increase should be decided by public vote. Both Kehoe and Richardson said they hoped to free up funding for transportation from existing sources of revenue.

Recent events at MU have already attracted attention from legislators. Ninety-nine Republican representatives and 18 Republican senators sent a letter to the UM System Board of Curators demanding Melissa Click and Janna Basler be fired for controversial actions documented in a viral video. And in December, Rep. Rick Brattin, R-Harrisonville, proposed a bill that would revoke college scholarships from any student athlete who "calls, incites, supports, or participates in any strike or concerted refusal to play a scheduled game." Brattin has since withdrawn the bill.

Cierpiot said he and other lawmakers were not ruling out measures that would affect MU’s funding in order to get the university’s attention.

Kendrick said he would oppose such efforts, calling them "frustrating."

The regular legislative session opens at noon Wednesday and ends May 13.
Kurt Schaefer and Josh Hawley are battling for the GOP nomination for Missouri attorney general.

Schaefer called the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran a terrorist organization.

Hawley notes the U.S. removed the group from the list of terrorist organizations in 2012.

BY JASON HANCOCK
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JEFFERSON CITY - A decades-old Iranian militant group has become a point of contention in the Republican primary for Missouri attorney general.

**Sen. Kurt Schaefer, a Columbia Republican, slammed his GOP rival, University of Missouri law professor Josh Hawley, for writing a legal brief making the case that the United States shouldn’t designate the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran as a terrorist organization.**

Schaefer told the Columbia Daily Tribune that it demonstrated a lack of judgment for Hawley to “represent a terrorist organization.”

Hawley responded with a letter to Schaefer arguing that he is spreading misinformation about the group and pointing out that Republicans such as U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, former U.S. senator Kit Bond and former Missouri governor John Ashcroft have voiced strong support for the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran.

“You seem to misunderstand the threat we face from the Islamist regime in Iran and the value of pro-Western groups like (the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran),” Hawley said in his letter to Schaefer.

The group in question was founded in the 1960s to oppose the Iranian government. It was responsible for several killings of Americans through the 1970s.

It eventually renounced violence and began working with the United States in opposition to the current government of Iran. Hawley noted in his letter that the group has “provided critical intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program and other sensitive matters, and assisted the U.S. military in defeating our enemies in Iraq.”

In 2012, the U.S. removed the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran from the list of terrorist organizations.
The race for the Republican nomination for attorney general promises to be heated, with both sides building campaign war chests in preparation for the August primary. Schaefer reported nearly $1.5 million cash on hand in October, while Hawley had a little more than $700,000.

MU fraternities given more time to install sprinkler systems

COLUMBIA — Five fraternity houses at MU are being given more time to meet six-year-old requirements for installing sprinkler systems.

A Columbia Fire Department proposal would require fraternities and sororities that can't meet the June 1, 2016, deadline to file for an extension and include a plan for installing sprinklers.

The ordinance change was approved Monday by the Columbia City Council.

Assistant Fire Chief Brad Fraizer said the number of fraternities without sprinklers went from six to five after Acacia Fraternity agreed to not house more than 15 occupants. Sprinklers are only required if there are at least 16 occupants, he said.

A separate measure approved by the City Council allows offsite parking for MU Greek houses within 1,000 feet of a fraternity or sorority house.

Tim Teddy, city community development director, said the parking rule is limited to MU’s Greektown.

The city requires one parking space for every two occupants of a fraternity or sorority house. As the houses became bigger, Teddy said, it was more difficult to meet this requirement on land adjacent to the houses.
EDITORIAL: When everyone's a victim, no one's a victim

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, 2 hrs ago

With the help of cable news networks and social media, Americans enjoyed a round of holiday schadenfreude last week: Affluenza Boy and his mom were discovered hiding in Mexico.

This is what you call a “good for all time zones” story: No matter where you live or what your politics, it was easy to take satisfaction in the troubles befalling Ethan Couch, 18, and his mother, Tonya Couch, 48, of Burleson, Texas.

Here’s a kid who, at the age of 16 in June 2013, smashed his dad’s pickup truck into a group of people who were working on a disabled vehicle. Four of them died; seven other people were hurt, including passengers in the pickup truck. The kid’s blood alcohol level was more than three times higher than the legal level for an adult.

But he wasn’t an adult, so he was tried in juvenile court, where a judge gave him probation after hearing a psychologist argue that Ethan was a victim, too. He said the boy suffered from “affluenza,” having never been taught the values of right and wrong and personal responsibility by his wealthy parents.

Liberals could blame the wealthy parents. Conservatives could blame the soft-on-crime judge. Everyone could be shocked that Ethan’s lawyers had the unmitigated gall to argue that their client was a victim, too.

Just in time for the new year, America’s victimhood culture had a new poster boy.

Twenty-two years ago, as Arthur C. Brooks, president of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, wrote recently in the New York Times, the social critic Robert Hughes noted the rise of
a “grievance industry” in the United States. Mr. Hughes foresaw an America with an
“infantalized culture” of victimhood.

In his book “The Culture of Complaint,” Mr. Hughes argued that America had become “obsessed
with therapies and filled with distrust of formal politics; skeptical of authority and prey to
superstition; its political language corroded by fake pity and euphemism.”

Mr. Hughes blamed this on excessive polarization and politicization. “Polarization,” he wrote,
“is addictive. It is the crack of politics — a short, intense rush that the system craves again and
again, until it begins to collapse.”

In the early 1990s, Mr. Hughes could have been analyzing the 2016 presidential campaign, “a
war of words,” as he called it, confounding multiculturalism with political correctness. Everyone
has a grievance with the other guys, because it’s the other guys who are getting all the breaks.

The victimhood culture is now getting some serious study in academe, perhaps because
grievance is a growth industry on university campuses. People with legitimate beefs — those
who have been priced out of college, or held hostage to student lenders, or attacked by sexual
predators or had their ideas shouted down — find their problems ignored or minimized. When
everyone is a victim of “microaggressions,” it’s hard to find breathing room. When the design of
a Starbucks coffee cup is perceived as an attack on religion, those who suffer real persecution for
their beliefs must shake their heads.

Last fall sociologists Bradley Campbell of California State University-Los Angeles and Jason
Manning of West Virginia University pulled off a rare coup: Their article in an obscure journal
called Comparative Sociology suddenly got a lot of mainstream attention. They suggested that at
least on some college campuses, the moral culture had shifted.

No longer, they said, do we live in an “honor culture,” like the Old West, where personal insults
are settled physically. And we seem to be moving away from the “dignity cultures” that
prevailed in the 19th and 20th century. “When intolerable conflicts do arise, dignity cultures
prescribe direct but nonviolent actions,” they wrote.
You might cut off relations with someone if the insult was great enough. As a last resort or if the offense was serious enough, you might call police or a lawyer. An “ethic of restraint and toleration” prevailed.

But now, on many college campuses, they say a “victimhood culture” prevails, a culture “characterized by concern with status and sensitivity to slight combined with a heavy reliance on third parties. People are intolerant of insults, even if unintentional, and react by bringing them to the attention of authorities or to the public at large. Domination is the main form of deviance, and victimization a way of attracting sympathy, so rather than emphasize either their strength or inner worth, the aggrieved emphasize their oppression and social marginalization.”

What started with “trigger warnings” (this class might expose you to something you find unpleasant) and “microaggression” mediators at Ivy League schools found its way to our favorite land-grant university last fall. Protesting students at MU were offended when a photographer invaded their “safe space,” which was right in the middle of a public university campus.

The marketplace of ideas had become closed to contrarian ideas. A legitimate grievance about patterns of racism became conflated with other, less pervasive complaints. When everyone’s a victim, no one is. This is surely not what a university should be.

David Frum, a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, suggests in an article in the January-February issue of The Atlantic that the perception of victimhood is driving a lot of the support for Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

“The angriest and most pessimistic people in America are the people we used to call Middle Americans,” Mr. Frum writes. “Middle-class and middle-aged; not rich and not poor; people who are irked when asked to press 1 for English, and who wonder how white male became an accusation rather than a description.”

These people, he writes, “express heavy mistrust of every institution in American society: not only government, but corporations, unions, even the political party they typically vote for — the
Republican Party of [Mitt] Romney, [Paul] Ryan, and [Mitch] McConnell, which they despise as a sad crew of weaklings and sellouts. They are pissed off. And when Donald Trump came along, they were the people who told the pollsters, ‘That’s my guy.’

“They aren’t necessarily superconservative. They often don’t think in ideological terms at all. But they do strongly feel that life in this country used to be better for people like them — and they want that older country back.”

Last week Mr. Trump even lamented the loss of his freedom to use ozone-depleting aerosol sprays to control his famous coiffure. Oh, the tragedy of it all.

The guess here is that he and his supporters are enjoying the troubles of Affluenza Boy and his mom along with everyone else. Born white and male in the middle of the American century, they’re missing the irony.

Allow permit holders to carry guns on college campuses

By John R. Lott Jr. and Michael R. Gordinier: John R. Lott Jr. is the president of the Crime Prevention Research Center, and Michael R. Gordinier is a senior lecture at the Washington University Business School.

No MU Mention

Would posting a “gun-free zone” sign in front of your home make you feel safer? Probably not. Criminals don’t obey these signs. In fact, to criminals, gun-free zones look like easy targets.

So why do we put up these signs in other places? Bills being considered by Missouri state Sens. Brian Munzlinder, R-Williamstown, and Bob Dixon, R-Springfield, would lift the current ban on concealed carrying at higher education institutions. Gun control advocates can’t point to any problems with permit holders carrying gun in those places, but it hasn’t stopped them from opposing the proposed law.
Since at least 1950, all but two public mass shootings in America have taken place where general citizens are banned from carrying guns. In Europe, there have been no exceptions. Every mass public shooting has occurred in a gun-free zone. And Europe is no stranger to mass shootings. It has been host to three of the six worst K-12 school shootings and by far the worst mass public shooting perpetrated by a single individual.

With dozens of cases where permit holders have clearly stopped what would have been mass public shootings, it is understandable where killers avoid places where they can’t kill a large number of people.

What might be surprising is how killers often openly talk about their desire to attack where guns are banned. The Charleston killer’s first choice was to target the College of Charleston, but he chose the church instead because there were armed guards at the college.

Just a few months ago, the diary of the Aurora, Colo., “Batman” movie theater killer, James Holmes, was finally released. He turned down his first choice, an airport, because he was concerned about their “substantial security.” Out of seven theaters showing the “Batman” movie premiere within 20 minutes of the suspect’s apartment, he attacked the only one banned permitted concealed handguns.

Or take cases from last year. Elliot Rodger, who shot to death three people in Santa Barbara, Calif., explained his own choice. In his 141-page manifesto, Rodger turned down targets because he worried that someone with a gun would cut short his killing spree. Justin Bourque shot to death three people in Canada. His Facebook page made fun of gun bans, with pictures of defenseless victims explaining to killers that they weren’t allowed to have their guns.

Policeone, the country’s largest private organization of police, with 450,000 members, found that 80 percent of their surveyed members thought that letting permit holders carry at schools would likely reduce casualties.

In late 2013, Ron Noble, the secretary general of Interpol, noted two means of protecting people from mass shootings: “One is to say we want an armed citizenry; you can see the reason for that. Another is to say the enclaves [should be] so secure that in order to get into the soft target, you’re going to have to pass through extraordinary security.”

But Noble now realizes that it was virtually impossible to stop killers from getting weapons.

Extensive evidence backs this up. University of Chicago economist Bill Landes and I studied the effects of 13 types of gun control laws on public mass shootings from 1977 to 1999. Permitted concealed handgun laws were the only effective measures in preventing or reducing the harm caused by these attacks. Attacks occurred in those tiny areas where victims weren’t able to protect themselves.
Today, 12 states mandate that permit holders are allowed to carry guns on public college campuses. An additional 21 states leave it up to the university. Some fear that students with permits will lash out violently at others, but he can’t point to one single time that has happened at schools where permits have been allowed. Despite concerns, there has never been a case where a student with a permit has threatened a professor over grades or anything else.

The same concerns were raised for permit holders generally before Missouri enacted concealed carry in 2004. Ten years later, permit holders have proven to be extremely law-abiding.

Indeed, a study this past year by the Crime Prevention Research Center found college-age permit holders in Michigan, Nevada, and Texas (three states that break down revocation data by age) are at least as responsible as older permit holders.

Accidents over the decades are exceedingly rare. There were four accidental discharges by teachers or staff — one each at universities in Colorado, Idaho, Mississippi and Utah. All cases involved very minor injuries. None involved others getting a hold of the guns.

Gun-free zones are a magnet for murderers. But a year after permit holders are allowed to defend themselves and others, everyone will wonder what all the concerns were about.

Responding to Racist Stereotypes

Much research has been conducted in recent years about the barriers black students face in finding college success on predominantly white campuses. They struggle with underrepresentation, social isolation, academic hurdles and racial stereotyping from both their peers and their professors. All that can be especially true for black men, researchers have found, with two-thirds of black male undergraduates not earning a bachelor’s degree within six years.

But in a new article published in Harvard Education Review, Shaun Harper, founder and executive director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, decided to take the research in a different direction: investigating how the one-third of black male students who persisted through graduation at predominantly white colleges and universities managed to do so.
“So much has been written about deficits concerning students of color, and men of color in particular, and that’s important,” Harper said. “But if we want to know something about barriers to success, there are thousands of pages that have been written that gives us some insight into that. Comparatively speaking, there’s very little research on black male success that actually focuses on success. If we really want to bolster success, we should commit at least a fraction of our energies on studying those who have been successful.”

Harper visited 30 predominantly white public and private institutions and interviewed 143 black male students he considered “achieving” -- students with high grade point averages who were also involved in leadership positions in black student organizations, student government and other groups. All but two of the students reported dealing with racist stereotypes on campus.

The students frequently reported being asked by white students about their presumed dancing, rapping and athletic abilities. They described faculty members asking if they had plagiarized academic work, not on the basis of any evidence but because it was good, and other students asking how they, as black students, were admitted to college in the first place. One black Indiana University student recalled being stopped outside his residence hall and asked by two white students if they could buy marijuana from him. The student, dressed in a suit at the time, was a prominent member of the university’s student government.

“Despite their status on campus, these guys were not exempt or immune to racial stereotyping,” Harper said. “On a number of these campuses, there were guys who were student president, people you would think are so visible that no one’s going to mistake him for being one of the football players or a drug dealer. I would have thought white students would think, ‘Well, that black guy is our student body president, not our weed man.’ But their status on campus did not give them immunity.”

The students’ involvement on campus did help in other ways, however, Harper found. The students reported that the more involved they were as student leaders, the less professors seemed to stereotype them. “I am definitely privileged because my teachers know me and don’t make ignorant racist comments to me,” one student told Harper. “Now, the way they treat other African-American students in class is another story, a sad story.”

The students also said that their roles in student organizations -- and the communication lessons they learned from older members of those groups -- helped them speak up against stereotyping and other forms of racism they saw in the classroom and elsewhere on campus, including in meetings with the institution's
president or the Board of Trustees. Harper noted that many of the students referred to a three-step process they frequently used to respond to racist assumptions:

A white peer asks a question like, “You got weed?”
The achiever responds by calmly asking, “What made you assume I sell, smoke or know where to find weed?”

The achiever waits patiently for the white peer to reflect and answer the question. During this reflecting period, the stereotyping peer usually comes to understand on her or his own that the question posed or assumption made was racially problematic. The students said they still left such situations feeling frustrated, but much less so than in earlier encounters when they were angry at themselves for not speaking up. They also credited their high grades to their involvement in campus leadership roles and the related benefits. “I am frustrated by the misperceptions white students have about African males on Michigan State’s campus,” one student said. “I am involved because I want to do something.”

But witnessing and standing up to racism -- especially when paired with other aspects of college life such as tough course work and extracurricular activities -- can be exhausting, the students said.

‘Emerging Mental Health Crisis’
While Harper explores black male students who are succeeding, another new study looks at the cost that success can have on many black students. A recent paper published in the journal Educational Theory discusses the mental health issues that can arise from such work. Based on interviews with students and review of decades of research on the subject, the paper warns that the notion of “grit”-- the popular idea that students can persevere through adversity with enough mental toughness and resilience -- is masking “an emerging mental health crisis” among black college students fighting to combat stereotypes.

The researchers refer to the students’ coping strategy as “John Henryism,” comparing the students to a folk hero who pitted his own strength against a powerful steam-powered hammer in a race to drill through a mountain. Henry won the race but quickly died when his heart gave out.

“We have witnessed black students work themselves to the point of extreme illness in attempting to escape the constant threat of perceived intellectual inferiority,” Ebony McGee, co-author of the study and an assistant professor of diversity and urban schooling at Vanderbilt University, wrote. “We argue that the current enthusiasm for teaching African-American students with psychological traits like grit ignores the
significant injustice of societal racism and the toll it takes, even on those students who appear to be the toughest and most successful.”

Harper, too, said he is worried about black students -- even those who are achieving -- devoting so much energy to fighting stereotypes when the energy could be invested in academics.

“I had men in my study talk about how their white peers would be able to go to class and focus on being engaged in student organizations,” Harper said. “Meanwhile, the men in my study had to do that, plus actively work to dismantle racism and confront stereotypes. These students worked so hard and people have worked hard with them to help them become more resilient, which is great. But resilience and grit wouldn’t be as necessary if predominantly white institutions were less racially hostile.”

The students running 'white unions' on US campuses

Dozens of "White Student Union" pages have appeared on Facebook, claiming to represent white students at US universities. While many turned out to be hoaxes, some are run by real students hoping to tackle "anti-white belief" on campuses.

The first page created, "Illini White Student Union", was launched in response to a black student solidarity rally on 18 November, according to the University of Illinois' student paper.

The page described itself as "a new page for white students of University of Illinois" committed to working "against the terrorism (students) have been facing from Black Lives Matters activists on campus".

It reportedly asked students to send in photos of "anti-whites" who had taken part in the rally and was quickly removed by Facebook.

But the page started a trend, with at least 30 White Student Union pages appearing on Facebook. Many originated from a post the Daily Stormer, a white supremacist site "attempting to preserve Western Civilization".
The post called on readers to make pages for "various universities" in retaliation for the removal of the University of Illinois' page - even if they are not students.

Others are linked to a similar post on 4Chan, a bulletin-board site allowing users to comment anonymously.

The post encouraged people to create pages "at the most leftist colleges and universities in the western world" and has since been removed.

Fake photos

The University of Missouri's White Student Union page - which has now been removed - claimed the group had met on campus to raise money for Generation Identitaire, the youth wing of a French nativist movement, and Students for Western Civilization, a group that wants to "organize for and advance the interests of Western peoples".

But the photo it used - showing three girls dressed in pink shirts - was of three sorority members from a different university, raising money at a suicide-awareness bake sale.

Jaynie Coffman, the sorority's PR administrator, was sent a link to the photo.

"I couldn't believe that this organisation used our picture for something so horrible. They edited our sorority letters off their shirts," she said.

"Our sorority is out there and associated with this group. If we weren't contacted about our image being used, it could have been on the internet for thousands of people to see without any explanation."

New York University administrators also condemned a White Student Union page created using the school's name, saying it had used the NYU logo "illegally and without permission".

Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo, a professor at the university's School of Social and Cultural Analysis, called the page "a parody" aiming to "belittle the language of black student movements".

'Anti-white abuse'

But while most of the pages are run by internet "trolls", some are managed by students looking to end "anti-white beliefs" on their campuses.

The BBC spoke to a number of them. While they asked to remain anonymous, they agreed to video chat and make contact using their university email addresses.

One student, known only as Ajay, runs the Iowa State White Student Union Facebook page. He says he started the page after experiencing racial discrimination on campus.
"When on campus I will attend rallies of different ethnic support groups to hear their message. A lot of time they tell me to leave because I'm just there to make fun of them, or tell me I will not understand because I have not experienced racism," he said.

The group held a meeting on campus, he added, and plans to contact the university's president to gain official recognition.

While Harvard University's page has received more of a backlash, its admin insists its goals are the same.

Eric - not his real name - studies biology at the university. He created the page with two friends and hopes it will grow into an official union.

The group has met three times and consists of three members, "all white Europeans - although we have also coordinated with a Korean friend of mine," he says.

The group discussed how to gain official recognition on campus and tried to identify sympathetic professors.

Many ethnic minority students say the pages have made them feel unsafe on campus.

Rowa Mohamed, a student living in Canada, says a page using her university's name shared her information after she complained to officials.

"I feel unsafe walking alone on campus and I am always with others. Because they maintain their anonymity while harassing me, I never know who it could be," she said.

"I haven't been comfortable attending classes. It's really increased my anxiety and I've had to rely heavily on my friends of colour for comfort and protection on campus."

The page - which calls itself "Western White Student Union" - is thought to be one of the first in Canada. Others have also been reported in Australia.

Joanna Thompson, a lecturer at the University of Illinois' Department of Criminology, Law and Justice, says media depictions of black people as "violent animals" play a part in the creation of white student unions.

"Young people see so much these days, not just on the news but through social media," she said.

"If they are being bombarded by negative images of blacks, the fear could lead them to need a space where they feel safe and where they can regain that top spot on the racial hierarchy."