The Moment We've Waited For?
The recent protests on campuses have made it clear that we in higher education have students’ attention and engagement, writes Elizabeth A. Lehfeldt. Now we have to decide what to do with it.

From angry student protests to the backlash that paints them as coddled and pampered, we have reached a watershed moment on college and university campuses across this country as we begin 2016. **Empowered and emboldened by their peers at the University of Missouri and many other institutions, students have presented college presidents, faculty members and administrators with lists of demands meant to address discrimination, racism and sexism, and to create more inclusive environments.**

Those requests have been wide-ranging: hire more minority faculty, remove the names of donors and patrons implicated in colonialism and racism from buildings, include questions about microaggressions against students in faculty evaluations. And that’s just the short list.

The pushback against these students has been equally lively and includes outright mockery and ridicule -- citing the grammatical errors in a list of demands, for example. Some observers have criticized the students for being too sensitive. The president of one university accused some of them of wanting to “arrogantly lecture, rather than humbly learn.” Unfortunately, those are precisely the responses we would expect when those with power are being challenged.

But some of the reactions of college administrators and faculty members are well reasoned. Certain things can’t be accomplished within existing faculty governance structures -- or if they can, they will take time. For example, much of the faculty hiring process is well beyond the jurisdiction of students. Colleges and universities have a duty to protect not just students but also faculty members.

Those are, in fact, reasonable responses. But sometimes administrators, faculty members, and other campus leaders have undercut those responses with an air of impatience and frustration: students just don’t get it. They don’t understand how the college or university works. They don’t understand the role of faculty. They don’t understand history.
All of which prompts me to ask, as students return to classes: Isn’t this the moment we’ve been waiting for? Until this past year, our hand-wringing about students focused on their apathy and selfishness. We criticized Millennials for their passivity and lack of empathy. But lately they’ve been standing up, asking questions, criticizing the system and arguing not just for themselves but also on behalf of others. Isn’t this precisely the behavior we wanted?

Certainly, their responses are sometimes naïve, sometimes overly ambitious. They haven’t always reflected the complexities of the higher education environment and its management. But that’s OK. They’re college students. College should be the place where they try on controversial ideas, push the envelope, make demands. And get things wrong sometimes.

What if we -- administrators and faculty members -- leveraged this moment? There is an opportunity here. We have the students’ attention -- perhaps for some less than ideal reasons, but we have their attention nonetheless. The question is, what are we going to do with it?

We could simply rebuff them and say that they need to “humbly learn.” What if, rather than rejecting their ideas outright and saying they just don’t understand how things work, we taught them how the university works, acknowledging that it doesn’t always work well? What if we engaged their demands and told them to bring their critical-thinking skills (which we say we are teaching them in every curricular assessment report I’ve ever read) to bear on the situation?

To take just one example: the historian in me can’t help but wonder what would happen if we harnessed the student critique of donors, patrons, named buildings and the like to examine our institutional histories. I’m envisioning a series of conversations among faculty members, students and administrators that explored the lives of the historical figures whom students find controversial and whose names they want erased from the institution. Rather than dismissing such demands out of hand as too sensitive or misinformed, we should use students’ demands and critiques to further their education and the cultivation of critical-thinking skills.

What if professors and students engaged in the process of curricular design to increase the diversity of course offerings? We could harness student enthusiasm for particular issues and topics and involve them in the research and work necessary to guide curricula in new directions.

What if we pulled back the curtain and let students see what shared governance and the administration of higher education looks like? I’ve mentioned a university’s
obligation to protect its faculty members -- which to students often sounds like an excuse for inaction. But what if we invited them to participate in a series of conversations about academic freedom and what it protects?

Even as I pose these questions, I know why we haven’t done it yet. Digging deep into the past of our institutions’ donors and patrons might result in some uncomfortable discoveries. It might even incite the removal of those names from our campus buildings. Involving students in curricular design would mean exposing our teaching and pedagogy. And a conversation about academic freedom? I can’t even get my colleagues to have such a discussion among themselves, much less with students and administrators.

The reason we hesitate is because these protests and these demands, even when they are naïve and even when they overreach, challenge our power and authority. But that’s just it: we have the power and the authority in this situation. And without perhaps fully realizing it, our students may be asking us to use it in the service of their education. Isn’t this the moment we’ve been waiting for?

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Former university student pleads guilty in Yik Yak threat case

MARYVILLE, Missouri — **One of the men accused of threatening violence during racial unrest at MU has pleaded guilty.**

Connor Stottlemyre of Blue Springs, Missouri, admitted Monday in Nodaway County District Court to making a terrorist threat. The 19-year-old was attending Northwest Missouri State
University in November when he was accused of posting a threat on Yik Yak that read, "I'm gonna shoot any black people tomorrow, so be ready." Sentencing is set for Feb. 22.

The threat was made as dissatisfaction at MU came to a head, leading to demonstrations and the resignation of two top administrators.

One then-current and one former student at the Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla also were charged in threat cases the same week.

Feckless leadership here and in Europe open doors for the fringe: Reynolds

Look around the world, and you’ll see a leadership class that doesn’t seem to be up to the job and doesn’t want people talking about it. It bodes poorly for the coming years.

Here in the United States, the same day President Obama did a town hall meeting on CNN dedicated to the proposition that American citizens shouldn’t be trusted with weapons, The Wall Street Journal reported that Obama's own government had somehow shipped a highly classified Hellfire missile to Cuba. As Bloomberg’s Tobin Harshaw pointed out, this was not an isolated case:

“In March, The Washington Post revealed that the military had lost track of $500 million in arms shipped to Yemen, some of which were apparently stolen by the son of the former president.”

Harshaw continued, "And on a smaller but equally disturbing scale, The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday that an unarmed Hellfire missile used in a NATO training exercise in Spain last year was inadvertently shipped to Cuba. It’s unclear whether the cause was foul play or just incompetence on the part of the commercial freight shipper, but the fact that a piece of advanced military technology ended up in a nation under heavy U.S. sanctions is a clear warning that something is vastly awry.”
Oh, well. Just another bureaucratic snafu, nothing to be compared to the president's implication on Twitter that Americans can just order guns delivered to their homes via the Internet, just like shopping at Amazon. In real life, you have to be the Cuban government to get that kind of service. The Washington Post gave Obama's tweet "two Pinocchios" for "slippery ... confusing" language.

Meanwhile, our intellectual leaders from academia took time from a professional conference (at which their attendance was, in many cases, paid for at least in part by taxpayers) to mount a demonstration in front of the Texas Capitol in which a magic "circle of books" was deployed to protect against gun violence. At the University of Missouri, meanwhile, faculty members issued a letter of support for Prof. Melissa Click, who called for “muscle” to stop a student reporter from covering a protest, because, the letter-writers said, she was exercising her First Amendment rights — by trying to shut down a reporter.

In Philadelphia, a police officer — apparently lacking the magical protection of a book circle — was shot by a man in Muslim-appearing garb who said he did it for Islam and pledged loyalty to Islamic State. The response of Philadelphia’s mayor, Jim Kenney? This has nothing to do with Islam. Uh huh.

In Europe, of course, it’s even worse. I often say that America today has the worst political class in its history; Germany can’t quite say that, but only because its history is so awful. But today’s German leaders are giving it their best shot.

After hundreds of women were sexually assaulted by men of North African or Arab appearance, including at least 27 asylum-seekers from the Middle East and Morocco, in what appears to be a coordinated plot stretching across many cities and countries, the first response of the German authorities was to try to cover it up. Less than a week after the attacks, The Washington Post reported Germany's negotiation of a deal with social media companies to crack down on “hate speech” about migrants. A German government official even said that bad remarks about migrants were just as bad as the sexual assaults — which is a lot considering that one young female victim reported that "I had fingers on every orifice."

As Mark Steyn observed, “In one of the most famous public places in Germany a mass sexual assault took place ... and every organ of the state colluded in covering it up. ... So the state lacks sufficient manpower to be able to detain those whom they arrest in the commission of a crime ... but they have sufficient manpower to be able to prosecute you for pointing that out.”

It didn’t work, of course. As Melanie Phillips noted in the London Times, word spread quickly via social media and the Breitbart London website.

Now that it’s out, the Cologne mob-assault seems to have triggered a change in German attitudes toward unrestricted immigration, and even immigrant-welcoming Angela Merkel is starting to talk tough.

But what should worry us is that so many of our leaders, in so many ways, are painfully inept — and more interested in shutting up people who notice problems than they are in actually
addressing the problems. When the establishment fails so spectacularly — and so dishonestly — at doing its job, non-establishment figures come forth. For good or for ill, that’s likely to be the theme of the next few years.

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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As Federal Sex-Assault Investigations Multiply, Resolutions Remain Elusive

No MU Mention

Over the past year and a half, the number of colleges finding themselves in the cross hairs of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights over their handling of sexual-assault cases has nearly tripled, to 161.

Being put on the list is just the start of a painstakingly detailed back-and-forth that takes, on average, more than a year to resolve.

How colleges end up on the list, how long they will remain there, and on what points they will be found in or out of compliance with the federal gender-equity law known as Title IX remain a mystery to most college officials.

To help shed light on the process, The Chronicle is introducing an online investigation tracker with which readers can browse comprehensive information about federal inquiries and sign up to receive alerts about important developments in those investigations.

A quick look at the database reveals some surprising statistics about the most recent wave of enforcement, which began in April 2011, when the department issued a
pivotal "Dear Colleague" letter that spelled out colleges’ responsibilities under the law.

In 2014, 13 cases were resolved, and 70 were opened. Last year, only seven cases were resolved, and 106 were opened. The rapidly growing number of federal inquiries has created a significant backlog for investigators.

The completed cases, which involved a number of institutions that were found to have violated Title IX, including Michigan State University and the University of Virginia, reveal the department’s toughening demands and more-prescriptive approach toward compliance.

Meanwhile, new cases are piling up. From May 2014, the first time the department publicized a list of colleges facing investigation, to December 2015, the number of colleges under investigation jumped from 55 to 161. With some colleges facing multiple inquiries, the number of cases that remain open has climbed to 197.

An additional 46 cases have been resolved, bringing the total number investigated since 2011 to 243. They were almost evenly split between public and private colleges, with 121 cases at 89 public colleges and 122 at 97 private colleges.

The fact that only 19 percent of the cases tracked in The Chronicle’s database have been resolved shows the challenges facing investigators. The Obama administration wants to hire 200 more full-time employees for the civil-rights office, and the office itself says it could use 500 more.

In the Pipeline

Investigations are triggered either by a civil-rights complaint or as the result of a proactive compliance review.
St. Mary’s College of Maryland, a four-year, public liberal-arts college, has the dubious distinction of having the most investigations, with five, one of which has been resolved.

A college spokesman said that privacy rules prevented officials from discussing the cases, but that the institution was cooperating fully with the federal government.

The civil-rights office has also kept the State University of New York system busy, with 10 investigations, three of which have been resolved.

The university that’s been on the hook the longest — for four and a half years — and is still waiting for a resolution is the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Among other cases inching their way through the pipeline:

- A complaint that followed a racially charged rape accusation at Sarah Lawrence College has been under investigation for more than two years.
- At Columbia University, a student, Emma Sulkowicz, carried a mattress around the campus to protest the university’s handling of her alleged rape. The accused student, whom a university panel found not responsible, has sued Columbia and the art instructor who oversaw Ms. Sulkowicz’s mattress project, saying they allowed her to defame him.
- At James Madison University, the subject of another complaint, questions have been raised about how the university punished three fraternity members found responsible for sexually assaulting a female undergraduate during a spring-break trip.

One of the first cases resolved during the recent wave of federal enforcement was at the University of Notre Dame, where a 19-year-old freshman killed herself after reporting that a member of the football team had assaulted her. As part of a resolution
agreement in 2011 with the federal government, Notre Dame agreed to provide alternative arrangements for complainants who do not want to be in the same room as the accused during disciplinary hearings and to give both complainants and the accused the right to appeal the outcome of a hearing.

Given the volume of information the civil-rights office asks of colleges, including details about policies, training materials, and investigation notes, it’s hardly surprising that investigations can drag on for years.

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville, for instance, was given a list of 20 requests, one of which was for an Excel spreadsheet of every formal or informal student complaint or anonymous tip. The spreadsheet, the university was told, should include 16 categories of information for each complaint.

Institutional responses have typically involved colleges’ strengthening their sexual-assault policies and affirming their commitment to assault victims. Many colleges have hired Title IX investigators and conducted campus-climate surveys. Some have started programs to emphasize prevention techniques like bystander intervention.

Lawmakers in some states have weighed in by enacting affirmative-consent, or "yes means yes," policies.

Such changes have in some cases sparked a backlash by due-process advocates and men who say there’s been a rush to judgment. But others say that for all of the bureaucratic wrangling, the intense federal scrutiny has made campuses safer.
WASHINGTON (AP) — Mammograms do the most good later in life, a government task force has declared in recommending that women get one every other year starting at age 50. It said 40-somethings should make their own choice after weighing the pros and cons.

When to start routine mammograms and how frequently to get them has long been controversial. The latest guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, made public Monday, stick with its advice that women should have one every two years between ages 50 and 74. But they also make clear that it's an option for younger women even though they're less likely to benefit.

Some health groups urge mammograms every year starting at 40 — although last year the American Cancer Society upped its starting age to 45.

There is some common ground emerging, that mammography advice shouldn't always be one-size-fits all. "Age 50 isn't magic," said task force past chairman Dr. Michael LeFevre of the University of Missouri.

Here are some things to know about mammograms.

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WHAT THE TASK FORCE SAYS

Women in their 60s are the most likely to avoid dying from breast cancer thanks to mammograms, but there's clearly enough benefit for the average woman to start at 50, the task force found.

The advisory group wants younger women to understand the trade-offs before deciding: Among every 1,000 women screened, one additional death could be prevented by starting mammograms at 40 instead of 50. But there would be 576 more false alarms and 58 additional unneeded biopsies. Also, two extra women would be overdiagnosed, treated for cancer that never would have become life-threatening.
Monday's update, published in Annals of Internal Medicine, is largely a rewording of guidelines originally issued in 2009 and reconsidered in draft form last spring. This time, the task force stresses that "we think the science supports a range of options" for 40-somethings, LeFevre said.

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DIFFERING GUIDELINES

Mammograms aren't perfect, and different health organizations weigh the trade-offs differently. So do women and their physicians.

The American Cancer Society says to begin annual mammograms at 45 but switch to every other year at 55. After menopause, tumors tend to grow more slowly and women's breast tissue becomes less dense and easier for mammograms to penetrate, says chief medical officer Dr. Otis Brawley. Between ages 40 and 44, when breast cancer is especially uncommon, the society also says women should make their own choice.

"We're moving away from paternalistic medicine where we doctor organizations used to tell women, 'You must do this,' " Brawley said. "We're saying, 'This woman is at higher risk, therefore maybe she should get screened at 40. This woman is at lower risk, maybe she can wait a little later.'"

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists stands by annual mammograms starting at 40, while urging patient education and shared decision-making.

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THINGS TO CONSIDER

More than 200,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year, and about 40,000 die from it. It is most frequently diagnosed among women ages 55 to 64, and the median age of death from breast cancer is 68.

Screening guidelines are only for women at average risk of breast cancer. Women with a mother, sister or daughter with breast cancer have a higher risk than the average 40-year-old. Other factors can play a role, too, including genetics, breast density and menstrual and pregnancy history.

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PERSONALIZED SCREENING

Dueling guidelines mean "some people get so confused they don't get screened at all. Some are too anxious or afraid not to do more, and it may not be better for them," said breast cancer specialist Dr. Laura Esserman of the University of California, San Francisco. "Maybe we should be screening in a new way."

Esserman leads the first-of-its-kind WISDOM study that soon will begin enrolling 100,000 women to test whether tailoring screening to someone's individual risk is better than age-based mammograms. Women given annual mammograms starting at 40 will be compared with others assigned more or less frequent screenings, starting at different ages, based on in-depth risk assessments.
INSURANCE COVERAGE

Insurance usually pays for mammograms. Because of concern about how the task force recommendations might be implemented, Congress recently extended for two years legislation preserving access to routine mammograms without copays starting at age 40.

WHEN TO STOP

The task force says more research is needed to know whether to continue mammograms at 75 and beyond. The cancer society says to keep screening as long as women are in good health and have a life expectancy of at least 10 years.

WHAT'S NEXT

The task force said more research is needed to tell if newer 3-D mammograms should be used for routine screening and if women with dense breasts benefit from extra testing, such as with ultrasounds or MRIs.

The cancer society's Brawley said the mammogram age argument has distracted from a bigger urgency: "We ought to say this more: We need a better screening test for younger women."

Online:

Task Force: www.screeningforbreastcancer.org

WISDOM study: www.wisdomstudy.org