New MU provost Garnett Stokes addresses Title IX issues

By Ashley Jost

Thursday, February 26, 2015 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri’s new provost, Garnett Stokes, is “delighted” to bring on a permanent Title IX administrator to build on MU’s efforts to address gender discrimination and sexual violence reporting and education.

Title IX was among the topics Stokes discussed at her first-ever session with reporters on Wednesday morning, more than three weeks after she started in her role.

Stokes is no stranger to Title IX, coming to MU after being interim president at Florida State University for much of 2014. She was the campus leader during a series of controversial issues, including sexual assault allegations made against FSU quarterback Jameis Winston.

During a reception Tuesday afternoon to formally introduce Stokes to the campus, MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin said steps taken at MU and in the UM System to tackle sexual assault in the past year “mirrored” what Stokes and her administration did at FSU.

Loftin said Stokes’ experience serving as an interim president is “invaluable” to him.

“She gets where I’m coming from,” he said.

MU received national attention over Title IX policies last year when an ESPN “Outside the Lines” story raised questions about whether officials mishandled the alleged rape of a student athlete, Sasha Menu Courey, who committed suicide in June 2011.

“High-profile cases bring a lot of attention to an institution,” Stokes said. “What was most important to me was that we recognize the need for building a climate that engages our students, faculty and staff in reducing and eliminating incidents of sexual assault and sexual violence.”

Stokes said she learned a lot from the Winston case, particularly the value of a student-led process.
“Their engagement is absolutely essential,” she said. FSU students created an education and prevention campaign called “kNOw MORE.” Stokes said students at MU “have and can do exactly the same thing.”

Under recently approved UM System rules, Stokes, or a designee of her choosing, is responsible for commissioning investigations into any gender discrimination complaints filed against a faculty member.

After the investigation, the provost or designee is responsible for writing a summary resolution that could find no violation or could refer the case to mediation, an administrative hearing or a hearing in front of a three-person panel that would use a preponderance of the evidence standard to decide whether a violation occurred.

All Title IX complaints are now addressed by the Title IX Office, which Loftin created last year. The Equity Office previously heard those complaints, among other responsibilities. Stokes announced Wednesday morning that Ellen Eardley, a Washington, D.C.-based civil rights lawyer, will become administrator and assistant vice provost of the Title IX Office starting April 20.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU's new provost says she is ready to tackle tough issues on campus

Wednesday, February 25, 2015 | 9:20 p.m. CST; updated 6:23 a.m. CST, Thursday, February 26, 2015

BY TIMOSHANAE WELLMAKER

COLUMBIA— MU’s new provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs, Garnett Stokes, said Wednesday she has spent her first weeks at MU becoming familiar with campus.

Stokes started the job on Feb. 2, settling into temporary quarters in the General Services Building while offices in Jesse Hall are under renovation.

The provost is the university's chief academic officer. Stokes will oversee MU’s 14 colleges and their schools, departments and centers, as well as international programs, the Office of Institutional Research, UM Extension and other units that support academics.
Stokes came to MU from Florida State University where she was provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. She served as interim president for seven months in 2014. She holds degrees in industrial/organizational psychology and has been on the faculty at the University of Georgia and Franklin College.

In a wide-ranging discussion with a number of news media representatives on Wednesday, Stokes fielded these questions:

**Q. What is the first thing you plan to work on at MU?**

A. To make sure I get to know the campus. I started Feb. 2 trying to go around and meet people. I've got plans to tour colleges, centers and different areas of campus. You really have to get to know a place and get to know the people there. That's a top priority for me.

**Q. What are you looking for when you're touring the programs and colleges?**

A. My goal is understanding the discipline of every place that's here. My goal is to try to get it all done this term. That's how I will get the best picture of what I see we need to do moving forward.

**Q. At FSU, you've done a lot with the kNOw MORE campaign (about responsible conduct, resources and intervention on behalf of sexual assault victims). How do you plan to implement what you've learned at MU?**

A. We made a big announcement today about the hiring of Ellen Eardley (as Title IX administrator). I am absolutely delighted. Mizzou has already put something in place, but bringing Ellen in will allow us to really expand what we're doing related to Title IX, related to the education of our campus about sexual violence, sexual assault and sexual misconduct.

What I learned in the campaign at FSU was the value of a student-led process. Their engagement is absolutely essential. I was proud of the fact that the students themselves came up with the kNOw MORE campaign, and I think the students at Mizzou have and can do the exact same thing. That's an important part of what we do going forward.
Q. What did you learn from the Jameis Winston incidents at FSU that you will bring to MU?

A. Well, high profile cases bring a lot of attention to an institution. What was most important to me was that we recognize the need for building a climate that engages our students, faculty and staff in reducing and eliminating incidents of sexual assault and sexual violence.

It led me to recognize the value of communication and coordination of various units on campus. At FSU, we recognized the value of the importance of the creation of a Title IX office and the importance of a leader with close connections to the highest level of leadership in coordination to our education and communication efforts. That's the direction we have gone in at MU with the hiring of Ellen Eardley.

Q. You talk about the value of communication. What plans do you have for victims to be more communicative with the police and the authorities?

A. I recognize that part of the focus on the creation of this Title IX office is intended to really build a climate where people are free to talk about what is going on. I see part of the role of that office to really facilitate a climate where people feel free to engage in sometimes difficult conversations about what happens.

Ellen Eardley talks about how important that is going to be for our campus. I do think that institutional leadership is a crucial part of creating the right culture. One of my reasons for being happy about the hiring of Ellen is my ability to work closely with her and the chancellor, as well to move this campus forward with those initiatives.

Q. How close do you think the campus is to being in that spot of openness?

A. That's hard to say at this point. It seems that people are ready for this; people were excited about the creation of the Title IX administrator position. They were excited to see Mizzou really focused on being a national leader with regards to issues of sexual violence, sexual assault and sexual misconduct. People want to have the conversation. They want to be a part of making this an even better place for our students, staff and faculty.
Q. What do you plan to do with Mizzou Advantage?

A. We also have the MU Strategic Operating Plan, and I am really impressed with what I saw. What we will be charged with going forward is figuring out how we put all of these plans together. We are focused on moving ourselves up within the AAU. A lot of doing that involves doing more interdisciplinary work, and Mizzou Advantage represents that. It represents an opportunity for the campus to be part of where this institution is going. The conversation moving forward is, how we put these plans together. I really want to look at that going forward.

Q. What steps do you plan to take to improve MU's Association of American Universities ranking?

A. Almost everything we do will be focused on enhancing our excellence. We do need to focus on the AAU ranking and the metrics associated with them, but the bigger picture is making our great university even better. One of the things that excited me about coming to Mizzou was that this is an institution that is ranked already, but is looking to always get better.

The constant desire to be better and better is part of what I like about being here. It's not just a focus on the metrics, it's a focus on excellence in general. That is focusing on what it means to provide an excellent undergraduate education — what kinds of experiences do students need going forward in this century and beyond?

There are many ways in which I hope to improve our standing in the AAU. One way we can do that is to, with everything we do, pay attention to achieving excellence in the education of our students, recruitment, support for our faculty and engaging our alumni.

Q. What are your thoughts on coming into this major administrative position with (the buyout, which will involve more than 100 faculty members, looming)? How are you working with other administrators to foster what needs to happen?
A. It is interesting to come in to a job at this level with a deadline on when people will decide what they choose to do. I suspect there are people still thinking about it, trying to figure out if this is the direction they want to go.

But I’m not afraid of change. These are opportunities for the campus and for these individuals to plan for where they’re headed. Even those who might choose to take advantage of the voluntary separation plan aren’t going to be lost for us in terms of their access.

I think people love this place, and no matter what they choose to do, they want this place to be successful. I continue to believe that no matter how many people make this choice, we will take advantage of this to enhance the university. It is an opportunity for all of us.

Q. What are your thoughts on the role of the provost on campus and nationally?

A. Provosts absolutely have to be engaged nationally because so much is going on in higher education right now. If the provosts are not involved in that conversation, helping to shape the conversation and understanding what the issues are and bringing it back to the campus then the institution really cannot advance. I see the provost position as a critical leadership role in higher education across the country.

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Faculty Council continues debate over new Title IX rules

Faculty Council focused on Title IX procedures and problems in the School of Medicine in its meeting on Thursday.

Title IX

The council discussed the new Title IX procedures approved by the UM System Board of Curators on Feb. 5.

A part of the new procedures prevents the complainant and the accused from seeking an adviser who may ask and answer questions on their behalf. Law professor Frank Bowman authored a
letter formally asking the board to amend the new rule. The letter was signed by over 195 faculty members.

Faculty Council Chairman Craig Roberts suggested bringing in a third party to review the procedures in 12 or 18 months. Associate Professor of Law Ben Trachtenberg expressed concern over the plan to wait so long before reviewing procedures.

“That’s an argument made by people trying to delay change, but the change has already come,” he said.

Trachtenberg said the council should come to a consensus and decide collectively what its stance is toward the new procedures so attention can be given to other university matters.

“I think we should avoid going too far down the road without figuring out what we think,” he said. “This isn’t the faculty council on Title IX affairs.”

Nicole Monnier, chairwoman of the Academic Affairs Committee, said she would like to see the conversation go beyond the council and include more faculty members.

“I don’t want to vote on anything in council until there’s been the opportunity for larger campus input,” she said.

The council ultimately tabled the issue to be discussed again at the next meeting.

School of Medicine

Professor of Management Art Jago presented the findings of an investigation of problems within the School of Medicine’s work environment, research productivity and faculty governance.

Jago said while faculty in the school are generally satisfied, the investigative committee did discover a number of problems. He said the school ranks 91st out of 138 medical schools in National Institutes of Health funding and is generally below average in its funding and research emphasis.

Faculty at the medical school were less satisfied than MU faculty as a whole in a variety of categories, including tenure expectations and time, expectations and support for research, according to the university-wide Collaborative on Academic Career in Higher Education survey conducted in 2012.

Jago said there are incentive differences between research faculty with doctoral degrees and clinical faculty with medical degrees. Research faculty members receive “research incentive funds” for grants and clinical faculty members receive compensation based on “relative value units,” or time spent seeing patients.
“This represents a divide between the Ph.D and M.D. faculty,” he said. “It’s a rather deep divide. Each feels that they’re being inequitably treated by the two sources of income that exist for faculty.”

Jago said faculty members interviewed as part of the investigation were concerned about medical school governance and the school’s mentoring program. He also discussed the impact the medical school’s new dean, Patrice Delafontaine, could have on faculty morale.

“Everyone expects the new dean to produce dramatic changes,” Jago said. “Overcoming institutional inertia is a very important impediment to change, but everyone expects institutional changes. Some are terrified by it, and some are welcoming it because they think it’s long overdue.”

Race Relations

Berkley Hudson, associate professor of journalism and chairman of the council’s recently created committee on race relations said he and Roberts will meet with faculty, staff and students to determine who will be on the committee.

Hudson said they are considering the creation of a core group of committee members and another group of experts in various areas to provide advice, and they hope to have a list of names ready by spring break.

“It’s more complex than we thought when we first started, so we’re trying to be thoughtful about how it’s structured,” Roberts said.
had a negative effect on shared governance, research productivity and work environment within the school, according to the report.

After receiving several reports of perceived imbalances in the priorities of the School of Medicine, the faculty council appointed the committee to examine the school’s work environment for tenured and tenure-track faculty.

"It was really a team effort, and we put in long hours," said Art Jago, faculty committee chair and MU department of management professor.

Other committee members were Cheryl Heesch, MU department of biomedical sciences professor, Satish Nair, MU department of bioengineering professor and Carlos Wexler, MU department of physics and astronomy professor.

The committee used data from previous surveys and faculty interviews. Twenty-seven tenured and tenure-track faculty members were interviewed.

The key findings of the report were:

- Shared governance: the committee found multiple instances where clinical department leadership was perceived as lacking research competence, autocratic, intimidating and vindictive.

- Research productivity: MU ranks 91st among 138 medical schools receiving National Institutes of Health funding; 24th of 28 amongst these of the AAU; 15th of 24 in the Midwest and 8th of 11 for SEC Schools of Medicine. MU placed below average in each measure of research productivity.

- Work environment: perceived to be administratively "top-heavy," with 17 associate deans at the time of the report. Some associate deans were described as unhelpful and having minimal scholarly credentials. A lack of mentorship was mentioned, leaving junior faculty feeling uninformed of tenure expectations and requirements.

The committee gave 18 specific recommendations in the report, including:

- Faculty should have input into the selection of their department chairs, and the method of obtaining this input should be standardized across departments.
Having achieved tenure should be a required job qualification for department chairs, and tenure expectations should be clarified.

Greater awards for meaningful individual research productivity should be established.

Effective mentorship should be rewarded.

Among the committee's research, two surveys were included. A 2011 faculty survey of 464 full-time and part-time members of the School of Medicine faculty was conducted among 13 other medical schools. MU faculty were most satisfied with the nature of their work, which also was typical for the other 13 schools.

In a 2012 Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education survey, MU School of Medicine faculty reported they were less satisfied with the clarity and reasonableness of tenure expectations and issues related to research than other MU faculty.

The report has been sent to university administration, and Jago said he hoped they will take action.

J-School dean candidate Thor Wasbotten emphasizes the value of adaptability, relevance

Wasbotten said he admires the ‘Missouri Method,’ but believes more could be added to make the J-School even better.

The Missouri School of Journalism hosted its final open forum Thursday for the fourth candidate for the position of dean.

Thor Wasbotten was introduced by School of Law Dean Gary Meyers, who is the search committee chairman, before the forum in Leadership Auditorium.
Wasbotten is serves as the director of Kent State University’s School of Journalism and Mass Communications and was the assistant dean for Student Media and Online Operations.

He started his presentation with enthusiasm and his first topic was the future of the journalism and strategic communications at MU.

“I believe that the future of journalism and strategic communication will be in the engagement and involvement of targeted publics through multiple delivery channels with the purpose of informing, educating or persuading,” he said.

To Wasbotten, these two concepts differ. Engagement is the content journalists produce, which elicits an emotional connection to its audience. Involvement is the continued distribution of said content by the audience. Wasbotten said that without the emotional connection, involvement can not be achieved.

When journalists target different aspects of the public, involvement and engagement are at their highest.

“With the amount of data available, we are no longer just looking at demographics,” he said. “We must look at psychographics and ethnographics at a much deeper level.”

Wasbotten said students can best prepare for a future in either journalism or strategic communications by looking at how journalists provide information. To him, the most common ways are through digital means like social media, through data and storytelling.

His next topic was how to improve the quality of education while maintaining the value of a journalism degree from MU.

“We must challenge ourselves every single day to be relevant,” Wasbotten said. “If we approach our responsibility as educators, researchers and students, with a passion and understanding that is expected from this Missouri School of Journalism … a degree in journalism will remain one of the most prestigious.”

In order to continue to be on the forefront of journalism, Wasbotten said he wants to incorporate training beyond traditional media platforms, going as far to teach about ones not yet invented.

Something new Wasbotten wants to bring to MU, he said, is his idea of the “Missouri Conversation.” He would like to take events, such as terrorism, human relations and pollution, out to the community. He said he feels these topics, among others, affect everyone’s lives and therefore should be discussed between the public and the reporters.

“(The Missouri Conversation is) where we help our students, our communities and our publics throughout the state of Missouri and beyond, through dialogue, research, and storytelling,” Wasbotten said. “And if we do that, we will cement our position as the world’s premier school of journalism.”
When asked what the journalism school’s emphasis area would be, Wasbotten said he would focus on research and relationships within the industry.

“That helps provide data points for us to use to evolve the curriculum,” he said. “A conversation with the faculty who are the experts … will allow us to find these additional data points. Our faculty have been extremely responsive to the idea of remaining current and remaining relevant.”

Wasbotten stressed the importance of connecting with the students, stating he has an open door policy. He said he connected with the students at Kent State, but that there would be students at MU he would be able to form connections with as well.

When asked how to explain the value of a journalism degree to prospective students and parents, he said he believes the skills the Missouri School of Journalism teaches go far beyond just broadcasting and reporting. He said students are “adaptable and flexible in any industry.”

Wasbotten was asked to describe his leadership style and he categorized himself as being focused, strategic, able to make decisions and collaborate and also as wanting to be out and representing his school.

He said he is not afraid to talk in front of people.

“As dean, you end up being the face of the school and for us to energize our base, energize our donors and our friends and those we impact,” Wasbotten said. “That would end up being my job, to be a forefront of celebrating all the things we do.”

Associate Dean Lynda Kraxberger is a member of the search committee and she said Wasbotten has the experience needed to lead this journalism school.

“He has a true vision for what the next level of journalism education should be and while he has been at a smaller program, he knows what all the different pieces are that need to be in place in order to lead a bigger program,” she said.

Now that all the candidates — Sonya Forte Duhé who visited campus Feb. 12, David Kurpius who visited campus Feb. 19 and Esther Thorson who visited campus Feb. 23 — have been heard from, Meyers said the decision will be debated amongst the search committee and the decision will ultimately be decided by Provost Garnett Stokes.

“I know she will hear from a variety of different constituencies, she’ll hear from the search committee, review the feedback that’s given electronically, and I’m sure she’ll talk to all the different categories of people who have met with the finalists to make her decision,” Meyers said.

Meyers said he doesn’t know when the decision will be released, but he is hoping it is within the next month.
New film gives chilling account of sexual assault on college campuses


Sexual assaults on college campuses have reached alarming levels and the issue has drawn the attention of Congress and even President Obama himself. The latest research indicates that one in five college women will be sexually assaulted and as many as 90% of reported assaults are acquaintance rapes. It is believed that more than 100,000 college students will be sexually assaulted during the current school year. Nowhere is the deck stacked more against sexual assault victims than in college athletics. In just the last few years alone there have been cases at Florida State, Michigan, Oregon, Vanderbilt and Missouri.

All of this is a backdrop to a harrowing new film that premieres in theaters on Friday in New York City and Los Angeles. The Hunting Ground is a jarring exposé that shines a bright light on the epidemic number of sexual assaults taking place on college campuses each year.

The Hunting Ground features a group of survivors who faced harsh retaliation and harassment for reporting that they had been raped. The film focuses on institutional cover-ups and the brutal backlash against survivors at campuses such as Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USC and the University of California-Berkeley, among others.

Some of the most vexing stories featured in the film involve women who were assaulted by athletes. While The Hunting Ground isn’t all about sports, the most dramatic moment in the film occurs two-thirds of the way through when the woman who accused former Florida State quarterback Jameis Winston—who after a strong showing in last week’s Combine is projected by many to be the No. 1 pick in this spring’s NFL draft—appears and tells her story publicly for the first time. The woman, who is named in the film but SI.com has chosen to protect her identity, is shown on camera and gives her life-changing account of what she says happened the night in December 2012 she left a Tallahassee bar with Winston.

A high school honor student who planned to attend medical school, the woman is articulate and attractive. She looks like the girl next door, a person you would trust to babysit your children. It is uncomfortable to watch—yet impossible to look away—when she describes being beneath Winston on his bathroom floor, repeatedly telling him “no” before being physically overpowered.
“We’re grateful it’s the first time people will get to hear [her] story,” said *The Hunting Ground* director Kirby Dick. “It’s her first-hand testimony. Up to this point it hasn’t been in a public space.”

The woman’s parents also appear in the film. Her father talks about driving to Tallahassee Memorial Hospital with his wife to be with their daughter hours after the incident.

There is nothing easy about retelling these stories for the world to see. But the attorney for the woman who says she was raped by Winston, John Clune, said his client decided to break her silence in the film because she felt it was the right venue to tell her story.

“The film was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Clune said. “The work by these filmmakers is nothing less than groundbreaking. It took tremendous courage, but our client and all of the incredibly brave women in the film have advanced the cause of rape survivors everywhere.”

*The Hunting Ground* also examines a sexual assault accusation against a Notre Dame football player in 2010. Tom Seeberg, whose daughter committed suicide after she says she was sexually assaulted by a Fighting Irish starter, tells a heartbreaking account of school officials thwarting the investigation into his daughter’s complaint. A former Notre Dame police officer reveals that he and his colleagues were not allowed to approach or question an athlete on athletic properties.

The film also mentions rape cases involving football players at Missouri and Vanderbilt, as well as basketball players at Oregon.

The testimonials of rape survivors are wrapped between raw footage that is both gut-wrenching and disturbing. A small mob of unruly fraternity pledges at Yale are captured on film outside a freshman dorm for women, chanting: “No means yes. Yes means anal.” All the while a guy with a bullhorn is shouting: “Louder.”

In another scene we see drunken frat boys spilling out of a house where there is a sign out front that says: “THANKS FOR YOUR DAUGHTERS.” It’s enough to outrage any parent with a daughter heading off to college.

The film is directed by Dick and produced by Amy Ziering, the team behind the Oscar-nominated film *The Invisible War*, which revealed systemic sexual assaults and cover-ups within the U.S. military. That movie prompted Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta to announce significant policy changes and inspired the passage of the Military Justice Improvement Act.

Dick and Ziering started looking into the situation on college campuses shortly after the release of *The Invisible War*. “We were astonished that the problem was as serious in higher education as it was in the military,” Dick said.

Full disclosure: I appear in *The Hunting Ground* as an expert. **Two of the cases in the film—Lizzy Seeberg’s alleged assault at Notre Dame and running back Derrick Washington’s sexual assault of a student at the University of Missouri—are featured in my book The**
System: The Glory and Scandal of Big-Time College Football, which I wrote with 60 Minutes correspondent Armen Keteyian.

Some of my research is also featured in the film, including the statistic that student-athletes are responsible for 19% of the reported sexual assaults on campus, despite the fact that they comprise just 3.3% of the male student population. Those figures arose from a first-of-its-kind study I conducted with researchers at the University of Massachusetts in the mid-90s when we were granted access to judicial affairs records and police reports at colleges across the country.

Over the past 20 years I have researched hundreds of cases of sexual assault involving athletes. During that time I’ve interviewed countless sexual assault victims. The thing I found most telling was what prosecutor Willie Meggs did not say in the film. Meggs was asked if he thought a rape took place in Winston’s apartment. It was a perfect opportunity for the man who chose not to prosecute Winston to say no. Instead, he said something “bad” happened in that apartment that night. He just didn’t have sufficient evidence to prove it.

That’s not unusual. That’s typical. Only about 20% of rapes reported to the police in the U.S. are prosecuted. Yet at least 92% of reported sexual assault claims are found to be true. The problem is that date rape cases are very difficult to prove beyond a reasonable doubt, especially when alcohol is involved and the incident occurs in the perpetrator’s apartment, dorm or hotel room. The doubts raised by those factors are amplified when the accused is a star athlete.

The greatest achievement of The Hunting Ground is that it empowers rape victims to team up with each other and come forward. It’s fair to say that for the first time in many years, women like Jameis Winston’s alleged victim have powerful allies.

By the time the NFL draft takes place in May, the film will be in theaters around the country, the name of Winston’s accuser will be everywhere and more details about the night in question will likely come out. All of this brings to mind the legal maxim caveat emptor, which essentially is a warning that means let the buyer beware.

Jason Licht, the general manager for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, ultimately has to decide whether to use the first pick on Winston. He’s on record saying: “This is the most important pick, potentially, in the history of the franchise.”

Memo to Licht: Watch The Hunting Ground.

The ramifications in this instance are equally big for the NFL, whose image took a beating over the last year after Ray Rice was caught on tape knocking out his then-fiancé in an elevator. The controversy erupted after Commissioner Roger Goodell imposed a two-game suspension without bothering to obtain and watch the video.

Memo to the Commissioner: Watch The Hunting Ground.
No matter what happens with Winston, the film succeeds in its main goal: to shine a light on sexual assault on college campuses. It’s an important issue that isn’t going away, and if something drastic isn’t done immediately, it will only get worse.

Jeff Benedict is a lawyer and has written five books on athletes and violence against women, including Public Heroes, Private Felons: Athletes and Violence Against Women, and Out of Bounds: Inside the NBA’s Culture of Rape, Violence and Crime.

Senate approves Schaefer bill to keep Nixon out of UM presidency

By Rudi Keller

Thursday, February 26, 2015 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY — A bill given first-round approval Wednesday in the Missouri Senate will have “a prophylactic effect” protecting the University of Missouri from politicians maneuvering into the system presidency, Sen. Kurt Schaefer said during floor debate.

The bill would prevent members of the UM Board of Curators from voting to employ the governor who appointed them. The legislation allows a qualified former governor to be hired, Schaefer said, but prevents a sitting governor from exerting pressure to get the job or appointing friends who will offer the presidency after the governor leaves office.

“We’re discussing a whole lot of ethics laws on this floor right now that I would argue don’t ever result in the end result that people claim, but they clearly create the appearance of an impropriety, which by itself is enough to undermine the public’s confidence in us, which is why we are fixing those things,” he said.

Schaefer’s bill, approved on a voice vote, would go beyond a UM System rule barring the employment of current lawmakers, statewide elected or appointed officials and curators for two years after officeholders’ terms end. Nixon leaves office in January 2017. Two current members of the board and the eventual appointee to fill a vacant seat will be in office until Jan. 1, 2021.

President Tim Wolfe has held the job since February 2012 and receives a salary of $459,000 per year.
During debate, Sen. Jason Holsman, D-Kansas City, asked Schaefer if he had any reason to believe the bill was needed.

“It seems to me to be a witch hunt,” Holsman said. “It looks to me like you are going after this governor from something you have found to be objectionable, something that may happen in the future that you have no evidence that could happen.”

Holsman questioned Schaefer’s argument tying the bill to the discussion of lobbying and campaign finance laws. Constituents were concerned about the influence of lobbyist gifts and campaign donations, Holsman said, but no one had ever mentioned worries that the curators might hire Nixon to be president of the university.

“I think we are walking down a slippery slope here when we start chasing things that don’t necessarily have a factual basis in evidence,” Holsman said.

“We pass things with a prophylactic effect every day in this chamber where something hasn’t happened yet, but we pass a law to make sure that it doesn’t,” Schaefer replied. “It happens every day.”

A former governor who wants to teach at the university and is qualified to do so would be welcome, Schaefer said. Teaching positions are awarded by each campus, and the curators have no direct control over hiring decisions, he said.

Schaefer’s bill requires a final vote to advance to the House.

**Sale of $38.5M in bonds for University of Missouri approved**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — In a story Feb. 18 about a Missouri state board authorizing a bond sale to pay for a University of Missouri building renovation, The Associated Press erroneously reported that the project would make space for another 3,300 students. The university estimates that the renovated building would be able to accommodate 3,300 students, total.

A corrected version of the story is below:
A Missouri state board has approved the public sale of $38.5 million in bonds to pay to renovate a University of Missouri-Columbia hall.

The Board of Public Buildings voted Tuesday in favor of selling the bonds for Lafferre Hall in the university's engineering college.

Planned renovations include repairs to portions of the hall built decades ago and adding lab space.

Renovations are scheduled to be completed by December 2016.

The university estimates the renovated building would be able to accommodate 3,300 students and could take care of $15 million in deferred maintenance.

The Missouri Legislature in May approved $200 million in bonding for repairs and renovations to existing college buildings and $400 million for state buildings. Lafferre Hall is the first to get bonding approval.

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**Academic Minute: Improving Teaching Evaluations**

February 27, 2015

Appraising the work of an educator is a highly nuanced process. In today's Academic Minute, the University of Missouri's Cory Koedel describes his work to improve the overall fairness of teaching evaluations. Koedel is an associate professor of economics and public policy at Missouri's Columbia campus.

MU Law School Hosts Ferguson Symposium


COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Boone County to test new siren system Tuesday
Thursday, February 26, 2015 | 4:32 p.m. CST
BY CHRISTOPHER AIKEN

COLUMBIA — The Columbia/Boone County Office of Emergency Management will test a new emergency siren system at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Tuesday's test will replace the normal Wednesday drill for March and is part of National Severe Weather Preparedness Week.

It will be the first test of a new emergency siren system that was programmed in February. The new system divides the county into three geographic zones — north, central and south — giving emergency operators the option to alert more specific segments of the county that are under threat of severe weather.

The three zones will be activated simultaneously Tuesday and for all future monthly tests, said Capt. Martina Pounds, spokeswoman for the Boone County Fire Protection District.

Tests will return to a regular monthly first Wednesday basis in April, Pounds said.
MU will test its emergency alert system Tuesday in conjunction with the statewide drill.

Committee hears testimony on bill to protect religious student groups

By MICHAEL LINDQUIST Missouri Digital News

Thursday, February 26, 2015 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY — The Senate Education Committee heard testimony on two bills Wednesday that would prohibit campus policies denying financial or other benefits to student religious groups that limit membership to others sharing the same beliefs.

The bills, proposed by Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, and Sen. Ed Emery, R-Lamar, are intended to allow the groups to be selective in their membership and use meeting space, receive funding generally available to other student groups and receive other benefits given to campus associations.

Schaefer said stripping campus religious groups of funding and other perks has become a problem in other states that he hopes to prevent in Missouri.

“I know one of the first questions probably some of you will have: Well, has this happened in Missouri?” Schaefer said. “I’m not aware of it officially happening, but I have been told by some students, including some who have graduated from public institutions in Missouri 10 to 15 years ago, that their organizations were told that they could not have meetings on campus.”

The bills filed by Schaefer and Emery, and a similar bill filed in the House by Rep. Elijah Haahr, R-Springfield, seek to prevent actions such as last year’s decision by California State University to take recognition away from the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship for refusing membership to lesbian, gay and transgender students.

“So, it’s been going on a long time, I think it’s more mainstream attention now because of what’s happened in California ... but we need to make sure that this does not happen in the state of Missouri,” Schaefer said.
University of Missouri Law Professor Carl Esbeck said seven other states have passed similar bills.

Sen. Dan Brown, R-Rolla, said he thinks the bill might be taking a wrong approach to traditional American values.

“Amer..." Brown said.

Schaefer said the line cannot be drawn on campus.

“Those religious beliefs are at the core foundation of our constitutional system of government and it is not the place of an institution of higher learning to tell people what they should or should not believe in the religious context or what religion they can practice,” Schaefer said.

Changes to Sex Assault Bill

February 27, 2015

By Michael Stratford

NO MU MENTION

WASHINGTON -- The bipartisan group of U.S. senators that has been pushing legislation to curb campus sexual assaults is making some changes to their proposal as they look to advance the measure in the new Congress.

The sponsors of the legislation, who now include five Democrats and five Republicans, on Thursday unveiled a new version of their bill aimed at holding colleges more accountable for addressing sexual violence.

Those lawmakers said at a press conference that the revised proposal was a response to feedback from victims of sexual assault, advocates for the rights of accused students, law enforcement and college and university administrators.
“We have listened,” said Senator Claire McCaskill, the Missouri Democrat who is leading the effort. “Today’s bill is much stronger for it. We have improved it. We have made changes based on suggestions we have heard.”

McCaskill said the legislation would strengthen the rights of accused students, which critics have said are undermined by the bill.

“We are very focused on making sure there’s also due process,” she said.

A new provision in the bill would require colleges to notify both the victim and accused student within 24 hours of a college’s decision to move ahead with a disciplinary hearing for an allegation of sexual misconduct. The legislation also now describes students accused of sexual assault as “accused students” instead of “assailants.”

Joe Cohn, the legislative policy director at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, called some of those changes "an incremental step in the right direction."

But, he said, the proposal "still doesn't come anywhere close to striking a balance" between the rights of the complainant and the rights of the accused.

Elsewhere in the legislation are tweaks that appear to address some of the concerns colleges and universities have expressed about the bill.

The new draft, for instance, clarifies which law enforcement agencies colleges must sign an agreement to combat sexual assault with, as well as the role of the adviser that colleges would have to assign to a student making a complaint of sexual assault.

The legislation would now require colleges to anonymously survey their students about the prevalence of sexual assault once every two years instead of annually. The results of those surveys at each institution would be published online.

But much of the legislation, including requiring more sexual assault training on campuses, remains unchanged from when it was first announced last summer.

Colleges would still face stiffer financial penalties for mishandling sexual violence cases under the Clery Act and the gender equity law known as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The bill would allow the Department of Education to impose a fine as high as 1 percent of a college’s operating budget. However, the proposal now calls for the revenue collected from those enhanced penalties to be used for a new grant program to help colleges to combat sexual assault rather than flowing back to the Department of Education office responsible for enforcement.

Some colleges and universities had argued that allowing revenue from penalties to flow directly back to the Department of Education might create a “bounty mind-set.”

Since the legislation was first unveiled last summer, some universities, like the State University of New York System, have embraced the proposal and adopted procedures that, in some cases, mirror the legislation. Other groups, such as the American Council on Education, said they were concerned that the proposal was too “heavy-handed” toward institutions.
Governors, state legislatures and individual institutions have also proposed and enacted new policies to deal with sexual assault in recent months.

Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, a Democrat, said that colleges and universities have been “taking some steps in the right direction” to address sexual assaults.

“There have been some reforms,” he said. “But there is so much work still to be done.”

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Democrat of New York, though, continued to take a harsher tone against how colleges are performing on the issue.

“The reason why schools are failing is that they do not take this crime seriously,” she said, adding that one-third of students found responsible for sexual violence by a college are not expelled from the institution.

The Senators cosponsoring the legislation said Thursday that they were optimistic they would be able to pass a version of the bill in the new Congress.

Senator Dean Heller of Nevada, the leading Republican cosponsor of the bill, said he discussed the bill with Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who chairs the Senate education committee and was interested in bringing the bill before that panel.

“This may not be the perfect piece of legislation that he may agree to,” Heller said, adding that “at the end of the day it may look a little different than what we have.”

McCaskill said in an interview that she, too, had spoken with Alexander about advancing the bill, and, in particular, the added requirements on colleges.

“We are open to his suggestions on how we can make it less burdensome,” she said.

In a statement provided by his office, Alexander said that he wanted to “ensure that regulations on colleges are effective for students.” He has made reducing federal requirements on colleges a priority as he works on a rewrite of the Higher Education Act.

“I look forward to working with Senators McCaskill, Heller and others to examine the best steps the federal government and our colleges and universities can take to help create a safe environment for students,” he said.

February 27, 2015

Senate’s Revamped Sexual-Assault Bill Puts More Pressure on Colleges
NO MU MENTION

A bipartisan group of 12 U.S. senators introduced legislation on Thursday that is aimed at curbing sexual violence on campuses in ways that protect both victims and accused students. The changes reflect heightened attention over the past six months to the due-process rights of accused students.

The Campus Safety and Accountability Act, sponsored by six Democrats and six Republicans, builds on legislation that was introduced over the summer but never came to a vote. The new version was strengthened with additional input from sexual-assault survivors, students, colleges, law enforcement, and advocacy groups, according to one of its main sponsors, Sen. Claire McCaskill, a Missouri Democrat. A companion bill is expected to be introduced soon in the House of Representatives.

The revised proposal comes at a time when the Department of Education is investigating nearly 100 colleges and universities for possible violations of the federal civil-rights law known as Title IX. Colleges have increasingly been held responsible under that law to investigate and resolve alleged assaults promptly and fairly, whether or not the police are involved.

As the pressure from all sides intensifies, colleges have been struggling to understand their legal responsibilities, as well as such fundamental questions as how to define rape, especially when ambiguous, alcohol-infused sexual conduct is involved.

Since the original bill was introduced, advocates for accused students who feel the process is often stacked against them have been encouraged by a couple of high-profile controversies: the unraveling, in December, of a sensational claim of gang rape at the University of Virginia that was reported in Rolling Stone magazine, and objections by law professors at Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania that university policies offer accused students too little opportunity to defend themselves.

A ‘Road Map’ for Colleges

The new Senate bill acknowledges those concerns while stressing the need to hold colleges accountable. "To truly curb these crimes, we’ve got to have a road map for colleges and universities to increase responsiveness when crimes occur, better protect and empower students, and establish better-informed guidelines that actually have some teeth," Ms. McCaskill said in a written statement.

Like the previous bill, the new legislation would require colleges to designate "confidential advisers" to help victims of sexual assault, offer specialized training for anyone handling rape cases, and publish the results of "campus climate" surveys online. Campuses that violate the terms of the bill could face a penalty amounting to up to 1 percent of their operating budgets—a more realistic, and likely, punishment than the 100-percent funding loss that is currently threatened.

The issue of confidentiality is one of the most vexing problems colleges face when an assault is reported—how to ensure that students can speak to someone in confidence while still meeting a college’s legal-response and reporting requirements.

The bill would require colleges to designate confidential advisers to help victims of sexual harassment or violence, domestic abuse, and stalking. The advisers would provide information about support services and accommodations such as changing housing or class schedules, as well as reporting options. The
decision of whether to report an assault to campus officials or local law-enforcement officials would remain up to the victim, although the adviser could help.

Some victims’ advocates have been alarmed by legislation, proposed in a few states, that would require anyone who learns of an assault to report the matter to the police. Legislators who back such changes say that mandatory reporting could ensure that matters aren’t swept under the rug, but some victims’ advocates say it could discourage victims from speaking out.

The bill calls for better coordination with local police departments. Colleges would have to sign memoranda of understanding, updated every two years, with local law-enforcement agencies spelling out each party’s responsibilities.

As in the earlier bill, colleges would have to use one uniform process for student disciplinary proceedings, rather than allowing athletics departments to handle theirs separately. Athletics departments are sometimes accused of looking the other way when a prized athlete is accused.

Colleges would also be required to provide a written notification, to the accused as well as the victim, of any decision to proceed with a campus disciplinary hearing within 24 hours of that decision. The notice would have to include details of the complaint, a summary of the disciplinary proceeding, and the rights and due-process protections available to both parties.

"It’s important for us to emphasize we are very focused on making sure there is also due process," Ms. McCaskill said at a news conference on Thursday.

Realistic Penalties

The bill contains what the authors consider a more realistic penalty for colleges that violate Title IX. The existing penalty, which, according to a news release, "is not practical and has never been done," is the loss of all federal student aid. The bill would introduce fines of up to 1 percent of a college’s operating budget. It would also increase fines under the campus-crime-reporting law known as the Clery Act, from $35,000 per violation to $150,000.

The revised bill would require colleges to publish a climate survey that gauges students’ experiences and perceptions of sexual violence every two years instead of every year, as the earlier bill had prescribed. Demands and guidelines for such surveys are coming from all directions these days, including the White House, the Association of American Universities, consulting firms, and legal settlements with colleges sued under Title IX.

Despite assurances that the bill would be fair to everyone involved, some advocates on both sides found fault with it. "There’s nothing here that protects the fundamental due-process rights of the accused," said Joshua A. Engel, a lawyer who represents students who feel they have been unjustly accused of assault. That includes the right to effectively cross-examine an accuser and limits on the use of hearsay, he said. In addition, "You can have all the training you want, but if the people you’re training have insufficient experience in handling these cases, that’s not enough."

Meanwhile, Laura L. Dunn, executive director of SurvJustice, a nonprofit group that provides assistance to sexual-assault victims, objected to the designation of campus-based “confidential advisers,” who she said should at the very least be required to tell victims that the advisers have a conflict of interest because they work for the college. Students might be discouraged from hiring off-campus advisers who could offer more effective, unbiased support, she said.
Joining the lawmakers were Annie Clark and Andrea Pino, survivors and founders of the group End Rape on Campus, as well as Scott Berkowitz from the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

"I do think with this version that the co-sponsoring senators are trying to better balance the bill between the rights of complainants and respondents, so that it has wider appeal to Congress," said Brett A. Sokolow, president of the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management, a consulting and law firm.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat and a co-sponsor of the bill, said the measure would fix problems that do a "disservice" both to victims and to those who are accused.

"The bill actually has clarified rights for the accused," she said. "Right now, the process that’s going on on college campuses serves no one. It doesn’t serve the survivor, it doesn’t serve the accused, and because there’s such a lack of training, a lack of clarity, and a lack of due process, it’s a broken system."

February 27, 2015

The Ever-Growing World of College Rankings

College rankings keep proliferating, but what do they really tell us?

By Goldie Blumenstyk

NO MU MENTION

Another day, another college ranking. Or so it seems.

Last year at least three new rankings emerged from national publications or major companies, joining a long line of magazines that have entered the rankings game since U.S. News & World Report started publishing its list annually, in 1985.

With the August 2014 debut of Money magazine’s Best Colleges, the ranks of rankers now include Kiplinger’s Personal Finance, Forbes, and The Washington Monthly, along with employment-focused companies like LinkedIn, which introduced its University Rankings in October, and PayScale, which will release its sixth annual return-on-investment ranking in March, just before U.S. News publishes the latest edition of its Best Graduate Schools.

And all the activity doesn’t even count the ratings proposed by the Obama administration.

To Corbin Martin Campbell, an assistant professor of higher education at Teachers College of Columbia University, who studies rankings, the proliferation reflects "a bizarre paradox": There are more rankings than ever, but "they really don’t speak to the education core of an institution."
At the same time, she notes, colleges possess "this incredibly rich data" about learning—thanks to accreditation, curriculum reviews, syllabus analyses, and creative ways of assessing college teaching—that never make their way into any kind of consumer ranking. "The public is really left wanting," she says.

For other rankings skeptics—and they are legion—the proliferation is easier to understand. "It’s click bait, basically," contends Richard A. Hesel, principal at the Art & Science Group, a consulting company that works in higher education.

But it’s apparently click bait that resonates. Since 1995 the company has conducted three surveys of prospective college students. Early on, the rankings weren’t that significant a factor in students’ application decisions, but by December 2012 its StudentPoll found that two-thirds of students bound for four-year colleges were taking rankings into account. Among students with the highest SAT scores, it was 85 percent.

Mr. Hesel blames "all the media hype about the rankings, higher education’s own pandering to them, and the intense competitive landscape of college admissions" for the seeming influence of college rankings, even as he argues that most institutions would be better off spending less time worrying about their ranking and more time ensuring they’re providing a valuable student experience and innovative teaching.

According to Student-Poll, which is done in collaboration with ACT, U.S. News was far and away the most influential: 58 percent of those who used a ranking cited it, followed by 21 percent for Princeton Review, 9 percent for Forbes Top Colleges, 5 percent for Thebestcolleges.org, and 8 percent for all others.

For that reason, Mr. Hesel, for one, says he doubts the influx of new rankings will substantially influence students’ college choices or unseat established players like U.S. News.

"People have in their head an idea of where the well-known places stand," he says. Newer ones "won’t have currency."

The newer entrants, however, see themselves not as also-rans but as innovators. They contend that their approaches do a better job of measuring the impact a college has had, versus rankings that often merely reflect the quality of those who applied and enrolled, because they focus on how students fare after college and, in some cases, try to account for the socioeconomic status of the student body.

We’re entering either rankings overload or Rankings 2.0.

‘Perverse Incentives’

Money’s Best Colleges ranking was developed in collaboration with the company College Measures and its founder, Mark Schneider, an expert on higher-education data. The rankings take into account affordability, graduation rates, student debt, and how students fare after graduation.

Kim Clark, a longtime reporter at U.S. News who moved to Money four years ago, says she appreciates the "accountability" that her former publication introduced into the higher-education market but over time also worried about the "perverse incentives that the U.S. News rankings kind of created." (Among them, colleges gin up applications so they can appear more selective.)
It was her idea that Money do its own. "My motivation was to do something better" than U.S. News, she says. Ms. Clark says she consulted with several higher-education experts in deciding what data to measure and how to weigh the 18 factors in three categories. The ratings use data from PayScale, which collects information on salaries via crowdsourcing from individuals. It also relies on teaching evaluations from RateMyProfessors.com and federal loan-default data adjusted to take into account the economic diversity of the student pool.

The result, says Ms. Clark, is a rating weighted heavily toward affordability and return on investment. "The name of the magazine is Money," she says. "That’s our brief." Though a competitor, Forbes, already does a ranking with similar goals, Ms. Clark says that Money editors feel they’ve found a niche.

In the vein of the approach that The Washington Monthly takes with its rankings—rewarding colleges for what they do to promote social mobility and societal good—Money also developed a separate list that it calls "Value All Stars," for the 25 colleges that exceed their peers in outcomes of their graduates, considering the socioeconomic diversity of their student populations. "To me the ‘value-added’ schools are really important," says Ms. Clark. "They’re knocking it out of the park." Social mobility also plays heavily into the formula for the general rankings.

PayScale, while making its data available to others—it has collaborated with a software company called CollegeNet to produce a Social Mobility Index ranking of colleges—also develops two of its own rankings focused on value added from a very dollars-and-cents point of view. Its five-year-old College ROI Report calculates the value of 1,000-plus colleges based on their cost relative to the salaries of their graduates, and its PayScale College Salary Report, which began in 2008, ranks colleges based on the starting and midcareer salaries of their graduates.

"Students entering college weren’t doing a ton of research about what they’ll be making after graduation," says Lydia Frank, director of editorial and marketing at PayScale, explaining the company’s rationale for developing the rankings.

She says PayScale considers itself not so much in the rankings business as in "the higher-education information business." And that, she says, is because "ultimately we’re a compensation-data company"—one that can benefit greatly by getting more colleges to enlist more of their alumni to submit their salary information to the PayScale database. "The data is really valuable to us," says Ms. Frank.

To that end, PayScale has conducted an experiment with seven colleges offering free, detailed reports on alumni, in some cases broken down by major, showing how their salaries compare with graduates of other colleges. (One of them, Wittenberg University, even posted its report online.) In return, the participating colleges encourage alumni to submit their salary data to PayScale.

The underlying premise of the PayScale rankings, particularly its College Salary Report, may seem antithetical to many in higher education who decry the notion that the value of college can be measured by how much its alumni earn. But Ms. Frank says the company is finding growing acceptance—both from consumers and from colleges themselves. That coincides with the increasing pressure colleges face to show how their alumni are faring, says Ms. Frank. "Now we get, ‘Why aren’t we on the list?’ Before it was, ‘Take us off the list.’"

College rankings are also a means to an end for LinkedIn, the online networking and job-recruiting site that now contains profiles of more than 350 million people. "Today’s students are tomorrow’s professionals," says Crystal Braswell, a manager in its corporate-communications office.
In October, a year after it lowered the minimum age for members and introduced University Pages, where colleges can display information to be shared with prospective students, employees, and alumni, LinkedIn unveiled the first version of its University Rankings. As of now, the rankings cover only eight fields of study—investment banking, marketing, design, and accounting among them—for colleges in the United States, Canada, and Britain. Colleges with the most-successful alumni in those fields rank the highest.

Ms. Braswell says the company plans to expand the rankings to include additional fields of study, graduate schools, and universities in other countries. "Rankings are not a stand-alone thing," says Ms. Braswell. "Students need to do other kinds of research when they’re choosing a school."

LinkedIn also offers other college-oriented services, including the Decision Board site, begun in the fall of 2014, where students can solicit advice about colleges from others in their LinkedIn networks. For a site that becomes more and more valuable to recruiters as it demonstrates a growing and engaged base of members, the college strategy makes sense. Ms. Braswell says the site has about 40 million students and recent graduates as members.

The magazines that produce rankings are also looking at them as a means to another end: profits, for one.

At Money, says Diane Harris, the magazine’s editor, “we really did it with really pure journalistic ambitions,” but it wasn’t looking to lose money on the project either. The rankings did well. In the first 10 weeks, they accounted for about a third of all the traffic to Money’s website, she says. As a result, the magazine plans to invest more to improve them, in particular developing a better search tool. She says editors also plan to mine the data to expand the magazine’s coverage of higher education throughout the year.

In a similar vein, next month marks the debut of The Other College Guide: A Road Map to the Right School for You, a 400-plus-page resource for college students based in part on The Washington Monthly’s college ratings. (The book, published by New Press, is written by Jane Sweetland, a former dean and journalist; the Monthly’s editor, Paul Glastris; and the magazine staff.) It too sees rankings as the basis for new business opportunities.

Any College Can Achieve

The rankings universe appears to be ever-expanding. Which means that just about any college can find some list in which it’s a high achiever, even as officials often trash the whole enterprise.

"Colleges are ready to trumpet whatever they get," says David Hawkins, executive director of educational content and policy at the National Association for College Admission Counseling. Meanwhile, he says, “there’s a significant body of our members who think rankings shouldn’t exist at all, that education is such a personal experience that you can’t generalize about it.”

Richard H. Hersh isn’t a Nacac member, but he’s solidly in that "shouldn’t exist" camp. A former college president (of Hobart & William Smith and of Trinity College, in Connecticut) and co-author of the book We’re Losing Our Minds: Rethinking American Higher Education, Mr. Hersh is dismissive of all the rankings because, he contends, what they measure is at best correlational: They gauge “the quality of the people who applied to colleges," he says, and use that to suggest the quality of a college itself. People are just avoiding the question, "What is actually being learned?"
When he was a college president, he says, he tried for seven straight years to get his fellow presidents in the Annapolis Group to boycott U.S. News. He says only two were willing to sign on.

Mr. Hawkins, of Nacac, says he does see one silver lining in the proliferation of rankings. They could help change the general perception that U.S. News rankings are "almost official." The more the other rankings catch on, he says, they can help "make the point that its methodology is not sacred."

Ms. Harris, the Money editor, says the rankings satisfy needs at several levels. For one, parents want to be sure that they and their children are getting real value, and that students will leave college prepared for a successful life.

Rankings are also appealing because anybody who went to college has some kind of personal stake in seeing how their college stacks up, Ms. Harris says. "And," she notes, "everybody likes a good list."