Culture shock: Students push to shake up ideas about race on MU campus

By Ashley Jost

Sunday, March 22, 2015 at 12:00 am

Students enrolled at the University of Missouri today might never see the results of their advocacy for change addressing how minorities are, whether intentionally or unintentionally, marginalized on campus.

The reality of academia is that systemic changes can happen only so quickly.

MU was built on the tax dollars of slave owners. Former presidents owned slaves. The harsh reality of lynchings in Columbia still lives on in stories, and so does the oppression that minority students — not just blacks — feel today. And the experience for a minority student now, as told in the anecdotes shared at open forums, hasn’t changed significantly in the past 50 years.

Deputy Chancellor Mike Middleton recalls a truck full of college-age students yelling racial slurs as he walked down the street when he was enrolled at MU in the mid-1960s.

“There is a positive trajectory the university is on, and it has come a very, very long way since 1964 — that’s a good thing,” said Middleton, a former trial attorney for the civil rights division of the Department of Justice. “The bad part is that the progress that has been made to date has taken 50 years — half of a century.”

Resource centers, like the Gaines Oldham Black Culture Center or the Multicultural Center, weren’t there during Middleton’s time as a student, and having those safe spaces is crucial, he said.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Jonathan Butler was new on campus when someone spray-painted a racial slur across his dorm room door in 2011. He’s still at MU, pursuing his graduate degree despite frequently feeling unsafe while walking around campus.

Butler is among the organizers of MU 4 Mike Brown, a student group that developed after Michael Brown, 18, was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson last August. Students
rallied behind the organization as a way to show support for unarmed minorities who were killed by police officers.

Organizers such as Butler held “die-in” events, peaceful protests, poetry readings and other demonstrations to show — like many around the country who have unified around the same issues — their disdain over the marginalization many students feel. The discussion over time turned to the student experience in an attempt to push for change.

At the first student forum on race relations, stories flowed liberally about faculty members patronizing students in the classroom and about experiences of minority students who have been called names or felt threatened while walking through Greektown.

Discussion on campus heightened after several members of Sigma Alpha Epsilon at the University of Oklahoma were filmed singing a racist chant earlier this month. The participants at OU were punished, and the fraternity was kicked off of campus.

After the incident, MU 4 Mike Brown supporters marched through Greektown and parts of campus in what organizers called a “celebration of blackness.” About 45 minutes into the march, students added a chant: “Back up, back up, we want freedom, freedom. All these racist … Greeks, we don’t need ‘em, need ‘em.”

In December, student leaders from a handful of organizations representing multiple races and ethnicities gave administrators a list of requests. Among the requests was a call for public, monthly meetings with student leaders to discuss progress. The list also included changing deep-rooted problems: cultural competency training for faculty, recruiting more faculty and students of color — things that, as MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin stressed to students at a forum last week, “won’t happen overnight.”

“There’s no way we can turn a switch and things change immediately,” Loftin said when discussing student criticism of the chancellor’s inaction after a demonstration this month that ended at his doorstep. “Students need to understand that when it comes to faculty, which was the bulk of their concern, those things have to come from faculty leadership. I can’t impose things on them and expect success. I have urged them along as best I can about that.”

To some students, Loftin’s response feels like finger-pointing.

“This has to start from the top, and the chancellor is at the top,” said Reuben Faloughi, a doctoral student in educational and counseling psychology.

Faloughi described the forums as “retraumatizing.” The ongoing discussion about students’ experiences feels like an attempt to drag out the conversation until students are tired of talking, he said.

Diversity at MU isn’t just a black-and-white issue. Other minority students are also concerned about their voices being heard and are trying to inject their stories into the ongoing dialogue.
Andrew Albarca, president of the MU Association of Latin American Students, said his organization — like the Muslim Student Organization, LGBTQ supporters, the Asian American Association and other minority groups — is using this time to engage in the discussion about marginalized populations.

“It seems like there are unheard voices on campus,” Albarca said. “It doesn’t always seem like our issues matter. We face issues like being tokenized, too. ... Student projects will require someone to interview a person from another country, and people automatically come to us even though most of the students in ALAS were born in America.”

Student leaders from the Asian American Association declined to comment on this issue, and Muslim Student Organization leadership didn’t respond to requests for comment.

### MU STUDENT DIVERSITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Two or more races</th>
<th>Unspecified</th>
<th>Non-residential international</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** University of Missouri system

### THE FACULTY APPROACH

MU Faculty Council Chairman Craig Roberts is worried he might be part of the problem. It’s a problem he wasn’t even fully aware of until the first student forum in December.

“I am like many faculty members,” Roberts said. Out of 2,000 faculty members, 75 percent are white. That percentage has changed slightly in the past decade. In 2004, 83 percent of faculty were white. “I’m typical. I think probably two-thirds of our faculty are just like me in terms of awareness, which is really what we’re talking about here.”
Until the December forum, Roberts had regarded the incident of students spreading cotton balls across the Black Culture Center lawn in 2010, the racial slur painted on a statue in 2011 and other similar problems as a series of isolated incidents.

“I realized in that listening session that we’re not dealing with incidents; we’re dealing with a way of life,” Roberts said. “And for me, my white privilege is something I did not know I even had until that session. ... One student would tell a story, and hundreds would nod. You realize that they’re all experiencing the same thing.”

In late January, Roberts announced the creation of a “race relations” committee spearheaded by journalism Associate Professor Berkley Hudson.

Hudson hopes to have the committee members established this month.

The committee doesn’t have charges yet because, Roberts said, it’s important to get the members in place, allow them to identify problems and brainstorm solutions. The goal in picking members is for diversity in viewpoints and backgrounds. No specifics have been laid out, but Roberts expects eight to 12 members on the committee, including a graduate and undergraduate student. Most of the members will be faculty.

The committee will also have an outside circle of advisers, including student leaders, administrators and leaders in the Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative — a program meant to foster diversity through training and “chances to discuss and promote inclusiveness.” Those people will be engaged for opinions and experiences but won’t make decisions.

“Faculty are permanent; students are transient,” Roberts said. “We need a faculty base of support for addressing these issues because they’re the ones who define culture here, along with administrators.”

Hudson, who has met with dozens of students, faculty and staff discussing these issues, said the committee will begin by identifying the problems.

“I can say from talking to students, faculty and staff over the last month that these are problems that happen every day,” he said. “They happen in slight ways, and they happen in extreme ways. Nobody is being shot, but they’re not being respected sometimes.”

Hudson identified a cognitive dissonance on campus among those who, by “a chosen unawareness,” aren’t acknowledging there is a problem. There’s a failure to communicate — and an unwillingness in some cases, he said.

“We need innovative ideas to reach those people who don’t think there’s a problem or not much that could be done,” Hudson said. “But I will say this: Could what happened at Oklahoma University have happened here? Most certainly. I want to do everything I can to make sure it doesn’t.”
Hudson’s is an ad hoc committee, but an existing committee within the Faculty Council also is tackling the issue. Angela Speck, chairwoman of the faculty diversity committee, is hoping to address an overhaul in the way cultural competency is laced throughout the curriculum.

Speck talked about her committee’s goals at the open forum last week, providing her contact information for anyone interested in providing input.

Because of a campus diversity requirement, it’s mandated that programs include cultural learning in coursework. Some programs have classes focused on diversity, such as the cross-cultural journalism class for students in the School of Journalism. Other programs integrate learning mechanisms into existing classes — or they’re supposed to.

An overhaul of the diversity requirement was addressed several years ago but voted down by about 70 percent of faculty.

“It was voted down because there was a perception we didn’t need it,” Speck told the crowd Tuesday afternoon at the forum. “Clearly that’s not true.”

The committee is still in the information-gathering stage.

**ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES**

Expanding the route of the campus tour to include the social justice resource centers is in the works. Loftin also said he wants more minority students in the summer welcome program. Most of the students helping with the program now are white, he said.

Although students criticized the chancellor for inaction and a lack of transparency, Loftin has been commended on social media sites and during the latest open forum for being direct about the way harassing comments will be dealt with by the university.

Messages posted on an anonymous social media app, Yik Yak, after a Ferguson-related demonstration on campus last fall brought harassing online commentary to the fore.

“Lets burn down the black culture center & give them a taste of their own medicine,” one of the anonymous Yik Yak comments said after the event last December.

Police have identified the IP addresses the comments were posted from and are continuing to investigate the Yik Yak case and others.

At last week’s forum, Loftin read the Missouri statute that outlines how harassing language can be a misdemeanor and, from there, how it can be elevated into a felony hate crime.

“There are consequences of your language,” Loftin said. “This isn’t the university” policy; “this is the law.”
On Wednesday, the chancellor suspended a student who posted negative remarks online in response to another student’s letter to the editor in the Maneater, the MU student newspaper.

The letter, written by MU senior Farah El-Jayyousi, was a response to the Missouri Students Association and Graduate Professional Council decision to show the film “American Sniper” on campus in April. El-Jayyousi described how the screening makes her feel unsafe as a Muslim student on campus.

The university hasn’t released the name of the student Loftin suspended, but MU police sent the case to the Boone County prosecuting attorney for possible charges.

Loftin is considering what other administrative actions can be taken.

Loftin said he will consider several ideas that surfaced during last week’s forum, including a shorter cultural sensitivity training program — with a participation mandate — to fill the void until Hudson’s committee gets off the ground with more ideas.

Students also asked for more transparency from Loftin, hoping to see weekly, if not daily, updates on what he’s working on, whom he’s meeting with, etc., to address the campus race issue.

Loftin said he’s thinking about how to distribute such updates to students.

Loftin also said last week that he is considering making the school’s chief diversity officer report directly to him.

Middleton said he hopes the ongoing effort to get into the hearts and minds of others through education efforts inside and outside the classroom works, but since the campus shifted to that focus a few years ago with the creation of the Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative, he isn’t confident that dramatic changes have been made.

“I like to think it has made some change in the hearts and minds of people, and that in the long run we will see the benefit of it,” Middleton said.

Middleton said he hopes that, in the meantime, the discussion will remain about increasing diversity and not just by bringing in more minority students and faculty.

“Greater numbers of” diverse populations “improve climate, no doubt, but let’s not let the numbers drive that,” he said. “Having more people of color heightens learning. It heightens the culture. If you latch onto that idea, then you’re motivated to improve the quality of your product, not motivated to achieve some number.”
Editorial: MU on race

The newbie at the gate

By Henry J. Waters III

Sunday, March 22, 2015 at 12:00 am

In the long view of University of Missouri-Columbia history, current Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin is a newbie. Yet, judging from the tenor of the packed house on campus Tuesday, the chancellor deserves blame for what students, faculty, staff and administrators believe is an unfriendly atmosphere for minority students.

It was a group of the most discontented: Ferguson protesters, Latino and Muslim student organizations and others harboring complaints. Many speakers accused Loftin and his administration of not doing enough to comply with a list of student concerns presented in December containing such evergreen issues as lack of faculty diversity and cultural training for students and employees.

It’s not a fair rap — not because the worriers should shut up, but because Loftin and his staff don’t deserve such criticism.

Having been around these parts for several semesters, I can remember clearly the showing of this movie before. Loftin and all chancellors before him want greater numbers of well-qualified minority students, faculty and staff. As noted here before, wanting and achieving are two different things. The pool of qualified black faculty and students is smaller than the nationwide demand. Places like Missouri are hard pressed to compete with places like Harvard and UCLA for the most coveted hires.

The same is true for students. Universities are regularly pressed to increase minority student populations without eroding admissions standards. Aggressive minority preference admissions policies were found unconstitutional in court. Within established legal limits, most universities, including MU, aggressively seek minority enrollments and are more than happy when a faculty opening can be filled successfully with a minority person.

The other side of the equation deserves attention. It is perfectly clear any well-qualified student of any race or color has more than an equal shot at admission to MU and once here receives equal or better institutional support.
Some of the criticism aimed at Loftin properly belongs to perpetrators beyond his immediate control, such as students who engage in reprehensible racist behavior. Anyone with a longish view of campus affairs will agree campus administrations are paying more attention to such errant behavior today than ever before.

Loftin did a good deed meeting with the unhappy. By all accounts he patiently accepted their comments. He said — honestly, I think — he is frustrated, too, and would like to see all gripes satisfied, but there is only so much officials at Jesse Hall can do. Until we see evidence that the Loftin administration doesn’t care, we should focus as much on accomplishments as on ground yet to be gained.

HJW III

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.

Pope John Paul II

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

GUEST COMMENTARY: Pretending racism doesn't exist on campus benefits no one

Monday, March 23, 2015 | 6:00 a.m. CDT
BY LINDSEY DAVISON

In November, when it was announced that officer Darren Wilson would not be charged for killing Michael Brown, I was fast asleep in Milan, Italy.

The time difference meant the announcement was made in the early morning hours of Europe, and I couldn't will myself to stay awake long enough to wait for it.

The stream of tweets and Facebook posts I woke up to was both disheartening and strikingly contrasting. There were posts from minority students at MU expressing hurt, bewilderment or indignation. Others revealed they felt broken or defeated. One black student tweeted that she was in tears thinking that Michael Brown could have easily been her younger brother.
For every tweet from a minority expressing confusion or sorrow, someone else posted a quote about love or peace from a historical figure.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous words popped up roughly every seven tweets: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

Surely, I thought, these people don’t memorize these quotes, but simply Google them for times like this. You know, times when it’s simply easier to be without an opinion. Times when it’s effortless to use the words of someone else to acknowledge a current issue. Times when it’s trouble-free to reduce national news to less than 140 characters.

Then there were fellow MU students who continued using their social media capabilities to post selfies and adorable cat videos, as if there were no news at all. I was baffled by this. How can you be so close to a national event, one that has resulted in unrest on MU’s campus, and not acknowledge it?

Graduate student Jonathan Butler expressed a similar concern during a forum regarding race relations at the university earlier this week, saying that the people needing to change their behavior aren’t attending the forums or acknowledging that there is a race issue on campus. The forum was a part of a series of listening sessions hosted by MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

"It can't just be in these forums," Butler said, according to a previous Missourian report. "It's the people who aren't in this room who aren't getting this information."

Traci Wilson-Kleekamp, a mentor and tutor in the Missouri athletics department, said, "Your predominantly white institution doesn't seem to give a damn."

Perhaps the issue is that college is generally a temporary stage of one’s life. Why should you care about issues on campus when you’re only here for a few years? Why invest in changing the culture of the university when you’re leaving soon?

The answer to these questions should be simple: This is an educational institution, and learning shouldn’t be limited to the classroom. If you want to grow into the best possible version of yourself, learn about other people and issues that are bigger than you. Listen to stories; don’t ignore the news.
MU was desegregated by court order, not by choice, just 65 years ago. While the university has made strides to reduce racism since then, there is still much to be done. Pretending that racism doesn’t exist on this campus does not benefit you whatsoever in the long run. You're not doing yourself any favors by trying to be blissfully unaware.

While actions can be made from an institutional standpoint, it is only us, as a collective student body, that can reduce racism in the everyday culture on this campus. Admitting that it exists (and that you probably cannot fathom its effects if you are not a minority) is a good first step. Attempting to shield yourself from the realities of the world do not make them magically go away.

In the 2014 Oscar-nominated film “Selma,” there is a scene in which black protestors cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge only to be brutally beaten by police officers. A crowd of white people stand on the outskirts, silently watching the beatings.

I don’t want to look back on my college years and know I was exactly like these people, standing by watching history unfold, but pretending it isn't.

*Lindsey Davison is a senior at the MU School of Journalism.*

**COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE**

**UM, historical society at odds in scramble for state bond funding**

By Rudi Keller

Sunday, March 22, 2015 at 12:00 am

JEFFERSON CITY — The University of Missouri is elbowing its way into discussions for using a $75 million construction fund by suggesting to lawmakers that a research center and museum for the State Historical Society of Missouri cannot be built if higher education projects are not eligible for the money.

The money was included in a bill, passed on a 26-5 vote Thursday in the Missouri Senate, to revise the allocations for $600 million in Board of Public Buildings bonds authorized by a law passed last year.
Last year’s bill set aside $200 million for repair and renovation of campus buildings, $200 million for repair and renovation of state buildings and $200 million to rebuild Fulton State Hospital. With the mental hospital financed through a separate state agency, the new bill sponsored by Sen. Mike Parson, R-Bolivar, shifted $125 million to state repair needs, for a total of $325 million, and set aside $75 million for the construction of new state facilities.

Parson and other Senate leaders made the historical society’s building, estimated to cost between $37 million and $40 million, a priority for the new construction funds. Veterans are also competing for a share of the money, with Gov. Jay Nixon and some House members favoring construction of a new veterans’ nursing home, estimated to cost about $40 million.

“What I know is everybody’s fighting over a pool of money,” Parson said.

The questions about the historical society’s eligibility under the provisions of the Senate-passed bill stem from how the society is funded. The historical society is housed in Ellis Library, and the university is the society’s assigned fiscal agent under state law.

Appropriations to the society are made to the university on its behalf, both for operating and capital improvement needs. UM System lobbyist Marty Oetting is telling lawmakers that if higher education is not eligible for the construction money, the society might also be barred.

“It is not clear that this funding would be available for higher education institutions,” John Fougere, UM system spokesman, said to explain the university’s position. “The state made us the fiscal agent of the State Historical Society and it is in a university building, but that is a little different from other facilities on our campus.”

The historical society is an independent entity with special duties under state law, Executive Director Gary Kremer said. Those duties include collecting and preserving documents, artifacts and art on behalf of the state, publishing reports of its work to preserve Missouri history and making the collections available for public viewing and research.

“We have our own statutory authority, and we have our own board of trustees,” he said.

The society picked up a supporter last week when former state Rep. Dwight Scharnhorst registered as a lobbyist on its behalf. Scharnhorst, who served four terms in the House, volunteered to work on securing funding for the research center, Kremer said.

The university did well last year when lawmakers considered building projects, but only one — $38.5 million for renovation of the College of Engineering facilities in Lafferre Hall — has become reality. Nixon withheld general revenue allocated for construction of buildings called 50/50 projects, which included $32.9 million over the system’s four campuses.

The final provisions for Board of Public Buildings bond authority blocked $25 million set aside for the State Historical Society and $67 million for other new higher education buildings.
Because of those obstacles, and with authority to spend under current appropriations expiring June 30, the lobbying will intensify.

“I think whenever you have got something like that bonding bill up, people see where the projects are moving and if they have other priorities and projects they will try to move that,” Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said.

The university wants funding for its 50/50 projects, including an applied learning center, teaching winery and arts center in Columbia, Fougere said.

“Donors have stepped up to show their support for these capital projects,” he said. “We are seeking about $29.7 million in matching funds for those programs.”

Parson said he is confident the bill passed by the Senate would allow the historical society construction to be funded. But the scramble will intensify, he said.

“When you put $75 million on the table for all projects, that’s not very much money at the end of the day,” Parson said.

Editorial: Historical society

New hope for a new building

By Henry J. Waters III

Friday, March 20, 2015 at 2:00 pm

For decades, even generations, supporters of the State Historical Society of Missouri have sought new quarters. This year in the Missouri General Assembly, prospects look better.

For as long as I can remember, the society has been housed in the lower level of the Ellis Library on the University of Missouri campus, an unsatisfactory location. Valuable university space is occupied that could be used by the library, and, most important, the premises are wholly inadequate.

The historical society is designated by state law as a repository of state historical papers and artifacts. It owns artwork worth many millions of dollars that languishes in basement storage, inaccessible for public viewing and dangerously subject to damage.
Year after year the society board of trustees and staff have relentlessly begged the state for needed capital funds. Lawmakers have been positive but unable to get the society building through the vagaries of the budget process. This year the stars are more favorably aligned.

Senate leaders say the project is a top priority. President Pro Tem Tom Dempsey said he wants to protect “those Missouri archive materials and artifacts that are of great historical value at the State Historical Society that I think are in constant danger of being damaged or destroyed.”

Dempsey could not have said it better. Senate Appropriations Chairman Kurt Schaefer has been a strong supporter and remains so. Sen. Mike Parson, who sponsored a successful bond proposal that would fund the project, also listed the building as his top priority. Next steps are passage by Senate and House and approval by the governor.

In cooperation with the university and the city of Columbia, land is available on Elm Street across from the campus. Extensive architectural work has been done. The project is “shovel-ready” if funding can be gotten.

The new building will be a world-class art museum as well as a research resource. It will enable academic collaboration with the MU College of Arts and Science. A new emphasis in Missouri history is in the works for teaching and research in the new premises.

Expected to cost more than $40 million, the new facility will be an exciting addition to the campus and downtown, attracting visitors and allowing proper fulfillment of the archival mission.

As a member of the society board of trustees, I’m happy to be part of this very important and exciting effort. My thanks in advance to our esteemed solons in Jefferson City.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

GUEST COMMENTARY: Change only happens when we show up for each other

Monday, March 23, 2015 | 6:00 a.m. CDT
BY ELIZA SMITH

I am a 25-year-old white woman. We should probably start there.

As an undergraduate at MU, I was concerned with myriad things, mostly related to money.
Could my nanny job afford me the campus uniform of a Columbia fleece and shiny new Sperry’s? (No.)

How would I pay off my student loans? (My mother would come into an inheritance and give me the money.)

As a young woman, I walked to the parking garage at night with my car key held between my knuckles like a knife. I watched my drink carefully when I was at the bar with friends. I did not attend fraternity parties because I read the national news.

I was mildly attentive of my safety — in ways that my male counterparts were not, sure — but I never feared being here. And I certainly never felt unwelcome.

Jonathan Butler, who found a racial slur spray-painted on his dormitory door in 2009, feels unsafe. Keisha Avery faced cutting racism in a classroom. These sentiments (among many more) were brought to light in a forum about race hosted by Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, as reported by the Missourian.

I know that racism exists. And when I clicked through photos on the university’s Facebook page of the Michael Brown protests in the Student Center, I was sick to read the vile comments from students and alumni.

Besides briefly entertaining the notion of withdrawing from my master’s program because I didn’t want a degree from a university rife with hate, I did nothing.

When anonymous threats emerged on Yik Yak, a phone app I had never heard of, I attributed them to a single ignorant person made during an incredibly tense time in our state.

But that message of hate was not an exception to the rule. And it was ignorant of me to pretend this would all just go away.

The issue is not a black-and-white one. And matters of inclusiveness and safety affect everyone on campus, due to reasons as insignificant as a person’s gender, sexual orientation or religion.
For those of us who are empathetic but uninvolved, it is time to acknowledge that change doesn’t happen because we want it to. Change only happens when we show up for each other.

The next forum is scheduled for April 29. Mark your calendar now. Show up. Bring someone else who needs to hear what is happening on the same campus they cross every day.

Forums will not solve our problems, but community might.

I am a 25-year-old white woman. Who are you?

*Eliza Smith is a graduate student at the MU School of Journalism.*

---

**Editorial: Loftin on sports**

An agent for change

By Henry J. Waters III

Saturday, March 21, 2015 at 12:00 am

**R. Bowen Loftin makes news.**

*The University of Missouri chancellor met with reporters Wednesday with a meaty report on ideas for the athletic department.* While extolling the virtues of outgoing Athletic Director Mike Alden, he looked forward to new directions with the arrival of Alden’s successor, Mack Rhoades.

Not least because Loftin is the kind of leader who will hand out marching orders.

Citing the possibility of adding men’s tennis, Loftin said, “That’s just one very clear example where we have to do something. We have many more like that. I’ve given him certain things I think we need to work on. Hard.” Rhoades might need another pair of running shoes.
Loftin said MU is the only SEC school without men’s tennis, and other campus leaders say schedules are hard to make with only 13 teams.

“I said, ‘Mack, we’re the only school in the SEC without men’s tennis. How about that?’” a message from headquarters any AD can grasp.

Tennis is a money-losing sport, but Loftin thinks increasing revenue from SEC membership will bridge the gap — and, apparently, also for an additional women’s sport made necessary under Title IX rules if men’s tennis is added.

Enter the horses. Maybe.

Equestrian is the only SEC sport not available at MU. Loftin’s wife, Karen, is a serious horse aficionado.

Not that the chancellor would craft the roster of sports offered at MU accordingly, but the stars seem to be aligning in ways that might suit both members of the first family.

Equestrian sports might offer a chance for additional collaboration between MU and Stephens College. Stephens has facilities and horses and staff. Perhaps an MU program could get off the ground most readily by working with Stephens. Perhaps both institutions could benefit in the long term from such an arrangement.

Or perhaps not. Since I have not been hired to arrange a merger, I graciously defer to the leaders of both campuses, known to be determined people able to analyze and decide without advice from this quarter, even though it surely is worth at least the price charged.

Rounding out the SEC roster seems to make sense but will cost money. SEC schools, including MU, anticipate increasing revenue and increasing costs. Loftin and Rhoades seem ready to dive into this whirlpool with enthusiasm and energy.

How big will sports become? Next thing we know, the SEC will be enlarging the roster. How about wrestling? MU already has a men’s team, and women’s wrestling is the coming thing.

My mind whirls, and the cashbox jingles.

HJW III

What more can we ask than to never know what to expect.

Poet Paul Violi
COLUMBIA — A contingent of MU students is headed to the beach for spring break, but those students won't be lounging all day in the sun.

Twelve students left Friday on a nearly 14-hour drive to Tybee Island, Georgia, to help create a safer environment for endangered loggerhead sea turtles.

The students going to the Georgia shore make up one of the 65 groups that include 767 students — the most ever — signed up for Mizzou Alternative Breaks.

Mizzou Alternative Breaks was founded in 1991. Each trip is planned by students. Student leaders choose the destinations and organizations to work with.

Grace Gabel, a volunteer for a group going to Florida, said the experience will be keeping with the spirit of alternative spring break to "get outside of your comfort zone and serve others."
The students going to Georgia will work with the Tybee Island Marine Center to pick up plastic bags, cigarette butts and any other trash, said Cody Shelley, the Tybee Island Marine Center program coordinator. The work will create a safer place for loggerheads to lay their eggs.

There's a chance the volunteers won't arrive in time to greet the nesting sea turtles because the mating season doesn't start until May, Shelley said. Even so, the students can count on an educational beach walk that explains the critical role the island plays in the marine environment for creatures such as the North Atlantic right whale.

Shelley said the marine center focuses on connecting visitors with Georgia's coast, and "getting people out on the beach is how we do that."

Maria Kernychna and Maddison Balachowski, the students leading the Georgia group, said they're considering starting an awareness program when they return.

Part of Mizzou Alternative Breaks is to "help bring it home," Balachowski said. Her idea would be finding ways to raise awareness about how litter thrown away in Columbia affects sea life.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MISSOURIAN MINUTE: Mentor program gets kids thinking about college

Sunday, March 22, 2015 | 4:40 p.m. CDT
BY SITE MA

The Missourian Minute is an occasional video series of scenes from around mid-Missouri. These visual slices of life capture the sights and sounds of people and the activities they cherish.

COLUMBIA — Catherine Cox, a third-grade student from Benton Elementary School, has a lot of ideas about what she wants to do when she grows up.

College Mentors for Kids helped her decide to be a mentor in the future.
"I want to find teenagers and adults who would come and do life experience with them, and many, many different things like learning what they taught me," Catherine said. "That’s what I like to do in the future, teach them."

**College Mentors for Kids started in November and partnered Catherine and 39 other students from Benton with student mentors from MU. Every Tuesday, the kids and their mentors get together to do activities focusing on community involvement, career development and diversity.**

Catherine’s mother, Cathy Cox, who is also the home-school communicator at Benton, said this program gives her daughter the opportunity to see what college is like from a different perspective.

"I have seen a change when she interacts with young women," she said. "It’s just much more gentle."

Shelbi Danner, the vice president of College Mentors for Kids, said this kind of mentoring relationship is important for kids that are underprivileged.

According to a Missouri Department of Higher Education report, "achievement gaps in Missouri are most prevalent among schools with large concentrations of poor and minority students." In 2012, more than 90 percent of students who attended Benton were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, and more than 70 percent were minority students.

"I know the importance that having someone in your life who can tell you that even though you have barriers, you can go to college," Danner said. "Set your dreams high, set your goals high and you can do it."

Danner said the program plans to expand to 80 kids within the next year and recruit more mentors.
Future revealed to MU medical students


COLUMBIA, Mo - Medical students in Columbia and around the country opened residency letters on Friday and found out where they'll be spending the next few years.

After years of studying and stress, a group of around 100 MU med students gathered to open the envelopes that revealed their futures.

"I'm really excited because I matched into UT the Southwestern plastic surgery program today," Abby Warren said.

MU School of Medicine students found out where they'll be spending their residency years on Match Day. It's a long process that started more than a year ago. Students have a list of favorites, but no guarantee that they'll be matched.

"To come to the end of it and for both of us to have an outcome that we're both together -- I don't think we could have asked for anything more," Woody Smelser said of his match and that of his wife, Katie Smelser.

Woody and Katie married while in med school, and like most future doctors, they're moving to an urban area for residency. However, a handful of students choose the less traveled path: practicing medicine in a rural setting, which administrators said is needed.

"A lot of physicians, a lot of health care is delivered in the urban setting, especially the suburban setting, and so, we have a real shortage of who wants to work in rural settings," said Dr. Rachel Brown, associate dean of student programs for the MU School of Medicine.

The School of Medicine pre-admits 15 students from rural areas out of the 104 available slots with the idea that those students will move back to rural areas after graduation. Administrators said that because of the program more graduates are living and practicing in rural parts of Missouri.

Almost all of the MU graduates were matched Friday with a residency program. Around 30 percent will stay at Mizzou for their training.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia police staffing remains a problem, officers and officials say
Saturday, March 21, 2015 | 6:00 a.m. CDT; updated 2:45 p.m. CDT, Saturday, March 21, 2015
BY KELSI ANDERSON

COLUMBIA — It was noon on Thursday when Columbia Police Officers Lindsey Mueller and Robert Fox joined Sgt. Michael Hester for a shift meeting at the Police Department headquarters. Mueller and Fox, who have 10 and nine years of experience on the force, respectively, were getting ready to head out on patrol and were about to be briefed about what they might expect.

Mueller and Fox would bring the total number of officers on patrol at that time in Columbia to 12.

"That's 12 officers to cover 68 square miles," Hester said, "so divide all the city's problems by 12."

Mueller said being spread so thin can make things hectic.

"It depends on the day, but for the most part it's call to call, with calls waiting on us while we're handling a call," Mueller said.

"So for these guys, a child abuse call, for instance, would be a big deal," Hester said. "They have to write a report and do an investigation, and there's five, 10, 20 calls waiting for them — and it all has to be done at the end of their shift."

City officials for years have been decrying what they say is serious understaffing at the Columbia Police Department, caused by a lack of money to hire more police officers. The challenge has been a prominent topic during the City Council election season, with nearly all of the 13 candidates saying the city needs to find a way to beef up the force.

Mayor Bob McDavid and others have blamed eroding sales tax revenue caused by an increase in Internet sales, saying that has taken a heavy toll on the city's ability to match police numbers with Columbia's growth, in terms of both size and population. City
voters in November, however, rejected Proposition 1, a bill that would have raised property taxes to pay for 15 new firefighters and 40 new police officers over five years. As it stands, the Police Department employs 163 sworn officers, spokeswoman Bryana Maupin said. Given the fiscal 2015 budget's projection of a Columbia population of 119,476 people, that adds up to 1.36 sworn police officers per 1,000 residents. The result is longer emergency response times and little time left over for officers to devote to proactive and community policing methods.

A Police Department study cited in the 2015 budget says that in order for officers to devote a third of their time to community policing, the department would need 19 to 30 additional officers.

The MU Police Department, meanwhile, employs 35 police officers, with an authorized strength of 37, MU Police Capt. Brian Weimer told the Missourian. Adding those 35 officers would bring the ratio to 1.65 per 1,000 residents.

City Manager Mike Matthes said the situation is critical.

"We are as thinly staffed as we can possibly be and still function," Matthes said. He recounted a meeting with Deputy Chief Jill Schlude during which he asked her to check her iPad to see how many on-duty officers would be available if a call came in.

"It was zero, at 10 o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday. Imagine what it was gonna be at 11 o'clock that night or 2 a.m. on a Friday," Matthes said.

Of the 163 sworn officers on the police force, 82 are patrol officers, Maupin said. Of those, three are in the academy and three are in field training. The department also has five officer vacancies.

The failure of Proposition 1 left the city with no means to boost police numbers.

"Property tax is always a hard sell," Matthes said. He suspected voters would prefer a sales tax but the city opted against that because the "slow starvation" of sales tax revenue would leave Columbia in the same position 10 years down the road.
"I believe in a year or two we're going to have to ask (for a property tax increase) again," Matthes said.

**Response to unfavorable department review**

The Police Department has faced challenges beyond staff numbers. A 2012 independent review of the Columbia Police Department by Eric Anderson Associates detailed a dismal account of low police morale, lack of communication and a supervisory culture that was "approaching toxicity."

The report listed 14 recommendations for improving the department. They included fostering communication, addressing pay compression, establishing a fair internal justice system and improving training efforts. Matthes said the city is "pretty well done" with all the recommendations, except the accreditation of the department, which is an ongoing process.

"The fundamental problem was with the command staff," Matthes said about the report's findings. "I pulled them all in and talked to them. ... They admitted they'd never given Chief (Ken) Burton five minutes of respect, and they'd been undermining him since Day One."

To address the issue, Matthes said, the city moved down the line at which employees are "at will," or able to be terminated without a stated justification. That ability now rests with both the deputy chief and the assistant chief.

"It's just a command and control function," Matthes said. "Say if I'm your manager and I can't fire you, then you can do whatever you're passionate about and you don't have to listen to me," Matthes said. "There needs to be one police chief, not 10."

"That seems to have fixed a lot of the insubordination," Matthes said. He also believes efforts to improve communication between command staff and the rest of the department are a primary factor that helped "move the needle."

Matthes said he is satisfied with the direction of the Police Department. "I really believe we've turned the corner on the culture side of it and the communication side of it."

**New police buildings**

Construction of a new police headquarters was among 14 recommendations in the department review, and the city's 2014 draft of its Capital Improvement Plan included
potential projects to build two new police station facilities. The draft Capital Improvement Plan for 2016 includes a preliminary design for a municipal service center that could include a police precinct station north of Interstate 70. The long-term goal would be for the department to have a north precinct and a south precinct as well as a central headquarters.

If the municipal service center is going to happen, the City Council will have to leave it in the Capital Improvement Plan, and voters will have to renew the city's capital improvements sales tax later this year.

"We would co-locate our stuff to be near each other, and the precinct is part of the municipal service center concept. We have the need for a police presence on the north side," Matthes said.

As for the downtown headquarters, Matthes said the department has outgrown it. "But we can get away with that because officers spend all of their time out of the office going call to call to call,"

Sex assault, drinking push colleges to moment of reckoning

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

NO MU MENTION

CONCORD, N.H. • On college campuses nationwide, the intertwined problems of sexual assault and alcohol are under intense scrutiny as students increasingly speak up and the federal government cracks down. Pushed to a collective moment of reckoning, colleges and universities are trying a slew of solutions focused on
At the University of Virginia, a social network will connect female freshmen with older mentors. Rhode Island’s Brown University hopes to make it easier for women to report sexual assault. In New Hampshire, Dartmouth College has banned hard liquor and plans to take the unusual step of completely overhauling its housing system.

At Dartmouth, where a committee spent nine months researching high-risk drinking, sexual assault and a general lack of community on campus, no one solution stood out.

“I was hopeful that they would find some campus that had really unlocked the secret, but what they found is that every campus is suffering from these issues and struggling with these issues,” Dartmouth President Philip Hanlon said.

Even as administrators implement changes, new incidents have cropped up. A Penn State fraternity is accused of posting photos of nude women, some apparently unconscious, on a private Facebook page. The University of Wisconsin-Madison terminated a fraternity chapter last week after an investigation found it engaged in hazing that included excessive underage drinking and sexualized conduct.

On March 9, the Sigma Alpha Epsilon chapter at the University of Oklahoma became the target of national outrage after a video surfaced of members chanting racist lyrics.

At the University of Virginia, social activities at fraternities were suspended after the November publication of a Rolling Stone article describing a gang-rape at a fraternity. Though much of the article was later discredited, the school lifted the suspension only after Greek organizations agreed to new rules banning kegs, requiring security workers and ensuring at least three fraternity members are sober.

The university also is considering new courses on safety and a research institute on violence, and a group of administrators, faculty members, students and others will make recommendations next month on changing the university’s culture with regard to alcohol and sexual assault.

In Rhode Island, where Brown University students recently protested the handling of a female student’s drugging and sexual assault allegations, a task force on sexual assault is expected to release its final report this month. The university has begun implementing some recommendations made in December, including handling complaints more quickly and reducing the “traumatic nature” of the process.

Dartmouth last year overhauled its policies to include harsher sanctions for sexual assault and it is developing a four-year, mandatory sexual violence prevention program. On the fraternity front, it plans to require all student organizations, including fraternities and sororities, to undergo annual reviews to ensure they are being inclusive and diversifying their membership.

But going further, Dartmouth is literally changing how students live. Starting with the class of 2019, each incoming student will be assigned to one of six “house communities” — a cluster of residence halls that will serve as a home base for social and academic programs. Each community will have a professor in residence and dedicated space for academic and social interaction.

In recommending the house system, Hanlon’s committee faulted the school for failing to invest in residential life over the years and creating a void that was largely filled by the Greek system.

Dartmouth joins a small but growing number of U.S. colleges and universities that have embraced the “residential college” model, which typically involves small, faculty-led communities that include students from various years and backgrounds. The concept goes back centuries in England, but only about 30 U.S. schools have at least one residential college, the vast majority of them created for reasons unrelated to the challenges that led to Dartmouth’s decision.
Rice University in Texas, which started its residential college system in 1957, randomly assigns every student to one of 11 colleges. Mixing freshmen in with upperclassmen helps transfer traditions and standards of behavior, and having separate governing systems for each college makes them “incubators of problem-solving,” said John Hutchinson, dean of undergraduates.

For example, when the university wanted to tackle alcohol abuse several years ago, he said, it gathered together residential college leaders, who then strongly recommended a ban on hard alcohol.

Dartmouth’s plans are largely an experiment. No one has specifically studied whether residential colleges make for safer campuses, and like Dartmouth, a handful of schools with residential college systems are under investigation by the Department of Education for how they handle sexual assault and harassment.

But administrators and students say that such systems can help schools deal with problems better.

Tennessee’s Vanderbilt University, where two former football players were recently convicted of raping an unconscious student in June 2013, opened 10 residential colleges for freshmen in 2008 and two more for older students last fall.

Cynthia Cyrus, provost for learning and residential affairs, said that there have been fewer reports of “extreme behaviors” from the two new colleges compared with traditional housing, and that students living in the freshmen houses and the new colleges more often have what she calls “the difficult conversations” about rape, religion and other issues.

**Editorial: Withholding A+ and more from Missouri students**

A group of Missouri legislators is continuing a determined effort to bar undocumented immigrant students from making Missouri a better place by limiting their access to higher education.

This is the second year in a row — and it probably won’t be the last — in which some Republican lawmakers have targeted students who graduate from high school in Missouri, but who aren’t here legally because they were brought here as small children, from being eligible for state aid or favorable tuition at state colleges or universities.

But that’s not all. These legislators want Missouri’s higher education institutions to charge these students the highest tuition rates possible, which would be as out-of-state students, even though most of them grew up here. Schools that don’t charge the maximum tuition are being threatened with loss of state funds.

These young people have done nothing wrong, and yet some Missouri lawmakers want to punish them. The students’ biggest crime is that they were born elsewhere and brought here as youngsters. Many of them are living legally in Missouri as so-called DREAMers, students whose deportation is deferred because they meet specific criteria, such as having lived in the United States since before they were 16.

Their deferral is temporary and does not provide them with a path to lawful permanent resident status or citizenship. It does not grant them some back-door access to being fully accepted as U.S. citizens. Some are here under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Initiative, an executive order enacted by President Barack Obama after the DREAM act failed to pass Congress.
For Missouri Republicans, the Obama angle settles the issue.

The teens have been instructed from an early age to strive for the American dream, and a central theme in that is education. Discriminating against them just doesn’t make sense, economically or in any other way.

**Included in the legislative punishment effort are other immigrants who have a lawful presence, such as asylum seekers and refugees. For them, too, highest possible tuition and no state aid. The difference is expensive. Tuition at the University of Missouri for out-of-state students is $24,314, compared to $10,286 for in-state.**

The scholarship program the lawmakers don’t want non-documentated students participating in is the A+ program. It provides students with scholarships equal to two free years at a participating community college or vocational school, as long as they graduate high school with at least a 2.5 GPA, have a 95 percent attendance rate and complete at least 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring.

**Those are high standards** requiring serious dedication from the student. That high-caliber effort should be recognized by a state whose lawmakers repeatedly have asserted that they want a talented pool of workers to help attract business development.

Business start-ups and those looking to relocate list an educated and talented work force among the top qualities they are seeking. Those lists don’t mention immigrant status.

Requiring these highly motivated and top-performing students to pay even more than their counterparts just because they are foreign-born is a mistake. Academic and economic development studies have shown that a healthy immigrant community helps an area prosper.

At least 18 states around the country, including four bordering Missouri — Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma — recognize this. They offer in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students, and many also make scholarships and other forms of financial aid available. This is a smart investment in the economic futures of these states, as well as in the young people who will benefit from higher education.

**The federal government** guarantees all children regardless of their immigration status a K-12 education. The U.S. Supreme Court has weighed in, saying that denying such educational access would create a permanent underclass of citizens.

Missouri needs all the ambitious, striving, dream-believing young people it can get. Offering modest financial benefits to students who have earned them, regardless of their immigration status, would be the right thing to do morally and economically.

It’s been a boon to other states that have tried it. Missouri ought to be next. The bills seeking to limit educational access are SB 224, sponsored by Gary Romine, R-Farmington; HB 186, sponsored by Scott Fitzpatrick, R-Shell Knob; and HB 3, sponsored by Rep. Tom Flanigan, R-Carthage.
Two years ago, it might have seemed strange when Gov. Jay Nixon started pushing for Missouri to create its own branch of Western Governors University.

After all, WGU is a bit of an oddity. It’s a nonprofit online university that doesn’t use teachers. Students work at their own pace and are assigned course mentors who offer tutoring, advice or pep talks as needed. Students can also skip large sections of the curriculum if they can demonstrate command of the subject.

After two years and a state investment of $4 million, WGU-Missouri leaders say the school is doing what it’s supposed to do: providing access to students who don’t fit the mold of a traditional student.

Students, they say, are earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees more quickly and for less money.

However, skeptics say the WGU model cheats students out of the one-on-one interactions between teachers and students that typically drives the learning process. There’s also concern that the idea of quicker and cheaper degrees could entice students who aren’t disciplined enough to be successful in WGU’s hands-off approach.

Sarah Powell, 39, is perhaps the prototype WGU student.

She had an associate’s degree in veterinary technology from Jefferson College that she wasn’t using. Later, as a stay-at-home mother caring for her three children, she opened a day-care center at her house.

“I was working 14- to 16-hour days taking care of other people’s kids, and I just finally decided I wanted something more,” she said.

Powell eventually enrolled in WGU, earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees in teaching in a little over three years.

Powell said she liked WGU’s competency-based model, where instead of the traditional A-F grading system, students pass or fail.

“Either you know it or you don’t,” Powell said. “If you are struggling on your assignments, you redo them. They don’t allow you to get by. You have to pass with the equivalent of what would be a B grade.”

Powell is now a seventh-grade science teacher at Valley Middle School in the Northwest School District in House Springs. Powell graduated from the national WGU before Missouri started its own chapter. Missouri’s version has 1,400 students enrolled and has graduated just under 550 students in two years of operation.

**HALF THE COST**

A recent Harris Interactive survey of new graduates found that 82 percent of WGU graduates were employed full time, compared with the national average of 77 percent. A Gallup-Purdue survey of students who graduated in the past five years, showed that WGU students were more likely to self-report as engaged and thriving in their jobs than graduates of other schools.

Matching productive people with jobs they can thrive in follows one of the loftier goals in higher education circles: putting a dent in the estimated 36 million Americans — 700,000 Missourians — who’ve completed some college but didn’t earn a degree.

“We are doing what we were created to do,” said Angie Besendorfer, WGU-Missouri’s chancellor.

Dedicated students, she said, can earn a degree 30 percent more quickly and for half the cost of students enrolled at a traditional four-year university. Rather than offering semesters, WGU is organized into six-month periods, each costing roughly $3,000. Students can take as many classes as they can handle in each period.
But a Washington State study of more than 50,000 students found that those who enrolled in online courses were more likely to fail or drop out of school than students who enrolled on brick-and-mortar campuses. A Columbia University study found similar results.

Both studies dealt with community college students, but the logic translates to four-year schools: Significant numbers of students require a strong connection with their teachers to succeed.

Besendorfer said she didn’t put too much stock in critics who say WGU students miss out on one-on-one interactions with instructors. Students read course materials, watch web videos and turn in assignments, much like traditional students do. Besendorfer said students who had a good grasp of a course could test out of a course immediately by passing an exam, writing a paper or completing a project demonstrating their knowledge of the subject. Students who struggle can lean on course mentors for one-on-one tutoring, she said.

“This model has been around for a long time,” she said, and has been successful.

**NARROW FOCUS**

WGU was founded in 1997 by 19 sitting governors. So far, WGU has enrolled more than 55,000 students, with an average age of 36.

With its origins as an economic development engine, WGU isn’t the place to earn a liberal arts degree. Instead, the focus is narrowed to a number of key areas: information technology, business, teaching and health.

WGU is based in Utah, but so far five states have created their own offshoots. Some — including Missouri’s — were started with taxpayer money, but each one supports itself through tuition and private donations. WGU-Missouri got started with a $4 million community development block grant from the state to help with startup costs.

Because Missouri created an affiliate of the national university, WGU spends more marketing dollars here than in other states, WGU officials said. Nixon has appeared in television ads touting the benefits of WGU-Missouri.

As an online-only school, WGU competes with schools such as Kaplan University and the University of Phoenix. But unlike many of its competitors, WGU is a nonprofit. Even so, Chief Executive Officer Robert Mendenhall earns more than $600,000 a year.

Rusty Monhollon, assistant commissioner for academic affairs with the Missouri Department of Higher Education, said two years wasn’t enough time to assess how well WGU-Missouri was doing.

As WGU-Missouri produces more data, the school will ultimately be judged on how well its graduates perform on standardized tests, licensing exams and other precursors to employment, he said.

“Ultimately, the purpose of any institution is to help students learn and to get students to be successful,” Monhollon said. “The competency-based model is a proven way for some students to achieve that.”

---

**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

**Momentum grows in Missouri to block local business regulations**
By Virginia Young

JEFFERSON CITY • Environmentalists in Columbia, Mo., wanted the city to ban plastic shopping bags to help control litter and promote reusable bags. But when community opposition to the proposal mounted this month, the Columbia City Council shelved it.
That wasn’t enough for the Missouri House.

Last week, on a vote of 114-38, the House passed a bill that would bar cities and counties from banning or taxing plastic or paper bags. And that may be only the beginning of the Legislature’s growing interest in curbing the authority of cities and counties.

Prompted mainly by actions in Columbia, legislators have filed several bills to prevent local governments from regulating business practices. They would curtail everything from “ban-the-box” ordinances — which limit employers’ use of criminal background checks — to cities’ efforts to regulate ride-booking companies such as Lyft and Uber.

The rise in so-called “pre-emption” bills reflects a national trend, with many of the examples coming from states where Republican-controlled statehouses are pushing back at policies crafted in the more Democratic cities.

“When the states try to develop economic policy, they want their regions to be somewhat cohesive, and they don’t want to have one sector or one zone of their state be anti-business,” said Jon Russell, director of the American City County Exchange. The exchange is an arm of the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, a free market advocacy group that drafts model laws.

Critics say pre-emption bills infringe on local control and take decisions away from the level of government that is closest to the people. Some also question how pre-emption squares with the conservative principles of the Republican-led Missouri Legislature, which balks at federal intervention in state affairs.

“It’s hypocrisy at its highest level,” said Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis. “This is like oxymoron. How are you going to say we don’t want government controlling individuals’ lives and then you’re going to mandate what cities can do?”

Though the bills’ backers say no current laws would be wiped out, future proposals in urban areas could be affected. That has made leaders in St. Louis and Kansas City nervous.

“We’re keeping an eye on the legislation,” said Mary Ellen Ponder, chief of staff to St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay. “We oppose anything that violates our power as a home-rule charter city to find local solutions to local problems.”

STARTED BY TOBACCO

Pre-emption bills are pushed by industry groups, which find it easier to lobby a single state legislative body than scores of officials in city halls around the state.

The tobacco industry started it.

Case in point:

When Missouri last raised its tobacco tax — to 17 cents a pack in 1993 — it was part of a package deal that included freezing local cigarette taxes. Then-Speaker Bob Griffin agreed to the pre-emption to secure a state tobacco tax increase for children’s health programs.
The tactic of pre-empting local laws also has been widely used by the National Rifle Association. For example, last year, Missouri lawmakers enacted a law that prevents cities from barring individuals with a concealed-gun permit from openly carrying a weapon.

Over the years, other business groups caught on.

In 2013, the telecommunications industry got the Legislature to pass a bill restricting what cities and counties can consider when they decide on the placement of towers to serve cellphone users.

This year, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce & Industry made pre-emption a marquee issue by including a pushback at cities among top chamber priorities.

“Activists are starting to go to local communities to impose some of their ideas,” Tracy King, a lobbyist for the chamber, said in an interview.

For example, she noted that last fall, San Francisco became the first city to place limits on how chain stores schedule their workers. Meanwhile, New York City, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland, Ore., require private employers to offer paid sick leave.

King said that 13 states have pushed back, passing pre-emption legislation similar to the chamber’s bill.

That proposal, sponsored by Rep. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia, and Sen. Mike Kehoe, R-Jefferson City, would prevent cities from setting minimum wages or requiring private employers to provide paid sick leave or other “terms of employment.”

Cities also could not bar companies from checking job applicants’ criminal history.

“The state has the ability to regulate commerce,” Kehoe said at a Senate hearing last week. “We should be in a unified pattern, not having all these different standards for business to follow and keep track of.”

Kehoe said that while he favors giving people with criminal records a second chance, businesses need to be able to run background checks so they can comply with insurance and other requirements.

The name of that provision — ban the box — relates to the box that job applicants usually must check on an application if they have a felony conviction.

People who apply to work for city government in St. Louis have not been required to check such a box since last fall, and Nasheed sponsors a bill that would extend that policy to public and private employers statewide, though its chances of passage are slim.

Kehoe said that if his bill passes, the current ban-the-box policies in St. Louis and Columbia would not be rolled back. But other cities would be prevented from imposing such a requirement on the private sector.

Bill Gamble, a lobbyist for Kansas City, called the bill unnecessary.

“We don’t have plans to do any one of these three things” that would be prohibited, he said. But the legislation gives the impression that Missouri’s urban areas are anti-business, he said, “and that’s not true.”

COLLEGE TOWN IN SPOTLIGHT
The debate has made headlines repeatedly in Columbia, home to the flagship campus of the University of Missouri.
In a state that has trended Republican in the last decade, Columbia has, too, with its House delegation now split 2-2 between Republicans and Democrats and the county’s Senate seat held by a Republican. Still, Columbia maintains a more liberal flavor than most outstate areas.

In addition to considering a plastic bag ban and passing a ban-the-box law, Columbia recently enacted regulations for ride-booking companies. Bills in the hopper in Jefferson City would give the Missouri Department of Transportation exclusive authority to regulate those companies, which use digital networks or software apps to book rides.

Among those unhappy with the state’s tightening leash is Columbia City Councilwoman Laura Nauser. She is a Republican, though council members are elected on a nonpartisan basis.

Nauser co-chaired the city’s violent crime task force that recommended the ban-the-box ordinance. It prevents most employers from asking job applicants about their criminal history until after a conditional offer of employment is extended.

The goal, Nauser said, was to “allow people with nonviolent felonies to integrate back into the community by getting a job.”

The task force’s study took 14 months and included numerous public forums, so to have legislators jump in is “very disheartening. I take this as an affront to my legislative authority to represent the constituents in my community.”

Jocelyn Johnston, an associate professor at American University’s School of Public Affairs, said cities are becoming more entrepreneurial and taking on policy initiatives that state legislatures have resisted.

But in the end, local governmental units are creatures of the state, and derive their powers from state laws.

“So the state can shut it down,” she said.

*The plastic bag bill is HB722. The chamber’s bills are SB455 and HB865. The ride-sharing company bills are HB792 and SB351.*

---

**Rash of elementary school suspensions in St. Louis area are a pipeline to problems**

*March 22, 2015 6:45 am • By Elisa Crouch*

Thousands of suspensions are issued to elementary school children in the St. Louis area each year for infractions ranging from throwing chairs to mouthing off.

Among those punished are kindergartners who bite. Preschoolers with toileting mishaps during nap time. Second-graders who throw snowballs. They also include children who commit more serious offenses, such as starting fights with classmates and carrying illegal drugs in their backpacks.
The rash of suspensions has resulted in a loss of tens of thousands of instructional hours in the St. Louis area alone, with minority children catching the brunt of them.

And it has happened even as districts leaders with the highest suspension rates say the punishment should be used only as a last resort.

“In the number of years I’ve been doing this, I don’t know that you could find evidence that out-of-school suspension really does anything for students,” said Scott Spurgeon, superintendent of Riverview Gardens schools, where about 4,200 elementary school suspensions were issued last year. However, “I don’t know the system is set up so we have alternate choices.”

To be sure, the numbers illustrate some of the challenges teachers face when confronted with students whose behavior they can neither manage nor understand.

In struggling districts, where most of the elementary suspensions are happening, some teachers have been placed in classrooms without the training to help them manage high concentrations of children who struggle both academically and socially.

Adding to the problem is a gap between suspension rates of black and white students in Missouri public schools — the widest in the nation, according to a study the Civil Rights Project at UCLA released earlier this month, which used data from the 2011-12 school year.

“They’re the children being overly suspended and kept out,” said Amanda Schneider, an attorney with Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, whose clients include parents of suspended children. “They’re low-income clients. They’re in poverty. They have children who need intensive services and supports.”

Many might think of suspension as a phenomenon mainly affecting defiant adolescents. Overall, data provided to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch by area districts show suspension rates are highest at the middle and high school levels.

But in some districts, such as St. Louis, Ritenour and Hazelwood, educators routinely issue more suspensions to first-graders than to 12th-graders.

In districts across the area, schools are cracking down on younger students for behavior some experts say is typical.

In the St. Charles School District, for example, three suspensions were issued last year to kindergartners and first-graders who failed to follow instructions, according to district suspension records.

In Riverview Gardens, four suspensions were issued to first-graders who brought toy guns to school, district records say.

In Normandy, a preschooler was sent home indefinitely for wetting his pants during nap time, his mother said at a recent public forum.

Some elementary school children are spending as many as 10 days at home, causing them to fall behind. Others end up in neighborhood day care facilities or at work with their parents.

They include Raheema Wilson’s fourth-grade daughter, who was suspended for three days last fall from Lucas Crossing Elementary School in Normandy for talking back to her teacher.

“She didn’t have any homework to do,” Wilson said. So, “She came home, helped me clean the house and wash clothes.”
‘SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE’

Some experts say a cycle begins when a child is suspended in the early grades. It initiates what some refer to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The stigma of having been suspended follows students. As they move up a grade, new teachers expect bad behavior, leading to a self-fulfilling prophesy.

SUSPENDING A FIRST-GRADER FOR DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT MAY RESTORE ORDER. BUT OFTEN, THE CHILD RETURNS TO SCHOOL WITH THE SAME BEHAVIOR PATTERNS, UNLESS ROOT CAUSES ARE ADDRESSED. THIS CAN BE COMPOUNDED WHEN THE CHILD SLIPS EVEN FURTHER ACADEMICALLY.

Larry Gilmore said this was what happened to his son. The boy was repeatedly suspended from schools in Collinsville starting in first grade, Gilmore said. In middle school, he was sent home for resting his head on his desk. The boy dropped out as a 10th-grader and is now at a juvenile detention center, Gilmore said.

“He just kept falling behind,” he said.

Ideally, experts say, preschools would work early to help with social and emotional growth. But a 2011 report from the University of Missouri-Columbia shows that Missouri’s state-funded preschools expel children at twice the national rate — initiating a pattern that continues into elementary school.

“We would never suspend a child because they’re struggling with math. But we do suspend children when they’re struggling to get along with people,” Lisa Eberle-Mayse, director of inclusion services for United for Children, a childcare support agency. “What it gets down to is there’s a whole area of social and emotional development that we aren’t paying the right kind of attention to.”

CULTURAL BIASES

Arriving at the sort of remedies needed to help stem suspensions requires some educators to cross cultural divides.

Teachers often don’t understand the poverty and how it manifests itself in classroom behavior, Eberle-Mayse said. And they aren’t always aware of biases or misconceptions they might have toward children of different racial groups.

In Kirkwood, while African-American students made up about 14 percent of enrollment last year, they constituted 71 percent of suspensions, according to district data. In Ferguson-Florissant schools, black children made up 80 percent of enrollment but 92 percent of the district’s suspensions. And in Lindbergh schools, black students make up 4 percent of enrollment but 16 percent of last year’s suspensions.

Some districts are providing teachers with cultural responsiveness training to help them better understand minority and low-income students and how to communicate with them.

“Our first step is to admit that we have a problem,” said Chris Raeker, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in Kirkwood, whose suspension numbers shot up last year when African-American transfer students from the Riverview Gardens School District began attending its schools. The teaching staff in Kirkwood is mostly white.

Many say biases show up when teachers misinterpret actions of some students — but not all — as aggressive behavior. A black male who remains standing after being told to sit, for instance, may be disciplined for disrespect, whereas an Asian or white female student may not.

“We all have our biases,” Raeker said. “We don’t recognize our biases. One of the things we’re trying to understand — what do minority students need from us when they walk through the door?”

SUBJECTIVE DISCIPLINE
On March 10, St. Louis Superintendent Kelvin Adams told the district’s governing board that his staff was exploring the gray areas that result in hundreds of suspensions in city schools each year.

Nearly one out of five of the 3,989 total suspensions last school year was for “insubordination/disrespect,” a category that could mean any number of things. Determining what is or isn’t disrespectful — such as a student’s turning his head or stomping his foot — relies too much on the subjectivity of a teacher or administrator, Adams said.

In 2013, the Los Angeles Unified School District banned school staff from suspending students for “willful defiance,” which could include any behavior ranging from dress code violations to talking back.

In many cases districts have no flexibility. Many school district policies require that the most serious offenses, such as bringing weapons to school and physical assault, result in suspension, with the intent of protecting other students in the classroom.

Since Adams became superintendent in 2008, the out-of-school suspension rate is down by more than half, district numbers show, partly because disruptive older students have been sent instead to alternative schools and online education programs.

Most elementary schools in the city don’t have in-school suspension options. Last year, 1,422 suspensions went to children in elementary school. Almost 200 suspensions were of kindergartners. Eight were of preschoolers.

“That’s eight too many,” Adams said. “I don’t know that they even understand.”

Next year a Therapeutic School will open in the district to serve children who often need more emotional and social support.

**WORKING ON DISPARITIES**

Throughout north St. Louis County, districts have been working to address the racial disparities and overall suspension rates.

In Normandy, in-school-suspension rooms were put in place in January. Out-of-school suspensions have dropped about 50 percent since October, when more than 600 were issued district-wide, said Candice Carter-Oliver, an assistant superintendent for Normandy.

In Jennings, mental health workers paid for through the St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund are embedded in every building.

The agencies have helped guide children with behavior issues and serve as a resource to parents and staff, said Phillip Boyd, the district’s assistant superintendent of support and innovation.

“Not only is this a different approach than what had occurred in prior years, it is also the right way to approach education.”

Riverview Gardens also has developed partnerships with mental health agencies and other organizations working to help children learn the social and emotional skills they need to succeed in school.

But Spurgeon, the superintendent, would like to have in-school suspension rooms to keep children who’ve been disciplined engaged in their studies. This would require additional staff — something Riverview Gardens can’t afford, Spurgeon said.

“We don’t have extra resources to ensure we can provide other alternatives for students, to provide them a learning opportunity rather than consequences,” he said.
Elementary School Suspensions

The Missouri and Illinois school districts in the region with the highest rates of elementary school suspensions in 2011-12, with total number of children suspended. (Rate equals total children suspended divided by enrollment.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Suspension Rate</th>
<th>Total Suspensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cahokia</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>29.12%</td>
<td>3470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normandy</td>
<td>21.65%</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverview Gardens</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>10.89%</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritenour</td>
<td>10.21%</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East St. Louis</td>
<td>9.62%</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson-Florissant</td>
<td>8.97%</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>8.70%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelwood</td>
<td>8.21%</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University City</td>
<td>7.28%</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Park</td>
<td>5.61%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maplewood-Richmond Heights</td>
<td>5.48%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collinsville</td>
<td>5.36%</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alton</td>
<td>5.14%</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock Place</td>
<td>4.38%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright City</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Alton</td>
<td>4.12%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affton</td>
<td>3.76%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Racial Gap in Suspensions
Missouri ranked last among 50 states in a UCLA study for having the highest gap in suspension rates between black and white elementary school pupils in 2011-12. Listed below are the Missouri and Illinois school districts in the region with the highest such gap in the suspension rate, by percentage points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Racial Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cahokia</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Alton</td>
<td>29.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Park</td>
<td>19.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>11.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayless</td>
<td>10.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockwood</td>
<td>10.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East St. Louis</td>
<td>9.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindbergh</td>
<td>9.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverview Gardens</td>
<td>9.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock Place</td>
<td>9.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritenour</td>
<td>8.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelwood</td>
<td>7.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson-Florissant</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkway</td>
<td>7.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattonville</td>
<td>6.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collinsville</td>
<td>5.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alton</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Still a challenge**

Several school districts report having fewer suspensions in recent years, while others show an increase. Below is the number of suspensions from preschool through fifth grade in 2013-14 for a selection of area school districts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Suspensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson-Florissant</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelwood</td>
<td>1605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkwood</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindbergh</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maplewood-Richmond Heights</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normandy</td>
<td>523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritenour</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverview Gardens</td>
<td>4132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockwood</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>1422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster Groves</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wentzville</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pokin Around: Did dad who killed his kids have brain tumor?**

Steve Pokin, News-Leader 12:46 p.m. EDT March 22, 2015
The rumor I hear is that William R. Williams, the man who took his life after killing his two young children, had a brain tumor.

I wrote a news story that ran in the paper Friday about Williams' tenure as police chief in the small city of Bourbon, where he worked from 1996 to 2006. I spoke to two former Bourbon mayors who worked with Williams daily. They said he was friendly, a good cop and good for the city, but had a shaky personal life. Two of his marriages ended in Bourbon.

When my story was posted on the News-Leader Facebook page, several readers commented as fact that Williams had a brain tumor.

The second comment on my story states: "He had a brain tumor. And depending on its location, it could have caused this behavior."

None of the posters explain how they would know this. I didn't know it when I wrote the story. And I don't know it now. In my opinion, people desperately want to believe Williams had a brain tumor because they don't want to face the horror that a once-loving father could kill his children.

**What will likely be a definitive answer is coming. The autopsy of Williams' body is done. But separate from that, Dr. Douglas Miller is examining Williams' brain. Miller is a neuropathologist and a clinical professor at the School of Medicine at the University of Missouri, says Tom Van De Berg, chief forensic investigator with the Greene County Medical Examiner's Office.**

Van De Berg could not give me a ballpark idea of when the results will be known — other than in the coming months.

Williams made no mention of a brain tumor on his Facebook page, which has a March 10 final entry where he talks about his two children, Brodie, 4, and Marley, 2.

Lisa Cox, spokeswoman for the Springfield police, told me Friday that she checked with the officers involved in the 23-hour standoff with Williams and they say that Williams never mentioned having a brain tumor.

What I have seen was a TV news story that ran before my story was published that states the following: "Relatives said he also recently was diagnosed with a brain tumor."

No sources are given. As a result, I don't know whom to call to check if that is accurate.
On other fronts, the News-Leader has diligently reached out to Williams' wife Brittnee Williams, who has thus far declined to comment, and others. The paper has been unable to contact Williams' parents.

Amanda Garretson, of Bolivar, tells me she knew the couple well.

She says Williams told her — as well as his wife Brittnee — that he had a brain tumor.

"But I don't know if that was true or not," Garretson adds. "He was going through a really hard time in his life and was lying about a lot of things."

Garretson said she is trying hard to believe that Williams told her the truth about having a tumor.

"Otherwise, I'm going to hate him," she says.

Many already hate Williams. Judging from the comments on my story, many readers didn't like the fact I called his former bosses — having no knowledge in advance what they might say — and that the two former mayors told me Williams was likable and professional.

But tumor or not, I should mention this from a story in the American Brain Tumor Association: "Changes in personality and behavior occur in the majority of patients with brain tumors at some point during their treatment. In some cases, these changes are so subtle that the patients themselves are more aware of their difficulties than are those around them. In others, it is the caregiver rather than the patient who first recognizes that something is different."

What I take from that is that a brain tumor does not necessarily prompt someone to kill his children and take his life.

It is frustrating at times for reporters when people on social media share what they believe to be "facts" — either when they are not facts or when there is no attribution provided for the information.

Most of you probably don't know that the News-Leader — unlike many other media outlets in Springfield — does not report on what reporters and editors hear over the police scanner. Sometimes scanner communication is harried and frantic. At times, what we hear as the news unfolds turns out to be accurate. Too often, in our view, it's not.

It very well could be that Williams had a brain tumor. It very well could be that the initial reporting I saw — the TV station using an unnamed source — turns out to be accurate.

But here, I'm proud to say, we're going to wait.
These are the views of Steve Pokin, the News-Leader’s columnist. Pokin has been at the paper three years and over the course of his career has covered just about everything — from courts and cops to features and fitness. He can be reached at 836-1253, spokin@gannett.com, on Twitter @stevepokinNL or by mail at 651 N. Boonville, Springfield, MO 65806.