Crime rates up on MU campus


COLUMBIA, Mo. - Some University of Missouri students told ABC 17 News on Tuesday and Wednesday that they are concerned for their safety on campus.

They said they are getting more MU alerts which to them feels like more crime around them.

ABC 17 News took that question to the MU police department.

"There is not a big upswing of crimes on campus. There are crimes in the area, crimes on campus. We have seen slight increases and bumps like this in previous years," said Captain Bryan Weimer with the University of Missouri police department.

ABC 17 News pulled the numbers and learned violent crimes on campus are higher than they have been in the past five years, and it's not just violent crimes that are up.

In 2014 there was a hike in the category of rapes and burglaries.

In fact, they were also the highest they have been in several years.

As for this year, the numbers are not in yet.

However, this time of year can be a dangerous one according to police.

"It's coming up at the end of the school year, there could be more potential for crimes at times, but nothing to indicate a big upswing in crime," said Weimer.

Since April student have received five MU alerts for a shooting, bomb threat, and robberies.

"We have seen where you get two or three over a two to three week period and people thought at the time there was a massive upswing in crime, but no it was just unfortunately several things that happened right there around the same time," said Weimer.

Of the five alerts sent to students in the past month, only two of them happened directly on campus, the others in the surrounding area.
One person in custody after barricading themselves in home


COLUMBIA, Mo. - University of Missouri police continued to stand guard outside the home on Redwood Drive where a man was taken into custody after barricading himself inside all throughout Wednesday night. Several officers inside searched the home.

Right now, it still isn't clear why the man was taken into custody, why he barricaded himself inside, or what police were searching for.

Police responded to a home at 122 Redwood Drive Wednesday afternoon shortly after 4:30 p.m. for a person who had barricaded themselves inside the home.

University of Missouri Police and Columbia Police were still on the scene past 5:30.

Emergency dispatch said police in plain clothes assisted in the response.

The suspect bears a striking resemblance to the suspect in a Tuesday night robbery on the MU campus, but MUPD has not confirmed that.

Several neighbors said they were positive that is why MUPD responded to the call.

"MUPD doesn't usually come out here, so I think it was because he was the robber from last night," neighbor Austin Hopping said. "That looked exactly like the guy in the suspect picture."

Another neighbor who didn't want to be identified said he was shocked when he saw the man come out of his house.

"I watched ABC 17 News and saw the surveillance photo and it looks like the exact same guy from the news," he said.

They agreed they wouldn't be surprised if he was the robber because they said strange things have been happening in the neighborhood since he moved in just a few days ago.
"I was outside last night with my step dad and we saw this man run up to my neighbors car and try and get in the window. My neighbor saw him and came out, so he ran off," the witness said. "But then he laid down behind one of my other neighbors cars waiting for them to come out."

Tuesday night's robbery was the latest in a series of break-ins happening on or near campus over the last month. Police said they do not think they are related.

MU campus alerted of second robbery in one day

By Alan Burdziak

Wednesday, May 6, 2015 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri Police Department is looking for a man who committed a strong-arm robbery Tuesday night near the sand volleyball courts by Hawthorn Hall, less than 24 hours after a robbery at a fraternity house.

The culprit was described as a light-skinned black man in his late teens to early 20s, according to an MU Alert the university issued at about 8 p.m. Tuesday. The man got into a damaged, navy-colored minivan on Rollins Road with five or six other people inside. The van headed east toward College Avenue, police said.

MU police Capt. Brian Weimer said Wednesday morning that he could not immediately access additional information on the case but he planned to issue a news release later in the day with more information.

Another alert described the assailant as about 5 feet 8 inches tall and having short hair. He was wearing a white shirt, black athletic shorts, orange shoes and possibly had a lanyard around his neck. A final alert was issued at 8:49 p.m. and said there was no immediate threat to campus safety.

Crime on or near campus has been in the spotlight lately as several high-profile incidents have occurred over the past few weeks. This is the second robbery in as many days on or near the MU campus. On Tuesday morning, three masked men entered the Phi Delta Theta fraternity house, 101 E. Burnam Road, and robbed and assaulted two fraternity members.
No arrests have been made in either robbery.

The alert system has been criticized for either not notifying students, staff and faculty in a timely manner or for calling list members in the middle of the night.

The former happened April 15, when police shot and killed Mark W. Adair, a parole absconder and robbery suspect, in the Hitt Street parking garage. The university the next day apologized for not sending out alerts to warn the campus community as Adair made his way toward campus. The first alert went out about 11:30 p.m., about a half-hour after Adair’s confrontation with police.

A few days later, on April 19, MU authorities sent emails, texts and phone calls through MU Alert about a robbery on Hamilton Way at about 2:30 a.m. Some people who live off-campus were annoyed by the late-night phone call.

Then, on April 21, Memorial Union and the Student Center were evacuated for a bomb threat.

Alerts about the threat were posted online and on social media, but no emails or text messages were sent because, a university spokesman said, the incident was localized.

MU officials met the day after the bomb threat to talk about how best to use the system.

**MUPD Take Robbery Suspect into Custody**


**MUPD release pictures of robbery suspect**

MU police release surveillance images of alleged strong-arm robber

By THE TRIBUNE'S STAFF

Wednesday, May 6, 2015 at 3:10 pm

University of Missouri police Wednesday afternoon released surveillance images of a man suspected of committing a strong-arm robbery near Hawthorn Hall on Tuesday night and are asking for the public’s help in identifying him.

The images show a young, light-skinned black man in his late teens or early 20s wearing a white shirt and black athletic shorts and a lanyard around his neck.

Police say he robbed a woman about 7:40 p.m. Tuesday near the sand volleyball courts by Hawthorn. The robber got into an old, damaged dark blue minivan that went east on Rollins Street toward College Avenue after the robbery, according to a news release from Capt. Brian Weimer. The department is not releasing what the man stole from the woman, Weimer said.

Anyone with information is asked to call Detective Sam Easley at 573-884-3721 or CrimeStoppers at 573-875-8477 to remain anonymous. Tips also can be submitted online at www.875tips.com. A reward of up to $1,500 could be awarded if information leads to an arrest.

MU Interfraternity Council hosts race relations forum

Watch story: http://www.kому.com/player/?video_id=28770&zone=2,5&categories=2,5
COLUMBIA - Mizzou has hosted a series of race relation forums, and the Interfraternity Council held a student panel discussion.

Airick West, who works with the Kansas City based Organization Community360, moderated the participation questions.

Community360 is a multiple day workshop program that works on "restorative justice" and leadership development.

The panel and participants discussed hard work versus equal access to opportunity, what types of conversations people should have to help improve relations and what the role of the majority has when speaking about the minority.

This event comes a day after MU Campus Dining Services apologized via Twitter for "culturally insensitive decor and costumes" at its Cinco de Mayo celebration. Employees and students wore ponchos and sombreros while preparing food.

"A lot of people, they dress up in sombreros, moustaches and go out and enjoy all the deals and stuff and they don't realize that this is a culture you are appropriating and when you're Mexican, that's your identity, you can't just take it off like the costume you're wearing on that one day," student Deja Mackey said.

Dining Services went on to say that the incident "is not what our university represents and it does not reflect Mizzou's core values" and said it will "ensure this never happens again."

**COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN**

Missouri student transportation, scholarship funds released

Wednesday, May 6, 2015 | 7:01 p.m. CDT
BY MARIE FRENCH AND SUMMER BALLENTINE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**NO MU MENTION**

JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon released $67 million in restricted spending for this year's budget Wednesday, while the Senate overwhelmingly approved nearly $300 million of bonding for state building repairs that had been delayed because of lagging revenues.
The spending measures come after several months of improving revenue collections. Nixon last year withheld more than $700 million of authorized spending in order to balance the budget, some of which had already been released before Wednesday.

The newly released money includes $10 million in transportation aid for local school districts, $15 million for college scholarships and millions more in matching funds for building projects at public universities. Nixon announced the funds' release at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where $10 million of that money will help construct a new business administration building.

State revenues have grown 7.7 percent so far this fiscal year, which runs through June 30. That's above the Nixon administration's projection of 4.6 percent but still short of the roughly 10 percent that would be needed to fully fund the budget. However, about $269 million in the budget is still being blocked — including more money for K-12 transportation aid, a building project at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, dental coverage for adults on Medicaid and child care subsidies for low-income working parents.

The money released Wednesday also includes funding for preschool grants, the Parents as Teachers early childhood program and forensic exams in child abuse cases.

About $5 million will go to repairs at state buildings, which has become a priority for lawmakers hoping to catch up on years of delayed maintenance. The Senate also approved bills that would set aside $40 million in bonding to pay for maintenance at the state's aging Capitol, where stalactites are growing in the substructure. Public colleges and universities would get $160 million for repairs and renovations under the bonds, while $100 million would go to other state-owned buildings.

Senators also agreed to set aside $10 million in bonding for state parks; about $15 million in general fund revenue for parks had been cut in the House's earlier proposal.

The Senate also reduced the amount of time Missouri would have to pay off debt from the bonds from 25 years to 15 years for college and university projects and down to 10 years for other repairs to state-owned buildings. Republican Sen. Rob Schaaf of St. Joseph said that could save taxpayers more than $90 million in interest.
The House can either adopt the Senate changes or opt to hash out the differences, but time to reach a compromise is short. Lawmakers face a Friday deadline to approve budget bills.

Mizzou professor teaches senators about technology to help seniors stay at home

Technology is extending the amount of time aging Americans can live in the familiar surroundings of their own home, rather than be placed in a care facility. Professor Marjorie Skubic, director of the University of Missouri’s Center for Eldercare and Rehabilitation Technology, told members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging Wednesday, about an automated in-home health monitoring system that may allow seniors to stay in their own homes for nearly two years longer than they might otherwise be able to.

Skubic oversees TigerPlace, the University’s specially designed independent, senior housing facility in Columbia. The university started testing technology at the 54-unit complex in 2005.

She told senators about Eva, a TigerPlace resident with history of congestive heart failure and a “cycle of re-hospitalization as her condition worsened, got better and then worsened again.”

Eva volunteered for the university’s sensor study. Skubic told the senators that the motion, bed, and chair sensors installed in her apartment detected changes in Eva’s patterns. These alerted others to a worsening of her health. Without immediate action, Eva would have been readmitted to the hospital. Skubic said the nurse monitoring Eva said what was needed was a change in medication, not re-hospitalization.

Eva’s doctor resisted this request because she didn't meet his standard protocol. But Skubic said he was persuaded “and she never went back to the hospital for heart failure again … The sensors in Eva’s apartment picked up subtle changes before Eva or her doctor noticed it,” said Skubic.

Since then, the university has developed an automated system that sends automatic alerts to the nursing staff. These help those making clinical decisions. The system now includes a bed sensor that captures pulse, respiration, restlessness, a fall detection system, and a walking-gate analysis system. Skubic told senators that the walking-gate analysis system can indicate possible early dementia by detecting changes in walking speed and length of stride.

Sensors can be placed discretely throughout a home or apartment and do not need to be worn by a person. Skubic said, the system does not use surveillance cameras, to respect residents’ privacy, but it does use what she called “depth images” that produce shadowy silhouettes. “The
sensor system observes the seniors, learns their typical patterns and sends alerts to clinical staff when there are signs of health problems,” said Skubic. She says the system has detected early sighs of pneumonia, urinary tract infections, pain, delirium, and hypo-glycaemia.

Senator Clair McCaskill, the committee’s ranking member, invited Skubic to update Senators on the technology in use at TigerPlace. McCaskill says she’d like to see such technology “monetized” so that it can be made commercially available to seniors across the country. "This is a really important for our debt and deficit, because if we can figure this out, the cost savings are dramatic to the long-term problems with the demographic bubble that is represented with the (Baby Boomer) generation," McCaskill said.

Testimony provided in Wednesday’s hearing was provided to update committee members on the latest technology available to help the elderly live on their own longer, assist family members and other caregivers in taking care of aging loved-ones, and help families reduce the expense of placing relatives in nursing homes and other care facilities.

TigerPlace was built by Americare, a private corporation that operates the housing, housekeeping and dinning, according to Skubic. Clinical operations are handled through the nursing school.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU professor encourages technology use to improve seniors' lives at home

Wednesday, May 6, 2015 | 8:11 p.m. CDT
BY LAURA WELFRINGER

COLUMBIA — MU professor Marjorie Skubic's mother-in-law didn't get any help from technology the night she fell and broke her shoulder, losing the ability to carry her great-grandchildren.

"She never healed properly," Skubic told the Senate Special Committee on Aging Wednesday afternoon at a hearing organized in Washington, D.C., on how technology can allow seniors to age more safely at home.

Skubic is director of the MU’s Center for Eldercare and Rehabilitation Technology. She also oversees TigerPlace, which is the MU Sinclair School of Nursing’s residential apartment facility for seniors.

The bipartisan panel was led by Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Missouri, and chairwoman and Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.
Skubic was among those who spoke at the hearing about how various technologies can allow seniors to age at home while staying independent and healthy, which is becoming a critical issue as the U.S. population ages.

Collins opened the hearing with a daunting statistic: 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 every day. While under 14 percent of the U.S. population was 85 or older in 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that number will reach 21 percent by 2040.

Meanwhile, the number of potential care-givers is on the decline, Collins said. And according to McCaskill, there is a "disconnect between the number of seniors who want to stay in their home (87 percent) and those who have to move."

The development of cutting-edge technologies could help, several aging experts said at the hearing.

"Technology can help to bridge the care gap, reduce isolation ... enrich the life of seniors by keeping them engaged and connected with their families," Collins said.

Skubic gave the example of bed sensors as a key tool that should be developed to track seniors' pulse and respiration. She said sensors are cost-efficient and have "a dramatic potential of cost savings."

"The potential for proactive health care is significant," she said.

She talked about a particular patient at TigerPlace, with a history of congestive heart failure who kept going to the hospital for the same problem.

But when TigerPlace caregivers began tracking the patient's condition with sensors, they were able to detect its worsening. They changed her medication, and she never went back to the hospital for heart failure.

TigerPlace opened in 2004 and is operated by MU and the Sikeston-based company Americare. It was approved by the state as an "aging in place site," and it promotes the development of technologies to help seniors age at home. TigerPlace notably use cameras that only record the silhouettes of the seniors who are tracked at home by their relatives, so as to address privacy concerns.

During the hearing, Laurie Orlov, founder of Aging In Place Technology Watch, compared the various technologies to "interlocking pieces of a puzzle."
"Communication and engagement technologies" such as Skype or Facetime are paramount for seniors to stay connected via emails, text messages or video calls, she said. She said they should be used concurrently with safety devices such as activity monitors or medical alert devices linked to temperature detectors.

Orlov also touched on "learning and contribution technologies" as being important for keeping seniors’ minds sharp. Although the Internet is a good way for seniors to connect, learn new skills, volunteer and find jobs, she said she’s concerned about the cost of broadband access and cellphone contracts.

For caregiver Charles Strickler, who also spoke at the hearing, sensors have helped him and his wife keep track of the activities of his mother-in-law, who has dementia. The sensors on his mother-in-law’s bed, toilets and refrigerator detect motion and door openings and deliver alerts to the Stricklers' cellphones. The sensors also allow the couple to track her sleep and make sure she doesn't forget to eat. They also receive graphic representations of the data.

Although Strickler said the aging-in-place tools are not a magic solution, he said they provide higher standards of health care to seniors while respecting their privacy and independence. And the cost isn't prohibitive, he said.

However, persuading seniors to allow sensor technology into their houses has its challenges.

"Loving threat has worked in many cases, but it's important that people (seniors) understand what they are opting into," Orlov said.

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**Why doctors should fix tiny tears in knees**

Within the knee, two specialized, C-shaped pads of tissue called menisci perform many functions that are critical to knee-joint health. The menisci, best known as the shock absorbers in the knee, help disperse pressure, reduce friction, and nourish the knee.
Now, new research shows even small changes in the menisci can hinder their ability to perform critical knee functions.

The research could provide new approaches to preventing and treating meniscal injuries as well as clues to understanding osteoarthritis—meniscal problems are one of the major causes of joint pain and degeneration.

“The menisci are sensitive, and a fine line exists between the menisci doing what they’re supposed to do and the menisci not functioning properly,” says Trent Guess, associate professor of physical therapy in the University of Missouri School of Health Professions and orthopedic surgery in the School of Medicine.

“As the meniscal attachments to the tibia—the calf bone—become more lax, it doesn’t take much for the menisci to lose all their function. This function declines as individuals age and could be one contributing factor to osteoarthritis.”

Osteoarthritis occurs when cartilage on the ends of bones degrades over time, which can lead to painful bone-on-bone rubbing during movement. Many individuals suffer from the condition, which commonly affects joints in the knees as well as in the hips, ankles, shoulders, elbows, fingers, toes, and spine.

The gait lab

Guess leads the Mizzou Motion Analysis Center, which houses a gait lab that uses a variety of sensors to evaluate how people walk and move. In the lab, participants walk on sensors called force plates that measure the force exerted between their feet and the floor.

Participants attach small, reflective sensors or “markers” to their bodies, and infrared cameras capture the movement, which is sent to a computer for analysis. The researchers use this data to see which muscles are being activated during each movement.

Using computational models that combine gait measurements with medical images, the researchers can predict how much force is exerted on knee structures—such as cartilage, ligaments, and the menisci—during a particular movement.

‘Huge amount of force’

“Getting up and out of a chair, an individual can put four times her body weight just across one knee,” Guess says. “Can you imagine a basketball player jumping up and down, the force that he would put across his knees? It is a huge amount of force.

“If someone doesn’t have functional menisci, basically all those forces are concentrated in a small area, which creates a lot of pressure on the joint and is bad for the cartilage, which over time, could lead to osteoarthritis. The menisci act as a cushion, distributing forces over a larger area while also nourishing and lubricating the knee.”
Guess says his research can inform physicians and physical therapists, who may want to reconsider how they treat injuries, such as a torn meniscus.

“It’s hard to believe that only 20 years ago people didn’t think the menisci were important, so if the menisci were injured, they’d be removed,” Guess says. “Now, we realize their importance for all aspects of knee function and preventing osteoarthritis.

“Surgeons might not have bothered to fix meniscal tears in the past, but our research suggests repairing these injuries might be worthwhile because, if left untreated, damage to the menisci could contribute to osteoarthritis in the near future.”

The study appears in the *Journal of Biomechanics*. The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases of the National Institutes of Health supported this work.

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**MU group analyzes county road and bridge funding needs**

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Wednesday, May 6, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Karen Miller remembers a time when Boone County could buy a ton of asphalt for $80, with delivery and paving included. But times — and the price of petroleum products — have changed.

“Now it costs that much just to go and pick it up yourself,” Miller said Tuesday after the Boone County Commission heard the summary of a study of the county’s transportation infrastructure. Miller, the Southern District commissioner, said the presentation by four University of Missouri graduate students confirmed a lot of the funding challenges that counties are facing.

*The study was a capstone project for the students who are pursuing master’s degrees in public affairs through the Truman School of Public Affairs.*

The students — Ryan Betz, Claire Donze, Kyle Olmstead and Adam Schmid — concluded that as the county’s population continues to grow and create greater demand for new and better roads, a variety of measures will be needed to maintain and increase funding for those projects.
“It will require a basket of solutions,” Olmstead said, referring to the increasing pressure on the county to deal with state funding shortfalls and continued dependence on sales tax revenue, which county Auditor June Pitchford describes as “volatile.”

The road and bridge sales tax accounts make up more than 70 percent of the county’s budget for transportation projects. The study pointed out that economic downturns like the recession of 2009, which had a marked affect on sales tax revenue, “continue to make it difficult for the county to make large, long-term plans.”

The county maintains more than 800 miles of roads and spent $19 million in 2014 mostly for “routine maintenance.” As state and federal funding — which accounts for only 7.4 percent of that amount — is in danger of falling even further, the county’s ability to react to increased funding needs is limited, Schmid said.

The study concluded, among other things, that state-level policy changes are needed, in particular, an increase in the state’s gasoline tax. Although a gas tax increase bill is now being debated in Jefferson City, Donze said “there’s not a lot of political will” to increase the tax, which has been the same since 1994.

The state is in danger of losing hundreds of millions of dollars in federal road and bridge funding if it is unable to match federal money.

“The combination of federal budget cuts, the recent economic recession, and the widespread use of fixed gasoline taxes for state and federal highway funding contribute to a growing gap in county transportation funds,” according to the study.

The capstone project compared Boone to nine other counties outside the state with similar size, demographics and governance. The study looked at what those counties have done to address road and bridge funding issues. Some of the conclusions included using transportation development districts, or TDDs, to supplant the loss of state and federal dollars; selling and issuing bonds to finance major capital projects; development of a county “infrastructure bank” to make low-interest loans or grants to municipalities in the county; researching ways to use private capital “in a more effective” manner; and more collaboration among the county and municipalities.

Miller said the county already has a road and bridge tax revenue-sharing process for the county’s municipalities and that it cooperates on some municipal road projects.

“A lot of it is stuff we are doing,” Miller said. “Like they were saying, there’s no silver bullet out there.”

Commissioners generally are not in favor of additional TDDs — Columbia already has 12 of the state’s 166 districts — unless the targeted sales tax districts could be used to fund public, not just commercial area, road projects.
Presiding Commissioner Dan Atwill initiated the capstone project several months ago to develop a relationship with the Truman School, which he said local governments should use more often for analyzing issues and addressing “the interests of the county.”

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

English professor revives the practice of letter writing for today's students

Thursday, May 7, 2015 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

BY REBEKAH HALL

COLUMBIA — A phone call is quick. An email is quicker. A text message gets the job done in seconds.

Having to wait to hear from someone today is pretty much a lost sensation, given the near-constant availability on social media.

But Marty Townsend, an English professor at MU, teaches a course challenging all that.

Last fall, Townsend received a grant from the MU Campus Writing Program to teach The Letter as Genre, a look at writing letters from both literary and social perspectives.

Students studied different kinds of letters, including correspondence written in the Middle Ages and letters from Martin Luther King Jr. They pored over letters from politicians and soldiers, friends and lovers. The students read the love letters from John and Abigail Adams, Warren G. Harding, Virginia Woolf and others.

"We spent a week on the serious and sincere love letters, and also on the salacious, never-meant-to-see-the-light-of-day love letters," Townsend said. "Both were very intriguing."

The class also read letters from Boone County soldiers during the Civil War and visited the National Churchill Museum in Fulton to see a traveling Smithsonian exhibit called "Mail Call." It featured letters between soldiers and their families that spanned several wars.
In addition to studying letters, students formed teams to conduct research on the future of letter writing and presented it to the class at the end of the semester. On the last day of class, the students wrote letters to each other.

Some of the results from their projects were so good, Townsend said, that they’re being compiled in a collection the class will publish.

Townsend said she was inspired to teach letter writing after reading an article declaring that it was dead. The 2013 piece in The New York Times, "The Death of Letter Writing," prompted her to examine what the author proclaimed a dying art form. She began to wonder what today’s college students would have to say about it.

"That one column was the premise for the entire course," she said. "Getting students thinking on this topic was my whole aim."

The New York Times piece by Mason Currey meditated on the loss of letters in relation to the process of creative writing. Ernest Hemingway, Currey noted, "turned to his letters when his fiction wasn’t going well; they were a welcome break from what he called the 'awful responsibility of writing.'"

**Importance in history**

Newsweek addressed the same issue a few years ago, remarking upon the importance of letters in documenting historical events: "The decline in letter writing constitutes a cultural shift so vast that in the future, historians may divide time, not between B.C. and A.D., but between the eras when people wrote letters and when they did not. Historians depend on the written record."


Townsend said the students in her class seemed to gain new appreciation of writing letters, both for recording history and preserving relationships.
"I think their perspectives all grew," she said. "They enlarged substantially what they know about letters and the importance of letter writing."

Among the letters they studied were the poignant and meaningful ones from soldiers far from home during wartime.

"They are so filled with emotion and intriguing for what they don’t say," Townsend said.

Soldiers don’t write letters home telling their loved ones how difficult their lives are and how horrible war is, she said.

"They write home very neutrally to reassure their families that they’re OK," she said, "and that they will come home and that everything is acceptable."

**Reviving the practice**

During the semester, many of the students adopted a practice of regular correspondence themselves.

"Several of the students in the class began to write letters to special people in their lives," Townsend said.

One reported in her end-of-term evaluation that her Christmas gift to family members was a handwritten letter to each of them.

Another student, Kelsey Hurwitz, began a letter-writing relationship with her mother in California.

"We just read so many letters and we read so much about them, I just figured I should be writing my own," Hurwitz said. "If I really believed in the impact that letters have, I should incorporate that into my own life."

She and her mother now write to each other two to three times a week.

"I love every letter," said her mother, Robin Hurwitz. "I love re-reading them, and they’re right by my desk. Getting the letters from her is the highlight of my day."

Kelsey Hurwitz said the letters make communicating with her mother special.
"I think it’s more personal," she said. "I’ll go down when I’m going to go to lunch and open my mailbox, and I’ll have a letter, and I’ll take it to a dining hall and eat, and it feels more like having my mom with me than it would if I were sitting there texting her instead of reading a letter."

Her mother agreed.

"We talk on the phone. We Facebook. We email. So it’s not like we don’t communicate, but I think we write to each other in a letter differently than we communicate electronically," she said. "I think I save things for letters."

**The past in letters**

Townsend said her interest in letter writing began while she was growing up in a small town in Illinois.

"When I was growing up, we didn’t have email, we didn’t have text messages. If we wanted to communicate with a friend in another place, we wrote a letter," she said. "Telephoning long distance was expensive. Of course we wrote letters."

Her father, the Rev. Henry F. Neal, was a Lutheran minister in Hebron, a town near the Wisconsin border in eastern Illinois. As she began looking for material for her class, she stumbled upon a letter in her father’s archives dated May 24, 1964.

The author was a friend of her father's, a Presbyterian minister from Hebron named Robert Beech. Beech had gone to Mississippi to help register black voters, and he wrote to Townsend's father about it.

"His friend was very much a part of the civil rights wave of action that was going on in the deep South," she said.

She was thrilled to be able to use the letter in her class.

"For me to be able to use a letter, a piece of paper that was 50 years old, from among my father's belongings, was extraordinary to me," she said.

She laments that her own letter-writing practice is not steady enough. She writes more rarely than she'd like to admit, she said.
"I always write handwritten thank-you notes for gifts that I receive from people," she said. "But is a thank-you note a letter? That's one of the questions we asked."

Her take after teaching the class is that writing letters can be revived and even treasured. "Because we still have this very basic human need to connect with other people in a way that electronic communication just doesn't let us have."

Townsend said she's doing her part to ensure that the practice doesn't disappear.

"It's not lost if somebody's doing it," she said.

For Robin Hurwitz, sending a child to college halfway across the country was bittersweet, but Townsend's class helped bridge the gap.

"Because this woman took the time to share something she's interested in," Hurwitz said, "we both became more passionate about it, and we both communicate on a whole other level."

May 7, 2015

3 Key Findings About College Admissions

By Eric Hoover

NO MENTION

If your vice president for enrollment looks haggard these days, maybe it’s because the percentage of accepted applicants who enroll keeps going down, complicating those all-important revenue projections. Or maybe she’s scrambling to attract more transfer students to the campus. The best strategy for recruiting foreign students? Everyone’s trying to figure that out, too.

Those are a few of the challenges described in a new report from the National Association for College Admission Counseling, known as NACAC. The report suggests that enrollment leaders must be "nimble and fluid," says Jeff Fuller, director of student recruitment at the University of Houston: "Today it’s about being flexible. You may have to look outside your traditional high-school population to meet your enrollment goals."

Here are three sets of findings from NACAC’s annual "State of College Admission" report:
Yield Rates Are Sliding

Nationally, application surges continue for most colleges, with more than 70 percent reporting year-to-year increases in 10 of the last 15 years. For the fall 2013 admission cycle, 32 percent of freshmen submitted seven or more applications.

As applicant pools expand, uncertainty usually grows. Many colleges have seen their yield rate — the percentage of accepted students who enroll — decline sharply. In the fall 2013 admission cycle, the average institutional yield rate was 35.9 percent, down from an average of 39.5 percent in 2010, and 48.7 percent in 2002.

It’s long been said that enrollment goals are subject to the whims of teenagers. Yet Mr. Fuller, the association’s president, says many decisions about where to enroll now hinge on last-minute conversations students have with their parents about affordability. Sometimes that means students who had planned to attend four-year colleges end up enrolling at community colleges. "Those kinds of conversations," he says, "are definitely playing into yield numbers."

Transfer Students Are Crucial

Many colleges are located in regions where the number of high-school graduates has plateaued. That’s one reason some enrollment officials are deciding to make transfer students a bigger piece of their recruitment puzzle.

Forty-four percent of four-year institutions reported an increase in transfer applicants over the previous five years, and 37.6 percent reported an increase in transfer enrollments. At public institutions, two-thirds of transfer students were previously enrolled at community colleges.

"A lot of us are really seeing the value of these students and what they add to the campus," Mr. Fuller says. "They’ve got a proven history."

As for the future, 58 percent of four-year colleges anticipate that recruiting transfer students will become more important over the next three years. (Public institutions were more likely than private ones to rate the importance of such students highly.) And 80 percent of respondents said their college had admissions counselors who work exclusively with prospective transfer students.

Recruitment Has No Borders

College-bound students everywhere are on the move. Over the last 40 years, the report notes, the number of students enrolled in colleges outside their home countries increased to 4.5 million from 800,000. That number is projected to exceed seven million by 2025.

Meanwhile, more and more foreign-born students are earning diplomas at American high schools. "Recruiting international students," the report says, "is no longer reserved only for those professionals who travel internationally."

All that’s changing the dynamics of colleges’ global outreach. Many colleges that traditionally have not sought international students are now doing so aggressively. For all but the most famous American colleges, that can prove both exciting and challenging. "They’re introducing their institutions," Mr. Fuller says, "to global students who may not know their institutions."
One fact that enrollment officials must consider: American colleges aren’t the only ones recruiting overseas. More American students are pursuing undergraduate degrees abroad than ever before, according to research cited in the report. American colleges, it says, "will need to be increasingly mindful of peer institutions in other countries, in terms of both the competitive and collaborative potential they represent."

Admissions Reality Check

May 7, 2015

By Scott Jaschik

NO MU MENTION

This is the time of year full of hysterical news articles about what a small share of applicants gained admission to the likes of Stanford University or the University of California at Berkeley.

Those reports may be true with regard to those institutions, but the 2014 State of College Admission report from the National Association for College Admission Counseling offers data from a survey of four-year college admissions offices that reflect the vast majority of American colleges and students. And the results are quite different from the media hype.

It is true, for example, that more students are applying to more colleges than they have in the past. Thirty-two percent of fall 2013 freshmen had submitted seven or more applications for admission, an increase of 10 percentage points since 2008.

But as Sweet Briar College demonstrated this year, more applications generally may not mean more students. In the five years before the college's board announced plans to shut down, applications increased from 572 per year to 936. But the college couldn't persuade enough of those who were accepted to enroll, and it saw its yield (the percentage of admitted applicants who enroll) drop from 33 to 21 percent.

The NACAC survey found that for the classes colleges enrolled in fall 2013, the average institutional yield rate continued a long-term drop, to 36 percent. In 2002, the national average was 49 percent.

Many colleges are thus admitting more applicants but enrolling fewer of them. And the result is that most four-year colleges are not competitive in admissions. As has been
the pattern in recent years, the average admission rate (the percentage of applicants who are admitted) is in the mid-60s. The new data show the figure at 64.7 percent, up one point from the previous year, but down from the years before that. Despite these ups and down (which are modest), colleges with single-digit percentage admissions rates (some Ivies, etc.) are quite atypical.

A new issue NACAC is tracking is interest in transfer applications. As the population of high school graduates has fallen in many states, and concern about student loans has increased, both students and colleges are embracing the idea (long favored by many) of students starting at community colleges. Seventy percent of four-year colleges reported that they held recruitment events at community colleges.

But while some colleges reported increased numbers of transfer applicants, others didn't -- with more selective colleges being in the latter group. And while many private colleges are starting to focus on the transfer student, public institutions are way ahead. At public institutions, the freshman-to-transfer ratio for admitted students averaged 5 to 1, while the figure was 18 to 1 for private colleges. And at private colleges that accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants, the ratio was 25 to 1.

May 7, 2015

Campus Diversity, Often Seen as Key to Learning, Can Have an Educational Downside

By Peter Schmidt

Although diversity on college campuses is widely viewed as crucial for learning, negative experiences with students from other backgrounds may actually hurt undergraduates’ intellectual development, a new study suggests.

The study, based on tests administered to college students as both freshmen and seniors, linked negative experiences with diversity to declines both in students’ critical-thinking skills and their "need for cognition," or tendency to be intellectually engaged.

Positive experiences with diversity, on the other hand, appeared linked to increased need for cognition but to have no real impact on their critical thinking, a paper summarizing the study’s findings says.

The paper, which is not yet available online, cautions that enrolling a diverse student body does not guarantee positive or meaningful interactions between students from different backgrounds, even though it does represent "an important starting point."
"Apart from preventing or responding to negative interactions," it says, "administrators and faculty need
to be intentional about creating environments to encourage positive interactions. A good starting point
includes improving faculty skills in teaching at increasingly diverse institutions."

The study differs from much other research on diversity on college campuses in its attempt to
objectively measure the educational impact of diversity experiences and in its willingness to consider
their downside as well as their upside. Most other research on diversity reflects ideological polarization
on the subject as a result of the legal and political debate over race-conscious college-admissions
policies.

Critics of such policies, including many conservative groups, have focused on trying to show that the
policies confer unfair advantages on black, Hispanic, and Native American applicants, and set up many
such students for academic failure.

Supporters of race-conscious admissions have published numerous studies arguing that diversity
produces educational benefits, but generally have based such conclusions on the subjective impressions
that students, faculty members, or administrators have offered in surveys. More nuanced and
evenhanded research on the subject has tended to emerge mainly during lulls in the affirmative-action
debate.

Bad With Good

The new examination of the impact of both positive and negative diversity experiences is based on data
on nearly 2,700 students in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, a large-scale,
longitudinal study led by the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College, in Indiana. The study assesses
students at four-year colleges both in the fall and spring of their freshman year and again in the spring
of their senior year. In addition to gauging their intellectual development, it asks students about their
college experiences.

The Wabash assessments given students after their freshman fall ask several questions about their
experiences with students who are from different racial or ethnic backgrounds or who hold different
values, religious beliefs, or political views.

Participants in the study are asked to estimate, on a five-point scale ranging from "very often" to
"never," how often their encounters with such students lead to negative experiences such as feeling
silenced by prejudice and discrimination, feeling insulted or threatened based on their backgrounds, or
having interactions that were hurtful or tense.

Similarly, students are asked how often such encounters lead to positive experiences such as sharing
personal feelings and problems or having discussions that are meaningful and honest or that deal with
intergroup relations.

The Wabash data used for the new diversity study came from three cohorts of students, who entered
college as freshmen in 2006, 2007, or 2008. They represented 28 liberal-arts colleges, six research
universities, and nine regional institutions.

Among other things, the paper on the new study says that:

When it came to how students’ critical-thinking skills appeared to be affected by diversity interactions,
their own race or ethnicity did not matter much. For both white and minority students, negative
diversity experiences were related to reduced critical-thinking scores, regardless of what positive
diversity experiences they also may have had. Positive diversity experiences were not related to gains in critical thinking for either group.

How diversity interactions related to students’ need for cognition, or tendency to be intellectually engaged, appeared much more dependent on the students’ backgrounds and overall college experiences. The relationship between positive diversity experiences and improved need for cognition appeared greater for white students than for minority students. Students who reported frequent positive experiences with diversity appeared less affected by negative ones.

Interacting with diverse peers left students more likely to have both positive and negative diversity experiences. Among students who had a high level of positive diversity interactions, almost 40 percent also reported having a high level of negative ones. Among students who experienced a low level of positive diversity interactions, almost 60 percent also experienced a low level of negative ones.

The paper, presented last month at the American Educational Research Association’s annual conference, cautions that the study had several limitations. Among them, the group of colleges involved, rather than being nationally representative, was relatively selective and dominated by liberal-arts institutions. As is the case with all observational studies, the researchers could establish correlations, but not causality, in examining how the factors they studied related to one another. The small number of racial and ethnic minority students in the sample left the researchers feeling compelled to lump all such students together in a single "minority" category.

Among the paper’s authors are Josipa Roksa, an associate professor of sociology and education at the University of Virginia, and two administrators of the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College, Charles Blaich, its director, and Kathleen S. Wise, its associate director. Also involved in the study were three scholars at the University of Iowa’s Center for Research on Undergraduate Education: Ernest T. Pascarella, a professor of higher education and the center’s director, and two doctoral students, Cindy A. Kilgo and Teniell L. Trolian.

Colleges move to expand services for immigrant students
By LISA LEFF
May 7, 2015

DAVIS, Calif. (AP) — Miguel Davila had reasons to be skeptical when the University of California, Davis dedicated a bright, clearly marked space on campus for students who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children.
Being unauthorized to live and work in the country he has called home since he was 9 had forced the native of Peru to twice turn down admissions offers from other schools because he couldn't afford to go. He changed the subject when friends asked why he didn't apply for financial aid.

Relief has replaced whatever doubts the 21-year-old Davila held about the resource center that opened last fall and serves an estimated 200 Davis students lacking lawful immigration status.

Located in the heart of campus in a building that also houses programs for American Indian, black, Latino, Southwest Asian and LGBT students, it's become his go-to place to hang out between classes.

With immigration reform stalled in Congress, a small but growing number of colleges are rolling out their own welcome mats for young people residing in the country illegally or, like Davila, under temporary deportation reprieves.

Schools in California, Illinois and other states with large immigrant populations are offering in-house grants, scholarships from private donors, law clinics and additional support for such students.

Starting Thursday, University of California President Janet Napolitano will host a two-day national conference on how colleges and universities can better serve their legally insecure students.

In the seven months since the UC Davis center opened with a $500,000 budget and a full-time director, Davila has received legal advice on studying abroad, career and mental health counseling — and a sense of belonging.

"It's been really empowering for me to have people outside my immediate family encouraging me and telling me I'm doing good and I'm here for a reason and I can do anything," he said.

St. Peter's University in New Jersey announced in November that it was creating a center like the one at UC Davis. Emory University in Atlanta, New York University and Tufts University outside Boston plan to start allowing immigrant students enrolled this fall to compete with U.S. citizens for need-based financial aid.

"The things we do for our undocumented students are no different than what we should do for all of our students, which is help them succeed," said Daniel Lopez, associate vice president for student affairs at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, which has assigned an adviser and trained faculty to work with about 265 Eastern European, Korean and Latin American students.

The efforts build on the passage in at least 21 states of laws or policies allowing unauthorized immigrants to pay resident tuition rates at public institutions. Those immigrants are often referred to as “Dreamers” after the long-delayed federal DREAM Act that would create a path to citizenship for some immigrant U.S. high school graduates.

The trend has not been without controversy. After California State University, Long Beach created a staffed meeting place for its estimated 650 Dreamers in March, members of the College Republicans chapter at the school asked the system's governing board to intervene.

So far, the Board of Trustees has declined.

"We just think the university is doing special treatment to this one group of students instead of spending the $96,000 that went to the center in a way that would benefit everybody, including undocumented students," said Nestor Moto Jr., the chapter's chairman.

Immigrant youth in California have found an unexpected ally in Napolitano, a former Homeland Security secretary. The state is one of five where students who are ineligible for federal aid and loans because of their immigration status can apply for state financial aid.
Undocumented students and supporters previously argued that Napolitano had overseen a record number of deportations as head of the federal agency, and they were the most vocal critics of her 2013 appointment to lead the 10-campus UC system.

After assuming the post, Napolitano pledged $5 million to support UC's unauthorized immigrant students, estimated at about 2,000 this year.

Money has been directed to financial aid and to fund the Davis student center and related offices at six other campuses. Two lawmakers have proposed expanding to the rest of the state's public universities and 112 community colleges.