Mizzou to implement gender-neutral housing, restrooms

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Students living in College Avenue Hall's gender-neutral housing have to first sign an agreement saying they understand their suitemate or roommate could be of a different gender.

Frankie Minor, director of MU Residential Life, says the push for gender-neutral environments at MU began in 2013. But it wasn't until last summer that it was approved, after the University of Missouri System added gender expression and gender identity to its non-discrimination statement.

"What we're trying to do is create a safe space for a group of students who reported the highest level of unsafety or are feeling less safe on our campus," Minor says. "And again, we're not requiring any student to live there."

The group Minor is referring to includes transgender or gender-nonconforming students. In the past, Minor says housing agreements let students note if they needed accommodations for gender identity or exploration. And transgender students said they were harassed and intimidated while using bathrooms that were either designated "male" or "female."

Minor says the new unisex bathrooms don't have to be a big deal.

"If you've gone to the mall or to the movie theater or other places, you've seen unisex restrooms," he says. "When you're in this public unisex restroom, that space is yours until you're done with it, and then somebody else uses it."

Incoming MU student Shelby Jones says she chose to live at Gateway Hall so she could participate in a Freshman Interest Group, a program in which students who live together take
some of the same classes, for her major. She was unaware Gateway had gender-neutral bathrooms when she signed a contract to live there for the 2015-2016 school year.

"I'm still super excited to live there," Jones says. "I wouldn't change where I'm going to live because of (gender-neutral bathrooms)."

Jones says it is different from what she's used to and makes her feel slightly uneasy. But since she has a gay family member, Jones says she's no stranger to gay rights issues. However, upon hearing about it for the first time, her dad expressed concerns about the living arrangement.

"He was like 'What? You're going to be sharing a bathroom with guys?'' Jones says.

Missouri lawmakers are concerned, too.

Two bills opposing gender-neutral environments have been introduced in the Missouri House of Representatives. Rep. Jeff Pogue, R-Salem, who sponsors both bills, said in a news release:

"The culture… of the United States as a society, since implementation of public restrooms, has been that men (males) and women (females) have separate public restroom facilities."

The news release said House Bill 1338 suggests this status quo should be maintained. And Pogue's second bill, House Bill 1339, "prohibits the appropriation or expenditure of state revenues for the purpose of creating a gender-neutral environment, unless required by federal or state court order."

In the release, Pogue references Amnesty International, an international human rights organization, recommending "gender segregated toilet facilities" to protect safety.

While he cannot comment on pending legislation, Minor addresses safety concerns, as well.

"Safety and security is one of the issues that we feel is important for us," Minor says. "I want students to enjoy living here. I want them to form friendships. I want them to do well academically."

Minor stresses that the unisex bathrooms are not what people think of when they picture community-style bathrooms. Gateway Hall's bathrooms do not have stalls. Instead, they are private rooms with locking wooden doors and have toilets and showers.

As for College Avenue Hall's gender-neutral housing, students of all genders or who are gender-nonconforming will have the option to live together in the same room or suite.

Minor says, as of right now, only two out of a maximum of 16 residents have signed up to live on the gender-neutral floor, but students can sign up until July. If there is a greater need, he says Residential Life will reevaluate and add more suites in the future.
This housing option, Minor says, will not only benefit the LGBT community but also relatives or best friends who want to live together.

And those are not the only potential roommate combinations.

"We knew that there was the possibility that a heterosexual couple might sign up for this," Minor says. "That's why, in the statement, we say we're not saying you can't do that."

Minor says MU Residential Life will not ask students why they want to live in the gender-neutral housing or ask them to disclose their gender identity.

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**Mizzou to implement gender-neutral housing, restrooms**

Rose Schmidt, University of Missouri via USA TODAY College 10:49 a.m. CDT May 11, 2015

Watch the story: [http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=f55105e6-0b4d-4569-ba1e-214917b05f6b](http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=f55105e6-0b4d-4569-ba1e-214917b05f6b)

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**Compound numbs pain 5X longer than lidocaine**

A new compound offers longer-lasting pain relief with no serious side effects, and experts say it shows promise as an alternative to current anesthetics, including lidocaine.

“Because of its versatility and effectiveness at quickly numbing pain in targeted areas, lidocaine has been the gold standard in local anesthetics for more than 50 years,” says George Kracke, associate professor of anesthesiology and perioperative medicine at University of Missouri School of Medicine.

“While lidocaine is effective as a short-term painkiller, its effects wear off quickly. We developed a new compound that can quickly provide longer lasting relief. This type of painkiller could be beneficial in treating sports injuries or in joint replacement procedures.”
25 minutes of relief

Painkillers work by interfering with the nervous system’s transmission of nerve signals that the body perceives as pain. Lidocaine is used as an injectable pain reliever in minor surgical or dental procedures, or as a topical ointment or spray to relieve itching, burning, and pain from shingles, sunburns, jellyfish stings, and insect bites.

The new compound, called boronicaine, could potentially serve many of those same functions as an injectable or topical painkiller.

To develop the compound, M. Frederick Hawthorne, director of the International Institute of Nano and Molecular Medicine at the University of Missouri, synthesized boronicaine as a derivative of lidocaine. By changing aspects of the chemical structure of lidocaine, the new compound provided pain relief that lasted five times longer than lidocaine.

In pre-clinical, early stage studies, boronicaine provided about 25 minutes of relief, compared to about five minutes of pain relief with lidocaine.

Fewer side effects

“Although some conditions may warrant the use of a short-lasting painkiller, in many cases a longer lasting anesthetic is a better option,” Kracke says. “Having a longer lasting anesthetic reduces the dosage or number of doses needed, limiting the potential for adverse side effects.”

While other types of painkillers can provide longer pain relief than lidocaine, they can cause heart toxicity, gastrointestinal issues, and other side effects. Preliminary findings show no toxicity in single-dose studies of boronicaine, though more studies are needed.

“Boronicaine could have distinct advantages over existing painkilling medications,” says Hawthorne, distinguished professor of chemistry and radiology. “We’re conducting more research into the side effects of the compound, but in time it could very well become a useful material to use as an anesthetic.”

The paper, presented at the Experimental Biology 2015 conference in Boston, is also published in the journal ChemMedChem.

The University of Missouri System Intellectual Property Fast Track Funding Program, the MU International Institute of Nano and Molecular Medicine, and the MU Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine funded the work.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Fair will remain at events center one more year, but future remains uncertain
Monday, May 11, 2015 | 8:12 p.m. CDT; updated 11:33 p.m. CDT, Monday, May 11, 2015

BY WILLIAM SCHMITT

COLUMBIA — If she had a magic wand, Janet Thompson said, she'd make it so the Central Missouri Events Center was open, allowing the Boone County Fair Board to continue holding the county fair there.

But the Boone County Northern District commissioner is neither a fairy godmother nor a graduate of Hogwarts, and the fairgrounds remain closed for the foreseeable future. Given the limits of human ability to make reality conform with wishes, what would be a feasible replacement for such a spell?

"One-eighth of 1 percent sales tax," Thompson said with a grin. "That's my magic wand."

Thompson was referring, of course, to Proposition EPIC, the tax proposal that county voters soundly defeated last August. She took EPIC's demise as a clear message from voters on how residents want their money to be spent.

Yet the Boone County Fair will still happen at the events center this year, and it's scheduled for July 20-26. The fair board will rent the events center from July 10 through Aug. 3 at a cost of $20,000 plus utilities, and it will pay a $10,000 cleaning and utility deposit.

It doesn't look like the fair will return to the property on Oakland Gravel Road any time soon, though. Thompson said it's possible the fair could move to Ashland, Centralia or Hallsville, though the logistics are at the discretion of the fair board.

Fair board President Jeff Cook said that the board hasn't looked at where the fair will be held next year and that it's focused on fully booking the 2015 fair. Cook said the fair is 95 percent booked, with Wednesday night in the coliseum still available.

This year's fair will have a tractor pull, a demolition derby, a dog show, a rodeo, a pony pull, a mule show, the "dock dogs" diving competition and tigers.
Tigers? On the fairgrounds?

"They'll be fenced in," Cook said. He said the tiger show will feature "three or four tigers ... (trainers) just do tricks and stuff with the tigers."

Cook said future fairs might be a bit smaller. If the fair were held at Trowbridge Arena, for example, it might just be a livestock show, with no grandstand events, no "dock dogs" and no coliseum.

And no tigers.

"We'll still have a fair, we just don't know where it will be at," Cook said. "We don't know what cards are gonna be dealt to us yet."

Cook said the fair board would look to keep the more popular events for any downsized future fair. The dog show and tractor pull have been reliably popular, he said, and the demolition derby is always a crowd pleaser.

"We're trying to not focus on this being our last fair at the fairgrounds," Cook said. He said the goal is to put on a show that’s bigger and better than fairs in years past.

While the county fair has historically been a showcase for rural agricultural expertise and accomplishment, Thompson sees it as a chance to involve urbanites as well. In fact, Thompson envisions the possibility of the fair being a county event held across the city, beginning with a parade across Columbia and culminating in a block party downtown.

The fair could stay in the county seat of Boone, but where, and how? Thompson said voters clearly don't want a sales tax. And a county request for $91,940 from the city's Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2013 to pay for renovations at the fairgrounds didn't pan out.

"After (EPIC) went down in flames," Thompson said, she spoke with "a low-level official" in MU's College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources to discuss the possibility of involving MU. She said that with students leaving during the summer, not even Columbia's difficult parking situation would deter the fair from being held at venues such as Trowbridge Arena or near Sanborn Field.
Thompson, an avid equestrian, also said she tried to gather members of the horse community at her house to come up with ways to pay for the fairgrounds. After Facebook got wind of the gathering, she said, the number of expected attendees shot up, and the Jan. 18 event was moved to the Peachtree Center, where Hallsville engineer Chad Sayre first offered his brainstorm on how the fairgrounds could be salvaged. But nothing concrete came of this, either. Thompson said she "hasn't heard boo" from people who approached her in January.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

FROM READERS: MU law school "applause walk" recognizes faculty
Tuesday, May 12, 2015 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

BY ILHYUNG LEE/ MISSOURIAN READER

Ilhyung Lee is professor of law at the University of Missouri.

The law school at the University of Missouri celebrates a tradition. As associate dean Chris Wells explained, when a member of the faculty retires from full-time duties, "faculty, staff and students line the hallway and applaud as (the) retiring professor leaves his/her final class."

The end of the spring 2015 semester saw the retirements of three members of the law faculty: Professors Philip G. Peters, Jr. and John Lande, both of whom accepted the university’s early retirement option, and longtime assistant dean Bob Bailey.

Law school Dean Gary Myers commented that the three "have influenced literally generations of law students."

Ten minutes before the end of the final class for each of the three professors, the law school community began to gather for the "applause walk." Eventually, a sizeable crowd lined the path from the professor's classroom to the stairwell. "To the extent possible we wanted to keep this a surprise," said Wells.
Peters received his walk on April 28, shortly after 11:45 a.m. The next day, it was Lande’s turn. Bailey received the honor the following morning.

None of the faculty members are retiring permanently. That is, no one plans to pack up and move to Florida to play golf.

What will retirement mean for the three?

"I can pick and choose my favorite parts of the job, like teaching and writing, and do them in smaller doses," said Peters, an international expert in the field of health law. In the fall, he will teach a five-credit torts course, a personal favorite.

Lande, who specializes in dispute resolution, explained in a blog post that he will teach half time, publish articles ("though at a slower pace"), and volunteer as a mediator.

Bailey will continue to serve as assistant dean and teach arbitration, among other courses. He will also mentor students and future lawyers of the state, as he has done for the past 36 years.

With respect to the applause walk tradition from the perspective of an honoree, Lande offered: "I . . . felt some anxiety in advance. I was surprised how touched I felt. Everything went by in a blur . . ."

Lande added, "With fewer commitments, the big change in the rest of my life will be greater freedom to choose what to do. I’m really curious to see what I do."

Peters said that retirement will allow for more time to devote to community service. He might also learn to play a musical instrument. "I’m seriously thinking about the saxophone."

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Public can comment on proposed changes to Missouri's guardianship law

May 12, 2015
By Jesse Bogan

ST. LOUIS - Four years in the making, a task force last week finished a draft revision to a state law that
affects some of Missouri’s most vulnerable residents — 30,000 wards or clients deemed too incapacitated to make decisions for themselves. Another 23,000 cases involve minors whose parents were found unable to make choices for them.

The law covers people with mental illness, head injuries and other issues that cause them to have court-appointed guardians as substitute decision makers. Guardians typically have the ultimate say on anything from a ward’s roommate to personal property to life support.

“As we review the law, we are making sure people are protected before their basic civil liberties are taken from them,” said Dan Wheeler, a former probate commissioner in Jackson County who is part of the Missouri Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders, or MO-WINGS.

MO-WINGS started meeting in 2012 to review and recommend changes to the 100-page guardianship law. The law last underwent a major revision in 1983.

“It’s good to look at any body of statutes at least every 20 years because things can get very outdated in the Missouri code if you aren’t careful,” said David English, a co-chair of the task force and law professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Among the possible changes, the task force seeks a better balance between safety for wards and protection of civil liberties. It wants to increase the possibility of a limited guardianship, so some wards can be more involved in decision making if a probate judge agrees that is appropriate, for instance to get permission to vote or change residences.

The task force wants to update the wording and organization of the statute so families can more easily understand the law before they lose parental rights, or the power to make decisions for spouses and relatives.

The proposed changes coincide with dramatic increases in the number of people the law affects.

Missouri had 29,908 adult wards under guardianship in 2014, a jump from 21,356 in 2001, according to Wheeler, who reviewed statistics provided by the Missouri Supreme Court. The number of minors under court-ordered guardianship doubled in that period, from 11,769 in 2001 to 23,239 in 2014. Those figures include people who have been given conservators to oversee financial decisions.

The number of elderly wards is expected to continue to rise as baby boomers age.

Meanwhile, heightened caseloads can take their toll on court-ordered guardians. Many are family members or friends. But the guardian of last resort is the public administrator — one in each county and the city of St. Louis. They take care of physical needs, placement in nursing homes or more restrictive environments for those who do not have anyone to care for them.

The decisions public administrators make also cover daily life, including whether their wards can drive, marry or divorce. Technically, wards aren’t even supposed to buy anything without permission.

Some wards have been debilitated by car accidents. Others have lost their mental ability to function over time because of dementia and associated age-related illnesses. Some are referred by hospitals that can’t discharge people who can’t take care of themselves.

“Today, I had to give consent to remove life support,” Jefferson County Deputy Public Administrator Mark DeClue said last month about a 79-year-old man who fell in a hospital. “You wouldn’t have wanted to talk to me three hours ago. I hardly knew this gentleman and he’s under my care. It’s not easy to say, ‘OK, let him go.’ ”

DeClue said the man became a ward in 2014 after he became depressed and combative. A probate court decided his family wasn’t able to make decisions for him.
DeClue said guardianship cases have “blossomed” in recent years. Ten or 15 years ago, he said the typical case involved an elderly person in a nursing home whose family stopped making payments. Now, he said, younger people with mental illness and drug issues are “coming our way very, very rapidly.”

St. Louis County Public Administrator Tom Arras said the whole idea is to protect a person who is not capable of making his or her own decisions. He’s concerned that proposals to update the guardianship law could pit the ward and guardian against each other.
“Reforms are going to make it harder for guardians to perform their function,” he said.

Christopher Cross, a court-appointed guardian from Springfield, Mo., said while reforms are needed he is concerned the wrong kind could cause “serious public safety risks when forensic clients are involved.”

At this point, the draft changes to the statute are only recommendations. Members of the MO-WINGS task force said public input will be sought until November. Until a website is developed, people can contact the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council or co-chairs of the task force for comment.
A formal proposal is expected to be presented to the 2016 Legislature.

COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE
COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

Teachers injured by students cost $1.4 million over nine years

By Roger McKinney

Monday, May 11, 2015 at 2:00 pm

In her 27-year teaching career with Columbia Public Schools, Cheri Guelbert said, she has been choked, hit, pushed, bitten, head-butted and kicked by her students.

Guelbert, who works with students with intellectual disabilities as a community skills teacher at Rock Bridge High School, said none of her injuries was serious, but “it’s a significant problem because teachers do not go into the profession thinking that they are going to get hurt.”

In Columbia, those injuries cost the school district $1,397,487 in workers’ compensation claims to 1,244 employees injured by students from 2005-06 to 2013-2014. By far, most of those teachers were injured by students with special educational needs.

The largest claim amount year was 2006-07, when 162 reported incidents resulted in 30 paid claims and cost the district $681,482. The largest number of claims was 215 in 2012-13, when 17 paid claims totaled $27,103.
CPS Chief Financial Officer Linda Quinley said the large figure in 2006-07 stemmed from her discovery upon joining Columbia Public Schools that employees were not reporting their injuries immediately. CPS administrators started stressing to principals the importance of timely injury reporting, even for minor incidents.

Quinley said employees who fail to report injuries immediately reduce or eliminate their chances of making a workers’ compensation claim. Timely reporting also ensures that an injury isn’t exacerbated, she said.

Quinley said most incidents don’t require treatment and don’t have any cost. Besides teachers, employees injured by students include paraprofessionals.

Through March of the latest academic year, 101 CPS employees had been injured by students at a cost of $75,048. District officials hope to decrease those numbers in the future by contracting out the education of students with severe emotional and behavioral issues to a third party.

Statewide, 95 school employees injured by children filed claims in 2014 with the Missouri Department of Labor at a cost totaling $81,629. The Department of Labor’s numbers include colleges and are independent of the CPS system, which is self-insured. In 2013, the Department of Labor paid out $20,049 for 87 claims.

Guelbert said when a teacher is injured, it affects morale.

“When teachers are injured, it is hard for them to see that they are supported,” Guelbert said. “Many times they are not supported, and sometimes they are blamed for the incident. It is hard to go to your place of employment and feel unsafe.”

Jennifer Black Cone, a teacher at Rock Bridge High School and working conditions chairwoman for the Columbia Missouri National Education Association, said minor bruises and scratches are the most common injuries.

Guelbert said injuries to joints — shoulders, elbows and knees — are among the worst and can lead to lifelong problems and pain. She said minor injuries such as pinches and slaps might not hurt, but they undermine the teachers’ authority.

Carla London, the district’s student and family advocacy supervisor, did not provide numbers but said a few students each year without a diagnosed disorder have caused minor injuries to educators. She said any student intending to harm a teacher would get a suspension hearing, where several options are available. The building administration would decide when a student could return to the classroom.

Chad Rose, assistant professor in the special education department at the University of Missouri, teaches a behavior management course to special education teacher candidates. Rose said he discusses a variety of scenarios with students.
“I demonstrate how to appropriately interact with students to avoid the possibility of an aggressive response, such as appropriate posturing, facial expression, proximity and tone,” he said.

Before he went into higher education, Rose was a high school special education teacher who worked primarily with students who engaged in aggressive and violent behaviors. He said the topic is addressed in several other courses at MU.

“My colleagues and I try to train our pre-service teachers to address a wide variety of behaviors, including aggression that may be directed toward teachers,” Rose said.

A plan by Specialized Education Services Inc. to open a location in Columbia for the 2015-16 school year could provide a partial solution. The company started about 30 years ago and specializes in educating children in the autism spectrum and students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

CPS administrators plan to send students with the most serious behavior problems to the SESI school. The state would then reimburse the district for the full cost of educating students with high needs, which would pay for the contract.

Administrators have taken notice of the teacher injury problem. Superintendent Peter Stiepleman said at an April school board meeting that the SESI location would house violent students who make it difficult for employees to come to work. “Our employees are getting injured” by the students, Stiepleman said.

Lou Ann Tanner-Jones, CPS special services director, said administrators have not decided which students would attend the SESI location. She said the plan has been well-received by parents with whom she has communicated.

Guelbert said the plan has potential. “It’s a positive step in the right direction,” she said. “This company has been working with these types of kids for years and has the supports in place to help them.”

She offered one caution.

“I am concerned parents may refuse to let their children go to this program, and the district will be back where it started,” she said.
Are we living through a plague of hypersensitivity?

Most readers will be aware of campaigns to dampen hateful speech, to stop "microaggressions," and to get professors to supply students with "trigger warnings" — verbal trailers or coming attractions — when anticipating visual and verbal disturbances. It’s as if we need the equivalent of G, PG, PG-13, R, and X ratings for both texts and talk. Those who want mandatory warnings believe they are straightforward remedies for a straightforward problem: Vulnerable people need to be protected from upset. If the demand for comfort collides with the need for truth, or with the needs of an atmosphere of intellectual give and take, the truth must be more prettily wrapped. At my own university, advocates of trigger warnings counted "roughly 80 instances of assault" in Ovid’s Metamorphoses alone.

Though Metamorphoses is neither a Sadean revelry nor a snuff movie, some students find it deplorable that they’re required to read the book without a prior alert. The counterargument is not hard to make. No one ever promised that the truth would be comforting. History, Western and otherwise, is (among other things) a slaughterhouse. The record of civilization is a record of murder, rape, and sundry other brutalities. As for the discomfort that may be occasioned by the discovery — even the shock — of this record, discomfort is the crucible of learning. The world is disconcerting. The proper way to begin understanding it is to accept the unwritten contract of university education: I am here to be disturbed.

Excesses of censorial zeal are easy to recognize, and pseudosolutions that require tiptoeing through minefields are easy to decry. The more deeply interesting question is: Why are we having this discussion at all? Deploring is simple, but grasping is hard.
The closer you look, the higher the questions pile up. Are more students arriving at college already feeling rattled? Is sexual assault on campus more common than ever, requiring new levels of preventive intervention? Or is the fear of rape, surely realistic up to a point, inordinate?

Does a troubling curriculum suggest an abundance of troubled minds? Is there an epidemic of fragility? Of the fear of fragility? Or both? (Are they the same thing?) Maybe more traumas — more date rapes, more racial "microaggressions" — lie in wait for unsuspecting students nowadays. Does the clamor for the right to be undisturbed emanate from a particular set of students, or does it reflect a more sweeping incidence of disturbance? Is there a climate of contagion? Is fragility the new normal?

It is, of course, conceivable that sensitivity in the face of ugliness is on the upswing even if presumably objective measures of the ugliness are not. In other words, if we are living through an epidemic of thin-skinnedness, the problem of explanation is only kicked backward into the mists of obscure causation. Why should so many skins be so thin nowadays?

I t is, of course, impossible to say anything terribly precise about phenomena so hazy as psychic tendencies and aggregate trauma. That said, we have some surveys to consult. Please supply these data with requisite grains of salt before rushing to interpretation.

There is ample reason to believe that more college students now than 20 or 30 or 40 years ago consult campus counselors to deal with one stress or another. According to the most recent survey (September 1, 2012 to August 31, 2013) of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors:

Anxiety continues to be the most predominant presenting concern among college students (46.2 percent; up from 41.6 percent in 2012), followed by depression (39.3 percent, up from 36.4 percent in 2012), and relationship problems (35.8 percent, unchanged from 2012). Other common concerns are suicidal ideation (17.9 percent, up from 16.1 percent in 2012), alcohol abuse (9.9 percent, down from 11 percent in 2012), and sexual assault (7.4 percent, down from 9.2 percent in 2012).

For what it’s worth, concern about sexual assault actually dropped almost two percentage points just as the campaign for trigger warnings was revving up.
But how do students, in aggregate, feel? It’s an absurd question, but there are data that help us reformulate it in a more interesting way. Intriguing is the annual UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey of freshmen. It’s national, and it spans more than 40 years. Last year’s survey found that incoming students’ "self-rated emotional health dropped to 50.7 percent (rating themselves as ‘above average’ or ‘highest 10 percent’ compared to people their age), its lowest level ever and 2.3 percentage points lower than the entering cohort of 2013." When HERI first asked students to rate their emotional health, in 1985, the proportion who said either "above average" or "highest 10 percent" was 63.6 percent. Either first-year students are reporting more honestly, or they’re feeling more troubled.

The 2014 report went on to say that "the proportion of students who ‘frequently’ felt depressed rose to 9.5 percent. … Counseling centers on campus report … record number of visits." One high-ranking campus counselor with whom I spoke noted the growing numbers of students who seek psychological counseling while attending his college. Today, on his campus, roughly half of undergraduates seek help at least once during their time in college. When he started out in his position, 20-some years ago, less than one-third as many did so.

Wait times to see counselors are rising, for as fast as new staff are added, so much faster is the growth in demand. Depression and anxiety are the most common complaints. High levels of stress ("frequently overwhelmed by all I have to do") were reported by 16 percent of freshmen in 1985; in 1998, by almost twice as many, 29.6 percent. A 2012 study by the American College Counseling Association concluded that 37.4 percent of college students seeking counseling had "severe psychological problems," more than twice as many as the 16 percent who did in 2000. One-quarter of all the students served by the counseling centers were taking psychotropic medications. Eighty-six percent of counseling directors observe that the proportion of incoming students who arrive at college already taking what they call "psychiatric medication" has been growing. Do the drugs help, or is there a dependency loop in which the expectation of psychotropic relief actually spreads psychic suffering? How many students have benefited from psychotropic drugs helping them make it into college in the first place (SSRIs, ADHD meds, etc.), as opposed to those who are damaged by them?

Then, too, there is the question of the declining stigma of mental upset. Counseling services are easier to come by than in past decades — there are more counselors on staff, their budgets have grown, and they are more accessible. So supply might well be cultivating demand. To what degree? It’s not knowable.
Leave aside the question of why students consult counselors, and suppose that they do experience more travail than before. Why should more students feel stressed, anxious, depressed, even suicidal? Economic unsettlement might well be a factor. (But socially rooted anxiety was not born yesterday. When I was in college, anxiety spread like nuclear fallout from bomb tests.) Today, famously, competitive fervor is fierce. More of today’s students are employed while in college, or expect to be, and this double duty may well be another source of stress. In 2009, according to HERI, about one-quarter of all students worked six to 20 hours per week, and of them, almost one-quarter reported "occasionally" or "frequently" missing classes for that reason. An additional one-eighth reported working off-campus more than 20 hours per week, of whom more than half at least "occasionally" missed classes. Meanwhile, debt mounts. College anxiety seeps down into grade school.

For what it’s worth, depression rates in general, not just on campus, have been going up for decades. During the decade from 1991-92 to 2001-2, according to one study, major depression among American adults more than doubled, from 3.33 percent to 7.06 percent. There’s a "cohort effect." People now in their 20s are more likely to be depressed than were people now in their 50s when they were in their 20s, and similarly for other age groups. The campus mystery turns out to be only a chapter in a larger mystery about the collective state of mind.

The subjects of student labor and debt raise another question: Are the ranks of the especially anxious, depressed, and otherwise destabilized swelled by the many students who are the first in their families to attend college? So much is surmised by journalistic reports and by one college administrator I have spoken with, a man who deals regularly with such students — who haven’t read widely, don’t bring much cultural capital to campus, and might be especially prone to feeling awkward, timid, and outclassed. Indeed, students at several universities are talking online openly — but anonymously — about what it’s like to run out of money while classmates chat about their delightfully pricey spring-break vacations.

For example, much distress is reported by students who post on a Facebook page called Columbia University Class Confessions. On this site, which went up on March 22, several hundred postings testify to injuries of class. Some students say they’ll be homeless once the dorm closes for the summer, others that they resort to sex work to keep going. One writes:

I’m sick of people saying that first generation students aren’t struggling — that people are just complaining or are "angsty." Angsty? Some of my family members are living in a shelter. I didn’t have food for four days during this past spring break. When I had
a psychiatric crisis last semester, I didn’t go to the ER because I was afraid of the bill. The summer break between my freshman and sophomore year I was homeless. This semester, I had to drop one of my classes because I couldn’t afford the textbook, and I’ve been in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship for the sake of the economic/housing security because I didn’t have any family members who could take me in. So yeah, Columbia is a great school. And I am lucky to be here. But I am damned if you’re going to try to tell me that we’re all just complaining or playing oppression Olympics.

Shall we surmise that first-gen malaise contributes to an overall malaise that, in turn, can worsen curriculum shock? A recent article in The New York Times, by Laura Pappano, notes the numbers involved: "Of the 7.3 million full-time undergraduates attending four-year public and private nonprofit institutions, about 20 percent are the first in their families to go to college."

But not so fast. Pappano goes on to dash cold water on the hypothesis that distress among first-gens contributes significantly to overall distress: "While the number has ticked up as college-going has increased over all, the proportion has actually declined from 40 years ago, when 38 percent were first generation, according to the annual UCLA survey." All in all, then, the first-gen fish-out-of-water hypothesis lacks explanatory power.

Now we enter the realm of higher, perhaps airier speculation. Has American culture fueled an expectation of comfort? These days, we’d rather say, "I’m uncomfortable with what you say" than "I disagree with you." We’d rather say, "I’m a little bit disappointed with you" than "You disgust me" or "You’re wrong."

(Interestingly, usage of the phrase "a little bit" tripled in the Google Ngram database from 1964 to 1970. Since then usage dipped, only to resume its climb in 1980, surpassing the previous peak by 1993.)

We talk readily about "comfort zones." The term does not seem to have been used much before the 1990s. A Google Ngram search for "comfort zone" shows a tenfold increase from 1965 to 1996 (with a slight downturn over the following four years). Another Ngram shows that the word "comfortable" slid from 1916 to 1964, then started rising at a rate considerably greater than the earlier slide, almost doubling from 1964 to 2000. Maybe "a little bit" and "comfort zone" soared in the 60s because rising hostilities in American life called forth a spate of euphemisms to muffle the noise. Maybe a lot of Americans didn’t discover they wanted a "comfort zone" until they were radically discomfited.
In particular, have students grown more consumer-minded than their predecessors? Does online obsession feed distraction, a predisposition to thoughtlessness, a hunger for instant gratification and an intolerance for the unexpected? Are the screen-obsessed young so "mesmerized by their own looking," as Jodi Dean, a professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, argued in Blog Theory (Polity, 2010), so accustomed to online comfort zones, that they bridle more than ever before at challenges to what they hold dear or the reasons they hold it dear?

John Ehrenreich, a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at the State University of New York College at Old Westbury, in a forthcoming book, points to a clamor of individualism that arises from, and accentuates, the socially driven strains on social solidarity. Today’s young people are "me directed." They are what they want and what they have, not what they have accomplished. Ehrenreich maintains that they exhibit "greater narcissism, unrealistically high self-appraisal, and an increased focus on immediate gratification and on external goals such as money, image, and status." On those measures they contrast with the identity norms of earlier white-collar generations, which were identified, influentially, by the sociologist David Riesman in The Lonely Crowd(1950): first, the inner-directed, who learn self-acceptance and the cultivation of competence by internalizing parental (usually paternal) norms; and then the outer-directed, who take their cues from media and peer groups.

These changes, Ehrenreich says, make young people today more "vulnerable to emotional distress." Their individualism is panicky. They lack anchorage. They scramble to mark their self-improvements in a world where it’s become normal to be "awesome" and "amazing." Their sources of social support have declined. Their expectations of the future are, shall we say, destabilized. Family instability meshes with economic insecurity. They are, know it or not, uncomfortable. All this might well fuel an uproar for comfort.

It’s hard to say anything very rigorous about the incidence of rape, or attempted rape, or date rape, or childhood abuse. The most commonly cited statistic is this: "A 2007 campus sexual assault study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that around 1 in 5 women are targets of attempted or completed sexual assault while they are college students." In fact, that study involved a web-based survey of undergraduates. The number of students who submitted answers was large (5,466 women and 1,375 men), but the number of universities was not: It was two — one Southern, one Midwestern. The study found:
13.7 percent of undergraduate women had been victims of at least one completed sexual assault since entering college: 4.7 percent were victims of physically forced sexual assault; 7.8 percent of women were sexually assaulted when they were incapacitated after voluntarily consuming drugs and/or alcohol (i.e., they were victims of alcohol and/or other drug-enabled sexual assault); 0.6 percent were sexually assaulted when they were incapacitated after having been given a drug without their knowledge (i.e., they were certain they had been victims of drug-facilitated sexual assault).

But even those apparently hard-and-fast numbers are squishy. Without question, sexual assault generates trauma. But it might also generate the expectation of trauma. What precisely can be traced to the danger of rape on campus? The murk goes on.

For one thing, the number of undergraduate women who reported having been the victims of either completed or attempted sexual assaults before they entered college was almost as high as the number who reported being sexually assaulted at college. It is no comfort to women sexually assaulted on campus to know that the chances of being raped, or otherwise assaulted, are roughly the same whether they are on campus or off. In fact, controlling for demographic differences between the two populations, a 2010 study of women ages 18 to 24 found higher rates of sexual-partner violence, physical-partner violence, psychological-partner violence, sexual harassment, and drugged drinks off-campus than on-, although none of the differences were statistically significant.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are crimes, never to be taken complacently anywhere. But if we are looking for reasons that women in college should be more agitated, more needful of "trigger warnings" and "safe spaces" than women not in college, it’s doubtful that one such reason is a campus-specific "rape culture."

Is there an academic style at work, an intellectual mood that heightens sensitivity to transgressions committed by words? Beginning in the late 1960s, the humanities and, to a lesser degree, the social sciences have been profoundly affected by what Richard Rorty called "the linguistic turn." Simply put, in many fields, words mattered more than before. Language was no longer taken to be an incidental element in social processes but "constitutive" of them. (By the way, Google Ngram shows a boom in use of "constitutive," some fivefold from 1960 to 2000.) In theory, naming mattered acutely. There were no things without names, not even categories for things. To hold power over language was integral to holding power over
bodies. Words were instruments of victimization. To be silenced was to be powerless; to speak was to fight the power. Victims were victimized by words. In the work of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, social power was reflected, reinforced, even "constituted" by language. In the work of Jürgen Habermas, rationality itself was based on speech.

It seemed to follow, then, that changing the way people speak — and write — was a royal road to social change. The equality movements of the 60s insisted on the power of vocabulary to honor or damage. "African-American" supplanted "black," which in turn supplanted "Negro." To insist on "woman" rather than "girl" was to demand respect. To speak the unspeakable ("vagina," "queer") was to banish invidiousness. "Enslaved persons" had a humanity that "slaves" did not. "Mrs." yielded to "Ms." "Actresses" were grouped with "actors," "stewardesses" became "flight attendants," "freshmen" became "first-years." The right to name oneself became the bedrock of dignity.

This move was particularly conspicuous in the strand of feminism conveyed by the law professor Catharine MacKinnon, who found pornography central to the subordination of women. "What pornography does," she argued in the ironically titled Only Words, "it does in the real world, not only in the mind." It discriminates. MacKinnon didn’t have evidence that pornography caused rape. But it is more plausible, and effective, to argue that language and image are crucial to discrimination. Hostile environments can be built with words. Speech acts can amount to sexual harassment. Words matter. They did and do, but they are not omnipotent.

Insofar as arguments about the need for trigger warnings, speech-muffling, and runaway squeamishness rest on beliefs about the practical consequences of speech, they fail. No one knows the effects of nasty talk. Slurs can be denounced as disgusting without requiring censorious policy. Cherry-picked surveys and anecdotes cannot overcome the principle that liberty of speech is too precious to cancel, most especially on campus, where the cultivation of reason is fundamental — for citizenship as well as for learning. Fright in the face of words needs to be tamped down, not encouraged. The burden of proof lies heavy on anyone who insists that the conceivable harms are decisive.

When the uproar subsides, the principle will remain: Discomfort drives education. Discomfort and its odd-duck partner, reason.