Missouri House intern policy under review following scandal

BY SUMMER BALLENTINE, 15 hrs ago

JEFFERSON CITY — A team has been formed to review the Missouri House's intern policy after the former speaker admitted to exchanging sexually suggestive texts with a Capitol intern and resigned, Republican Speaker Todd Richardson said Wednesday.

Richardson, of Poplar Bluff, said he's asked a working group to conduct a "robust review" of current policy. The legislative intern handbook details how to report sexual or other forms of harassment and how those complaints are expected to be investigated. Texting or other forms of association with employees and lawmakers is not addressed.

The review comes amid increased national scrutiny of Missouri Capitol internship programs. Former House Speaker John Diehl, a Republican from Town and Country, resigned May 15, the last day of session, after apologizing for texting with a 19-year-old intern.

Richardson, who was elected by the House to replace Diehl, said strengthening the current intern policy would be one of his top priorities after session ended.
Democratic and Republican House members, the House clerk’s staff, legislative researchers and others are involved in the review, Richardson said. They have not yet met, but Richardson said he's tasked them with comparing Missouri’s code of conduct with other states' policies. He also asked the group to reach out to Missouri universities with internship programs at the Capitol for feedback, and Richardson said he's spoken with officials from the University of Missouri and Missouri State University.

"It's a priority to have a policy in place long before the universities start their selection process, which is going to start in the fall," Richardson said, "so everybody has some confidence in the policy."

Republican Rep. Kevin Engler of Farmington said he hopes to compile as part of the group recommended changes to present to GOP House members during a private meeting scheduled for the end of July.

Additions to the handbook might include communication and "interpersonal" guidelines, he said.

"The vast majority of interns have had a great experience," Engler said. The aim is to "make sure that continues."

May 28, 2015

Education chairman vows further scrutiny into Mizzou unpaid leave policy

COLUMBIA, MO — Questions are being raised inside the administration at the state funded University of Missouri — Columbia about how their professors can go about running for state office.

The latest questions surround Josh Hawley, a university associate professor of law who is considering a run for attorney general. Hawley is not listed on the class schedule for the fall.
Casey Baker with the School of Law told *The Missouri Times* that Hawley was hired as a tenure-track faculty member, indicating that the school is likely to grant him tenure once he meets the necessary minimum requirements.

Hawley is nearing the minimum requirements — which include publishing scholarly articles and a few years as a regular faculty member — to receive tenure, which virtually guarantees job safety for college professors. There are internal discussions inside the university about whether Hawley might take an unpaid leave to ultimately seek public office.

While the School of Law does not grant general paid sabbaticals, it does grant a research leave as well as unpaid leave for various reasons. The university describes unpaid leave as something that may be granted in circumstances involving "prolonged illness or injury, or for any exceptional personal or institutional reason", also "such leave must be requested by the employee and recommended by the department chairperson or administrative head."

There are other requirements for leave eligibility, according to university policies:

"A leave of absence may be granted only if the employee has a bona fide intention to return to the University following the leave."

How this would apply to an individual seeking to run for office, which would ostensibly be aimed to be successful therefore prohibit returning full-time to the school, is not entirely clear.

However, the leave is not completely unpaid. According to existing university policy, which was Baker provided to *The Missouri Times*:

- "the period of the leave of absence is counted as length of service in computing vacation accrual rates"
- "Employees are granted personal days during the leave of absence."
- "Employee contributions to the UM Retirement, Disability and Death Benefit Plan will not be required for leave of absence periods for which no salary is paid."
- "During the leave period an employee is eligible to continue participation in the University of Missouri’s staff benefit program (medical, dental, life, accidental death and long-term disability)."

Questions about school employees attempting to influence elected officials and campaign while on the clock come as University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe — who at a base salary of $450,000 is one of the highest paid taxpayer funded employees in the state — is barnstorming around the state in support of a tax increase on cigarettes which ultimately puts more money in the coffers of the university. Per university policy, Wolfe would ultimately have to personally approve Hawley’s request for leave. University officials denied
to comment on whether Hawley had notified his superiors that he intended to seek any form of leave — as university policy dictates — and Hawley did not respond to attempts to contact him.

Up until now, Hawley has kept up appearances at campaign events, using his role with the Missouri Liberty Project to speak about conservative issues to a wide-range of primary-vote-rich crowds. Hawley’s desire to run has made waves in reports from around the state.

“His own political ambitions have been implicit in his presence on the campaign trail,” wrote PoliticMo’s Eli Yokley

Unpaid leave is limited to one year, so he would have to leave the university altogether, were he to win the primary, or continue working at the university this fall in order be able meet the leave requirement.

Whether or not Hawley’s work ultimately culminates in launching a statewide campaign, there have been ongoing discussions reviewing the university’s policy on employees running for office since the spring semester drew to a close.

John Fougere, Chief Communications Officer for the University of Missouri System, explained the policy as it is currently written in an email to The Missouri Times.

To answer your questions, University employees may engage in lawful political activities, like any other personal, non-official undertaking, provided it is done on the individual’s own personal time and does not interfere with University duties. Any staff member, before officially announcing as a candidate for or accepts any elective office must inform his/her superior officer of such an intention and the superior must make that fact known to the president of the University. The President will offer no objection to the candidacy, provided it does not require time or attention that interferes with University duties. The holding of any elective full-time office in local, county, state or Federal government is forbidden while the individual is serving on the staff of the University. Before accepting such an office, the staff member is required to resign his/her University post. A person seeking election to such an office must resign or request a leave of absence as of the date of filing for the primary. With regards to paid versus unpaid leave, the staff member must make an application and be approved for leave that meets the specific guidelines for leave as outlined in the University’s collected rules, which are provided.

Legislative reaction has been cool to university employees running for office.

“I think usually public universities have policies that does not allow employees to run for partisan office while on staff. But unpaid leave makes a difference. It’s not as blatant as a sabbatical and it’s still somewhat an implied endorsement. But for me, if you want to run for office in that position, then you either need to resign your position or go on unpaid leave,” said Senator David Pearce (R-21) chairman of the senate education committee.

Representative Steve Cookson (R-Butler County), the chairman of the House Higher Education Committee was blunt on the matter.
“This does not pass the smell test. There seems to be a definite conflict of interest that is inappropriate. This will be scrutinized and investigated further in the coming legislative session if not before.”

Mizzou basketball APR tumbles

By Dave Matter

COLUMNIA, Mo. • Once again, Missouri athletics fared well in the Academic Progress Rate with four of Mizzou’s 20 teams finishing with the highest multi-year scores in their respective conference.

Men’s indoor track and field and men’s outdoor track and field both led the Southeastern Conference with multi-year APR scores of 988, while MU’s women’s swimming and diving team also led the SEC with a perfect score of 1,000. MU’s wrestling team led the Mid-American Conference with a score of 986.

If you’re unfamiliar with the APR scores used by the NCAA, this refresher should help.

It wasn’t all good news for Mizzou. The men’s basketball team produced the school’s lowest multi-year team score of 941, which ranked 13th among the 14 teams in the SEC. The Tigers’ multi-year score was dragged down significantly by its most recent single-year score for 2013-14: 851, which ranked between the 10-20th percentile for all Division I men’s basketball teams, according to the NCAA’s data.

It’s the lowest multi-year APR score for the basketball program since the 2004-05 score of 938. The multi-year score is a rolling four-year average score that measures athlete retention and eligibility. Teams are subject to penalties if their four-year APR falls below 930. Missouri’s 851 score for 2013-14, the last of three seasons under the Frank Haith regime, will put the program in jeopardy of falling below the 930 mark next year. The team would have to produce a single-year score of 931 for 2014-15 to hit a four-year average of 930 next year.

Why the APR plunge for the 2013-14 Mizzou team? Seven scholarship players from that roster left the program before their eligibility expired. If they left in poor academic standing, that would further damage the team’s APR. Those players were Jabari Brown, Jordan Clarkson, Shane Rector, Torren Jones, Zach Price, Stefan Jankovic and Cameron Biedscheid.

Here’s a look at every single-year APR score, multi-year APR score and conference rank for multi-year APR for Mizzou’s 20 teams:

**Men’s sports**
Baseball, 982, 976, 5th
Football, 961, 976, 3rd
Basketball, 851, 941, 13th
Cross country, 1,000, 996, 2nd
Golf, 994, 994, 3rd
Swimming & diving, 962, 981, 3rd
Indoor track & field, 1,000, 988, 1st
Outdoor track & field, 1,000, 988, 1st
Wrestling, 989 986, 1st (MAC)

Women’s sports
Softball, 1,000, 994, 2nd
Basketball, 964, 987, 3rd
Cross country, 1,000, 991, 5th
Gymnastics, 1,000, 982, 3rd
Soccer, 1,000, 987, 6th
Swimming & diving, 1,000, 1,000, 1st
Tennis, 1,000, 992, 4th
Indoor track & field, 1,000, 998, 2nd
Outdoor track & field, 1,000, 998, 2nd
Volleyball, 1,000, 994, 5th

Taking a look at Mizzou’s two high-profile sports, here’s how the multi-year APR scores stacked up in the SEC for football and men’s basketball:

Football
Vanderbilt, 983
Alabama, 978
Missouri, 976
South Carolina, 975
Texas A&M, 974
Florida, 971
Ole Miss, 971
Auburn, 968
Georgia, 961
Mississippi State, 947
LSU, 947
Tennessee, 945
Kentucky, 945
Arkansas, 938

Men’s basketball
Florida, 1,000
Kentucky, 995
Georgia, 990
South Carolina, 989
Vanderbilt, 983
Alabama, 974
Tennessee, 965
Ole Miss, 959
LSU, 957
Auburn, 946
Texas A&M, 944

Missouri, 941
Mississippi State, 938

In 2015-16, 21 teams will be ineligible for postseason play because of low APR, down from 42 teams last year.

Baseball: Campbell University, Mississippi Valley State University
Football: Alabama State University, Florida A&M University, Gardner-Webb University, Savannah State University, Tennessee State University
Men’s Basketball: Alcorn State University, Florida A&M University, Stetson University, University of Central Arkansas
Men’s Cross Country: Florida A&M University
Men’s Golf: Prairie View A&M University, University of Idaho
Men’s Soccer: Howard University
Men’s Indoor Track and Field: Fairleigh Dickinson University, Metropolitan Campus, Florida A&M University, Prairie View A&M University
Men’s Outdoor Track and Field: Florida A&M University, Prairie View A&M University
Women’s Basketball: Savannah State University

In 2015-16, 28 Division I teams are subject to penalties – separate from the postseason requirement – for not meeting the minimum academic standard set by member schools. That’s down from 70 last year.
Jesse Hall reopens after updates

Watch story: http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=29069&zone=2,5&categories=2,5

COLUMBIA - After an $8.5 million update, one of Columbia's most recognizable landmarks is open once again.

The construction on Jesse Hall began almost a year ago, relocating all of the offices inside to other buildings.

The additions to the building include 1400 sprinkler heads, more than 400 smoke detectors, and a second elevator to satisfy ADA requirements.

Departments that moved out during the renovation have begun to move back into the building, including the Office of the Provost, Admissions, Cashier's Office, and Financial Aid.

The move in process is scheduled to continue into June.

One employee said the transition was going really well.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Median construction will close two College Avenue lanes until August

SOPHIA ZHENG, 14 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Construction of a median on College Avenue will close two lanes of the road over the summer.
The central north- and south-bound lanes between University Avenue and Rollins Street will close Monday, according to a City of Columbia news release. They are scheduled to reopen Aug. 21.

Traffic changes during the construction also include:

- No left turns from College Avenue onto Rosemary Lane or Wilson Avenue.
- No left turns from Rosemary Lane or Wilson Avenue onto College Avenue.
- Pedestrians can only cross on either end of the construction zone.
- Parts of the sidewalk on both sides of College Avenue will be closed during construction.

The median is part of the College Avenue Safety Enhancement Project, which also calls for two crosswalks with flashing signs north and south of Wilson Avenue.

That stretch of College Avenue separates MU from much of East Campus. The project aims to funnel pedestrians to the crosswalks and block opportunities to jaywalk.

---

No progress so far on MU daycare


COLUMBIA, Mo. - ABC 17 News has been checking on the status of a University of Missouri daycare, and learned Wednesday there has been no progress so far.

ABC 17 News first reported on the process over a year ago, when officials unveiled plans to rebuild the Student Parent Center.

The facility used to be inside University Village, near Providence and Stewart.

That was demolished after Columbia firefighter Bruce Britt was killed in a walkway collapse there in early 2014.
The university was offering to lease land for the new daycare at little to no cost.

So far, they haven't received any proposals from developers who are interested in replacing the center.

**COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN**

FROM READERS: Students Supporting Israel forms at MU in response to Middle East conflict

BY CHANTELLE MOGHADAM/ MISSOURIAN READER, 1 hr ago

*Chantelle Moghadam is the co-founder and current officer of Students Supporting Israel at the University of Missouri.*

Since taking French classes in elementary school, I had dreamed of spending a semester abroad in Paris. It wasn't until last semester, while I stared at my acceptance letter for an exchange program at one of the most prestigious universities in France that my dream finally became a reality.

Rewind to a few months before, when I was in Paris and southern France for two weeks with my parents. As the war between Hamas and Israel raged on in the Gaza Strip, you could feel the effects in Paris. Thousands of protesters claimed to be demonstrating against Israel but used chants like, "Gas the Jews!" — in French of course. They proceeded to break the windows of Jewish shops in the area. Thousands of French Jews have moved to Israel to escape anti-Semitism.

Through my anticipation to study abroad, I tried to ignore the fact that every time I thought about Paris, the only thing I saw were those demonstrations. More news came out every day about the rising anti-Semitism in Europe until, finally, I admitted to myself that even a dream I had had since I was a little girl was not worth risking my life.
From then on, I decided to make the remaining semester I would spent at Mizzou worth it, which is why I decided to found Students Supporting Israel at the University of Missouri with one of my best friends. We are currently one of 35 Students Supporting Israel chapters (and growing) in three countries dedicated to educating our peers on Israel and supporting its right to exist.

When my father left Iran in 1978, just before the Islamic Revolution and just after his father was killed for being a Jew, he was one of thousands of Iranian Jews who either went to the United States or Israel to escape anti-Semitism. Israel took them in without question, immediately providing a safe haven not far from their home, and had Israel not existed, many of them might never have made it out of Iran.

Over the past few years, a campaign called the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement has swept across college campuses in the U.S. and Europe. This campaign was created for the sole purpose of advocating for the boycott of Israeli goods in hopes of influencing the government to change its policies, specifically regarding the West Bank and other settlements. But more broadly, the BDS Movement compares the Israel-Palestinian conflict to the Holocaust (an offensive comparison at best, an anti-Semitic one at worst).

Regardless of one's perspective on the conflict, the BDS Movement does not help Palestinians. The Israeli companies that the movement is boycotting are some of the largest employers of Palestinians in the area. They provide Palestinians with better pay, more equal treatment and better working conditions than they would ever receive in their own country. It is high time we realize that this is not about Palestine; this is about Israel. This is not about protecting Arab and Muslim lands; it is about erasing the only Jewish one.

Jews are the minority in every single country in the world except for Israel. Anti-Israel sentiment has been so strong that Jews are too intimidated to speak out against it. Well, popular opinion has not always been correct, and we all have a responsibility to speak out when it is harmful. We must not be silent in the face of such anti-Semitism. We must never forget why we created Israel in the first place.
Adding Branches to the Human Family Tree

For scientists who study human evolution, the last few months have been a whirlwind. Every couple of weeks, it seems, another team pulls back the curtain on newly discovered bones or stone tools, prompting researchers to rethink what we know about early human history.

On Wednesday, it happened again. Yohannes Haile-Selassie of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and his colleagues reported finding a jaw in Ethiopia that belonged to an ancient human relative that lived some time between 3.3 and 3.5 million years. They argue that the jaw belongs to an entirely new species, which they dubbed Australopithecus deyiremeda.

While some experts agree, skeptics argued that the jaw belongs to a familiar hominid species, known as Australopithecus afarensis, that existed from about 3.9 to 3 million years ago.

Studies like this one are adding fresh fuel to the debate over the pace of human evolution. Some researchers now believe the human family tree bore exuberant branches early on.

“I’m so excited about these discoveries, I’m driving my friends crazy,” said Carol V. Ward, a paleoanthropologist at the University of Missouri. “It makes us stop and rethink everything.”

In the 1990s, the broad outlines of human evolution seemed fairly clear. Early human ancestors — known as hominids — evolved from an ancestor shared with chimpanzees about six or seven million years ago. These hominids were short, bipedal apes with small brains and arms and legs still adapted for climbing trees.

Until about three million years ago, experts thought, there weren’t a lot of hominid species. In fact, some researchers argued that most hominid fossils represented just a single species.

In 1974, paleoanthropologist Donald Johanson and his colleagues found a fairly complete 3.4-million-year-old skeleton in Ethiopia, which they nicknamed Lucy. The species was named Australopithecus afarensis, and many more examples have come to light, dating from about 3.9 to 3 million years ago.

Scientists had thought that hominid evolution became more complex just 2.4 million years ago. New species split apart from Australopithecus afarensis, at least a few of them coexisting in Africa.
One lineage, called Paranthropus, evolved powerful jaws it probably used to grind tough plant matter. Other hominids developed nimble hands, which they used to make stone tools for butchering meat. Eventually they evolved into tall, long-distance walkers.

These hominids belonged to the genus Homo, which produced our own species about 200,000 years ago.

But with new discoveries like Australopithecus deyiremeda, this eons-long story may need to change. Hominids may have become much more diverse much earlier than previously thought. Australopithecus afarensis may have had a lot of company.

In 1995, Ronald J. Clarke of the University of Witwatersrand and his colleagues discovered Australopithecus fossils in a South African cave. While the fossils have yet to be formally named, Dr. Clarke and his colleagues have started referring to the putative new species as Australopithecus prometheus.

Geologists initially estimated that the rock layer atop the bones was 2.2 million years old. But that research did not tell them exactly how much older the fossils might be.

More recently, Dr. Clarke and his colleagues have used new methods to date the rock layer in which the fossils were embedded. In April, they reported that Australopithecus prometheus was 3.67 million years old.

Yet another possible contemporary of Australopithecus afarensis lived in Kenya. In 2001, researchers reported the discovery of a flat-faced hominid skull dating back 3.5 million years. They dubbed it Kenyanthropus platyops.

And even before Wednesday’s announcement, Dr. Haile-Selassie had been adding to the debate about early hominid evolution. In 2012, he and his colleagues reported finding 3.4-million-year-old foot bones in Ethiopia from a previously unknown hominid.

The long, grasping toes appear to have been better suited for tree-climbing than those of Australopithecus afarensis, suggesting it belonged to a species of its own. Until scientists can describe more bones from its skeleton, it remains without a species name.

These early hominids may have been more mentally sophisticated than previously thought, scientists also have found. Up until now, the oldest stone tools ever found dated back 2.6 million years — about 400,000 years after Australopithecus afarensis became extinct.

But last Thursday, Sonia Harmand of Stony Brook University and her colleagues reported discovering tools in Kenya that they estimate to have been made 3.3 million years ago. The researchers suggested that the tools were made by Kenyanthropus, because its fossils come from rocks about the same age and in the same region of Kenya where the tools were found.

Dr. Ward said that the evidence gathered so far points to a much earlier explosion of hominid diversity. “It changes our view of human evolution in a fundamental way,” she said.
Four or more species may have coexisted with Australopithecus afarensis. Some may have specialized in different ways of getting food — perhaps with newly developed stone tools, for example. Or they may have competed with one another.

The tools also hint that at least some of these early hominids were capable of more complex thinking than previously believed. “The stone tools represent a sophistication in how they use and manipulate objects,” said Dr. Ward.

Scientists have also shed new light on the transition from Australopithecus to Homo. In March, Kaye E. Reed of Arizona State University and her colleagues reported finding the oldest Homo fossil, dating back 2.8 million years.

It has some anatomical features found only in Homo, such as narrow molars. But it also has other traits, like a rounded chin, that make it look more like Australopithecus afarensis.

Dr. Ward said scientists now must trace back Homo’s origins to one of the several hominid species that may have lived between three million and four million years ago — and figure out why the other species became extinct.

But some hominid experts remain unconvinced that the road to Homo took so many turns. Tim D. White, a paleoanthropologist at the University of California, Berkeley, argues that most of the new studies have been rushed into publication without careful peer review.

The 3.3-million-year date for the ancient stone tools, for example, “seemed quite sketchy to me,” Dr. White said. The tools could have been made hundreds of thousands of years later, he said.

Dr. White is also skeptical that the new fossils represent a wealth of new species. He suspects that most of them are just Australopithecus afarensis — including Australopithecus deyiremeda.

“Lucy’s species just got a few more new fossils,” he said of Wednesday’s announcement.

The peculiar anatomical quirks described by other scientists are no more unusual than the variations found within living ape species, he said. When scientists discover a fossil, Dr. White warned, it can be easy to blow minor variations out of proportion.

“A piece of a mandible doesn’t tell you much,” he said. “Whenever you have small samples, you run a very real risk of mischaracterization.”

Dr. White thinks it is wiser to assume that new fossils belong to documented species, like Australopithecus afarensis, instead of hypothesizing a new species with every new fossil. As he sees it, human evolution isn’t the bushy tree that Dr. Ward describes.

“A saguaro cactus would be the metaphor,” said Dr. White.
Even Dr. Ward expects that scientists eventually will decide some of the new “species” really aren’t species. Even so, she predicted that early hominids would remain more diverse than traditionally thought.

“There were at a bare minimum two hominins around at that time, and perhaps three or more, which is exciting and important however it falls out,” she said.

May 28, 2015

Chinese Students in U.S. Seek to Expose Tiananmen Square Crackdown to Peers Back Home

By Mary Ellen McIntire

A letter about the Tiananmen Square massacre signed by 11 Chinese students in the United States and other countries is gaining traction after a state-run Chinese newspaper wrote that the students had been "brainwashed" while studying overseas.

Yi Gu, a graduate student from China who is studying chemistry at the University of Georgia, published the letter online detailing the violence that took place in Beijing nearly 26 years ago. His letter, presented as discoveries Mr. Gu has made since coming to the United States three years ago, addresses a subject that is rarely discussed publicly in China and is widely censored by Chinese authorities. As such, it marks an unusual move for a Chinese student.

"This part of history has since been so carefully edited and shielded away that many of us today know very little about it," the English translation of the letter reads. "The more we know, the more we feel we have a grave responsibility on our shoulders." Mr. Gu said he’d learned little about what happened at Tiananmen Square in 1989 before coming to the United States, but he was able to conduct his own research online and in the library when he arrived at the University of Georgia. He said he even spoke with survivors of the massacre who gathered in Washington, D.C., last year to mark the 25th anniversary of the incident.
"I believed it was the moral responsibility to reveal the truth and show students in China how the truth has been hidden," he said in an interview on Wednesday with The Chronicle.

With the 26th anniversary coming up, on June 4, he said it seemed like an appropriate time to share his findings, which he has posted online to be read back home even though the Chinese government censors Internet sites there.

Mr. Gu’s letter was signed by students at the University at Albany, the University of Missouri, and Columbia and Missouri State Universities, as well as at universities in Europe and Australia, before publication. It has since gathered about 100 signatures more. He said he hoped to inform peers in China about the killings, since they are given few details about the massacre in Chinese schools.

It’s unclear how widely the letter has been read in China. But it has attracted attention from the Chinese newspaper, Global Times, which posted an editorial denouncing the letter and arguing that the student signers had been influenced by "some overseas hostile forces." The vocal response has helped increase the number of signatures on the letter, he said.

Fear of Returning

Mr. Gu said he had received a few threatening messages, written in Chinese, since the letter has drawn notice.

But he said he’d also received more uplifting responses.

"We have been living in this constant fear for several decades, and if we continue to keep silent, and no one rises up, we and our friends will continue to live in this fear," he said. "What we are doing is trying to stand up and fight for our future where everyone can live free without fear."

Still, Mr. Gu said he wonders when he might be able to return to China now that he has spoken out about Tiananmen Square.

"I miss my parents, and I want to be with my family, but it seems almost impossible for me to go back right now," he said. "But I hope that one day I will be able to go back to China."

Perry Link, a well-known China scholar at the University of California at Riverside who has been barred from China for nearly two decades, said that Chinese students in
America will typically seek out such information on their own but avoid talking about it even among themselves.

In class discussions about their home country, the students typically avoid politics altogether, he added, although they will sometimes speak privately with a professor.

"Even for Chinese students outside China, they feel watched, and indeed they sometimes are watched," he said.

Mr. Link noted that American universities seeking partnerships with Chinese institutions know that self-censorship and limits on academic freedom come with the territory.

"When an issue like this letter comes up," he said, "it just raises the stakes for U.S. college administrators on the academic-freedom side."

On Wealth Gap, Old Song, New Words

May 28, 2015

By Karen Gross

NO MU MENTION

Inside Higher Ed's recent article on the growing chasm between wealthy institutions and "poorer" (in dollars) institutions begs us to answer this question: How should we deal with the reality that the 40 wealthiest institutions (the Elite 40) hold 66 percent of the higher education endowment wealth, receive 60 percent of private donations and have highest percentage of endowment growth in recent years among higher education institutions? Can we and should we live with this reality?

Regardless of one's views of wealth distribution as a generalizable matter, the concentration of wealth in the Elite 40 is problematic for many within and outside government. I suspect that this concern is not because of a distaste, per se, for wealth and its benefits. Rather, it is the felt need to provide affordable quality education for the thousands upon thousands of
vulnerable students currently and prospectively in the educational pipeline coupled with the current lack of resources at many of the institutions that have served and continue to serve these students.

In situations like this, I worry that current and future proposed solutions (whether public or private) will suffer from three defects: they will be overbroad, they can have dramatic unintended consequences and they will not lead to enabling educational opportunity for those most in need.

Take this example from the Inside Higher Ed article. One of cited colleges' presidents suggested that instead of redistributing wealth from the Elite 40 to others, we should redistribute students. This is, in essence, a call to address undermatching, an issue of keen interest to the Obama administration, among others. It sounds good; it sounds right. It appeals, at least on the surface, to our sense of fairness.

Would that the fix were that simple.

Even if elite institutions were to take more Pell students (say, double their current percentages), that alone will never address the growing chasm between the wealthy and the poorer (in dollars) institutions. Further, many vulnerable students would not succeed at or be a good fit for the Elite 40. Moreover, and perhaps of greatest significance as a reality check, given the growing percentage of vulnerable students in America, the Elite 40 cannot meet these needs, even if they so desired.

One Proffered Solution: Altered Taxation

So, we need to consider other solutions. There is a long history of using federal and state taxation to redistribute wealth.

Best to start with the most commonly proposed solution: taxing nonprofit institutions at the local, state and federal level. Unfortunately, this solution is at once overbroad and misguided.

Assuming the focus is on all nonprofits, such an approach would mean that churches, hospitals (many) and educational institutions could be subjected to property, income and capital gains taxes, as for-profit corporations are now. Such a solution would put many vulnerable institutions in jeopardy, as they would not have the capacity to meet these multilayered tax burdens. To be sure, one could determine that only some taxes paid by for-profits should be carried over to the nonprofit sector.

Putting nonprofits in financial jeopardy is unwise for many reasons. Nonprofit institutions truly contribute to their communities in meaningful ways and can be seen as having a positive economic impact, absent taxation. Some nonprofits actually pay local taxes on newly acquired property or renovations; others pay for water and sewerage. Others contribute space to the community or offer programs that benefit communities’ well-being - - like being a disaster relief site or immunization site in the event of a massive outbreak. They are often large employers in small communities, and they bring in revenue through visits and parental/family/friend stays. Just look at some of economic impact statements prepared by institutions.
Now, one could suggest a progressive tax solution where nonprofits with the largest endowments would pay the highest tax (federal and state) and then that rate would lower as endowment size diminished. Obviously, institutions could game the system (not unheard of in the world of tax); for example, instead of holding money in endowments, they could shift the monies to trusts or other nontaxable vehicles to avoid taxation.

Another tax approach would be to change the deductibility of donations (of individuals and organizations) to institutions with endowments of a certain size. For example, donations to endowments over $1 billion would be taxed at a predetermined rate. Alternatively, one could make this a regressive tax to encourage large gifts, where the deductibility would be greater than smaller gifts. This approach shifts the burden to donors, rather than receiving institutions and could reduce the level of giving to all institutions, an unfortunate outcome.

**Some Out-of-the-Box Solutions**

Instead of tax-based solutions, here are three other solutions worthy of consideration. They offer approaches that encourage giving, that retain revenue for the benefit of educational improvement and fit within the framework of how educational institutions currently function or could effectively function prospectively.

Before turning to them, a pragmatic note: for these approaches to succeed, the Elite 40 would need to see their obligations to other institutions and society more broadly. They would need to see that there is a price for wealth in terms of giving back to the larger community of students who want and need an education.

**Idea One:** For educational institutions with endowments over $1 billion (the threshold is a matter that could be adjusted), 5 percent of all dollars received as donations from private sources (whether individuals, corporations or foundations) would be placed into a national (or regional) designated fund designed to improve education across the pre-K-to-20 pipeline. (One could debate whether the right figure is 5 percent or 1 percent or 10 percent.) This fund could be managed by an existing or a to-be-created foundation. The Elite 40 (and those with endowments over $1 billion -- the Elite Plus) would be contributing to the same fund. How the fund operates, how it elects to distribute its interest and corpus can be determined.

In essence, this 5 percent “penalty” is akin to the penalty (often termed luxury tax) charged to professional athletic teams that have salaries over a mandated cap. Interestingly, the rationale is comparable in a sense: to create parity among competitive teams, salaries are capped so that the richest teams cannot accumulate all the talented players. Or, the fund could be analogized to the cy pres awards in class action lawsuits. These funds, made up of undistributed awards, must be given to nonprofits that will use the monies for a similar purpose. By way of example, a cy pres in a class action award against a credit card company could go to a nonprofit that engaged in financial literacy education.

**Idea Two:** The Elite Plus would be able to retain all donations received if they entered into meaningful partnerships with one or more colleges/universities that served at least 40 percent Pell-eligible students, 60 percent first-generation students or 50 percent minority students. (To be sure, these percentages can be re-evaluated.) The key here is meaningful
partnerships, and how that would be assessed on an ongoing basis is a critical issue, as one wants to encourage compliance rather than gaming the system to further self-interest. The costs of these partnerships would be borne by the Elite Plus and would have to equal or exceed the dollar amounts identified in Idea One.

Examples would include reciprocal faculty swaps, payment to faculty from the Elite Plus or who are newly hired to teach at the partner institution; cross registration with the requisite transportation to/from the Elite Plus; shared or funded student support systems including tutoring, mentoring, psychological services, academic advising, career planning and graduate school preparation; creation of shared multicultural events and programming with joint participation from both campuses; and summer programming starting in the year between high school and college and each summer thereafter.

Viewed through a positive lens, these partnerships are not one-way transfers of dollars, knowledge and capacity. There are reciprocal benefits, creating a win-win rather than mandated largesse. Professors may learn from teaching students who are less privileged, and that learning can benefit their home institution. Research opportunities, mentoring and shared academic programming can be enriching. Consider a conference on homelessness or drug abuse or incarceration; might students who have had these experiences in sizable numbers enrich the understanding of these problems and their solutions?

Idea Three: The Elite Plus could create institutionally funded centers designed to study, reach out to and assist institutions serving vulnerable student populations (based on the criteria established in Idea Two). These centers would be funded from a percentage of the donations made (calculated as described above); their contributions would have to be tangible, producing scholarship, empirical research, conferences, engagement opportunities and the like.

A current example, although now funded through grants and donations from outside sources, would be the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions. As its website reflects, the center is engaged in a host of research projects designed to improve the outcomes for students at minority-serving institutions, including HBCUs. It issues white papers and publishes books, holds conferences, and its grants usually include monies to be distributed to fiscally constrained minority-serving institutions to enable them to effectuate change effectively.

Conclusions: Process and Theory Concerns

It is easy to critique the solutions presented here.

Some of the challenges are what I would call design questions: What institutions fit within the Elite Plus? How would the various financial thresholds be determined and would they come with automatic inflators (or deflators)? How would the fund created in Idea One function and who would oversee it? What would be the structure of the partnerships and how would success be measured and collaboration ensured in Idea Two? How would the centers within the Elite Plus would be created and overseen in Idea Three?
But there is another set of questions about how we want to treat the Elite 40 and whether they have obligations to others and whether strategies to redistribute wealth are apt in this situation, recognizing that we redistribute wealth regularly in this nation through any number of means at both the state and federal levels. Fundamentally, these questions go to the core of how we want to function as a nation, what obligations we have to others and how we view charitable giving, education (particularly higher education) and wealth disparities.

Process questions matter, but until the deeper philosophical questions are addressed, progress will be limited. To that end, here are two guiding principles that, at least for me, justify the suggestions made here.

First, whatever the challenges, it seems wiser to have the solutions developed and vetted by those with a real stake in the outcomes -- public and private educational institutions, organizations that support educational and social reform, including think tanks from all sides of the proverbial aisle, and philanthropists. Solutions delivered from the states or federal government are less likely to meet everyone’s needs effectively.

Second, as a nation, we are only as strong as our weakest citizens. As such, we all benefit by lifting the bottom -- overtly. We create a greater likelihood that more and more individuals will contribute meaningfully to their families, their communities and our nation. Our economy will be better off if more and more individuals have access to postsecondary education and career opportunities.

Failure is expensive. Think about the costs of prisons and psychiatric treatment. Ponder the costs of the criminal justice system. We pay a price for poverty. Poverty impacts health, education and community safety, among other negative consequences. Social support systems, even minimal ones, are expensive. There is no question about that.

So, it seems wiser to pay for success, to pay to create pathways to and through postsecondary education. Rather than paying for the consequences of failure, let’s develop ways to fund success. Indeed, the promise of opportunity is the bedrock of this nation. We need to make good on that promise. The ideas suggested here start us on that pathway.
By Kellie Woodhouse

NO MU MENTION

As Illinois, Louisiana and Wisconsin threatened nine-figure reductions in higher education funding, public colleges and universities in those states made their own threats in return. System leaders warned -- often and loudly -- that layoffs, program cuts and the general welfare of the states' college students were on the line if legislators went forward with the proposed cuts.

Now two of the three states appear to be on the path to dramatically minimizing funding reductions. But while Louisiana and Illinois staved off cuts that were roughly $600 million and $400 million, respectively, the University of Wisconsin System remains vulnerable to a $300 million reduction over the next two years.

And unlike in Illinois and Louisiana, where the legislatures plan to raise taxes to offset cuts proposed by their governors, Wisconsin's Republican-controlled Legislature hasn’t showed a public willingness to lower the proposed cuts, although a joint committee on finance is expected to discuss the UW system this week.

State higher education budgets are precarious things. They’re often first proposed by a governor as part of a state’s overall budget, and then sent to the state Legislature, which debates and refines funding proposals until a final state budget is passed, usually in May or June.

Funding bills can change drastically in scope throughout the legislative process, depending on the politics involved.

In Illinois, for example, the legislative and executive branches are controlled by different parties, and thus the state Legislature -- which is controlled by a supermajority of Democrats -- was expected to rein in the $400 million in cuts proposed by Republican Governor Bruce Rauner. The governor's budget proposed $6 billion in spending cuts. Illinois has a broken pension system with a shortfall of $111 billion, as well as the worst credit rating of any state in the country.

"Nobody figured we'd get off without some reduction, [but] most everyone understood what the governor proposed was not going to be what we had to live with," said Randy Dunn, president of the Southern Illinois University System, which stood to lose $62 million under Rauner's plan.

Democratic legislators in Springfield, the state's capital, last week said they would reduce public college funding by 6.5 percent instead of 31 percent. They plan to raise taxes to close the gap.

In Louisiana, where both the governorship and the state Legislature are controlled by Republicans, officials are also working to fund universities at higher levels than Governor Bobby Jindal originally proposed, and have drummed up $615 million in additional revenue, the bulk of which is going to universities. Instead of an 82 percent higher education
reduction, the House of Representatives is now proposing just $40 million in cuts. A bill has been sent to the Senate for approval.

Though Louisiana's Legislature has lessened funding cuts, it does not seem ready to give Louisiana's public universities control over tuition -- which is set by lawmakers. The state’s House of Representatives last week voted against two measures that would have given universities the ability to set their own tuition rates.

**Advocating for More**

Somewhere in the legislative process, university leaders testify before state leaders and lobby for funding. And when massive cuts are threatened, presidents try to be as loud as possible.

In Illinois, the presidents and trustees of all nine of the state's public universities paid a simultaneous visit to lawmakers in Springfield this week, seeking more state funding.

“One of the things that any president has to do in providing budget testimony to legislators, particularly when you’re looking at the level of cuts we were, is to try to equate the cut to what it means to the university, beyond just dollars,” Dunn said. “Part of the challenge that presidents have in these situations is articulating the impact.”

Yet often leaders with a lot to lose do more than testify. This year, with massive cuts looming, several leaders have equated cuts with layoffs, or more financial strain on students.

When the Louisiana Legislature threatened $392 million in cuts, the leader of the state’s largest university system threatened financial exigency in return. The possibility of such a drastic move by Louisiana State University -- which would have eliminated tenured faculty jobs, forced programs to close and likely damaged the reputation of the university -- made headlines nationwide, in part because of its rarity and severity.

When funding cuts were threatened in Arizona this year, Arizona State University President Michael Crow sent an email to alumni slamming the state Legislature. And when a 14 percent cut was passed in March, Crow called the reductions a “drastic remedy” to budget problems and a “setback for Arizonans who already are frustrated by the state's sluggish economic recovery.”

Daniel Hurley, incoming president of the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan, and former head of government relations and state policy at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, called the proposed cuts in Louisiana and Wisconsin “historically extreme.”

“The sheer magnitude of those proposed cuts really required an elevated response on the part of the public higher education community,” he said.

Proposed cuts in Wisconsin prompted the University of Wisconsin at Madison’s chancellor to publicly announce a reduction in some 430 jobs, another move that made headlines.
“Our programs and services are all useful and worthy of support, but we have attempted to prioritize those most essential,” Chancellor Rebecca Blank wrote in an April blog post announcing plans for layoffs and budget cuts. “I recognize that this process will impact good people and limit our ability to serve students and the state. I particularly regret the impact these cuts will have on our employees and their families.”

Blank declined to be interviewed for this article.

The Madison campus is not alone. If Republican Governor Scott Walker’s cuts are approved, the other dozen or so campuses in the UW system are planning to offer early retirement to more than 1,000 employees, cut 330 positions through layoffs and attrition, and leave more than 90 vacant positions open for the foreseeable future, according to an analysis by the Wisconsin Budget Project.

And UW system leader Ray Cross threatened to quit if Walker's proposed cuts aren't reduced.

**Wisconsin’s Uncertainty**

Walker, a 2016 presidential hopeful, has made tax cuts a trademark of his tenure, leaving little revenue for a discretionary budget item like higher education. The Republican-controlled Legislature has, up until now, backed him in this strategy. Last year lawmakers approved his plan for $541 million in tax cuts, and Walker says he's reduced taxes by $2 billion since 2011.

Yet Wisconsin is a state where legislators control much more than just funding. Walker’s proposal for the next two years includes $300 million in cuts -- a 13 percent reduction in the higher education budget -- to the state’s only four-year public university system, as well as mandatory tuition freezes. If the provision is approved, come 2017 Wisconsin’s public universities will have forgone in-state tuition increases for four straight years.

The Legislature is slated to discuss the University of Wisconsin’s budget this week. Leaders of the joint finance committees -- whose offices did not respond to requests for comment -- have thus far been mum on Walker’s proposed cut.

“It’s really a mixed bag at this point in terms of what the Legislature is saying,” said Tamarine Cornelius, a policy analyst with Wisconsin Budget Project. “It’s really up in the air.”

However, legislators do plan to ax the only provision in Walker’s budget that some university leaders were pleased about: increased autonomy. In the face of cuts, Walker had planned to create a separate authority that would give the UW system more control over its budget. That idea will likely be scrapped, lawmakers have said.

More and more, tuition is overtaking state funding as the primary revenue stream for public colleges. Last year states increased higher education spending 5 percent overall, the third consecutive year of improved funding. But as recently as 2012 the average state's spending was cut by 8 percent, and higher education funding remains below pre-recession levels in 47 states.
Planning Blind

A drawn-out budget process makes it difficult for colleges to plan for the next year.

Decisions on tuition, enrollment, faculty hiring and whether to fund new programs or cut old ones are often made without knowledge of what state funding will be for a fiscal year that is often just months or, in some cases, weeks away.

“We’re having to gamble on a whole lot of things,” F. King Alexander, president of the Louisiana State University System, said in April, well before legislators’ decision last week to reduce the planned cuts.

Although legislators in Illinois plan to cut around 6.5 percent of the state’s higher education budget, it’s not a done deal. The governor could veto the Legislature’s fiscal 2016 budget, which is expected in the coming weeks. If that happens, the Legislature will likely override the veto, but the governor can call lawmakers back to Springfield in the summer for special sessions aimed at finding a compromise.

In short, it could be a while before universities in Illinois receive a final funding figure.

“More so than any other public institutions, and certainly private organizations, public colleges and universities are put in an incredible bind when there are significant state budget cuts proposed,” said Hurley, the state policy expert.

“That time between when the state budget is proposed and when it’s passed, a lot can happen in that time frame. These are massive enterprises, and a lot of planning has to take place,” he continued. “When there are potential huge cuts out there looming, but it’s not quite clear what’s going to happen... it causes for a lot of anxiety and tension.”

For example, when Southern Illinois University’s Board of Trustees considered tuition rates for the coming year, it had to do so without a clear idea of how much revenue would come from the state. At the time, the 31 percent in cuts proposed by the governor was the only figure on the table, and neither SIU’s president nor its trustees knew how much funding the state would actually cut.

The board ended up raising tuition by 5 percent.

“We were looking at tuition with great uncertainty as to what the state was doing,” said Dunn, the SIU leader. “There was still, back in April, a very real concern that while it may not be the 31 percent the governor proposed, we could be looking at half that.”

The university developed contingency plans in case cuts were severe. Officials created lists of potential reductions and prioritized them by importance and savings.

“The idea would be that we could flip the switch on a sufficient number of these lists we’ve been working on to match the amount of money we had to come up with,” Dunn said.

Illinois saw a substantial, and rare, 21 percent increase in state funding last year (most of the additional revenue was earmarked for staff pensions, and universities didn't actually see an increase in operating support), and Dunn said that perhaps college leaders need to
adjust to a new funding reality. Many believe that Rauner, who was elected governor in 2014, is likely to propose higher education cuts again.

“A lot of us in Illinois looked at what was going on in other states... and for many years we were able to say, ‘Thank goodness we’re in Illinois,’” Dunn said. “We didn’t see these stories of disaster that were taking place in some other areas of the country. And there was some comfort in that. Maybe some of us got too comfortable.”

May 28, 2015

Fraternities’ Ranks Swell at a Time of Intense Public Scrutiny

By Katherine Mangan

NO MU MENTION

Recent headlines about brutal hazings, drinking-related deaths, and sexual assaults have tarnished the image of fraternities but have barely dented their coffers.

Membership in the 74 national and international fraternities that belong to the North-American Interfraternity Conference continues to grow at a steady clip, with 46 percent more students paying dues in 2013-14 than in 2005-6.

The conference represents more than 6,000 chapters on about 800 campuses. Total membership grew from 264,956 in 2005-6 to 387,859 in 2013-14, and early projections show continued growth this year.

At the same time, fraternities face limited financial and legal exposure when mayhem breaks out because of how they’re structured and insured: Many of their assets are insulated by foundations and housing corporations that are harder to tap, and Greek organizations have banded together in group-insurance plans that restrict coverage for their members and chapters.

Students pay hundreds of dollars in premiums for insurance that’s unlikely to cover them if underage drinking, hazing, or other activities prohibited by the fraternity —
but ubiquitous in Greek life — are involved. Instead, those liabilities are likely to be passed on to the homeowners’ policies of the students’ parents.

The combination of expanding membership rolls and carefully crafted insurance policies has helped fraternities that are under the gun not only survive but thrive.

A couple of recent cases illustrate how a lawsuit can trigger a game of hot potato.

*When Hazing Is Involved*

Eric Barnum was president of his fraternity, Sigma Alpha Epsilon, at Cornell University, when a 19-year-old sophomore died in a fraternity hazing ritual. The freshman pledges were the ones doing the hazing; the student who died, George Desdunes, was one of the fraternity members they allegedly tied up and forced to drink vodka each time he missed a trivia question about his fraternity. His mother sued the fraternity and several of its members for $25 million.

Mr. Barnum was named in the lawsuit even though he said he wasn’t present when the abuse occurred, in 2011. Lloyd’s of London, which insures the fraternity and its officers, refused to cover him because hazing was involved.

Instead, the legal costs were passed on to his parents’ homeowners’ insurance, State Farm Fire and Casualty. Last month State Farm and the Barnums sued Lloyd’s of London, saying that Mr. Barnum was neither involved in any hazing activities nor negligent in his training and supervisory duties, as the mother's suit asserted.

When national fraternities exclude coverage for drinking or hazing-related incidents, "the kid feels like he’s being scammed," says Douglas E. Fierberg, a Washington-based lawyer who is representing Mr. Desdunes’s mother, Marie Lourdes Andre. "He’s paying the premiums of a policy that’s protecting the national, but not him."

Most injuries and deaths involve the misuse of alcohol, whether it’s rape, hazing, or students falling out of windows, Mr. Fierberg says. Such exclusions are spelled out in Sigma Alpha Epsilon’s health and safety guide.

"Your personal insurance is always primary and stands ahead of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon insurance," it states. Chapters and fraternity members won’t be covered under the fraternity’s general liability coverage in cases involving "acts of hazing, sexual abuse/misconduct, assault and battery, and violations of fraternity alcohol policy."

Fraternities take pains to spell out the consequences of breaking their regulations, and that includes being dropped from insurance, says Peter Smithhisler, president of the North-American Interfraternity Conference. "It illustrates the importance of students’
understanding their obligation to follow the rules," Mr. Smithhisler says. "Students shouldn’t be surprised when they’re held accountable."

National fraternities operate chapters like franchises, much the way restaurant chains do. Critics maintain, though, that the controls that allow someone to assume they’ll get the same quality sandwich at a Panera Bread in Boston or Austin are often lacking with fraternities.

That’s because the national organizations set standards for behavior for their chapters but then leave the responsibility for enforcing those policies to inexperienced, underage, and sometimes intoxicated undergraduates. Despite Mr. Smithhisler’s assertion that fraternities’ reactions are "swift and decisive" when violations occur, critics say those actions usually involve suspending, rather than revoking, charters.

A 'Remote and Tenuous' Relationship

A ruling last year by the Indiana Supreme Court offers more insight into how liability issues often play out. The court decided that neither Wabash College nor the national Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity was responsible for physical and mental injuries a freshman fraternity pledge, Brian Yost, said he suffered during a 2007 incident that may or may not have been part of a hazing ritual (he says it was; the local chapter, which later reached a settlement with him, says it wasn’t).

Mr. Yost’s fraternity brothers were trying to wrestle him under running water in a tradition known as "showering," and he fought back, so one of his brothers placed him in a chokehold, according to his family’s lawsuit. When Mr. Yost lost consciousness, the students panicked and dropped him, the lawsuit says, causing his head to slam into the bathroom floor.

The court cleared the college of any liability, saying its duties didn’t include oversight and control of students living in a house the college owns but leases to the fraternity.

The national fraternity, which lacked direct oversight and control of the chapter, couldn’t be held liable either, the court ruled. "The designated evidence indicates that the national fraternity strongly disapproved of hazing and promoted gentlemanly behavior in its printed charters and bylaws through its aspirational enactments and promotional materials," the ruling stated.

Local chapters receive risk guides from the fraternity’s insurance company, and members complete an online course that spells out the dangers of hazing. If members ignored or violated those rules, the court said, the national fraternity can’t be held
legally responsible. The relationship between the national fraternity and the individual student, the ruling said, "was remote and tenuous."

Fraternities are doing everything in their power to keep it that way.

"The nationals take the position that they can’t go down with all the sinking ships," says Brett A. Sokolow, president of the Ncherm Group, a consulting and law firm that advises colleges and that was formerly known as the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management.

The goal, typically, is to push liability onto the local chapter, he says.

Chapters, in turn, often deflect responsibility onto parents’ homeowners’ insurance because fraternity members typically still use their parents’ address as their own. But those insurance companies are starting to specifically exempt activities that are illegal or that involve fraternities, Mr. Sokolow says.

In the Wabash case, after clearing the national fraternity and the college, the Indiana Supreme Court left open the question of whether the college chapter was at fault.

Jim Ewbank, a lawyer representing that chapter, says it settled with the student and his family for an undisclosed sum.

He says the insurance companies that represent national fraternities are justified in denying coverage to members who break the law or violate fraternity policies. Most, he says, won’t deny coverage just because underage students were drinking, but they probably will if a pledge is forced to drink alcohol.

"To say the nationals are leaving members out in the cold is just not true," Mr. Ewbank says.

Over the past six to eight years, the amount fraternities have paid out to settle lawsuits has grown from about $20 million a year to $30 million, Mr. Sokolow estimates. A Bloomberg Business analysis of IRS filings estimated that, in 2010, fraternities took in $170 million in revenue. None of the national groups that represent fraternities keep tabs on revenues, and none of the fraternities contacted by The Chronicle, including Sigma Alpha Epsilon, would divulge those figures.

But many of their accounts are clearly flush with cash as more and more dues-paying students continue to flock to fraternities.
Charles G. Eberly, an emeritus professor of counseling and student development at Eastern Illinois University, says that now, more than ever, students crave connections.

Because of the pressure on faculty members to shift from mentoring students to generating economically valuable research, "time to listen to students has been markedly reduced," says Mr. Eberly, a former president of the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity, based at Indiana University at Bloomington.

Fraternities provide the social support and encouragement students need as they forge their personal identities, Mr. Eberly says.

They also provide opportunities for leadership training and community service, benefits that too often get overlooked when the focus is on misbehavior, advocates say.

"Sometimes, people rally to the brand when it’s under challenge," says Peter F. Lake, director of the Center for Excellence in Higher Education Law and Policy at Stetson University. "There may be something to the adage that there’s no such thing as bad publicity."

But headlines about out-of-control partying and sexual misconduct could turn some students off while "encouraging people with high-risk behaviors to join," Mr. Lake adds. "By vilifying the Greeks, you might create the monster you’re afraid of."