Sororities Say They, Too, Have a Key Role to Play in Preventing Sexual Assault

The intense scrutiny surrounding sexual assaults on campuses has helped lengthen the list of noes that some fraternities must observe. No more open parties. No kegs, just cans. No hard liquor. No pledging.

But at the University of Missouri’s flagship campus, in Columbia, members of the Greek community might soon have to contend with a more drastic change: no women in fraternity houses. At least, not when students are most likely to be partying.

Missouri’s administration has stressed that the controversial idea, which would bar women from fraternity houses on weekend nights and at certain other times during the year, is just a proposal. It is one of several expected to be discussed on Saturday at a campus summit on sexual assault that will include Greek leaders and alumni.

But sorority members on the campus have condemned the idea and expressed frustration that they weren’t consulted when the proposal was developed.

The controversy at Missouri has highlighted some of the tensions between the roles of fraternities and sororities in combating sexual assault. Critics of fraternities say their culture of alcohol-fueled parties increases the likelihood of rape, and much of the demand for reforms of Greek life has focused on changing men’s behavior.

Prevention strategies aimed at women, by contrast, are often criticized as blaming the victim. But sorority leaders say they can play an important role in training their members in bystander intervention and other techniques to keep peers safe.

An advisory group called the MU Fraternity Alumni Consortium drafted several proposals for reforming Greek life after conversations about sexual assault with the Columbia campus’s chancellor, R. Bowen Loftin, and the Missouri system’s president, Timothy M. Wolfe. In addition to the ban on women during certain hours, the list includes a ban on hard liquor in fraternities and on out-of-town formal events.

Any policies that would have such a broad effect on campus social life should be the product of extensive discussions that include Greek women, female students, and assault survivors, said Matthew Leibowitz, executive director of Consent Is So Frat, a group that advocates for sexual-assault awareness in Greek life. "Sorority women need to be at the center of that conversation," he said.
The Missouri proposal is not unique. In January, in the midst of a controversy over a now-retracted article in *Rolling Stone* magazine describing an alleged gang rape at the University of Virginia, sorority women at UVa were ordered by their national affiliates to stay out of fraternities on "bid night," a popular party occasion. The directive sparked outrage on and off the campus.

Julie L. Johnson, a top official at the National Panhellenic Conference, said her group’s national sorority affiliates had already banned members from participating in men’s recruitment events, including bid night. Still, the backlash at Missouri echoes the criticism at UVa. Sexual-assault prevention is a commendable goal, many observers said, but college women, like other adults, should be able to make their own choices.

Sorority leaders in Missouri’s Panhellenic Association sent a letter to Chancellor Loftin in April asserting that the proposed policy "could lead to an increase in dehumanizing or making women counterparts inferior to the fraternity men."

Mr. Loftin has responded to several concerned students on Twitter, writing that the Interfraternity Council and Greek-life administrators "are working to make sure" student input is heard. A sorority member replied, "But not PHA?," in reference to the sorority organization. Mr. Loftin didn’t respond.

President Wolfe said in an interview with *The Chronicle* that any new policies would have to be carried out and enforced by Greek leaders, so students would have to "buy in" first. He emphasized that the proposals were a "combined opportunity" for Missouri’s fraternities and sororities to work together.

One expert endorsed the ban’s intentions. Fraternities would be less likely to throw high-risk parties if sorority members and other women were unable to attend, said John D. Foubert, a professor of higher education and student affairs at Oklahoma State University and president of One in Four, a nonprofit group dedicated to rape prevention. Mr. Foubert was behind a widely cited 2007 study that found that fraternity and sorority members were more likely to commit and become victims of rape.

He said he was encouraged to see experimentation in dealing with the problems of Greek culture.

But such proposals could put a barrier between men and women at a time when a stronger conversation about prevention is needed, said Angela Rose, executive director of Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment, a nonprofit group, known as PAVE, that supports survivors of sexual violence.
Sororities’ Power

Experts stressed that sororities have a role to play in prevention, and that finding a balance is key. Women should have the freedom to enjoy a party without worrying about being assaulted, but if they see the warning signs of a sexual assault, they should also have the tools to react.

"Administrators or the media or national sorority leaders can say that frats need to clean up their act, but frats aren’t necessarily going to do that unless the people on the ground and coming to their parties are enforcing that as well," said Sara C. Surface, a UVa senior who has become a prominent advocate for sexual-assault survivors. "There’s a power that sorority women have in getting fraternities to have stricter enforcement."

Prevention is a steadily growing part of sorority members’ education, said Julia K. Dixon, a sorority alumna who works with PAVE as an advocate against sexual assault in Greek life. A task force, recently convened by the National Panhellenic Conference, is creating materials on prevention and awareness to distribute to its sorority chapters nationwide. Sororities at Missouri plan to roll out new educational standards for members this fall.

"Sororities are absolutely a space for women educating women, as well as setting an example — setting the social tone for what that campus is like," Ms. Dixon said.

Charlene Y. Senn, a social psychologist at the University of Windsor, in Ontario, was the lead author of a widely publicized recent study illustrating the successes of a prevention program aimed at women. She said her program, which includes self-defense training, would serve sororities well.

Such efforts have sometimes been criticized as placing the burden on women to resist rape, but Ms. Senn said she doesn’t support policies restricting how female students may dress or where they may go. Until men are taught at an early age not to engage in poor behavior, women should have the tools to help themselves, she said.

Ms. Rose, the PAVE official, said sororities should be better equipped with resources to help survivors, particularly in the immediate aftermath of an assault. Ms. Surface said she provided training this past year for UVa’s Inter-Sorority Council presidents on supporting survivors, and she’d like to see that effort spread to other campuses.

Onus and Responsibility

Victims’ advocates often emphasize that campus sexual assault is not a simple problem with a one-size-fits-all solution. The issue doesn’t just concern men; it doesn’t just concern Greek life. So keeping women out of fraternity houses would be a misguided approach, Ms. Rose said.

Sexual violence is one of several problems that have led to recent fraternity-chapter suspensions, prompting some observers to ask whether fraternities should be abolished. But fraternity men will have to deal with many of their deep cultural problems themselves, said Mr. Foubert.
When it comes to prevention, the National Panhellenic Conference’s Ms. Johnson said, sorority women also have a responsibility: to look out for themselves and their sisters. She said she was encouraged that sorority members were now receiving far more education on issues like sexual-assault prevention than past generations did.

"Why does the onus rest on the woman? I couldn’t agree more — it’s not fair," she said. "But it’s kind of the way it is on a lot of things." Personal responsibility, she added, "does come down to you in the end."

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Consortium revises proposals days before sexual assault summit

JESSICA SHERWIN, 10 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — The MU Fraternity Alumni Consortium appeared to be backing away from a proposal to ban women from fraternity houses on certain nights at certain times, two days before Saturday’s summit on sexual assault in fraternity houses.

Consortium spokesman Ted Hellman said Thursday the idea of banning women was never considered, and social media took the group's proposals out of context. Hellman added that the consortium was considering and would present at the summit a proposal to require a guest list during the "high risk periods."

The summit will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m Saturday. Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, executive members from Panhellenic Association, Interfraternity Council and Greek chapters and alumni will be on hand to discuss ways to address sexual assault. The Panhellenic Association will live-tweet the summit. Media will not be permitted to attend.

The consortium's proposals will be among the topics to be discussed. A draft of the proposals was obtained by the Columbia Missourian through an open records request. The draft dated April 8, 2015, stated, “Women students are restricted from being guests in fraternity houses during certain high risk periods. The high risk periods are: 10 p.m. until 3 a.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights; every night during the first week of each semester (syllabus week); the night of Stop Day each semester."
Hellman, the author of the drafted proposals, said the word "restriction" was meant to convey a very different meaning from that of "ban."

“Ban means people are never allowed,” Hellman said. "Restricted means they are allowed under certain circumstances. We object strongly to the term 'banned' because we have never used it."

The Panhellenic Association opposed the restriction on women in a letter to the Chancellor and in a statement released June 5, according to previous Missourian reporting. The association unveiled a new sexual violence education program to be enacted at the start of the next school year. The plan is independent from the consortium’s proposals.

“We wanted the administration to know that students on IFC and PHA were capable of creating policies that can affect our community and hopefully, if the plan works, reduce the number of sexual assaults that happen on our campus,” Panhellenic Association spokesperson Carolyn Welter said Thursday. “I think we wanted to show that we have been thinking about this; this isn’t new to us.”

Hellman said the Greek community as a whole is misinformed about the consortium’s proposals.

"What they are reading on social media is not correct," Hellman said. "Anybody can start a rumor."

News of the proposals spread on social media earlier this month. In opposition, Twitter accounts such as @StopLoftin and @SaveMUGreekLife popped up to voice disapproval. National media outlets have covered the backlash.

“I’m confident that this summit will be very helpful in helping students process (the proposals),” Hellman said.

**Revised Policies**

Instead of a restriction, Hellman said the consortium would present another option at the summit: requiring a guest list during "high-risk periods."
Hellman said the idea of a guest list is already a "best practice" for Fraternal Information and Programming Group, the insurance pool that is responsible for MU fraternities' liability coverage. The group requires that all fraternities keep a guest list of people on the properties they insure.

Interfraternity Councilspokesperson Parker Briden said in an email that the council currently requires guest lists for all registered social events.

"What we are considering is that all fraternities follow the insurance guideline," Hellman said. "Theoretically, as long as a woman was on the guest list, she would be welcome in a fraternity house on a weekend night. I can tell you, without any reservation whatsoever, women are not being banned from fraternity houses in any sense."

Welter said the Panhellenic Association executive board anticipated the consortium revealing revised policies at the summit.

Hellman said the consortium recommended the summit this Saturday, so the group, student leaders in Greek Life and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin could discuss proposals and implementation strategies.

"The purpose of the summit is for people to understand exactly what proposals are being considered," Hellman said.

Hellman said the alcohol policy that has been circulating on social media is a policy made by the Interfraternity Council, not the consortium.

"The alcohol policy is being considered by the IFC," Hellman said. "It’s not our responsibility; it’s a policy that they are currently working on."

The April 8 draft of the consortium's proposed policies stated, "Distilled spirits...are prohibited in fraternity and sorority houses at all times. Beer is the only alcoholic beverage permitted in fraternity houses that have alcohol accreditation."
The draft later said the Interfraternity Council would issue a policy relating to alcohol in approved houses. Out of the 33 chapters under the council, five are allowed to have alcohol, according to the MU Greek Life website.

The Interfraternity Council and Panhellenic Association have publicly supported the alcohol ban.

Hellman added that though the consortium began with over 20 ideas, the group has narrowed the possibilities down through evaluation of each idea or proposal. Mandatory drug testing for all in-house members of fraternities and sororities was also proposed, but Hellman said on June 5 that the provision was dropped.

**Panhellenic Association Plan**

The University of Missouri Panhellenic Association released a sexual violence education plan Monday, detailing how the organization would teach its members how to handle sexual violence situations.

The plan, drafted by Kendall Foley, the association's vice president of risk management, calls for new member peer educators and mandatory “focused education training,” according to a news release about the new program.

"Our plan is targeted to empower women and make them feel like they could be in a situation, know their rights, know when they would be violated and how," Welter said. "So our plan is really directed towards empowering women, versus the consortium’s plan (that) is kind of directed towards putting down women and saying they are not able to make a decision for their own safety."

Welter said the Panhellenic Association strategically released the plan before the summit. She said the association's plan and the consortium's proposals are very different. Panhellenic Association President Allison Fitts will present the plan at the summit.
"I think our plan is more fitting and makes a lot more sense because it was drafted by women who know what the college scene is like," Welter said. "I think our plan could combat the issue (the consortium) is trying to address with the banning of women in fraternities."

Welter said the Panhellenic Association's plan was not an alternative to the consortium's proposals but had many of the same goals. The plan has been in the works since January and involved communication between the association, the Interfraternity Council, the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center and the Title IX Office.

“Regardless of whether it’s in the fraternity house or not, those situations are still going to arise, so I think that the alumni consortium is kind of apparently not wanting it occur in the fraternities,” Welter said. “I think our plan is more comprehensive and educational, so it can apply to any situation, not just in the fraternity house.”

MU could pass strictest Greek life policy in SEC

Watch story: [http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=29363&zone=5&categories=5](http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=29363&zone=5&categories=5)

COLUMBIA - The University of Missouri could become the strictest SEC school when it comes to Greek Life.

KOMU 8 News looked at Greek life regulations at all SEC schools to compare them to proposed changes to MU policy to be discussed at a joint student-alumni summit Saturday.

The changes include a ban on any hard liquor in fraternity houses; no longer allowing out-of-town social events; restricting female guests in fraternity houses from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings.
The original proposal included mandatory drug testing for all Greek students, but that was dropped.

Following complaints by Greek leaders, KOMU 8 News looked into how other SEC schools compare when it comes to Greek life policies:

Arkansas had probably the most thorough policy, restricting any chapter to nine social events and requiring campus police be at social events. Fraternities also have to register the event with the university ten days in advance.

Florida, Georgia, and LSU also require social events have university approval beforehand.

LSU, Florida, and Georgia all specify social events have to end at 2 a.m. on weekends.

Georgia and LSU regulate the type of alcohol containers used at social events: no kegs or punch bowls or other "open source" containers.

LSU also bans homemade alcohol as well as anything stronger than 12 percent alcohol by volume and restricts any drinking games or other encouragement of binge drinking.

KOMU 8 News found no mention in other university's policies of restricting guests to fraternity houses or to mandatory drug testing for Greek students, the two proposals that met with the largest student push-back.

The proposals are at the center of a disagreement between Greek student leaders and the administration.

In attempt to improve safety on campus, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin has met with fraternity alumni to brainstorm policies designed to better protect female students. Some student leaders said some of the proposed policy changes are "overreaching."

MU Greek leaders have a chance to meet with the administration and alumni on Saturday. This follows a spike in crime and sexual violence on and around MU's campus.

At first, the chancellor met with members of the Mizzou Fraternity Alumni Consortium, a loosely affiliated group the university calls on for advice from time to time.

KOMU 8 News talked to the Ted Hellman, a spokesman for the alumni consortium. He sent an official statement via email, saying the consortium "collaborated with alumnae representatives from Pan Hellenic Association sororities in response to Chancellor Loftin's request for proposals throughout the process." However, he did not specify when the consortium began collaborating with PHA representatives.

Some student Greek leaders criticized Loftin after the alumni consortium released its list of proposed policy changes, saying they were not involved in the process.
"The Panhellenic Association and any leaders within the community were not approached, and were not involved with any of the initial proposals made by the consortium, and we heard about all these proposals after they were made," said Carolyn Welter, vice president of public relations for the Panhellenic Association.

A letter from PHA to Loftin was signed by all ranking members of PHA as well as every sorority house president on campus.

"The goal is to address the safety of women students in fraternity houses, but the proposal was written by men who are not entrenched in daily campus, fraternity or sorority life," the letter states (original emphasis).

When KOMU 8 News asked Hellman if he could verify when PHA representatives were brought into the meetings, he sent another written statement by another member of the consortium saying the consortium met with Interfraternity Council members twice during the proposal process. The email made no mention of any sorority involvement. Hellman has not responded to further requests to clarify when and if sorority students were included in discussion.

The letter from PHA, dated April 29, was followed by a joint news release put out by PHA and the Interfraternity Council. In the news release, both Greek councils said they plan to oppose many of the policy proposals, calling them "ineffective and uneducated."

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**Sexual violence education suggested for Missouri sororities**

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — [The University of Missouri Panhellenic Association is proposing an education plan to help sororities prevent sexual assaults on campus.](https://newscom.com)

The association says the plan will be used by sororities beginning in the fall semester. It will present the plan during a summit on Saturday designed for Greek leaders and members to discuss how to prevent sexual violence.

The Panhellenic Association is an umbrella group for campus sororities. Spokeswoman Carolyn Welter says the plan uses resources already available on campus, with additions.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports the plan includes a yearly education for sorority members and encourages peer educators. It also would require sorority chapter leaders to be trained to handle reports of sexual violence in their chapters.
University of Missouri adding new plans to make campus safer for women


Sexual Violence Prevention Plan For MU Sororities Set

The University of Missouri’s Panhellenic Association will implement a new sexual violence prevention plan this fall semester for sororities. It will reach about five thousand college-aged women.

Carolyn Welter, Vice President of public relations for the association, said that educating women can help raise awareness of sexual violence issues happening around them. She said it can also help reduce the number of sexual assaults in the community.

"Through our research we’ve kind of realized that there is a lack of education surrounding sexual violence just in terms of even the definition of sexual violence and what is an act of sexual violence and what can be prosecuted,” Welter said.

Kendall Foley, Vice President of risk management for the association, is an advocate for the plan because it will teach women the meaning of sexual violence in order to keep them safer. Foley said it will help women coming to college for the first time feel more comfortable speaking about sexual violence.
“We found it really important to be educating them right at the very beginning. We know they are most at risk in their first semester, so that felt really important to us,” Foley said.

Foley also said that under the plan sorority chapter leaders will go through training on how to report sexual violence.

Executive Director of the Missouri Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Colleen Coble, said it is important to applaud student leaders for creating a sexual violence prevention plan on their own as a part of a campus and community wide program.

“I think one of the most positive aspects is that it is student led, that it is flexible and allows for the ongoing education of the members of the sororities and fraternities and the entire college campus as an outgrowth,” said Coble.

**Man accused of helping women steal credit cards from recreation center**

Thursday, June 18, 2015 at 2:00 pm

**University of Missouri police on Wednesday arrested a man suspected of driving two women to the Student Recreation Center, where the women allegedly stole several items out of lockers, then taking them to retailers to make fraudulent purchases.**

At least one of the women, Samara B. Eagen, 30, has been arrested. An MU police captain did not immediately respond to a message seeking more information.

Prosecutors charged Nicholas R. McCallister 26, with four felonies: two each of felony stealing and fraudulent use of a credit device. McCallister allegedly drove Eagen and another women to the recreation center, where the women stole wallets, car keys, a laptop computer and credit and debit cards from unsecured lockers, according to a probable cause statement. There are at least three known victims.

Using the keys, the women unlocked a car in a parking garage and stole several items out of the vehicle, the statement said. McCallister allegedly then drove the women to Wal-Mart on the south side of Columbia to purchase an Xbox One and more than $1,000 worth of gift cards. They also tried to buy more gift cards at a Hy-Vee, but the card was declined.
When police caught up with him, McCallister admitted the women gave him a $100 gift card for his help, which was bought using a stolen credit card, the statement said. Police also found the Xbox One that was purchased with the stolen credit card in McCallister’s hotel room.

McCallister is being held at the Boone County Jail on a $12,000 bond. Eagen also is at the jail, with her bond set at $33,000. It is unclear whether the second woman has been arrested.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Locals gather to support Charleston victims

ALEXANDRA WOZNICZKA, 8 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Under the gathering dusk, students, community members and local church leaders congregated Thursday at a vigil in front of a Pan-African flag, black balloons and a poster bearing #blacklivesmatter.

The vigil, held at the Gaines Oldham Black Cultural Center, was meant to help ease the pain of the church shooting on Wednesday in Charleston, South Carolina, in which nine people were killed. The strong tradition of music and prayer that is characteristic of African American churches prevailed.

Many people in the black community spoke of feeling anger and frustration after hearing the news of the shooting. More than 100 people gathered. Students organized the vigil to give the community a safe space for healing and to help promote a sense of unity in Columbia.

Bishop Lester Woods from Urban Empowerment Ministries opened the vigil with a prayer, asking those attending not only to hold hands but to lock arms in a show of support.

"Let's show South Carolina that Columbia cares," he said.

Candles were then passed out to the crowd while a group of volunteers held pictures of those killed in the shooting. The vigil was bookended by reading aloud the names of the nine victims.
The Charleston County Coroner released the names of the victims earlier in the day. They are the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, 41; Myra Thompson, 59, who was also a pastor at the church; Cynthia Hurd, 54; Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, 45; Tywanza Sanders, 26; Ethel Lance, 70; Susie Jackson, 87; DePayne Middleton Doctor, 49; and Daniel Simmons Sr., 74, who died later in an operating room, according to the The Post and Courier.

The suspected shooter, Dylann Storm Roof, was arrested in North Carolina during a traffic stop Thursday morning. Federal authorities are investigating the shooting as a hate crime.

Co-pastor at Bethel Baptist Church Carl Kenney said in an interview before the vigil that to say that he’s angry “would be an understatement.”

He referenced a period of increasing racial tensions in America, starting with the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and reignited again by the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and more.

“Racism isn’t something that is in our DNA” but is learned in society, he said.

“I think that there is this brewing mindset among conservative America that is anti-black, anti-progressive agenda. It’s anti-black lives matter,” he said. “It’s within certain outlets of the press where every time a black life is taken that it’s framed where 'it’s not about race.'”

Those gathered sang "We Shall Overcome," an anthem for the civil rights movement, multiple times throughout the vigil.

MU senior Autumn Branch, one of the organizers, asked those present to think about the words as they sang.

"I might not live to see (equality), but my children might," she said to the crowd.

MU seniors Ayanna Poole and Wycla Bratton, along with Shelby Parnell, conveyed emotions of anger, sadness and pain through poetry.
"I am tired of screaming black lives matter because I know they do," Poole said to the crowd.

Bratton and Parnell echoed a similar sentiment, and all three pledged to keep fighting for equality.

Caya French attended the vigil to show her support and to teach her daughter about tolerance.

“I think there’s a culture in our country of hatred that we would like to be a part of changing,” French said. “We brought our daughter out to help her see what is going on in the world, to be aware and also to be part of the change of making things better for everyone.”

At the end of the vigil, black balloons were released into the sky. The crowd watched in near silence as the balloons faded into the night sky.

Mary Hull-Lovett, pastor at St. Paul A.M.E. Church, closed the vigil in prayer.

"I pray for protection in all of our churches," she said. "God is on our side."

Prayer vigil held in Columbia for Charleston shooting victims

COLUMBIA, Mo. - Thursday night dozens gathered to mourn the nine people shot to death at a historic church in Charleston, South Carolina.

**The prayer vigil started at 8 p.m. at the Gaines Oldham Black Culture Center on the University of Missouri campus.**

Around 60 people prayed for healing, both in Columbia and in Charleston, before a moment of silence was held.

Several poets also spoke at the event.
Chinese exchange brings language to Columbia schools

June 19, 2015 • By TANZI PROPST

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Paper, paint brushes and cups of water were recently passed out to a group of Summer Expeditions students in a room at Hickman High School. The visiting Chinese instructor greeted the class with a cheerful "ni hao" before starting on a calligraphy lesson.

The Columbia Public School District began working with the University of Missouri's Confucius Institute and Shanghai Normal University to bring the Chinese language to Columbia's public schools nearly two years ago, the Columbia Missourian (http://bit.ly/1L77Dhg ) reported. It now offers an introduction to Chinese to middle-schoolers and Chinese levels 1, 2 and 3 for high schoolers. Students are also getting a taste of Chinese culture — like calligraphy — and history.

MU's Confucius Institute, a nonprofit educational organization funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education, aims to provide Chinese language teaching, training and resources for instructors. The district hopes to create art, Chinese tai chi, Chinese folk music and dance classes.

"By 2016 or 2017, the CPS system should be awash with the Chinese language," said Handy Williamson, MU vice provost for international programs and director of the Confucius Institute.

A delegation of seven Chinese student-teachers has been sent to Columbia to teach students about Chinese culture, language and arts. Six student-teachers from the delegation plan to stay throughout the summer and school year, Columbia Public Schools spokeswoman Michelle Baumstark said.

Students from Shanghai Normal University were chosen by the Confucius Institute through a process of testing that required nearly a half year to prepare for, according to Jenny Chan, a calligraphy teacher.

"This is such an amazing experience and opportunity for all of us," Chan said.

Rising sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders enrolled in the Summer Expeditions summer school program spend an hour every morning learning about topics like calligraphy, history and culture, arts and language. Fifty-five high-achieving students who don't qualify for the district's gifted classes are enrolled in the program, which lasts four weeks, according to a brochure. Students will interact with Chinese educators, go on field trips and get math, science, reading and writing lessons.

Students from every district elementary school are in the program, Superintendent Peter Stiepleman said.
“Something deeply embedded like this lets the students have open minds,” said Wen Ouyang, a translator for the delegation from the Shanghai Normal University. "It opens their eyes to see the world and gives them more chances to be successful in the real world."

Five language teachers and two art teachers rotate from classroom to classroom teaching students in the summer school programs.

Mindy Fang has been teaching part-time in China for five years and is spending June and July in Columbia teaching students about Chinese art. Fang said the experience has been challenging.

"The learning environment is so different here than in China," she said. "They learn so fast."

Fang, who apologized for her English, had a two-word assessment of the program: "It's cool."

The Institute and Shanghai Normal also have arranged to send several Columbia students to China next month. Last year, the program sent 14 middle-school students to China for a two-week summer camp.

This year, a group of eight students from Rock Bridge High School who have been taking Chinese and received A's can travel to China all expenses paid by the Institute and Shanghai Normal.

Columbia Public Schools plans to send Hickman High School teachers Jana Wilson and Annelle Whitt to China this July with the student delegation. The exchange will last two weeks and aims to help educators learn how to better teach the Chinese language to students.

"We live in a global society," Whitt said. "We want our children to be prepared from cradle to career."

Weather woes worry Missouri farmers as planting delayed by heavy rain

June 19, 2015  •  By Tim Barker

It’s safe to say this summer is not being kind to Missouri farmers.

A seemingly endless string of storms, showers and cloudy days has conspired to keep large tracts of farmland virtually unworkable.

And much of it may simply go unused this year.

Greg Sharpe, who farms northwest of Hannibal, has been in the business for some 35 years. This year, he said, is among the worst he’s seen.

He went into the season planning to lay down 500 acres of corn and 300 acres of soybeans. So far he’s managed to plant just 200 acres of corn.

“I don’t have any beans planted at the moment,” Sharpe said. “There are areas here that are as wet as they’ve ever been.”
It’s a statewide problem, with Missouri farmers well behind last year’s planting pace, according to a crop progress report issued earlier this week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The state’s farmers had planted just 42 percent of their soybean acreage, compared with 85 percent a year ago. Illinois farmers have fared much better, with 90 percent of soybean acres planted, compared with 94 percent a year ago.

Soybean planting typically starts shortly after farmers finish their corn fields. Ideal planting windows vary by region, but the goal, in general, is to have soybeans planted by the first week of June.

**Losses can pile up quickly after that, with delays sapping the quality of the harvest. A rule of thumb offered by the University of Missouri Extension suggests a yield drop of one bushel per acre for every week that planting is delayed in June. But once July hits, the yield loss increases to three bushels per acre for every delayed week.**

With that in mind, many farmers consider July 10 to be a planting deadline.

Going beyond that date is not something recommended by Bill Wiebold, a professor of agronomy with the Extension.

“It just depends on how much risk a farmer wants to take,” Wiebold said.

It’s not just the potential for yield loss that affects the decision. There’s also the looming threat of an early frost’s damaging the crop before it can be harvested.

For now, Missouri farmers are hoping for a dry spell that lasts long enough for those fields to clear out.

“And even if it stops raining, the ground is so saturated, it will take several days of sun and wind,” said Denny Mertz, who farms in the Elsberry area.

Mertz was able to get his corn in the ground earlier this year but hasn’t touched his tractor since May 3. That means he has 200 acres of soybeans still unplanted.

And so he finds himself checking weather reports at least three times a day. He hasn’t seen much lately, however, to generate much in the way of optimism.

“We’re seeing that big storm down in Texas and it just continues to bubble up,” Mertz said.

In the end, some farmers will find it more lucrative to forgo planting altogether and collect what they can from their so-called preventive planting crop insurance. The coverage — it pays a percentage of previous years’ harvests — kicks in when weather makes it too difficult to plant.

‘A TOUGH SITUATION’

One of the problems for Missouri farmers is that this isn’t a national problem.

If it were, a lackluster soybean harvest might not be such an awful thing.

After a couple years of record corn and soybean harvests, the market is flush with excess inventory, keeping prices low for both grain crops. A drop in inventory could push grain prices upward, offsetting lower yields.

But that’s not the way this one is playing out.

“Our neighbors have their soybeans planted. We don’t,” said Wiebold, the agronomy professor. “Right now, Missouri farmers are in a tough situation when they look at what’s happening in other states.”
Still, just because states such as Illinois have had better luck this year with the weather, that doesn’t mean things are perfect.

The crop progress reports don’t always reflect an accurate picture of what’s happening, said Emerson Nafziger, a crop sciences professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The USDA reports show considerable planting progress. But many of those planted acres are now under water. And some will have to be replanted after they dry out.

“If they get really wet after getting planted, they’ll simply die from a lack of oxygen,” Nafziger said.

Still, he said, it’s too early to start making estimates on how this year’s harvest is going to be affected by a wet June.

Last year also saw a lot of rainfall in June, yet farmers ended up with robust yields.

“We were fine last year,” he said. “We were fine because it quit raining.”

Debt-Free and (Mostly) Detail-Free

June 19, 2015

By Michael Stratford

NO MENTION

As the idea of debt-free college swirls around the Democratic presidential campaign and some liberal policy circles, the groups that represent colleges and universities are sizing up what it might mean for them.

For the most part, they’re just waiting to see details. So far, debt-free college remains a largely high-minded goal, and the plans from the politicians embracing it have been vague.

What is clear, though, is that a shift to debt-free college would likely represent a fundamental change from the current financing system of American higher education.

“It’s potentially a really far-reaching, dramatic reshuffling of higher education,” said Terry Hartle, senior vice president for government relations and public affairs at the American Council on Education.

Views on 'Debt Free'
Details (such as they are) about what politicians and policy groups are saying about the plans.

Even if debt-free college continues to catch on, it’ll likely be years before legislative details are even contemplated, much less written into a bill that becomes law. In the meantime, though, the proposal itself appears to be driving a conversation about higher education on the Democratic campaign trail, foreshadowing the student debt issues that may play a prominent role in the election that is 17 months away.

“It’s too soon to tell” how colleges will respond to the debt-free college proposals, Hartle said. “The several debt-free proposals out there reflect both widespread concern about the cost of college and the Democrats’ desire to ensure that young voters go to the polls in 2016.”

Hartle said that his association has had “a couple of passing conversations” with presidential campaigns about debt-free college. They were mostly “fact-finding” for the campaigns rather than an explanation of details, he said.

The calls for debt-free college nearly all recognize the large cutbacks many states have made to higher education spending in recent years -- and draw attention to the need to boost that funding again.

“Debt-free higher education is aspirational,” said Peter McPherson, president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. “But it’s a goal that brings out important conversations,” for example, spotlighting state disinvestment and how to deal with it, he said. “We fear the long-term trend and we would like to have that conversation.”

“As people talk about debt-free education,” McPherson said, “I want to take advantage of the opportunity to talk about how we can take concrete steps to deal with the origination of debt.”

He said he wanted to draw attention to “loans students shouldn’t take out in the first place” because of overborrowing -- which colleges need greater authority to curb -- or because the student is using the money to attend a poorly performing institution.

Too much federal aid, he said, is going to colleges that don’t serve students well, and the eligibility standards for colleges to receive student loans and grants need to be strengthened.

Although public colleges and universities may welcome the attention to the state funding issues they’ve faced in recent years, a debt-free college plan driven by new federal spending is also riddled with challenges for those institutions.

The federal government has long financed higher education through aid to students who choose their institution. If, as some of the debt-free college proposals call for, the federal government upped its direct subsidies of states and institutions, that would likely mean greater federal control over higher education -- a concern some voiced even with the more modest community college plan earlier this year.

The tuition-free college plan by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, for instance, would require participating states to make sure that 75 percent of classes at public institutions are taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty, an effort aimed at reducing their reliance on adjunct professors. While such a
shift would likely cost colleges more money, many faculty groups would cheer such a requirement, and some bemoaned the lack of such a provision in President Obama's plan for free community college.

If public institutions were forced to drastically reduce tuition to get access to federal money, that could lead to cuts that hurt educational quality, said Iowa State University President Steven Leath.

“Quality is an issue,” he said. "We need to have an adult conversation about how to pay for it.”

One of the things that has become clear is that the debt-free plans focus on public higher education. That marks a significant shift in federal policy on college access, which has traditionally focused on aid that can be spent at public or private, for-profit or nonprofit institutions.

Such a shift would be of concern to private colleges, said Sarah Flanagan, vice president for government relations and policy at the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

In addition to concerns over whether the benefits in a debt-free college plan would wisely target limited dollars to students who actually need them, Flanagan said, private colleges would worry that a new federal program would undermine political support for existing student aid programs like the Pell Grant.

“In the zero-sum budget game, the thought that you could create a massive spending program for public colleges while preserving student-based aid programs for students going to all institutions is unrealistic,” she said.

Debt-free college is, in some ways, an expansion of the free community college plan President Obama rolled out in January.

In the face of formidable congressional opposition to the cost of their proposal, administration officials have said they’re focusing on using free community college as a way to drive a conversation about making two years of postsecondary education as universal as high school. They’ve looked, for instance, to cities and states to jump on free community college even if it is stalled at the federal level.

Debt-free college is likely to be far more expensive than the community college plan, regardless of how it’s structured. The administration has indicated that it’s looking at the idea but has balked at embracing the promise of a college education completely free of debt.

“We’re talking about it and thinking about it,” Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell said last week at an education forum hosted by National Journal. But, he added, “We think that affordability doesn’t necessarily end up at zero.”

David Bergeron, vice president for postsecondary education at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, said that the wide-ranging debt-free-college conversation playing out has been constructive.

“We’re all trying to triangulate around: how do you finance a system in such a way that everybody has an option to a public alternative that is of high quality and free,” he said, adding that, in his view, that doesn’t necessarily mean completely eliminating loan borrowing for all public university students.

“It’s both a political and policy conversation,” he said.

And it’s a conversation that, for now at least, is confined to one side of the political spectrum.
Senator Lamar Alexander, the Tennessee Republican who chairs the Senate education committee, speaking at the same event, was far more skeptical of debt-free college.

“It’s that kind of talk that makes students think they can’t afford college,” he said. “Two years of college for a low-income student is already free, or nearly free.”

“Every political season,” he added, “politicians run around saying ‘we’re going to solve your student loan problem’ hoping to get votes.”