At U. of Missouri, Grad Students Rally for Better Conditions, and Faculty Come to Their Aid

Graduate students rallied at the U. of Missouri at Columbia on Wednesday. An uproar over their pay and work conditions erupted last week after the university abruptly cut, then temporarily reinstated, their health-insurance benefits. But that was only "the straw that broke the camel’s back," one faculty supporter said.

By Vimal Patel

At the University of Missouri at Columbia, long simmering concerns over poor working conditions for graduate students have boiled over.

On Wednesday, several hundred graduate students, faculty members, and other protesters marched on the campus to push the administration to raise stipend levels, offer better housing and child-care options, and make other improvements. Rallying under the iconic columns at the university’s Traditions Plaza, the crowd chanted "M-I-Z, shame on you," with many wearing red T-shirts with slogans that supported the
The uproar began earlier this month after university officials told students that because of changes in federal policy they would no longer receive health-insurance subsidies, a message sent out only hours before the benefits were set to expire. R. Bowen Loftin, the university’s chancellor, last week apologized for the "lack of appropriate notice and prior consultation" and created a task force to propose ways to deal with the health-care issue. He also said the university would hold off on dropping the subsidies, so that students enrolled in the 2015-16 academic year could continue to have their insurance covered by the university.

Despite those steps, the students have continued to press their case, saying that health care was only one of several issues that they want the university to address. While graduate-student protests aren’t rare, the Missouri one is unusual in part because of the high level of faculty support. About half of the university’s departments wrote letters in support of the students. Many department heads and faculty advisers reassured graduate students they would not be penalized if they walked out of classes they were scheduled to teach in order to participate in Wednesday’s events. Some faculty members even taught their undergraduates about the plight of the low-paid graduate assistants or canceled classes altogether.

"We as a department have for too long sat idly by as key support for graduate students has eroded, from the lack of a student parent center and housing options to stagnant salaries, increasing fees, slashing of tuition waivers, and now a last-minute reneging on health insurance benefits," said one letter signed as "the Anthropology Faculty."

One of the most outspoken faculty members is Lois Huneycutt, an associate professor and director of graduate studies in the history department, who spoke at Wednesday’s protest. In an interview with The Chronicle, she discussed why faculty members are so supportive of the graduate students’ cause and why events at Missouri may have implications for other universities. The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Q. Why have faculty been so supportive of the graduate students these last two weeks?

A. It’s the most unanimous I’ve seen this faculty in the 20 years I’ve been here, I think all of us recognize that graduate students have been exploited for some time, and feel guilty about it. Most people have jumped for this chance to actually do something.
Q. Why should Missouri faculty feel guilty?

A. These students have over the last five years had an erosion in their already precarious position. Our faculty recognizes this and yet we’re asking them to take on more and more of the load of undergraduate teaching.

Q. What advice would you have for faculty at other institutions?

A. If you have tenure and you’re not using it, it’s going to waste. They have a responsibility, particularly if they’re out there recruiting graduate students, to really understand the conditions that their graduate students are living in. They also need to be honest with them about their workload and chances of employment at the end of their degree. I’m still amazed to talk to students in the last stages of deciding where to attend graduate school and still not having had anyone at their home institution tell them about their employment outlook, particularly in the humanities and social sciences.

Q. What implications do you see beyond Missouri?

A. Obviously, the fact that graduate students are overworked and underpaid is not unique to us. Our students have reached out to students from other universities that are unionized. I just don’t believe this model of paying them so little can continue. Something’s got to give. I think we’re at a tipping point.

Q. How did Missouri get to this point?

A. I don’t think we have administrators who are malicious, but I also don’t think that graduate education has been a budget priority for a long time. In a situation where everybody is scrambling for every available dollar, graduate students don’t have much of a voice. They really don’t have anyone in administration whose job it is to advocate for graduate-student interests.

Q. Do you put any of the blame on the state legislature?

A. I blame both the university and legislators. We have allowed our infrastructure to crumble. Our graduate-student housing was declared unsafe after a firefighter was killed in a collapse. [The firefighter was evacuating students from the building, where a second-story walkway had collapsed.] It was torn down and not replaced. Our child-care center was condemned. Our library is in really sad shape. The health-care issue was just the straw that broke the camel’s back.
MU graduate student concerns in spotlight at march, rally

By Megan Favignano

Wednesday, August 26, 2015 at 4:22 pm

A large group of University of Missouri graduate students and faculty — all wearing red — formed a semicircle around the entrance to Traditions Plaza and listened Wednesday as Alex Howe explained the reason for the gathering.

“Let me be clear to the administrators: it is true we are here today because of you," Howe, an MU graduate student, told the boisterous crowd. "But not because you wish to celebrate our contributions to this university. Rather, we are here today because you have repeatedly failed to make graduate students a budget priority ... We will not let our message be softened. We are fed up.”

The group applauded Howe, who was one of nine speakers at a graduate student rally Wednesday. The large crowd — composed mostly of graduate students but including faculty, too — marched from the Columns to Traditions Plaza, where they held the rally.

The march and rally were organized by the Forum on Graduate Rights, a student group, as a way to draw attention to issues affecting graduate students after MU administrators said graduate student employees would no longer receive health insurance subsidies. The administration later rescinded that decision. The group's demands include a permanent solution for health insurance subsidies, on-campus graduate student housing and on-campus child care.

Some graduate students skipped out on their lab assignments, classes and jobs teaching courses to undergraduates to send a message to administrators about graduate students' role on campus.

On-campus child care is an important issue for third-year doctoral student Rachel Straughn-Navarro. Straughn-Navarro and her husband have a 4-year-old daughter and a 7-month-old daughter. Straughn-Navarro, who brought her 7-month-old to the rally with her, said she was going to class an hour late Wednesday night because she didn’t have a babysitter this week for
the hour her class overlaps with her husband’s work schedule. He gets off work at 5 p.m., and her class starts at 4.

“Every semester it’s different. Every semester we have to refigure our family schedule to figure out how it’s going to work,” Straughn-Navarro said.

Their older daughter attends the child development lab on campus, but she said it is too costly to send both of their children. The child development lab cares for seven infants, eight toddlers and 60 preschoolers and is open to the public. Straughn-Navarro said she likes the child development center, but would like to see a child care option geared toward student parents.

Marchers carried signs that read “Please, sir, I want some more health insurance,” “In support of #GradRights,” “We are not line items,” and “Faculty for grads.”

During the march and rally, members of the Forum on Graduate Rights’ steering committee asked graduate students to sign a petition to gauge graduate student interest in unionizing. The steering committee has a subcommittee assigned to research forming a union, the benefits and challenges of a graduate student union would have and the interest level among students.

As the rally came to a close, graduate student Eric Scott, part of the Forum on Graduate Rights, told the crowd graduate students need to remain united.

“Whether you’re walking out for the rest of the day or whether you’re going back to your labs, classrooms or offices — whatever it is you do, remember that we’re in this together,” Scott said. “Today is not the end, today is the beginning.”

**Fight between MU administration, graduate students leads to 'day of action'**

By Megan Favignano

Wednesday, August 26, 2015 at 10:56 am

*University of Missouri graduate students were taking part in a “day of action” Wednesday — the latest turn in a battle between the students and MU administrators over a list of student grievances.*
Those grievances became a rallying point for graduate students after MU’s decision this month, later rescinded, to stop providing subsidies to pay for graduate student employees’ health insurance premiums.

Students had threatened to walk out of classrooms, labs and offices to bring attention to demands including health insurance, better pay and housing assistance. The Forum on Graduate Rights student group later labeled Wednesday a “day of action” instead after talking with MU administrators about their demands.

Graduate student Anahita Zare, a Forum on Graduate Rights spokeswoman, said the group encouraged students who feel comfortable leaving work at their assistantships or not attending class Wednesday to help with the group’s education efforts. Students were stationed around campus throughout the day, and a rally and march were planned for noon at the Columns.

“We’re calling it a celebration because the administration’s “communication thus far has been a small step, but a step nonetheless,” Zare said. “And we want to use this gathering to draw attention to the issues that we as graduate students face.”

More than 60 MU departments sent the Forum on Graduate Rights letters supporting graduate students, with some backing the initial walkout idea and promising not to penalize students for participating. A Department of Anthropology statement said it supports a walkout and that some faculty would cancel classes to join graduate students in solidarity.

School of Journalism graduate faculty said in a statement that they would not penalize graduate student employees who participate in a walkout should one occur. Graduate students are “crucial” and a “tremendous source of pride” for the journalism school, the statement said.

The noon rally and march were meant to celebrate the important role graduate students have on campus, Zare said.

Last school year, graduate students taught 2,325 of 16,946 class sections at MU, university spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said. The university’s 6,266 graduate students also contribute to research, which helps boost MU’s status with the Association of American Universities.

University officials have said MU cannot guarantee health insurance assistance next school year for graduate student employees. A task force is assessing the university’s options this fall, and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin said a decision will be made in January.

The health insurance issue has been resolved for now, but the decision was “the spark that lit a long-accumulated pile of kindling,” a Forum on Graduate Rights letter said. The group, which formed after MU said students no longer would receive insurance subsidies, sent the letter to members of the university community, including undergraduate students and their parents, this week.

Eric Scott, graduate student with the Forum on Graduate Rights, said he thought Loftin’s response and decision to reissue insurance subsidies for this year was a good first step.
Loftin’s decision led the group to change its plans of a walkout to a day of graduate student celebration, advocacy and solidarity to draw attention to the group’s demands: better living wages, full tuition waivers, subsidized healthcare, international student health subsidies, on-campus housing, on-campus child care and an elimination of fees.

The lack of communication and student input in the initial decision to stop providing insurance subsidies sparked a conversation among graduate students about unionizing. Scott said any efforts to unionize would be an independent student effort and would not go through an official student group. The Forum on Graduate Rights has a committee devoted to discussing the possibility.

Loftin said he doesn’t have personal experience with unions. There are other unions on campus, he said, and the UM System’s human resources office works with unions and their contract negotiations. “I have no issue with them talking about that if that’s what they decide to do and they can do it in a legal way,” Loftin said. “If they do it, we’ll figure out how to engage with it.”

MU graduate students rally for change


COLUMBIA, Mo. - Hundreds of University of Missouri graduate students rallied on campus in front of the columns demanding change Monday.

Earlier this month, the university took away health care from graduate students a day before it was set to go into effect. Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin reversed the university decision last Friday restoring health care. But Wednesday students said more needs to be done.

The Forum on Graduate Rights, a group that has grown to about 1,600 graduate students, and some faculty members rallied in front of the Mizzou columns wearing red shirts. The group then marched to Traditions Plaza holding up signs and chanting.

"A lot of people don't have child care assistance," MU graduate student Mitch Johnson said. "And it's not a long term plan right now. They're just trying to buy us out for the short term period, but there's no long term. Is there gonna be health care next year? I mean we're gonna have the same issue here."
In a letter to the Mizzou community, the forum said, "Over the past few years we have lost access to childcare and house, seen a reduction in our real wages, seen many of our colleagues living in poverty and had more of our already low wages taken back by the university in fees."

"My husband and I together made $18,000 a year as full time graduate students," MU graduate student Jayme Cisco said. "So that's just not, that's deplorable, and it's certainly below other universities that are similar to us."

Abc 17 reached out to the university Wednesday.

"The chancellor, along with the rest of the university's administration, fully supports and values our graduate students - in fact our mission of education and research depends on them," Christian Basi with the MU News Bureau said.

The chancellor's task force to look into how MU can continue to officer students health care legally met for the first time Tuesday.

"I know that they want to work with us," MU graduate student Katie Steen said. "So I think going forward, a unified approach with both the administration and the students is what's gonna be able to improve the lives of graduate students on our campus."

The chancellor also plans to meet soon with the graduate student experience task force and will talk with them about their additional concerns, Basi said.

The forum said it will continue its campaign until students are given "decent working conditions and provisions."

The task force's recommendations are due to Chancellor Loftin by October.

MU Graduate students walk out of classes

COLUMBIA - **MU graduate students gathered on the quad and at the Memorial Union for a noon rally after walking out of class Wednesday. Many wore red to symbolize their protest.**

The action committees for the protest met around campus at 8 a.m. They prepared for the day's protest, and discussed their goals for the outcome.

One committee member said the day is not about demands, but about recognition.

"Today is supposed to be a chance to highlight what grads do for the university of Missouri, and what they contribute," Secretary of the action committee, Sarah Senff said.

The Forum on Graduate Rights announced plans of the walk-out three days ago. Its issues with the university's policies still have yet to be fully resolved.

Although their desires, such as wages for graduate assistants that are above the poverty line and on-campus child care, don't directly affect everyone, they are still receiving heavy support from their peers.

"I think the school should understand where they're coming from. They're getting things taken away from them that they deserve," MU undergraduate student, Alexis Carter said.

Some other demands include affordable housing, tuition waivers and a guaranteed, fully subsidized health care plan.

"Being grad students, you pour thousands and thousands of dollars into going to Mizzou and they deserve those extra benefits," Carter said.

Senff urged the community to look at what the graduate students are actually saying on twitter via #GradsDo and #MlzzouUnited or at MUgradrights.org. Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin responded to some of the issues on Friday, Aug 21, but as of now, the walk-out is still set to take place today from 9 a.m until noon.

Committee members, along with other graduates, said they don't feel like requests are too outrageous, and they are only asking for basic necessities.

"When we can concentrate on teaching undergraduate students and doing effective research in our lab, we serve the university better than when we're focused on making poverty level ends meet," Senff said.

The action committee said they are fighting for their rights as well as undergraduates'.

"Undergraduates deserve better too," Senff said. "And when our grads get better, our undergraduates get better education."
Some professors and departments cancelled classes due to the protest, but not all. The Journalism School's associate dean for undergraduate studies sent out the following email:

Dear students,

You might have heard about the planned graduate student walkout for Wednesday, Aug. 25th.
I want to let you know that all journalism classes and labs will be held as scheduled.
There will be no class cancellations at the Missouri School of Journalism as a result of the proposed walkout.

Sincerely,

Lynda Kraxberger
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies
Missouri School of Journalism

Some students who did not plan to participate said they support the cause.

"I think it's a good thing. They need to take a stand. It's really ridiculous that they're even having to go through that," Lacey Tucker said.

Grad Students Hold Rally

Watch story: [http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=12ded7e7-4ffd-483b-bca4-e9827a18b496](http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=12ded7e7-4ffd-483b-bca4-e9827a18b496)
MU grad students rally

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=3e36a7f8-0220-4b08-9700-ca5338961e88

Forum on Graduate Rights: Increase representation, regroup

EMMA VANDELINDER, 11 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — In the wake of a day of rallying, steering committee members of the Forum on Graduate Rights at MU said Wednesday that the next steps will be to regroup and formalize the movement.

“We’re trying to organize the troops and make our committee an effective message — make it so that we can communicate to our graduate students and our supporters in an effective way, communicate with the administration in an effective way and work toward getting these issues resolved,” said Anahita Zare, outreach chairwoman for the Forum on Graduate Rights.

“We need to stay united,” she said, “and keep our presence known.”

The noon rally was the first large-scale act of protest for graduate rights since MU withdrew health care subsidies for graduate assistants on Aug. 15; the subsidies were reinstated Friday for one year. Although the rally and daylong walkout by graduate students and supporters was sparked by the university’s abrupt decision on health care, the forum is pursuing a host of
demands including more on-campus child care, affordable on-campus housing and tuition waivers.

“Now we have to go and turn our focus to the long-term goals,” said Jason Entsminger, chairman of the legal and issues committee for the Forum on Graduate Rights. “We’re going to be working in the next few months on bringing together a set of the issues that people face — hopefully some listening sessions or different activities that allow people to bring to the forefront and to bring out into the open all of the many multifaceted issues that the erosion of support for graduate workers has had on their lives.”

**Committee plans more voices, perspectives**

Entsminger said members of the steering committee discussed on Sunday increasing the committee's size and expanding the types of students represented.

The six steering committee members, made up of the leaders of the six subcommittees — outreach, legal and issues, action, finance, events and organizing — have been at the movement's forefront for the past two weeks, he said. But more voices and perspectives are needed by those who can provide additional insight and recommendations for action.

The committee will be expanded to include six more members: three people who are dedicated to the steering committee and have no part in the subcommittees; one person who will represent the interests of professional students; one who will represent the interests of international students; and a committee chair.

Unlike graduate students, Entsminger said, professional students — who are advanced students in law, medicine and veterinary medicine — are not considered employees of the university and not affected by the health care subsidy withdraw. However, they are still affected by affordable on-campus housing, child care facilities and some tuition issues and need representation on the forum, he said.
“Professional students have issues as well that need to be addressed, some of which are in our current list of demands, some of which we might not know about because most of us are not professional students,” Entsminger said. "Before we set down a full strategy of how we’re going to engage with the university, we want to have as many people at the table as possible.”

Steering committee member Eric Scott said the forum will continue to pursue action on its list of demands and continue communication with the MU administration. The forum is also investigating the benefits of collective bargaining but is not committed to the strategy, he said.

Kristofferson Culmer, another steering committee member, said a conversation that members will have at a meeting later this week will be about the next steps, how to keep up the momentum that has built over the past two weeks and how to be productive in moving forward.

'Entire country is watching what goes on here'

MU’s decision to pull and then temporarily reinstate health care subsidies for graduate assistants has drawn national attention. The decision was a response to a recent IRS interpretation of the Affordable Care Act that prohibits employers from giving subsidies to employees for the purpose of purchasing health care from individual health care plans.

Students and supportive faculty and staff stood up Wednesday not just for the rights of graduate students at MU, Scott said, but for every academic institution across the nation struggling with this issue. Other universities dealing with this problem are waiting to see what happens at MU, Culmer said.

“Not just Missouri, but this entire country is watching what goes on here, at the University of Missouri,” Culmer said.

The rally took place on Francis Quadrangle around the columns, where Scott gave a speech to a sea of people wearing red — the color chosen for official rally T-shirts — and kicked off the march to Traditions Plaza.
There, subsequent speakers spoke about the need for more graduate student representation to the administration, accountability in the insurance subsidy flap and the role of graduate students in the shared governance process at MU. These issues have been brought up repeatedly over the past week by members of the Graduate Professional Council and the Forum on Graduate Rights.

Many of the demands listed by the recently created Forum on Graduate Rights were put forward to administration officials years ago by the Graduate Professional Council and the Graduate Student Association but were not sufficiently addressed, said Matt McCune, director of communications for the Graduate Professional Council.

“We don’t know what system needs to be put in place,” McCune said. “Those are obviously conversations that need to happen. We just know the current mechanisms are ineffective.”

Earlier this year, New York University administrators avoided a strike during the middle of midterms by negotiating an agreement with their graduate students demanding benefits similar to those listed by MU — higher wages, health care, child care and tuition. The outcome of fierce year-long negotiations resulted in graduate students being awarded benefits to wages, health care, family health care, child care and Ph.D. tuition remission, according to Al Jazeera America.

Graduate student employees at NYU are unionized. Although no formal mention of unionizing was made by speakers at the MU rally, talk of it was overheard repeatedly in the crowd.

**The start of a movement: Graduate students walk out**

Graduate students plan to participate in an all-day celebration of their worth to the university Wednesday that some are calling a “walkout.” The event is being held in response to the administration failing to meet the deadline for seven demands listed by graduate students last week.
Issued on Aug. 19, the Forum on Graduate Rights gave administrators six days to put forth a plan addressing their demands. That initial release said graduate students would walk out at noon Aug. 26. A later release called for an all-day walk out.

The event will take place from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., and students will rally at the Columns from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.

According to the release, their demands were as follows:

-- A guarantee that no graduate student employee be paid at a rate below the individual poverty line regardless of their appointment status, department or college.

-- A guarantee that all graduate student employees receive full tuition waivers, regardless of their full-time equivalent appointment.

-- Revised Aug. 22: a fully-subsidized student health care plan for all graduate student employees that is guaranteed for the full term of their graduate student employment.

-- Immediate action on the part of the university to ease the burden on international students caused by the loss of their health insurance subsidy.

-- More and affordable university-sponsored graduate student housing.

-- A return of affordable, on-campus, university-sponsored childcare facilities for graduate students.

-- Revised Aug. 22: A waiver of supplemental fees imposed by colleges, schools and departments for all graduate student employees.

A week after graduate students were informed that their insurance had been canceled, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced that the university would in fact defer its cancellation of graduate student health insurance. After the initial announcement of their loss of health insurance, graduate students created the group Forum on Graduate Rights.

“We are as invested in the University of Missouri as the undergraduate students,” said Rebecca Benson, a member of FGR’s Outreach Committee. “We want to see the university prosper and send out the best students it can, but in order to provide the best research, teaching and resources possible, we have to have acceptable living conditions.”

After graduate students contacted faculty members across campus in request of their support, departments started to publish formal statements about the issue. Collaborating with graduate students across campus, FGR collected statements of support of 22 departments, all of which supported the walkout by promising to not penalize its participants.

Lynda Kraxberger, associate dean of the School of Journalism, informed students via email Tuesday evening that journalism classes and labs would meet as scheduled during the
Wednesday walkout. The School of Journalism’s faculty was the first department to announce that its graduate faculty members unanimously support the walkout and would not penalize graduate student employees for participating.

A Domino Effect

The groundwork for the walkout was laid Aug. 14 when graduate students were told they were losing their university-sponsored healthcare coverage due to an IRS interpretation of the Affordable Care Act. According to the IRS, the subsidies offered to graduate students through the university are considered “individual market plans,” which are prohibited by the act. The email notification was sent out about 13 hours before domestic student health insurance expired. For international students, this information came 13 days after their promised health insurance plans had started.

On Aug. 17, the Graduate Professional Council and the Graduate Student Association held a forum in Middlebush Hall. Nearly 500 graduate students gathered to discuss grievances regarding the loss of their healthcare plans. On the same day, Loftin created a task force to search for solutions.

FGR was created shortly after the forum and graduate students began to discuss the walkout and rally at the Columns. According to GPC member Matt McCune, some GPC members aided in the formation of FGR and then stepped aside to allow the new group to spearhead further efforts.

In a news release dated Aug. 19, FGR identified seven demands addressing the loss of graduate student healthcare and the lack of childcare facilities and university-sponsored housing available to graduate students since the demolition of University Village, which housed the Student Parent Center.

Loftin said he had received and reviewed the demands issued by FGR.

“In addition to health insurance, this letter addresses a number of issues that are closely linked to the university’s budget,” Loftin wrote in an announcement. “MU’s budget priorities are addressed through shared governance, primarily through the Budget Allocation and Advisory Committee, in which graduate students have ongoing representation.”

FGR revised its demands Aug. 22 in response to the temporary restoration of graduate student health care.

On Aug. 25, an image was uploaded onto MU’s Research, Graduate Studies and Economic Development website that quoted Hank Foley, senior vice chancellor of the department, expressing his support for the rally.

“Be at the Columns at noontime tomorrow to express gratitude and support for our students and to celebrate the central roles that they play in teaching, scholarship, research and the life of the mind at MU,” Foley said.
A Celebration of Graduate Student Contribution to the University

Some GPC members were involved in the creation of FGR, but since its formation nine days ago, a steering committee and several other committee have emerged. GPC members stepped aside to allow an elected and volunteer group.

GPC President Hallie Thompson said GPC is focusing on the rally and the march that will follow shortly after rather than the all-day walkout.

“We’re not referring to the walkout, but we’re referring to the rally or gathering at the columns and a march at noon as a celebration of graduate contribution to the university,” Thompson said.

GPC also requested that faculty, graduates and professionals wear red at the rally.

Although some GPC members are no longer involved in the FGR, members have worked together to contact faculty members and request their support in the event in order to promote the well-being of its constituents. Thompson said she and other members of the GPC met with Loftin and Foley to discuss the needs and demands of graduate students.

“The administration is excited and wanting to work with us because they know graduate students are very important to the research and teaching missions of the university,” Thompson said.

According to FGR, graduate student employees will hand out flyers, operate information booths, cancel classes, or spend a portion of classes educating their students about these issues.

Professor would get tenure upon return from AG race, MU chancellor tells lawmakers

By Rudi Keller

Wednesday, August 26, 2015 at 4:38 pm

JEFFERSON CITY — The University of Missouri granted tenure July 31 to Josh Hawley, an associate professor of law seeking the Republican nomination for attorney general, but made the decision effective only if he returns to work after a leave of absence, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin told a legislative committee Wednesday.
Loftin appeared before the Joint Committee on Education at members’ request to discuss the leave policy, tenure and the faculty workload. Most long-term leave is for academic purposes or personal reasons, such as illness of the staff member or a relative, he said.

Less than 1 percent of cases are relevant, regarding ability of faculty and other staff to take time off to run for public office,” Loftin said.

Hawley’s leave runs from Sept. 1 through Aug. 31, 2016. If he loses the Aug. 2, 2016, primary and returns to the university, he will be a tenured faculty member at the MU Law School, Loftin told the committee. If Hawley wins the primary, he would need another leave of absence to compete in the November general election.

Hawley’s current leave was granted by Law School Dean Gary Myers and Provost Garnett Stokes. If he requests a second leave, the decision would be up to Loftin.

Loftin after the hearing declined to say what he would do.

The issue of Hawley’s tenure status was raised by supporters of state Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia in late July when the university Board of Curators was considering a new leave policy for political candidates. Under the rules in effect until April 1, a university employee seeking a full-time political position must be on leave or resign before filing for office. After April 1, the employee must seek leave before forming a committee to raise money for the race.

“There seems to be some cynicism in the capital, with people curious about the timing of this and why it was needed when it won’t affect the current situation,” said Sen. Gary Romine, R-Farmington. “It does cloud the issue and create suspicion and that is why we are here.”

Hawley asked for a year’s leave May 22, more than two months before the curators voted on the new policy.

Only four university employees — Hawley, former political science professor Rick Hardy in 1992 and 1994, ADA coordinator Chuck Graham in 1996 and law professor Kris Kobach of UMKC in 2004 and 2010 — have sought and been granted leave to seek office.

Hardy and Kobach were tenured when they decided to run, Loftin said. Graham was not in a tenure-track position.

“Hawley’s decision to apply for leave was coincident with his consideration for tenure,” Loftin said. “That caused me to be a little bit concerned about how to handle it.”

Hawley and his wife, Erin Hawley, both started at the MU Law School in 2011. Erin Hawley was granted tenure on July 31, Loftin said.

With Josh Hawley pursuing his political ambitions, providing no value to the university over the coming year, “I wasn’t sure I did the right thing,” Loftin told the committee.
Some members of the committee also questioned whether Hawley should have been granted leave. Rep. Steve Cookson, R-Poplar Bluff, said he disliked that Hawley had a guaranteed job if he loses the primary. “We have a state employee, that is basically what a professor is, that is going to be able to run for an office and then, if they prevail, they are leaving that state employment, and if they don’t prevail they have a tenured status to come back to their old state job.”

Another lawmaker, Sen. Jamillah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, questioned whether it was good for the university. Schaefer is chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, with oversight of all state spending, including the university's $428.8 million operating appropriation.

“You don’t think that becomes a conflict of interest for the university that you would have to come before appropriations while you have someone running against the sitting chairman?” Nasheed said. “I think you ought to not allow this.”

While she did not think Schaefer will retaliate, Nasheed said it would be difficult for her to refrain. “I, personally, would do anything I can to destroy them.”

In Texas, where Loftin was president of Texas A&M, the law does not allow university employees to run for office without resigning, Loftin said.

“I would not have advised” Hawley “to do this if I had a role in it,” he said.

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**Editorial: UM emails**

Proper disclosure policy

Wednesday, August 26, 2015 at 2:00 am

_Sen. Kurt Schaefer thinks the University of Missouri gave Josh Hawley a sweet deal to allow the law school prof to run against Schaefer for Missouri attorney general._ To prove his point, Schaefer and others are seeking disclosure of relevant university email records.

Former Rep. Kevin Elmer says a request he filed has so far cost him $5,000, but as of this writing only a few records have been delivered. Hawley argues only emails regarding administrative records of the university must be released under the state Sunshine Law but says if university policy requires more, he will gladly comply.
The university has a history of resisting disclosure of records and meeting proceedings required under the law. That Elmer has had to spend $5,000 merely to register requests is familiar evidence of the hurdles the UM System and MU have consistently erected. Usually such public agency flouters outlast private investigators of modest means. This time maybe we will learn something more about how the law must be enforced.

The university has a policy that forbids faculty and staff from engaging in political activities while on the university payroll. Schaefer & Co. want to know what sort of communication between Hawley and the university led to his leave of absence so he could run for office.

The first layer of concern here has to do with the university’s compliance with the Sunshine request. The clearly stated intent of the law assumes all records of public agencies are open except for carefully described exemptions. If an agency simply releases records in a properly compliant manner the law is most clearly recognized, the public is best served and costs to requesters are minimized. Fighting with petitioners and parsing records adds to cost and confusion of enforcement.

The city of Columbia has a proper policy. Emails sent and received by officials on agency business are simply and automatically delivered on request. People using these accounts should know their communications are public records. If public officials get to pick and choose, the meaning of the law is shredded.

Hawley says partisan opponents are trying to interfere with his campaign against Schaefer. Maybe so, maybe not. Regardless, broadly relevant university email records should be turned over promptly at minimal cost. Compliance with the Sunshine Law is the important issue.

Public disclosure of public business is essential to public oversight, without which democracy means nothing.

(St. Louis CBS-affiliate)

**MU welcomes record enrollment**

*KMOV-TV St. Louis*

2015 MU Homecoming to continue the century-old tradition

LIYING QIAN, 1 hr ago

COLUMBIA — MU will celebrate its 104th homecoming on Oct. 10. This year's homecoming will feature the theme of "Show-Me State of Mind."

“Missouri is the Show-Me state,” said Aly Friend, the adviser for the MU Homecoming Steering Committee. "When everybody comes home for homecoming, they kinda get the Mizzou state of mind.”

A flag football tournament, a competition that students living in MU Residence Halls will compete in, will take place in September as a warmup. The Spirit Rally, an old homecoming tradition that used to take place in Greek Town, will be moved to the Traditions Plaza this year.

Most traditional events, such as the talent competition, campus decorations, homecoming parade and football game, will be continued, according to Friend.

More than 30,000 people are expected to turn out at the parade and campus decorations, Friend said.

"I think that homecoming is probably one of the largest things that happen in Columbia in fall," she said. "Mizzou is the birthplace of the homecoming tradition. I think our alumni and fans are really supportive of the tradition."

The 33-member Homecoming Steering Committee has been planning this annual event since spring. Below is a schedule of 2015 homecoming events.
New and revamped MU residence facilities open for fall semester

COLUMBIA — Students returning to school in August will be greeted by Gateway Hall, a new five-story, community-style residence hall. It is located on the southeast side of campus adjacent to Virginia Avenue, Mizzou Market and Plaza 900. A renovated Wolpers Hall will also open, and MU will continue to work on the first phase of the Dobbs Replacement Project.

With MU’s enrollment growing, the Department of Residential Life has been planning to build more residence halls to accommodate students, especially freshmen. About 90 percent students living on campus are freshmen, almost 67 percent more than 20 years ago, said Frankie Minor, director of Residential Life.

One shared feature of all upgraded and newly-built facilities is the community-style interior layout.

"We design our facilities in order to create a sense of community and to get students to connect with each other," Minor said. "That’s one of the reasons why our current plans are not to build any more suite-style halls."

GATEWAY HALL

This 331–bed, coed hall, approved by the university's Board of Curators in June 2011, was designed for a green architectural standard called Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design. It will feature a green roof, solar water heater, thermostat control system, dual flush...
toilets, energy-efficient USB wall outlets in each room, and furniture made of stones and trees removed from construction sites.

"The university is trying to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability," Minor said. "Gateway is probably our most ambitious project (in terms of sustainability)."

According to MU's Residential Life website, this $29 million residence hall will be the first dorm on campus to include gender-neutral restrooms, with private, lockable rooms that have showers or toilets.

“We are trying to create a more flexible environment for students and accommodate all students, including those who identify as transgender or something other than just male or female," Minor said.

**WOLPERS HALL**

Wolpers Hall, a newly upgraded community-style residence hall on central campus, will reopen for fall. Closed in December 2013 for renovations, the four-story, coed dorm will house 312 students. The main renovations include more social and study space, bathrooms and new furniture on each floor. The renovation is estimated to cost about $18 million.

**DOBBS PROJECT**

The Dobbs Replacement Project, a two-phase project, is still in progress. This project is the final step of the Residential Life Master Plan, approved by university curators in 2001.

The first phase includes the demolition of Jones Hall, to be replaced by two new residence halls still in the design phase. The first is expected to house 290 students and open in fall 2016. The second is expected to accommodate 280 students and open in fall 2017.

According to the Residential Life website, the two unnamed dorms will have five stories and a similar exterior appearance to southwest campus housing such as North, Center and South halls. Its interior layout will include traditional single and double student rooms and restrooms.
The second phase of the project calls for replacing Laws and Lathrop halls with three new residence halls. The replacement of Laws Hall and construction of two new buildings are expected to be completed in fall 2019. The reconstruction plan for Lathrop has not yet been approved. If approved, the new residence hall would open in fall 2021, Minor said.

The Dobbs project will also feature solar water heater and thermostat control system in each hall. After the facilities are replaced, 270 more beds will be available for students, Minor said.

The five new buildings in the Dobbs project are estimated to cost about $141 million.

Good Vibrations Key to Insect Communication

Listen to story: [http://kbia.org/post/good-vibrations-key-insect-communication](http://kbia.org/post/good-vibrations-key-insect-communication)

Animals, including humans, feel sound as well as hear it, and some of the most meaningful audio communication happens at frequencies that people can't hear. Elephants, for example, use these low-frequency rumbles to, among other things, find family or a mate across long distances. Whales do it, too.

But you don't have to weigh a ton to rumble. In fact, you don't have to be bigger than a pea. Consider, for example, the treehopper, a curious little sap-sucking insect that lives on the stems of leaves. Or the tree cricket, which communicates by rubbing together tooth-like structures on its wings, the way you might draw your thumb across the teeth of a comb.

University of Missouri biologist Rex Cocroft has spent much of his career listening closely to treehoppers. In 1999, a team from NPR's Radio Expeditions program rendezvoused with Cocroft at a locust tree in a backyard in Virginia. Soft-spoken and bespectacled, he was pressing a phonograph needle up against the stem of a leaf.

"I'm just trying to get a good contact here," he said at the time. "Mind you, this is not in the manufacturer's instructions for these phonograph cartridges." But then, there's no guidebook for listening to treehoppers. Cocroft created his own.
He knew that needles in those cartridges are exquisitely sensitive to vibration. So he connected a wire from the cartridge through an amplifier to his headphones. This is what he heard.

"All the signals that you are hearing are produced by males," Cocroft explained. They do it by vibrating their abdomens to make a wide assortment of bizarre sounds.

It works like this: The insect uses muscles in its thorax and abdomen, to shake the abdomen, which vibrates "rather like a tuning fork," Cocroft said. "These vibrations are transmitted to the stem through the insect's legs, and then travel out in both directions along the stem, where they can be picked up by any other treehopper within a meter, or so, on the same plant."

There is almost no airborne sound produced with these vibrational signals, Cocroft explained. "If a treehopper were to stand on your finger and produce a signal, you would feel the vibration but hear no sound."

It's the phonograph needle and cartridge that pick up the vibration of the plant stem — and transform it into what we hear as sound in the recordings. But the treehoppers are picking up the signals via very sensitive vibration sensors in their legs.

Some signals, not surprisingly, seem to be aimed at attracting females, Cocroft said. And some are aimed at other males.

"So we're hearing purring, bdddddrrrr sounds," Cocroft explained — "sounds that males give ... when two males meet each other, when they are mate-searching on a branch." Normally, a person couldn't hear any of this, because the sound travels along the stem, inside it. And that's how other treehoppers detect it.

So, how did such a weird insect telegraph evolve?

Well, Rex says treehoppers, like many insects, have very sensitive legs. And they stand around on stems, which are good at transmitting vibrations. So they just used what nature gave them to communicate with each other. As social animals, that's what they need to thrive, says Cocroft.

"They have so many different forms of social behavior and grouping," he explained. "And once you have animals living in groups, then you have all sorts of interesting possibilities for communication."

Such as, for example, treehopper scouts that tap out a signal to others that there's a predator nearby.

Technology helped scientists like Cocroft reveal this hidden vibrational world — tech like phonograph needles, and devices called accelerometers that measure vibration. His work helped usher in a new generation of insect eavesdroppers — including Laurel Symes, an evolutionary biologist now at Dartmouth College, who has spent much of her professional life studying crickets.
Unlike Cocroft, Symes tunes into vibrations we can hear — from male tree crickets.

"If you look closely at one of the wings," she says, "it has a whole bunch of tiny teeth on it. And that rubs against the vein on the other wing — and that causes the whole wing to vibrate, sort of like a drumhead would."

Tree crickets don't seem to have as big a vocabulary as treehoppers do. What they do have is a remarkable ability to discriminate tiny differences in sound frequency, with acuity worthy of a concert violinist.

The females listen carefully. And the reason? Well, in the deep woods, you'll hear all sorts of crickets chirping. Those are the males of numerous species, all saying, "Come and get me." To us, they sound pretty much the same.

But the sounds actually are different. The speed at which they rub their wings together — the pulse rate — varies from species to species.

Symes discovered that females pick up on that.

"They've evolved to be very, very good at recognizing the exact thing they are looking for," she says: the sound of a potential mate from their own species.

There's a good reason to very picky, Symes says: "If you don't get it right, you lose." If you pick the wrong species of male to mate with, she says, you won't make little crickets.

She actually rigged up a clever sound experiment to test how good the females are at detecting the right chirp. Symes synthesized the sounds made various male crickets on a computer — each was identical to the natural sound it was mimicking — and then she played it back to two species of females through a speaker.

Here's a male cricket chirp at 43 pulses per second.

The females of one species hustled over to the loudspeakers when they heard that sound, looking for a mate. The other females? Meh, not interested. Then Symes used a different chirp — at 51 pulses per second, it's just eight pulses a second faster than the first one.

It's so close in speed to the previous one that most human listeners can't hear the difference. But the female crickets of the second species — the ones that ignored the first sound — got all romantic with the speaker.

What's happening, Symes says, is that crickets (there are about 140 species in North America alone) have divided up the sound spectrum into sonic niches. Each species has its own frequency, like a radio station. And they manage this highly specialized communication with a brain the size of a pinhead.
"One of the things that makes them cool," says Symes, "is that they have really simple sensory systems — yet they parse this really complex world."

It took Symes years, and many nights in weird places to decipher what was happening. She had to go to where the crickets live and record them — like up a tree on the Mexican border, where border patrol agents wondered just what the heck she was doing.

"You're part way up a tree," she recalls, "and the vehicle pulls up and stops and flips on a light — 'What're you doing out here tonight, ma'am?' and 'Oh, I'm just collecting crickets'. They believed me. That's what amazed me."

Now she's so tuned into the cricket world that she thinks — and sometimes sounds — like them. We asked her to imitate one species of cricket.

Yes, Symes can do 60 pulses a second herself, just from memory. She says 60 pulses is a lot like a humming refrigerator. In fact, she's always listening to vibrations, whether she wants to or not: crickets, fans, air conditioners.

"We think that we know what's going on out there," she says, "and we're [only] getting this tiny slice of all of the sound in the world."

Cocroft feels the same way. Today he says he dreams about wiring up the outdoors and amplifying it, and just drifting through it — ears wide open. He says most of this sonic world still remains to be discovered.

"It's a very intense world, and so little of it, really, has ever been listened to," he says. "It's possible still for anyone to go out into a weedy field or roadside and tap into those plants — and hear very interesting sounds that no one has ever heard before."

Sounds that have been rounded and shaped by millions of years of evolution, and the struggle to survive.

Undocumented immigrants facing tuition hike

A small word change in a Missouri budget bill is costing two undocumented students big for the 2015-16 year.

Two MU students are facing a tuition increase of nearly $15,000 this year after a small word change in a Missouri budget bill.
The students, who are undocumented immigrants living in Missouri, will be charged out-of-state tuition for the first time this year after wording in House Bill 3 was changed from the 2014 version, which prohibited students with an “unlawful presence” from receiving in-state tuition rates, to students having an “unlawful status” — a change that state Rep. Scott Fitzpatrick, R-Shell Knob, said was necessary because of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, which protects undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children.

“When we wrote the language last year, we didn’t really realize the DACA students had been granted lawful presence by some entities of the federal government, so this year we changed it to lawful status to clear up confusion on that particular front,” said Fitzpatrick, who worked on the bill.

MU spokesman Christian Basi said they cannot be named as they are protected by law and the university. These two are the only MU students MU knows are affected by the change.

Fitzpatrick said that if he had known the word change would affect currently enrolled students, he would have been willing to work on a solution to make the change only affect future students, but he was not aware of that until after the fact.

“We didn’t want it to be more attractive to immigrate illegally than it is to come here on a student visa and pay that rate of tuition, so we were kind of trying to provide guidance to the universities and make sure people who are here illegally do not get more favorable treatment than those who are here legally,” Fitzpatrick said.

Although colleges throughout Missouri will be enforcing the bill as law, some organizations are questioning its morality and validity.

“First of all, you shouldn't be discriminating students based on the country they were born in,” said Vanessa Crawford Aragón, executive director for the Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates in St. Louis.

they actually put this language in the title of the appropriations bill, which isn't a regular statutory bill and you cannot legislate through the appropriations process.

Crawford Aragón said the change is legally unenforceable, as the language was put in the appropriations process, where one cannot legislate if they so choose.

For now, MU is working with these students to ensure they can continue their education. However, it is still unclear to administration exactly what aid can be offered.

“We want to make sure we are following the will and intent of the legislature, so we are reviewing that now,” Basi said. “We are working with those students to help them find additional financial aid.”

Another bill would have prevented these students from receiving state scholarships, but that bill was vetoed by Gov. Jay Nixon.
“The other thing sort of at play here is that there was another bill, Senate Bill 224, that limited the A+ scholarships to U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents,” Crawford Aragón said. “Gov. Nixon vetoed that bill, so a lot of our efforts at the moment are organizing community members to support the veto and to stop the legislature from overriding that veto.”

The veto session for that bill is set to take place on Sept. 16.

Fitzpatrick said he received support for the word change for HB3 from both Democrats and Republicans, with 27 votes yes and seven no. Most of his office was in support of the bill as well.

Fitzpatrick was only aware that the change would affect current students at the Saint Louis Community College, which reached out to lawmakers for advice on the matter.

In 2014, Fitzpatrick learned that STLCC was offering undocumented students the rate of tuition based on where they currently reside, which meant that in-district, undocumented students would receive a better tuition rate than in-state residents. Fitzpatrick said he and most of his colleagues agreed that they did not want undocumented students to receive a better rate of tuition than Missouri residents, but they did not know it was an issue at other colleges yet.

“When we had that bill last year, there was a fiscal note on the bill dealing with tuition where all the universities who responded indicated that it would have no impact because it was their current practice to already charge those students whatever the highest tuition was,” Fitzpatrick said. “So as far as we were concerned, and the impression we received, was that nobody was doing this yet, other than Saint Louis Community College.”

Crawford Aragón said since her students have been getting their financial aid notices, she has talked to some students who have been looking to schools outside of Missouri for better tuition rates, and has even met some students who do not think they will be able to go to college at all anymore.

“I think the thing to keep in mind is the people who are impacted by this are students who are just like any other students at these universities, they qualified for in-state tuition because they graduated from high school in Missouri,” Crawford Aragón said. “They did what they needed to do to qualify to go to college, they jumped through all of the hoops that everybody else has, so there's just no reason to charge them an exorbitant tuition rate.”
Missouri gets nearly $600,000 to support small business exports

Watch story: http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=30226&zone=5&categories=5

COLUMBIA - The United States Small Business Administration provided Missouri with nearly $600,000 in federal funding to help Missouri businesses export products to new markets in Central and South America, Governor Jay Nixon announced Wednesday.

The funding is part of the State Trade and Export Promotion Grant Program. STEP awards grants to help small businesses increase the number of goods and the number of countries states sell products to. The International unit of the Missouri Department of Economic Development will administer the distribution of the $599,000 grant.

The Missouri Small Business and Technology Development Centers is an extension of the University of Missouri that focuses on supporting business growth, and local and regional economic development through job creation and retention. The SBTDC found that small and mid-sized businesses make up almost 97 percent of U.S. exports.

"There's a market for Columbia businesses outside the United States," said Larry Dill, the director of the International Trade Center of the MU extension. "96 percent of the worlds consumers live outside the United States. Over two thirds of the worlds purchasing power is outside the United States. Where would a company look for new markets? Outside the United States."

The International Trade Administration is a branch of the United States Department of Commerce. The ITA found $14.1 billion of goods exported from Missouri in 2014. The ITA also found Missouri's top five exported goods were transportation equipment, chemicals, processed food, machinery, and electrical equipment in 2014.

"Exporting creates local jobs. It's all about jobs. Jobs are incredibly important especially as our economy changes," Dill said.
Nixon said the STEP grant will be used to focus on export and trade promotion activities in key global regions, including Central America and South America. The funding will help incentivize Missouri exporters to focus their targets on the countries of Colombia, Panama and Peru.

Instead of Commemoration, Let Women's Equality Day Be a Call to Action

Congress declared August 26 Women's Equality Day 44 years ago in commemoration of the 19th amendment, which granted women's suffrage. Gaining the right to vote was one giant leap for womankind, but only one small step towards equality. Instead of a day of commemoration, I say we approach Women's Equality Day as a day of action to further our quest for true gender equality.

Many gender gaps still exist and many barriers hold women back. Ninety-five years after gaining the right to vote, women are still not paid equally for their work and the United States is one of only nine countries that doesn't provide paid maternity leave for working mothers. Despite now earning a majority of college degrees, women only make up about 5 percent of CEOs.

There are many issues that need to be addressed, but here are three existing gaps that we all should be working to close:

1. **Pay Gap** - Earlier this year, the Women's Foundation released with the Institute of Public Policy at the University of Missouri a research study about the Status of Women in Missouri. Our study found that a woman who works full-time in Missouri earns 29 percent less than a man does for the same work. With few exceptions, this income gap persists across racial and ethnic groups, age, education levels and occupations. Nationally, the gender pay gap is generally reported to be 22 percent. It's past time for equal pay for equal work!

2. **Opportunity Gap** - Our research also found (not surprisingly) that working women and families face challenges when it comes to securing safe healthy supervision for their children and care for aging parents. Supportive work policies are extremely valuable as they allow women and families to be prosperous and more productive, but many employers do not have policies such as offering flex-time for caring for family members, paid maternity and paternity leave or childcare benefits. This holds women back from achieving their full career and economic potential.
3. **Leadership Gap** - Women are largely underrepresented in elected office, in the C-suite and on boards and commissions; all places where policy decisions are made. A research study commissioned by the Women's Foundation with the University of Kansas in 2014 found barriers to women's civic engagement. Women who have not served feel they don't have the knowledge and expertise needed, and feel less confident in their leadership skills. It also showed that many women weren't aware of the opportunities to serve in local government and that they'd be more likely to serve if asked.

How long will women have to wait before Women's Equality Day will truly commemorate gender equality? At the Women's Foundation, we're working for change -- to close these gaps and remove barriers for women and their families. We've been advancing the cause of equal pay with elected officials and community leaders in Missouri, recruiting more women to local and state leadership positions, and working with researchers and policy makers to help further supportive policies in the workplace.

Someday soon, I hope that Women's Equality Day can commemorate more than women's suffrage. I hope that it can be used to commemorate true equality where women share the same chances and opportunities as men. Just like the struggle to gain women's suffrage, full economic equality won't come easily. We have to work for it. At the Women's Foundation we will continue to work for change. Will you help us?

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**The Washington Post**

**WDBJ: A small newsroom, struck by violence, covers its own tragedy**

By Paul Farhi August 26 at 9:48 PM

Alison Parker and Adam Ward began Wednesday morning with the most routine of assignments for TV journalists in a midsize market. Their station, Roanoke’s WDBJ (Channel 7) assigned them to interview a local business executive at a nearby mountain resort — the sort of story designed to create a few cheerful but forgettable minutes for the morning newscast.

By the time the sun rose, they were dead, killed by a man who had worked in their own newsroom.

The slaying of the two young journalists by a gunman who later killed himself was both shocking and mysterious. Was it a vengeful act of workplace violence or a twisted media-age statement, played out on live TV — and ultimately the Internet — for maximum revulsion? Or maybe both?
But for a crime that instantly drew international attention, the dynamics were strikingly intimate, the killer and his victims as well as their significant others all linked by their jobs at a small TV station in a small Virginia city.

The killer, Vester Lee Flanagan, 41, worked for WDBJ as a reporter before being fired after an apparently stormy few months in 2013. His brief tenure coincided with Ward, 27, a cameraman hired in 2011, and only barely overlapped with Parker, 24, a former station intern from 2012 who was hired as a reporter last year.

There were more personal connections. Ward’s fiancee, Melissa Ott, worked at the station, as did Parker’s boyfriend, anchorman Chris Hurst. As producer of the morning newscast, Ott was running the show when Parker and Ward drove out to Smith Mountain Lake on Wednesday morning to interview Vicki Gardner, a member of the local Chamber of Commerce.

In a horrific twist, Ott was in the control room watching the interview when Flanagan allegedly approached Parker and Ward and began firing.

The shootings thrust the station into the bizarre position of reporting the deaths of their own colleagues. “It is my sad duty to report . . . that Alison and Adam died just after 6:45 [a.m.] when the shots rang out,” Jeff Marks, the station’s president, told viewers in a morning broadcast.

With smiling photos of Ward and Parker displayed on the screen, he added, “Our hearts are broken.”

It wasn’t until later in the morning that Marks confirmed to viewers that the gunman in the shootings was Flanagan, a man whom Marks had fired two years earlier.

The shootings were a grotesque shock, not merely because American journalists are rarely the targets of such violence, but because there is no precedent for such a thing happening on a live telecast.

Video of the slayings, which was recorded both by Ward’s TV camera and the gunman’s cellphone, quickly made its way to social media on Wednesday. Flanagan posted the cellphone video on his Facebook page before shooting himself to death in Fauquier County as police closed in.

Marks told viewers that the station, a CBS affiliate that promotes itself as “WDBJ7,” would not run the shooting video, which it had aired live, “because frankly we don’t need to see it again, and our staff doesn’t need to see it again.”

People in TV news have long been wary of the potential for mayhem during live TV reports. Reporters have frequently been heckled or even physically harassed by attention-seeking passersby; footage of such encounters — once known within the TV-news industry as “tapes of wrath” — can be found all over YouTube.
But injuries, let alone deaths, have been almost unknown until recently. Earlier this month, two news crews in San Francisco were robbed and one journalist was pistol-whipped as they reported live on a homicide. The threat posed by covering stories such as urban unrest has led some stations to assign security guards to their crews and to scrub station logos from the “live” transmission trucks.

“The problem has been around for a long time, but it does seem recently to have become more dangerous,” said Barbara Cochran, a professor at the University of Missouri’s journalism school and a former Washington bureau chief for CBS News.

Cochran says news stations can take extra precautions, but they can’t do without on-the-spot reporting. “You’re never going to do away with live shots because that’s one of the virtues of TV,” she said. “It takes viewers to the scene of a story.”

Wednesday’s slayings, however, may have been the result of a more common American problem: A workplace grievance turned deadly. Mike Cavender, the executive director of the Radio Television Digital News Association, a trade group for news executives, says that Flanagan — who went by the name Bryce Williams when he was on the air — was let go from WDBJ in early 2013 and later filed a lawsuit against the station, alleging discrimination. The case was dismissed by a judge in July 2014, after which Flanagan posted a series of increasingly hostile comments about the station on social media.

“TV is a stressful business, but the fact is we’ve seen workplace violence occur in places that are far less stressful than TV,” Cavender said. “Every workplace has to be aware of and deal with” potentially unstable individuals.

Despite the extraordinary nature of Wednesday’s news, WDBJ’s anchors remained composed in delivering it.

Morning anchor Kim McBroom calmly noted that the day was supposed to be Ott’s last on the job, that Ott and her fiance Ward were planning to move to Charlotte. McBroom said she brought in a cake, and Parker, the reporter, had purchased balloons to celebrate the occasion in the newsroom.

“It was just an ordinary day, and we were so happy” for them, McBroom said on the air.

“We’ve lost two friends, two co-workers,” anchor Jean Jadhon added, her voice quavering but not breaking. “Families have lost their daughter, their son, a fiance. . . . We’ve lost two members of our family.”

Hurst, an anchorman at the station, wrote on Facebook that he and Parker had moved in together recently and had planned to marry.

“She was the most radiant woman I ever met,” he wrote. “And for some reason she loved me back.”
As the news spread across the globe, police distributed two still images of a man holding a weapon. They were taken from Ward’s TV camera as he recorded Parker’s last interview.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

More apartment complexes offer homes to students in downtown Columbia

BEN LANDIS, 1 hr ago

COLUMBIA — The student apartment boom continues in downtown Columbia with the Lofts opening a second location on Broadway and the District Flats, the controversial Opus development, going up on Eighth Street.

The Lofts at 10th Street and Broadway were ready for occupancy on Aug. 1. The Lofts' original location on Ninth Street, near MU, was move-in ready in 2013.

The Lofts on Broadway were ready more than three weeks before MU students returned for fall classes and a little more than two weeks before Stephens College and Columbia College returned.

Kelly Mason, an employee for the Lofts of Columbia, said there was a clear interest in the apartments on 1007 E. Broadway. Nearly all of the 28 one-person apartments and four two-bedroom apartments have been leased out.

District Flats at 127 S. Eighth St., by the Tiger Hotel, were designed as complex to house students and young professionals in downtown Columbia. Construction began in the middle of summer, and the shell went up relatively quickly.

The website for the complex has advertised underground parking, in-unit washers and dryers, a movie theater and study rooms for prospective tenants.
According to the website, District Flats offers one-bedroom and one-bath units; shared and private two-bedroom and two-bath units; and private four-bedroom and four-bath units.

District Flats representatives could not be reached for further explanation about the new apartment building in the downtown area.