Warning sent on MU campus after person with gun reported

Watch story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=e18848cc-1504-4538-9a45-6a459717fccb

Authorities with Mizzou sent out a tweet Thursday evening from the MU Alert account saying "Active threat near MU Take precautions."

According to the MU Alert website, about 7:20 p.m., an older model white Camry with 5 occupants drove by Lathrop Hall.

Witnesses said five passengers were in the car.

According to the website, the passenger behind the driver had a black pistol according to three students who were walking by the car.

Authorities said no shots were fired and the gun was not pointed toward anyone.

They also said no one is in imminent danger and the car sped off north on Tiger Avenue.

The passenger holding the gun had brown shaggy hair with a white T-shirt.

The students went inside Lathrop Hall and are safe.

KRCG 13 has a reporter on the way to the scene and will bring you more details as they become available.
Reports of gun on MU's campus results in MU Alert

COLUMBIA - Reports of someone in a car displaying a weapon on the University of Missouri campus caused MU to issue a campus-wide alert.

Five people were in a white Toyota Camry and one person in the backseat was holding a black pistol, according to MU Alert.

Three students saw the car near Lathrop Hall before it took off down Tiger Avenue.

The University of Missouri Police Department has searched the campus, and the car has not been located.

There were no shots fired, and the students in Lathrop Hall are safe.

The alert was issued around 7:30 Thursday evening and said there is an active threat near MU and to take precautions.

Car Passenger Displays Gun on Mizzou Campus

Watch the story: http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=5b3493f7-1c93-4ccf-b1b3-9e08d0aa0249
A report of a car passenger brandishing a handgun set off alerts on the University of Missouri campus Thursday night.

In a message posted on the MU Alert website at 7:54 p.m., police said they received a report at 7:21 p.m. that three students had seen a person with shaggy brown hair, wearing a white T-shirt, riding in an older model, white Toyota Camry holding a black handgun as the car drove by Lathrop Hall. No shots were fired and the gun wasn't pointed at anyone, MU police said. Five people were in the car, police said.

The students went inside Lathrop Hall. The car sped off north on Tiger Avenue, but MU police could not find the vehicle on campus and notified the Columbia Police Department, according to a second post at 8:17 p.m.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU alerts students after reports of gun on campus

COLUMBIA — MU alerted students via Twitter and text messages Thursday evening that they should take precaution because of a report of a gun on campus.

Although an initial report warned of a weapon being brandished, an update minutes later clarified that the gun was not being pointed at anyone and that no shots were fired.
The person with the gun was reportedly a passenger in an older model white Camry that was driven by Lathrop Hall at about 7:20 p.m.

According to three students walking by the car, the passenger behind the driver had a black pistol, the alert said.

The alert said the three students were safe, as they went inside Lathrop Hall.

An update at about 8 p.m. assured students that MU Police Department officers had spread out across campus. As of 8:17 p.m., the car had not been found.

Campus alert issued for Mizzou

COLUMBIA, Mo. - A campus alert has been issued for the University of Missouri in Columbia

MUPD officers told ABC 17 News the alert was just before 8 p.m. after a possible gun was spotted near campus.

Police said just before 7:30 p.m., three students walking by Lathrop Hall reportedly saw a passenger in a white older model Toyota Camry with a pistol.

Investigators said the person never pointed the gun at anyone.

The car was last seen driving on Tiger Avenue.

If you have any information, you're asked to call 9-1-1.
MU administrators apologize for mishandling grad insurance communication

EMMA VANDELINDER, 10 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Leona Rubin apologized Thursday for what she called inefficiencies in how she communicated with administrators and students about cutting graduate assistant health care subsidies.

"The intent of withdrawing the subsidies was not to scare the bejesus out of you, and certainly not to hurt them (graduate students). That was never the intent," Rubin said at an MU Faculty Council meeting. "We really were directed that the subsidies could not continue, and although I attempted in a very broad way to communicate this information across the administration, I didn’t do a very good job of doing that."

Rubin, who is associate vice chancellor for graduate studies, joined Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin and Provost Garnett Stokes in answering council members’ questions about the decision to pull the subsidies, their subsequent one-year reinstatement and the future of graduate education generally at MU.

Rubin, Loftin and Stokes each apologized for how the initial decision was handled.

"I'm sorry personally for what's happened here," Loftin said. "I'm the chancellor, there are no excuses about that, but it happened, and it shouldn't have happened as it did."

Speaking publicly about the matter for the first time at any length, Rubin said she was "being a good soldier. Following the rules. That's it. And I didn't communicate it well."
She said she saw the stipends offered in lieu of health care subsidies as a safety net for graduate students this fall, until she had more time to find a long-term solution.

Rubin said she was waiting to make long-term decisions because she thought the IRS would change its recent interpretation of the Affordable Care Act — that employers cannot provide subsidies for their employees to use specifically on individual health care plans.

"(I was) listening to national organizations constantly tell us that the IRS was going to change their mind and exempt graduate education and graduate students from this new ruling that's in the Affordable Care Act," Rubin said. "And to date, the IRS has not done that. So I was waiting for that to happen and very much hoping it would, but it didn't."

She said the decision was made "under the impression" that MU had to remove the subsidy.

When asked by a Faculty Council member who "directed" or "impressed upon" the administration that the university had to remove the subsidy, Rubin said the direction came from the office of human resources and the university's General Counsel.

In an interview last week about his participation in the decision and discussion on graduate health insurance subsidies, the chancellor said that there was little consultation with key players and that he was first notified of the IRS interpretation on July 29 in an email from Rubin. At the meeting Thursday, he said he heard about the larger discussion of eliminating health care subsidies in the spring.

"This had been discussed in AAU (Association of American Universities) and APLU (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities) meetings without indicating the date ... as something which was going to occur at some future without a date," Loftin said.

When pressed about the future of recruitment and maintenance of the graduate student body at MU, Loftin would not give specific details or ideas.
"This is why we want to have a conversation about it," Loftin said. "Right now we are in a position where we need to begin looking at (fiscal year 2017). We want to have a budget put together by March of '16 to be able to do that. We have a semester, and a little bit of next semester, to work together to get to the right place."

Stokes, who as the chief academic officer for MU oversees all academic priorities, activities and policies, said she made assumptions about who was involved in the conversation to withdraw graduate assistant health insurance subsidies.

"This is a team that's still learning how to communicate with each other and how to do that effectively," said Stokes, who joined MU in February. "And so I myself made mistakes in thinking about who knew what and who was really dealing with it. And I made assumptions about who actually was driving that decision. So I didn't go to Bowen and say, 'Bowen, we have a serious issue, and we need you here to help us deal with it.'

"So I think you can look at this two weeks of intense communication," she continued, "and realize that there are places where many of us feel like we didn't tell the people we needed to tell, because what I did was make assumptions about who was already involved in that process."

Stokes said the financial status quo at MU could be continued. Although priority has been placed on faculty recruitment and increasing faculty salaries, she said the administration understands the graduate students' plight and will move forward in addressing graduate education.

"We're going to have to make some investments in graduate education — that's simply where we have to go," Stokes said. "Right now, I don't know exactly how we will do that or how much that will be. ... It's about supporting our students and about having competitive graduate programs and being able to compete for those students and support them while they're here."

Rubin also mentioned receiving requests under Missouri's Sunshine Law for related emails.

"I've had a great opportunity to go back and read my own emails," she said. "And to be honest, yeah, how you say something and whether you scream, 'Help! I don't know what to do!' or 'This
By Rudi Keller

Thursday, August 27, 2015 at 2:00 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 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 unpaid leave runs from Sept. 1 through Aug. 31, 2016. While on leave, Hawley will not accrue credit toward retirement and must pay the full cost of health insurance to retain coverage.

If he loses the Aug. 2 primary and returns to the university, he will be a tenured faculty member at the MU School of Law, Loftin told the committee. If Hawley wins the primary, he will 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.

After the hearing, Loftin 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 UM Board of Curators considered 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 to run for office. After April 1, the employee will have to seek leave before forming a committee to raise money for the race.

“There seems to be some cynicism in the Capitol, 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 requested a year of 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 the University of Missouri-Kansas City 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.

“She’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 School of Law in 2011. Erin Hawley was granted tenure on July 31, Loftin said.

With Josh Hawley pursuing his political ambitions and providing no value to the university in the coming year, Loftin told the committee, “I wasn’t sure I did the right thing.”

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 has 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,” Cookson said. “If they don’t prevail, they have a tenured status to come back to their old state job.”

Another lawmaker, Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, questioned whether it was good for the university. Schaefer is chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, which has 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.”

Although 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.

Researchers take sensor system from lab to marketplace

BY MEGAN FAVIGNANO Columbia Daily Tribune

COLUMBIA, MO.
While some go to the doctor once a year, many residents at the TigerPlace assisted living community in southeast Columbia get a virtual checkup every day.

*Wireless sensor systems installed in about half of the community's living spaces constantly monitor residents' vitals and calculate their risk of falling, the Columbia Daily Tribune (http://bit.ly/1KcoxPJ ) reported.*

*That monitoring system, created by University of Missouri researchers, is starting to appear in other assisted living homes and hospitals throughout the state. A new program through the Sinclair School of Nursing is helping the technology break into the mass market.*
Marilyn Rantz, professor emeritus with the School of Nursing, and Marjorie Skubic, a professor with MU's College of Engineering, have worked to create the system for more than a decade. Rantz said she and Skubic have a shared passion for predicting health changes and the risk of falls because both have seen the effects one fall can have on the health of an elderly person. Rantz said her mother fell several years ago.

"If my mother's risk of falling — if we had known that it was going up — we would have known weeks before that there were changes going on," Rantz said. "She fell, was on the floor for eight hours, and her health declined."

Rantz's mother fractured her shoulder in the fall and died within six months. Skubic's mother-in-law also fell at one point and injured her shoulder. Her mother-in-law's shoulder never healed properly and caused constant pain the rest of her life, Skubic said.

The sensor system is able to detect changes in health earlier than when individuals notice themselves feeling ill, Rantz said.

"We can actually detect illnesses 10 days, two weeks, sometimes even longer before the resident would typically complain" about not feeling well, Rantz said. "It gives the nurse a heads up that something's not right with that person."

The MU research team developed a suite of sensors during the past decade.

Rantz said the monitoring system has detected numerous health issues, including upper-respiratory infections, pneumonia and urinary tract infections as well as changes in chronic health conditions, congestive heart failure, diabetes, lung disease and cognition.

The monitoring system, Rantz said, works by providing more frequent and detailed vital signs. The movement sensors use silhouettes instead of pictures or video to collect data.

Skubic said people usually only get a thorough update on their vital signs once a year when they visit a doctor. The sensors, she said, constantly are producing data.

"It's like having a checkup every day," Skubic said.
The monitoring system includes several different types of sensors placed throughout an individual's living space in discreet locations. One sensor rests between the mattress and the box spring and monitors pulse and respiration rates to detect restlessness in bed. If someone is not sleeping well, Skubic said, it's often an early indicator of a health change.

A gate-analysis system observes people as they walk — capturing their walking speed and stride — to detect whether people are at risk for falling. Rantz said many people are not evaluated for fall risk even at their annual checkup.

An individual typically needs a bed sensor, a gate analysis and at least four motion sensors placed in high-traffic areas of their home to get good readings from the monitoring system, Rantz said. The sensors are wireless and connect to the Internet.

TigerPlace was built with research in mind. When residents move in, they consent to participate in the evaluation and agree to let the researchers access their health information anonymously.

The researchers used grants to purchase the initial motion sensors, which were installed in TigerPlace apartments in October 2005. They have since tested various brands of sensor equipment at TigerPlace, working to establish a sensor system that works while keeping cost in mind.

"We've been able to use the infrastructure here to really test out the effectiveness of this equipment," Skubic said.

About half of the TigerPlace residents have the sensor systems installed in their living space, and the other half act as a control group for the research. The half that does not have the monitoring system receives the same care from the same nursing staff as those who have the sensors. They have served as a control group as the team works to collect data showing how effective the sensors are at predicting health changes.

From their data, Rantz said the care model used at TigerPlace helps people stay healthier about two years longer than in a traditional setting. The monitoring system helped people stay healthier about four years longer than in a traditional setting, she said.
As they tested various brands of equipment, Rantz said they tried to focus on what they thought would be affordable.

"If you were ever going to reach out to the public, you needed to be able to develop a system that was going to be affordable," Rantz said.

Skubic and Rantz have teamed with MU alumnus George Chronis for the past couple of years to produce a commercial version of the monitoring system. MU has been encouraging those efforts.

Hank Foley, senior vice chancellor for research and graduate studies at the university, created a five-point plan to improve research efforts at MU and to raise its status in the Association of American Universities. Part of Foley's plan included encouraging entrepreneurship among researchers.

"It's much more than understanding science now," Foley told the Tribune in 2014. "It is understanding the context, and that context is changing. Entrepreneurship, innovation and invention are considered more important today than they were before. The translation of research from the lab to the marketplace is much more crucial."

Skubic and Rantz have been working to break into the marketplace. Skubic said there is a significant difference between the equipment they produce for research purposes and the products they plan to market to consumers.

"The kind of systems that we build as research prototypes are not the sort of robust systems that you want to be able to sell to people," Skubic said. Chronis' company is "turning our research prototypes into really robust, reliable commercial products."

The technology has been installed in 13 Missouri assisted living facilities and hospitals, including Barnes Jewish hospital in St. Louis. The company producing the monitoring system will be installing the technology in a few locations outside of Missouri this fall.

Skubic and Rantz contacted Chronis about four years ago to discuss commercializing their research. When Chronis was pursuing his doctorate at MU 20 years ago, Skubic was his adviser.
Chronis initially said he did not have time because of a number of other projects demanding his attention. When they contacted him again about a year later, he decided to get involved.

"I always wanted to create something what would help people," Chronis said. "It's fascinating to be able to take an application like that, that would help people in such a real way."

Chronis started Foresite Healthcare, which has a small lab space in Columbia, in May 2013 to commercialize the product.

The company licensed the intellectual property of the monitoring system in August 2013 and has been creating the products in St. Louis. Foresite made its first installation in late 2013 and has expanded to nine full-time and two part-time employees.

Those involved in the project hope to make the monitoring system more accessible for residential use. Rantz said they have been piloting the technology in a few homes.

Sinclair@Home, through the Sinclair School of Nursing, became available this summer and installs the system in private residences. The service is available to Columbia-area residents who have high-speed Internet connections, and it costs about $350 per month after a one-time installation fee and sensor deposit. The Sinclair@Home service includes the sensors, the sensor network and off-site support from Sinclair Home Care nurses.

Home installation has some challenges that health care facilities installing the technology don't face, Chronis said. The system requires a strong Internet connection and server, which Chronis said can be difficult in some residential locations.

Most hospitals and assisted living communities already have an established network infrastructure, so it there isn't much cost related to installing the monitoring system in individual rooms. The installation cost rises when one person is paying for the monitoring system and infrastructure for a single-family home.

"A hospital can afford a system like this. They see the benefit immediately," Chronis said. "If you have a 4.5 percent fall rate, and you reduce that, you're
saving the hospital hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Whereas at home, a person may say, 'I'll take the risk because I can't afford to pay for that.'"

The hope, Chronis said, is that insurance companies will begin covering some of the costs associated with the technology as a preventative measure once they see the health benefits of the system.

The researchers are recommending the government reimburse residents for the cost of the sensors as a cost-saving measure because the system will allow individuals to live in their own homes longer.

Skubic wants to put the monitoring system in her parents' home. Rantz is eager to see it installed in more homes.

"Sometimes it kind of takes your breath away," Rantz said. "It's something that you hope for and you pray for, and I just want to see it ... become a reality in people's homes."

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This is an AP Member Exchange shared by the Columbia Daily Tribune

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

GEORGE KENNEDY: Graduate insurance debacle sheds some light on Loftin as university leader

GEORGE KENNEDY, 14 hrs ago

“I was right there in that process, and it wasn’t always easy. But we made some very good choices, in my opinion, and the evidence bears out that fact.”

(That was Texas A&M University President R. Bowen Loftin in 2013 describing his role in the firing of the football coach and the hiring of his successor.)
“I learned about it about three in the afternoon through social media. I don’t really know when the decision was made, quite frankly. There was very little consultation with key players like myself.”

(That was MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin last Friday describing his role in the decision to cancel insurance subsidies for graduate student employees.)

The coaching change seems to have worked out well. The insurance subsidy cancellation was quickly reversed.

The question — it seems to me an important one — is which is the real Richard Bowen Loftin. Is he, as one MU administrator characterized him to me, a “narcissist” focused solely on his own image? Or is he, as a couple of faculty leaders who have worked closely with him observed, a “students first,” hands-on leader?

His choice of neckwear, his frequent presence on Twitter as “bowtieger” and his disclaimer of responsibility for an unpopular decision might suggest the former.

The apparent esteem in which he was held at A&M and his willingness to grapple with issues as sensitive as race relations at MU suggest the latter.

For what it’s worth, my own two encounters with the chancellor have been brief but positive.

There’s no dispute that he’s a bright guy. A doctorate in physics from Rice University and a successful career as scholar and administrator are evidence of that.

Nor can there be much doubt that he takes care of himself. When he left A&M — forced out by political pressure, by some accounts — he negotiated severance pay of $850,000. The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that his total compensation for that last year in Texas was $1.1 million.

His starting salary here was $450,000.
The most troubling aspect of the insurance issue is that it’s just the latest in a series of blows suffered by the same graduate students the chancellor purports to hold in high regard. As the students point out, in the past couple of years, affordable housing and child care have been taken away, stipends have lagged behind competing institutions, tuition waivers have been slashed, supplemental course fees have been added and now this.

It’s hard to reconcile that pattern with the rhetoric of the “Dear Colleagues” statement released over the names of the chancellor and his top aides last Friday:

“As a research university, MU places extraordinary value on graduate student contributions to our scholarly and campus community. We are committed to being a place where graduate students thrive as they earn their degrees.”

The student response was, I thought, appropriately skeptical. “Chancellor Loftin’s solution appears to be reliant on shared governance,” the students wrote. Then they pointed out that their concerns “have been previously and repeatedly communicated to administration.”

Less important to the students but worrisome to faculty and mid-level administrators, I would think, was the speed with which her boss threw Leona Rubin, associate vice chancellor for graduate studies, under the bus. It was she who announced the cancellation, but her name was absent from the statement of reversal.

Wednesday’s rally by the graduate students, its widespread support by faculty and ongoing uncertainty at the top suggest that we’re not close to finished with these issues.

I’m afraid that Faculty Council member Nicole Monnier was correct in describing the debacle as “not only a blatant breakdown in communication, but ultimately, a failure of leadership.”

Or, as the chancellor himself explained in his interview with the Missourian’s Geoff West, “Many mistakes were made.”
COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — A steering committee working to improve conditions of graduate assistants at the University of Missouri plans to make changes that will more effectively communicate the group's message to school officials, several committee members said.

The vow from the steering committee to continue working came after hundreds of graduate assistants and their supporters attended a rally Wednesday on the campus, The Columbia Missourian reported (http://bit.ly/1EXBjX8 ).

"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.

The rally Wednesday was the first large protest for graduate rights since the university abruptly withdrew health care subsidies for graduate assistants in mid-August, then changed its position and reinstated the subsidies for one year. Some classrooms and lecture halls were empty before the rally because instructors canceled classes in solidarity with the graduate student rally.

Besides continuing to discuss health care subsidies, the forum also will push a number 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."
The six steering committee members, made up of the leaders of six subcommittees, have led the protests for the past two weeks, but Entsminger said more perspectives are needed to provide additional recommendations for action. The steering committee will be expanded to include a representative for professional students, a person to represent international students and a committee chair.

Entsminger said professional students — who are advanced students in law, medicine and veterinary medicine — are not considered employees of the university and were not affected by the potential health care subsidy withdrawal. However, they are affected by affordable on-campus housing, child care facilities and some tuition issues.

"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," he said.

Kristofferson Culmer, a steering committee member, said members will meet later this week to discuss how to keep up the momentum that has built over the past two weeks and how to be productive in the future.

Many of the demands from the Forum on Graduate Rights were given to administration officials years ago by the Graduate Professional Council and the Graduate Student Association but were not sufficiently addressed, said Matt McCune, spokesman 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."

Last school year, graduate students taught 2,325 of 16,946 class sections, university spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said. The university's 6,266 graduate students also contribute to research.

Information from: Columbia Missourian, http://www.columbiamissourian.com

University of Missouri grad assistants to continue movement
University of Missouri graduate assistants to continue pushing for improved working conditions

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Graduate assistants at the University of Missouri say they will continue working to improve their working conditions at the school.

On Wednesday, hundreds of graduate assistants and their supporters rallied on the Columbia campus to express frustration over several issues. The protest was sparked when university officials announced in mid-August that health subsidies for graduate assistants would be withdrawn. The university decided Friday it would reinstate the subsidies for one year.

Anahita Zare, outreach chairwoman for the Forum on Graduate Rights, says the group plans to get more organized and to work on more effectively communicating its message.

The Columbia Missourian reports some other issues include more graduate student representation to the administration and the role of graduate students in the shared governance at the university.

MU graduate students to plan next steps after march highlights student issues

By Megan Favignano

Thursday, August 27, 2015 at 2:00 pm

A University of Missouri graduate student organization will meet Sunday to decide its next steps after a march and rally Wednesday attracted more than 1,000 people to bring attention to students’ demands that include continued health insurance subsidies and bigger stipends.

About 1,200 people took part in Wednesday’s events, said Anahita Zare, a spokeswoman for the Forum on Graduate Rights, a group formed to lobby MU administrators on behalf of graduate students seeking better benefits. The student group formed after MU administrators said graduate student employees no longer would receive health insurance subsidies. The administration later rescinded that decision, guaranteeing subsidies for the current school year.
MU 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 marched from the Columns to Traditions Plaza, where the rally was held.

Students hope to keep the pressure on administrators to meet their list of demands. “We want to show that this wasn’t the end; this was the beginning,” Zare said.

Zare said the committee is gathering support and encouraging graduate students to share their stories on social media, using the hashtags #GradsDo and #MizzouUnited. The group will continue to discuss its concerns with MU officials, she said.

Faculty members from across the university are supporting the graduate students’ efforts. Angela Speck, professor and director of astronomy in the physics department, said the faculty’s support for graduate students is not altruistic.

“We cannot do what is the mission of this university without our graduate students,” Speck said during her speech at the rally. “We need you.”

Some graduate students skipped out on lab assignments, classes and teaching courses to undergraduates to participate in the events and to send a message to administrators about graduate students’ role on campus.

The student group’s demands include a permanent solution for health insurance subsidies, on-campus graduate student housing and on-campus child care.

On-campus child care is an important issue for third-year doctoral student Rachel Straughn-Navarro. 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 did not have a babysitter this week for the hour her class overlaps with her husband’s work schedule.

“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.

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.

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.”
“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,” graduate student Eric Scott told the marchers.

Graduate education is a discussion item on MU’s Faculty Council agenda Thursday. Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, Provost Garnett Stokes and Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies Leona Rubin will attend the meeting Thursday afternoon.

MU officials were not available for interviews by deadline Thursday.

Breaking Grad: Part 1


The Aug. 14 decision by MU to cut graduate student health insurance prompted hundreds of students to organize and submit a list of demands. The demands included reinstating health insurance, which has happened but will last only one year. Other demands were that students must be paid a living wage, full tuition waivers, permanent fully subsidized health care, more affordable university run student housing, university run childcare facilities and the elimination of departmental fees. They set a deadline of Aug. 25 at 5 p.m. for their demands to be met or they would walk out.

Nearly 1,000 graduate students and their supporters walked out of class and held a rally at Traditions Plaza on Aug. 26. The students chanted slogans condemning the university’s policy of giving raises to Chancellor Loftin and athletic coaches while taking away their basic benefits. Many students and faculty members spoke about how their lives had been affected by the changes and expressed what they wanted from the university to make it right.
‘Powder keg’ employees a problem for HR even after they’re gone

Angry employees like self-described “powder keg” Vester Lee Flanagan, the onetime TV reporter who killed two former co-workers on live television Wednesday, are able to move from job to job because old bosses are too leery of legal action to talk when called for a reference, according to experts.

The 41-year-old Flanagan’s career was checkered with baseless complaints against co-workers, lawsuits alleging racism and incidents of bullying and belittling colleagues at WDBJ-7, in Roanoke, Va.. But as with many other problematic employees, his reputation did not always precede him as he built his resume. Employers who have rid themselves of a bad apple may see no benefit to sparing others of the same problem.

“Employers are concerned about lawsuits,” said Susan Heathfield, a human resources consultant. “There has been a trend in recent years for employers to adopt policies that state that all information shared about a former employee must come from HR, and many HR departments have also developed a policy that says they will not provide a prospective employer with any information except dates of employment, salary, and job titles.”

After landing the job in March, 2012, Flanagan, who reported under the name Bryce Williams, quickly developed a reputation for complaining about co-workers, being difficult to work with and displaying poor news judgment, said station manager Jeff Marks, who nonetheless defended his station’s screening of new hires.

"By and large, we get really good employees here, but every now and then, one slips through the cracks," Marks said Thursday at a news conference.

When it came time to fire Flanagan in February, 2013, the station's human resources officials called the police to oversee Flanagan’s ouster, and co-workers hid in another room. The precautions proved well-founded, as Flanagan made a scene by issuing threats and refusing to leave peacefully. Former station manager Dan Dennison said later in a deposition for a racial discrimination case Flanagan filed that she scene left employees terrified.

“He repeated his feeling that firing him would lead to negative consequences for me personally and for the station,” Dennison said in the deposition for the case, which was dismissed.
The incident was foreshadowed several years earlier, when Flanagan was fired at Tallahassee TV station WTWC in 2000. After a promising start, he quickly became a pain in the neck, recalled co-workers there.

Don Shafer, Flanagan’s former boss at WTWC, called Flanagan a “pretty good reporter” but said “things started getting a little strange with him.”

“We ended up having to terminate his contract and let him go for bizarre behavior and fighting with other employees,” Shafer said on San Diego 6, where he now serves as news director.

“He threatened to punch people out, and he was kind of running fairly roughshod over other people in the newsroom,” Shafer added.

When Flanagan left Tallahassee, he filed a discrimination suit which was settled out of court. That is the type of thing a former employer would be hesitant to warn a prospective one about, and Flanagan likely had only to show some footage of his best work and make a good impression in his interview, said one expert.

“Individuals with poor work histories may present well in a time limited interview,” said Jude Miller Burke, author of “The Millionaire Mystique: How Working Women Become Wealthy and You Can Too!” and a corporate consultant. “And, often when a potential employer calls a past employer for a reference, the calls are not returned and people give up.”

Employers are legally permitted to answer questions honestly and completely when asked for a reference, but whatever they say must be documented in case litigation follows, said Heathfield. An employer may choose to communicate between the lines, answering “yes” or “no” in such a way that communicates their opinions without leaving a verbal trail.

“Smaller places might just shoot from the hip and tell the truth,” said Seth Allcorn, a professor of professional practice at University of Missouri. “But they may have legal exposure if [the subject of the reference] finds out.”

In the lengthy manifesto Flanagan sent ABC News shortly after the killings, Flanagan called himself a “powder keg” and accused WDBJ-7 of sinking his chances to land a job at a station in Pennsylvania. He reportedly wrote that he was offered the job at the unidentified TV studio, but the offer was then rescinded. But the claim could not be verified, and experts said any number of red flags could have prompted a station to give Flanagan the cold shoulder.

Once an employer unwittingly hires a volatile worker, supervisors face a minefield of delicate challenges, according to Allcorn, author of the 1994 book “Anger in the Workplace.”

“You have to try to help them, and solve the problem in an incremental fashion,” said Allcorn. “But if the person is running out of control, eventually he does become a security issue. At that point, you just say, “Well, we gave it a run.”
Some six months before firing Flanagan, Dennison warned him in a memo that he “must make improvements immediately” or “face termination of employment.” He was singled out for an inability to work well with colleagues and for wearing a President Obama sticker while reporting on the 2012 election.

Dennison and WDBJ-7 appear to have done everything by the book with Flanagan, according to Allcorn. Given that he struck some two years after he was fired, there may have been little anyone could have done to protect themselves or their employees, Allcorn acknowledged.

“This was someone with a serious mental disorder that went well beyond typical workplace anger,” he said.