How the U. of Missouri Became a Hotbed for Graduate-Student Activism

By Vimal Patel

Columbia, Mo.

On a recent Sunday evening, nine graduate students at the University of Missouri at Columbia met in a cramped room on the third floor of Ellis Library. They were leaders of the newly formed Forum on Graduate Rights, and after two weeks of organizing protests and jousting with the administration over the working conditions of graduate students, they were catching their breath and plotting their next steps.

The forum came together last month, somewhat spontaneously, to fight a university move to cut health-insurance subsidies for graduate students. In the wake of a public outcry, the administration reversed the decision, if only temporarily, and now the forum and other graduate students are figuring out how to turn the newfound grass-roots activism on the campus into a sustained campaign. Their goal: Make graduate-student needs a top priority for Missouri administrators.

They argue that the university has long neglected them and cite a list of complaints: the closing of a child-care center, the elimination of student housing, and low Ph.D. stipends. They argue, for example, that the minimum stipend, of about $12,000 a year for a graduate assistant fellowship, is far from adequate and falls below what most major research universities offer.

For the students, resentment over their treatment was a powder keg that grew over several years. And though the university’s administration has taken a variety of steps to make the graduate experience better, the forum plans to take future action, and might even form a union.

As graduate-student advocates elsewhere watch the campus to see how the showdown will be resolved, Missouri illustrates just how quickly and easily such frustrations can boil over — and provides something of a cautionary tale for other universities.

In an era of tight university budgets, the needs of graduate students are getting lost as a priority, says Brian Wilkey, president of Student Advocates for Graduate Education, a national group. The health-care issue at Missouri brought the poor treatment of graduate students to the fore, but the challenging environment for master’s and doctoral students has primed many campuses for a surge in protests and complaints.

Graduate-student debt is at an all-time high, and tenure-track jobs are getting harder and harder to land as the number of new Ph.D. recipients outpaces new academic jobs. All of that is
resulting in "more activism and more regular banding together of graduate students," says Mr. Wilkey, a Ph.D. student in the department of human development and family sciences at the University of Texas at Austin.

_The Spark_

If anger about graduate students’ working conditions at Missouri was a powder keg, the spark that lit it came in the form of an email. On August 14, Leona J. Rubin, associate vice chancellor for graduate studies, sent a message that said that changes in federal law would require the university to eliminate health-insurance subsidies for graduate students, and that their insurance would expire at the end of the day.

Missouri isn’t alone in dealing with this issue. Many university lawyers have interpreted the Affordable Care Act as preventing universities from providing subsidies for student health-insurance plans, and higher-education associations have asked the Internal Revenue Service to clarify the rules.

But students felt Missouri had made its decision prematurely, as many other universities are awaiting clarification on the matter before they act. And no university gave such little notice as Missouri did.

Shortly after the email went out, a group of students quickly researched the issue of coverage and organized a forum three days later to explain it to their peers. When a standing-room crowd of hundreds of graduate students showed up at the university’s Walter Johnson Auditorium, and voiced broader frustrations, organizers say they seized the moment to channel the passion into a structured group, the Forum on Graduate Rights.

Primarily using Twitter and Facebook, the forum and its supporters publicly shamed the administration for its treatment of graduate students. Graduate students at the handful of universities that have also opted to cut subsidies, like Louisiana State, joined in, raising the level of the online protest.

The uproar seemed to catch university officials flat-footed, and they did not react quickly to the students’ confusion about health insurance. At first, R. Bowen Loftin, the university’s chancellor, apologized for poorly communicating the cut in subsidies. Then, a week after Ms. Rubin’s email, he said the decision to end coverage would be deferred a year.

But by then, the Forum on Graduate Rights had drawn more than 1,200 Facebook members and showed no intention of disbanding. If the university had reacted more swiftly, at least one graduate student says, the new activist group would never have formed.

After the university’s reversal, members of the group organized a campus rally attended by more than a thousand students and faculty members. The members are now informally surveying the graduate-student body to find out whether there is enough support to start a union.
The August email "was a moment of clarity," says Jason Entsminger, a first-year Ph.D. student in agricultural economics. "With that one unilateral action, graduate students saw the light of how unilateral governance on this campus has been. It underscored how fragile our dignity as human beings is."

**Balancing Priorities**

Administrators at Missouri sympathize with the graduate students’ concerns, but say the concerns must be seen in the context of the university’s larger budget challenges.

Like most public universities, the university is being asked to do more with less. Data provided by administrators show that state money covered 70 percent of the university’s operating budget in 1990, but only half of that today. The university recently gave buyouts to 111 tenured faculty members to free up funds, and the Columbia campus says it has more than $500 million in deferred building maintenance.

Even with tight budgets, the administration has increased the minimum stipend twice since 2014 and says it has not ignored graduate-student needs. Earlier this year it formed a panel to examine graduate students’ problems and hired consultants to study their housing needs.

When asked about the campus’s new graduate-student activism, Mr. Loftin, the chancellor, glanced out his office window in Jesse Hall and told the story of Mr. Loftin, the Rice University Ph.D. student in physics.

More than 40 years ago, Mr. Loftin’s $158-a-month stipend meant his staples included day-old bread and a three-pound tub of generic peanut butter. After he and his fellow graduate students argued to the department’s faculty that their stipends were not livable, Mr. Loftin was appointed to a two-person committee to study stipends, and eventually they were increased.

The story illustrates Mr. Loftin’s main message to agitated graduate students at Missouri: Work with us to solve these problems. In the wake of the recent protests, the university formed a task force led by a dean and with graduate-student members to figure out health-care options. The university plans to raise stipends again, to be more competitive with other public institutions in the Association of American Universities.

"Perhaps it’s possible for us to objectively find a measure we could all agree on and make that the minimum stipend," says Mr. Loftin.

As for graduate students who argue that the best chance for fair treatment by the university is to unionize, he says: "They have a right to form a union, but doing so won’t create more resources."

**National Echoes**

As graduate-student issues continue to simmer at Missouri, master’s and Ph.D. students elsewhere are looking to it as an example of the type of public activism that is needed to make substantial changes on their campuses.
"The graduate-student issues at Missouri — stipends, housing, child care, feelings of being overworked and underappreciated — have been echoed to me by students across the nation," says Kristofferson Culmer, a fifth-year Ph.D. student in computer science at Missouri.

Mr. Culmer, who is chair of the Forum on Graduate Rights’ steering committee and president of the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, says the demands on graduate students’ time and their precarious roles at universities mean organizing for better working conditions can be difficult, but dormant concerns could erupt at any time, as they did at Missouri.

Mannie Liscum, a professor in the biological-sciences division at Missouri and a former associate graduate dean, agrees. While "the system has been taking advantage of graduate students for a long time," the situation has become more volatile lately. "I think the pressures have just built to this point where the students are ready to explode," Mr. Liscum says. "This isn’t unique to Mizzou."

Emergency crews respond to chemical leak on MU campus

Watch story: http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=30352&zone=5&categories=5

COLUMBIA - Emergency crews responded to a chemical leak that caused an evacuation on the University of Missouri campus late Thursday evening.

The Columbia Fire Department said a canister of Methylimidazole, which is used to breed plants, leaked inside the Sears Plant Growth Facility off Hitt Street.

Two researchers were inside the building at the time, according to Christian Basi with the MU News Bureau. Basi said they were treated on site.

MU News Bureau said there were no injuries, but the two receiving treatment were being sanitized to fulfill all safety precautions.
Only a small amount of Methylimidazole was involved in the spill, according to the MU News Bureau.

Crews initially responded Thursday evening around 7:50 and blocked traffic between University and Rollins Streets.

Competing forces look to raise the Missouri cigarette tax

BY SCOTT CANON
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Time and again, Missouri voters chose to keep the state’s cigarette tax the lowest in the land.

Yet no fewer than three competing groups spent this summer plotting how to again ask Missourians to boost the cost of a pack of smokes.

Naturally, none of the groups thinks much of what the others are pushing. Instead, they’re employing gamesmanship to rally as many backers as possible behind their measures — and to discourage support of the competition.

Some analysts figure only one proposal will ultimately make it to the November 2016 ballot — the one most likely to garner support from anti-smoking groups that have tried, and failed, in past years to crank up the tax.

The choices offered to voters could turn on how those monied forces line up in the next few weeks.

One convenience store group is floating a plan to add less than a quarter to the cost of a pack. Saying it’s tired of fighting off big tobacco tax boosts, the organization proposes a small one.
Advocates for a suite of early childhood programs want to add 50 cents to the cost of a cigarette pack. They’re toying with multiple proposals — dangling bait that might exploit divides within the tobacco industry or that could recruit other influential allies.

A third group would slap a full dollar on the price of a pack, promising the money for college scholarships and employing the considerable political clout of the state’s higher education establishment.

Ballot efforts to raise the 17 cents-per-pack tax fell to defeat in 2002, 2006 and 2012. But the last campaign lost by less than a percentage point.

“The politics are trending toward increasing it,” said Peverill Squire, a political scientist at the University of Missouri. “The question is by how much.”

And, just as critically, where will the money go.

Analysts say time is already running short. Ballot language must be approved by the Missouri secretary of state, typically a two-month process. Then the proposals must withstand likely legal challenges from opponents. Next comes the labor-intensive and expensive — most estimates range north of $750,000 — work of collecting nearly 100,000 signatures before a May 8 deadline.

To persuade donors to contribute to a signature-gathering effort, the various camps must also persuade them they’ll ultimately round up enough cash to win next fall. Such a campaign, experts say, would need at least $5 million.

More immediately, the groups find themselves trying to elbow aside the efforts of the others.

Convenient idea

The Missouri Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Store Association proposes bumping the tax by 23 cents. It would direct the money either to road construction or general state revenues. The plan draws skepticism in the state’s political circles.

“It’s a bargaining chip,” said Republican political consultant James Harris.

It’s largely perceived as a bluff by the cigarette sellers to see if the other groups might shoot for a lower increase. In return, backers of the competing proposals might form an alliance with the convenience stores that spent so heavily to beat
past tobacco tax-boost plans. Its ubiquitous outlets also work as pulpits to argue that steeper prices would hurt small businesses.

Ronald Leone, the executive director of the group, said he’s tried to trigger an “adult conversation” about an alternative to “unfair and outrageous” increases in the state’s cigarette tax.

If the other groups ratchet down their proposals, he said, the convenience stores might join forces or at least agree to sit out the campaign. Failing that, the organization’s 23-cent tax boost could go on the ballot and tempt voters to choose the lowest increase.

“Our ultimate goal is to put this issue (a cigarette tax increase) to bed for the foreseeable future,” Leone said.

Multiple choice

Raise Your Hand for Kids proposes a 50-cent tax boost to raise money for health and education programs for the first five years of life — including diaper vouchers for pregnant women who complete smoking cessation classes.

So far, that group has submitted six differing petitions to the secretary of state. Partly, it’s exploring which ideas will produce ballot language that would appeal most to voters. Partly, it’s looking to see which other groups might back its cause.

For instance, one proposal would leave state law untouched on what special fees tobacco companies must pay stemming from a 1998 settlement over marketing their cancer-causing product. The companies agreed to make payments based on their annual national cigarette sales.

That status quo proposal favors newer, smaller cigarette makers who weren’t parties to the compact and don’t have to pay into the same anti-smoking efforts and other funds.

Those mostly discount brands represent a far larger part of the market in Missouri than they do in other states, where they’re treated the same as companies that were part of the settlement. Consequently, agreeing to leave the law alone might draw the support of so-called Small Tobacco.

Big Tobacco might be inclined to back another proposal drafted by the group if it changed the law.
Or one of the two might agree merely to sit out the campaign in return for steering one direction or the other.

“Having the different options strengthens our negotiating position,” said Erin Brower, the executive director of Raise Your Hand for Kids. “We’re in a three-way primary. The tobacco tax, since it is the lowest in the nation, you can understand why different interest groups are going to want to go after it.”

She argues the convenience store proposal is simply too low to discourage smoking. She contends that the colleges’ $1-a-pack tax asks more than Missouri voters are willing to raise the tax — particularly when smokers are disproportionately poor and college students tend to come from wealthier families.

Campus clout

Finally, the Missouri Promise Initiative is just a few weeks old. It’s yet to conduct polling or hire a consultant.

But its president, St. Louis lawyer Dudley McCarter, says the group has rounded up pledges of $200,000. More critically, it boasts backing from the state public university and community college associations and corporate alumni.

University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe has given speeches endorsing the $1-a-pack increase for scholarships. He declined, through an assistant, to comment for this story. In response to a legislator concerned that he was using his public position to push for a tax increase, Wolfe wrote “I will not be using University of Missouri resources in my support of this important initiative and will take personal time off for these activities.”

The push is also backed by Clint Zweifel, the Democratic state treasurer, and state Attorney General Chris Koster, the leading Democratic candidate for governor.

The group estimates the tax boost would raise about $340 million its first year (a figure likely to drop as smokers quit or stop shopping in Missouri for cheaper cigarettes). The scholarship money would be available to students who graduate from high schools in the state and pursue higher education in Missouri.
McCarter said the convenience store group is “just playing a strategic campaign to mess things up.” Raise Your Hand for Kids pushes a worthy cause, he said, but “we’ve got more civic boosters ready to back us than them.”

He’s also confident that traditional anti-smoking groups will join the tax-for-scholarships camp partly because the higher surcharge would do more to discourage cigarette use.

One key group, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, declined to comment on the coming campaigns.

Harris, the Missouri political consultant, said whether and where health-oriented groups pledge their money this year could determine how many tax-boost proposals show up on the ballot and which might fare best with voters next year.

“You want to have a certain amount in hand,” he said, “and know you have some reliable sources.”

MU Interfraternity Council bans hard alcohol in fraternity houses

By Megan Favignano

Thursday, September 3, 2015 at 2:00 pm

An Interfraternity Council policy change means University of Missouri fraternity members no longer will be able to consume hard alcohol in fraternity houses.

The council, the governing body for MU’s fraternities, passed the policy change Aug. 20, before the start of the fall semester.
The policy allows all fraternity members and their guests of legal drinking age to consume beer or wine on fraternity property and prohibits members and guests from possessing, distributing or drinking hard alcohol on fraternity property.

The policy defines hard alcohol as a drink with alcohol content greater than 15 percent. Council spokesman Parker Briden said the purpose is to reduce over-intoxication.

“That’s something that we’ve heard from a lot of different people who are educated on relationship and sexual violence prevention is that over-intoxication consistently plays a role in sexual misconduct,” Briden said.

The policy was last updated three years ago. It allowed alcohol on fraternity property as long as the fraternity house met certain criteria during its annual accreditation.

Accreditation categories included academics, risk management, member development and conduct.

The council started talking about changing the policy about a year and a half ago and did so last semester as part of a campuswide conversation about sexual misconduct, Briden said.

MU officials and members of the university’s Greek community held a summit on sexual assault and student safety in fraternity houses in June, at which students discussed the hard liquor ban.

“If you’re able to consume alcohol legally, you should be able to consume beer and wine in your home in a responsible way. We think that realistic approach is something that will reduce the abuse of alcohol,” Briden said. “And create an environment where sexual misconduct is less likely to happen.”

Enforcing the hard liquor ban will be a new focus of third-party audits conducted at fraternity houses, Briden said. Audits are conducted randomly. A fraternity chapter officer will walk through the fraternity house and property with the auditor, who will provide a report to the chapter president, adviser, Interfraternity Council president and council vice president of risk management.

A team of Interfraternity Council presidents wrote the new policy, Briden said. This semester, the group will monitor the audits to assess the new policy.

Panhellenic Association spokeswoman Carolyn Welter said the National Panhellenic Conference prohibits alcohol in sorority houses. The Panhellenic Association oversees sororities on the MU campus.

When asked for her opinion about the policy, Welter said the Interfraternity Council knows what’s best for the fraternity community.

"It's going to be good for all college students: men and women," she said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU fraternities to ban hard alcohol at their houses

JACK WITTHAUS, 12 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Remember those Greek Life proposals — like banning women from fraternity houses during certain hours — proposed earlier this summer?

Only one has survived.

About a week before the fall semester started, MU’s Interfraternity Council announced it had updated its alcohol policy and that hard liquor would be forbidden at MU fraternity houses effective immediately. The hard booze ban was enacted after months of research and debate at the IFC and followed a presentation and discussion at the Chancellor's Summit on Sexual Assault and Student Safety in Greek Life in June.

Per the IFC policy, hard alcohol is defined as a drink with an alcohol content greater than 15 percent. The policy bans hard liquor (example: vodka) and grain alcohol (example: Everclear).

Beer and wine? They're still fine.

Fraternity houses will be subject to random “audits,” which are visits from a third-party security company, to make sure the rules are being followed. Audits aren’t anything new and have been used in the past to enforce previous policies. Audits reports are sent to IFC for review.
Parker Briden, a spokesman for IFC, said the new alcohol policy aims to create a realistic set of rules, reduce overindulgence and take a step toward combatting sexual misconduct, according to the IFC alcohol proposal document. It's also simpler.

There's “zero tolerance” now for any policy violations, meaning all violations will be passed to the MU Office of Student Conduct for discipline. In the past, it was unclear what kinds of violations had to be passed on.

The audit system has been improved as well, Briden said.

Because the policies were created with a lot of input from fraternity presidents, Briden said he believes there's buy-in and that the policies will be effective.

The proposed alcohol ban was just one of a set of controversial proposals from the MU Fraternity Alumni Consortium, a group of men who serve on MU fraternity housing boards or as fraternity advisers. The proposals included:

- A ban on any alcohol except beer at fraternities
- A ban on fraternities hosting out-of-town formals
- A drug-test requirement for in-house members of all Greek organizations
- A ban on women in fraternity houses between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, in addition to the entirety of syllabus week and "Reading Day" every semester

The proposal to ban women from fraternity houses drew the strongest reaction, especially on social media. Twitter accounts such as @stopLoftin and @SaveMUGreekLife gained hundreds of followers as the accounts channeled displeasure about the proposals. The Panhellenic Association released a letter in April criticizing some of the proposals, saying that the proposals made female visitors feel as if they could not make choices for themselves and characterized "women (as) counterparts inferior to the fraternity men."

The Fraternity Alumni Council quickly retracted the proposed curfew on women. Before the summit, Ted Hellman, who acted as the consortium's spokesman, said the idea of banning
women was never considered and blamed social media for taking the consortium's proposals out of context, according to previous Missourian reporting.

A June summit to address sexual assault in MU Greek Life gave more attention to the proposals. The event attracted about 250 people but was closed to the media.

So far, the other proposals discussed at the summit seem to have gained little traction.

“(The beer-only proposal) was the proposal people agreed with,” Briden said. “It was a reasonable step.”

Panhellenic Association spokeswoman Carolyn Welter said IFC executive leaders were passionate about banning hard liquor.

Ending hard alcohol might be met with mixed emotions, Welter said. But she believes the purpose of the new policy is in the interest of student safety.

She also thinks IFC will be able to enforce the policy.

“They know their community the best,” Welter said.

Mizzou pays big bucks for nonconference games

Sept. 4, 2015  •  By Dave Matter

COLUMBIA, Mo. • Last week Missouri announced an upcoming three-game football series with Middle Tennessee, with games scheduled for Columbia in 2016 and 2023 and a game in Murfreesboro, Tenn., for 2022.

The contract includes an interesting clause. According to the agreement, obtained by the Post-Dispatch in an open records request, Mizzou can reschedule the 2022 game under one condition:
“Should the University of Missouri need to move the game designated for 2022 at Middle Tennessee State University for the sole purpose of scheduling a nonconference home and home series that same year with a Big 12 institution, both parties agree after other options are fully explored to adjust the date of the game scheduled for Sept. 17, 2022 to a subsequent year on a date that is agreed to by both parties. It is agreed by both parties that if there is a change that the University of Missouri will play the game in Murfreesboro no later than the fall of 2025. The University of Missouri must inform Middle Tennessee State University of such a change no later than July 1, 2016.”

What does that mean? Mizzou has the next 11 months to secure a home and home series with a Big 12 school that would allow MU to push the MTSU road trip to 2024 or 2025. Who might that Big 12 team be?

“It simply allows us some flexibility in the event we can schedule a non-conference Power 5 series with Big 12 opponents in 2021 and 2022 should we have to go on the road in 2022 for that series,” Bryan Maggard, MU’s executive associate athletics director shared in an email. “2021-2022 are the next years we need a non-conference Power 5 series and this gives us a window of time to accommodate should an opportunity arise.”

The SEC mandate requiring teams to play one power conference opponent outside of the SEC schedule begins in 2016. MU fulfills that requirement with games against the Big 12’s West Virginia in 2016 and 2019, the Big Ten’s Purdue in 2017-18 and Brigham Young in 2020. BYU is an independent program, but the SEC decided that BYU will count as a power conference opponent.

MU could also fulfill the SEC rule by scheduling a team from the ACC, Big Ten or Pac-12, but with the contract language limited to a Big 12 school, it appears Mizzou is focused on finding an opponent from its former conference.

According to the website FBschedules.com, Oklahoma already has as a series with Nebraska set for 2021-22 ... TCU is scheduled to play Cal and Colorado those years ... Oklahoma State travels to Boise State in 2021 but has an empty slate for 2022 ... West Virginia plays Maryland and Virginia Tech ... Texas plays Arkansas and Ohio State ... Iowa State rarely plays a power conference team in addition to its annual game against Iowa.

Who’s left? The site doesn’t show Baylor, Kansas, Kansas State or Texas Tech having a non-league game against a power conference opponent for 2021-22. Could the Tigers and Jayhawks rekindle their rivalry? If so, MU’s got less than a year to put something together before the deadline in the MTSU contract.

As for that Middle Tennessee series, Missouri will pay MTSU a guaranteed $1.1 million for next year’s game. For the two subsequent games in Murfreesboro and Columbia, the home team will pay the visiting team $200,000. The visiting schools will receive 400 complimentary tickets for each game and can purchase up to 6,000 more tickets. It would cost either school $800,000 to break the contract for any of the three games.

A few more items from nonconference game contracts:

• For Saturday’s home opener, Missouri is paying Southeast Missouri State a guaranteed rate of $385,000. When SEMO returns to Columbia in Sept. 2019, Mizzou will pay the school $425,000. In both cases, Missouri gave SEMO 400 complimentary tickets and allotted the school 4,000 tickets to purchase. Next year’s game would cost either school $425,000 to break the contract.

• Next year, Missouri will pay FCS opponent Delaware State $525,000, with 400 complimentary tickets and up to 2,000 tickets to buy. The game comes with a $425,000 buyout clause.

• Eastern Michigan visits Mizzou for two games in 2016 and 2020. Next year, MU will pay the Mid-American Conference team $1.3 million to play at Memorial Stadium and another $1.1 million for the 2020 game. In both cases, EMU receives 400 complimentary tickets and can purchase up to 1,500 more. The buyout price is $1 million.
• Missouri State, coached by former Mizzou defensive coordinator Dave Steckel, visits MU on Sept. 2, 2017 and will take home $400,000. The Bears will receive 400 free tickets and can buy 2,000 more. The game carries a $1 million buyout.

• The Tigers wrap up their two-year series with Arkansas State with next week’s visit to Jonesboro, Ark. The visiting team makes the standard $250,000 for each game, getting 350 free tickets and the chance to buy 4,000 more. The series came with a $600,000 buyout. (Missouri could have opted to break the contract once ASU decided against moving the game to Busch Stadium.)

• Missouri’s series with BYU, which starts with this year’s game in Kansas City and concludes in 2020 in Provo, Utah, comes with one unique clause. The home team will play the visitor $250,000 for each game — Mizzou is the designated home team for the Nov. 14 game at Arrowhead Stadium — but both schools will also pay the travel costs for two other 2015 games: Wagner College at BYU and Idaho State at UNLV.

Say what?

Follow along. BYU was scheduled to play at UNLV on Nov. 14. Instead, the Cougars will play Mizzou in Kansas City that day. That meant BYU had to find UNLV an opponent. BYU was scheduled to play Idaho State earlier in the season. BYU negotiated with Idaho State to play at UNLV instead and then added a home game against Wagner to replace Idaho State.

To make it all possible, Mizzou and BYU will split costs for Wagner’s bus travel to Provo, plus hotel rooms and meals, along with Idaho State’s charter flight to Las Vegas, plus the $95,000 difference between UNLV’s guaranteed payment and what would have been BYU’s guaranteed payment.

• One last note on contracts: Missouri begins a two-year series at West Virginia next year, opening the season on Sept. 3 in Morgantown. The Mountaineers will visit Columbia on Sept. 7, 2019. The visiting teams will make $250,000 for each game, with a $1 million buyout to break the contract. The visiting teams agreed to receive 300 complimentary tickets with a chance to buy 3,000 more.

MU researchers genetically edit mosquitoes with dengue virus

Watch story: http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=30334&zone=5&categories=5

COLUMBIA- MU researchers have found a method that successfully edits genes in mosquitoes that carry dengue fever.
Researchers edited genes the *Aedes aegypti*, the mosquito species that carries dengue fever. They previously tested the gene editing system by changing eye color. The change was inherited over several mosquito generations.

Shengzhang Dong, a postdoctoral fellow at MU, said the change in eye color proved the technique could work in knocking out genes relating to viruses in mosquitoes.

"You can see the gene missing from the DNA," Dong said. "At the same time, you can also see the phenotype, which is a change in eye color."

Alexander Franz, an associate pathobiology professor at MU, explained the connection between the dengue virus and mosquitoes.

"If a mosquito is infected with a virus, the virus is acting in a genetic manner with the mosquito," Franz said. "So, when we study gene function we can find out which genes are interacting with these replicating viruses."

He said it will be at least a few years before the application can be used in real world.

"The biggest hurdle is field testing, along with government regulations from agencies like the FDA and EPA," Franz said.

Dong said the results of this testing could be applied to other mosquito-borne diseases and diseases in other insects.

"There are several insect species such as the corn rootworm and beetles where this technique can be applied," Dong said.

Franz said it would take at least a year to see disruption in the dengue virus if researchers introduced a mosquito population without the virus in the wild.

**COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN**

Brain training program to open in Columbia offers hope to families

LIYING QIAN, 13 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Brain Balance Achievement Center, a national network of franchise operations helping 4 to 18-year-old children overcome attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia,
Asperger's syndrome, autism and other disorders, is opening a Columbia franchise on Friday at 2703 E. Broadway.

The program is built upon an approach of sensory, motor and cognitive exercises and nutritional guidelines to strengthen what it calls the weak hemisphere of the brain. Columbia center director Krista Jones said in an email that families will have take-home exercises to continue stimulating the weak side of kids' brains under trainers' instructions.

The integrated treatment, the company says, can "correct the underlying imbalance and achieve measurable, long-term changes in your child's behavior and academic performance."

The program claims that children's behavioral, learning and developmental disorders are a result of the disconnection between the two hemispheres of their brains, which is called "functional disconnection syndrome."

**Brick Johnstone, an MU Health Psychology professor and neuropsychologist with 25 years of clinical practice, said he wasn't aware of any research that supports the theory.**

The company's website lists three white papers authored and co-authored by Robert Melillo, Brain Balance's founder and a chiropractor. In addition, the website lists 18 documents in a page called "research." Of the total, six are reviewed articles published by academic publications and four are academic research papers. The other documents are: three news articles, one book excerpt, two research reviews, one Wikipedia excerpt and one study abstract.

Carolyn Pridemore, a teacher at Southern Boone School District in Ashland, and Todd Pridemore, a minister at The Baptist Home in Ashland, co-own the Columbia Brain Balance Center. Last year, they enrolled their middle son, Andrew, who was diagnosed with ADHD and Asperger's syndrome, in the Brain Balance program in Overland Park, Kansas.

Andrew's symptoms diminished after six months of training in the program, Carolyn Pridemore said. She also said working with many kids struggling to read every day made her recognize the local need for services to help troubled kids reach their physical and academic potentials.
"We wanted to be able to help families like ours," Carolyn Pridemore said. "This program provides a new way (to help kids with neurological disorders) for Columbia."

She explained functional disconnection syndrome this way: "When one side is functioning at a higher level than the other, you will see behaviors such as ADHD, processing disorders and other neurological disorders."

This medication-free treatment begins with an assessment that tests a child's motor skills, reading ability and how he or she visually and verbally processes information. Then, the program will develop a treatment plan for each child based on his or her assessment results.

"They (learning, behavior and developmental disorders) relate to thinking, relate to the brain, but saying that it's an imbalance between the two hemispheres of brain is over simplistic," Johnstone said. "It's probably inappropriate. I'm not aware of such a theory, and I'm not aware of any research that supports that theory."

The company has opened 82 franchises across 28 states during the past 10 years.

Columbia Brain Balance has hired three full-time and four part-time staff members. Carolyn Pridemore said the staff expertise includes nursing, nutrition and special education. All have experience working with children with special needs and their families.

Full-time staff has been trained by Mark Goldenberg, a chiropractic neurologist in New York City, for two weeks. Part-time staff is being trained by full-time staff, staff at the Overland Park Brain Balance and corporate trainers.

"The biggest thing we need is the deep passion for kids with special needs and the desire to change their lives," Carolyn Pridemore said.

A three-hour assessment will cost $195. Parents will go over the assessment report with the center director and decide whether the program is a good fit for their family. The treatment
includes more than 72 training sessions, with 36 sensory and motor-focused sessions and 36 cognitive-focused sessions.

Children will come to the center three times a week for at least 12 weeks. Each session runs for one hour. The length of each program depends on the assessment results and recommendations by the program director. The cost of treatment will vary on a case-by-case basis.

Carolyn Pridemore said parents could pay by installments or seek financing from their banks or Your Tuition Solution, a K-12 education loan program that provides families with various payment options. There is also a discount plan available.

"We do not offer a 'cure,' but we do offer hope to families who choose to partner with us that their child can improve through this program socially, behaviorally and academically," Jones wrote in the email.

About 20 kids have signed up for assessment so far. Jones said the first assessment was scheduled for this week.