Professors worry mandatory reporting will keep students quiet about sexual harassment, assault

BY SCOTT CANON
scanon@kcstar.com

Michael Williams wants his young college students to feel they can come to him for help.

He’s eager to guide them with an assignment or offer a sympathetic ear when things go sour in their personal lives.

But if they confide something to the University of Kansas journalism professor about sexual harassment or worse …

“I have said to the student, ‘I’m really sorry this happened, but if you tell me more details, I have to report this’ ” to others on campus, said Williams, president of KU’s University Senate. “Sometimes, the student goes ahead and tells you everything anyway. They’re seeking an adult they can trust. …

“But I’ve had students say, ‘I don’t want anyone else to know.’ They don’t tell you anything more. That’s when the situation gets a little gray.”

And, say faculty from Manhattan to Columbia, a student who can’t tell a professor something in confidence might not tell anybody.

Those same professors embrace the need to track sexual harassment and assaults, to better root out campus rapists and to get a student help in a time of crisis.
Yet some say a student looking for a familiar person to confide in might clam up if that means hearing from some other college official — no matter how kind that third party might be.

“I want to help that student,” Williams said. “But if the first thing out of their mouth is ‘I don’t really want to report this,’ what do you do?”

The federal government continues to pressure college campuses to make sure that women, in particular, can pursue their studies safe from sexual harassment and assault.

That’s long been enshrined in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibiting sex discrimination on campus. Title IX may be best known for how it remade college sports by demanding that women get the same chance at athletic scholarships as men.

But increasingly it’s also grown as a tool to fight campus rape. Washington puts ever more exacting demands on schools to better document all manner of assault and harassment.

New federal requirements that kicked in over the summer demand that schools beef up both training for students and efforts to report potential Title IX violations.

That followed a stern reminder issued by the U.S. Department of Education’s civil rights office in 2011 widely interpreted on campuses that — with a few deliberate exceptions — virtually anyone working for a university must alert administrators about suspected cases.

That’s why Williams feels obligated to warn students that telling him about a date that turned violent or a relationship that’s become abusive means he must tell others.

Angela Speck, who teaches astrophysics at the University of Missouri, is an outspoken advocate for logging assault cases. Such reporting, after all, can reveal where and how problems happen. And she speaks enthusiastically about various caring and competent professionals on campus ready to help someone who’s been attacked.

Still, she said, few students already know those professionals.
“That’s great if you know about it, if you feel comfortable dealing with absolute strangers,” Speck said.

Maybe, she said, at least one professor in a department should be left off the hook on reporting so students can confide in a familiar face.

“Otherwise,” she said, “how can you have a conversation in confidence if you know that you’re talking to a mandatory reporter?”

Campus safety

Research shows that college students might actually come under sexual attack less than their peers who aren’t in school, but their age group stands particularly vulnerable to such assaults.

Campuses can be boozy places populated by people new to a certain freedom that puts them at added risk.

Although a Rolling Stone article about a supposed gang rape at the University of Virginia was ultimately discredited, it touched a nerve with its criticisms of how universities sometimes flub reports of assault.

MU came under fire in the wake of Sasha Menu Courey’s suicide in 2011. She wrote in a journal, found after her death, that she was raped. When the university found her rape allegations in emails after her death, an independent law firm concluded last year, MU should have launched an investigation.

Meantime, U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill has been pursuing legislation to toughen campus standards for assault prevention training, counseling efforts and clearer adjudication measures. Last year, her office released a survey that concluded many schools fall short in how they investigate and resolve such claims.

This year, stories about legislators hitting on college interns working at the Missouri Capitol led to the resignation of the speaker of the House and a Kansas City area senator. That, in turn, sparked some alarms at colleges with students interning in Jefferson City.

“Since those stories in Jeff City broke, we added some more Title IX training,” said Bill Horner, an MU political science professor who conducts independent study courses with legislative interns in the state capital and Washington, D.C.
Those various developments further propelled efforts on campuses to live up to Title IX requirements. Failing to do so would put federal funding, critical to any college, at risk.

The National Institute of Justice found about 3 percent of women told surveyors they’d been subject to anything from rape to some form of unwanted touching in the last year. Research suggests the danger is greater for women this time of year, particularly if it’s their first semester on campus.

So all freshmen and incoming students at the MU system’s four campuses this year must complete “Not Anymore” training. It reminds guys that a drunk woman is in no position to consent to sex, coaches bystanders how to step in to stop a dodgy situation, and pitches all range of campus services to those who come under assault.

Online software training given to all new students mixes videos and quizzes that can take an hour or more to complete. Those who don’t finish the training can’t register for classes next semester.

The videos use how-to skits paired with often emotional testimonials from people who were raped.

“Consent must be the presence of yes … enthusiastic consent. If someone isn’t actively participating, they’re not consenting,” say the actors. “And remember, consent cannot be given by a person who is underage, drunk, drugged or mentally impaired.”

The software can run the college $5,000 to $10,000 a year, depending on the number of students and how much a campus wants to customize off-the-shelf material.

With growing pressure to live up to Title IX rules, sales are booming.

“We certainly increased the number of campuses we’re working for,” said Brian Cooley, the chief marketing officer of EverFi, which counts Emporia State University, Missouri State University, Central Missouri University and a handful of others in the region among 800 schools on its client list.

Some students grouse about the training as yet another bureaucratic chore, Title IX officers at Missouri and Kansas schools say. A handful, said Mikah Thompson of the University of Missouri-Kansas City, worry that watching the videos will
make them revisit a trauma. Typically an email to her office will get them an exemption.

“But we get a lot of feedback from people who say they’re glad somebody’s talking about this,” she said.

Confidentially speaking

Campus Title IX officers talk passionately about requiring professors to pass on tips about possible cases of harassment or assault. For starters, they read the federal Clery Act, which requires campuses to openly document crime, to include faculty among those with “significant responsibility” for students to be among mandatory reporters.

More practically, they argue that without professors in the mix, much might go unnoticed.

They also argue that professors become less anxious about their role when they understand that making a call to a Title IX office doesn’t necessarily trigger a large-scale investigation.

“There may be misconceptions with faculty about what it means,” said Ellen Eardley, the Title IX administrator at MU. She was hired after MU elevated the job to a full-time position following the Menu Courey case. “They’re connecting students with a central resource that can explain their options and what’s available.”

A report from a professor typically means the student will get a phone call, said Sally Herleth, the executive director of human resources at Truman State University.

“We’re just letting them know what we can do for them,” she said, “and what their options are.”

Most cases come directly from students, Herleth said. But she’s fielded three reports from faculty so far this fall, including a student who spoke to one faculty member about an unwelcome hug from another instructor.

The key to tracking problems, said Missouri State Title IX coordinator Jill Patterson, “is that students feel comfortable” getting help.
Title IX coordinators, said Kansas State University math professor Andrew Bennett, “are better at this job than I am.”

“But sometimes a student says, ‘I’m comfortable with this person,’ ” said Bennett, the president-elect of the K-State Faculty Senate. “ ‘Maybe I want to talk privately about it with my teacher. But if I speak to the teacher about this, suddenly it’s going to get out of my control.’ … We’d like it to be an option. We don’t want to put up walls between us and the students.”

Or, as former Faculty Senate president Dave Rintoul said, “Those are serious decisions. I don’t want to make those (reporting) decision for those kids.”

Other professors don’t see much chilling effect from the requirement, partly because they say students in crisis share their problems because they’re seeking just the sort of help a Title IX report would bring forward. And many students may not be reluctant to share things with a professor because they don’t realize that instructor is required to share it with others.

“I’m many other things to them first,” said Richard Sonnenmoser, who teaches creative writing at Northwest Missouri State University. “I’m a writing teacher and something of an authority figure and a lot of other things. … Students may not know about mandatory reporting.”

At Missouri State, theater professor Carol Maples is the artistic director of the Giving Voice drama troupe, which performs interactive scenes in which actors explore how to navigate various scenarios. Recently, it developed a performance to help faculty spot students who might be dealing with an assault or a troubled relationship.

“I’m hearing some questioning on whether they should and how they should handle” Title IX reporting, she said.

Maples believes faculty should be required to share potential cases students share with them.

“I have concerns that students might stop talking,” she said. “(But) it puts faculty into the position where you must do something. That’s important.”
The Association of American Universities (AAU) is set to release on Monday, the findings of a national sexual assault campus climate survey.

More than 25 of the AAU member public and private research universities, including University of Missouri, and one non-member institution participated in the sexual assault climate survey this spring. University of Kansas, a member of the AAU did not participate in the survey.

More than 150,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional students at 26 AAU universities and one non-AAU institution participated in the survey.

The survey, conducted by Westat, a research company, was designed to “help our institutions gain a better understanding of this complex problem on their own campuses as well as nationally,” AAU President Hunter Rawlings said in a statement released Friday morning.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU could pursue action against anyone found involved in racial slur incident

RUTH SERVEN, Sep 18, 2015

COLUMBIA — A week after MU’s student body president said someone shouted racial slurs at him near campus, an MU Police spokesman said the university could pursue disciplinary action if any students were found to be involved.

Payton Head, the president of the Missouri Students Association, said Saturday — in a Facebook post that went viral— that he was walking down Hitt Street the night before when someone in a pickup truck rolled by shouting racial slurs.

MU Police Maj. Brian Weimer said the department has reached out to Head.

“Obviously, calling someone names is completely inappropriate,” Weimer said, “but as of this moment, there is no crime yet.”

Head wrote about the incident in a Facebook post on Saturday. As of Friday evening, the post was shared 1,696 times. The incident became national news, and outlets including the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and The Washington Post reported on it.

"This is my reality," Head wrote. "Is it weird that I think that I have the right to feel safe here too?"

On Thursday, five days after Head wrote his post, MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin issued a statement calling on the MU community to stand against “incidents of bias and discrimination.”

Loftin did not refer specifically to Head, but he referred to “recent incidents” in general.
Early Thursday morning, before Loftin's statement was emailed to students, Head tweeted at MU's Twitter account.

Payton Head @MSAPresident
@Mizzou I just don't get it. Why are we so reactive? Why has everyone shared my story but you? 6 days later is unacceptable. Am I bad PR?

Christian Basi, an MU spokesman, said Thursday that Loftin and Head talked briefly on the phone before the chancellor published his statement. Basi said Loftin expressed concern about the incident and offered his support to Head.

“Let me be very clear about where I stand as Mizzou’s chancellor: One bias incident is too many. The incidents that I have heard about — both blatant and subtle — are totally unacceptable,” Loftin said in the statement.

According to the statement, the delay in response by the administration was to give MU Police time to interview people involved in the incident.

Head did not respond to repeated requests for comment Thursday or Friday.

Sydney Rice, an MU senior who is a diversity peer educator for the campus multicultural center, said that she expected more from the chancellor.

Rice said she thought the statement only told people to stop conducting certain behavior, instead of providing an avenue for better behavior.

“It’s like when a parent says, ‘Stop hitting,’ instead of explaining why it’s not okay to hit people,” Rice said.
University of Missouri student Payton Head said he was called a racial slur on campus last week and that the experience reminded him why he got involved with student government.

As Head walked through campus near Hitt Street last Friday night, he said, a group of guys riding on the back of a pickup truck started screaming the slur at him.

Head created a Facebook post — which was shared more than 1,500 times this week — about his experience and gave examples of other instances of racism he has heard from students during his time at MU.

“This happens to students all the time,” Head said in an interview. “I talked about … what it means to be transgender and to be spit on walking down Ninth Street … or holding hands in a same-sex relationship and having people throw drinks at you. It sickens me … that people think this kind of behavior is OK.”

Head is president of the Missouri Students Association, MU’s undergraduate student government. He said he ran for MSA after a similar experience he had while walking through Greektown in spring 2014.

Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin addressed discrimination on campus in a statement this week, saying one incident is too many.

“The incidents that I have heard about — both blatant and subtle — are totally unacceptable,” Loftin wrote.

Race issues and discrimination have been an increased focus on campus during the past year. Loftin and MU administrators hosted a listening session last December to hear concerns faculty, staff and students had after the events in Ferguson last fall related to the police shooting of Michael Brown. The conversation that day steered away from Ferguson as students talked about their own experiences with discrimination on campus. The discussion continued during a spring forum.
In response to those campus conversations, the MU Faculty Council created a Race Relations Committee. The committee is working to become more familiar with problems on campus and will develop tools to educate faculty about race issues.

The association has focused on inclusion and diversity, Head said, including creating a gender-neutral restroom map and hosting diversity and inclusion workshops. But the student leaders and MU need to do more, he said, to change the culture on campus.

“I don’t want to come back in 20 years and be having the same conversation,” Head said.

In his Facebook post, Head encouraged students to become diversity peer educators — an MU training program — and to hold their fellow students accountable for unacceptable behavior.

MU still has work to do when it comes to discrimination and bias on campus, Loftin wrote in his letter.

“We will be continuing our efforts to respond to the concerns that have been raised and to employ working groups relative to the steps we must take as a university and a community to live up to our values,” Loftin wrote.

Loftin encouraged anyone who has safety concerns to contact the University of Missouri Police Department. Head said MU police contacted him for more information about last Friday’s incident but that he did not have a lot of details to provide.

“In the moment, you’re not worried about the license plate number,” he said.

Head said the racist heckling didn’t make him angry but that he did feel disappointed.

“This is home, and I just want this place to be better,” Head said.

The (Fake) Meat Revolution

IF only meat weren’t so delicious!

Sure, meat may pave the way to a heart attack. Yes, factory farms torture animals. Indeed, producing a single hamburger patty requires more water than two weeks of showers. But for those of us who are weak willed, there’s nothing like a juicy burger.
Ah, but that’s changing.

A revolution is unfolding in the food world, resulting in the first alternatives to meat that taste like the real thing. Veggie burgers used to seem like a blend of tofu and cardboard, but in the last few years food scientists have come up with first-rate faux chicken strips and beef crumbles.

It will be a while before we’re fooled by a fake sirloin steak, but scientists think they’ll eventually get there. And before long you’ll walk down the meat aisle of your supermarket and see plant-based “meat,” even leaking “blood.”

These meat alternatives could end up being cheaper than real meat. Buyers won’t just be vegans but also carnivores simply looking for healthy, sustainable, cheap food.

So look out. If the alternatives to meat are tasty, healthier, cheaper, better for the environment and pose fewer ethical challenges, the result may be a revolution in the human diet.

“The next couple of years will be exciting ones,” says Joseph D. Puglisi, a Stanford University professor of structural biology who is working on meat alternatives. “We can use a broad range of plant protein sources and create a palette of textures and tastes — for example, jerky, cured meats, sausage, pork.”

“The true challenge will be to recreate more complex pieces of meat that are the pinnacle of the meat industry,” he added. “I believe that plausible, good-tasting steaks and pork loins are only a matter of time.”

Puglisi is advising Beyond Meat, a start-up that is a leader in the field, with investments from Bill Gates and both Biz Stone and Ev Williams of Twitter fame, not to mention Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, the venture capital firm that backed Google and Amazon. Beyond Meat says its sales are doubling each year.

“We’re really focused on the mainstream,” said Ethan Brown, the founder of Beyond Meat, over a lunch of fake chili, meatballs and hamburgers. It was a banquet of the bogus.

Brown, 44, is deeply concerned by climate change and spent eight years in a company making hydrogen fuel cells. But he read that livestock cause more greenhouse gases than the entire transportation industry, and he wondered if he shouldn’t focus more on food.

He came across two University of Missouri scientists who had figured out how to realign plant fibers into something more like meat, and began working with them. Brown founded Beyond Meat in 2009, and Whole Foods helped the company develop imitation chicken strips that were its first product.

At the beginning of 2013, its products were in 360 stores; now they are found in 7,500, and will soon be in Walmarts as well. Beyond Meat is aiming to get its products on pizzas and in fast-food restaurants and is targeting the average consumer.
“We want to create the next great American meat company,” Brown says. “That’s the dream.”

One advantage is health. Beyond Meat’s best-selling product, the Beast Burger, is loaded with protein, vitamins, antioxidants and Omega-3s. The disadvantage, alas, is that it still tastes a bit too virtuous.

Mock chicken and beef crumbles are triumphs when mixed in other foods (Whole Foods once inadvertently swapped real curried chicken salad with fake curried chicken salad, and no one noticed for two days). But if I were a cow, I might be a bit embarrassed by Beyond Meat’s meatballs and Beast Burger.

Moreover, prices are still a bit higher than real meat.

But both taste and price are likely to improve in the next few years, and other companies are also making great progress. One of Beyond Meat’s rivals is Impossible Foods, founded by a Stanford University biochemist, Patrick O. Brown, and there is an explosion of research in this field today.

The mainstream food industry isn’t saying much publicly. But recently released documents from the American Egg Board, a quasi-governmental body, show it regarded Hampton Creek’s egg-free “Just Mayo” spread as a “major threat.” In one internal email, an Egg Board executive jokingly suggests hiring a hit man to deal with Hampton Creek.

My take is that the optimal approach to food, for health and ethical reasons, may be vegetarianism. But the average American still consumes close to half a pound of meat a day, so a large-scale impact requires providing options for the ambivalent or weak willed among us who can’t quite make the leap.

And if I can still enjoy a juicy burger now and then, while boosting my health, helping the environment and avoiding the brutalizing of farm animals, hey, I’m in!

**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

**Uncle Sam creates a scorecard for colleges and universities**

September 20, 2015 12:15 am  •  By Jim Gallagher

Ten years after entering Washington University, former students are earning a median salary of $62,300 a year.

That’s a good thing to know if you’re shopping for a college.
Former students at the University of Missouri-Columbia earn a median of $46,000. At the St. Louis campus, it’s $40,400. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, it’s $56,000.

So says Uncle Sam, and he has their tax filings.

That and a lot of other useful stuff is in the new version of the federal government’s College Scorecard, available at collegescorecard.ed.gov.

The data have some problems — more on that later — but anyone looking for a college or trade school will find the scorecard very useful. You’ll get a rough idea of what you’ll actually pay at a particular school, after financial aid, and the debt you’ll take on. You can sort the schools delivering good value from schools that soak their students for cash and dump them out semi-educated.

For instance, the average annual price is $33,484 per year for a four-year Washington University degree, after financial aid. (Low- and middle-income students may get it cheaper.) The price tag is about $16,940 at Mizzou and $18,798 at the University of Illinois.

Put that cost together with salary and other data, and you start to see if you’ll get your money’s worth.

At some schools, the value is questionable. At Stevens Institute of Business and Arts in St. Louis, students pay $19,259 per year to earn $26,200 after leaving — just slightly above the $25,000 average for high school grads.

For another gauge of real-life payoff, look at the percent of students paying down their student loans. Nationally, two-thirds of graduates with loans have made at least one payment reducing the principal within the last three years. At the University of Missouri-St. Louis it’s a healthy 78 percent. At Maryville University, it’s 84 percent. But at Harris-Stowe State University, it’s 26 percent, and 46 percent at Stevens.

If you can’t pay down your loans, you didn’t get value for your tuition.

Forty-four percent of students who begin college never graduate. Some are left with student debt, but without the nice bump in income that comes with a degree.

So look at graduation rates to see how well a school moves students toward success. At St. Louis University, for instance, 70 percent graduate within six years of starting. At Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, it’s 51 percent.

Those comparisons can be a little unfair to commuter schools, like SIUE and UMSL (graduation rate 46 percent), where lots of working people go part time and take more than six years to finish.

That gets us to some other problems with the scorecard. The median salary figure includes stay-at-home parents, the disabled and unemployed. The median salary for college graduates with jobs would be higher.

The 10-year pay calculation is based on people who started college, so dropouts are included. Still, 10 years is plenty of time for part-timers to graduate, and a school with a lot of underpaid dropouts isn’t getting the job done. The salary figure isn’t broken down by major.

“That’s a big flaw,” says Kal Chany, author of the Princeton Review’s Paying for College Without Going Broke.

Engineers make lots more than teachers. So, heavy engineering and science schools will look better than other colleges, he notes.

In fact, the Missouri University of Science and Technology — the state’s engineering college in Rolla — has the highest 10-year salary in the region at $65,500.
The salary calculation also includes only students who applied for a student loan or other financial aid while in college. Rich kids are left out.

How should parents and students use the scorecard?

Carefully, Chany says. Schools that show high salaries and low costs are also generally very hard to get admitted to, he notes. That’s an argument for parental whip-cracking over students in high school.

The scorecard also doesn’t solve the issue of whether a high-cost, high-prestige school really delivers extra value, even if its graduates make more money on average. Would a kid smart enough to get into Washington University do just as well in life if he went to UMSL on the cheap?

The scorecard gives typical out-of-pocket costs for students at different income levels. But you if have a 30 ACT, or play a mean fiddle, a school may give you a better deal.

The scorecard tells you nothing about campus culture, or the quality of teaching in a given major. A great school for finance may be rotten for a poet.

So, the scorecard is a way to screen out schools that don’t get the job done for students, or charge too much for middling results. The scorecard won’t show you where to go. It will show you where not to.

It might also swing some close decisions between similar schools.

The Obama administration gave up on its plan to actually rank colleges for quality, after hearing howls from the ivory towers. That’s a shame, because organizations such as U.S. News will rank them anyway, and parents pay attention.

The government, with all its data, could do a better job.

Letter to the Editor: An open letter to Chancellor Loftin from Jordan Hoyt

“We have a right to choose how and where we enhance and employ our education, and the university’s decision to sever ties with Planned Parenthood infringes on that right.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is a letter to the editor written by a member of the MU community who is not part of The Maneater’s staff. It is not the opinion of The Maneater or its editorial board. In accordance with our letters policy, we publish every letter submitted to us barring personal attacks or hate speech; we welcome responses to this and everything we publish via a letter or in our comments section.

An open letter to Chancellor Loftin:
You know me — we’ve met many times. I am an active and vocal graduate student leader on campus, currently earning my second degree from the University of Missouri. I am a taxpayer, a homeowner and a registered voter. I am a native Columbian and a lifelong resident of this amazing city — and I do love my city. I love our passion and our diversity. I love our citizens and the voices they give to the issues that are important to them. I love that we are one of the most educated cities in the nation, thanks to the many institutions of higher education that call Columbia home. However, I do not believe that you have had the opportunity to cultivate such a love for your new home. If you had, you would know that Columbia needs people to care for it intensely and unwaveringly. You would know that your graduate students trickle into our community and do an immense service for this city. We work in hospitals, schools, government, city offices, local businesses and restaurants. We are interns, fellows, researchers, and graduate employees; mentors, parents, friends, and caregivers. We love what we do because, when we set aside our shamefully low income, lack of housing, loss of insurance, funding cuts, skyrocketing student loan interest rates, the university’s blatant disregard for the phenomenal weight that we pull as a student body, and your stony silence in the face of racism perpetrated against your students, we find that we are still privileged enough to be able to pursue our dreams in higher education. Ours is a privilege borne of choice.

We have a right to choose how and where we enhance and employ our education, and the university’s decision to sever ties with Planned Parenthood infringes on that right. It is a disservice to your students — graduate and undergraduate alike — and your community, and it opens a dangerous door. In doing so, you have diminished our capacity to serve our community’s needs, and destroyed a decades-long partnership that has benefitted students, faculty, and the population that is served by our local Planned Parenthood — a population that needs preventative cancer screenings, breast exams, STI testing, well-woman exams, family planning services and educational outreach; all services that the students and faculty who choose to work with Planned Parenthood are well-qualified to provide. So I’m writing today to ask you, where does this end? If the University of Missouri — a public, land grant institution dedicated to higher education — will bend to the threats of a small group of misinformed, biased, witch-hunting politicians at the cost of their students’ educational enrichment, then why would any student choose to come here? What benefit is there in coming to an institution that doesn’t value your community, work, family, intelligence, diversity, or freedom of choice? What other carefully cultivated partnerships will be hastily broken, without input from the faculty and students who are directly impacted by such a decision, before you realize that these people — your faculty, staff, and students - are the very heart of your work here, and you won’t survive without us?

Chancellor Loftin, I’m writing to tell you that your heart is still pumping. It’s pounding in your ears and it’s only going to get louder. Perhaps it’s time to start marching to its beat.
No trigger warnings yet on classes at Kansas, Missouri campuses, but profs still worried

BY SCOTT CANON
scanon@kcstar.com

Mount Holyoke College dumped its long-standing productions of the play “The Vagina Monologues” this year because, its theater board concluded, “the show offers an extremely narrow perspective on what it means to be a woman.”

Narrow because it explores feminine identity in a way that leaves out transgender women.

Lauded as a clever merger of art and feminism when it debuted nearly 20 years ago, the play’s known a history where it once was more likely to drop jaws simply with its focus on female anatomy.

In fact, it still runs at the University of Missouri and tends to shock Columbia audiences more for its explicit dialogue than for slighting any sliver of femininity.

Those reactions — that the work of Eve Ensler is dated feminism, or that the work is overly provocative — reveal a difference between an East Coast liberal arts college for women and a public Midwestern school.

Yet Midwestern schools also worry that campuses could wind up too sensitive about too many things to deal with controversy in classwork.

Conservatives roll their eyes at ivory tower political correctness — what they often see as an obsession with victimhood.
Liberals argue that something as painless as a word choice here and there can go a long way to making more students feel welcomed.

Meantime, colleges try to teach a wide range of students — evangelical, gay, blind to privilege, immigrant — to refine their critical thinking and emerge sturdy enough for a sometimes-ugly real world.

College professors say they can feel caught in the middle in ways that make it harder to talk candidly with students about anything verging on controversy.

“There is pressure from both sides,” said MU faculty member Nicole Monnier — from the sometimes oversensitive left offended by seemingly innocent language and from the increasingly suspicious right that sees college faculty as liberal brainwashers.

Now come “trigger warnings.” Such preambles give a heads-up to discussions of violence, sexuality, race or merely points in history that might traumatize some unknown fraction of students.

In the last two years students at the University of Michigan, Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, Oberlin in Ohio, Rutgers in New Jersey, Scripps in California and Wellesley in Massachusetts all pressed their schools for warnings about troubling passages in films, books, lectures and art displays.

At the same time, a series of critiques now argues that U.S. campuses tend to sheath young people in intellectual bubble wrap. The critics include many instructors.

“It’s a noble impulse,” Monnier said. “But part of me wonders if we’re hurting students’ ability to deal with life. After all, they will eventually leave our campuses.”

Look far enough across the higher education landscape and you’ll find one faction or another insisting on sensitivities that others find absurd:

- Late last year at the University of Michigan, Omar Mahmood lost his column at the student newspaper after satirizing trigger warnings and conversations about privilege.
- A professor at the University of California-Santa Barbara tangled with anti-abortion protesters on campus. She ultimately pleaded no contest to
misdemeanor charges of theft and battery. But she found solidarity among various academic circles after saying photographs of fetuses triggered her actions and violated her right to “go to work and not be in harm.”

▪ Harvard Law professor Jeannie Suk wrote in The New Yorker in December that “students seem more anxious about classroom discussion, and about approaching the law of sexual violence in particular, than they have ever been in my eight years as a law professor. … Students often ask teachers not to include the law of rape on exams for fear that the material would cause them to perform less well. One teacher I know was recently asked by a student not to use the word ‘violate’ in class — as in ‘Does this conduct violate the law?’ — because the word was triggering.”

▪ In July, the University of New Hampshire removed a “bias-free language guide” from its website that warned against using the word “American” and counseled against using the word “poor” to describe someone’s economic status.

The guide’s authors said it aimed to encourage critical thinking about language, not to censor discussion. The university issued a statement declaring “speech guides or codes have no place at any American university.”

College cocoon

Defenders of trigger warnings say they fit uniquely into college classrooms. Young, often naive students find themselves grouped with almost random strangers exploring subjects that can stir strong emotions.

“It’s the decent thing to do,” wrote Sean Trainor, who teaches history and humanities at Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Fla. “It is simply a sign of respect for one’s students, for the wrenching process of learning, and for their ability to make informed decisions about their education and welfare.”

Most academics trace trigger warnings to online forums among people subjected to sexual assault. When some participants began to recount details of their attacks, others insisted on trigger warnings so they wouldn’t revisit their own trauma.

In time, that migrated to campuses, particularly women’s and gender studies programs where rape is a regular topic.
From there, trigger warnings move to other disciplines.

The American Association of University Professors weighed in against the practice, saying “this movement is already having a chilling effect on our teaching and pedagogy.”

A draft policy considered, then abandoned, at Oberlin suggested warning students of discussions of “racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism” — things seen exclusively from the vantage of somebody who identified as male or female at birth and continues to see themselves as that gender — “ableism, and other issues of privilege and oppression.”

An instructor navigating so many topical landmines would find it difficult to step into any subject, said Hans-Joerg Tiede, member of the committee on academic freedom and tenure at the American Association of University Professors.

“This idea of not offending or upsetting or challenging students came from the right 20 years ago,” said Tiede, a computer science professor at Illinois Wesleyan University. Now, he said, it comes from a variety of directions.

Labeled as leftists by conservatives, college faculty have long chafed at suggestions that they don’t make room in the classroom for a range of political views. Several public schools in Missouri have adopted statements of “intellectual pluralism” promising that sort of openness — a move widely seen as reacting to criticism from conservative Republicans who dominate the General Assembly.

Faculty at various universities in Kansas and Missouri said they’ve not heard their students ask for trigger warnings, but dread that day is near.

“It’s hard to predict what will upset people,” said Charlene Muehlenhard, a professor of psychology and women, gender and sexuality studies at the University of Kansas. “If someone has been traumatized, it’s very hard to predict what might be upsetting to them. … So what do you warn them about?”

Yet she and other professors also say a good instructor briefs students about what to expect in class. It’s less formal than a trigger warning on a class syllabus, but serves the same purpose.

“The stuff we’re talking about is not safe stuff,” said Clarence Lang, chairman of the African and African-American studies department at KU. “I don’t think you
can sanitize social inequalities, racism, misogyny. What you can do is make sure that people discuss these things in a climate of mutual respect.”

Or what if, like MU professor Stephanie Shonekan, you teach a class about hip-hop and wander into the inevitable discussion about using the N-word? And your white students don’t understand why the black students are offended when the white kids sing along to rap with the taboo word in the lyrics?

“The white hip-hop heads are kind of stunned by what the black hip-hop heads say about the N-word and the use of it … that it really matters who’s saying it,” said Shonekan, an ethnomusicologist and chairwoman of MU’s Department of Black Studies.

Professors say that they watch their language, that they’re aware students might be sensitive, even oversensitive, to what comes up in class.

“It’s part of being an instructor. But we’re not sugar-coating our learning,” said Fred Guzek, a marketing and management professor and president of the Kansas State University Faculty Senate. “It’s not as if they’re in a protected cocoon.”

Many in academia say accommodating the outlook of a wide range of students doesn’t require censoring course work or employing trigger warnings.

“If we’re not pushing students a little bit out of their comfort zones,” said Deborah Curtis, provost and chief learning officer at the University of Central Missouri, “then we’re not helping them.”
Infographic: Breaking down Clery releases since 2011

Sixteen of the 53 releases involved sexual assault and rape.

The MU Police Department has sent out 53 Clery releases, or emails informing MU students and employees of crimes reported on campus, since 2011. The Maneater analyzed Clery releases from 2011 to the present based on data from MUPD’s website.

Clery releases are not related to reports made to the Title IX office, which released its first annual report Thursday. The Title IX Office does not share information about sexual assaults with the police department. The only time it would share information with the police department is if there was a threat to overall campus safety, MU spokesperson Christian Basi said.

Sexual assault and rape were the most commonly Clery-reported incidents, with 16 reports. Males were the suspects in 89 percent of the reports, and females were the victims in 66 percent of the reports.

Race of the suspect was specified in 40 of the 53 releases. Of the releases that included race, 45 percent listed the suspect as white and 45 percent listed the suspect as black.

The 2012-13 school year had the most releases sent of the past five school years, with 16.

All schools that participate in federal financial aid programs are required to send timely warnings about campus crimes that pose a threat to students or employees based on the Jeanne Clery Act, according to the Clery Center for Security on Campus.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM curators spend nearly seven hours Sunday behind closed doors

KASIA KOVACS AND AUSTIN HUGUELET, 12 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — The UM System Board of Curators met for seven hours Sunday in closed session. None of the six curators present — two others joined by phone — commented as they walked briskly out of the meeting room in University Hall.

They took a few breaks and had lunch brought in, but they spent most of the meeting behind closed doors.

The curators, who make up the governing body of the University of Missouri System, called the closed session at 5 p.m. on Thursday. According to the agenda, the board closed the meeting to talk privately about "certain confidential or privileged communications with university counsel, negotiated contracts and personnel matters."

Although the state Sunshine Law allows discussions involving personnel matters to be closed to the public, any vote to hire, fire, promote or discipline an employee must be made public within 72 hours of the close of the meeting.

UM System spokesman John Fougere said that if a decision of another kind is made, it will be announced to the public. But he said he didn't know a timeline for such an announcement if it occurs.

The meeting at University Hall lasted from 8 a.m. to about 3:15 p.m. The curators present were board chairman Donald Cupps of Cassville, vice chairwoman Pamela Henrickson of Jefferson City and members Ann Covington of Columbia, Maurice Graham of Clayton and John Phillips and Phillip Snowden, both of Kansas City.
Curators David Steelman of Rolla and David Steward of St. Louis and non-voting student representative Tracy Mulderig, who attends the University of Missouri-St. Louis, joined by conference call.

Neither Steward nor Steelman could be reached for comment late Sunday afternoon. The board is supposed to have nine members, but no one is currently representing District 1, which covers the city of St. Louis.

Also at the meeting were UM System President Tim Wolfe, General Counsel Steve Owens and board secretary Cindy Harmon.

The curators met on a home football weekend for the Tigers. It also was Family Weekend at MU, with parents and siblings of students making their presence felt, especially in downtown Columbia. Mizzou Alumni Association volunteers from across the country returned to participate in Leaders Day.

It was a busy end to a busy string of days at MU. Last weekend, Missouri Students Association president Payton Head responded to being called racist slurs near campus in a widely shared Facebook post. The Washington Post published an article about Head's response on Wednesday.

Last Monday, the resignation of Patrice "Patrick" Delafontaine, who became dean of the MU School of Medicine on Dec. 1, was announced, effective immediately.

On Tuesday, the Missourian reported that contracts between MU's medical and nursing schools and Planned Parenthood were canceled since the Senate Interim Committee on the Sanctity of Life began its investigation this past summer.

On Thursday, MU released its first review of student sex discrimination reports to the year-old Title IX Office.
Messenger: Nixon to voters who want a say on stadium: Let them eat cake

September 19, 2015 10:30 pm  •  By Tony Messenger

The opening words of a resolution passed by the Missouri Legislature in 2001 stand in stark contrast to Gov. Jay Nixon’s contention that elected officials deserve no say in whether taxpayers’ hard-earned dollars are tapped to subsidize a billionaire’s National Football League investment in St. Louis.

“WHEREAS, Section 21.527, RSMo., requires that certain projects to be funded by revenue bonds shall be approved by the General Assembly,” begins the resolution, which related to the new University of Missouri basketball arena now known as Mizzou Arena. “WHEREAS, the General Assembly is desirous of approving a project for a sports arena ...”

Nixon knows those words well. He wrote most of them.

He was the state’s attorney general, but, more importantly, the intermediary between his alma mater and the anonymous donor of arena seed money (then-Blues owner Bill Laurie). Nixon was then, as he is now with a new NFL stadium in St. Louis, front and center in favor of using public funds to build a massive monument to this nation’s obsession with big-time sports.

Then, as now, Nixon’s role was controversial. Then, as now, a billionaire was calling the shots.

In 2001, though, Nixon recognized the obvious: Public money should not be committed to a sports stadium project, whether for the university or a professional team, without either a vote of the people or their elected representatives.

These days, the governor swims in a sea of contradictions.

For the television cameras and sports columnists, he is the man leading the charge.

For the Cole County judge who heard a challenge filed by state lawmakers questioning the governor’s authority to commit state money to the project without legislative approval, he was just a bystander. Nothing to see here, the governor’s lawyers argued on his behalf. Jay Nixon who?

Lately, the governor has gone so far as to suggest that economic development projects are not worthy of legislative approval. It is as though the two biggest economic development deals of his tenure as governor — massive taxpayer subsidies handed out to Ford and Boeing to keep them in Missouri and hopefully entice job growth — are but a mirage. Both of those deals required a special session of the Missouri Legislature and votes by local elected bodies.

If you are a Rams fan, of course, such process concerns are like a referee from the No Fun League calling a 15-yard penalty for excessive celebration after your team scores the winning touchdown. Who cares?

You want NFL football in St. Louis, and you don’t care about the economics, or the civics, of making it happen.
I get that. I am a lifelong sports fan. From almost the day I was born, I have bled the blue and orange of my beloved Denver Broncos. Last year, like tens of thousands of my ilk, I walked out of the still completely functional Edward Jones Dome, head hanging low, stunned at the sudden realization that Peyton Manning was old.

My new sports columnist colleague, Benjamin Hochman, jumped on the stadium bandwagon after his first interview with the Stadium-Cheerleader-In-Chief, pointing to Coors Field in my hometown as a great example of what a stadium can do to revive a distressed area.

Neverminding the clear difference between a stadium open for 81 dates in a city like Denver with mild summers, vs. one open for eight games a year, much of it during the doldrums of a Midwestern winter, Hochman’s mention of Coors Field is apropos for one very important reason:

The people of Denver voted to build that stadium.

Actually, and there is another great lesson for St. Louis here, voters in a six-county region voted yes to approve a 1-cent sales tax to help fund the stadium.

If memory serves me correctly, I was one of them.

And given a chance, I would likely vote to fund an NFL stadium in St. Louis. Not because it would signal economic nirvana, but because it is as important culturally to me as the zoo, the art and history museums and the botanical garden.

But Nixon, and Mayor Francis Slay, who first vowed to “vigorously” defend a city law requiring a public vote, and then joined Nixon’s cheerleading squad the moment Judge Thomas Frawley threw taxpayers under the bus, are actively working against a public vote.

To me, that trumps every reasonable argument in favor of the stadium.

Jeannette Mott-Oxford agrees. The former state representative, who helped found the Coalition Against Public Funding for Stadiums that led to the now bypassed city law, is hopping mad over the lack of public process for a project that won’t get built without a massive taxpayer subsidy.

“When it comes to sports, we socialize the risk and privatize the profit. And that frosts my pumpkin,” she says. “The lack of transparency is appalling.”

In Missouri, if taxpayers don’t pay for schools, they go unfunded. If a city doesn’t pass a bond issue to buy new firetrucks, as happened in St. Louis in August, the firefighters have to make do.

But billionaires wanting to shave costs off of their monuments to greed?

They stand arm in arm with elected enablers from the porticos of our public buildings, tossing crumbs to the voters below.

Let them eat cake. Just don’t let them vote.
MU's Beckner, three teammates, involved in car accident

September 18, 2015 8:05 pm  •  By Dave Matter

UPDATED, 8:05 p.m.

COLUMBIA, Mo. • Missouri freshman defensive lineman Terry Beckner Jr. and three teammates were involved in a two-vehicle accident in Columbia on Friday, the MU athletics department confirmed. Wide receivers Keyon Dilosa and DeSean Blair and tailback Trevon Walters were passengers in Beckner’s car, which was involved in the wreck at College Avenue and University Avenue around 4 p.m.

Originally, MU released a statement saying all four were taken to University Hospital to treat injuries, none of which were considered life threatening. MU has since amended that statement, saying Beckner and Dilosa were treated for injuries at the scene of the accident and released. Blair and Walters were both transported to University Hospital as a precaution.

A Columbia Fire Department spokesman confirmed that an adult female was also transported to the hospital, along with two adult males and two minor children.

Missouri coach Gary Pinkel was photographed at the scene of the accident after the players were taken to the hospital.

In a statement sent to reporters, MU said the playing status of Beckner, Dilosa and Blair was being assessed and probably wouldn’t be known until Saturday. Walters is recovering from spring knee surgery and hasn’t played in a game this season. The Tigers (2-0) kick off against Connecticut (2-0) at 11 a.m. at Memorial Stadium.

The accident occurred around the time players head to the football facility from where they ride together to a local hotel to spend the night before the next day’s game.

Beckner, a key reserve from East St. Louis, Ill., and last year’s Post-Dispatch All-Metro Defensive Player of the Year, has four tackles through two games. He’s part of a five-man rotation at the two defensive tackle position. The highly recruited freshman was one of the country’s top-rated players in the 2015 signing class and chose Missouri over Auburn, Florida State and Ohio State.

Blair and Dilosa are both backup receivers and have played regularly the first two games. Dilosa, a redshirt freshman from Round Rock, Texas, started the season opener and has three catches for 25 yards. Blair, a redshirt freshman from Jacksonville, Fla., has a 21-yard reception.

The accident comes two months after junior defensive lineman Harold Brantley sustained serious leg and knee injuries in a one-car accident on June 21 in Columbia. Brantley will miss the season while recovering.
UPDATE: Beckner Jr. among four Missouri football players involved in car crash

MADELYNE MAAG AND CHRISTIAN CLARK, Sep 18, 2015

COLUMBIA — Missouri football players Terry Beckner Jr., Desean Blair, Keyon Dilosa and Trevon Walters were involved in a car crash Friday afternoon at College and University avenues.

Beckner Jr.’s car was one of two involved in the crash, which occurred about 3:52 p.m.

According to Mizzou Athletics media relations director Chad Moller, Beckner Jr. and Dilosa were treated and released at the scene of the accident. They were not transported to the hospital. Blair and Walters were transported to University Hospital as a precaution.

The other vehicle involved in the accident contained a woman and two children in car seats.

According to the MU Police Department, Whitney McCaully was driving a silver Ford Explorer north on College Avenue around 3:50 p.m. At University Avenue, she was turning left on a yellow flashing arrow. With a green light, Beckner was heading south on College Avenue when his SUV hit the right side of the Explorer.

The Explorer spun and landed with one tire on the median. The SUV containing the football players swerved right and crashed into a post.

All adult drivers and passengers were sober, and all were wearing seat belts, police said.

McCaully had two children, ages 1 and 4, in car seats. All three were taken to Boone Hospital after the accident Friday afternoon.
Moller released this statement Friday confirming the news:

“The status of Beckner, Blair and Dilosa is being assessed and likely not known until tomorrow. Walters has not played in Mizzou's first two games of the season, due to a knee injury sustained in the spring.”

Beckner Jr., a freshman defensive lineman, has registered one tackle for a loss and one pass break-up on the season. He was rated as one of the top high school players in the country last spring when he committed to Missouri.

Dilosa, also a freshman, has caught two passes for 25 yards this season.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Lee Elementary remembers lost loved ones with 'buddy bench'

JULIA QUADE, Sep 18, 2015

COLUMBIA — A new "buddy bench" on the playground at Lee Expressive Arts Elementary School holds a memory of Mariah Loriston. The bench’s legs are purple because that was Mariah's favorite color.

The 6-year-old kindergartner died last year from epilepsy-related causes.

On Friday, Mariah’s family, and Lee students and faculty, gathered by the playground to remember Mariah, as well as the lives of two other former Lee students.

Tashel Bordere, an MU assistant professor in human development and family science and a state extension specialist, began the memorial by pointing to the buddy bench. Installed two
weeks ago in memory of Mariah, it is a mosaic of hundreds of shiny, colorful stained glass stones.

Gennie Pfannenstiel, an integrated art specialist at Lee, helped think up the design. She worked with each classroom to integrate their studies of living organisms. Among the creatures the students chose for the bench were a lion, a monkey and an owl. Each animal has a heart incorporated into its design.

“We thought it would be appropriate to honor life and the life cycle,” Pfannenstiel said.

All students at Lee — estimated at 320 by principal Ed Elsea — had the opportunity to put at least one stone on the bench.

Bordere led grief counseling sessions for the students at Lee last October and November. The counseling wasn't tied to Mariah's illness, but it ended up preparing her classmates for her death on Dec. 29.

On Friday, the teachers and some of the students wore blue shirts that said #BlueForKids.

“It means these teachers support you, and children have feelings, too,” Bordere said.

She opened up the microphone for students who have lost loved ones to talk about them. A few went up in front and talked about family members and pets who have died.

Moved to tears, a couple of students left the memorial to talk with their teachers.

Classmates remembered Mariah and knew of other students who were good friends with her.

“We can always remember our loved ones,” Bordere told the gathering.

She named ways the students can remember loved ones who have died, including baking their favorite recipe, going to the park or telling stories about them. The students responded with laughter and smiles.
“Whenever you remember, you keep them close to your heart,” Bordere said.

She even led a call-and-response chant. “Does Lee forget?” Bordere shouted. “Lee remembers!” the students yelled back, brimming with the kind of enthusiasm elementary school children have by the bucket-full.

Elsea handed flowers to Mariah’s parents, Kendra Richardson and Pierre Loriston, as well as the family members of the other two former Lee students, DeAndra Carter and Jade Stafford. Mariah’s parents, brother and family friends wore shirts with her picture on the front.

Carter, a former graphic design student at MU, died this year when she was 25 years old. Her niece, Kaylie, is a fifth-grader at Lee now.

Jade died in 2013, two years after she left Lee, in a car crash. Her mother attended the memorial.

Karen Burger, the former principal at Lee, read a poem in memory of Mariah, Jade and Carter. The students responded to each stanza: “We remember.”

Elsea concluded the memorial by presenting a plaque that will be placed on the front of the bench.

He said the bench will serve as a buddy bench, meaning that if any student has a hard time finding someone to play with at recess, they can sit on the bench and other students will be able to go to the bench and include that student.

As the memorial concluded, the students joined together to play on the playground. Some ran to the buddy bench to get their picture taken with Mariah’s family members.

“She gets to live on,” Mariah's mother said. "Her story didn’t end that day.”