Loftin: MU will cover graduate assistants' health insurance costs next year

By Megan Favignano

Wednesday, October 14, 2015 at 7:22 pm

The University of Missouri will cover the cost of health insurance premiums for graduate student employees next year, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin said Wednesday.

“I met with the deans last Thursday morning and announced to them that we would be able to take care of the insurance going forward,” Loftin said.

Loftin revealed his decision to faculty at a meeting Wednesday after they expressed concerns about recruiting graduate students for next year. At the meeting, Nakhle Asmar, chairman of the Department of Mathematics, said his department wrote a letter to Loftin and Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies Leona Rubin last month that said faculty were concerned about recruiting without being able to tell prospective students what their health insurance would cost.

“It’s so detrimental that some departments have decided to skip recruiting all together,” Asmar said.

While Loftin said MU would cover insurance costs, he did not give more specifics. A task force looking at how the university can subsidize health insurance for graduate assistants is finalizing its recommendations, said Hank Foley, MU senior vice chancellor for research and graduate studies. The panel might publish its recommendations in the next month, he said.

In August, MU informed graduate assistants it could no longer pay for their health insurance premiums because of a recent IRS interpretation of the Affordable Care Act. Graduate students with assistantships also receive tuition waivers and stipends in exchange for teaching undergraduate classes and conducting research.

After backlash from students and faculty, MU officials said the university would continue to pay for graduate assistant health insurance premiums. Officials created a task force to find a way to continue covering graduate assistants’ health care costs while following the IRS interpretation of health care law.

Loftin said it is likely the IRS will create an exemption to its interpretation for graduate students.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU chancellor guarantees graduate student employee health insurance subsidies now, in future

EMMA VANDELINDER, 11 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — MU graduate student employees will continue to receive health insurance subsidies from the university, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced in the Fall General Faculty meeting Wednesday afternoon.

“We will guarantee that we can make this happen,” Loftin said of providing the subsidies to graduate student employees now and in the future.

Graduate student employees currently receive health insurance subsidies from the university. On Aug. 14, students received an email notifying them that, effective the next day, the university would not provide health insurance subsidies for graduate student employees due to a ruling by the IRS, which threatened the university with fines if they continued to provide the subsidies.

The decision was reversed on Aug. 21 and the subsidies were immediately reinstated, but some students, faculty and staff had been waiting for a permanent decision from administrators.

Loftin’s announcement at the meeting was made in response to a question posed by Nakhle Asmar, MU Mathematics chairman and professor. Asmar referenced a letter he sent Loftin a month ago that asked when professors and graduate students would know the final decision on the state of the health insurance subsidies.

“Given the need to constantly replenish our teaching ranks and the start of the recruiting season and the fact that delaying your decision until January 2016 will undoubtedly hurt our recruiting efforts, is there any way to resolve the health insurance issue by November 1?” the letter said.
The letter, Asmar said, was endorsed by over 40 faculty members and over 30 chairs from various departments. He said he had not received a response from administrators.

Loftin said he had received the letter, but was waiting to make an official announcement.

“It’s how can we do it? That’s the question,” Loftin said. “It’s not if we want to do it — we want to do it. The question is how to do it the best way.”

Loftin said he was given an informal report on the progress of the Task Force on Graduate Student Health Insurance, which indicated two possible solutions to the problem.

The IRS agreed to pursue waivers of their original ruling for graduate students, but has asked for confirmation of this decision from another government department, Loftin said. The change could take more time, but it could be a viable solution, he said.

Loftin did not discuss the other option in detail, but indicated that the task force had another plan.

“I can’t tell you which method we’ll do right now, but we’ll certainly take care of the issue,” he said.

Loftin said he's waiting on a formal report from the task force before he makes the official, detailed announcement, but he gave his personal guarantee that the health insurance subsidies were secure.

Hank Foley, senior vice chancellor for research, graduate studies and economic development and member of the task force, said the formal report will be released by the end of the year.

Others expressed concern about the cancellation of a number of contracts MU held with Planned Parenthood, which allowed students to complete clinical hours with the health care provider. Loftin said the university did not back away from all of the contracts. Some of the contracts had expired and some had not been used, he said, which is why they were discontinued. He also said two new contracts between MU and Planned Parenthood are in the works.
“If you have a demand in your student body for these agreements to be in place and able to have practicums of vocation, do it,” Loftin said.

“We’re simply writing them in a way to make sure that we’re compliant with state law,” he said.

One faculty member asked about the resignation of the School of Medicine dean, Patrice Delafontaine. Loftin said he was not able to comment on why Delafontaine decided to resign for privacy reasons.

Two faculty members also brought up the university’s decision to discontinue full tuition waivers for graduate student employees with quarter-time assistantships, or graduate student employees who work for the university about 10 hours a week.

“The goal is to make sure that any programs impacted by the quarter-time waiver going away would be worked with individually to find the best possible solution for them,” Loftin said. “That’s where it is today, as far as I know, anyway.”

Lois Huneycutt, associate professor and director of graduate studies in the Department of History, has been a prominent voice in the discussion on graduate rights. She argued that programs were "thrown into chaos" with the announcement of a decision that, she said, was made by people who had "no clue" about how departments use assistantships and how important they are.

“All of the programs that use 0.25 appointments for graduate students are affected by (the change),” said Michelle Morris, associate professor in the Department of History. “... My heartfelt suggestion is simply that you reconsider and that you work on something more systemic and less ad hoc.”
Administrators take tour of MU campus in wheelchairs

By Megan Favignano

Wednesday, October 14, 2015 at 2:00 pm

As University of Missouri student James Bohnett approached the end of a crosswalk on campus, he lifted up the front end of his wheelchair to avoid a small dip in the sidewalk. MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin followed behind him — also in a wheelchair. Loftin made it over the dip, but his wheelchair got stuck in a metal storm grate farther down the sidewalk.

Bohnett said accessibility on campus is important. He recalled a time when he was 30 minutes late to class because had trouble finding a wheelchair-accessible entrance into a campus building.

“When you’re a disabled individual, you’re looking for that same independence that anyone else is looking for,” Bohnett said.

Loftin, UM System President Tim Wolfe and MU Provost Garnett Stokes toured campus in wheelchairs Tuesday to learn more about accessibility on campus. Two students — including Bohnett — two professors, MU’s Americans with Disabilities Act compliance manager and a member of MU’s Disability Center joined them.

During the tour, Amber Cheek, MU’s ADA compliance manager, pointed out the lack of signs leading to accessible entrances on campus. Such entrances, especially on MU’s older buildings, are not always in the front or noticeable, she said.

“Ellis Library has its accessibility on the side, and it works well if you know it’s there,” Bohnett said.

Cheek is working with campus facilities to add signs across campus. She hopes to have that project complete by the end of the school year.

Wolfe also noted the steepness of ramps. Loftin said that while he was in a wheelchair, he noticed not as many people made eye contact with him.

Overall, Bohnett said, MU is accessible for people with disabilities, especially given the age of some campus buildings. The Student Recreation Complex, where Bohnett spends a lot of time playing basketball, is one of the most accessible buildings, he said.
Julie McGinnity walked with her service dog during Tuesday’s tour. She is a graduate student set to get her degree in December, and she is blind.

When she arrived at MU in 2013, McGinnity tried to have her screen reader — a computer program that reads aloud — tell her where accessible entrances were from the online accessibility campus map. She said her screen reader did not do well with the map’s format.

McGinnity, a campus student organization and the Disability Center at MU are creating a 3-D map of campus with terrain details, accessible entrances and buildings labeled with Braille.

After the tour, Loftin said MU needs to do more to make campus accessible beyond legal requirements.

Wolfe is not the first president to take a tour of campus in a wheelchair — former President Elson Floyd did as well. Floyd, 59, died in June. He was president of the UM System from 2003 to 2007, before he became president of Washington State University.

At a memorial for Floyd on MU’s campus, Gerald Hitzhusen, MU associate professor and director of the Midwest Symposium on Therapeutic Recreation, challenged Wolfe to tour campus in a wheelchair as Floyd had done. Hitzhusen helped organize Tuesday’s tour.

The tour was part of MU’s Celebrate Ability Week events. The celebration continues with lectures and films throughout the week.

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Guest Column: Dear Chancellor Loftin: It isn't enough

Graduate student Jonathan Butler says Loftin’s response is a start, but it isn’t enough.

By Jonathan Butler

Dear Chancellor Loftin,

Your recent email about implementation of diversity and inclusion training is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

In order to continue to press forward in the right direction as a “Mizzou Family,” all demands submitted to administration going back to 1969, and even before that, need to be acknowledged and addressed. All of those demands made by concerned students, faculty and staff need to be tackled in a way that is not a "knee-jerk" reaction to external/internal pressures. I
would also caution you and your staff on the use of your language in email messages like these. Your language projects the image that administration crafted these strategies for change 1) out of their own concern and 2) as a result of the recent racial slur incident with the Legion of Black Collegians Homecoming royalty court. This is incorrect and problematic for two main reasons:

The first reason is that administrators are not the originators of these strategies for diversity and inclusion. These strategies started with Lloyd Gaines back in 1935 as he pursued a law degree here at MU and was faced with racism and hate. It continued in 1939 with Lucille Bluford fighting for her right to an education. It continued in 1969 with Black students fighting for their rights and demanding increases in Black faculty and staff. It continued in 2014 with the creation of MU4MikeBrown by three Black queer women who wanted to ignite change at Mizzou and put an end to the racist culture on campus. Even today in 2015 with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, you have students, especially those doing grassroots organizing (and aren't in formal organizations) who have purposefully, strategically and consistently brought these concerns to the attention of your administration. This is why your language that attempts to adopt strategies like diversity and inclusion training as “new strategies” without acknowledging where the ideas/strategies came from is disrespectful and false. These issues and the strategies that brave individuals have brought to the attention of administrators is not new to MU and also not new to you and your staff specifically. So to not acknowledge the protestors, organizers, students, faculty and staff that have taken of their time and energy to hold you and your administration accountable is very disrespectful and paints a false image of the work that your administration has been doing on this campus.

The second main reason this message is problematic is because it continues to only highlight incidents at MU that involve student organizations or people with social platforms like the Missouri Students Association’s president. Acknowledging their experiences is very important but by only highlighting those experiences you implicitly erase the hundreds, if not thousands, of marginalized students at MU who face incidents of racism, sexism, homophobia, islamophobia, transphobia and every over "ism" and "phobia" you can think about every day at MU. I think about how recently a friend of mine was faced with racist students outside of the J-School, and I did not see any messaging from you or your staff showing any kind of public concern or care for their situation which happened prior to the LBC incident. These "unheard" stories are worth your time and attention; their lived experiences are worth acknowledging and their humanity worth fighting for. This constant lack of acknowledgment to the struggles of oppressed individuals reinforces the notion that administrators only react to incidents on campus that happen to people in organizations or positions of social power. This also signifies that administrators are highly selective in their "concern and care" for members of the student body both undergraduate and graduate, which I personally believe to be a true yet unfortunate fact.

As I said in the beginning I acknowledge that diversity and inclusion strategies are a step, but it is not enough. You and your staff will be on the wrong side of history if you continue to erase the voices of marginalized students who fight for their lives and the lives of their friends every day. I hope that your staff puts out an additional statement acknowledging these facts because otherwise your words will end up being another shallow message that is not beneficial to the student body.
The Struggle Continues.

Column: Loftin’s response is a start, but not a solution.

Yes, I do think that the Chancellor is responsible for the 35,441 students enrolled at MU.

By Kennedy Jones

There have been some negative comments concerning my letter to Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, so let me get one thing straight before I continue. Thank you, Chancellor, for the truly caring steps you’ve chosen to take in this case. Many students have expressed their gratitude and appreciation for how the situation was handled.

For those of you who are asking if I believe that the Chancellor is responsible for the 35,441 students enrolled in MU as of 2014, the answer is yes, I do. Much like a parent is responsible for the actions of their children, so is Loftin. Much like a teacher, Loftin is responsible for the actions of the students enrolled in his class.

In school, it doesn't matter how they graded daily behavior, your teacher was still responsible for recording and taking action to correct your behavior. And much the same, that is Loftin's job. This week, through the Legion of Black Collegians, our students have taken actions to remember our roots and the struggles that we have, are, and will endure as a people.

Even outside these events, we were reminded by those that wish to challenge us of these very same things. And I must say that we were constantly reminded of our misplacement, of how silly the things we were doing were, whether you were told to "Go back to Africa" or had your opinions aggressively challenged, or whether you simply decided to march during the Uplift event.

Speaking of the Uplift event — it was beautiful. It was charged with emotional release and special remembrance. However, during the event, people were using Yik Yak to express their true opinions behind anonymous social media walls.

The mandatory discrimination course that each student will go through starting January 2016 is a step, but a step to something I fear can never be fully corrected, because these thoughts and opinions are so deeply ingrained in these few, I fear they'll never be able to separate themselves from the influences of their past.
Not every person can be stopped from expressing their opinions, but let us be clear that these recent events are not anomalies in the MU community. People hold these views frequently and feel completely comfortable with expressing them because they believe that they're right.

Editorial: Our wish list for MU’s new $1.3 billion campaign

Ellis Library, the Counseling Center, and graduate students all deserve prioritization.

In recent years, it's seemed as though our university has been just barely scraping by with its budget from year to year. Now, with the announcement of the $1.3 billion “Mizzou: Our Time to Lead” capital campaign, we’re hoping that the bill will no longer be passed to students for necessary projects that ought to be included in this fundraising campaign.

This capital campaign is, without a doubt, a huge positive for MU. It’s the largest fundraising campaign in our university’s history. What’s even more exciting is that over $650 million of the monetary goal has already been raised during the campaign’s silent phase. And the campaign has all the right ideas.

They want to bolster our endowment, which is important to the long-term financial health of our university. The endowment must be sizable and competitive with similar universities, which hasn’t been the case in the last decade. We hope to see the campaign remedy this shortcoming.

The campaign also seeks to fund more signature centers and institutes, which are essential to boosting the credibility of our university and furthering interdisciplinary research. The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders and the Reynolds Journalism Institute are two positive examples of this.

Lastly, the campaign sets out to create a “campus renaissance” to revitalize MU by rebuilding and extensively renovating various schools and centers around campus.

And that’s all fantastic.

We understand that this campaign is still relatively early in its development, and that it's impossible to say exactly where every dollar raised will go. We also understand that fundraising efforts like this seek out large gifts that are consequently spent on projects of the donor's choosing.
That being said, here are three things what we, as students, believe ought to be prioritized when deciding where the funds raised by the campaign end up going:

**MU Libraries**

Next month, students will vote in a referendum on an additional student fee to remedy our out-of-date library system. The fee would start off as a $5-per-credit-hour charge for the 2016-17 academic year and increase by $2 each year until it reaches $15 per credit hour in 2022.

There is no question that our library system needs this funding. Staffing has not kept up with MU’s growth. The quantity of library staff has decreased by 25 percent while the student body has grown by approximately 50 percent between 1998 and 2013. What’s more, library staffers haven’t seen salary raises in nine of the last 13 years. The fee would remedy the library’s staffing problems and would also fund major renovations to Ellis Library.

Our library system is in dire need of capital, and while this new campaign prioritizes projects like a new School of Music building and a renovation to the Fine Arts Building, it does not visibly prioritize revitalizing our library system.

This whole affair is confusing to us as students. The library system is coming to students for funding after being told by our administration that their requested funding just wasn’t in the cards. The library system cannot be left out of this capital campaign while other similar projects are being prioritized instead.

**MU Counseling Center**

The MU Counseling Center, much like our library system, is also severely understaffed. In the last year, MU has seen a 35 percent increase in requests for mental health services. With more people using the center, accompanied by an increasing awareness of mental health on college campuses, the counseling center needs capital to grow and accommodate this demand.

The Counseling Center doesn’t just need more staff, it needs staff that have the opportunity to meet with the same student each time, rather than forcing that student to visit several different staff members. The center cannot make meaningful progress toward helping those who suffer from mental illness without establishing a rapport with the students who seek out help.

On the Giving To Mizzou website, there is a section dedicated to donations for health services at MU. However, while MU Health Care, the School of Medicine and the School of Nursing all have donation sections, the Counseling Center does not. This needs to change. MU needs to prioritize the imminent needs of the center in order to truly begin a campus renaissance.

**MU Graduate Students**

In the wake of the protests and marches surrounding graduate student rights, MU still hasn’t established a plan to improve the way it treats its graduate students, much less meet all of the demands they’ve made.
They’ve asked for higher stipends, tuition waivers, childcare and more affordable graduate student housing. It’s time that our administration start taking these demands seriously, and one simple way of doing that would be to prioritize the needs of graduate students in this campaign.

Capital campaigns aim to accommodate the growth of a university, and one aspect of growth is improved wages and accommodations for university employees. Improving conditions for our graduate students is imperative to achieving “global leadership in research and teaching,” which is the stated goal of the campaign.

Column: We cannot sit idly by while our fellow students are being exploited

Our graduate students are being exploited right under our noses, and too many undergraduates aren’t even aware of it.

By Madison Conte

In the classroom or at the columns, armed with chalk or a megaphone, we’ve all witnessed our crimson-clad graduate students in action. They’re an impassioned breed, fervently teaching undergraduates new concepts, all the while soaking up their own lessons and balancing their lives at home.

University-vetted, graduate students have plenty of wisdom to share, so students often find themselves hanging onto each word in English classes and seeking them out during their office hours for help with those pesky problem sets. They have so much to offer, so we listen; but it seems the university isn’t offering them the same courtesy.

Since early August when MU sent out a very last-minute email informing them that the university would no longer be subsidizing their health care, graduate students have been raising their voices and fighting back for their rights. They’ve staged walkouts and protests, peaceably raising awareness and attempting to get their needs met by administration. Now, in the aftermath of these demonstrations, it’s more important than ever not to let the struggle of our graduate students silently slip away.

Their outrageous demands included: Subsidized health care A living wage On-campus childcare More affordable university housing Full tuition waivers Removal of departmental fees

How can we have extra money just lying around for such frivolous spending when we have sports teams and new Starbucks operations to finance? What next? Are they going to demand clean drinking water and an asbestos-free teaching environment? The absurdity!
Without our grad students, this university would be so much lesser for students and faculty alike, and yet administration continues to dismiss their basic human needs, tossing them out in the rain like flea-infested puppies.

They are using our students as workhorses, sending them out to the fields without the compensation their diligent work has earned. This cruel treatment is unacceptable from anyone, but it is absolutely deplorable that this blatant disrespect comes from the very people who are supposed to be protecting and advocating for the students at MU.

This issue of unthinkable disrespect is happening right under our noses, and perhaps the most unfortunate fact is that many undergraduates aren’t even aware of it. Undergraduates make up the majority of this campus and we are not using our power effectively. We seem to be pitifully absent at the events the graduate students have organized, and many aren’t even aware of what they are going through at all.

Just because undergraduates are not being directly persecuted does not mean that we aren’t affected, and it does not mean that it isn’t our concern. When the university treats a group of students unfairly, it has treated us all unfairly. When the well-being of each and every student is not at the top of the checklist, something’s very wrong with our system.

We cannot sit idly by while our fellow students are being exploited. We must be active participants in the politics of our university. We must celebrate our administration when they do great things, and we must hold them fiercely accountable when they have done their students wrong. Together we are 35,000 voices, and 35,000 voices can carry quite a distance. We must stand and we must scream with our graduate students for the justice they deserve as human beings.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU launches mentoring service for entrepreneurs

DANIEL CHRISTIAN, 13 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — A group of MU representatives traveled to Cambridge, Massachusetts, last winter to see how MIT nurtures and supports its entrepreneurial community.

The MU faculty in that group hoped to encourage young entrepreneurs and university researchers to translate their ideas into businesses through a similar program. Co-director
of the MIT Venture Mentoring Service Michael Foster and his team helped show them how it's done.

On Wednesday, Foster was in Columbia to cut the ribbon at the Mizzou Venture Mentoring Service launch at the Life Sciences Business Incubator on Providence Road.

The event was organized to launch the program and give the mid-Missouri business owners who will be mentors in the program an opportunity to meet and be trained by Foster.

"The concept is that any entrepreneur and any start-up business has a higher probability of success if they get coaching from businesspeople that have experiences and have lived through developing a business," Foster said.

MU Vice President of Research and Development Hank Foley said he is looking forward to emulating the success of the MIT program.

"MIT has solved this problem," Foley said. "They know how to connect mentors with entrepreneurs, young entrepreneurs especially, to really increase the success rate of those entrepreneurs and to help them really learn."

Teresa Maledy, CEO of Commerce Bank, Central Missouri Region, said the experience she's racked up in her 35 years of banking is a potential tool in advising up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

"I think what it will do is help us become more effective coaches and help us guide the entrepreneur through the process," she said.

Foley described the mentors as a resource to help the entrepreneurs navigate the hazards of starting new businesses.

"A lot of it is learning by doing," Foley said. "You try something, you fail, somebody helps you figure out why you failed, and then you go for it again and try again."
Foster said the program is different from local incubators in that each entrepreneur has a team of mentors that constantly changes based on the new company's needs.

"An incubator has a time frame," Foster said. "We have no time frame."

Co-director of the Mizzou Venture Mentoring Service Gloria O'Brien wrote in an email that it has not scheduled any future training sessions for mentors.

A recording of the training session Wednesday will be used to train future mentors.

Entrepreneurs will begin the program as soon as they schedule an appointment with the mentoring service.

MU students and staff learn ways to protect themselves and others during active threats


Columbia, MO — **Mizzou students and staff gathered at the University of Missouri Police Department for a Citizens’ Response to Active Threats training program Wednesday.**

With the shooting at the Umpqua Community College in Oregon still fresh in our minds, students and staff at the University of Missouri are taking extra precautions by taking part in an active threat training program at MUPD.
"People will learn to deal with active threats, so active killers active shooters," Lieutenant April Colvin of MUPD said. "When a person comes in a crowd and threatens people with a knife or gun or even without a weapon we teach people how to respond to that person."

A small group gathered at MUPD to learn how to respond if an active threat were to arise in an area they were in.

The class is taught by MUPD officers and is divided into two sections, a classroom session and then a hands-on practical application block.

During their classroom portion they use case studies from the school shootings that occurred at Columbine, Virginia Tech and Nickel Mines.

"Columbine and Virginia Tech were definitely game changers in how law enforcement responds, the Amish school we talk about that more because there's still a lot of people that think this can't happen if they're in a smaller community or something like that," Lt. Colvin said.

Lt. Colvin explained these classes are held because active threats do occur and their department wants to increase people's knowledge and survival."

Sadie Turnbull, who is an undergrad student at Mizzou, said she attended previous self-defense classes before, but wanted to learn how to react during an active threat situation.

"I want to be able to continue to be prepared and if something does happen, I can help other people and hopefully be part of the brave people who stands up against anybody who comes in and attacks anywhere," Turnbull said.

Lt. Colvin said they cover a variety of aspects during this class.

"We talk about getting out, escaping, we talk about if you're trapped, barricading in place, so you're making it difficult for the intruder to get to you and then we also talk about if they actually do make it in to you, now it's time to fight."

"I think people need to realize that it can happen anywhere I bet the people in Oregon never thought it would happen to them and so that's why I think everyone should consider taking some type of self-defense class or even, I mean it's not really a self-defense class, but just any type of knowledge of what to do in a high stress situation," Turnbull said.

The next Citizens' Response to Active Threats training session is scheduled for February 23rd and 25th from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m.
Former MU official to help lead commission studying court bias

Wednesday, October 14, 2015 at 2:00 pm Comments (3)

A long-term study of Missouri’s courts to root out bias against racial and ethnic minorities will be led by Mike Middleton of Columbia and include Circuit Judge Gary Oxenhandler and University of Missouri Law Associate Dean Chuck Henson, Supreme Court Chief Justice Patricia Breckenridge said Tuesday.

Middleton, deputy chancellor emeritus at MU, will be one of three co-chairs of the 40-member Commission on Racial and Ethnic Fairness, along with William Bay, a St. Louis attorney, and Judge Lisa White Hardwick of the Missouri Court of Appeals.

Middleton joined the faculty of the MU School of Law in 1985 after working as the director of the St. Louis District office of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He was named deputy chancellor in 1998 after serving as assistant provost for minority affairs and faculty development.

The commission will study six areas, with subcommittees dedicated to in-depth reviews of the justice system in general as well as civil and criminal courts, juvenile justice, municipal courts and the practice of law. The commission will make its first report on June 1 and report on Jan. 1 annually.

Fracking Chemicals May Mess With Hormones, Lower Sperm Counts

Prenatal exposure to a cocktail of chemicals commonly used in the various phases of oil and natural gas production, including fracking, could carry long-term reproductive health consequences, according to a new study published on Wednesday.
Scientists tested 24 fracking chemicals -- including benzene, toluene and bisphenol A -- and found that 23 of them could mimic and mess with the natural signaling of estrogens, androgens and other human hormones, including functions critical for the healthy development of sex organs and future fertility. Researchers found that male mice exposed in the womb to minute levels of the mixture developed enlarged testes and decreased sperm counts later in life.

**The concentrations represent potentially realistic levels of human exposure via drinking water, according to Susan Nagel, an author of the study and an expert in reproductive and environmental health at the University of Missouri.**

"Bottom line, hormones work at very low concentrations naturally," Nagel told The Huffington Post. "It does not take a huge amount of a chemical to disrupt the endocrine system."

Hormone-disrupting chemicals have become the subject of increasing scientific scrutiny. In a statement published last month, the Endocrine Society, a professional medical organization, described the potentially widespread health threats posed by the class of chemicals. Even at very small concentrations -- say, a couple of tablespoons in an Olympic-size swimming pool -- exposures to these chemicals early in life have been shown capable of derailing normal brain and sexual development, diminishing the immune system's ability to fight disease, among other effects. Combine these chemicals, the society warned, and the risks may become all the more unpredictable and worrisome -- and potentially costly. An analysis published in March attributed more than $200 billion a year in health care expenses and lost earning potential to hormone-disruptor exposures in the European Union.

"We can't dismiss chemicals that we detect in our food or water just because they are at low doses," said Andrea Gore, a hormone disruptor expert at the University of Texas at Austin.

Gore, who is also editor-in-chief of Endocrinology, the journal in which the new study appears, suggested the findings fit an emerging pattern. In addition to reproductive health problems, scientists have increasingly found links between exposure to hormone disruptors -- which are also commonly found in plastics, herbicides, nonstick fry pans and other consumer goods -- and health issues like obesity, diabetes and breast cancer.

"During development, there are so many developmental processes -- structures and organization of different organs that are set up," she said. "If that gets perturbed, then an organ can really be deficient."

The boom in the extraction of oil and natural gas has continued across large swaths of the U.S. this year, even inspiring a new primetime television show. Fracking companies use a mix of pressurized water, sand and chemicals to unlock hydrocarbon reserves deep in shale rock. Among the approximately 1,000 different chemicals known to be used in these operations, the study authors report, at least 100 could potentially interfere with the natural hormone messengers in the body.

The oil and natural gas production industry, however, maintains that the processes involved in its operations are safe. Industry representatives were critical of the new research.

"This study presents the most unlikely scenario in order to suggest the worst possible health outcomes," Katie Brown, a spokeswoman for Energy in Depth, the oil and gas industry's education and public
outreach arm, told HuffPost in an emailed statement. "The researchers manufactured a concoction of far more chemicals than are even used during fracking, and at far higher doses."

Nagel acknowledged that the highest of the four concentrations her team added to the drinking water of pregnant lab mice -- a level that mimicked the concentrations found in fracking wastewater from some Colorado drilling sites -- was unlikely to represent realistic human exposures. But she suggested that the bottom two doses could, in fact, be relevant based on their estimates.

What’s more, Nagel and her team found that in some cases, exposures to those lower concentrations actually resulted in greater effects than the higher concentrations. This phenomenon, where minute amounts of a chemical prove more potent than larger quantities, continues to crop up in research on this class of chemicals. Researchers are finding that the dose does not always make the poison -- at least not in the ordinary sense. Yet the traditional dose-response assumption remains the basis for most regulatory tests.

In her email, Brown also highlighted the Environmental Protection Agency's long-awaited investigation into the potential effects of fracking, released in June. The agency found "no evidence of widespread water contamination," she pointed out, and any issues the EPA did find were "isolated and small compared to the total number of wells drilled."

As Factcheck.org pointed out after the report’s release, an EPA official noted that the report makes no determination of safety and, in fact, points to some specific cases of water contamination. Both sides, according to Factcheck.org, are guilty of misrepresenting the study's findings. The true extent to which fracking can contaminate drinking water with chemicals such as these hormone disruptors remains unclear.

In July, a California panel concluded that because of data gaps and inadequate testing, the true impacts of the fracking process are still mostly unknown. The panel left open the possibility that the toxic chemicals used could contaminate drinking water.

Fracking companies are not required to disclose all of the chemicals they use in their operations. A controversial exemption from existing environmental regulations, known as the "Halliburton loophole," continues to make it difficult to monitor fracking activities, let alone prove any links to health problems.

Despite the roadblocks to research, findings on the subject continue to mount. A study published in March 2014 found that pregnant women who lived near fracking wells faced an increased risk of giving birth to children with health issues such as oral clefts and heart problems. Another paper by Nagel's team, published in December, suggested that tiny doses of chemicals released during oil and natural gas production could pose serious health risks to developing fetuses, babies and young children.

More recently, in September, researchers reported findings of a 40 percent increased risk of preterm birth for babies of expectant parents living nearest to fracking operations in Pennsylvania.

Brian Schwartz, lead author of that study and an environmental health researcher at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, called Nagel's new findings "interesting, important and potentially relevant." But he, too, cautioned against inferring too much when it's not clear whether the doses fed to the mice truly reflect the levels at which people may be exposed.
Nagel and Gore both emphasized the need for further research into various levels and routes of exposure - from air pollution to drinking water -- as well as other potential hormone-disrupting effects.

What the new study uncovered for male reproductive health, said Gore, "may only be the tip of the iceberg."

Twentieth anniversary celebration looks at growth of LGBTQ Resource Center over the years

When the MU LGBTQ Resource Center opened in October 1995, it looked nothing like it does today.

“It was only open a few hours at a time, and you had to kind of basically make an appointment to get there,” former LGBTQ Resource Center coordinator Nikole Potulsky said. “Bottom line is, in 1995, it was hard to find community and having a center let you go somewhere where you could create community.”

Potulsky, previous coordinator Struby Struble, current coordinator Sean Olmstead and students attended the LGBTQ Resource Center’s 20th anniversary celebration Oct. 9 in recognition of the center’s efforts to support students of different identities on MU’s campus.

Olmstead took over this summer from Struble after she enrolled at Mills College in Oakland, California to pursue an MFA in creative writing. He said he hopes that his work in the center, a resource he never had in college, will continue to give support to students.

“It’s a great experience to help provide a place where (students) can be themselves authentically and not have to apologize for who they are or the space they take up,” Olmstead said. “I kind of joke with students about that, like don’t apologize for the space that you take up, but I really mean it, because we’re oftentimes told that we shouldn’t be here, we don’t exist, that we’re problematic.”

Potulsky attended MU as an undergraduate student from 1994 to 1999 and became coordinator for the center in 2001. Before the center opened in 1995, people like her struggled to find people with whom they could identify, she said.

“In 1995, I was a sophomore,” Potulsky said. “I had just come out. I had my first girlfriend. Back then there was barely the Internet, so if you wanted to find other LGBTQ people, you really had to do it word-of-mouth. You had to out yourself, which was a risk.”
Olmstead said the center has grown throughout the last 20 years to meet the changing needs of students.

“In the beginning, it was just trying to convince the administration that heterosexism and homophobia exist on this campus,” Olmstead said. “Now, it’s a lot more education. We’re trying to focus on creating more allyship on campus while still creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students.”

Potulsky agreed that the center has changed immensely since its opening.

“In those first couple of years, it was a gathering spot,” Potulsky said. “Now, it’s a hub of activity. There are people that lobby at the state level from this place. There’s a radio program that airs out of the center now. It’s unbelievable, unbelievable growth over the last 20 years.”

In 1995, The Maneater published an article illustrating the importance of the center, which at the time was called the “Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Resource Center.”

“I think it is really hard for gays and lesbians,” then-senior Christian Burlingame said in the article. “They grow up in an environment that constantly sends them messages that they are wrong, and that what they’re feeling is wrong or bad.”

Current freshman Sterling Waldman, who uses they/their pronouns, spoke on their perspective as a transgender student at MU.

“I think overall, the internalized messages are still very similar,” Waldman said. “I think that’s changing and shifting a little bit. It’s gone from like no positive media representation to barely positive media representation, but there is some now, which is definitely going to at least begin shifting cultural norms.”

Waldman said they would not have chosen to come to MU if the LGBTQ Resource Center didn’t exist.

“It’s so well-established,” Waldman said. “It’s one of the best in the Midwest. It’s really a defining characteristic of my experience here.”

Moving forward, several people at the event expressed they would like to see the center work on issues that address the intersectionality of different minorities on campus.

“How do we talk about trans students who are also in the Jewish faith, and how do we talk about queer Muslims and what that feels like, and how do we just incorporate the disability movement when we’re talking about inclusivity on campus?” Struble said. “It’s not just inclusivity of our sexuality, it’s inclusivity of all of our identities. I think it’s just important to keep moving with the times.”

As for Olmstead, he said he continues to learn more every day about the wants and needs of the students who come to the center.
“I hope that (the social justice centers) continue to be places where students can learn to discover themselves, educate each other and create programs that support an inclusive campus,” Olmstead said.

The LGBTQ Resource Center is hosting Coming Out Week from Oct. 11 to Oct. 17, which includes a workshop and keynote speech by Potulsky. The annual Pride Photo will be taken at 5:00 p.m. on Oct. 14 on the Francis Quadrangle.

Is It Fair to Ask Fraternity-Council Presidents to Reform Greek Life?

By Sarah Brown  OCTOBER 14, 2015

When Timothy Bryson was elected president of the Fraternity Council at the University of South Carolina at Columbia last fall, he believed firmly that Greek life there was in need of change. He loved being a fraternity member. But he was frustrated by what he saw as a recklessly permissive culture among some of his peers: "Ignore, ignore, ignore, and hope something doesn’t occur."

He had reason for concern. Two months earlier, a sophomore pledge at nearby Clemson University, Tucker Hipps, died during an alleged hazing incident.

Mr. Bryson saw many similarities between Clemson and his own institution: dangerous drinking, out-of-control parties, and recruitment problems that "had been pushed under the rug for a while."

Then, in March, a similar tragedy struck South Carolina: A freshman fraternity member, Charles Terreni Jr., died of alcohol poisoning at an off-campus house frequented by members of the university’s Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. Mr. Bryson vowed to do more to hold his peers accountable.

In theory, he was in a position to do so. Fraternities, as private organizations, are generally free from institutional interference as long as they comply with college policies. And interfraternity-council presidents sit at the top of the self-governance structure under which most North American Interfraternity Conference chapters operate.
As pressure grows on fraternities to take a hard look at their alcohol-fueled ways, many of these presidents do more than run meetings and organize events. There are calls for them to act as visionaries and reformers. That might involve helping to revamp a college’s rules for social organizations, banning hard liquor from fraternity houses, or cracking down on alcohol use during new-member recruitment.

Some leaders, like Mr. Bryson, are eager to improve safety and to paint over fraternities’ party-hard image. But reformers "are the exception and not the rule," said Gentry R. McCreary, chief executive of Dyad Strategies, a risk-management firm that works with colleges.

Part of the reason for the rarity of reformers is that the role can put students in a bind. Council presidents have to strike a balance between enjoying the social benefits of Greek membership and enforcing unpopular rules; any decision to penalize a chapter is likely to affect at least a few of their friends. Sometimes there is pushback. Mr. Bryson learned that firsthand.

A President’s Fall

During the first four days of fall classes at South Carolina, there were three hospitalizations related to fraternity-recruitment activities, Mr. Bryson said. (The Fraternity Council at the university governs chapters within the Interfraternity Council, or IFC, and the National Pan-Hellenic Council, as well as several multicultural Greek organizations. Only IFC chapters have formal recruitment. Mr. Bryson was also IFC president by virtue of his position.)

Several days later, an IFC adviser told the Fraternity Council’s executive board and the chapter presidents that university officials were aware of the trouble. The adviser gave them a warning: If you have activities planned this weekend that include alcohol, we’d advise you to cancel them. But Mr. Bryson said the council and university staff kept hearing reports from students about alcohol at recruitment events.

That Sunday, Mr. Bryson, along with several other council leaders and administrators, suspended rush at 13 chapters. It was a harsh penalty, but he called it "an emergency situation" and said something forceful had to be done.

"In accordance with our bylaws, we should fine each chapter for having alcohol at recruitment events," he said. "I don’t think we should send them invoices as they send kids to the hospital." "I don’t believe anyone thought Fraternity Council would self-govern," he added, "because it had never happened before."
The council reversed the suspensions within two weeks. Still, several fraternity leaders argued that Mr. Bryson did not have the evidence to take such a drastic measure and had overstepped his role. They called for him to be impeached along with Jonathan Withrow, the council’s vice president for conduct. Mr. Withrow elected to resign. Mr. Bryson was removed by a vote of the 27 chapter presidents on September 21.

The decision to halt rush, Mr. Bryson said, "was a slap on the wrist compared with long-term consequences."

‘I’m Kind of a Buzzkill’

Mr. Bryson’s removal was one of the most public examples of backlash against an interfraternity-council president. Several current and former presidents interviewed by The Chronicle emphasized a need to communicate with chapter presidents and to convey expectations and potential penalties before taking action. But they understood Mr. Bryson’s intentions.

Many of them had enacted and enforced unpopular policies, and they acknowledged that policing fellow students — often their friends — could be a challenge.

"There’s a lot of people who think I’m kind of a buzzkill," said Robert Schmidt, president of the Interfraternity Council at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. He wrote an op-ed essay in the campus newspaper defending Mr. Bryson.

Mr. Schmidt’s council passed a ban on hard liquor at Greek social events last spring, a move provoked in part by the alcohol-related death of a fraternity pledge in September 2014, he said.

Nebraska’s student-affairs office handles allegations that might warrant suspensions, he said. But the council can levy initial penalties against chapters.

"My best friends, they’re going to be my friends no matter what," he said. But younger members complained about the liquor ban. "They ask, Why can’t we do this? Why are you controlling my decisions? " He tells them: If the council doesn’t regulate it, administrators or the police will. Still, he said, "it really does put us in a difficult spot."

Jason Blincow led the drafting of a new alcohol policy at the University of Missouri at Columbia. Mr. Blincow, president of the Interfraternity Council there, said the policy took effect this fall and included a hard-liquor ban on all fraternity property. Some members did not welcome the change, he said, but he allowed a trade-
off: Every chapter is now allowed to have beer in the house at all times, which was not the case previously.

"In their eyes, they’re gaining something," he said.

Peter Diaz, president of the Interfraternity Council at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has worked to make houses "safer spaces" and to restore a sense of control over parties. He began requiring chapters to register every party well in advance, and he increased enforcement of existing rules that parties have a security presence and a set guest list.
The changes have met resistance from non-Greek students who had grown used to crashing the parties, Mr. Diaz said. But he has not backed off.

"When they get turned down, they think it’s because the fraternity is elitist or racist," he said. "But the real reason is we have a rule: Do not let people in who you do not know, unless they’re invited. Once you lose control of your party, you lose control of everything that happens."

Nationwide, however, visions of reform are not common among interfraternity-council leaders, said Mr. McCreary, the risk-management consultant, even as the councils face increased scrutiny. "Most are there to maintain the status quo and to do what the chapters want them to do — which is often to advocate and defend," he said.

Ideally, more council presidents would take bold stands, as Mr. Bryson did, said Steve Veldkamp, executive director of the Center of the Study of the College Fraternity, at Indiana University at Bloomington. But he recognized the risk of retaliation from other students. He said he had heard "horrible stories about them being mistreated in social circles." That raises a question: Is it reasonable to expect students to hold their peers accountable when a quintessential college experience — the fraternity party — is on the line?

Some observers contend that putting a student-run council in charge of groups that engage in high-risk behavior makes little sense. "Clearly what’s happening isn’t working," said Mr. McCreary, who has proposed a shared-governance system in which national organizations or fraternity alumni take on more direct involvement in chapters’ day-to-day activities. Such an approach would require both groups to assume more liability as well, he said.

Mr. Veldkamp said the current model can work well, provided that colleges, too, are involved. Many interfraternity-council presidents are "extraordinary human beings," he said. More than other Greek-life officials, he said, "they have an understanding of what needs to happen." The council presidents agreed. Sonjay Singh, who recently led
the Inter-Greek Council at Connecticut’s Trinity College, said "the students have done multitudes more than the school has ever done to fix issues in Greek life."

Still, Mr. Veldkamp said, "I absolutely worry if it’s too much" to ask of students.

Offering institutional support and training opportunities for presidents is essential, said Mark Koepsell, executive director of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. One wonders why students would want to take such a stressful job — an unpaid one, no less. Mr. Bryson and others said it is one of the most rewarding leadership experiences a student can find.

But the short-term nature of the position might continue to thwart the efforts of reform-focused presidents. Momentum in favor of change in fraternities tends to ebb and flow on campuses, Mr. McCreary said. Several times at Indiana, Mr. Veldkamp said, council leaders ran on platforms that were "the antithesis of change," and reversed stricter policies put in place by their predecessors.

The future is a central concern for Mr. Diaz, of North Carolina. "I’ve spent all year working towards that end," he said, "and once I’m at this point, with a month left, I’m thinking, We did some great things," he said, "and I want this to continue." He can only hope that happens.

Read the story at: http://chronicle.com/article/Is-It-Fair-to-Ask/233769

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU and Red Cross hosting event for earthquake awareness

MADISON LEE, 15 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Missouri is more at risk for earthquake damage than most people realize.

The southeast corner of the state is near the New Madrid seismic zone, which is the most active earthquake zone east of the Rocky Mountains, according to an MU news release. Although Boone County is 275 miles from the earthquake zone, it's considered at risk for damage from the New Madrid fault.
The MU Department of Emergency Management, Department of Geology and the Red Cross are hosting the Great Central United States ShakeOut, the world's largest earthquake awareness program. The event will take place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday at the MU Student Center. Students, faculty and staff are encouraged to attend.

Eric Evans, MU Emergency Management Coordinator, said he organized the event to inform students about earthquake safety.

"Most students may not realize that Missouri is a state vulnerable to an earthquake because of where we are geographically," Evans said.

Aside from providing educational information to students, faculty and staff, Evans said he plans to work with students, making sure they have and can navigate apps such as Red Cross and GoMizzou, both of which provide information during emergency situations, including earthquakes.

Mizzou trains football players to identify concussions

Watch story: http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=30991&zone=2,5&categories=2,5

COLUMBIA - Brain trauma has been back in the headlines thanks to new research studies showing high levels of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE, in athletes who competed in high-level contact sports.
CTE is not able to be diagnosed until after death, but sports teams are being cautious when athletes have suspected head injuries, especially concussions.

"What happens is there is some force that goes into the brain tissue itself and causes either a tearing or a bruising or just a chemical reaction to occur in the brain that results in some form of a manifestation of that," said Christopher Wolf, a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine at the Rusk Rehabilitation Center.

Athletes suffering from concussions are at a higher risk for repeated brain trauma if their brains aren't allowed to heal properly.

"Over time we see that it's easier for people to get a second or a third or a fourth concussion and so on, so that cumulative effect can happen, they can actually end up with more pathology additive through time," Wolf said. "Typically, people take longer to recover from each successive concussion, and they may be left with some of those symptoms that don't go away."

**At the University of Missouri, football players are trained to look for signs and symptoms of concussions in themselves and fellow teammates.**

"Starting at the beginning of the year when we impress upon them the signs and symptoms, and the fact that a head injury is not an ankle sprain," said Rex Sharp, Associate Athletic Director for Sports Medicine at Mizzou. "You only have one brain, and there's no reason to take any chances whatsoever."

Knowing the signs and symptoms is important because helmets only really help with fractures or other types of skeletal head trauma, not concussions.

"That's kind of a misconception too, that helmets prevent concussions. And I don't know if that's really true. Helmets prevent injuries to the head, but not necessarily concussions," Sharp said. "I think most of the time, the helmet only prevents injuries to the cranium itself."

Prevention doesn't begin on the field or in the locker room, but in the weightroom with neck strengthening.

"The stronger your neck is the less likely you'll be to have some rotational force that might contribute to a concussion," Sharp said.

If anyone suspects that a player suffered a concussion or other type of head injury during practice or a game, they are immediately pulled.

"Actually, we've had a couple this year, so immediately, we as a staff, put them with our team doctor," Sharp said.

Over the years, Sharp has created his own policy when dealing with players who may have concussions: "We take their helmet away. I'm not standing there with them the whole time
because there's still action going on on the field, so I figured I'd probably notice someone running out without a helmet."

Sharp says that in the 30 years he's been taking the helmets away, he's never had a player attempt to sneak back on the field without their helmet.

If a player is diagnosed with a concussion, they are not allowed back on the field for the rest of the day, and must pass an assessment to make sure they have recovered before they are allowed to return. This process could take a few days, but Wolf says that the first two weeks after a concussion are when people are more susceptible to repeated injury.