Gene therapy treats muscular dystrophy in dogs

Researchers have successfully treated dogs with Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) and say that human clinical trials are being planned in the next few years.

Muscular dystrophy, which affects approximately 250,000 people in the US, occurs when damaged muscle tissue is replaced with fibrous, fatty or bony tissue and loses function.

“This is the most common muscle disease in boys, and there is currently no effective therapy,” says study leader Dongsheng Duan, professor in medical research at the University of Missouri School of Medicine. “This discovery took our research team more than 10 years, but we believe we are on the cusp of having a treatment for the disease.”

Patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy have a gene mutation that disrupts the production of a protein known as “dystrophin.” Absence of dystrophin starts a chain reaction that eventually leads to muscle cell degeneration and death. Affected boys lose their ability to walk and breathe as they get older.

Dystrophin also is one of the largest genes in the human body. “Due to its size, it is impossible to deliver the entire gene with a gene therapy vector, which is the vehicle that carries the therapeutic gene to the correct site in the body,” Duan says. “Through previous research, we were able to develop a miniature version of this gene called a microgene. This minimized dystrophin protected all muscles in the body of diseased mice.”

However, it took the team more than 10 years to develop a strategy that can safely send the micro-dystrophin to every muscle in a dog that is afflicted by the disease. The dog has a body size similar to that of an affected boy. Success in dogs will set the foundation for human tests.

In this latest study, the team demonstrates for the first time that a common virus can deliver the microgene to all muscles in the body of a diseased dog. The dogs were injected with the virus when they were two to three months old and just starting to show signs of DMD. The dogs are now six to seven months old and continue to develop normally.
“The virus we are using is one of the most common viruses; it is also a virus that produces no symptoms in the human body, making this a safe way to spread the dystrophin gene throughout the body,” Duan says.

“These dogs develop DMD naturally in a similar manner as humans. It’s important to treat DMD early before the disease does a lot of damage as this therapy has the greatest impact at the early stages in life.”

The technology used to create the gene-therapy has been licensed by Solid Ventures, LLC.

The journal Human Molecular Genetics published the study, which the Department of Defense, Jesse’s Journey-The Foundation for Cell and Gene Therapy, the National Institutes of Health, Hope for Javier, the Kansas City Area Life Sciences Institute and the University of Missouri supported. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the funding agencies.

Researcher: Muscular Dystrophy treatment for humans 2 years away

Watch story: http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=31105&zone=2,5&categories=2,5

COLUMBIA - A researcher at the University of Missouri said Thursday he can safely say treatment for humans with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) is two years away.

Dongsheng Duan said, "If you were a kid diagnosed with the disease, from the moment you get the diagnosis, you're done, that's it, no happy life. They die by the time most of us are graduating from college."

He said the initial gene mutation responsible for the disease was discovered back in 1986. It disrupts the production of a protein that protects muscles from degeneration. The new treatment works by introducing a fully functional version of the gene into the body using a harmless virus.
"At the time, they thought it would be fairly easy to put the gene back into the body, but the road to that goal is not that straightforward," Duan said.

He said his team was able to cure a mouse improving the overall function of its muscles.

"A mouse is a mouse, it's not a human, so to get from a mouse to a human there are several things," Duan said. "We needed to find a model between the two."

Researchers moved on to testing the treatment in dogs.

A few years ago, he said they did an injection into a single muscle of a dog.

"A dog naturally develops DMD identical to humans and if we can treat dogs we can move this to a boy," Duan said.

He said after the initial injection they measured the muscle force and saw considerable improvement. They then injected the virus containing the gene into the blood stream of the dog.

"We saw that there was no toxicity. We looked at [the muscle] activity, it was great. We did a biopsy and took some piece of muscle out of dog and examined it under a microscope and it looked fabulous, it's incredible," Duan said.

He said the virus used is safe and is the only virus that can go to all of the muscles in the body.

"80 percent of us have been infected at some point by this virus, most of the time it's nothing. We don't even know we have been affected," Duan said.

The virus is the forefront for a number of gene therapy applications, he said.

"In one clinical trial they tried to treat a boy with a disease that kept him from seeing. They put the normal gene into the virus and the boy could see," Duan said.

He said treatment for DMD will soon be as simple as getting an injection.

"It would keep the remaining muscle healthy and improve their life quality. They don't go downhill, but rather maintain stable [muscle function] or even go upward," Duan said.

He said is he hopeful.

"We are finally getting to a stage where we can say we are getting pretty close, it's going to happen," he said.
Loftin speculation surprises MU students

Watch story: [http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=4b87dd7e-7c4a-4f10-a8cd-b0a6cd7435cb](http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=4b87dd7e-7c4a-4f10-a8cd-b0a6cd7435cb)

Columbia — **MU students said Thursday they were surprised there was any speculation at all about Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin's future.**

On Wednesday morning, Columbia Rep. Caleb Jones tweeted that he had heard the UM System Board of Curators was about to fire Loftin over MU’s September decision to cut ties with Planned Parenthood. MU has since concluded three site agreements that will allow nursing students to work at Planned Parenthood facilities in Columbia and Independence. The Board of Curators held a closed-door meeting Wednesday afternoon to consider personnel matters and contracts but would not provide details on what personnel matters they discussed. Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, told reporters board president Donald Cupps had told her rumors about Loftin’s termination were simply rumors.

Many MU students hadn't heard of the speculation surrounding Loftin, and those who had said they were surprised anyone had questioned Loftin's future at MU. Freshman Luke Currey said he had seen posts about Loftin on social media, but he paid them little mind.

"I kind of assumed it was a rumor," he said. "It was just an anonymous post from someone, so I didn't think anything of it."

Senior Dan Alvey said he also was surprised by Wednesday's speculation.

"It will be interesting to see what comes of it. He's had a lot to deal with since he first came here," he said.

Jones has not responded to repeated requests for comment about Wednesday's tweet.
MU answers questions about Curators’ meeting


COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

GUEST COMMENTARY: Stem cell research at MU can help pregnant mothers

R. MICHAEL ROBERTS, 1 hr ago

Once again MU has found itself in the eye of a political hurricane with politicians, not scientists, vying to direct how, when, and if academic research projects are carried out.

**What are we trying to accomplish with stem cell research at MU?**

The main focus of my laboratory over the past six years, and the reason why we use induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSC) and human embryonic stem cells (ESC), is to study preeclampsia, a common disease that affects more than 1 in 20 pregnancies. In these pregnancies, the mother develops high blood pressure, excessive protein in her urine, and often other grave symptoms. The severe, early onset form of the disease is the most common cause of maternal death in the U.S. and kills thousands of women and their unborn children worldwide, particularly in impoverished communities. The only cure for the condition is delivery of the placenta, which requires a caesarian section and is most commonly performed well before
the time of normal delivery. What makes preeclampsia so frustratingly difficult to study is that its onset is very early in pregnancy, probably in the first week or two following conception, when the placenta is beginning to establish itself in the wall of the womb and well before symptoms appear. Moreover, there is no early diagnostic test for the disease.

Our approach to study preeclampsia is to recreate the early placental cells of the pregnancy that led to the disease in the first place. The experiments are performed with iPSC that we generated from umbilical cord tissue of infants born after an uncomplicated pregnancy and compare them to similar cells generated from cords of babies whose mothers had experienced severe, early onset preeclampsia. This latter group of infants was born after a caesarean section performed around 30 weeks of pregnancy to save the life of the child and the mother. We culture these umbilical cord cells, convert them to iPSC, and then recreate replicas of the placental cells that supported the already born babies when they were tiny fetuses. In this way we can compare the placental cells from a normal pregnancy with those from a preeclamptic pregnancy. We have already had a major breakthrough: The placental cells from preeclampsia pregnancies invade poorly through a jelly-like matrix similar to what they might encounter in the wall of the womb.

So why must we use human embryonic stem cells?

In 2006, a new, Nobel Prize winning technology emerged that allowed ordinary somatic cells, such as ones from skin and even white blood cells, to be “reprogrammed” to form cells almost identical to human embryonic stem cells. My group has shown that these so-called induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSC) can also be turned into placental cells by the same three pharmaceuticals we used earlier with the human cells (ESC). However, it remains unproven whether iPSC are equivalent to ESC in their ability to differentiate into placental cells that are fully functional. Accordingly, my laboratory continues to use these ESC lines (created 25 years ago) as controls, because so much is known about them, and their use ensures that the induced lines are behaving as expected. Without these controls our studies would lack the credibility of rigorous, controlled research standards.

Missouri voters approved this research

Human embryonic stem cells were on the front pages of our newspapers and a major political issue in Missouri nine years ago. In November 2006, Missouri voters approved the Missouri Stem Cell Research
and Cures Initiative as a state constitutional amendment. It reinforced what was already legal at the federal level, namely that responsibly performed research with human embryonic stem cells was permissible. At that time, my research group in the Bond Life Sciences Center, using these cells, had been working for more than three years to study how the early human placenta forms.

These cell lines had been created at the University of Wisconsin in the 1990s from embryos consisting of just a few cells and donated by couples attempting to have children by in vitro fertilization (often called IVF), a procedure that has produced over four million babies and many million more “unused” embryos. The National Institute of Health, which supports my program at MU, has been permitted to sponsor work on human embryonic cells since August 2001, when President George W. Bush issued an executive order permitting research on already existing human embryonic stem cell lines. These “Bush” lines enabled our group to learn how to generate placental cells representing the very earliest stages of pregnancy in a culture dish.

**Conclusion**

The majority of our work to study preeclampsia is with induced cells, not embryonic cells. The embryonic cells serve as controls and help to establish the technologies. Only existing embryonic lines, created approximately 25 years ago, are used in our research. Not being able to use embryonic cells would hinder the work because we would be unsure whether our findings were unique to the induced cells or comparable to actual human embryonic cells.

Our goal is to understand what goes wrong in preeclampsia and provide a means for developing treatment options, including drugs that might reverse the abnormalities we see in the placental cells. Both my research colleagues and I believe that this research is ethical, defensible and necessary. We are comfortable working with embryonic cells in this limited way in order to cure one of the major causes of maternal and fetal death.

*R. Michael Roberts is a Curators’ Professor of animal science and biochemistry and an investigator at the Bond Life Sciences Center at MU. He joined the faculty in 1985 and was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences in 1996. Roberts was awarded the international Wolf Prize for*
Student accused of hate crime pleads guilty to lesser charge

Oct. 23, 2015

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — A University of Missouri student accused of a hate crime has pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor.

Bradley M. Becker was originally charged with second-degree property damage motivated by discrimination, a felony, after vandalizing a residence hall in April.

He pleaded guilty Tuesday to second-degree property damage and was given a suspended 90-day jail sentence. He was placed on two years' unsupervised probation.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports (http://bit.ly/1Lqevo3) a swastika and symbol for the “Illuminati” were discovered in a Mark Twain Residence Hall stairwell in April. Two days later, a swastika and the words "You have been warned" were found in the same spot.

According to a probable cause statement, Becker said he committed the vandalism “in the spur of the moment” and was inspired by YouTube videos.

University of Missouri gets swept into renewed battle over embryonic stem-cell research

By JO MANNIES  •  OCT. 22, 2015

Nine years after Missouri voters approved protections for embryonic stem cell research, the issue has re-emerged as a hot topic in Jefferson City and among next year’s candidates.

A key factor: Missouri Right to Life – a longstanding opponent of embryonic stem-cell research – is linking the issue to its opposition to Planned Parenthood, which operates Missouri's only abortion clinics.

"Being pro-life is not just about abortion," said Susan Klein, Right to Life’s legislative liaison. “It’s about protecting life on every issue.”

The University of Missouri has become a target because of research it's doing with established stem cell lines on pregnancy complications.

Behind every debate on this issue is the 2006 constitutional amendment approved by voters that protects embryonic stem cell research.

And winding through all of this is politics: Former U.S. Sen. John Danforth, a Republican, opposes abortion but supports this research, while the most prominent GOP gubernatorial candidates are opposed.

Eric Greitens, John Brunner, Catherine Hanaway and Peter Kinder have all declared their opposition to embryonic stem-cell research or at least the state
funding of it, despite the protections added in 2006 with the narrow passage of Amendment 2 to the state constitution.

Kinder and Hanaway highlighted their opposition to any use of state money for embryonic stem-cell research, while the others declared their blanket objections to such research.

Hanaway, for example, said, “Protecting religious liberties will not stop Missouri from being a leader in medical research. I applaud those researchers in Missouri who are making great strides with non-embryonic research.”

Meanwhile, the likely Democratic nominee, Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster, has reaffirmed his support of embryonic stem-cell research and emphasized that the stem-cell debate was a key reason he left the Republican Party in 2007.

**In fact, Koster has launched a petition drive on his campaign website “to stop the threats to the University of Missouri” where some of the stem-cell research is taking place.**

**Focus shifts to University of Missouri**

The injection of the University of Missouri into the stem-cell/abortion debate appears to have raised the stakes. Some abortion opponents are calling for hearings, and possible legislation, pertaining to what the university’s scientists may or may not be doing when it comes to embryonic stem cells. Even if no state money was involved.

“I do not think that state institutions that receive taxpayer funds should be involved in embryonic stem-cell research,” said Josh Hawley, a Republican candidate for attorney general who also is a Mizzou law professor on unpaid leave.

The other major Republican candidate for attorney general, state Sen. Kurt Schaefer of Columbia, leads the Senate panel looking into Planned Parenthood’s activities in the state.

Schaefer says it’s legitimate to link the embryonic stem-cell issue to the debate over whether Planned Parenthood in some states has been improperly handling fetal remains after abortions.
“The question is, is stem-cell research going on … essentially on stem cells that are derived by ending a human life,” Schaefer said. “And that’s a very serious issue and … it’s relevant to the discussion on Planned Parenthood” and allegations that its operations in some states are improperly selling remains from abortions for stem-cell research.

As for the University of Missouri, Schaefer said he’d been assured that the embryonic stem-cell research only involves the stem-cell lines that had been approved during President George W. Bush’s administration as part of a national compromise.

“At this point, I have no reason to dispute that,” Schaefer said. But he added, “That’s something we will probably want to look at, at some point in the committee” to make sure that what the university had told him was accurate.

A university spokesman said that Schaefer’s account is correct. The embryonic stem-cell research at the university uses only Bush-era stem-cell lines and involves only two projects, the spokesman said.

Both projects deal with certain complications during pregnancy -- notably pre-eclampsia, which can be fatal. The aim is to find better treatments or prevention, he said.

Klein emphasizes that Right to Life does support other forms of stem cell research, such as those involving adult stem cells or cells from umbilical cords. Right to Life contends that other research has had more promising results than those involving embryonic stem cells.

**Abortion opponents split over stem-cell debate**

Mary Kogut, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri, laments that the stem-cell issue appears to have been drawn into the debate over her agency’s operations. She emphasizes that Planned Parenthood in Missouri doesn't participate in any donation programs involving fetal tissue or stem cells, but adds that she has respect for the women in other states who have donated such tissue for medical research.

"Stem cell research is a bipartisan issue," Kogut said. "It does not have anything to do with abortion."
Some Missouri abortion opponents, who asked not to be identified, said there is concern within the ranks that the renewed focus on the longstanding embryonic stem-cell issue could hurt their efforts to persuade the General Assembly to approve more abortion restrictions and to take on Planned Parenthood.

Abortion opponents are seeking to end the Medicaid payments that now go to Planned Parenthood for family planning and women’s health services. Those payments come from the federal portion of the Medicaid program. Several states have lost court fights over defunding efforts, while others – notably Texas – have moved forward with defunding.

**Klein with Right to Life predicts there will be more legislative action in Missouri next session regarding abortion and stem-cell research.**

Klein acknowledges that Amendment 2’s protection of stem-cell research prevents Right to Life from seeking an outright ban on embryonic stem-cell research. Instead, the group is focusing on curbing any possible use of state money for such research.

Among other things, Right to Life and its allies have fought for language in development bills to bar any spending that could end up going for embryonic stem-cell research or cloning. Those fights often have been intense, because some business groups contend the restrictive language has been too broad.

“The research industry does not want any boundaries,” said Klein. “The research industry is just trying to protect their right to take innocent human life.”

Former Sen. John C. Danforth, R-Mo., is a longstanding abortion opponent – and a big supporter of stem-cell research, including the use of human embryos.

He adamantly contends that it’s a mistake to mesh abortion with embryonic stem-cell research.
“I believe in medical research,” Danforth said. “Embryonic stem-cell research is very promising,” citing efforts to tackle debilitating diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and ALS. One of Danforth’s brothers died of ALS.

Referring to the embryos, Danforth said, “For somebody to say that something that’s smaller than a dot at the end of a sentence is of more value that somebody who is suffering from a terrible disease, is a pretty far-out position.”

He also believes that resurrecting the embryonic stem-cell debate could hurt Republicans next year.

Klein disagrees. “Missouri is a very pro-life state,” she said. “They’ve shown that for years when they get to the polls.”

Democrats counter by noting that their party holds all but one of the statewide elected offices in Jefferson City. And all of those Democrats back embryonic stem-cell research and reproductive rights.

In 2006, the Missouri battle over embryonic stem-cell research and Amendment 2 is widely believed to have helped propel U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., to victory.

McCaskill had endorsed Amendment 2, while then-Republican incumbent Jim Talent opposed it.

McCaskill said, “Overall, I believe the stem-cell initiative that was on the ballot was a positive for our campaign. At a crucial moment, it galvanized national support for me.”

She recalls that her office was flooded with donations after actor Michael J. Fox, who has Parkinson’s, campaigned in Missouri for her because of their mutual support for embryonic stem-cell research. Commentator Rush Limbaugh then came under fire for mimicking Fox’s shaky physical movements.

McCaskill contends that those seeking to ban embryonic stem-cell research also are out to restrict invitro fertilization, because the embryos used in research often are the leftovers from the process and donated by the families.
Looking at the debate in Missouri, she added, “The notion you want to make 
stem-cell research illegal because fetal issue was donated in a handful of 
Planned Parenthood clinics … doesn’t make sense.”

Right to Life and its allies disagree. And Klein predicts that the debate will 
propel more social conservatives to flock to the polls next year to elect like-minded candidates.

**the maneater**

**MSA senate failed to come to a vote on a 
resolution regarding Planned Parenthood**

*The Missouri Students Association full senate confirmed three positions, sent two resolutions back to their committees and passed four acts during the Oct. 21 meeting.*

At the beginning of the meeting, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Cathy Scroggs addressed the senate. She requested that the senate send the minutes of each meeting to her so that she can forward discussions to related administrators.

Timothy Davis was confirmed unanimously as sergeant at arms. He said his training as a military police officer through the National Guard made him the best candidate for the job.

The senate also unanimously confirmed Saad Malik as activities director. Malik said he plans to organize events for senators to socialize “outside the chamber” so that they can communicate better during meetings.

Alex Higginbotham, who has been involved in Campus and Community Relations Committee since his freshman year, presented many ideas to improve the committee during his speech for his confirmation as chairman. He said he wanted to diversify the committee’s contacts within the city government, distribute more duties amongst members, and foster more interaction between the student body and the committee. He was also confirmed unanimously.

Resolution 55-12 sought to address student opinion on discrimination of all forms. It was sent back to the Social Justice Committee to allow members more time to develop it.

Resolution 55-11 supported the re-establishment of ties between MU and Planned Parenthood. After over 40 minutes of discussion, it was also sent back to the Social Justice Committee. Davis spoke in opposition to the resolution on the grounds that he thought MSA should not speak for the students on such a divisive issue. Representatives from Mizzou Students for Life also attended the meeting.
The senate unanimously passed acts 55-07 through 55-10, which involved travel pool requests appropriating money to STRIPES, the Department of Student Activities and KCOU to help fund travel to conferences.

Act 55-05, which would appropriate funds to help Associated Students of University of Missouri purchase a license from Turbovote, failed with no affirming votes and two abstentions.

Thirty-eight senators attended the meeting.

University of Missouri Re-signs Contracts with Planned Parenthood

The University of Missouri will again allow nursing students to gain clinical experience at Planned Parenthood clinics.

The move comes two months after the university canceled 10 contracts with Planned Parenthood. The Columbia Missourian reports that the canceled agreements had allowed nursing and medical students to gain experience at Planned Parenthood facilities in five cities in four states.

MU Health Care spokeswoman Teresa Snow said the new agreements include clauses prohibiting students from helping provide abortions or counseling a woman to have an abortion. Students also were barred from assisting with abortions under the previous contracts.

Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri President and CEO Laura McQuade praised the development in a news release Wednesday but said "more must be done." She said the university had capitulated to "political bullying."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

No unexplainable gender wage gap among MU faculty, study says

RUTH SERVEN AND SARAH WYNN, 10 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — There is no systemic gender, racial or ethnic inequity in faculty salaries in most MU departments, according to a study released at the MU Faculty Council meeting Thursday. Besides the College of Engineering, pay differences in all departments were explainable, the study said.

Although female faculty members at MU tend to make $16,000 less than male counterparts and racial and ethnic minority faculty members tend to make $16,000 less than majority counterparts, those differences can be explained by three main elements — research productivity, rank and administrative experience, said Mike Urban, co-chair of the Chancellor's Status of Women Committee.

According to the study, male faculty members tend to have 3.5 more years of experience in the university than female faculty and earn more because of that experience, not necessarily because of unfair treatment by the institution.

The study also found that male faculty members were more likely than females to reach the rank of full professor and were more likely to have higher productivity.

Faculty members from racial and ethnic minorities tended to have lower salaries than majority faculty and were also less likely to hold high rankings and gain experience, the study said.

However, the study concluded that the differences in pay were not statistically significant and were explainable by differences in academic experience, rank, department, research productivity and position.
Faculty in the School of Medicine and the School of Law were not included in the study because their salaries are determined by different factors. Non-tenure-track faculty and part-time faculty were not included in the study.

Linda Reeder, chair of the Status of Women Committee in the College of Arts and Science, said she did not think the study adequately answered her committee’s concerns about salary compression for associate professors. She said she hopes the university will continue to commission studies on gender pay gaps. Several faculty members at Faculty Council echoed her with requests for more studies over regular intervals.

Urban encouraged the administration and Provost Garnett Stokes to look at the study and the three factors that explain the difference in salary between men and women.

“What we would really like to do is basically explore that a little bit further and use this study as a starting point for a broader discussion about these things so that we can sort of help make the institution a little bit stronger,” he said.

Debate Over Jefferson Statue at U of Missouri

October 23, 2015

Students at the University of Missouri at Columbia are debating the appropriateness of a statue of Thomas Jefferson on campus. A petition was recently created urging the removal of the statue. The petition notes that while Jefferson is known as a proponent of equality, he was a slaveholder and held racist and sexist beliefs. "Thomas Jefferson’s statue sends a clear nonverbal message that his values and beliefs are supported by the University of Missouri. Jefferson's statue perpetuates a sexist-racist atmosphere that continues to reside on campus," the
petition says.

College Republicans have countered with a #standwithJefferson hashtag on Twitter, demanding that the statue remain in place. Defenders of the statue have also draped an American flag around it (above right) for events at the site of the monument.

This May Be The Secret To Empathy

Hint: You don't have to be selfless to feel it.

Empathy has only existed as a word in the English language for a little over a century. But its power cannot be denied.

Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and be sensitive to the "feelings, thoughts and experience of another," but that is not the whole picture. Researchers at the University of Missouri have found that empathy has as much to do with our sense of self as it does with our sense of others.

Brick Johnstone, a neuropsychologist and professor of health psychology at the University of Missouri, and a team of researchers published the results of their empathy study on Wednesday.

In the study, researchers gave neuropsychological evaluations and self-reported questionnaires to a group of 31 individuals with traumatic brain injuries. Twenty of the participants also received MRI brain scans. Johnstone and his colleagues found that individuals who were more empathetic appeared to have greater functioning in their right parietal lobe, the area of the brain associated with self-orientation. He also found that increased functioning of the areas of the brain focused on the self went hand in hand with increased empathy.

"This is one instance when being more self-focused is related to virtuous behaviors," he said in a release.

Johnstone said several psychological and spiritual "interventions" can help individuals develop their sense of self. Psychological counseling, for example, can focus on helping patients take the perspective of others and experience such perspectives as if they were one’s own, he told The Huffington Post.

Religious practices can benefit from stressing "that to truly care for one another we must understand their situation and incorporate it into a strong sense of the self," Johnstone said.
Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg emphasizes similar values when she teaches Lovingkindness meditation, a mindfulness practice that aims to enhance empathy and develop what Salzberg calls "a strong sense of self respect." The two are intimately related, she told HuffPost.

"Mindfulness of one's own pain (awareness without judgment)... is the basis for being able to tune into the pain of others without judgment," Salzberg said.

In many ways, empathy goes hand in hand with the golden rule, Johnstone said, "I ask that others treat me as they would themselves; and I will treat others as if they were my self."

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Black Studies Conference urges tangible actions to create inclusion

DANIEL CHRISTIAN, 12 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — MU student leaders and local activists discussed social issues such as mandatory diversity training for incoming freshmen, bringing the black community together outside of MU and LGBTQ inclusion at an all-day conference Thursday.

Payton Head, president of the Missouri Students Association, delivered one of the keynote speeches at the conference, which was organized by the MU Black Studies Department.

Creating an inclusive atmosphere

Kenneth Bryant, a graduate student, talked about the differences between radicalism and respectability as paths to activism. He said the radicalism path consists of grass-roots protesting and demanding justice. The respectability path promotes dialogue and seeks to change legislation.

When talking about how those two methods could translate to campus activity, panelists said it's important to push for tangible programs to create an inclusive atmosphere.

Graduate student Angi Haeny said the administration's recent decision to include mandatory diversity training for incoming freshmen is only a start. It will take time to see if it works, she said.
"I don't think we need to implement something for the sake of implementing it," she said. "We need to make sure its good and effective."

Junior Brittani Savage discussed the intersection of black life and the LGBTQ community. She asked LGBTQ black students how they felt.

One response read, "It seems like black lives matter until they're gay or trans."

She urged those in attendance to examine their own privilege. She said that to become a strong ally to any oppressed community, one first needs to identify the ways he or she oppresses others.

In reference to creating a campus environment in which black students can feel at home, senior Warren Davis said it's important to act now.

"It's not something that can be done right away," Davis said. "But waiting isn't an option any more."

**Activism at the community level**

Adrian Clifton spoke about the Worley Street Roundtable, a coalition she recently founded that is designed to support black parents and teachers and help Columbia Public Schools better support black students. The coalition consists of doctoral students, local activists, pastors and others.

"Our goal is to thread together the community," Clifton said.

Carl Kenney, co-pastor at Bethel Baptist Church and a Missourian columnist, spoke about the lack of black leadership and businesses in Columbia. He said these realities led him and his colleagues to create the African American Clergy Coalition of Mid-Missouri, which seeks to create a stable group of leaders with a common goal to combat injustices.

Traci Wilson-Kleekamp, a family history research consultant, spoke about the importance of incorporating the city's black history into school curriculums.
"There's a lot of history about people of color in this community we don't know about," Wilson-Kleekamp said. "So the question is: How come we don't know?"

She went through several historical documents and photographs to illustrate how the black community united to survive after the Civil War, specifically how the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association helped former slaves find economic success.

**MSA president: Ongoing conversation 'good start'**

The key-note speakers were MSA President Payton Head and MU associate professors Cynthia Frisby and Kristin Kopp.

Head spoke of his own challenges with race at MU and how he encourages other students in MSA to try to adopt the perspective of others.

He said he reminds the mostly white Students Association that its collective job is to speak for the students that do not have the privilege to speak for themselves.

He also criticized the administration for putting the onus on students to solve race relations problems on campus. Head said that as a research-based university, MU should be looking at how other campuses have handled and improved similar problems.

"I just want you to be a little more considerate the next time you ask a student, 'Well, what do you think we should do?'" he said. "Because I don't get paid over $100,000 to ask people how to do my job."

At least MU is having the conversation, and that's a start Head said.
COLUMBIA — The Multicultural Achievement Committee will host its fifth annual Achievement Conference on Friday and Saturday.

The MAC Achievement Conference includes students from all four Columbia public high schools and the Youth Advisory Council of Columbia, making this one of the only student-led conferences in the country, according to information from Columbia Public Schools.

This year's theme is "Opportunity Up." S. David Mitchell, an associate professor in the MU School of Law, will deliver the keynote address from 8:10 to 9 a.m. Saturday at Columbia College.

District coordinator Annelle Whitt said they chose Mitchell after they heard him speak at an NAACP banquet last year. “We thought his speech was thought-provoking, and he was able to bring a historical perspective to what we see going on in some of our communities across the country,” Whitt said.

Although the official registration deadline has passed, limited registration will start at 7:30 a.m. Saturday.

The eight conference workshops are free and open to the public. Each will focus on education in present day and the importance of creating inclusive communities. The full list of workshops can be found on the 2015 MAC Achievement Conference website.

Friday events will be held at the district’s Aslin Administration Building, 1818 W. Worley St., with Saturday events at Columbia College, 1001 Rogers St.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Students write words they never want to hear again on 'wall' at MU

KYLIE BOYCE, 10 hrs ago
COLUMBIA — Phrases like "you talk like a white guy," "she deserved it" and "racism doesn't exist" were all written on a wall made of paper and cardboard boxes on MU's campus Thursday.

The 12th annual Hate Wall, organized primarily by the MU Multicultural Center, was an outlet for MU students to write words or phrases they never want to hear again on campus, according to the description on the side of the wall.

The wall was torn down after a corresponding event Thursday evening called If These Walls Could Talk.

Student Okey Ukaga wrote "oreo" on the wall, a derogatory slang term which refers to someone who is viewed as only being black on the outside.

"In high school a lot of people would say I dressed really white or I talked really white, perpetuating the idea that to dress nice or talk well or eloquently means that it's only something that white people can do," Ukaga said.

Ukaga's word was surrounded by provocative words ranging from homophobic slurs to extremely racist language.

"This is a great way to get the majority of students on this campus involved. It's done publicly — it's a way for people to show they are standing in solidarity with marginalized groups," said Ipsa Chaudhary, co-chair for Four Front Council, a group of students who work to give a voice to minority students.

The goal of the event was to bring awareness to hurtful language and encourage conversation about it.

Student volunteers in the sponsoring organizations wore red shirts that read "stop the hate" and spent most of their day in Speakers Circle explaining this goal to passing students.

One volunteer, Jillian Cleaver, wrote more than eight phrases on the wall.

"She-male," "vomiting sounds" and "glass bottle thrown at my head" were among them. She said she experienced all of them during her time at MU.
"I think it's very valuable to have such a tangible manifestation of the oppression that many students on this campus feel every single day," Cleaver said.

One word that was repeated throughout the wall was "retarded."

"I wrote 'retarded' because it's an inappropriate, completely outdated word," said Lisa Crader, executive staff assistant for Student Life.

She said she found the Hate Wall to be a "good in your face example" that highlighted improvements community members can make in their civility.

"Everything up here is the opposite of being civil to each other," Crader said.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Students share personal stories at 'If These Walls Could Talk'

JENNIFER ALDRICH, 9 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — MU students told personal stories through art at “If These Walls Could Talk” on Thursday.

Sophomore Jillian Cleaver shared her story through a poem. She said she wanted to share her experiences and have an outlet to express how she feels.

“I’m a disabled trans woman, and I feel alienated from my own community here,” Cleaver said. “So it’s really important for me to participate so people understand what happens on this campus.”

Cleaver’s poem addressed her speech disorder, which she said she is often harassed for.
“I’m often interrupted and spoken over,” Cleaver said. “People will make fun of me and ridicule me for the way I talk.”

Often, the ridicule comes from everyday interactions, Cleaver said.

“A lot of this stuff is day-to-day interactions,” Cleaver said. “I’m constantly misgendered; people will laugh at me walking to class.”

Shelby Anderson, a junior at MU, performed a spoken word piece titled “Realizations.” The piece addressed the prejudices she’s experienced since she was 5, Anderson said.

She said that sharing her story is important because other people encouraged her, and she wants to encourage others.

“It took me hearing a lot of other people sharing their pieces to be comfortable with myself,” Anderson said. “Knowing that my piece may speak to somebody and encourage somebody is important.”

Anderson said that speaking out against prejudice is a way to take control of her oppression and not make it oppression anymore.

Joel Dalton, a grad student at MU, shared a letter he wrote to his former self. He said he chose the letter because it addresses both his queer identity and his Latino identity.

Dalton said that he wouldn’t wish the prejudice he has gone through on anyone, but it has made him into the person he is today.

“I don’t like to define myself by prejudice, but I know it’s very much a part of the way I’ve grown up,” Dalton said.

He said he has had supporting spaces that helped him not internalize the messages that were fed to him. He said that people have to start seeing things in a new way to overcome prejudice.

“Rather than seeing our differences, we have to see our similarities,” Dalton said.
About 50 attendees listened to the students in the MU Student Center. Following the event, the Hate Wall was torn down by attendees and participants.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

FROM READERS: Eva Johnston Scholarship supports female college students

KAITIE WALLACE/MISSOURIAN READER, 1 hr ago

_Kaitie Wallace is the publicity intern for the Columbia Branch of the American Association of University Women. Wallace is a junior at MU studying Journalism._

Each year, the Columbia Branch of the American Association of University Women awards one woman the Eva Johnston Scholarship. This year, MU student Ariel Gibbs was awarded this prestigious scholarship.

Since its founding in 1907, the Columbia Branch of AAUW has placed a heavy emphasis on scholarship and education. The Columbia Branch of AAUW includes a very diverse group of recent graduates, professionals and active members of the community working to break through educational and economic barriers for women.

In October 1907, Dr. Eva Johnston became the first president of the Columbia Branch of AAUW. She was the first dean of women students, and the Eva Johnston Hall at MU is named in her honor. After having an annual scholarship for students for several years, the scholarship was named for Eva Johnston in 1941 after her death.

The Eva Johnston scholarship is awarded to a female student who is a resident of Missouri and attends Columbia College, Stephens College or MU. This year’s recipient, Ariel Gibbs, is a senior at MU studying nutrition and exercise science. After graduating, Gibbs wants to become a firefighter and a commissioned officer in the Missouri Army National Guard.
“I feel honored and blessed to be awarded the scholarship. The AAUW is a fantastic organization that does a lot of great things for women and the advancement of women, and to be selected by such an organization is humbling and truly an honor,” Gibbs said.

AAUW continues to honor Eva Johnston with the awarding of this scholarship. For the 2015-2016 academic year, the Eva Johnston Scholarship will be awarded to a Columbia College student.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Historic Preservation Commission hosts spooky walking tour

SEAN ROBERTS, 18 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Ghost stories, fires and urban legends will come to life on Wednesday evening during a walking tour hosted by the Historic Preservation Commission.

The tour will begin at 6 p.m. on MU’s Francis Quadrangle and wind through downtown with a ghost story, infamous fire or some form of urban legend from the past 125 years at each location.

The event is free and open to the public. No registration is required. For special accommodations contact Rachel Bacon at 874-7239 or ribacon@gocolumbiamo.com.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia's three city flag design finalists emerge

CHRIS STAFFORD, 12 hrs ago
Photo courtesy of the city of Columbia

ARTIST: Jon Sheltmire. CROSS: Represents Columbia being at a crossroads in the center of the state of Missouri. BLUE: Represents Columbia's many distinctive rivers, creeks and lakes. GREEN: Represents Columbia's woodlands, trails, parks and heritage of nature conservation. COLUMBIA SYMBOL: Represents our diverse, close-knit community and pays homage to the familiar, well-designed City of Columbia logo.
The red, white and blue bars of the flag are meant to mimic the design of the flag of Missouri. Inspiration for the three stars on the flag came from the design of the flag of Chicago, which has four stars to represent four important events in the city’s history. In this flag, the three stars are representative of Columbia’s status as an educational hot spot in Missouri. The red star represents Stephens College, the gold star represents MU and the blue star represents Columbia College.
ARTIST: Nicole Johnston. "Elements of the Past, Present and Future." ENVIRONMENT: The blue sky and green earth express Columbia’s commitment to its surrounding environment, parks, recreation and future sustainability. GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY: The white letter “C” highlights the city’s name as well as the government and businesses fostering economic development of today and tomorrow. COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION: The gold key figure mimics the negative space created in the Daniel Boone City Building’s key sculpture and embodies not only the individuals within our ethnically diverse community, but also the city’s commitment to education and its long-standing partnerships with the numerous educational institutions that helped form its original foundations. HISTORY AND CULTURE: The black outlines create a stained glass window effect symbolizing the city’s rich history and vibrant artistic culture.

COLUMBIA — Only one of three final designs — submitted by Jon Sheltmire, Michael Bauer and Nicole Johnston — will have the honor of being Columbia's new city flag in 2016.

Residents can comment on the flag designs and choose their favorites on the city's website or on a bulletin in the lobby of the Daniel Boone City Building. Public comment will close in early 2016, and the City Council will look over the results to decide on a winner.
The flag designs are intended to show strong symbolism and follow the "five principals of flag design" laid out by the North American Vexillological Association, according to a news release from Columbia's Office of Cultural Affairs.

The flag contest began in 2014 when 84 designs were submitted, many of them by schoolchildren. After hearing public input, the Standing Committee on Public Art reviewed designs and picked finalists, then took them to the City Council to get its opinion. The council chose the final three designs.

Sarah Dresser, a programs specialist for the Office of Cultural Affairs, said that back in 1988 an informal flag stationed on a white background with the city logo was created for a flag exchange ceremony with representatives from Matto City, Japan, which is one of Columbia's sister cities.

"The flag stuck around for a bit but wasn’t used in many official capacities," Dresser said.

Bauer said he got the inspiration for his design when he went to his cousin's wedding in Chicago. Chicago’s city flag has four stars that represent four historical milestones in the city. Bauer applied that principle to his design.

"I just did it for fun, and I didn't expect my design to get this far at all," Bauer said.

**The three stars on his design represent MU, Stephens College and Columbia College.**

**Bauer said he made the design without any graphics experience.**

Johnston, whose design incorporates the letter C and the Keys to the City sculpture outside city hall, said she only came to realize that her design is somewhat similar to Colorado's state flag after reading a KOMU Facebook post.

It was definitely not a premeditated type of thing," Johnston said, adding that she probably should have done more research on the different state flags before deciding on a design.

Finalist Sheltmire could not be reached for comment.