American-Islamic advocacy group backs MU student's lawsuit

RUTH SERVEN, 14 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — The executive director of a Muslim advocacy group held a news conference Wednesday morning in support of an MU student who is suing her professor for harassment.

Faizan Syed, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations' St. Louis chapter, stood in front of the MU Columns and talked about Fatma El-Walid and her interactions with her professor, Michael Garcia. About a dozen community members attended.

In a lawsuit filed Nov. 30, El-Walid and her attorney asserted that Garcia made a series of discriminatory and insulting remarks to El-Walid about her gender and religion during his office hours. According to the lawsuit, after the incident, El-Walid said she was afraid to walk to her car, didn't feel comfortable attending any other professors' office hours and saw her grades fall.

"You have to realize when students experience this kind of paralytic sexual harassment, discrimination at school, and public humiliation, and it's done not by another student or by a stranger but by a professor, who is trusted in order to educate that student, that is the most heinous type of action," Syed said.

Syed said his organization has helped college students who have been harassed, but it has never helped a student who is filing a lawsuit.

Iman Eldeib, a Columbia resident, said she came to the news conference to support El-Walid.
"I felt it was important to stand with her as my sister in humanity, and it really doesn’t matter what faith she is," she said.

Eldeib said the best way to change false beliefs about Muslims is to get to know the Muslim community. She said she would like to see Garcia issue an apology and for the university to put him on probation and require him to go through sensitivity training.

"Otherwise, bigots don’t belong at Mizzou. That’s not the face of Mizzou that you want the world to see."

**MISSOURIAN**

Nursing school receives donation for diversity

CECILIA SALOMONE, 20 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — The MU Sinclair School of Nursing received $122,500 for diversity scholarships and programs Wednesday, according to an MU news release.

The donation will create the Gregory and Diane Lind Diversity in Nursing Program, which will offer scholarships to undergraduate minority students pursuing nursing degrees beginning in the spring 2016 semester.

Gregory Lind received his master’s degree in nursing from MU in 1980 and said he hoped his gift would promote diversity in the nursing school.

“With this gift, Diane and I hope to move beyond mere conversation into real action,” Lind said in the news release. “The Sinclair School of Nursing has long been a place of diversity and inclusivity, and we want to help continue and expand that tradition.”
The program will provide financial awards for qualified students who complete a two-credit elective course on academic success, according to the release. It will also provide annual stipends to student ambassadors who serve as mentors and coaches for underrepresented minority nursing students.

The Linds currently live in Seattle where Gregory Lind operates a primary care walk-in clinic he founded in 1990.

According to the release, Lind has been an active member of the Sinclair School of Nursing Dean’s Advisory Council and the school's Capital Campaign Steering Committee, receiving a Citation of Merit award from the school in 2010.

**MU nursing program gets boost to support minority students**

Watch story: [http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=31935&zone=2,5&categories=2,5](http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=31935&zone=2,5&categories=2,5)

COLUMBIA – A Seattle couple is working to help the University of Missouri to become more diverse in its nursing program.

Gregory and Diane Lind gave the Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing an endowment gift of $122,500 to create the Gregory and Diane Lind Diversity in Nursing Program.

Gregory Lind graduated from the University of Missouri with a master’s degree in nursing in 1980 and has been an active member of the Sinclair School of Nursing Dean’s Advisory Council.

The program, starting at the beginning of the upcoming spring semester, will look to create scholarships for minority students pursuing undergraduate degrees in nursing.
Judith Miller, dean of the MU Sinclair School of nursing, said this gift will provide many more opportunities for minority students pursuing a career in nursing.

“We find that with diverse students, one of the barriers, as in many students, one of the barriers is not having the financial resources to achieve the goals they want to achieve, particularly in higher education,” Miller said. “Though this is a real balloon for us, and we’re just thrilled to have this funding.”

Gregory said the Sinclair School of Nursing has been a place of diversity and inclusivity, and he hopes the gift from him and his wife will continue to expand that tradition.

“We need to really focus on enhancing our reputation on diverse nurses and we are at a shortage right now in having those nurses represented.”

Recent studies show there isn’t only a shortage of minority nurses, but nurses in general. Local hospitals like Boone Hospital are seeing these shortages.

Miller said there is a chance of a shortage of around one million nurses by 2020, and this new program would help students become more prepared with a student success course.

“It will also enable us to have some creative approaches for all students to have a student success course which enables them to be able to figure out how to have great study skills and how to be able to advance in to the clinical major in nursing.”

Jamaa Learning Center becomes latest charter school to close

Dec. 17, 2015  •  By Elisa Crouch

ST. LOUIS • After being put on notice multiple times about poor finances and lackluster academics, Jamaa Learning Center will close its doors in June and cease to operate as a charter school.

The University of Missouri-Columbia will notify parents Thursday that it intends to end its sponsorship of the school, effectively closing it at the conclusion of the school year. Without a sponsor, a charter school cannot get state funding. The school, at 3108 North Grand Boulevard, has struggled since it opened its doors in 2011.

Jamaa is one of St. Louis’ 29 charter schools, which are tuition-free and public, but operate independently of the city school system.

Multiple charter schools have closed in the last several years. The state effectively closed six schools run by the for-profit Imagine Schools Inc. in 2012 due to years of substandard academics. In 2013, Shearwater, a
school to help high school dropouts earn diplomas, voluntarily ceased to operate. And last spring, Construction Careers Academy closed.

Jamaa enrolls about 150 children in kindergarten through eighth grade. It recently had taken out a $20,000 loan to create a large enough cash reserve to stay off of the state’s “financially distressed” list. An October balance sheet shows that its liabilities are more than double the cash on hand, adding to Mizzou’s concerns about its viability.

“There were concerns about the loans being taken to cover operating expenses,” said Earl Simms, St. Louis director of Mizzou’s Office of Charter School Operations.

Poor test scores have been a concern for years. At some grade levels, fewer than 10 percent of children scored proficient in math or English on the 2015 Missouri Assessment Program.

“When you have financial stress, that translates into not keeping teachers,” said Wayne Crull, president of the board that oversees Jamaa. “You end up hiring at the last minute and you don’t always get the best.”

Mizzou’s decision is no surprise to school officials. In June, the university’s charter school office notified the school that it had “substantive concerns related to fiscal viability and academic infrastructure of the school,” and that it planned to let its sponsorship lapse in 2016.

A letter to parents states that services will continue as normal for the duration of the school year. The letter also lists contact information for dozens of district and charter schools so parents can begin the search for a new school for 2016-17.

The Missouri Charter Public School Association issued a statement indicating it would work with the school and Mizzou to develop a closure plan for Jamaa.

“Regarding the closing of Jamaa Learning Center the process should now begin to make sure that the school ends the year responsibly, keeping the best interests of the students foremost in mind,” the statement says.

About 11,000 children are enrolled in charter schools in St. Louis.

Jamaa Learning Center will close in June; charter school raised financial, academic concerns

By DALE SINGER • DEC. 17

After five years dedicated to helping “educate and empower students and families” — but losing its charter from its sponsor — Jamaa Learning Center will close its doors at the end of the current school year.
The north St. Louis charter school, operating at 3108 North Grand, has struggled both academically and financially since it opened in 2011 under the sponsorship of the University of Missouri-Columbia. It has been on probationary status for the past two years.

The final day of class is scheduled for June 2.

In a letter to Wayne Crull, chairman of the board at Jamaa, Deborah Carr, who heads charter school operations at Mizzou, said the university “continues to have substantive concerns related to fiscal viability and academic infrastructure of the school.”

She said the university would let Jamaa’s charter lapse when it expires on June 30, 2016. Carr also said Mizzou “will assist with the transfer of sponsorship should a new sponsor be obtained by Jamaa during this upcoming academic year.”

But Trina Clark James, founder of the school, said that since being notified in June that the charter would not be renewed, the school had been unsuccessful in finding another sponsor.

In an interview, James said that, though scores on state tests and Jamaa’s annual report card had been consistently low, she did not feel those numbers accurately reflected what the school has accomplished.

“We have had families that have come to us and said their child has not been able to be successful,” she said, “and they see so much growth in their child academically after they came here.

“In some cases, it was because we were able to identify that that child had a disability and so we were able to start providing special education services that had never been diagnosed.”

In a letter to parents, James and members of a transition team that will handle the school’s final months gave assurance that the school will continue to provide educational services until the end of the school year.

“Equally important as your child successfully completing this school year is finding the best school for your child for the 2016-2017 school year,” the letter said. “Both Jamaa and the University of Missouri are committed to helping to you do so.”
And, the letter said, the closure may not mean the end of Jamaa.

“Work is still being done to secure a future for Jamaa Learning Center for future school years,” it said. “We will keep you informed on this process as more information is available.

“However, because that process has not been completed we believe it is in your child’s best interest to consider all of your educational options for next year, which include attending St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS), applying to another charter school in the city, and any other options of which you may be aware for your child.”

Transition team will help families

Members of a transition team named to guide Jamaa’s closure will be available to answer questions from parents and others at 5:30 p.m. Thursday and 8 a.m. Friday.

Earl Simms, who is a member of that team and works with charter schools sponsored by Mizzou, said the university originally had moved to pull its sponsorship after two years, but it relented and gave the school more time.

He said there is no simple answer to the question of why Jamaa fell short of success, but questions persisted about both its success in the classroom and its ability to persist financially. “The academic and financial outcomes for sustainability at the end of the day just weren’t there,” he said.

Simms said the bills the school owed amount to twice as much cash as it had on hand – a situation he called “persistent and trending in the wrong direction.” But, he added, the school’s board says it has a plan to make it through to the end of the school year.

Jamaa – pronounced Ja-MAH -- is named for a Swahili word meaning family, village or tribe. It opened with 75 students in kindergarten, third and sixth grades. As it has expanded to include kindergarten through eighth grade, enrollment has held steady at about 160 students.

Its scores on this year’s MAP tests as released in August by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education showed 19.7 percent proficient or advanced in English, 8.3 percent in math and 6.7 percent in science. The school earned 25 out of 50 possible points on its annual performance review.
But James said those raw numbers don’t show the true extent to which Jamaa had succeeded in helping individual students progress.

“It might not look like that it’s positive for the school as a whole,” she said. “What they don’t see is one student who came to us and started in kindergarten and taking the MAP test and doing really well.

“Most of our scholars are coming to us with educational experience that has not been working well for them. So they’re coming, and we’re seeing growth after they’ve been with us one or two or three years.”

Operationally, James added, the school has had a hard time. Since its early days, funding outside of the traditional support Missouri pays to all public schools has been hard to come by.

“We don’t have any major organizations we’re affiliated with,” she said. “We really are a small, home-grown kind of mom and pop type school, so we have been operating off of just the public funding that all public schools, district or charter, receive every year.”

James grew up in St. Louis and attended Clayton schools under the voluntary desegregation program. She said she started Jamaa so students living in the city would have an option for a quality education near their homes.

Its guiding philosophy is based on what its website calls the “Five E’s” – academic entitlement, cultural and arts enrichment, health and beauty enhancement, financial empowerment and emotional and spiritual enlightenment.

While Jamaa will be closing next June in its current form, James hopes the spirit of the school will be able to live on.

“We don’t see that as us not being able to live up to what the original vision was or to create something that is sustainable,” James said. “We see it as this is no longer the path of our going forward, and we are working on other options.”

**Reaction to the closure**

Responding to the upcoming closure, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released this statement from Chris Neale, assistant commissioner in the office of quality schools:
We will support the school and the sponsor in ensuring a smooth process for closure. Our first priority is making sure their students find other opportunities for a high quality education in the St. Louis region.

In a separate statement, Doug Thaman, executive director of the Missouri Charter Public School Association, said accountability has to be the most important factor in deciding whether a charter school should remain open.

“The idea of a school closing is never popular,” Thaman said. “Parents and children have developed relationships with staff making it difficult to see things come to an end. A school closing places a hardship on the students and parents faced with transitioning to a new school as well as the staff having to gain new employment.

“However, under the charter public school model, the educational outcomes and the overall operational health of any school must be at a high level to justify continuing operation best serving the children.”

He said his association would work to help ensure the closure goes smoothly and students move on to a high quality school.

“We encourage all stakeholders to place personal feelings and agendas aside,” Thaman said, “keeping the students' best interests at the focal point of this process and minimizing the impact on their education. That is the most important factor for all parties moving forward.”

According to data from the association, more than a dozen charter schools have closed in Missouri, including Imagine, Paideia, Shearwater, Thurgood Marshall and Ethel Hedgeman Lyle in St. Louis.

Missouri bill stripping protesting athletes’ scholarships withdrawn

Missouri State Rep. Rick Brattin (R) has withdrawn a bill aiming to strip college athletes’ scholarships if they refuse to play for non-health reasons.
Brattin proposed the bill on Friday, in wake of a strike by University of Missouri football players hoping to force change on the school’s campus related to widespread racial issues and calling for the resignation of the university president.

Brattin said that in proposing the bill he simply wanted to create a dialogue around “an extremely important topic,” according to the Associated Press.

“While I am withdrawing the legislation, I hope the conversation will continue so that we can take steps to ensure the University of Missouri is providing a stable, positive learning environment for our young people,” Brattin said in a statement. “I sincerely believe students should be able to express their viewpoints, but I also believe our flagship state university has to keep and maintain the order that is expected from such an esteemed educational institution.”

His proposal wanted to revoke scholarships for any athlete that “calls, incites, supports or participates in any strike,” and required schools to fine coaches that facilitated any such protests.

After the strike, Missouri head coach Gary Pinkel stood in support of his players, who ended up not boycotting any games after the school’s president stepped down. Pinkel stepped down from his job days later due to a cancer diagnosis.

Missouri bill to revoke striking athletes' scholarships withdrawn

Well, this was quick.

A bill pre-filed in the Missouri House of Representatives proposing to give the government the right to revoke a striking athlete's scholarship has been withdrawn two days after it was entered into the house ledger.

The bill sponsored by Rep. Rick Brattin (R), duly received a ton of criticism as soon as it was pre-filed. Athletic scholarships at the University of Missouri are funded through the Tiger Scholarship Fund, which is bankrolled by private donations.

According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Brattin withdrew the bill without comment. The bill's co-sponsor, Kurt Bahr (R), had this to say, which is all you need to know regarding the amount of research that went into this bill.

Brattin made talk show rounds on Tuesday within the state. He told KTGR in Columbia that Missouri players had an obligation to play football.
"The current events and what took place at MU I hated to see what was going on and kind of an anarchy occurring due to the actions of the football team," Brattin said. "And we had a university that didn’t keep the order within the university and I think that we need to hold those accountable for actions such as this.

"I’m not against people’s First Amendment rights and speaking their minds and doing what they believe is right. But they also had an obligation to play football, and they utilized their position as a football player to go on strike and put the university in a horrible situation. I don’t think that’s good conduct of a football team."

Anarchy is not the right word to describe the Missouri football players’ protest. While some – possibly even Brattin himself – disagree with the premise of the protest, the idea was clearly thought out by members of the Missouri football team. And coach Gary Pinkel repeated over and over that he supported his players. The bill was also requested fines for coaches who would support a protest.

Pinkel retired at the end of the season because of lymphoma. Brattin told KTGR if Pinkel "had acted like a coach and not get political which is exactly what he did, we wouldn't be talking about this right now."

Brattin was also on 610 Sports in Kansas City on Tuesday and curiously revealed he had not spoken to anyone of color regarding the Missouri protests. Missouri players went on strike in support of a graduate student who was hunger striking. The graduate student went on protest amidst increasing racial tension at the university.

In addition to the free speech ramifications, the bill, had it continued in any official capacity, could have raised interesting questions for the NCAA as well as it clearly classified athletes as a different type of student. But Brattin and staff clearly didn't consider all the ramifications of his proposal. If the bill was well-thought-out, it would have made it more than 48 hours, right?
Missouri bid to strip scholarships if athletes strike pulled

BY JIM SUHR Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, MO. - A Missouri lawmaker withdrew a bill Wednesday that sought to strip scholarships from college athletes who refuse to play for reasons unrelated to health, saying he merely sought to spark dialogue about "an extremely important topic."

Republican state Rep. Rick Brattin proposed the bill Friday in response to last month's threat by University of Missouri football players not to play unless the school addressed complaints about racial issues on its main campus. The threat was seen as instrumental in forcing change, including the Nov. 9 resignations of the university system's president and the chancellor of its main campus in Columbia.

The bill sparked a social media backlash, with critics saying it would rob athletes of their free-speech rights by holding their scholarships hostage.

The proposal called for revoking the scholarships of any athlete who "calls, incites, supports or participates in any strike." It also would have required colleges to fine members of coaching staffs for encouraging or enabling such student protests. Missouri’s football coach, Gary Pinkel, publicly supported the players' stance. He stepped down days after the administrators resigned, saying he had been diagnosed with cancer.
In a statement Wednesday, Brattin said the issue — athletes and social activism that could affect their responsibilities under an athletic scholarship — "deserves deliberate consideration."

"While I am withdrawing the legislation, I hope the conversation will continue so that we can take steps to ensure the University of Missouri is providing a stable, positive learning environment for our young people," Brattin said. "I sincerely believe students should be able to express their viewpoints, but I also believe our flagship state university has to keep and maintain the order that is expected from such an esteemed educational institution."

Brattin did not respond to Associated Press telephone requests Wednesday for an interview.

State Rep. Brandon Ellington, a Kansas City Democrat who chairs the legislative black caucus, had claimed Brattin's measure "seeks to further solidify and legalize institutional racism by targeting black athletes for exercising their constitutional rights to free speech and reducing them to the status of subjugated livestock."

On Wednesday, Ellington called Brattin's withdrawal of the proposal a good move.

"This unconstitutional legislation never should have been filed in the first place," Ellington said. "Seeking to punish those who peacefully take a stand against racial injustice violates not only the constitutional right to free speech but the values we hold as Missourians. Given the overwhelmingly negative response to his misguided and offensive proposal, I hope Rep. Brattin finally understands that."

Sponsor withdraws Mizzou athlete strike proposal
Dec. 16, 2015 • By Kurt Erickson

JEFFERSON CITY • A controversial proposal that would have revoked the scholarships of Missouri athletes who participate in strikes or other protests was withdrawn early Wednesday.
State Rep. Rick Brattin dumped the legislation, but said he is hopeful it will continue to generate debate “on what I believe is an extremely important topic.”

In the latest flare-up in an ongoing debate over race at the University of Missouri, the Brattin, R-Harrisonville, filed the measure on Friday. It would have stripped scholarships from athletes who refuse to play “for a reason unrelated to health.”

It drew immediate opposition from a range of critics, including legal experts who said it would have violated a student’s First Amendment rights.

The measure also would have required the university to levy a fine against any member of a coaching staff who encourages an athlete to participate in a strike.

The legislation was filed in response to members of the MU football team announcing in November that they would stop participating in team activities until former university system president Timothy M. Wolfe resigned.

On Nov. 9, Wolfe resigned and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin was reassigned. Mizzou head football coach Gary Pinkel announced his resignation soon after for health reasons.

In a statement issued Wednesday afternoon, Brattin said: “I sincerely believe students should be able to express their viewpoints, but I also believe our flagship state university has to keep and maintain the order that is expected from such an esteemed educational institution.”

In an interview Tuesday on 610 Sports Radio in Kansas City, Brattin scoffed at critics who said he is racist for introducing the measure. “That’s complete garbage,” Brattin said. “It has nothing to do with race or anything like that.”

The chairman of the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus said Brattin made the correct decision to remove the bill from consideration.

“Seeking to punish those who peacefully take a stand against racial injustice violates not only the constitutional right to free speech but the values we hold as Missourians. Given the overwhelmingly negative response to his misguided and offensive proposal, I hope Representative Brattin finally understands that,” state Rep. Brandon Ellington, D-Kansas City, said.

The controversy sparked one former NFL player to introduce legislation in Illinois designed to protect student athletes’ freedom of speech.

State Sen. Napoleon Harris, D-Harvey, who played for three pro teams, including the Kansas City Chiefs, said what was being discussed in Missouri was “blatantly unconstitutional.”

“I want to make sure our universities remain bastions of free speech and personal growth,” said Harris, who starred at Northwestern University.

Brattin’s decision to withdraw the legislation came as a surprise Wednesday to co-sponsor Rep. Kurt Bahr, R-O’Fallon.

“Unfortunately, it’s going to be seen as a coup by those who opposed the bill,” Bahr told the Post-Dispatch.

In addition to inflaming an issue that has roiled the state’s flagship university in Columbia, a Washington University law professor said the proposed law would violate a student’s right to free speech.
“This proposed law is a classic example of a government lashing out at political ideas it doesn’t like,” said Gregory Magarian. “That is exactly the kind of government tyranny the First Amendment was written to prevent.”

Bahr acknowledged the proposal had drawn national attention.

“I did get quite a few questions about it,” he said Wednesday.

The bill is House Bill 1743.

MISSOURIAN

Missouri state representative withdraws bill to revoke athletes' scholarships

AARON REISS, 15 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — That happened fast.

State representative Rick Brattin, R-Harrisonville, has withdrawn the bill he pre-filed Friday that proposed revoking the athletic scholarship of any student athlete who "calls, incites, supports, or participates in any strike or concerted refusal to play a scheduled game." Additionally, the bill called for any member of a coaching staff who "encourages or enables a college athlete to engage" in such behavior to receive a fine from his or her institution of employment.

The bill was House Bill 1743. It never had a hearing scheduled.

On Monday, the bill’s co-sponsor, Kurt Bahr, R-O’Fallon, said it was “obviously in reaction” to the Missouri football players' boycott. The team announced it would not participate in football activities until graduate student Jonathan Butler’s hunger strike ended. Butler refused to eat until then-University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe was no longer in office. A day after the whole team announced its boycott, Wolfe resigned.

When the bill began to receive attention on social media Monday, many were critical of it, questioning its legality. The Tiger Scholarship Fund pays for athletic scholarships, not the state. The fund is made up of private donations. According to the Missouri student-athlete handbook,
the athletics department, “similar to a private business … must operate solely from what revenue it generates.”

Bahr said Wednesday that Brattin’s research department “neglected to mention” that the state can’t dictate how athletic scholarship funds are used.

The intention of the bill, Bahr said, was simply to hold athletes to the requirements of their athletic scholarships — namely competition. He views the scholarships as contracts. Students who receive state-funded academic scholarships, he said, would lose those scholarships if they didn’t fulfill the delineated requirements, such as grades in good-standing.

“I don’t just wear a helmet on Saturdays and disappear the other six days of the week,” former Missouri team captain Ian Simon, a leader of the boycott, said to the Missourian on Monday regarding the bill.

State representative Brandon Ellington, D-Kansas City, said in a statement that while Brattin made the correct decision to withdraw the bill, Brattin never should’ve pre-filed it.

"Seeking to punish those who peacefully take a stand against racial injustice violates not only the constitutional right to free speech but the values we hold as Missourians," said Ellington, chairman of the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus. "Given the overwhelmingly negative response to his misguided and offensive proposal, I hope Representative Brattin finally understands."

Brattin’s office did not immediately return a call for comment from the Missourian on Wednesday.

Bahr said the reaction to the bill surprised him. He called the criticism regarding the legality of the bill fair. He took issue, though, with critics who said the bill was racially charged. The Missouri football boycott began when 30 black football players tweeted a photo of them locked arm-in-arm, announcing they wouldn’t play.
“The issue at hand was an issue of proper leadership within the college,” Bahr said. “It was never meant to be a racial issue. When that was the loudest criticism, that did surprise me.”

Bahr said the goal of the bill “was never to micromanage. It was to engage in that dialogue with the leadership of the university to make sure they’re properly managing these types of more extreme forms of communication by students.”

With that in mind, asked if he thought the bill was successful, Bahr said yes.

“It’s unfortunate some of the conversation was so negative in tone,” he said. “But the conversation has still begun, and I don’t think it has been forgotten immediately.”

MISSOURIAN

MU Alert put to the test in a stressful year

Some say the system didn't do enough when responding to incidents around campus

JACK WITTHAUS, 2 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Since it was created five years ago, MU Alert has been a source of confusion — and sometimes frustration. This year was no different.

Throughout 2015, MU faculty, staff and students took to social media to criticize the emergency alert system's communication about incidents, which included a bomb threat, an armed robbery near campus and the shooting by police of a man in an MU parking garage.

That criticism turned into an evident loss of trust in MU Alert after an anonymous poster on Yik Yak threatened on Nov. 10 to "shoot every black person I see" at MU. The shared screenshots caused panic that night and sparked rumors on Twitter that the Ku Klux Klan was on campus.
The next day, some students decided not to show up for classes or work, prompting the closing of a few businesses that depend on student help. Even after MU Alert provided updates on the situation and said police had apprehended a suspect, fears were apparently not allayed.

Interim Chancellor Hank Foley, who heads the MU Emergency Plan Team, blasted the alert system at a faculty council meeting on Nov. 19, saying that the university did a terrible job communicating with students, according to previous Missourian reporting.

Foley called for more communication to explain to students "what the hell's going on." He then announced the creation of an ad hoc crisis communication team to improve communication with students. Between Nov. 10 and 11, MU Alert sent out six Tweets and no texts.

"We will do better," Foley told Faculty Council. "I promise you we will do better."

**Put to the test**

Last April — long before the November Yik Yak incident — in the span of about a week, MU Alert was used about a half dozen times in various ways, drawing criticism from the MU community.

- Most notably, MU Police later apologized for failing to update the campus in a more timely way after police fatally shot an armed robbery suspect in the Hitt Street garage on April 15. There was no mass notification email while the search was in progress, but an email was sent after police killed Mark W. Adair, 51.

- MU Alert did not send an email or issue a statement on April 18 when six men attempted to grope and kiss two women near Memorial Union. Another group of female students had reported an assault by a similar group about 11:30 p.m. April 17 on Rollins Street.

- On April 19, Columbia police responded to an armed robbery report at 2:26 a.m. in the area of Hitt and Locust streets near Paquin Tower. MU Alert sent out a mass notification email, and some people received a strange-sounding automated phone call at 3:08 a.m.

- On April 21, MU Alert sent no mass email notification when a bomb threat was called into the MU Student Center. The Student Center and Memorial Union, meanwhile, were evacuated. Nearly half an hour passed after the evacuation before MU Alert posted on its website about the threat and removal of students from the buildings.
That same night, MU Alert issued a mass email notification around 10 p.m. and posted a statement online advising students, faculty and staff to take precautions as police investigated a shots fired report. The MU Alert Twitter account called the incident a "shooting" not a "shots fired" — an important distinction because the first means someone has been shot while the second is victimless. An update about 20 minutes later stated the situation had been stabilized.

According to MU Alert's website, a team of communications professionals along with members of MU Police and MU's emergency management office, are in charge of MU Alert. As of Tuesday, Foley was still not listed as interim chancellor on MU Alert's website.

Basi expressed frustration about the number of times he has been asked to answer questions about the MU Alert system. He said it's difficult to give thousands of faculty, staff and students specific directions because each person's circumstance can be different during times of crisis. He said that's why MU Alert messages are broadly worded.

Basi said ideally when someone receives an alert, they take note of their surroundings and take actions for their personal safety.

"We're dealing with a very diversified audience when we activate the system," he said.

The emergency alert system, he said, is made up of a variety of in-house and other tools. MU created the website, for example, but the text message system uses Blackboard Connect.

Basi said some weather alerts are sent out automatically as some systems like Blackboard Connect are tied into the National Weather Service alert system. There are also pre-loaded messages that can be sent out in a matter of seconds.

Why certain alerts are used in various situations is outlined on the MU Alert's website. In general, the entire campus will not be notified with a text message if a situation is isolated. About 78 percent of faculty, staff and students subscribe to text message alerts, Basi said.

Basi said MU Alert is open to feedback and is constantly being re-evaluated. For example, when message alerts have been sent over the years, Basi said MU Alert has heard back from people who have signed up
for the alert system and didn't receive the message. In those cases, he said MU Alert has worked with different carriers and Blackboard Connect to help make the system work better.

**A case for too much information**

So why doesn't MU Alert send out more warning messages? According to the website, law enforcement and emergency responder experience along with numerous studies show that over-notification causes people to begin to ignore warning messages.

But many involved with emergency alert systems say that more information is better. Janine Sikes, a spokeswoman at the University of Florida, said at first the university's emergency alert system, UF Alert, was brief in its descriptions. Then UF Alert started giving more detailed descriptions and sending more messages, including more text messages.

There were a few complaints on campus about the quantity of messages, Sikes said. But she said the increased awareness of incidents on campus has led to crime-solving tips. She said parents and students seem generally happy with the system.

"They are delighted that both their children and themselves are notified," Sikes said. "It's important to know when to steer clear, when to stay in your apartment."

In a 2014 Campus Safety Magazine article, Dave Bujak, director of emergency management at Florida State University, defended using the school's alert system even for non-emergencies. He said that the more interactions students have with the system, the more familiar they become.

The increased use of messaging, Bujak said, has created a level of "respect and rapport" between students and FSU's administration on social media. For example, he said students have alerted the university when there's a water leak or traffic signal out.

Ara Bagdasarian, the CEO and co-founder of Omnilert, a company that creates emergency alert systems, said it's important to keep the community informed, especially on Twitter. During times of crisis, he said people can create their own story lines that may not be accurate.
Since no system is perfect, he said that after every incident the policies and practices should be reviewed and improved upon. Trust and transparency should be major concerns for every emergency alert system.

"It's all about constantly improving the response and communicating with people," Bagdasarian said.

David Wallace, an MU senior studying communications, said he wished there had been more communication during the Student Center bomb threat incident last April. At the time, he was in the Center for Student Involvement, which did not have a yellow alert box.

After one person returned for the restroom, he told Wallace's group that the building was being evacuated because of the threat. By the time Wallace left, most of the building was empty.

Wallace has been frustrated with MU Alert ever since he arrived at MU. He said he's never received an alert text, even though he's signed up for the system. He also said that when he does see alerts, he thinks they lack context and wishes there were more follow-up during emergencies.

He acknowledged that the system can be difficult to operate as people have various standards for being informed during times of crisis. But he said he and most people he knows feel similarly about MU Alert.

"I've lost a lot of faith in the system," he said.

Graduate student group blasts MU insurance recommendations

By Megan Favignano

Wednesday, December 16, 2015 at 2:00 pm
Members of a University of Missouri graduate student advocacy group say health insurance recommendations outlined in a panel’s report would leave graduate students worse off than MU’s current plan.

The Forum on Graduate Rights steering committee released a written statement Friday regarding a task force report with recommendations for how the university can cover insurance premiums for some graduate student employees. The report outlines two options — creating a fellowship or increasing stipends — and suggests MU consider adding a middle-tier plan option.

Eric Scott, a graduate student and part of the Forum on Graduate Rights, said none of the recommendations do what the current subsidy does.

“None of them guarantee ongoing coverage in the same way the subsidy plan does and there are some unintended side effects,” Scott said.

Traditionally, MU has provided graduate assistants with 20-hour appointments an annual subsidy of about $3,000 for health care costs. The Forum on Graduate Rights formed in August after MU told graduate assistants it could no longer subsidize their health insurance premiums because of a recent IRS interpretation of the Affordable Care Act.

After student and faculty backlash, the university rescinded that decision for this year and created a task force to examine how MU could cover premium costs next year while following health care law.

A fellowship or extra stipend funds would be taxed, while the subsidy graduate student workers traditionally received was not.

The Forum on Graduate Rights steering committee thinks it is unlikely MU can accurately assess how the interplay between stipends or fellowships, the accompanying tax burden and other sources of income will affect individual graduate assistants and their families.

That extra income, Scott said, could prevent some graduate student workers from qualifying for state and federal financial assistance such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps.

Scott said if students have the decision to choose the current gold plan or a potential silver plan, they most likely will choose the cheaper option even though it offers inferior coverage.

“The incentive is going to be to go with the most economical option,” Scott said.

School of Health Professions Dean Kristofer Hagglund, task force chairman, said the recommendation is to only consider adding a silver level plan.

“The recommendation ... is to examine the benefits and drawbacks of adding this plan. It seems just as likely that this action would be not taken, as taken,” Hagglund said in an email.
The Forum on Graduate Rights is urging the university to continue to fully subsidize health insurance premiums.

Islamic group pressures MU for more diversity training

The action follows a lawsuit against an MU professor accused of harassing a female Muslim student

The Council on American-Islamic Relations says the university has not adequately disciplined the professor

BY MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS
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The St. Louis chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations on Wednesday showed up on the University of Missouri’s Columbia campus and publicly criticized the school’s handling of complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination from a Muslim student.

The student, Fatma El-Walid, whose family is from Libya but lives in Columbia, has filed a lawsuit against professor Michael Garcia. It accuses him of making sexually harassing and discriminatory remarks that referred to her religion and traditional dress.

In the shadow of the MU columns, the organization called for mandatory sensitivity and cultural competency training classes for faculty, staff and students.

In October, then-MU chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced that starting in January, all incoming freshmen would be required to complete an online diversity and inclusion training program.
But that is not enough, said Faizan Syed, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

“We want face-to-face sensitivity training,” Syed said. “Online training does not work because many online trainings are not taken seriously. People just run through them.”

Syed said El-Walid came to the council for help and filed a charge of discrimination with the Missouri Commission on Human Rights and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The lawsuit also names the University of Missouri’s Columbia campus and the four-campus university system’s Board of Curators.

The university said it would not comment on ongoing litigation. Garcia could not be reached for comment.

The lawsuit seeks damages of $25,000 for El-Walid, a Muslim who wears the hijab, a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women. It alleges that Garcia used offensive language during the cellular biology class he taught and El-Walid attended.

According to the lawsuit, El-Walid, currently an MU senior in the medical field, experienced crying spells, her grades dropped and she lost a scholarship because of sexist, demeaning and humiliating comments from Garcia in class and other times in March 2015.

It alleges that El-Walid was subjected to offensive and unwanted sexual comments by Garcia, whom she accuses in the lawsuit of “creating a sexually hostile learning environment” for her. According to the suit, Garcia made several offensive remarks during a meeting of students in his office in March. The suit alleges Garcia asked El-Walid a series of questions including, “Have you ever been called a towel head on campus before?” and “Are you a Jew hater?”

On Wednesday the council called for the university to discipline Garcia, a tenured professor.

The El-Walid suit was filed November 30 after turmoil erupted on the campus when a predominantly black student group, Concerned Student 1950, staged a weeklong campout and hunger strike claiming systemic oppression and unwelcoming racial climate on the campus. The events led to the resignation of
the MU chancellor and president of the four-campus University of Missouri System.

American-Islamic relations group calls for sensitivity training at MU

By Megan Favignano

Wednesday, December 16, 2015 at 5:00 pm

The St. Louis chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations is working with a University of Missouri student who recently filed a lawsuit alleging that an MU professor made discriminatory and sexist remarks toward her.

Faizan Syed, the St. Louis chapter's executive director, said during a Wednesday press conference that the organization hopes the university will implement mandatory cultural sensitivity training on campus.

“There should be meaningful, in-person cultural sensitivity training to prevent this type of action from happening again,” Syed said.

In the lawsuit filed in Boone County Circuit Court on Nov. 30, Muslim student Fatma El-Wali alleges associate professor Michael Garcia used offensive language and made unwanted sexual comments toward her during the spring semester. El-Wali claims Garcia’s comments created a hostile learning environment.

According to court documents, El-Wali alleges Garcia asked her, “Have you ever been called a towel head on campus before?” and “Did your parents waterboard you as a child in preparation for the future?” El-Wali claims Garcia also asked, “How many virgins do you get when you die?” and “Are you a Jew hater?”

The questions came during a meeting Garcia held during his office hours, which about nine students attended. A student anonymously reported the incident to MU’s Equity Office, according to court documents.

Syed said MU’s system for reporting incidents did not help El-Wali, so she contacted the Council on American-Islamic Relations. The organization connected El-Wali with an attorney.
Syed mentioned student protests on campus this semester that aimed to make administrators more aware of racism and discrimination issues on campus.

“Should it take protests in order to tell university administrators that racism should be dealt with and should be taken seriously?” Syed asked. "And should it take these types of press conferences for a young Muslim woman to be able to get justice and not have to feel attacked by a professor here on campus?”

Nadia Irsheidat, a practicing Muslim who will start taking classes at MU next semester, said she has faith in UM System officials to address discrimination on campus. Irsheidat said the university’s online diversity course should be held in-person rather than online.

There should be more initiatives related to "inclusion policies where it will need more discussions and training sessions and lots of preparation and implementation of such things,” Irsheidat said.

Irsheidat is a friend of El-Walid’s family. She said she did not know specific details about El-Walid’s experience until the lawsuit was filed.

Syed said the remarks Garcia allegedly made during the spring semester were the first time El-Walid experienced discrimination on campus.

The lawsuit outlines two counts of violations under the Missouri Human Rights Act, with one count specifying a public accommodation violation. El-Walid could not attend Wednesday’s press conference because she had a conflict with her exams at MU, Syed said.

Josh Oxenhandler, who is representing Garcia, told the Tribune on Dec. 4 that he would not comment on the pending litigation.

“Suffice it to say, my client vehemently denies the allegations,” Oxenhandler added.

Panel responds to 'Islamophobia' in wake of recent negative comments

INES KAGUBARE, 9 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — In the wake of anti-Islamic rhetoric from U.S. public officials and some Republican presidential candidates, a group of community members gathered Wednesday night to talk about peace, tolerance and understanding of the Muslim community.
The event at the Columbia Public Library was sponsored by Mid-Missouri Fellowship of Reconciliation and Mid-Missouri Peaceworks in cooperation with the Islamic Center of Central Missouri.

**MU Peace Studies Professor Jamil Al-Wekkian was one of five panelists who spoke to an audience of about 70 people. He recounted hearing Donald Trump's recent comments about banning Muslims from the country for the first time.**

Al-Wekkian remembered saying, "God, did he just say that?"

The MU professor, who is a Muslim, said he felt fearful because of the sentiments of Trump and others. Al-Wekkian added that he thought those remarks promoted widespread fear and hatred from the public.

The four other panelists were Farah El-Jayyouis, a recent MU graduate; the Rev. Maureen Dickmann, pastor at Rock Bridge Christian Church; Ruth O’Neill, a member of the St. Francis House Catholic Worker community; and the Rev. Jim Bryan, a retired pastor at the Missouri United Methodist Church.

The event was held to bring the community together to discuss methods to combat hate speech and intolerance specifically targeted at Muslims in response to Trump’s and other U.S. public officials' comments.

The panelists encouraged people to be tolerant of other groups, politically active in their communities and to push peace and understanding of other cultures.

Bryan, the retired pastor, spoke about the Christian community.

He said he found comments by Christians who "speak down and with disrespect" to the Muslim community “discouraging, disgusting and disheartening.” He said those kind of comments are contrary to Christian values.
Al-Wekkian agreed and added that Muslims should not be the only group speaking out against hate speech and ignorance. He said everyone should try to educate themselves and spread their knowledge to the greater community.

Mohammad Eldeib, a community member and Muslim, said he was touched by the fact that there were people from different backgrounds who came to support the Muslim community.

"I'll never forget this," he said.

Non-Muslim community members also advocated raising public awareness of the issue.

Grace Vega, a member of Race Matters, said everyone should continue to be active in speaking up against intolerance, even after dialogues like the panel on Wednesday. She said attending the event alone was not enough to get people to understand the issue.

"We've got work to do," she said.

DECEMBER 16, 2015
University of Missouri's assistant Greek Life director back

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, MO. - A University of Missouri employee has resumed working after her videotaped clash with a student photographer during campus protests helped fan debate about free press.

The Associated Press
The Columbia Missourian reports that the MU Office of Greek Life said Tuesday that Janna Basler has returned to her job in the office.

Basler and assistant professor Melissa Click of the school's communications department drew criticism for trying to stop a photographer from taking pictures of protesters celebrating the university system president's resignation announcement last month. Video posted online shows Basler telling photographer Tim Tai, a student working freelance for ESPN, to "leave these students alone" in their "personal space."

Basler was placed on administrative leave for more than a month. She said in a statement she was "deeply sorry for what happened."

Greek Life director returns to job at Mizzou

Dec. 16 • By Jessica Bock

A University of Missouri-Columbia employee is back working on campus after an investigation into her actions during student protests in November.

Janna Basler, a senior associate director of Greek Life, was placed on administrative leave on Nov. 11. Basler made headlines as one of several school faculty and staff members who tried to block student journalists from covering the protests in the Carnahan Quadrangle at the university. Protesters from the group Concerned Student 1950 formed a circle there to block the media from students who had set up tents.

In a cellphone video that has now gone viral, Basler can be seen confronting Tim Tai of St. Louis County, who was taking photos for ESPN on the day that UM System President Timothy M. Wolfe resigned. When he asked for Basler’s name and asked if she was an employee, she responded only that her name was “Concerned Student 1950.”

Basler apologized to Tai in the days following the incident. Melissa Click, an assistant communications professor also seen in the video, resigned her courtesy appointment to the journalism school that week. Christian Basi, a spokesman for the university, would not say whether Basler was paid during the leave. Mizzou’s human resources policies do not allow him to discuss disciplinary actions, including any disciplinary actions involving an employee’s salary, Basi said.