MU lecture series will highlight African-American history in Missouri

COLUMBIA — Starting early next year, MU and the State Historical Society of Missouri’s Center for Missouri Studies will begin a series of lectures covering the history of African Americans in Missouri.

The lectures will be free and public. The venues have not been confirmed, but Mary Ellen Lohmann, spokeswoman at the historical society, said they will be on campus and accessible to students. Topics will cover pre-Civil War to present-day issues. The speakers, who are still being finalized, will include campus scholars and visiting experts, Lohmann said.

One lecture will be led by Lonnie G. Bunch III, founding director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum of African American History and Culture, who will speak about the value of studying African-American history, according to a news release from the historical society.

Also on the lecture series is Diane Mutti-Burke, an associate professor of history at University of Missouri-Kansas City and the author of "On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slave-Holding Households,” Lohmann said.

The lineup and dates for the series are yet to be determined, she said. The series, which will comprise 12 lectures, will run for three semesters.

Binges may hurt livers of chronic drinkers

A new study with mice shows that chronic alcohol use, when combined with repeated binge drinking, causes more damage to the liver than previously thought.
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports approximately one in six adults binge drinks about four times each month.

“Heavy binge drinking by those who habitually consume alcohol is the most common cause of liver damage in chronic alcoholic liver disease,” says Shivendra Shukla, professor of medical pharmacology and physiology at the University of Missouri School of Medicine and lead author of the study.

“We know that this behavior causes large fatty deposits in the liver that ultimately impair the organ’s ability to function properly. However, we wanted to understand the mechanism that causes this damage and the extent of the harm. Our research focused on different forms of alcohol abuse and the results of those behaviors.”

Shukla’s team studied mice to examine the extent of liver injury caused by chronic alcohol use, repeat binge episodes, and a combination of both. During a four-week period, the team found that mice exposed to chronic alcohol use and repeated binge consumption exhibited the highest levels of liver damage.

“Either chronic alcohol use or acute repeat binge episodes caused moderate liver damage when compared to the control group not exposed to alcohol,” Shukla says. “This outcome came as no surprise. However, in the mice exposed to both chronic use and repeat binge episodes, liver damage increased tremendously.

“Even more shocking was the extent of fatty deposits in the livers of those exposed to chronic plus binge alcohol. It was approximately 13 times higher than the control group.”

The highly amplified fat accumulation was in part caused by metabolic changes within the liver. These changes not only significantly increased fatty liver deposits, but increased stress on the organ while decreasing the liver’s ability to fight the stress.

Shukla also points out that chronic and excessive alcohol use should not be associated only with liver damage.

“Drinking alcohol excessively can create an inflammatory response to the liver and other organ systems in the body,” Shukla says. “If those organs work at a lower level of function, then a whole host of physiological processes can be affected. It is important for us to understand the extent of damage caused by alcohol abuse, which also can lead to other health issues such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer.”

The study appears in the journal Biomolecules.
Guns on campus: The college question

By Mará Rose Williams

LAWRENCE, Kan. -- No-guns-allowed signs stick to campus doors at the University of Kansas.

But that will change come July 1, 2017, when any student, visitor, faculty or staff member over the age of 21 will be able to walk onto the Lawrence campus, or any other Kansas public university, with a handgun tucked inside a pea coat, purse or backpack.

Great, some say. If someone comes with guns blazing onto our campus we can take him down. Bad idea, say others. Alcohol, college students and guns make for a dangerous concoction.

The topic of guns, and how schools will handle them on campus, is one of the hottest subjects at colleges around the country these days. Earlier this month the issue flared at KU when students and professors packed an auditorium for a discussion on concealed weapons.

In Missouri, state Sen. Bob Dixon, a Springfield Republican, introduced a bill that would permit concealed weapons on the state’s public college campuses, including University of Missouri System schools in Columbia, Kansas City, St. Louis and Rolla. MU officials would not comment on how the pending legislation would impact campuses.

In the wake of mass shootings at Connecticut’s Sandy Hook Elementary School, a South Carolina church, Umpqua Community College in Oregon, and most recently San Bernardino, Calif., talk about citizens arming themselves has escalated. At the same time, gun-control groups plead louder for deeper background checks, and limits on the sale of assault weapons and ammunition.

At Liberty University, a conservative, evangelical-based college in Virginia, president Jerry Falwell Jr. recently lifted a ban on guns in university dormitories and urged his students to arm themselves and learn to shoot.

“It just blows my mind when I see the president of the United States say that the answer to circumstances like (the shooting in San Bernardino) is more gun control,” Falwell said during a campus speech. “If some of those people in that community center had had what I’ve got in my back pocket right now....” (According to media reports, his campus audience erupted in applause.)
The arguments are just as passionate on the other side.

“I want to be clear that I am not in favor of allowing concealed carry on university campuses,” KU Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little said in a message to her campus earlier this month.

Retired U.S. Navy admiral William McRaven, the special operations commander who directed the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, and now is chancellor of the University of Texas System, is also opposed to college students carrying concealed handguns on public university campuses.

“The presence of concealed weapons will make a campus a less safe environment,” McRaven told USA Today in August.

It's the law

Despite the ongoing debate, guns are coming to campuses across the country.

Kansas is one of nine states — the others being Colorado, Texas, Arkansas, Oregon, Utah, Idaho, Mississippi and Wisconsin — that have provisions that allow campus-carry or will soon.

In 2011 anti-gun lobbyists were able to push back against guns on college campuses, and bills in about a dozen states either died or were delayed.

But in 2013, a year after 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot to death 20 children and six adult staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the tide seemed to shift.

At least 19 states introduced legislation to allow concealed-carry on campus, and the next year at least 14 states introduced similar legislation, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

It was 2013 when Kansas state law made it legal to carry a concealed weapon into public buildings, including the more than 800 buildings on the six public campuses governed by the Kansas Board of Regents.

But schools haven’t had to worry so much about guns in classrooms and dorm rooms before now because the universities had a temporary, four-year exemption from the law. The exemption allowed the regents to prohibit guns of any kind in their campus buildings.

Earlier this year Kansas amended its gun law so that gun owners can carry a concealed weapon without permit training. That state liberty would also be true for Kansas’ public college campuses once the four-year exemption expires in 2017. The concealed-carry freedom on campus won’t apply to long guns such as rifles, though. Handguns only.

And since university hospitals don’t follow the regents’ rules on guns, KU hospital, for example, will have its own standards. The medical school will permit concealed weapons.
“Unless something changes in the next year or so, Kansas colleges will have guns on their campuses,” said Mike Williams, president of the KU University Senate, which led the recent campus session on guns.

“It is the law,” Williams said. “We cannot break the law, and the university is not in a position to change the law.”

Instead, campus groups are educating each other on what’s coming, and university leaders, with guidance from the Board of Regents, will make policy to manage the inevitable. Last week the regents approved a draft of a new guns-on-campus policy. The board is expected to vote on the policy next month.

For Students for Concealed Carry, a group that’s been lobbying for the right to bear arms on campus for several years, “this is a victory,” said Edwin Stremel, a 2005 graduate of Pittsburg State University and director of the student concealed-carry gun group in Kansas.

Two sides

When the college exemption expires, concealed weapons would be allowed everywhere on Kansas campuses unless metal detectors — that could run in the range of $4,000 to $5,000 apiece — are installed and staffed at building entry points.

At Kansas State University, for example, adding security measures “could potentially cost tens of millions of dollars,” said Jeff Morris, a university spokesman. “Our annual police/security budget is only $3 million. So it’s not feasible.”

But that’s not to say that Kansas campuses might not end up with some gun-free zones such as sports stadiums, arenas and theaters.

Among the arguments for guns is that concealed carry on campus could help stop sexual assaults and other crimes.

“If a criminal knew a person they were going to rob might have a gun they might think twice before committing that crime,” said Joshua Young, a 37-year-old KU social work student from Kansas City, Kan. Young, who served 14 years in the Navy as a military police officer, said the debate over guns is almost a daily happening in class. Usually he’s outnumbered.

“Most people I think have a lack of knowledge about firearms,” Young said. “All they see is weapons on TV being used to kill. They never think about weapons (being used) to defend.”

Some students on the KU campus support that idea.

“I have no problem with guns being on campus,” said Keith Strawder, a University of Kansas senior from Grandview. “At the end of the day, no gun legislation or sign on the door is going to stop someone from committing some heinous act. I would much rather have the option to protect myself.”
But some campus administrators argue they have more to think about than classrooms and lecture halls, and most are not so eager to have guns in their buildings.

“Our most significant concerns relate to weapons inside certain facilities on campus, including Missouri State’s child care facilities, K-12 school, health care facilities, athletic and entertainment spaces as well as the residence halls and academic buildings throughout campus,” said Ryan DeBoef, chief of staff and assistant to the president for governmental relations at Missouri State University in Springfield.

Some of the gun conversation is how they would be stored. KU has weapons storage in a lockbox in the campus public safety building. But with concealed weapons, students who legally can own a weapon would be allowed to provide their own storage and keep it in their dorm room.

Campus gun owners would only be permitted to expose their weapon when moving it from storage to their person. But what’s not known yet are details such as what happens when a dorm mate doesn’t want to be in a room with a weapon. Will campuses have gun-free rooms or floors?

Some resident assistants have said they already are nervous about knocking on students’ doors when they suspect drinking is going on.

“I don’t want to approach that resident if I know they have a gun,” said Miranda Ganter, a sophomore from Houston and a resident assistant in KU’s Oliver Hall. “How am I supposed to do my job if I can’t even talk to that resident? How am I supposed to talk to a resident who I know might have a gun? I’m scared.”

Others said they worry about guns on campus because there are more than 1,000 suicides on college campuses a year, according to a study by Emory University in Atlanta. And 54 percent of all completed suicides are done by firearm.

The University of Colorado tried for years to keep guns off its campus but was eventually forced by the courts to allow concealed weapons when it was sued by Students for Concealed Carry on Campus in 2012.

The Colorado Supreme Court ordered the university to abide by the state law that allowed concealed-carry permits for people 21 and over. The university had appealed the matter twice and lost.

Since students, faculty and staff have been carrying guns on the campus, Colorado has had only one incident. A faculty member was showing another his weapon when the gun was accidentally fired. The bullet ricocheted off a wall and struck a faculty member in the leg.

At KU, faculty have said they’d be nervous about having closed-door sessions with students who might be armed and at the same time upset about their last grade. And a member of the KU community stood at the campus session on guns and said he wouldn’t send his child to a college where a threat could be backed up with deadly force. Gregory Cushman, who identified himself
as a concerned parent and teacher living in Lawrence, said the university should worry that it may be tough to recruit faculty and students with guns on campus.

Colorado university officials said they have not had a problem recruiting there.

At the University of Texas, Daniel S. Hamermesh, a professor emeritus who lectures to hundreds of students at a time, terminated his employment with the university where he’d taught since 1993. Hamermesh said that having students with guns was too risky for him to remain on the faculty.

The school is the site of the second-worst U.S. campus shooting ever. In 1966 a student gunman firing from a clock tower shot 43 people as they crossed the campus green. Thirteen died.

Hamermesh, in an October letter to administrators, said, “With a huge group of students my perception is that the risk that a disgruntled student might bring a gun into the classroom and start shooting at me has been substantially enhanced by the concealed-carry law.”

Hamermesh said he would leave for the University of Sydney in Australia, “where, among other things, this risk seems lower.”

UM Curators to hold special, closed meeting Tuesday

By Megan Favignano

Monday, December 21, 2015 at 2:26 pm

The University of Missouri Board of Curators will meet in closed session Tuesday afternoon.

The UM System published the special meeting notice and agenda Monday. The agenda cites sections of the Sunshine Law, Missouri’s open records and meetings law, that allow the curators to close meetings for communication with university counsel, negotiated contracts and personnel matters.

UM System Spokesman John Fougere said he was unable to comment on what the curators planned to discuss during the closed session. Fougere said the board was not planning to make any public statements or announcements after the Tuesday meeting.
If the board votes on final personnel decisions during closed session, the Sunshine Law dictates the university must disclose the decisions within 72 hours.

Interim UM System President Mike Middleton put one upcoming new hire on the board's radar in his first report to the curators earlier this month. He said the UM System planned to hire a chief diversity, inclusion and equity officer within two months. The position is one of several new initiatives the curators approved last month after then-President Tim Wolfe resigned. Wolfe’s resignation came after weeks of student protests over MU’s racial climate.

The curators will meet at 2 p.m. Tuesday in room 321 of University Hall. The meeting will start in open session before the curators will vote to enter closed session.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

How Does a College Get an Exemption From Title IX?

NO MU MENTION

The federal gender-equity law known as Title IX has largely become known for two issues in higher education: requiring equity in opportunities for women in college sports and, more recently, a nationwide wave of demands for colleges to crack down on sexual harassment and rape.

In fact, the law's reach goes much further than those specific issues, barring all forms of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation in "all aspects of education programs or activities operated by recipients of federal financial assistance," according to an explanation of the law from the U.S. Department of Justice.

But a report released on Friday by the Human Rights Campaign concludes that a growing number of colleges are applying for and receiving waivers from some of the law's provisions. The group, which advocates for civil-rights protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, found that 56 colleges, enrolling an estimated 120,000 students, have sought and received exemptions from some provisions of Title IX relating to gender identity and sexual orientation. Here are some answers to key questions about those waivers.

What are the exemptions?

The law itself contains a provision allowing an institution or educational program controlled by a religious organization to waive only parts of the law that conflict with
the college's religious tenets. "For example, Title IX would not require a religiously
controlled organization that trains students for the ministry to offer such training to
women if the organization's religious tenets hold that all ministers must be men," says
the Justice Department's manual explaining the law.

How do colleges receive an exemption?

In order to be exempted from the law's requirements, a college must write a letter to
the Education Department identifying which parts of the law conflict with its religious
beliefs. In its request to the department, which the Human Rights Campaign shared
with The Chronicle, Louisiana College, in Pineville, La., said it should be exempt
from several provisions barring discrimination based on sex, marital and parental
status, pregnancy, and gender identity.

The college's president, Rick Brewer, cited several passages of scripture and the
college's affiliation with the Louisiana Baptist Convention as the reasons it sought the
waiver. "We affirm God's good design that gender identity is determined by biological
sex and not by one's self-perception — a perception which is often influenced by
fallen human nature in ways contrary to God's design," Mr. Brewer wrote.

How many colleges have received such exemptions from Title IX?

The report from the Human Rights Campaign identifies 56 colleges that have applied
for and received waivers from portions of the law since 2013. All but 10 of those
requests have been granted since 2014, including 43 this year, according to figures
from the group. No requests were made from 2009 to 2011, the Human Rights
Campaign found. A spokesman for the group said it was unaware of any colleges that
had been denied exemptions.

The Education Department has also released a longer listing of 226 colleges that have
received waivers since 1976, including 21 requests this year that are still pending.
Missouri professor: Theft accusations were misunderstanding

Dec. 22, 2015

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — A University of Missouri professor says that his now-dropped charges related to the removal of artifacts from a national forest were due to miscommunication.

Professor R. Lee Lyman says he and two other researchers went on a 2013 trip to the Umatilla National Forest and Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness in southeastern Washington for "archaeological reconnaissance."

"They made some assumptions of what archaeological reconnaissance means, I made some assumptions about what that rule means and those assumptions were not the same," Lyman said Friday.

Lyman claims the U.S Forest Service informed the researchers that they didn't need permits to collect artifacts on federal land.

Once in Missouri, the men reported what they collected and the Forest Service demanded that they return the artifacts.

Authorities say the researchers removed more than 93 items, including chipping debris and rock samples from seven sites in violation of the federal Archaeological Resources Protection Act.

Lyman said they only removed items they believed were in danger of being destroyed, per his agreement with the service.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports that they were charged this summer with second-degree theft and second-degree malicious mischief. The professor was also charged with making false or misleading statements to a public servant.

Columbia County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Dale Slack said charges against doctoral candidate Matthew T. Boulanger and research affiliate Dave N. Schmitt were dropped in September after they agreed to testify against Lyman at trial.

The professor's charges were dropped after he agreed to write a letter of apology to the Nez Perce tribe, whose federally protected land hosted the trip. Lyman also agreed to not conduct research on federal land for one year.

Slack said that they were not happy with the way the case turned out, but that "The only thing that led me to settling the case was the difficulty in proving damages."
Planned Parenthood

Keeping its Columbia license

By Henry J. Waters III

Monday, December 21, 2015 at 2:00 pm

By the time you read this, U.S. District Judge Nanette Laughrey might already have decided whether Planned Parenthood is able to keep its license to provide abortions in Columbia. She is scheduled to make a finding by Dec. 28.

After political pressure led by Sen. Kurt Schaefer, University of Missouri Health Care ended “refer and follow” privileges for St. Louis physician Colleen McNicholas, who had been providing abortion services here. Subsequently, as pressure from Schaefer and others continued, the state Department of Health and Senior Services moved to revoke the clinic’s license, deviating from its normal procedure allowing clinics time to reconcile problems rather than pulling licenses. Planned Parenthood is seeking an injunction from Laughrey against the revocation.

Though the judge needs no advice from this quarter, I hope Laughrey recognizes the flap over local abortion services for the political stunt it is. If Schaefer were concerned only with following the law regarding the Columbia clinic, he would be more than satisfied with the removal of the physician’s privileges, which effectively halts abortion services. If the state of Missouri wants to follow the law, it need not revoke the license. It can do what it routinely does, standing by while a licensee takes steps to correct a deficiency.

If the license is revoked now and a qualifying physician later is hired, the state would surely reissue the license, but the squabbling politicians would have another built-in chance to demagogue the issue.

Judge Laughrey will do the right thing if she tells the state to leave the license intact.
No Crystal Ball? Here's Help With 2016 Economic Forecasts

Every investor celebrating Christmas this week would love this gift: a really good crystal ball.

It'd be so helpful to look right through the orbuculum and glimpse the future prices of stocks, bonds and gold bars.

Unfortunately, no such ball exists. Our next best option is to turn to economic forecasters. And in general, the professionals see mostly good news for 2016.

The mainstream view is that the new year's gross domestic product — the broadest measure of the economy — will grow in the 2.5 to 3 percent range. In the first 6 1/2 years of this recovery, the average growth rate has been in the 2 to 2.5 percent range.

In other words, most economists believe the coming year may bring a slightly better pace of expansion than what we are seeing now.

Here are some 2016 predictions that reflect commonly held opinions among top forecasters:

- **Corporate profits perking up.** "Earnings growth is expected to accelerate. Resumption of earnings growth is key to stock market performance in 2016 ... [which means] another year of potentially positive returns." — LPL Financial
- **Oil prices staying low.** They likely will remain depressed, and may even fall below $35 a barrel. "I don't think we've seen the bottom of energy." — Laurence Fink, BlackRock chairman, speaking on Bloomberg TV
- **Interest rates rising.** The Federal Reserve has finally begun hiking short-term interest rates and now is "likely to proceed very slowly. IHS Global Insight expects four [quarter-percentage-point] increases in 2016 (in March, June, September and December) and four more in 2017." — IHS Global Insight
- **Residential construction improving.** "Homebuilding, especially single-family homebuilding, will remain a key driver of economic growth in 2016. There is a great deal of pent-up demand for housing." — PNC senior economist Gus Faucher
- **Unemployment falling.** The 5 percent jobless rate could go even lower, "perhaps down to the mid-4's." — Julie Heath, director of the University of Cincinnati's Economic Center
- **Auto sales setting records.** *Auto sales are projected to hit 17.3 million by the end of 2015, just shy of the 2000 record of 17.4 million. 'That threshold certainly will be surpassed in 2016 as sales stretch to an almost-mythical 18 million vehicles.'* — Robert Weagley, chair of the personal financial planning department at the University of Missouri
- **Manufacturing strengthening.** "The manufacturing economy is stabilizing after a difficult 18-month period (mid-2014 to late 2015) and may accelerate further." — John Canally, economic strategist for LPL Financial
- **Wages inching up.** "The U.S. is poised for real wage growth of 2.7%, barring rising inflation." — Korn Ferry Hay Group
While most predictions are on the positive side for companies, workers and consumers, economists also see potential trouble spots. Those include a too-strong-dollar that could further depress U.S. export sales; continued sluggishness in China; plunging commodity prices that could lead to many more layoffs; and terrorist events.

And speaking of forecasts, how did the professionals do when predicting 2015?

Pretty good, really.

Here's a line from a Wall Street Journal story that ran in mid-December last year:

"The U.S. economy is poised for stronger growth in 2015 due to falling gas prices, a tighter job market and expectations of larger wage gains, according to the latest Wall Street Journal survey of economists."

Those forecasters may not have had a crystal ball, but at least for 2015, their darts mostly landed on the right numbers.

MU students work to establish university's first Latina sorority

COLUMBIA — Four years ago, Jessica Banuelos came to MU from a small town in northern Illinois to study psychology. She was the first person in her family to pursue higher education.

Her parents moved to the U.S. from Central Mexico about 35 years ago and motivated Banuelos from childhood to go to college. When she finally did leave home, she was astonished at the differences. Her small hometown, for example, had a higher Latino population than Columbia, and she felt out of place here.

Intimidated at first, Banuelos decided that the resources and opportunities at MU were too good to abandon, so instead she began to look for ways to make the campus more representative of her experience.

For the last two years, Banuelos has been trying to establish Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority at MU. It is the oldest Latina sorority in the nation, and if Banuelos succeeds, it will be the first Latina sorority at MU, as well as the first in the state.
In two years, the group has grown to 14 eligible women, who are now awaiting approval from the national board of the sorority. The board will either decide to give them official chapter status or keep them as an interest group, which means they could reapply to be a chapter again next fall.

Although it was the first Latina sorority in the United States, Lambda Theta Alpha welcomes all races and ethnic groups. According to the organization's website, the sorority was founded in 1975 by 17 women at Kean University in Union, New Jersey. They recognized that Latina women were integrating themselves in higher education, but they still lacked equality and support.

Traditionally, the role of Latina woman was to nurture the family and fit into an established patriarchal society. As the Latino population in the United States began to grow in the 1970s, that practice began to change. Latina women became more independent and began to engage in educational, political and social opportunities.

The 17 women at Kean University wanted a sorority that would serve as a support group for them. The goal was to bring a sense of belonging to the Latina women in universities and help them achieve their highest potential. The sisterhood would “cater to the needs of Latinas and the universal woman.”

Banuelos said she chose Lambda Theta Alpha because it is the traditional sorority that emphasizes strength in every aspect of life without advancing progressivism — pushing for women's rights in the workplace, for example — as newer Latina sororities do.

Since 1975, at least two dozen distinct Latina sororities have organized at public and private universities including Yale, Indiana, Arizona State, Texas Tech, Colorado and Iowa. Lambda Theta Alpha is the oldest with 131 chapters in 24 states.

“It encompasses the values of unity, love and respect, which I identify with strongly as a Latina woman,” Banuelos said.

Like historically black fraternities and sororities, Lambda Theta Alpha celebrates traditions such as party walks and strolls to demonstrated unity and pride.

A tradition within Lambda Theta Alpha is saluting when members of the organization praise a particular member or honor the organization's accomplishments. The salute is written, often includes lyrics from contemporary songs and is performed with movements that may be synchronized. Saluting symbolizes unity and respect, according to the sorority's website.

The membership is deliberately small; 20 students is the maximum for Lambda Theta Alpha. Right now, 14 women have the eligible 2.8 GPA set by the national organization, with a few trying to bring their grades up this semester.

Banuelos said the low number can be a drawback when organizing events, but it’s a plus for getting members to know each other on a personal level.
If the group becomes an official chapter, the women will be able to participate in formal Greek recruitment. As part of the process, a letter from MU Greek Life was required, declaring that the university had adequate environment and resources for the chapter. If formally established, Greek Life would then recognize and support the sorority.

Lambda Alpha Theta cannot, however, establish a house on campus, Banuelos said. Meetings are held in the Multicultural Center in the lower level of the MU Student Center.

“(Not having a house) doesn’t seem to stop fraternities and sororities from growing,” she said.

In 2012, Banuelos decided to attend MU, at least 400 miles away from her hometown of Mundelein, Illinois, north of Chicago.

Mundelein is a town of about 31,000, and Latinos make up 30 percent of the population, according to the 2010 census. Columbia has a population of 108,500 with a Hispanic population of just 3 percent.

Banuelos knew she was leaving the familiar neighborhood, friends and family when she chose MU, but she didn’t realize she was also leaving her culture.

In the tight Latino community of Mundelein, she was surrounded by a big Mexican family. So when she came to Columbia to study psychology, she said she was astonished that she didn't immediately meet other Latina students on campus.

Culture shock hit her hardest during the spring semester of her freshman year, so she transferred to Northern Illinois University in DeKalb and commuted from Mundelein.

It was even harder to get involved there, Banuelos said. She began to realize that she had left many opportunities behind at MU, including academics. Her psychology classes weren’t as advanced and as challenging, she said, so she decided to return.

Back at MU at the beginning of her sophomore year, a friend pointed her in the direction of the MU Multicultural Center, where she was encouraged to get involved. During her freshman year, she had attended information meetings of a sorority that was re-establishing itself on campus, but something didn't click.

"There were over 200 girls, so it was interesting that I didn’t really connect with anyone," she said. "I felt that I was kind of isolated outside of the group. I didn’t think it was for me."

After joining the Association of Latina American Students her sophomore year, she met the founding brothers of Lambda Theta Phi, the first Latino fraternity on campus. She shared her interest in Greek life and mentioned that she hadn't found a fit.

One of the brothers told her that with effort, she could create her own organization. That night she began researching traditional Latina sororities.
Banuelos knew that bringing a sorority to the MU campus would not be easy. She began the effort in spring 2014 without much luck. The next fall, her sister, Melissa, enrolled in MU and encouraged her to keep trying. This time, Banuelos was more successful.

To become an interest group, at least eight freshmen and sophomores needed to qualify and demonstrate intent, but it would take at least two years to get established. In the past two years, the interest group has recruited new members, held cultural events, joined activities on campus and generally made its presence known.

Members have also raised money for dues and philanthropy, mainly by saving their own and soliciting donations from relatives. The national organization supports St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. Meanwhile, the national organization has conducted workshops to teach the women management skills.

“They’ve been walking us through the process and having classes on how to work on time management so we’re able to establish the sorority and keep it going, as well as doing our school work,” Banuelos said.

On Nov. 9, the group presented its accomplishments, involvement and growth on campus to the national board. Because members must be politically involved, the national board also wanted to hear their opinions about issues such as racism on campus, according to Ana Gonzalez, the vice president of the interest group.

Now they must wait. Even if the national organization doesn't accept them this year, Banuelos is certain the group won't give up. She said coming this far feels surreal.

“When we first started, we were like, ‘oh God, a two-year process? We’re never going to make it,’” said Banuelos, who will graduate in May and is applying to graduate school.

“But now we’re here and kind of freaking out because it’s so real.”