MU graduate students hope union contract will bring stability

By MEGAN FAVIGNANO
Tuesday, December 22, 2015 at 2:00 pm Comments (5)

University of Missouri graduate student Sarah Senff said she wants a guarantee she will receive everything the university offered when she accepted an assistantship in the MU Theater Department. The MU administration’s promise is not enough of a guarantee, she said.

“A union-negotiated contract would be one of the ways to make” graduate student workers “feel a little more secure in our position,” Senff said. “I think there has been a rather significant erosion of graduate life and working conditions on campus.”

Senff hopes she and all graduate student workers on campus will get that guarantee with the creation of an MU graduate student union.

Graduate students began researching the process for forming a union in August after the university said it could no longer subsidize health insurance premiums because of a newly announced IRS interpretation of health care law.

After faculty and student backlash, the university rescinded that decision for this school year and created a task force to look for long-term solutions.

The Forum on Graduate Rights, a student group that formed after the initial health insurance announcement, has spent the semester advocating for better graduate student benefits. The group’s demand list includes stipend increases, guaranteed health insurance and graduate and family on-campus housing options.

The Forum on Graduate Rights has been collecting the signatures needed to hold a union vote, which the group hopes to have in the spring. Graduate student Adam Johnson, a biology doctoral candidate, has supported a union-negotiated contract from the beginning of the Forum on Graduate Rights’ efforts. He said graduate students don’t trust the MU administration.

“There is some concern that as changes happen at the administrative level, solutions to problems with our stipends and benefits may change as well,” Johnson said. “And that’s not an acceptable position for a group of employees to be in.”
Johnson said he felt strongly about the need for a union and offered to help the students who were leading the union effort. He has talked to students in his department about the benefits of a graduate student union and answered questions about forming one.

“A lot of people would really appreciate the stability of knowing with some confidence that this is my annual stipend, this is the health insurance benefits I’ll have, these are the fees I’ll pay for my courses,” Johnson said.

Most of the people Johnson has talked to this semester have supported the idea of a union for the stability it could provide, he said.

The Forum on Graduate Rights distributed union cards to collect signatures of graduate student workers who support having a union vote on campus. Johnson said students he talked to often asked whether by signing the union card they were voting for a union and whether their support of a union vote would be confidential.

The names of graduate students who signed union cards will not be given to the university or supervisors and will be confidential, Johnson said.

Senff said the No. 1 issue has been a lack of communication between administration and graduate students. A graduate student union could help improve shared governance on campus, she added.

For Senff, health insurance has been the Forum on Graduate Rights demand that most affected her personally. However, she said the lack of graduate student on-campus child care has been an issue in her department.

“And although their children are adorable, because they don’t have child care, they are bringing them to meetings and to classes,” Senff said. “They’re adorable, but they can be a distraction.”

Even if a union doesn’t secure better benefits for students, Senff said, it would still be valuable.

“If nothing else, a union helps us know exactly what we’re getting into. There are no surprises with a union,” Senff said.
2015 was a hugely significant year for black America.

The movement to make sure black lives matter gained momentum as activists took to streets, campuses and presidential forums everywhere to address racial inequality head-on. They spoke out against everything from police killings and everyday, casual forms of racism to the dangerous reality of America’s deep-rooted racial issues.

Black activists accomplished so much this year and reached new levels of success. They not only fought for what they believed in -- they inspired others, enacted change and ultimately, had their voices validated. Here are 11 big accomplishments black activists achieved this year that we would like to think helped to make our world a better place:

- **1. Black Lives Matter leaders met with Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders.**

  Democratic presidential nominees Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders individually met with Black Lives Matter activists this year to discuss policing reform and racial injustice. The meetings marked significant moments which helped recognize the movement as a national political force. Both Clinton and Sanders spoke candidly about race and planned agendas to combat mass incarceration and criminal justice issues, which disproportionately affect black lives. In a separate meeting in November, mothers of slain black teens -- including Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Tamir Rice and Michael Brown -- met with Hillary Clinton to discuss gun reform in America.

- **2. The Say Her Name Campaign raised awareness about police violence against black women.**

  Black women activists across the country led a national campaign this year to fight for the recognition and respect all black women deserve but don’t always receive. For so long, the concerns for their treatment and safety have been
neglected -- as are the names of black women and girls who fell victim to many of the same issues that affect our black men and boys. The Say Her Name campaign, which was launched by several community organizations and gained major momentum earlier this year, changed that. Activists fought to include black women and girls as part of the national conversation around both racial and gender inequality.

- **3. Mizzou student protests lead to university president’s resignation.**

  In November, black student activists at the University of Missouri rallied together to protest the racial issues that they claimed had plagued their campus for years. More than 30 black football players refused to return the football field because they were fed up with the casual, everyday forms of racism they said they faced. Days later, faculty, students and state lawmakers called for the university's president, Tim Wolfe, to leave. One student, Jonathan Butler, courageously started a hunger strike to protest the actions of the school’s president. Wolfe promptly resigned, signaling a significant moment for student-led activism and the fight for racial equality.

- **4. Campus racism protests forced schools to reckon with their racial history.**

  The resignation of the former Mizzou president Tim Wolfe catalyzed a wave of campus racism protests at schools across the country. Black students everywhere spoke out about the casual racism they experience at school and forced faculty to take a deeper look at their concerns and the racial history on their respective campuses including those at Harvard, Brown, Yale and elsewhere. Protests were held, demands were made and some students were successful like at Georgetown where students successfully got administrators to rename buildings that once honored slaveowners.

- **5. Activists protested the Confederate flag and fought for its removal from public spaces.**
On July 10, the confederate battle flag -- which has always stood as a symbol of white supremacy and racism -- was removed from the South Carolina statehouse. One activist in particular, Bree Newsome, scaled the pole outside of the statehouse and temporarily removed the flag in a powerful display of protest that she said was done “in defiance of the oppression that continues against black people in the southern United States.” As a result, petitions and protests popped up everywhere as activists demanded the removal of the flag from other public spaces. In one big victory, in October, students at Ole Miss University voted to remove the flag from their campus -- their demand was later upheld.

6. The issues of the black trans community became widely recognized.

The danger and disrespect transgender people face is part of an ongoing and difficult journey -- and one that certainly does not escape trans people of color. Thanks to activists like Cherno Biko, Laverne Cox and Janet Mock, the voices of people of color in the trans community have been amplified. Mock brought national recognition to 17 tragic murders of trans women of color when she read aloud the names of these victims during a live broadcast on MSNBC in August. Black trans activists also joined forces with Black Lives Matter movement this year to ensure that all black lives matter.

7. Black students at the University of California prompted the school to pull out $30 million from prison investments.

During this year's fall school semester, black students at the University of California rallied together to protest the university’s controversial $30 million investment into private prisons. On Friday, the school dropped the deal after meeting with students from the university’s Afrikan Black Coalition and listening to their demands. In a detailed letter written on Nov. 30, the student group wrote that the investments were “ethically embarrassing” and that private prisons turn “black, brown and immigrant bodies into profit under the guise of rehabilitation.”
8. The road where Sandra was stopped by police was renamed in her honor.

Two months after Sandra Bland was found dead in her jail cell, local residents rallied together to demand her legacy live on. Bland died in police custody three days after she was arrested for a traffic violation in Waller County, Texas. Her death was ruled a suicide, but her family disputed the findings and have since filed a wrongful-death suit. In August, local protesters rallied together and marched to the city council building to demand the road where Bland was pulled over be renamed in her honor. The request was approved and the road, originally named University Boulevard, was changed to Sandra Bland Parkway.

9. Activists launched Campaign Zero to help combat police violence.

In August, key leaders of the black lives matter movement came together to create Campaign Zero, a project that aims to combat cop violence by introducing a comprehensive list of proposals for police reform. The campaign digs deep into ways police -- both on the state and federal level -- can reduce their racial bias, undergo better training and wear body cameras at all times to help prevent police violence against black Americans.

10. Black musicians banded together for a benefit concert around racial inequality.

Many musicians have used their voices for much more than music. Some like John Legend and Pharrell have effectively used their talents and platforms to speak out -- and sing -- about the racial injustices that plague the black community. In November, some of music’s biggest and vocal stars teamed up for a one-night benefit concert on the A&E Network titled, “Shining a Light: A Concert for Progress on Race in America.” Through the power of performance, the black voices that graced the stage that night aimed to highlight how “the uncomfortable truth racial inequality and bias still impact our society.”
Activists have been keeping busy this year to provide independent platforms to “check the police,” which is exactly what the Police Union Contract project aims to do. The project, which launched in December and was founded by four key black lives matter leaders. It aims to take a detailed look at police contracts and how they fail to hold cops accountable. The platform is part of the movement’s Campaign Zero project and helps to tackle the broader, blistering issue of police violence against black Americans.

Obama advises student activists to be tolerant

In a lengthy interview Monday with NPR’s Steve Inskeep, President Barack Obama expressed both support and trepidation for the work of student activists across the country.

While Obama declined to wade into specific campus controversies — such as discussions about the seal of Harvard Law School, his alma mater, or the renaming of Yale’s Calhoun College — he did express concern campus protesters can display an intolerance toward opposing perspectives.

“I think it’s a healthy thing for a young person to be engaged and to question authority ... to ask tough questions about social justice, so I don’t want to discourage kids from doing that,” the president told Inskeep.

He added, however: “As I’ve said before, I do think that there have been times on college campuses where I get concerned that the unwillingness to hear other points of view can be as unhealthy on the left as on the right.”

Before black football players at the University of Missouri joined student protests across the country, Obama had already weighed in on political correctness in academia.

Speaking at an education town hall in Iowa in September, he said college students shouldn’t be “coddled and protected from different points of view.”

“Anybody who comes to speak to you and you disagree with,” Obama said, “you should have an argument with them, but you shouldn’t silence them by saying you can’t come because I’m too sensitive to hear what you have to say.”

At the time, the president pointed to conservative guest speakers and books with language that might be offensive to blacks or women as things that might disturb students.
On Monday, he pointed to protests about lectures given by the director of the International Monetary Fund or Condoleezza Rice.

“Feel free to disagree with somebody, but don’t try to shut them up,” Obama told NPR.

“If somebody doesn’t agree with affirmative action, you may disagree with them — I disagree with them — but have an argument with them. It’s possible for somebody not to be racist and want a just society but believe that that is something that is inconsistent with the Constitution.”

He concluded: “My concern is not whether there is campus activism, I think that’s a good thing. ... What I don’t want is a situation where particular points of view that are presented respectfully and reasonably are shut down, and we’ve seen that sometimes happen.”

In an interview with ABC's George Stephanopolous in November, Obama said, “I’d rather see young people “err on the side of activism than being passive.”

**College Protesters are Not a Threat to Free Speech**

Posted: 12/23/2015

*Alan Singer* Become a fan
Social studies educator, Hofstra University

College students protesting against offensive speech and behavior and buildings and schools named after racists and slaveholders have been accused of rampant political correctness and trying to censor opposition. In its September 2015 issue *The Atlantic* magazine declared, *"Today's college students can't seem to take a joke,"* forcing comedians who want to perform on campuses to alter their routines. A recent article in *New York* magazine accused student protesters at the University of Missouri, UCLA, Wesleyan, Columbia, and Yale of *"left-wing hostility to freedom of expression."* Bill Maher on his HBO talk show demanded to know *"Who raised these little monsters?!"*

Campus campaigns against offensive speech and symbols are not just limited to the United States. At Oxford University in England and in South Africa students want statues honoring Cecil Rhodes, who championed British imperialism in Africa, removed from campus or public display.

President Obama recently entered the fray with an interview on National Public Radio. Speaking with Steve Inskeep, host of *Morning Edition*, Obama hedged his bets. He said "I
think it's a healthy thing for young people to be engaged, and to question authority," but "I do think that there have been times on college campuses where I get concerned that the unwillingness to hear other points of view can be as unhealthy on the left as on the right."

Obama specifically complained, "There have been times where you start seeing on college campuses students protesting somebody like the director of the IMF or Condi Rice speaking on a campus because they don't like what they stand for. Well, feel free to disagree with somebody, but don't try to just shut them up." He also called for dialogue with people who do not "believe in affirmative action" because "it is possible for somebody not to be racist and want a just society but believe that that is something that is inconsistent with the Constitution."

Well Mr. President, I promise I won't try to shut you up, or Condoleezza Rice, or Christine Lagarde of the IMF, although I do not believe I really could if I wanted to. But I agree with the student protesters. Yes, in the course of action they may go a little too far, but their actions are what open up, not close down debate. Without their protests the issues they raised have been ignored.

Condoleezza Rice has ever right to speak, but not the right to be a college commencement speaker without protest. Rice has never publicly answered for her support for policies during the Bush administration that have contributed to chaos in the Middle East and the death of thousands of American soldiers. In fact she defended Bush military lies, disasters, and incompetence, and excused his ignorance by praising his "instincts." Rice, who is represented as a speaker by All American Speakers and Washington Speakers Bureau, trades on her Bush era celebrity and was paid $150,000 in April 2014 to speak at the University of Minnesota. She also frequently appears on television, according to the website IMDb, 69 times (not counting repeats). Before Condi gets my invite, she has an obligation to publicly be questioned about what she did and why she did it during the Bush years. I would also like to see her sharply cut her price. Meanwhile Lagarde is facing prosecution in her own country, France, for financial chicanery. She certainly has the right to speak, and I hope she does, at her trial.

I support Affirmative Action and I do not believe that everyone who raises questions about it is a racist - although many are. But segregation is racist, stop-and-frisk is racist, trying to block poor and minority people from voting is racist, and denying educational opportunity to poor and minority youth is racist. Identifying policies like these as racist, showing their connection with opposition to affirmative action, pressing people who hold these ideas to justify their positions, and limiting their ability to oppress others, expands civil rights and does not threaten anyone's freedom of speech.

Freedom of speech, which I highly value, is not absolute in the United States or in other democratic countries. According to the United States Supreme Court, it is unlawful to
advocate for the use of force in a volatile situation where speech leads directly to action or make threats to harm someone. Knowingly making false statements, blatant and exploitative obscenity, and child pornography are also not protected speech. Hate speech in various forms is outlawed in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.

I have never been invited to be a college commencement speaker, because of my ideas, and also because I will not bring in donor dollars. In this country money drives access. By the way, if a college is interested, I charge much less than Condoleezza Rice.

Unlike President Obama, I welcome student demands for political sensitivity. Student groups may go too far in some of these demands, but it is their demands that open up discussion. As long as the rich and powerful control the media, billionaires give endless dollars to rightwing Republican party candidates, and as long as the Internet is open to ever rightwing crackpot idea, I do not think we have to worry that leftist students will somehow undermine freedom of speech in the United States.

When is it right to remove a statue?

By Finlo Rohrer
BBC News Magazine

Activists are campaigning for a statue of Cecil Rhodes to be removed from an Oxford college. The movement against him is part of a wider drive to get rid of monuments to figures who are now intensely controversial.

The problem with statues is that stone or bronze is meant to last forever, but reputations crumble much more easily.

Cecil Rhodes is a classic example.

Earlier, this year the #RhodesMustFall movement succeeded in getting the statue of the diamond tycoon and imperialist removed from the University of Cape Town.

Rhodes believed the English were a "master race" and he was instrumental in the seizure of swathes of African land. But the movement against his statue was aimed at wider targets - continuing domination of education by white academics and generally addressing the lack of change in modern South Africa.

"He represents the former colonial representation of this country - supremacy, racism, misogyny," said student representative Ramabina Mahapa. "The statue represents what is wrong with society." Radical activist Julius
Malema said: "It is through collapsing of these types of symbols that the white minority will begin to appreciate that there's nothing superior about them."

The movement spread to other universities in South Africa and has now arrived in Oxford, where Oriel College is under pressure to take down a statue marking Rhodes's large financial contribution. But a petition has been countered by a series of figures counselling caution, including historian Mary Beard who said it was "not the job of the present to tick the past off".

One letter writer to the Daily Telegraph argued: "The trouble… is that almost every person of that era held opinions that were commonplace at the time but are at odds with modern thinking. Taken to its extreme, this approach would lead to the eradication of almost every building and statue commemorating notable figures of the past, including the Albert Memorial and Nelson's Column."

And indeed rows over statues are increasingly common. The US is undergoing a cultural battle over symbols of the Confederate era that has seen a statue of Jefferson Davis removed from the University of Texas-Austin. Students at the University of Missouri also asked for a statue of Thomas Jefferson - third president of the US - to be taken down as he was a "racist rapist".

Statues of Lenin have been toppled in many countries that have rejected communism, but last year in in some cities in eastern Ukraine, pro-Russian protesters rushed to protect statues at risk of being torn down. Equally symbolically, a statue of Lenin in Odessa was turned into Darth Vader.

In the UK, a row is rumbling on in Bristol over the commemoration of Edward Colston. The 17th Century businessman and MP was a key figure in the Royal African Company and the transport of many thousands of slaves. But he was also a key philanthropist in the city - which was a major hub for the wider trade around slavery - and is remembered with a statue and an annual day of celebration. Now there is intense controversy over whether the statue should be removed.

There are a slew of figures in London from the same period - all involved in some way in slavery - whose statues are still standing.

The legacy of slavery, imperialism and race aren't the only reasons for campaigning against a statue.

The 1992 unveiling of a statue of Arthur "Bomber" Harris, head of the RAF's Bomber Command in World War Two, created a wave of protest, culminating in sustained vandalism. Harris was criticised for having masterminded saturation bombing of areas of Germany that cost large numbers of civilian lives.

One letter writer to the Times said: "We need not be proud of a man who, for all his professional skill and dedication, committed the force to acts of destruction devoid of direct military value, of which people of humane and Christian sentiments have long been bitterly ashamed."

Another wrote: "I read with disbelief and disgust that a monument is to be erected to 'Bomber' Harris. Certainly, a public remembrance to the very brave British airmen is long overdue, so long as the names of the instigators of the barbarity are not mentioned. I survived the air raids on Cologne as a teenager."

Other statue subjects have been controversial from the start. Oliver Cromwell is credited by many with being a key figure in the development of Western democracy. But he also stands accused of leading massacres in Ireland.
When a statue of him was proposed for Westminster in 1895, it was met with bitter opposition in Parliament from both Irish Nationalists and Conservatives. A century later a group of MPs campaigned to have it melted down.

The stimulation of debate prompted by a call to remove a statue can be a good thing, says historian Prof Madge Dresser, from the University of the West of England, who has written extensively about the legacy of slavery.

"I think it is a process, rather than the actual removal, starting a debate about collective values. Statues are lightning rods, symbols of the prevailing values of the society. When those values are not shared a debate needs to be started."

No-one would suggest the retention of a statue of Hitler, Dresser notes. But for many other statues the argument is far less clear-cut. And there is an argument that removing statues has the potential to harm our understanding of history.

"I do also take the point that if you look at many of the people celebrated in statues, they have been responsible for death and destruction," says Dresser. "Do we start taking them all down?"

People might not want to take their cue from the medieval Christians who gleefully melted down bronze equestrian statues of pagan Roman emperors and reused the metal. The one such statue to remain - that of Marcus Aurelius - was spared the furnace only because it was wrongly thought to depict the Christian Emperor Constantine.

Dresser suggests there is another way for more recent statues to be handled. To take the example of Colston in Bristol, the current positive plaque on his statue could be replaced by one that made clear that he was involved in the slave trade. Thus a debate could be started. "It's better on the whole to keep the statues but to recontextualise them."

While the statues of Rhodes may be disappearing from South Africa, the giant Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria has remained and - despite its background of Afrikaner nationalism being associated with the later rise of apartheid - been tolerated as a slice of history and an opportunity to discuss the wrongs as well as the rights of bygone eras.

Other debates over statues may soon follow the same subtle path.

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Who was Cecil Rhodes?

- Imperialist, businessman and politician who played a dominant role in southern Africa in the late 19th Century, driving the annexation of vast swathes of land
- Born the son of a vicar in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, in 1853, first went to Africa at the age of 17; grew cotton with his brother in Natal, but moved into diamond mining, founding De Beers, which until recently controlled the global trade
- Rhodes's bequest continues to finance scholarships bearing his name, allowing overseas students to come to Oxford University; most famous of these was probably Bill Clinton
Controversial even in his own time, Rhodes backed the disastrous Jameson Raid of 1895, in which a small British force tried to overthrow the gold-rich Transvaal Republic, helping prompt the Second Boer War, in which tens of thousands died.

Was Reagan Right? Is Financial Aid The Cause Of The Student Debt Bubble?

Alexa Davis, CONTRIBUTOR
DEC 22, 2015 @ 06:05 PM 458 VIEWS

A recent paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research suggests the main driver behind the United State’s chronic issue of skyrocketing college costs is overly generous federal student loan programs.

The study, by Grey Gordon of Indiana University and Aaron Hedlund of the University of Missouri, uses a model to suggest federal subsidies comprise the majority of a 106 percent increase in mean college tuition from $6,100 to $12,600 between 1987 and 2010. Other cost impacts include rising input costs and post-college wage earnings premiums; however, expansions in borrowing limits and grant aid, in isolation, account for 102 percent of tuition increases.

How much have borrowing capacities swelled to spur such a large impact on college tuition? Since 1987, the real aggregate student loan borrowing limit has jumped 56 percent to $40,800 in 2010 dollars. According to the study, significant growth in borrowing capacities are mainly due to the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which governs all federal student loan and grant policies.

The notion that financial aid could negatively impact educational affordability is not novel. President Ronald Reagans’ Education Secretary William Bennett first hypothesized that increasing student aid could lead to hikes in tuition in his
famous “Bennett hypothesis.” The Bennett hypothesis states an $1 increase in subsidies leads to an $1 increase in higher education tuition prices, so students do not maximally benefit from financial aid.

“If anything, increases in financial aid in recent years have enabled colleges and universities blithely to raise their tuitions, confident that Federal loan subsidies would help cushion the increase,” Bennett said in a 1997 Op-Ed New York Times article.

In July, The New York Federal Reserve published a staff report, which also found evidence that relaxed government aid programs can do more harm for students than good.

According to the paper, “Institutions more exposed to changes in the subsidized federal loan program increased their tuition disproportionately around these policy changes, with a sizable pass-through effect on tuition of about 65 percent.”

The New York Federal Reserve equates rising tuition costs to the 2002 – 2006 housing bubble, in which greater access to credit led to unreasonably high asset prices and individuals struggled to repay crippling loads of debt. Similar to eager homeowners, students have overwhelmingly receptive to loose credit restrictions. In fact, total annual federal student loan originations grew from $53 billion to $120 billion between 2001 and 2012 alone.

Federal student loans, like mortgages, originate from government programs to fund an underlying asset. However, unlike mortgages, student loans are not dischargeable through bankruptcy so students are saddled with financial burdens for life.

Despite support from many academics and industry leaders, the jury is still out on the accuracy and limitations of the Bennett hypothesis. Some researchers have found a positive relationship between rising aid and tuition at exclusively at public universities, such as 1991 study by Northwestern University President Michael McPherson and former President of Macalester College Morton Schapiro. However, others suggest the Bennett hypothesis exists only among top-ranked private institutions, such as a 2007 study by Larry Singell, Dean of Indiana University’s College of Arts and Sciences, and Joe Stone, Professor at the
University of Oregon. A multitude of other papers reject the Bennett hypothesis completely.

Gordon and Hedlund acknowledge their study may slightly exaggerate the impacts of federal loans and grants on growing tuition costs, but still claim it is the single most important factor contributing to the college cost crisis.

Students Work Toward Missouri School’s First Latina Sorority

December 22, 2015 4:29 PM

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) – University of Missouri students are working to establish the school’s first Latina sorority.

Jessica Banuelos, who is studying psychology, has been working for the past two years to establish a chapter of the Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority at the school. The Columbia Missourian reports that it was started in 1975 at Kean University in Union, New Jersey, and is the oldest Latina sorority in the US.

Banuelos began researching Latina sororities after meeting the founding brothers of Lambsa Theta Phi, the first Latino fraternity on campus during her sophomore year.

She began the process of establishing the chapter in spring 2014.

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

Banuelos’ group has grown to 14 women, and they are now waiting for approval from the national board of the sorority. The board can either decide to grant them
official chapter status or keep them as an interest group, which means they could reapply next fall.

The national organization has conducted workshops to help teach the students management skills as they go through the necessary steps for chapter establishment.

“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.

If the group becomes an official chapter, the women will be able to participate in formal Greek recruitment. The sorority only allows a maximum of 20 students per chapter.

Lambda Alpha Theta cannot establish a house on campus, Banuelos said, but meetings are held in the Multicultural Center on campus.

Kansas, Missouri grapple with issue of guns on campus

Kansas is one of nine states that have provisions that allow campus-carry or will soon

A Missouri legislator introduced a bill that would permit concealed weapons on the state’s public college campuses

BY MARA ROSE WILLIAMS
No-guns-allowed signs stick to campus doors at the University of Kansas. But that will change on 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, R-Springfield, 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 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 because 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 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, said he 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 KU senior. “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.

Finally, faculty

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 would 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.
At the University of Texas, Daniel Hamermesh, a professor emeritus who lectures to hundreds of students at a time, terminated his employment with the university where he had 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.”