COLUMBIA — A few months ago, Michael Middleton was preparing to retire as deputy chancellor at MU — to visit his seven grandchildren and spend more time traveling with his wife.

Although he would remain part time, his work at the university he has called home for more than 30 years was drawing to a close.

Until it wasn't.

As his responsibilities within the university administration were slowing, tensions on campus were building.

During the past semester, the campus erupted in protests, culminating with the Nov. 9 resignations of University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe and MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

Three days later, Middleton was named interim president of the four-campus system. With a 30-year tenure as a law professor and administrator whose role included improving equity and diversity at MU, it seemed he was the right person for the job.

Middleton assumes the interim position amid a slew of institutional, academic and social messes. In addition to mending trust with faculty, students and staff, he faces enormous expectations to improve race relations on campus.
But MU and the UM System won’t necessarily see sweeping change in the next six months.

To improve race relations, Middleton said he plans to install task forces on the UM System campuses to investigate the racial climates and search for best practices, not an entirely different approach from Wolfe or Loftin.

Wolfe assembled a systemwide task force in 2014 after MU was criticized for its handling of sexual assault cases, and Loftin created the Graduate Student Insurance Task Force after graduate insurance subsidies were cut last summer.

“I’m a really optimistic guy,” Middleton said, “but if you expect immediate change in the culture on our campuses, that’s probably asking too much.”

Expectations

When Middleton stepped into the role of interim president, he inherited a university the size of a small city that had just gutted some of the most powerful positions in its leadership.

The students who had spent the fall protesting were not interested in a placeholder president, said Kristofferson Culmer, an MU graduate student and the UM System Intercampus Student Council chairman. They didn’t want a lame duck, someone who would uphold the status quo while the curators were on the search for someone to take over permanently.

“We wanted someone who could begin to address the issues of the campus head on,” Culmer said.

Culmer is also a chair of the Forum for Graduate Rights, one of 14 student groups that formed a coalition called the Collaborative, meant to work with students, faculty and administrators at MU and within the UM System to implement policy changes.

The Collaborative will release a report with the proposed policy changes in the spring, but according to Culmer, priorities include a culture of trust and transparency, shared governance,
diversity training and professional development, mentorship and increased funding opportunities for students of color.

Middleton, Culmer said, should lead the charge in these policy changes, starting by confronting challenges at the university with open dialogue.

But Middleton is not only obligated to listen to students. Other stakeholders have expectations, as well.

Faculty and administration members are disgruntled after shake-ups in university leadership. Donors and alumni may be inclined to reconsider their financial gifts after a semester of turmoil.

State legislators are eyeing higher education with bills that might address academic freedom and faculty oversight. And there is always the issue of higher education funding.

State appropriations account for 10 percent of MU’s operating budget, and that figure has been trending downward for the past 15 years. Given recent events at the university, the legislature might be unwilling to pass Gov. Jay Nixon’s initiative to increase higher education funding by 6 percent.

There’s no question that the position of university president is not easy. The question is how Middleton will handle it.

Plans

The campus racial climate is a priority.

The UM System administration has already started to search for an assistant diversity officer and examine how sufficient the established rules for covering race issues are, Middleton said. A systemwide task force established by the UM System Board of Curators will look at programs and practices for race issues on all campuses, as well as identify best practices at other universities.
“We are really trying to build a world-class approach to addressing inclusion, diversity and equity in higher education,” Middleton said.

He also plans to look at the number of faculty and staff of color. One of eight demands by Concerned Student 1950 was to grow the number to 10 percent by academic year 2017-18.

Although he never committed to this time frame, Middleton said he will look at recruitment programs and financial packages to add faculty of color, as well as maximize the diversity of the pools of candidates.

He also hopes to restore trust with campus constituencies, including faculty. Apart from saying he would “get out and try to reassure people that this university has been strong and growing for 175 years,” he shared no specific strategies.

One thing Middleton said the campus can expect to see immediately is a swifter discipline process for those found guilty of discrimination and racism.

“I think we have been pretty effective in finding the offenders and taking them before student conduct committees, so that with civil rights enforcement activity, I think we’ve already gotten it beefed up and in place,” he said.

Middleton said he expects to see recommendations by some task forces by summer. With those recommendations, he hopes to build a catalog of campus programs for students of color and find resources to fund them. Existing programs are underfunded and focus on groups of people too small to address the larger issues of marginalization and exclusion, he said.

“The problem is taking those effective programs and scaling them up to make them available to the huge number of people we have in this system,” he said, though he did not name the programs about which he spoke.

“I suppose it’s only fair that you measure my success by those kinds of measures,” he said.
The next six months will consist of research and planning, Middleton said. The solution lies in a widespread shift in the collective culture of campus, not in quick fixes.

“Culture change is complex,” he said, "and whenever you talk about culture change, you imply that somehow you are going to make people curb their constitutional rights to think the way they want to think and say what they want to say.”

He said that moving forward with culture change is a balancing act of freedom of expression and sensitivity to the experiences of others. Education and training in diversity issues will be paramount in Middleton’s approach to race relations.

“I think the best way to strike that balance is to educate people on the effects of what they do,” he said. "I think most people are good-hearted people who don’t want to offend, intimidate or harass a student. I think it’s mostly inadvertent behavior, and I think learning and conversation can get us to the point where we are going to see some change in behavior.”

Achievements

In November, MU was scrutinized by the national media, which flooded into Columbia during the campus protests and resignations. When he was appointed interim president of the UM System on Nov. 12, Middleton was thrust into the spotlight.

“The value that we bring to the state of Missouri is remarkable, and none of that has stopped. We are still educating 77,000 students in the state,” he said in an interview shortly after he was appointed. It was his third of five interviews scheduled that day, and he answered questions with the careful consideration of a seasoned lawyer.

It’s clear MU means a lot to Middleton. He was a student in the 1960s — only a decade after the first black student was admitted to MU — and a founding member of the Legion of Black Collegians, a governing body for black student organizations on campus. He returned to MU as a law professor in the ‘80s and ‘90s and became an administrator in 1998.
Middleton taught criminal law and employment discrimination, along with other classes, when he was a member of the Law School faculty. Although he was a tough professor, he was “readily approachable,” said Melvin Smith, a former student who is now an attorney in St. Louis.

“For minority students, Middleton was someone you could confide in about both academics and the inner workings of culture at the university,” Smith said.

As deputy chancellor, Middleton worked closely with the leadership at MU, especially Brady Deaton, who was chancellor from 2004 to 2013.

“Any time we had an issue that had to go to the chancellor for decision, the chancellor relied very strongly on Mike to review all the materials,” said Ken Dean, senior associate provost.

“Mike would listen, he would read all the materials, he would review any materials that were recorded. Then he would provide an evaluation and a synthesis to the chancellor to help him make the final decision. So he was the chancellor’s right-hand man.”

Those qualities, and others, will be assets in Middleton’s role as interim president, Dean said.

“He’s thoughtful, he carefully considers all sides of the issue, he makes fair and reasonable judgments that come out of that consideration,” Dean said. “A very even disposition. He makes everybody feel that he’s listening to them because he is listening to them. Those are all the attributes that will allow him to do a great job in this new position.”

Even though Middleton’s role wasn’t explicitly designed to handle student affairs, he opened his door to students who wanted to speak with him about university matters, not unlike his years as a law professor.

“I saw Mike Middleton from time to time and we'd speak, and he always seemed to be concerned with what was going on with the lives of students,” said Culmer, who has known Middleton since 2011 when he was the Graduate Professional Council president at MU.

But Middleton’s term as MU deputy chancellor wasn’t always smooth sailing.
In 2010, cotton balls were strewn in front of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, a racial reference to the period in U.S. history when slaves picked cotton. Middleton reacted frankly and firmly.

“The entire Mizzou family has been offended by the acts that occurred the other night,” Middleton said at a forum after the incident. “Administration is totally offended by what happened and totally committed to making sure it does not happen in the future.”

The turbulent environment on campus today also presents opportunities to lead.

“I’m disappointed that we didn’t do what was necessary to avoid the explosion that we recently experienced,” Middleton said, ”but I’m optimistic and happy that I’m now in a position where I might be able to have more influence on solutions to that issue.”

**Forbes**

**Amid Campus Protests, Universities Worry About . . . Fundraising**

The recent rash of campus protests has caught the national eye, causing some to ask, “What exactly are students taught in college today?” and “What are senior university administrators doing to enforce—or not enforce—rigorous instruction, the instruction needed to ensure that American college graduates are able to survive in the intensely competitive, 21st-century world marketplace?”

However, a new report suggests that universities are focusing on a different question: “How will our school’s response to the campus unrest affect our annual fundraising?” This is the thrust of an article that informs its readers, “As colleges grapple with issues of race and diversity, they face questions from alumni and donors—not all of whom are pleased with new campus efforts.”

It is not difficult to understand why schools should be so concerned about their alumni’s and other donors’ reactions to both the student protests and, more important, to how the administration reacts to them. After all, national polling results show that, even before the recent spate of protests, large segments of the American people have been concerned over tuition hyperinflation and crushing student-loan debt.
Polling also shows equal concern on the part of the public that schools are not adequately preparing students for the rigors of the world of work. The fourth annual Gallup-Lumina Foundation poll finds that only 13 percent of Americans strongly agree that “college graduates in this country are well-prepared for success in the workplace.” This number is down from 19 percent three years ago.

More troubling, those surveyed who possess college degrees are much more skeptical of higher education than those who do not. Eighteen percent of those with bachelor’s degrees are “much less likely to strongly agree” that college graduates “are ready for the workforce,” whereas six percent of those without degrees hold this view.

Given this backdrop of general apprehension about American higher education, university fundraisers are right to worry about the path going forward. They likely are looking at, for example, the recent survey of Missouri voters conducted in the aftermath of the University of Missouri protests, which forced both the school’s president, Tim Wolfe, and the System’s chancellor, R. Bowen Loftin, to resign their offices.

Pollsters asked Missouri voters if they “agree or disagree with the University of Missouri student protesters’ actions in the past week?” By more than a three-to-one margin (62 percent to 20 percent), voters disagreed with the student protesters’ actions.

But the protesters were not the only recipients of voters’ displeasure. The survey asked whether “these recent events affected your view of the University of Missouri football team, and if so has that affect been positive or negative?” The football team, supported by its coach, had vowed not to play its next game unless President Wolfe resigned. Although this tack succeeded on campus, respondents to the statewide poll weighed in by more than a two-to-one margin (48 percent to 22 percent) to report that their view of the team had been negatively affected.

The university’s leadership fared still worse in the poll. When voters were asked, “Have these recent events affected your view of the University of Missouri Administration, and if so has that affect been positive or negative?” a strong majority reported that its view of the school had been affected negatively. Fifty-eight percent reported a negative response. Only 11 percent voiced a positive response, while 31 percent answered “no change/unsure.”

Will these negative perceptions harm the future prospects of Mizzou and, by extension, other protest-plagued schools? This was the focus of the poll question, “Would you encourage your children to attend the University of Missouri?” By a ten-point margin (45 percent to 35 percent), those answering “no” outnumbered those responding with “yes.” Twenty percent of respondents indicated that they were “unsure.”

The poll also had bad news regarding Missouri voters’ willingness to part with more of their tax dollars to support the state’s public universities. By a ten-point margin (48 percent to 38 percent), respondents rejected the suggestion that an increase in the state’s cigarette tax should be enacted to fund additional public university scholarships.
Finally—and somewhat surprisingly, given the country’s heightened political polarization—the polling data reveal less of the usual conservative-liberal, Republican-Democrat divide on the issue. A question asking whether voters agree with the protestors’ view of racial inequality at Mizzou showed the usual ideological cleft—75 percent of self-identified Republicans disagree with the protestors, while 22 percent of Democrats agree with them. By a smaller margin, 52 percent of whites disagree, while 40 percent of blacks agree. However, those who indicated that they were “non-partisan,” when asked to identify their political party, disagree with the protestors four times more than they agree (58 percent to 14 percent).

Although the Missouri poll may tempt some to expect that similar sentiments are sweeping the nation, it is far too soon to tell. Polls come and go; the voters’ negative reactions to the Mizzou protests may not last and, if they do, they may not translate into action that threatens university funding. Indeed, such inertia on the part of alumni has long been a source of frustration for would-be higher-education reformers. Too often, alumni have responded to criticisms of their alma mater with a circle-the-wagons defensiveness.

This instinct toward self-protectiveness is somewhat understandable: “Alma mater” means “nourishing”—and thus, “dear”—“Mother.” Now, if you choose to criticize someone’s mother, being correct in your critique is often not enough. School spirit can trump the political-party identification, and even the political philosophy, of alumni. Consider the fact that, in the year following the Penn State University football team’s child-molestation scandal, fundraising for the school was nonetheless robust. Indeed, it has been reported that, one year after the Sandusky scandal, “the school earned $208.7 million in donations—the second-highest annual amount in school history.”

However, if it is premature to offer forecasts about the ultimate effect of the protests on future university fundraising as well as state-legislative support, it might also be a mistake simply to assume that this, too, will pass, and that university life will continue as before. As Medicaid expansion and K-12 funding take up increasing portions of state budgets, legislators already have to look hard to find additional financing for public higher education. Although legislative critics of the universities’ responses to the protests may not push to cut public higher-education financing outright, it could incline them not to look as hard as before for additional funding.

As for future support from alumni and other donors, we should consider the fact that growing numbers of Americans now deem college costs to have exceeded the value of a bachelor’s degree. If campus unrest spreads, and administrators show themselves to be unable or unwilling to restore a rigorous learning environment on campus, how long will already-skeptical supporters continue to donate?

Some in the universities are now beginning to ask this question. The answer might come to change the face of American higher education.
Registered nurses cut drug errors at nursing homes

Nearly 66 percent of all adverse events experienced by nursing home residents, including falls, delirium, and hallucinations, could be prevented, in part, by monitoring medication more closely.

Both registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) perform medication reconciliation, a safety practice during which health care professionals review patients’ medications to reduce the likelihood of preventable adverse drug events.

But a new study finds that RNs are more likely than LPNs to identify high-risk medication discrepancies, suggesting they are better equipped to assess and identify medication errors that could pose risks to residents’ safety.

The findings suggest the need to distinguish differences in responsibilities for RNs and LPNs in nursing homes, the researchers say.

“Nursing home work is hard,” says Amy Vogelsmeier, associate professor of nursing at the University of Missouri. “The ability to manage patients’ care and keep them stable is a clinical challenge that requires highly educated, clinically savvy nurses.”

Currently, RNs are not functioning in nursing homes to the full scope of their practice. RNs and LPNs are assigned the same responsibilities; yet, earlier research findings show that LPNs are more focused on tasks, whereas RNs are more focused on comprehensive assessment and resident safety.”

For the new study published in the Journal of Nursing Regulation, researchers examined the extent to which licensure (RN or LPN) relates to the detection of medication discrepancies. Thirty-two RNs and 70 LPNs from 12 nursing homes in Missouri participated in the study. RNs detected medication order discrepancies involving high-risk medications significantly more often than LPNs.

Distinguishing the differences in how RNs and LPNs perform similar responsibilities and making sure nurses complete the tasks for which they are trained could improve patient care for nursing home residents, many of whom are frail and require specialized care.
“RNs and LPNs contribute to resident safety in different ways,” Vogelsmeier says. “They both serve important roles; however, nursing home leaders must understand the distinct contributions of each role. For example, during a process such as medication reconciliation, which is executed differently by RNs and LPNs, understanding the differences will allow for the nurses’ different skill-sets to be more appropriately utilized.”