ABC 17 News confirms fewer people applying to MU for next fall


COLUMBIA, Mo. - ABC 17 News has learned early indicators show a downward trend in applications to the University of Missouri in Columbia following a number of very public issues and controversies on the campus last fall.

Applications made by incoming freshmen for the coming 2016-2017 school year have decreased noticeably since last year, based on a report obtained by ABC 17 News this week.

The memorandum from the Office of Enrollment management addressed to a number of administrators and faculty was sent out on Monday, January 4.

Among the highlights of the report, as of the compilation of this report, 941 fewer freshman had applied to enroll at Mizzou in 2016 compared to 2015. That is an almost 5% decrease year-to-year.

The report also notes a concern about diversity, stating that 19% fewer African American first-time college student applications have been received.

Another highlight from the report shows that graduate student applications have decreased by 354; that’s a 19% drop compared to last year. That number was also down 552 compared to 2 years ago.

Officials said deposits are down significantly, however more deposits are expected to arrive once students receive information about orientation near the end of the month.

The report said enrollment officials anticipate a decrease in fall enrollment after looking at the initial application numbers.

Here’s a breakdown of what demographics saw decreases in applications:

- High ability (ACT of 30 or higher) decreased by 7.7%
- African American applications decreased by 78 from last year, a 19% decrease
• Hispanic applications down by 1
• Transfer students decreased by 94 applications since last year
• International applications decreased by 6
• Graduate applications decreased by 19% and decreased 552 compared to 2 years ago
• Non-Missouri resident applications decreased by 948 and non-resident deposits dropped by 25% since last year
• Illinois applications have decreased by 7%, and deposits decreased by 31%

Missouri resident applications increased by 21, but deposits have decreased by almost 10%.

Texas applications have also increased by 5.2% compared to last year.

ABC 17 News is reaching out to officials in MU Admissions and lawmakers for their response to the enrollment numbers.

Wheaton Professor May Be Fired for Pro-Islam Stance

A college professor in Illinois who is at risk of being fired for her remarks on Islam and Christianity spoke out on Wednesday, saying she was grateful for her supporters.

Wheaton College, a private evangelical Christian institution, had put Larycia Alaine Hawkins, an associate professor of political science, on leave last month over “the theological implications” of her remarks that Christians and Muslims pray to the same God. On Tuesday, the college said that it had started a process that could lead to her termination, but gave no time frame.

The college’s actions drew criticism on social media after it put Dr. Hawkins on leave with pay in mid-December for her remarks.

“I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book,” she wrote on Facebook, in part, on Dec. 10. “And as Pope Francis stated last week, we worship the same God.”
While the college defended itself against any impression it was anti-Muslim, saying it did not take a position against her decision to wear an Islamic head covering to show solidarity, Wheaton said Dr. Hawkins’s theological statement seemed “inconsistent” with the college’s doctrine.

On Wednesday, as the termination proceedings loomed, Dr. Hawkins wrote on Facebook about her gratitude for the support she had received from friends and family, as well as from people she had never met: “You will never know how your support of an unknown woman has moved my soul.”

Her case is not the only one in which a professor has been caught up in a controversy involving freedom of expression.

**Also this week, the University of Missouri faced renewed pressure over one of its faculty members when Republican lawmakers called on it to fire an assistant professor, Melissa Click, for trying to eject journalists from a student protest in November.** A General Assembly statement said that more than 100 Republican lawmakers and 18 members of the Senate Majority Caucus sent the letter to the university.

“In any other setting, an employee who violates the rights of the employer’s customers and threatens them with physical harm would be fired on the spot,” wrote State Representative Jason Chipman, a Republican who signed the letter, on his Facebook page on Monday. “However, in the People’s Republic of Columbia, it’s just another day at Liberal Land.”

In response, Ms. Click’s supporters released a letter calling on the university “to defend her First Amendment rights of protest and her freedom to act as a private citizen.”

Ms. Click had cut her ties to the school’s journalism program after the video showed her calling for “some muscle” at a protest seeking increased action over racial issues on campus, but university officials could not immediately be reached on Wednesday about her status in the department.

**THE KANSAS CITY STAR.**

**If Missouri legislators pick off Melissa Click, it’s not a win for education**

By Mary Sanchez

Rest assured, the Missouri legislature is not overly concerned with press freedom.
They know we can hold our own. It’s a two-way street, a robust relationship of friction and cooperation.

So political pressure to oust a University of Missouri professor for her childish and already apologized-for rant is not primarily about the First Amendment, despite some of the points made in letters signed by more than 100 Republican House members and 18 senators.

Released this week, but dated before the Christmas break, the legislators call for the “immediate firing” of MU assistant professor Melissa Click by the Missouri Board of Curators, saying — among other things — she “displayed a complete disregard for the First Amendment rights of reporters.”

Yes, this is the fracas that refuses to simmer down. If it takes the right turn, that might not be bad.

Click did herself no favors back in November by screaming at reporters covering the Concerned Student 1950 movement on the Columbia campus, trying to keep journalists from a public space where protesting students gathered. The legislators called her out for unprofessionally “inciting the unrest on the Columbia campus.”

She certainly added to the embarrassment. But inciting, not so much.

The problems are there. Minority students are not well represented on campus, and many have legitimate concerns about how that influences their education. Click just upped the wattage by raising the question of how a professor of communications could be so clueless about press freedom. She would have been a better ally by guiding the students toward assessing their goals, their tactics, developing relationships with media and engaging with reporters covering a public protest.

But Click also irked because she inserted herself into a culture war. In the moment where she is caught on video, she illustrated for many the idea that college campuses are ultra-liberal bastions where out-of-touch professors indoctrinate, brainwash and coddle students.

So how about using the episode to discuss what is taught and how useful studies are in helping students obtain jobs, become engaged citizens and feel as if the tuition they paid was worth it?

For that outcome, legislators will have to back off using Click as a poster child for all that ails higher education.

A lot of professors are immersed in fields of study that seem frivolous and downright daffy on a cursory glance. Click is an easy target. She studies Lady Gaga and “Twilight” and “50 Shades of Grey.” Not exactly physics or accounting.

Still, she might hold access to skills that are marketing gold. The legislators nod to that possibility in the letter: “we recognize there may be some value in pop culture studies.”
Click was a co-author (along with two other MU professors) of “Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media and the Vampire Franchise.” Corporations spend oodles of time and dollars trying to figure out how to reach millennials, who now outnumber baby boomers. She apparently looked into the appeal of the vampire phenomenon and how it was marketed differently across genders.

If Click is astute at dissecting the nuances and habits of demographic groups, if she is able to train college students to do such work, those are marketable skills.

Two 2005 Kansas City Star articles quoted Click on views about Martha Stewart as the style icon was emerging from prison and needed to rebuild her business empire. Her observations were the type of insight that businesses pay hefty fees to obtain. Is that enough to hold a professorship? Maybe, maybe not.

College campuses have long pushed societal envelopes, causing people to chafe at the passions of students and how they voice their concerns. But college also must be a time for a stiffening of the vertebrae, readying for life.

How well our systems accomplish those goals needs constant assessing. That end won’t be reached by politicians picking off professors one by one.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Mizzou Faculty Members Defend Professor Who Accosted Journalists

More than 100 faculty members at the University of Missouri have released a letter defending Melissa A. Click, the assistant professor of communication who infamously was caught on video asking for “some muscle” to prevent student journalists from covering protests over racism, The Kansas City Star reports.

The letter, which the professors originally sent last month to administrators on the Columbia campus, was released after more than 100 Republican state lawmakers demanded that the university fire Ms. Click and Janna Basler, the campus’s assistant director of Greek life.

“We wish to state in no uncertain terms our support for Click as a member of the University of Missouri faculty who has earned her position through an outstanding record of teaching and research,” the professors’ letter reads, according to the Star. They went on to call the video incident “at most a regrettable mistake.”
Ms. Click previously apologized, and resigned a courtesy appointment in the university’s journalism school.

In their December 18 letter, the lawmakers demanded that the university “take immediate action to address the inappropriate and criminal actions” of Ms. Click. They went on: “As an academic professional, her first goal should have been to promote a safe and stable learning environment for all students, and to represent the university to the public in a way that strengthens the image of our flagship state institution of higher education. Instead, Professor Click’s comments served to inflame an already caustic situation that was clearly out of line.”

A university representative told the Star that the university would not comment because it is a personnel matter.

Some MU faculty counter calls for professor's removal with letter of support

By Rudi Keller

Wednesday, January 6, 2016 at 2:00 pm

A group of more than 100 faculty members joined the political battle over the University of Missouri’s employment of Melissa Click on Tuesday by releasing a letter sent last month supporting her and attacking her critics.

“We believe that Click has been wronged in the media by those who have attacked her personally and have called for her dismissal,” the faculty members said in the letter, written Dec. 14 and addressed to UM interim President Mike Middleton, interim MU Chancellor Hank Foley, Faculty Council Chairman Ben Trachtenberg and two others.

The letter was signed by 116 faculty members, including several members of the Faculty Council. The letter was released after 117 Republican lawmakers released letters calling for the Board of Curators to fire Click, an assistant professor of communications who used force and intimidation in an attempt to prevent journalists from covering campus protests in November.

A video of Click demanding photographer Tim Tai stop taking pictures of student protesters went viral. The video also shows her calling for “muscle” to push back journalists covering the event.
The MU Police Department investigated the incident and sent a report to Columbia City Prosecutor Steve Richey. A decision on whether to prosecute her was pending, Richey said Tuesday.

Click had been working with the protesting students for several weeks, the letter says, and “her actions on November 9 constitute at most a regrettable mistake.”

Click’s actions properly sparked a discussion of First Amendment rights, the letter said.

“However, much of the commentary in the press and on social media has gone beyond legitimate debate to ad hominem attacks on, and harassment of, Click personally, and has even included calls for her dismissal from the university,” faculty members wrote. “In many cases, we believe, this commentary has been driven by outside groups with agendas external to that of the university.”

At a news conference Tuesday, Gov. Jay Nixon joined in the criticism of Click but he did not endorse calls for her to be fired. Nixon said he did not like what he saw after footage of the incident went viral.

“It is completely unacceptable behavior on the part of a faculty member, especially in journalism or communication,” he said. “Someone that’s a professor of journalism or communications at the university saying, ‘Go bring in the muscle’ so we don’t have to use the First Amendment — quite frankly, if people are upset, I am OK with that.”

State Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia, released the legislative letters along with state Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia. On Twitter, Jones on Tuesday defended the letter and his criticism of the university.

“Still Die Hard MU fan-I want my kids to go there-Right now, I wouldn’t send my dog there,” he wrote in a reply to state Rep. Jeremy LaFaver, D-Kansas City.

MISSOURIAN

'Violent acts' training film being made at MU Thursday and Friday

COLUMBIA — Prospective students on tours of MU on Thursday and Friday have been warned that they might hear and see some unusual — and perhaps frightening — scenes on campus Thursday and Friday because of a video shoot.
Four campus organizations — MU Police, MU Operations, the Academic Support Center’s Mizzou Video Production and MU Marketing and Communications — are collaborating on the production of a violent-incident training video this week.

The video is intended to help people on and off campus know how to respond in the event of a violent situation, such as a shooting, said MU Police Major Brian Weimer. The video will depict scenes of a violent event and offer tips on what to do to stay safe "in the unlikely event" of such a thing happening on campus, a release from the MU News Bureau states.

Filming will begin at 8 a.m. in Leadership Auditorium at the west end of the first floor of the Student Center on Thursday and is scheduled to end about 5 p.m. On Friday, filming will again start at 8 a.m. and end in the mid-afternoon at the south end of Francis Quadrangle and on the steps and first floor of Jesse Hall, according to the release.

Some of the actors will carry fake guns and will appear to take other actors hostage. Still more cast members might be seen running and screaming or appear to be wounded.

But tours will run as usual, Assistant Director of the Office of Admissions Patrick Elmore said. He said the admissions office wasn't entirely sure whether it would re-route the regularly scheduled 11 a.m. tours both days.

MU News Bureau spokesman Christian Basi said the organizations producing the video hope to have it available to the public within the next few months.

Signs will alert passers-by to what's going on, and MU staff will be on hand in each filming area both days.

In the event of a real emergency, students and staff would be alerted by the campus notification system. Official university sources such as MU Alert are the best place for emergency information, Weimer said.

"Don't turn to social media and start unnecessary fear," Weimer said.
According to everytownresearch.org, there were 31 shootings on college campuses in 2015. Some universities, such as Ohio State and Texas State, have created videos instructing viewers how to respond to events involving an active shooter.


With more people prepared, Weimer said, there would be fewer deaths and injuries if a violent incident did happen on MU's campus.

"The more different educational tools you put out there, the more it'll help people to help be prepared," he said.

MU officials film training video on campus

Watch story:  http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=32129&zone=2,5&categories=2,5

COLUMBIA - The University of Missouri Police Department and MU Operations will film a safety training video on campus Thursday and Friday.

The video will be used as an instructional tool to teach students and staff how to respond to dangerous situations on campus.

MUPD Major Brian Weimer said officials will take several measures to make sure people know there is no real danger.
"We'll have officers on the scene to help make sure people know this is not an actual situation," Weimer said.

MU will use students as extras who will act out violent acts such as active shooter situations.

Weimer said officials will use the MU alert system to let people know if there is any real danger.

"That's not being used as part of the video, so if you get something in an MU alert then that is something real going on," Weimer said.

He also said officials will monitor social media to make sure there are no rumors spread.

Filming will be in the MU Student Center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday and near Jesse Hall Friday. Actors will use fake weapons and screaming may be heard.

Weimer said officials will take several measures to prevent rumors including monitoring the filming areas and putting up signs.

"Campus safety is very important to the University so we don't want to cause any unnecessary scares," Weimer said. "We also believe by putting this together we'll be able to help a lot of people if something like this would happen."

The video will be posted on MUPD's website when it is finished and will be available the public.

MU safety officials filming active shooter training video on campus


COLUMBIA, Mo. - The University of Missouri Police Department along with MU Operations will be filming an active shooter training video on campus Thursday and Friday.

According to the FBI, between 2000 and 2013, there were 39 school shootings across the United States. Of those shootings, 12 happened on college campuses.
University officials said the video will help educate students, faculty and staff on how to respond to a violent situation on campus.

"We're trying to get people to learn if you can run and get away from the situation, that's what you should do," said Major Brian Weimer. "If not, try to barricade yourself in the area, silence your phones, etcetera. And if that doesn't work and they break through the door, you're actually going to have to fight and make that decision."

Actors will be carrying fake weapons and others will appear wounded. Christian Basi, a university spokesperson, said more than 60 people will be involved in the filming.

Major Weimer said filming areas will be blocked off to the public and signs will be in place to notify the public that a reenactment is taking place.

"That's one thing we've seen in the past is in drills and situations, if someone catches wind of something going on and all of the sudden it gets to social media and the rumor mills get going, then we have a much bigger issue than we had before," he said.

The campus notification system will be activated if an actual emergency should happen during filming. Major Weimer urges everyone to pay attention to the MU Alert webpage and Twitter for notifications of any credible threats.

The campus police department already offers Citizens' Response to Active Threats (CRAT) classes, but Major Weimer said this training video will be available to everyone who may not be able to attend the training classes.

"We want to make sure we take advantage of all the different resources that are available to our community to get the information out there. If the text message goes out, something bad has already happened," he said. "It just gives them a better opportunity to be safe and get through a situation like that."

Filming will take place all day Thursday near the Student Center and all day on Friday on the Francis Quadrangle near the steps of Jesse Hall. The video will be released after the start of the spring semester.

MU officials warn of pretend violence

Safety officials at the University of Missouri are warning the public about a training video they plan to film Thursday and Friday that will involve fake guns and screaming actors.
MU officials will film a safety and training video about what to do in case of violence on campus from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday at the MU Student Center and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday at Jesse Hall and the Francis Quadrangle, the university said in a news release. Actors will carry fake weapons and will appear to take other actors hostage during the filming.

Officials said they will activate the campus notification system if there is a real emergency.

FROM READERS: Not enough to be the nice guy in the room?

Jaron Vail moved from St. Louis to Columbia about four years ago. Vail is a member of the Missourian's Readers Board.

A preacher once told me that it wasn't good enough just to be a nice guy. For years I wondered what he meant. Now, after the events at Mizzou and other campuses and during the current constant media coverage surrounding the presidential election, I am starting to understand. Being just "a nice guy" means being on the fence, too simple, too — blah. Our society requires us to make ideological claims. Are you a Democrat or a Republican? Are you a Christian or an atheist? Left-winger. Right-winger. Black. White. Capitalist. Social reformer. Whatever you decide, make it plain or we'll make your mind up for you.

I was deeply troubled by the demands made by the protesters at Mizzou. For one thing, any organization, private or public, cannot purposely hire one race over another just to equalize racial disparity. I believe that's illegal. Just hiring a high volume of African-American employees will not solve racial problems. I was also troubled by Carl Kenney’s Nov. 16, 2015, article “No time for a break, there’s work still to be done,” which implies that Columbia is an awful place for black people to live. Well, that’s way too general for me. I myself am African American and have been living in Columbia for over four years. So far, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Columbia.
My point is this: When you generalize enormous populations or people, you sometimes fall on your own hypocrisy and end up exciting unnecessary anger. When you make claims that all Muslim immigrants could be terrorists or make claims that a majority white administration doesn’t care about the needs of black students without verifying if the majority of students, not just black students, but all students, feel that way, you can potentially leave a campus in confusion and unnecessarily accuse innocent people.

Let me be clear. I don’t want to downplay the concern of racism in Missouri or America, but what should we expect? Part of our history in this state and in this country is racism. That’s just the reality. But change doesn’t come without changing the minds of people. This will involve long, grueling, and often unpleasant conversations.

The more inclusive we strive to become, the more open we are about accepting our feelings and our history, then, maybe, just maybe we can get past the problems that ail us. Sometimes there is something to be said about leaving ideology and politics behind and just listening. Maybe over a couple of beers perhaps? Just like a middle of the road nice guy. Nice gals are welcomed too.

Better Learning Communities Academy becomes second charter to close this spring

ST. LOUIS • Nearly five years ago, a nonprofit group that built more than 100 homes in the depressed Hyde Park neighborhood opened up a charter school hoping to provide better opportunities to the children nearby.

In June, the school — Better Learning Communities Academy — will close as the result of poor academic outcomes.

The University of Missouri-Columbia notified the school in December that it would no longer sponsor the elementary school after June 30, making the school the second charter that will close this spring. A sponsor is required for any charter school to receive state funds.
Last month, Mizzou’s Office of Charter School Operations notified Jamaa Learning Center that it would discontinue sponsorship as the result of the school’s academic and financial problems. “We have to stand by the academic outcomes and the academic quality of schools,” said Earl Simms, the St. Louis director of Mizzou’s charter school office.

Better Learning Communities Academy serves about 160 children in kindergarten through sixth grade. It operates inside Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 2153 Salisbury Street, and draws children only from the surrounding neighborhood.

School will continue as normal through the end of the school year. A transition team will work with parents to place children in district schools or other charter schools in the fall. Charter schools are tuition-free public schools that operate independently of school districts.

Officials with Better Learning Communities were hoping to have more time to improve outcomes. “There’s a lot of sadness right now from the community, the parent and students,” said Kathleen Mueller, chairman of the board that oversees the school. “We felt like we were making progress.”

On Missouri’s most recent annual performance scorecard, Better Learning Communities earned 28 percent of the points available in academics and attendance. The state noted improvements in English and math.

“We have made improvements but we haven’t improved as substantially as we’d hoped,” Mueller said.

The school is among those endorsed by Mayor Francis Slay, whose office has a vetting process to foster quality schools and discourage weak operators.

“This did not work,” said Carl Filler, director of strategic policy initiatives and community partnerships. “It’s not a happy moment but it’s understandable.”

Both Jamaa and Better Learning Communities operate in ZIP codes where thousands of children lack access to high quality schools. Filler said Slay’s office is working to direct more successful charter school operators to open in areas such as Hyde Park.

“When charters are wanting to come in or expand, we point to the areas where charters are most needed,” he said.
When Sri Ponnada arrived at the University of Iowa, in 2012, she immediately noticed a lack of cultural understanding among some of her peers in the classroom. "They would say things like, I never saw a black person before I came to Iowa," Ms. Ponnada, who is Indian, recalled. "And it’s probably true, if they’re coming from small-town Iowa."

Ms. Ponnada, who graduated in December, loved the university. But while on its campus, she said, she occasionally experienced microaggressions — subtle, offensive comments that made her feel unwelcome. Several racial incidents reinforced her concerns: A Ku Klux Klan-themed sculpture sparked outrage on the campus in 2014, and around the same time a slew of insults against Asian students appeared on Yik Yak, the anonymous social-media platform.

So last February Ms. Ponnada, then a student senator, sought to address the campus culture by pushing for a change in Iowa’s general-education program. She proposed a student-government resolution supporting a restructuring of the university’s Values, Society, and Diversity course requirement. She argued that the existing course wasn’t specific enough and that students needed an academic space to confront their biases and learn about their differences.

Last month Iowa officials announced that they would do just that. All students in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will have to satisfy a new, more-focused diversity-and-inclusion requirement, as well as a separate values-and-culture requirement, starting in 2017.
Such mandatory courses are becoming more common. The recent wave of protests over campus racial climates has added fuel to that fire, as many student activists have demanded stronger diversity curricula.

Dozens — perhaps hundreds — of institutions already require their students to take at least one course that explores diversity in some manner. Many colleges have students select from a broad menu of classes that cover issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or religion; a smaller group of institutions have focused the requirement more narrowly on racial and ethnic studies.

Some research has indicated that the courses have a positive effect on student attitudes toward other ethnicities and cultures. Still, the classes can be controversial. Some critics argue that the courses are unnecessary and doubt that they produce real results. Other opponents contend that they politicize education by promoting an ideology of social justice.

Mandatory diversity courses tend to surface as a result of student protests, said Shaun R. Harper, director of the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania. "Very rarely are these diversity requirements born out of the goodness of the hearts of faculty who just want to do it because it’s the right thing to do," he said.

The idea behind the courses is to broaden students’ cultural horizons and give them the skills to interact in an increasingly pluralistic society — skills that many of them did not obtain before enrolling in college.

Some students say such gaps in understanding have become more noticeable at their colleges in the past three months as racial tensions have escalated.

Denys Reyes, a senior at Claremont McKenna College — where activists recently forced the dean of students to resign after she sent a controversial email that went public — said she and other student organizers "are having to teach our own student body how to talk about race,
because they just don’t know how.” The California college has no diversity-course requirement, but adding one is among the activists’ demands.

By some accounts, the scope of research on diversity curricula is limited, but most studies have found that taking a course exploring some aspect of diversity or race positively affects how students view people of other cultures and backgrounds.

Mitchell J. Chang, a professor of education and of Asian-American studies at the University of California at Los Angeles who has researched diversity curricula, said

"These requirements, for those who know little about them, may appear to be purely a political act to appease students,” Mr. Chang said in an email. But, he said, he and others have found that "fulfilling such a requirement can expose students to academic materials that prepare them for the future in ways that higher education has not yet widely pursued in such a targeted way."

Camille Z. Charles, a professor of sociology and chair of the Africana-studies department at Penn, was among the faculty members who supported the creation of a diversity-course requirement about a dozen years ago. Throughout her nearly 20 years at the university, she said, some students have entered her class on racial and ethnic relations doubtful of diversity’s importance in society — and many of them leave the class less certain of their earlier convictions.

"I may not completely change students’ minds by the end of the semester," she said, "but they are more open, and they know how to have these conversations without being insensitive and disrespectful." Students who are already attuned to issues of diversity also benefit, she added, by becoming better listeners.
At most institutions with diversity-course requirements, students can choose from a range of classes in different departments that cover some aspect of cultural diversity. But Penn’s Mr. Harper questioned whether such broad definitions — where "just about anything qualifies" — are adequate, especially right now.

When this reporter mentioned that she had met a curricular diversity requirement with a class called "Sport and American History," Mr. Harper was skeptical. "Doesn’t it then suggest," he asked, "that if you’re going to learn about people of color, you’re going to learn about them in a sports class?"

Ms. Reyes agreed. For instance, she said, a course that covers Japanese history in America might talk about Japanese-Americans mostly in the context of their internment during World War II. "That’s not enough," she said. "You need to understand why those things happened and how they relate to today — not just race, but power structures and privilege."

A handful of colleges have more narrowly defined their mandatory courses. At Scripps College, in California, students have been required to take a class focused on race and ethnicity for 25 years, said Julie E. Liss, a professor of history and interim dean of the faculty.

A range of courses qualify, Ms. Liss said, but the explicit goal is to address the systemic discrimination and exploitation of certain ethnic groups in the United States and relate such issues to contemporary experiences. "Race in Popular Culture and Media" and "Chicanos/Latinas and Education" are among the classes that count, while "United States History to 1865" does not.

Matthew E. Hill, an associate professor of anthropology at Iowa, led the committee that initially examined the proposed change in the institution’s diversity requirement.

When committee members looked at how other colleges had structured their diversity courses, Mr. Hill said, they found that some small liberal-arts colleges required students to take one
specific class that addressed race and ethnicity. That wasn’t feasible for a large public university like Iowa, he said.

Still, the committee ultimately decided that narrowing the scope of Values, Society, and Diversity was important, he said. Courses like "King Arthur Through the Ages" and "Food in America" qualified under that broad designation. For a short time, even physical-education courses — including one on table-tennis — counted. The concentration "didn’t do any one thing very clearly," Mr. Hill said.

Mr. Harper encourages student activists to make their demands for diversity courses more specific. Many activists might want a course that centers on race and ethnicity in contemporary culture, he said, but they "don’t have the full language to specify exactly what they mean. They put it all under the banner of a diversity course."

‘Political-Correctness Anxiety’

Few faculty members at Iowa bluntly opposed strengthening the diversity-course requirement, Mr. Hill said. The main concerns had to do with logistics, he said — for instance, ensuring that splitting Values, Society, and Diversity into two requirements wouldn’t add to the credit hours required for graduation.

Not everyone was on board, though. Ms. Ponnada said that a number of student-government leaders initially told her that a course specifically on diversity wasn’t necessary and that most students wouldn’t want another general-education requirement.

Those two arguments are common, and they surfaced recently at Claremont McKenna. Ms. Reyes said student activists have sought to solve that problem by structuring their proposed requirement as an overlay. Under their plan, students would have to take a course covering a specific focus — power and privilege, for instance — but that course would also satisfy another general-education requirement.
There are other reservations, too. Peter A. Lawler, a political-science professor at Berry College who describes himself as a postmodern conservative, said that while students should learn about race, gender, and other cultures in college, classifying courses with a "diversity" label is problematic.

"The word ‘diversity’ is a bureaucratic word invented by the Supreme Court that universities now have to use when they’re concerned about racial justice," he said. It’s become a meaningless term that "masks what we really want to talk about and argue about," he said.

At the University of California at Los Angeles, faculty members voted down diversity-course proposals in 2004 and 2012.

During the most recent round of debate there, in 2014 and early 2015, the opposition took two primary forms, said Jerry Kang, the university’s vice chancellor for equity, diversity, and inclusion. One was the "standard culture-wars and political-correctness anxiety."

The other doubt, he said, was "disciplinary skepticism." Some professors in engineering, for instance, didn’t understand why diversity was an important topic in their disciplines, he said.

When Mr. Kang spoke with unconvinced faculty members, he told them, "I get it." But he tried to present diversity in a frame of conflict and disparity, as an intellectual dilemma "that we need to understand at every level." It wasn’t about being politically correct, he said, but about solving a problem that "is unbelievably challenging and important to our mission as a public university."

A requirement eventually won enough faculty support to pass at UCLA. It took effect starting with students who enrolled in the university’s College of Letters and Science last fall.

When a college does adopt a requirement, though, UCLA’s Mr. Chang said, it’s essential for tenure-track faculty members to oversee it.
He said he has noticed a number of institutions where diversity-related courses are largely taught by part-time instructors. Not committing permanent resources to the requirement, he said, "undermines its importance in the long run."

More Changes to FAFSA List

No MU Mention

States worry that a Department of Education plan to curtail their access to data from the federal student aid form will cause headaches for state aid awards. The U.S. Department of Education is planning to further restrict how it shares information about students’ college preferences, but some state officials are concerned the changes will make it more difficult for them to award funds from state financial aid programs.

The department has already stopped providing colleges with the entire list of institutions that students express interest in attending when filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, known as the FAFSA. That new policy, which took effect Jan. 1, was a response to concerns that students may have been disadvantaged by colleges knowing the other colleges to which a student was also applying (and where those institutions ranked on the student’s list.)

State agencies that award financial aid, however, continue to have access to the full list of colleges a student provides on the FAFSA, including the ordering of those institutions. But the Education Department now plans to change that, a department official confirmed in an email to Inside Higher Ed.

Starting on the FAFSA for the 2017-18 academic year, the department will stop providing state agencies with the order in which students list colleges, the official said. States will continue to receive the full list of colleges that students share on the application, but the Education Department will first randomize the ordering of the institutions.
State officials have found that students are most likely to attend the college they list first on the FAFSA. Many state agencies use that information to plan how much state financial aid money they expect to dole out. And others use the information to start packaging state financial aid awards.

The Education Department has previously acknowledged that states use the FAFSA lists for such purposes. The current FAFSA, for instance, warns students that “the order in which you list schools may affect your eligibility for state aid.”

Without access to the list of colleges students provide on the FAFSA, in the order listed by the student, state officials say they will be left in the dark about which students are planning to enroll at colleges for which they may be eligible for state aid.

The National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs sent a letter to the Obama administration last year urging officials to reconsider their plans. “No longer providing states with the schools listed, or no longer providing the schools in the order listed by the student, is anticipated to have costly and confusing impacts to both states and students,” the group wrote (italics from the original).

In Pennsylvania, for instance, about 80 percent of state grant recipients attend their first-listed institution on the FAFSA, according to Keith New, a spokesman for the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, known as PHEAA, which administers the program. For those students, PHEAA automatically calculates their state award -- which ranges between roughly $100 and $4,000 -- after receiving the information from the FAFSA.

New said if the Education Department curtails PHEAA’s access to students’ FAFSA list information, the agency would have to reach out to about 130,000 state college or university applicants rather than automatically calculating their awards. “The burden will be placed on the students to provide the name of their school to us a second time. It's certainly going to be a big communications issue and it would add complexity,” Keith said. “The potential is significant for students, especially those who may already be at risk, to fall through the cracks.”

Similarly, Tennessee officials said the department’s plan to randomize the FAFSA list would complicate how they dole out state awards, including the popular Tennessee Promise program, which allows students to attend community college without paying tuition.
Tim Phelps, associate executive director of the Tennessee Student Assistance Commission, said the state typically packages an award to the first institution that is eligible for state aid that a student provides on his or her FAFSA list. Without access to the complete FAFSA list information, he said, the commission would have to wait until students directly provide them with the name of the colleges for which they are seeking state aid.

“It’s adding another barrier that students would have to cross, in order to continue to be eligible or to become eligible,” Phelps said of the department’s plan.

The department’s initial move to curtail colleges’ access to the FAFSA list was announced last August after concerns that some colleges were using the lists of colleges students provide on the FAFSA in ways that could harm students’ admissions or financial aid prospects.

“We had learned, from a number of places, that some schools -- not most but more than we would like -- use those data for purposes totally inappropriate, and in some cases, unlawful,” Jeff Baker, a department official, said at a federal financial aid conference last month. *Inside Higher Ed* reported in 2013 that some colleges were denying admission and possibly reducing financial aid to students based on the FAFSA information the department was sharing with colleges.

But state officials contend that their use of the FAFSA college list, by contrast, benefits students by streamlining the process for students to apply for state-based loans and grants.

“It tries to solve a problem that doesn’t exist,” said Phelps of the Tennessee aid agency. “It really muddies the water for our programs.”

The FAFSA for the 2017-18 school year, for which these changes would take effect, will be published and available starting this Oct. 1 under the Obama administration’s new, earlier timeline for federal financial aid.