Social groups vital for retirees to live long and prosper, studies suggest

This is part of a regular series on aging well.

If you’re feeling a little long in the tooth, join the club. Curling, pottery, wine appreciation, bridge – any club will do. The trick is to socialize in groups, which a spate of new studies suggests is a leading way to live long and prosper.

In fact, belonging to social groups is as effective as exercise in preventing death in early retirement, according to a study published in February in the journal BMJ Open.

Researchers looked at the social habits of 424 Britons as they transitioned into retirement. Here’s what they found:

- Older adults who belonged to two groups or clubs before they retired had a 2-per-cent risk of death in the first six years of retirement; the risk increased to 5 per cent if they lost one group membership.
- If participants dropped both groups, the mortality risk jumped to 12 per cent.
- For every group membership lost in the year after retirement, participants reported a 10-per-cent decline in quality of life six years later.

Some retirees may have withdrawn from group activities because of health issues that hastened their demise. But over all, physical health was not a significant predictor of death when other variables, such as age, sex, socioeconomic status and group memberships, were factored in, the study said.

Being part of social groups boosts self-esteem, resilience and mental health and may encourage healthy habits, researchers say.

Joining religious, volunteer or community groups may even improve sleep – another factor in age-related decline, according to a study published early this month in the Journal of Social Science and Medicine. Researchers analyzed the link between older adults’ social group activities over five years and their sleep, using self-reports of sleep habits and a device called an actigraph, which measures sleep quality.

The result: “People who are more active in social activities sleep better,” said Dr. Jen-Hao Chen, an assistant professor of health sciences at the University of Missouri. While it’s possible that people who sleep better simply have more energy to socialize in the first place, participation in group activities may in itself reduce stress and promote good sleep, Chen said.
He added that early retirement is a time of flux. More than two-thirds of the people in the study changed their level of group participation over the five-year period. Some may have withdrawn from social activities to care for grandchildren. Others may have used their extra free time to get more involved in sports, volunteering or community groups.

Chen noted that socializing one-on-one, such as helping a neighbour or friend, does not offer the same health benefits as group activities. The reasons for this are uncertain, he said, but “that kind of relationship may drain older adults’ resources, their emotional energy.”

For introverts, the focus on group activities may not be good news. But hopefully it’s never too late to join a club that would have you as a member.

16 Mizzou students, one professor safe in Brussels

COLUMBIA, Mo. — The University of Missouri confirms to KRCG 13 that 16 journalism students and one professor studying abroad in Brussels are safe this morning.

MU News Bureau Spokesman Christian Basi says the university and international department have been in contact with the students and staff.

The university has been sending notifications to the students' families.
16 Missouri Journalism students safe in Brussels after terror attacks

BRUSSELS, Belgium - All 16 University of Missouri Journalism students studying abroad in the Belgian capital of Brussels are safe Tuesday morning after terror attacks.

ABC 17 News talked to Samantha Kummerer, a Missouri Journalism student interning at Reuters TV in Brussels. Kummerer tells us all 16 students in Brussels are accounted for and safe.

There were at least two explosions at the Brussels' Zavantem airport, and a third explosion struck at one of the city's metro stations near the European Union. At least 28 people were killed in the attacks, according to Belgian media.

McCaskill: Colleges should be more accountable, state lawmakers less noisy

ST. LOUIS • As college tuition has spiked across the country and graduation rates have become stagnant, the federal government needs to take a more active role in making sure colleges and universities provide better value to students, Sen. Claire McCaskill said Monday.

McCaskill, D-Mo., was at Metro Academic and Classical High School with education leaders from around St. Louis as part of her statewide “College Affordability” listening tour kicking off this week.
The senator touched on a number of topics including how colleges can become more accountable to the public, the predatory tactics used by some for-profit schools and also the recent turmoil at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

In Mizzou’s case, McCaskill criticized lawmakers who have threatened to cut the school’s funding over how the university’s leadership handled student complaints over racial issues on campus.

“You have way too many people in Jefferson City trying to score political points,” she said, adding that there are more pressing topics in higher education that state legislators should be focused on.

Missouri is “20 percent below the national average in supporting higher education,” she said. “That’s embarrassing.”

McCaskill also criticized Republican lawmakers in Washington, who she said are working against a plan to allow students to refinance student loans, much the same way mortgages and other loans are refinanced.

Student loan debt has been a big topic in higher education circles over the past decade, but particularly in the last three years when total student debt passed the $1 trillion mark, surpassing the country’s total credit card debt.

McCaskill said students should be allowed to refinance their federal student loans so that their interest rates reflect current market rates.

Forcing students to pay the federal government rates higher than the market rate is “offensive” and “immoral,” she said.

McCaskill later took aim at the nation’s for-profit schools, particularly the ones who bombard the public with television commercials promising quick turnarounds and great job opportunities after graduation.
Many of those schools, including the now-defunct Corinthian Colleges, have increasingly been criticized for saddling students with debt, while not delivering on their job placement promises.

McCaskill said one way to combat a predatory business model was to demand more accountability. The way to do that, she said, is through increased transparency.

For-profit schools, in particular, should be required to be more vigilant in reporting their graduation rates, the percentage of graduates who get a job shortly after graduating, and the percentage of income graduates are paying in student loan costs.

It’s similar to the idea behind President Barack Obama’s College Scorecard: the more readily students and parents can find statistics on a school, the better choice they will make in finding value. And, consequently, a more informed consumer will force colleges to provide better bang for the buck.

Other topics area education leaders discussed with McCaskill included steps students can take to decrease their debt load.

Alan Byrd, dean of enrollment services at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, said students can help themselves by taking 15 credits each semester — a course load that keeps students on track to graduate in four years. It’s a strategy that reduces the amount of loan debt they accrue and ensures that students on financial aid don’t exceed time-to-completion requirements that come with that aid.

Another consensus idea was that schools should make more of an effort to expand dual enrollment opportunities — where students can take college courses while still in high school — to reduce the amount of time and debt they accrue in higher education.

Jay Goff, vice president for enrollment at St. Louis University, said the federal government could do a lot to help students finish college more quickly and rack up less debt by bringing back the summer Pell Grant program for low-income students.
Starting in 2012, federal rules changed and Pell grants are no longer offered to students enrolled in summer school.

Students who take three years of summer school can shave as much as a year off their time-to-completion, Goff said.

**Title IX Office expects rise in investigations after changes**

MU’s new Office for Civil Rights and Title IX handles a wider range of discrimination besides sexual harassment.

Since its creation in June 2014, the Title IX Office has made significant changes to its policies and procedures, which have resulted in an expected increase in sexual harassment investigations.

According to its first annual report, the Title IX Office received reports of 374 alleged policy violations from Aug. 1, 2014, to July 31, 2015.

Most of the reports have been student to student complaints, chair of MU’s ad hoc faculty committee on Title IX Cooper Drury said.

“What I see it as, in my understanding, is it’s not an increase in things actually happening, but an increase in reporting, which the committee sees as a success in the reporting rules, activities and training that the Title IX Office has rolled out,” Drury said.

However, the Title IX Office has only released one report, from the 2014–15 school year, which makes it hard to draw comparisons with previous years.

“We expect an increase in reports as the university community learns more about the services offered by the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX,” Title IX Administrator Ellen Eardley said in an email. “Many people know that we investigate discrimination and sexual violence, but that is not all that our office does.”

According to the MU News Bureau, the Title IX Office has made the following changes since fall 2014:

- Creating a new Title IX Office, hiring a permanent Title IX administrator and three investigators.
• Implementing the “Not Anymore” online program, a video-based educational program about sexual assault, consent, dating violence, stalking and bystander intervention required for all new undergraduate, graduate and transfer students.
• Executing online sex discrimination training for all faculty and staff during the 2014–2015 academic year.
• Implementing and revising new policies regarding sex discrimination, which include requiring all employees to report incidents to the Title IX Office.
• Adopting new procedures for investigating complaints against faculty and staff.
• Training 60 employees on gender discrimination and university policies through a two- to eight-day training course.
• Creating promotional materials including a website to report Title IX violations and provide information about students’ rights and options regarding Title IX incidents.
• Working with Residential Life, Greek Life, Athletics, the Provost’s Office and the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center to hold workshops and other educational opportunities including Green Dot, a bystander intervention program.
• Ongoing coordination among campus and community stakeholders who most frequently respond to reports of sex-based violence in monthly meetings of MU’s Sexual Assault Response Team.

“Students, faculty and staff now have a better understanding of how to report and help people who have been victims of sexual harassment or discrimination,” Drury said.

Garnett Stokes, provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs announced the creation of a new Office for Civil Rights and Title IX on Dec. 2.

Prior to the creation of the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX, discrimination and sexual harassment reports were not investigated in a centralized location or with a standardized set of procedures.

“The Title IX Office was only responsible for reports of all types of sex discrimination against students or third parties,” Eardley said in an email. “The scope of the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX is much broader.”

The new office investigates discrimination or harassment due to race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, genetic information, disability or veteran status, according to the office’s website.

According to the article, the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX is coordinating non-discrimination and equity efforts throughout campus through partnerships with the Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative, the Office of Student Conduct, the MU Equity Office, Office of Accessibility and ADA Education, MUPD, Human Resources and the Provost’s Office.

The Office for Civil Rights and Title IX provides victims of discrimination with resources and referrals to help them stay in school and/or continue employment, Eardley said.
“No one is required to pursue a complaint of discrimination,” Eardley said. “In some cases, a full investigation is not pursued and may not be necessary. It is important to remember that the number of reports to my office is not the same as the number of incidents of discrimination.”

Losing AAU status not fatal for Nebraska

JILLIAN DEUTSCH, 1 hr ago

COLUMBIA — Five years ago, University of Nebraska Chancellor Harvey Perlman attended a reception in Washington, D.C., alongside the 61 other leaders of schools in the Association of American Universities.

Perlman knew Nebraska was in trouble. The university's AAU membership was up for review, and this meeting in April 2011 would determine its future.

But most of the other university leaders didn’t realize it would happen that night. After dinner, they arrived back to their Four Seasons Hotel rooms where ballots, slipped under the doors, awaited.

The other university presidents and chancellors asked Perlman the next day, “What the hell is going on?”

What went on was the end of a messy process: Perlman gave a speech in defense of Nebraska’s status; and the association gave the school leaders a week to return their marked ballots, with abstentions counting in favor of maintaining Nebraska as a member. A week passed, and the AAU was still soliciting votes past the deadline, Perlman recalled.

On April 26, two weeks after the vote began and 102 years after Nebraska joined the AAU, Perlman received word that Nebraska was out.

The AAU could seem like a meaningless bureaucratic acronym, but for those who work in higher education, it has traditionally been the high mark of success. It describes itself as the association of
leading research universities “on the leading edge of innovation, scholarship, and solutions that contribute to the nation's economy, security, and well-being.”

Having status within the 116-year-old, invitation-only, 62-member club is supposed to mean you’re one of the best research institutions in the country. The AAU assesses its members on how many competitive federal research grants they have, how many faculty members belong to the national academies, how many awards faculty members win and how often they show up in prestigious publications.

To lose AAU status, people thought, would be the mark of a declining, inferior institution.

**MU has been an AAU member for 108 years, and the university hasn’t forgotten. The AAU name peppers its strategic plan and is at the forefront of big administrative decisions and goals such as revamping buildings, improving the library and increasing professors' research production.**

MU’s mission to stay within the AAU is clear. University higher-ups explain rebuilding and focusing on research as efforts to shore MU’s status within the AAU. When Nebraska, a similar land grant institution, was ousted by its fellow members, MU saw what might happen. But after its turbulent ousting, Nebraska’s story offers a more positive perspective on life after the AAU.

Nebraska and the AAU break up

The AAU dumped Nebraska essentially for two reasons.

First, the University of Nebraska’s medical school is at its Omaha campus, not the flagship campus in Lincoln. So, any federal research dollar, premier faculty member and publication in a prestigious journal from the medical school couldn’t be counted toward Nebraska’s AAU status.

Second, the university focuses heavily on agriculture research, a priority for a land grant institution. But in the eyes of the AAU, agricultural research is not peer-reviewed, competitive research, so it is “not considered as highly,” AAU spokesman Barry Toiv said, compared with medical and economic research.

During the break-up process, Perlman pled his case.
In a letter to the AAU review committee on Nov. 8, 2010, Perlman stressed how Nebraska’s federal research expenditure percentage growth over the past decade had been one of the highest in the AAU and the university had recently invested in new research facilities.

"We believe that this possibility places at risk much of the progress the university has experienced during the last decade,” he wrote.

The AAU committee pushed back, saying that even “if Nebraska were to continue through 2020 exactly as in the recent past, the university would remain in the lowest percentiles of the AAU, with many non-members presenting notably stronger credentials for membership.”

A two-thirds majority vote of AAU members was necessary to kick out Nebraska. But even before the vote, Perlman seemed less concerned that losing status would affect the university’s ability to do research and more with the stigma of being ousted.

"As I know you must realize, being dropped from membership would have a far greater impact on an institution than not being invited to membership in the first place,” he wrote to the AAU.

Five years later, Perlman has moved on.

It doesn’t matter to him whether Nebraska wears an AAU badge. As he nears retirement from the chancellor's job — he’ll return to the College of Law — Perlman just cares that his students get a quality education. From his perspective, Nebraska still does this: The university's land grant mission hasn’t changed; enrollment continues to grow; and it still conducts premier research and draws prestigious faculty.

“You never know whether it had an impact, right?” Perlman said. “Are there faculty out there we could’ve gotten if we’d had AAU? I don’t know.”

The only time he hears about it is when reporters call to ask.

“Beyond the embarrassment of this,” Perlman said, losing AAU status has affected the university “not a bit.”
Other faculty seem to agree.

Back in May 2011, the Lincoln Journal Star newspaper quoted Mathias Schubert, a university physicist and engineer, saying “the university's expulsion from a group of the top 63 research universities is ‘consequential’ and ‘should be carefully reviewed because several of our peer institutions are members.”

Now, though, Schubert's attitude toward the AAU equates to a shrug.

“I believe it is correct to state that nobody (UNL faculty) really cared about AAU neither before nor after parting from AAU,” he said in an email. “I am not sure if this statement is worse for UNL or for AAU, but I also guess it does not matter anyways. In short, my comment on AAU is: It does not seem to matter.”

How the AAU began

In the ever-expanding landscape of higher education, students have many options. There are community colleges, liberal arts colleges, for-profit colleges, arts colleges, vocational-technical colleges and career colleges, single-sex colleges and many other types of specialized colleges. But those within the AAU are considered the best U.S. research colleges. (There are two Canadian members: McGill University and the University of Toronto.)

In 1862, the Morrill Land Grant Acts provided land for every state to create its own institution of higher education. The purpose of these land grant institutions was to provide an education focused on agriculture, home economics and other “practical” professions for the general population.

Meanwhile, those who wanted a more prestigious education went abroad to Western European institutions, notably in Germany, that were considered at the forefront of research.

A group in 1900 sought to change that. Presidents from Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Columbia University, the University of Chicago and the University of California looked at the field of American universities and chose the 14 best. These 14 met at the University of Chicago in February of that year to form a
collective of leading Ph.D.-granting universities both founded on U.S. soil and meeting the high research standards of their German peers.

They called themselves the Association of American Universities. Other universities were allowed into the association solely by invitation; the University of Missouri in Columbia was invited in 1908.

The new association’s goals, according to the AAU, were to establish standards for universities across the country and improve the reputations of American universities overseas. It succeeded. Elite universities abroad saw the AAU label as a marker of premium, American-grown education, admitting only those students into their own graduate education programs.

Over the years, the AAU shifted its focus. From 1914 to 1949, it became an accreditation agency, creating an “Accepted List” of non-member institutions whose students were also considered capable of pursuing graduate education at European institutions.

In the 1930s, it focused on lobbying for higher education funding from the federal government. It was successful in getting money from federal bodies such as the National Science Foundation when it was created in 1950. In 1962, the AAU established a Washington, D.C., office to lobby for money and, five years later, created the Council on Foreign Relations for campus officials to come together and discuss federal policy issues.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the AAU used this lobbying power to focus on rising tuition costs created by the implementation of affirmative action, financial aid and health standards. But most importantly, the AAU became a “presidents’ organization,” allowing presidents and chancellors to come together, to network and work together for a collective good.

Now, the AAU continues this work. It lobbies for higher education funding, allows university leaders to network and brings universities together for research, as it did last year when it produced a sexual assault report survey.

But in the vast field of higher education, membership in the AAU still represents an academic gold standard.
Deconstructing the AAU

The year Nebraska left the AAU, a 2012 Chronicle of Higher Education report showed plenty of non-members were outpacing AAU members in securing federal research dollars. Those non-members wanted into the AAU.

Although these members wanted to join, after ousting Nebraska and nudging out Syracuse University, some education researchers seemed to take Perlman’s anti-AAU stance. In addition to Perlman calling the AAU “a country club,” others have called it an “old boys club,” “a fraternity” and “a retro old-boy network.”

“It’s a group of presidents who enjoy being a part of something exclusive,” Perlman said.

In 2011, the Chronicle of Higher Education quoted university leaders within the AAU as saying they were unhappy that “membership in the association (had) become much more quantified.”

One anonymously quoted president said the Nebraska vote was divided because “the membership itself is divided about what it means to be a top research university.”

Academics then and now became critical of the AAU’s devaluing of non-medical and -scientific research like those in agriculture and the humanities. They’ve also criticized the AAU for prioritizing research above teaching, capping membership at a random 62 members and not considering financial aid or diversity as markers of a university’s success.

James Fredericks Volkwein is an education professor at Pennsylvania State University and scientist at the Center for the Study of Higher Education there. He’s looked at ranking systems his whole career.

“We love to rate and rank,” Volkwein said. “... We do it for sports teams, cars, all kinds of products. There are rating and rankings for everything in society. We’re always looking for No. 1.”

Ultimately though, there are faults with every system of rating and ranking, Volkwein said.
There’s the U.S. News and World Report ranking, which relies on "16 areas related to academic excellence;" the Princeton Review, which uses student surveys; and President Barack Obama’s “College Scorecard,” which began in 2014 and evaluates universities based on "cost, value and quality." Some, Volkwein said, do a better job by assessing student outcomes — such as Forbes, which assesses outcomes from students and alumni over three years, and the Fiske Guide to Colleges, which assesses based on campus culture.

Kevin Carey, the education policy program director at the New American Foundation, imagined a new AAU with diverse criteria in his 2014 plan “Building a New AAU: the Case for Redefining Higher Education Excellence.”

In this plan, Carey rejected the “antiquated, exclusionary values” of the current AAU for a “new definition of higher education excellence that truly serves the needs of our times.” The criteria included those set by the AAU but added the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded; the undergraduate admissions rate, penalizing those with large rejection rates; the number of degrees awarded to minority students; the number of students receiving Pell Grants; and the net price for low-income students.

In Carey’s vision, this led to an 82-member “New AAU” that added more universities from Southern and Western states and decreased the number of private institutions on the list. On this list, MU would be No. 56.

At its core, the AAU’s current standards emphasize its overall purpose: prestige.

“It depends on what you regard as being important,” Perlman said. “If you want gold stars after your name, then (the AAU is) important because the AAU is a gold star.”

Syracuse and the public good

The same year Nebraska lost its AAU membership, Syracuse University voluntarily gave its membership away rather than face the same review process Nebraska had just endured.
“It was very clear that the easiest path to scoring high on the criteria is to have large medical schools or large science and engineering faculties,” former Syracuse Chancellor Nancy Cantor told the Chronicle of Higher Education in a May 2011 article.

Cantor decided to take the university in a different, albeit controversial, direction. Instead of investing in the large medical schools or large science and engineering faculties that the AAU prioritizes, Cantor invested in what she called the public good.

Syracuse sought to revitalize the Rust Belt city that gave the university its name: It refurbished parks, remade a building where dealers grew marijuana into a center for academic programs, focused on locally based research and gave free tuition to local high school students.

The fall after Syracuse gave up its AAU status, Cantor increased Syracuse’s undergraduate enrollment by 20 percent, raising the minority student freshman class from 18.5 percent to nearly 32 percent; increased the number of students qualifying for Pell grants from 20 percent to 28 percent; and tripled the amount of money on need-based aid to $131 million, all according to the Chronicle of Higher Education in October 2011.

Cantor explained these changes as a departure from enrolling “well-off white students from the Northeast.” Instead, she wanted to focus on the growing population of lower-income, minority students from the South and West.

“If you were a strategic business, you would be optimizing on what the world is going to look like,” Cantor said in the October 2011 Chronicle profile. “You wouldn’t be holding on for dear life to your brand.”

But rebranding came with a cost.

Syracuse’s reputation as a research institution sank. It fell in the U.S. World & News Report ranking. Some university researchers resented focusing their research on the local community.

And the money spoke for itself.
Cantor more than doubled the university's debt. When she abruptly left Syracuse for Rutgers University in 2012, her replacement, Washington University School of Law Dean Kent Syverud, wasted no time in shifting the university’s goal back to research.

Cantor had invested upward of $150 million of the university’s money into new projects that benefited the university and the community, according to the Syracuse New Times. Some university faculty and administrators felt it was a waste of money.

And although Syverud often spoke highly of Cantor’s commitment to the community in public addresses, he pulled back on investing in the city of Syracuse to focus on internal revenue. He wanted to put the money back into building up Syracuse’s reputation.

But in November 2014, protesters staged a sit-in of the chancellor’s on-campus residence. The group called THE General Body demanded better treatment of minority students. One point the group made was that it was “concerned about a potential drop in diversity among the student population under Chancellor Kent Syverud,” because his emphasis was on national rankings.

MU and the AAU

Depending on where you look, MU walks alongside and strays from Nebraska’s path.

Both are public, flagship, land grant institutions. They have a key mission to serve the citizens of their respective states. They both have deep roots in agricultural research.

Unlike Nebraska, though, MU’s medical school is on campus. MU is also much larger: Both had record-breaking enrollment years in fall 2015, with MU attracting 35,000 students to Nebraska’s 25,000.

Other rankings offer little clarity. For the 2015 U.S. World & News Report rankings, MU and Nebraska tied at No. 103. Out of 200 institutions rated by the Center for Measuring University Performance in 2014, Missouri ranked 85th. No. 82? Nebraska.

Toiv said there’s no ranking system within the AAU. It’s merely a membership, he said, but as Perlman attested, those within the AAU know where they stand.
And many of those at MU are worried about its standing. Interim Chancellor Hank Foley has been focusing the university’s money and attention on research.

When he was the vice chancellor for research and graduate studies in 2014, Foley developed a plan to bolster MU’s AAU status from No. 32 to No. 28 by 2018. In an interview with the Columbia Tribune, Foley said “the AAU is not static” and described a plan to funnel 2 percent of the university’s funds toward scientific research.

When Patrick Delafontaine suddenly resigned as dean of the School of Medicine in fall 2015, pharmacology and physiology professor Virginia Huxley told the Missourian the school was losing an investment in its AAU status, which was “in jeopardy.” In February, Foley brought Delafontaine back.

Foley also announced plans to the UM Board of Curators in December to focus on research facilities such as building a new space for the Nursing School and rebuilding Lafferre Hall as efforts to bolster MU’s AAU status.

"Those areas are the ones most likely to get the statistical results that the AAU looks for," Foley told the curators.

But focusing on AAU metrics doesn’t necessarily make the quality of an education improve.

Walter McMahon, an economics professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, an AAU member, said that even though AAU metrics like federal research expenditures show success in research, they only measure one aspect of a university's product.

“The true product, true outcome of a university is the human capital that is created as each student gets an education,” McMahon said.

Despite critics, as long as the AAU still stands as the pinnacle of prestige for a research university, there are still plenty of non-members knocking at the association’s door and current members, such as MU, fighting to stay on the inside.
Perlman no longer receives invitations to stay at the Four Seasons Hotel in Washington along with the other 61 AAU leaders. He doesn’t miss an opportunity to gloat about the university’s new life without the AAU.

In a 2014 state of the university address, Perlman told the crowd that he had one regret during his time as chancellor:

“I refer, of course, to the loss of our membership in AAU,” he said. “But since then, our enrollment has grown, we have become more attractive to non-resident and international students, our research trajectory has continued to exceed the pace of most AAU institutions, we competed for and won designation as a (University Affiliated Research Center), one of only 14 in the country, we have tripled our national academy memberships, and our rankings, for what they are worth, in U.S. News and World Report have steadily improved, now being at the highest in the history of the university.

"I guess my regret," Perlman said, "is that our expulsion from AAU didn’t come sooner.”

**MISSOURIAN**

**Sinclair School of Nursing simulation training targets intimate partner violence**

COLUMBIA — Graduate nursing student Grace Johnson’s face and arms were covered in makeup on Wednesday afternoon, but it wasn’t your typical makeup job.

Johnson was playing the part of a patient who had been physically abused, the pink and red blotches near her eye and on her arm and leg imitating bruises.
"It makes the situation seem less fake," she said.

This role playing is part of the Sinclair School of Nursing’s intimate partner violence training. Students like Johnson or volunteers — the "patients" — are paired with nursing students who ask about the patient's relationship with their partner, trying to determine whether the person has been abused. The idea is to practice a conversation a nurse would have with a real patient in a clinical setting.

When it’s over, the "patient" assesses the nursing student on how comfortable and safe they felt during the interaction. The nurses get to see this feedback afterward and discuss it with their partner.

“I think having these experiences prior to going into the workforce as a nurse are really helpful,” Johnson said. “It can be a hard topic to navigate and discuss because it’s not something you normally talk about.”

**The Sinclair School of Nursing has implemented the training to get students comfortable with showing empathy and asking difficult questions with sensitivity. The training is part of the curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate students, Lea Wood, director of simulation, said.**

It's also a response to the prevalence of intimate partner violence in the country. Approximately one in four women and one in seven men in the U.S. have experienced severe intimate partner violence, according to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey.

“Assuming you care for more than four patients, health care providers will likely encounter someone who has been the victim of intimate partner violence,” Wood said.

**Creating confidence**

The battering isn't always in plain sight.
That's why the simulation has another type of "patient" — one who is emotionally, not physically, bruised. In these cases, nurses have to ask more extensive questions about the abuse.

**Both of these exercises help prepare nurses who are better trained to deal with this kind of violence, said Judith Miller, Sinclair School of Nursing dean.**

“If you understand how to do these screenings in a very respectful, caring way, then the simulation experience can lead to them being more confident in the real world,” Miller said. “If you practice these skills in a setting that is protected, then you’ll be more comfortable with them in the long run.”

The program was designed to make the interviews routine by walking nursing students through the process. The simulation is part of Wood's research on intimate partner violence and results have been published by the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning.

Students are given guidance on the questions to ask, and even what kinds of facial expressions show empathy instead of judgment.

“Our entire goal is to give our students the exposure to these delicate situations,” Wood said. “We want to give them the chance to ask these questions in a safe environment where there is no judgment from others.”

Students typically go in nervous, with some even shaking, but they come out talking about how much more capable they feel. That's how it looked Wednesday when about 15 pairs of students went through the training in an afternoon session.

Graduate nursing student Nicole O’Rourke said she was nervous going into the simulation, but she knew she had to overcome her nerves to learn.

“Unfortunately, we see intimate partner violence a lot in health care, so it’s important to prepare yourself as much as you can,” O’Rourke said.
Most of the nerves arise from the fear of asking a question that might be offensive. However, Wood said, it’s much better to find out if a question is offensive in the simulation than in a real clinical setting.

“The (patient role players) give the students a lot of insight on what is OK to ask and what is not OK to ask,” Wood said. “They all have personal opinions on whether a question is offensive, or worded in a bad way, and it’s helpful to hear all the different perspectives.”

**A unique approach**

There are no uniform national guidelines for screening people for intimate partner violence, Wood said.

Several national organizations, such as the American College of Physicians and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend various approaches. Some say to screen yearly, some say to screen only women and some say to only screen if the patient is obviously bruised.

“There is no clear consensus on who we should screen and how often we should screen them,” Wood said. "This creates even more confusion and less screenings."

Wood said the Sinclair School of Nursing doesn't use one of these guidelines but combined several of them to create their own standards and training.

These simulations take place once a year for graduate students and once a semester for undergraduate students.

The training is the first of its kind in the U.S., according to Wood, and she said she hopes other nursing programs would emulate it.

“I’m sure a lot of courses in women’s health and mental health talk about it, but after a lot of research, I found that we are the first to publish and present this hybrid simulation,” Wood
said. “I hope it encourages more training programs and leads to more people screening for intimate partner violence."

She pointed out there's more screening for tobacco use than there is for intimate partner violence. "We say you should screen every patient every visit," she said.

Screenings should take place in all health care settings because of the prevalence of the problem, Wood said.

"It happens everywhere, not just in the emergency room, and that is the caveat," she said. "No matter where you are, you’re going to encounter this violence, and that is why it's so important to screen for it so frequently."

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**University of Missouri struggles to retain black faculty**

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Black faculty members at the University of Missouri say the school needs to reconsider retention tactics if it hopes to recruit and keep faculty of color.

The Columbia Missourian reports that last fall, student activist group Concerned Student 1950 demanded an increase in black faculty and staff at the university to 10 percent, up from the current 2.8 percent, by the 2017 to 2018 academic year. University officials have indicated their intention to recruit faculty of color.
But nine former faculty members told administrators in November that the effort will be all for nothing if the university can't retain them.

"There have been several assistant professors hired, and a great number of them left before their fourth year," Flore Zéphir, professor of French and director of the Afro-Romance Institute. "Something is wrong. What had happened in Columbia or in their department that made them leave as soon as they could?"

Black faculty often spend more time mentoring non-white students and faculty, making arguments for promotion, and participating on boards and committees, challenges that have been enough for some to leave.

Noelle Witherspoon Arnold, a former MU faculty member in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, left the university last semester after five years there. She said part of her decision was that she noticed what she called alarming trends of women and faculty of color hitting a ceiling when it came to job promotions and salary increases.

"There were leadership opportunities in my department, and my department was extremely supportive. However, a lot of the leadership in the college were not people of color, and I just sort of felt like there was nowhere for me personally to go as far as advancing," Arnold said.

Arnold said the hiring of Chuck Henson as the school's interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity was fine, but "I would like to see Mizzou actually dedicate a large amount of funding specifically to diversity and inclusion and then earmarking that money for faculty retention. ... I think it's going to have to be a devotion of money and resources rather than just programming, because programming has happened and programming turns into a simple platitude."
THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

MARCH 21, 2016 2:59 PM

Could Donald Trump bring down Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri?

Republican incumbent faces viable challenger

Donald Trump or Ted Cruz might have down-ballot impacts

Race might determine which party controls U.S. Senate

BY CURTIS TATE
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WASHINGTON - A few months ago, it looked as if Republican Sen. Roy Blunt would have an easy time winning a second term.

But the combination of a viable Democratic challenger and a chaotic presidential primary that’s poised to put Donald Trump at the top of the GOP ticket could make Missouri’s U.S. Senate race more competitive than anyone had thought.

This year’s wildly unpredictable presidential election has created the possibility that Blunt will have to have to distance himself from his party’s standard bearer in order to defeat Democrat Jason Kander, say longtime Missouri political observers.

“**It was one of the seats people saw as an outside chance of being competitive,”** said Peverill Squire, a political science professor at the University of Missouri. **“The odds are better now.”**

The altered landscape means Missouri might have a more decisive role in determining which party controls the Senate next year. And Kander is optimistic about his chances: “I expect it’s going to be a very close race in Missouri,” he said in an interview.
Republicans currently have 54 Senate seats in Washington, a majority they just gained two years ago. But they are defending 24 seats this year, including Blunt’s.

Democrats have 46 seats, including two independents. They would need to pick up only five to retake the majority. The nonpartisan Cook Political Report rates four of those races – Florida, Illinois, New Hampshire and Wisconsin – as “toss-ups.”

Missouri, currently rated by Cook as “likely Republican,” could tip the balance. The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee is bullish it can.

“There are opportunities this year,” said Lauren Passalacqua, a spokeswoman for the committee. “Missouri is one of the places where we can expand the map.”

Democrats think they have a shot with Kander, a 34-year-old veteran of the war in Afghanistan who was elected Missouri secretary of state in 2012.

That’s an office Blunt himself held from 1984 to 1993. He then served seven terms in the House of Representatives before being elected to the Senate in 2010.

“He’s in a good spot for an incumbent in Missouri,” James Harris, a Republican political consultant, said of Blunt. “He’s got a fair bit of resources.”

This year, however, the same anti-Washington mood that’s propelled Trump and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz to the front of the Republican presidential pack might prove challenging to Blunt, who, as vice chairman of the Republican Conference, is a member of the Senate leadership.

Trump and Cruz have harnessed voters’ frustration by running against Washington, leaving veteran Republicans such as Blunt in an awkward spot.

Still, Blunt, 66, has clear advantages in incumbency, fundraising and name recognition.

Tate O’Connor, a spokesman for Blunt’s campaign, said the senator had visited every county in Missouri, “and his conservative message is resonating with voters.”

“No one works harder for Missourians every day than Roy Blunt,” O’Connor said.

Jennifer Duffy, senior editor of the Cook Political Report, said she was watching the race very closely but hadn’t seen enough evidence to rate it as more competitive.
“They’re throwing things at Blunt really hard,” she said. “I also know Blunt runs really good campaigns.”

Still, Duffy said, any Republican campaign manager this year shouldn’t take any chances. “I would operate under the assumption that Trump will hurt,” she said. “Don’t wait and see.”

Blunt has not explicitly endorsed either Trump or Cruz. Ahead of last week’s Republican presidential primary in the state, he steered clear of both his party’s leading candidates.

Trump edged Cruz by a bit more than 1,700 votes in unofficial results. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton edged out Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders in the Democratic presidential primary.

Although he has endorsed Clinton, Kander said he understood the frustration voters felt. “I don’t think Donald Trump on the ballot hurts me at all,” Kander said. “Some of them will vote for me, too.”

Clinton has a “great shot” to win Missouri, he added.

That would buck a trend in recent years where Democrats still win statewide races in Missouri but lose at the presidential level. The state hasn’t voted for a Democrat for president since Bill Clinton in 1996.

“We’ve gone Republican at the presidential level,” said Daniel Ponder, a political science professor at Drury University, “but it’s not a lock statewide.”


Blunt’s fundraising numbers might be a sign that he’s taking Kander seriously.

As of Dec. 31, the most recent Federal Election Commission numbers available, Blunt had raised more than $9 million to Kander’s $3.2 million. Blunt spent $12 million to beat then-Missouri Secretary of State Robin Carnahan in 2010.

Two Republican Senate incumbents whose races are rated as toss-ups, Illinois’ Mark Kirk and Wisconsin’s Ron Johnson, had also raised more than $9 million as of Dec. 31.
Kander is likely to do well in the urban cores of Kansas City and St. Louis, and he might attract some swing voters in the suburban counties at each end of the state. But conservative southern Missouri is Blunt’s home turf. To win statewide, Kander will have to narrow the margin there.

“If you look at the Democrats who’ve been successful,” Harris said, “they’ve done that.”

Still, with more than half a year to go until November, there are lots of unknown factors that could push the race in one direction or the other.

Republicans face the prospect of a contested convention, where neither Trump nor Cruz has secured enough delegates to win the nomination.

If Trump is the nominee, some Republicans have floated the idea of an independent challenger who could split the vote in November. Or Trump could drive Democrats to turn out, hurting Republicans down the ballot, including Blunt.

“From an incumbent’s perspective,” Squire said, “unknowns are very worrisome.”

Kander, though, is taking on an experienced lawmaker with a deep war chest. And Trump could not only drive Republican turnout higher, he could also pick off disaffected Democrats who are frustrated with both parties or unenthusiastic about Clinton.

Clinton will need to mobilize her voters to give Kander a boost where he needs it.

“I don’t think there’s anything in our recent history that even comes close to this,” Squire said.
False alarm leads students to ask MU Alert for follow-up texts

COLUMBIA - University of Missouri students are asking MU Alert for more precision when it comes to sending out 'shots fired' alerts.

MU Alert sent out a 'shots fired' tweet, text and email Sunday night for the second time in 15 days.

KOMU 8 News reached out to the MU News Bureau but it declined to talk on camera, referring to the MU Alert website.

MU student Clayton Davis said the alerts are coming off as random.

"My first thought was 'uh oh, not again' because these things have happened before when they've send out alerts about shots fired," Davis said. "Actually there was one a week or two weeks ago."

Other students tweeted back at the alert and asked for more information.

Bryan Mink tweeted, "Is there a general area of campus you can tell us to be cautious of?"

MU Alert tweeted back, "Working to confirm with police. Will post as soon as it is."

Tony Barton said he thinks the system needs more work and alerts should be more precise.

"I appreciate them sending out a notification just to be safe," Barton said. "But the university is kind of large in terms of area. So they tell us to avoid campus at some times and to take precautionary measures. But the last few times they report shots fired have been nothing."

MU said it's first alert sent to students and tweeted out is an automatic post that goes out with a report. After the initial notification, MU said it then confirms the incident and it posts updates from there.
Sean Walsh said he thinks MU should confirm the incident before sending an alert.

"I would much rather them confirm the information before being sent it out," Walsh said. "Last night could've just been 'boy crying wolf' and it frightened a lot of people. I know that a couple of my friends felt unsafe walking back from Ellis last night just because the alert was so vague. They need to confirm more information with the caller before sending out a blast text to perhaps 32,000+ people and scaring them."

Davis said it's a good thing the alerts are prompt because it initially makes people feel safer.

"I would say it's good to be better safe than sorry," Davis said. "If there's a chance that there might be shots fired, better to let people know the police's first suspicion rather than not saying anything at all."

MU Alert said it posts updates online, but Barton said he would like to see follow-up texts too.

"I would like a follow-up message when they have more information as opposed to what they've been doing for years, which is leaving us in the dark," Barton said.

Fireworks blamed for Sunday reports of gunfire near University of Missouri

By Rudi Keller

Monday, March 21, 2016 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri’s campus alert system was triggered just before midnight Sunday by a report of possible shots fired near the intersection of Providence Road and Stewart Road.

An investigation by the Columbia Police Department showed the noise was fireworks, spokeswoman Officer Latisha Stroer wrote in an email.

Seven minutes after the initial alert was sent via text at 11:58 p.m., it was updated to show there was no danger. It was the second time in two weeks that an incident reported as possible shots being fired near campus found no cause for concern.
“We try to monitor things that are near campus that might pose a threat,” said Major Scott Richardson of the MU Police Department. An on-duty supervisor determines whether there is a threat, Richardson said.

Boone County Public Safety Joint Communications also received a report about 12:40 p.m. of possible shots being fired on Brandon Road, one block north of Stadium Boulevard and west of Providence Road. That report also turned out to be fireworks, Stroer wrote.

That incident did not result in an alert. The difference, Richardson said, is that the late-night fireworks also resulted in calls to the MU police dispatcher while the afternoon call did not.

“We received a call of three shots possibly being fired and we responded to that area,” he said. “Then we received an additional call after the alert went out and that person said they had seen the fireworks.”

On March 6, the alert system was triggered by reports that shots were fired in the alley between the Lofts at 308 S. Ninth St. and the Hitt Street Garage. Officers found no evidence that shots were fired.

The alert system provides text messages, emails and online reports intended to inform students, faculty and staff about possible dangers, Richardson said. The system is designed to put people on their guard in case a situation poses a true danger, he said.

“It goes out to our community until we can determine what else is going on,” he said.
JEFFERSON CITY - The fever that gripped the Missouri Senate for two weeks appears to have broken.

But the hard feelings that nearly short circuited the legislative session remain.

The Senate has been consumed by a “religious freedom” amendment to the state’s constitution since March 7, when Democrats kicked off what became a 39-hour filibuster of the bill. Republicans responded with a rarely-used procedural maneuver that cut off debate and forced a vote, which in turn sparked a week of Democratic stall tactics in retaliation.

The impasse had many Capitol veterans worried the legislative session had been derailed, with little hope of getting back on track before May 13 adjournment.

As lawmakers head home for spring break this week – the mid-point of the annual legislative session – both sides seem ready for détente. The state’s $27 billion budget still must be finalized, along with a long list of legislative priorities.

Yet any accord will be a fragile one, in danger of being shattered as controversial topics like guns on campus and voter ID remain on the horizon.

“As long as there are bills on the (senate) calendar that would undermine Missourians’ rights, I’m willing to be part of a group that would slowdown the Senate for as long as possible,” said Sen. Jill Schupp, a St. Louis County Democrat.

For his part, Senate President Pro Tem Ron Richard, a Joplin Republican, says he sees no reason why the Senate can’t get back to business. And he sees no reason to apologize to Democrats for ending their filibuster.

“All I did was stop debate and go to the vote,” Richard said. “I don’t need to mend any fences for following the rules.”

**Ethics reform**

When lawmakers return to the Capitol later this month, one of the first topics they’ll face is legislative ethics reform.

The issue was a top priority of legislative leaders following a year of scandal that resulted in two lawmakers resigning in disgrace over revelations of inappropriate conduct with interns.
The Missouri House quickly approved seven bills within the first month of the session and sent them to the Senate.

The Senate has debated four of those measures, to vary degrees of success.

A proposed one-year cooling off period for lawmakers before they can become lobbyists was watered down by the Senate. A bill restricting how campaign money can be invested was beefed up to add more restrictions on former legislators. A lobbyist gift ban was set aside, as Senators heatedly disagreed over whether a ban was needed.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Kehoe, a Jefferson City Republican, said the fourth bill, which would ban legislators from working as paid political consultants while in office, will likely be sent to the governor shortly after spring break.

**Voter ID**

No issue threatens the peace in the Missouri Senate more than a bill mandating voters provide a government-issued photo ID before being allowed to cast a ballot.

It’s been a GOP priority in Missouri for more than a decade. But every year it runs into insurmountable roadblocks, from courts that deemed the idea unconstitutional to Gov. Jay Nixon’s veto pen.

This year, with massive veto-proof super majorities in both the House and Senate, Republicans expect 2016 to finally be the year voter ID gets across the finish line.

The only thing that stands in their way is another Democratic filibuster. And Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, a St. Louis Democrat, has promised to lead the filibuster if voter ID is brought up on the Senate floor.

Nasheed believes the bill would disfranchise thousands of Missourians, particularly people of color and those living in poverty.

Another extended filibuster could lead Republicans to once again cut off debate using the procedure known as “moving the previous question,” or “PQ.”

And that could irrevocably break the Senate.

“The filibuster is a tool,” Kehoe said. “The PQ is a tool. I don’t want to say there’s only one way to get to an end on (voter ID). Democrats know it’s an important issue to us. There’s no way of knowing how that ends.”
Schupp said she’s hopeful both sides can sit down after spring break and discuss how the Senate can function for the next two months and avoid another confrontation.

“If we have to do this, if we have to pass voter ID, is there any way to make it a little less horrific to the Democrats?” Schupp said. “I don’t know that there is, but we want to have that conversation. And we want to talk about what other divisive issues they’d be willing to take off the table to give them voter ID.”

**Mizzou**

**As the Senate begins its deliberations on the state’s $27 billion budget, the fate of the University of Missouri looms large.**

The House voted to cut nearly $8 million from the budget of the UM System administration, which includes the president’s office and the board of curators. An additional $1 million was taken from the Columbia campus’s budget and redirected to Lincoln University in Jefferson City.

Both moves were in response to a year of unrest over racial tensions on the school’s flagship Columbia campus.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, a Columbia Republican, expressed support for the moves Thursday, saying “there has to be accountability for bad management.”

“The only tool we have to hold the University of Missouri accountable is the budget,” Schaefer said.

The university system received $434 million in state funds for the budget of the current fiscal year that ends July 1.

**Final stretch**

The list of proposals lawmakers may consider in the session’s final two months is long.

The “religious freedom” bill that derailed the Senate is now in the hands of the Missouri House. If passed, voters would be asked later this year whether to amend the state’s constitution to allow certain individuals and businesses to refuse service to same-sex couples based on religious grounds.
Senate leaders have vowed to debate possible solutions to cover a gap in funding for Missouri’s roads and bridges, although widespread opposition to any tax increase will likely make that debate difficult.

Bills allowing concealed weapons to be carried on campus, and implementing new restrictions on abortion providers, are also expected to get a lot of debate.

Kansas City officials are closely watching bills that would eliminate the city’s 1 percent earnings tax, repeal local regulations on taxis and vehicle for hire companies like Uber, and limit punishments that can be doled out by municipal courts.

Richard, the Senate president, said Republicans still hold 24 of the Senate’s 34 seats. The last two weeks of Democrat stall tactics won’t change the way the Senate operates moving forward, he said.

“We’re still (24),” he said, “so we’re still going to move on our business as the majority party.”