Parental roles matter in fostering relationships between children, stepgrandparents

Popular television shows such as "Modern Family" and the "Brady Bunch" brought the dynamics of stepfamilies into mainstream pop culture. However, as families become increasingly diverse and complex, defining family membership remains ambiguous. Now, researchers from the University of Missouri's College of Human Environmental Sciences and Sinclair School of Nursing are shedding new light on what happens within a family when the stepgrandparent had no active role in raising the parent of the stepgrandchild. Their findings indicate that how a parent behaves toward the stepgrandparent determines the relationship between their child and the stepgrandparent.

"In our research on families, we had theorized that there were three distinct types of stepgrandparents: long-term, later life and inherited," said Marilyn Coleman, Curators' Professor of Human Development and Family Science. "However, we now have found that a fourth pathway to becoming a stepgrandparent exists. In cases where stepgrandparents did not help raise their stepgrandchildren's parents, but have been in the lives of stepgrandchildren from birth or early childhood, the grandparent role, in essence, skips a generation."

Coleman, along with Larry Ganong, co-chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Science and Ashton Chapman, a doctoral student at MU, examined 35 relationships involving skip-generation stepgrandparents to understand what determined strong relationships within the family unit. They conducted interviews with stepgrandchildren to determine relational history, the benefits and challenges related to being a stepgrandchild and general feelings and attitudes about the stepgrandparent.

They found that the relationship between stepgrandchild and stepgrandparent was influenced by cultural stereotypes, the parent's relationship with the stepgrandparents and the parent's role as "gatekeeper" either facilitating or inhibiting the relationship. They also found that in every instance, the stepgrandchild mirrored their parent's relationship and perception of the stepgrandparent. In cases where the parent modeled a close relationship with the stepgrandparent and facilitated bonding between the stepgrandparent and child, kinship in the family was stronger. In cases where the parent felt torn between biological parents and stepparents, those feelings could transfer to their children impacting relationships with stepgrandparents.

"When it comes to family, norms and obligations matter," Chapman said. "Understanding who is supposed to do what and how family members are identified affects the family dynamic. If the stepgrandchild knows from day one that a stepgrandfather is simply grandpa, his role will be more important in the child's life."
"Relational ties in stepfamilies can be convoluted and difficult to navigate," Ganong said. "Yet, established boundaries and understanding can strengthen family bonds, even when the family tree looks more like a family bush."

MU is expected to announce a major orthopedic donation

The donation will help fund research for regenerative orthopedics

The University of Missouri is expected to unveil a donation to help fund research for regenerative orthopedics.

Regenerative therapies aim to help patients heal from injuries when their bodies can't do it on their own. Specifically for orthopedics, this can include shoulder injuries, different joint injuries and even arthritis pain.

Thursday's donation is set to be used for research so the 30 university orthopedic surgeons have the possibility of using a regenerative technique in the future.

The donation will be at least $1 million, according to a university spokesperson.

The donation announcement will take place at 9 a.m. Thursday at the Reynolds Alumni Center.

MU interim chancellor, Hank Foley will be there along with the dean of the MU School of Medicine, Patrick Delafontaine. James Stannard, the chair of orthopedic surgery and medical director of the Missouri Orthopedic Institute will also be there as well as the director of the MU Comparative Orthopedic Laboratory, James Cook.
GOP lawmakers hold back Kansas and Missouri in fight against hunger

Food insecurity is a growing problem in Missouri, Kansas and throughout the United States

Low-income families still suffering effects of Great Recession

*The Editorial Board*

In bills passed the last few years, callous Kansas and Missouri lawmakers have shown little regard for the increased struggles of low-income families to get enough to eat.

The GOP-controlled Kansas Legislature just days ago harshly agreed to reduce the lifetime limit for welfare to families from three to two years. Gov. Sam Brownback had signed the old three-year limit into effect in 2015. Soon, the new restriction will be three years less than allowed by federal law.

In Missouri, about 26,000 residents lost food stamp benefits last month for failing to comply with work and job training requirements. They took effect in 2016 after the Republican-dominated General Assembly enacted a law barring the state from waiving work requirements until 2019, overriding a veto by Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon along the way.

These state lawmakers are doing exactly the opposite of what advocates for the poor had hoped. But there is no state or federal department for hunger, said Sandy Rikoon, dean of the College of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Missouri-Columbia and director of the Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security.

People who are poor are essentially voiceless as federal and state lawmakers react to enormous pressure to decrease spending. Kansas and Missouri continue to show that cuts are done at the expense of the less well off.

But for the health of all people in Kansas and Missouri, policymakers should pay attention to reports that show food insecurity is a persistent post-recession problem.

A new Missouri Hunger Atlas 2016 report from Rikoon’s food security center lists the state with a food insecurity rate greater than 16 percent. That’s 1 million Missourians, or one in six persons, who lacked adequate access to enough food.
For adults, food insecurity can cause work absenteeism, income losses and increased health care costs. For children it can lower school performance.

A Feeding America report puts food insecurity in the U.S. at 15.4 percent, affecting 48.1 million Americans. In Kansas it’s 14.2 percent. Of the people in the 26-county service area for Harvesters — The Community Food Network, 15.3 percent of the population is at risk of hunger.

In the Kansas City area, food insecurity is highest in Jackson and Wyandotte counties. In juggling housing, utility, transportation and other expenses, food often is sacrificed.

With public aid reduced, people are turning to food pantries, soup kitchens and churches for help. The agencies are having a difficult time coming up with enough donated goods to keep up with the demand.

Sarah Biles, director of communications with Harvesters, said last year Harvesters took in and distributed 46 million pounds of food. This year the amount is expected to be more than 48 million pounds.

Hunger is a big and growing concern that lawmakers must take seriously. In Harvesters’ service area, the average cost of a meal has increased 4 percent in the last year to $2.83. The increase adds up, straining food budgets.

Solutions include lawmakers raising the minimum wage so salaries cover families’ expenses and provide enough food. The restrictions on welfare benefits also must be loosened to provide families and children with a safety net.

Lawmakers have the power to do all of this. They just need to find the political will.

University of Missouri graduate council urges recognition of union

The University of Missouri Graduate Professional Council on Tuesday voted to support efforts of the Coalition of Graduate Workers to win recognition as a union.
A resolution on behalf of the graduate assistants who voted April 18 and 19 to create a union was approved on a voice vote. The resolution called the vote "a legitimate democratic expression of desire for union representation" and called on MU to recognize the results.

Approximately 30 percent of the graduate assistants voted in the election, with 84 percent of votes supporting a union. The university does not recognize the graduate assistants as employees. Leaders of the unionization movement have said they are prepared to go to court to win recognition.

The Coalition of Graduate Workers was formed from an organization created by graduate assistants in response to an August decision to eliminate subsidized health insurance. The assistants are not included in the general insurance coverage for university employees and the practice of buying individual plans as part of their compensation violated new IRS rules for insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

The university reinstated the insurance subsidy and will provide it next year after the IRS gave the school more time to comply with its interpretation of the ACA. The university has also increased the minimum cash stipend for some doctoral students.

**University of Missouri turmoil to be used as selling point in presidential search**

*When the University of Missouri Presidential Search Committee on Wednesday discussed how to persuade a reluctant candidate to consider applying, Curator Donald Cupps had a straightforward pitch to offer.*

“Last year we had more problems than a run-over dog and we still got a 4 percent increase,” Cupps said.

In that sentence, Cupps summed up events since August that put unprecedented national and international attention on the university as a result of campus protests, graduate assistant employment issues, faculty dissension and administrative infighting. The 4 percent refers to the
funding boost granted by state lawmakers for the coming fiscal year despite political antagonism the campus problems generated.

The university is looking for a permanent replacement for Tim Wolfe, who resigned Nov. 9 during ongoing protests over racial issues by Concerned Student 1950. At first defiant, Wolfe reversed himself when the Tiger football team joined the protest by boycotting athletic activities. Interim President Mike Middleton, called from retirement to take over, has said he is not interested in the permanent position.

News coverage of the protests, the boycott and Wolfe’s resignation made the public aware of the turmoil and publications that focus on higher education — and are read by almost all likely candidates — explored the issues in detail. During the committee meeting, members discussed how to present those difficulties in the 11-page position profile document and in one-on-one conversations with prospects.

“In the last few years, the System and its campuses have lived, like many other universities in the nation, through racial tension, student protest, and leadership turnover, especially at the University of Missouri-Columbia campus,” the document, which won preliminary approval, states. “Important grievances surfaced and the University has moved deliberately to address them.”

The document lists nine “opportunities and challenges” that include repairing the university’s fractured relationship with the public and political leaders and leading "a statewide conversation about the value of diversity, inclusion, equity, and respect."

The final document, with committee edits, will be approved by committee co-chairs Cheryl Walker and Jim Whitaker before it is distributed to potential candidates. One part of the discussion Wednesday focused on how to describe the role of system administration in the operation of the university.

Consultant John Isaacson of Isaacson Miller Inc. wrote that in 1963, the state “created a powerful university system to serve the whole state.” He defended the word powerful because it contrasts with the advisory role, with little direct authority, in the design of some other university systems.

“The theme is important — most university systems are meaningless and this one is formidable,” Isaacson said.

The document is not intended to be widely distributed, but instead it will be used to get the attention of candidates who are being actively recruited to apply, he said.
The one-on-one conversations with prospects will be an important part of recruiting, he said.

“The problem we are trying to solve is a candidate who says it is politically impossible, doesn't want the job,” he said.

Conversations with prospects should emphasize that the Columbia campus is functioning normally and that the disruptions of the fall have made the university take a look at itself, committee member Stephanie Shonekan, chairwoman of the Black Studies Department at MU, said.

“I would definitely highlight upfront that the University of Missouri System is at the forefront of addressing the issues of diversity and equity on campus,” Shonekan said. “It makes us a leader, it makes us a system that other university systems are looking toward.”

UM System presidential search committee approves position profile, talks sales pitch
RACHEL PHILLIPS, 14 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — The next University of Missouri System president will be expected to lead a statewide conversation about diversity, inclusion, equity and respect, create a vision for the UM System and assemble a leadership team, according to a new job description.

The UM System presidential search committee discussed minor revisions to the "president position profile document" before approving it during a meeting Wednesday. The UM System Board of Curators also approved the job profile when members met after the search committee's meeting. Both meetings were conducted by teleconference.

The position profile lays out information on the presidential search and the UM System's background, as well as the qualifications and expectations listed in the President Qualifications Statement the committee approved at its April 14 meeting.
According to the profile, the future president must also:

- "Create an enduring social compact with the citizens of the state of Missouri and their elected officials."
- "Assist each campus in authoring and especially in executing a business and strategic plan that enables each campus to develop its unique and appropriate mission and allows the whole system to thrive."
- "Steward the resources of the university to promote the mission in a responsible, equitable and efficient manner that maximizes value to the taxpayers of the state of Missouri."

Leading up to the creation of the documents, public forums were held on each of the system's four campuses to discuss desired qualifications. One-on-one interviews and group sessions also occurred. The committee also accepted input online and by email.

John Isaacson, chair of the search firm Isaacson, Miller, said the position profile is a public document that will be used with potential candidates to get them interested in the job.

"It's part of the art of persuasion," he said.

The search firm and search committee were careful not to sugarcoat the situation when writing the document, board chair Pamela Henrickson said after the meeting.

“The person who sits on top of that (UM System) has a lot of ability to move Missouri forward, and that’s what we want to emphasize,” she said.

The position profile requires one more approval from the search committee co-chairs. Kelley Stuck, the UM System interim vice president for human resources, said it will be finalized in the next day or so, then posted online. Advertisements will be placed in various publications.

The search firm will continue to develop the pool of candidates and begin screening them. Stuck said the committee will begin to review candidates at its June meeting.
UM spokesman John Fougere said in an email that to the best of his knowledge and from a review of archived documents there was no comparable position profile document created during the 2011 presidential search process, only a qualification statement and an advertisement.

During the meeting, search committee members also weighed in on the subjects that should be included when trying to persuade candidates. Committee member and MU associate professor Stephanie Shonekan said that despite challenges, the UM System is not a war zone but rather a wonderful place.

"I would like to just make sure that the flavor of the pitch is couched in a way that takes the elephant in the room and makes it like a beautiful poodle," she said.

Committee members also said that despite problems, the system is still hanging on and playing an important role in Missouri.

"Last year, we had more problems than a run-over dog, and we still got a 4 percent increase (in appropriations)," curator Donald Cupps said.

Following the meeting, Henrickson said the board still planned to have a new president by the end of the year.

Former UM System President Tim Wolfe resigned Nov. 9 amid campus protests. Mike Middleton was appointed to serve as interim UM System president on Nov. 12.
Columbia, MO — **University of Missouri Curators are one step closer to choosing a new System President.**

The Curators approved a profile document on Wednesday morning that describes job qualifications to potential candidates.

Members of the University's Presidential Search Committee approved a list of qualifications during their meeting last month.

University leaders expect a large response from potential candidates during the next several months.

Board of Curators Chair Pamela Henrickson said, "Like many other things in life, you only need one. You need the right one. Whether we get 6 candidates or 3 or 30, we only need one."

The Curators are searching for a new University System President after former President Tim Wolfe resigned in November following student protests and racial unrest on the Mizzou campus.

**UM Curators finalize Presidential search document**


*The University of Missouri Curators and the Presidential Search Committee have finalized the document the search firm will use to find candidates.*
In Wednesday morning’s meeting, the group tweaked language and details in the document. Some examples include adding “international students” to the document when talking about groups of inclusion.

The group also discussed the financial information to add in the document. They wanted to make sure to include budget numbers and how much the institution gets from the state and be as accurate as possible.

Our ABC 17 News crews spoke with Curator Pamela Henrickson after the meeting. Henrickson said they wanted to make sure the most accurate information is available to the candidates.

"In an organization the size of this one, the source of the funds that run the place are very important to the person at the top of the organization," Henrickson said.

Another part of the document described how each campus operates under their own "individual strategic plans". One curator mentioned this was important for the campuses to know the new president won’t create new plans for each campus.

The document also said the new president should "improve student success", "promote the mission" of the University, and empower a "team of leaders".

**THE KANSAS CITY STAR.**

**University of Missouri projects low freshman enrollment**

The university will enroll its smallest class of new students since 2006
As of last week, more than 4,700 students had paid a $300 enrollment deposit
That’s a 22 percent decline from this school year

*From staff and news services*

**The University of Missouri will have the smallest class of new students this fall since 2006, according to recent projections that show the loss of new enrollments could be higher than previous predictions.**
Projections in February were that freshman enrollment could be down as much as 900 and the overall campus loss would be about 1,500. University officials at the time were predicting a $32 million deficit, translating to hundreds of positions affected.

With new projections in, Christian Basi, university spokesman, said it may be Friday before a new dollar impact is determined.

“We have known for months that our freshman class would be smaller than last fall, and with both resident and nonresident deposits lagging well behind last year’s numbers, this May 1 report confirms that we will have an entering class of fewer than 5,000,” said Barbara Rupp, interim vice provost for enrollment management.

Rupp said that as of last week, more than 4,700 students had paid a $300 enrollment deposit, which was refundable through Sunday.

That’s a more than 22 percent decline from this school year’s total of nearly 6,200 students.

This fall’s enrollment will include about 4,800 new freshmen if the projected pattern holds. The university enrolled just more than that number in fall 2006.

After earlier projections in February, Interim Chancellor Hank Foley instructed campus divisions to cut their budgets by 5 percent, including a hiring and wages freeze.

This year’s total enrollment is nearly 35,500.

Basi said the total decline from this year is difficult to determine with the potential loss of new freshmen now at more than 1,400.

In January, university officials said they believed that race-related protests that erupted on the Columbia campus in November and put MU under a national spotlight contributed to a projected drop in enrollment.

The latest numbers show that African-American applications have decreased by 69 and deposits have decreased by 214 from one year ago.

But Hispanic applications have increased by 33 from this time last year. Deposits from Hispanic students, though, are down by 71.

Applications and deposits from international and transfer students also are down.

This year’s total freshman class of 7,600 includes students who are in their second year who did not have 30 credit hours when the fall semester began as well as students who transferred with credit.
“A lot of this is asking us to speculate right now,” Basi said. “We are focused on working toward retention rates to make sure students are successful here.”

Basi said the university message to prospective students and their parents is that “our mission is going on unabated.”

While donations to the university dropped off in November and December, Basi said, donors still committed more than $65 million in donations since the kickoff of MU’s comprehensive fundraising campaign in October. And MU researchers received commitments of more than $37 million in grant dollars from the federal government and nearly $19 million in nonfederal grant dollars.

“We have these wonderful things happening,” Basi said. “The problem is we are having a difficult time getting that message out.”

**Mizzou's enrollment plummet is more drastic than previously projected**

By Koran Addo St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 14 hrs ago

This fall could mark the smallest class of incoming freshmen at the University of Missouri-Columbia in nearly a decade as the school continues to lose students, partly because of last fall’s protests.

The university on Wednesday announced the amount of students paying freshman tuition deposits — a key indicator of coming enrollment — has decreased by 1,470 compared to last year.

It's nearly 600 fewer students than what was projected in February, when the university was estimating 900 fewer incoming freshmen.
What it means is that Mizzou could have a freshman class of fewer than 5,000 students for the first time since 2007.

In contrast, the university enrolled 7,600 freshmen last fall. That number includes second-year students who did not complete enough credits to qualify as sophomores.

University administrators note that they’ve been expecting a drop-off for some time, as there are fewer high school students in the pipeline.

But last’s fall’s protests have also played a part.

“As we’ve been talking to prospective students and parents, we’ve been told the events of last fall have played a role in their decision-making process,” spokesman Christian Basi said.

School administrators have said they are seeing less interest from out-of-state students, and recruiters are hearing more concerns from students in the Chicago area, in particular.

Barbara Rupp, the university’s director of admissions, has said there’s potential to lose students from rural areas, given how polarizing last fall’s protests were.

The enrollment woes are just some of the problems Mizzou has faced since the campus found itself in the national spotlight late last year as students protested a series of racist incidents, eventually toppling the university’s top leadership.

State lawmakers threatened to cut Mizzou’s funding and donors rescinded roughly $2 million in pledges.

But Basi is adamant that the university is fundamentally healthy.

“Since November, our researchers have been awarded $50 million in grants,” he said. “And donors have given gifts exceeding $65 million, also since November.”
Even so, Basi said the university will be looking for possible tweaks to recruiting strategies with an eye toward the fall of 2017 class.

In particular, recruiters will expand to different parts of Chicago, Dallas and other cities, while working more closely with high school counselors to counter any stigma associated with Mizzou, he said.

In particular, Mizzou is battling a perception that its campus is unsafe.

“The events of last fall were nonviolent. We had no episodes of violence. And any threats were immediately acted upon,” Basi said.

He added that Mizzou’s police department has been protected from budget cuts, and the department is in the process of adding more officers.

“The perception out there is different from what a student would experience on campus,” Basi said. “The biggest thing is for students and parents is to come visit us and see what we have to offer.”
COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The University of Missouri will have the smallest class of new students this fall since 2006, according to recent projections that show the loss of new enrollments could be 50 percent or higher than previous predictions.

The interim vice provost for enrollment management says that as of last week, more than 4,700 students had paid a $300 enrollment deposit, which was refundable through Sunday. That's a more than 22 percent decline from this year's total of nearly 6,200 students.

This fall's enrollment will include about 4,800 new freshmen if the projected pattern holds. The university enrolled just more than that amount in fall 2006.

After earlier projections in February, interim chancellor Hank Foley instructed campus divisions to cut their budgets by 5 percent, including a hiring and wages freeze.

UPDATE: University of Missouri freshman class likely to be smallest since 2006

By RUDI KELLER

Wednesday, May 4, 2016 at 2:00 pm Comments (41)

The University of Missouri in the fall will have the smallest class of new college students since 2006, according to the latest projections that show the loss of new enrollments could be as much as 50 percent higher than previous forecasts.

The decline comes after a year of unprecedented national and international attention on MU, brought on by campus protests, graduate assistant employment issues, faculty dissension and administrative infighting.
As of last week, 4,738 students had paid a deposit of $300, which was refundable through Sunday, according to a memo from Barbara Rupp, interim vice provost for enrollment management. That is a 22.3 percent decline from this year’s total of 6,191 freshmen. It’s the smallest class since fall 2006, when MU enrolled 4,838 new freshmen out of a total student body of 28,253. This year’s total enrollment is 35,448.

In each of the past four years, the number of new freshmen who enroll in the fall has been within 100 of the May 1 paid deposits.

Interim Chancellor Hank Foley in February ordered campus divisions to cut their budgets by 5 percent, including a freeze on hiring and wages, when Rupp projected the loss of new freshmen would be 900 and the overall campus loss would be about 1,500.

Rupp’s memo reported 83 fewer deposits were received from transferring students and MU received 749 fewer applications for admission to graduate school. With the potential loss of new freshmen now at more than 1,400, the total decline from this year is difficult to gauge, spokesman Christian Basi said Tuesday.

“That’s where I can’t help you because that is something we are just not going to know until the first day of classes,” he said.

Managing enrollment is a responsibility of individual campuses, but the curators are paying attention, Board of Curators Chair Pam Henrickson said Wednesday. The unanswered question is whether the decline is the start of a trend or a one-time dip.

“It presents us with problems and opportunities, and we are going to try to take advantage of those opportunities and do better next year,” Henrickson said.

Tuition for the coming year, which will not change, will be formally set by the curators within a few weeks.

This year’s total freshman class of 7,600 includes students who transferred to the university with credit and students who are in their second year who did not have 30 credit hours when the fall semester began. In each of the past 10 years, the sophomore class has been about 80.5 percent as large as the freshman class, but long-term enrollment projections cannot be made at this time, Basi said.

“A lot of this is asking us to speculate right now,” he said. “We are focused on working toward retention rates to make sure students are successful here.”

The largest decline in deposits is in the largest school, the College of Arts and Science, where 520 fewer new students have paid deposits. Arts and Science has about 10,000 undergraduate and
graduate students. The School of Journalism, with 225 fewer first-time students, and the Trulaske College of Business, with 199 fewer, have the second- and third-largest declines in prospective students making deposits.

Out-of-state students, who pay more for tuition, make up the largest share of the decline in new students, with 887 fewer paid deposits than May 2015, according to Rupp’s memo.

There is little the university can do to recover the lost enrollment by the fall, Basi said.

“We are already having discussions of what activities do we need to be focusing on for our fall 2017 class,” he said. “We are finished with recruiting for fall of 2016. We will continue to talk to any students who have deposited money. We need to be looking toward the following fall as well.”

The curators expect the final document to be publicized on the presidential search committee’s website by Thursday.

The search committee wanted to make sure the firm would be able to get the point across that the University of Missouri System is a thriving institution. One member said, "we did not have a disaster, we had a challenge." She said the university "worked through it". She wanted to ensure candidates knew the university, specifically the Columbia campus, was not a "war zone".

The firm also asked the committee to tell them of any ongoing activities around the system aimed at bettering the racial tensions at the campuses so they could pass along the information to any candidates.

In return, the firm will provide bi-weekly summary reports of the work they've been doing.

The committee will meet again on June 16th in Columbia to review candidates. The committee expects to have a new University of Missouri System president by the end of the year.

**Missourinet**

*After protests, state legislature approves University of Missouri study commission*
The state legislature has called for a commission to study the University of Missouri’s administrative structure.

Many state lawmakers want to see what changes might have allowed MU to respond more quickly to protests last fall against racism, and to issues like the discipline of Professor Melissa Click. The proposal was offered by Senator Kurt Schaefer (R-Columbia), and some say it was partly responsible for the legislature restoring some funding that had been reduced from the University’s state aid, as many lawmakers were critical of the response to those protests and to Quick’s behavior.

Click was seen on camera calling for “some muscle” to keep a student journalist away from protesters last fall, and verbally assaulting a police officer in a separate incident.

Representative Caleb Jones (R-Columbia) says MU’s current rules and regulations could be slowing down responses.

“This is the legislature partnering with the University of Missouri to say, ‘Hey, we all are aware that there are plenty of things that have gone wrong, there are plenty of things that need to be changed, and we are going to stand with them to help them with … a different perspective of how some of these things could be changed,” said Rowden.

Many Democrats voted against the proposal. Assistant Minority Leader Gail McCann Beatty (D-Kansas City) said the University doesn’t need the legislature’s guidance.

“I believe the University has taken some steps. They’ve got a new president, a new chancellor, and we need to give the University the opportunity to make some changes before we, as a legislature, decide that we’re going to tell them how to move forward,” said McCann Beatty.

The House and Senate’s leaders will appoint the members of the commission.

MU researchers find association between dog-walking, physical health

The study focused on older adults and examined how emotional bonds with pets influenced dog-walking behavior.

By Kyra Haas

May 4, 2016

Dog-walking can improve the physical health of older adults, according to a study MU researchers published in March. The study suggests that emotional bonds between the person and the dog affect how frequently dog-walking occurs.
“People with higher degrees of pet bonding were more likely to walk their dog and to spend more time walking their dog each time,” the study stated. “The relationship with one’s dog may be a positive influence on physical activity for older adults.”

Graduate student Jessica Bibbo, who worked on the study, said the results were exciting because the study used national data. The bigger sample allowed for a generalization to the older adult population as a whole. Bibbo works at MU’s Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction (ReCHAI) and said the center often has to work with smaller, local samples.

Bibbo has been involved with several other studies and research projects as a research assistant at ReCHAI, but said this the first time a study she’s contributed to has gotten a lot of press coverage. Articles about the study recently appeared in publications such as Science Daily, Medical News Today and the Daily Mail.

Dog-walking was associated with lower body mass index, fewer activities of daily living limitations, fewer doctor visits and more frequent moderate and vigorous exercise, according to the study.

Bibbo’s mentor, ReCHAI Director Rachel Johnson, told the Daily Mail that retirement communities should incorporate more pet-friendly policies, such as dog-walking trails and dog exercise areas to provide their residents access to the health benefits.

The idea for the study came out of an assignment Bibbo had for a class last year. She was searching for a large sample so she could do a complex data analysis for her assignment when a particular data set caught her eye. The 2012 Health and Retirement Study, which is published every two years, included a module about human-animal interaction. This was the first time the study had included a human-animal interaction module.

Bibbo told Johnson, who has studied dog-walking since 2005, about the module. Bibbo also got in contact with Angela Curl, an assistant professor in the School of Social Work, who is an expert on this particular data.

“The three of us collaborated, and so between Dr. Curl’s expertise, the data set and Dr. Johnson’s expertise in dog-walking, that's how we chose our variables,” Bibbo said.

After they finished analyzing the data, the trio submitted its manuscript in July 2015, and it was published in March.
“It was a long academic process,” Bibbo said. “I mean, I don't think it was long for academia; it's just that academia is a long process.”

Bibbo said that while the results about dog-walking benefiting older adults’ health weren't surprising, the potential link between emotional bonds and prevalence of dog walking was exciting.

“It's not just having a dog,” Bibbo said. “Having a dog in the household isn't going to necessarily change behavior … We found is that the emotional relationship that we share with our companions may shape our behavior and that may have positive effects on health, as well as our emotional well-being.”

Washington watchdog group files complaint against Schaefer

JEFFERSON CITY — A Washington watchdog group has filed a five-count complaint against Missouri Senator Kurt Schaefer of Columbia, accusing him of using his office in a corrupt manner to illegally pressure the president of the University of Missouri and at least one curator to change a 41-year-old leave policy in order to harm a political opponent.

FACT, the Foundation for Accountability and Civic Trust, is a group whose stated mission is to expose unethical behavior to 'restore faith in our public officials.' The group filed a five-count complaint with the Missouri Ethics Commission accusing Schaefer of using his position as the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee to coerce and bribe University President Tim Wolfe and curator David Steelman into changing a university leave policy that would make it
difficult for university professor Josh Hawley to run against him in the republican primary for Attorney General.

FACT says that Steelman, in fact, "pushed to change a 41-year-old University policy in order to appease Schaeffer and protect funding for the University."

The Ethics Commission has declined to investigate the allegations, saying they are criminal in nature and therefore not under the commission's purview.

Schaefer's campaign spokesman Scott Dieckhaus said Hawley is behind the allegations. In a prepared statement, he said, "Professor Hawley's campaign is using organizations that operate in the shadows of the law, away from the light of campaign finance disclosure. I don't think this is appropriate for any campaign, but particularly not for someone who wants to be the state's chief law enforcement official. I challenge Hawley to disclose his ties to these groups and to demand that they disclose the source of the funds they are using to wage their meritless smear campaign."