MU hires its first chief diversity officer

Generated from News Bureau press release: “McDonald Named Interim Vice Chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity”

By Mará Rose Williams

The University of Missouri has its first permanent diversity, equity and inclusion officer.

Kevin McDonald, who has been the vice president and associate provost for diversity and inclusion at the Rochester Institute of Technology, will begin immediately as MU’s chief diversity officer.

He will also serve as interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity for the Columbia campus.

MU interim Chancellor Hank Foley said Monday that McDonald, who has also has been vice president for equity and inclusion at Virginia Tech and served in compliance roles at John Hopkins University and the University of Maryland in College Park, is “uniquely qualified to serve in this dual role” at MU.

“We’re at an important point in time in our history, and we don’t want to lose the momentum from all the work that has been completed,” said Foley. “Dr. McDonald’s expertise is just what we need to continue building on the progress that we have made over the past several months. I’m looking forward to working with him.”

Foley thanked Chuck Henson, who has served as interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity since November 2015.

The university quickly placed Henson in that newly created position following a series of racially charged student protests on campus, last November.

Concerned Student 1950, a predominantly black student group, accused the university of systemic oppression and demanded a list of changes including the hiring of more black faculty. The protests led to the resignations of university System President Tim Wolfe and R. Bowen Loftin, then chancellor on the Columbia campus.

One of the first moves to address inclusion, diversity and equity at Mizzou was mandatory training on diversity-related issues. During Henson’s tenure, more than 4,000 students, faculty and staff were trained.
In addition, MU’s diversity division streamlined required training on best practices to ensure a diverse pool of candidates for anyone involved in hiring faculty, including people on a search committee.

Henson also oversaw the university’s designing of new programs to help faculty and staff understand and discuss diversity issues on campus. And, MU partnered with the State Historical Society of Missouri to implement the “African-American Experience in Missouri” lecture series.

University of Missouri System diversity officer to serve dual role

By THE TRIBUNE'S STAFF

Monday, June 13, 2016 at 1:56 pm

Kevin McDonald, who on June 1 started work as chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer for the University of Missouri System, also will hold the title of interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity on the Columbia campus.

McDonald will take over from Chuck Henson, who held the post from Nov. 11 until he resigned April 29 to return to his post of associate dean at the MU School of Law.

The campus and system elevated the status of diversity and inclusion officers after fall protests over racial issues on the Columbia campus. McDonald is the first system-wide administrator to hold the title.

Interim MU Chancellor Hank Foley said in a news release that the close work between the campus and the system on diversity issues makes McDonald a good choice for the dual role.

“We’re at an important point in time in our history, and we don’t want to lose the momentum from all the work that has been completed,” Foley said. “Dr. McDonald’s expertise is just what we need at this critical time. I’m looking forward to working with him.”

Before working for the university, McDonald was vice president and associate provost for diversity and inclusion at the Rochester Institute of Technology and vice president for equity and inclusion at Virginia Tech. His salary is $235,000 per year.
MU spokesman Christian Basi said McDonald will not receive any additional salary for taking on the second role. If McDonald serves in the dual role through June 12, 2017, the university will deposit $23,500 into his retirement plan, Basi said.

Kevin McDonald to serve as the interim vice chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity at MU

COLUMBIA, Mo - University of Missouri Interim Chancellor Hank Foley announced Monday that Kevin McDonald, the UM System’s first ever Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion officer, also has agreed to serve as the interim vice chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity at MU. The appointment is effective immediately.

“We have worked closely with the UM System on diversity issues, and Dr. McDonald is uniquely qualified to serve in this dual role,” Foley said. “We’re at an important point in time in our history, and we don’t want to lose the momentum from all the work that has been completed. Dr. McDonald’s expertise is just what we need at this critical time. I’m looking forward to working with him.”

“MU has made very intentional strides around diversity and inclusion over the past several months,” McDonald said. “My entire career to this point has been working on a campus with students, staff and faculty, and this joint appointment puts me back in an environment where I’m very comfortable. It’s going to be very important to establish strong relationships with students, faculty and staff, and understand their perspectives so that together we can develop an overarching strategic framework of where we want to be in the years to come.”

McDonald is replacing Chuck Henson, who has served as interim vice chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity since November 2015. During Henson’s tenure, more than 4,000 students, faculty and staff were trained on diversity-related issues. Additionally, the Division of Inclusion, Diversity and Equity accomplished the following:

- Developed the “Diversity@Mizzou” orientation training program – a new program required for all incoming students.
- Implemented and streamlined required training for those responsible for hiring faculty—anyone serving on a search committee or who might be responsible for hiring from an
external pool of candidates has been trained on best practices to ensure a diverse pool of candidates.

- Designed new educational and professional development offerings – these programs are designed to help faculty and staff understand and discuss diversity issues on campus.
- Partnered with The State Historical Society of Missouri to implement the “African-American Experience in Missouri” lecture series.
- Hosted distinguished guest lectures by experts who discussed issues related to inclusion and diversity.

Prior to his current role, McDonald served as the vice president and associate provost for diversity and inclusion at the Rochester Institute of Technology where he committed himself to making excellence inclusive in every aspect of organizational functioning. Previously, he was vice president for equity and inclusion at Virginia Tech where he developed a significant track record of contributions toward the university’s equity, diversity and inclusion goals. He also has served in compliance roles at John Hopkins University and the University of Maryland in College Park after working for Network Solutions, Inc. and the US Department of Justice early in his career.

McDonald received his doctoral degree in Higher Education Leadership from the University of Rochester and holds a juris doctor from The Ohio State University as well as a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Andrews University. He also holds certifications with the Cornell Diversity & Inclusion Studies Program and is a certified mediator in three primary mediation models.

**MU names new interim vice chancellor for diversity**

COLUMBIA - The University of Missouri announced Monday Kevin McDonald has agreed to serve as the interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity.

McDonald, the UM system's first ever chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer, will serve in his new position effective immediately.
“We have worked closely with the UM System on diversity issues, and McDonald is uniquely qualified to serve in this dual role,” University of Missouri Interim Chancellor Hank Foley said. “We’re at an important point in time in our history, and we don’t want to lose the momentum from all the work that has been completed. McDonald’s expertise is just what we need at this critical time. I’m looking forward to working with him.”

“My entire career to this point has been working on a campus with students, staff and faculty, and this joint appointment puts me back in an environment where I’m very comfortable. It’s going to be very important to establish strong relationships with students, faculty and staff, and understand their perspectives so that together we can develop an overarching strategic framework of where we want to be in the years to come,” McDonald said.

McDonald replaces Chuck Henson, who has served as vice chancellor since November 2015. During Henson’s tenure, 4,000 students, faculty and staff were trained on diversity-related issues.

Prior to his current position with MU, McDonald served as the vice president and associate provost for diversity and inclusion at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Kevin McDonald Takes Over as MU Diversity Officer

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyses.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=f42cc6ea-07f9-4146-8c9a-441a0ffda0f8
It's a rebuilding year: MU turnover has affected all parts of administration

COLUMBIA — Since Sinclair School of Nursing Dean Judith Miller arrived at MU in 2008, 11 of the university's 14 schools or colleges and libraries have had a change in dean.

In the past year alone, 10 schools have either changed leadership or will by December.

But Miller says she's unfazed by the number of interims. Although she said outgoing deans Thomas Payne and Michael O’Brien have been mentors to her, interims are accepted and respected by the MU Council of Deans.

“Their input is solicited and valued,” Miller said. Continuity has value, but so does having a variety of voices, "diverse thought and new insights,” she said.

With an interim UM System president and chancellor at the helm, three deans — all signers of the letter demanding the resignation of former Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin — announced in the past seven days of May that they are leaving the university.

School of Law Dean Gary Myers will return to teaching in the law school. O’Brien, dean of the College of Arts and Science, is leaving to become provost at Texas A&M-San Antonio, and Payne, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, will retire at the end of December.

In 2015, five new deans were announced, two of them as interim. Provost Garnett Stokes, who began her tenure at MU in February 2015, is responsible for appointing deans.

Of MU’s nine vice chancellors, three were hired as interims in November 2015 following the resignations of Loftin and UM System President Tim Wolfe. Two interims, Hank Foley and Michael Middleton, filled the chancellor and president positions, respectively.

On Friday, MU named Patty Haberberger, Saint Louis University’s assistant vice president, as the next vice chancellor for human resources. Since December 2014, the position has been filled by an interim, Jatha Sadowski. Haberberger begins work Aug. 1.

On Monday, Foley announced that Kevin McDonald, the chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer for the UM System, had also agreed to serve as the interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity at MU.
Senior Associate Provost Ken Dean might be an expert on being interim. He's been interim provost, interim dean for the law school three times and will become the school’s interim dean again in August.

"You do the job just like you’re the permanent person,” he said. “Otherwise, I think if you don’t approach it from that standpoint, there’s a chance that you will lose momentum of the program.”

In Dean’s experience, some people think it's better to delay making decisions when the person in charge is an interim. However, he said he thinks actions should be taken regardless because delays can hurt the institution.

School of Journalism Dean David Kurpius said the deans used to meet with the provost monthly or every other week. Lately, the Council of Deans meets almost weekly.

The changing makeup of that council does present challenges. For example, journalism professor Berkley Hudson, chairman of Faculty Council's committee on race relations, said at a June 9 meeting that the committee had recently met with the deans about creating race-focused groups within MU schools and departments.

“The deans' council is a different council now, so we’ll need to go back and meet with them again,” he said.

One factor that could be having an impact on retirements is the UM System Board of Curators' vote in April to limit retiree health insurance benefits for 84 percent of eligible employees, according to previous Missourian reporting.

Miller said she doesn’t think the transitions will affect the recruitment of new deans because they report to Stokes.

Kurpius agreed. He also predicted that the university will eventually be stronger.

"Any time you have leadership transitions at the very top, it makes it difficult to regain stability in the very short term," Kurpius said.

"This is a university that’s been around for a long time. In the historical pattern of leadership, this is just a blip on the map."
Budget cuts deliver powerful blow to MU Libraries

By Rudi Keller

Monday, June 13, 2016 at 2:00 pm

The way campus divisions implement University of Missouri budget cuts for the coming fiscal year will determine whether future reductions are decided centrally or whether control remains in the hands of deans and department chairs, Vice Chancellor for Finance Rhonda Gibler said Monday.

Deans, department chairs and division directors are making decisions about how each campus unit absorbs a 5 percent cut in general fund support. In the College of Arts and Science, a cut of $4.2 million means 57 fewer faculty and staff positions.

Ann Riley, interim director of MU Libraries, said the cuts mean an end to routine purchases of books in various subject areas in favor of careful decisions about which titles to buy.

“We will still be purchasing books, but it will be many fewer — perhaps half as many as last year,” Riley said.

The UM System Board of Curators meets Thursday to set a budget for the year beginning July 1 for all four campuses, MU Health Care and the system administration. The budget will reflect lower tuition revenue for MU based on a projection that enrollment will decline by 2,600 students, or about 7 percent.

The budget also will include a $3.8 million cut in state support to the system administration.

Interim MU Chancellor Hank Foley in March ordered the cuts because of a dramatic drop in enrollment linked to a poor public image of the university after protests last fall, more aggressive recruiting of potential students by other schools and a decline in the number of high school graduates. The various divisions on campus also have been told to brace for cuts of 2 percent or more in each of the next two years.

Gibler said that number is more of a warning than a projection.
“Those are me trying to express to folks as they are doing their planning” to not count on an increase in fiscal year 2018 “or an increase in 19,” Gibler said.

How the 5 percent cuts are implemented likely will determine how the next round of reductions might be made, she said.

“If we think they are not being particularly strategic in how they are going about it, then there will be conversations between the provost, chancellor and that set of leaders,” she said.

The cuts already have resulted in 38 layoffs and 50 fewer jobs in the operations division because of attrition and leaving open jobs unfilled. The 13 colleges and schools on campus are cutting at least 104 positions — 44 tenure or tenure-track faculty positions, 29 adjunct or nontenured faculty and 31 staff or administrative posts.

The tenure-track positions all represent jobs that otherwise would be open on Sept. 1, said Patricia Okker, senior associate provost. It is unclear how many of the other jobs were filled during the current year, she said, because there is no centralized decision-making that sets staffing levels at each college.

Those 104 positions do represent permanent cuts, she said.

“The resources behind those positions are gone for good,” she said. “It is not holding out, waiting for those resources to be put back in the budget. It is a permanent reduction.”

The budget that will be presented to the curators does not attempt to shift the $3.8 million cut from the system to the campuses, Gibler said. There will be effects, she said, such as slower approval of contracts at the general counsel’s office or other delays because of reduced system staffing.

“The folks at the system are working really hard to not cut anything that flows to the campuses,” she said.

For MU Libraries, Riley has asked academic departments to monitor a list that will be posted later this summer of journals and other subscriptions that will not be renewed. The libraries already faced a budget crunch because students in December rejected a proposed library fee increase, she said, and the campus cut of $2 million aggravated the problem.

Ellis Library is no longer open 24 hours when school is in session, and the rising cost of subscriptions is forcing other difficult choices, she said.
MU high school 'flies in the face' of online education

Generated from News Bureau press release: “International Expansion of University of Missouri High School Could Enhance Mizzou's Enrollment and Diversity Efforts”

COLUMBIA — On Friday, Taylor Compton drove nine hours to graduate from high school, with 13 other students she'd never met, at a college campus she'd never been to.

Breaking with tradition runs in Compton's family. Her father spent 12 years getting his undergraduate degree and started law school at age 30. Her mother took two years off before getting her undergraduate and law degree. But after she passed the bar and practicing law for a few years, she and Compton's father decided to become traveling professional bridge players. They now own a studio in Dallas dedicated to playing and teaching the card game.

It made sense that their daughter would choose an unconventional high school.

“Growing up seeing that you don’t have to be the norm," Compton said, "I was confident enough to look into it and take it on."

Compton was referring to MU High School, an online education program she graduated from on Saturday. The ceremony in Memorial Student Union's Stotler Lounge was streamed online to 137 other graduates who were not able to attend. The 14 graduates present were ushered down the aisle by a jazz quartet playing "Pomp and Circumstance."
Compton chose MU High School after researching the program and deciding its reputation was among the best of online schools. Best College Reviews, for example, places it in the top ten best online high schools in the country.

MU High School is an accredited high school operated by the MU College of Education. Its curriculum is built to apply to various cultures and countries, Executive Director Zac March said. The program is available to students in all 50 states and 65 countries, and continues to expand.

March said many international students are attracted to the school as an opportunity for English immersion. After studying with MU High School, they're better prepared to study abroad, partially because the program helps them learn English.

In January, the student body doubled from 3,000 students to more than 6,000. Most of those students enrolled through a recent partnership with 56 private schools in Brazil and are working toward a dual diploma. That means they will take a full Brazilian course load on top of the MU High School courses.

"They're raising the bar higher than what we anticipated," March said, adding that those Brazilian students are studying about 12 hours a day.

The high school uses video and discussion boards to connect students around the globe, said Principal Kathryn Fishman-Weaver. She spoke excitedly at the graduation ceremony about their global learning community that "flies in the face" of expectations for online education.

Compton believes online education is on the rise both because of its convenience and its potential to challenge its students.

Although online studying can appear to be isolating, she said she still felt connected to her peers and instructors. She used online boards to comment on other students' work, and was excited to hear different perspectives from people around the world.
Compton finished her high school education in three years while she worked as an intern for two film companies. Online school allowed her to take self-paced classes and tailor her schedule to work towards her dream of getting into film school. She applied to schools in Los Angeles and New York, including New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where the directors Martin Scorsese and Joel Coen received their undergraduate degrees.

She stressed the importance of making school "part of a life," rather than "making school life."

“I still kept school a priority," she said, "but it wasn’t my only priority."

Krista Galyen, director of research and development at MU High School, gave the closing remarks. She and other speakers at the ceremony explained that unclear plans for the future can lead to uncomfortable, yet rewarding, learning situations.

"When you don't know what you're doing," Gaylen said, "it means you're doing something new and exciting."

As for Compton, she will begin the Tisch School of the Arts' undergraduate Film and Television program in the fall.

**Mizzou Crackdown on Marijuana Imagery Triggers Lawsuit Threat**

*For the past fifteen years or so, pro-marijuana students attending the University of Missouri-Columbia have printed t-shirts and banners emblazoned with versions of this design, featuring a stylized "tiger claw" made of pot leaves and Mizzou's official "MU" logo.*

But no longer. After the university demanded that student activists pushing for reform of the nation's drug laws stop using a pot leaf in their logo, a national group has threatened a lawsuit on their behalf, citing
First Amendment grounds.

The battle is being waged by the campus chapter of NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), along with the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

"We have a very polarizing topic," concedes the outgoing president of Mizzou's NORML chapter, Benton Berigan. "Because of our viewpoint, we might be under higher scrutiny for the things we do. Whatever we're doing, we always makes sure to go through the proper procedures."

Berigan, a Ph.D student in the Division of Biological Sciences, says that NORML's use of Mizzou imagery stretches back more than a decade, and that the "tiger claw/pot leaf" design originated from the school's own Student Design Center.

Last spring, Berigan approached the Student Design Center to update NORML's logo for the coming year. The result was an updated version of the stylized tiger claw, which also incorporated an illustration of the campus skyline.

That's where the problems began. In August 2015, Berigan submitted a request to the university to sell the t-shirts during a fundraiser. His request was denied. Because the shirts included the full name of the university, Berigan was told he needed additional approval from the college's Office of Licensing & Trademarks.

The university, it turns out, was none too thrilled.

In an email to Berigan in early September 2015, a university "licensing assistant" rejected Berigan's request, writing that although "the attached design looks fine," the office “would like for the cannabis leaf images to be removed from the design.” The email explained that Mizzou's licensing policy “prohibits the use of alcohol or drug-related images.”

Indeed, the official design guidelines for Mizzou's student organizations state: “No use of the university’s name or logo may be approved in connection with promotion of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs or in connection with pornography or other forms of expression limited by law.”

In a later email, Berigan was also informed that using an image of the campus skyline was also out of the question, since "campus landmarks are considered trademarks of the university and any use of landmarks or campus imagery for logo purposes needs to be approved by MU Marketing and Communications." Berigan tried to explain that NORML only advocated drug law reform, not drug use — but to no avail.

Faced with fighting Mizzou's mind-numbing bureaucracy, Berigan reached out to the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), which in turn fired off a lengthy and blistering letter to Mizzou Interim Chancellor Henry C. Foley.

"The University of Missouri’s refusal to allow MU NORML to use a marijuana leaf on its promotional materials raises serious First Amendment concerns and must be reversed," stated the letter, dated April
22. "FIRE calls upon the University of Missouri to promptly approve MU NORML’s proposed designs and unequivocally assure all Mizzou students that the university will respect its students’ free speech rights. FIRE is committed to using the resources at our disposal to see this matter through to a just conclusion."

Catherine Sevcenko, FIRE's director of litigation, tells RFT that the letter represented a "shot across the bow," implying that Mizzou's restrictive branding policy could lead to a lawsuit. In a remarkably similar case from 2014, FIRE filed a First Amendment lawsuit against Iowa State University for banning its own campus chapter of NORML from using ISU’s trademarked initials.

This past January, a federal district court ruled against ISU and issued a permanent injunction prohibiting university administrators from using its trademark policy as a cudgel against student pot activists.

"There is exactly the same case as Iowa's," says Sevcenko. "And we took that to court."

Reached by phone on Friday, Mizzou spokesman Christian Basi tells RFT that the university is "continuing to review the correspondence from FIRE," adding, "It's something we want to go through very carefully."

University of Missouri says No to Marijuana on T-shirt

The University of Missouri has denied a request from a student group that wants to put a marijuana leaf on a T-shirt next to the university's name.

Leaders for the campus chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws are fighting the decision, saying it's about First Amendment rights and fairness.

The Kansas City Star reports MU NORML wanted to raise money selling T-shirts with a marijuana leaf in the shape of an animal paw next to the campus skyline, another cannabis leaf and the name of the group and the university.
The group sought the university's permission, but was rejected.

The university says it's reviewing a foundation's recent letter in support of the group.

Positive Body Image Can Mean Better Health


Negative body image has been shown to lead to poor health and life choices. Our guest, Virginia Ramseyer Winter with the University of Missouri says that the opposite is also true: that positive body image can improve mental and physical health in girls and women.

Listen to the story here: http://www.wpr.org/listen/938561

University of Missouri School of Medicine opens physician training campus in Springfield

A physician training campus in Springfield is now a reality.

On Monday, the University of Missouri School of Medicine, CoxHealth and Mercy Springfield marked the opening of the MU medical school's new clinical campus in Springfield.
Headquartered at 1845 S. National Ave., the partnership between MU and the Springfield health systems was created to help address a critical shortage of physicians.

“It is important to understand we are still one medical school, now with two top-quality campuses and some of the best clinical partners in the state,” said Patrick Delafontaine, dean of the MU School of Medicine, in a news release. “We now have the partners, resources and talent needed to transform medical education in Missouri.”

The new clinical campus will allow MU medical students to complete the last two years of training Springfield, where they will spend time learning inside Mercy and CoxHealth.

“Today’s ceremony is very meaningful to us,” said Linda Headrick, senior associate dean for education at the MU School of Medicine, in a release. “Through this clinical campus, students will be exposed to high-quality practice in a great community where they will be able to work one-on-one with attending physicians.”

The Springfield campus is part of a larger medical school expansion project taking place at Columbia, Missouri, which includes the construction of the Patient-Centered Care Learning Center, a $42.5 million medical education building at the University of Missouri opening in 2017.

According to the release, the expansion is expected to have a significant impact in Missouri by adding more than 300 physicians, 3,500 new health care jobs and $390 million annually to the state’s economy.

Andrew Evans, associate dean and chief academic officer for the medical school’s Springfield clinical campus and associate professor of clinical medicine, said nine medical students will begin their last two years of training at the start of the 2016-17 year.

He said starting in August 2017, 32 additional medical students will be admitted to MU every year as a result of the expansion.

By 2020, a total of 64 third- and fourth-year medical students are expected to be based in Springfield.

“Uniting our organizations to develop a second clinical campus in Springfield, Missouri, was by far the best way to expand health care and medical education in the communities we serve,” he said, in the release.

According to the release, more than 90 percent of Missouri counties lack adequate access to health care professionals.

“By giving students more options for clinical training in other hospitals and physician practices, we are educating them on the diverse health needs of our state and increasing the odds of putting more physicians in Springfield and southwest Missouri,” said Frank Romero, chief medical officer for CoxHealth, in the release.
Planning for the MU clinical campus in Springfield started eight years ago. Missouri State University will also provide support to the MU medical students by providing access to student health, recreation and IT support, the release said.

“Our collaboration with MU and CoxHealth for this clinical campus is another example of like-minded organizations working together to do what’s right for patients in the future,” said Stuart Stangeland, chief operating officer for Mercy Springfield Clinics, in the release. “Our doctors are excited about getting to practice medicine while also teaching and mentoring our next generation of providers.”

**MU Medical School Expands Program in Springfield**


**MU Clinical Campus Opens**

Mom’s stress may put kids at risk for autism

Women who experience stress during pregnancy and have a stress-sensitive gene are more likely to give birth to a child with autism, researchers have discovered.

The finding could be a step toward helping identify women who have greater risks for having children with autism when exposed to stressors during a specific time window during their pregnancy.

“Autism was thought to be largely a genetic disorder, but previous research has shown that environmental influences such as stress can play an important role in the development of the condition,” says David Beversdorf, associate professor of radiology, neurology, and psychological sciences at the University of Missouri.

“We know that some mothers who experience significant levels of stress don’t have children with autism, but others do. To help understand why, we studied a gene that is known to affect stress and found a link between it and the development of autism with exposure to stress.”

For a new study, published in Autism Research, scientists looked at two groups of mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder. The mothers were surveyed about stress during their pregnancy, such as loss of a job, moving, or divorce. The mothers’ blood was tested for a variation of the stress-sensitive gene known as 5-HTTLPR, which regulates the neurotransmitter serotonin in the nervous system. When a variation of the gene is present, the availability of serotonin is altered, causing an increased reaction to stress.

In both groups, mothers of children with autism who have the variation of the stress-sensitive gene reported experiencing more stress during the end of the second and the beginning of the third trimester of pregnancy, compared to mothers who did not carry the altered gene.

“ Though this was an observational study and future confirmation of this finding is needed, it’s possible we could, one day, identify women who may be at a greater risk of having a child with autism when exposed to stress,” Beversdorf says.

“More research is needed to understand the mechanisms of how this gene-stress interaction works, but hopefully this could someday help prevent some cases of autism.”
Other researchers from the University of Missouri and from Queen’s University, Central Methodist University, and Massachusetts General Hospital for Children are coauthors of the study.

New MU research suggests mass shooters aren't necessarily mentally ill

COLUMBIA — New research from the MU School of Medicine suggests labeling mass shooters as "psychotic" may give us a poor understanding of the psychology behind horrific acts of violence and how to prevent them.

The study, "Anders Breivik: Extreme Beliefs Mistaken for Psychosis," published in the Journal of American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, draws a line between mental illness and "extreme overvalued beliefs," defined as a non-delusional, strongly held belief that is shared by others in a person's religious or cultural group.

A person with an extreme overvalued belief has an intense emotional commitment to it and may act it out violently.

These extreme beliefs are often radicalized by internet usage, as seems to be the case with Omar Mateen, who killed 49 people and injured dozens early Sunday morning at a gay nightclub in Orlando. President Barack Obama said Monday the shooter's actions appeared to be inspired by extremist information on the web.

Tahir Rahman, an assistant professor of psychiatry at MU and the study's lead researcher, said he didn't want to directly relate his research to the Orlando shooting yet because information was still emerging and he had not studied the case in depth. However, he said he does believe the internet plays a huge role in the radicalization of beliefs about religion, race and sexuality.

Viewing content online that you agree with prompts search engines to find topics that are related to previous searches, he said. That results in users becoming increasingly less likely to stumble upon information that doesn't align with their beliefs.

"The internet refines your beliefs. It is designed to do that," Rahman said.

"If you’re a conservative, then you’re not going to get liberal stuff."

For instance, someone with homophobic beliefs might search for anti-gay websites, Rahman said. The next time that person uses a search engine, it will pull up other sites with similar views.
"Radical beliefs have been around since the beginning of mankind," Rahman said. "What has changed is how people radicalize. If you can make friends online, then you can radicalize online. As a society, we need to confront how these beliefs are amplified."

Rahman said 80 percent of mass shootings are not caused by mental illness, and he believes mistaking extreme overvalued belief for psychosis results in taking a misguided approach to preventing them. He said the federal government should change strategies and set a goal to reduce mass shootings.

"This is a behavior," he said, "not a disease."

Rahman's study focused on the case of Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people at a youth camp on Utøya island and in Oslo, Norway, in 2011. In Breivik's case, an initial psychiatric evaluation found that he had paranoid schizophrenia and was legally insane.

However, there was backlash to the finding, and the court brought in another investigative team. That team determined Breivik had a personality disorder but was not psychotic. Rahman's study found that Breivik's case fit more into the category of extreme overvalued beliefs — extreme non-delusional beliefs shared by others.

Dean Strang, one of the defense attorneys for Steven Avery featured in the Netflix documentary "Making a Murderer," said that an extreme overvalued belief is essentially a more accurate description of cognitive error, another term for human error or a distortion of the mind, and it affects all aspects of an investigation.

Strang said reframing how we understand mental illness versus extreme beliefs will allow forensic psychiatrists to research more accurately.

Rahman's study suggests current clinical guides do not help forensic psychiatrists understand what can be considered psychotic behavior and what is just a delusion or extreme belief.

"Cognitive error is unavoidable," Strang said. "The question is degree. Extreme overvalued belief is at the far end, but anchoring bias and simple tunnel vision are at the moderate end of what I think is basically the same spectrum."

Anchoring bias is used in many different contexts to describe the cognitive trap of allowing a first impression to have too much influence on a decision or conclusion.

Rahman said talking about extreme beliefs and violent behaviors is an important step toward preventing mass shootings.

"There are drunk driving campaigns, HIV awareness campaigns and other public health measures," he said. "This should be a massive public health campaign, too."
Transgender student visibility has Missouri and Kansas colleges making accommodations

Caitlyn Jenner’s Vanity Fair cover kick-started a national conversation about what defines gender and what that means.

Yet college campuses have buzzed with conversations about transgender issues, unisex bathrooms and the rest for years.

That talk yielded changes, with more in the works, both big and small.

Barnard College, a private school in New York City, this spring became the seventh elite women’s college to admit applicants who self-identify as women regardless of their sex at birth. Stephens College, an all-women school in Columbia, has talked about a similar move for nearly a year and expects to decide before January.

At public colleges in the Kansas City area, unisex bathrooms and gender-neutral dorms have opened up. Wording in some anti-discrimination policies has been tweaked to protect transgender students.

But “things can always be better,” said Luke Harness, a trans man and graduate student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and co-founder of the school’s new Trans+ Social Group for transgender students.

Harness transitioned from female to male from 2012 through 2013, about the same time he helped start Trans+. This year, the group became the first officially recognized student organization for transgender students and their allies at UMKC.

Trans+ started with fewer than 10 members and now lists 26, Harness said. With the rising visibility of transgender celebrities — Jenner and Laverne Cox of “Orange is the New Black” — Harness expects membership in Trans+ at UMKC to climb.
Except for Kansas State University, which said three transgender students signed up for dorm rooms for the fall, officials at area universities said they don’t know how many transgender students currently are on campus or living in dorms. For now, all dorm rooms at UMKC, K-State, the University of Kansas and the University of Missouri are assigned by gender.

“If a student doesn’t let us know ahead of time” that they have some special need where gender is concerned, “we may not know at all,” said Jonathan Pryor. He’s coordinator of UMKC’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and questioning, Intersex, Asexual, or LGBTQIA, services on campus.

But when a student self-identifies as transgender, he said, “we try to make sure we work with transgender students to make sure they don’t feel further marginalized.”

UMKC’s housing website speaks directly to transgender students: “If you are a transgender student looking for on-campus housing, you may indicate this on the online contract or select the gender with which you identify. You may also call our office to talk to someone if you do not feel comfortable selecting one of the gender options on the contract.”

**In Columbia, MU is piloting gender-neutral housing in the fall. Fewer than 20 spaces with restrooms offering more privacy than the communal bathrooms found in many college dorms are set aside for special requests, said Cathy Scroggs, vice president of student affairs at MU.**

K-State is building a new residence hall and renovating another. Both will have gender-neutral bathrooms and space for gender-neutral bedrooms.

“Ideally, we want our students who happen to be transgender to live among our other students. We don’t want to isolate,” said Nick Lander, assistant director for residence life at K-State. The school also has maps that point out the gender-neutral restrooms on campus.

Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville has had gender-neutral housing since 2012.
UMKC is considering providing some gender-neutral living arrangements for its students. But like at most other area schools, unisex bathrooms are still scarce across campus.

“These are conversations we have been having on campuses for a while,” Pryor said.

After months of discussion, this past school year the UM system added protection for gender identity and gender expression to its nondiscrimination policy at all four campuses in Kansas City, Columbia, St. Louis and Rolla.

And a year ago, UMKC adopted a preferred-name policy that allows students in gender transition to go by a name other than the one given to them at birth but that relates to the gender they identify with. That name can appear on all university paperwork, rosters and emails.

On some campuses, considering gender diversity goes much further than what a student wants to be called.

While at most universities the student insurance policy does not cover sexual-reassignment surgery, Campus Pride, a national LGBTQ student advocacy group, lists 62 schools, including MU and Washington University in St. Louis, with policies that do. MU students use Aetna, which covers hormones and gender-reassignment surgeries. Kansas Board of Regents university student policies cover hormone therapies under their policy’s prescription benefit.

The continuing challenge for state schools, officials said, is accommodating a diverse population of students. Even among the transgender student community, the stories vary.

Three years ago, Harness, who was raised in a conservative family in Lee’s Summit, didn’t even know gender transition was possible, he said. But when the then-21-year-old was between his sophomore and junior years at UMKC and doing work study in the Multicultural Student Affairs office, he heard about an informational event — The T in LGBT — on campus.

“I wanted to go for the free lunch,” said Harness, who at the time did not fully understand the gender identity confusion he says he’d felt his entire life. “I was just sitting there eating my spaghetti, and the panel started talking about transition. I realized that was me.”
Harness wasn’t aware of any support network on campus for people like him.

“It was really scary,” he said.

The first few times he called a Kansas City therapy line for help, he said he hung up the moment someone answered. A year later, in 2013, Harness went through breast-removal surgery and fast became a campus spokesman for transgender issues.

Once a month now, Harness co-hosts “Trans Talk,” a program that’s part of the KKFI radio show “The Tenth Voice.”

While UMKC and other campuses have had a university-managed LGBTQIA center of some kind for years, Harness said there’s still need for transgender support groups like Trans+.

“Most times, when people say LGBT, they are talking about gay, white men,” Harness said.

The rapid growth in Trans+ membership, Harness said, isn’t because more transgender students are enrolling at UMKC. He said it’s more likely because now there’s a place for them to find people with whom they can relate.

Jack Warner, a 21-year-old second-year UMKC pharmacy student and a trans man, said Trans+ changed his life.

“I was looking for solidarity and there, on a wall on campus, was a Trans+ flier,” Warner recalled. “That was a great feeling. I don’t even know if I would be transitioning right now without my group. ... They showed me that I could do it. That you can actually be who you are. And that makes me very happy.”
Students chide Dartmouth for lack of faculty diversity

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Since arriving at Dartmouth College in 2014, Melissa Padilla would chat with her friends about the lack of diversity among the faculty and wonder why there weren't more instructors who looked like them.

But it wasn't until May when one of her favorite teachers, an assistant professor of English who is Asian-American, was denied tenure that the 26-year-old senior went public with her concerns.

Angry over the denial, Padilla joined dozens of students and faculty at the Ivy League school who launched a campaign demanding that Aimee Bahng's case be reconsidered. They pressed the administration for answers over the tenure process and launched a petition in support of Bahng that has gathered more than 3,600 signatures.

Protesters took to social media using the hashtags #fight4facultyofcolor and #dontdodartmouth on Bahng's behalf. They also held a campus rally in May that included a casket representing the "death of our education" and carried roses for each of the minority faculty they say have left the college since 2002.

"Once we sort of got past the anger, we were kind of shocked," said Padilla, who is Mexican and lives in the United States with her family on a green card. "We didn't understand why the college would not take this opportunity to keep a professor of color on campus that is not only providing the academic prestige they want but is also mentoring students of color."
Dartmouth is the latest university to find itself in the crosshairs of students angry about the makeup of its faculty and, in some cases, its student body. **Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, one of the first protests kicked off at the University of Missouri over harassment of students and dearth of African-American faculty.** They have spread to campuses across the country, where demonstrations and sit-ins have forced administrators to consider bolstering diversity training, expanding African-American programs and hiring more minority faculty to improve the racial climate.

"Dartmouth is not singular," said Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, president of the Association for Asian American Studies, who signed the petition and sent a letter in support of Bahng. "When one looks at the last year and the number of protests that have occurred on college campuses around this issue of diversity, tenure denial is part and parcel of the larger trend among higher ed institutions."

Students are targeting faculty diversity because they have seen so little progress on the issue — despite universities repeated promises to recruit and retain faculty of color. In 2013, 21 percent of full-time faculty was nonwhite, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Most Ivy League schools fared even worse, with Dartmouth acknowledging only 16 percent of its faculty were minorities — compared with 35 percent of its student body.

Craig Wilder, who is African-American, spent six years at Dartmouth teaching history before leaving in 2008 for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He recalled how the college would promote diversity and brought in several talented scholars of color during his tenure. But he said the scholars often left after not getting tenure or being promoted.

"I was not alone in questioning the morality of continuing to recruit promising scholars to an institution that had a questionable commitment to their success," said Wilder, who had tenure at Dartmouth. "That doubt fully informed my decision to leave."

While Dartmouth wouldn't comment on Bahng's tenure case due to privacy concerns, the college insists that it is taking the issue of diversity seriously. In November 2014, it announced a goal of increasing minority tenure-track faculty from 16 percent to 25 percent by 2020, which requires
an extra $100 million over the next 10 years. It also is doubling the amount in its diversity recruitment fund to $2 million a year.

Similar campaigns have been launched by Brown University, which is spending $165 million on efforts to address diversity and racism, including $100 million to diversify faculty. Yale University has committed $50 million to diversify its faculty.

Bahng arrived at Dartmouth in 2009. Along with her teaching and writing on Asian-American literature, feminist science and technology studies, and queer theory, the 40-year-old mentored undergraduate and graduate minority students and helped create and teach a popular course dedicated to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Bahng said she didn't make a stink about her tenure denial, even though she thinks Dartmouth got it wrong.

At the same time, "I recognize we are in a certain moment when students and faculty and staff of color across many institutions of higher education feel as though we at a sort of breaking point," she said.