When Does a Student-Affairs Official Cross the Line?

Tim Tai, a student photojournalist, is trying to take pictures of a protest on the University of Missouri’s Carnahan Quad held by a group of activists who are protesting the campus racial climate under the name Concerned Student 1950. They are asking him to leave. Mr. Tai is arguing his right to stay.

Ms. Basler, who is white, slides between Mr. Tai and the other students. "Sir? I’m sorry, these are people, too," she tells him. "You need to back off."

Mr. Tai holds his ground. He tries to lean around Ms. Basler for a view of the encampment that protesters have set up on the quad. She moves with him like a basketball defender, her hands raised. Standing with their faces inches apart, they trade warnings about physical contact.

"What’s your name?" Mr. Tai asks.

Ms. Basler shakes her head and says nothing.

"You’re with the office of Greek life?"

"My name," she says decisively, "is 1950."

Ms. Basler was, in fact, senior associate director of student life at the university. But when another student posted online video of the confrontation, hundreds of thousands of people watched her disavow her affiliation to Mizzou’s embattled administration and side with the student activists.

The firestorm that ensued — much of it focused on Melissa Click, an assistant professor of communication who was eventually fired for her behavior during the protest — was exceptional. But Ms. Basler’s role in the confrontation last November 9 illustrates a tension familiar to many college officials who, like her, are in charge of supporting students outside the classroom.

Anger over structural racism on college campuses has put black students and their allies at odds with their institutions. The activists have demanded swift change and, in some cases, called for current leaders to resign. The protests have put officials who work in student affairs, like Ms. Basler, in the position of advocating for students who are purposely disrupting normal operations — to the chagrin of colleges’ other political constituencies, including many other students.

The question for student-affairs workers, then, is this: How does one support student activists while remaining responsible to the institution?

"‘Walk the line’ is a perfect phrase," says Shannon Ellis, vice president for student services at the University of Nevada at Reno. "And it is a very fine line."
The location and the meaning of that line, of course, may change depending on whom you ask. But one thing is certain: With YouTube infamy a few keystrokes away, the consequences of getting caught on the wrong side can be significant.

Ms. Basler and her Mizzou colleagues know this firsthand. The fallout from her on-camera confrontation with Mr. Tai was swift and lasting. Officials remain skittish about it even now, eight months later. Nearly everybody involved, including Ms. Basler and Mark Lucas, director of student life, either declined to be interviewed or did not respond to emails from The Chronicle. Catherine C. Scroggs, vice chancellor for student affairs, agreed to talk briefly but was not made available for a follow-up interview.

However, email messages obtained by The Chronicle in response to a public-records request, along with interviews done by a law firm hired by the university to investigate what happened on the quad that day, shed some light on what led to Ms. Basler’s fateful run-in with Mr. Tai, and how Mizzou officials scrambled to protect her in the aftermath.

"For us," says Ms. Scroggs, "it was a whole different type of experience than we’d had before." On the day she became famous, Ms. Basler was awake before dawn.

At 2:27 a.m., she wrote a message to Lawrence Ross, author of a new book about racial politics on college campuses. He had written to her several days earlier, and his timing had been auspicious. At Mizzou, black students and their allies, frustrated by their experiences of racism on the campus and in the surrounding city of Columbia, were demanding a change in the university’s leadership and a new plan to increase diversity.

"Your book could not come at a more needed time at Mizzou," Ms. Basler wrote to Mr. Ross.

What do students need? That is what student-affairs officials are supposed to figure out. That morning, Ms. Basler was thinking about the needs of Mizzou’s graduate assistants, who were helping undergraduates cope with the unrest and racial tension on the campus.

Before sunrise, she exchanged emails with Kelsey Kupferer, a graduate student in the public-affairs school. Ms. Kupferer, too, had hardly slept. She feared that if top administrators did not resign that day ("regardless of if that's right or wrong"), or if Jonathan Butler, a student who was staging a hunger strike, became seriously ill, or if there was violence, then things could get out of hand.

Around 10 a.m., news began to trickle out that Timothy M. Wolfe, the Missouri system’s president, had resigned. It was a victory for the protesters, but many were worried about their safety.

According to a summary of an interview she later gave to investigators from Bryan Cave, the law firm hired by Mizzou’s board, Ms. Basler then called Jonathan A. McElderry, coordinator of the Black Cultural Center. Mr. McElderry told her that students there and on the nearby Carnahan Quad felt they were in harm’s way. Several students later told investigators that they had felt hounded by people from the news media.

Ms. Basler and a colleague then walked to the quad, where students had formed a protective ring around the encampment.

That’s where she encountered Mr. Tai.
After their initial tense exchange, Ms. Basler and Mr. Tai fell into a stalemate. The activists standing behind her informed the student journalist that it was over: that he had lost this fight, and it was time to leave.

Soon after, the human wall behind Ms. Basler began to shuffle forward, and she and Mr. Tai found themselves face to face once more.

"You’re pushing me, you’re pushing me!" he said, raising his voice.

"I’m being pushed," she shouted back, "I don’t have a choice!"

Student affairs is a profession that self-selects for empathy, says Gwendolyn Dungy, a former executive director of Naspa — Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. People get into the field, she says, because they are passionate about speaking up for college students, a group whose political expressions tend to be greeted with impatience and condescension by older adults. Many student-affairs workers were once student activists themselves.

But within that sense of solidarity, there are boundaries. If the job calls for someone like Ms. Basler to advocate for student activists, it also requires that she challenge them.

"I think they are stepping over a line," says Ms. Dungy, referring to student-affairs workers, "if at any point they lose that sense of who they are as educators."

That line can be hard to locate, says Kimberly Griffin, an associate professor of student affairs at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Ms. Griffin teaches in a graduate program for aspiring student-affairs professionals at Maryland’s College of Education. They deliberate over case studies and do role-playing exercises, in which the point is not necessarily to arrive at a "right answer" for any given scenario.

"What’s difficult about ‘best practices’ is that it speaks to an average situation," she says, "and no situation is ever average."

"If there is any way we can get out in front of that," wrote Ms. Kupferer, "by telling GAs what we can do to support and protect our kids before if things go crazy, before things go crazy, we should do that." Ms. Basler agreed.

Some institutions encourage their student-affairs workers to subordinate their own politics to other considerations. Ms. Ellis, the student-services director at Reno, which is a public university, says that when she interviews job candidates, she looks for people who are willing to take a dispassionate approach when it comes to supporting students in their political action.

"You have to put your personal views aside, because you’ve got a job to do," she says. "The state’s not paying you to go out and protest for them or against them."

Student-affairs officials have hardly played a neutral role in campus politics over the years. Their duty to support the individual needs of students has often cast them as advocates of diversity and stewards of the various multicultural, women’s, and LGBT centers that come with it. They were instrumental in civil-rights movements on campuses in the 1960s and ’70s, and have long pushed their institutions to be more attentive to the voices of marginalized students.

Some have done so at their own peril. Back in the 1940s, Ruth O. McCarn, dean of women at Northwestern University, was accused by a fellow administrator of spreading "tolerance
propaganda" for trying to help black female students get campus housing, according to research by Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle, a former assistant vice provost for student success at the University of Kansas. The university later fired Ms. McCarn for being, in her words, "interested in the welfare of all students."

"When I was in student affairs," says Ms. Dungy, "sometimes something would arise where I knew I was going to take a stand based on my own values and the philosophical foundations of student affairs that could have gotten me fired, and I would come home and ask my husband, ‘Can we live if I don’t have this job? Can we make it?’"

"You have to have courage in that," she continues. "And I think people who go into student affairs do, and that’s why that young woman in Greek life" — Ms. Basler — "was saying what she stood for."

Maryland’s Ms. Griffin says she does not teach her graduate students in student affairs to disregard their own values when they conflict with those of their institutions. But she does advise them to learn where their institutions’ lines are, so they know the stakes when they take a stand on the other side.

When Ms. Basler confronted Mr. Tai on the Mizzou quad, she argued that he should yield to the student activists who were blocking him. "You’re infringing on what they need right now, which is to be alone," she told him. She did not know, according to the investigators, that the student journalist had a legal right to stay and take photographs.

"Basler believed that she had official authority to order media from the area because the students did not want their photographs taken," the law firm wrote in a report released in February. "However, she had not been trained in First Amendment issues."

At around noon that day, Ms. Basler got a call from her boss, Mr. Lucas, the director of student life. He "told her that he had been contacted by the campus news bureau," according to investigators, "and that she needed to calm down and watch herself."

Ms. Basler did not seem worried. Two hours later she got an email from a photo editor at the Columbia Missourian, a local newspaper, asking her to confirm her identity in a photo that had been taken that day on the quad.

"Yes it is!!" Ms. Basler responded. "Gladly!!"

Back in the student-life office, Mr. Lucas was getting his team on message. He circulated a slate of talking points from Garnett S. Stokes, the provost:

The campus? "Quiet." The events of the past week? "An opportunity for students to witness change as it happens in the real world." Safety? "Our top priority."

But Mizzou officials could do only so much to control the narrative of what was happening.

The growing anger at Ms. Basler, however, could not be contained so easily.

Messages started arriving in her inbox. Some struck a respectful tone. "I don’t disagree with your position," wrote Luke Miller, an alumnus, "but it certainly seems to me that you are advocating for one side when both sides cite the same right to freedom of speech."
Other messages did not. She forwarded one racist, sexually explicit email to her bosses. "This is just one of hundreds of emails I am getting," she told them. "Why would anyone subject themselves to this? How do those students deal with this every day?"

That evening Ms. Basler exchanged emails with Ms. Click, the communication professor, who was getting hate mail of her own. Investigators said Ms. Basler told them that she had been alarmed by Ms. Click’s conduct on the video. At the moment, however, they seemed to share a bond that comes with being under attack. They joked grimly about running away together.

"It's going to blow over, right?" wrote Ms. Click.

"I really hope so," replied Ms. Basler. "I am so thankful for you right now."

She responded to Mr. Miller, the alumnus who had respectfully questioned her actions. Ms. Basler explained that she and a colleague had called the campus police, "but they didn’t come," and that she didn’t want to see anything happen to her students.

"What you don't see," she wrote, "is the students who were protesting were getting scared."

Now it was Ms. Basler who was feeling scared. The emails kept coming. She went to bed at around 3 a.m. and did not go into work the next morning.

Ms. Basler’s inbox was not the only one that was overflowing. The next day, November 10, Mr. Lucas and Ms. Scroggs were also slammed by emails from people who had been outraged by the video.

Not all of the messages could be dismissed as mere noise. Some writers identified themselves as alumni. Many called for Ms. Basler to be fired, or to resign, or at least to apologize. Several threatened to withhold donations to the university.

Jeff L. Hilbrenner, an alumnus of Mizzou’s law school who is partner in a local law firm, wrote to Mizzou’s student-affairs leaders to say that he had known Ms. Basler for a decade and had enjoyed their interactions but was "highly offended" by what he saw in the video, which he considered "bullying, demeaning, and criminal conduct."

Karl Adrian, alumni-board president at the fraternity Delta Sigma Phi, wrote to Mr. Lucas, asking that "action be taken as an example to our young men and women that there are consequences fairly applied to all that break rules." He said Ms. Basler should be fired.

"I plan to bring this video to the [Fraternity Alumni] Consortium to garner support if necessary," said Mr. Adrian, "but I hope it’s not."

The volume of incoming messages became overwhelming. Mr. Lucas asked that Ms. Basler’s email account block all messages from outside the university. By then the student-life office itself was under siege. In a cluster of offices in the student center, Mizzou staffers were forming a perimeter of their own.

"The number of voice messages that have come in to the Greek Life phone number and the main Student Life phone number are in the 4-5 dozen number and ever increasing," wrote Mr. Lucas late that morning in a note to officials in Mizzou’s media-relations bureau.

He said they were trying to listen to all the messages and forwarding many to the campus police. "Several have threats of violence," he said, "and we are concerned for Janna’s well-being."
At 1:01 p.m., Angela E. Dahman, a marketing-and-communications manager, wrote a summary of how the staff was handling the deluge.

They were vigilant about all messages coming in and out of the office. The front-desk phone had been set to "do not disturb." Front-desk staff members had been instructed to say they were "not at the liberty to discuss" anything having to do with Ms. Basler, except to confirm that she worked at Mizzou. Calls to her publicly listed extension were forwarded to the Greek-life office’s general number.

Passwords were reset, including those for the office’s voicemail and email, as well as "all social-media passwords." Ms. Basler’s own social-media accounts were "locked down," and two staffers were charged with monitoring and reporting any incoming "speech which infringes on university or other applicable laws/rules, individual rights, and laws."

That afternoon, Mr. Lucas gave his student-life staff a pep talk. He reminded them that counseling services were available to them, too. "We all entered this profession, and we remain here, because we care deeply about students," he wrote in a memorandum.

"I also care about each of you, and I know these past three semesters have weighed on many of us. Please remember to take time for self-care."

It was a strange moment for the student advocates. With Mr. Wolfe’s resignation, the students who were conducting peaceful demonstrations against racism had won a significant victory against Mizzou’s top administrators. And yet the 24 hours since the president’s resignation seemed to mark a low point for the student-life office. The need to protect Ms. Basler from the digital onslaught compounded the existing challenge of making students feel safe. Meanwhile, rumors abounded that forces more sinister than stubborn journalists might soon descend on the quad.

"Our community is fractured," Mr. Lucas wrote in his memo. "Our students are hurting. Our staff are now being threatened. This is devastating and is not the type of change we want to see."

The video of Ms. Basler’s confrontation with Tim Tai was percolating on social media. That afternoon Ms. Scroggs, the vice chancellor for student affairs, told her that "some people were really upset" about what had happened, according to investigators, "but she had calmed them down." (Ms. Scroggs told The Chronicle that she does not recall that conversation.)

Not all the messages arriving in Ms. Basler’s university email account were negative.

"Keep your head up, and don't let the bastards get you," wrote Mr. Ross, author of the book on campus racial politics with whom she had corresponded the previous morning.

"Yes, the photographer should have been allowed to take pics," he wrote, "but they're going to blow this up to create a false equivalence. I got your back."

Ms. Basler had champions at Mizzou as well.

"I wanted to tell you how much I admire your strength and courage to stand up and support our students," wrote Sarah Garcia, a member of the university’s Title IX support staff. "I knew you were an open-minded and kind woman, but you showed steadfast compassion when it mattered the most, and I am inspired by your conviction."

Ryan O’Connor, a student who had served as leader of a Mizzou fraternity, responded to a call for Ms. Basler’s termination with a sharp rebuke. "I don't know you, but I do know Janna
Basler," he wrote. "She cares about every student and creates relationships that last." Firing her, he said, would not help anyone on the campus. "The demands you’re making," he wrote, "are just plain irrational if you truly care about this community."

That evening Mr. McElderry, coordinator of the Black Cultural Center, told Mr. Lucas and other officials that while it might be "in the best interest" for Ms. Basler to issue an apology, he had reservations about the critique that the video had inspired.

"I believe we all stand behind Janna 100 percent, but I think the media and others are getting caught up in the fact that it is a ‘public outside space,’" Mr. McElderry wrote. "No one has the context about the threats that came to the area earlier in the week or the stress of having media present."

That evening the university issued an apology in Ms. Basler’s name. She drafted it, according to investigators, and university officials edited it.

"I allowed my emotions to get the better of me while trying to protect some of our students," it read. "Instead of defusing an already tense situation, I contributed to its escalation."

She apologized in person to Mr. Tai. The student photojournalist described her apology to investigators as "gracious, genuine, and sincere." He was never comfortable with how the story of his run-in with Ms. Basler and the protesters had overtaken the story of the protest itself. "Maybe let's focus some more reporting on systemic racism in higher ed institutions," he tweeted the day after the confrontation.

Ms. Basler acknowledged in hindsight that she had failed to conjure adequate empathy for Mr. Tai. Had she "been aware of the shouting and yelling at Tai by Professor Click and others," she reportedly told the investigators, "she would have understood his frustration and why the situation had escalated."

She was not fired, but the university put her on administrative leave. She returned to work quietly last December and has avoided the spotlight since then. "What happened on Carnahan Quadrangle," she wrote in her apology, "has been a lesson for me."

To some observers, no apology is necessary.

Curtis M. Taylor watched the video from Nebraska, where he was in his first year as an assistant director of multicultural organizations and programming at Creighton University. He recognized Ms. Basler; at a professional conference she had interviewed him for a job at Mizzou. Mr. Taylor, who is black and gay, eventually went to work at Creighton, a Roman Catholic institution that is 70 percent white, but he had liked Ms. Basler.

And so, on a day when Ms. Basler’s inbox was overflowing with angry messages, Mr. Taylor sent her a different sort of collegial note. "I personally applaud your efforts and advocacy for the students in this instance," he wrote.

It’s fair to question how Ms. Basler had handled the situation, Mr. Taylor told The Chronicle, but when it comes to student-affairs work, a personal bias in favor of those who are underserved by the status quo is a better guiding light than a politically anodyne, all-rights-matter attitude.

If Ms. Basler did cross a line that day, he said, she still taught Mizzou’s student activists something:

"Even people who don’t look like me are here for me."
MU Interim Chancellor Foley calls for moment of silence

COLUMBIA - At around 11 Friday morning, University of Missouri Interim Chancellor Hank Foley encouraged the university community to observe a moment of silence for the victims of the acts of violence that have occurred in Louisiana, Minnesota, and Texas this week.

The email notice expressed Foley's grief over the losses from the three events, encouraged the observation of the moment of silence, and mentioned that there are multiple community events coming up to support racial justice and healing.

The email, which came from Foley personally, did not suggest a location where those who wish to participate could gather.

On MU's campus this afternoon, KOMU 8 talked with about a dozen employees and students, who either did not receive the email, or said they probably would not observe the moment of silence, and that they would carry on with their daily activities as usual. One employee in MU's Jesse Hall said most employees would probably be out to lunch at 1 pm. The Admission's Office held an informational meeting at 1 pm, and did not participate in the moment of silence.

Post-Bach Engineering student Kyle Sullivan said he never received the email from Foley, despite that it was addressed to the entire university community.

"I didn't get the email, I don't know if other people have gotten the email, so I really have no idea whether or not that's going to be something that's going to be able to happen because I don't believe there's enough notice," Sullivan said.

Sullivan said that Facebook would have been a more effective way to reach people and communication the Chancellor's message.

Undergraduate MU student Josh Reedy agrees with Sullivan, and said he does not believe the email was effective in communicating the news of the tragic events. "There are also other issues.
Even though they may have been on the news, people still probably don't even know about them, unless they saw them on their Twitter or Facebook feed."

Reedy said a designated gathering would have been more effective in calling awareness to the moment of silence. "I think honestly the most effective way to get people to notice stuff like this, is kind of doing what we did last year. I mean those protests definitely got attention. I mean regardless of whether you think they were right or wrong, they got attention. People listened. So stuff like that is what's going to get people to listen."

Foley sent the email this morning, but is not on campus. An employee in the Chancellor's office said Foley is currently out of state at a development conference. The Chancellor's office would not comment on Foley's email or his suggestion of silence. The MU News Bureau also refused to comment.

Raasch: Look to history to see cyclical nature of democracy in crisis

Generated by News Bureau press release: “When Facing Crisis, American Democracy has Always Risen to the Challenge”

WASHINGTON • Crisis.


A crisis of confidence in government’s ability to do anything about the issues.

With the echoes of real gunfire in Minneapolis, Baton Rouge and Dallas literally and liberally coming through Americans’ televisions, these are not abstract challenges.

A University of Missouri professor says we’ve been here before and surpassed crises of various iterations.
In his upcoming book, “Four Crises of American Democracy,” Alasdair Roberts, a professor at the Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri, traces post-Civil War crises and what can be learned in confronting the “crisis of anticipation” he said that Americans have just entered.

“This sense of American democracy getting into deep trouble has been something that has been building up for three or four years,” Roberts said. “... I felt it was time to address that.”

Roberts' book, which Oxford University Press will publish in December, traces previously similar periods of democratic self-doubt:

- A “crisis of representation” during the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, when disenfranchised women and blacks and working-class Americans protested and government struggled to respond.

- A “crisis of mastery” stemming from World War I through World War II, when America’s economic and physical safety were tested through the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism and fascism.

- And a “crisis of discipline,” as represented in the economic and energy shocks of the 1970s, and then-President Jimmy Carter’s “malaise” speech.

Now we are entering a “crisis of anticipation,” Roberts said, as Americans rethink the Reagan-era paradigm of small government, economic and trade liberalism, and other doctrines of the last 30-plus years. He said there is a sense that democracy is not equipped to deal with long-term challenges on everything from climate change to illegal immigration to policing.

“One of the basic things that government has to do is maintain peace and order inside the country, and do it in such a way that the use of force is seen as legitimate by the people that are being governed,” Roberts told the Post-Dispatch. “One of the issues we clearly see coming on the agenda is whether local police forces are policing in such a way that is regarded as acceptable by the people who are being policed.”
Roberts said that both presumptive presidential candidates are struggling along with the rest of us to define where to go next. He said the extreme rhetoric and widely divergent solutions being offered, from Donald Trump to Bernie Sanders, are reminiscent of extreme nature of the early years of previous crises.

Roberts compares Trump to a home remodeler who relishes the demolition but has not drawn coherent plans for the remodel.

Roberts says Hillary Clinton is tethered in the public’s mind to “Clintonism” — a sense that her husband’s administration in the 1990s continued the Reagan paradigm on everything from trade to welfare reform. Roberts points out that Bill Clinton famously declared in his 1996 State of the Union speech: “The era of big government is over.”

Now Hillary Clinton is struggling to appropriate some of the themes of Sanders, her primary challenger, such as opposing free trade agreements, that require her to walk away from Clintonism.

“In order to win an election, they have to have a story about where the country is going that is compelling to a large number of people,” Roberts said of Clinton and Trump.

“On Trump’s side, he can tell the story of what he thinks has gone wrong, but he can’t articulate a vision of where to go.”

Clinton’s “inclination is basically to say, ‘I have a story about what we are going to do. It is the same story we have been telling for many years,’” Roberts said.

“That is not satisfactory to people, and she is improvising: ‘What elements of Sanders’ campaign will I take on board?’

“She is improvising a story,” Roberts said, “but it is pretty obvious she is improvising a story.”
Roberts said he is “cautiously optimistic” the U.S. will move through this crisis, but he says it could take 10 to 15 years, and the effort will be pushed by new generations of politicians who think and speak differently about challenges and solutions.

“If you look at history, you have grounds to feel more upbeat,” Roberts said. “You have to take a longer view. It is not something that gets fixed in a year or two.”

High school could boost University of Missouri enrollment

COLUMBIA, MO (AP) – The University of Missouri-Columbia, which is faced with a likely decline in enrollment this fall, could get some help from the recently expanded University of Missouri High School.

University administrators expect to see about 2,600 fewer students on campus in the 2016-17 school year, including 1,500 fewer freshmen.

The hope, however, is that students taking courses through the university’s high school program will eventually enroll at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reports university administrators are cautiously optimistic that its high school, which has 6,000 students and has been quietly branching out to foreign countries over several years, will continue to fulfill its academic purpose while also creating a path for increased enrollment at the university.
Students need more than information to change their borrowing habits

Knowledge isn’t as powerful as you might think when it comes to student loan borrowing.

Uninformed teens and college students are often cited as a major cause for the rise in student debt over the past several years. If these 17, 18 and 19-year olds only understood how much they were borrowing and what that would mean for them after college, the logic goes, they would make smarter borrowing decisions.

But a new study indicates that it likely takes more than information to change students’ borrowing behavior. Student loan borrowers at University of Missouri who received a letter detailing a personalized picture of how much money they’ve borrowed to date, their future monthly payments and other data about their loans were not significantly more likely to borrow less after receiving the letter, according to research released last week by Rajeev Darolia, a public policy and education professor at the University of Missouri.

The findings add another wrinkle to the efforts of experts and policy makers to curb growing student debt with more information. Countless surveys show that student loan borrowers often regret their debt after they’ve left school indicating they might make different decisions if they had a more accurate picture of their loans. Experts and media outlets (including this one) spotlighted the use of debt letters as an innovative solution to this post-college buyer’s remorse.

Colleges’ efforts to be more transparent with their students about borrowing is certainly a welcome step, but Darolia’s research is a reminder to be skeptical of any silver bullet approach to tackling student debt. The letters in Darolia’s experiment may have been ineffective because they didn’t deliver the data in a way that students internalized. It’s also possible, though, that larger forces are affecting the way students borrow. College costs have grown over the past several years as wages have remained largely flat. The
result is that families are increasingly turning to borrowing to finance school. Graduating college debt-free is a privilege of the largely white and wealthy few, as left-leaning think tank Demos, noted last week.

Students may not be changing their borrowing behavior once they receive the letter because they’re borrowing what they need to pay for school, even if that doesn’t appear to be a wise financial choice. An anecdotal example of this dynamic: When I wrote about this topic last year, a Twitter follower who got one of the letters at a different college said she simply cried upon receiving it.

“That’s a great initiative, more information is great,” Darolia, who is also a visiting scholar at the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, said of debt letter programs at other schools. “What this study suggests however is that by itself, information alone is probably not going to be sufficient to lead to large scale systematic changes in behavior.”

Still, helping borrowers be more informed consumers is a laudable goal, Darolia said, and he suspects students need more than letters to get true understanding of the implications of their loans. Resources like one-on-one counseling could help borrowers wade through all of the different factors they should consider.

“Student loan decisions are actually very complex, they require a pretty sophisticated understanding of a lot of complicated topics,” Darolia said. Evaluating whether a student loan is a good investment takes more than a simple cost-benefit analysis, he notes. Borrowers need to have a sense of how much they expect to earn when they graduate, how the interest will accrue and the different repayment plans available to them, to make an educated investment. “To put all of that together and make good decisions when often some of these students are very young, that’s very difficult,” Darolia said.

At Montana State University, officials provide borrowers taking on more debt than average with a slew of information that they hope will help them sort through whether their debt is a good investment. That includes details on how many classes they need to average each semester to graduate in four years, how many classes they need to pass and other academic information. At the bottom of the letter, there’s a warning to recipients that if they continue to borrow at their current rate they may struggle to repay their debt.
Providing that information makes sense given that college students need to think about their major, time to completion and other factors in addition to their debt load, said Carly Urban, an economics professor at Montana State who researched the effectiveness of the debt letters.

Urban and other researchers found the letters didn’t make much of a difference in students’ borrowing behavior, but they did push some students to approach college with a plan that would ensure they finished on time and with a degree. Students took more classes, got better grades and in some cases even changed their major to a more lucrative field, like science or business, after receiving the letters, she said.

The letters were successful at changing students’ behavior — if not their borrowing habits — partly because they began with language praising praised the students’ decision to borrow money to attend college and invest in their future, Urban said. The letter even goes so far as to note that college graduates live longer. “It’s almost like when you’re talking to a child, you say something good,” she said. “That’s maybe what’s getting them to read the entire thing.”

Peer pressure may have also influenced students to be more proactive about making a good investment, Urban said. At Montana State only those students who were borrowing more than average received a letter. “They’re getting this because they’re in ‘trouble,’” she said. “If you get the letter and your roommate, your sibling or someone else doesn’t get the letter you’re more likely to seek out those resources.”

In Darolia’s study, recipients of the letter were chosen at random from the pool of student loan borrowers at University Missouri, so some borrowers who didn’t necessarily need to adjust their borrowing also received the missives. Though Darolia’s study showed little change in borrowing behavior after students received the letters, he’s still bullish on the power of information to help influence students’ decisions. The letter did encourage students to seek more information from counselors and other sources, he added.

At Indiana University, which has become a model of sorts for the debt letter, officials view the notice as one part of a suite of programs aimed at helping students become better informed borrowers, said Phil Schulman, the director of the office of financial literacy at the school. Still, that hasn’t stopped some from pinning their hopes on the potential of a letter to shift students’ borrowing behavior. Indiana lawmakers passed a law last year requiring all colleges and universities in the state to send their students a
letter detailing how their borrowing habits could affect them in the future. Nebraska followed suit.

The debt letter interests universities and lawmakers partly because it’s a solution to a seemingly intractable problem that’s easy to implement and “isn’t high maintenance,” Schulman said. But a notice alone likely isn’t enough to change behavior.

“The debt letter is a means to provide awareness to the issue for students and parents,” he said. “We want it to be a step in the process of tackling their debt.”

UM commission

Politics or substance

By Henry J. Waters III

Sunday, July 10, 2016 at 12:00 am

Barely had the names of the new University of Missouri Review Commission appointees become known than Gov. Jay Nixon withheld funds allocated by the General Assembly for its operation.

It is more than tempting to regard this entire shenanigan as a political pushing match. That it had a political genesis is unarguable. Less certain is how the members would see and perform their duty. My own original take, expressed last week, was that the enterprise might end up in the never-never land reserved for typical university committees.

The political motivation was made clear by Sen. Kurt Schaefer, who proposed and engineered the statute forming the commission. One can imagine such a creation built on entirely pure motivation, but this version arose out of the cauldron of criticism aimed at university officials for their alleged failure to handle recent campus protests and faculty sympathizers. By the time Schaefer formed the review commission, this anger had coalesced into a determination to punish rather than help.

The telling evidence came when Schaefer warned that future state funding would depend on whether the university accepted the nascent commission’s findings. This raw blackmail of both the university and commission members gave credence to charges the commission was entirely a political concoction.
Even though the eight members were all appointed by Republican leaders of the Missouri House and Senate, when I saw their names I withheld such condemnation. The group was full of Republicans, all right, but none of those I know would accept the appointment on the blatant grounds articulated by Schaefer.

Even though Gov. Nixon will not allow current funding, commission members say they will meet anyhow, counting on a bit of temporary funding and a chance of more to come. If anything, this will enhance their stature. The legislature had appropriated $750,000 for commission operations, an outrageous amount giving the impression Schaefer & Co. were indeed after the university and willing to spend lots of public money in the effort.

The members of the commission will try to do a responsible job. Give them that. But don’t count on their ability to do much good. They won’t be able to force themselves on the entire university community. They might be able to suggest a few small things on the margin that all hands can embrace without choking, but they won’t be able to force painful change. Maybe the very spectacle of the university in the dock is enough for Schaefer & Co.

Not that continual second-guessing of university operations is a bad idea, but mounting such a partisan charge is no way to go about it.

ESPN to honor Missouri football team for 2015 boycott amid campus unrest

By Tod Palmer

Missouri’s football team made national news last November when the team boycotted practice for a few days (and threatened not to play BYU in a game at Arrowhead Stadium) amid racial unrest on campus.

An enrollment decline for 2016-17 is believed to be part of the fallout from protests that hastened the resignations of then-University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

The boycott, which shined a much brighter spotlight on Jonathan Butler’s hunger strike and the wider protests than existed before, also led to a politically charged budget fight with the legislature.

It’s understandable if university officials, who have ramped up diversity initiatives on campus during the last eight months, would prefer not to have the furor revisited.
Instead, ESPN will honor the Tigers football team with a Stuart Scott Enspire Award, which “celebrates someone that has taken risk and used an innovative approach to helping the disadvantaged through the power of sports,” according to a release from the network.

“We were surprised, because we didn’t learn of it until they announced it,” Mizzou athletic director Mack Rhoades said.

According to ESPN, the Tigers’ players “took a huge risk — their scholarships could have been revoked and their futures hung in the balance. But their actions indicated it was a risk worth taking to help bring action to this critical issue.”

Tennis legend Billie Jean King and Patriots owner Robert Kraft also will receive Enspire Awards at the Sports Humanitarian of the Year Awards, which will be hosted by Laila Ali on Tuesday at The Conga Room at L.A. Live in Los Angeles.

Rhoades doesn’t plan to attend the ceremony, but “somebody will be there to represent the University and we’ll accept the award,” he said.

The 2015 Mizzou football team and other Enspire Award winners also receive a $50,000 grant from ESPN to direct toward a qualified charity of its choice.

Highlights from the show will air in a 30-minute program at 6 p.m. July 15 on ESPN.

Missouri football boycott a reminder of the power of athletes

In recent days, we've seen two black men in vastly different parts of our country die by police officers' pistols. We've dealt with the shooting deaths of five police officers at a once-peaceful protest in Dallas.

Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and those officers have caught the nation's attention. They've stirred debate about the state of policing and the value, or lack thereof, placed on black men's lives.
Athletes, some of our society's most powerful influences, have offered their thoughts and prayers on social media. They've blasted their thoughts to fans who hail from vastly different economic, social, geographical and racial spheres.

Sports can make people who otherwise might not care about racial injustice start to pay attention.

I've seen it happen.

**Making a difference**

I'm a sports reporting intern for the Chronicle and a rising senior at the University of Missouri-Columbia. This past fall, Concerned Student 1950, a student activist group that can trace some of its roots to the Ferguson, Mo., protests that followed the death of Michael Brown, issued a list of demands to the university's administration.

The goal of the demands was to help fix the racial injustice and inequality perceived on campus. The group called for the removal of then-University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe, whom it viewed as exercising "gross negligence."

On Nov. 2, one of the group's leaders, Jonathan Butler, began a hunger strike he said wouldn't end until Wolfe was no longer president. Minimal dialogue between the parties occurred. Little progress happened. There was minimal national media attention.

On Nov. 7, a Saturday, 30 black Missouri football players announced they would boycott football-related activities until Wolfe was no longer in office. By Monday, after the entire team announced it would stand in solidarity with those players and international media swarmed the university, Wolfe and
then-Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin resigned. The hunger strike ended. The Tigers missed one practice.

"I just feel like, with particular issues, with us being athletes, it's our duty to show the students that we're more than just athletes, that we are students like everybody else," said Missouri receiver J'Mon Moore, a graduate of Elkins High School and one of the leaders of the boycott. "We do have a word. We do have a say-so on the things going on outside of football."

Missouri was 4-5 at the time of the boycott. The Tigers were set to play a non-conference opponent, Brigham Young University, in Kansas City.

Was it disappointing that the attention created by a football team possibly forfeiting a game - and not the possible death of a graduate student - is what ultimately put pressure on Wolfe to step down? Yes.

Was it surprising? Nope.

After Wolfe announced his resignation, Concerned Student 1950 celebrated on the quad it'd camped out on for a week. Players danced with members. They chanted. Circled around them was more than a quarter-mile worth of people locked arm in arm. Some of these supporters were around before the football players' involvement. Many others weren't.

It wasn't until the football team boycotted that Concerned Student 1950 became the central topic of practically every conversation in Columbia.

**Shared experience**

Many of the biggest stars in American sports are black men, the demographic that has been at the center of many high-profile, officer-involved shootings.
It didn't matter that, as athletes, the black Missouri football players experienced more privileged lives than non-athlete black students on the Missouri campus. And it doesn't matter that some of sports' biggest stars, people such as LeBron James, James Harden and Cam Newton, are now wealthy and, seemingly, free of some of the institutionalized forms of racism minorities encounter each day.

As a reporter covering the Missouri protest, I learned these athletes can empathize: Even if they don't feel as oppressed as other black citizens by the time they've achieved fame and glory, they likely did at one point.

"If the worlds of the average black students and the black athletes in the football program were as distinct and separate - with the black athlete not being subject to what black students were talking about - the black athlete wouldn't even understand when they approached them," Dr. Harry Edwards, a pioneer of the sociology of sport, said soon after the Missouri boycott. "It was the common shared experience (that the athletes identified with), and anyone who doesn't face that fact is fooling themselves."

**Speaking out**

Friday, New York Knicks star Carmelo Anthony used Instagram to make an impassioned plea. He asked for more athletes to take stands like the ones the Missouri football players did.

"I'm calling for all my fellow ATHLETES to step up and take charge," Anthony wrote in the caption of a photo of Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Lew Alcindor and other black athletes at a 1967 news conference pertaining to Ali’s decision to be a conscientious objector. "Go to your local officials, leaders, congressman, assemblymen/assemblywoman and demand change. There's NO more sitting back and being afraid of tackling and addressing political issues anymore. Those days are long gone. We have to step up and take charge. We can't worry about what endorsements we gonna lose or whose
going to look at us crazy. I need your voices to be heard. We can demand change. We just have to be willing to. THE TIME IS NOW. IM all in. Take Charge. Take Action. DEMAND CHANGE."

Sports are too big of a business today for lawmakers, administrators and bureaucrats to call athletes’ bluffs.

In 1969, a group of black Wyoming football players, now known as the Wyoming Black 14, lost their spots on the team after they asked to wear black armbands during a game against BYU. The armbands were a form of protest against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' then-policy preventing black men from being priests.

Forty-six years later, a losing college football team helped remove its university's top administrator.

Fallout From Bad Headlines
A new working paper finds that incidents of murder, sexual assault, hazing and cheating can deter students from applying

No MU Mention
Scandals on college campuses -- whether related to sexual assault, hazing or other crimes -- have made headlines in recent years. A new working paper suggests that such scandals with extensive media coverage can hurt colleges by causing a significant drop in applications.

The paper, which was authored by two researchers at the Harvard University Business School and one researcher at the College Board, looked at scandals at the top 100 universities in the U.S. News & World Report rankings from 2001 to 2013. The 124 total scandals were related to four types of incidents: sexual assault, murder, cheating and hazing. (While many would consider campus murders a tragedy, the paper includes them in the category of scandal.)
The paper found that a scandal mentioned once in *The New York Times* led to a 5 percent dip in applications the following year. Meanwhile, a scandal mentioned in more than five *New York Times* articles led to a 9 percent dip.

Most dramatically, a scandal covered in a long-form article -- which the paper defined as an article longer than two pages in a publication with national circulation -- led to a 10 percent drop. That’s roughly the same impact on applications as falling 10 spots in the *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings, according to a previous study by two of the same researchers.

“When a university or college has a scandal on its campus, then in the next year, they’re going to receive fewer applications than we would expect as a direct result,” said Jonathan Smith, a co-author of the paper and a policy research scientist at the College Board.

“Students make decisions on where to apply and enroll based on small pieces of information that are easy to obtain and right in front of them,” Smith said. These pieces of information might include an article about a scandal, a rise in a college ranking or a victory by a sports team, he said.

Three-quarters of the institutions witnessed at least one scandal during the time period studied, according to the paper. None experienced more than four.

Murders accounted for 42 percent of the scandals, followed by sexual assaults at 30 percent, hazing at 15 percent and cheating at 13 percent. But the paper notes that there were not necessarily more murders on campuses than other types of scandals -- there were just more murders covered by the media.

Out of the 124 scandals in total, 28 were covered in one to five *New York Times* articles in the following month, and 13 were covered in more than five *New York Times* articles. The 83 other scandals were covered by smaller news outlets, such as local newspapers or broadcast channels.

As an illustrative example, Smith cited 2012 coverage of hazing at Dartmouth College by *Rolling Stone* and *The New York Times*. The 8,000-word *Rolling Stone* piece, entitled “Confessions of an Ivy League Frat Boy: Inside Dartmouth’s Hazing Abuses,” told the story of a freshman who was abused while pledging a fraternity. The freshman wrote in an op-ed for the campus newspaper that he was forced to “swim in a kiddie pool of vomit, urine, fecal matter, semen and rotten food products; eat omelets made of vomit; chug cups of vinegar, which in one case caused a pledge to vomit blood ... among other abuses.”
In 2014, Dartmouth saw a 14 percent decline in applications, *Inside Higher Ed* reported at the time. Philip Hanlon, president of Dartmouth, blamed the decline on the college's reputation for rowdiness and sexual assault.

The paper also found that a college is less likely to have another scandal the year after a scandal, as opposed to five years afterward. This may be because colleges respond to scandals by implementing new policies or procedures in the following year -- although no data support this speculation, Smith said.

The paper ultimately demonstrates that the media can act as an “accountability measure,” Smith said. “Students and parents want to know the schools,” he said. “The media is serving the purpose of providing that information. It’s essentially holding colleges accountable.”

But a shortcoming of the paper is that it didn’t include scandals that weren’t picked up by the media, Smith said. “There are probably other sorts of scandals that garnered media attention, and we don’t know what those are,” he said.

### Food pantry helps clients to 'grow their own'

Tomatoes are just one ingredient in Sister Connie Probst’s recipe to nourish low-income residents of south St. Louis.

She also grows and distributes bell peppers, jalapeños, basil and dill at St. Anthony of Padua Food Pantry in Dutchtown.

Container gardening is just one element of a multifaceted program that Probst and her food pantry co-director, Sister Marie Orf, have created to serve more than 800 families a month.
When Probst, a registered nurse, took over the food pantry six years ago, it was giving out the typical canned goods and packaged fare to about 120 families a month.

“As I started work, I just kept saying to myself, ‘How can they have fresh food? How can they grow their own?’” said Probst, 65.

She dismissed the idea of a community garden — “unless it’s right next door, people won’t do it.” She landed on container gardening, even though no other area food pantries were doing it.

Volunteers put together a small greenhouse in the yard of the 125-year-old church. They plant the seedlings each February, fortifying them with organic compost from the St. Louis Forestry Department.

Probst repots the vegetables as they grow, arranging the black plastic containers on make-do benches of milk crates and plywood and protecting the long rows from the vagaries of a St. Louis spring. By mid-June, the pantry has distributed about 1,300 plants.

For Probst, it’s worth the months of effort. “It changes our clients’ outlook for life,” she said of tending to the plants. “It goes deeper than healthy food.

“They are able to grow something that is alive. We tell them, ‘Talk to your plants. They listen to you.’”

One client told Probst that caring for her little garden was the only thing that gave her solace after her son died.

“It can be a spiritual journey,” Probst said.
‘You feel good’

At Grow Well Missouri, “We hear about these benefits all the time,” said Bill McKelvey, project coordinator for the University of Missouri Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security in Columbia.

The grant-funded program, now in its third year, provides seeds, plants and educational materials to about a dozen food pantries, mostly in rural parts of the state.

“People who use food pantries are disproportionately affected by diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol — all health conditions that tend to be related to diet,” said McKelvey. “Fresh food and vegetables lower the likelihood of those chronic conditions.”

But it’s more than that.

“You feel good growing your own food. There’s a sense of accomplishment in the process from seed to harvest,” he said.

Gardeners have a reason to be active, to get outside. They often share their yield with family and neighbors and are motivated to try new foods and experiment with recipes.

“It’s become clear that all these other benefits are likely as important as the food that’s produced,” said McKelvey.

Mary Carter, 55, who lives in an apartment near St. Anthony’s, was sold on gardening from the start.

Last year, her tomato plants yielded so much fruit, “We were telling the neighbors, ‘Go ahead and get you some.’ We use them in tomato-mayo sandwiches.”

On a morning last month, Carter picked up a jalapeño plant and a tomato plant. Her grandson, Julio Rivera, had been enlisted by Probst to carry pots from the yard to the ledge next to the pantry entryway so clients could pick them up as they left with food.
Julio, 13, has lived with his grandmother since age 2, when his mother was killed. They get by on Julio's survivor benefits and Carter's disability checks. Carter, a widow, has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and has broken her back three times.

The pantry allows them to eat fresh food that she would not be able to afford at the grocery — chicken, vegetables, bread and snacks on this visit. She calls St. Anthony’s “the yellow pages of resources.”

At a table inside, a nurse takes blood pressure readings and gives out the phone numbers of nearby health centers and information on a free prescription drug program. About a third of the pantry’s clients lack health insurance.

St. Louis University medical students perform foot exams and distribute free socks. Three other volunteers provide information on government benefits and job training programs, make appointments for legal assistance and eye-doctor visits, and give out schedules for tutoring and tax services.

“We try to take a holistic approach,” said Probst. “How do we assist them to take a step up? They’re poor. Health care isn’t always accessible. You don’t eat right. The amount of stress — that creates health issues.

“It’s not a simple answer. It’s complex.”

‘Keep it balanced’

Probst makes it her priority to give produce and protein with every load of food that goes out the door. In addition to donations from the USDA, St. Louis Area Foodbank and Operation Food Search, the pantry receives handouts from local grocery stores and bakeries.

If the 20,000 pounds of food received each month is lacking in veggies, fruit, milk or meat, Probst shops for it, spending $25,000 a year fortifying the giveaways.
“We keep it balanced,” said Probst. “Everybody gets produce.”

Which is not to say that junk food isn’t part of the mix. On a recent visit, bottles of Diet Mist TWST soda are lined up next to the avocados, dried cranberries and onions. But the push, and not just at St. Anthony’s, is for more healthful fare.

At St. Louis Area Foodbank, which serves nearly 500 agencies in the region, almost one in six of its food items is fresh produce, an increase of 57 percent over last year.

“We want to be as nutritious as possible,” said Ryan Farmer, the food bank’s communications director. “It benefits us as a community to feed people better food. There’s a better chance for people to remain healthy and productive.”

To make sure their clients know how to use foods that may be unfamiliar, St. Anthony’s hosts a “Tasty Kitchen” every couple of weeks. Probst or other volunteers create a recipe with items the pantry is distributing that month.

An overflow of canned salmon and refried beans resulted in salmon tostadas. Another month, it was shredded chicken with cabbage and onions.

Juanita Foote, 43, was a fan of the chicken wrap recipe, full of cranberries and green apples. Foote, a certified nursing assistant, was picking up a basil plant to take home with her groceries.

The food she receives at the pantry helps stretch her paycheck through the month so she can provide for her daughter and 1-year-old granddaughter.

“The pantry helps me put better diets together,” she said. “It’s so vibrant.”
Street Party benefits MU Children's Hospital

COLUMBIA - **Mid-America Harley-Davidson played host to the 12th annual Street Party with the proceeds benefitting the MU Children’s Hospital Saturday.**

Families of all ages enjoyed crafts, games, raffles and food at the event. Yet, Jeanne Campoli-Mason had something else in mind when it came to her favorite part of the event.

“Kids mean everything to me. You can’t do enough for kids and that’s why I started this,” Campoli-Mason said. “This started from a number of children that all wanted to do different crafts and games. And so they tell what they want and I put it together for them.”

The MU Children’s Hospital Mascot TJ the Tiger made a special guest appearance at the party. The mascot helps children get well in the hospital by providing support and teaching them how to take care of themselves.

The event is put on entirely for free and funded by donations.

“Making at least one day that they have fun doing whatever they want. No cost just have a good time, make crafts and do games. It’s all for them.” Campoli-Mason would later add.

There were jars scattered around the event site for attendees to donate to the MU Children’s Hospital.

The Street Party ran from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday.