MU program to provide mental health care in rural areas

Generated from News Bureau press release: Program Will Train Mental Health Providers, Improve Health Care in Rural Missouri

A new program at the University of Missouri is seeking to boost mental health care in rural areas. The school’s received a $700,000 federal grant to train psychologists for work in parts of the state where specialized care’s not offered.

Dr. Laura Schopp with the MU Health System says the goal is to provide patients with mental therapy in addition to the physical health treatment they’re getting. “We know it’s not enough, for example, when a patient comes into the doctor’s office, the doctor says ‘You should really quit smoking’. A few patients do, but most aren’t able to do it just on that recommendation alone. So we know we have to come in and deliver support services and help that patient get motivated, stay motivated and have the skills they need to manage their chronic health conditions.”

Schopp contends people in less populated communities are more likely than their urban counterparts to suffer from a number of illnesses. “Our biggest issues are depression, substance abuse, anxiety disorders, and developmental disorders like autism.”

Schopp says people in less populated communities have very little access to specialized care. “We do know, both anecdotally and from previous studies, if you live in a rural area and you need high end, specialized care, it’s very, very difficult.”
Under the program, psychology students who are just short of a doctorate degree will be trained to work alongside primary care doctors. Schopp says the funding will support 5 interns per year to be sent out to under-served communities in the state. She says more than half of Missourians who have a mental health problem do not receive treatment.

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Better navigation may be bad for male turtles

Posted by Jeff Sossamon-U. Missouri August 25th, 2016

Generated from News Bureau press release: “BPA Can Disrupt Painted Turtles’ Brain Development, Could be a Population Health Concern”

The common chemical BPA can change turtles’ behavior, new research suggests, reprogramming male turtle brains to show behavior common in females.

Researchers worry this could lead to population declines in painted turtles.

Last year, the researchers also determined that BPA can disrupt sexual function in painted turtles, causing males to develop female sex organs.

Bisphenol A (BPA) is used in many consumer products including water bottles, metal food storage products, and certain resins. Often, aquatic environments such as rivers and streams become reservoirs for BPA, affecting turtle habitats.

“Previously, our research team found that BPA and ethinyl estradiol (EE2), a hormone found in birth control pills, could ‘sex-reverse’ turtles from males to females,” says Cheryl Rosenfeld, an associate professor of biomedical sciences in the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine and an investigator in the Bond Life Sciences Center.

“Painted turtles and other reptiles lack sex chromosomes. The gender of painted turtles and other reptiles is determined by the incubation temperature of the egg during development. Studies have
shown that exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), such as BPA, can override incubation temperature and switch the sex of males to females.

“In our latest study, we found that BPA also affects how the male brain is ‘wired,’ potentially inducing males to show female-type behavioral patterns.”

Researchers applied a liquid form of BPA and ethinyl estradiol to painted turtle eggs and incubated the eggs at a temperature that typically results in males. Five months after hatching, turtles were tested with a spatial navigation test that included four food containers, only one of which was baited with food. Each turtle was randomly assigned one food container that did not change over the trial period.

Researchers predicted that male turtles exposed to BPA and EE2 would exhibit improved navigational ability—similar to behaviors observed in female turtles.

Results showed that developmental exposure to BPA and EE2 improved spatial navigational learning and memory in males, as shown by increased number of times spent in the correct target zone and greater likelihood of solving the maze compared to control turtles, who were male based on the lower incubation temperature.

“Previous studies have found that female turtles are much more adept at spatial navigation—think of female sea turtles that return many years later to the same beaches where they hatched to lay their own eggs,” Rosenfeld says. “We found that developmental exposure to BPA essentially overrides the brain development of male turtles as indicated by the enhanced navigational ability of the turtles we studied.

“While improved spatial navigation might be considered a good thing, it also may suggest that when they reach adulthood male turtles will not exhibit courtship behaviors needed to attract a mate and reproduce, which could result in dramatic population declines.”

Rosenfeld notes that this is the first study to show that these harmful chemicals not only reverse the physical sex-characteristics but also affect the brain in a turtle species. Turtles are known as an “indicator species” because they can be used as a barometer for the health of the entire ecosystem. By understanding the possible effects EDCs have on turtles, researchers might be able to understand the possible effects the chemicals have on other wildlife species and humans, Rosenfeld says.

The study appears in the journal *Hormones and Behavior*. Funding came from Mizzou Advantage, the Office of Research, and the Bond Life Sciences Center at the University of Missouri. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the funding agencies.
This embryo has DNA from both parents’ mitochondria

Generated from News Bureau press release: New Discovery in Genetic Research Could Lead to Treatments for Mitochondrial Diseases

When parents pass along their genes to their children, most of the DNA from the mother and father is evenly divided. However, children receive one type of DNA, called mitochondrial DNA, exclusively from their mothers, while the fathers’ mitochondrial DNA is naturally removed from the embryos.

Scientists have now created pig embryos with “heteroplasmy,” or the presence of both maternal and paternal mitochondrial DNA.

This new innovation, reported in the Proceedings in the National Academy of Sciences, will allow scientists to study treatments for mitochondrial diseases in humans as well as the significance of mitochondrial inheritance for livestock.

The researchers found a way to prevent this paternal mitochondrial DNA removal process in pig embryos, thus creating embryos with “heteroplasmy.”

“As many as 4,000 children are born in the US every year with some form of mitochondrial disease, which can include poor growth, loss of muscle coordination, learning disabilities, and heart disease,” says Peter Sutovsky, professor of reproductive physiology at the University of Missouri.

“Some scientists believe some of these diseases may be caused by heteroplasmy, or cells possessing both maternal and paternal mitochondrial DNA. We have succeeded in creating this condition of heteroplasmy within pig embryos, which will allow scientists to further study whether paternal heteroplasmy could cause mitochondrial diseases in humans.”

For their study, Sutovsky and lead author Won-Hee Song, a doctoral candidate in the College of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources, identified two separate ubiquitin-binding proteins, called SQSTM1 and valosin-containing proteins (VCP), within embryos they believed were responsible for removing paternal, sperm-contributed mitochondria and their genetic cargo.
Sutovsky, Song, and their colleagues experimented by inhibiting SQSTM1 and VCP separately, but found that even when one protein was incapacitated, the other protein still carried out the duty of disposing of the paternal mitochondria inside the fertilized egg. However, when Song and Sutovsky inhibited both proteins simultaneously, the paternal mitochondria were not removed and remained within the embryos.

“This research is important because we now know for sure what processes lead to the deletion of paternal mitochondrial DNA from embryos,” Sutovsky says. “This knowledge will enable us to further explore how some children may develop devastating mitochondrial diseases. From there, we can create treatments and therapies that may help prevent or reduce the effects of heteroplasmy and other mitochondrial disorders.”

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture of the US Department of Agriculture funded the work, as did the National Institutes of Health Office of Research Infrastructure Programs, and the Food for the 21st Century program at the University of Missouri. Stuart Meyers, a professor in the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, is a coauthor of this study.

**Mizzou's interim chancellor asks review panel to help 'rekindle confidence' in university**

COLUMBIA • A commission tasked with reviewing the University of Missouri system met for the second time in Columbia Tuesday, this time hearing feedback and updates from university officials.

The session was largely a brainstorming effort as members consider how to improve diversity and inclusion, workforce readiness, research, the school's satellite campuses and the entire system's accountability to taxpayers.

Hank Foley, interim chancellor of the university's flagship campus in Columbia, stopped by and painted a sunnier picture of Mizzou than the one that led to the panel's formation.

Its creation was one of several responses from lawmakers to racial justice protests at the university last fall, a threatened boycott by the Mizzou football team and the departure of two top administrators. The commission is tasked with making recommendations to improve the university system and hopefully prevent budget cuts.
Also at issue: damaged public perceptions and school morale after the events of last fall, especially in light of falling enrollment numbers. “People need to believe in this place again,” Foley said.

He praised fundraising numbers and new hires, including Kevin McDonald, the new interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity.

Foley said that while the university is diverse, it needs to ramp up efforts to be more inclusive. He declined to comment on those efforts, however, instead promising that more will be revealed in September because he “didn’t want to steal (McDonald’s) thunder.”

He did acknowledge a proposal of doubling the number of faculty from minority groups in four years. He also said the university was making efforts to be more transparent about its budgeting and spending.

Commission members asked extensively about recruitment, something Foley said the university hadn’t had to worry about before because of steady growth.

“I think it’s important that we rekindle confidence and pride in Mizzou amongst all Missourians. And right now I feel that has been stressed, and I feel that stress, I see it in my inbox,” Foley said. “We are better than people perceive us to be. And we’re doing better than people perceive us to be.”

MU Interim Chancellor Foley addresses Review Commission; September diversity announcement planned

COLUMBIA, Mo.- There have been 37 layoffs this year at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Interim Chancellor Dr. Hank Foley says despite the job cuts, Mizzou’s fall enrollment is the third-highest student retention rate on record at the University.

Foley says students who attend Mizzou want to return.
“It’s really good for how we feel about ourselves and the job we’re doing and how our faculty feel about what they’re doing. And I can’t tell you how uplifting that is for all of us, both as administrators and faculty. And we have outstanding faculty,” Foley told reporters.

Chancellor Foley addressed the University of Missouri Review Commission on Wednesday in Columbia, saying rekindling pride in Mizzou is important for all Missourians.

“And I’m going wherever I can in the state to talk about what a great University this is, what proud traditions it’s had and has, and that we’re also making tremendous progress for the future and that we’re really a very good investment for the state and its taxpayers to make,” Foley says.

Foley also says the school’s diversity is improving among the student body.

“We were up to last year 26 percent of our students were not majority-white students. All right, so we bring in students who are international, students who are from all minority groups. We’ve done a good job, we can always do better. Where we need to do better is on inclusion and retention of those students and faculty,” Foley says.

Foley told the Commission that the University must be inclusive. He plans to make a September announcement about diversity at Mizzou, although he wouldn’t elaborate with reporters. That announcement will apparently involve Kevin McDonald, MU’s new Interim Vice Chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity.

Commission member Renee Hulshof, who graduated from Mizzou’s School of Journalism, tells Missourinet the September 13 announcement will include a press conference.

Foley noted MU has about 13,000 employees. The UM System’s Steve Knorr told the Commission that the UM System’s entire budget is about $3.1 billion. That includes University Hospital.
The University of Missouri Review Commission was established under legislation this year from State Sen. Kurt Schaefer (R-Columbia), who said that the UM System’s future was unclear, without some oversight.

University of Missouri Review Commission member Renee Hulshof discusses diversity issue

The University of Missouri plans a September 13 announcement regarding diversity at its flagship campus in Columbia.

MU Interim Chancellor Dr. Hank Foley addressed the University of Missouri Review Commission’s Wednesday meeting at Mizzou, saying he’ll make a September announcement about diversity. While Chancellor Foley declined to elaborate about that announcement with reporters, Commission member Renee Hulshof says it will take place on September 13.

“Seems to me it’s a press conference. The University’s been covered up with requests from all over the nation, like how are you doing this year, how are things, how are things … and they said we’re going to do this one time. And it’s going to be on the 13th. Here’s how we’re doing, here’s what we’re doing,” Hulshof says.

Foley says Mizzou’s diversity is improving among the student body, saying 26 percent of last year’s students were not majority-white. Foley says MU needs to do a better job on inclusion and retention of minority students and faculty. The diversity issue is important to Hulshof.

“And when we talk about diversity, what kind of diversity are we speaking of? Are we speaking of gender diversity, are we speaking of cultural diversity, we speaking of race diversity, what are we talking about? And making sure that we don’t simplify that issue down to a simple matter of black white,” Hulshof says.

Hulshof has spoken to MU Interim Vice Chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Kevin McDonald, and says McDonald told her it’s beyond that.
Chancellor Foley wants to double the number of minority faculty members.

Foley also told the Commission that despite 37 layoffs this year at Mizzou, the school’s fall enrollment is the third-highest student retention rate in the University’s history. Foley says people want to come to Mizzou, adding that the school has an “outstanding faculty.”

Hulshof has numerous questions about Mizzou’s retention rate.

“Do we lose more between freshman and sophomore year? Do we lose more as we progress towards graduation than we do non-minority students? I don’t know the answer to that,” Hulshof says. “And, do we lose students from rural areas more than we lose students from urban or vice versa? Do we lose females more than males? I mean, what is the retention rate and who do we lose is a key question,” Hulshof says.

The University of Missouri Review Commission was established under legislation this year from State Sen. Kurt Schaefer (R-Columbia).

**MISSOURIAN**

**Chancellor asks UM Review Commission to polish university's image**

ADAM ATON, 11 hrs ago

COLUMBIA -- **MU Interim Chancellor Hank Foley said Wednesday he hopes a state commission tasked with probing the University of Missouri System will boost the school's image instead.**

**At the second meeting of the UM System Review Commission, established by lawmakers to assess institutional weaknesses that surfaced last fall, Foley put a positive face on the situation.**

When asked what task he hoped the commission would undertake, he answered: Make us look good.
"We are better than people perceive us to be, and we're doing better than people perceive us to be," he said, noting that MU just posted its third-best student retention rate in its history, as well as its highest average ACT score among freshmen.

MU's strained reputation is obscuring the school's progress, he said.

"Unfortunately, it only takes a couple of things done poorly to change the dynamic and to change the story," he said. "And so I would say to the extent that you can help us regain that support, and to the extent that you can help us to bring those people back, if you will, those taxpayers — that would be extraordinary."

The commission faces a deadline of Dec. 31 to recommend to the legislature changes to the university system.

Lawmakers created the commission after criticizing the way university officials handled last year's student protests over administrators' perceived indifference to racism on campus. The commission is charged with recommending changes. Next year, lawmakers will consider whether administrators followed those recommendations when setting funding levels.

Commissioners sounded receptive to Foley's pitch. Pamela Washington, a Maryville University adjunct professor, said she agreed with Foley's perspective. She said Foley is doing what he needs to do to heal the university's image.

Dave Spence, a St. Louis businessman and the 2012 Republican nominee for governor, said he is holding a lunch Thursday for people he thinks could serve as ambassadors for the university.

Foley said he recognizes how much stress the university faces. Funding problems could make it more difficult for MU to remain in the Association of American Universities, a prestigious group of research institutions.

But Foley said MU, a member of the AAU for more than a century, still has time.
"Inertia is our friend right now," he said. "I don't think anyone wants to ask a school like ours to leave, given the stresses that we've been under the last 10 or 12 years."

This meeting came two days after MU students returned for the semester to see the effects of a 5 percent budget cut across campus — the result of declining freshmen enrollment, university officials say.

Foley told commissioners the university is stepping up recruitment, especially among in-state high school students. But he warned that next year's budget could bring other cuts.

"We'll probably have to do this again next year to some extent," he said about addressing possible budget cuts. "We don't know yet how much. But we're ready, and we're prepared for that."

Foley said university administrators are squeezed between limited state funding and a Missouri law that pegs tuition increases to inflation.

Lawmakers earlier this year threatened to cut the university's budget in response to how administrators handled last fall's protests, which drew national attention to the Columbia campus and helped lead to the resignations of the UM System president and MU chancellor.

Those proposed budget cuts garnered bipartisan support in the House, but Senate budget writers scaled them back — leaving the university with a net increase in state funding. The review commission grew out of that deal.

The legislature earmarked $750,000 to fund the commission, but in July, Gov. Jay Nixon withheld that state funding. That left the commission with no dedicated staff or means to pay for expenses.

Legislative staff could still assist the commission, said Adam Crumbliss, the House's chief clerk.

The commission's next meeting will be Sept. 27 at Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla.
University of Missouri Review Commission meets for second time

COLUMBIA, Mo. - The University of Missouri Review Commission met Wednesday for the second time. The group was put together by state lawmakers and tasked with reviewing the university system and make any necessary recommendations they find.

The eight member commission divided themselves into four groups, Governance and accountability, Diversity, Distance learning and research, and workforce readiness.

Commission member Dave Spence called the commission a "friend group".

"We're here because we care about the university," Spence said. "This is not working against anybody. It is working with curators, it is working with the chancellors, with the faculty, and coming up with common sense ideas on what makes sense for the university going forward."

Interim Chancellor Hank Foley also spoke at the meeting. Foley didn't shy away from the trouble Mizzou has seen in the last year. The student body is down 5% overall since last year. The freshmen student body is down in size, a decline in revenue the university will have to deal with for at least the next four years. Foley said the university has made budget cuts and dipped into reserves to deal with the shortfall.

But Foley also seemed optimistic. He said this year's freshmen class is one of the best academically the university has ever seen. He also said despite a tough November and December, the university raised $170 million in development.

Commission Vice Chairman Gary Forsee asked Foley what he'd like to see the commission accomplish. One thing Foley said was rekindling the confidence and pride in Mizzou from all Missourians.

Forsee was system president from 2007 until 2011.

Forsee said the university is in the middle of a challenging time. Smaller graduating classes coupled with the protests on campus and enticing offers from universities in neighboring states contributed to the lower freshmen class enrollment.
"This is a time where the brand and the university needs the state support for us to be strong and be able to attract the best students, teachers, faculty and researchers."

Tuition changes in neighboring states also led students away, something Forsee said the University of Missouri may have to think about in the future to stay competitive.

"We'll have to figure out how to respond to that to be sure that we're offering Missourians the best chance to come to one of our four-year public institutions and certainly one of University of Missouri's four campuses."

In July, Governor Jay Nixon stripped the commission of $750,000 worth of state funding.

Foley Appears Before Missouri Review Commission

Watch story: http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=a0c2b688-e9b5-4393-91e9-00a1d37be4ac

University of Missouri graduate student group rallies for union recognition

By Brittany Ruess

Wednesday, August 24, 2016 at 3:56 pm
The Coalition for Graduate Workers at the University of Missouri hopes to keep up its momentum in the new school year, with a focus on getting university officials to recognize the group as a union.

Leaders of the effort called for change during a noon rally on campus Wednesday — the third day of the new semester — that attracted more than 100 people.

Graduate student assistants first sought to unionize last year, an effort sparked after MU officials said the university would not offer individual health insurance to graduate assistants. At the time, the health insurance plans were going to be replaced with a stipend to cover insurance costs. The decision was quickly reversed for last school year and this one, but MU officials are waiting for federal regulators to clarify whether and how schools can offer insurance to assistants under the Affordable Care before coming up with a more permanent plan.

Graduate students voted in April to accept the Coalition for Graduate Workers, which is affiliated with the Missouri National Education Association, as its bargaining unit. The coalition is seeking recognition to represent about 2,600 MU graduate assistants in collective bargaining. However, MU leaders said graduate assistants are not employees and did not accept the coalition as a bargaining group.

The coalition's primary focus this year will be on getting university recognition for the union — either through an agreement or a court ruling — so graduate student assistants can negotiate a contract, said coalition spokesman Joseph Moore. The coalition filed a lawsuit in Boone County in May seeking legal recognition as a union.

“There are many issues that are outstanding, and we won’t see results without pressure,” Moore said.

The coalition treated the rally in part as a recruiting opportunity. Multiple speakers called for graduate assistants to join the group and sign-up sheets were available.

The National Labor Relations Board voted 3-1 Tuesday to compel private universities to recognize graduate assistants as employees. The decision does not apply to public universities like MU, but coalition co-chairman Eric Scott said the university “doesn’t have a leg to stand on” in denying MU graduate workers the same recognition.

“We have no intent of slowing down,” he said.

Speakers talked about coalition demands for better wages, a health insurance guarantee and more affordable housing and childcare.

Pattie Quackenbush, a PhD student and non-tenured instructor in the School of Natural Resources, said the university makes promises to graduate workers it doesn’t keep.

“A promise is not a contract,” she said. “They could break a promise.”
New year, new push for unionization by MU grad students

COLUMBIA — Eric Scott stood by boxes of red T-shirts stacked by the Thomas Jefferson statue at noon Wednesday. He handed out shirt after shirt to waiting graduate students and supporters for a rally on MU's Francis Quadrangle.

Scott printed 1,000 shirts — he hadn't given them all out by the time the rally started — bearing the acronym CGW and a black drawing of the MU Columns.

The new shirts, referring to the Coalition of Graduate Workers union, were a pointed push for unionization of graduate student workers on campus and an update from last year's "Graduate Students Mizzou" shirts. After a tumultuous year, graduate student workers want to keep pushing MU to recognize their union and give them collective bargaining rights.

Supporters pulled the shirts over their heads and began spreading out around the MU Columns. A few minutes after noon, Scott, co-chair of the Coalition of Graduate Workers, strode out onto the grass and lifted a megaphone.

"Last year, we came together because the loss of our insurance made us realize each one of us is small in relation to the monolith of the university," he said. "But when all of us stand together, we are a power that can shake these columns!"

After his speech, Scott led graduate students on a march through Jesse Hall and onto Traditions Plaza for a series of speeches and chants.

Speakers stressed the importance of the union and encouraged graduate students to keep fighting for their demands.
Although grad students might be tired from the past year and from the beginning of a new semester, they must remain vocal and join a union, Sarah Senff, organizing and grievance officer for the Coalition of Graduate Workers, told the gathering of 100 or so.

"A union means there is a voice speaking for you, even when you are tired," Senff said.

Alex Howe, a research assistant in philosophy and the treasurer for the Graduate Professional Council, stressed the need for unity and unionization on campus.

"Our campus is under significant budget pressure, and we're seeing lots of constituencies emerge," he said. "We need to remain patient and compassionate and communicate with each other."

A lot happened for graduate student unionization last year. Hundreds of graduate student workers walked out of their classes and crowded around the MU Columns on Aug. 26 to protest the sudden removal of their health insurance subsidies. In response to protests, health insurance subsidies were eventually reinstated for that year and for the 2016-2017 school year.

Higher stipends and the return of insurance for graduate student workers were achieved through advocacy, said Anahita Zare, spokeswoman for the Forum on Graduate Rights, the Coalition of Graduate Workers' partner grassroots organization.

This year, grad students will keep pressuring MU to recognize a union and to meet their demands. Demands for affordable housing, early childhood education and full tuition waivers for all grad student appointments remain unmet.

Activism led to a vote to unionize in April and an affiliation with the Missouri National Education Association and the National Education Association. MU has not recognized the union.
In May, the Coalition of Graduate Workers filed a lawsuit against the UM System Board of Curators asking the 13th Circuit Court to order MU to honor the unionization vote and recognize graduate assistants as employees with bargaining rights.

Graduate students referenced the National Labor Relations Board's decision on Tuesday that graduate student workers at Columbia University should be seen and treated as statutory employees. Although the decision only applies to private universities, it's expected to encourage unionization efforts at public schools.

"Don't give up," Kristofferson Culmer, a doctoral candidate in computer science, said at the rally. "And don’t be quiet."

MU Coalition of Graduate Workers say of union: 'the fight is not over'

COLUMBIA – The MU Coalition of Graduate Workers rallied on Wednesday to create “a sea of red” on the quad and then marched over to Traditions Plaza.

Coalition member Pattie Quackenbush said, “The columns are here, they’ve always been here. This is a new, Traditions Plaza, it’s a new thing. Jesse sits right in the middle. The fact of the matter is we have to keep working with our old past, our new future and the current admins. So it’s almost a symbolism of that journey.”

Joseph Moore, another member of the coalition, said it was just a coincidence that a ruling from the National Labor Relations Board came down on Tuesday saying graduate workers at private universities are considered employees and have a right to unionize.
MU is a public university, therefore the ruling does not apply, but the decision generated some hope among the coalition.

“It certainly sets a precedent at the federal level that states and local courts can follow,” Moore said. "I firmly believe it’s going to help us tremendously in our own legal case.”

MU said in a statement to KOMU 8 News that it still wouldn’t recognize graduate workers as employees, because it follows Missouri laws, which are different from those affected by the Labor Relations Board ruling.

That statement said, in part, “MU and graduate students still need guidance from Missouri courts about important, and as yet undecided, issues of unionization in our state.”

Here is what they Moore said the coalition wants from the university:

- To recognize their union voluntarily
- To begin the process of collective bargaining
- To have a legally binding contract for graduate students that prevents things like revoking health care subsidies

“We wanted to show administrators that we are here. We are not going away. The union is not going anywhere. You can try to drag it out in the courts all you want, but we are going to be here as long as it takes,” Moore said.

MU graduate students rally to unionize

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Hundreds of Mizzou graduate school students held their second annual rally and march to support their right to form a worker’s union.

Their unionization depends on an upcoming decision within the Missouri Court System.

Mizzou graduate students sued their school in hopes of legally proving they are University of Missouri employees and are entitled to form a union. The protest comes one day after the
National Labor Relations Board ruled student assistants at private colleges and universities have the right to unionize. The ruling does not apply to Mizzou because it is a public school.

Union Organizer Eric Scott said, “When we are united together, we are a power that can shake these columns.”

Protesting MU graduate students marched from The Columns, through Jesse Hall to Traditions Plaza. Outreach Officer for the MU Coalition of Graduate Workers Joseph Moore told the crowd a case pending in Missouri court should legally prove their right to unionize.

Moore said, “I’m pretty optimistic. I wouldn’t want to put a time line on it, especially after the NLRB ruling in regards to private institutions that helps our legal case tremendously. It strengthens our argument. I think we will win eventually.”

University Officials have reinstated health care benefits and gave a pay raise to graduate students, but they will not recognize them as employees.

The lawsuit deciding whether Mizzou graduate students have a right to form a union is making its way through the Missouri Circuit Courts.

MU graduate students voted to unionize in April.

MU grad students rally on campus Wednesday

COLUMBIA, Mo. - Graduate students at the University of Missouri held another event Wednesday to mark the first anniversary of their worker rights rally held in 2015. The gathering was set to begin on campus around noon at the columns.

Last year on Wednesday, August 21, they walked out of class during the first week of school, after officials briefly pulled their health insurance. That decision was reversed within a week the Friday before classes started.

Grad students still continued to push other demands. They report seeing drops in affordable childcare, housing and living wages, while some of their colleagues fell into poverty as university fees continued to rise.
The group later voted to unionize in April, but the UM system refused to recognize those attempts. The issue was then picked up in the courts, where a final decision is still pending.

Graduate workers hold second annual rally for graduate rights

Coalition of Graduate Workers co-chair Eric Scott: “Each one of us is not that powerful in comparison to the grand monolith of the university, but when we stand together, when we are united together, we are a power that can shake these columns.”

Gathered in front of the Columns in a sea of red shirts, the Coalition of Graduate Workers and the Forum on Graduate Rights held a rally today, beginning at the Columns and ending with a series of speakers at Traditions Plaza. Coalition co-chair Eric Scott began the rally with a megaphone, speaking of unionization.

“Each one of us is not that powerful in comparison to the grand monolith of the university, but when we stand together, when we are united together, we are a power that can shake these columns,” Scott said.

This time last year, graduate students held a walk-out after the university gave them 13 hours advance notice that their health insurance coverage would not be renewed. After this first protest, the graduate rights forum formed and began collecting signatures to hold a union authorization election.

The coalition, which started as a branch of the forum, held the election in April. Graduate workers voted in favor of the union, but the university has not formally recognized it. The coalition brought a lawsuit against the university, which is working its way through the courts.

“We now have a lawsuit in the Boone County circuit court so that our union will be recognized by the university,” sociology doctoral candidate David Elliott said. “It’s actually a frivolous lawsuit because it’s a point of law that’s unnecessary. The administration is wasting taxpayer dollars now, paying for this union besting lawyer, over something that didn’t need to be questioned.”

This year, both the workers coalition and the graduate rights forum met to both recognize and celebrate their successes and to reaffirm their goals for the upcoming school year. They plan to continue advocating for affordable housing, child care, a living wage and their healthcare.
The National Labor Relations Board ruled on Tuesday that graduate student workers attending private universities have the right to form unions, but this ruling does not apply to public universities, such as MU.

However, graduate workers are hopeful that this ruling will set a legal precedent and that there will soon be a ruling concerning public institutions.

“Last year, departments showed unanimous support for the graduate students,” said Rabia Gregory, an associate professor of religious studies. “We, as faculty, did this because we knew that graduate students are vulnerable to harsh repercussions if they speak out alone without support from people who have more power than they do.”

Elliot believes that having a union that is legally recognized by MU would not only protect and benefit graduate students, but could also be helpful to the general public.

“Unions have gotten a bad reputation in the last generation, but when you go back to say World War II, most veterans from WWII were members of unions,” Elliott said. “It’s extremely patriotic, and in my view it’s actually good for the university, and good for the state’s economy.”

**MISSOURIAN**

**Two new housing options open for graduate students**

MEG VATTEROTT, 1 hr ago

COLUMBIA — Graduate students will have more housing options this fall, including rooms in Respect Hall and a development called The Reserve at Columbia.

About 40 spaces are available at both new options.

More affordable housing options was one of the demands made by graduate students last fall, in addition to child care and subsidized health care.

“We had decided, based on the projection size of the freshman class coming in, and the fact that we are opening a new residence hall, Brooks, that we didn’t need all of our capacity,” said Frankie Minor, director of Residential Life.
With fall enrollment projected to drop by up to 2,600 students, Respect and Excellence halls were put on standby status until other halls were filled. Excellence Hall remains on standby status.

When used as undergraduate housing, Respect Hall had two double rooms connected by a bathroom. For graduate students, the rooms will become two single rooms connected by a bathroom, allowing them to have more privacy and space.

In addition to Respect Hall, another university-operated, extended-campus housing option is available for graduate and professional students at The Reserve at Columbia called Tiger Reserve. Space at The Reserve for graduate and professional students allows for academic-year or semester-based contracts. Students will have a private room and bathroom while sharing common space and a kitchen with other graduate students.

Minor said the basic benefit of working with university housing instead of other housing options is the simplicity.

“You are working with the university, so in essence, your bills are all going through your student account,” Minor said.

This removes the need for students to make separate payments to the landlord, cable company and utilities. If they receive a stipend through the university, this allows that money to be directed to housing through the same system.

“We are in the business of helping students, not to make money,” Minor said. “Our job is to provide a service to students that is going to help them be successful.”

Graduate students often need flexibility due to the nature of their programs, which sometimes requires them to break their housing contracts. For graduate students living in university housing, Minor plans to make this easier to do.
One floor in Respect Hall will also be used for guest housing. This creates an affordable on-campus place to stay for temporary visitors. Examples of this include a visiting faculty member or a medical student on a short-term rotation at the university hospital.

“We have had a demand for years,” Minor said.

The Residence Hall Association will continue its other graduate student housing options. This includes the on-campus apartment-style housing in Manor House, Tara Apartments and University Heights. Minor said that those options are typically close to full capacity.

“If we can accommodate a few more students, for whom this is a good, better, or best option, we are more than happy to try it,” Minor said.

SERVE & PROTECT?
A HISTORY OF THE POLICE [2016]

Backstory Radio Story features MU expert Alasdair Roberts, professor in the Truman School of Public Affairs. His interview begins at the around the 15:30 minute mark.

Listen to the story here: https://soundcloud.com/backstory/serve-protect-a-history-of-the-police-rebroadcast

For many Americans, police shootings in Louisiana and Minnesota earlier this summer were strikingly similar to other instances across the nation in recent years. The prominence the shootings—and the retaliation in Dallas—has sparked a new round of questioning about the role of local police in their communities. In this episode, we’re looking at how the police departments we’re familiar with today took shape. We’ll explore how the first municipal
police departments were assembled to quell riots in the 1840s, not fight crime. And we’ll consider what happens when the police don’t protect those they serve.

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Editorial: MU enrollment

For months, ever since last fall’s eruptions on campus, critics have predicted the University of Missouri would suffer dire reductions in this fall’s enrollment. Now that actual effects are becoming known, the numbers can be interpreted several ways.

Officials had predicted a loss of 2,600 in total enrollment. Preliminary numbers show 2,273. First-day freshmen were down by about 1,400, in line with predictions. Final numbers will be up or down somewhat when late enrollees and dropouts are known.

Several factors are cited for the smaller freshman class: smaller high school graduating classes, increased recruiting from competing universities and colleges, and the unrest on campus. How much loss can be directly attributed to the unrest is hard to know. Moreover, how can blame be assessed?

Some will blame the protesters entirely, leaving campus officials and the rest of us as victims. According to this view, the reputation of the university was unfairly sullied by a few selfish students who took to the streets instead of using more responsible means to air their complaints.

Some will blame university officials: They should have been more sensitive or wise all along, heading off the protests in a sea of understanding. Or, once they saw the ridiculous protests, officials should have gotten tough, telling the students they came here to get an education, not to camp out on the quad. If they don’t like it here, they can leave. Scholarship athletes in particular have no business biting the hand that feeds them. The football coach had no business standing up the protesters.

A vast middling crowd believes the student protests are part of a way of life on public college campuses and that the university reacted about as well as should be expected, avoiding a protracted war between student activists and officials, moving quickly to establish new management, giving the students their due but no more. In this view, the loss in enrollment is understandable but not excessive, and the thing to do is recognize the shortfall for what it is and spend time looking ahead, not back.
The shortfall is taking a bite out of the MU operating budget. Division heads have been told to cut back on spending to help accommodate an anticipated reduction of some $36 million this year. Interim Chancellor Hank Foley wisely says he and his minions will build on gains, including record levels of private fundraising, near-record levels of freshman student retention and equal to the highest mean ACT test level of any freshman class in history.

We have this glass either half-full or half-empty. It’s not overflowing, but, as always, it makes more sense to work on raising the level than griping about it.

Soon a new university system president and chancellor will be ensconced. With the right attitude, they will gaze ahead toward a future with much on their side. The University of Missouri has known challenges but great opportunity. What’s new, and what more could prospective managers want? Until we learn otherwise, we should assume they see it that way and help rather than hinder their progress.

WDAF-KC (Fox) – Kansas City, Mo.
8/24/16

Enrollment Numbers Down at Statewide and Regional Universities and Community Colleges


MISSOURIAN

MU changes bathroom labels to promote gender inclusivity
COLUMBIA — Many single-occupancy restrooms across the MU campus that were labeled as "unisex" will be re-labeled "toilet" by the time students return in August.

The change to "toilet" will only affect single-occupancy bathroom stalls. In residential halls, single-occupancy stalls with showers and sinks will be re-labeled "shower" and "toilet," depending on the contents of the restroom.

The move follows a resolution passed by the Missouri Students Association in January. According to the resolution, the change will "make MU's campus bathrooms more accessible to trans and gender non-conforming students."

Sterling Waldman, a social justice chair in the MSA Senate, engaged the support of the MSA for the re-labeling. He said he believes the word unisex excludes people who do not identify as male or female.

"Unisex is just such an uncomfortable and outdated word," Waldman said.

Nathan Hurst, who works for the MU News Bureau, said in an email that MSA donated $5,000 to the project and the Department of Residential Life has used $1,000 of the funds to update signage in 14 residential halls and two campus dining halls.

MU Residence Hall Association President Matt Bourke said it will help make the MU campus as inclusive as possible to as many identities as possible.

"This is our way of making people feel that no matter how they identify, there is a space for them," Bourke said.

However, according to Waldman, finding a private place to go to the bathroom on campus can sometimes be difficult.
"There aren't enough, not even close to enough," he said. "There's not even one in every building."

According to a map provided by the LGBTQ Resource Center at MU, there are 28 single-occupancy stalls across campus, most concentrated in the center of campus. There is currently not enough money to complete the renaming project for all 28 stalls, Hurst said.

It will cost an estimated $11,600 to change every relevant sign on campus and, due to budget cuts, Hurst said there is insufficient money available to support the entire project.

"Campus facilities is currently working with students from MSA to identify which bathroom signs are of the highest priority and change the signage on those bathrooms using the remaining $3,000 of the allotted MSA money," Hurst said.

New residential halls and recently renovated buildings will have updated signs installed during renovation or construction.

**Campuses as Racial Utopias?**

It depends on whom you ask, write David L. Brunsma, David G. Embrick and James M. Thomas, who contend that institutional leaders often try to deny racial tensions on their own campuses.

A recent survey by *Inside Higher Ed* and Gallup of college and university presidents reveals that while 84 percent of university leaders believe race relations on their own campuses are either "excellent" or "good," less than 25 percent thought so about race relations on other campuses in 2015-16. The percentage of presidents who assessed their own campus racial climate as "good" or "excellent" and elsewhere as not, increased from the previous 2014-15 survey.

Yet this past academic year was marked by numerous high-profile protests at colleges and universities across the country. At the University of Mississippi, for example,
students demanded and won the removal of the Mississippi state flag from campus grounds. **At the University of Missouri, student protesters helped force the resignation of both the system president and chancellor of the main campus.** Student protests at Brown University led to the president’s promise to devote more than $100 million to diversity and inclusion efforts on her campus.

How is it possible that in a period increasingly defined by the resurgence of nationwide protests across campuses, college and university leaders can deny or minimize racism at their own institutions?

In late December 2015, we asked colleagues across the country to send us their institution’s responses to nationwide student protests against racism and discrimination. We sought publicly available messages posted to university websites, shared through campus wide email distributions or statements to local, state and national press. **We were interested in what we have coined the post-Mizzou effect, believing that the high-profile case at the University of Missouri would provide an opportunity for college and university leaders to confirm what the aforementioned survey found:** that while other campuses are embroiled in racial conflict, their own communities were safe. All told, we collected nearly 70 responses from leaders of institutions that ranged from small liberal arts colleges to large research institutions.

An analysis of those responses reveals that while college and university campuses may each be distinct spaces, they rely upon familiar tropes, or frames, to communicate beliefs about their own campus racial climate as it compares to others. For example, nearly every person who responded declared that race relations on their campus are good, much improved compared to previous years, or that the institution is taking significant steps to make things better. No response made mention of failed efforts or existing racial conflict.

On the one hand, that is not surprising. University leaders are often asked to help fundraise and need to be adept at convincing private citizens, public officials and certainly alumni that their campus is a good investment. On the other, given the sheer number of campus protests nationwide, as well as the enormous news media coverage that followed them, we find it hard to believe that every institution we sampled is a utopia for race relations.
The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education has a crowdsourced list of more than 100 campus racial incidents dating back to 2011, and FBI data shows that more than 780 hate crimes took place on college and university campuses in 2013. Meanwhile, by the end of 2015, student protesters had issued written or verbal demands at nearly 80 colleges and universities.

Nevertheless, nearly half of our sample contained explicit commitments from college and university leaders to “diversity,” “inclusion” or “equity.” Some marked their efforts as enduring, woven into the fabric of their institution. Brandeis University, for example, claimed its commitment is “lasting,” while Virginia Commonwealth University declared its commitment is “unrelenting.” Other institutional leaders promised their communities that the events across the nation would produce new commitments. At Duke University, for example, leadership declared that “continued campus dialogue” would occur in 2016, sparked by the “national debate about issues around race, diversity and inclusion.” Still other college and university leaders chose to downplay or minimize any potential racial conflict at their institutions. At Georgia State University, for example, leadership touted its national recognition in “The Washington Post for our commitment to diversity.”

Yet a deeper analysis of the various responses reveals that, in many cases, commitment functioned as a way for institutions to distance themselves from the racial conflict taking place elsewhere and/or deny racial tension on their own campus. For example, the same day that hundreds of students gathered to raise awareness about experiences of racism at Columbia University, its president declared in an email to the campus community that the university’s commitment to addressing racial inclusion there and elsewhere was “deep.” Likewise, four days after students rallied against a “climate of antiblackness” at the University of California, Irvine, the institution’s leadership proclaimed that the continuing diversity activities and dialogues on that campus reinforced its “commitment to sustaining and supporting a diverse community.” Moreover, the Black Student Union had filed a letter with a number of demands for improving the campus racial climate earlier in the year.

As scholars who study race and racism, we are concerned that the public messaging of campus racial climates by college and university leaders is deeply entrenched within the larger ideologies of colorblindness and diversity. In the 21st century, racism has been caricatured as extreme bigotry, often directed at an individual or group of individuals,
by another. Yet a significant body of sociological research shows that contemporary racism is much less overt and often comes in the form of downplaying or minimizing existing racial disparities. Colleges and universities, for example, will often tout their creation of an Office for Diversity and Inclusion as evidence of their deep commitment to promoting racial inclusion, while their leadership and senior faculty ranks remain overwhelmingly white (and male).

On college campuses, as in every corner of our society, pretending that race, racial inequality and racism do not exist is not the same thing as working actively to effect social change in these spaces. As faculty members at three different universities, when we embarked on this project, we did so because the race-related communications and responses coming from our own institutions were, given our experience, quite out of the ordinary from administrations -- rare indeed are communiqués that even come close to discussing race and racism.

ColLEGes and universities, the vast majority which are historically white, are spaces that are rife with racial conflict, but not typically discussed -- whether in the dorm, the classroom, the department or the halls of administration. We believe the events at institutions like the University of Missouri represent the tip of an iceberg and reveal only a small part of the racial animosity that has pervaded campuses for generations of students, faculty members, staff members and administrators. What encouraged this collective administrative response across dozens of colleges and universities to the tip of that iceberg is unclear. What is clear from our initial research is that this response, in its institutional inertia, appears to quickly wish to push the tip back underwater.

**Op-Ed: Diversity on campus sparks protest? It's a sign of progress.**

Show of hands: you work side-by-side with people who are much poorer or wealthier than you — and you share your living space with someone from a religion, race, nation or sexual orientation other than your own.

We suspect few adults have their hands in the air. The vast majority of Americans live and work primarily with people much like themselves.
The clearest exception to this demographic homogeneity occurs in academe. It wasn’t long ago that students at our nation’s colleges and universities were predominately white, male and from affluent families. Today, only 44% of college students are men, and 52% are white. Fully 39% of undergraduates come from families with incomes low enough to qualify for Pell Grants. Especially notable, the most selective schools — those with applicant pools large enough to fill their classes many times over — have transformed their student bodies, going from among the least diverse to among the most.

In light of all that, no one should be surprised that student unrest has rocked campus after campus over the past year. What began at the University of Missouri quickly spread across the country. Whether public or private, large or small, urban or rural, few were immune.

Were diversity and inclusion easy, other sectors of society might have already succeeded at it. Apartment buildings and suburban enclaves, corporate work teams and boardrooms, the U.S. House and Senate — all would be appreciably more diverse.

The young adults moving onto college campuses over the coming weeks arrive from communities and K-12 systems that are largely segregated by race and by income; they may graduate into jobs and neighborhoods that remain so as well. But while on campus, a daughter of a hedge fund parent may share a room with the daughter of a migrant worker; a straight Republican may room with a gay Bernie Sanders supporter. Everyone is here, and everyone lives together, if not in perfect harmony. Still, for four precious years they share classrooms, bathrooms and, for most, an abiding affection for their future alma mater.

They are part of an ambitious experiment in diverse populations living together. Unlike experiments in medicine or engineering, however, there is little empirical research to guide anyone and no controlling for conditions. On the contrary, the participants have no interest in being controlled or viewed as subjects.

If this academic year is anything like the last, some students will proclaim loudly what a terrible job college administrations are doing to create an inclusive community and will demand change. Others will work with one another and with faculty and administrators to advance diversity and facilitate better mutual understanding. Some will do both. Still others will quietly decline to participate by self-segregating or even dropping out.

As college presidents ourselves, of course it is our preference that students collaborate with faculty and administrators rather than occupy offices, shut themselves off from fellow students with whom they disagree, or leave school. But we recognize and accept that these students are coming of age in a time of political, social and economic turbulence unseen in a generation. This year’s presidential election rhetoric only makes things more volatile.

We have less patience with pundits and politicians who opine from gated communities and segregated offices about campus incidents that, for all their notoriety, are utterly unrepresentative of the main points of tension on campuses. For every student who complained about inauthentic ethnic food in the cafeteria, to cite one well-publicized example, exponentially more Asian and Asian American students endured insults and snubs based on jealousy, stereotypes or outright
hatred. Likewise, for every example of students demanding safe places or trigger warnings so as to avoid material they consider offensive or upsetting, innumerable LGBT students and students of color found themselves in situations where they were affronted or physically threatened.

Social experiments often fail, as any baby boomer who joined a commune in the 1960s can attest. But the efforts currently underway on college campuses to enact the American ideals of opportunity, diversity and unity are noble, and the participants deserve respect for trying to achieve them.

The surprise isn’t that there’s friction on campus these days, but how well this unique experiment actually works.

Barry Glassner is president and professor of sociology at Lewis & Clark College. Morton Schapiro is president and professor of economics at Northwestern University.

**The Sky Isn't Falling**
Critics of this week's NLRB decision in favor of graduate student unions at private institutions say it could turn graduate education upside down. But that hasn't happened on a campus with one of country's oldest public-sector graduate employee unions.

**No MU Mention**
Graduate students generally celebrated this week’s decision from the National Labor Relations Board saying that graduate assistants at private institutions may now form unions because being students doesn’t preclude them from also being employees. But the decision elicited doom and gloom from others, including the board’s one dissenting member, who said classifying graduate students as employees could “wreak havoc” on their educations.

Philip A. Miscimarra wrote in his dissent in the case involving student workers at Columbia University that for “most students including student assistants, attending college is the most important investment they will ever make ... I do not believe our statute contemplates that it should be governed by bargaining leverage, the potential resort to economic weapons and the threat or infliction of economic injury by or against students, on the one hand, and colleges and universities, on the other.”

The American Council on Education followed suit in criticizing the decision, along with some Republican lawmakers. Top concerns were that a proliferation of private
university unions would drive up tuition, to compensate for associated cost increases, and would compromise the mentor-mentee relationship central to graduate training. Critics also said the decision was too sweeping, in opening the door to unions not only for graduate instructors but externally funded research assistants and even other kinds of student workers, such as graders.

But is the sky really falling? Acknowledged throughout but not central to this week’s decision is the fact graduate students are already unionized on several dozen public campuses, which -- unlike their private counterparts -- are governed by state law. A look at the American Federation of Teachers-affiliated graduate employee union at the University of Michigan, one of the nation’s oldest, suggests that identifying students as workers hasn’t held the institution back.

Michigan is one of the country’s top graduate institutions, with international recognition for many of its departments. Indeed, other top public institutions -- such as the University of California System and the University of Washington -- have graduate assistant unions. And while Michigan is public, it receives the vast majority of its general funds from tuition and fees. State support made up just 16 percent of that budget in 2015. Most research support is from the federal government.

“It’s a specious argument to say that graduate employees are really a driver of costs in higher education,” said John Ware, a Ph.D. candidate in applied physics at Michigan’s Ann Arbor campus and president of the Graduate Employees’ Organization. “Graduate employees are doing huge amounts of instructional work and enormous of amount of research work. So compared to how much work of the university we are doing, what we make in pay and benefits is a fraction of the budget.”

As far as relationships between graduate students and professors go, Ware pointed to research suggesting that unionized graduate students on public campuses actually report better levels of support than their nonunionized peers. That same paper was cited in Tuesday’s NLRB decision concerning the graduate student union bid at Columbia.

Faculty members seem to agree that the union hasn’t negatively affected Michigan, with a few caveats.

“What we have at Michigan works OK, where graduate student instructors are in the union and graduate student research assistants are not,” said Bill Schultz, a professor of mechanical engineering at the Ann Arbor campus and president of the Faculty Senate. “I understand and respect that some students are represented by a union and I think it’s done good things for them.”
At the same time, he said, “it’s different and it doesn’t work well if everyone --
including research assistants -- were to unionize. ... And that’s certainly not the minority
opinion.”

Michigan’s graduate student union was founded in 1970. It’s gone on strike only once,
before it secured its first contract in 1975. It represents about 1,800 graduate teaching
and staff assistants on three campuses in collective bargaining, and advocates for about
2,050 additional graduate research assistants who are not formally included in the
union.

The Graduate Employees’ Organization has battled over the years to formally represent
research assistants, and there was a union organizing drive for those assistants in
2011-12. But state labor officials -- similar to the NLRB since 1974, until this week --
have argued that research assistants’ work pertains too much to their own educational
goals for them to be considered employees. That became law in Michigan in 2012, even
though many graduate assistants argue their intellectual work and long hours still
benefit the university.

Minimum full-time equivalent pay for graduate students at the Ann Arbor and Dearborn
campuses was set at $18,200 in 2013, and has increased 2 percent in each year since,
according to the union’s current contract. The 2013 study cited in the recent NLRB
decision in favor of graduate student unions at private institutions found that graduate
students on unionized public campuses enjoy better pay than their nonunionized peers,
in additional to better support, but Michigan’s salaries aren’t even near the top of the
national graduate employee pay ladder. The national median salary for graduate
teaching assistants was $30,810 last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
Beyond pay, the Michigan contract ensures important benefits, such as heavily
subsidized health insurance; dental coverage; a child care subsidy up to about $4,350,
depending on the number of children; parental accommodation and bereavement leave.
Class limits are supposed to be set by department, according to the contract, and there
are provisions for due process.

A Michigan spokesperson provided basic information on the union. Schultz, the Faculty
Senate president, noted that there was significant faculty opposition to the research
assistants’ union push around 2012.

While individual research assistants who take up instructors’ assignments can be
accommodated, he said, trying to work researchers into a union setting is lot more
complicated than teaching assistants. External funding is never guaranteed, for
example, he said, and potentially taking students away from their immediate research
to do other kinds of work could significantly slow down their progress to a degree. Moreover, he said, overseeing an assistant’s research makes him feel much more like a mentor than an employer.

To the research assistant question, the NLRB said in its decision that Columbia, “while advancing the assistants’ doctoral theses, also meets research goals associated with grants from which the university receives substantial income.” And because Columbia “directs the student research assistants’ work and the performance of defined tasks is a condition of the grant aid, we conclude that the research assistants in this case are employees” under the National Labor Relations Act, it said.

Ware, the president of Michigan’s union, is a research assistant, not a teaching assistant. He’d like to be part of collective bargaining, and noted that research assistants on some public campuses are covered by union contracts. At the same time, he said, the presence of the Graduate Employees’ Organization has bettered working conditions for all graduate assistants at Michigan. They have access to the same health care plans, for example, he said.

“It’s also true in terms of the quality of the work environment -- unions can help to improve workplace climate, and that makes a difference for everybody,” Ware added. Adrienne Eaton, associate dean of the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University, co-authored the widely cited paper on graduate student union outcomes. She said her research doesn’t address costs of graduate student unions directly, but underscored the finding that graduate student employees are paid relatively more than their nonunionized peers. However, she said, “my sense is that the economic issues are not the central concern of many of the grad students organizing in private sector universities, so it's not clear that unionization will push up costs much.”