Fracking chemicals alter hormones of baby mice
Posted by Jeff Sossamon-U. Missouri August 29th, 2016

Generated from News Bureau press release: “Exposure to Chemicals Released During Fracking May Harm Fertility”

More than 15 million Americans live within a one-mile radius of unconventional oil and gas operations. These UOGs combine directional drilling and hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” to release natural gas from underground rock.

A new study links exposure to chemicals released during hydraulic fracturing to adverse reproductive and developmental outcomes in mice. Scientists believe that exposure to these chemicals also could pose a threat to human development.

“Researchers have previously found that endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) mimic or block hormones—the chemical messengers that regulate respiration, reproduction, metabolism, growth, and other biological functions,” says Susan C. Nagel, associate professor of obstetrics, gynecology and women’s health in the School of Medicine.

“Evidence from this study indicates that developmental exposure to fracking and drilling chemicals may pose a threat to fertility in animals and potentially people. Negative outcomes were observed even in mice exposed to the lowest dose of chemicals, which was lower than the concentrations found in groundwater at some locations with past oil and gas wastewater spills.”

Researchers mixed 23 oil and gas chemicals in four different concentrations to reflect concentrations ranging from those found in drinking water and groundwater to concentrations found in industry
wastewater. The mixtures were added to drinking water given to pregnant mice in the laboratory until they gave birth.

The researchers compared the female offspring of the mice that drank the chemical mixtures to female offspring of mice in a control group that were not exposed. Mice exposed to drilling chemicals had lower levels of key hormones related to reproductive health compared to the control group.

“Female mice that were exposed to commonly used fracking chemicals in utero showed signs of reduced fertility, including alterations in the development of the ovarian follicles and pituitary and reproductive hormone concentrations,” Nagel says.

“These findings build on our previous research, which found exposure to the same chemicals was tied to reduced sperm counts in male mice. Our studies suggest adverse developmental and reproductive health outcomes might be expected in humans and animals exposed to chemicals in regions with oil and gas drilling activity.”

The study appears in the journal Endocrinology. Coauthors of the study are from Duke University, the University of Florida, the University of Missouri, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and the US Geological Survey.

Funding came from the University of Missouri Research Council, Mizzou Advantage, and the US Environmental Protection Agency’s STAR Fellowship Assistance Agreement awarded to Christopher D. Kassotis. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the funding agencies.
Forums scheduled for proposed University of Missouri speech policies

By Rudi Keller

Monday, August 29, 2016 at 2:00 pm

When the Coalition of Graduate Workers marched through Jesse Hall on Wednesday during their demonstration to agitate for union recognition, members remained silent to avoid violating University of Missouri regulations prohibiting disruptive protests in its buildings.

But members did not seek a permit to use Francis Quadrangle, which would be required under proposed guidelines issued in May, for their well-advertised event, spokesman Joseph Moore said Monday.

Members did not need to make noise inside to be noticed, he said.

“We don’t need to have chants,” Moore said. “Our very presence, the fact we are all wearing the same color, the fact we came in together and the fact we are all unified sent the message.”

At 3 p.m. Tuesday in the Leadership Auditorium of the MU Student Center, interim Chancellor Hank Foley will lead a campus forum on the proposals made in May by the Ad Hoc Joint Committee on Protests, Public Spaces, Free Speech, and the Press. A second forum will be held at 3 p.m. Sept. 19 in Jesse Wrench Auditorium at the Memorial Union.

Coalition members will attend the forum, but the organization has not taken a stand on the proposals, Moore said.

The committee’s proposals cover “how public spaces can be regulated on campus in a way that protects safety, free inquiry, and free expression as well as to suggest how the university might resolve future conflicts concerning the use of public space on campus,” Foley wrote in an internal campus email inviting students, staff and faculty to the forum.

The proposed policies incorporate many existing university regulations, such as restrictions on camping on campus, and include guidelines for behavior in areas designated by law as public forums. The committee was formed after protests by the Concerned Student 1950 group that
included a campout on Carnahan Quadrangle, attempts to set up areas where reporters were not allowed and confrontations between protesters and the press.

The most famous image of the protests was former Assistant Professor Melissa Click calling for “some muscle” to remove a photographer from the demonstration site. That is not acceptable, and police do not have the power to demand to see, confiscate or delete photos, the proposed policy says.

“Photography is allowed in traditional public forums or other public spaces,” the proposal says. “In other words, when a person is in a public space, the person has a right to photograph anything that is in plain view.”

The policy also lists areas where protests are allowed with a permit but where spontaneous protests may not be held, areas that can be reserved but which also are available for spontaneous events and areas where no demonstrations will be allowed.

The areas that are off-limits include parking lots and garages during hours requiring parking permits, the entrances to all buildings and the areas near the MU Research Reactor, the MU Power Plant and areas adjacent to health care facilities. Demonstrators would be prohibited from occupying university buildings after hours or constructing anything without permission.

The proposed policy makes a distinction between legal protests and dissent and civil disobedience, defined as willful violations of law or policy intended to force change.

“Although deliberate acts that violate the laws, rules, and policies applicable to free expression may constitute civil disobedience, those who commit such civil disobedience should be willing to and must expect to suffer the disciplinary and remedial consequences of their actions as provided by law, rule, or policy,” the draft says.

MU to hold open forum on new policy

COLUMBIA - The MU Faculty Council will hold a meeting Tuesday to discuss a new proposed policy with students, staff and faculty.
The Ad Hoc Joint Committee on Protests, Public Spaces, Free Speech and the Press drafted a policy in May that will be discussed at the meeting Tuesday afternoon.

"It [the policy] explains that all outdoor space on the campus is available for assembly but then articulates the standards under which the university can regulate those uses," committee chair Bob Jerry said.

Committee member and journalism professor Sandy Davidson explained when a previously scheduled university event conflicts with a group's plan to exercise its first amendment rights, the university event does take priority.

"Think of public forums, streets, sidewalks, we've got Francis Quadrangle that's a public forum, we've got the Carnahan Quad, we've got the Speaker's Circle. We've got spaces where people can engage in First Amendment expression and do so at any time," Davidson said. "But we've also got some spaces, and back to the Quadrangle, which is a public forum, but sometimes it is a site where we have university functions. So if the university does schedule a function, then that would take priority."

The committee was created in January 2016 after campus protests last fall. Its purpose is to serve as a body to make recommendations to the university regarding the regulation of public spaces.

The forum is at 3 p.m. for any student, faculty or staff member who wants to ask questions or offer comment on the policy. Jerry said the committee will take those suggestions and revise the policy accordingly, at which time it will have another forum in September to discuss the changes.

"Everyone on the committee is willing to participate in helping this process of getting suggestions and make recommendations on how we might adjust this particular recommendation, and then all of that will go to the faculty council and the chancellor and then it will be up to them, and I think technically, ultimately, the chancellor, to decide whether this will become a policy for the whole university," Jerry said.

The meeting will be in the Leadership Auditorium of the MU Student Center.
University of Missouri researchers blinded, killed six beagles for inconclusive study

Six puppies were blinded for a University of Missouri-Columbia study, and then killed after the results were inconclusive.

In a study published on April 7, four researchers at the university were looking to find the effects of topical hyaluronic acid to heal eye damage in dogs for its pilot study.

After the six beagles — all less than a year old — were purposely blinded in their left eyes, the researchers split them up into two different groups, one that received the acid for treatment, and one that didn’t.

Neither group of the puppies in the experiment recovered from the severe damage to their eye.

All six were killed after the pilot study was over, with the damaged eyes removed and stored for future research.

The university has defended its study, telling the Daily News that animal research was necessary to find answers to “some of the most important medical questions.”

“Since dogs share similar eye characteristics with people, they are ideal candidates for corneal studies,” Mary Jo Banken, a spokeswoman with the school, said in a statement.

She added that the dogs were “as comfortable as possible” during the tests.

The Beagle Freedom Project, an advocacy group for the dogs, called the university irresponsible for its research, ignoring its own standards for sufficient studies.

“Their own research protocol identified that six dogs was insufficient for this type of research, that they needed a bigger population pool,” Kevin Chase, the vice president of the organization told The News. The study originally called for 24 dogs. “Even if the research was effective by pouring this acid into their purposely damaged cornea, it would have been written off, because the population size was too small.”

Chase also argued the dogs, despite their blindness, could have been adopted following the experiments, rather than be euthanized.
The research industry’s standard is to euthanize any animals used in experiments once the study is over, Chase said.

He advocated for the Beagle Freedom Bill, which passed in New York on Aug. 16, ruling that cats and dogs used in state-funded research must be put up for adoption instead of being killed.

Similar laws have also been passed in states like California and Nevada.

The bill was named after beagles because the majority of experiments on dogs are performed on the breed because of its friendly nature, Chase said.

Mizzou Researchers Sued for Blinding, Killing Beagles in Failed Experiment

Listen to the story: http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=55c7765e-156c-40ce-b243-85a5ea05c00

COLUMBIA, Mo. (KMOX) – Researchers at the University of Missouri – Columbia who purposely blinded six beagles and then killed them after the project failed are being sued by a rescue organization.

The deaths of the dogs came to light after the Los Angeles-based Beagle Freedom Project, a non-profit which finds homes for animals who survive medical research, sued the university for attempting to charge the group an estimated $82,000 to make copies of its current research projects. While waiting on the suit, Kevin Chase, Beagle Freedom Project’s vice president, says they looked through the universities published animal research. One particularly “disturbing” study published in the 2016 Journal of Veterinary Ophthalmology caught their attention.

“[The university researchers] killed these six beagles after purposefully damaging their corneas pouring an experimental acid into them and then killing them when they’re done because the experiment failed,” Chase says.
The researchers poured an experimental acid into the dogs’ corneas to test a treatment for corneal ulcers. However, they only had the capacity to use six out of 24 beagles, which is too small of a sample for scientific research.

“And so if the acid they dripped into the cornea of these dogs had proven successful...it still would have been considered, by their standards, ineffective research or invalid research because the population study was too small to be studied,” Chase says.

The university sent a statement saying, “All studies were performed in accordance with the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology Statement for the Use of Animals in Ophthalmic and Vision Research and were approved by the MU Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.” The statement also says the animals were treated humanely and “every effort was made to ensure dogs were as comfortable as possible during the tests to study the effectiveness of the new drug treatment.”

Four MU Researchers under Fire for Intentionally Blinding Six Beagle Puppies

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyses.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=b503881d-6f3c-4a2a-acc3-95ba5a5b1bad

EDITORIAL

Girls raise funds in honor of beloved dog

Tuesday, August 30, 2016

Anyone who has ever owned pets knows the love they bring to our lives. They’re not just animals; they’re family, and loyal, protective, even vulnerable. Just like family, when they hurt, we hurt. And one of the hardest things we face is when we have to let them go. Eleven-year-old
Maddie Dean and her 8-year-old sister, Emma, of Cape Girardeau County, know this firsthand, but they also know how to best honor that special family member.

Imagine the devastation when golden retriever Bailey Dean, only 4 years old, was diagnosed with canine osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer. The fast-growing cancer ended the dog’s life in just months.

Upon losing their beloved Bailey, the sisters decided to turn their heartbreak into help.

"After Bailey died, I just asked Mom if we could raise money for dogs with cancer," Maddie told Southeast Missourian reporter Lindsay Jones. With Mom's approval, Maddie turned her birthday party into a fundraiser. The girls collected donations for the University of Missouri's College of Veterinary Medicine in lieu of gifts for Maddie.

The family traveled to Columbia, Missouri, to present a $500 donation to Dr. Jeffrey Bryan, associate professor of veterinary oncology at Missouri. They also toured the Veterinary Health Center.

The Deans remember Bailey as "an energetic puppy" who "was constantly frolicking with the two girls." Emily Dean, the girls' mother, told the Southeast Missourian, "She was always excited when we came home, especially the kids."

The sisters hold those memories close to their hearts. They are not sure if they are ready for another pet after such a heartbreaking loss. But they are sure that their love for Bailey lives on and that their donation will help other dogs, which is the perfect way to honor Bailey.

**Renewed Diversity Push**

As first academic year since last fall's protests start, many colleges are adding diversity programs to orientation or requiring students to complete online multicultural training.

Last year, colleges were rocked by a series of protests over racial inequality on campuses and across the country. With signs pointing to those protests returning as students head back to campus this month, colleges and universities are preparing for another year of student activism.
Among those preparations, several institutions have begun offering new diversity and multicultural programming to their students.

“This isn’t a new area for higher education at all, but it’s clear that more and more campuses are recognizing it’s important to try and create more opportunities for open dialogue about these issues,” Kevin Kruger, president of NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, said. “Most campuses understand that the protests and activism last year show that there are issues that need to be addressed.”

**Students at the University of Missouri at Columbia must now complete mandatory "citizenship" training, a series of fall workshops that the university created after protests on campus last year, which included the football team threatening to boycott games and that led to the resignation and ouster of the university's president and chancellor.**

The Citizenship@Mizzou training requires students to gather in an auditorium for group discussions, musical performances and speakers. Students are asked to share their opinions and questions about diverse groups. A student might say, for instance, that he believes Islam is more dangerous than other religions. Other students can then chime in, disagreeing with that student or asking him to elaborate on how he came to that conclusion. The meetings also include musical performances in which a song is performed in different genres -- Americana versus R&B, for example -- and students are asked to reflect on which version they were more comfortable with.

Starting this year, Oregon State University will require students to take an online "social justice" course that will act as a primer on "concepts of diversity and inclusion." Virginia Tech University required all first-year and graduate students to take a similar online course earlier this month. Called DiversityEdu, the online course, which is also used by several other institutions, is meant to help students acquire the "skills for engaging successfully with diversity and mitigating the influence of unconscious biases and stereotypical thinking on personal choices and professional decisions." The course includes readings and writing prompts such as "Describe a time when someone made a false assumption about you," as well as video reenactments of discriminatory and racist interactions.

At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, officials are piloting a new “community building program” with a focus on religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, nationality and ethnicity. The new program follows last year's anti-racism protests as well as a series of troubling incidents on campus, including Swastikas taped to the door of a Jewish student, racist slurs and threats directed at a black student through an anonymous note, and the heckling of a Native American elder during a healing circle.
Tensions were further flared in April, when university police pulled a black student from class and arrested him for allegedly spray-painting anti-racist messages across campus. The new program will be offered to 1,000 incoming first-year students this year as a series of two-hour “in-person facilitated workshops,” Meredith Mcglone, a spokeswoman for the university said. The workshops will include structured dialogue, group activities, reflection and action planning. The university said the goal is to provide students with a broader awareness of diversity of social identities on campus, enhanced skills for engaging in constructive dialogue about those identities, and skills to detect discrimination and how to intervene.

“College is often the first time where people are exposed to people who are different from themselves,” Joshua Moon Johnson, special assistant to the university’s vice provost for student life, said in a statement. “Those could be religious differences, racial, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation. This pilot is an effort to definitely create some broad awareness of difference, not to tell people how to think, but to tell people how to critique the ways in which they think.”

Shaun Harper, executive director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, said there’s value in diversity and multicultural programs, but said that such initiatives can be ineffective if they are just a two-hour seminar or if they are connected to student orientation events.

“Orientation is a time of information overload,” Harper said. “These are 17- and 18-year-olds who are excited about getting off to college, who are saying goodbye to their parents. They have a ton of emotions. They’re not all that excited to sit through one session after another on one topic after another. I’m afraid that some diversity discussions get sort of lost because it’s all too much.”

Instead, Harper recommends that colleges organize ongoing first-year diversity seminars or that they find ways to “integrate diversity across the curriculum.” The Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education is piloting a new survey tool this year that could soon help colleges make those changes, Harper said.

The tool is being tested at 100 institutions this semester, surveying freshman about what experiences they have had with different races, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations and religions. The responses can then be shared with a student’s academic advisor, Harper said, who will use the survey to help the student pick classes that might “introduce her to dimensions of diversity that she hadn’t been previously exposed to.” Similarly, the survey could be used for determining who might benefit most from different kinds of multicultural programming, rather than spending resources on blanket attempts that include students who may already have been exposed to such ideas.
“We know from research that students are increasingly coming to us from racially segregated residential and educational environments,” Harper said. “They’re also coming to us from places that are largely segregated by income, so you have students arriving on campus that very likely have not had exposure or meaningful interactions with low-income people. The inventory we are developing will help assess the extent to which students have had those interactions on a student-by-student basis.”

Harper said such an effort would be more effective than if a university were to pay for a pre-made two hour workshop or online course.

A recent Harvard Business Review report, which analyzed three decades’ worth of data from more than 800 U.S. companies and firms, concluded that requiring diversity training of that kind in the private sector can actually “activate bias rather than stamp it out.” Such training could have a similar effect at colleges, critics of diversity programs argue. They say multicultural programs initiatives are costly and ineffective.

“Requiring such training in a university setting where participation is mandatory will likely produce backlash,” W. Lee Hansen, a professor emeritus of economics at the University of Wisconsin, wrote in a recent essay. “Many students, staff and faculty will object to this training, believing they do not need it. Some may even refuse to participate.”

Kruger, of NASPA, said, however, that the costs of diversity and multicultural programs are relatively small when compared to a college’s overall budget, and that they are an integral part of most institutions’ missions.

“These are done not only to prevent less incidents of bias, but also because they’re in the spirit of universities being a marketplace of ideas,” Kruger said. “We want to give students the competency to engage in these important conversations. These programs are built on the assumption that those conversations have an intrinsic value.”
Jay Sexton chosen as inaugural Kinder Institute Chair in Constitutional Democracy

JENNA ALLEN, 12 hrs ago

Generated from News Bureau press release: “MU Kinder Institute Names Oxford Scholar as New Chair in Constitutional Democracy”

COLUMBIA — The Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy at MU has chosen Jay Sexton to be its inaugural institute chairman, according to an MU News Bureau news release Monday.

Sexton, a historian, former professor and distinguished fellow at the University of Oxford's Corpus Christi College in the United Kingdom, will begin his position Thursday. He will also be teaching a class on Civil War history at MU.

Kinder Institute Director Justin Dyer praised Sexton's credentials in the release.

"As a world-renowned scholar, award-winning teacher and former director of the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford, Dr. Sexton will immediately add to the international reputation and stature of the Kinder Institute and university," Dyer said.

The Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy is an MU academic center that supports the teaching and study of American democratic and constitutional traditions, according to the organization's website.

The institute provides opportunities for undergraduate students, faculty and graduate students in its mission to serve MU and the greater community of Columbia.
Sexton, a Kansas native, said he's excited to join the institute and happy to be back home. "I achieved what I wanted to achieve in the U.K., but I had always hoped to return to the Midwest," Sexton said.

Sexton said the institute, which has just opened its new offices in Jesse Hall, consists of history and political science faculty and is looking to appoint more faculty members this fall.

Sexton said he's hoping to bring his knowledge and passion for the Civil War and broader world history to his work in the new position. As a long-term goal, Sexton said, he and other faculty members are hoping to make the institute a name known locally, nationally and beyond.

"We've got our sights set high," Sexton said. "We want to make the Kinder Institute a leading center for the study of political thought and history."

Enrollment Down at MU, Up at Other Universities


New sensor system can predict when senior citizens are heading for a fall

Generated from News Bureau press release: “Sensor Systems Identify Senior Citizens at Risk of Falling Within Three Weeks”

Falling is awful. It causes irreparable harm to senior citizens and the fear of falling reduces senior citizen mobility drastically, creating a feedback loop that can be catastrophic. Now, thanks to a team at the Sinclair School of Nursing and the College of Engineering at the University of Missouri, caregivers can predict falls up to three weeks out, allowing for care and assistance before it's needed.
The system is non-wearable and uses cameras to assess gait speed and stride length. The researchers found that a “gait speed decline of 5 centimeters per second was associated with an 86.3 percent probability of falling within the following three weeks.” Further, a shortened stride length “was associated with a 50.6 percent probability of falling within the next three weeks.” With these two pieces of data caregivers can intervene before things get out of hand.

“Aging should not mean that an adult suddenly loses his or her independence,” said Marilyn Rantz, Professor Emerita of Nursing. “However, for many older adults the risk of falling impacts how long seniors can remain independent. Being able to predict that a person is at risk of falling will allow caretakers to intervene with the necessary care to help seniors remain independent as long as possible.”

The team based their system at TigerPlace, a retirement residence in Columbia, Missouri. They installed sensors around the location and set up an email alert system “when irregular motion was detected.” It’s a great use of some intelligent technology and, what’s more, it requires no wearables and is completely passive.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

AUGUST 29, 2016 10:30 AM

MRIGlobal and University of Missouri earn Zika study grant

BY DIANE STAFFORD
stafford@kcstar.com

Scientists know that the aedes aegypti mosquito can spread the Zika virus when it bites more than one person.

And they know that the virus can be transmitted from mother to fetus, resulting in microcephaly, an abnormally small head for the child, mental retardation and other complications.
What’s not known is the exact mechanism that transmits the virus. And that’s what MRIGlobal and the University of Missouri are studying.

The Kansas City-based research organization and MU announced Monday that they have received a $50,000 research grant, awarded by the Kansas City Area Life Sciences Institute.

The study, funded by the Paul Patton Trust, allows continuation of work begun earlier this year.

Carl Gelhaus, principal scientist at MRIGlobal, said there’s a desperate need to understand the transmission that causes such serious birth defects.

Researchers will use mice to study how Zika spreads and causes microcephaly. Gelhaus said the MRIGlobal team will focus on the birth defect research, and the MU team will delve into the genetics angle in the brain.

“Our hope is that we will identify drug and vaccine targets that can be further developed to stop the devastating effects,” Gelhaus said.

Gelhaus assured residents that the work is being done in “some of the best containment facilities in the world” and that he had “no concerns whatsoever about mosquitoes exiting the facility.”

Wayne Carter, CEO of the life sciences institute, said the grant fits with aims of the institute and the Patton Trust — to focus on genetic diseases that affect children, lead to life-changing treatments and pursue research programs with the greatest scientific relevance and potential impact.

For Your Anti-Union Information

Crop of university 'anti-union' university websites sparks criticism from proponents of graduate assistant unions.

NO MU Mention

The National Labor Relations Board ruled last week that graduate student workers at private institutions may now form unions. But they need to vote to unionize first. In the meantime, a handful of institutions, including those with active graduate assistant union campaigns, have either launched or updated websites that they term information, but that are attracting criticism as being “anti-union.” Others say universities have an obligation to inform students of the drawbacks to unionization — not just the benefits.
“What’s frustrating to me is the false moderation here, under the guise of making information available, when what’s actually being presented is a partisan argument against unionization,” Paul Katz, a Ph.D. candidate in history at Columbia University, said about his institution’s new website. “Everything about this site is very clearly crafted to support the main contention that readers are supposed to conclude, which is that the [union] is a dangerous, outside, third-party presence.”

After much legal back and forth, the NLRB last week ruled 3-1 that graduate teaching, research and staff assistants at Columbia may vote to form a union affiliated with the United Auto Workers. Since then, Columbia, along with Harvard, Princeton and Yale Universities and the University of Chicago, have posted information online about the possible effects of unionization. Most point out that all union members must pay dues and are expected to participate in strikes, should they occur, and that unionization won’t necessarily improve their working conditions. Some contain concerns previously voiced to, and largely rejected by the NLRB — namely that unionization compromises the student experience in a number of ways.

“While reasonable people can come to different conclusions on this point, it is vital that we maintain the special and individual nature of students’ educational experiences and opportunities for intellectual and professional growth,” reads a letter from on the Chicago website from President Robert J. Zimmer and Provost Daniel Diermeier. “A graduate student labor union could impede such opportunities and, as a result, be detrimental to students’ education and preparation for future careers. It could also compromise the ability of faculty to mentor and support students on an individualized basis.”

A Yale news story quotes President Peter Salovey as promising a free and open debate on the union issue. But, he says, “The mentorship and training that Yale professors provide to graduate students is essential to educating the next generation of leading scholars. I have long been concerned that this relationship would become less productive and rewarding under a formal collective bargaining regime, in which professors would be ‘supervisors’ of their graduate student ‘employees.’”

Columbia, Chicago, Harvard, Princeton and Yale all have Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) pages; several note they were partially adapted from Chicago’s.

**Here are some examples from Columbia’s:**

If a union wins an election, will graduate student stipends and teaching income increase? What about benefits?

We do not know. In a unionized setting, wages, hours, and other terms and conditions are subject to collective bargaining. Stipend levels, remuneration, and benefits may change; there is no guarantee that they will increase.
Chicago has had a long-active campaign for a graduate assistants’ union affiliated with UAW, which also is organizing at Boston College, the union announced this week. Other unions organizing graduate students on private campuses include the American Federation of Teachers and Service Employees International Union.

UNITE-HERE has been working with graduate students at Yale for years; the union announced Monday that graduate assistants on that campus had petitioned the NLRB for a union election involving departmental-level or “micro-units.”

Nothing New
Managerial information campaigns are nothing new, either within academe or without. A number of colleges and universities have launched them in response to recent adjunct union drives, for example. But universities -- no longer protected by a past NLRB ruling from a union vote -- are updating their arguments. And they've attracted some criticism from graduate students and others as being disingenuous.

Fred Klonsky, a retired teacher, posted some of Chicago’s content to his popular blog about education matters. He left the job of editorializing to his readers. Comments were largely negative, including “Under the cover of lofty language, it is still Union Busting 101” and “Translation of UC statement: ‘We have been screwing over the grad students forever and we like it that way, we don’t want any changes.’”

Jezebel, a popular feminist website, called Columbia’s website “slick” and essentially shallow.

“[T]he provost’s anti-unionization website does not contain very much specific information about why those concerns, or the potential drawbacks for student workers
of being represented by UAW, beyond the usual issues of having to ‘pay dues’ and potentially being fined for not participating in a strike,” it said.

Katz, of Columbia, said it was disappointing but not surprising that so many of anti-union administrators’ arguments presented before the NLRB were being rehashed on the internet. He noted similarities between today’s information campaigns and anti-graduate assistant unions fights of the past, including the mostly defunct set of “At What Cost?” websites. Supposedly maintained by graduate students, the sites date back to around the last time the NLRB considered — and ultimately decided against — these unions, in a 2004 case concerning Brown University.

Both then and now, Katz said, such campaigns weren’t openly anti-union. But they seemed to center on questions about what “could” or “would” happen in worst-case scenarios, rather than on the large sample of graduate student union outcomes at public institutions, he said. Several of the new websites -- including Columbia’s, above -- cite only the 2-percent dues paid by graduate student workers at New York University to UAW, for example. NYU university agreed to voluntarily recognize graduate assistants over two years ago in a case that was previously pending before the NLRB.

Corey Robin, a professor of political science at Brooklyn College and the City University of New York Graduate Center, on his personal blog poked fun at the obvious similarities between some of the FAQ websites.

"Unions, these universities have argued, would impose a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach on the ineffably individual and heterogenous nature of graduate education," he wrote after quoting some nearly identical language on different sites. "Casual readers might conclude that the only thing standardized and cookie-cutter about unions in elite universities is the argument against them. Or perhaps it’s just that great minds sometimes really do think alike."

Others disagree, saying it’s entirely appropriate for colleges and universities to share their positions on unionization with students, just as parent unions have done. After all, the websites contain no threats or falsehoods.

Caroline Adelman, a spokesperson for Columbia, said its website was “moderate” and contained “important information.”

Joseph Ambash, managing partner with Fisher Phillips in Boston, successfully argued the Brown case before the board back in 2004. He said it was too soon to say whether any institution would challenge a graduate assistant union election, and that creating an
informational website is hardly the first step in that direction. Rather, he said, matching union information with managerial information is “standard operating procedure.” “I recommend that every institution do this — it’s perfectly appropriate that every institution that cares about this issue wants to inform students of accurate information in relation to unionizing,” he said. “This is nothing new.”

Neither is criticism of employers, Ambash added. "Any time an employer shares information or explains the possible downsides of unionization, [unions] accuse the employer of being anti-union, but nothing is further from the truth. Employers should share accurate information so that voters can make an informed choice."

Katz said it’s up to graduate students to debate among themselves the pros and cons of a union now. He said organizers and community leaders have asked Columbia going back two years to remain neutral, as NYU pledged to do after the voluntary recognition. Putting up this kind of website isn’t neutral, he said.

Not all universities with graduate student union movement have responded to the NLRB decision this way. Brown — the subject of the 2004 case against unions — did put up a FAQ-type web page this summer about graduate student unions and formally opposed the notion that students are employees. But in a recent email to faculty, students and staff, President Christina Paxson and other administrators said that while the university is dedicated to a balanced debate, it “will comply with the NLRB’s recent decision and support discussions among graduate students as they explore whether or not unionization is right for them.”
The evidence is clear: For the average student, college is an investment that pays off.

But averages conceal variation, and college outcomes vary widely. Variation in postcollege earnings and student debt has also increased over time, according to new research, raising the stakes on students’ college choices.

College is no guarantee. Many students never graduate. Even someone who earns a degree doesn’t always make more money than the typical person with less education. Factor in the ubiquity of student debt, and there’s a chance that things will go badly wrong — especially for those who don’t graduate.

Perhaps there was a time when a simple message about going to college was enough, says Eric Johnson, assistant director for policy analysis and communications in the office of scholarships and student aid at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After all, he says, "failing at college used to not be a catastrophic event."
In this way, Mr. Johnson says, higher education parallels real estate. Back when a standard home mortgage was the only option, it made some sense to say that real estate was "always a good investment," he says. Purchasing a house could normally get buyers into only so much trouble when the process was meant to ensure they were able to afford it. But exotic financing options have introduced more risk, and the old advice no longer applies.

Crafting the right message about going to college, like crafting the right message about buying a home, is tricky. How do you describe an investment in oneself that has clear and important benefits, on average, but can be ruinous in some circumstances?

The message is "not as simple as ‘Go to college,’ it’s not as simple as ‘College for everybody,’” says Nicole Hurd, the founder and chief executive officer of the College Advising Corps, which places recent college graduates in high schools to work as college advisers.


A ‘Core Value’

This problem, it turns out, is not unique to higher ed. "In the real world of any kind of messaging, there’s variability in outcomes," says Joseph Cappella, a professor in the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Experts encourage people to do things that usually carry benefits, but those actions don’t always bring the desired results. Still, he says, that doesn’t mean people shouldn’t do them.

What makes a public message effective, Mr. Cappella says, is connecting it to a "core value."

College may not be a core value, he says, but education is, so that’s what a public message should emphasize. Once a message hits on that core value, it can mention the fine print, he says.
Getting such a less-simple message right isn’t easy, but it matters. Many people know someone who went to college and is worse off as a result. Tell them that college is unequivocally a good investment, and you’ll only increase their skepticism. Maybe a more-nuanced message has a better chance of being heard.

In her speech at the Democratic National Convention last month, Hillary Clinton drew a distinction between "college" and other kinds of work-force preparation. "Sure, college is crucial, but a four-year degree should not be the only path to a good job," she said. "We will help more people learn a skill or practice a trade and make a good living doing it."

That line might frustrate a higher-education expert. "College" encompasses much more than four-year-degree programs, and is in fact the country’s main system of vocational training. But to everyone else, the word is likely to conjure up a four-year, residential, liberal-arts education.

"I’d like to rebrand the word ‘college,’” Ms. Hurd says. When people believe that college is not for them — or not for everyone — they may be working with a narrow definition of what it includes.

The Right Option

What college advocates are really trying to get at, Ms. Hurd says, is not "college for all," but "the right postsecondary option for all." But that phrase, she acknowledges, doesn’t exactly roll off the tongue.

Perhaps there are other ways to convey it. "The public message that college is worthwhile is still 100 percent accurate. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that message," says Judith Scott-Clayton, an associate professor of economics and education at Teachers College of Columbia University, who has studied the variation in college outcomes.

Still, she says, "there are some predatory actors in higher education," and so would-be students can’t assume that anything called "college" has their best interests at heart.
Some of those bad actors are for-profit institutions, Ms. Scott-Clayton says, and it can be hard to determine whether a college is part of that sector on the basis of its marketing materials. At the same time, she says, "just because an institution is not-for-profit doesn’t guarantee that they’re an awesome institution."

The simple, safe college-search advice Ms. Scott-Clayton recommends is: "College is worth it, and relying on public institutions and public sources of funding are a good default strategy."

That is not to say students shouldn’t go to private colleges, she adds. Such colleges can have better outcomes and might even be more affordable after financial aid. But students should have a good reason for going to one.

‘Match and Fit’

Many people believe that more-expensive colleges are better than less-expensive ones, says Douglas Webber, an assistant professor of economics at Temple University who has also studied the varying payoffs of college degrees. But evidence does not support that belief. So on top of telling people that they should go to college but need to graduate, he might add that "you don’t have to pay a lot for it."

Those education researchers’ focus on affordable options is no accident. After all, rising prices and widespread borrowing are responsible for some of the worst outcomes facing former students as well as much of the hand-wringing over whether college is worth it.

Little in life is "good or bad for all people under all circumstances," writes Ms. Baum, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute, in her new book. Take marriage, for example. That’s another institution strongly linked to positive outcomes. "But clearly," she writes, "we should not advise young people just to get married because marriage makes life better. It matters when you get married, why you get married, and whom you marry."
The benefits of college, like those of marriage, come down to the specifics. It matters where students go to college, what they study, and whether they graduate.

Understanding that is "why we spend all of our time with students talking about match and fit," says Ms. Hurd, of the College Advising Corps.

Finding a college that’s a good match or the right fit is a profoundly personal exercise. A public message can’t possibly tell every student the best path to and through college for her, individually. But maybe it could convey that finding that path is an integral part of seeing her investment pay off.

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