Airlines and others are frustrated over abuses of loose rules guiding registration of emotional support animals.

Generated from News Bureau press release: Research Highlights the Legal Issues of Certifying Emotional Support Animals

When Kari Whitman of Ace of Hearts Dog Rescue brought her emotional support dog Hank on an American Airlines flight last year, other passengers couldn't help but take notice. The grossly obese dog had to be hauled onto the flight in a cart. He had his own seat in first class, but spent most of the trip lying on the floor of the plane near Whitman.

Hank was a model passenger compared to a pot-bellied emotional support pig that boarded a U.S. Airways crowded Thanksgiving morning flight from Connecticut to Washington in 2014. At first passengers thought that the tattooed woman with the pig was carrying a giant stuffed animal over her shoulder, but when the pig hopped down, pooped in the aisle and squealed, they knew otherwise.

As complaints from airlines and passengers mount over the large array of animals being hauled onto planes by their supposedly emotionally dependent owners, the Department of Transportation is taking a closer look at size and species restrictions for these animals. A DOT Advisory Committee on Accessible Air Transportation is meeting this week to decide on guidelines.

Service animals, such as those that help blind people, are limited to dogs and, in some cases, miniature horses. Since 2003, when the DOT revised its policy on service animals to include emotional-support animals, there have been no restrictions for these animals. An added perk for pet owners is that their animals can essentially fly for free -- right in the cabin.
"American Airlines has transported many species as service animals, including pigs and birds," Ross Feinstein, a spokesman for AA, told Seeker. "Primary complaints have been about animal behavior."

Passengers with allergies or animal phobias have filed complaints with various airlines. One person's emotional support animal can be another individual's nightmare.

Problems aren't limited to flying either. People have been allowed to wear giant boa constrictors around their necks in stores because the snakes function as emotional support animals. Daniel Greene, who suffers from seizures, claimed that his snake alerted him to pending seizures by giving him a neck hug. Onlookers have not been so comfortable around the seemingly mild-mannered boa.

Then there is also a provision under the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 that views emotional support animals as "reasonable accommodation," even in homes and housing communities that have a "no pets" rule.

The incentive, then, to register a pet as an emotional support animal is clear: free flights, companionship in places that otherwise wouldn't allow pets, and a way to stick it to landlords with no-pet rules.

Plus, the registration process can be ridiculously easy. Technically a person has to provide a letter from a licensed mental health practitioner attesting to the psychological benefit of a pet's presence. But some websites claim to provide this letter after a three-minute screening process. All it takes is a few online clicks, filling out some surveys — and a payment.

Caught up in the mess are people who legitimately need such animals, physically disabled people who are worried about their service animal rights, and the psychologists who are often asked by their patients to provide supporting documentation.

Geoff Ewart says his wife's need to fly with her German Shepherd is sincere. Ewart wrote to the DOT as part of a comment-gathering process tied to this week's meeting, explaining his wife has "relatively severe anxiety that, among other difficulties, surfaces as a fear of flying, having her emotional support animal with her when she's traveling -- especially when flying alone -- makes a big difference in her life."

However, some psychologists are uncomfortable being put in the middle of the situation, or realize later what a tangle they've just entered. Jeffrey Younggren, a professor of clinical and forensic psychology at the University of Missouri, recently conducted a study on this issue with grad student Cassie Boness and psychologist Jennifer Boisvert.

"Most (psychologists) do not understand how serious the letter is and that it is a formal disability letter," Younggren told me. "When this is explained to them and what the implications of such a certification might be -- for example, testifying in court to substantiate the opinion -- they are quite happy to leave these certifications to more qualified evaluators."
Younggren and his colleagues believe that the evaluation process should address specific psychological issues that are going to be improved, and not just that the owner wants to be with their pet.

Most importantly, the researchers believe that the evaluations cannot be done briefly or online through the use of questionnaires.

As Younggren said, "we need to raise the bar on what must be done here."

New DOT regulations on emotional support animals are expected to be out for public comment within the year, although new rules could take months or years to take effect.

**MU Study Shows Fracking May Harm Women’s Fertility**

Generated by an MU News Bureau press release: [Exposure to Chemicals Released During Fracking May Harm Fertility](http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=ae81dfcb-dad8-443a-9a52-76fe12f39cb6)

Mizzou fraternity accused of instructing pledges to use date-rape drugs

By Ashley Jost St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Updated at 4:50 p.m. Saturday with additional statement from national fraternity officials.

A fraternity at the University of Missouri-Columbia at the center of a racial incident last month is under investigation for a slew of violations, and has been put on notice about an allegation that new members were instructed to drug women before sexually assaulting them, according to documents obtained through a records request.

Mizzou’s chapter of Delta Upsilon is currently suspended by the campus and its national organization. The chapter was put on probation in mid-September for alcohol violations. Two weeks later, police were summoned to the fraternity house for a racial incident. The fraternity was suspended Sept. 28, the day after that incident.

A Post-Dispatch request for disciplinary records regarding the fraternity yielded 79 pages of documents outlining numerous alcohol violations, along with a letter from Mizzou Title IX Administrator Ellen Eardley outlining details of an allegation made against the fraternity.

Eardley said her office received a report that “on or about Monday, August 22, 2016, active members of Delta Upsilon fraternity allegedly provided each new member with three pills and instructed them to drug women for the purpose of incapacitating them prior to engaging in sexual activity. It has been alleged that new members are required to engage in such conduct in order to complete the initiation process.”

Three weeks later, city police responded to at least four incidents in one night, two of which involved party-goers who drank too much, according to Mizzou police officer Steve Verble.
All fraternity and sorority houses are in Columbia Police Department jurisdiction, but calls for service are reported to campus police.

In a Sept. 10 email to Janna Basler, assistant director of Mizzou’s Greek Life, about those incidents, Verble wrote that Delta Upsilon “seems to have returned in full force as the usual problem it is.”

In her response, Basler agreed that “there are definitely some issues occurring” and that this was more than an isolated incident.

The newspaper’s records request spanned all of the 2015-16 school year and the first few months of the current year.

A report filed last fall by the Department of Residential Life outlines a hazing incident in which a man who identified himself as a pledge member of Delta Upsilon said members forced the initiates to fight one another. He had a battered hand when leaders at his dormitory found him. When they asked if he was drunk, he said, “I don’t even know. They gave us so much.”

An undated document that appears to be from the current semester outlines a “recalibration plan” for the Mizzou DU chapter, listing a string of personal and group development seminars in which members apparently participated.

Mizzou officials refused to comment on whether this effort was university led, and officials with Delta Upsilon’s national chapter couldn’t be reached for comment Friday.

Delta Upsilon executive director Justin Kirk emailed a Post-Dispatch reporter on Oct. 5 saying he was aware of the newspaper’s records request and offering some information about recent changes in the Mizzou chapter.

“Because of the chapter’s historically strong track record and alumni support, we have worked tirelessly and collaboratively with the university to investigate recent incidents and support the sanctions it has brought forward,” Kirk said wrote.
In 2014, the chapter removed 90 of its 132 members. Sometime after that, the fraternity employed a graduate student to live in the house for programming and guidance. They also hired an off-duty police officer to “walk the chapter facility during high-risk times.”

“Delta Upsilon International Fraternity continues to work closely with the University of Missouri to investigate recent issues, some of which we have just learned of within the last few days,” Kirk said in the email. “We will not condone or tolerate the type of behavior alleged in these incidents, and the chapter remains on a temporary suspension as our investigation continues.”

On Friday, the fraternity released another statement from Kirk that said the alleged incidents in the university’s documents were “deeply concerning” and that the fraternity remained under suspension while the investigation continued.

Kirk added that “some of the alleged incidents, including the distribution of predatory drugs, were not pursued further by the police or the university. There have not been reports of sexual assault against the chapter.”

Kirk sent a follow-up statement Saturday saying that the allegations were “found to be unsubstantiated” by Mizzou. Another Delta Upsilon official said Mizzou had informed the fraternity via “verbal confirmation.” A spokesperson from Mizzou said he couldn’t comment on the allegations.

Mizzou spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken confirmed that the fraternity was under investigation by the Student Conduct Office and the university’s Office of Civil Rights and Title IX.

When asked how Mizzou monitored the fraternity during its suspension, Banken said in a statement: “If these allegations are serious, the national governing boards of the fraternities and sororities will be notified as well as their alumni executive boards. Members of these two organizations may take additional reactive measures against accused members or of the fraternity or sorority.”
COLUMBIA — In a response Friday to allegations of MU’s Delta Upsilon fraternity members using "date rape" drugs, the organization's executive director said none of the reported incidents was "pursued further" by police or the university.

The statement released Friday by Justin Kirk, executive director of the Delta Upsilon fraternity’s international office, came in response to a story in the Columbia Daily Tribune published Thursday night that included details about fraternity pledges being provided some type of date-rape drug and asked to use them on women as part of an initiation process.

Reports obtained Friday by the Missourian allege multiple incidents in the past year of hazing, physical abuse, using drugs to incapacitate women and providing alcohol to minors by members of Delta Upsilon fraternity.

“The allegations detailed in university documents are deeply concerning, and Delta Upsilon will not condone or tolerate such alleged activities,” Kirk said. “The International Fraternity is learning of some of these alleged incidents for the first time, while others have already been adjudicated by the university and fraternity.”
Kirk said there haven’t been any reports of sexual assault against the chapter, and a Columbia police spokeswoman said Friday there were no pending investigations of the fraternity involving sexual assault.

*In a statement posted on the fraternity's website Saturday, Kirk said allegations "that fraternity associate members received pills to be used to incapacitate and rape women were rumors found to be unsubstantiated by the university" and called the rumors "disgusting and egregious."

MU spokesman Christian Basi said Saturday he could not comment "at this time" on Kirk's latest statement.

Delta Upsilon is in the jurisdiction of Columbia police, as is all private property in Greek Town.

The fraternity was suspended Sept. 28 by its international office and MU after members allegedly harassed and used racist slurs against members of the Legion of Black Collegians near the fraternity's house at 711 Tiger Ave.

The LBC incident falls under MU police jurisdiction because it happened on the sidewalk, technically university property. Anything that happens in the house or on the property is under Columbia police jurisdiction, Larimer said. MU police Maj. Brian Weimer said the same thing about MU police department's jurisdiction.

Delta Upsilon has been sanctioned by MU 18 times over the past year, according to the documents. The fraternity is being investigated by the offices of Student Conduct and Civil Rights and Title IX, Basi said Friday.

*On Saturday, Kirk said the only active university investigations into the chapter are a Title IX investigation into members' alleged involvement in the LBC incident and a Student Conduct investigation into alcohol violations from a Sept. 16 event with two other fraternities.

MU Title IX Administrator Ellen Eardley told members of Delta Upsilon fraternity in a letter that the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX received a report Aug. 22 alleging fraternity
members were giving each pledge three pills so they could “drug women for the purpose of incapacitating them prior to engaging in sexual activity.”

Interfraternity Council President Ben Baker said the council does not issue sanctions to fraternities.

**Reports since start of school year**

At 8:11 p.m. on Sept. 16, MU police responded to a woman in Johnston Hall who was naked from the waist down, appeared to be very intoxicated and was spreading feces on the wall outside of her room. She told police that she had been to a party at the Delta Upsilon house earlier that night and that other people had made drinks for her.

On Sept. 10, a female student tripped and hit her head in Gillette Hall. She didn’t want to be taken to the hospital for her injuries but told a Department of Residential Life staff member that she had been drinking at Delta Upsilon that night.

That same night, Columbia police were dispatched to the house two other times. The department received a call at 12:43 a.m. about a female who had drunk too much at the fraternity house, according to police documents. At 1:19 a.m. another caller reported that a male had been pushed down the house stairs.

Later that night, a police officer pulled over a car around 2:31 a.m for driving the wrong way down Curtis Avenue, a one-way street in Greek Town. A passenger of the car ran from the scene and into the Delta Upsilon house before the officer could begin his investigation. The driver of the car said that he was a sober driver for the fraternity and that the passenger who fled was a fraternity brother. The driver was ticketed, but the passenger was not located by police.

For these incidents, the fraternity received university disciplinary probation, alcohol event probation and a ban on alcohol in the chapter house. Members were instructed to attend an alcohol education program and write a book review of “Guyland” by Michael Kimmel, a book
about navigating the transition from boyhood to manhood. The fraternity also had to attend a disciplinary hearing and a follow-up meeting, as well as pay a $500 judicial processing fee.

Hard liquor — defined as a drink with an alcohol content greater than 15 percent — is forbidden at fraternity houses effective for the fall 2015 semester. The ban was enacted after months of research and debate among IFC after a Chancellor's Summit on Sexual Assault and Student Safety in Greek Life. All violations are passed to the Office of Student Conduct for discipline.

In the reports, other allegations against the fraternity include:

- Possession of alcoholic beverages and controlled substances on Aug. 27.

- Threatening or intimidating behaviors, failure to comply or resisting arrest, and theft of on-campus property on April 13.

- Violating student conduct and possession or distribution of alcohol or controlled substance on Aug. 25, 2015.

Physical abuse and threatening conduct, violation of university equal education/employment policy, violation of university regulations, hazing and providing alcohol to a minor on Aug. 22, 2015.

The Office of Greek Life referred all questions to the MU News Bureau.

MU Delta Upsilon chapter president Austyn Bair didn’t respond to requests for a comment.

**Reputation on campus**

Dozens of students told the Missourian on Friday they've heard about bad things happening at the Delta Upsilon house. Some said they had heard stories about the fraternity hazing new members and using drugs to incapacitate women. Many said they hoped the stories were just rumors.
When Meg Vatterott was a freshman, she said others advised her to avoid parties at Delta Upsilon. Vatterott, now a senior, said she hasn’t heard anything about active members giving pledges pills but wasn’t surprised by the allegations.

“When I read the allegations (Friday), I was kind of disappointed because I thought that after getting a new house and getting in trouble the past year or so that maybe things would’ve changed,” Vatterott said.

Senior Polly Haun said she’s heard since freshman year that Delta Upsilon was known for putting things in women’s drinks.

Some students said that kind of characterization was unfair to Delta Upsilon. Rylee Schmitt, a sophomore, said she always felt safe at the fraternity's parties.

Delta Upsilon opened a new house in fall 2015 that accommodates 78 members. According to the fraternity's international website, there are 142 members of MU's chapter.
University of Missouri fraternity under investigation for allegedly teaching pledges how to use date rape drugs


Watch the WDAF story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=dcc63c33-0c35-49e2-9aa1-394a3db71b1c

COLUMBIA, MO (KTVI) - A University of Missouri fraternity already suspended for possible racial problems is under investigation for allegedly giving pledges date rape drugs and instructing them to use them on female students.

A Mizzou spokeswoman confirms both the Civil Rights & Title IX as well as the Student Conduct officers are investigating the Delta Upsilon fraternity. Dozens of pages of documents Fox 2 obtained reveal allegations of serving alcohol to underage students, hazing pledges and probably the most serious, the question of using date rape drugs.

The allegations against members of Delta Upsilon are serious. In a letter to the fraternity from the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX Assistant Vice Chancellor Ellen Eardley wrote, "Active members of delta upsilon fraternity allegedly provided each new member with three pills and instructed them to drug women for the purpose of incapacitating them prior to engaging in sexual activity. it has been alleged that new members are required to engage in such conduct in order to complete the initiation process."
Students are talking about the issue. Kenya Liddell said, "We're supposed to be doing the right thing and being leaders of tomorrow."

It was just last month the fraternity got in trouble for allegations of using racial slurs and now this. Student Sam Nelson said, "It's frankly terrifying that men think it's okay to drug women and take advantage of them."

The documents are from police reports and the Department of Student Life among other organizations. They contain claims from young women who believed they were drugged. Including one about a pantsless female discovered in Brooks Hall who may have spread feces on a wall. She said she had been to a party at Delta Upsilon and had been drinking. Her friends said she was not acting normally and believe she may have been drugged.

Some people don't believe the accusations. Peter West is a student, "I think it's absurd. I just can't see that happening. I can't."

There are also accusations of hazing. A Delta Upsilon pledge was found in Lathrop hall with a bloody hand. He said he couldn't talk about it. According to the report he said, "They made us fight each other."

Members of the local fraternity declined to be interviewed, they directed me to the national office.

Delta Upsilon's National office released a statement that said the university documents are deeply concerning and Delta Upsilon will not condone or tolerate such alleged activities. The documents also show that some of the alleged incidents, including the distribution of predatory drugs, were not pursued further by the police or the university. There have not been reports of sexual assault against the chapter.

The findings of the investigation could result in Delta Upsilon losing recognition from the school which, for all intents and purposes, means it would be closed down at Mizzou.
Delta Upsilon International says university not investigating 'date rape' drug use

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=58399d3b-6eef-4559-9149-55109d5ec0ef

INDIANAPOLIS, In. - Delta Upsilon Executive Director Justin Kirk released another statement Saturday regarding recent investigations into the fraternity's University of Missouri chapter.

Earlier this week, ABC 17 News obtained records from university police and the Office of Student Conduct detailing incidents involving Delta Upsilon fraternity members, including allegations of "date rape" drug use.

"To clarify recent media reports, according to the university, there are no active university investigations into Delta Upsilon's Missouri Chapter regarding the distribution or use of predatory drugs. The allegations that Fraternity associate members received pills to be used to incapacitate and rape women were rumors found to be unsubstantiated by the university. No formal charges were filed against the chapter. Such rumors are disgusting and egregious."

Kirk said the university is only investigating the reports of members using racial slur involving the Legion of Black Collegians on Sept. 27-28 and alcohol violations from an event with other fraternities on Sept. 16.

ABC 17 News reached out to MU spokesperson Christian Basi for clarification Saturday afternoon, but have yet to hear back.

Kirk said Delta Upsilon International is working closely with the university on the open and active investigations.

Similar stories ran nationwide.
Delta Upsilon MU Chapter Under Fire

Watch the KSPR story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=af530032-4529-41a8-9ddf-fac10be3b2cc

Watch the KMBC story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=c7244a6a-9335-44a9-aebf-0b3203bfaa12


UM system president search continues


COLUMBIA, Mo. - The University of Missouri has been searching for a new system president after Tim Wolfe stepped down in November 2015 amid racial tension and campus protests.

Since then, curators have formed a search committee and enlisted the help of a Boston-based recruiting firm Isaacson, Miller.
The firm specializes in finding candidates for key positions in higher education institutions around the country.

According to the firm's website, it is handling more than 160 different searches for college and university positions, with 24 of those being for the office of president, or CEO of the institution.

ABC 17 News reached out to Isaacson, Miller for a comment, but didn't get a response.

Banken to retire Dec. 1 from MU News Bureau

Mary Jo Banken, longtime executive director of the MU News Bureau, will retire on Dec. 1.

Banken took a job as administrative assistant in the bureau in 1988 after six months with the School of Library and Information Sciences, she wrote in an email Thursday. She began work in June 1988 at the University of Missouri, moving from a job as executive staff assistant in the public relations and president’s office at Austin Peay State University, she wrote.

She became executive director of the news bureau in 2000. In her email, Banken wrote that her new title will be “Grandma.” She wrote that in January she will move to Gainesville, Fla., where her younger daughter and grandson live.

“I have very mixed feelings about leaving my Mizzou family, but my grandson is currently my top priority,” Banken wrote.

Amid challenges, MU medical school sets high goals for improving diversity

TAYLOR BLATCHFORD, 1 hr ago
COLUMBIA — The MU School of Medicine's problem is a common one: It wants and needs to improve diversity, but has to compete against every other school with the same goal.

On top of that, the school’s self-imposed policy of recruiting almost exclusively from Missouri makes the potential applicant pool even less diverse, according to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges.

And still, Warren Lockette, the school's senior associate dean for diversity and inclusion, says he wants the school to be No. 1 in the nation in diversity one year from now.

This goal might sound pretty far-fetched. In fact, when Lockette said it recently in front of School of Medicine Dean Patrice Delafontaine, his boss questioned whether it was realistic in the short term.

After all, last year only 5 percent of students enrolled in the medical school were underrepresented ethnic minorities. But Lockette is serious.

“I would like to have every dean of every medical school sending me an email saying, ‘How did you do it?’” Lockette said. “I want us to be a leader. I’m just not happy with slow incremental improvements.”

Whether changes are slow or drastic, the school has to improve its diversity in order to keep its full accreditation status from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, which accredits medical schools. The committee flagged diversity and three other areas, including student mistreatment, as noncompliant in its June 2016 evaluation of the medical school.

The school must send the committee a detailed plan for improvement by December. If the committee decides that there hasn't been enough improvement by next June, the school will be put on probation.
The committee’s findings weren’t a surprise, Delafontaine said. But he doesn’t think there’s any realistic chance MU will be put on probation. He sees the accreditation report as highlighting what the school can do better. Since receiving the report in June, he’s created task forces of faculty, staff and students for each piece of the action plan.

"We really are a top school, so to get citations like this is really the norm," Delafontaine said. "I don't know of any LCME accreditation visit where there's not a citation. The chance of this going to probation or loss of accreditation is extremely low."

The school’s lack of diversity stems from multiple sources, and there’s no simple solution. Medical schools across the nation have long been competing to attract the same underrepresented students, according to a study in the Journal of the National Medical Association. Once they get them to enroll, the school environment must be inclusive and comfortable enough for them to remain.

**A historic problem**

The school has lacked diversity in its student body for years. The committee identified student and faculty diversity as a problem in its 2008 evaluation, noting that there were no black students in the first-year class. There wasn’t an administrator leading diversity efforts or a strategic plan to address the issue.

Following the evaluation, the school hired Lockette’s predecessor, Ellis Ingram, and enhanced programs meant to encourage underrepresented students to enter the medical field. Black and Hispanic faculty increased, as well as rural and low-income students, but the numbers of students from underrepresented ethnic minorities largely remained stagnant.

The school also hired Traci Wilson-Kleekamp as its diversity coordinator with a special focus on recruiting underrepresented students. She said she believed the school wasn’t serious about increasing diversity and had no infrastructure to support her efforts.
"They have a cultural ideology about equality or inclusion that is antithetical to having a more diverse environment," Wilson-Kleekamp said. "A lot of them think if you have diversity, the person you're interested in is automatically unqualified."

She said MU rejected almost all the students she recruited in the five years she was there, even though she was promoted to director of diversity and outreach initiatives. Frustrated with the lack of support, she quit in 2013 and said she felt like she was forced out.

School of Medicine spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said it was the school's policy not to discuss personnel matters so she declined to comment on Wilson-Kleekamp's remarks.

Delafontaine and Lockette weren't at MU for the last LCME visit. Delafontaine became the school's dean at the end of 2014, and Lockette was hired shortly after when Ingram retired. But they're the ones tasked with finding a solution when the committee determined in this year's evaluation that the school hadn't improved enough.

Recruiting underrepresented minorities is challenging for any medical school because of a limited applicant pool. But MU has another barrier to increasing diversity: its focus on applicants from Missouri, which has an even less diverse applicant pool than the national average, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Delafontaine said the school focuses on in-state applicants because Missouri is facing a significant physician shortage, especially in rural areas.

According to Association of American Colleges data, 76 percent of MU’s 2015 entering class was from Missouri. Out-of-state applicants are unlikely to be admitted unless there’s a “compelling reason” for the admissions committee to make an exception, such as a strong tie to the state of Missouri, according to the admissions website.

The policy is meant to keep graduating physicians in the state of Missouri, and it has worked: More Missouri physicians come from MU’s medical school than all other medical schools in the state combined, according to the Association of American Colleges.
However, the focus on admitting Missouri students also works against the school’s diversity efforts. Few Missouri applicants are from underrepresented ethnic minority groups, which include black, Hispanic and American Indian students.

In 2015, 9.3 percent of Missouri’s applicants were from one of these underrepresented groups, according to Association of American Colleges data. Nationally, underrepresented minorities made up 14 percent of the applicant pool.

Just 19 underrepresented minority students from Missouri enrolled in medical school in 2015: 16 black students, two Hispanic and one American Indian. Underrepresented minorities made up 13 percent of the national first-year class, but only 7 percent of Missouri’s.

Delafontaine knows the school’s diversity is limited by its focus on in-state students. He said the school tries to compensate by placing high value on diversity for the out-of-state students it does admit.

More underrepresented students applied and were accepted to the school in 2016, Delafontaine said, likely because of an increase in scholarship support.

"We're very happy with that," Delafontaine said. "I think it's a good start, but I want to see our school more diverse overall. I don't want to be near the average in that area. I really don't."

Seven of the 129 scholarships listed on the school’s website give preference to underrepresented ethnic minorities. In the future, Delafontaine also hopes to partner with historically black universities or those with higher proportions of minority students to increase recruitment.

But these small improvements aren’t enough for Lockette. He wants a medical school class that represents the demographics of the United States, which he knows would take significant work. However, he believes the school’s leadership has the right mindset to make that wish a reality.

**Mentoring and faculty**
Improving diversity and inclusion isn’t just about recruiting, Lockette said. It’s also about creating an inclusive environment and making students feel welcome once they’ve enrolled.

Connecting with faculty and older students as mentors is an important part of that environment. Dale Okorodudu, who graduated from the School of Medicine in 2010, knows that firsthand. He’s now an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and a physician at the Dallas VA Medical Center.

Okorodudu said he was an undergraduate when longtime faculty member Ellis Ingram sought to persuade him to attend MU’s medical school.

"He was instrumental in terms of finding students he saw potential in and mentoring them," Okorodudu said. "He went out of his way to make sure we were doing what was necessary to succeed."

The mentoring he received inspired Okorodudu to participate in the CALEB science club, a program Ingram created to connect younger students in the community with the health professions.

“It was ingrained that this is what we’re supposed to do,” Okorodudu said. “This is how to make society better: Find people who have great potential, be there for them and help them succeed.”

Okorodudu wanted to keep helping these students when he left MU for his residency at Duke University, but long-distance communication was a challenge. The desire to maintain those relationships led him to create Diverse Medicine, an online community for underrepresented medical students and professionals. The network now includes more than 2,000 members. He also founded Black Men in White Coats, a video series which aims to increase the number of black men in the medical field by featuring black physicians.

The pool of underrepresented minorities applying for faculty positions is also limited. Only 4.6 percent of the School of Medicine’s 569 full-time faculty came from underrepresented minorities as of 2013, according to the LCME report.
Lockette wants to change that so more MU students can create connections with mentors from similar backgrounds. He said Delafontaine has made efforts to attract more underrepresented faculty, such as creating a diversity lecture series with successful speakers who are minorities.

“It’s important for students to have ideal role models,” Lockette said. “Students live up to the perceptions and expectations you have of them. When you have accomplished faculty that are minorities, it sends an implicitly strong message to minority students.”

No simple solutions

School of Medicine assistant professor Camila Manrique has learned that improving race relations is slow, steady work. She’s been examining the racial climate across MU for the past year and a half as a member of the Faculty Council Race Relations Committee.

Manrique said the committee openly discussed issues of race in a respectful environment, and she found that was effective in opening members’ minds to views and experiences outside their own. Now, their goal is to seed similar discussion groups within individual schools and departments across campus.

Manrique has connected with other professors in the medical school who she said are willing to listen and engage. She’s hopeful that there’s a will to make changes among faculty and administrators.

Medical students have also taken the initiative to start discussions about the school’s climate. After graduate student Jonathan Butler began a hunger strike last fall calling for UM System President Tim Wolfe’s resignation, a group of students set up roundtable discussions about diversity, second-year medical student Benjamin Vega said.

While starting discussions is one important step, increasing diversity in the school isn’t a simple or easy process, Manrique said. She believes it will take years of investing in local communities to widen the pipeline of underrepresented students going to medical school.
“We need to do more,” Manrique said. “It’s a joint effort of everyone involved in the medical school to create a more diverse environment.”

**MU Health sets sights on Mayo status**

A portion of a long-rumored plan for University of Missouri Health Care to create a health system to rival the Rochester, Minn.-based Mayo Clinic — in part by acquiring private medical practices in Boone County — appeared to gain public light Oct. 6 when the UM System Board of Curators were told of affiliations with three area private medical providers.

But MU Health officials now are claiming the information presented to the curators about the affiliations was inaccurate.

MU Health CEO Mitch Wasden told curators at their October meeting in Kansas City about the health system’s plans to counter potential revenue losses as a result of changes under the Affordable Care Act.

He presented a slide showing MU Health either has affiliated with or acquired three area private practices: Columbia Family Medical Group at 303 N. Keene St.; Fulton Family Health at 2613 Fairway Drive in Fulton; and Columbia Surgical Associates at 3220 Bluff Creek Drive.

The health system did announce a partnership with Columbia Surgical Associates in October 2014 with officials saying the affiliation could be the first of many with local health care providers.

Wasden referred to the affiliation as a step toward “clinical integration” and a way to share costs and increase revenue.

On Thursday, MU Health public relations manager Mary Jenkins said the information presented to the curators was incorrect.

“It’s not accurate to say that Columbia Family Medical Group or Fulton Family Health are affiliates with MU Health,” she said in a phone interview.

She did not directly address whether MU Health currently was in negotiations with the practices or other independent medical providers.
“We’re always interested in talking to providers about ways that we can expand access to health care,” Jenkins said, again declining to specify whether MU Health was in talks with Columbia Family Medical Group and Fulton Family Health.

Representatives at those medical practices did not return calls for comment.

Columbia Family Medical Group has six primary care physicians and two nurse practitioners. Fulton Family Health has four primary care physicians.

Two years ago when MU Health teamed with Columbia Surgical Associates, Wasden said: “There are a lot of opportunities for local providers to work closer together ... This is the beginning of this for us, not the end.”

The presentation Wasden made to curators, along with other ongoing developments, matched the objectives outlined in a document titled, “University of Missouri’s quest to become the Mayo of the Midwest” and subtitled, “The termination of private practice in Boone County.”

The unsourced memorandum first surfaced in late spring, and Jenkins said MU Health officials were not aware of the document or who wrote it. Some state legislators, officials at Boone Hospital Center and a variety of local health care professionals have seen it, and copies were sent to two Tribune reporters. The full document is available at www.columbiatribune.com.

The slide presented to curators on Oct. 6 that listed the three medical groups was titled, “Improve our clinical footprint and payor mix.”

The memo that came to light in late spring, which Wasden has not acknowledged, purported to summarize a discussion or talking points among MU Health and Anthem Blue Cross/Blue Shield officials and said, “MU plans to actively and aggressively ($$) pursue the private sector’s primary care ... providers and bring them under the MU umbrella by the end of 2016.”

The memo listed the targeted providers as internal medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, general practice and obstetrics.

The memo listed discussion participants as Wasden; Jeri Doty, MU chief planning officer; Vince Cooper of MU Health; Jay Moore of Anthem; and Steve Martenet, president of Anthem BCBS of Missouri and HealthLink. One talking point of the 21-point memo detailed Anthem’s partnership with MU Health in 2016 to include only MU Health as a provider in individual and group insurance plans sold through the health insurance exchange, or Obamacare plans.

Other bullet points in the memo highlighted the need to “keep care local” without needing referral to “a St. Louis-based hospital system.” Boone Hospital Center, MU Health’s main competitor in Columbia, is operated by and leased to St. Louis based-BJC Health Care. The document also noted other MU Health partnerships and initiatives to improve patient access to care, including moving to electronic doctor’s visits.
At the Oct. 6 curators meeting, UM System Chief Audit Executive Ryan Rapp preceded Wasden’s presentation with a report on seven internal audits of programs or initiatives to improve and boost MU Health’s growing market share of medical services.

“Partnerships with community physicians, other providers and hospitals are clinical integration efforts pursued by MU Health,” Rapp told curators.

The first audit was titled, “Strategic expansion: Affiliate agreements, MUHC,” which he said was “part of the broader strategy being integrated by MU Health.”

Wasden reported that during the year ending March 30, MU Health’s revenue grew $50.7 million to $839.9 million and net operating income increased 26 percent.

Wasden presented curators with a 30-minute overview of the last 12 months of MU Health operation, future plans and the state of health care business. Changes on the horizon for 2017 and 2018 could mean as much as $50 million in cuts. The health system’s current operating margin of 8.75 percent — almost double the margin four years ago — could take a major hit with new reimbursement rules.

“The ACA has the ability to almost make you a break-even operation,” Wasden said.

Health care analysts have warned the changes will be especially challenging for smaller health systems.

“What it does highlight is the importance for us to grow,” Wasden said. As an academic medical center, MU Health’s operating margins are important for helping fund other functions of the health system, including the School of Medicine.

“That’s why we continue this effort around clinical integration,” he said. “We have to keep growing our footprint. We’ve got to expand.”

One key program that highlighted the health system’s growth was the Mizzou BioJoint program, a collaboration among the School of Engineering, School of Veterinary Medicine and Missouri Orthopaedic Institute. Wasden said the BioJoint program was expected to lose money in its first year and instead made a $3.5 million profit.

MU Health’s market share also continues to grow with sharp increases in women’s health services and cardiovascular services.

Curators lauded Wasden for an “extraordinary” and “breathtaking” performance as hospital CEO.

MU Health Care operates 56 outpatient clinics, some of which are located in University Hospital.
In 2015, MU Health opened three Mizzou Quick Care clinics in three Columbia grocery stores, expanded to the South Providence Medical Park and started the Mizzou BioJoint Center, and embarked on an expansion project at Missouri Orthopaedic Institute.

Other expansion plans did not succeed and also created tension with Boone Hospital Center offices. A partnership with Leawood, Kan.-based Nueterra Health resulted in the purchase of Callaway Community Hospital in Fulton and a subsequent proposal for a 10-bed, $38 million surgical hospital in east Columbia. With Boone Hospital President Jim Sinek among the more vocal opponents, the Missouri Health Facilities Review Committee turned down the project last July.

Sinek was among Boone Hospital officials who panned the proposal as MU Health’s attempt to “cherry-pick” the more lucrative surgical procedures from Boone Hospital. He accurately predicted the proposal would not be approved but would “make it very difficult” for future discussion about collaboration between Boone Hospital and MU Health.

He characterized the effort to build a new hospital as an “attack” on Boone Hospital.

“That makes it much more challenging to come to the table and say, ‘Hey, why don’t we do something collaboratively,’ ” Sinek said.

Despite the testy past relationship and competitive conflict, MU Health now is in talks with the Boone Hospital Board of Trustees as one of four health systems interested in managing or partnering with Boone Hospital.

Boone Hospital’s lease with St. Louis-based BJC Health Care is set to expire in 2020. The terms of the lease call for either party to notify the other by 2018 if the lease needs to be ended or renegotiated.

Boone Hospital trustees have sought requests from health systems to manage the hospital or partner in managing.

Boone Hospital board Chairman Fred Parry, who also is a Republican candidate for Southern District commissioner, has said the partnership with MU Health “makes a lot of sense for the community.”

“Twenty years down the road, we’ll say, ‘Hey, we had a great opportunity in 2016 for our two hospitals to collaborate — without merging,’” Parry said.

Boone Hospital is the county’s largest asset with almost 2,000 employees and some $300 million in annual revenue.

Wasden told curators that MU Health’s proposal, which has not been publicly detailed, “could potentially move to a second round.”
“If our goal is to become a destination medical community, we think we can do that on our own,” Wasden said, but a partnership with Boone Hospital would be “an accelerator and allow us to go a little bit faster.”

Boone Hospital Center, at 1600 E. Broadway, is licensed for 397 beds and serves a 25-county area. In August, U.S. News and World Report named Boone Hospital the No. 1 hospital in Mid-Missouri — for the second straight year — and No. 3 in the state.

MU Health Care consists of University Hospital at 1 Hospital Drive, Ellis Fischel Cancer Center, Women’s and Children’s Hospital, the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute and the Missouri Psychiatric Center, all based in Columbia, and outpatient clinics in Columbia, Fayette and Fulton. Affiliates of MU Health include Rusk Rehabilitation Center, operated by HealthSouth Corp., and Capital Region Medical Center in Jefferson City.

MU Health and Boone Hospital representatives also are among members of the Mayor’s Task Force on Medical Tourism, appointed by Mayor Brian Treece. The initiative to promote Columbia as a destination for medical tourism is “an opportunity for an unprecedented partnership between competing health care providers,” Treece said Aug. 31 at a City Hall news conference.

Treece said he had thought the biggest challenge for the group would be to overcome competitive attitudes, but that was not the case.

“I think the fact that you have both MU Health Care and Boone Hospital, Columbia Orthopaedic Group and Mizzou BioJoint Center all in the same room for the first time ever” will result in “what’s right for our patients and our community,” Treece said.

He pointed out that Columbia “probably missed the opportunity to locate the Mayo Clinic” in the city, noting that the Rochester, Minn., health system is “a destination for health care services” with “worldwide recognition.”

The Mayo Clinic’s namesake, William Mayo, obtained his second medical degree in 1854 from the University of Missouri School of Medicine, which moved from St. Louis to Columbia in 1872.

One of MU Health’s representatives on the medical tourism task force is a former Mayo Clinic executive, Jonathan Curtright, who was named chief operating officer in February.

Curtright said at the August news briefing that he was not familiar with the anonymous “Mayo of the Midwest” document that seemed to spell out MU Health’s expansion strategy.

He said private practice physicians in Columbia “do great work” and that there was “a place for” private practices and both University Hospital and Boone Hospital.
“We are committed to working with the private practice physicians here in Columbia,” Curtright said. “It’s one of the cornerstones of the health care market here in town. And we have every intention of fostering that and building on that.”

MU professor reaches international recognition for his knowledge of political debates

Generated from News Bureau press release: After Debates, Clinton’s Increased Positive Scores by College-Aged Students is Historic

More than 84 million Americans watched the first presidential debate, according to Nielsen.

Mitchell McKinney watched the people watching it.

McKinney, the director of MU’s Political Communications Institute, is internationally recognized for his work studying political debates. McKinney provides frequent commentary for news outlets such as NPR, The New York Times, CNN, and The Washington Post. During the 2012 election cycle, he served as the principal political debate analyst for NPR News and USA Today, and was quoted by more than 800 news outlets.

“I’ve been a political junkie my whole life,” McKinney said. “When I was an undergrad, I did student government and then I did internships in Washington, DC. So when I was crafting my research agenda as a faculty member, in grad school, I was drawn to political campaigns and presidential campaigns.”

As a graduate student, McKinney began to study “one of the key moments” of the presidential campaign — the presidential debate.

He studied speech communication and government at Western Kentucky University before receiving his master’s degree in organizational and political communications from the University of North Carolina. McKinney earned his doctoral degree in political and organizational communication from the University of Kansas before coming to MU 16 years ago.

In this election cycle, McKinney and his colleagues are analyzing the relationship between social media and and college students’ political participation.

“We’re analyzing how these young voters — the millennials — are using social media to engage in the debates,” McKinney said. “I call it ‘social watching.’”
Specifically, the team is studying the usage of Twitter by politically aware millennials.

“We’re looking at what is the nature of the second screen activity, of the tweeting,” said McKinney. “Is it just attacking the candidates that you don’t support? Is it snark? Cynicism? Humor? We’re interested to find out what it is when folks are engaged in a presidential debates, and they’re tweeting out their comments, what are they saying? That’s sort of a massive project.”

For the first debate, McKinney and his colleagues surveyed more than 400 college students across the country before and after their viewing of the debate. The survey results indicated a more than 10 percent increase in the likelihood that those students surveyed will vote for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, according to the statement released by the study’s directors through the MU News Bureau.

McKinney and his team followed a similar procedure for the second debate. Four hundred college students were surveyed before and after the town hall-style debate. The researchers noted an increase of 6 percent in students’ likelihood to vote for Clinton following the second debate, according to the statement released following the completion of their second study.

Political communications assistant professor Benjamin Warner is working with McKinney on these studies.

“He’s been a mentor to me since I arrived, and a tremendous collaborator and a tremendous colleague,” Warner said. “He is incredibly professional. He is incredibly organized. He’s really funny, and he’s really impressive.”

The team will continue data collection with the third and final presidential debate on Oct. 19.

“This has been quite an unusual election cycle,” McKinney said. There’s a lot of unknowns. In some ways for studying these things, it makes it very exciting in the sense that we don’t know what to predict. We don’t know what to expect.”