MU News Bureau

Daily Clips Packet

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Grad students, faculty support new federal action on health care subsidies

COLUMBIA- Leaders of both faculty and graduate students responded positively on Tuesday to recently issued federal health care recommendations on graduate student health care subsidies.

The recommendations from the Department of Labor, Health and Human Services and the Treasury indefinitely remove the possibility that MU would be fined by the federal government for providing graduate students with health care subsidies.

"I'm happy because I get to keep my health insurance, but at the same time I would like a stronger guarantee than what we've got," said Eric Scott, co-chair of the Coalition of Graduate Workers.

Scott is concerned that an equal and opposite set of recommendations could undo the extension. A permanent fix in the form of legislative change would end the uncertainty.

Ben Trachtenberg, chair of the MU Faculty Council said, “Nothing’s stopping us from coming up with something better if we can, but at least we’re not under the gun of a threat of some federal fine.”

The recommendations came as a relief to Trachtenberg, who said the inability to ensure health care coverage was crippling the university’s recruiting efforts.

MU has been providing the graduate students with health care subsidies without the possibility of federal fines since February 2016, when the IRS and Labor Department announced they would not enforce their 2013 interpretation of the Affordable Care Act, which made such a practice illegal. The announcement said the interpretation would not be enforced for one "plan year" beginning before January 1, 2017. MU Spokesperson Christian Basi believes the subsidies would have run through the spring 2017 semester. The recent federal recommendations extend that period indefinitely.
In August 2015, former MU Chancellor Bowen Loftin announced MU would resume providing the health care benefits to the graduate workers despite the risk of federal fines, after services had been ended earlier that month.

Graduate students responded by protesting and voting to unionize in April. The university did not acknowledge the union, and the graduate students sued MU in the Boone County Circuit Court for recognition in May. The motion hearing is set for Nov. 21.

Despite the legal proceedings, the conversation on graduate student health care will continue.

Basi emailed KOMU 8 News saying, "the secondary extension has allowed the university the time and ability to work toward identifying a permanent quality, affordable, health coverage solution for our graduate students looking forward."

Column: Ellis closing its doors for the night is not outrageous

The library is no longer open 24 hours, but this has been a long time coming.

Emmett Ferguson is a freshman journalism major at MU. He is an opinion columnist who writes about student life for The Maneater.

Ellis Library is not open 24 hours anymore. No longer can students go in at any time they choose, day or night, to study. This is outrageous in the eyes of many students; however, this most recent cutback from the library is in no way ridiculous.

It’s unfortunate that the library won’t be open 24 hours. The classic image of a college library is a student inside at 2 a.m., nose buried in a textbook and hands death-gripping a Starbucks coffee like it was the last string tied to mental stability keeping them sane. While the coffee part is probably still true, that student would’ve had to leave hours ago under the new, restricted hours.

The library itself is not to blame for this. The library has tried to avoid taking this measure for a while now and has even taken bullets in place of students to try and keep the library open. The library’s budget, when adjusted for inflation, is down about 40 percent in the past 15 years. This resulted in cutting from its own staff before closing the library earlier and inconveniencing students. As university enrollment grew, the library staff shrunk, dropping by about a quarter of full-time employees since 2001. People lost their jobs before Ellis decided not to be open 24/7.

A university library is much more than just an old brick building filled with books and computers. The library is a whole system that the university, both students and staff, is reliant on. Over 40 percent of the library’s budget is used on subscribing to databases and journals. These
offer recent and reliable research for professors and students to use. These databases are essential for professors who conduct outside research — which is many of them, because the university often judges the value of a professor on their research. This makes it very difficult for new staff to prove they are worth keeping, and it can result in them being dropped. Imagine being a professor in the science department and wanting to conduct a study, but you don’t have access to the research you need to conduct it. The acquisitions budget is so ridiculously low that certain professors cannot even access articles that they themselves have published because the library can’t afford a subscription to the database those articles are on.

The library attempted to resolve the problem by proposing a student fee that would’ve started out as $5 per credit hour per student. Quick math: That’s about 75 bucks if you’re taking a 15-credit-hour semester. This would’ve allowed the library not only to stay open 24 hours, but re-subscribe to databases essential to professors, renovate sections of the library that students have been complaining about, potentially rehire staff and even subscribe to modern magazines that students could read for their own pleasure.

While a majority of students last year actually thought the library was underfunded, a majority also didn’t vote for the student fee that would’ve fixed that. There was even a campaign started encouraging students to fail the library fee, claiming that it was the university’s job to pay for the library. The reality of the situation is that the university gets the majority of its money from the students. The state of Missouri provides less than half of the funding for the University of Missouri; most of it comes from students already. To put this in autumnal themed layman’s terms, say your college tuition was a venti pumpkin spice latte at Starbucks, this student fee would add not even two cents onto your purchase.

Yes, it is inconvenient that the library is no longer open 24 hours, especially to those students paying for college themselves, working one or more jobs and only finding themselves with time to study at odd hours. However, it is not at all unreasonable or unwarranted. People lost their jobs before students were stopped from waltzing in at 3 a.m. to cram for an exam they’d put off studying for. Most of all, it is not at all the library’s fault. The library has been dealing with a mediocre budget for more than 30 years, yet the only time students have ever said anything about it is when it has even the slightest effect on them. So no, it is in no way outrageous for the library to close its doors for the night.
Fewer Fans Attending MU Football Games

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=4a75e17b-5c72-4d21-b220-d454d50a9f97