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With spotlight on sexual harassment, employers should take heed

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Debbie Dougherty has been extensively pitched by the News Bureau as an expert in the field.

Cases of sexual harassment have been making headlines on an almost daily basis in recent months.

While many of the accounts have involved power players in media, entertainment or politics, they have shined a spotlight on the issue as a whole.

Employers should take heed and review their policies and also provide training on what constitutes sexual harassment, because one person's perception of it may not be the same as another's, experts say.

"It can be very gray," says Wendy Parker, a professor of law at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Given the current climate, "everyone's wondering what can I do and what can't I do," she says, noting employers should tell employees what they do and don't find acceptable.

There's the law, and then there's what the company can dictate, she says.

For example, some companies say you can't date your subordinate, which isn't the law, but their own policy, Parker says.

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.”

It also has to be pervasive or severe, Parker says.

“The law, when it comes to sexual harassment, is pretty forgiving of people being asked out on dates, people complimenting each other and an occasional touch on the shoulder,” she says.

Also, in order to prove that a victim was sexually harassed, the person has to show he or she thought the behavior was offensive, says Ellen Storch, a partner at Kaufman Dolowich & Voluck in Woodbury.

It has to be offensive from a subjective view (meaning the victim has to have been offended) and from an objective perspective (meaning another reasonable person would also find the conduct offensive), she says.

Sometimes this can be hard to prove in cases such as a text exchange in which the now-victim participated in the banter, she says.

Storch says she reviews the texts to see if there was an opportunity for the victim to express in some way that he or she wasn’t enjoying the comments or exchange.

To establish a case, the plaintiff has to establish that the conduct was unwelcome,” she says.

To protect your business, train employees and managers on what constitutes sexual harassment.

“A lot of people don’t realize where the line’s crossed,” says Christine Malafi, a partner at Ronkonkoma-based Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, who has advised clients on sexual harassment prevention training.

Following the law is great, but employees need to implement best practices. For example, while employees can socialize, a best practice would be to prohibit supervisors from after-hours, one-on-one socializing with subordinates being considered for a promotion, she says.

Another best practice: Don't permit sexual innuendo during business discussions. And, of course, both the law and best practices require that there's never a quid pro quo — an employee can never be asked for sexual favors in return for a job benefit, Malafi says.

In an organization, the way people talk habitually lays the framework that allows sexual harassment to exist, says Debbie Dougherty, a professor of organizational communication at the University of Missouri College of Arts and Science.

“I think about it as an organizational culture phenomena,” she says. “It’s woven into the culture.”

Companies have to decipher how people are talking within an organization and what sexual harassment means within that organization and what function it’s serving (i.e. creating camaraderie), and then find ways to achieve that function in an alternative way, she says.

“Every organization at some point faces sexual harassment,” Dougherty says. “The real problem happens when it gets woven into the culture.”

T COLUMBIA DAILY
TRIBUNE

UM researchers awarded \$450,000 grant to study ‘flipped classrooms’

By WAVERLY COLVILLE

Generated from News Bureau Press Release: [MU team to study flipped instruction in Missouri high school algebra classrooms](#)

A team of University of Missouri researchers will use a half-million-dollar grant in order to study a new, opposite-style teaching method called “flipped classrooms.”

Flipped classrooms are when teachers send students home with a video of a lecture, question or problem and then use class time to work on homework, projects or discussions. The \$450,000 grant paying for the study came from the National Science Foundation.

Principal investigator Zandra de Araujo and co-principal investigator Samuel Otten, along with Ze Wang, James Tarr and a team of research assistants, will spend two years on their study. They will spend time in 40 middle and high school algebra classes throughout Missouri, 20 flipped and 20 traditional.

“The teachers are ahead of research in this case,” de Araujo said. “Researchers are trying to catch up and figure out what teachers are doing, what’s effective and what’s not so it’s a teacher-led innovation and we’re just trying to understand what teachers are doing more systematically.”

They’ll interview teachers and students to collect data about performance and to see if there is correlation in teaching methods and student achievement.

Although they could not disclose the specific teachers they’ve spoken to, several classrooms throughout Columbia Public Schools have flipped classrooms.

“The underlying philosophy is that students are building context or background knowledge (at home),” said Kerry Townsend, the library media coordinator for CPS. “The rigorous part is the application so it makes sense that a teacher is there or other students in a collaborative environment.”

Otten said the research team already spoke with several teachers who expressed the effectiveness of using classroom time for group activities, not singular ones.

“(The teachers) like being there with the students as they work on the problems because students can help each other or teachers can be there to talk through the problems with them if they’re having difficulty,” Otten said. “If you’re watching a lecture, that’s basically something where you can sit and take in the lecture. It’s an individual activity.”

However, Townsend said a possible downside is if a student doesn’t watch the lecture video, because the student would have nothing to do during class. Also, some students may not have internet at home, especially in rural areas.

On the teaching side, teachers must work farther ahead to plan lectures and other activities. However, Townsend said that flipped classrooms also allows great potential for teachers to work together.

“One teacher could write or design lectures for their students and then share what they’re doing,” Townsend said. “You can’t change course last minute in a flipped classroom.”

Townsend, De Araujo and Otten predicted with the advancement of technology continuing, flipped classrooms will only continue to grow in popularity and this study will provide insight into the most effective ways to continue it.

“Flipped instruction is trying to tie into that fact of how connected we are to society and how we use technology to find our information,” Otten said. “I can’t imagine that this trend (of flipped classrooms) would reverse. We just want to make sure that as we’re doing that, we’re doing it in the best way possible.”



[Video game technology helps MU physical therapists](#)

By MATT WELLER

Generated from News Bureau Press Release: [Video game system technology helping physical therapists, athletic trainers](#)

COLUMBIA - **MU researchers think they have found the next breakthrough in physical therapy: video games.**

Researchers believe the same technology used to detect a gamer's movement or program players into their favorite games can be used to aid in injury recovery.

The technology tracks a person's movement and creates a visual output for a therapist to study. Researchers said it will make it easier for doctors and therapists to make more exact calculations on a patient's condition and flexibility.

"It works the same when video game technology works," said Associate Professor of Physical Therapy Trent Guess. "It takes a snapshot of a 3-D image of the front of your body and it fits a skeletal model to that."

"Currently, when we measure motion, we measure it with our eyes. We aren't able to put numbers on things," said Dr. Aaron Gray. "So with this technology, we are able to quickly and accurately measure motion and give a number or value to that motion."

Gray said the device will be especially helpful with knee injuries.

"We've looked at risk factors for people tearing their ACL, dislocating their knee cap, or even having runners knee. Medical research shows us that when athletes squat on a single leg that their knee caves in and they're at higher risk of injury," Gray said. "So some of our initial work is having athletes drop off of a box and onto the ground and then jumping as high as they can, then we can measure how much their knees cave in."

Researchers have been using the Microsoft Kinect for the study, which retails for just \$100.

"Traditionally, motion analysis is done in expensive labs where the cost of equipment can be up to \$150,000 and the motions sensors we are trying to use now are one one-thousandth of the cost," Gray said.

Gray said the cheaper alternative could allow future patients to do more in-home therapy.

"This could be something where you do exercises at home and get feedback from the video game system. Many people have played video games like the dancing games where the game tracks your movement and tells you whether you're doing it correctly or incorrectly," he said.

Gray said it's still unclear if the technology can help reduce recovery times, but initial testing shows it's possible. He said the next step will be more intensive testing to determine if the device can measure things like impact forces.



[Safety tips for ice and cold from an MU Health Care Physician](#)

By EDWARD REDLER

Watch video at: <http://www.komu.com/news/safety-tips-for-ice-and-cold-from-an-mu-health-care-physician>

COLUMBIA - Wet and freezing weather conditions are continuing to hit Missouri this weekend, increasing the likelihood of cold-related injuries.

Chris Sampson, M.D., an emergency physician with MU Health Care, says he often sees an influx of patients needing treatment for injuries during cold, icy weather.

Sampson recommends the following to prepare for ice:

- Carry an extra blanket and coat in the car, in case you get stuck for a long period of time.
- Always wear sturdy shoes with good treads to help avoid slipping.
- Salt the driveway, steps and sidewalks early and often.
- When walking your pet, be aware of where the leash is at all times to avoid tripping, and be mindful that your pet could pull, knocking you off balance.

When the temperature outside remains below freezing, the cold can cause injuries, too.

“With frostbite people can start experiencing symptoms pretty rapidly,” Sampson said. “With mild winds and cold temperatures it can occur in as less than 30 minutes, with extreme cases, when it's very very cold and winds are very very strong, sometimes frostbite can develop in as little as 5 minutes.”

Sampson said it is safe for kids to play outside, however, they need to dress in layers, keep their extremities covered and limit their time to no more than 30 minutes. He gives adults the same advice.

“If your kids are going to be outside playing, I would probably dress them in an additional layer of clothing so that way they can stay warm,” Sampson said. “Make sure that they are bundled up with exposed areas covered, so hats to cover the ears, scarfs, and gloves also, so the fingertips are not exposed in the cold weather.”

A Winter Weather Advisory was in effect for Camden, Miller, and Maries counties through 10 a.m. Saturday where patchy freezing drizzle was possible.

This comes following another advisory Friday across portions of central, east central and northeast Missouri.

A Wind Chill Advisory remains in effect from Saturday 6 p.m. through noon on Tuesday. During this time, evening wind chills could fall 25 degrees below zero. Frostbite and hypothermia can occur for both people and pets if precautions are not taken.



MU Health physicians provide tips to survive bitter cold temps

Generated from MU Health video: [MU HEALTH CARE PHYSICIAN OFFERS SAFETY TIPS FOR ICE, COLD](#)

Watch the story: <http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=384867ea-11dc-4165-9f97-d9c672e73666>



Daily English newspaper in Dubai serving more than 100,000 people

[Blueberries: Assisting cancer treatment](#)

Research shows consuming blueberry extract may have a positive outcome

Generated from MU Health press release

New York: Suffering from cervical cancer? Along with your radiation therapy, start eating blueberries. New research shows consuming blueberry extract while on treatment may have a positive outcome.

“Radiation therapy uses high-energy X-rays and other particles such as gamma rays to destroy cancer cells,” said lead author of the study Yujiang Fang, professor at University of Missouri School of Medicine.

“For some cancers, such as late-stage cervical cancer, radiation is a good treatment option. However, collateral damage to healthy cells always occurs. “Based on previous research, we studied blueberry extract to verify if it could be used as a radiosensitiser,” Fang added.

Radiosensitisers are non-toxic chemicals that make cancer cells more responsive to radiation therapy.

An earlier study had showed that resveratrol, a compound in red grapes, could be used as a radiosensitiser for treating prostate cancer. Blueberries also contain resveratrol.

For the study, published in the journal *Pathology and Oncology Magazine*, researchers used human cervical cancer cell lines to mimic clinical treatment.

The cell lines were divided into four groups that included a control group, a group that received only radiation, a group that received only blueberry extract and a group that received both radiation and the extract.

The researchers found that radiation decreased cancer cells by approximately 20 per cent. The cell group that received only blueberry extract had a 25 percent decrease in cancer.

However, the biggest decline in cancer cells occurred in the radiation and extract group, with a decrease of about 70 per cent.

“Blueberries are very common and found all over the world. They are readily accessible and inexpensive. As a natural treatment option for boosting the effectiveness of existing therapies, I feel they would be enthusiastically accepted,” Fang noted.



Blueberries may help patients with cervical cancer

Generated from MU Health press release

Watch the story: <http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=d8423ae2-ed1b-49bf-b612-99f3b1e617e5>

Similar stories ran on multiple CBS affiliates across the nation

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dying Town

Here in a corner of Missouri and across America, the lack of a college education has become a public-health crisis.

By SARAH BROWN AND KARIN FISCHER

Drive 90 miles north on Interstate 55 from Memphis, then 20 miles west on Route 412, cutting through seemingly endless fields of cotton, rice, and soybeans. You'll know you've arrived when you see the sign: Welcome to Kennett. Hometown of Sheryl Crow.

This small town in southeastern Missouri used to greet visitors with a different motto: "Service. Industry. Agriculture." But the machine-parts-maker closed and the trailer manufacturer left and the aluminum smelter went under. There's not nearly as much industry around here as there used to be. Sheryl Crow's Grammys aren't going anywhere.

Route 412 becomes First Street, and downtown opens up with a McDonald's to your left and a Burger King to your right. There are just two grocery stores in town, but fast-food restaurants are everywhere. It's easier to find a pharmacy than a salad bar.

Outside the row of medical offices that border the hospital, people pause for one last smoke. Mr. Chan's still sells doughnuts and kolaches, and Riggs Supply is, somehow, holding on, but there are many boarded-up storefronts along First Street these days. Down the road, a branch of the local college offers programs in education, criminal justice, and agribusiness. College-going isn't so common, though. In this area, just one adult in 10 has a four-year degree.

Recently the town tried to revitalize the area around the old county courthouse. It added new streetlights and redid the sidewalks. But few people use them.

This is the Missouri Bootheel. The counties around here are called that because if you squint at a map, it kind of looks like the heel of a boot, jutting south from the rest of the state into Arkansas and Tennessee. The name comes from its shape, but it's something of a metaphor, too. It can sometimes seem like life is trying to grind people down.

It's a place, one of many in America, where disadvantages pile up. Researchers are uncovering links between education — or lack of it — and health, and they don't like what they see. It's not clear whether a college degree leads directly to better health, or, if so, how. But the findings are alarming: Educational disparities and economic malaise and lack of opportunity are making people like those in the Bootheel sick. And maybe even killing them.

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But Jim and Annie aren't unusual in having their days dominated by medical concerns. Here in the heart of the Bootheel, in Pemiscot County, where they live, and in neighboring Dunklin, where Kennett is the county seat, a quarter of all adults report being in poor or only fair health. Five days each month, per capita, are lost to poor physical health, and another five to poor mental health.

If that seems high, it's because it is. Places like the Bootheel tend to be sicker than more-affluent and better-educated parts of the country. Even more troubling, recent research shows that the health gulf is widening. In the past two decades mortality rates for middle-aged white Americans without a college degree — a group that includes most residents of the Bootheel — have soared, reversing a century of improving longevity.

The authors of that research, a pair of Princeton University economists, call these "deaths of despair." People with a high-school education or less, they argue, have weaker job prospects, and, faced with declining economic and social well-being, turn to drugs and alcohol. Despair, in the guise of overdoses, cirrhosis, even suicide, claim the still-young.

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Freda Kershaw has photos of her sons and grandchildren at her home in Caruthersville.

Her mother had always made ends meet, but she wanted more for her five children and for Freda: a steady paycheck, a house, a nice car. She wanted them to go to college. She says she even took some college courses when her kids were in their teens, so they could be close to someone who aspired to more than just working and coming home every day.

So Freda left behind her 3-year-old son, Sean, and went to Southeast Missouri State, 90 miles away, in Cape Girardeau. Four years later, after graduation, she came right back. She wasn't sure what she was going to do, but her boyfriend and son were there, and her mother's health was worsening. The Bootheel was where she needed to be. She got married and brought Sean home.

Freda worked at the county health department, then as a liaison for a team of health researchers at Saint Louis University. Later she got a master's degree in public health and became a substance-abuse prevention specialist. She was living the life Erma had wanted for her.

As her career was coming together, her family was falling apart. Her husband was a great father, but he was struggling with drugs. Sean was starting to rebel. She wishes she'd taken him to college with her. Back in Pemiscot County, he had bounced around among several homes, raised by her mother, her brother and his wife, their older kids, Erma. It was stressful, and he soon got into trouble.

Sean, now 37, has been in and out of prison for the past 20 years. Recently he's been abusing opioids. After his most recent arrest, Freda was actually grateful. "People would call me, concerned about the last state they'd seen him in," she says. "He could have lost his life if he'd stayed on the streets."

Her younger son, Abram, started college right after high school, but his girlfriend was pregnant. Freda told him what Erma had told her: Stay in college. I'll help take care of the baby.

Abram wasn't hearing it. He returned to Caruthersville and got a job at a steel mill 30 miles away. Now he's a truck driver and able to provide for his family. But he's on the road a lot of the time, away from his wife and kids. He would have been much better off, Freda says, with a college degree.

Once Sean leaves prison, Freda doesn't know what she's going to do. She wants him to get proper treatment for his drug problems and land on his feet. But she can't invite him to live with her. We aren't taking care of a grown man, her second husband told her. It was hard to hear, but she agreed.

She thinks drugs tighten their grip on the community as people lose the fight in them. It's almost as if they're medicating themselves to cope with the feeling that their life will never get better, she says. They feel that they're born into it and they're going to die in it. Many kids simply can't picture a different future. "You see hopelessness in a whole new way," she says.

On top of her counseling job, Freda works part time for a nonprofit group within the University of Missouri at Columbia that helps at-risk youth. She wants to be sure someone is telling these kids that they can go places, that they can go to college, that their future is bright. Just like Erma told her.

The Mizzou nonprofit helps support a community center in Caruthersville, where kids can get a hot meal, play basketball, read books. It keeps them out of homes where family members are struggling with drug addiction and other domestic problems.

Freda sits back in a plastic chair, in a room off to the side of the center's basketball court. She wears a jacket emblazoned with the logo of FCC Behavioral Health, the agency she works for, along with jeans and sneakers for running around with the kids.

A few young men are at the center this afternoon, playing basketball. Kevin Anderson graduated from high school a couple of years ago, the only one of five kids in his family to do so. He tried to sign up for classes at the local community college, but "everything didn't go through," he says. Now he just wants to get a job, though he's not sure where. He hasn't tried college again.

"They got financial aid or whatever, but nobody gets that," he says. "It's limited to certain people."

"They do have grants, you guys," Freda interjects. "Which is money you don't have to pay back that will cover some of those costs."

"You have to qualify for it, though," Kevin says.

Yes, Freda says, but all you have to do is fill out a form. "It's online," she says.

"I heard you gotta pay for that!" Kevin says, exasperated.

When young people from the Bootheel do go to college, they tend not to come back. They leave behind this community, its people, and its problems. Who can blame them? many locals will tell you. There are no jobs. There's nothing to do around here.

We often talk about the economic payoff of a college education, about the job it will get you, the money you'll make. Maybe, though, we need to think differently about the stakes, to view our educational divides in public-health terms.

Education matters, now more than ever. Get it, and chances are you will have a happier and longer, a wealthier and healthier life. Does going to college lead directly to better health? That's a question for another day.

What is clear is that the college degree is a marker, a dividing line for health outcomes. As the benefits of having a degree accrue, so do the costs of not having one. You can see the toll here in the Bootheel, in all the Bootheels across America. In lives cut short by disadvantages that multiply.

[Story continues.](#)

MISSOURIAN

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Don't confuse lifelong learning with vocational training

JACK WAX, Jan 1, 2018

In his recent guest commentary, Mark Dorman of McGraw-Hill Education celebrated the idea that we are all “lifelong learners.” No one can disagree with that or with his plea for higher education institutions to develop innovative courses for adults throughout their careers.

But his focus solely on lifelong learning as a way to attain a better job and a more competitive economy is too common and wrong.

He misses an important point: Lifelong learning encompasses far more than retooling a workforce for better jobs. I should know. I am a retired 68-year-old and am looking forward to taking a full load of non-credit courses at [Osher@Mizzou](#) Lifelong Learning Institute this upcoming winter semester.

I have taken courses at Osher for the past four years. About 600 other older adults are also regulars here in Columbia. Judging from appearances, I think we range in age from the early 50s to early 90s.

We are a community of learners, taking short courses on everything from James Joyce's "Ulysses" to physics, Shakespeare and beading.

Some of us meet regularly to practice our Spanish on each other; others swap information about travel locations or take part in a diversity book club. In one of our academic years, more than 100 courses are offered.

I seriously doubt that anything Osher students have learned will end up contributing significantly to their net worth or enriching the local economy. Although some Osher students still work, most are retired. Yet we are all lifelong learners, and I believe that what we learn is as important to us as a new set of job-related skills are for younger adult learners. Individually, we develop our human, not our economic, potential. And in doing this, we add to mid-Missouri's social capital.

Columbia has a well-deserved reputation as an education community where ignorance isn't honored and where prejudice isn't a cultural value. Whether through formal or informal methods, Columbians rely on organized education as a foundation for community values and individual growth.

Education is about the change that takes place in the minds of learners and its effects on their lives. For older adults who take courses at Osher, lifelong education is a way to keep our minds and spirits growing, despite our aging bodies.

New knowledge and new neural connections can flush out deep channels of mental habits, opening up new ways of thinking and new possibilities. We come to understand the present and the past, while preparing for the future.

During my career years as I sat in a desk on Friday afternoons, waiting for the weekend, I would never have guessed I would have another chance to study Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." I could never have imagined that I would be shivering on a cold night, balancing my camera on a tripod, learning to photograph the Milky Way, or learning from an experienced birder about migratory birds at the Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area.

Money is a necessity, and education is usually a sure path to earning more of it. During the stages of life when earning more — or enough — money is a priority, educational institutions can, and should, as Dorman advocates, provide a range of options to adult students.

But don't confuse that vocational education with lifelong learning. There's a whole universe out there, and lifelong learning is the only way to explore it.

Jack Wax is the chair of the [Osher@Mizzou](#) advisory council.

UM shake up, eclipse headline top stories of 2017

Columbia is a university town, so perhaps the only story that could overtake the complete blotting out of the sun at midday is the massive restructuring program at the University of Missouri.

The university's new leadership at the system and Columbia campus level and its overhaul that includes millions of dollars in cuts and hundreds of jobs lost topped the Tribune newsroom's selections for top stories of the year. Running in a close second was the total eclipse of Aug. 21, during which Columbia and much of Central Missouri were in middle of the path of totality. It's rare for such a celestial occurrence to happen in our little spot of the world, and the event drew visitors from around the world.

Meanwhile, the changes at the university will have ramifications here — where the economy is largely dependent on what happens at MU, the UM System and MU Health Care — for years or even decades. Time will tell how the new leaders' decisions change the university and Columbia, but they certainly had a huge impact in 2017.

Here are the top stories of the year selected by the Tribune newsroom staff.

Choi, Cartwright take over at University of Missouri

New leadership with a big agenda took over the University of Missouri System and the Columbia campus in 2017.

President Mun Choi arrived March 1, and [in May promised](#) “a truly exciting period of transformation at the University of Missouri System.”

The first steps were [budget cuts](#), \$101 million and 474 jobs, at the beginning of June, intended to both balance spending with revenue and provide money to reallocate to priority projects.

Alexander Cartwright, Choi's [selection as MU chancellor](#), arrived Aug. 1. Enrollment when classes started three weeks later was the [smallest since 2008](#).

There are projects underway to examine every degree program, [streamline administration](#) and set financial goals that don't depend on new state funding. Steps to make the [university more](#)

[affordable](#) include cuts to dorm room rates and meal plans, free or cheaper textbooks from online sources and new scholarships for lower-income and high-achieving students.

In an [interview in July](#), Choi said he hopes to be president for at least 10 years.

Choi said he hopes “when people look back and identify areas where I helped to improve the university, that they say he brought in a clear, strategic approach of operating and supporting a university; he helped to bring the pride back that was rightfully placed in this institution.”

Columbia inside eclipse’s path of totality

Columbia residents and visitors [were in awe on Aug. 21](#) when the moon blocked the sun for minutes during what will be remembered as a once-in-a-lifetime event for many — the 2017 solar eclipse.

Columbia was not only in the path of totality, but located in one of the spots where totality would last the longest. Totality was expected to last 2 minutes and 40 seconds.

A city-sponsored party at Cosmo Park attracted [thousands while thousands others](#) watched the spectacle from several locations on the University of Missouri campus, The Roof at the downtown Broadway Hotel, Gans Creek Recreation Area and open spaces throughout Boone County.

The eclipse started around 11:45 a.m. and totality began at 1:12 p.m. Duration of the solar eclipse was about 90 minutes.

Hotels in Columbia were nearly completely booked. The Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau estimated that the city’s population of 120,000 could have doubled during the eclipse, but official numbers were never available.

Leading up to the solar eclipse, [MU astronomy professor Angela Speck](#) was interviewed by local and national media about the event and became well known as an expert on the subject. In an interview with the Tribune, Speck said Columbia’s location in the path of totality was a reason she came to the city.

Officials had warned the public that staring directly at the eclipse could cause eye damage, but [no eye injuries were reported](#) following the eclipse.

There was also concern drivers would stop, possibly in the middle of the road, to look at the the eclipse. No vehicle accidents were reported as a result of the eclipse.

Officials combat growing opioid epidemic

State and local officials made efforts in 2017 to tackle the ongoing opioid epidemic, which claims hundreds of lives annually in Missouri.

[The Columbia City Council in March voted unanimously](#) to join the St. Louis County prescription drug monitoring program, or PDMP, a database accessible to doctors and pharmacists to track narcotic prescriptions. The database is designed to prevent “doctor shopping,” when patients get prescriptions for addictive opioids and other drugs from multiple doctors, dentists or other medical professionals.

[The Boone County Commission soon after approved entering the county into the PDMP](#), requiring all pharmacies in the county to participate in the database. Columbia pharmacies started using the system in April and those outside the city limits started in July.

[Legislation that would have created a statewide PDMP](#) passed the Missouri Senate in April after numerous modifications to the original language, but the bill eventually died.

[Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens signed an executive order in July](#) creating a different type of database that targets those prescribing and distributing addictive painkillers in large volumes, like pill mills.

An analysis by the Tribune showed [opioid deaths in Missouri were on track to outpace traffic fatalities](#) as of the end of August. The Columbia Fire Department from January 2017 to mid-November had responded to 309 overdose calls, an average of one overdose call per day. The department administered the anti-overdose drug naloxone 17 times and the University of Missouri Hospital used it 38 times on overdose patients.

The Columbia Police Department trained 130 of its officers how to administer naloxone, also called Narcan. Two CPD employees completed a course allowing them to train more officers in how to administer naloxone. [CPD issued 75 naloxone kits](#) to its officers in mid-December.

[Nearly every pharmacy in Columbia also has naloxone](#) available for purchase. Under a new law that went into effect this year, Randall Williams, director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, issued a statewide standing order permitting the sale of naloxone, which would have otherwise required a prescription.

Affordable housing

Local and state leaders this past year [focused attention on support for affordable housing construction](#)— the state cut its support while Columbia officials initiated new programs and broke ground on new development.

State officials made national headlines with a decision in late 2017 when the Missouri Housing Development Commission [voted to not issue state low-income housing tax credits in 2018](#). The tax credits are one of the many ways Missouri developers support affordable housing development, such as the Columbia Housing Authority. The CHA relies on tax credits to fund renovations and construction of its hundreds of low-income housing apartment units, and the vote may stymie a planned project to renovate 50 of those units.

On the local level, officials ramped up efforts to support affordable housing construction despite the state cuts.

Reducing a local shortage of affordable home and rental options has been a top priority of Boone County and Columbia leaders the past few years, and several promising initiatives to tackle the problem kicked off in 2017. Most notably, a new not-for-profit [Community Land Trust organization broke ground](#) in early 2017 on its first affordable home project on Lynn Street. The organization, which has been supported by city funding thus far, will sell subsidized housing to home owners while keeping the deed to the property in trust. Retaining ownership of the property ensures any resale of the home remains affordable for low-income individuals.

The local affordable housing shortage affects homeowners, but is most prominent for Columbia's renters, of which more than half are housing cost-burdened, according to data provided by the city's Housing Programs Specialist Randy Cole. Someone is considered housing cost-burdened if 30 percent or more of their income each month goes toward putting a roof over their head.

The most recent data available from the American Community Survey indicates median rent in Columbia is \$803, making the percentage of housing cost-burdened renters 56.8 percent. About 20.6 percent of Boone County homeowners maintaining a mortgage are housing cost-burdened, with the median selling price for a home in the county at \$183,950.

As the year ends, debates about how to incentivize more affordable rental construction continues with members of the Columbia City Council as well as the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Columbia City Council approves tax break on Broadway Hotel project

[The Columbia City Council in December approved](#) Broadway Hotel owner David Parmley's request for \$2 million in tax increment financing, or TIF, to help finance a \$20 million second hotel tower downtown.

The council's vote of approval came after the city's TIF Commission, composed of representatives of the taxing districts affected by the tax break, voted against recommending the council approve the request. Some community members and commission members were skeptical that Parmley needed the tax break to finance the project.

Council members sought to balance the economic benefits the project is expected to give to downtown with meeting TIF standards mandated by state statute.

The 73,000-square-foot tower proposed will include 80 guest rooms and 8,000 square feet of meeting space. It will be located on Walnut Street across from the existing hotel. Parmley has argued downtown needs large meeting space to better attract conferences and events to the city's center.

Parmley applied for TIF under the conservation area designation, which in part calls for the area being developed to be “detrimental to public health, safety, morals, or welfare and may become a blighted area.” State law also calls for TIF only to be approved in cases where a development cannot occur without the tax break’s assistance.

The TIF will freeze property taxes on the property being developed for 23 years, saving Parmley about \$2 million. Parmely plans to use a more than \$13 million bank loan and \$3.9 million in private equity in addition to the TIF. However, that leaves a \$1.25 million gap, which consultants have suggested Parmley fill by later asking the council to approve a Community Improvement District. If approved, that CID would charge additional sales tax at the hotel for a certain time frame and use the money for the hotel tower.

Gun crimes and homicides increase

Local residents took note in 2017 of increased gun crimes and homicides in Boone County.

The death of a [28-year-old man in December](#) at a home in the Old Hawthorne subdivision was the ninth homicide in Columbia during 2017, making the year one of the deadliest in terms of homicides the past two decades. Though the number for 2017 was higher than normal, some officials expressed skepticism that it represents a distinct upward trend in homicides, as the numbers fluctuate each year.

CPD leaders pointed to gang and drug activity as the leading cause of gun crimes and homicides in Columbia. [Police Chief Ken Burton assured residents that they are safe](#) despite the highly-publicized murders, and encouraged people to think critically about the reports. The violence officers saw was mostly contained to about 1 percent of the population who engaged in gang and drug activity, he said.

Providing an example about critical thinking, he said if one person has their television stolen and that appears on the news, that does not mean there is a broader theft problem. There would still be more than 100,000 Columbians who did not have their television stolen, Burton said.

The violent year [drew comment from Columbia Mayor Brian Treece](#), who during a December Columbia City Council meeting stated CPD’s detectives are “spread thin” because of the recent gun crime and homicides. The mayor directed City Manager Mike Matthes to find ways to help the department “get on top of the problem” — whether that’s through approving more overtime hours for officers or reassigning officers with detective experience to help with investigations.

One way that residents could help decrease gun violence in the community, according to Columbia Police Department officials, is securing their weapons so they cannot be stolen. Contributing to the gun violence problem in 2017 was an increase in the number of guns stolen, particularly from vehicles. People neglecting to secure their weapons and lock their vehicles were noticing guns disappearing all over town, according to CPD spokeswoman Bryana Larimer.

The department placed lighted signs along the road that warned people to secure their guns, and tracked the number of thefts to-date.

Tax cuts spare students, state treasury

The debate over federal tax cuts caused heartburn for college students as benefits such as [tax-free tuition waivers](#) and the [deduction for student loan interest](#) were put in jeopardy. It also created [worries for state budget planners](#) because Missouri's income tax is tied closely to the federal system, meaning changes in Washington can cause big losses or gains for the state treasury.

When it was over, tuition waivers for graduate assistants and the spouses or dependents of college employees [remained tax exempt](#) and other higher education benefits in law survived as well.

The [impact on state revenues](#) will be small, with revenue expected to fall by about \$58 million, or 0.6 percent of total general revenue. That's smaller than the changes in state revenue year-to-year due to economic conditions.

The two biggest changes, at least for state revenue, are the increased standard deduction, which about doubles for all filers, and the elimination of the personal exemption. The first cuts revenue and second increases receipts, almost canceling each other.

But coming a year after Gov. Eric Greitens cut \$83.8 million from college and university budgets as he took office, and proposed cutting another \$40.4 million just from the University of Missouri, any loss will make budgeting tougher in future years.

Committee working to rename Lee school

A committee is leading the charge to [rename Lee Expressive Arts Elementary School](#) to distance the school from Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. The school was named for Robert E. Lee when it opened in 1904 and the general's name remains written in stone above the school's door.

Parents and teachers have discussed wanting a change for many years and that desire gained traction this fall after debates erupted nationwide about monuments and historic markers and statues that memorialize the Confederacy and slaveholders. The national debate was sparked by events in Charlottesville, Va.: white nationalists marched to protest the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue in August and the demonstrations turned violent, killing a counter protester.

After those protests, the Lee Autonomous School Board [sent a letter to the district's Board of Education](#) asking that the school be renamed. Residents, including CPS students, spoke mostly in favor of a change at a Columbia Board of Education meeting in September. A few people told the board they wanted the school's name to remain, citing a desire to not erase the negative parts of the country's history.

The board of education voted in September to create a committee which will recommend a name change to the board. That committee met for the first time in December.

About 25 years ago, Columbia Public Schools began calling the school Lee Expressive Arts Elementary in an effort to distance the name from Robert E. Lee and to showcase the school's arts focus.

Police race debate continues on

[Debate over racial disparities in policing](#) continued in 2017, sparking [attempts at collaboration](#) among city leaders and residents of Columbia.

After the June release of a yearly report from the Missouri Attorney General, which provides data about racial disparities in police stops and vehicle searches, local law enforcement again faced criticism and accusations of racial profiling from residents. The report indicated for Boone County's two largest law enforcement agencies, not much changed between 2015 and 2016.

The [disparity index](#) for black people who Columbia police pull over increased, from 2.97 in 2015 to 3.13 in 2016, and the arrest rate of black people went up, from 11.92 to 12.57. The disparity index is the proportion of traffic stops divided by a race or ethnicity's proportion of the population. An index of 1 indicates no disparity.

In reaction to outrage over the data, the Columbia NAACP in partnership with other local organizations held a series of meetings for Columbia residents to talk about problems they saw with local policing, equity and civility, and compile ideas about what could be done to address those problems. Hundreds of people turned out to the meetings, and a list emerged of actions both the city and its residents could take to improve the relationship between police and the community.

The series of meetings took the place of the city-planned "community engagement process" to discuss policing that was not specifically targeted at addressing racial disparity and equity. The failed effort was in response to a resolution the Columbia City Council passed earlier in 2017 which called for the city to develop a community engagement process on the Columbia Police Department's staffing levels, officer safety and morale, and community-oriented policing.

City officials have said the Columbia Police Department is understaffed by 30 to 50 officers. City Manager Mike Matthes has indicated plans to ask voters to raise their property taxes to pay for additional officers, but there is no scheduled date for the measure to appear on a ballot.

Boone Hospital trustees, MU Health enter partnership negotiations

More than a year after the Boone Hospital Center Board of Trustees sought proposals for new management of the county-owned hospital, [trustees and the University of Missouri Health Care system in August](#) announced they were exploring a partnership.

Since then, the trustees have been solely meeting with MU Health representatives, negotiating deals of a partnership that have not yet been made public. Negotiations are expected to continue into the new year. The board of trustees issued a request for proposals for new hospital management in spring 2016 and received submissions that summer.

Its lease with current operator BJC HealthCare, based in St. Louis, ends in 2020, but parties must notify each other whether they wish to continue, modify or end the lease by December 2018.

After months of reviewing the proposals, the trustees released the names of the companies vying to operate Boone Hospital Center — MU Health, BJC, Kansas City-based St. Luke's Hospital and Duke LifePoint Health Care, a for-profit company based in Brentwood, Tenn. Talks with these companies were put on hold as the trustees continue exclusive discussions with MU Health.

Trustees and MU Health officials have said a partnership between the two would allow Columbia to compete with health care markets, like those in St. Louis and Kansas City, while improving local specialty care and saving on certain costs.

The potential partnership between Boone Hospital Center and MU Health [received mixed reactions in the community](#). Vocal opponents expressed concerns that a partnership would decrease patient choice. Supporters believe the move could make Columbia a destination regionally, and possibly nationally, for health care.

MISSOURIAN

[TOP STORIES: The 17 most-read stories show the highs and lows of 2017](#)

BY MISSOURIAN STAFF Dec 30, 2017 (0)

[It was an incredible year of news in Columbia and mid-Missouri, and by looking at what attracted the most readers, 2017 could be seen as a year of setbacks — from MU layoffs to widespread spring flooding in Missouri — but also of renewal and excitement, such as the repair of Cafe Berlin and the promise of new technology to make travel across the state in a flash.](#)

Here are the top 17 stories of the year, based on reader interest:

There were trillions of Japanese beetles in Missouri this year, an entomologist with the Missouri Department of Conservation told us. Thanks to mild winters, the species as thrived and fed on trees, vines, shrubs, flowers and crops. Aggressive pesticides were the only way to contain these tiny monsters.

Keeping with the agriculture theme, morel mushroom season was a blockbuster for readers. Morel recipes aside, mid-Missourians love the hunt for the fungi, which can fetch \$25 to \$50 a pound in some cases.

The arrest of three men, Kenneth Ronald Jones, Barry Manthe and Ron Clark, brought the difficulty of prosecuting sex trafficking to our attention — and yours. Columbia Police worked closely with the FBI in this case, but the brothel and others like it had operated for years because prostitution by itself was considered a low priority for the understaffed CPD.

A local tragedy became a national headline when an inquest following a 17-year-old Fayette high school student's suicide found cause to charge his manager at Dairy Queen with manslaughter for repeatedly bullying the teen. The jury also found that Glasgow High School was negligent in bullying prevention. This story isn't over, as the school district and Howard County Coroner Frank Flaspohler wrangle over the release of some of the evidence presented at the inquest.

Anxious Missouri travelers watched for updates on the state's fumbling efforts to become Real ID compliant. Repeated attempts to bring the state into compliance in the legislative session failed, putting us in limbo. Thanks to several extensions from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, your current Missouri license will be allowed at airports until at least October 2018.

Readers were fascinated to learn more about Missouri's first lady Sheena Chestnut Greitens, a professor at MU and co-director of its Institute for Korean Studies. Her research interests in East Asia and authoritarian regimes, and her political interest in supporting foster care and adoption services, stem from a personal connection: Her sister, Catherine, was adopted from Seoul, South Korea.

One of the biggest stories of the year was MU's painful layoffs, and the most-read of those stories brought news of the layoffs of longtime student affairs leader Mark Lucas and residential life's Frankie

Minor. Information on layoffs was difficult to come by as MU moved quickly to consolidate departments to meet increasingly tight budget constraints.

When a community favorite comes under attack, Columbia rallies, and Cafe Berlin was no exception. In what the owner called a “calculated attack,” the break-in left shattered glass across the floor and tens of thousands of dollars in damage. Local downtown businesses donated supplies, food and help to get the restaurant and music venue back in operation.

It was a year of cutbacks at MU, and few aspects of campus life were spared. News of reduced parking permits and increased prices drew readers and outrage. Officials said the decision was made to reduce congestion in the core of the campus and encourage more carpooling, bike commuting and use of public transportation, but many MU students weren’t having it.

The nursing shortage in Missouri hospitals was the highest it had ever been, with nearly 16 percent, or about 6,000, of staff nursing positions left vacant. A nationwide shortage has been spurred by an improving economy that makes retirement more attractive. Columbia’s universities are looking for ways to fill the gaps through their nursing programs.

The Columbia Daily Tribune’s Bill Clark caused a stir in a column about a traffic stop in which he claimed he was treated unfairly and wrote, “I’m lucky I didn’t get shot.” Clark, who had been a columnist at the paper for 60 years, was suspended over the incident. He publicly apologized after a dash cam video was released.

Readers were eager to know about a new parking enforcement tactic, the “Barnacle,” which the city began using this summer. If residents accumulate more than four unpaid parking tickets, they may find themselves in a sticky situation: a large plastic shield with suction cups placed over their windshield, with only city parking officials able to remove it.

After a devastating flood hit Van Buren, Missouri, and destroyed many of its buildings, the town of 800 was quick to begin recovery. No one was killed in the flooding, but structures like homes and the Baptist church would have to be torn down or gutted and rebuilt.

Newly-developed technology created the possibility of a 15-minute trip from Kansas City to St. Louis. Missouri submitted a proposal to a contest hosted by the Los Angeles-based startup Hyperloop One in the hopes of bringing the technology to the state and was one of 11 American semifinalists. Judges and engineers “were impressed by the quality of the KC-St. Louis proposal and feel an opportunity exists” for future development of the route.

Tiger basketball fans were hyped about the possibility of recruiting Jeremiah Tilmon and Kevin Knox. Knox ended up choosing Kentucky over Missouri, but Tilmon committed to the team after asking to be released from his letter of intent to play at Illinois. Tilmon had an impressive start in November and continues to be a player to watch.

Following tough budget cuts across the UM System, MU’s student center, recreation center and unions saw reduced hours. Weekends were most affected by the reductions, and some students were disappointed that places like the MU Student Recreation Complex and certain dining halls wouldn’t be open as late.

Lucy’s Corner Cafe closed its doors after three decades of serving up some of Columbia residents’ favorite breakfast food. Owner Lucy J. Reddick said the closing was “sad but necessary” and that she wanted to leave the business on her own terms.