



MU News Bureau

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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Mizzou names permanent dean for largest college on campus

ST. LOUIS • In what could, but probably won't, be one of her last acts as the provost at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Garnett Stokes has named a permanent dean for the largest college on campus.

Stokes — who is set to leave in early 2018 to become [president of the University of New Mexico](#) — picked longtime Mizzou Tiger Pat Okker as the dean of the College of Arts and Science.

Okker has worked at Mizzou for 27 years as a professor, a department chairwoman and eventually senior associate provost.

When Stokes came to campus, Okker worked in her office. She held the senior associate provost role until summer 2016 when then-[Arts and Science Dean Michael O'Brien](#) took a job in Texas. Okker was chosen as interim dean.

The College of Arts and Science is by far Mizzou's largest school, encompassing studies from [physics to art history](#). The school [recently gobbled up the Truman School of Public Affairs](#), which used to be a standalone college, amid ongoing budget troubles.

"During her time as interim dean, Dr. Okker demonstrated that she is a dynamic, decisive leader who is willing to make tough decisions," Stokes said in a statement. "There is no question that Dr. Okker is prepared to lead the college into the future as a thoughtful innovator who understands the pressing issues affecting public higher education, especially our preeminent research universities."

MISSOURIAN

UPDATE: MU names Okker new dean of College of Arts and Science

BY MARIA F. CALLEJON 21 hrs ago (0)

After serving in an interim post for 16 months, Patricia Okker was appointed as the new dean of the College of Arts and Science on Tuesday.

MU Provost Garnett Stokes praised Okker in announcing her appointment.

“Dr. Okker cares about the success of faculty and staff and students, and her messages regarding the value of the arts and sciences have resonated with donors and board members,” she said.

As dean, Okker’s two main goals for the school are increasing research capacity and increasing student success. “I will not pick one over the other,” she said.

For the former, a better administration of resources and more federal funding are crucial.

Okker wants to help faculty obtain more funding for research projects, but she also plans to encourage more “interdisciplinarity” among the university’s departments, maybe even new partnerships.

As for the latter, two of her initiatives are related to student success and career readiness.

The first is the appointment of an internship coordinator. She also plans to create a new career fair in partnership with the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

The College of Arts and Science is MU’s largest and oldest academic unit. It is made up of 28 departments, ranging from aerospace studies to music, and it accounts for one quarter of MU students, 25.8 percent.

“The success of the campus depends on the success of Arts and Science,” Okker said. “Every student takes courses in A&S.”

She said students spend half of their total credit hours in the college.

The College of Arts and Science also plays a large role in MU’s status in the Association of American Universities, because of its prominent presence in the research realm. University officials were unable to say Tuesday how much of the university’s total research effort was represented by the college.

Okker said the university is “fortunate” to be an AAU member, since it enhances its competitiveness facing other institutions.

The selection of Okker won praise from other faculty members. “The provost made an excellent choice,” said John Walker, director of the division of Biological Sciences, who co-chaired the search committee.

Stokes, Walker and Okker herself agree that her ability to deal with faculty and alumni was one of reasons she got the job. In 2013, she was awarded the Faculty-Alumni Award from the Mizzou Alumni Association.

Okker has been at MU since 1990, and has previously served as chair of the Department of English and senior associate provost. While serving in the provost’s office, Okker was responsible for academic program reviews, strategic planning, leadership development and academic personnel issues.

She has served as interim dean of the college since August 2016, following the departure of former dean Michael O’Brien, who left to become the provost at Texas A&M University–San Antonio. During Okker’s term as interim dean, she launched a career-readiness program for A&S students and oversaw the creation of the School of Visual Studies and approval of the School of Music new building project.

Okker earned a bachelor of arts degree from Allegheny College, a master's degree from the University of Georgia, and a doctorate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Okker's research focuses on 19th-century American periodicals and women's writing. She is the author of two books and numerous essays and editor of an essay collection. In 2003 she was named a William T. Kemper Fellow for Teaching Excellence.

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TRIBUNE

Okker named dean of MU Arts and Science

Pat Okker, a 27-year veteran of the University of Missouri faculty, was named dean of the College of Arts and Science on Tuesday after almost 16 months as [interim dean](#).

“Dr. Okker emerged from a strong pool of finalists as the clear choice of faculty, staff, and campus leaders inside and outside of the college,” Provost Garnett Stokes said in a news release. “During her time as interim dean, Dr. Okker demonstrated that she is a dynamic, decisive leader who is willing to make tough decisions.”

Okker, a professor of English, joined MU's faculty in 1990 and became a full professor in 2004. She chaired the English department from 2005 to 2011, when she was appointed senior associate provost. While in the provost's office, Okker was responsible for academic program reviews, strategic planning, leadership development and academic personnel issues, the news release stated.

The dean position became open in June 2016 when [Michael O'Brien resigned](#) to become provost and vice president for academic affairs at Texas A&M-San Antonio.

Tuition waivers for UM employees imperiled by tax plan

By RUDI KELLER

During the 2016-17 academic year, the University of Missouri System provided \$5.5 million in tuition discounts to employees and their dependents, a tax-free benefit that is common across higher education.

In the future, however, those benefits would be taxed the same as other income under some versions of the tax overhaul plan being debated in Congress. At an average of \$1,400 per semester for employees and \$1,750 per semester for dependents, a change in the status could cost individuals several hundred dollars in additional taxes.

The tax exemption is eliminated in the House plan approved last Thursday by a 227-205 vote that had the support of Fourth District U.S. Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Harrisonville, who represents Boone County. And while it is retained in the Senate version that will be debated after Thanksgiving, its future is uncertain as the two bills are merged into a final product.

The exemption is in the same section of tax law that allows colleges and universities to grant tuition waivers to graduate assistants. Like the waiver for employees and dependents, the House plan would eliminate the benefit for graduate assistants while the Senate proposal retains it.

UM System President Mun Choi has said that the university is working through its association memberships to lobby against repeal of those provisions and others that would make it more difficult to pay for college or repay student debt. The waivers are among the most important benefits colleges and universities can offer, said Craig Lindwarm, director of Congressional and Governmental Affairs for the Association of Public Land Grant Universities.

Some have suggested that the benefit could be preserved by renaming the waivers as scholarships, Lindwarm said. Scholarships are not taxed and neither plan would alter that tax treatment.

“I would just say that for APLU’s purposes and in our communication with our members, we don’t see any ambiguity here,” Lindwarm said. “What happened under the House bill and elimination of the tuition waiver would be to skyrocket some students’ taxable income. There

shouldn't be any expectation that some sort of loophole is going to be found to preserve the benefit."

UM employees receive a discount of 75 percent on tuition and required fees for up to six hours of coursework per semester. Their spouses and dependents receive a discount of 50 percent on tuition for up to 140 credit hours of coursework. The employee portion cost the university \$2.5 million in the 2016-17 academic year while support for dependent education cost the university \$3 million.

Higher education tax changes

The tax overhaul plans moving through Congress would alter or eliminate several of the tax benefits available to college students and their parents. Here's a comparison of how the bill approved last week in the U.S. House compares to the proposal awaiting debate in the U.S. Senate:

Tax-free tuition waivers: Under current law, tuition waivers granted to employees of higher education institutions and their dependents, as well as waivers granted to graduate students, are not taxed as income. The House plan would eliminate the exemption while the Senate bill retains it.

Student loan interest: This deduction, up to \$2,500 for individuals making \$80,000 or less and couples earning \$160,000 or less, is eliminated in the House bill but retained by the Senate proposal.

Tuition and fees: A deduction, up to \$4,000 depending on income, expired at the end of 2016 and is not renewed in the proposals in either chamber.

American Opportunity tax credit: This is partially refundable credit against taxes owed for up to \$2,500 of tuition and other qualifying expenses during the first four years of post-secondary education. The House tax plan extends the credit to five years of post-secondary education while the Senate plan leaves the program as it is.

Lifetime Learning tax credit: A credit against taxes owed for 20 percent of tuition to attend classes after the first four years of higher education. The House bill eliminates the credit while the Senate plan retains it.

Employer tuition assistance: Current law allows employers to provide up to \$5,250 of tax-free tuition assistance to their workers. The House plan eliminates the benefit while the Senate plan retains it.

The benefit is an important part of retaining and supporting employees, in part by providing an incentive to remain at the university during a period of budget cutbacks, UM spokesman Christian Basi said.

“This is a way we are able to help individuals further their education and their career, and thus their earning power, boosting the economy of the state and the region,” he said.

For graduate students, loss of tax-free tuition waivers could [increase tax bills by up to 350 percent](#).

Graduate assistants at MU receive a stipend based on the amount of work expected of them each week to support teaching or research. The minimum stipends range from \$8,263 for a master’s degree student with a quarter-time appointment to \$18,000 for a doctoral candidate with a half-time appointment.

Most also receive a waiver for all or part of their tuition and fees. For a Missouri resident, a full waiver is worth \$7,587. For a non-resident, the value is \$18,851.

Both the House and Senate plans eliminate or cut back on tax breaks allowed for paying tuition. Neither renews the deduction for tuition and fees and the House plan eliminates the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit, which allows people in graduate classes or who return to school later in life to reduce their taxes by a portion of the cost.

“The combination of taxing tuition waivers and eliminating the lifetime learning credit is a double hit on graduate students,” Lindwarm said.

While the Senate plan is more favorable to higher education than the House version, both have issues that could drive up costs for colleges and universities, Lindwarm said. A change in the tax treatment of bonds issued for refinancing debt and new taxes on the profits of “unrelated business income” from activities such as bookstores are among the items education groups are opposing, he said.

“I think policy makers, particularly with these provisions, should hit the pause button,” Lindwarm said. “They should look at the kind of workforce we want to create in this country, the kind of economic growth that comes from having an educated citizenry and how we should incentivize that.”

MISSOURIAN

Five MU scholars named AAAS Fellows

BY PAIGE COX

Generated from News Bureau press release.

Five faculty members from MU were named Fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, AAAS.

David Braun, School of Medicine Dean Patrice “Patrick” Delafontaine, David Emerich, , J. Chris Pires and Thomas Edward Spencer were all accepted as 2017 fellows along with 391 others.

The AAAS Fellows are recognized from several different fields of science.

Braun is recognized under the biological sciences section. He was elected for distinguished contributions to the field of plant genetics, particularly in the area of carbohydrate transport and partitioning in crops.

Delafontaine was recognized under the medical sciences section and received his fellowship for his contributions to the field of IGF-1 atherosclerosis and the role of angiotensin II in skeletal muscle atrophy. IGF-1 atherosclerosis is growth factor that circulates at high levels in the plasma, which is used for cell growth and differentiation and tissue repair. Skeletal muscle atrophy is a pathological condition characterized by the loss of strength and muscle mass, and angiotensin II causes atrophy.

Emerich was recognized under the agriculture, food, and renewable resources section. He was chosen for distinguished contributions to the field of nitrogen fixation and for substantial contributions to teaching of plant biochemistry.

Pires was recognized under the biological sciences section. He was selected for distinguished contributions to the fields of plant systematics and evolution, particularly for the study of genome evolution and the consequences of polyploidy.

Spencer was recognized under the agriculture, food, and renewable resources section. He was elected for distinguished contributions to agriculture, and biological and medical sciences, particularly in using animal models and functional genomics to understand uterine placental function and development.

Fellows can be nominated either by the steering group of the 24 sections of AAAS or by three current fellows. Current fellows can nominate anyone as long as they are not affiliated with the nominee's institution.

According to the AAAS website, new fellows are honored at an event at the association's annual meeting the following February, where they receive a certificate and rosette. The names of the newly elected fellows are also published in the journal *Science*.

MISSOURIAN

GUEST COMMENTARY: FCC rule changes constrict the diversity of media voices

SANDY DAVIDSON

Sandy Davidson, Ph.D., J.D., teaches communications law at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. She is also a Curators' Teaching Professor and the attorney for the Columbia Missourian.

On Nov. 16, the FCC voted 3-2 along political lines to relax rules that militate against media consolidation. Arguably, the rule changes will contribute to a shrinking number of voices available to U.S. media consumers.

Do we value a diversity of voices contributing to the marketplace of ideas? Or is it acceptable to have increasing media consolidation that reduces the available voices and viewpoints? This has long been a point of controversy, with the FCC at times battling Congress and the courts.

Congress gives the FCC its marching orders and requires the agency to review its media ownership rules every four years to decide if they still serve the public interest. (See amended section 202(h) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.)

One rule in the FCC's cross-hairs in November was the cross-ownership rule. This rule generally barred media companies from owning both print and broadcast media in the same market. The FCC had granted some exceptions.

For example, in 1948 in Columbia, H.J. Waters Jr., who published the Columbia Daily Tribune, also bought KFRU radio in partnership with Mahlon Aldridge. When the FCC's ban took effect in 1975, the FCC "grandfathered" this cross-ownership and permitted it to continue until the sale of the Tribune's KFRU interest in 1989.

After the rule against cross-ownership had been in effect for almost 30 years, the FCC proposed eliminating it. But in June 2004, the U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals issued a 133-page decision that said the FCC could not put its proposed rule changes into effect. That decision kept the ban on cross-ownership in place.

From April to November 2007, the FCC held hearings, starting in Tampa, Florida, to gather public comments on whether cross-ownership rules should be axed in the 20 largest media markets. More than 1,000 people attended the final hearing in Seattle. Although the FCC leaned toward relaxation, public comments were overwhelmingly negative. Congress balked. The Senate Commerce Committee unanimously denounced the FCC's attempt. The FCC backed off.

FCC Commissioner Michael J. Coppins' commented: "Congress and the American people have done everything but march down to Southwest DC and physically shake some sense into us. Everywhere we go, the questions are the same: Why are we rushing to encourage more media merger frenzy when we haven't addressed the demonstrated harms caused by previous media merger frenzy?"

On the other hand, would allowing newspapers and broadcasters to join forces result in a better product and thus benefit consumers? Perhaps. But almost certainly it would result in fewer voices.

Besides voting to permit cross-ownership, the FCC on Nov. 16 also relaxed its rule against owning two TV broadcast stations in one market. This will grease the skids for FCC permission for Sinclair Broadcast Group, which already owns 173 stations, to buy 42 TV stations from the Tribune Media Co.

But another problem looms: The FCC caps the number of households that an over-the-air broadcaster can reach at 39 percent. However, the proposed Sinclair-Tribune deal would result in a media giant that greatly exceeds that number. This giant would beam its voice into 72 percent of American households.

Earlier rule changes have already diminished the diversity of broadcast voices. For example, eliminating the FCC's "Fairness Doctrine" shrank the marketplace of ideas. Under this doctrine, if one side of a controversial issue was aired, then differing opinions also had to be aired.

In 1967, the FCC adopted rules concerning stations that made a personal attack on the "honesty, integrity and character" of a domestic (not foreign) person or group, or that aired a political editorial or documentary supporting or opposing a candidate. The station had to notify the targeted persons or groups and provide free response time.

The Supreme Court unanimously upheld these rules in *Red Lion Broadcasting v. FCC* (1969). The rules didn't violate the First Amendment, the Court said, adding, "It is the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount."

In 1976, the FCC decided that broadcast stations had to devote a reasonable amount of time to airing controversial issues on matters of public importance, along with differing viewpoints. An over-the-air invitation to people with opposing views was insufficient. Stations had a duty to look for people with opposing views and notify them of the opportunity to respond — the “seek out” rule. Some broadcasters despised these rules as burdensome.

In August 1987, the FCC abolished the Fairness Doctrine except for “personal attacks” and “political editorials.” But even those rules ended in October 2000. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ordered the FCC to repeal them because the FCC had not been enforcing them.

While the Fairness Doctrine is currently defunct, some folks in Congress still like it — so it could return, but not likely. Rush Limbaugh has called efforts to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine a “hush Rush” movement spurred by opposition to the proliferation of stations carrying his program.

In the meantime, a \$3.9 billion Sinclair-Tribune deal awaits FCC approval.

The FCC’s recent rule changes constrict the diversity of voices, moving us in the wrong direction. Reducing the marketplace of ideas in favor of more media consolidation does not serve the public interest.



KOLR-TV (CBS) – Springfield, Mo.

New MU Scanners Help Diagnose Animals and Save Crops

Generated from News Bureau press release: [Fighting disease and world hunger: New PET/CT scanner opens at the University of Missouri](#)

COLUMBIA, Mo. -- The University of Missouri has a new weapon in the fight against disease.

A new imaging tool at the College of Veterinary Medicine, called the pet scanner, will improve the accuracy of diagnosing small animals with cancer and cardiovascular disorders.

The scanner can help track how diseases evolve and progress.

Another new tool, the CT scanner, will help provide new capabilities for plant science research.

Engineers hope it will help crop breeders develop new pest-resistant plants to help solve global food shortages.