University of Missouri nursing school to enter into new agreements with Planned Parenthood

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The University of Missouri will again allow nursing students to gain clinical experience at Planned Parenthood clinics.

The move comes two months after the university canceled 10 contracts with Planned Parenthood. The Columbia Missourian reports that the canceled agreements had allowed nursing and medical students to gain experience at Planned Parenthood facilities in five cities in four states.

MU Health Care spokeswoman Teresa Snow said the new agreements include clauses prohibiting students from helping provide abortions or counseling a woman to have an abortion. Students also were barred from assisting with abortions under the previous contracts.

Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri President and CEO Laura McQuade praised the development in a news release Wednesday but said "more must be done." She said the university had capitulated to "political bullying."
Planned Parenthood announces agreements with MU nursing school


COLUMBIA - Planned Parenthood announced Wednesday it has entered into short-term, individual contracts with MU's nursing school.

The university had previously canceled its contracts with Planned Parenthood in September following the creation of a state legislative committee to investigate the organization. The committee was created in response to videos claiming to show Planned Parenthood staff selling fetal tissue.

An MU spokesperson said in September the previous contracts were an optional rotation to participate in clinical training in women’s health.

The organization released this statement Wednesday afternoon:

“Today’s move by the University of Missouri to allow students in the School of Nursing to initiate short-term, individual contracts with Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri is a positive step for students, but more must be done. These contracts open back up critical access to educational and training opportunities for MU nursing students who wish to learn from our dedicated professionals how to provide life-saving preventive health care. However, these contracts are no substitute for the decades-long partnership between Planned Parenthood and MU recently ended because of the university’s capitulation to political bullying.”

“We call on Chancellor Loftin and MU Health Care to listen to the voices of the thousands of students and community members who have spoken out out in defense of their rights to educational opportunities and access to health care, and to fully reinstate both privileging and all contracts between MU and Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri.”

MU Health Care also released a statement Wednesday afternoon:

"Three nursing students have expressed interest in gaining clinical experience at Planned Parenthood locations in Missouri. One student will be doing clinical rotations at the Independence, Mo clinic, and two at the Columbia clinic for the spring 2016 semester. The new site agreements are written specifically for each individual student experience. Currently, one agreement is final for the Independence location, the two others for the Columbia location have not been finalized yet.

In the new site agreements, both parties will mutually agree on the educational objectives of the clinical experience. The agreement will ensure that University policies are followed as well as state and federal laws. Students receiving training under these agreements will not perform or
assist in pregnancy terminations, counsel women to have pregnancy terminations or encourage women to have pregnancy terminations. Unlike the previous site agreements, each new agreement will have a start and an end date."

KOMU 8 News is awaiting a response from Sen. Kurt Schaefer (R-Columbia), who chairs the committee investigating Planned Parenthood.

MU allows students to do clinical work at Planned Parenthood on individual basis


COLUMBIA, Mo. - **ABC 17 News has confirmed the University of Missouri has allowed students in the School of Nursing to initiate individual short term agreements with Planned Parenthood in Columbia.**

MU officials told ABC 17 three students in the school expressed interest in doing clinical work with Planned Parenthood.

MU emphasized that the three students will not be involved in any way with abortions.

Planned Parenthood released a statement Wednesday saying, “Today’s move by the University of Missouri to allow students in the School of Nursing to initiate short-term, individual contracts with Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri is a positive step for students, but more must be done. These contracts open back up critical access to educational and training opportunities for MU nursing students who wish to learn from our dedicated professionals how to provide life-saving preventive health care. However, these contracts are no substitute for the decades-long partnership between Planned Parenthood and MU recently ended because of the university’s capitulation to political bullying.”

“We call on Chancellor Loftin and MU Health Care to listen to the voices of the thousands of students and community members who have spoken out out in defense of their rights to educational opportunities and access to health care, and to fully reinstate both privileging and all contracts between MU and Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri.”
Two months after canceling agreement, MU enters new contract with Planned Parenthood

MU will enter new contracts with Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri after canceling agreements between the School of Medicine and the Sinclair School of Nursing almost two months ago, according to an Oct. 21 news release.

The agreements originally ended after Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, held several hearings on the legality of MU’s relationship with the local clinic. Although Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin originally testified against cutting ties, they were ultimately severed regardless.

PPKM President and CEO Laura McQuade said in the statement that while this is a positive step, more must be done.

“These contracts open back up critical access to educational and training opportunities for MU nursing students who wish to learn from our dedicated professionals how to provide life-saving preventive health care,” McQuade said in the statement. “However, these contracts are no substitute for the decades-long partnership between Planned Parenthood and MU recently ended because of the university’s capitulation to political bullying.”

MU Health Care voted to discontinue “refer and follow” privileges Sept. 24, which allow physicians to access their patients’ information. The vote spurred from MU Health Care believing the privileges were “outdated and unnecessary,” Steve Whitt, MU Health Care chief medical officer, said in a Sept. 24 MU News Bureau release.

Sheila Kostas, PPKM vice president of public affairs and communications, defended the significance of these privileges in a Sept. 24 PPKM news release.

“Referring physicians can then follow their patients’ progress if ever needed, but the attending physician at the hospital provides the necessary patient care,” Kostas said in the Sept. 24 statement.

The change to the privileges become effective Dec. 1.

“We call on Chancellor Loftin and MU Health Care to listen to the voices of the thousands of students and community members who have spoken out out in defense of their rights to educational opportunities and access to health care, and to fully reinstate both privileging and all
contracts between MU and Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri,” McQuade said in the Oct. 21 statement.

The University of Missouri System Board of Curators have been in a closed-door meeting since 1 p.m. today, and are rumored to be discussing firing Loftin over his handling of the situation. The Curators had no comment after the four-hour meeting. Any personnel decisions have to be made public within 72 hours.

Mizzou signs new agreement to allow nursing students to train at Planned Parenthood

By JO MANNIES • 10 HOURS AGO

The University of Missouri’s nursing school in Columbia has signed new agreements with two Planned Parenthood clinics to allow nursing students to obtain some of their training in women’s health services.

A university spokesman said the agreements are not contracts, but will enable three students who requested it to perform their clinical training at Planned Parenthood.

Separate agreements will be set up for any future students seeking that opportunity, the spokesman said.

Two of the students asked to train at Planned Parenthood’s clinic in Columbia, while another student wanted to obtain training at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Independence, Mo. Both clinics are overseen by Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri.

The agreement emphasizes that the students are not to be involved in any sort of abortion-related services or counseling. The Planned Parenthood clinic in Columbia has been providing drug-induced abortions and was resuming surgical abortions when critics persuaded the university to drop hospital privileges for the clinic physician performing abortions.

In a statement, Planned Parenthood executives praised the new arrangement with the nursing school. But the officials emphasized they preferred the older arrangements that the school had recently terminated.
State legislators opposed to abortion have been conducting hearings about Planned Parenthood’s operations in the state in the wake of videos alleging that some Planned Parenthood operations in other states had been profiting from the sale of fetal remains for medical research. National Planned Parenthood officials have denied any improprieties and emphasized that the videos were heavily edited.

Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster recently announced that his office completed an investigation of Planned Parenthood’s abortion activities in Missouri and found no evidence of wrongdoing.

Wednesday's announcement of the nursing school's new agreements with Planned Parenthood coincided with a closed-door meeting the university system's Board of Curators. Some social conservatives contended that the meeting was prompted, in part, by the actions of University of Missouri Chancellor R. Bowen to end the earlier, longstanding arrangements with Planned Parenthood and to rescind the hospital privileges of the physician conducting abortions at Planned Parenthood's Columbia clinic. The curators have not commented.

Closed-door meeting triggers questions over Mizzou chancellor's fate

Oct. 21, 2015  •  By Koran Addo, Alex Stuckey

COLUMBIA, Mo. • Ongoing turmoil at the University of Missouri-Columbia over its affiliation with Planned Parenthood, the racial climate on campus and how the university treats its graduate instructors has led to speculation over how long Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin will keep his job.

The intrigue grew when the University of Missouri Board of Curators held an unexpected closed-door meeting on Wednesday to discuss “personnel matters,” without any additional elaboration.

In and around Columbia, critics have said Loftin is prone to making unilateral decisions and off-the-cuff remarks, sometimes catching the Board of Curators and Missouri System President Tim Wolfe off guard.

Loftin, who was traveling Wednesday, could not be reached for an interview. But he did say in a message that he had been unaware of the curators’ meeting until it was publicly announced.

Buzz about the bow-tie wearing chancellor’s future got louder when state Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia, tweeted a rumor early Wednesday that the curators’ meeting was an attempt by the president and the board to fire Loftin.
But after emerging from the 4½-hour closed meeting, no one in the meeting would comment.

Much of the friction has come after Mizzou discontinued the clinical privileges for a Planned Parenthood physician and terminated multiple relationships with different Planned Parenthood affiliates last month.

On the latter issue, MU Health spokesman Teresa Snow said the agreements were outdated and rarely used.

But both moves were viewed as a way for Mizzou to distance itself from Planned Parenthood after the clinics became the focus of intense national attention following the release of doctored videos alleging the sale of fetal tissue.

State Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, acknowledged on Wednesday the speculation buzzing around Jefferson City and Columbia.

“I applaud the chancellor for being instrumental in getting the university out of the abortion business. He showed leadership on this,” Schaefer said. “If the board and the system is trying to get back into the abortion business, that would be very troubling to me.”

On Wednesday, the university announced that it had extended certain clinical privileges to three nursing students to work with Planned Parenthood on a limited basis unrelated to abortion services.

Along with the Planned Parenthood issue, the chancellor has come under fire for how he’s handled the issue of racism on campus.

Some students have complained that the chancellor hasn’t been more forceful in responding to certain incidents.

In September, student body president Payton Head said he was walking down a street when a group of men driving by in a pickup yelled racial slurs at him repeatedly.

Earlier this month, members of a black student group said they were confronted by a man at Traditions Plaza who used a racial slur. Group members were particularly upset by what they described as a lack of action by a campus safety officer who was present.

After the second incident, Loftin posted a video on his website condemning the incident and acknowledging that racism is “alive and well” on Mizzou’s campus.

Shortly afterward, the university announced that all incoming freshman, along with faculty and staff would be required to undergo training programs centered on racism.

State Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, said she started hearing rumors on Tuesday of Loftin’s potential ouster. On Wednesday, she drove to Columbia to speak in support of the chancellor.

“I know that he’s probably in some hot water for how he openly confronted the issue of racism on campus. I mean, what university wants their chancellor to come out and say what he said,” Nasheed said. “I’m sure the board was furious.”

Nasheed said she wasn’t allowed to address the curators before they went into closed session, but she did speak to board Chairman Donald L. Cupps.

“He told me, ‘I know there are a lot of rumors about what’s going to happen in this meeting, and that they’re just rumors,’” Nasheed said. “I took that to mean they weren’t looking to take any action right away.”
Some critics also say Loftin bungled how the university handles health care coverage for its student teachers — graduate students who conduct research, grade papers and conduct research.

The university suddenly stripped graduate assistants of their university-paid health insurance two weeks before school started. The university blamed it on a new rule contained within the Affordable Care Act.

Other schools across the country, however, either interpreted the rule differently or took a wait-and-see approach. Mizzou’s handling of the issue prompted a loud outcry and a social media campaign criticizing the chancellor.

He later apologized and backtracked, restoring the benefits to Mizzou’s student teachers.

Nasheed said it remained unclear how strong his support among board members, and how just truthful the whispers surrounding his job security, really were.

Loftin has been Mizzou’s chancellor since February 2014. He had previously served as president of Texas A&M University. His current base salary is $450,000.

*Samantha Liss and Dave Matter of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.*

---

**MO Senator says UM Curators not discussing firing Chancellor Loftin**


COLUMBIA, Mo. — University of Missouri Curators would not say Wednesday evening whether MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin was part of their closed-door discussions that day.

Speculation began that Loftin was about to lose his job when state Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia, tweeted that UM System President Tim Wolfe was calling a Curators meeting to fire Loftin due to his role in ending MU Healthcare's partnership with Planned Parenthood. MU Healthcare had granted Dr. Colleen McNicholas so-called refer and follow privileges to allow
Planned Parenthood's Columbia facility to perform medical abortions earlier this summer. McNicholas' privileges were revoked on Sept. 16.

The Board of Curators closed Wednesday afternoon's meeting to discuss personnel matters and contracts. Members declined to say what specifically they had discussed, but Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, told reporters Board of Curators President Donald Cupps told her Loftin wasn't on Wednesday's agenda at all. Nasheed said while she doesn't always agree with Loftin, she was opposed to any effort to oust him, saying firing Loftin "would be political suicide." She said she was pleased with Loftin's recent efforts to address race relations on campus.

"He's a man of character, he's moving this campus forward in a progressive way," she said.

MU Healthcare did conclude three new site agreements with Planned Parenthood this week to allow three nursing students to work with the organization. MU Healthcare spokesperson Teresa Snow said the site agreements spell out each student's educational goals and start and end dates, but no money is exchanged between MU and Planned Parenthood. Two students would work at the Columbia facility and one in Independence, but Snow said none of them would be involved in any way with abortion-related services.

UM System spokesperson John Fougere said there would be no immediate announcements stemming from the Curators meeting. Jones did not return multiple calls seeking comment for this story. MU also did not respond to several requests for comment.

Curators mum on topics discussed in four-hour closed session

By Rudi Keller

Wednesday, October 21, 2015 at 6:37 pm

The University of Missouri Board of Curators met in closed session for more than four hours Wednesday afternoon, but the subject of the discussion and whether any action was taken was not disclosed.

Board President Donald Cupps declined to answer questions from waiting reporters as he left the offices of President Tim Wolfe. UM System spokesman John Fougere said he had nothing to disclose.
The curators began meeting shortly after 1 p.m. with an agenda that included personnel matters, litigation and sealed bids and contracts.

Under the state Sunshine Law, personnel decisions made in closed session must be disclosed within 72 hours to allow time for the employee involved to be notified. Other actions that can take place in closed session, including discussions of lawsuits, sealed bids or real estate transactions, can be withheld until a final resolution to the issue occurs.

Before the meeting, politicians, journalists and others interested in the university were speculating that the personnel portion was for the purpose of considering whether to dismiss Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin. Some lawmakers and abortion rights supporters have called for Loftin’s job because he initiated a review of university contracts with Planned Parenthood and the privileges granted by MU Health Care for a doctor hired to provide abortion services at the Columbia clinic.

State Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, drove to Columbia to speak to the curators in defense of Loftin. She was not allowed to speak and said afterward that Cupps assured her that firing Loftin was not going to be part of the discussion.

Nasheed said she disagreed with Loftin’s actions and the university decisions on Planned Parenthood, but supported Loftin because he is working to improve race relations on campus.

“He is doing the right thing and to attack him and to call for the board to fire him would be appalling,” Nasheed said. “I was one that criticized him as well, but we are not all going to agree on everything.”

During an August hearing of the Senate Interim Committee on the Sanctity of Life, Loftin promised to review both the clinical agreements and the granting of privileges to Dr. Colleen McNicholas, who is providing medication-induced abortions at the Columbia clinic.

All existing agreements except one for the School of Social Work were canceled after the review. Three new agreements, short-term contracts for individual nursing students to do clinical work with Planned Parenthood, are being finalized, MU Health Care spokeswoman Teresa Snow wrote in an email to the Tribune.

One student will work in the Independence clinic and two will be working in the Columbia clinic, Snow wrote. The contract for the student who will do clinical rotations in Independence has been completed and the two for Columbia have not, she wrote.

The students will work with Planned Parenthood during the spring semester, she wrote.

“The agreement will ensure that University policies are followed as well as state and federal laws,” Snow wrote. “Students receiving training under these agreements will not perform or assist in pregnancy terminations, counsel women to have pregnancy terminations or encourage women to have pregnancy terminations.”
University spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said in September that the medical agreements were canceled because no students were doing clinical rotations at the Columbia facility.

On Sept. 21, the executive committee of the medical staff of MU Health Care voted to end “refer and follow” privileges at the hospital. McNicholas and one other physician had those privileges. Steve Whitt, chief medical officer of MU Health Care, said after the decision that committee members did not discuss the Columbia clinic but understood the political atmosphere surrounding their decision.

In a statement issued Wednesday, Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri President Laura McQuade said the new agreements are a good start but that the university should re-instate the long-term contracts.

The decision to end the earlier contracts was “capitulation to political bullying,” McQuade wrote. The new contracts are short-term and only apply to the students who have requested to work at the clinic, McQuade said.

“These contracts open back up critical access to educational and training opportunities for MU nursing students who wish to learn from our dedicated professionals how to provide life-saving preventive health care,” McQuade said.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

No announcement after closed UM curators meeting

KASIA KOVACS, 12 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Members of the UM System Board of Curators were tight-lipped after a nearly 4 1/2-hour session behind closed doors Wednesday afternoon. It was the second such meeting in the past month.

Speculation about MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin’s job status — whether he would be let go after about 20 months — followed the announcement of the meeting shortly after noon on Tuesday.
One such rumor came at 9 a.m. Wednesday from state Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia, who tweeted: "I'm being told @UMPrez is holding a Curators mtg in an attempt to fire @bowtieger for his 'role' in shutting down PP #moleg @Rep_TRichardson"

Jones did not respond to calls to his Capitol office or his Columbia law firm.

But, according to state Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, who showed up at the curators' meeting, the rumors were only that. Nasheed said board chairman Donald Cupps of Cassville told her the curators would discuss other issues. "But it won’t be the firing of the chancellor,” she told reporters camped out at University Hall just after the curators closed their meeting to the public.

After the meeting, a reporter asked UM spokesman John Fougere as he was leaving the board room whether Loftin still had his job. "Yes," Fougere responded.

The curators, who make up the four-campus system’s governing body, did not comment on the specifics of the meeting, which lasted from 1 to about 5:20 p.m.

The meeting agenda included "certain confidential or privileged communications with university counsel, negotiated contracts and personnel matters.” Missouri's public records law allows discussions involving personnel matters, among other exemptions, to be closed to the public.

Except for Curator David Steward of St. Louis, all curators attended the meeting in person. University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe, General Counsel Steve Owens and non-voting student representative Tracy Mulderig from the University of Missouri-St. Louis also attended the meeting in person.

Steward did not immediately respond to a call requesting comment.

Before the meeting, Nasheed said that she hoped to address the curators in support of Loftin but that she was not allowed to join them during the closed session.
“He’s moving this campus forward in the most productive way, and the most progressive way,” Nasheed said. “I do believe that at the end of the day, it would be political suicide to fire the chancellor.”

But not everyone with a stake in the university is as willing to stick up for Loftin.

The chancellor has been under fire for several matters, including canceled contracts with Planned Parenthood; unexpected cuts to graduate student employee health insurance subsidies and plans to cut tuition waivers for some graduate students; the sudden resignation of the dean of the School of Medicine; and the handling of racism on campus.

The MU administration has taken several steps in response to the criticism by announcing mandatory diversity training at MU and reinstating graduate student health insurance subsidies and a few Planned Parenthood contracts. But many say that these steps are not big enough.

The curators also met in another closed session on Sept. 20, when they spent seven hours in private discussion with Wolfe and Owens.

Any vote to hire, fire, promote or discipline an employee must be announced to the public 72 hours after the meeting’s close. Fougere said no announcement would come Wednesday and would not comment beyond that.
COLUMBIA, Mo - Missouri State Senator Jamilah Nasheed showed up at the meeting in hopes of addressing the board. Senator Nasheed's attendance came after speculation circulated online Wednesday that curators would discuss the future of Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin at the University of Missouri.

Wednesday morning, Rep. Caleb Jones, (R)-Columbia, tweeted the board was trying to fire the chancellor for his role in ending some contracts with Planned Parenthood, including physician privileges which will end abortions at the Columbia clinic.

Nasheed said she believed it had something to do with Loftin's comments about racism on campus.

Nasheed said she was not allowed to address the board in executive session. Board president Donald Cupps told her the curators were not going to discuss Loftin Wednesday.

Senator Nasheed said although she has disagreed with Loftin on issues in the past, she believes he is moving the MU campus forward in a productive and aggressive way.

"But what I don't want to happen is the firing of the chancellor," Nasheed said. "I think he's doing an outstanding job. And I think at the end of the day, the racial diversity sensitivity training is something that is most definitely needed here."

"I do believe that it's the right thing to do at a time when racial relations is at an all time low," Nasheed said.

Nasheed also said she thinks it would be political suicide for the board to fire the chancellor.

Loftin became chancellor of the University of Missouri on February 1, 2014. He previously served as the 24th President of Texas A&M University from 2010 to 2014.

If the board took a final vote on a personnel issue, it has 72 hours to inform the public of its decision.

The UM Board of Curators met Wednesday afternoon on University of Missouri campus. The meeting got underway at University Hall at 1:00 p.m. Wednesday and lasted for more than four hours.
Rep.: Chancellor Loftin's job on the line over Planned Parenthood

Watch story: [http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=31092&zone=5&categories=5](http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=31092&zone=5&categories=5)

COLUMBIA - The University of Missouri Board of Curators was meeting Wednesday, but officials would not comment on reports that discussion centered on calls to fire Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin because of a dispute over Planned Parenthood.

Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia tweeted the meeting was an attempt to fire Loftin, but, when KOMU 8 News spoke to him, he would make no further comment.

The dispute centered on a doctor who was performing medical abortions at the Planned Parenthood facility in Columbia. Dr. Colleen McNicholas had some privileges at the University of Missouri Hospital.

Republican lawmakers said that was illegal, because MU is a public institution and taxpayer funds are not to be used to pay for abortions. MU Health Care said the law did not apply because McNicholas was not an employee of the system and was only able to refer patients to the hospital and then follow their progress.

After an outcry from Republican lawmakers, MU Health Care revoked McNicholas' privileges, prompting protests by supporters of Planned Parenthood, who said the university should not have cut relations.

Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia, tweeted Monday that the Board of Curators may want to fire Loftin over the matter.

When KOMU 8 News asked the University of Missouri system for a response, communications officer John Fougere said, "Missouri's Sunshine Law statute and our university collected rules, we cannot comment on anything that goes on in executive (closed) session."
MU researchers successfully treat dogs with muscular dystrophy

Watch story: [http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=31093&zone=2,5&categories=2,5](http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=31093&zone=2,5&categories=2,5)

COLUMBIA - Researchers at the University of Missouri have successfully treated dogs with the most common form of muscular dystrophy, Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD).

Researchers said human clinical trials are being planned in the next few years.

"This discovery took our research team more than 10 years, but we believe we are on the cusp of having a treatment for the disease," one researcher said.

Dongsheng Duan, the study leader, said DMD is the most common muscle disease in boys, and there is currently no effective therapy for humans.

He said patients with the disease have a gene mutation that disrupts the production of a protein known as "dystrophin." The absence of this protein leads to muscle cell degeneration and death. Boys with DMD lose their ability to walk and breathe as they age.

Duan said dystrophin is one of the largest genes in the human body.

Through previous research, Duan's team developed a miniature version of the gene called a microgene. He said the microgene successfully protected all muscles in the body of diseased mice.

After more than 10 years, the team has now found a way to safely send the micro-dystrophin to every muscle in a dog that has the disease. He said dogs have a body size similar to that of an affected boy.

Duan's team found that a common virus makes this possible.
Researchers injected this virus into dogs between two to three months old, that had started to show signs of DMD. They said the dogs are now six to seven months old and continue to develop normally.

"These dogs develop DMD naturally in a similar manner as humans," Duan said.

Duan said the virus used produces no symptoms in the human body, making it a safe way to spread the dystrophin gene throughout the body.

He said it's important to treat DMD early before the disease does a lot of damage, and the therapy has the greatest impact in the early stages of life.

Bob McDonald's son suffers from DMD.

"You have to have, not just hope, but you have to have optimism and Dr. Duan gives us that," McDonald said.

Duan recently received a five-year $3 million grant from NIH to continue his research.

Thomas Jefferson statue incites debate at Mizzou

A public statue of Thomas Jefferson on the campus of the University of Missouri in Columbia has generated intense debate at the school -- and more recently, on social media -- over whether the founding father and third U.S. president deserves to be honored given his known status as a slave owner.

The controversy over the work of art landed on the front page of the Columbia Missourian, the school newspaper, on Wednesday. On Twitter, the hashtag #StandwithJefferson has in recent days elevated the debate to a national level, with some claiming that the calls to remove the statue represent an excess of political correctness.

An online petition has demanded the statue's removal from the quad area of the University of Missouri campus. The work of art represents "the dehumanization of black individuals who Jefferson himself viewed as inferior," the petition states.
But the petition has only garnered about 80 signatures. A competing petition from the Mizzou College Republicans, a student organization, has been passed around campus -- and received more signatures -- calling for students to support keeping the statue.

"I feel like we're forgetting important moral and political values that Thomas Jefferson stood for," said Skyler Roundtree, chairman of the Mizzou College Republicans, in a phone interview.

He said that the current culture is one where "when someone takes offense at something, then it should be removed."

The competing petition states that "we are living in a time where our society has begun to sacrifice morals and traditions only to be politically correct."

The bronze statue, which depicts Jefferson seated and writing with a quill pen, was unveiled in 2001 and was a gift from multiple trustees of the Jefferson Club, a philanthropic group for the university.

Earlier this month, the statue was covered with adhesive notes with the words "racist," "misogynist," "slave owner" and "rapist," according to reports. The "rapist" epithet presumably refers to the widely accepted belief that Jefferson fathered children with his slave Sally Hemings, who was a teenager at the time.

The Columbia Missourian reported Wednesday on student reactions to the controversy. "It's offensive to idealize and cherish someone who raped and owned slaves," said one student.

Others defended Jefferson, citing his role as the primary author of the Declaration of Independence and one of the country's founding fathers who laid the groundwork for democracy.

The Mizzou College Republicans confirmed reports that one of its black student members, Jasmine Wells, had been the subject of online harassment for expressing her support for keeping the Jefferson statue. The group has posted photographs to its Facebook page showing members draping an American flag around the statue.

On Twitter, Wells identified herself in one of the photos, saying: "And I can assure you that I am quite proud to be in that picture."

The hubbub over the Jefferson statue comes amid several controversies around the country this year concerning public monuments depicting Southern and Confederate leaders.

The debates follow the June shooting deaths of nine people in a predominantly black church in Charleston, S.C., as well as urban unrest around the country following accusations of police brutality against black individuals.
Earlier this year, officials at the University of Texas at Austin removed a public statue of Confederate president Jefferson Davis following complaints that the work of art glorified the South's racist past.

The statue of Davis was moved from its outdoor location on the school's campus to an indoor exhibition space. School officials decided that four other statues of prominent Southern leaders on the campus grounds would remain in place.

In August, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal sought to block the removal of four Confederate statues in New Orleans, following a vote from two city commissions in favor of removing them.

A statue of Confederate Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard in New Orleans was defaced earlier this year with the words "Black Lives Matter."

In Kentucky, a statue of Davis in the state Capitol building in Frankfort became the subject of public debate over whether officials should have it removed. In August, a historic advisory panel voted in favor of keeping the statue at its location in the Capitol.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Departments state support for student group; group calls for Wolfe's resignation

RUTH SERVEN, 10 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Ten days after members of the student group Concerned Student 1950 blocked UM System President Tim Wolfe's car during the MU Homecoming Parade, the group issued a statement of demands, which included a request for an apology from Wolfe and his removal from office.

Wolfe had not publicly responded to the demands as of Wednesday. The group requested a response from administration by Oct. 28. However, Wolfe had previously reached out to the student activists in the group.

"President Wolfe has reached out to them and has invited them to meet with him and offered them a number of times he's available," said UM Systems Spokesman John Fougere.
The group outlined eight demands. Highlights include:

- A news conference of Wolfe reading a handwritten, formal apology.
- The immediate removal of Wolfe as UM System President.
- Enforcement of mandatory racial awareness and inclusion curriculum for all faculty, staff and students, controlled by a board of color.
- An increase in the percentage of black faculty and staff to 10 percent by the 2017-18 academic year, and the development by May 1 of a 10-year plan to promote a safer, more inclusive campus.
- An increase in funding to hire more mental health professionals for the MU Counseling Center, particularly those of color, and more staff for the social justice centers on campus.

Concerned Student 1950 also tweeted a letter on Oct. 13 describing the events of the parade.

The Department of Black Studies issued a statement in support of the group on Oct. 13 as well. Stephanie Shonekan, chair of the department, said the statement responded to student activist work throughout the past two years — from the death of Michael Brown to recent incidents involving MSA President Payton Head and the Legion of Black Collegians.

“It’s just good that we share the work that these students are doing because it is work,” Shonekan said Wednesday. "It is exhausting; it’s time out of their studies and the other work that they have to do.”

Shonekan said she was appalled by comments posted on previous news articles in various publications about race on campus.

“If you’re not a black student on Missouri’s campus, you don’t know what that experience is,” she said.
The Department of Classical Studies posted on its Facebook wall Wednesday morning echoing Shonekan’s statement.

“We endorse that sentiment, and we join her in supporting our students who are actively working for change, trying to improve the campus environment,” it said.

The School of Health Professions emailed a statement Friday signed by Dean Kristofer Hagglund to its faculty, staff and students. It said: “In recent weeks, it has become obvious that racism at Mizzou is a very real, very present problem. I sincerely apologize to students who feel that their presence on campus has not been heard or valued by those in a position to make a difference in our campus culture.”

“We’ve heard the distress of the black students on campus and for the students of our school. We want to offer all the help we can,” said Hagglund in an interview Wednesday.

Hagglund said the School of Health Professions has formed a task force on student inclusion and diversity. By the end of the semester, the task force will give a report about ways the school can improve the inclusion of underrepresented minorities, which include racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities.

As future health providers, students of the school will have to care for a diverse population, Hagglund said.

“We’re training the next generation of the health care workforce, and we would like that workforce to be reflective of the people that they serve,” he said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU pilots new learning management system in Canvas trial

BROOKE KOTTMANN, 18 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — As an educator and web designer, Krista Galyen is driven by those moments when learning and joy intersect. Effective technology, she said, can empower teachers to connect with students and trigger their understanding of information.

"I want to find technology that helps create sparks of human connection," said Galyen, lead of design and development for MU K-12 Online.

Galyen thinks that spark can occur through Canvas, a learning management system that delivers educational materials and courses to instructors and students. Galyen was responsible for leading the team that designed and built the Canvas sites for MU Middle School and MU High Schools, which are both part of Mizzou K-12 Online.

Canvas is being considered to replace Blackboard as the learning management system at MU. Canvas is being tested this semester by more than 140 instructors in more than 240 classes, said Tanys Nelson, manager of Learning Technologies at MU. Five teachers in the pilot program who were interviewed for this article said they prefer it over Blackboard, largely because they find it easier to use and more student-friendly.

Canvas 'more mobile friendly'

Blackboard and Canvas offer 90 percent of the same tools: assignment submissions, quizzes, grade books and email, but there are a few key feature differences, said Danna Vessell, director of Educational Technologies, ET@MO.
Launched in 2008 by Instructure Inc., Canvas is an online application that allows teachers and students to communicate and share content. It allows users to connect to other external tools such as plagiarism detection, social media and virtual classroom tools, Nelson said.

Another attribute that sets Canvas apart from Blackboard is responsive design, Nelson said. “It’s more mobile friendly,” she said. “It is designed to adapt more readily on any device — phone, tablet or desktop.”

Galyen said that in the end, it's about students connecting to their teachers and vice versa.

“Through (Canvas), I have found teachers can quickly and efficiently help students feel heard when they need help," she said. "It’s about having the right tools to facilitate teacher-student interaction and there being rapid, easy tools to facilitate human-to-human connection. Everything else is gravy.”

Blackboard was founded by Blackboard Inc. in 1997. Some faculty complaints about it are system outages and downtime and about the site not being user-friendly and requiring too many clicks to perform tasks, Nelson said.

Navigating Canvas is easier and more efficient than navigating Blackboard, Galyen said.

“Under the hood how the sites are built, I learned from Canvas engineers that Canvas’s core code is smaller and built to stay streamlined by making features plug-ins rather than keeping them in the core code,” she said. "Blackboard’s features are still in the core code, making it bloated and a big, monstrous beast.”

Canvas’ pilot program started last summer and will continue through the spring. Overall, the pilot program is successful, Nelson said.

“Several (instructors) are very satisfied with using with Canvas,” Nelson said. “Some are concerned with the amount of time it takes to move materials from Blackboard to Canvas. Some are concerned Canvas doesn’t have enough features to meet their instructional needs.”
Blackboard course materials are transferred into the Canvas pilot as developmental courses that instructors can use to set up their Canvas pages so that they don’t have to start over. But even if courses are transferred, instructors still have to do some cleaning up and fix modules that didn’t transfer correctly, Nelson said.

'It's like my sandbox'

Jill Ostrow, an associate professor of teaching in literacy education, lives in Oregon while teaching online literacy education classes for MU. Professors and instructors shouldn't be worried that switching to Canvas from Blackboard means they lose all of the information when transferring sites, Ostrow said.

Ostrow uses the development course to practice things she’s unsure about: “It’s like my sandbox. It’s my practice place. It’s my playground. It’s so useful.”

Kathleen Dolan, director of the execMBA program and instructor at MU’s Trulaske College of Business, compares using Canvas to using Blackboard in her MBA Seminar and International Business courses.

“Canvas is not as customizable as Blackboard, but for the learner, that is a great thing,” Dolan said in an email. “The look and feel of Canvas is modern and simplified. Blackboard appears cluttered and ‘old’ on a visual level.”

Dale Fitch, MU associate professor and associate director of social work, said his online students who live in rural parts of Missouri have had no problem accessing Canvas, which doesn’t rely on broadband Internet connection as much as Blackboard.

“Blackboard is still behind the curve in that regard,” Fitch said. “It does not matter how easy the system is to use if you can’t easily access it.”

Fitch is concerned his colleagues are so accustomed to using Blackboard that they are overlooking all the new features Canvas has to offer.
“People are hung up on this learning curve,” Fitch said. “The next version of Blackboard is going to involve the same amount of learning as Canvas is now, but Canvas is a much better site.”

Galyen, who is also an adjunct professor for an MU Introduction to Web Development course, acknowledged that it’s often difficult to switch to a new site once you are accustomed to an older one.

“It’s a tradeoff,” she said. “Blackboard has more features, but its development moves slower. Canvas has a friendly user experience that is pleasant and enjoyable. I couldn’t disagree, though, that Blackboard has more tools and features in the back end.”

Galyen relies on Canvas’ user interface to help with connecting her to her students.

“A discussion that looks like a Facebook thread with little pictures of my students allows me to feel that my students are human,” Galyen said. “Getting humans to connect is the goal. It’s these tools that are most important in getting people to connect in the online space.”

Associate teaching professor of biological sciences Bethany Stone, who piloted Canvas in her General Botany class over the summer and now in her online Genetic Diseases course this fall, likes a SpeedGrader function on the site that Blackboard does not have.

“The most remarkable thing about Canvas is the ease in which I can provide feedback to my students,” Stone said in an email. “I spend less time clicking from one assignment to the next and more time writing to my students.”

Candace Iveson, clinical instructor of the School of Social Work, spends a lot of time editing course materials on her Blackboard sites but can more quickly update her Canvas courses. Canvas is fast and intuitive, Iveson said.

“(MU) has to do something,” Iveson said. “They can’t implement effective online education and technology with Blackboard. It can’t currently support this.”
Surveys will follow testing

Surveys are sent to piloting faculty and students to collect information on Canvas experiences and to see if Canvas is meeting faculty and students' academic needs, Nelson said.

Feedback from the summer 2015 semester showed students favored a grade book tool that Canvas offers but Blackboard does not.

“The feature allows students to input a grade estimate for a certain test or assignment,” Vessell said. “If you want to get an A, you can see what you have to do to get one. It was the No. 1 most popular tool.”

After the piloting session is complete and feedback is gathered from surveys, Educational Technologies and the Learning Management System Review committee will compile a proposal for a campuswide learning management system recommendation. The proposal will go before either the provost or chancellor and then to the University of Missouri System, Nelson said.

If a decision is made for MU to switch to Canvas, it will be on a gradual timeline and won’t happen over the course of one semester — it will be much slower, Vessell said.

“Does Canvas meet most of the faculty’s needs?” Vessell asked. “That’s the question we need to answer.”

OCTOBER 21, 2015

JCCC campus paper wants the Carlsen name off prominent building

For building’s 25th year, group says center shouldn’t be named for man accused of harassment
School newspaper editor plans to speak during public forum at board of trustees meeting Thursday

BY MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS
mdwilliams@kcstar.com

As Johnson County Community College prepares to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Carlsen Center, a student group wants to see the name changed on the school’s most prominent building.

The education and cultural center on the Overland Park campus is named after former president Charles Carlsen, a popular leader who served in that capacity for 25 years.

In an editorial published earlier this month in the college’s student-run newspaper, the editorial staff called for the center to be renamed because Carlsen was accused of having made unwanted sexual advances to a female employee shortly before he voluntarily retired in 2006. Those allegations, which brought controversy to the institution at the time, were never proved.

The Campus Ledger was first to report on the sexual harassment allegations and the subsequent investigation by the school nine years ago. This latest editorial represents the second time the paper has questioned the name emblazoned on the center. An editorial raising the naming question was published in 2008.

According to news reports at the time, Carlsen stated that while he had done nothing wrong, the investigation was distracting from the college’s education mission. Carlsen could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Carlsen was responsible for helping to establish the center that opened in 1991.

Ledger editor Peter Schulte said he and other members of the staff plan to appear before the college’s trustees at the board’s 5 p.m. meeting Thursday to present their name-change request.

“With it being the 25th anniversary, it’s a time to reflect and to talk about successes and failures,” Schulte said this week. He said that since most students attending the two-year college were most likely not on the campus nine years ago, “we thought it would be relevant to bring this story to light and to bring up the name change.”
Trustees reached by phone Wednesday said they were not aware that students planned to address the board regarding changing the name of the Carlsen Center. Nor were they certain about the process to take such action.

“This issue has not been raised in the four years that I’ve been on the board. I don’t have any feeling on the matter one way or the other,” said trustee president Greg Musil. “I am willing to listen. It is obviously a serious enough matter for them to bring this up.”

Musil said the college has been talking about spending money to make improvements to the facility in recognition of its 25 years on campus.

The facility was built for $21 million as an arts complex. It houses the 1,250-seat Yardley Hall, the 400-seat Polsky Theatre, a recital hall, a black box theater for student performances, classrooms and offices.

Community college trustees said they don’t respond at meetings to comments made during the public forum portion of the session, and even if students bring up the name-change idea they were not certain it would be discussed further among them.

Renaming a campus facility because of controversy is not new — it’s why some schools across the country are cautious about naming structures after living former administrators, benefactors or their living family members. There’s always the risk that person may fall into misfortune that could cast a shadow on the school.

Consider Penn State University, which a few summers ago removed a statue of longtime football coach Joe Paterno because of the Jerry Sandusky child molestation case.

The University of Missouri learned the risks in naming facilities for the living in 2004. That’s when its new $75 million basketball arena was named the Paige Sports Arena after Paige Laurie, then a 22-year old Wal-Mart heiress. Her parents, Nancy and Bill Laurie of Columbia, had donated $25 million toward the project.

Eight months later, the girl’s roommate accused her of cheating in college. The next week, the school renamed the facility Mizzou Arena.
Korean, Chinese students take issue with Sunshine Sushi logo

CHRIS STAFFORD, 12 hrs ago

The two groups, along with Jeff Zeilenga, MU assistant vice chancellor for student auxiliary services, and Julian Kiehn, campus dining services director, met with the restaurant owners Tuesday afternoon. The student groups are proposing that the company change its logo because they believe it resembles the Imperial Japanese flag, otherwise known as the Rising Sun flag.

Japan used the flag during World War II, when it conquered South Korea, parts of China and East Asia. In 1945, when Gen. Douglas MacArthur signed a treaty that secured the Japanese surrender, the flag's use and any reference to the "Empire of Japan" were prohibited. In 1954, Japan's military started using a slightly altered version of the imperial flag, exacerbating wounded feelings.

Many Koreans and Chinese consider the flag offensive and a reminder of a dark past. The owners of Sunshine Sushi, who are not Japanese, said they had no intention of offending anyone with their logo.

Originally from Myanmar, co-owner Oo Min Aung said that "even though the logo of the company has similarity of Imperial Japanese, it actually means shining rays."

Aung said he understands the concerns of the two groups and their history. He explained that his country also suffered from Japanese imperialism during World War II and did not want to offend the groups.

"It's just unfortunate that it is coincidence," Aung said.

Kim Joon Woo, president of the Korean Student Association, first saw the logo as a freshman in 2012. He said he thought at the time that he lacked authority to speak out because of his status as a freshman and a new member of the association. The group has discussed the issue several times but delayed taking action.
"It's a taboo," Kim said. "Everybody knows about it, but they don't want to talk about it."

Kim feels that now that he is president of the group, it's an opportune time to confront the issue.

"Most people our age aren't into this kind of history," Kim said. "They forget this. But this is really important. We have to know what's bad and what's right to see the right history. It's as big of an issue for us as racism. It's like giving us the middle finger."

Kim proposed that Korean professors on campus create a program to educate students about the history of the flag and why it is offensive to some.

One idea discussed at the meeting was to have a contest in which students could submit new designs for the restaurant logo. Aung said he would be willing to consider changing the logo if it matches the "sunshine" aspect of its name. No promises were made, but the groups agreed to meet again.

---

Who Should Prevent Social Media Harassment?
October 22, 2015

By Josh Logue

NO MU MENTION

WASHINGTON -- On Wednesday 72 women's and civil rights organizations urged the U.S. Education Department to tell colleges that they must monitor anonymous apps like Yik Yak -- frequently the source of sexist and racist comments about named or identifiable students -- and do something to protect those students who are named.
The groups said they view anonymous online abuse as an emerging issue under provisions of the Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

For colleges, Yik Yak and similar apps have already led to numerous protests and anger, but some experts question the practicality and legality of administrators doing what the groups want.

Two of these groups, Feminists United on Campus and Feminist Majority Foundation, also filed a specific complaint with the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights alleging the University of Mary Washington failed to adequately address harassment and threats against students posted to Yik Yak last year. Representatives from those groups said Wednesday that the OCR informed them it would investigate their allegations.

The trouble at Mary Washington stemmed from a debate over Greek life and sexual assault. Anonymous rape and death threats against members of Feminists United on Campus were posted to Yik Yak after the Feminists United members came out against allowing fraternities and sororities on campus and criticized the campus rugby team for a lewd chant. That April, Grace Rebecca Man, a Mary Washington student and former Feminists United board member, was murdered. Though no evidence has arisen linking her death to threats made on Yik Yak, many see a link. Steven Vander Briel, her housemate who is charged with Man’s murder, pled not guilty in August.

Racist or offensive posts to Yik Yak have prompted protests on college campuses in the past, but law enforcement has also started to become part of the story. Students have been arrested in recent weeks for threats they made using the app at Texas A&M University and Emory University. After a Michigan State University student posted “I’m gonna [pistol emoji] the school at 12:15 p.m. today,” he was charged and was sentenced to two years' probation and an $800 fine.

In the Mary Washington case, Feminists United and Feminist Majority Foundation filed a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights, accusing the university itself of fostering a hostile environment on campus by responding too slowly and inadequately to the situation. And after the Mary Washington president, Richard Hurley, vociferously refuted those allegations in a letter to the campus community, the two groups amended their complaint, accusing Hurley of retaliating against the students with a “disparaging” letter. In addition to discrimination and sexual harassment, Title IX laws prohibit “retaliation” against anyone who files a complaint. In a letter sent Friday responding the complaint, the OCR said it has jurisdiction over and will investigate both allegations.

“This is a big achievement,” said Debra Katz, one of the lawyers representing the groups who filed the complaint. “Anonymous social media apps are the new frontier of unlawful conduct under Title IX,” and by opening this investigation, the OCR is “demonstrating that it takes these anonymous social platforms seriously.”

The University of Mary Washington did not respond to requests for comment. In his letter, however, Hurley said the university does not have the legal authority to track down threats on its own, and in response to concerns over Yik Yak, the university increased campus security, offered a campus escort to a student who felt unsafe and encourages all students to report all threats, even anonymous ones, to the campus
police and Title IX office.

Katz, along with representatives from several feminist and civil rights groups, along with the two behind the OCR complaint, spoke at a press event Wednesday, urging the Department of Education to issue new guidelines regarding sexual harassment on campus. A total of 72 groups signed a letter asking “that the Office for Civil Rights issue guidance reminding academic institutions of their legal obligations to prevent and remedy all forms of prohibited harassment, including harassment through anonymous social media applications.”

“It is the obligation of every university and every college that allows this type of social media to go through its server to be made available as apps on its campus to monitor it,” Katz said. “The burden needs to be on administrators [not students] to monitor this, and to report it and to take it seriously.”

But that may be a tall order for most colleges and universities, said Will Creeley, vice president of legal and public advocacy at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. “To require universities to police anonymous speech online sets them up for failure,” he said. “Even setting aside the First Amendment implications, which I think are substantial.”

The Supreme Court has affirmed multiple times, he said, that there is a right to anonymous speech, and that the First Amendment applies to public colleges. There are exceptions for speech that is threatening or defamatory, but those categories are narrow, and “making that determination is beyond the competency of colleges.”

That hasn't stopped some colleges from trying, though. The College of Idaho, a private liberal arts college, took a step beyond blocking access to the app over its campus network with a technique called "geo-fencing" that makes the app totally unusable within a certain radius. But even that wasn't 100 percent effective, The Idaho Statesman pointed out, because students were still free to use the app off campus. Colleges do have some options, according to Tracy Mitrano, a consultant on technology and legal issues and a blogger for Inside Higher Ed. But banning these anonymous apps or having the universities themselves monitor them is probably a bad idea. “Universities are in a very difficult place. They are interested in being sure their campus is a safe place to women and minorities, but they are being asked to control things out of their control.”

Banning these sites incurs very serious First Amendment concerns, Mitrano said, and usually isn’t very effective anyway because students can connect on their own, avoiding university servers. Monitoring them would be a “Sisyphean task,” she said, and from a university’s perspective, it would be “difficult to track who is making threats,” because the posts are anonymous.

“But just because you can’t find the offenders doesn’t mean you do nothing,” Mitrano said. Rather, colleges should focus on changing campus culture via education, expanded counseling services, and partnerships with student groups and Greek life.
Kenyon College, for example, took to the very social media it was trying to change with a project called Respectful Difference.

Yik Yak itself has taken some steps toward addressing the anonymous harassment the app is often criticized for. “Guarding against misuse is something we take incredibly seriously, and we’re constantly working to enhance our protective measures,” said Hillary McQuaide, a company spokesperson, in an email. “Today, we have a number of safeguards in place like filters, pop-up warnings, in-app reporting, moderation and suspensions. In addition, we’re incorporating natural language processing and machine learning techniques. Encouraging a positive, constructive and supportive community environment on Yik Yak is a top area of focus for us.”

Critics, however, like Katz and the groups she represents, say whatever the app is doing obviously isn’t working. “The steps Yik Yak has currently taken to address inappropriate comments are insufficient and ineffective,” Katz said. “None of these approaches has succeeded in addressing the program.”

Women’s Groups Urge Colleges and Government to Rein In Yik Yak

By Peter Schmidt
OCTOBER 21, 2015

NO M U MENTION

WASHINGTON
Seventy-two women’s and civil-rights groups on Wednesday announced a campaign to enlist the federal government in pressuring colleges to protect students from harassment via anonymous social-media applications like Yik Yak.

The groups have sent the U.S. Education Department a letter calling for it to treat colleges’ failure to monitor anonymous social media and to pursue online harassers as a violation of federal civil-rights laws guaranteeing equal educational access.

The letter says many colleges have cited "vague First Amendment concerns" to shirk their obligation to respond to harassment, intimidation, and threatening behavior via such applications. It calls on the department’s Office for Civil Rights to require colleges to fight such online abuse by taking steps like identifying and disciplining
perpetrators and creating technological barriers to the use of social-media applications that harassers favor.

Debra S. Katz, a lawyer involved in the advocacy groups’ effort, announced that she had persuaded the Office for Civil Rights to investigate the University of Mary Washington, a public institution in Virginia, based on accusations that the university had subjected students to a sexually hostile environment by failing to confront online harassment and had illegally retaliated against students for complaining. She said she also had sent a letter requesting a meeting with Yik Yak’s founders, Tyler Droll and Stephen Brooks Buffington, to discuss steps their company can take to end harassment. And she said she planned to push lawmakers to regulate Yik Yak if the company fails to tackle the issue on its own.

"Until there is a cost for online harassment, nothing will change," Shauna Thomas, a co-founder of UltraViolet, a feminist advocacy group, said on Wednesday as her organization joined others at a news conference here announcing the anti-harassment campaign.

Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation, said she had been shocked to hear people argue that the First Amendment covers the type of speech the groups’ campaign seeks to curb. "Social media should not have this kind of protection," she said.

Fight Over Fixes

Yik Yak, released in November 2013, is hardly the first social-media application to cause havoc on campuses by offering students a means to anonymously post slanderous gossip, racial slurs, and threats of harm. Years before it came along, for example, the short-lived gossip website JuicyCampus earned notoriety as a forum for the posting of offensive material.

The letter that the 72 advocacy groups sent the Education Department on Tuesday mentions several other social-media applications, such as 4chan, an online bulletin board, and BurnBook, a forum for school-based commentary, as vehicles for anonymous harassment.

Yik Yak, however, appears to be more popular and profitable than many of the other social-media applications designed to facilitate anonymous commentary. While JuicyCampus was forced to shut down in 2009 due to a lack of financial support and revenue, Yik Yak has managed to raise more than $60 million in investments.
Hilary McQuaide, a spokeswoman for Yik Yak, said in an email on Wednesday that the company had not yet received the letter from Ms. Katz requesting a meeting.

"Guarding against misuse is something we take incredibly seriously, and we’re constantly working to enhance our protective measures," the company said in a statement provided by Ms. McQuaide. "Encouraging a positive, constructive, and supportive community environment on Yik Yak is a top area of focus for us."

Among the company’s safeguards, according to the statement, are filters, pop-up warnings, in-app reporting, moderation, and suspensions, as well as software that can automatically scan for certain words to detect trouble.

But those safeguards were dismissed as superficial and ineffective in the letter that Ms. Katz sent to Yik Yak’s founders on Tuesday on behalf of the Feminist Majority and Feminists United, a student group at the University of Mary Washington. The letter notes, for example, that abusive users can bypass the application’s system for filtering threatening speech by slightly altering words, changing "rape" to "grape," for example. She argued that Yik Yak’s use of community monitoring, which theoretically lets students down-vote harassing comments out of existence, does not prevent the posting of comments that offend, bully, or threaten, and offers little protection to students from minority groups who are unlikely to see others come to their defense.

At Wednesday's news conference, Ms. Katz said she hoped to persuade Yik Yak to be more forthcoming in revealing the identities of users who harass online, and to stop refusing to hand over users’ names to people outside law enforcement unless ordered to do so by a court. Observing that the company has been quick to provide information identifying people who have threatened criminal acts such as shootings, she said it should also feel obliged to identify the violators of federal laws barring educational institutions from discriminating based on sex or race.

Firsthand Accounts

Colleges, for their part, have been too quick to disclaim responsibility for dealing with harassment and threats on Yik Yak, partly because students can use the application without access to university servers, argued the letter sent to the Education Department by the 72 advocacy groups. (Its signatories included the American Association of University Women, the National LGBTQ Taskforce, the National Organization for Women, and several local organizations, such as the DC Rape Crisis Center.)
A statement that the groups issued to the news media offered a litany of incidents in which women had felt bullied or threatened via Yik Yak, including a controversy last fall at Eastern Michigan University stemming from students’ use of Yik Yak to hurl insults and sexual remarks at instructors in an honors class. Much of Wednesday’s event was devoted to firsthand accounts of how anonymous Yik Yak posts had left women feeling harassed or threatened.

"We were sexually harassed, called vulgar and offensive names. The most vitriolic of the posts threatened us with rape and murder," Julia Michels, president of Feminists United, said in recalling how Yik Yak users harassed women at the University of Mary Washington.

Ms. Thomas, of UltraViolet, said that social-networking platforms are "a major reason why rape culture persists."

The civil-rights complaint filed against the University of Mary Washington initially argued that the university had violated Title IX, which bars sex-based discrimination by education institutions, by deeming the harassment of students on Yik Yak as protected by the First Amendment. The complaint was subsequently amended to accuse the university’s president, Richard V. Hurley, of illegal retaliation for issuing a letter criticizing the initial complaint and denying many of its claims.

The Office for Civil Rights announced its intent to investigate the university this month. Marty Morrison, a university spokeswoman, on Wednesday issued a statement in which its administration said that "the prevention of sexual misconduct is an institutional priority" and that the university welcomes the Education Department’s guidance.

Ms. Katz said she hoped the Office for Civil Rights would issue strong new guidance requiring colleges to stem online harassment "because schools, quite frankly, are very scared of lawsuits."

Reynol Junco, who has studied Yik Yak extensively as an associate professor of education and human-computer interaction at Iowa State University and a faculty associate at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, on Wednesday said he would hate to see colleges prevent students’ use of the application, because many of the statements made on it, including those directed toward marginalized populations, are positive or affirming. "If you get rid of Yik Yak," he said, "you will never get a really true sense of the campus culture."

Peter Schmidt writes about affirmative action, academic labor, and issues related to academic freedom. Contact him at peter.schmidt@chronicle.com.