University of Missouri Struggles to Bridge Its Racial Divide

Scott N. Brooks, draped in a dapper shawl-collar sweater, looked out on the auditorium of mostly white students in puffy coats and sweats as they silently squirmed at his question. Why, he had asked, does Maria Sharapova, a white Russian tennis player, earn nearly twice as much in endorsements as Serena Williams, an African-American with a much better win-loss record?

“We like to think it’s all about merit,” said Dr. Brooks, a sociology professor at the University of Missouri, speaking in the casual cadence of his days as a nightclub D.J. “It’s sport. Simply, the best should earn the most money.”

Maybe tennis is not as popular here as overseas, one student offered. Dr. Brooks countered: Ms. Williams is a global figure. As the room fell silent, the elephant settled in. Most sat still, eyes transfixed on the stage. None of the participants — roughly 70 students new to the University of Missouri — dared to offer the reason for the disparity that seemed most obvious. Race.

The new frontier in the university’s eternal struggle with race starts here, with blunt conversations that seek to bridge a stark campus divide. Yet what was evident in this pregnant moment during a new diversity session that the university is requiring of all new students was this: People just don’t want to discuss it.

The racist episodes that rocked the Missouri campus last fall, leading to resignations by its president and chancellor, set administrators here and around the country on frantic course correction efforts. They have held town halls to hear students’ complaints, convened task forces to study campus climates, adjusted recruiting strategies and put in place new sessions on implicit bias and diversity, like the one Dr. Brooks spoke at, held in mid-January.

More an introduction to the diversity on campus than an instruction manual for navigating it, the session featured eight professors who spoke about their teaching and research that related to race and culture. One presented a campus survey showing how Missouri students’ attitudes broke down based on their race (for instance, about 63 percent of black students identified as liberal, while only 38 percent of whites did). Another discussed myths about Islam and offered a few surprising facts (the country’s oldest mosque is in Cedar Rapids, Iowa). Yet another talked about cultural appropriation (Mexican-themed costume parties can be offensive).

And then there was Dr. Brooks, a 43-year-old African-American who teaches “Race and Ethnic Relations” and challenged the students to think about race through the prism of sports. He offered a gentle explanation of the Williams/Sharapova discrepancy: “Maria is considered a
beauty queen, but by what standards of beauty? Some people might just say, ‘Oh, well, she’s just prettier.’ Well, according to whom? This spells out how we see beauty in terms of race, this idea of femininity. Serena is often spoofed for her big butt. She’s seen as too muscular.”

After the session, Dr. Brooks told me: “There’s still a reluctance to want to use the explanation of race, racism. I think that becomes part of what we try to do.”

The professors hoped the session would get students interested in exploring and embracing different cultures — to “stretch,” as Antonio Castro, an education professor, called it. “You have to be willing to take on opportunities to do something you haven’t considered before,” he advised students.

Such is the ideal, a campus where diversity is embedded in the everyday routine.

College officials have spent decades rolling out one initiative after the next, from scholarships to summer bridge programs to race-conscious admissions, to attract students from underrepresented populations. Since 1980, the percentage of blacks and Hispanics attending higher education institutions has more than doubled, from 13 percent to 28 percent in 2014, while the white population has dipped to about 52 percent from 84.

Yet administrators might have been missing a trickier truth: Diversity is one thing, inclusion is another.

Yes, colleges have brought more minorities to campus. But that has not necessarily meant success. The four-year graduation rate for black students who started college in 2007 was 21 percent, a mere 1 percentage point higher than for the 1996 cohort. (At the same time, the rate for white students went up 7 percentage points, to 43 percent.) According to the latest data from the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, a quarter of black students left their campus after freshman year, compared with 16 percent of white students.

All too often, administrators and students say, universities have allowed, and in some ways fostered, siloed existences in which different races barely interact with one another. Academic support services and social events bring together students of the same race; thematic freshman interest groups and housing cluster like-minded classmates. Students — black and white — self-segregate in Greek life and even campus cafeterias. “Rather than integrating these students into the fabric of the institutions, they created separate and distinct systems for them,” said E. Andre Thorn, who worked in academic retention services at Missouri before directing the multicultural center at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

When she set off to write her doctoral dissertation for the University of Maryland about eight years ago, Leah K. Cox sought to find out what colleges could do to increase interaction between races. She surveyed about 20 liberal arts institutions and concluded in her thesis, “Interactional Diversity and the Role of a Supportive Racial Climate,” that “when students feel comfortable, their desire to interact with other students, faculty and staff is greater.”
Dr. Cox, now special assistant to the president for diversity and inclusion at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Va., remembers the days when conversations about creating diverse and inclusive campuses were confined to whispers among a small community that cared. “Now,” she said, “people are asking to talk about it.” In her 30 years in academia, she’s never seen anything like it.

Inclusion starts with ensuring that minority students are “not on campus in token amounts,” said Linda S. Greene, a law professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who has served in various administrative roles that included diversity work. While some universities, particularly wealthy elites and flagships, conduct outreach to minority high school students, Ms. Greene challenges them to be as committed to building diverse and thriving student bodies as they are to recruiting top-flight athletes. She advocates identifying, developing and nurturing minorities as early as kindergarten, and investing in research on initiatives that drive success. “The big picture for me is this: You can determine an institution’s priorities by its dollar commitments,” she said. “We know what it takes for stem cell advancements and transplantation breakthroughs. When diversity becomes important enough, those commitments will be made.”

The terms “campus climate” and “inclusion” have taken off as diversity buzzwords. The University of Minnesota has established the Campus Climate Workgroup to study the problem and announced in January that it was creating a bias response team on the Twin Cities campus. At the University of Texas, Austin, the Campus Climate Response Team has been busy: In its second year, 2013-14, students reported 69 distinct incidents, 75 the following year and 53 this fall alone. Experts say bias complaints tend to be underreported, so increases indicate that the online resource has made students more comfortable reporting problems.

Since the campus uprisings last fall, students have been emboldened to complain about racial slurs yelled across campus as well as subtle but offensive messages from white students and professors, who look to them in class to answer questions about minorities and signal low expectations. Reuben Faloughi, a doctoral psychology student and member of the black protest group Concerned Student 1950, told me people often assume he’s on a sports team. Is being an athlete or an entertainer “the only thing I can be successful at?” he asked.

Benjamin D. Reese Jr., vice president for institutional equity at Duke University and chairman of the national association for college diversity officers, is in high demand these days, getting more requests to deliver lectures about bias than he can fulfill. “I think where we’re at now is a recognition on the part, primarily of students, that there’s a lot of work that’s been left undone,” he said.

One call came from Chuck Henson, named Missouri’s interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity last November, a day after Timothy M. Wolfe, the university system’s president, resigned. Mr. Henson invited Dr. Reese to campus to give faculty and staff members a lecture on implicit bias. To illustrate the attitudes and beliefs lurking below the surface, Dr. Reese flashed photographs of people on a projection screen and asked the audience to shout the first thing that came to mind. A picture of a heavyset black man, sitting with his leg propped up and wearing a suit, elicited “heavy,” “musician,” “bookie” and “savvy.” He was Tyrone B. Hayes, a biologist who teaches at the University of California, Berkeley.
The lecture was just one step Mr. Henson has taken as he faces the daunting task of turning around a race problem that has haunted the university for decades. At about 7 percent of the student body and 3 percent of the faculty, African-Americans remain underrepresented in a state that is nearly 12 percent black. Calls for diversity have ebbed and flowed over the years along with black enrollment. Like other public universities in the Midwest, Missouri draws large numbers of rural and urban students, two cohorts that tend to be opposites in terms of race, culture and experience, which officials say makes nurturing understanding between them that much harder.

On paper, the university has done plenty to address diversity. An initiative that began more than a decade ago included a two-day summit, a campus climate study and a program called Difficult Dialogues, in which faculty members learned techniques in conversing on controversial topics and conflict resolution. But faculty, students and administrators say such efforts never seemed central to life on campus.

Reaching students where they live starts with administrators simply listening, said Mr. Henson, a Yale and Georgetown Law graduate who carefully weighs every word he speaks. He remembers the reaction of students at Mizzou Hillel after sitting with them for about two hours last November to hear about their experiences on campus. Weeks earlier, a swastika had been found smeared on a bathroom wall with feces.

“What kind of overwhelmed me, and still does as I reflect on it, is how happy they were that we just sat there and listened,” Mr. Henson said. “If you are interested in a relationship, particularly in a circumstance where one is in a position of authority, my personal belief is you don’t wait for someone to reach out to you. The right thing is to take the first step. Not to pretend that something didn’t happen or that whatever happened didn’t have a sufficient magnitude to cause you to react to it.”

Since taking on the new role, Mr. Henson has met with many student leaders, protesters, faculty members and administrators. He tapped the head of the black studies department and of women’s and gender studies to organize diversity sessions for incoming students. With the help of the Missouri historical society, he has organized a lecture series about the history of African-Americans in the state. But really, Mr. Henson said, creating the nurturing environment the university wants will take more than a series of programs.

A little more than a year ago, Craig Roberts, a plant scientist and chairman of Missouri’s Faculty Council, was sitting in on a session organized by R. Bowen Loftin, the flagship’s chancellor at the time, to allow black students to air their concerns after the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown in nearby Ferguson. A white Mississippi native with a twang and a frothy smile, Dr. Roberts is as conservative as they come. He had never seen race as a problem in more than a quarter century on campus. But that night he heard the testimony of black students.

He was convinced. “They weren’t just telling how they’ve been treated,” he said. “They were giving each other tips on how to cope with this when it happens.” (One student pulls into the nearest gas station when he sees the police behind him.)
Dr. Roberts had an idea: a race relations committee. He tapped Berkley Hudson, a fellow Mississippian who teaches journalism, to lead it. They recruited people who had experienced racism as well as those who were skeptical that the campus actually had a problem. The hope was to have honest conversations about their differences and come to understand and respect one another. They would then figure out ways to replicate their methods campuswide.

The committee ended up with four women and eight men — five white, five black and two Hispanic. Two members were students, including Jonathan Butler, a graduate student whose hunger strike in November grabbed headlines.

A meeting last fall serves to illustrate how the experiment works.

Raymond Massey, a white, Bible-quoting professor of agricultural and applied economics who is skeptical of claims of racism on campus, described how he had asked his students what they thought of the university’s latest episode, a slur hurled at a black student group. But instead of addressing that incident, a white student interjected that she had been terrified when demonstrators staged a die-in, lying silently on the floor of the student union in protest of police violence against blacks. She was afraid to get up from her seat. She couldn’t get around them, she said. And she feared if she left, they’d call her racist.

As Dr. Massey spoke, Corie Wilkins fumed. Mr. Wilkins, an African-American in his senior year studying journalism, was unmoved and, in fact, offended. The die-in was peaceful, he argued, and white people didn’t have to worry about facing violence on campus. “Now if this was a black person coming out of work late at night and there’s three, four white guys standing around their car, that, to me, that’s real fear,” he said.

Dr. Massey shot back: How could Mr. Wilkins validate his own fears but not the woman’s? Mr. Wilkins countered: Because there was no history of racist attacks against whites on campus. Back and forth they went, until Michael A. Middleton, a committee member who is now interim president of the four-campus university system, intervened. “We have to understand each other if we hope to be understood,” Mr. Middleton, who is black, told them. “So we need to think through why she felt unsafe and understand that she did feel unsafe and deal with that. Just as we’re asking the white population to deal with the fear a black student has walking across campus.”

Voices eventually came back down. Tempers simmered. This was precisely the type of emotional untangling the committee was working toward.

“If we commit to a better understanding of why we as individuals act, speak, think, behave the way we do,” Mr. Henson said, “we are in a much better position as individuals to have a culture that we can share. I’m not asking you to change your beliefs. I’m asking you to think about what your beliefs are and why you have them.”

Dr. Massey said that what resonated for him was how quick he had been to embrace the white student’s fear but he had not done the same with black students. “I saw it as a pervasive problem
that everybody was looking at their own side and understood their perspective,” he said. “They didn’t understand the other person’s perspective.”

Mr. Wilkins said he learned that tone matters. He cannot get too excited every time he hears something he doesn’t like. “I can admit that that wasn’t the time to assert my point the way I did,” he said.

Now the committee is wrestling with how to export what they are doing. They have released video confessionals of members talking about race and they plan to shoot more. They hope to go to like-minded cohorts to help them grapple with the issues they themselves have struggled with in committee meetings.

“We realize,” Mr. Hudson said, “we are writing a script to how to have these conversations about race.”
In the mess that has become the University of Missouri system governance, Foley has emerged as a bright spot. Thrust into the chancellor's job on short notice on Nov. 12 after a series of crises forced the departures of system President Tim Wolfe and MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, he is receiving strong reviews for openness and smart management.

“The reaction in general is pretty positive,” said Ben Trachtenberg, chair of MU’s Faculty Council on University Policy. “People are cautiously optimistic that his heart is in the right place and they want him to succeed.”

Foley has won points for calming discontent among graduate assistants, who balked last year about low stipends and the announced removal of health benefits. He has begun inviting students to “chat with the chancellor” on Friday afternoons. And he’s been walking the halls of the Missouri Capitol, trying to repair relations with lawmakers.

Foley is no stranger to campus upheaval. He was Penn State’s executive vice president for research and dean of its graduate school when multiple child sexual abuse charges against a former assistant football coach ripped that campus apart. In June 2013 he became the University of Missouri system’s executive vice president for academic affairs.

In his speech, Foley stressed the need for MU and all public universities to adapt quickly to changing times and stresses.

“The tension around race relations and the campus climate shows that we need to do more to be fully inclusive,” he said. “When I refer to student expectations, though, I am not speaking about just African American and other underrepresented students; I am speaking about all expectations of all students. Students do have much higher expectations of the experience of university life than do many of us who went to college decades ago.”

He acknowledged the rift between the Missouri General Assembly and the University of Missouri system, especially the Columbia campus.

“I know that the State of Missouri is and always has been our greatest benefactor. I never take this for granted, and none of us should. So, if at times our legislators become exasperated with us, as they are these days, let’s not be too surprised. Let’s do better. Let’s regain their trust and respect.”
He spoke about the contract between the state and its land grant universities, and talked about the many ways MU returns the taxpayer dollars it receives back to the community in the form of medical discoveries, patents, new businesses and jobs.

Addressing Missouri citizens, he said, “I know we don’t always make you proud. I wish we did, but if you look beyond the headlines, you’ll see much for you to be very proud of, year in and year out.”

And to the campus community: “We’re far from perfect, but our ideals are the right ideals. Let’s live up to them. Let’s step up our game.”

Foley’s speech unfortunately was squashed between two thunder-stealing events.

Earlier in the day, an email that Tim Wolfe, the former university system president, had written to presumed supporters burst into open circulation and commanded the limelight.

Curator Yvonne Sparks of St. Louis resigned that same night, and officials announced the resignation of curator David Steward of St. Louis this week. A third curator, Ann Covington, resigned in November. That leaves a third of the seats on the nine-member board vacant, at a time when curators must seek a permanent replacement for Wolfe as system president.

In the midst of the uncertainty, Foley told his audience last week that he’d like to remain as chancellor.

“I love Mizzou and I would love to do this job,” he said. “But that said, that’s for you all to decide, not me.”

Given all that’s gone on over the past few months, it seems likely and proper that Foley should get a chance at a second annual address next year. Perhaps calmer circumstances will allow it to be a bit shorter.
University of Missouri system's credit outlook is lowered

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — A leading bond-rating company on Monday announced it's downgrading the outlook of the University of Missouri system's credit rating, noting the departures of two top administrators amid student protests over racial issues last year on the Columbia campus.

Standard & Poor's said in a report that the outlook of the four-campus system's AA+ credit rating dipped from stable to negative, primarily because of concerns with the system's ratio of available resources to debt. The outlook could be a precursor to actually lowering the rating.

Besides the resources-to-debt ratio, the rating company also raised concerns about the turmoil at the school. Students protested last year over what some saw as administrators' indifference to racial issues on the Columbia campus. The demonstrations drew national attention and led to the resignations of the university system president and the Columbia campus' chancellor.

Standard & Poor's said the upheaval could "affect demand and enrollment in the short term and pressure the rating."

To maintain its current rating, the university system would need solid growth in its resources-to-debt ratio and clarity on the presidential search and other leadership changes. A lower credit rating could make bonding more difficult and more expensive.
University system spokesman John Fougere said that for years the system knew taking on debt for infrastructure work on campuses and health facilities — coupled with budgets "pressured by short-term challenges" — could lead to a rating downgrade. But he said the new rating report also shows the system still has a strong financial profile.

"Whether S&P ultimately rates the UM System with an AA+ or an AA rating, our rating as a university system will remain exceptionally strong relative to our higher education peers across the sector," Fougere said in a statement.

The report comes as some lawmakers continue to be frustrated over the handling of the protests and the potential long-term impact on the University of Missouri, including its reputation.

"The lack of stability going on at the University of Missouri is causing a lot of concern," Republican Rep. Caleb Jones, of Columbia, said Tuesday. He said that extends beyond the credit rating to "every Missourian and every alumni on what the future holds."

S&P downgrades its outlook on UM System credit rating

By Roger McKinney

Tuesday, February 2, 2016 at 2:00 pm

Recent turmoil at the University of Missouri caused credit rating agency Standard & Poor’s to more closely examine the university system’s credit rating.

As a result of the analysis, S&P on Friday downgraded its outlook on UM’s AA+ credit from stable to negative. University system officials say other factors — mainly debt — had a bigger effect on the action.

Downgrading the outlook isn’t the same as downgrading the credit rating, but it sometimes is a precursor.

“There is a one in three chance that the rating could be downgraded during our two-year outlook period,” S&P analyst Ashley Ramchandani said in an email.
S&P said in a news release that the negative outlook incorporates changes in senior management for both the university system and the Columbia campus that might “affect demand and enrollment in the short term and pressure the rating.”

The agency refers to the resignations of MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin and UM System President Tim Wolfe in November after weeks of student protests charging racism on campus and the failure of leadership to address it.

State lawmakers also are scrutinizing state funding for MU, but S&P said that did not factor into the action.

“While the university’s operations and balance sheet have remained stable in the past few years, the ratio of available resources to debt may no longer align with the AA+ rating category if the university fails to improve its balance sheet strength during our outlook period,” Ramchandani said in the release.

Brian Burnett, vice president for finance and chief financial officer for the university system, and Tom Richards, treasurer and chief investment officer for UM, said the outlook downgrade is related more to debt the university has assumed to fund investments in buildings and infrastructure. The university system has about $1.63 billion in total debt, S&P said.

“It’s not unexpected,” Burnett said, adding that a possible downgrade in the credit rating was discussed with the Board of Curators back in 2012.

“It’s not something we’re excited about,” Burnett said of the outlook downgrade. “It’s also not something we’re overly concerned about.”

Richards said the AA+ rating places UM in an elite group of universities. He said the timing of the review had already been scheduled and was not triggered by campus events.

“While one campus might have challenges, one of the strengths of our system is the combined credit strength of our four campuses and our health system,” Burnett said.

If the credit rating were downgraded at some point, Burnett said it would result in a small increase of interest rates for any borrowing done by UM, depending on interest rates when any loans are issued.

The S&P news release said UM historically has experienced stable or growing enrollment across all campuses, moderate selectivity and healthy student retention. The agency assessed UM’s financial profile as “extremely strong, with consistently solid operations, stable available resources and reasonable debt burden.”
Mike Middleton, University of Missouri System’s interim president, faces a difficult task

MU’s interim system president was inspired on issues of diversity and inclusion when he was a youngster

He had experience in government before moving to academia

And now, in a leadership post, he faces a dizzying variety of issues

BY ROBERT LANGELLIER
Special to The Star

From his front window on Rose Street in Jackson, Miss., young Mike Middleton spotted Martin Luther King Jr. strolling down the road. Behind King was a group of marchers. Mike and his sister Jeanne ran out to join.

“You get back in this house in three minutes!” his mother yelled. Middleton and his sister were on the streets, again, like the last time King came through. Middleton was running from police dogs, Middleton was splashed with the hoses. And Middleton was back at home, safe, smiling.

Now he’s at his desk in a wide room in the University of Missouri’s University Hall — the system president’s desk. Middleton, now 68, chews through the story, speaking low and slow. “My parents could not be that active,” he says of the King marches.

It’s here where Middleton, in suit and tie, inadvertently makes a revealing statement about who he is, about the structures of power, about the viscosity of institutions, and about how far gone he is from his younger days of activism:

“You can’t take off your uniform and go out there and protest.”
The University of Missouri — its students returning a couple of weeks ago after a tumultuous semester — continues to be choke-slammed by every conceivable entity, from a band of activists to, very soon, the Missouri legislature. It faces threats of decreased alumni donations, decreased state funding, decreased enrollment. There’s been student unrest on race, protests over graduate health care and Planned Parenthood. There’s its precarious position in the Association of American Universities; and, recently, virulent accusations from deposed system president Tim Wolfe.

One of the recipients of these accusations is Mike Middleton, Wolfe’s interim replacement. It’s his job to at least begin to fix the mess.

Middleton has always had an uncanny ability to mediate. His brother, Richard T. Middleton III, cites it. His contemporary colleagues — Brady Deaton and Richard Wallace, the two chancellors before R. Bowen Loftin — cite it. He is, after all, a lawyer. Now Middleton finds himself controlling the system’s $3.14 billion in university funds and faced with an impossible collision of conflicting interests to mediate.

His resume shines. As an MU undergraduate in the 1960s he informally counseled Chancellor John Schwada on race issues, helped found the Legion of Black Collegians and helped draft a list of demands that nearly mirror those of Concerned Student 1950. He earned his doctorate, also at MU, in 1971. He spent a half decade as a trial attorney for the Department of Justice. He sat in high seats at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Department of Education.

In 1985 he became MU’s first black law professor, with an emphasis on civil rights. A former student, Anita Estell, described Middleton as “contemplative” and a “steady hand,” a professor who encouraged his students to “get involved on the national level.”

A decade later, in 1998, he was deputy chancellor of the campus, serving until August 2015. As Deaton puts it, “It’d be hard to find another individual with as comprehensive a knowledge of the state of Missouri as Mike Middleton.” If anyone can steer the university back, it’s probably him.
Middleton did his share of front-line activism on campus as an undergraduate. He says he quit Marching Mizzou because they played “Dixie” at halftime. In another old story, he and his friends in Kappa Alpha Psi, then the only black fraternity on campus, tried to raise a black liberation flag at halftime of a football game just as white students were raising a traditional Confederate flag. An MU policeman scooted through the crowd with his hand on his gun and took the flag, and that was that.

But Middleton soon graduated. Then he graduated again. He entered the federal courts and began a decades-long career in pursuit of civil rights from the inside of the system. And that was that.

There’s a sense that Middleton’s career at MU has been less than a fulfillment of his potential. Much of his job as deputy chancellor involved working on diversity, which, in a sea of white administrative faces, was often perceived as a puppet position.

“It tells me a lot about an institution that you take people of his caliber skills and you put him in that kind of position where you can only look through the window at him,” community activist Traci Wilson-Kleekamp says.

Middleton felt that marginalization. “I was swimming upstream trying to effect change,” he says, his speech measured. “I think this position (as president) gives me a little more clout, a little more influence than I had as deputy chancellor.”

He’s been married since the year he graduated, has three children and seven grandchildren. But no one can offer much more than that. No personal stories are shared, no quirky anecdotes, no exemplary scenes. He is brilliant, virtuous and somewhat flavorless on the surface. Whether that is emblematic of a black man playing least-common-denominator to survive in a white world or the inevitable result of a life in administration is a difficult question. Middleton hasn’t gone there in interviews, but it’s a point that Wilson-Kleekamp raises.

“When you are in a position like that and there’s a lot of (white) people on campus like that, people need job security and it’s not easy for people to jump up and go, because they get comfortable in their life and they stay there,” Wilson-Kleekamp says. “They figure out how to cope, and they figure out how to manage, so they can collect their check.”
“I have the utmost respect for him and the things he’s done in this space,” says Reuben Faloughi, a member of Concerned Student 1950. “That being said, because of the history of the university, I reserve some skepticism for anyone and everyone from the old culture. Historically, things tend to slingshot back to the status quo.”

Faloughi and Wilson-Kleekamp both express support for Middleton, but their reservations make clear the divide between race and the power structure.

In a recent letter containing a basketful of accusations, former MU System president Tim Wolfe pointed a finger at Middleton’s connection to members of Concerned Student 1950 and his inability to solve racism on campus during his tenure as deputy chancellor.

“Why did the Board of Curators decide to hire the leader who had failed miserable (sic) in his capacity as the long time leader on diversity issues on the MU campus?” Wolfe wrote.

“I don’t want to dignify that with a response,” Middleton said, speaking with the Chronicle of Higher Education. Wilson-Kleekamp, however, did.

“If he wanted to be disruptive (as deputy chancellor), he would have had to do it very quietly behind the scenes,” she said. “People can only make change within the comfort zone of the person they work for. I call that plantation politics. Not that he wants to be a part of that, but those are the rules of engagement.”

Even in a realistic lens, however, it’s difficult to enumerate Middleton’s achievements at Mizzou. Part of that has to do with the inherent opaqueness of administrative vocabulary and with Middleton’s roles through the years. Despite a lot of illustrious titles on his resume — principal deputy assistant secretary, associate general counsel, vice provost, deputy chancellor — Middleton’s involvement in university legal matters makes his accomplishments difficult to clarify.

Ask what a president of a university system does, and one gets the administrative gloss in answers like: “The president of the system works with the Board of Curators of the university on all aspects of university policy related to the
collected rules, the financing, the benefits system, the retirement system, and has each of the chancellors of the campuses report.”

In a college setting particularly, administrative language is coherent with a long-standing system in which the lowest bodies — the students — do not understand the mechanisms of the highest bodies in time to critique it. That was part of Wolfe’s undoing.

One can see the similarities between former chancellor Deaton and interim president Middleton when they speak. Deaton speaks much more quickly and confidently, but both can carefully mete out strategized statements.

Before Middleton is ready to directly tackle the university’s problems, his answer to his role right now is perfect and nonspecific — on an issue far too complex for a media soundbite.

“The first thing,” Middleton says, “is to restore some confidence in the system, some trust among faculty, students, graduate students, staff, others who have problems; try to control the vitriolic animosities that we feel between some donors, some legislators, others who just have bad feelings about the university and how we handle a variety of things. If we can calm that down, bring some reason to the table, bring some balance to these issues, I think we’ll be going a long way towards getting the university on the right track to focus on educating our students, conducting productive research, and providing health care to Missourians.”

And that brings you to the mediating essence of Mike Middleton.

“I never saw him angry,” recalls Anita Estell, a student of Middleton’s in the ’80s.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen him angry,” former chancellor Wallace says.

Last year, Middleton gave a Black History Month speech entitled “Living Civil Rights: A Mizzou Challenge.” “I urge you to understand that whatever indignity you are subjected to, your reaction is in your control,” he said.

The story of young Mike running to join MLK in Jackson is picturesque, but it isn’t the creation story Middleton offers up front. What he offers is more true to his fiber. It wasn’t the hoses or the dogs or King himself that turned him toward
civil rights, but it did happen in the same time period. It was the grand arrival of
the lawyers, specifically Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP coming to town.

“They were talking to the mayor and the police chief and the politicians, and they
were taking people to court, and they were getting things done,” he says. “And I
said, ‘I … I can do that. I think I’d be better doing that than being out here in
these streets with a picket sign running away from police dogs.’ ”

Middleton, of course, is more than a civil rights advocate. But race, he admits, is
what brought him to the table. At the press conference announcing his interim
presidency, Middleton looked tired. Across four decades of swimming through
white institutions, he remembered when he was a concerned student, sitting in
solidarity with black students at an MU football game.

In a way, he’s still alone. He’s a black man on top of a white institution, faced
with a centuries-old conflict that he’s expected to fix through initiatives. And to
even do that, he needs the Board of Curators, the legislature and alumni on his
side. His actions, rather than his placating demeanor, will have the power to
reveal more about him than the past decade has, but he still has restricted
mobility.

The one thing that does seem clear about Middleton is his sincerity. Speaking at
an MU Law School commencement eight years ago, he outlined the approach to
conflict that would eventually earn him the interim presidency.

“Abstract reasoning, clarity of thought, an understanding that every conflict can
be viewed from a variety of legitimate perspectives, critical thinking, factual,
respectful, civil discourse — these are the qualities of mind and character that are
so necessary to the healing of our common societal difficulties.”

Middleton spent a long time in waiting. He said he thought he should have been
 chancellor when Deaton retired in 2013 instead of Loftin.

“I think Professor Middleton required something of a different caliber of
courage,” Estell, his former student, said. “He labored in the vineyard. A lot of
times people get discouraged by the inertia and leave the cause of equity.” She
paused. “When your interest in victory is more profound than the challenge, you
stick it out.”
Middleton did, technically, leave the cause of equity. He'd been retired for about three months, before Curator Don Cupps pulled him out of it. Middleton was not expecting the call.

“I thought, well, they’re going to do the same thing they always do, go find some hotshot-on-paper outsider, and—”

For the first time, Middleton’s precision breaks. He hesitates, understanding the subtle implication of his words. Glances over at his chief communications officer.

“I’m sorry,” he says, smiling bashfully and smoothing his uniform. Then he corrects himself.

Middleton fires back at former UM president


COLUMBIA, Mo. - Another salvo was fired Tuesday, in the battle of words between the University of Missouri system and its former leader, Tim Wolfe.

The latest exchange after the unrest and transition at the university comes in an article from the Chronicle of Higher Education.

In the article, interim president Michael Middleton acknowledges the concerns of some that the University has capitulated to a “small and misguided mob.” Middleton says the students are not in charge, but that doesn't mean the students don't matter.

The interviewer asked Middleton about Tim Wolfe's letter criticizing the University of Missouri System and the hiring of Middleton as interim president. Middleton said Wolfe's remarks are a remnant of the very racism the protesters were identifying at Mizzou.

He went on to say Wolfe's letter suggested Middleton's role as a black administrator, and his relationship with the hunger-striking student Jonathan Butler, was to “keep those people quiet
and happy." Middleton says he thinks Wolfe perceived him as a leader who was supposed to keep "those people out of (Wolfe's) business."

The publication pointed out that Tim Wolfe didn't respond to a request for a response to the article. ABC 17 News has also emailed, called and gone to Wolfe's house asking for more details about his claims and allegations in the email that become known to the public. A man at Wolfe’s house said Wolfe was not home, nor has Wolfe returned our messages.

The UM Board of Curators is set to hold a meeting Thursday and Friday to discuss a variety of topics, including an update on the search for a new system president.

Meet the New Student Activists

Young African-Americans and their allies are demanding change, leading people of all backgrounds to talk about issues that have lain dormant for decades. What do they want? Inclusion and representation — now. Here, seven students talk about the problems, the protests and themselves.

AMANDA BENNETT University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa

Bio: Senior, English/African-American studies; co-organizer of We Are Done movement; producer and co-author of “How Does It Feel to Be a Problem” video

My Story: I am totally African-American. My grandfather was a sharecropper in rural Alabama who moved to Atlanta and became a mechanic and worker at General Motors, so I grew up in Atlanta around middle-class black people. To come to Alabama and see this kind of segregation was horrifying to me. A lot of people who were impoverished 50 years ago, around the time of Selma, are still impoverished. Nothing has changed structurally.

It would be a lie to say I’ve never been fearful for my safety. I’ve been called the “n” word by fraternity men. I’ve had Muslim friends called the “n” word. Because of how Alabama is, black kids don’t have the political connections to make their voices count, so they’re even more vulnerable.

I’ve experienced dozens of micro-aggressions: being forced off the sidewalk, or asked during class if all black people eat collard greens, or why the slaves didn’t just free themselves — this was in American literature class; we might have been reading “Huckleberry Finn.” Having to put on a happy face and pretend these things aren’t dehumanizing to me was a farce.
The root cause of these issues is the Machine, an underground coalition of 28 fraternities and sororities that has controlled politics on campus for over 100 years. In recent decades, the Machine has been accused of assaulting and intimidating students — they’ve been known to key cars and draw swastikas on campus — and electioneering in student government and local elections.

I’ve been blogging about the Machine for about a year, and every time I’d post something my hand would shake. But I thought: I have a voice. I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t do anything. What I was doing was bigger than myself.

**What We Want:** We Are Done was a demonstration held on Nov. 19. We marched from Malone Hood Plaza, where George Wallace stood and said Vivian Malone and James Hood could not enter, to the Gorgas Library, named after the wife of the Confederate general Josiah Gorgas, who was the university’s eighth president. About 300 of us sang “We Shall Overcome.”

We Are Done was not just a protest; it’s also a movement. We are done tolerating the bigotry, injustice and social inequality on campus. We have 11 demands, which include implementing a division of diversity, funding programs that support multicultural work, and requiring the trustees to acknowledge the Machine and take steps to bring it above ground. Our demands are not radical but a logical extension of human rights.

**STORM ERVIN University of Missouri, Columbia**

**Bio:** December 2015 graduate, sociology/black studies; co-founder of Concerned Student 1950 (the year the university admitted its first black students)

**My Story:** My freshman roommate would use colorblind racist terms like “ghetto” or “hood rat” to describe me. I went to a frat party and I saw a Confederate flag. I can’t say all white students are racist at Mizzou, but the culture I experienced was. It gave me a new way of understanding my reality — it was not about any individual, it was structural and institutional. The higher-ups enable this culture. We had the poop swastikas going on, and our leadership was silent about it.

The Legion of Black Collegians puts on a homecoming for black students. They were rehearsing for an upcoming event when people called them “niggers.” President Wolfe didn’t find the need to do anything.

About a week later, 10 of us stood in front of President Wolfe’s car during the all-school homecoming parade. We each recited a line about an incident of racist violence at Mizzou since 1950. A police officer put his hands on my chest; we were shoved off the street. Wolfe’s driver hit one of the demonstrators. Wolfe sat there and watched.

That was our first major action under Concerned Student 1950. We wanted our voices to be heard. But a group of white people formed a line in front of us and began chanting over our reality. After, one black student, Jonathan Butler, decided to go on a hunger strike. The only way to save his life was to get Wolfe out of office. We had media, a petition that went around.
Eventually, many of the football players announced they wouldn’t play until he resigned. Wolfe resigned.

DAVID C. TURNER III University of California, Berkeley

Bio: Ph.D. candidate, social and cultural studies in education; national organizer with the Black Liberation Collective, a coordinating hub for student activists

My Story: My mother was very interested in giving us a nuanced understanding of what it means to be black. She graduated from Tennessee State University, a historically black college. We lived in Nashville for two years, and she would take my sister and me to certain places to show us things to help us see what black folks have to fight for. My dad was a former drug addict who went into drug rehabilitation work. He made sure we understood that just because these folks are down on their luck doesn’t mean they matter less.

After reading Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” in 11th grade, I understood that education was part of a system to help reproduce oppression and oppressive contexts. If I was going to do anything with my life, it would be to transform that. I’m interested in education for social change. Not teaching in schools, but education that helps you see yourself and your world differently.

I’m African-American and 6 feet 5. I’m constantly followed in stores; I’m pulled over a lot when I’m driving. I was 18 and the police almost blew my head off because I reached for my registration too quickly. I’ve never been taken in, but I’ve had to pay a lot of fines for mundane things. I had to pay $200 because my taillight wasn’t bright enough! That’s what we’re fighting against.

Just because Berkeley sits on the political left doesn’t mean racism doesn’t happen here. On campus, if more than five black people congregate, a police presence pops up. They never say anything; they just stand there and watch, which is creepy.

Students at the social work school here held a teach-in over racist comments one of their white professors had made. He said Black Lives Matter should focus on black-on-black crime rather than police brutality. He read a rap song he wrote about it. First and foremost, it’s empirically inaccurate for someone with a Ph.D. who studies vulnerable communities to assert such a thing. Second, to be so culturally insensitive as to insist that the only way you can get black students to understand is to do a rap song, especially in a graduate program at one of the top schools in the country, is insulting.

What We Want: Folks were asking Mizzou, “How can we help? How can we be there for you?” They said, “Don’t come here; we want you to do this on your campus.” There hasn’t really been a coordinated effort to help build student leadership at the national level for at least two decades, since the Black Student Leadership Network. We want to help students build their campaigns so their message gets out to a larger audience. Young black people have the potential to transform American politics. That’s what we’re seeing at this very moment.
JOSH FREEMAN  Princeton University

Bio: Sophomore, mechanical and aerospace engineering; co-founder of Princeton Open Campus Coalition, aimed at protecting “diversity of thought and the right of all students to advance their academic and personal convictions in a manner free from intimidation”

My Story: I went to a small, mostly white high school in Norfolk, Va. My friends and I — both black and white kids — would joke with each other in ways that could be considered racist. But there was no animosity between us. We’d known each other forever. At Princeton, everyone is much more concerned with the way they speak.

If students at Princeton feel they must protest, then there is a problem that needs to be discussed. But they’re not trying to discuss it, they’re trying to force their ideals on the university. I respect what the student activists are doing here, but not the way they’re going about it and the directions of the demands. They try to silence anyone who disagrees with them. It’s a very “us versus them” mentality. On Facebook it was heavily hinted I was a traitor and white sympathizer.

What We Want: I disagree with those who want to rename the Woodrow Wilson building and college. Wilson is a part of Princeton’s history. We can’t erase this, no matter what. We have to discuss the good and the bad with his legacy.

JOSH ZUCKERMAN  Princeton University

Bio: Senior, politics; co-founder of Princeton Open Campus Coalition

My Story: I’ve always been interested in politics. I joined The Princeton Tory, a political and philosophical magazine with a conservative bent, in my freshman year. I’m now editor in chief. But the coalition has nothing to do with the magazine. This is something I’ve been feeling for a long time, that students are intimidated or otherwise unwilling to express what they believe.

What We Want: Before the P.O.C.C. was founded, a friend and I wrote a petition outlining what we found objectionable about the demands that the Black Justice League had made; it has more than 1,800 signatures. One goal is to try to unite people across all ideologies. We need a campus culture where disagreement is managed in a civil manner and no one resorts to name calling or bullying techniques to silence those who disagree with them.

I don’t think anyone reasonable would assume we are honoring Woodrow Wilson for his racism. The best way to acknowledge his legacy is to preserve the monument and reinforce the fact that he had appalling beliefs that were wrong then and wrong now. If we cannot look toward Wilson as a source of honor, then we can’t go back to Jefferson, Plato, Aristotle. Margaret Sanger advocated eugenics! Abraham Lincoln had some very racist ideas. If we can’t honor someone who has a past, there won’t be anyone left to honor.

NAILAH HARPER-MALVEAUX,  Yale University
**Bio:** Senior, American studies/theater studies; director of theatrical productions that tell the stories of African-Americans

**My Story:** I’ve been surrounded by social justice and law my whole life. My mom is a civil rights lawyer turned law professor at Catholic University, while my dad is U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Human Rights Council. My dad is Cherokee and Macanese, from Macau, and my mom is Creole, a mixture of Spanish and black descent. I don’t look white but I don’t look black, either. I identify as Indian and black. Because I’m mixed I have been very conscious of race my whole life, which is probably why I’ve participated in so many political events at Yale, including the midnight march to walk the demands to the president’s house. It was very empowering.

**What We Want:** The immediate goal is a more inclusive Yale. There’s more to be done, but the dialogue is a huge step. White allies trying to understand is a huge step. The administration listening is a huge step. There’s a dearth of voices of women of color in the Yale theater community. Black women are at the bottom of the totem pole. When you free women of color, you free everyone.

**BRYLAN DONALDSON**  
**University of Kansas, Lawrence**

**Bio:** Junior, information technology; co-founder of TEAM Jayhawks (for Together Everyone Achieves More)

**My Story:** My dad has been in jail off and on since I was born. The longest he’s been out is three months. I don’t even know what he’s in for. Although I don’t see him that often, I give him all the credit. He pushed upon me the importance of being educated and being aware locally and nationally.

I haven’t experienced racism on campus at all. Part of it is the environment I’ve been in — I’m an athlete. I played football and we’re treated differently. We get more respect. But also, there are two criteria for racism to exist: The person making the comments or gestures has to intend to do it, and the receiver has to be willing to accept that gesture or comment as racist. “Sticks and stones can break my bones” — that’s my attitude.

**What We Want:** We founded TEAM Jayhawks in response to the protests on campus. The other founders and I felt the activists were going about it in a disrespectful manner, and in a way the larger student body could not empathize with. For example, at a community forum hosted by the chancellor, members of a minority group, Rock Chalk Invisible Hawk, took the mike and started cussing her out. Now, Rock Chalk had been trying to push its demands for two years; they lashed out because nothing had been done. They were angry. I understand that. We stand in solidarity with other minority organizations on campus, but our methods are different.

Two friends and I are entrepreneurs, and a few months ago we did “Start Up Weekend.” We learned about a concept called design thinking, a human-centered approach to solving problems. We plan to have people gather around and come up with ideas on a topic we give them. From there, they’ll break into small groups, share their ideas and get feedback. Not only do you get
insight and answers but a perspective you may not have had before. We don’t want to be called activists. We’re educators.

County, city adopt resolution supporting UM funding

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Tuesday, February 2, 2016 at 12:06 pm

Worried a legislative cut to state funding for the University of Missouri System would create a tidal wave of economic hardship for families and businesses in Mid-Missouri, the Boone County Commission on Tuesday became the first local governing board to approve a resolution asking the General Assembly not to slash funding for the university.

The resolution also was adopted Monday by the Columbia City Council, though it did not appear on the council’s agenda ahead of the meeting, and is listed as an action item on the Board of Education agenda for next Monday.

Columbia Public Schools Superintendent Peter Stiepleman, who was on the six-member committee that finalized the resolution last week, said Tuesday the community and school district recognize what MU alumni, students and “hardworking parents paying tuition” already understand — “the success of our flagship university is inextricably linked to our local economy and our state’s economy.”

The resolution said the UM System’s economic effect on the entire state is “incalculable” and pointed out that the university is the largest employer in Central Missouri.

Boone County Southern District Commissioner Karen Miller said major cuts to funding after turmoil at MU in the fall would have “unintended consequences.”

Cuts would have little effect on professors and upper-level administrators, Miller said. The more likely casualties would be the jobs of support staff, custodians and similar positions.

“We would lose the everyday family member, the middle class of our community,” she said. “I don’t think the legislature wants to hurt those families.”
Northern District Commissioner Janet Thompson predicted a “tsunami effect” on local businesses and social programs.

Presiding Commissioner Dan Atwill said for Boone County and adjoining counties, the economic impact of salaries and retirement income alone for MU employees is close to $1 billion annually, citing information provided by UM.

Atwill organized the committee to draft the resolution after a Jan. 15 joint meeting of county, city, Columbia Chamber of Commerce, school and MU representatives. Each organization except the city was involved in the drafting of the resolution. Atwill said City Manager Mike Matthes had a scheduling conflict for Friday’s committee meeting, and commission staff members said Mayor Bob McDavid did not respond to an invitation to attend.

Atwill suggested appointing the committee in light of an ongoing clash between lawmakers and the university over campus protests last fall that resulted in the resignation of UM System President Tim Wolfe and other controversies that led MU campus Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin to step down.

Some legislators have threatened punitive budget cuts against the university. The state provides 20 percent of MU’s funding.

The committee wanted to work quickly to have a resolution ready to present at a hearing next Tuesday of the Joint Committee on Education in Jefferson City.

The resolution doesn’t intend to “criticize or lay blame” for problems at MU, Atwill said, but to emphasize UM’s economic importance.

“I’m not so naïve to think this will change anything,” Atwill said. “But we’ve got to take a position on things that are important to our community.”

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Messenger: Somebody needs to drive University of Missouri out of ditch. Now.

By Tony Messenger

A year ago, St. Louis lawyer Mary Nelson appeared before the Missouri Senate's gubernatorial appointments committee, seeking approval for her nomination to the University of Missouri Board of Curators.
Her credentials are difficult to dispute. A University of Missouri Law School graduate, Nelson had been on the board of trustees of the law school's foundation. She's been a president of the St. Louis Board of Police Commissioners and served in a variety of government roles in both the city of St. Louis and in state government. As general counsel for the St. Louis Community College system, she had direct insight into matters of higher education.

But Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, was on the war path. Already a year or so into a seemingly full-time campaign for his next prospective political job, attorney general, Schaefer wanted to give his nemesis, Gov. Jay Nixon, a defeat.

There were three nominees to the Board of Curators up for approval that day. Besides Nelson there was Philip Snowden of Kansas City and Maurice Graham of Clayton. All were lawyers. Snowden and Graham are white. Nelson is black.

Schaefer, himself a lawyer, accused Nixon, a Democrat, of stacking the board with his “lawyer buddies” so that they might some day appoint him as the next president of the university.

The white lawyers won their votes. Nelson lost hers, with not a single Republican voting yes.

Not much was made of the vote at the time, but in light of two resignations in the past week of the only African-American members of the Board of Curators, the incident highlights a dysfunction between the governor's office, the Legislature and the state's public university system that threatens Missouri's economy and should worry every parent with a child who hopes some day to graduate from one of the four campuses of the state's land-grant university.

It is entirely possible that the resignations of Yvonne Sparks, an executive with the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, and David Steward, CEO of World Wide Technology, were unrelated. Steward's term was almost up and he is running a growing business that is building a new headquarters. Sparks had only recently been appointed and may well have been worried about suffering the same humiliating treatment Nelson received by the Legislature.

Neither Steward, nor Sparks has said anything critical related to their departures.

But the result of the resignations, especially in light of last fall's Concerned Student 1950 protests, is impossible to ignore. The nine-member Board of Curators, already down a member from Columbia is down to six members, all white, all attorneys.

Six white attorneys. It's hardly an advertisement for the diversity the University of Missouri needs to lure its future faculty, students or administrators.

The university system lacks a president. Its main campus lacks a chancellor. Many of its deans and other administrators hold interim titles. Black students and faculty feel disenfranchised.
White donors are angry. Lawmakers are meddling with the curators. The curators are meddling with the now nearly non-existent administration. The governor lacks a strong enough relationship with lawmakers in either party to do much about the dysfunction.

On Monday, the president pro tem of the Senate, Ron Richard, R-Joplin, said it was unlikely that the Senate would confirm any new curator appointees this year. That means at a time in which the university faces perhaps its most important presidential search in decades, it does so with only six curators, facing potential gridlock with five votes needed on any action.

This is a much broader problem than a sudden political conflict over Planned Parenthood or campus protests that divided the university community. It's bigger than the personal dislike between a senator (Schaefer) and a governor. It's bigger than term limits or the state's deepening partisan divide. It started long before a deposed president wrote an ill-advised letter criticizing everybody who was standing between him and a financial settlement.

It's the result, at least in large part, of a broken political system that has few incentives left for a governor and Legislature to work together for the good of the state.

In late 2003, under the direction of then President Elson Floyd, the university added “economic development” to its mission statement. It wasn't so much a change of direction, but a recognition of what the university means to this state. It is one of its major economic drivers, both in cities and rural areas, driving the state's entrepreneurial spirit with millions of research dollars and providing the employees of the future. So it should be no surprise that the unrest and lack of leadership at the top of the university is now threatening its credit rating, according to a report this week from Standard and Poor's.

That economic engine is sputtering as its state leaders drive it into a ditch because they can't stop behaving like bickering children in the back seat unable to get along for the sake of a smooth trip.

Somebody, or, better yet, some coalition of diverse Missouri leaders, needs to get behind the steering wheel and chart a safe path forward.

Nothing less than the stability of Missouri's economy is at risk.
Curator vacancies could remain open for next governor, Senate leader warns

By Rudi Keller

Tuesday, February 2, 2016 at 10:55 am

JEFFERSON CITY — The University of Missouri Board of Curators will open its regular January meeting Thursday with one-third of the board seats vacant and top legislative Republicans warning they won’t get more help anytime soon.

Senate President Pro Tem Ron Richard, R-Joplin and chairman of the Gubernatorial Appointments Committee, said Tuesday that he wants to wait until next January before considering any appointees for confirmation.

“If there are candidates, they have to be strong candidates and reform-minded for change,” Richard said. “But right now the entire Senate, Democrats, Republicans, aren’t of a mind to appoint anybody for a while, maybe until we get a new governor.”

Businessman David Steward resigned his seat representing the Second Congressional District in a letter Friday to Gov. Jay Nixon. Steward cited the demands of his expanding business, St. Louis-based World Wide Technology, in his letter to Nixon. His departure leaves the board without a black member at a time when the UM System is dealing with the fallout of demonstrations over race relations at its flagship campus in Columbia.

“It has been an enlightening experience, and I pray and hope the very best for the University of Missouri system and the board of curators moving forward,” said Steward, who was appointed in 2011 to a term expiring in January 2017. “Our students are important and will continue to have a vital role in our future.”

The remaining board members will be able to do business and vote as long as they have a quorum of five members.

The other two vacancies are for the First Congressional District seat, left open last week by Yvonne Sparks’ resignation, and in the Fourth District, represented on the board until November by Ann Covington of Columbia. State law requires that each of the eight congressional districts have at least one representative on the nine-member board.

Richard said he was surprised by the departure of Steward, a Republican. No one he knows wants to be on the board, Richard said.

“People want to stay as far away from them as they can,” Richard said.
State Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis and a member of the Gubernatorial Appointments Committee, urged Nixon to fill at least the Steward and Sparks vacancies with “minorities who will be qualified and ready, willing and able to serve.”

With the school’s undergraduate population 79 percent white and 8 percent black, “we have a large amount of African-Americans that attend MU, and they need representation,” she said.

Nixon is on a weeklong trade mission to South America, and it is uncertain when he will address the vacancies.

Spokeswoman Channing Ansley said the governor will fill the vacancies with people who “reflect the great diversity of our state.”

No more than five members of the board may be from the same political party. The partisan split of the remaining members is four Democrats and two Republicans.

If the Senate does not confirm any curators, the incoming governor will have at least five vacancies to fill, said state Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, a member of the committee.

A Republican governor likely would appoint four Republicans and one Democrat, Schaefer said, and a Democratic governor would have to appoint at least three Republicans. Schaefer said he supports Richard’s plan to wait.

“If his message is we are going to look with a very skeptical eye at who goes on this board given the fact that everything seems to be going in the wrong direction very quickly, that is a very prudent position to take,” Schaefer said.

**MISSOURIAN**

**STEVE SPELLMAN: Conflict with the Legislature doesn't bode well for MU**

STEVE SPELLMAN, 1 hr ago

*The relationship between the University of Missouri and the state's legislators is under unprecedented strain.*

A number of university folks are upset about interference from the Capitol about its contract with Planned Parenthood and the effort to get rid of assistant professor Melissa Click.
Government leaders are horrified about protests portraying our flagship public university and the state at large as racist, which led in November to the removal of MU’s highest officials.

They don’t want a public institution to have any involvement with abortion. Some may see the university as a socialist incubator.

These feelings were not invented by politicians. Resentment has been on the rise for a long time, as rural Missourians see both their children and tax dollars going to Columbia, with neither seeming to ever come back.

Legislators representing another state university in their backyard see MU as their main funding competitor.

Winning men’s basketball and football teams may have kept these resentments at bay, until both squads stopped, well, winning. Then some Mizzou fans became really offended when football players, with Coach Gary Pinkel's backing, threatened to boycott a game last fall.

This was like a punch in the gut to those who follow Tiger sports religiously.

The Athletics Department’s phone was ringing off the hook with enraged fans, I heard. I also heard the university was reluctant to ask for donations for a while. Game over.

Legislators say when they tour the state these days, the first thing most ordinary residents ask is, "What is the world going on at the university?"

They share examples of high school seniors around the Show-Me state ditching plans to attend MU.

At a forum on campus last week, I asked Sens. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, and Eric Schmitt, R-Glendale, what the state is obligated to fund and what authority it has over MU.

With a $500 million appropriation for MU up for debate, Schaefer explained that, unlike K-12 education, the Legislature has no legal obligation to give the UM System a dime.
There are now proposals to micromanage MU — requiring the teaching of certain courses, for example, allowing concealed weapons on campus, and asking for control over personnel decisions.

Sen. Schmitt confirmed that he and his colleagues have no authority over, say, firing professors, but if things are going on at MU that people in the state find unacceptable, that sentiment will logically influence elected officials who have power over the purse strings.

Another fellow suggested to me that it’s like voices at MU are yelling on a street corner at the Capitol, "You all suck!," then demanding in the next breath "to show me the money."

These are not smart tactics in touchy times.

There is an urgent need to fundamentally re-examine the increasingly irreconcilable relationship between the university and the state.

In fact, after 177 years, the time has come for good, honest scholarship about the arrangement. There are surely more orderly and mutually beneficial ways for MU to achieve greater independence in the 21st century.

FEBRUARY 2, 2016 9:40 AM

Sinquefield give $2M to University of Missouri music effort

*The Associated Press*
COLUMBIA, MO. - Conservative donor Rex Sinquefield and his wife have donated $2 million to the University of Missouri to support a music initiative.

Sinquefield and wife Jeanne Sinquefield awarded the money Monday to the Mizzou New Music Initiative.

As a longtime supporter of the university's music school, Jeanne Sinquefield says the goal is "to find and grow musicians, have musicians write and play their music and have concerts and audiences."

The couple's latest gift brings their donations to the university to more than $15 million. That includes last year's donation of $10 million to support a planned, $74-million School of Music building.

The initiative supports the Mizzou International Composers Festival, several competitions and scholarships for music composition students.

MISSOURIAN

MU's Asian students reluctant to report episodes of discrimination, racism

SEAN NA, 1 hr ago

COLUMBIA — Jang Yu-seung, an MU transfer student from South Korea, was walking down Ninth Street near Middlebush Hall last fall when a white student walked by and yelled a profane and hateful comment at her.

Then he spat on her foot.

It wasn't the only act of racism Jang said she has encountered. At Plaza 900, a campus dining hall, she once tried to order a sandwich. People behind her mocked her accent when she tried to pronounce "mozzarella." She hasn't eaten at the deli since.
“I was really embarrassed,” Jang said. Ever since, she has become sensitive about her accent, fearing people around her will laugh at her English.

Jang said she wanted to report the incidents to MU officials, but she didn't know how.

“How could I bring that issue, where? How?”

Before October, students, faculty and staff had different channels to report racial discrimination. Students might have complained to the Office of Student Conduct or the MU Equity Office, while faculty and staff could report discrimination to the Human Resources Services Center, the Equity Office or the Office of the Provost.

Ellen Eardley, assistant vice provost for Civil Rights and Title IX, oversees the newly created office, which is responsible for investigating reports of all forms of discrimination on campus. The office also develops policies and practices to reduce or eliminate discrimination.

Having "a single, centralized office dealing with discrimination would alleviate any confusion about where to report discrimination," Eardley said.

Asian student numbers

As of fall 2015, the total Asian student population at MU (not including those from the Middle East) was 2,303, according to the MU International Center. The number rises to 3,082 when Asian American students are included.

African-American students and others at MU were quite vocal last fall in protesting a climate of racism and discrimination on campus. Their continued demonstrations, including Concerned Student 1950's protest during the Homecoming parade and its days-long campout on the Mel Carnahan Quadrangle, helped lead to the resignation of former University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe and, in part, to then-MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

Although MU’s Asian students will say anecdotally that they experience the same types of racist episodes that African-Americans do, they also are reluctant to report them. Russell Hsu, a third-year journalism
student and vice president of the Taiwanese Student Association, said one reason for the generally passive attitude of Asian students is their "fear of persecution" from non-Asian peers.

"We don’t have that many people whom we know anyway," Hsu said. "So, our social circles are a lot tighter. So, you don’t want to offend anybody and (get) everything broken up."

Media portrayal

Zack Morrison is president of the Asian American Association, the largest Asian student organization at MU. He said the media's portrayal of Asians and the way Asian parents raise their children might explain why Asians' concerns are under-reported.

"It ties back to representation in the media," Morrison said. "We are always treated as the silent model minority. We always have to do good. We have to be the best at math, and we can't be troublemakers."

Morrison was adopted from China at age 2, so he's been exposed to American culture his entire life. He said Americans seem especially intolerant of people from different countries with distinct accents.

“I have heard people complain all the time about how their calc (calculus) teacher or physics TA has an accent, and it is so difficult for them to understand them,” he said. “And, so they will say they hate that person.”

Several Asian international students who have experienced racial discrimination told the Missourian they decided not to report the incidents because they didn't think it would lead to change.

Ken Han, who lived in a residence hall during his first year at MU in 2014, said he encountered frequent racial discrimination from white students. He said they often gathered in the lounge and used slurs while talking about him. They also banged on the door to his room and ran away once or twice a week.

“They just hated me just because I am Asian — maybe my appearance, accent, everything," Han said.

Fear of backlash
Han never wanted to report the racism, though, because he feared backlash and thought it would make no difference. He also said he didn't want the white students to get in trouble and hoped over time they would learn about his culture and stop bothering him.

"I kind of understand them because they are not accustomed to Asian students in their lifetime," Han said. "I just want them to learn naturally because we are all students. We are in the process of learning something."

Jiali Chen, president of the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars, said several Chinese students have said they suffered discrimination but didn't want to report it for fear they could compromise their status as non-resident and international students.

Yizhe Sun, a fourth-year journalism student from China, said he understands why Asian students don't like to air their complaints.

"We are here to study, not to cause a problem and attempt to make a change in this society," he said.

Still, Sun believes MU should be aware of the problem and combat it.

Sun said he experienced racism only once, in 2012, but it was unforgettable. It was his first week at MU, and he ran into three female white students in a residence hall who called him "yellow" and "chink."

"I feel very sad and embarrassed," he said. "It made me feel as if white people really don't like Chinese."

Not easy to fit in

Sun didn't know the students' names, but reported the discrimination to a hall coordinator. The coordinator told Sun that she would investigate and find out the students' names, but Sun said that never happened.

Director of Residential Life Frankie Minor said the coordinator's former supervisor reviewed her work files but found no document that matched Sun's story. Minor also noted that under the federal privacy laws, MU is prohibited from disclosing personal information about students without their consent.
The coordinator no longer works at MU and was unavailable for contact. Sun moved out of the residence hall two weeks after the incident.

Minor said Residential Life staff encourage students to file bias incident reports, but staff members can also report discrimination themselves if they discover or experience it. He noted that the annual report from the Civil Rights and Title IX Office "reflects that Residential Life is one of the most diligent units reporting these types of unfortunate incidents."

Vera Tan, who transferred to MU from Malaysia in 2013, said she was shocked when she arrived at MU by how segregated it was. Coming from Malaysia, where multiple languages, races and cultures comprise one society, diversity is nothing new to her. She soon realized, however, how difficult it was for her to fit into a predominantly white campus.

Training initiative

During Tan's first semester at MU, a classmate told her that another white student had called her a “bitch” because she had offered a conflicting opinion in class. She perceived that as racist.

"Can you imagine, that I grew up in a place with so many races and this was the first time in my life that I experienced an explicit racism?" Tan asked.

In October, when Loftin was still chancellor, he announced that MU would require diversity and inclusion training for all incoming students and faculty beginning this semester. That announcement came a day after a reported racial incident against African-American students at Traditions Plaza.

Cathy Scroggs, vice chancellor for student affairs, is responsible for student diversity education and said the training will include every marginalized group on campus.

Scroggs said finalizing the training curriculum normally takes a year to a 18 months, so it's unlikely to be perfect at first.
“It’s a journey,” she said. “We want to be sure incoming students understand the kind of environment we have and the type of inclusive campus we have. This training will set the stage so when they leave after the training, students will say, ‘Oh, OK. This is what I expected here at Mizzou.’”

Stephanie Shonekan, chair of the Black Studies Department, and Joan Hermsen, chair of the Women’s and Gender Studies Department, are crafting the curriculum.

Chuck Henson, the interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity, was unavailable for comment.

Scroggs said the newly developed diversity training has been given to new students this semester.

Divergent views

Leaders of Asian student groups differed in their ideas for how to fight racism.

Prathamesh Bandekar, former president of the Cultural Association of India, said MU diversity officials should invite members of all student organizations to an open meeting at least once every semester. That, he said, would "help enhance the sense of belonging at MU."

Bandekar said Asian students might not report discrimination because they are unsure of the repercussions and their rights, or because they don't want to hurt their studies. Being unfamiliar with American culture and away from their families might make them ill-prepared to deal with the aftermath of a complaint.

Andrew Pham, external vice president of the Asian American Association, said he and members of other minority organizations agree that if MU wants students to be more active in reporting discrimination, offices such as the Civil Rights and Title IX Office must be more approachable.

"Right now, the only time we hear about the Title IX is through text, email or newspaper print," Pham said. "You haven't seen the face of anybody from Title IX, and we don't know who operates in there and who works in there. And so, it makes (it) very hard (for students) to come to them with such a sensitive topic."
Eardley, of the Civil Rights and Title IX Office, said four investigators in the office address every type of discrimination reported by all groups. She also plans to hire an education-and-prevention specialist who will work closely with the Chancellor's Diversity Initiative, the student social justice centers and other campus groups to spread the word about changes in university policies for addressing discrimination.

If her office is to perform as expected, though, students, faculty and staff will have to be active in reporting their concerns.

"None of our work exists in vacuum," Eardley said, adding that she's cognizant of the fact that different folks might not trust people in authority or feel comfortable reporting discrimination.

"I am working to build trust with various communities," she said.

Bill seeks to restore First Amendment rights of student media

By Rudi Keller

Tuesday, February 2, 2016 at 10:04 am

JEFFERSON CITY — When St. Joseph native Walter Cronkite anchored the CBS Evening News, he signed off each broadcast with “And that’s the way it is.”

He was called the most trusted man in the nation. So when on Feb. 27, 1968, Cronkite said the Vietnam War could only end in a negotiated peace without victory, it was painful to hear and sobering to think about.

It was one of the most powerful uses of First Amendment press freedoms in U.S. history. Two other Missourians with notable First Amendment credentials — Tim Tai, a University of Missouri journalism student, and Cathy Kuhlmeier Frey, plaintiff in a landmark Supreme Court case — on Monday told the House Emerging Issues Committee that Missouri needs a law to protect student journalists when they tell painful truths.
Tai testified in favor of a bill named the Cronkite New Voices Act sponsored by state Rep. Elijah Haahr, R-Springfield. It would limit the reasons for blocking publication of articles by school-sponsored media. Schools would have to show the article is libelous, an unwarranted invasion of privacy, violates the law or incites others to unlawful acts, school policy violations or causes “substantial disruption” at the school.

Tai covered the fall campus demonstrations at MU for ESPN. He was captured on video as he asserted his press rights Nov. 9 on Carnahan Quadrangle. Under current law, school administrators can do what the demonstrators on the quad attempted, Tai said, by controlling the content of stories told by student journalists.

“For years, student reporters have been treated as second-class journalists,” Tai said. “And that’s a shame, because they are often the only ones tackling crucial issues in schools and on campuses.”

The bill, Haahr said, “draws a bright line for Missouri schools and universities for student free speech rights.”

Student journalists should enjoy the same rights as professionals, he said.

The 1988 Supreme Court decision in Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier allows schools to censor school-sponsored media. The court ruled that the principal of Hazelwood East High School had not violated student free press rights when he quashed publication of articles providing in-depth coverage of teen pregnancy, divorce and runaways. Kuhlmeier Frey was one of three students who sued the school district, claiming the censorship violated their First Amendment rights.

The parents of each student interviewed gave permission and the stories included resources for students who needed help, Frey told the committee.

The principal told the student journalists “the stories were too mature for an immature audience,” Frey said. “My response to that was ‘if you are old enough to get pregnant, aren’t you old enough to read about it?’ ”

The ruling set student publications apart from student expression in other forms, said Frank LoMonte of the Student Press Law Center.

“The piece of real estate in a school that has the least degree of First Amendment protection is the editorial page of the school newspaper,” LoMonte said.

Eight states have passed laws similar to Haahr’s proposal, LoMonte said.

Several student journalists and faculty advisers testified in favor of the bill. Doug Crews of the Missouri Press Association asked the committee to “right a terrible wrong that happened in scholastic journalism 25 years ago.”
The Radio Television and Digital News Association in December gave Tai a “First Amendment Defender Award” for his actions on Carnahan Quadrangle. He told the committee that Haahr’s bill would prevent administrators from suppressing stories like a New York high school that had only two bathrooms for 3,600 students or an Indiana tennis coach who scammed players for more than $1,000.

“These cases illustrate how easily a student publication can cease to be an educational platform for young journalists and instead be the school’s de facto public relations arm,” Tai said.

The committee will vote on the bill at its next meeting, Haahr said.

MISSOURIAN

Missouri football recruiting class feels fallout of campus protests

RON DAVIS, 12 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — The turmoil Missouri football faced in fall 2015 — from participation in racial protests on campus to a 5-7 season and the resignation of a longtime coach — could have convinced plenty of recruits to turn away from Columbia.

But for some, like Hinds Community College safety Greg Taylor, the team’s stance in support of black student rights was reaffirming.

"It was good that they stuck together as a team and the coaches stood behind them," said Taylor. "It's like a family there, and I want to be a part of that. It didn't give me any second thoughts."

Missouri expects to sign at least 16 players to letters of intent on Wednesday, which is National Signing Day for college football programs nationwide. The Tigers' class is No. 53 in the country and No. 14 among Southeastern Conference schools according to 247Sports.com as of Tuesday evening.
With the season Missouri had and the campus events that put the Tigers' season in jeopardy, it's understandable that this class is the SEC's worst. However, recruits who stuck around said the team-first attitude Missouri put on display was a major plus.

"When those guys stood up and they were standing behind him," Natereace Strong, a junior college teammate of Taylor and four-star running back prospect, said. "It was good that they were supporting a young man.

"I didn't have any second thoughts. That's where I'm going. There are problems at every university."

The young man Taylor mentioned is Jonathan Butler, who went on a hunger strike in early November that he said would last until UM System President Tim Wolfe resigned. The strike led Missouri football players J'Mon Moore, Ian Simon and others to rally to the cause and stand in solidarity with Butler.

With growing racial tension on campus, the Missouri football team united with student protest group Concerned Student 1950 to protest and call for the resignation of Wolfe.

The program's boycott lasted less than two days, and Wolfe resigned on Nov. 9. Had the boycott gone through that next weekend, Missouri would have forfeited a game against BYU and have been fined $1 million.

In an email leaked Jan. 27, Wolfe acknowledged the ramifications of the protest might be greater than that $1 million figure.

"In hindsight, the $1 million penalty associated with forfeiting the game against BYU would have paled in comparison to the more than $25 million in lost tuition and fees MU will realize with reduced enrollment this Fall," Wolfe said in the email. "It’s also a pittance of the threatened loss of state funding that could be as much as $500 million."

Some players gave pause and rethought their commitments in the midst of the upheaval as well.
Webb City offensive lineman Trystan Castillo was Missouri's first commit of the 2016 class. He originally planned to enroll for the spring semester, but amid the protests he decided he needed more time to evaluate his choices.

Castillo ultimately reaffirmed his commitment to Missouri on Jan. 27, the same day Wolfe's email was leaked.

Unlike Castillo, Missouri lost linebacker commit Tobias Little's commitment to Louisville. When Little decommitted on Nov. 16, he cited campus safety as reasons for his decision.

New quarterback commit Micah Wilson said the protests had no impact on his decision to commit and it was never anything he needed to discuss with Missouri coach Barry Odom.

"That (the protest) really didn't have anything to do with it," said Wilson. "I always wanted to be a Missouri Tiger. They never really talked about that."

Perhaps a reason for the certainty and the confidence of some in the coaching staff's handling of social issues this past fall is the promotion of Odom to head coach. When Odom was the defensive coordinator this past season, he stood right behind the team when they protested.

"It was very frustrating knowing that Coach Pinkel wasn't going to be the coach anymore, so I was like, 'Well I hope Coach Odom gets it.'" Strong said. "Once he got the job, it was a big, big burden that was lifted off. I was so excited. My family was excited."

**MISSOURIAN**

Missouri lawmakers eye universities' living requirements

ASSOCIATED PRESS, 19 hrs ago
JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri lawmakers have turned their scrutiny of public universities toward mandatory student fees and services.

A House panel heard testimony Tuesday on proposals to prohibit universities from requiring students to buy a meal plan or live in campus dormitories.

Rep. Jason Chipman said his legislation is based off his own college experience, not the recent turmoil at the University of Missouri.

According to the MU News Bureau, all first-time MU students younger than 20 prior to Aug. 15 of their enrollment year, who are taking more than six hours of coursework, are required to live in university or Greek housing.

Classification as a first-time student does not depend on graduation, but applies when there has been no prior college enrollment. Any exceptions must be granted by the university.

In addition, students living in residence halls and other designated campus housing must have a dining plan. Several options are available, depending upon where students live.

University officials said dorms encourage more campus involvement and better academic performance. Chipman said those reasons aren't good enough to coerce students into taking on more debt, and they shouldn't have to ask for an exemption to live where they want.

Chipman's bills could also affect campus infrastructure and contracts designed for certain levels of student participation.

Bright Flight scholarship loses some of its shimmer in Missouri

1 hour ago • By Koran Addo
No MU Mention

Thirty years after Missouri established a scholarship program designed to keep its brightest college students in-state, some say it’s a flawed approach that ends up hurting the state’s needier students.

About 6,000 Missouri students qualify for Bright Flight scholarships each year. The program has generally rewarded students who score in the top 3 percent on the ACT standardized test — generally a 31 out of a potential 36. The state average is 21.5.

In 2014, the state spent about $17 million on the program. It pays a maximum of about $3,000 per student, though awards have been smaller amid budget cuts.

That’s an inefficient use of state resources, argues the Active Advocacy Coalition, a statewide group of students working to improve access to education.

“State dollars are very scarce; we should be getting the most value out of them,” said Karissa Anderson, a policy analyst with the coalition. “We should use them where we can make the most impact.”

Anderson, along with other policy experts and about 30 volunteering college students, will be in Jefferson City on Wednesday to make their case to legislators.

Their basic pitch is that the state would get more value by directing Bright Flight dollars to low-income students rather than to the select, well-off students who typically receive the award.

The report shows that Bright Flight recipients are concentrated in mostly affluent metropolitan high schools. Nearly a third are from 20 Missouri high schools.

Additionally, the report says:

• Roughly one-third of Missouri’s 800 high schools currently have five or more Bright Flight recipients.

• Private school students make up 10 percent of the state’s high school students but account for 20 percent of Bright Flight awards.

• Almost 75 percent of recipients come from St. Louis and Kansas City, while only 11 percent live in rural areas.

Research shows that higher ACT scores correlate to higher family incomes. So the argument is that by basing Bright Flight solely on ACT scores, the state is directing money to students who already have the means to pay for college, rather than to the students who don’t.
And, typically, those higher-means students go to high schools with better resources to prepare students for college, Anderson said.

In other words, a Normandy High student with a 4.0 grade-point average may have a harder time getting a Bright Flight scholarship than a typical student at St. Louis University High School, which has a robust ACT-preparation program, she said.

**It’s a familiar conundrum in higher education policy: What is the right balance between need-based aid and merit-based aid?**

“What we know is that merit-based aid tends to affect which college students are going to,” said Will Doyle, a professor of higher education at Vanderbilt University. “When it comes to need-based aid, it affects whether a student goes to college or not.”

“If a state has limited funds and a real disparity in enrollment by income, the most efficient use is to put the money toward need-based aid,” he added.

An argument could be made that Missouri already does that.

The state spends about $60 million each year on roughly 51,000 students as part of the Access Missouri scholarship program for low-income students.

Those students are eligible for a maximum $2,850 a year from the state to attend public, four-year universities. But in truth, a lack of state funding means that recipients of both the Bright Flight and Access programs are receiving lower awards.

The coalition report argues that even more money — the $17 million from Bright Flight — should be dedicated to Access Missouri. Either that, or award the money only to students who have a financial need, distribute the scholarships equally to the top students at each high school or base the awards on broader criteria.

All of those options would make more of a difference to more students than the current system, the report says.

That argument is bolstered by Chris Lorenz, a counselor at Parkway West High School in Chesterfield, one of the top 20 schools in terms of Bright Flight recipients.

Lorenz said the maximum $3,000 students receive from Bright Flight isn’t enough to persuade the highest-achieving students to stay in state. Many of them are offered substantial scholarship packages from schools around the country.
“When you talk about a student getting a 31 on the ACT, these are high-fliers who typically have a lot of college options,” he said. “As they start hearing back from different colleges, Bright Flight is not enough of a financial incentive to stay.”

Even if a student decides to stay in-state, it’s typically because their school of choice has a good program in the subject area they’re interested in, and not because of Bright Flight, Lorenz said.

As students talk to legislators this week, part of their pitch is that increased need-based aid is good for the state long term.

“The state has a goal to raise the number of adults with a college degree to 60 percent by 2025. Right now we’re at 38 percent,” said Amber Overton, who co-wrote the report for the coalition. “The only way to move the needle is to direct the dollars toward the students who rely on it.”

Sen. David Pearce, R-Warrensburg, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, said he thought it was important to have distinct and separate scholarship programs in the state. “I’d hate to cannibalize one scholarship program in favor of the other.”

**Geography Matters**

By Ellen Wexler

**No MU Mention**

If only tuition were lower, and high school students were armed with better data. That’s the idea that has guided the policy discussion about college access and affordability: to make better enrollment decisions, the story goes, students need money and information.

But that narrative misses an important point about how students make decisions: for many students, where they go to college depends largely on where they live, according to a study commissioned by the American Council on Education.

The majority of incoming freshmen attending public four-year colleges and universities enroll within 50 miles of their home, the study found. And the farther students live from any particular college, the less likely they are to enroll.
“The zip code that a child is born into oftentimes determines their life chances,” said Nick Hillman, an author of the study and assistant professor of education leadership and policy analysis at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. “Place matters because it reinforces existing inequalities.”

At public four-year colleges, the median distance students live from home is 18 miles. That number is 46 miles for private nonprofit four-year colleges, and only eight miles at public two-year colleges.
But when it comes to college choice, Hillman thinks geography is overlooked. Policy makers focus too much on expanding students’ awareness of their possible choices, he said, without realizing that students’ options are already limited.

The study points to tools like the College Scorecard, which are intended to help students make informed, thoughtful decisions about where to enroll. But if a student needs to stay close to her family, what will she gain by learning that the perfect institution is hundreds of miles away?
“The conversation pretty much ends with, ‘Hey, get better information in the hands of students,’” Hillman said. “But the way that prospective students use information is very different depending on what kinds of students you're looking at.”

The crux of the problem is a misalignment of expectations: from policy makers’ perspective, students would attend college at whatever institution is best for them. But for some students, location is nonnegotiable -- and often, that means their options are dramatically limited.

For upper-class students, having more information might help; they have the flexibility to travel, and they can afford to shop around. But it isn’t enough for working-class students, who may need to choose from the options available nearby.

“Most of the conversations today overlooks the working-class student and prioritizes the upper-class student,” Hillman said. “It’s just really frustrating from the academic side -- and even more frustrating from a policy angle.”

**Education Deserts**

And for working-class students who want to stay close to home, what happens when there aren’t any colleges nearby? No matter how well-informed these students are, they don’t end up with many options.

These are students who live in what the study calls “education deserts.” An area qualifies as an education desert if there aren’t any colleges at all, or if one community college is the only broad-access public institution nearby.

An education desert can include private and public colleges that are particularly selective. That’s because local residents may not be accepted into those colleges -- which means they have even fewer options. And if there’s only one community college within commuting distance, that’s likely where those residents will end up.

“The role of community colleges is paramount,” said Lorelle Espinosa, assistant vice president at ACE’s Center for Policy Research and Strategy. “We need to be thinking about the institutions that exist in these places and making sure they are equipped to serve students.”

Policy makers need to focus on solutions that will help all students, she added, not just those with the freedom to travel. Most of the country’s education deserts are in the Midwest and Great Plains states, the study found. Community colleges enroll over half of students who live in education deserts, while private institutions account for less than 15 percent of education desert enrollments.
“Every state should have a good inventory of their deserts,” Hillman said. “They should know exactly what colleges are operating in these areas, to what extent they’re serving their communities.”

And after that, Hillman thinks policy makers should look at how they fund their colleges in education deserts, perhaps switching from performance-based models to equity-based models. In areas where opportunity is slim, he said, policy makers need to focus on building up the colleges that serve their communities.

Hillman’s family lives in northern Indiana, where only a few broad-access public colleges serve large numbers of students. But not all policy makers have lived in an area where opportunities are so slim. And that, Hillman said, is why they overlook geography: many of them traveled far from home to attend college, and many of their children have done the same.

“How to Make Public Engagement a Priority at Research Universities

Robert J. Jones, President, U. at Albany

No MU Mention


Public universities should deepen their engagement with their communities and make those partnerships part of their core academic missions, says Robert J. Jones, president of the University at Albany, part of the State University of New York system. Universities' expertise should be used to solve society's complex problems, he says, and public engagement needs to be integrated into both faculty-reward systems and students' educational experiences.

Mr. Jones spoke with The Chronicle about how college leaders can help overcome public mistrust of higher education by approaching community partners with more humility. On their
campuses, he says, presidents need to make the case that community engagement not only is in the public's best interest but also is in universities' best interest.