Finding the right system leader will be crucial in fixing a broken Mizzou

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The University of Missouri brand is damaged, and the firestorm over racial issues that drove two top leaders from their jobs last fall still smolders.

Last week at a meeting interrupted by student protest, the board of curators began the process that they hope will help restore the university to its high perch.

That’s the search to replace former system president Tim Wolfe, whose perceived racial insensitivity fanned unrest on the Columbia campus that included a student’s hunger strike and a threatened boycott by the football team.

Never, as some see it, has there been a more important hire in the 177-year history of one of the nation’s top land grant and research universities.

It will be the new president’s job to oversee the rebuilding of fractured relationships with students, faculty and alumni. And with state legislators bent on cutting taxpayer support.

The system’s new leader will also be the one to pick a new chancellor for the flagship campus in Columbia, which now has eight positions on the chancellor’s staff and four dean’s seats filled with interim appointments. The campus has also seen a dip in new enrollment applications and donor dollars.
“It’s just very, very sad that we’ve been in the news as much as we have with bad things when there’s so much good going on there,” said former curator Judith Haggard.

And yet as events last week made all too clear, bad things continue to mount, making the new president’s challenges all the more difficult.

The American Association of University Professors has questioned the university’s recent suspension and investigation of assistant professor Melissa Click, who was caught on video blocking a photojournalist covering a student protest.

The Missouri auditor’s office announced Thursday it would examine the system’s administration.

And the university’s credit rating outlook slipped last week from stable to negative because of concerns about finances and potential lost enrollment.

What also has ignited recent questioning about the stability of the university was the scathing, self-serving email Wolfe sent to supporters last month slamming the board of curators, former Columbia chancellor R. Bowen Loftin and state legislators.

“I believe the University of Missouri is under attack and current leadership from the board on down is frozen,” he wrote.

Many saw the letter as final proof Wolfe was a poor choice by the curators when he was hired in late 2011.

Wolfe did not respond to numerous requests for comment, but current and former curators spoke openly to The Star about his presidency.

Some continue to defend him; others say the perception that he was run off by students may make it hard to find his successor.

“I don’t think there’s going to be a whole lot of top-notch candidates breaking down the door,” said Wayne Goode, a former curator and former state senator. “I hope I’m wrong.”

Hiring Wolfe

Curators will get help finding Wolfe’s replacement from a national search firm, as they did when he was hired. However, they are promising to be more inclusive
and transparent. The search committee will include curators, two students, two faculty members and a member of the staff. Public forums are planned for each campus in April.

The search committee that chose Wolfe was made up solely of curators. An advisory committee included faculty and students, but members had little say.

“The advisory committee was a sham. ... It never received any information on candidates,” said Gary Ebersole, a history professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Curators on the Wolfe search team said they talked to faculty and students, cast a wide net and narrowed the field to two finalists. But the only candidate the advisory committee ever saw was Wolfe, a business executive with deep ties to Columbia. He was a hometown high school football star and MU business school alumnus, but he had no experience in academia.

“I consider that a failed search,” said current curator David Steelman. “If we do not have a broad pool of candidates to choose from, I have no problem saying let’s restart the search.”

This time around, Steelman would prefer someone with a strong academic background, someone who understands “that leading faculty is not command and control, like in a business.”

Wolfe was the second system leader in a row tapped from the corporate sector. He replaced Gary Forsee, a former CEO at Sprint.

When Forsee was selected, faculty members were skeptical about a corporate guy at the helm. But his success won them over, so curators were comfortable picking another businessman.

Haggard said Wolfe seemed to have many of Forsee’s attributes, and the fact that he had community ties and his parents were both college professors were added pluses.

“He was a Columbia person,” she said. “We thought the world of him when we hired him.”

Curator John Phillips said the board now knows corporate success does not guarantee a successful university leader.
“Gary Forsee was a quick study on the challenges in running a large university — dealing with a board of political appointees, having to conduct most of your business in public and shared governance,” Phillips said. “Wolfe ... was not as successful.”

The mistakes

When Wolfe was hired four years ago, curators cited his listening skills.

“The best listener I ever met,” Warren Erdman, then chairman of the board of curators, told Inside Columbia magazine in 2012. “He generally wants to learn from every conversation.”

In that article, Wolfe summed up his secret for success: “Listen to your clients or the market, listen to your people, listen to experts.”

Many now question whether Wolfe practiced what he preached.

“I don’t want to dance on Tim Wolfe’s grave,” Steelman said. “I do think President Wolfe had strengths, but he had difficulty with collaboration. You can’t collaborate if you can’t listen.”

Still, Wolfe got important stuff done:

- He saved money by sharing things like legal services among the four campuses.
- He reviewed how each campus responds to reports of sexual assault and made improvements.
- Systemwide enrollment exceeded projections, surpassing 77,000 by fall 2014.
- The percentage of underserved minorities was higher than ever.

But Wolfe started off badly. In May 2012, he ordered the closure of the five-decades-old university publishing house to save $400,000. But he later reversed himself after a groundswell of angry faculty and alumni stressed the press’s importance in publishing professors’ scholarly works.

“Had he talked to faculty first, he would have learned that no university press breaks even, let alone turns a profit,” Ebersole said.
But what Wolfe concedes may have been a bigger mistake was his hiring of Loftin to lead the Columbia campus.

Like Wolfe, Loftin was hired with the thought that he would eliminate inefficiencies and shake things up.

But some say Loftin, like his boss, may have moved too fast in an academic culture where change comes painstakingly slow.

“I think that quickness caused Bowen and Tim to make decisions not well thought through,” Phillips said.

Loftin stripped graduate teaching assistants of health care insurance with only a 24-hour notice, then reversed the decision when those students protested.

He eliminated the vice chancellor for health science position, which angered faculty, who told university leaders they wanted Loftin gone.

University deans claimed Loftin created a “toxic environment through threat, fear and intimidation” and voted no confidence in him.

In his finger-pointing email, Wolfe blamed Loftin for bowing to legislative pressures to cut ties with Planned Parenthood and for failing to communicate with system leaders as football players planned to boycott, and he accused Loftin of shifting the focus of student protest onto Wolfe to save his own job.

Loftin, in an interview with The Star on Friday, called that last charge “absolutely ludicrous.” He said the protesters are intelligent students who made mistakes and “to think I would manipulate them like pawns on a chessboard is disrespectful” to the students.

Students said they shifted blame to Wolfe for the campus chaos, which had been brewing since the August 2014 fatal police shooting in Ferguson, Mo., because Wolfe had more power than Loftin. And Loftin had been meeting with students for months.

The pivot point was an incident at last fall’s homecoming parade.

Protesters target Wolfe

When demonstrators blocked the red Chevrolet convertible he was riding in down University Avenue, Wolfe didn’t step out of the car and talk with them
about racial problems on campus. Instead, he sat for 10 minutes in the passenger seat, listening to their chants until police broke up the protest.

In a TV interview, Wolfe explained that wasn’t the time for him to make a public statement. Wolfe said his plan was to meet with students and his message would be “Teach me. Tell me what’s on your minds. ... I’m here to listen.”

But students with Concerned Student 1950, the predominantly black student protesters, said Wolfe was dismissive when they met and didn’t take their complaints seriously.

Former curator David Bradley describes the meeting differently. He said Wolfe told him the students did not come to find resolution. They refused to shake Wolfe’s hand, peppered him with yes or no questions and then left.

Some of the same students later cornered Wolfe during a visit to Kansas City and when asked if he understood systemic oppression, Wolfe gave what they believed was a flip answer and walked away.

That stands in contrast to how Wolfe dealt with another potential crisis. When news surfaced that the university had failed to investigate rape allegations against football players by a former member of the swim team, Wolfe launched a systemwide review of how sexual assault cases were handled.

None of the curators knew Wolfe’s resignation was coming. Phillips said he learned about it 30 minutes before the announcement.

“I tried to talk him out of it,” Phillips said. “He didn’t listen.”

The Columbia controversies couldn’t have come at a worse time for the university’s fundraising efforts.

About a month before the November protests, the public phase of a $1.3 billion fundraising campaign for the Columbia campus was unveiled.

But the campaign has stumbled as bad publicity mounted. More than 1,500 emails poured in from alumni threatening to pull or withhold donations, some upset that Wolfe bowed to pressure, some angry that he and others didn’t handle things better.

“There are a lot of very confused, upset, angry, embarrassed alumni that we got emails on that ran the gamut,” said Tom Hiles, vice chancellor for advancement.
Most of the university’s major donors stuck with Mizzou.

Still, it will be a challenge reaching this year’s record fundraising goal of $165 million, Hiles said.

Choosing the next president

Some say Wolfe’s personal involvement in the Columbia campus problems was unwise.

“The role of the president is not to manage what’s going on on each of the campuses; the chancellors are doing that,” said Brady Deaton, who preceded Loftin and was MU chancellor for nearly 10 years. The president’s job, he said, is to coordinate and work with chancellors on budget and academic programs.

Deaton boasts that MU is one of 34 public research institutions in the country that are members of the esteemed Association of American Universities. Some argue even after all the turmoil that Wolfe and Loftin did a lot to maintain that standing.

“This is a great university,” Deaton said. “It has great faculty doing great things.”

And that faculty has mixed feelings about the Wolfe administration.

“The best I can describe decision-making under Loftin/Wolfe is that it was often mysterious,” said Art Jago, a member of the MU Faculty Council. “Did faculty like Wolfe? Some thought he had a strong grasp of strategy, others thought he was out of touch.”

As much as the university needs stability, there’s no need to rush in choosing a new president, Steelman said. Interim president Mike Middleton, a former civil rights lawyer and longtime MU administrator, “is doing a very good job,” he said.

More important is choosing the right person. The job could be hampered by the fact that three of the nine seats on the board of curators are vacant, and Republican lawmakers have threatened to block Gov. Jay Nixon’s attempts to fill those posts until next year, when a new governor takes office. Others complain the board — all white lawyers — lacks diversity.

Nixon promises, however, to make interim appointees when the legislature ends its session this spring.

The board can then come to some consensus on what it wants in a new president.
Some faculty and students already have their preferences.

“The next university president needs to be someone who has enough self-confidence and sense of self that she/he can be humble in interacting with students, faculty, alumni, donors and other constituents,” Ebersole said. “Obviously, the president also has to have good political antennas — sensing issues of race, privilege, discrimination, economic inequality and so on on the campuses and in the workplace.”

A university does so many things — running everything from medical schools and hospitals to conservatories, journalism schools and physics labs — no one person can be an expert at all of them, said Ben Trachtenberg, chairman of the MU Faculty Council.

“The university system president must be humble enough to accept that he can’t know everything and know that counsel with a wide group of stakeholders is essential to success,” he said.

Ken Bryant Jr., president of the Graduate Student Association at MU, said the system needs “someone with a holistic background in diversity and inclusion, someone who understands more than just race, gender issues, ableness.”

Bryant, a fourth-year grad student in political science, said what students want in a president and a chancellor “is legitimacy.”

He added: “Students want someone with a background ... who can articulate a vision of diversity and inclusion. Next time, when the president is tasked with responding about diversity and inclusion, and it may not be about race, he should be prepared.”

**UM not negotiating with Tim Wolfe**

By Rudi Keller

Saturday, February 6, 2016 at 12:00 am Updated: 8:16 pm, Sat Feb 6, 2016.
The University of Missouri Board of Curators will not cave to demands by former University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe that it reopen negotiations over a severance package, curators Chair Pamela Henrickson said Friday.

During a news conference after the curators’ meeting, Henrickson addressed issues raised by a letter Wolfe sent by email Jan. 19 to an unknown number of friends and university supporters. She said Wolfe’s letter accurately described the status of talks — he wrote that talks had stopped and he faced “accepting a small fraction” of the pay provided in his contract — but disputed his assertion that the board wanted a “gag order” to prevent him from criticizing the board.

“I wouldn’t characterize it that way,” Henrickson said. “We did want to agree on how each of us would characterize the separation going forward.”

Wolfe resigned Nov. 9 to quell demonstrations over racial issues on the Columbia campus by Concerned Student 1950 that included a hunger strike by graduate student Jonathan Butler and a boycott of athletic events by the Tiger football team. He has not spoken publicly about his resignation and declined the Tribune’s request for an interview Friday.

The Jan. 19 letter is the only statement by Wolfe that has become public. In it, he slammed the curators, state Sen. Kurt Schaefer and former Columbia campus Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, and asked for help pressuring the curators for more money. In the letter, he complained that Loftin would receive 75 percent of his former salary in a new position and about a job for former head football coach Gary Pinkel that will pay $350,000 annually.

“The amount the board has put on the table for me is equivalent to what I would have been paid if they had terminated without cause and my annual performance and longevity incentive,” he wrote.

Wolfe referred to a provision that granted him 60 days’ pay, half pay for each month remaining on the contract and accumulated deferred compensation and incentive pay. His salary was $477,544 and he was eligible for deferred compensation of $50,000 for longevity and up to $50,000 in incentives annually.

That clause, however, referred to a board action to terminate Wolfe. The contract did not include any compensation if he terminated the contract early.

In his letter, Wolfe also accused curators of working behind his back, contacting “subordinate staff and faculty members to dig up dirt and use their Curator role to further personal agendas.”

Henrickson, in response, said she had not regularly contacted faculty or staff outside regular channels.

“Well, we had students encouraging us to spend more time on campus and finding out what is going on everywhere,” she said. “I don’t know that it’s a problem.”
Curator David Steelman of Rolla said in an interview that he had done so but disputed Wolfe’s characterization of his action. Over time, Steelman said, he had become distrustful of the information he received from Wolfe.

“I think the mistake President Wolfe made is he thinks the university is command and control and it was his job to control the information that curators got,” Steelman said.

During the campus protests, Steelman said, he visited the tent city set up by demonstrators to get more information for himself.

“I think one of the tremendous improvements President Middleton has made, and he and I have talked about this, is he has no problem with me talking to faculty,” Steelman said.

The curators will meet later this month to select a recruiting firm to help find a permanent replacement for Wolfe. Like his predecessor Gary Forsee, Wolfe was hired from the business world and had no academic leadership experience. Henrickson said another business leader could be a good choice, but she would not limit the selection criteria in any way.

MU interim president urges community to move forward, stop pointing fingers

Interim University of Missouri President Michael Middleton made assurances Friday that the university took seriously last fall’s unrest on the Columbia campus and was moving forward with a number of steps designed to make the network of four campuses more tolerant to minorities.

Middleton’s remarks during Friday’s Board of Curators meeting followed a lengthy listening session where board members heard from students who accused them of not doing enough to change the culture on the Columbia campus.

Tim Love, a graduate student in Mizzou’s English department, said the much-talked-about mandatory diversity classes for staffers and incoming students wasn’t enough. Former Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin ordered the diversity classes last fall after a series of racially motivated incidents on campus.
Black student anger over those incidents built throughout the fall, culminating in November with a strike by some football players, one student’s hunger strike and the resignation of President Timothy M. Wolfe.

Since then, the system office — which oversees the campuses in St. Louis, Columbia, Kansas City and Rolla — has been walking a tightrope in between black students who say Mizzou is an unwelcoming campus and some Republican lawmakers who say the university is unnecessarily bowing to students.

On Friday, curator John Phillips listed some of the actions the university has taken since November including hiring a diversity, equity and inclusion officer for the Columbia campus. The board is currently looking to hire someone in that role at the system level.

The other campuses already had diversity officers, but now those people report directly to the chancellor of each campus.

Additionally, the university has set up a diversity task force and set aside $900,000 for a campus climate survey, diversity training and mental health services.

Phillips further told students that the board’s authority was limited because board members served in an oversight capacity.

“Maybe now’s the time to do much more,” said Love, the graduate student.

After the student remarks, Middleton gave his president’s report.

In his remarks, he pushed back at legislators in Jefferson City, where he’s heard changes on campus referred to as either the animals running the zoo, or the inmates running the asylum.

“We are neither an asylum nor a zoo,” he said, before listing a number of the university’s accomplishments.

“Our students are neither inmates or animals,” he continued. “They are young adults we are grooming” to be future leaders.

Middleton also pushed back at the culture of finger pointing on campus and in Jefferson City. He called it “downright exhausting.”

In order to resolve the differences on campus, “we must get away from the blame game,” he said.

Middleton also told a story of black alumni meeting with black high schools students thinking about attending Mizzou.
He said the black alumni told the students there was racial discomfort when they were in school, but it was outweighed by the overall experience of being a Mizzou student.

Middleton also responded to talk floating around Jefferson City that legislators could strip the university of state funding over its diversity initiatives or its ties to Planned Parenthood.

“Our hope is that our elected officials care too much to weaken one of the state’s most important assets,” he said.

University of Missouri curators seek to calm racial issues, legislative criticism

By Rudi Keller

Saturday, February 6, 2016 at 12:00 am

The University of Missouri is addressing its problems and answering critics the best way it knows how but will defy anyone who seeks to insult it and the students who brought issues of racial discrimination to the forefront, interim President Mike Middleton said Friday.

In an address to the Board of Curators, Middleton described the steps that have been taken since the Nov. 9 resignation of Tim Wolfe to make the school a more welcoming place for all students. He also reported how the university is handling legislative criticism over student protests, the role of athletes in those actions and the system for granting faculty teaching waivers.

And he asked critics to tone down the harshest rhetoric directed at the university.

“I have heard references to the inmates running the asylum,” he said. “I heard this morning references to animals running the zoo. Let me say we are neither an asylum nor a zoo … Our students are neither inmates nor animals. They are young adults we are grooming to lead us through the 21st century.”

For the students and others critical that the university has not addressed racial problems, Middleton pointed to initiatives intended to make it a more important issue for administration. Three finalists for the job of system-wide chief diversity officer will be in Columbia over the next two weeks for interviews and public forums, he said. Each of the four campuses has a diversity officer who reports directly to the chancellor and $921,000 has been set aside to bolster diversity programs, he said.
And to legislative critics, he said the university is reviewing faculty teaching waivers and MU Athletic Director Mack Rhoades is working with athletes “to understand and confront issues in a manner to evoke positive change to help the university move forward.”

The day after Concerned Student 1950 protesters interrupted the curators’ deliberations, the public session of the board was used to show that members are listening to students. Board Chair Pamela Henrickson said she is determined to foster a culture of respect throughout the system.

One way, she said, was to let the protesters have their say.

“We thought it important to hear what they had to say,” Henrickson said to reporters after the meeting. “The students were obviously passionate about this issue. They were just trying to communicate with us.”

Another was the panel discussion that opened Friday’s meeting. A group of four students that included two graduate students and two undergraduates, three black and one white, two gay and two straight, told the curators what respect means to them. The curators heard that as well as proposals for increasing understanding among student groups.

“Obviously, in 90 days we can’t change the racial makeup of the campus, that is not physically possible, so we are looking at all kinds of things we can do in the short-run and creating long-term plans, and you will hear more about that this morning,” Henrickson said as she opened the discussion.

Timothy Love, a graduate student in the English Department, said that all students should take two full semester courses on diversity. Until the mindset that resists that idea changes, he said, there will be little progress. He also questioned the curators’ commitment to change.

“If there was monetary gain in racial harmony, the University of Missouri would immediately approve diversity course requirements,” he said.

Kelcea Barnes, a sophomore studying political science, sought to make the curators understand what it is like to be a young black woman on campus. Barnes is working as an intern in Jefferson City during the legislative session, she said.

“I didn’t come from Omaha, Nebraska, to be called a n…r to my face on this campus,” she said. “I didn’t come from Omaha, Nebraska, to be hypersexualized, not only on this campus but in Jefferson City.”

She pointed out that the curators listening to her were all white and five of the six were male. “We are here to talk about respect, we’re here to get a little uncomfortable,” she said.

Barnes also said it was important for the curators to respect the institution if they expect respect in return. She named the board’s vote to suspend assistant professor Melissa Click as an example.
“Overstepping your boundaries as the board of curators was not respect, responsibility, discovery or excellence at this institution,” she said.

Political critics have been threatening to cut the university’s budget. The national attention to problems at MU also have administrators predicting a drop in enrollment that could cost the Columbia campus $20- to $25 million in tuition revenue.

He has told lawmakers that “significant budget cuts at this point in time would do very, very serious damage to the University of Missouri system and all of its campuses,” Middleton said to reporters. “I hope they heard me. I understand their position. I understand their anger and their frustration.”

**MISSOURIAN**

**UM System Board of Curators meeting focuses on diversity**

REBECCA SMITH, RACHEL PHILLIPS, Feb 5, 2016

COLUMBIA — **Diversity and inclusion were the main focuses of the second day of the University of Missouri System's Board of Curators meeting Friday.**

The main event was a panel made up of four MU students who talked to the curators about diversity, racism on campus and overcoming prejudice. All four students were from MU — graduate students Timothy Love and Sean Joy, junior Jasmine Morgan and sophomore Kelceya Barnes.

Barnes gave three statements, which she said would help facilitate communication between UM System leadership and students.

"We don't have to like each other to respect each other," she said, arguing it is important for everyone to "take time to see a different point of view."

Barnes called on the curators to respect the administration they had put in place at MU. She specifically referred to the curators' decision to suspend Melissa Click for her call for "some
Barnes said this indicated the curators had overstepped their boundaries and showed a lack of trust in the decisions of the MU administration.

The panelists also discussed robust diversity course requirements and board communication.

Love stressed the need for mandatory courses about inclusiveness and recommended a two-course diversity requirement. He also said it is important for the campuses to analyze existing diversity courses to see if they were effective at addressing racism and encouraged the curators to increase communication and take action.

"Your actions speak much louder than words," he said.

Both the students and curators acknowledged the complexity of the issue, but the curators were confident that they were making progress on the list of diversity initiatives they had announced on Nov. 9.

Curator John Phillips mentioned how the UM System will host public forums for the candidates of the new position for the chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer. MU Interim Chancellor Hank Foley also outlined the university's strategic plan, which includes a diversity education course for incoming students and a lecture series about African-American life in Missouri.

After the panel, UM System Interim President Mike Middleton read a report to the board. His speech kept with the theme of solving diversity and inclusion issues throughout the UM System.

"We must stop trying to fix blame and stop looking in the rear-view mirror and start looking at the road ahead of us," Middleton said.

Pamela Henrickson, the UM System Board of Curators chair, also addressed a question during the news conference about future severance pay negotiations with former UM System President Tim Wolfe. She confirmed that the negotiations had "broken off," which was consistent with a claim Wolfe made in a confidential letter to the Missouri 100, an elite group of university supporters.
Black students seek swifter race reforms at Missouri

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — University of Missouri students pointedly pressed the system's governing board Friday for faster diversity reforms at the Columbia campus, which is still grappling with racial unrest three months since protests led to departures of two top administrators.

The four students — three black and one white — at times questioned the Board of Curators' resolve in addressing race issues, compounding pressures on the board that's also under fire from frustrated state lawmakers as the board handles business down three members and without any of color.

"At the end of the day you answer to us, because our tuition pays for this," Kelcea Barnes, a black undergraduate student who identifies herself as queer, told the curators during the last day of their two-day meeting, which was interrupted twice Thursday by protesters. "We don't get the big bucks to change this. You do."

"You're now responsible," she added. "You're at the age of accountability."

Timothy Love, a black graduate student, pushed for a requirement that undergraduates take at least one comprehensive class about race and gender and that it deals with "the science of prejudice." And he criticized the absence of diversity on the board that runs the four-campus system, given last week's resignations of the only two black curators.

"If there are no policies in place after all these months, we have a right to be angry," Love said. "It also doesn't help that all of you are white. That sends a signal that there's a gulf between us."

The curators offered no promises but indicated they understood the impatience.

"At every institution comes a time when it has to change," said curator David Steele, a Rolla attorney. "The process is great, but all that really matters is what you get at the end."

The November protests resonated across the nation and were spurred by what activists said was administrators' indifference to racial issues, leading to the resignations of the system president and the Columbia campus' chancellor.
The fallout also has come from the state's Republican-led Legislature, where Senate President Pro Tem Ron Richard this week described the system's relationship with lawmakers as "terrible." GOP leaders have said they have no interest in filling the curator vacancies before next year, when Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon is out of office.

"We're not in a hurry to do anything for the University of Missouri," Richard said. "It's apparent to me that no one is in charge. So we'll be in charge."

Nixon pledged Thursday to circumvent lawmakers, if needed, to fill the vacancies by making interim appointments when legislators are out of session.

Curator Pamela Henrickson, from Jefferson City, insisted Friday that the board has been "working hard" to mend relations with lawmakers, telling The Associated Press that "we're at the (Statehouse) every day."

"I think our presence in the Capitol is the most important thing, just convincing them that we have things in hand," she said. "Certainly we can improve (relations with lawmakers), and we're working very hard to do that."

UM System president talks progress, asks for patience in address to curators

Interim UM System President Mike Middleton: “A lot of people in groups blaming other people in groups for what are our beloved university is facing. I can tell you it’s downright exhausting.”

Interim President Michael Middleton didn’t sugarcoat the outlook for the UM System on Friday morning during his second report to the Board of Curators.

“I’ve walked the halls of the state capitol numerous times already in the first month of this legislative session, and I can tell you it’s not pretty down there,” Middleton said.

Republican lawmakers in the General Assembly have been vocal in their frustrations with the UM System, from threatening budget cuts to additional oversight. Senate President Pro Tem Ron Richard has also said the Senate won’t confirm any more curators until a new governor is sworn in, which would be in January 2017. The board currently has three vacant seats after the resignation of curators David Steward and Yvonne Sparks.
“We’re not in a hurry to do anything for the University of Missouri,” Richard told the Associated Press.

Middleton said he feels that he’s softening the legislators’ concerns. A task force has been established to look at teaching waivers, and recommendations are due in April. He said the MU Athletics Department is planning to implement several initiatives to “better equip our student athletes to understand how to confront issues in a manner to evoke positive change to help the university move forward.”

Middleton has been in the interim position for almost three months. During that time, he said he’s spent time doing a lot of listening.

“What have I gathered, in fact most of what I have heard is blame,” he said. “A lot of people in groups blaming other people in groups for what are our beloved university is facing. I can tell you it’s downright exhausting. It can literally sap your strength. But this institution and my deep love for it makes it all worthwhile.”

Middleton admitted that bettering relations in Jefferson City is going to take time, though.

“Patience is a virtue in situations like this,” Middleton said. “Just as these problems didn’t evolve overnight, your solutions will not come quickly.”

The curators announced a series of diversity initiatives Nov. 9, 2015, and Middleton said progress has been made. The search for a UM System Chief Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Officer has concluded, and public forums are scheduled next week with the three candidates.

The four campuses in the system also have individual diversity officers. Provost Garnett Stokes appointed Chuck Henson the interim vice chancellor for diversity, inclusion and equity. Henson reports directly to interim Chancellor Hank Foley.

“My door is open all the time to (Henson) and believe me he uses it,” Foley said in his update to the curators on MU’s strategic plan.

Middleton also said UM System staff are currently looking for a firm to conduct an audit of all diversity, inclusion and equity activities on all four campus and at the system. On Feb. 3, the UM System announced $921,000 in one-time funding for inclusion efforts on the individual campuses.

Middleton’s second address echoed the tone of his first report to the curators as he urged the community to look ahead to the future.

“We must stop trying to fix blame and focus on fixing problems,” he said. “It’s time to stop looking in the rearview mirror and start looking at the road ahead of us. It’s time to move forward.”
Middleton had a message to those who wonder who’s in charge of the university, a question he’s fielded in Jefferson City and heard around campus.

“I’ve heard references to inmates running the asylum and animals running the zoo,” he said. “We are neither an asylum or a zoo. We are a university … Our students are neither inmates or animals. They are young adults we are grooming to led us through the 21st century … This is our university and we are running it.”

Missouri presidential search committee members expanded

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The search committee for a new University of Missouri system president will include two students, two faculty members and a staff member.

The Missouri Board of Curators decided Thursday not to include an alumni representative chosen from nominations by each campus’ alumni association. Chairwoman Pamela Henrickson says the six curators, who are all Missouri alumni, will represent alumni.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports (http://bit.ly/1nM8Tx6 ) every person named to the committee will have a vote, which gives students a voting role for the first time.

The board is seeking a permanent replacement for Tim Wolfe, who resigned Nov. 9 after protests over racial issues on the Columbia campus.

Curators to give students, faculty roles on presidential search committee
Panel of Students Address Curators about Diversity

EDITORIAL: Missouri lawmakers should help, not handcuff, Mizzou

For a university system trying to send a message about inclusion and diversity, a photo of the University of Missouri Board of Curators defies the best public relations effort the university can muster.

The six remaining curators are of a certain age. All are white. One is a woman. The photo doesn’t show it, but they’re all lawyers.

This is the board that for the foreseeable future will determine how higher education progresses at the state’s signature land-grant university and three other campuses in the system.
The university system is being handcuffed by Republican state legislators who are using flimsy excuses and regressive thinking to reshape an institution of higher learning into one that reflects their particular brand of conservatism.

That’s the sort of reasoning that prompted Ron Richard, R-Joplin, Senate president pro tem, to say it was unlikely the Senate would confirm any new curator appointees this year. He was specifically referring to vacancies created by the resignations of the only two African-American curators, both of whom represented the St. Louis region.

Yvonne Sparks, an executive with the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, resigned Jan. 27, two months after her appointment by Gov. Jay Nixon. David Steward, chairman of World Wide Technology, resigned Monday. Nixon appointed him in 2011 to a term that would have expired Jan. 1, 2017. They were the only non-lawyers on the board.

Sparks and Steward cited personal and professional reasons for resigning and did not criticize the board or the university system.

There’s a third vacancy from the November resignation of Anne K. Covington, who represented the Columbia area. Two more curator terms are set to expire at the end of the year.

The university system needs help recovering from the diversity and inclusion problems that led to last fall’s protests. It needs curators who have foremost in their minds the quality higher education that Missouri’s young people deserve. It needs curators who care about producing an educated workforce for Missouri businesses. It needs curators who value science, research and technology.

It doesn’t need legislators like Richard, who told the Post-Dispatch’s Koran Addo that he wants “reform-minded” curators. It doesn’t need meddling from lawmakers who think the university should ideologically reflect the Legislature’s conservative bent.

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee and a candidate for state attorney general, and House Speaker Todd Richardson, R-Poplar Bluff,
should not be threatening to slash the system’s budget unless it toes the party line. They are not doing this to improve the education climate in Missouri.

Even if Richard is content leaving 17,055 students from St. Louis city and county without curators representing their interests, voters should not be. Lawmakers need to know that their constituents reject political-pawn status for the state’s flagship university.

UM won't like its 'haircut'

By BOB ROPER

Sunday, February 7, 2016 at 12:00 am Comments (4)

This is the second of two parts.

As one reviews the truly depressing events of 2015, what hurts the most is the realization that at least 95 percent of what the University of Missouri does continues at the same high level as before 2015. Yet everyone who continues to do the same high quality of work has seen his or her reputation besmirched by these events along with those who truly deserve it.

Unfortunately, more gasoline was poured on the fire in recent days. Former President Tim Wolfe’s “confidential” email attempted to settle some scores while asking for help in getting a severance package. It was, of course, leaked to the media and published. Meanwhile, Assistant Professor Melissa Click, the source of so much anger directed at MU, reached an agreement with the city prosecutor: She will not be prosecuted if she does 20 hours of community service and does not violate the law (If she provides assistance to Concerned Student 1950, does that qualify as “community service”?). Then the Board of Curators suspended her — with pay, of course. None of these events has gone down well with the folks who write the checks in the legislature.

What happens now? In the short run, it will be very bad. Enrollment projections for fall 2016 are down, with a projected tuition loss of $20 million to $25 million. Anecdotally, alumni and other giving is down, though dollar amounts are unavailable. Will research and other grants, public and private, be adversely affected? Who knows?

The real problem: the 2016 Missouri legislative session, now underway. Recall that Mizzou receives roughly $240 million from Missouri taxpayers in the current fiscal year in operating
funds, as well as $91 million for capital projects. Thanks to what transpired in 2015, the outlook for the next fiscal year, starting July 1, is grim. The attitude of large working majorities of the House and Senate seems to be, “MU has asked for it for years, and this year it is going to get it”: “Asked for it” as in having little relationship or involvement with legislators and senators except for the annual “ask”; “Asked for it” as in appearing — to the rest of the state, anyway — to have an elitist, entitlement attitude and values that are out of step with those of the majority of the taxpayers whose taxes pay for higher education in the first place; and “asked for it” as in the events of 2015.

Budget bills start in the House, then move to the Senate with the House recommendation. Many people believe there is a good chance that this year’s recommendation to the Senate will be zero. Talk about sending a message! Ditto regarding needed capital improvements, such as undergraduate laboratories.

What will the Senate do? Some funds will likely be added back, but the GOP leader of the Senate has talked of a “haircut” for MU. Remember, many legislators would like to take some of the university’s appropriations and send them instead to a higher ed institution, located near them, that they actually like. Best guess: The budget from the state goes down $50 million to $100 million from last year. The better approach would be to flat-line appropriations but greatly enhance oversight and audit efforts.

Some MU-related legislation might pass as a result of the events of 2015. There’s talk of limiting the number of non-teaching tenured faculty to 10 percent of all tenured faculty and ending non-teaching status after one year. Some would like to end appointment of members of the Board of Curators and elect them instead, with strict controls in the law. And the legislature is clearly going to be a lot more energetic in its scrutiny of productivity and efficiency at the university. A lot of faculty members believe that more spending equates to more quality and that demands for accountability are an assault on academic freedom. Those views are clearly incorrect and will get short shrift from the legislature this year. Expect more inquiries into administrative costs and quality of research. After 2015, the legislature is not going to accept “It’s none of your business” for an answer.

How about the university’s longer-term prospects? Of course, it depends on what MU’s leadership does going forward. It begins by recognizing the full extent of the problem. And part of that problem is that higher ed institutions across the nation are becoming caricatures of themselves and are in danger of imploding. They seem unable to defend themselves from illiberal pressures such as speech codes — “Free speech for me, but not for thee” — shouting down speakers, demanding the resignations of those who say things they disagree with, etc. A mobocracy is no way to run a university.

Strong, forceful adult leadership at Mizzou is obviously critically important as soon as possible. Strong leadership means enforcing the rules equally and against all violators. It means MU is a place of free and open inquiry where conservative students do not have to hide their views because of a fear of retaliation or ridicule. It means free speech is protected. It means dealing quickly and appropriately with legitimate grievances, racial or otherwise. And it also means telling protesters who are out of line “No” and, when appropriate, “Grow up!”
Interim Chancellor Hank Foley has set up an ad hoc committee on protests, public spaces, free speech and the press. Let us hope for great success on its part. Purdue University and a few others have adopted very strong guidelines on all of this and clearly intend to enforce them.

If MU does not reform itself, and soon, it is likely to become a very average, non-AAU university. Do we really want to go there?

Bob Roper is a retired bank executive and conservative commentator.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In Defense of Moderation

By Robert Zaretsky FEBRUARY 07, 2016

Increasingly, political figures on the right seem to vie with student groups on the left in their demands for safe spaces: a campus safe from debate with those bearing different perspectives, a country safe from those bearing different religions. Some demand walls against desperate immigrants they deem dangerous, others demand walls against costumed students they deem insulting.

In this quickening race to raise walls, what has become of the political and philosophical middle? Does this center still hold in our national and local politics? Have voices of moderation, both in the halls of power and in the groves of academe, lost their conviction while the extremes are full of passionate intensity?

"Moderation is a complex virtue with many facets, and is bound to be a contested concept, one that reflects the ambiguity of our moral and political vocabularies," writes Aurelian Craiutu. In a series of email exchanges over these questions, he reassured me that though moderation is alive and well, it is also terribly elusive. A political scientist at Indiana University at Bloomington, he finds himself the leading theorist of a concept that resists theorizing. As he confessed, "There is neither an abstract theory of moderation outside of particular situations nor a controlled experiment … for testing moderation in theory."
This helps explain why, despite its long and honorable history, moderation rarely is the subject of university courses. Craiutu once taught a graduate class on the subject but found it too unwieldy for traditional course listings. As for my own trawling through various curricula, the topic heading "moderation" led me mostly to seminars in labor arbitration. Relatively few works are dedicated to the subject: Harry Clor’s classic On Moderation: Defending an Ancient Virtue in a Modern World (Baylor University Press, 2008), Craiutu’s own A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748-1830(Princeton University Press, 2012), and his forthcoming book from the University of Pennsylvania Press, tentatively titled Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes. Moreover, moderation betrays a Zelig-like quality in the standard texts on modern political theory. Even in the works of those thinkers committed to moderation, like John Rawls, Michael Walzer, and Robert Bellah, the word rarely appears in the indexes of their books. That moderation often seems less a political position than a personal disposition is only part of the problem. There is also the fact that, for younger generations in particular, moderation is the conceptual equivalent of a plaid sweater. While we treasure the well-meaning aunt at family gatherings, the one who clucks "Everyone is entitled to their opinion" as food flies over questions of religion and politics, few of us want to spend much time in her company. Moderation has neither the comforting edginess of courses in queer theory nor the magnetic bleakness of classes in the history of genocide. It offers neither abysses to plumb nor identities to affirm. Is moderation, then, to political theorists what colic is to pediatricians? A term of convenience for something we know exists, though we cannot say just what?

Not so, according to Aristotle. The history of moderation is, in essence, a series of footnotes to the Nicomachean Ethics. And yet, 2,500 years later, we still trip over
the meaning of Aristotle’s golden mean. It is not, as commonly thought, simply the midway point between two extremes. If it were, Donald Trump, vowing to bar Muslims from our country, would be a moderate when contrasted with, say, Greece’s Golden Dawn party on his right and Mother Teresa on his left. Likewise, Professor Melissa Click, at the University of Missouri, with her call for "some muscle" in order to remove a reporter from a campus demonstration, would be moderate when set against Frantz Fanon on the left and Bull Connor on the right.

Yet, at least for many of us, there is clearly something deeply and disturbingly immoderate about both Trump’s vow and Professor Click’s request. Why is this? Aristotle offers one answer. Moderation, he insisted, is not a matter of axioms reached by theorizing, but of character shaped by experience. Twinned with prudence, moderation is our capacity to weigh the best course of action — not in theory, but in practice; not in the world as it should be, but in the world as it is; not in relation to a universal rule, but in relation to one’s own self — and duly act upon it. A moderate person understands not just the differences we have in perspective, but also the distinctions we make among values. As a prudent Elinor reminds the passionate Marianne in Sense and Sensibility, "It is not everyone who has your passion for dead leaves."

Herein lies the rub: Moderation can never be a science. In fact, as the French philosopher André Comte-Sponville argues, moderation begins where science ends. This suggests, in turn, that the literature on moderation is to be found, well, in literature. Consider the member of the Bordeaux parliament who, a little more than five centuries ago, decided to call it quits and turn to writing. On February 28, 1571, Michel de Montaigne declared that he was "long weary of the servitude of royal and
public duties" and would "retire to the bosom of the Muses, where in calm and freedom from all cares he will spend what little remains of his life now more than half run out."

This was Montaigne’s disarmingly polite way of saying he would no longer moderate between two armed camps beholden to different interpretations of their faith and bent on one another’s destruction. Could one blame him? For almost a decade, France had been convulsed by acts of political and religious terrorism carried out by its warring Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. The era’s horrors are most often associated with the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572. The Seine turned red with the battered corpses of at least 5,000 men, women, and children as Catholic mobs broke into Protestant homes and slaughtered entire families. In one typical case, a group of Catholics hacked to death a Protestant artisan while he and his wife were still in bed, stabbed his wife in the abdomen and heaved her body out the window. Her nearly born infant died with his mother in the street, his head poking through the abdominal wound.

France’s wars of religion left precious little place for political moderates. Yet Montaigne had done his best, serving as a trusted negotiator between the opposing camps of Catherine de’ Medici and Henri of Navarre. He was counted among the so-called *politiques* — men who, zealous only in their skepticism, rejected the absolutes of religious faith and accepted the ambiguities of real life. The moderation embraced by Montaigne was so repugnant to fanatics that at different times both Protestants and Catholics threatened his life.

The literary genre that Montaigne largely invented, and which occupied the remaining 20 years of his life, the *Essays*, could be seen as moderate politics by other means. As with any test, or effort — the literal meaning of "essai" — the genre is open-ended and provisional, best done by those who are patient and prudent. By its very nature, essay
writing also prevented Montaigne from making a systematic case for moderation, but he improvises tirelessly on the theme. One of his earliest essays happens to be titled "On Moderation." Declaring that he likes "temperate and moderate natures," Montaigne observes that the "excess enslaves our natural freedom and leads us astray from the fine and level road that nature has traced for us."

Nearly two decades later, in his last, magisterial essay, "Of Experience," his plea for moderation verges on the immoderate. His skeptical bent, he notes, leads to a "constant coolness and moderation in my opinions" but also to his "hatred for that aggressive and quarrelsome arrogance that believes and trusts wholly in itself, a mortal enemy of discipline and trust."

Two centuries later, this same arrogance again battered France, but it was now expressed in ideological rather than theological terms. As the Revolution careened into the Terror, Robespierre’s associate Louis Antoine de Saint-Just declared: "The Republic consists in the extermination of everything that opposes it." When terror was made the order of the day, in 1793, it set in motion not just the quasi-judicial execution of nearly 17,000 men and women but also the wholesale slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians elsewhere in France. As one commander, General François Joseph Westermann, reported, "Following the orders that you gave me, I have crushed children under the feet of horses, massacred women who at least will give birth to no more brigands, and have no prisoners with which to reproach myself." In Nantes, more than 4,000 civilians were drowned in the Loire River, while in villages women were raped before being bayonetted, and entire families were buried alive in pits they had been forced to dig.

Among those who fled France on the eve of the Terror was Germaine Necker, better known by her married name, Madame de Staël. Unlike Edmund Burke, she applauded the opening phases of the Revolution. Like him, she was appalled by the revolutionaries’ conviction that they could simply apply their universal and abstract principles to a vast assortment of peoples separated by languages, histories, and
customs. This display of "philosophic enthusiasm," she drily remarked, was at the root of the revolution’s excesses. The fanaticism that burst onto the political scene in 1793 was the "most powerful of all human passions," one that poisoned any value — including liberty or equality — that it touched.

Echoing Aristotle and Montaigne, Madame de Staël observed that everything that "partakes of reason, justice, and humanity demands attention, concessions, and a reason always adjusted to the present moment without losing sight of the future."

Until forced to flee Paris, she courageously defended the philosophical and political center. Hounded by forces on the left and right, she refused to cede her ground. It is all too easy, she declared, to "heap ridicule upon opinions that are removed equally from two conflicting extremes." Most of us, she continued, prefer the extremes at times of upheaval and fear. But does this mean we are "to allow every lunatic who discovers a new madness to erect a new barrier to truth?"

As any fox can tell us, the answer is no. Isaiah Berlin’s celebrated distinction between hedgehogs, which know one big thing, and foxes, which know many things, goes to the heart of philosophical and political moderation. Along with Shakespeare and Balzac, Berlin pinned a fox’s tail on Aristotle and Montaigne. (Plato and Dostoevsky are the heavy hitters among the hedgehogs.) To Berlin’s list of foxes, we can add not just Madame de Staël but also writers and thinkers otherwise as diverse as Jane Austen, Albert Camus, Adam Smith, and Hannah Arendt.

Unlike the hedgehog, who sees the world through the narrow prism of a single truth, the fox thrives in a pluralist world, aware that it abounds in values and alert to the inevitability that they will conflict. As Berlin concluded, "Not all good things are compatible" — a view acknowledged, accepted, and acted on by moderates.

Notwithstanding popular misconceptions of moderation, this requires a character that is neither weak nor indecisive, but instead passionate about tolerance and wild about prudence.

That helps explain why so many political moderates spend much of their lives in exile. Threatened by the Jacobins, and then by Napoleon, Madame de Staël spent several years drifting across Europe, setting up temporary shop in cities from Saint Petersburg to London. As for Montaigne, exile was internal. Even as he served powerful men and women, his essays reveal the shifting portrait of a free mind, one
attached to questioning and thus at stunning variance with the temper of the times. "We must reserve," he wrote, "a back shop all our own, entirely free, in which to establish our real liberty and our principal retreat." Even Aurelian Craiutu, born in Romania during the Ceausescu era, opted for internal, then physical exile. As he wryly remarked, having "lived under an immoderate regime might have something to do with my interest in moderation."

As it turns out, exile also became the fate of two courageous moderates at Yale University. During the recent controversy over Halloween costumes, Nicholas and Erika Christakis embraced the virtues and burdens of moderation. Posing questions about the university’s role in determining the kinds of costumes students should wear on Halloween, Erika Christakis tried to moderate, with remarkable care and thoughtfulness, the conflicting claims of the various sides in the debate. Nicholas Christakis, wading into a crowd of students who were outraged at his wife’s intervention, persisted in pursuing a dialogue while his interlocutors tried to shout him down and shut him up. While the couple continue to serve as master and assistant master at Silliman College, Erika Christakis decided to take a leave as a lecturer in early-childhood education.

Given the issues at stake, the Yale controversy veers between the comic and tragic. But a glance at our current political scene reminds us that the comic can, at times, morph into the catastrophic. At the end of his life, Montaigne observed with equanimity: "Affirmation and strong opinions are express signs of stupidity." No age, of course, is a stranger to stupidity — a prosaic truth that helps put in perspective our own era’s particular stupidities of extremism and excess. Though the degree and details vary dramatically, college campuses no less than national capitals have become stages for such stupidities.

But campuses have one advantage over capitals. The former, unlike the latter, have as their raison d’être critical inquiry and sustained conversation. Where better than a university to consider writers and thinkers who have made the case for moderation? The late philosopher Bernard Williams rightly hailed the "heroic Aristotelian capacity for compromise." Such compromise requires open forums for debate and dialogue. This seems a pious wish when student movements insist on "safe spaces" in which to fixate on their pain, and a leading Republican presidential candidate encourages attendees at his rallies to hound and pound dissenters. It is time, perhaps, for everyone to absorb and emulate the humility of one of Montaigne’s final and finest observations: "On the loftiest throne in the world, we are still sitting only on our own rump."
Click Isn't the Issue, White Racism Is

By ANDREW C. TWADDLE

Sunday, February 7, 2016 at 12:00 am

When I came to the University of Missouri in 1971, there were very few black people on campus. Few blacks were offered admission, and fewer were willing to come to a campus with a reputation as a hostile environment for blacks. Just a few years earlier, MU had lost a hard-fought legal battle to block the admission of blacks. Those who came felt isolated and unwelcome. Many white students openly harassed them.

Although this pattern has diminished somewhat over time, it is a persistent aspect of the culture, both of the state of Missouri and of the University of Missouri. As an elderly white man looking at recent events from the outside, I think this is what the Concerned Student 1950 movement was about. After decades of a growing presence on campus and growing integration, black students elected to leadership positions in the general student body are called ugly names and black students are still being told in a number of ways that they don’t belong at MU. We still have a race problem at MU.

But let’s be clear. We don’t have a problem with black students. We have a problem with white racism. That problem needs to be faced squarely. Yet from our Board of Curators and our legislators, I am hearing a concerted effort to deflect attention from the core issue.

Enter Professor Melissa Click. Victoria Johnson wrote an excellent summary in the Jan. 26 Tribune of the context for Click’s recent notoriety, which I won’t repeat here. Click’s photograph and her out-of-context statement seeking to keep a photographer out of an area occupied by students “went viral,” giving people opposed to the Concerned Student 1950 occupation an opportunity to rally and “change the narrative.” They took what should have been a very small incident and blew it out of proportion. Suddenly extreme right-wing legislators were calling for her dismissal, making her, rather than racism, the issue.
The fact that Professor Click was under extreme stress when she did something out of character, the fact that she apologized, the fact that she lost a courtesy appointment in the School of Journalism and the fact that the university was undertaking an investigation all notwithstanding, Sen. Kurt Schaefer led an attack on her, demanding her head. He was ill informed at best, mendacious at worst. Either way, his demands threatened the well-being of everyone at the university. Were they successful, they would have undermined the governance procedures of the university to a point where faculty would feel threatened.

MU has always had a Board of Curators that is politicized. Unlike the boards of strong universities in other states, who use their power to mobilize resources for the institution, our board likes to meddle in its internal affairs. Regrettably, and true to form, the board convened a special secret meeting to make matters worse by suspending Professor Click. Instead of allowing institutional procedures to play out, they elected to support the political agenda of Sen. Schaefer and his ilk.

Much has been said about the reputation of MU after the Concerned Student 1950 actions. My soundings suggest the following, based on my contacts in other universities across the country. The Concerned Student 1950 occupation was a positive event. It started a much-needed conversation about racism at MU that could only make us a better place. It triggered similar events at other schools, including in the Ivy League, giving our campus a leadership position nationally. People spoke positively about the students at MU and the way in which we were confronting racism.

The damage to the reputation of MU has come from the demands of our state legislature, their inappropriate intervention into the internal affairs of the institution and the abject failure of the Board of Curators to stand firm against those demands. MU is now seen as a place where institutional integrity has been undermined. Let’s hope the board steps back, reassesses its role and rescinds its regrettable action.

The one bright spot is the new campus administration. Judging from Chancellor Hank Foley’s State of the University address, steps are being taken to deal with the core issue, making MU a place where everyone can feel safe, supported and challenged. Let’s hope the Board of Curators and the state legislature mend their ways and lend appropriate support.

Andrew C. Twaddle is a professor emeritus of sociology at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

MISSOURIAN

What you need to know about the UM System's proposed retiree insurance changes

LIV PAGGIARINO, Feb 5, 2016
COLUMBIA — **A University of Missouri System committee has recommended changes to the system's retiree health insurance plan that would reduce how much the system pays for future retirees’ health insurance.**

If the changes pass, a portion of retirement benefits eligible employees who currently work at the university will receive a fixed annual subsidy instead of a proportional one, and newly hired employees with less than five years of service by the end of next year will not have access to employer-sponsored retirement benefits at all.

Public forums will be held in February and March for people to provide feedback to the proposed changes. Forum dates for Columbia will be posted soon.

The UM System Board of Curators will vote on the recommendations in the spring or summer, UM Interim President Mike Middleton said in a video announcement last week. He said the board will take no action until UM employees have had the chance to voice their opinions. The committee presented the draft of the plan to the curators on Thursday.

The recommendations come from a January report by the Total Rewards Advisory Committee, or TRAC, which was created in May to advise the system. The 16-member committee is made up of UM faculty, staff and retirees and is chaired by Kelley Stuck, interim vice president for human resources.

MU Interim Chancellor Hank Foley sent an email this week supporting the recommendations. He said the changes would allow the system to continue spending money on "what employees have identified as most important: pay, access to insurance during their employment, and the ability to save for retirement."

According to the TRAC report, the committee consulted focus groups of faculty, staff and retirees to gauge which types of insurance coverage UM should prioritize.

What is UM’s current retiree health insurance policy?
Once eligible for retirement, employees have a choice of which retirement plan to use. UM provides Medicare-eligible retirees with three coverage choices and pre-Medicare retirees with two. Only those eligible to retire are able to access retirement insurance.

According to the committee’s report, UM pays up to 73 percent of the monthly premium for retirement benefits. Those taking early retirement receive lower pensions and reduced subsidy from UM compared with those who retire later.

UM provides subsidies, or payments toward health services, to retirees at a percentage rate that the system calculates specifically for each employee. The percentage varies among employees depending on age and years of service.

What would change?

The committee recommends decreasing the amount UM will pay for retiree medical insurance benefits after most active employees reach retirement eligibility.

The recommendations would change percentage subsidies for early retirement employees to fixed annual subsidies for medical, dental and vision insurance.

Regardless of when an employee plans to retire, he or she must fulfill three criteria to qualify for any UM-sponsored insurance subsidy:

Be eligible for benefits with at least five years of service before Jan. 1, 2018.

Be at least 60 on his or her retirement date.

Have at least 20 years of service to the UM System on his or her retirement date.

If the employee meets all three requirements, then he or she qualifies for UM coverage and a subsidy of some sort. The type of subsidy, percentage or fixed, would depend on years of service and age:
If the years of service and age add up to 80 or more before Jan. 1, 2018, the employee’s subsidy will continue to be calculated with percentage system.

If the years of service and age add up to less than 80 before Jan. 1, 2018, the employee’s subsidy will become a fixed annual payment of $100 per year of service, up to a maximum of $2,500.

Employees hired on or after Jan. 1, 2018, will not be eligible for any retiree health insurance benefits.

Who would be affected by the change?

Active employees who aren’t close to retiring or who have not worked long enough at UM would be most negatively affected by the changes.

Some active employees would receive the same UM coverage and percentage subsidy as those who have already retired. If they choose to purchase UM coverage, others would receive a fixed annual subsidy depending on how many years they have served.

Anyone who has already retired from the UM System and receives UM insurance benefits won't be affected by the changes.

The committee report said about 30 percent of UM retirees decline using UM coverage because they found other coverage. Employees will still have the option to use other coverage if they so choose.

Why is the UM System recommending a change?

UM’s Total Rewards Advisory Committee has determined the system cannot keep sponsoring retiree medical insurance and continue to provide benefits to retirees without running out of money.

According to the committee’s report, the UM System will incur a $4.5 billion budget deficit by 2045 if it continues to pay the subsidies using the current percentage subsidy system.
“Given the current state of the University’s revenue sources, retiree insurance is an option UM cannot afford without salary reductions, other significant benefit cuts, and possibly reductions in resources for other campus priorities,” the report said.

What would stay the same?

The recommendations do not restrict current employees’ access to insurance while they still work at UM.

The committee emphasized that it will not have to change anything in regards to the current pension plan, because it is “stable and well-funded.”

UM does not propose to change the criteria for retirement eligibility. UM considers an employee eligible for early retirement once the employee reaches age 55 and has 10 years of service or age 60 with five years of service. To meet eligibility requirements for full retirement, an employee must reach age 62 with at least 25 years of experience or simply reach age 65.
Forwards Jakeenan Gant and Russell Woods were suspended from the Missouri men’s basketball team on Friday after both received citations for possession of drug paraphernalia.

Gant, a sophomore, and Woods, a junior, will miss Missouri’s game at Alabama on Saturday and their status with the program will be reevaluated next week, according to the MU athletic department.

Columbia Police Department detectives executed a search warrant Jan. 15 at the residence Gant and Woods share with two other men. The warrant was issued in connection with an armed home invasion robbery on Dec. 9 in Columbia.

Neither Gant nor Woods was the target of the robbery investigation, but detectives found two marijuana smoking devices in Gant’s bedroom and two more in Woods’ bedroom during the search. Gant and Woods both turned themselves in to Columbia police Thursday and were released on a signature summons. Possession of drug paraphernalia is a Class A misdemeanor under Missouri statues.

Mizzou athletics released a statement Friday afternoon:

“Student-athletes Jakeenan Gant and Russell Woods were notified earlier today they have been suspended for tomorrow’s game at Alabama, per athletic department policy. Their status with the program will be reevaluated next week.”

Columbia police arrested one of the robbery suspects, Koran Ward, 19, who lives with Gant, Woods and another man. The search uncovered items stolen in the Dec. 9 armed robbery and Ward was arrested on suspicion of first-degree robbery and unlawful use of a weapon. His bond was set at $54,500, according to the Columbia Daily Tribune.

Detectives also found marijuana or drug paraphernalia in the two other residents’ bedrooms.

Gant — a four-star prospect originally from Springfield, Ga., who was ranked No. 52 in the nation by Rivals when he signed with the Tigers — is averaging 4.5 points and 3.5 rebounds this season, which ranks seventh and fourth on the team, respectively. Woods, a Chicago native and junior college transfer from John A. Logan College, is averaging 3.5 points and 3.0 rebounds in his first season at Mizzou.
Together, Gant and Woods averaged 30 minutes per game. With both players unavailable at Alabama at 2 p.m. Saturday, the Tigers are left with only one scholarship reserve forward on the roster, D’Angelo Allen, who averages 2.1 points and 2.2 rebounds in 9.2 minutes per game.

The suspensions might mean additional playing time for freshman walk-on Adam Wolf, who has only appeared in four games this season. He’s a 6-foot-7 forward from Beaver Dam, Wisc.

This is the third time Gant will be held out of action at Missouri. In Sept. 2014, Gant was suspended briefly along with Allen after both were charged with a peace disturbance, stemming from an altercation in downtown Columbia. Gant also missed the first nine games of his freshman season during an investigation into his eligibility.

Gant took part in a summer internship program at T3 Technologies in Georgia in 2014 and was paid for work not performed, an impermissible benefit under NCAA rules. Three other former Missouri student-athletes — Jordan Clarkson, Tony Criswell and Cam Biedscheid — also took part in the internship program during the previous summer, allegations that led to the basketball team’s self-imposed sanctions.

Mizzou athletics announced a one-year postseason ban, scholarship reductions and recruiting restrictions among other penalties Jan. 13 and the NCAA’s final report, including possible additional penalties, is expected to be released this spring.

**MISSOURIAN**

**UPDATE: Two Missouri basketball players suspended after being arrested Thursday**

RYAN KOHN AND RYAN WILLIAMSON, Feb 5, 2016

COLUMBIA — Missouri sophomore forward Jakeenan Gant and junior center Russell Woods were arrested by the Columbia Police Department on Thursday.
Gant and Woods were arrested at 10 a.m. Thursday at 600 E. Walnut St. on suspicion of possession of drug paraphernalia but were released on a signature summons, according to a release from the Columbia Police Department.

The team announced Friday that Gant and Woods will not play when the Tigers take on Alabama in Tuscaloosa on Saturday and their status with the team will be re-evaluated next week.

According to the report, detectives secured a search warrant for the home of Gant and Woods on Jan. 15. At that time, the team was in Columbia, South Carolina for a game.

The detectives were looking to locate and preserve evidence pertaining to a home robbery. Koran Ward, a roommate, was a suspect in the robbery. According to a release from the Columbia Police Department, the Columbia Police SWAT team was asked to participate in the search because two of the suspects in the robbery case were carrying firearms. Ward, 19, is not a student at MU, according to the MU student database.

While searching the players' home, detectives found two "marijuana smoking devices" in each of Gant and Woods' bedrooms.

Ward was arrested on Jan. 15 for robbery in the first degree and for unlawful use of weapons felony. His bond was set at $4,500. Woods and Gant's arrests came 20 days after the search.

Jarrett Thomas, another person living in the house, was arrested at the same time. Thomas, a junior at MU, was arrested for possession of drug paraphernalia and was also released on a signature summons.

Woods is in his first season with the Tigers after transferring from John A. Logan Community College in Illinois and has not been suspended from the team previously.

This is the third time Gant has been suspended from the team. The sophomore forward was suspended after being arrested in September 2014 on suspicion of third-degree assault along with fellow Missouri basketball player D'Angelo Allen. Gant was later charged with peace
disturbance in November 2014 and was placed on two years unsupervised probation. Thursday's arrest appears to be a violation of that probation.

Gant returned to the team Oct. 1, 2014, but ended up missing the first nine games of the 2014-15 season due to an eligibility issue.

Without Woods and Gant, Missouri will have just three scholarship power forwards active against Alabama. The Tigers have lost seven consecutive games, including Wednesday's 76-73 loss to Mississippi. The two men combined for just two points and three rebounds in 17 minutes against the Rebels.

Local angel investment firm expands focus

By Alicia Stice

Saturday, February 6, 2016 at 12:00 am

Tensive Controls CEO Jake Halliday stood before about 50 potential investors last Tuesday and asked for nearly half a million dollars.

He spoke for about 20 minutes and made the case for an investment in his peptide-based drug company. Then the questions started.

“Either the question is seeking more information on something that was maybe glossed over in the presentation or challenging questions where they may believe there’s something you didn’t think of and point that out,” he said. “I enjoy that aspect of it.”

Sometime in the next week or so, Halliday expects to learn what the investors thought of his pitch and whether they are willing to shell out cash to help him promote Tensive Controls’ platform technology. The company uses peptide compounds rather than traditional drugs to treat wasting disease in cancer subjects.

“There are over 500 peptide drugs in development — 140 in clinical trials — and companies and organizations advancing those drugs don’t know yet that we could make their drug work better,” he said. “That’s part of going to conventions and research meetings and to business developments where those people are present.”
This financial courting ritual is part of the monthly meetings held by Centennial Investors, a local angel investment firm that infuses Missouri startups with cash they need to build prototypes, market their products and, hopefully, deliver sizable returns to members who helped front the initial costs. About two weeks ago, group members voted to take their efforts a step further by creating an accelerator fund to nurture young companies that might not be ready to come to them for the high-level investments sought by firms such as Tensive Controls.

Many of the companies who have worked with Centennial Investors rent space in the MU Life Science Incubator at Monsanto Place — Centennial Investors also rents office space in the building — and some have experienced tremendous success. Centennial Investors President Bruce Walker holds up Newsy as a prime example as one of the group’s more fruitful investments.

Newsy.com is a news video site that aggregates and analyzes news content from a variety of sources that moved to Columbia from San Francisco. The company sold to The E.W. Scripps Co. in 2013 for $35 million.

This helps mark an expansion in the firm’s focus. The group was founded to bolster Mid-Missouri companies but now considers possible deals from firms across the state, including companies from St. Louis and Kansas City. The hope is that, in addition to recouping their investments multiple times over, the members of Centennial Investors will help stimulate the local economy by infusing young companies with the money they need to grow and hire employees.

“If it weren’t for Centennial, there would be no money at all here in Columbia for startups,” Missouri Innovation Center President Bill Turpin said. “Almost all the life science companies are here in the incubator because Centennial invested in them ... and helped them get to the stage we’re at now.”

BRANCHING OUT

In 2005, the Columbia Chamber of Commerce prepared to celebrate its 100th anniversary. At the time, Walker said, a group of savvy investors started to talk about how to best use the occasion to make a difference in the Columbia entrepreneurial community rather than simply commemorate the anniversary with a party. Centennial Investors was born out of those conversations, and in the years since, it has invested in 20 different companies.

Equinoxis, a company that has developed tools for detecting lameness in horses, was the group’s first investment. After Centennial Investors bought a 10 percent stake in the company for $327,500, Equinoxis was able to develop prototypes and start marketing the product, General Manager Andy Wolter said.

“Within a year, we were actually making some sales, which was pretty great,” Wolter said.

The pace of investments has picked up in the past few years, Walker said, in part because the group has actively sought out companies that might be a good fit and encouraged them to apply
and in part because the group has gained notoriety in science and technology circles. The shift means more companies are applying for funding and pitching their ideas to the group’s members in the hopes of getting a helping hand.

Since the group formed more than a decade ago, it has broadened its focus both in terms of geography and startup stage.

“We’re not interested in deals from” Arkansas or California, Walker said. “But if they’re from Missouri, they emanate in Missouri and can legitimately show they have a presence in Missouri, we will look at them.”

He said the group decided to branch out for two reasons: to create a robust flow of investment opportunities for members and to help the rest of Missouri rather than solely the local region.

“We’re not a book club or a fantasy football league,” he said. “We’re not so parochial as to think we don’t want to benefit the rest of the state.”

The group’s recent move to create an accelerator fund means companies early in their development can secure a small amount of seed money to continue their growth.

Once the fund is a reality, startups will be able to apply for $50,000 to help get their feet off the ground. Those same entrepreneurs might eventually return to the group for additional funding as their companies grow.

“That’s going to bring a lot of companies out of the woodwork,” Turpin said. “There will be a whole lot more deals that I’ll see, ones ... that will become really good for Centennial investors to look at.”

THOROUGHLY VETTED

When companies knock on the door to Centennial Investors and request tens of thousands of dollars, they know to expect a lengthy process.

First, applications are screened for basic eligibility. Does the company focus on science and technology? Check. Is the company based in Missouri? Check.

Candidates then move on to the screening committee, which examines what the company has already done, its potential and the likelihood it will succeed. If the committee thinks they are a safe enough bet, they forward the company’s request to the board, where investors listen to a presentation similar to Halliday’s.

“If we reach a threshold of about 15 members showing interest ... we peel back the layers of the onion and learn about a firm — where it is now, where it’s headed, what the competition is,” Walker said.
Centennial Investors sometimes relies on the knowledge of members or outside experts, such as cosmetic surgeons who served as consultants before the group decided to invest in EternoGen, a company that produces a collagen-like injection.

If everything is approved, the investors start hammering out the specifics of a deal with the company. This involves going through details about the company’s plans for things such as protecting its intellectual property, commercializing its products and plans to deal with competitors. After expressing tentative interest, investors can decide whether they still want to invest or change the amount they are willing to sink into the company.

Individual members decide whether they want to be part of the investment, though there is no minimum they must contribute. Walker said $5,000 per investor generally is considered a good starting point.

“There’s no single template,” Walker said. “We will look at different kinds of companies, but they have to meet our criteria such that when it comes to membership they can say, ‘Here’s the risk, but I see a greater reward.’”

**FUTURE PLANS**

As the group has evolved, it has nearly doubled the pace of its investments. Its monthly meetings these days are filled with significantly more deal possibilities than a decade ago.

Walker said the group is trying to bolster its presence in the entrepreneurial community, scoping out companies that might be a good fit for investments and encouraging them to apply for funding.

Although the group’s membership has remained steady at about 60 members since its inception, Walker said he hopes that number soon will start to grow.

“We are not proactive as far as getting more members, but we will become proactive,” he said. “I didn’t want to bring new members on board if I could not assure them of robust deal flow.”

**MISSOURIAN**

Volunteers offer free tax help at three Columbia locations

BRIANNA STUBLER, Feb 6, 2016

COLUMBIA — It’s never too early to start filing taxes — especially when you can get help for free.
Every year, the state of Missouri provides tax help to those who qualify, and three sites are open in Columbia.

**On Wednesday at the MU Office for Financial Success in Stanley Hall, volunteers were already experiencing an influx of people looking for tax help.**

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, certified by the IRS, provides help to the home-bound and people with low income, disabilities or non-native English speakers. Tax assistance will be offered through April 16.

The volunteers, including MU students in law and financial planning courses, work in four-hour shifts.

"We started at 3:30 and will be here until 7:30," Bill Skiles said Wednesday. "We've had probably 25 or so come through so far. This room has been filled the entire day."

To qualify, the individual’s income must be less than $54,000, and some VITA locations have additional requirements.

Anyone looking for assistance must bring the following documents: Social Security card, a routing and account number for direct deposit, a photo ID and W-2 forms.

VITA sites can also electronically file taxes.

The three sites in Columbia and the hours are:

- The MU Office for Financial Success in Stanley Hall, 3:30 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturdays.
- The MU School of Law, 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. Mondays.
- The Family Impact Center, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Wednesdays.

Assistance is available on a first-come, first-served basis.
"It could be 20 minutes or it could be an hour and a half, depending on how many people are ahead of you," Skiles said. "Typically, once you get to the stations, it only takes about 25 minutes, if that, just depending on how intricate it is."

New leader of Missouri State NAACP promises more inclusion

The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS - The new leader of the Missouri State NAACP says he plans to build a younger, more inclusive organization that will work for various causes around the state.

Nimrod "Rod" Chapel Jr., 45, elected last month as the 14th President of the Missouri State NAACP, said he looks forward to moving the organization forward, giving it a bigger voice statewide and opening to other progressive groups and younger people, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

"A lot of the challenges come from the graying of our membership," Chapel said. "Younger people like millennials have the same objectives, but the way they express themselves is not the same."

Chapel replaced Mary Ratliff, who stepped down after 30 years. He said it is essential to include leaders of groups such as Black Lives Matter, which rose to prominence after the Ferguson police shooting of Michael Brown, and Concerned Student 1950, which organized protests at the University of Missouri that ultimately led to the resignation of university system President Timothy M. Wolfe.
"There is room in the organization, and we need to make sure they know that," Chapel said.

Chapel has also named a new executive committee that includes former Gov. Bob Holden and lawyer and radio talk show host Jane Dueker. Dueker is believed to be the first white female on the governing board in the Missouri chapter's 107-year history.

Chapel has been a longtime leader of the Jefferson City chapter and Ratliff oversaw the neighboring Columbia chapter, in addition to her role as state president. Both plan to keep their city branch positions, and Ratliff will remain on the executive board while Chapel serves as president.

"Rod and I are not close, but I can work with anybody working in civil rights and doing the right things," Ratliff said.

Chapel has also promised to reach out to other organizations fighting for similar causes, such as abolishing the death penalty and overhauling the court system. One of his first calls was to Charles Smith, president of the Missouri National Education Association.

"It's the first time the NAACP has reached out to me as an organization, with 35,000 members. It's all about working together. Together, we accomplish more," Smith said.

The Rev. B.T. Rice, a vice president of the St. Louis County NAACP chapter, said he looks forward to Chapel's leadership.

"I think he will really bring some good, fresh leadership," Rice said.

**MISSOURIAN**

Schaefer campaign funds outmatch Hawley's; Hawley points to 'culture of corruption'

ALLEN FENNEWALD, Feb 5, 2016
COLUMBIA — **State Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, who has been accused of trying to keep his opponent out of the race for attorney general, has raised almost three times as much as Josh Hawley for his campaign.**

As of Jan. 15, Schaefer had raised $2.48 million, including $500,000 from St. Louis businessman Rex Sinquefield.

In a highly publicized letter, former UM System President Tim Wolfe accused Schaefer of pressuring him to keep Hawley, an MU law professor, from running for attorney general by denying him leave of absence from the university.

According to Wolfe's letter, "Kurt Schaefer had several meetings with me pressuring me to take away Josh Hawley's right to run for Attorney General by taking away an employee's right to ask for an unpaid leave of absence when running for public office."

Schaefer denied Wolfe's accusation in other media reports, saying he told Wolfe the university should follow proper procedure. Hawley said he is taking an unpaid leave of absence to campaign for the Republican nomination for attorney general against Schaefer.

Schaefer also chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee, which oversees and reports on the distribution of public funds, including money allocated to the UM System. He did not respond to numerous Missourian requests by phone and email for comment.

If Wolfe's claims against Schaefer are accurate, Hawley and his campaign manager, Daniel Hartman, said the senator's attempt to pressure the former president for political gain is indicative of a "culture of corruption," fostered by the influence of lobbyists in Jefferson City politics.

Hartman said Hawley will work to correct this corruption if elected, setting him apart from Schaefer in that respect.
"Lobbyists in Jefferson City hold way too much influence over elected officials," Hartman said. "There are absolutely no limits to the freebies that lobbyists can give to elected officials. Josh can't be bought. There's one of the biggest changes right there — the lobbyists aren't on our side. The Jefferson City cartel is firmly against Josh in that respect."

Fellow law professor and Faculty Council chair Ben Trachtenberg said Hawley took the proper steps in applying for and receiving the leave.

"(In) the collective rules and regulations ... I believe it specifically states that if you are going to run for office, you must take unpaid leave, which strongly implies that running for office is a legitimate reason to request unpaid personal leave," Trachtenberg said.

Hawley said he would have continued to campaign had his leave been denied.

"I decided many months ago, when I first entered this race, that I was not going to allow dirty tricks to deter me from running a campaign about the issues, and I continue to stand by that," he said.

Hartman said the candidate has been on prospective unpaid leave since the end of May, before beginning his campaign, as per an Office of the Provost recommendation.

"There is only one candidate in this race receiving a taxpayer-funded salary," Hartman said, implying that while Hawley is on unpaid leave during his campaign, Schaefer continues to work as a state senator.

If elected, Hawley said his office would not accept gifts from lobbyists.

Schaefer's office is ranked seventh among Missouri legislators for the greatest amount of gifts received from lobbyists within the past two years, a grand total of $10,071, including 2014 Cotton Bowl tickets from AT&T worth about $900, according to the St. Louis Public Radio's Lobbying Missouri program.
Students discover the quiet, subtle benefits of meditation

NICK JORDAN, Feb 5, 2016

COLUMBIA — Eight students removed their shoes and filed into a dark room in the basement of MU’s St. Thomas More Newman Center on a recent Monday afternoon.

They silenced their phones, removed their backpacks and placed them in the cubbies near the doorway.

Each student picked a few pillows off the top of a pile. Some chose three, some two. The number didn’t matter. The point was to get comfortable.

As they made their way toward the center of the room, pillows in hand, they passed a quote from the Dalai Lama painted on the wall: “Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.”

Gently, the students — some beginners and some experienced — found a comfortable sitting position on their pillows. One is from Nigeria, another from Russia. Two MU women’s basketball players were also there. The game the day before didn't matter because the past doesn't matter. This was about becoming mindful of the present.

A bell rang and the students closed their eyes.

The meditation began.

An on-campus community

Maybe it's enough that for 30 minutes a couple times each week a growing number of students at MU aren't looking at their smartphones. No texts, no alerts, no email. Just silence and breathing, eyes closed.
But it's more than that.

It's also stress reduction and, potentially, a way to manage anxiety with no or less medication.

“(The classes) are kind of these really wonderful, life-changing experiences for the students,” said Terry Wilson, the director of Health Promotion and Wellness at the MU Student Health Center.

The center offers noon meditation every weekday in addition to three weekly for-credit classes in meditation. The sessions are held in the Contemplative Practice Center in the basement of the Newman Center.

Dominique Malebranche, an MU graduate student and instructor for the noon meditation sessions on Mondays, said meditation participation is trending upward.

“Our credit courses are always filled every semester,” Menarche said. “More people are learning about it and wanting to get a feel of how it actually impacts our lives.”

Wilson said the department no longer needs to advertise the for-credit classes, which began in 2005. The three classes often have wait lists because interest is growing via word of mouth.

Although each class focuses on different components, they all employ mindfulness meditation techniques.

Wilson tries to get students focused at the start of every class. She reminds them to be in their body because the body is always in the present moment.

“It’s the mind that takes you forward and backward,” Wilson said. “When the mind goes into the future, it’s the unknown. And that’s where the anxiety comes up.”

An alternative option
Anxiety is high among college students. A 2012 study from the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors found that 42 percent of college students reported experiencing anxiety. It’s so prevalent on MU’s campus that the Counseling Center has had problems keeping up with the demand for its services, according to previous Missourian reporting.

Wilson said the Counseling Center does refer students to the Contemplative Practice Center for help with stress management through meditation and mindful yoga. It’s part of MU’s integrative model — getting the medical, Behavioral Health and Health Promotion and Wellness services to work together to best meet each student’s needs.

Mitch Feyerherm, an MU freshman and frequent participant in the noon meditation sessions, said meditation helps free him from patterns of thinking that can overwhelm him.

“I do think (meditation) is a really good way to deal with stress in a very constructive way that isn’t medication or anything,” Feyerherm said.

Wilson has noticed the benefits for students. Based on what some students say in class discussions and individual assignments, all three of the classes help reduce stress, anxiety and depression, she said.

Scientific research supports meditation as an alternative or addition to medication for reducing stress and anxiety. A 2014 meta-analysis of 47 clinical trials, published in the National Center for Biotechnology Information, found some evidence that mindfulness meditation lessens anxiety, depression and pain after eight weeks. The benefits were comparable with what would be expected from the use of antidepressants but without the associated side effects.

An evolving practice

Wilson said Health Promotion and Wellness began offering meditation classes for students in 2002.
But there was a problem. At first, students didn’t recognize the benefits of meditation were cumulative, so they were giving up on the classes too quickly, she said.

“(The students) would come because (the class description) said 'stress reduction,' and then the second class they were like, ‘This is not stress reduction,’” Wilson said.

Within a few years, the department decided to turn the classes into courses for credit, tied to a grade. That meant students were more motivated to stick it out.

“It takes about the third or fourth class before all the light bulbs start going off, “ Wilson said. “And then it’s no turning back — they really begin to understand this can work.”

For Feyerherm, part of learning meditation has entailed becoming aware of the ups and downs of his own practice and that the benefits are inconsistent.

“With meditation it’s like I can feel all these wonderful revelations about the way that I am seeing the world," he said. "And then, there can be a week where I am just sitting there it feels like nothing.”

The changes are subtle, but before long, Feyerherm realized that he could change his whole mindset in a shorter period of time.

And it's not the kind of educational experience that's over when the course ends, Wilson said. Many students who've finished the course go to the noon meditation to help keep their practice going in a group setting.

Wilson said the majority of students find the course to be a very positive experience.

“They learn they don’t have to be stressed, they don’t have to be anxious,” she said. “There is a possibility to live a more peaceful life.”

But the benefits go both ways.
“It’s really inspiring when you get the feedback from the students,” Wilson said. “It’s so rewarding to share this practice with them.”