Police video shows Missouri professor Melissa Click facing off with cops during 2015 homecoming parade protest

Confronting a student journalist wasn’t the first time University of Missouri Columbia assistant professor Melissa Click showed off her fiery attitude.

Click picked a beef with Columbia cops, who captured the encounter on a body camera during a Concerned Student 1950 protest at the school’s homecoming parade in October, according to the Missourian.

The police video shows Click linking arms with fellow protesters and then heaving herself between a wall of demonstrators and a police officer asking the group to get out of the street. The group had surrounded a firetruck red 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle transporting former UM System President Tim Wolfe and his wife during the parade.

The Oct. 10 stunt brought the parade to a halt, prompting police to confront the protesters.

During the incident, Click went face-to-face with a police officer and asked him to “back up,” the video obtained by the Columbia, Mo., newspaper shows.

The showdown prompted another police officer to place his right hand on Click’s arm, a moment that prompted Click to fire back with profanities.

“Get your f***ing hands off me,” Click retorted.

The incident was a surprise to University of Missouri Interim Chancellor Hank Foley, who received a letter signed by 117 Republican lawmakers demanding Click’s termination. Foley was aware of Click’s Nov. 9 confrontation calling for “muscle” to remove a photographer seeking access to a Carnahan Quadrangle tent city, and is calling the latest video another example of her misconduct.

“Her conduct and behavior are appalling,” Foley said in a statement. “I am not only disappointed, I am angry, that a member of our faculty acted this way.”

Foley pledged to take the new video to the Board of Curators, a six-person group already investigating Click’s behavior.
Click also faces a misdemeanor assault charge for the November incident.

Despite being suspended from the Columbia school pending the board’s probe, Click hopes to keep her job.

She acknowledged making a “mistake” during her heated encounter with Mark Schierbecker. As for the latest video — that was her first foray in activism, she told the Missourian.

“I’ve never done anything like that before,” Click said.

Interim MU chancellor calls Melissa Click’s behavior in new video appalling

By Robert A. Cronkleton

University of Missouri interim chancellor Hank Foley on Sunday called Melissa Click’s conduct appalling after video was released this weekend showing her confronting Columbia police in a protest last fall.

Foley’s comment was in reaction to a video posted to The Columbia Missourian’s YouTube channel of the university’s homecoming parade in October.

“Last night, like many in our community, I watched newly released footage of Dr. Melissa Click directing a verbal assault against members of the Columbia Police Department during the homecoming parade in October 2015,” Foley said in the statement posted to the MU News Bureau.

“Her conduct and behavior are appalling, and I am not only disappointed, I am angry, that a member of our faculty acted this way. Her actions caught on camera last October, are just another example of a pattern of misconduct by Dr. Click — most notably, her assault on one of our students while seeking ‘muscle’ during a highly volatile situation on Carnahan Quadrangle in November.

“We must have high expectations of members of our community, and I will address these new revelations with the Board of Curators as they work to complete their own review of the matter.”

The Missourian obtained the video through an open records request and published the video Saturday. The video shows footage from two police officers’ body cameras. A camera Click cursing an officer. (Warning: The video contains explicit language.)
Click, an assistant professor of communications, was suspended after she was charged with assault in clashes with a student journalist at the height of student protests over racial issues at MU in November.

Click was caught on video calling for “some muscle” to remove a journalist from the quadrangle. She agreed to a deal late last month to avoid prosecution by doing community service and staying out of trouble for a year.

A new video has emerged to put a University of Missouri communications professor back in the center of controversy.

KMIZ.TV in Columbia reports that a new video featuring communications professor Melissa Click shows her in a confrontation with Columbia police during last fall's homecoming parade.

During the parade on Oct. 10, members of Concerned Student 1950 stood in front of former UM System President Tim Wolfe's car blocking him from moving forward.

After several minutes of protest, community members begin to stand in support with Concerned Student 1950, including Click.

In newly surfaced police body camera video, Click can be seen stepping between officers and members of Concerned Student 1950 while yelling at officers, KMIZ reports.

Video of Click's latest confrontation comes as a Texas public relations firm has started working with the professor in an attempt to repair her image. Status Labs of Texas has attempted to portray a more favorable images of Click to students and faculty on social media. The firm also has tried to feed a positive view of the professor on Google search results.

The latest video indicates the PR firm may face an uphill battle. Interim University Chancellor Hank Foley released a statement regarding the video Sunday evening.

“Last night, like many in our community, I watched newly released footage of Dr. Melissa Click directing a verbal assault against members of the Columbia Police Department during the homecoming parade in October 2015. Her conduct and behavior are appalling, and I am not only disappointed, I am angry, that a member of our faculty acted this way. Her actions caught on camera last October, are just another example of a pattern of misconduct by Dr. Click—most notably, her assault on one of our students while seeking ‘muscle’ during a highly volatile situation on Carnahan Quadrangle in November. We must have high expectations of members of
Interim University of Missouri Chancellor Hank Foley issued a written statement Sunday night responding to newly released police body camera video of MU Communications Professor Melissa Click in a confrontation with police after a demonstration by the group Concerned Student 1950 at the MU Homecoming Parade.

Here is Foley's complete statement:

“Last night, like many in our community, I watched newly released footage of Dr. Melissa Click directing a verbal assault against members of the Columbia Police Department during the homecoming parade in October 2015. Her conduct and behavior are appalling, and I am not only disappointed, I am angry, that a member of our faculty acted this way. Her actions caught on camera last October, are just another example of a pattern of misconduct by Dr. Click—most notably, her assault on one of our students while seeking ‘muscle’ during a highly volatile situation on Carnahan Quadrangle in November. We must have high expectations of members of our community, and I will address these new revelations with the Board of Curators as they work to complete their own review of the matter.”

The UM Board of Curators suspended Click with pay last month pending an investigation into her actions last fall. Click began doing interviews with local media outlets this week for the first time since a video of her confronting students trying to record demonstrators on campus unleashed a firestorm of criticism. Last month, more than 100 state legislators issued a joint statement calling for Click to be fired from her position at the University.

Previously, Foley had been more muted in his criticism of Click, saying she would go through a tenure review process as she would have if none of this had happened last semester.
Missouri chancellor, curators to confer over new video

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The interim chancellor of the University of Missouri says a new video shows "appalling" behavior from an assistant professor who was suspended for run-ins with student journalists during university protests last year and warrants a conversation with the university system's governing board.

The new video, which is from two police body cameras and was obtained through a public records request by the Columbia Missourian (http://bit.ly/1TkWLR3), shows the school's Homecoming parade in October, where demonstrators blocked then-system President Tim Wolfe's vehicle. In the video, assistant communications professor Melissa Click tells police to "get your hands off the children" and curses at an officer who grabbed her shoulder.

As Columbia police pushed protesters onto the sidewalk, Click hugged students and spoke with them before stepping between Missouri graduate student Jonathan Butler, who later went on a hunger strike, and an officer.

"I remember thinking, stupidly, that if as a white person I put myself in front of the students, that maybe they wouldn't push me," Click told the newspaper.

The University of Missouri's protests were spurred by what activists said was administrators' indifference to racial issues. The protests escalated in November, when video showed Click calling for "some muscle" to remove a student videographer from a protest at the university. The Columbia chancellor and Wolfe later resigned.

Click, who was suspended last month, was charged with misdemeanor assault, though a prosecutor said he'll drop the matter if she completes community service.

Foley said Sunday night in a statement that the footage showed a "pattern of misconduct."

"Her conduct and behavior are appalling, and I am not only disappointed, I am angry, that a member of our faculty acted this way," he said, adding later, "We must have high expectations of members of
our community, and I will address these new revelations with the Board of Curators as they work to complete their own review of the matter."

MU Interim Chancellor reacts to newly released Melissa Click video


COLUMBIA - Interim Chancellor Hank Foley released a statement Sunday night regarding a newly released video showing Melissa Click getting into an argument with Columbia police officers at the Mizzou Homecoming parade back in October.

The body camera video (see below) of one Columbia police officer obtained by the Columbia Missourian shows Click telling the officers to "back off" when she was trying to protect protesters who stood in front of former UM System President Tim Wolfe's car.

Foley said:

"Last night, like many in our community, I watched newly released footage of Dr. Melissa Click directing a verbal assault against members of the Columbia Police Department during the homecoming parade in October 2015. Her conduct and behavior on this video as well as the video from the events on Nov. 9 are not consistent with that which is expected of a faculty member. We must have high expectations of members of our community, and I will address these new revelations with the Board of Curators as they work to complete their review of the matter."

During MU’s Homecoming parade students wearing shirts that stated "1839 was built on my b(l)ack" locked arms and stood in front of Wolfe’s car while each told their personal experiences of injustice and racism.

Click has also been under fire after a viral video showed her getting into a confrontation with a student journalist back in November during campus protests.
Click was charged with a misdemeanor third-degree assault on Jan. 25.

Click entered into a "deferred prosecution agreement" with City Prosecutor Stephen Richey on Jan. 29, meaning that Click, in exchange for a promise of future legal conduct and some waived defenses, will only need to do 20 hours of community service work.

If Click violates the terms of this agreement, the city will resume prosecution.

WARNING: The language use in this video could be considered offensive.

MU Chancellor angry after seeing video of Melissa Click confronting Columbia Police

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Interim University of Missouri Chancellor Hank Foley released a statement Sunday evening after video of Dr. Melissa Click surfaced showing her confronting a Columbia Police officer. That video was recorded on an officer's body camera during the 2015 homecoming parade.

"Last night, like many in our community, I watched newly released footage of Dr. Melissa Click directing a verbal assault against members of the Columbia Police Department during the homecoming parade in October 2015. Her conduct and behavior are appalling, and I am not only disappointed, I am angry, that a member of our faculty acted this way. Her actions caught on camera last October, are just another example of a pattern of misconduct by Dr. Click most notably, her assault on one of our students while seeking 'muscle' during a highly volatile situation on Carnahan Quadangle in November. We must have high expectations of members of our community, and I will address these new revelations with the Board of Curators as they work to complete their own review of the matter."

The body camera video was obtained by the Columbia Missourian and posted to YouTube.

KRCG 13 reached to Melissa Click's media contact Lacy Rushin for comment, but we're still waiting for a reply. We also reached out to the Columbia Police Department. Officer Latisha Stroer told KRCG 13 the department doesn't have comment at this time.
MU interim chancellor responds to newly surfaced Melissa Click video


COLUMBIA, Mo. - **A new video featuring University of Missouri communications professor Melissa Click has emerged on the internet showing her in a confrontation with Columbia Police during last fall's homecoming parade.**

During the parade on October 10, members of Concerned Student 1950 stood in front of former UM System President Tim Wolfe's car blocking him from moving forward.

After several minutes of protest, community members begin to stand in support with Concerned Student 1950, including Click.

In newly surfaced police body camera video, Click can be seen stepping between officers and members of Concerned Student 1950 while yelling at officers.

A few weeks ago, ABC 17 News requested any police reports from the department involving Melissa Click. The records department informed ABC 17 News there were no arrests reports involving Click from the homecoming parade.

Interim Chancellor Hank Foley released a statement regarding the video Sunday evening.

“Last night, like many in our community, I watched newly released footage of Dr. Melissa Click directing a verbal assault against members of the Columbia Police Department during the homecoming parade in October 2015. Her conduct and behavior are appalling, and I am not only disappointed, I am angry, that a member of our faculty acted this way. Her actions caught on camera last October, are just another example of a pattern of misconduct by Dr. Click—most notably, her assault on one of our students while seeking ‘muscle’ during a highly volatile situation on Carnahan Quadrangle in November. We must have high expectations of members of our community, and I will address these new revelations with the Board of Curators as they work to complete their own review of the matter.”
OPINION: Actions on quadrangle were spontaneous, instinctive and regrettable

By MELISSA CLICK

Sunday, February 14, 2016 at 12:00 am

My name is Melissa Click. You might only know me from a video recorded at the University of Missouri on Nov. 9. I am deeply sorry for the mistakes I made that day and take full responsibility for my words and actions. I am grateful to have the opportunity to explain my actions on that day and demonstrate that I am more than the character you see in that video.

I have been a professor in the Department of Communication for more than 12 years. I am an educator who cares for MU students regardless of whether they ever set foot in my classes. I first met the members of Concerned Student 1950 at MU’s Homecoming parade. When the parade stopped a few blocks from where I was standing, I approached to get a better look. I encountered an angry crowd responding to the black students who had stepped in front of President Tim Wolfe’s car to ask for change after a semester of racially motivated threats on campus. Deeply moved by the students’ call for equality, I walked into the street to stand with them so they would know they were not alone.

I had very little contact with the group after Homecoming but watched with concern when group member Jonathan Butler announced a hunger strike. After the MU football team lent its support to the strike, I visited the students’ tents on Carnahan Quad to find out what supplies they needed. I learned what they needed most were volunteers to help sort through the many donations they had already received. As a caring faculty member wanting to help any way that I could, I returned to the campsite on Sunday, Nov. 8, to help organize the donations.

Over the course of that day, I saw MU administrators bring the students electricity and heat lamps. I also saw the students, prompted by some contentious interactions, put up signs asking others to respect their tent space as private. Because these signs were prominently placed around the camp and seen by members of MU’s administration who visited, I didn’t question their legitimacy.

I returned on Monday, Nov. 9, to take part in a walkout called for by MU graduate students and faculty. I saw many members of the national press on Carnahan Quad along with many members of the campus community. After President Wolfe’s announcement, the students enthusiastically granted interviews to the journalists present. Soon thereafter, the students requested some quiet
time to gather in their tent space to prepare for a news conference later that day. A spontaneous circle of MU faculty, staff and students developed to help give them that time. After they were told that the students needed to plan their next steps, the overwhelming majority of journalists waited on the Tiger Fountain and the steps of Cornell Hall.

I walked around the circle thanking the volunteers and repeated that the students would resume speaking with journalists shortly. As you know from the video, I also encountered one person, Mark Schierbecker, who had broken through this peaceful, temporary circle. Unlike the numerous professional journalists I had met that day who introduced themselves with their names and affiliations, he introduced himself only as “media.” I felt concerned about why he was inside the circle when the majority of journalists respected the students’ requests for a few quiet moments. The events on campus leading up to this day — including hateful and threatening incidents targeting black students — were heavy on the minds of those of us on the quad. Given this, I believe my concern was warranted, even though my actions that followed were not.

The encounter was a quick one. Having no training in crowd management, I felt overwhelmed and flustered. My regrettable call for “muscle” was not a call for violence but instead a request for more experienced and taller members from the camp to come to my aid. Indeed, in the 12-minute video of this encounter, you can see that two members of the student group peacefully escorted Schierbecker outside the circle. Shortly after, the circle broke up, and the students were swarmed with friends, supporters and journalists.

Journalists had a right to be at Carnahan Quad under the First Amendment, just as I, other faculty and students did that day. The temporary circle around the students was not intended to silence journalists or infringe on anyone’s rights, only to ask for a few moments of respect and courtesy while the students collected their thoughts.

I have watched with shock and dismay as the story surrounding my actions has evolved into a political battle involving the Missouri General Assembly, the UM Board of Curators and people on the Internet. Throughout the tumult of the past three months, I have continued to fulfill my obligations to MU’s students, my department and the campus committees and organizations that I serve. My dedication to MU remains steadfast. These are the things by which I believe I should be judged moving forward.

I truly believe that my 12 years of service and commitment to MU ought not to be judged by one hectic moment in which I acted in exasperation. Evidence of my character can be found in the teaching awards I have won, in the service I have engaged in, and in the quality and outcomes of my scholarship. I love working at MU, and while many people are concerned about the future of MU, I am not. Our university has a bright and promising future, and I want to be a part of it.

Melissa Click is an assistant professor of mass media in the MU Department of Communications.
Suspended Mizzou professor seeks to repair image, keep job

Monday, February 15, 2016

COLUMBIA, Mo. -- A suspended University of Missouri assistant professor who drew national attention for her run-ins with student journalists during race-related protests at the university last year has been working with a public-relations firm to try to repair her image and said she hopes to keep her job.

Melissa Click was caught on video in November calling for "some muscle" to remove student videographer Mark Schierbecker from the protest area at the public university.

Click was suspended pending an investigation. She also was charged with misdemeanor assault, although a prosecutor said he'll drop the matter if she completes community service.

In several interviews, the assistant communications professor has expressed contrition and said she wants to stay at Missouri.

"My mistake is just one part of who I am," she told The Columbia Missourian. "I want to stay at MU. I deserve to be heard, and I deserve to be treated fairly, and I'm going to fight to be treated fairly."

Click’s effort to modify her image is being handled by Status Labs, a Texas-based online reputation management firm. Status Labs contacted Click in January after she was suspended and is helping "get her side of the story out there efficiently," senior media director Lacy Rushin said in an email.

The company has provided black-and-white portraits of her, which contrast with the widely circulated photo of an angry Click pulled from Schierbecker's video. After the interviews, the company plans to try to create a "new media cycle" for Click by feeding new content to the first
Click was filmed Nov. 9 confronting Schierbecker near the Concerned Student 1950 camp after the resignation of former University of Missouri System president Tim Wolfe. She said ordering Schierbecker away from inside a human wall around the camp and calling for "some muscle" to remove him was poor judgment. She said she wasn't aware who Schierbecker was.

"I thought, 'I don't want a camera in my face. I don't know who you are,'" she said. "It was not my best moment. I could have been much more respectful. I should have slowed down."

Click said her call for "some muscle" was meant for people who could help her defuse the situation and never to call for violence.

In suspending Click last month, the university system's governing board of curators ordered an investigation by its general counsel to determine whether additional discipline "is appropriate." The curators set no deadline to finish the investigation. Click's supporters have included faculty members, 116 of whom signed a letter released Jan. 5.

Under the deal Click reached with prosecutors, she must complete 20 hours of community service but faces no jail time or fines if she stays out of trouble for a year.

Melissa Click wants people to understand context of her behavior during demonstrations

By Rudi Keller

Sunday, February 14, 2016 at 12:00 am

Melissa Click, the assistant professor of communication at the University of Missouri who has been in the cross hairs of lawmakers for her actions during student demonstrations on campus in November, said Friday that she wants people to understand the context of her behavior.

In several media interviews last week, and in an op-ed column published in Sunday’s edition of the Tribune, Click has repeated and expanded on the apology she issued Nov. 10.
Click agreed to 20 hours of community service in exchange for deferred prosecution of a misdemeanor assault charge for a confrontation during the November protests with student videographer Mark Schierbecker. The Board of Curators suspended her with pay Jan. 27 while her actions were investigated.

After refusing interviews for several months, Click spoke with the Tribune on Friday. She discussed her actions, the backlash from Republican lawmakers and negotiations with Schierbecker about demands that she make specific admissions in a public apology to him on KBIA radio. She isn’t happy with her suspension or the investigation, she said.

“The curators’ decision to not follow university policy is not only a dangerous precedent for the faculty, generally, but also does, I worry, set up an environment where I cannot be evaluated fairly,” Click said. “I sort of take things one day at a time, and if the worst happens, I have to figure things out when that happens.”

Click and Schierbecker both said they have met with the investigator hired by the UM System on behalf of the curators. The investigator gave no indication of when a report might be sent to the curators, she said.

Click appears in a well-known YouTube video filmed by Schierbecker on Nov. 9 telling him to back away from student demonstrators on Carnahan Quadrangle and requesting “some muscle” to remove him when he refused.

“There are some situations where maybe I am not best in helping, and crowd control is one of them,” Click said.

She said the experience has helped her realize her personal limits and boundaries.

“I think, I hope, many people can identify with making a mistake in a challenging moment,” she said. “I learned taking a “breath before I responded is a good idea. I learned about taking responsibility for your own actions and being humble.”

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, has been one of Click’s harshest critics in the legislature. Schaefer disapproved of the decision to suspend her as indecisive and has lambasted Click’s efforts to apologize.

“After the fact, someone has advised her it would be a good idea,” Schaefer said. “I am not saying it is a capital crime, but it is behavior so egregious that she has to be held accountable.”
Political pressure on University of Missouri curators' investigation troubles Click

By Rudi Keller

Sunday, February 14, 2016 at 12:00 am

The moment that made Melissa Click internationally known also put a target on her back for Republican lawmakers, who called for her firing in December and continued the pressure last week when a House committee chairwoman cited Click’s employment as one reason to deny the University of Missouri a budget increase.

During a state Senate debate the day Click was charged with misdemeanor assault in municipal court, black lawmakers challenged the GOP’s focus on her actions on Nov. 9, when she demanded a white student shooting video leave the demonstration site on Carnahan Quadrangle. They accused fellow lawmakers of channeling white resentment about the outcome of the protests — the resignation of UM President Tim Wolfe and commitment to address their demands — to a target safe from charges of racism.

“I have heard that argument made in several different places,” Click said in an interview Friday. “There is some legitimacy to the argument. I think if we think about the legislature’s concerns about the University of Missouri, I haven’t heard them articulate concern about the issues that black students have raised about feeling unsafe on campus or feeling excluded from the campus community.”

Click, who declined interview requests for more than three months, said it was “hard to sit and listen to everybody … debate my motivation while I was staying quiet.”

She finally consented to several media interviews in the past week and penned a Sunday op-ed column in the Tribune. Click said her recent media blitz is meant to help people understand her, not to justify her actions.

“I have apologized for them. I am apologizing again,” she said. “The harder thing for me is trying to understand why people are resistant to trying to understand the context for my actions. I think we can all agree I should have handled myself better.”

Media attention to the racism protests at MU began to spread beyond the state in the first week of November, after graduate student Jonathan Butler began a hunger strike to highlight Concerned Student 1950’s demands, which included Wolfe’s ouster. The spotlight became white-hot when sports media seized on a tweet by members of the Missouri football team that they would boycott athletic activities in support of the demonstration.

Wolfe resigned Nov. 9, and Butler celebrated by breaking his fast. The demonstrators attempted to create a media-free zone around a protest site on campus soon afterward. Mark Schierbecker,
a history major at MU, said Friday he was using a small camera and not working for any media organization when the demonstrators formed a human wall.

“They all just passed around me because they assumed I wasn’t a threat,” Schierbecker said.

His nearly 13-minute video shows the students advancing toward photojournalist Tim Tai, who was on assignment for ESPN. Tai asserts his First Amendment right to record the events and repeatedly asks the demonstrators to stop pushing him. Click appears in the video telling Tai he has to go.

In her direct confrontation with Schierbecker, Click told him to get out and shouted “I need some muscle over here” when he refused.

Click received about 1,100 emails that day and the next, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported in January. Journalists wrote expressing outrage over her failure to understand the First Amendment. Many people wrote notes demanding she be fired or resign, and some expressed a hope she would be raped or murdered.

The UM Board of Curators suspended Click with pay Jan. 27 while her actions were investigated.

Click said she tried to apologize personally to Schierbecker, who told her he would only accept the apology if she did it on the air at KBIA. The station posted his list of demands for her apology Jan. 25 with an article, after Click was charged with assault. Click had met with a constitutional lawyer, and Schierbecker wanted her to admit wrongdoing and that she had placed him and other students in danger by her actions.

“He wanted me to say particular things that I felt didn’t represent my perspective and potentially opened me up to legal difficulties,” Click said.

The demands were written in the heat of the moment, Schierbecker said, while his inbox was filled with messages from outraged journalists. Schierbecker said he was, in part, mimicking the Concerned Student 1950 demands.

“I no longer agree with most of what I said to her and put in written form,” he said. “As my position has evolved, I felt that I was being unfair in asking her to admit such things as her wrongdoing.”

Click’s workload this semester, before her suspension, was teaching a graduate Topics in Mass Communication course and supervising and mentoring 25 instructors responsible for teaching an undergraduate public speaking course. For the latter duties, she received a waiver of the standard faculty workload for the semester.

Faculty teaching waivers have been a target of legislative activity this year, and Click’s symbolism among critics for university issues extends to the waivers. Most legislative issues
with the university are demands that the school use taxpayer money responsibly, Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said Friday.

“There is clearly a sense, from some faculty members, that the universe they exist in is not the universe the rest of the world lives in,” Schaefer said.

In December, 99 Republican House members and 18 senators signed letters demanding the university fire Click, an assistant professor of communication who is up for tenure at the end of the academic year. Schaefer, a candidate for attorney general, along with state Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia, issued a news release with the letters calling for Click’s termination.

If the university doesn’t do what lawmakers want, he said, the General Assembly will hold the university accountable.

“What compounds it is, even though it is so clearly unacceptable for that environment and wrong for a public employee to do, it has been months and months and the university is stymied,” Schaefer said.

The legislative pressure is the main reason Click worries the investigation initiated by the curators will go against her, she said.

“The Missouri legislature is setting up an environment where I can’t be judged fairly,” she said. “The University of Missouri should be given the trust that it is serving the taxpayers. I work very hard at my teaching and have received awards for my teaching.”

Melissa Click says she'll fight to restore her reputation, keep job

COLUMBIA — MU assistant professor of communication Melissa Click has relied on a network of friends, colleagues and family to survive months of personal threats and formal punishment while fighting to regain her reputation and her job.

Click lay low while conversations about her spread across campus, the nation and the Internet. After receiving legal and public relations advice, she's decided to speak.

Three months since skyrocketing to notoriety for what she sees as her efforts to protect students protesting racism at MU, Click began trying to repair her public persona by giving at least five interviews in three days. To help rehabilitate her reputation and get back in the classroom, Click
has consulted with friends, lawyers and Status Labs, an online reputation management firm in Austin, Texas.

In an interview Friday with the Missourian, Click acknowledged she made a mistake in November and said her actions did not represent who she is. And that she is battling to get back to where and who she was.

"My mistake is just one part of who I am," she said. "I want to stay at MU. I deserve to be heard and I deserve to be treated fairly, and I’m going to fight to be treated fairly. I think it’s everybody’s right to be treated fairly."

Click was filmed Nov. 9 confronting MU student and photographer Mark Schierbecker near the Concerned Student 1950 camp on the Mel Carnahan Quadrangle after the resignation of former University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe. The student activist group set up camp Nov. 2, calling for Wolfe’s removal and supporting graduate student and activist Jonathan Butler, who was on a hunger strike until Wolfe resigned.

Schierbecker's YouTube clip spread across social media, drawing national attention to Click, MU and the state of Missouri and spawning storms of discussion about race relations, First Amendment rights and personal privacy in public places.

She acknowledged that ordering Schierbecker away from inside a human wall around the camp and calling for “some muscle” was poor judgment.

But Click, who also had joined student protesters during MU’s Homecoming parade, didn't rule out protesting with them again; nor did she rule out filing a lawsuit against the UM System Board of Curators, MU or Schierbecker. She said she would not join students in protest if she felt it would endanger others or disrupt an event.

Since Nov. 9, Click has faced the following:

- Death threats, rape threats and calls for her to be jailed and fired.
- Plans to revoke her courtesy appointment with the Missouri School of Journalism; she resigned Nov. 10 before a vote could be taken.
- A Title IX complaint filed against her Nov. 10 by Brian Brooks, a former associate dean of the journalism school; Brooks told the Missourian he thought Click had "proven herself unfit to teach at the University of Missouri."
- A misdemeanor charge of simple assault as a result of Schierbecker’s Nov. 11 complaint with the MU Police Department; the charge was deferred Jan. 29, and Click has been assigned community service.
- A Jan. 4 letter calling for her to be fired, signed by 117 Republican lawmakers and sent to MU Interim Chancellor Hank Foley, Interim UM System President Mike Middleton and the Board of Curators.
- Suspension from her teaching duties and banishment from MU’s campus.
- An investigation launched by the curators while she awaits news on whether she will receive tenure.
Her supporters have included MU faculty members, 116 of whom signed a letter released Jan. 5 in response to the Republican dispatch, and black rights activists, who interrupted a Feb. 4 curators meeting to advocate for Click. The context of her encounter with Schierbecker has been questioned, and the Concerned Student 1950 group has accused university administrators of scapegoating Click and turning her into a sideshow that distracts from the problem of racism on campus.

First, the Homecoming parade

Click, 45, was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and moved around before returning to Harrisonburg to attend James Madison University. She graduated in December 1993 after majoring in retail marketing and fashion merchandising. She was the first James Madison student to earn a minor in women’s studies.

At the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Click went on to study how mass media affects the construction of female identity. As she worked toward her doctorate, she found a best friend in fellow doctoral student Nina Huntemann, now an associate professor at Suffolk University in Boston and director of academics and research at educational technology company EdX.

Click is married to Richard "Chip" Callahan, chairman of MU’s Religious Studies Department. She has a 9-year-old son and 5-year-old twins. On Oct. 10, she and Callahan took the kids to the Homecoming parade. They were standing near the Residence on the Quad at Ninth Street and University Avenue when protesters brought the parade to a halt.

Click said she’s never been pepper-sprayed and doesn’t have a history of public activism, but she felt compelled that day to join the line of black students who stood in the middle of University blocking the red 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle carrying Wolfe and his wife, Molly.

"What (the students) were doing looked very hard on them, and I felt for them," Click said. "And I heard people in the crowd feeling angry with the interruption to the parade and the racial aspect of the message."

She said she felt scared but not angry when she linked arms with a protester and chanted along: "We have nothing to lose but our chains." As Columbia police pushed Butler and others onto the sidewalk, Click hugged students and spoke with them before stepping between Butler and an officer.

"I remember thinking, stupidly, that if as a white person I put myself in front of the students, that maybe they wouldn’t push me," Click said.

In Columbia police body camera footage, the 5-foot-tall Click implored officers for space — "Get your hands off the children" — before stretching her arms out to her sides. Her face filled the camera lens as she demanded that officers back off, and after an officer grabbed her shoulder, she yelled: "Get your fucking hands off me!"
She said she doesn’t remember using profanity. She characterized herself as sensitive to injustice and "empathetic, maybe to a fault." She said she intervened instinctively.

"I’ve never done anything like that before," she said Friday. "But I wanted to help. And maybe I didn’t do the right thing, I don’t know. But I didn’t have a lot of conscious thoughts then."

Then, the camp on Carnahan Quad

Click said she visited the Concerned Student 1950 camp the weekend of Nov. 7-8. Tents overflowed with donations, she said, and she was joined on that Sunday by other faculty members and staff to sort and categorize food, socks, blankets and other supplies.

By Monday, Nov. 9, the camp had become "a frightening place to be," Click said. The fearful atmosphere was caused by months of events, she said, including a pickup driving by the camp while flying a Confederate flag, the discovery Oct. 24 of a fecal swastika on a wall of a Gateway Hall restroom and "many instances of students being called the n-word."

That morning, after Wolfe announced he would step down, people formed a circle with the intent to separate the students in the camp from onlookers and members of the media. Schierbecker filmed a confrontation between MU journalism student and photographer Tim Tai and Janna Basler, an assistant director of Greek Life at MU.

Both Callahan and Click were inside the circle. The tall, skinny Schierbecker slipped through the wall of supporters and walked toward the camp. Again, Click was caught unaware on video.

"I thought, 'I don’t want a camera in my face. I don’t know who you are,'" she said, recalling when she saw Schierbecker. "It was not my best moment. I could have been much more respectful. I should have slowed down."

Click called for "some muscle," a phrase she said "came out of the recesses of my brain." She said the words were meant for people who could help her "defuse the situation" — a task she said had fallen to men at the camp in previous tense circumstances she witnessed.

"I never, ever meant to call for violence. I never wanted anybody hurt," she said. "The circle was intended to be peaceful, and I helped maintain that. I know how it looks, but I’m a nonviolent person. I didn't ever intend for harm to come to Mark at any point."

Coping with the hate

The next day, Nov. 10, Click found her email and phone mailboxes brimming with messages of hate, shaming and danger. Huntemann, her best friend, arrived in Columbia on Nov. 11 to help her friend cope.

Huntemann said she feels compelled to tell her friend she's a good person and her work matters. "She sees the anger and the hate," Huntemann said. "I worry that she might start to internalize it."
The flow of mail hasn’t stopped, Click said, and common themes have emerged: some related to race, some to gender and some saying, "You should be raped," "I hope you die" and "Why don’t you jump in front of a bus."

The horrific tone of the messages was so harsh that one of her advisees volunteered to curate the hate mail so Click wouldn’t have to see it. Postdoctoral fellow Holly Holladay, a former advisee, said she chose MU because of Click’s kindness and scholarly reputation. Because Click "taught me everything I know about being a good teacher," Holladay felt she had to help.

"It was almost out of a TV show," Holladay said. "Every time she turned around, there was a barrage of really hateful stuff. It sucked."

Click said she didn’t want to turn away from the messages and threats. She doesn't know why, she said, but she "wanted to witness it all."

"When you get them, you see they’re not mad at you — they’re mad," Click said. "They’re mad at women. They’re mad at black folks … Those people who hate me for that don’t understand that I was trying to do good, and I can’t absorb their hate, because it could have been any other person who made a mistake, and they would have hated them, too."

Between the mail, being suspended pending a Board of Curators investigation and a campaign by Missouri lawmakers to have her fired, Click has suffered enough, Huntemann said.

"She has become a vessel for a lot of anger over things that really aren’t related," Huntemann said. "She’s not anti-First Amendment. She’s not someone who’s trying to crush the Constitution. She’s a woman who got caught up in a moment."

Former advisee Amanda Edgar wondered, "How do you protect somebody who’s come under attack by the universe?" Besides moral support, Edgar said she sends Click pictures of kittens or links to Ani DiFranco songs.

Huntemann takes a more solemn tack: "Send her a happy message and tell her you love her."

**Academic work, classroom suspension**

Click started teaching at MU in 2003 as a visiting instructor, becoming a resident instructor in 2005 and an assistant professor in 2008. She has been derided at times because her body of work includes studies of "50 Shades of Grey," Lady Gaga and the "Twilight" series. Click has also served on the board of Console-ing Passions, a feminist media studies conference that examines how gender and sexuality are portrayed in mass media.

Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, a University of Arizona professor and frequent collaborator with Click, spent nine years in MU’s Communication Department, during which she and Click devoted some of their study to mass media popular among young women and girls. For scholarly work on "Twilight," for example, Aubrey said the pair analyzed 4,000 survey responses and dozens of focus group interviews to determine how "young girls were using 'Twilight' as a text to inform
their attitudes about sexuality and, in particular, sexual abstinence" in an age when "it’s culturally acceptable to dismiss things that girls like."

Aubrey’s output on "Twilight" was in the realm of surveys, whereas Click examined focus group reactions. They chose "huge, global phenomena" to research not based on excellence, Aubrey said, but because the messages produced by iconic pop culture have implications for mental health, sexual health and "what it means for a girl’s identity."

"We would never say that ‘Twilight’ is the best literary event of the 21st century," she said.

Aubrey said she worries that anti-Click sentiment will hurt Click's chances of teaching again at MU. Aubrey sent a letter to the Board of Curators to express her "grave concern" over the decision to suspend Click, which Aubrey viewed as "a complete violation of academic freedom and shared governance."

Click said she believes the curators’ decision was "dangerous for me. I think it’s dangerous for everybody else on campus, too."

"The campus has policies and procedures, and they should be followed," she continued. "I think the curators, and the legislature for that matter, have created an environment where I feel I won’t be treated fairly, and if I’m not treated fairly, I will do what it takes" to continue teaching.

When asked whether she would sue the curators or Schierbecker if a lawyer advised her to do so, Click said, "It's hard for me to answer without being in that context. I will take legal advice on my situation and, as I have with everything, decide for myself what I think I should do."

Aubrey said Click was an easy target for some politicians, because she symbolizes "a white, liberal, female professor who also sympathizes with black protesters. I don’t know how much more obvious it could be."

**Encountering journalists**

After posting the footage of Click to YouTube on Nov. 9, Schierbecker tweeted, "Official statement: I will not allow students to silence dissent by becoming a human meat wall that rolls over journalists doing their jobs."

For Schierbecker, a history major who said he was filming as an independent journalist, the issue is not academic freedom nor racism on campus nor administrative turmoil. He’s most concerned with protecting the rights guaranteed to U.S. citizens under the First Amendment.

Schierbecker has backed off from his crusade against Click. He told the Missourian on Nov. 11 that his "No. 1 priority" was "making sure she never teaches again."

But, he said Thursday, "I no longer agree with that. I was being rather foolish in the scrum of things after this became a national story."
Schierbecker said he no longer cares whether Click remains employed and no longer expects her to apologize to him in a public setting such as a radio interview. Although he still thinks "she was being a horrible person that day," he acknowledged that she might be due an apology from him.

"I probably owe it. I apologize for making it about an individual," he said. "I don’t think that I can pin all my frustrations on herself as an individual. I said a lot of really crass, immature stuff during the week of November, and I don’t think she deserved the attention."

The "attention" included scornful remarks that a professor of mass media teaching down the block from the Missouri School of Journalism would so blatantly tell a student journalist to stop doing journalism. The journalism school swiftly moved to revoke Click's courtesy appointment, through which she served as an outside faculty member on graduate student committees. She gave up the appointment before a vote could be taken.

One such committee was for MU alumna Taryn Wood-Norris’ master’s research on magazine cover depictions of celebrities. Wood-Norris, an art director at Wenner Media and past president of the MizzouNYC alumni chapter, said Click "basically did me a huge favor" by serving on her committee, considering the two were "not close."

"She really knows her stuff, and she’s actually, I think, kind of the perfect outside committee member for a lot of journalism students," Wood-Norris said. "She doesn’t necessarily do her research on journalism, but she has a really good understanding."

Wood-Norris said that "a system of bias" was historical at MU and that she felt the focus on Click "was just a complete distraction."

"In my experience with her, I don’t think she would ever intentionally step on a journalist’s rights," Wood-Norris said. "I think she got caught up in the moment and was trying to protect students’ rights."

Click said she "absolutely" respects journalists' right to be present at places such as the Concerned Student 1950 camp. She said the students, faculty and staff were exercising their First Amendment rights of assembly.

"We asked for journalists to give the students a little bit of time to prepare" for a press conference, she said.

Click said there was a difference between asking Schierbecker and other members of the media to leave the quad and asking them to step outside the circle — she said her message was the latter. When asked whether this was clear to Schierbecker, she said she didn’t think the two "had a clear conversation."

"I never said leave the property," she said. "Could he have interpreted what he wanted from that? Sure, it was an open statement, but no, the intention was never to leave the property, absolutely not."
Rehabilitating her image

Rumors and judgments spread swiftly on the Internet after the incident. Aubrey said the "shadow criminal justice system" of social media demands that "there’s gotta be some sacrifice that occurs, and that’s Melissa Click."

The Texas PR firm Status Labs reached out to Click on Jan. 29 after she was suspended, senior media director Lacy Rushin said in an email. After talking with Click and getting approval from her legal counsel, the company decided it was time she share her story with her community, Rushin said. As part of the repair work on Click's image, Status Labs provided black and white portraits of her — a contrast to the widely circulated still photo pulled from Schierbecker's video.

"So really we’re helping her to navigate media requests and get her side of the story out there efficiently," Rushin said. "She is the one living this, and she is the expert on herself, what happened that day, and why. We’re simply providing our expertise, pro bono, to advise her on how to rebuild her reputation, fix her online image and to share great content, not just sound bites."

After Click has given interviews and the company has "created a new media cycle," Rushin said, it will attempt to "influence the first page of (Click's) Google search results by feeding its algorithm" with newly created content: websites, social media pages, news releases and videos. The company will use social media to get its content in front of "stakeholders" such as students, faculty and administrators "so the right people see the message and content we want them to see," Rushin said.

"Our goal is that when the smoke clears and people search for Melissa Click online, they find her side of the story along with information about her career and accolades rather than just information about this one incident," Rushin said.

The Missourian was granted an interview for an hour with Click on the conditions that no photographers or other journalists be present. While meeting in a conference room at the Columbia Public Library, Click wrapped her hands around a thermos of tea and sat with her back to the door's glass window so she wouldn’t be recognized. She smiled frequently. Despite the stares, sanctions and shaming, she said she’s been living a normal life.

That means continuing to knit hats, scarves, sweaters and mittens, take her children to parks near their home, read nonfiction and "cheesy romance" and watch television shows such as "The Good Wife" and "The X-Files" for purposes other than studying programming content.

"I still do the laundry. I still let the cats in and out," she said. "I talk with my friends. I go to the movies. I refuse to have my life derailed by this one mistake, and I want it put in the context of my life."

Click questioned why so much attention was focused on her as opposed to the students she supported and the movement and awareness they stimulated. She said the toughest part of her
unwanted celebrity has been the loss of anonymity, but she’s optimistic that she’ll be able to get her life back in order.

"I don’t think all’s lost," she said. "I think I have learned that I have a lot of support and that people are willing to forgive a mistake when apology is heartfelt, and I hope people feel that it is. … I’m willing to look at my faults and be responsible for them."

Student who shot Melissa Click video asks lawmakers to relent on University of Missouri budget

By Rudi Keller

Saturday, February 13, 2016 at 12:00 am

The student videographer who became the victim in Melissa Click’s municipal assault charge said Friday that he wants state lawmakers to stop using the incident to justify budget cuts for the University of Missouri.

Mark Schierbecker’s video of Click — demanding he leave the Concerned Student 1950 protest site on Nov. 9 and calling for “some muscle” when he refused — has been seen more than 2.8 million times on YouTube. Demonstrators formed a wall of bodies, moving forward to push journalists away from an encampment where graduate student Jonathan Butler had just ended a hunger strike after the resignation of University System President Tim Wolfe.

On Wednesday, a House committee approved a 2 percent increase in aid to all state colleges and universities except the UM System. One reason for the action, said Chairwoman Donna Lichtenegger, R-Jackson, was that Click still had a job.

It is time to stop focusing on one incident more than three months old, Schierbecker said.

“I am going to be more public about this in the future,” he said. “I think they are using my video as an excuse for the budget cuts they already wanted to make. I think they do want her fired, just on a human level, but it has only been politically possible to cut funding because of this video.”
In December, 99 Republican House members and 18 senators signed letters demanding the university fire Click, an assistant professor of communication who is up for tenure at the end of the academic year. Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, a candidate for attorney general, has been one of the most vocal critics demanding Click’s job.

The Board of Curators suspended Click with pay Jan. 27, two days after charges were filed. Click agreed to 20 hours of community service in exchange for deferred prosecution.

The issue has grown beyond whether the university fires Click, Schaefer said Friday. It has become a question of decisive leadership. If an employee in the Department of Social Services was captured on video doing similar things and charged with assault, he would expect the director to have the worker fired, Schaefer said.

“The university will not step up and show any leadership,” Schaefer said. “That is the problem.”

Schierbecker is a history major who was not on a paid journalistic assignment that day. Before the attention he has received from the video, one of his avocations was making videos and editing Wikipedia articles, sometimes uploading the videos he shot.

“If anything noteworthy happened that day, I was going to upload the video to Wikipedia,” he said.

Since he made the video, he started working freelance assignments for the conservative College Fix website. “It is kind of awkward because I am liberal,” he said.

Rep. Dean Dohrman, R-La Monte, showed Schierbecker’s video and called a screenshot “the most famous photograph in Missouri” as he made the case for a required college course in free speech rights. Other lawmakers have focused on Click’s scholarship, which includes “‘50 Shades of Grey’ readers and the impact of social media in fans’ relationship with Lady Gaga,” according to her departmental biography.

In the past week, Click has broken her public silence in an attempt to explain her actions that day and seek forgiveness with an apology.

In an interview Friday with the Tribune, Click said she would say the same thing to her legislative critics, including Schaefer, that she has said to others who have vilified her.

“I have been a good member, a strong member of the university faculty,” Click said. “I care about students at MU, care about the mission and would ask them to try to see my mistake in that context.”

Because she has a doctorate in communication, many people assumed that meant training as a journalist, she said. Because she studies popular culture, she is belittled, Click said.

“The fact that I study entertainment and not ‘serious’ media definitely plays into it,” she said.
Mark Schierbecker, the University of Missouri student who videotaped an assistant professor calling for “some muscle” to keep student journalists from filming a protest, has asked lawmakers to stop using his video, and the incident, as an excuse to cut the university’s budget, the Columbia Daily Tribune reports.

On November 9 the assistant professor of communication, Melissa A. Click, demanded that student journalists keep away from a student protest over racial inequity on the Columbia campus, held shortly after senior leaders resigned. Mr. Schierbecker filmed her saying “Who wants to help me get this reporter out of here?” Ms. Click has since been suspended, but the video has been viewed on YouTube more than 2.8 million times. More than 100 lawmakers signed a letter asking that Ms. Click be fired.

“They are using my video as an excuse for the budget cuts they already wanted to make. I think they do want her fired, just on a human level, but it has only been politically possible to cut funding because of this video,” Mr. Schierbecker told the Tribune.

Faculty council seeks review of University of Missouri system, campus relationship

By Rudi Keller

Friday, February 12, 2016 at 2:00 pm

Correction appended
The University of Missouri Faculty Council voted Thursday to ask the UM Board of Curators to consider whether it would be better for the system and the Columbia campus to seek a divorce or forge a tighter relationship by consolidating the offices of UM System president and MU chancellor.

The resolution seeks a study of the organization of the system and its relationship to the MU campus. It also calls for the curators to consider slowing down the search for a permanent president while the study is underway.

It is specifically designed to look at the system, and nothing is taken off the table,” said Art Jago, professor of management in the Trulaske College of Business. “It is not a call for a divorce, but it is certainly a call to discuss how the system operates and MU’s relationship.”

With the UM presidency and the MU chancellor’s job filled by interim administrators, Jago wrote in a memo that accompanied the resolution, the time is fortuitous. Mike Middleton became interim president and Hank Foley became interim chancellor in November after the resignations of UM President Tim Wolfe and MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

“Moreover, this discussion can take place without institutional or personal loyalties to any particular individual that might prevent objective and dispassionate conversations and judgments,” he wrote.

The board voted Feb. 4 to create a presidential search committee that includes curators, two students, two faculty members and a staff representative nominated from each campus. A search consulting firm will be chosen later this month.

“What folks on council want is to take this opportunity to see what works and what doesn’t work,” MU Faculty Council chairman Ben Trachtenberg, an associate professor of law, said.

Mary Jo Banken, spokeswoman for the Columbia campus, said any comment on the resolution should come from the curators.

Neither John Fougere, system spokesman, nor Pamela Henrickson, chairwoman of the curators, responded to messages seeking comment.

The system administration was created in the 1960s with the addition of campuses in Kansas City and St. Louis. Elmer Ellis, president of the university at the time, was the first chancellor of the Columbia campus and the only administrator to hold both titles simultaneously.

“The way the system is set up now, there is no way a person can be system president as a part-time job,” Trachtenberg said.

Jago’s memo questioned the $74.8 million cost of system administration, 2.54 percent of the entire university budget. For perspective, he said it was eight times the budget of the Missouri School of Journalism, “the latter having tangible and relatable outcomes produced by its faculty and students.”
The resolution will be forwarded to campus and system administrators, Trachtenberg said. He will also take it to the next meeting of the Intercampus Faculty Council for consideration of an endorsement or a complementary resolution, he said.

“Ultimately the curators are going to do this or not do this based on whether it makes sense,” Trachtenberg said.

SECOND THOUGHTS:

This page has been revised to make the following corrections.

Sunday, February 14, 2015

University of Missouri Faculty Council Chairman Ben Trachtenberg was misquoted at the end of an article Friday about studying the merger of some functions of MU and the UM System. The quote should have read: “Ultimately the curators are going to do this or not do this based on whether it makes sense.”

University of Missouri seeks $10 million to support budding nuclear medicine supply industry

By Rudi Keller

Saturday, February 13, 2016 at 12:00 am

If there’s a magic word lawmakers want to hear before they spend state money, it’s “jobs.”

In a year when the University of Missouri’s budget is being battered, directors of the MU Research Reactor will need a little magic to get the $10 million they seek to build new training and lab space. If approved, the funding would allow the reactor to promise prospective tenants at the Discovery Ridge Research Park trained people ready to work in the growing field of nuclear medicine.

Northwest Medical Isotopes, an Oregon company, is about halfway through obtaining permits to build a $50 million facility at Discovery Ridge to supply material for medical imaging, CEO Nick Fowler said. The company expects to employ 68 people, and reactor officials see it as the
first arrival for what they hope will be a cluster of companies processing and shipping products nationally.

“Our central geographic location is a huge advantage for patients,” reactor Assistant Director Ken Brooks said. “Because these materials have a short shelf life, we can distribute throughout the U.S. That’s a huge advantage for the university.”

Northwest will process molybdenum, irradiated at the research reactor, for delivery to companies that load it into containers incorporating a device known as a generator.

As the molybdenum decays, it becomes an element called technetium, used about 50,000 times a day for cardiac and other medical imaging.

There is no domestic supplier. A loaded generator can supply technetium for about a week, so speedy processing and delivery is essential to obtain the maximum value from each generator.

When Brooks and his boss, reactor Executive Director Ralph Butler, talk about the possibilities for producing molybdenum, they start finishing each other’s sentences.

“In the world of short-lived isotopes and radiopharmaceuticals …” Brooks began to say.

“It is all about logistics,” Butler finished.

THE PUSH FOR FUNDING

The facility envisioned for the lab space isn’t flashy — renderings show a boxy building adjacent to the others surrounding the reactor — but it must be built to create training labs and classrooms to support an anticipated influx of employers, Butler said.

The proposal was endorsed by the Columbia Chamber of Commerce in its legislative platform.

“By allowing this expansion, it would place Columbia in a position to be an industry cluster,” said a chamber news release listing the organization’s legislative priorities. “This will bring more highly trained and highly paid employees to the area.”

The median salary of a nuclear medicine technician is about $72,100, state Reps. Stephen Webber and Kip Kendrick, D-Columbia, wrote Jan. 7 in a letter to Gov. Jay Nixon urging him to include the $10 million in his capital improvements budget.

“The growth in nuclear medicine combined with the physical and teaching assets at MURR provides an opportunity for Missouri to become a world leader in a growing industry,” Webber and Kendrick wrote.

Nixon didn’t ask for the money, but that hasn’t deterred Webber and Kendrick. Decisions on capital projects are made as the operating budget is finished in late April, which gives them time to enlist support.
“High-tech manufacturing can be the future of Columbia,” Webber said. “It creates a lot of jobs that pay very high wages. There are a lot of reasons we think Columbia is poised to make a big leap here.”

INSIDE THE REACTOR

Everything starts with the reactor, which was completed in 1966. Rated at 10 megawatts, it is the most powerful university research reactor in the United States.

It runs almost continuously, shutting down on Mondays for about 12 hours so crews can extract material irradiated for customers and research. Otherwise, the reactor can go as long as eight years without a maintenance shutdown, Butler said.

A power reactor such as Ameren Missouri’s Callaway Energy Center is rated at 1,190 megawatts, operating at 2,000 pounds of pressure at a temperature of 600 degrees. The MU reactor operates at 80 pounds of pressure at a temperature of 136 degrees.

The reactor is not built for heat, which creates steam to drive turbines, Butler said. Instead, it is the neutrons released by the chain reaction that are important for nuclear medicine.

“Think of the reactor as a neutron oven,” Brooks said. “Your oven at home generates heat. Our special oven generates neutrons. So you expose material to neutrons, to some desired purpose. Activate the material, and you have to handle and process the material in some FDA-compliant way.”

Reactor officials expect it to receive approval from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to become the only domestic supplier of iodine-131, used to treat thyroid cancer since 1951, in the near future.

On Jan. 22, Advanced Accelerator Applications presented data on a late-stage study of a new anti-cancer agent called Lutathera that incorporates lutetium-177 irradiated at the MU Research Reactor.

The company used a targeting peptide called dotatate to create a treatment that delivers radiation directly to the tumors of patients who have inoperable, slow-growing neuroendocrine cancer of the pancreas, the disease that killed Apple co-founder and CEO Steve Jobs. Results have been so promising for the treatment that it was given fast-track designation by the FDA in April and is available in Europe for advanced patients before formal approval.

Advanced Accelerator, based in France, is building a manufacturing plant in New Jersey that also will house its U.S. offices, CEO Stefano Buono said. Lutathera has a shelf life of only three days. Until the U.S. plant is completed, supplies of lutetium are shipped to Europe for manufacturing.

“MU is not the only supplier, but it is probably one of the best reactors to supply this drug in the world,” Buono said.
Its continuous operation “is very rare in the field of nuclear reactors,” Buono said. “If you want to make manufacturing, which is delivering the drug every day, you need to have an every day manufacturing” cycle.

A LIMITED SHELF LIFE

What makes logistics so important in nuclear medicine is the natural decay of radioactive elements, expressed by the term half-life. There are almost a dozen elements the reactor currently makes or intends to make, and it supplies or has working relationships with several companies besides Advanced Accelerator or Northwest Medical.

All of the elements have a limited shelf life, which no refrigeration or preservative can extend. The element Northwest Medical wants to use, molybdenum, has a radioactive form called moly-99 that has a half-life of 66 hours.

That means that in 66 hours, half of any given amount of moly-99 will emit an electron and become technetium-99, which is radioactive with a half-life of six hours. In another 66 hours, half of the remaining moly-99 will have undergone the same transformation.

Within the span of a week — 178 hours — the original source is exhausted and must be replenished.

All the moly-99 used in the United States currently is shipped from Europe, Fowler said.

He anticipates it will take another year to receive a construction permit from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to build the plant at Discovery Ridge.

“It should reduce costs throughout the supply chain,” Fowler said. “The intermediary can load with less moly; that will reduce costs.”

The moly-99 is collected on a device called a generator. The generators are loaded into lead-lined containers that resemble water jugs but weigh more than sledgehammers, which are then shipped to nuclear pharmacies.

At Mid-America Isotopes in Ashland, technicians begin work at 3 a.m. to prepare doses that will be delivered to area hospitals that day, co-owner Scott Brower said.

Without a U.S. supplier, pharmacies have to juggle supply shortages at times. Several producers are trying to create a domestic supply. “It is a race to the finish line,” Brower said.

The MU reactor is a natural source to meet the need, he said.

“It would be an upside to my business, which would also include another 200-plus radiopharmacies,” he said. “We would have a much stronger, reliable source of molybdenum.”
Currently used for imaging, moly-99 has potential therapeutic benefits, Fowler said. It has been underused because of supply constraints, he said.

“We are focused currently on moly-99,” Fowler said. “But in the target we irradiate, 256 isotopes are created, and we have an eye toward expanding our list of isotopes.”

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The 20-year plan envisioned by Butler and Brooks is to develop an industry cluster at Discovery Ridge, fueled with public and private investment. Eventually, there could be a reactor specifically designed to produce medical isotopes.

Lawmakers should not consider the $10 million appropriation, if granted, to be a commitment to invest in a new reactor, which Butler estimated would cost about $500 million.

“It would take government and private money,” Butler said. “You can generate a lot of revenue off a reactor specifically designed to radioisotope production, but you would need federal dollars to pull it off.”

Many of the about 70 jobs that Fowler’s company plans to provide will require a bachelor’s degree in a science and advanced training for six months to two years.

They also expect to create clerical and shipping jobs that will require specialized training and pay above the market rates, Fowler said.

If the new building is not constructed before his plant is ready to open and it is difficult to find trained technicians locally, Fowler said he will simply have to cast a wider net for qualified employees.

Companies have walked away from locating in Columbia in the past because the workforce wasn’t available, Butler said.

“It’s been an issue every time we approach a company or try to entice a company to locate to be close to the reactor,” he said.
By CONNOR LEWIS

Sunday, February 14, 2016 at 12:00 am

“You’re paid a wage, but you’re not employees.”

On Wednesday, University of Missouri System administrators and lawyers told graduate employees, to our faces, that our work doesn’t “count” — and that we don’t have organizing rights. We were astounded not just by the twisted argument, but also by its callousness. We do hard work of which we’re proud, and we do it because we believe the university can be a world-class institution.

We tried to find a more productive route. Graduate employees contacted the UM System in hopes of charting a more amicable path forward after the fall semester’s unrest. Graduate employees want a high-quality public university that serves Missourians, and we realized it was past time to start talking about making progress toward a more stable environment. With new administration, we felt there was room to rebuild a relationship that would legally and contractually protect the approximately 2,700 graduate employees at the University of Missouri-Columbia while working to build a university of which every Missouri resident could be proud.

Graduate employees work, in addition to their studies and research. Make no mistake about that. We earn wages, pay taxes, provide for our families and worry about our financial security and our futures. I drive the same car I learned to drive in 11 years ago. It’s older than most of my students, and I hope every day that I get a few more days out of it. Colleagues of mine work out child care arrangements with their friends, or just take their kids to classes they teach, because paying for child care is too expensive. We struggle to pay medical costs because the health insurance we fought hard to get back — and which isn’t guaranteed past next year — still requires too much in out-of-pocket costs.

We educate the 27,654 undergraduates at the university, providing a substantial portion of contact hours for students. We also produce high-quality, important research: MU’s research and economic production rely on graduate research assistants. In addition, we represent the university at regional and global conferences, showcasing MU to regional and national audiences.

But according to the Board of Curators, we don’t have the same constitutionally guaranteed rights as other university employees — collective bargaining rights granted by the Missouri Constitution and extended to everyone on campus except us. This is not a new or novel idea. Graduate employees have organized at more than 40 campuses nationwide since 1969, including many of the best public universities in the world.

The university’s chance to build a productive and amicable relationship is swiftly disappearing. Instead, the Board of Curators lawyered up. Curators never invited graduate employees to present our side. By choosing this path, which they were warned against during November’s listening session, they failed a crucial test of their leadership and sent a troubling indication that they have little interest in providing a stable future for the university. It’s not what we wanted, and we tried to avoid it.
So we will have to keep fighting for our rights — and the responsibility for that fight is squarely on the Board of Curators. We will still organize because we need the security of a collectively bargained contract and because the law is on our side. After we have won, many of us will still fundamentally distrust the university because it has proved unworthy of our trust.

It could have been different.

Connor Lewis is a graduate instructor at the University of Missouri and a co-chair of the Coalition of Graduate Workers.

COLUMBIA, MO. • The University of Missouri is looking into whether a graduate student employee union at the university would be legal, interim President Michael Middleton said.

“We believe that the university needs clarity on the graduate students’ legal right to organize, as there is no legal precedent or clarity in current Missouri law to make that determination,” Middleton said in a release Wednesday.

The release was issued after an unpublicized meeting between administrators and representatives of the Coalition for Graduate Workers and the National Education Association, according to the Columbia Daily Tribune.

The graduate employee rights movement began after officials at the Columbia campus announced last August that the university would immediately stop paying graduate students’ health insurance premiums because of potential penalties stemming from provisions of the 2010 federal Affordable Care Act.

The university later reversed its decision, and interim Chancellor Hank Foley said Jan. 19 that it would provide coverage in the coming academic year. This past week, Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., said the IRS had issued a new ruling that it would not impose the penalties for insurance plans that begin before Jan. 1, 2017.

The news release also listed other actions the university has taken for graduate assistants, including a plan to increase minimum stipends by $3,000 over the next two years.
“There is significant progress being made to address the identified concerns, and we are committed to working directly with graduate students to find common ground,” Foley said in the release.

Eric Scott, co-chair of the Coalition of Graduate Workers, said Friday that the university administration “is not willing to respect the Constitutional rights of its employees.” Scott, who is also a doctoral student in English at the university, said the coalition “will not rest until our union is recognized.

COLUMBIA — **MU graduate student workers are poised to take legal action regarding their right to unionize after university leadership asked for a legal opinion on whether they had to allow the students to hold a union election.**

The group looks to hold a union election because a union would provide protection in a way that other organizations can’t, said Eric Scott, the coalition's co-chair. He specifically cited the fact that only a union can provide a legal contract.

"Compensation and benefits for graduate workers can apparently change on a whim, so we really need the protections guaranteed in this contract," Scott said.

The Coalition of Graduate Workers voted in September to affiliate with the Missouri National Education Association, an education union in Missouri, as well as the National Education Association, a national education union. To hold a union election to create their own local union branch, the coalition needed about 2,000 MU graduate employee signatures in support of the idea, according to previous Missourian reporting.

Representatives from the Coalition of Graduate Workers and the National Education Association have met several times with MU leadership over the course of about a month and a half to discuss the graduate workers holding a union election, Scott said.

After the most recent meeting, the UM System released a statement Wednesday saying the university will require a legal opinion on the issue. It cited the fact that there isn't a legal precedent giving students the right to unionize. It also said current laws lack clarity.

The Missouri National Education Association also released a statement Wednesday responding to the decision. The release said the university's actions in refusing to grant consent for a union
election were "irrational." The coalition felt compelled to take legal action, and the university will probably lose the case as well as money and a reputation, it said.

Scott's fellow co-chair, Connor Lewis, wasn't sure about what form of legal action the coalition would take, but they are meeting with a legal team to discuss what the process might entail.

Lewis said people often don't realize the coalition looks out for graduate student employees, not all graduate students. He said the fundamental question his group asks is whether the graduate employees have the same rights as other employees at MU. The decision to require a legal opinion means the administration is answering "No," he said.

But MU will not wait to continue working on graduate employee issues, the release said. The statement reinforced the actions the university has decided upon: two upcoming increases in stipend rates for graduate students, the continuance of insurance stipends for the upcoming fiscal year and a request for proposals with options for affordable housing and childcare options.

The unionization effort follows events that occurred last fall, including the Aug. 14 announcement that as of Aug. 15 graduate students would no longer receive health insurance subsidies due to an IRS interpretation of the Affordable Care Act. The insurance was subsequently reinstated, according to previous Missourian reporting.

The Washington Post

‘My demons won today': Ohio activist’s suicide spotlights depression among Black Lives Matter leaders

A solemn group stood in the shadow of the statehouse in Columbus, Ohio, forming a circle on the snow-caked sidewalk. MarShawn McCarrel, 23, a well-known Black Lives Matter activist, had taken his own life on the statehouse steps. Now his friends had come together in his memory.

As evening turned to night last week, protest organizer Rashida Davidson, 25, recounted the personal toll of two years of activism: Trouble sleeping. Bouts of anxiety. Feelings of despair.

“This is really getting to us,” Davidson said. “And if MarShawn’s death does not show that… I don’t know what else we need to tell or show to say that this is really going on.”

Since he died early last week, news of McCarrel’s suicide has rocked the national police protest movement, forcing a round of introspection about a reality that predates the seminal 2014
shooting of a black teenager in Ferguson, Mo.: Some of the most prominent activists and organizers are battling not only the system, but depression.

In Oakland, Calif., a prominent activist posted the phone number for a suicide prevention hotline on her Facebook page. In Cleveland, a lead organizer confessed on Facebook that he, too, had tried to take his own life. Dozens of others have shared stories of their battles with depression, anxiety and insecurity on Twitter.

“In the movement you’re just constantly engaging in black death, seeing the communal impact,” said Jonathan Butler, the University of Missouri graduate student whose hunger strike last fall led to the resignation of the school’s president. “You’re being faced with the reality that I’m more likely to be killed by the police, that I’m being discriminated against. You start to see all of the micro-aggressions.”

Like many prominent activists, Butler said he has long struggled with depression, beginning with the death of his grandfather in 2011. His involvement with the protest movement at times has worsened his mental health, he said, not only because of the emotional strain of a single-minded focus on racism, but also because of more mundane stresses, such as media scrutiny and infighting among allies.

“So many people glamorize the visibility that comes with being in these spotlights,” Butler said. “And they’re not seeing the pressures.”


ESPN airing feature on MU boycott

By David Morrison

Saturday, February 13, 2016 at 12:00 am

The Missouri football team’s boycott in support of the Concerned Student 1950 protest will get a retelling on ESPN on Sunday.

As part of its Black History Month programming, ESPN is airing an hour long “SportsCenter” special starting at 4 p.m. called “Rise Up” that includes four segments of African-American
athletes “in a direct and intimate conversation sharing firsthand accounts of the events in the news cycle that impacted their lives.”

One of the segments, subtitled “rising up against authority,” centers on the Missouri football team’s backing of Concerned Student 1950 hunger striker Jonathan Butler and the group’s demand that University of Missouri System President Tim Wolfe be removed from office.

More than 30 African-American players posed for a picture with Butler the night of Nov. 7 and posted a message that they would not participate in football activities until Wolfe was removed from office and Butler’s strike was over. The next morning, the official Missouri football Twitter account sent a picture with most players, coaches and staff locking arms in support of the stand the initial players made.

The next day, Wolfe resigned.

Former safety Ian Simon, a team captain and one of the four main conduits between the team and Concerned Student 1950, is ESPN’s interview subject for the segment on the boycott.

“We are the biggest face on campus,” Simon says in a preview for the special. “So what better thing for us to do than give them the biggest platform they can have?”

After the segment, New York Times columnist William Rhoden and SEC Network reporter Maria Taylor will take part in “a brief discussion of the significance of the subject.”

The special also features segments with Chicago Bulls forward Taj Gibson talking about gun violence, former professional tennis player James Blake talking about racial profiling and ballet dancer Misty Copeland talking about prejudice and stereotypes.

TIGERS INVITED TO COMBINE: Center Evan Boehm, linebacker Kentrell Brothers and guard Connor McGovern will make up the former Missouri player contingent at the NFL combine in Indianapolis this month.

Boehm and McGovern are two of 53 offensive linemen invited, and Brothers is one of 42 linebackers.

Brothers was a first-team All-Southeastern Conference performer last fall as he racked up an FBS-leading 152 tackles, fourth on Missouri’s single-season tackles list. Boehm started a program-record 52 straight games, and McGovern started 40 straight games over three years.

All three took part in Senior Bowl activities in Mobile, Ala., but McGovern could not participate in the game because he injured a hamstring during practice.

The NFL combine runs from Feb. 23-29 at Indianapolis’ Lucas Oil Stadium, and much of the on-field workout portion will be televised by NFL Network.
FORD GETS NEW TITLE: Running backs coach Cornell Ford has added the title of “assistant head coach,” according to a football roster posted to MUTigers.com on Friday.

Ford, who coached cornerbacks under Gary Pinkel for 15 years before shifting to offense under Barry Odom, joins associate head coach/wide receivers coach Andy Hill in receiving a special title.

The spring roster also confirmed the team’s six early enrollees: freshman linebacker Trey Baldwin, senior wideout Chris Black, freshman linebacker Cale Garrett, junior offensive tackle Tyler Howell, sophomore quarterback Jack Lowary and freshman kicker Tucker McCann.

Tensions About Race at U of Missouri Kansas City

The University of Missouri at Columbia was the site of protests in the fall over racist incidents and the view of many black students that their concerns were not taken seriously. An anonymous email sent to reporters Sunday morning said that the situation is also bad for black students and employees at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, where officials are alleged to have told students and employees that they were doing a much better job than those at Columbia.

The letter details allegations such as a professor's use of a slur in the classroom, the discovery of a noose in a boiler room, a group of employees being shown a video that made fun of African-Americans and an incident in which someone suggested that the success of a black female employee was based in part on her ability to fry chicken.

The university released a statement Sunday. "The recent incidents involving UMKC staff cited in an anonymous letter either have been or are currently being investigated. Because these are personnel matters, it is unlikely that parties not involved would be aware of disciplinary actions taken," the statement said. It added, "UMKC has been working in recent years to create multiple avenues for faculty, staff and students to offer ideas on how to improve campus climate, and to tell us where we're falling short."
MU study shows lifelong exercise increases bone density in men

COLUMBIA - A University of Missouri researcher has determined that high-impact resistance training in adolescence and young-adulthood increases bone mass in middle-aged men.

A news release said associate professor in the Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology Pamela Hinton found that people who participated in high-impact activities when they were younger, had better hip and lumbar spine bone mineral density than people who did not.

Hinton said in the release that osteoporosis is a serious problem for men, not just women.

“The most important take-away is that if you are healthy, it is never too late to begin high-impact activities or resistance training to improve bone mineral density,” Hinton said.

The release said Hinton studied the physical histories of 203 males aged 30-65 years.

The study is called "Physical activity-associated bone loading during adolescence and young adulthood is positively associated with adult bone mineral density in men,” and was published in the {American Journal of Men’s Health}.

MU Black Culture Center program honors victim of lynching
By Roger McKinney

Saturday, February 13, 2016 at 12:00 am

James Scott, a 35-year-old janitor at the University of Missouri School of Medicine, was lynched in 1923 by a mob of as many as 2,000 white people.

A crowd that included families and MU students hanged Scott from what was the Stewart Bridge, near Stewart and Providence roads.

Nearly 93 years later, the Association of Black Graduate and Professional Students at MU is raising money for a historical marker for the location to remind residents of the event.

Scott was honored Friday in a program at the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, 813 Virginia Ave.

Keona Ervin, assistant professor of black history at MU, gave a talk on “Black Bodies Swinging: Lynching and the Making of Modern America.”

She said the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War from 1865 to 1877 was a brief time during which blacks who owned businesses and homes voted and served in elected office.

Reconstruction “suggested that another world was possible,” she said. That was followed by what she called the “re-enslavement” of blacks through sharecropping, the convict leasing system of using black prisoners to support industry, and racial terror, including lynchings.

“Lynchings were highly stylized, ritualistic and public spectacles” in which all of white society participated across classes and genders, she said.

“Lynching was often a response to black political and economic assertion,” Ervin said.

As a janitor at the medical school, Scott made a good living, Ervin said. His wife, Gertrude Carter, a teacher at Douglass School, also was well-paid. He was a World War I veteran. They were members of Second Baptist Church and had a new car.

“The couple was clearly respected,” she said. “The Scotts were symbols of black economic achievement and as such were a challenge to white society,” Ervin said.

Regina Almstedt, 14, reported being assaulted and raped on April 20, 1923. A week later, the girl identified Scott as her attacker from about 30 feet away.

The editorial in the Columbia Daily Tribune on April 28, 1923, written by Edward Watson, urged swift justice against Scott, noting that taxpayers should be saved the cost of a trial. That night, the mob broke into the jail and dragged Scott out of his cell by a rope around his neck. Scott swore his innocence to an MU student journalist walking beside him.
“Those in the community who wanted due process could not overcome groupthink,” Ervin said. Those who wanted Scott spared included Regina’s father, MU German Professor Hermann Almstedt.

“What distinguished the lynching of Scott was the fact that it happened in a town with a major university,” she said.

She said when news of the lynching reached civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, he declared: “The University of Missouri has opened a course in applied lynching.”

George Barkwell, a former city councilman, later was tried as the ringleader of the mob but was acquitted by an all-white jury. The charges against four others implicated in Scott’s death were dropped.

A new headstone for Scott’s grave at the Columbia Cemetery was installed in 2011. In 2013 Scott’s death certificate was changed to read that he died from “asphyxia due to hanging by lynching by assailants,” and a line saying he had committed rape was changed to read that he was never tried or convicted of rape.

Students Brianna Walker and Monica Hand performed a play, “The Missouri Horror,” written by David Crespy, a professor in the MU Department of Theatre.

Hand also recited her poem, “The Long Walk,” about the lynching.

A period of silence was accompanied by the projection onto a screen of the names of dozens of black men lynched in Missouri. They included Emmet Divens, lynched in Fulton in 1895; George Burke, in Columbia, 1889; Olli Truxton, Glasgow, 1891; and Thomas Hayden, Fayette, 1899.

An online fundraiser for the historical marker and its installation is at gofundme.com/lestweneverforget. It had raised $1,560 as of Friday evening. Angela Haeny, president of the Association of Black Graduate and Professional Students, said they hope to install the marker before the end of the semester.

OPINION: Hoverboard ban may be difficult to enforce on MU campus
No reports of hoverboards violations have been filed at this time.

**After the campuswide ban of hoverboards, students may not be concerned with the threat of punishment or strict enforcement from the MU Police Department or the Office of Student Conduct.**

Self-balancing scooters, also known as hoverboards, were banned beginning Jan. 8 because of the “potential impact on MU campus safety,” an email to students stated.

MUPD relies on individuals to report campus hoverboard violations by filing a report themselves, including specific information such as time, location, suspects involved and a detailed description of the event. Director of Student Life Mark Lucas compared the enforcement of the hoverboard ban to the smoking policy.

“There’s no smoking allowed on this campus, and everyday when we walk out there’s people smoking in the same areas,” Lucas said. “People ask me, ‘where’s the enforcement for it?’ Well, there is no enforcement. The enforcement is on individual people.”

Lucas said he has asked smokers to put out their cigarettes repeatedly with no cooperation and predicts that the hoverboard ban will follow the same pattern.

“Are the police going to come to track somebody down who’s riding a hoverboard?” Lucas said. “I have no idea. Everything we do in student conduct is based on receiving reports of violations, from either students, community or police. We don’t go looking for anything or initiate anything.”

Students wanting to file a report or complaint can visit the Office of Student Conduct website and fill out an incident report form.

After a hoverboard violation is reported, the charge is reviewed, and students could be charged with failure to comply with university policy, Office of Student Conduct senior coordinator Julie Drury said.

Drury and MUPD Maj. Brian Weimer both said their departments have received no reports of hoverboard violations.

COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE

'Columbia' brings billboard art show to print
Happy Valentine’s Day, readers of the physical edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune! In the spirit of the day, you are receiving an artwork — a gift — in your Sunday paper.

Titled “Armagarden,” this wallpaper-like arrangement of pistols, revolvers, bullets, fruit and flowers by artist Jeff Gibson is a multipurpose valentine. It arrives wrapped around your opinion pages because Gibson’s poster is designed to inspire discussion about some timely topics of the day — most obviously, love and guns. We all know Cupid wields an arrow. Artists across cultures and the ages have associated passion with weapons, injury and pain. You don’t have to go back to Greek poets or Renaissance balladeers. Just listen to Sinatra, or the blues, or pop music in general. Love hurts.

Aside from romance and its perils, passion takes many forms, and some apply to the gun debate, including love for country, community, nature, liberty, safety, family and humanity. Gibson’s work stakes no side in the argument, inviting you to interpret what his juxtapositions of banal Google-gleaned images mean in terms of gun control and whether the easy purchase of weapons makes society safer or more dangerous.

More subtly, the inclusion of art in today’s Tribune invites you to think about the function of your newspaper — the one you can hold in your hands and, like Gibson’s poster, hold onto for posterity. “Armagarden” appears folded, on newsprint whiter and heavier than usual, in the context of news and advertising from a specific place on a specific day. Imagine discovering it after the fact on Facebook or hunting around for it elsewhere online. This question of differences between how physical objects and digital screens communicate information prompted the publication of Gibson’s poster, which — it’s important to note here — is a product of the I-70 Sign Show public art project with sponsorship from the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri.

For nearly two years, the Sign Show has installed artworks on Missouri interstate billboards. Gibson’s newspaper poster is a more image-laden version of his “Armagarden” billboard, currently on view on a west-facing sign near Hatton, Exit 144. Driving to Columbia from St. Louis, you see it on the left, after ads for the adult entertainment venue Club Vogue. Sign Show artworks are not intended to beautify the landscape but instead function as playful, nonpartisan commentary on the state’s signage surplus and the culture-war messages that proliferate. Each artwork speaks to a different theme: Religion, gender, sex, labor, athletics and commerce are just a few examples. On the road, Gibson’s work addresses ads for guns and gun shows on the 250 miles between St. Louis and Kansas City.

Since the Johnson administration, people have decried billboards as environmental blight and more recently, with the Internet, dismissed them as dinosaurs. Yet there’s a paradox here in that digital culture adds value to the billboard. As we increasingly get information online, algorithms act as gatekeepers to reinforce existing values and tastes. Our exposure to things we don’t already “like” becomes rare. Billboards might be one of the few remaining ways we encounter
ideas that challenge our opinions or, at the very least, present an alien point of view. In the car, on the highway, away from the clickable screen, we see messages that can bore, irritate, offend and disgust in their content and design. We also experience them rooted in a specific moment and location, as opposed to floating around in a cloud.

This is not to dismiss the value of the Internet. By all means, spread the word about this cool artwork you’re getting in your newspaper. Post pictures of it on social media, and please use the tags #artinthenewspaper, #armagaden, #jeffgibson, #i70signshow, #rji and #columbiatribune. But also think about the difference between those pictures and the real thing. When you do, you might also notice that society is experiencing a kind of reactionary swing against the digital toward what commercial branders might call “the authentic.”

The not-there-ness of the digital has in many ways ignited a desire for objects, the analog and tangible sensation. Using a typewriter, paying with cash, owning a turntable and growing a garden are just a few activities that signify both a back-to-basics sensibility and hipster sophistication increasingly on the radar of digital corporate culture. Smartphone filters make photos seem vintage. Kindle re-creates as closely as possible the look of the printed page. Rumors circulated recently that Amazon plans to open a chain of brick-and-mortar bookstores, the better to track customer behavior but also satisfy our lust for a destination — a place — to spend time and interact with products, not to mention other people.

The newspaper for years has satisfied this longing for tactile things and rituals — going to get the paper, sitting down to read it, turning the pages, smelling the ink and handing sections back and forth with another person. But besides being an object, a newspaper is not unlike a billboard-laden interstate as a marketplace for the distribution of advertising, information and ideas specific to time and place. With Gibson’s poster, the Sign Show claims the physical newspaper as a space — a site, like a landscape — for the exhibition of artworks that simultaneously engage and critique their surroundings.

Though great to look at, “Armagarden” is not decorative. It is a timely and provocative image, fully integrated into the newspaper context, about an important issue of national, state and local significance. At the same time, it acknowledges shared territory between journalism and the arts as practices dedicated to self-examination. Art has a long history of subverting things people take at face value, changing formats and content in ways that force an audience to see things differently and reconsider the status quo. The Sign Show operates in this tradition, and by collaborating with the Sign Show, so does the Tribune. In publishing “Armagarden,” it embraces the nature and potential of its paper edition.

Readers, you cannot get this artwork online.

Anne Thompson, an adjunct assistant professor of art at MU, is a fellow at the Reynolds Journalism Institute and creator of the “I-70 Sign Show.”