

JAN 03 2012



## UM realigns some administrator posts

By Jacob Barker

The University of Missouri System is getting a new administrator to oversee two previously separate departments and eventually take over President Tim Wolfe's initiative to develop campus-specific strategic plans.

An announcement released Wednesday said the UM System will begin a nationwide search to fill a new position: vice president for academic affairs and research. Steve Graham, who is the existing senior associate vice president for academic affairs, and Mike Nichols, the vice president for research and economic development, will report to the new vice president.

Those two departments "embody the essence of the university's core mission areas," UM system spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said. Placing someone in charge of both of those departments will allow for greater collaboration between the two and allow the system to "perhaps be more nimble in the pace of change in higher education," she said.

"Having this position that encompasses both of those realms will really allow the university to kind of adapt," Hollingshead said.

Changes in the higher education realm, such as a declining pool of federal research funding and the rise of online learning, among others, have prompted Wolfe to push the system and its four campuses to develop strategic plans that identify a specific area in which each can become a global leader. That process has been overseen from the UM administration side by Nikki Krawitz, the vice president for finance and administration.

Krawitz, though, is retiring in June, UM announced Wednesday. The new vice president will take over her duties overseeing the strategic planning process.

Although it may sound like administrator-speak, the strategic planning process could hold real consequences for the system's campuses. Wolfe has said he plans to withhold as much as \$40 million in state money and reallocate it to the campuses based on their strategies and goals.

The strategic planning process is in full swing, and each campus is supposed to complete a five-year plan by June. That makes Tom Phillips, an MU professor of biological sciences and the co-chair of the MU team for system strategic planning, less worried about the process being thrown off by the turnover.

“In terms of the strategic plan, the process for what each of the four campuses are supposed to be doing is scheduled to be done about the time” Krawitz “is leaving,” he said.

The departure of Krawitz, who has been at her post for more than 16 years, means the system will have to search for another vice president while it looks to fill the new academic affairs and research position. Hollingshead said the priority will first be on finding someone for the newly created position before it begins looking for a successor for Krawitz. The search for the vice president of academic affairs and research should begin soon.

Wolfe also announced he would combine the system’s government relations and strategic communications departments. Steve Knorr, the current vice president for government relations, will head the new University Relations department.

In April, Wolfe axed an associate vice president of strategic communications position after Cindy Pollard left it to work for the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities.

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# MISSOURIAN

## Wolfe announces administrative changes for UM System

Wednesday, January 2, 2013 | 5:50 p.m. CST

BY [Caitlin Jones](#)

COLUMBIA — UM System President Tim Wolfe announced a series of organizational changes Wednesday that would realign and consolidate administrative offices at the system level.

Plans include merging the office of vice president of academic affairs with the vice president of research and economic development. A nationwide search will be conducted to fill the position, to be called the vice president for academic affairs and research.

Strategic communications and government relations will be combined into a department called university relations. Steve Knorr, current head of government relations, will lead the department. Jennifer Hollingshead, now in charge of strategic communications, will report to him.

**Wolfe outlined the changes in a Wednesday letter to University faculty and staff: "This means adapting our organizational structure to better meet both the opportunities — and challenges — that come with change so that our institution can be as efficient and effective as possible."**

The changes were precipitated by the announcement of Nikki Krawitz's upcoming retirement from her position as vice president for finance and administration in June.

Krawitz is responsible for the university's \$2.5 billion budget, as well as investments, university debt, internal auditing, facilities planning, procurement and institutional research and planning.

A certified accountant, she has 30 years of experience in higher education, according to [her biography on the UM System's website](#), and has been with the university system since 1996.

Uniting academic affairs and research is designed to align resources where several of the priorities are, said UM System spokeswoman Hollingshead.

"Marrying the organizational structures will allow the office to be more efficient and competitive, especially in our core mission areas," Hollingshead said.

The intent is to work with research units on all four campuses to be more effective in competing for the pool of research funding, she said.

Michael Nichols is vice president for research and economic development, but the office of the vice president for academic affairs has been vacant for several years, Hollingshead said.

A search will begin shortly to fill this post, she said, in order to devote sufficient time to identifying the right person.

"It's an important position embodying many of our core missions," she said.

Wolfe noted in his letter that this person will work with the chief academic officers on each campus to address the continuing evolution of higher education.

He or she will also be charged with strategic planning, helping each campus secure federal research dollars and promoting economic development in the state.

The office of university relations will be responsible for strategic communications, government relations and external affairs at national, state and local levels, Hollingshead said.

"We will be talking with a unified voice to all constituencies," she said.

In the search to replace Krawitz, Wolfe said the system is focusing the responsibilities for the role on university-wide financial planning, including budget, management of the endowment, retirement trust funds and debt, accounting, procurement, risk management and facilities planning and development.

At the end of his letter, Wolfe wrote that he is "confident these changes will be instrumental in ensuring we remain on the forefront of change as we continue to fulfill our statement mission and serve the people of Missouri."



## Two MU students die over holiday break

By Brennan David

A University of Missouri student's death Monday is not believed to have resulted from head trauma after a fall, results of a Wednesday autopsy showed, but no definite cause of death has been determined.

The autopsy revealed that a fall and subsequent trauma to the head of 20-year-old Michael Heney of Chesterfield were not what caused his death at a residence in Edwardsville, Ill., according to a Madison County, Ill., coroner's office news release. Heney suddenly fell forward and struck his head on the porch area around 10 p.m. The coroner had yet to determine a specific cause of death.

Heney, a junior majoring in business administration and a member of Pi Kappa Phi fraternity, was taken by friends to a clinic after he fell, but the clinic was closed. They then called 911, and emergency crews found Heney unresponsive. He was pronounced dead at a hospital at 10:59 p.m.

The incident is under investigation, according to the news release. Toxicology results are not expected for up to six weeks.

Heney was one of two MU undergraduate students who died over the holiday break in unrelated incidents. Freshman Cole Patrick, 18, of St. Joseph was killed Friday in a vehicle crash.

The driver of the truck he was in, Dylan S. Pierce, 17, of DeKalb, is suspected of being intoxicated at the time and has been charged with involuntary manslaughter.

Patrick, a biological sciences major, was killed when the pickup in which he was a back-seat passenger left the road and hit a tree. Another passenger survived with minor injuries.

Pierce told police he hit a slick spot and lost control of the vehicle, according to court records, and six hours after the crash, Pierce's blood-alcohol content measured .026 percent.

Patrick was not wearing a seat belt at the time of the crash, the St. Joseph News-Press reported. He was a member of the Delta Upsilon fraternity and was planning to attend medical school, an obituary in the St. Joseph paper said.

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# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

## Coroner: Fall did not kill Chesterfield man

18 hours ago • [STAFF REPORTS](#)

*UPDATED at 7:43 p.m. with funeral information.*

**EDWARDSVILLE** • A Chesterfield man who died Monday night after falling outside a home in Edwardsville apparently did not die from the fall itself, according to Madison County Coroner Stephen Nonn.

The circumstances of the fall were unknown but an autopsy shows Michael J. Heney, 20, did not die from injuries from the fall, Nonn said. Heney's head struck a porch, causing a minor head injury and a broken nose.

Toxicology results were pending Wednesday and may take four to six weeks, Nonn said.

Friends of Heney found him unresponsive about 10 p.m. at the home on West Southcrest Circle and took him to an urgent-care center, but it was closed. An ambulance then transported him to Anderson Hospital in Maryville, where he was pronounced dead at 11 p.m. Monday.

Edwardsville police are investigating.

**Heney was a 2010 graduate of Lafayette High School and a student at the University of Missouri-Columbia.**

He is survived by his parents, James and Renee Heney, siblings Alissa and Thomas Heney, and grandparents Thomas and Paula Heney, and Lyle and Dolores Laveau.

Visitation will be held at the Schrader Funeral Home and Crematory, 14960 Manchester Road at Holloway in Ballwin on Friday from 2-7 p.m.

A funeral service will be held Saturday at 2 p.m. at Lafayette High School Theater, 17050 Clayton Road, Wildwood. Interment private.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to Rockwood Drug-Free Coalition or charity of your choice.

# MISSOURIAN

## **UPDATE: Fall did not cause MU student Michael Heney's death, coroner says**

Wednesday, January 2, 2013 | 3:45 p.m. CST; updated 5:13 p.m. CST, Wednesday, January 2, 2013

BY J. Farmer de la Torre

**COLUMBIA — A fall on New Year's Eve that caused MU student Michael Heney to hit his head on a porch was not the cause of his death, Madison County Coroner Stephen Nonn reported Wednesday.**

But an autopsy conducted Wednesday did not reveal any definitive cause of death, Nonn announced in a news release.

In the release, Nonn said that "the fall itself and subsequent trauma to the head was superficial, along with a broken nose, and was not the cause of death."

Routine toxicology tests were performed but the results usually take four to six weeks, the coroner noted.

Heney was one of two MU students who died between Dec. 28 and Jan. 1. He was at a private residence in Edwardsville, Ill. Friends took him to an emergency clinic, which was closed, then called 911, according to a coroner's news release Tuesday. Emergency responders found him unresponsive.

Heney was an MU junior majoring in business. Funeral arrangements are incomplete and under the direction of Schrader Funeral Home in St. Louis.

Edwardsville police continue to investigate the incident.

MU freshman Cole Patrick, 18, of St. Joseph was killed when the pickup in which he was a back-seat passenger left the road and struck a tree, according to the St. Joseph News-Press. He was not wearing a seat belt.

The driver, Dylan S. Pierce, 17, of DeKalb, has been charged with involuntary manslaughter. Court records indicate that Pierce was intoxicated. Another passenger survived with minor injuries.

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

## Missouri's hospitals will benefit from expanded health care

8 hours ago • [by Rep. Chris Kelly D-Columbia](#)

The most important issue facing the next Missouri General Assembly is whether to expand health care coverage for uninsured Missourians who have incomes below 138 percent of the federal poverty level. (Poverty level equals an income of \$23,050 for a family of four.)

**The costs and benefits of expansion have been analyzed in three studies: one by the Missouri Office of Budget and Planning, one by the Kaiser Foundation, and one by the University of Missouri Medical School in cooperation with Dobson, DaVanzo & Associates. The MU study is the most conservative, so I will rely upon it. The projected economic benefits and the number of Missourians covered by the expansion are substantially higher in the other two studies.**

The federal Affordable Care Act (ACA, also known as Obamacare) allows states to expand their medical coverage to 138 percent of the federal poverty level. The federal government will pay 100 percent of the cost through 2016. That percentage will phase down to 90 percent in 2020. About 161,000 additional Missourians would receive medical coverage under the expansion. Absent expansion, those Missourians will continue to live without health insurance. When they experience health problems, they show up at hospitals and are treated — but the cost of that care is not completely compensated. We all pay the cost of their treatment. It is redistributed through increases in our health care premiums or absorbed by the hospitals as uncompensated care.

There is a provision in law whereby hospitals receive money to offset the cost of uncompensated care (called disproportionate share hospital allotments). This provision will be substantially reduced. It has been replaced by the option for states to expand coverage. That means that Missouri hospitals will lose DSH payments and, if there is no expansion of Medicaid coverage, they will also absorb the cost of treating people with no insurance — a huge financial burden.

Statewide, the cost of decreased DSH payments will be roughly \$500 million. Losses to hospitals resulting from other changes in law will be about \$2.6 billion. On the other hand, if Missouri expands coverage, the state will receive an additional \$8.2 billion from the federal government in the years between 2014 and 2020. The state will be required to pay about \$333 million, all occurring after 2017. The economic expansion would include an additional 24,000 new jobs with a payroll of nearly \$7 billion and a total impact on Missouri's economy of more than \$16 billion. Tax revenues to the state would increase by more than \$850 million. The tax revenue from the increased jobs and economic activity will generate more than double the cost of expansion.

Viewing the loss of DSH payments at a local level, Christian Hospital in St. Louis County will lose about \$30 million. The combined losses to Boone Hospital and the University of Missouri in Columbia will be about \$28 million. Proportional losses will occur to hospitals in Springfield, Kansas City, St. Joseph, Cape Girardeau and Joplin. The pattern is the same for all larger hospitals. They will be seriously harmed, but will survive.

Having grown up in a rural community with a small hospital, I wondered what was likely to happen in rural Missouri. I studied the probable result of expansion of Medicaid versus nonexpansion in West Plains as an example.

Ozarks Medical Center is a 114-bed hospital serving 11 counties and about 160,000 people. The closest large hospital is in Springfield, 100 miles away. OMC will lose about \$2,225,000 as a result of the reduction of the DSH provision. The medical center will still be required to treat all who appear at its door. In the event that those patients do not have insurance, the medical center will not be fully compensated for that care. The hospital estimates that cost next year to be approximately \$6 million to \$8 million.

On the other hand, if the state were to expand Medicaid coverage, more than 9,000 additional people would have medical insurance in the West Plains service area. In addition to the benefits of medical insurance for those patients, the entire south central region will experience an economic benefit. The federal contribution in the region is estimated to be \$463 million. More than a thousand jobs would be created. The total economic benefit to the region would be almost \$800 million. Much of this expansion would occur in Howell County. More patients mean more pharmacists, more nurses, more physical therapists, etc.

OMC is larger and stronger than some other rural hospitals. As one looks east toward the Bootheel, the situation becomes more troubling. The hospitals are smaller and their patient populations are poorer. If Missouri does not expand coverage, Missouri could lose more than a dozen rural hospitals — perhaps as many as 25 — a tragedy for rural Missouri.

I recently heard a story that illustrates the importance of these institutions to their communities. In 2007 a devastating tornado destroyed the town of Greensburg, Kan. The people had to decide whether to rebuild. Many said, if the hospital rebuilds, we will too. Rural hospitals are often the economic nuclei of their communities. Their loss would in some cases mean that their communities would lose the critical mass necessary to stay economically viable.

There is only one rational conclusion: Missouri will gain far more than it loses from the expansion of health care coverage.

Opponents of expansion say, “We cannot afford it,” but these claims are simply an expression of opposition to the concept of “Obamacare” without analysis of the actual economic costs and benefits. Whether one supports or opposes the underlying philosophy of Obamacare, it is the law of the land. Missouri should not undermine the solvency of its own hospitals and decimate the economic lifeblood of many rural communities just for the sake of demonstrating political purity. The Legislature has an obligation to examine what is economically best for the state of Missouri. We should work together to find a solution we can all live with.



The Tribune's View

## **Fred Hawthorne**

By Henry J. Waters III

**We have our own nanoscientist right here at the University of Missouri. Nobody else has an equal.**

This fact was underscored last week when the president of the United States announced Fred Hawthorne would receive a pair of prestigious awards: The National Medal of Science and the National Medal of Technology and Innovation. In each category, he is one of only a dozen recipients in the nation.

Hawthorne is examining the use of the element boron to fight and prevent cancer.

If Hawthorne can find a better way to combat cancer, he will have made an essential gain in an area the world seeks to conquer. Good for Fred.

**HJW III**



**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

## **Missouri misses out on millions in uncollected Internet sales taxes**

(AP) -- Researchers say Missouri misses out on millions of dollars each year in tax revenue that could be collected on Internet sales.

Missouri is one of the states that has yet to sign on to a 1999 agreement to simplify and encourage voluntary collection of sales taxes by e-commerce retailers. About 1400 retailers voluntarily collect sales taxes under the agreement. **Researchers at the University Of Missouri Truman School Of Public Affairs estimates Missouri has been losing about 468 million dollars annually in potential e-sales taxes.**

The researchers say participating in the program would be only a short-term solution for Missouri. The report says the better, long-term solution is for Missouri law makers to lobby Congress to pass new federal legislation.

Internet sales of taxable goods delivered in Iowa are subject to state sales and use tax.

# MISSOURIAN

## 2012 called state's warmest year on record

Thursday, January 3, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CST

BY [unho yi](#)

**COLUMBIA — Missouri had its warmest year on record in 2012, according to MU climatologists.**

The year could also rank among the 10 driest on record and could be the driest since 1980, MU climatologist Pat Guinan said.

Anthony Lupo, a professor in MU's atmospheric science department, said that a 2010 La Nina — a variation of sea surface temperature in the Pacific Ocean that disrupts weather patterns — caused last year's warm weather.

"This led to summer 2011 and especially summer 2012 being very hot," he said. "We've seen this type of thing before in the early to mid-1950s and 1930s."

Since the spring of 2010, only a handful of months have included below-normal temperatures in Missouri, Guinan said. In March 2012, temperatures were an "incredible" 14 degrees above normal, he said.

Lupo pointed to the warm weather as a cause of the drought last summer.

"What we need to be concerned about is a double-header; that is, a hot summer in 2013," Lupo said. "I am afraid this is possible because we have not received the rain we need to recharge the soil."

Guinan said that evaporation caused by the heat, in combination with low rainfall, caused a "flash drought" in the state, which hurt the farm industry.

Gary Wheeler, vice president of the Missouri Corn Growers Association, said the drought affected 60 percent to 70 percent of the Midwest. It is "still affecting the agriculture industry this winter and will throughout 2013," he said.

Richard Swald, 62, who has been farming his entire life in Atchison County, said the heat allowed farmers to work longer than in most years.

"Field farmers usually stop working around Thanksgiving in average years," Swald said. "But this year, they could stop working in the field in early December."

However, the drought also led to widespread crop and pasture losses, Guinan said.

Some growers experienced 15 percent to 20 percent decreases in their crop yields because of the drought, Wheeler said.

The drought also caused declining water and hay supplies, which put stress on livestock, Guinan said.

Uniontown dairy farmer Donna Telle said the drought had forced her to cut back on her farm. "I had to sell 12 out of 50 cows because we failed to get enough good quality of corn and hay to feed them," she said. "They were too expensive."

Telle, who has 35 years of experience in the dairy industry, said her cows also produced less, and lower quality, milk than in most years.

"We could produce roughly 10 to 15 pounds of milk less per cow than in other years," Telle said.

Lupo said the warm weather of 2012 is unlikely to last.

"Regardless of whether the climate warms or not, we will still have yearly variations on top of that," Lupo said. "It is not likely that we'd have three or more brutal summers in a row — at least, we don't find it in the climate record."

**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**



## **Tips for protecting trees and shrubs from storms**

21 hours ago • Associated Press

### **MU MENTION P. 2**

Even the sturdiest-looking trees can be brought down by high winds, heavy snow and ice, but there are ways you can limit the damage.

Here are some storm-proofing suggestions that will pay off over time, starting with determining which trees in your landscape are the most vulnerable.

"I'm a great believer in storm-proofing or preparing for anything that will have the most impact on your lifestyle," said Mark Chisholm, a third-generation arborist from Howell, N.J., and spokesman for Stihl Inc., a manufacturer of outdoor power tools.

"Try to prep your house and yard if you have the time," he said.

"Clear rain gutters so water will flow. Remove loose lawn furniture from decks. Stabilize trees around the house by cabling or tying them down, especially those that you know have structural flaws."

Additional tips:

— Get to know an arborist or tree-care professional — now. "When a storm hits, you'll likely be prioritized as an existing customer," said Chisholm, who works with the power industry clearing debris left behind by severe weather, including Hurricane Sandy in October.

— Get a pre-storm assessment to identify trouble spots. Decaying and leaning trees should be pruned, staked or removed, especially those threatening dwellings or utility lines.

— Think safety during cleanup. "The stuff on the ground won't hurt you unless downed power lines are involved," Chisholm said. "It's what's overhead that's dangerous. Stress fractures or dead and broken limbs can come crashing down and do serious harm."

— Be especially careful when working with chainsaws. "If a tree is on the ground, try to cut it up without harming yourself in the process," said Kim Gabel with University of Florida Extension in Key West. "If a badly damaged tree is still standing, it's not recommended that a layman climb a ladder to take care of it. Get professional help."

— Patience can be a money-saver when dealing with ice or snow loads on trees. "Wait until it melts and the weight is removed to see what kind of damage was done," Chisholm said. "Trees are resilient and are capable of bouncing back."

— Plant native trees rather than exotics. Some varieties fare better than others in storms, especially trees with conical branching, those with strong branch connections and trees that are small when mature, according to the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety.

— There is strength in numbers. "Trees planted in groups survive better in high winds," Chisholm said. "They can't bend as readily to the point of failure. They also help dampen the (wind) force."

**— Learn how to assess damage. "If you have a tree that has lost a couple of branches of significant size but the trunk is mostly intact, that's still a keeper," said Hank Stelzer, a state forestry specialist with University of Missouri Extension. "If you lose the top of a tree from ice or a windstorm and if half or a quarter of the trunk is gone, that's a no-brainer. It should go."**

—  
Online:

For more about First Aid for storm-damaged trees, see this University of Missouri Extension fact sheet: <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/G6867>

You can contact Dean Fosdick at [deanfostdick\(at\)netscape.net](mailto:deanfostdick@netscape.net)

# MISSOURIAN

## MU student begins intervention program for girls at Lange Middle School

Thursday, January 3, 2013 | 6:00 a.m. CST



MU student Stacy Stewart launched an after-school program, Desire to Aspire, for young girls at Lange Middle School. She brings in guest speakers and plans different activities for the girls. In early December, Jeanne Szkolka, owner of the Columbia Dance Academy, volunteered her time to teach a jazz class.

BY Kristi Luther

**COLUMBIA — Late last year, the dean of MU's Trulaske College of Business asked a cluster of girls at Lange Middle School: "How many of you like to argue?"**

All hands shot into the air.

"I like to argue, so guess what I did?" Joan Gabel continued. "I became a lawyer."

Gabel had been invited to talk to middle schoolers during an after-school program called Desire to Aspire, launched in the fall by MU student Stacy Stewart.

Stewart's dream was to help young girls build self-esteem, confidence and bright futures.

"It's a holistic mentoring program, and we really hit on a little bit of everything," she said.

About a dozen girls currently participate. They take dance classes, learn about future career paths and create goal boards that record their aspirations.

Stewart focuses on body image as well, given the ages of the girls in the program — most are 10 to 12 years old.

"At this age, there are a lot of unique distractions that their male counterparts may not experience, and sometimes that makes girls feel like they have less opportunities," Gabel said. "But programs like this help them see that they truly can make it and there is a lot out there waiting for them."

Encouraging college graduation is another key element of the program, as is acquiring social skills and courage. Stewart said she plans to take the girls to the Governor's Mansion in Jefferson City for tea, and self-defense classes are on her list.

"This program is really understanding, and Stacy teaches us better ways to deal with our problems," said Ania Chatman, 12.

"We have open conversations, and it's nice," she said.

### **Self-esteem and body image**

Most of the girls were referred to the program by counselors who saw a need — stress, perhaps a behavior problem or lack of confidence.

"These girls desperately need this love," Stewart said. "So we avoid traditional one-on-one mentoring. I don't want the girls to feel abandoned or bad about themselves when a mentor can't be there."

Many of the girls struggle with media projections that don't remind them of their mothers, sisters, teachers or themselves.

"When you look in the media, do you see women that look like you?" asked Amina Simmons, another guest speaker. Simmons is an MU graduate student and the graduate assistant at the MU Women's Center.

The answer was a resounding "no" by every girl in the room.

Other struggles include insecurities about weight, skin color, femininity and hair.

"Everyone tells me my hair is too big, but I brush it every day," said McKenna Wells, 12.

A big topic is boys.

McKenna remembered a trip to St. Louis to visit family. Tall, with long limbs and athletic ability, she looked forward to playing basketball with cousins and friends.

Instead she was greeted with boys telling her, "You're a girl, so you can't play basketball." She decided to play anyway.

Research published in 2011 in the Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology looked at the influences boys have on girls' experiences.

The study noted: "While experiences of exclusion were the most common type of gender discrimination reported by the girls, they also indicated that their male peers would call them derogatory names."

It also addressed how girls lose confidence during early adolescence, while boys become more assertive and arrogant, even in dangerous ways. The paper advocates an intervention system for these girls to "increase their resiliency while helping them recognize and change the systems which impact their lives."

This is also an objective of Desire to Aspire.

"I just want these girls to have a sense of self efficacy — 'that "I can" attitude — and to know they don't have limitations the way they think they do and are told," Stewart said.

### **A safe space**

Both frustrations and moments of great opportunity can be witnessed in conversations during an after-school session. One of the girls seems disinterested and talks while Gabel is speaking to the class.

Stewart, however, is quick to highlight the behavior when the girl demands silence so she can talk to her friends after the session.

"It isn't a good feeling when people talk over you, is it?" Stewart asks.

It is this back-and-forth, honest relationship that allows progress, she said.

"They should feel comfortable sharing but also being challenged to think beyond themselves," Simmons said. "They have so many great things to say, but nobody wants to listen."

While getting this group of girls to talk is easy, opening them up to difficult issues can be awkward. Desire to Aspire wants to become a safe space for them to discuss sensitive subjects.

During a game of "Happy, Crappy," Alexis Kennedy, 12, was the only girl with two happy highlights in her week instead of a happy one and a crappy one.

"I did great in my rehearsal, and I have a choir performance coming up," she shared with the group.

This "safe space" allows for conversations about other things, even violence. The pressure to prove themselves by fighting is a topic girls often raise during the sessions.

"I've learned that sometimes you have to do something that's not natural and avoid fighting and doing stuff back," said Anaiyah Garr, 11.

Many of the girls don't want to be seen as "weak" or disloyal to friends, a temptation that can land them to the principal's office. Many say they have tried to reduce the incidence of discipline problems because of Desire to Aspire.

"When you get older, people will be hungry for you to retaliate," said Alexis Johnson, who volunteers for the program. "But behind the scenes, they'll be so surprised that you were mature enough to walk away."

"No one will remember that you fought a lot and were tough in middle school. They'll remember that you didn't graduate the eighth grade," she added.

### **An idea is born**

Stewart, who plans to finish school in May with degrees in sociology and psychology, was inspired to develop Desire to Aspire after working as a tutor with the Moving Ahead program. There, she was reminded of situations she endured as a girl.

"A lot of girls confided in me there, and I definitely had some of those emotions when I was their age," Stewart said. "Obviously, programs like this are needed."

She said she knows how it feels when parents get divorced and there isn't enough food in the house.

"I've been through some of these things, too," she said.

Stewart began with a mission and a plan, and little else. She even remembers agonizing over the name.

"My friends kept telling me to just let it happen naturally, and they were so right," Stewart said. One day, she said, the name for her program "literally hit like an epiphany."

Desire to Aspire was launched.

### **The right school for the future**

Stewart began to contact schools in February, hoping for responses. She was thankful when she heard back from several schools, ultimately deciding that Lange would be best for kick-starting her idea.

"I couldn't have asked for a better school to start my program off in. They are so helpful and supportive," Stewart said.

She wants to expand into other schools, encouraging more girls to embrace possibilities.

"I want every girl in Columbia, the nation and the world to know that the options abound for them," she said.

"Just because their parents didn't go to college doesn't mean they can't. They can do it; they just have to fight for it."