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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

MU medical school dean resigns as school is under investigation

BY BLYTHE BERNHARD bbernhard@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8129 | Posted: June 7, 2012



Dr. Robert Churchill, outgoing dean of the University of Missouri medical school, has been on job less than three years.

The dean who was hired less than three years ago to fix problems at the University of Missouri School of Medicine has resigned as the school faces a federal fraud investigation.

Dr. Robert Churchill will leave the university in October to prevent further distractions surrounding the investigation of two of the school's radiologists, according to MU officials.

The radiologists, Dr. Kenneth Rall and Dr. Michael Richards, were dismissed Friday as part of the shake-up after an internal audit found the doctors illegally billed Medicare for services performed by resident doctors in training.

A law firm conducted the audit for the university after the U.S. Attorney's Office in Kansas City notified the school in November 2011 of its investigation into potential Medicare fraud. Rall stepped down as radiology department chairman in December, but stayed on as a professor.

"We were shocked and disappointed to learn about this, because any kind of fraud is entirely inconsistent with our health system's values, our mission, and our commitment to patient care," said Dr. Harold Williamson Jr., vice chancellor of the University of Missouri Health System, in a statement.

Both radiologists have clean records with the Missouri State Board of Registration for the Healing Arts, which licenses and regulates doctors.

Department of Justice spokesman Don Ledford said the agency doesn't discuss pending investigations.

In what it calls the early stages of its own investigation, school officials said they have not turned up any evidence that radiology patients were harmed.

Resident physicians are allowed to read patients' X-rays, but cannot bill Medicare for the procedure unless the images are also analyzed by a supervising doctor.

"We believe these two doctors sometimes claimed that they had actually completed this second review without actually looking at the image," Williamson said in the statement.

The radiology department will make changes to the software system doctors use to analyze X-rays and other images.

An independent board of radiologists will review the patient images in question to determine whether any patients need additional screenings. Those patients will be notified, Williamson said.

The school also offered to pay for an additional review by an outside radiologist for patients who request it.

Churchill was hired as dean in October 2009 with a base salary of \$480,000 after the medical school's residency programs were placed on probation by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. The council cited record-keeping problems and a lack of funding at the school which led to medical residents taking on non-educational duties such as scheduling patient appointments. Residents are trained in specialties at teaching hospitals for three to seven years after graduating from medical school.

The probation was lifted in early 2010, and the university cited the hiring of Churchill and Williamson as part of its improvement plan. Later that year, the accreditation council also gave the school's internal medicine residency program a probation that has since been lifted.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reported in January that the university health system provided radiology services to Women's and Children's Hospital patients without physicians ordering those services, according to a 2010 internal university audit.

The newspaper also reported that Rall had left Columbia 25 years earlier after he was charged in 1986 with embezzling money from business partners in a check-kiting scheme. He was convicted of misdemeanor stealing but had faced felony charges for a purported Medicaid fraud scheme involving patients. The case fell apart after an assistant county prosecutor said he lost evidence days before trial, the newspaper reported.

Rall was hired back at the medical school in 1998 by Churchill, who was serving the first of two stints as interim dean. By 2011, Rall had been named Boone County Medical Society Doctor of the Year.

Churchill subsequently defended hiring his colleague, explaining that "Dr. Rall paid his debt for this charge more than 20 years ago."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



SEC stages welcoming party for Missouri, Texas A&M

Wednesday, June 6, 2012 | 8:57 p.m. CDT; updated 9:20 p.m. CDT, Wednesday, June 6, 2012

BY CHARLES ODUM/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — It's not often Texas A&M fans in Georgia have the chance to pose for photos with Reveille, the collie mascot.

It's a similar rarity to see Missouri mascot Truman the Tiger high-stepping through the halls of an Atlanta hotel. LSU? Auburn? No, this is a different cat.

Reveille and Truman have a new conference home, and introductions were in order on Wednesday night.

Southeastern Conference commissioner Mike Slive and the SEC held an official welcoming party for Missouri and Texas A&M, only three months before the Tigers and Aggies open their first football schedules as members of the conference.

Slive noted that Atlanta hosts the SEC championship game. He said for one night, the city "is Missouri and Texas A&M, and we welcome y'all to Atlanta and the Southeastern Conference."

Among those attending the event were Texas A&M president R. Bowen Loftin, Missouri chancellor Brady Deaton, Tigers football coach Gary Pinkel and Aggies football coach Kevin Sumlin.

Missouri's first SEC game will come at home on Sept. 8 against Georgia.

"It's going to be mammoth," Pinkel said. "It's going to be very historic. It will be our first SEC game and our first SEC home game that we play. It will be wild."

For Missouri fans in SEC country, this new relationship is a dream come true.

"Thrilled. It was a wild ride," said Jon Smalley, a 1991 Missouri graduate who lives in Alpharetta, Ga., near Atlanta and attended the party with his 8-year-old son, Wyatt. Each wore Missouri shirts.

Smalley said he worried as he heard rumors about Missouri joining other conferences.

"We were supposed to be going to the Big Ten," Smalley said. "Then we didn't know where we would end up. Mountain West? It was scary. Then boom, we ended up in the SEC. I was thrilled. And the SEC East is great, especially, living in Atlanta."

Loftin said Texas A&M's academics will gain more attention through the publicity generated by competing in SEC athletics.

"We haven't had a good national stage so one of the drivers for me was the recognition that the SEC provides a lens through which the world can see Texas A&M, not simply for athletics, but for its many dimensions," Loftin said. "We think this is going to be a great boost for the brand, if you will, for Texas A&M and puts us on a national stage like we haven't been before."

Loftin said the second major motivation was to enjoy equal financial footing in the SEC, which he said the Aggies lacked when competing with Texas in the Big 12 and the old Southwest Conference.

"The SEC has always been a conference where everybody shared equally and everybody had the same voice," Loftin said. "That wasn't always the case in the Big 12 or before it, the Southwest Conference. We find this to be the way to achieve long-term stability. The SEC is an old conference, and it's going to be around a long time longer."

This is the second time Texas A&M women's basketball coach Gary Blair has been part of a transition to the SEC. He was the Arkansas coach for 10 years, beginning in 1993, when the Razorbacks were new to the SEC.

"There's not a team in the country that could come in and dominate the SEC because the league is so strong in every sport," Blair said. "You try to come in and blend in and be in the upper echelon of the SEC in every sport."

Pinkel said he is bracing for the challenge at Missouri.

"People ask me about the SEC. I just say they have a lot of great teams," Pinkel said. "It's like the NFL. You have to play your best every week and be able to finish games if you want to win. I think no one could argue, no coach in America could argue that."

"I understand everyone is going to want to watch how A&M and Missouri do, coming from the Big 12 into this league. My big thing, when you're new like we are, you've got to earn respect. That's what we're going to try to do."



The Tribune's View

UM Press

Vital or frivolous?

By Henry J. Waters III

When University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe suddenly announced he would close the University of Missouri Press, the reaction was quick and angry among those with a stake in the operation.

Not a financial stake. The UM Press is typical of similar operations in most states, all of which lose money. In Missouri, the UM System has been providing a subsidy of \$400,000 per year, an unsustainable outlay in the eyes of Wolfe and people familiar with the politics of university budgeting. Even firm supporters of the publishing operation acknowledge state lawmakers would not be willing to provide this kind of funding in the UM budget.

But this fact does not diminish the case academicians and historians make for continuation of a university press. They point to a host of important writings put into print through the years, books and pamphlets that otherwise would languish. Many are works of researchers on UM campuses, but not all, and not all UM writers are published by the UM Press. The network of university presses provides a number of outlets where editors review and approve or deny submissions based on the value of the work, not its money-making potential.

Nobody, Wolfe included, would say the university press is unimportant, but in a time of increasing budget stringency, saving the \$400,000 became the important factor.

But what if a good university press operation could be sustained at lower cost? Through the years, the UM Press has provided a number of services that might not be continued as high priority, and though past discussions have been had, no real effort has been made to streamline its operations. Now that actual contemplation of closure spawns so much widespread concern, it will make sense for the UM administration to look anew at options.

One option that does not seem likely is restoration of the press in its current form. At least, the operation needs a serious reincarnation. It might not need to disappear altogether.

HJW III

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Letters to the editor, June 7

Posted: Thursday, June 7, 2012 12:00 am

Harming the cultural climate

I served two terms on the faculty review board at the University of Missouri Press. Closing the press sends a signal that the University of Missouri no longer wishes to make a claim to valuing scholarship.

In policy decisions on my own campus and in the wider Missouri university system, I see two contrasting models of the university at work. In one model, the university is a seat of learning, dedicated to sustaining higher culture in Missouri. In this model, students participate in the community of minds created within the university. In the other model, the university is a factory designed to produce degrees. The students are customers purchasing degrees. The citizens of Missouri are shareholders of the company. In this model, the aim of the university is to turn a profit in the short term.

The decision to close the press looks like a product of this latter model. The goal of short-term profits runs counter to profit in the longer term: sustaining a cultural climate that is inviting to educated people — who create industries and technologies. Those people do not wish their children to grow up in a cultural backwater. They would look down on a university that has a football team but no university press.

Every university president has a legacy. People will suppose that University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe has an impoverished understanding of the mission of a university.

Closing the press will do irreparable harm to the cultural climate of Missouri. I hope Mr. Wolfe will not do this.

Joseph Carroll • St. Louis

Curators Professor, English Department, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Losing my Tiger pride

As a taxpayer and financial contributor to the University of Missouri (my graduate school alma mater), I'm completely dismayed by its administrators' redirection of a budget that barely sustained the University of Missouri Press. This administration also lets Missouri Review, our literary journal, limp along on a minuscule budget dependent primarily on funds from the Missouri Arts Council. The staff of both are paid less than their value, so why do they

do this work? Because they understand the role of public education and the importance of academic excellence.

The press was operated in the black not long ago and, since 1958, has spawned the work of thousands of scholars and academicians. In recent years, administrators cut the budget of other academic programs, and that resulted in the elimination of professional staff. The press' total budget wouldn't pay the salary of one coach or one administrator making these decisions. Lest we forget, taxpayers funded a new arena, a new tennis facility and a mascot mosaic, all requiring operation and maintenance budgets. Some considered an outlay of mascot funds to care for and feed and parade a live tiger here and there, but loud roaring opposing this idea led to common sense.

A university press is a key academic component of university life. And \$400,000 is a pittance sum compared to what's shelled out on various athletic staff or programs. With the demise of the press in 2013, Mizzou's reputation as an academic university must be questioned, and the university will establish an image as primarily a sports school.

I want to know into what dark hole will the University of Missouri Press' \$400,000 fall, and why can't our state university support a university press?

Sharon Kinney Hanson • Columbia, MO.



Ameren, Westinghouse visit MU to talk nuclear project

By Janese Silvey

Ameren Missouri and Westinghouse Electric Co. are meeting on the University of Missouri campus today to begin discussing how the university's engineering resources can help the companies secure a federal grant.

The afternoon session starts with a working lunch featuring remarks from MU administrators followed by a series of presentations about the College of Engineering, radiochemistry capabilities at MU and a tour of the MU Research Reactor. Sudarshan Loyalka, a curators' professor in the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute, also will present information about small modular reactors and related research at the institute.

Ameren and Westinghouse in April said they would seek as much as \$452 million in U.S. Department of Energy funding to design and build small modular nuclear reactors at Ameren's Fulton plant.

Because the meeting involves private companies, it is not open to the public, nor are reporters allowed to attend. Today's group does not report to a public governing body, so closing it is allowed under the state's Open Meetings and Records Law, said Jean Maneke, a Sunshine Law attorney for the Missouri Press Association.

The university has a media policy that requires any event, regardless of whether it's sponsored by a private entity, to be open to media as long as the general public, students or faculty are invited. Chancellor Brady Deaton drafted that policy after a keynote speaker at a Trulaske College of Business forum in 2009 requested that reporters not be allowed.

In this instance, only invited university personnel and representatives from the two companies are attending, meaning it is not open to the public, general faculty or other groups, spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said.

MU spokesman Christian Basi said Ameren and Westinghouse representatives are expected to discuss how the university might be able to assist with the process of designing and building small modular nuclear reactors.

"We're very pleased that Ameren and Westinghouse are exploring MU's capabilities, but we are unable to speculate on any further action that might be taken at this time," he said. "We need to be able to carefully explore detailed technical ways in which public and private partnerships may be of value to all of us."

The meeting comes on the heels of backlash over MU's decision to close the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute after the last student graduates. Some Ameren employees expressed concerns that changing the structure of nuclear engineering might hurt MU's chances of being involved in the reactor project. But the company's CEO, Warner Baxter, wrote a letter to the UM System last month supporting the changes and ensuring that the university will be an "important strategic partner" in the grant process.

Ameren and Westinghouse officials also are working with faculty at Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.

theman eater

MU continues plan to disband NSEI

The Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute was established in 2002.

By Mary Ryan

Published June 5, 2012

In the wake of heated debates between administrators and faculty at the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute, MU still plans to disband the program.

Students in the program will be redistributed to different academic departments. These changes will not go into effect until all of the program's current students, and students entering the program in Fall Semester 2012, have graduated.

"The official plan hasn't changed," Graduate Dean George Justice said. "The university's programs in Nuclear Engineering and Science will be expanding with the collaboration of faculty across the university, including faculty in the College of Engineering. The faculty members in NSEI with tenure homes in the Graduate School will find new tenure homes by July 1, 2014."

Tenured professors are challenging this decision to restructure the program, claiming administrators are in violation of the Collected Rules and Regulations by requiring tenured faculty to find new departmental homes without consent.

"On March 12, 2012, without warning to faculty or students, the administration announced that NSEI would no longer exist by March 15, 2012," Eddie Adelstein, American Association of University Professors member, wrote in a letter dated May 18 to the UM System Board of Curators. "At the same time, the website was dismantled and a sense of institutional panic developed."

The main goal of restructuring NSEI is to further develop the program. Energy companies Ameren Missouri and Westinghouse Electric Company are working to secure a contract with MU to build a small nuclear reactor, which would have federal funding of about \$452 million.

MU is working to respond to new economic opportunities in the areas of nuclear science and engineering as well as achieve national accreditation for MU's nuclear engineering degree, MU spokesman Christian Basi said.

"The college is currently preparing the curriculum, energizing the faculty, obtaining industrial input and obtaining necessary university approvals to offer M.S. and Ph.D.s in emphasis areas in nuclear engineering," Basi said.

Requirements for students currently pursuing nuclear science and engineering degrees will not be greatly altered with the changes to the general nuclear science program.

“The restructuring will not affect current students,” Justice said. “Students coming into the university after Fall 2012 to pursue nuclear engineering and science degrees will have a range of options to pursue this work at a very high level. We are working on the most effective way to increase offerings to serve those students.”

Though there are disagreements about the handling of the situation, both sides are interested in the welfare of the nuclear engineering and science degrees at MU and the welfare of its students and faculty.

“The University of Missouri remains fully committed to excellence in nuclear science and engineering in service to our students, our state and our nation,” Basi said. “MU is reconfiguring its resources to maximize their potential in the face of new demands and opportunities. The university greatly values the many contributions NSEI faculty continue to make to the university and to the nuclear engineering industry.”

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

The★Star
THE KANSAS CITY STAR

AP Associated Press

Student gets probation for racist graffiti at MU

COLUMBIA -- A former University of Missouri student was sentenced to two years of probation for painting a racist slur on the Columbia campus in 2011.

Benjamin A. Elliott was sentenced Monday after pleading guilty to misdemeanor property damage. He was also ordered to perform 100 hours of community service.

A racist term was spray-painted on a statue outside Hatch Hall on Feb. 12, 2011. That same day Columbia police found an anti-Jewish message spray-painted on a Toyota near campus.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports the case was delayed several times while prosecutors waited to see if the two incidents were related but no evidence was found to link the two and Elliott was sentenced only for the statue damage.

