Health care proposal could cost UM System millions

By Stephanie Sandoval

JEFFERSON CITY — A Missouri lawmaker wants to reduce student debt by removing mandatory health fees.

House Bill 2076, discussed in a public hearing on college health care fees Wednesday at the Missouri House, would allow students who already have health insurance to be exempt from paying health care fees at public institutions.

The proposal could cost the UM System over $7 million, according to UM System officials in a fiscal note on the bill.

The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Jason Chipman, R-Steelville, speaks from experience. Chipman attended Missouri University of Science and Technology.

“I was taking six hours, and I was forced to pay the student health fee,” Chipman said. “I was a veteran, had my own health insurance and access to the VA, living on my own, not on campus, and I still had to pay the student health fee, for which nobody could give me a list of what it was good for.”

In opposition to the bill, Dustin Schnieders, director of governmental relations for the UM System, said student health centers would not be able to sustain their services because of the large loss in revenue.

“I think health services on any campus is very important, and I support that,” Rep. Elaine Gannon, R-DeSoto, said in reply to Schnieders.

Undergraduate and graduate students at MU must pay a prepaid health fee of $95 if enrolled in seven credit hours or more during the fall and spring semesters.

The fee funds the MU Student Health Center and covers unlimited medical consultations with physicians and nurse practitioners, according to a video on the MU Office of Cashiers website.

MU requires international students to enroll in a university-sponsored health insurance plan, even if they have their own. The plan, which is not a requirement for domestic students, cost $943 this semester, according to the MU International Center website.
Chipman said lawmakers need to look at putting a cap on current and new fees to help control costs.

“I know schools are limited on increasing tuition, so what they resorted to is raising fees to make up the difference,” Chipman said. “Instead of changing the way they operate, they change the way they’re funded.”

Paul Wagner, deputy commissioner at the Missouri Department of Higher Education, said health fees are crucial for students.

“We have an increasingly large percentage of students who are arriving on campus with mental health issues,” Wagner said. “The 18- to 22-year-old age group is where most mental health issues tend to manifest, so the entire mental health side of the services that we provide is large and getting larger.”

Missouri State University Chief of Staff Ryan DeBoef said the school charges $58.51 per semester. All of the revenue goes toward the health center, DeBoef said.

“In spring 2012, the student body voted to add $2 to the health center fee so they could also receive free flu shots at the health center,” he said. “More recently, in fall of 2015, the student body voted to have the university charge an additional $29 per semester to build a new health center on campus.”

DeBoef said the new health center will be completed later this spring.

“The referendum received enormous student support with 86.4 percent of the vote for the fee,” DeBoef said.

Rep. Joe Adams, D-University City, said letting students vote on fees is “the right way to do it.”

“I remember when I went to University of Missouri in Kansas City, we raised, on a vote of the students, fees to do things that we wanted accomplished on our campus,” Adams said.

The bill does not prevent public institutions from offering students health insurance coverage and health services at a price.
Performance-contingent funding makes matters worse for public universities

By Tyler Wornell

JEFFERSON CITY — Next year, 10 percent of state universities’ core budgets will be contingent upon meeting six performance standards.

A House panel aired questions Tuesday during an education appropriations hearing about the performance funding model, and how it might further impact budget cuts that higher education is already facing in the 2019 fiscal year.

Earlier this month, the state’s Coordinating Board for Higher Education voted to tie 10 percent of institutions’ core budget money to performance measures. Previously, performance funding only applied to money outside of schools’ core budgets.

In Gov. Eric Greitens’ proposed 2019 budget, higher education would receive $810 million in general revenue — a $98 million, or 10.8 percent, reduction from last year. Ten percent of that core budget would be set aside and distributed to universities when they meet their performance goals. The University of Missouri System would have $37.6 million of its $376.5 million budget contingent upon performance measures.

There are six standards to meet, and a university would receive one-sixth of the money for every standard it meets. Any money not received would go into a fund used to help schools meet their performance targets.

Rep. Donna Lichtenegger, R-Jackson, who chairs the House Higher Education Committee, was distressed about the fact that the state has already placed a high burden on universities to find efficiencies in their current budgets.

“They’re like, blue in the face now,” Lichtenegger said. “I’m really worried about some of these financial institutions being able to hold on and stay alive.”

That sentiment was shared by other members of the committee, which turned the discussion to rethinking how higher education is funded. Higher Education Commissioner Zora Mulligan said she wants to begin crafting a more rational approach to funding higher education, like one that looks similar to the K-12 model. She said the department is committed to starting the conversation.
“What we have now... it doesn’t present a very compelling case and it makes higher education a natural target when we’re looking to balance a budget,” Mulligan said. “I think we need to get to a point where we have a recommendation that we can defend with data.”

Rep. Kip Kendrick, D-Columbia, said that while he isn’t opposed to the idea of some funding being contingent on performance, having it on top of other budget cuts is troubling. He said he’d like to see the higher education department offer ideas of revenue streams in future budget requests and that something similar to a funding formula should be part of the conversation.

“We’re seeing cuts to higher education that are going to affect middle-class families across the state and really impact the ability for affordable education and access to higher education,” Kendrick said. “As long as you see states having to make cuts to their budget, they typically go to higher education because it’s a cost that can be passed on to consumers.”

Mulligan said she expects the department will receive waiver requests from universities to raise tuition beyond the rate of inflation. Currently, state statute prohibits doing so. Sen. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia, has filed a bill that would lift the tuition cap.

While Kendrick said he hasn’t fully examined Rowden’s bill, he said a conversation needs to begin about the relationship between the state asking universities to cut their budget and restricting their ability to increase revenue.

The General Assembly will begin preparing its own budget in the coming weeks, and Kendrick, who serves on the budget committee, said there could be ways to build a “responsible” budget and put money back into higher education.

“When I talk about plugging some of that money back in,” Kendrick said, “hopefully we can produce the least worst situation that we can this year for public higher education institutions.”
MU chancellor voices concerns about proposed funding cuts

COLUMBIA, Mo. -- The University of Missouri's flagship campus in Columbia is raising concerns that proposed cuts will make it more difficult to meet goals that include paying for new research and academic buildings.

On Monday, Gov. Eric Greitens proposed cutting 10 percent from current appropriations for state colleges and universities and putting 10 percent of the remaining funds into a pool that only would be distributed if performance measures are met. That would put more than $80 million of the appropriation at risk for the four-campus University of Missouri system.

About 40 percent to 45 percent of the system's academic spending goes to the Columbia campus.

If approved, it would be the smallest state appropriation since 1998, the Columbia Daily Tribune reported.

"We only saw so much last night," University chancellor Alexander Cartwright said Tuesday. "But I have concerns about our ability to really be able to do all the things we would like to do going forward."

The cuts mean a stronger push this year to repeal or revise the state tuition-cap law that limits increases to the rate of inflation.

"We need to be thinking about how do we have the resources needed to deliver on a high-quality education for the citizens of Missouri and beyond," Cartwright said.

The budget plan proposed by Greitens also eliminates funding for medical education in Springfield, funding to expand the Missouri University of Science and Technology's program for cooperative engineering with Missouri State University and several other initiatives.
"We are going to have to look at and see how we can deliver on those programs, not having the resources needed," Cartwright said.

**Similar stories ran statewide**

**(AUDIO) Rowden: Proposed higher ed cuts “lazy and shortsighted”**

Columbia state Sen. Caleb Rowden is condemning Gov. Greitens’ proposed cuts to higher education.

“I think it’s lazy and shortsighted among other things,” Rowden says. “The governor has just used higher education as his way out, instead of doing the hardwork of really digging in and finding ways to save money in other areas of the budget.”

Rowden says the state should invest more in developing its workforce, to help the economy grow. He expects the legislature will not go along with the higher ed cuts.


**(AUDIO) Rep. Basye “troubled” by proposed higher education cuts**

Local Mo. Rep. Chuck Basye says he’s troubled by Gov. Greitens’ proposed spending cuts to higher education.

“In addition to the educational opportunities [the University of Missouri provides] young people, they do a lot of other things like Extension services – very, very valuable – the research they provide, things of that nature, the health care system,” Basye says.

Mizzou athletics operated in red last year, first time since joining SEC

By: Dave Matter

COLUMBIA, MO. • For the first time since joining the Southeastern Conference the University of Missouri athletics department operated in the red last year. Mizzou athletics made more money and spent more money than ever before during the 2016-17 fiscal year, but with ticket sales still lagging, expenses exceeded revenue by $4.5 million.

Ticket sales continued to tumble last year and couldn’t overcome increases in donor contributions and heightened spending for salaries and other overhead costs. Mizzou athletics generated $97,848,195 during Jim Sterk’s first year as athletics director, a slight increase of less than 1 percent from the previous year. Spending reached $102,409,131, an uptick by 8.6 percent, according to financial records obtained by the Post-Dispatch through an open records request. The financial figures are from the school’s mandated submission to the NCAA Membership Financial Reporting System.

The last time Missouri athletics reported an operating deficit was the 2011-12 fiscal year, MU’s final year in the Big 12 Conference. That year, Mizzou did not receive conference revenue distribution as part of its departure from the Big 12.

There’s a possibility Mizzou might operate at a deficit for 2017-18, too, when those numbers are finalized later this year.

“We’re a little similar to the institution,” said Tim Hickman, the athletics department’s chief financial officer. “We’ve had a little bit of a revenue dip with ticket sales particularly for a
couple years, but now this year we’re starting to see that trend back up. We hope that continues. But it takes a little bit of time to catch up. It’s possible we could have another deficit year.”

The latest financial data reflects Mizzou’s finances from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017, which included Barry Odom’s first year as Mizzou’s football coach, a 4-8 season that saw attendance figures dip for a second straight year, and Kim Anderson’s final year as the men’s basketball coach, when the Tigers played in front of thousands of empty seats at Mizzou Arena.

Mizzou’s greatest source of athletics revenue came from its media rights deals for radio, TV and Internet, most of which is distributed by the Southeastern Conference. This year’s total was $34,760,676, nearly a 4 percent increase from last year.

In Sterk’s first year, Mizzou’s donor contributions increased more than 26 percent to $22,355,552. However, the numbers submitted in the NCAA annual report can sometimes be misleading. The report only count funds that were spent in the given fiscal year, not money earmarked for future projects, such as the new football complex being built on the south end zone of Memorial Stadium.

MU also draws SEC revenue from outside media rights, and that figure increased almost 14 percent to $9,665,556.

Revenue for away game appearances took a major plunge, down from more than $3.5 million in 2015-16 to just $250,000. The $3.5 million payout in 2015 came from the Kansas City Chiefs for a football game at Arrowhead Stadium against Brigham Young. That year, the payoff from the Chiefs helped offset dwindling earnings on ticket sales, but during the past year, Mizzou ticket sales in all sports dropped again from $19,152,889 in 2015-16 to $17,993,862. Mizzou has undergone a three-year drop-off of more than 25 percent for ticket revenue from the 2013-14 fiscal year, the first year Mizzou won the SEC East Division under Gary Pinkel and the final basketball season under Frank Haith.
For the **football team**, revenue increased from $34.6 million to $35.7 million, though ticket sales dropped from $13,283,209 to $11,048,720, a decrease in 17 percent. The drop in revenue was not unexpected considering Mizzou's plummeting attendance figures in 2016, when the average home crowd fell from 65,120 in 2015 to 52,236 in 2016. Average attendance dropped again this past season to 51,490.

The **men’s basketball team** saw ticket sale revenue fall from $3,733,734 to $3,035,663, a drop by 19 percent. When attendance and ticket sales drop, so do parking and concessions revenue. The football team’s sales in those categories fell by $300,000, a decrease by 20 percent. The basketball team’s parking and concessions revenue fell by 29 percent.

Mizzou also saw a sharp decline in revenue for merchandise, royalties, sponsorships and licensing agreements, all of which can be traced back to fewer ticket sales to live events.

“With ticket sales being down, all ancillary things were down,” Hickman said, “whether that’s concessions or parking or royalties or licensing.”

Mizzou sold out of season tickets for men’s basketball games this season, meaning next year’s report will see a surge in revenue. Hickman said cash contributions will increase, too.

As for Mizzou’s expenses, salaries and benefits for coaches increased by nearly 14 percent to $21,107,952, with a large chunk going toward the new **men’s basketball** staff. New coach Cuonzo Martin’s salary was included in the 2017 fiscal numbers as MU spent $4,960,864 on head coaches’ salaries and benefits, compared to just $1,509,598 for Anderson the previous year. The assistant salary/benefits pool increased from $654,039 to $972,247.

The steepest spending increase came in the area categorized as overhead and administrative fees, which includes payments for utilities, phones, maintenance, security and equipment repair. Those expenses soared by 61 percent to $14,651,904. Most of that increase, Hickman said, was related to Mizzou’s new softball stadium, which opened last spring.
As has been the case for several years, MU athletics took in very little from the university’s coffers. The department received $1,015,000 from the university, same as the previous year, to waive fees for out-of-state students.

“We’re proud of the fact that we have very little campus subsidy,” Hickman said.

Here’s a line by line look at Mizzou's revenue and expenses figures from the last two years:

2015-16 Mizzou athletics revenue … 2016-17, percent change

Ticket sales: $19,152,889 … $17,993,862, down 6.1%

Direct institutional support: $1,015,000 … $1,015,000, no change

Guarantee fee for road games: $3,510,700 … $250,000, down 92.9%

Cash donations: $17,701,314 … $22,355,522, up 26.3%*

In-kind contributions: $2,281,246 … $1,225,993, down 46.3%

Media rights: $33,509,476 … $34,760,676, up 3.7%

NCAA distributions: $1,186,799 … $2,065,836, up 74.1%

Conference distributions: $8,483,295 … $9,665,556, up 13.9%

Programs/concessions/parking: $2,312,107 … $2,185,109, down 5.5%

Royalties/licensing/advertisements: $3,053,899 … $1,460,957, down 52.2%

Camps: $1,905,221 … $1,300,873, down 31.7 percent

Endowment/investment income: $1,333,454 … $1,402,592, up 5.2%
Other operating revenue: $1,830,439 … $2,166,189, up 18.3 %

Total operating revenue: $97,275,839 … $97,848,195, up 0.6 %

2015-16 Mizzou athletics expenses … 2016-17, percent change

Athletic student aid: $11,247,490 … 10,831,611, down 3.7 %

Guarantee fees for visiting teams: $3,258,529 … $3,777,358, up 15.9 %

Coaches’ salaries/benefits/bonuses: $18,563,146 … $21,107,952, up 13.7 %

Staff salaries/benefits/bonuses: $18,852,331 … $20,799,530, up 10.3 %

Severance payments: $0 … $450,000, N/A

Recruiting: $1,467,231 … $1,500,946, up 2.3 %

Travel: $6,653,591 … $6,810,366, up 2.4 %

Equipment/uniforms: $1,706,588 … $1,505,040, down 11.8 %

Game expenses: $3,352,605 … $3,409,177, up 1.7 %

Fundraising, marketing: $1,104,958 … $1,112,456, up 0.7 %

Camps: $1,222,044 … $757,970, down 38.0 %

Facilities debt/rental: $7,145,864 … $6,355,157, down 11.1 %

Spirit groups: $518,447 … $576,965, up 11.3 %
Medical expenses/insurance: $1,092,070 … $1,310,953, up 20.0 %

Membership dues: $78,643 … $74,573, down 5.2 %

Athlete meals: $841,967 … $750,645, down 10.8 %

Overhead/administrative: $9,099,575 … $14,651,904, up 61.0 %

Other operating expenses: $8,118,884 … $6,46,546, down 18.1 %

Total operating expenses: $94,323,693 … $102,409,131, up 8.6 %

* Cash donations only include money spent during the reported fiscal year, not money pledged for future use.

A few more notes and observations from the data:

Women's basketball ticket revenue increased by more than 51 percent, jumping from $94,051 to $142,285.

The football team spent far less on the head coach’s salary and benefits, going from $4,213,696 to Pinkel in his final year to $2,882,587 to Odom in his first year. The football staff’s salary and benefits pool decreased by around $40,000.

Here are the top 10 Mizzou teams ranked by revenue generated:

1. Football, $35.7 million
2. Men’s basketball, $10 million
3. Women’s basketball, $407,000
4. Wrestling, $308,000

5. Volleyball, $275,000

6. Baseball, $228,000

7. Softball, $223,000

8. Gymnastics, $146,000

9. Women’s golf, $121,000

10. Soccer, $113,000

(This explains why they refer to football and men’s basketball as revenue sports and everyone else non-revenue.)

Here are the top 10 teams in terms of team expenses:

1. Football, $21.1 million

2. Men’s basketball, $10.1 million

3. Women’s basketball, $3.54 million

4. Baseball, $2.69 million

5. Volleyball, $1.96 million

6. Soccer, $1.91 million

7. Softball, $1.84 million
8. Women’s track/cross country: $1.65 million

9. Wrestling, $1.52 million

10. Gymnastics, $1.46 million

Once again, softball hauled in the fourth-most ticket sales revenue behind the big three (football, men’s and women’s basketball) and made significantly more than the baseball team on tickets: $88,849 to baseball’s $50,944.

Which team makes the most money on camps? Volleyball at $226,821, followed by wrestling ($222,500), baseball ($145,840) and gymnastics ($115,135).

The football team spent $2,925,000 on guaranteed payments for nonconference visiting teams in 2016, up from $1,150,574 in 2015. The men's basketball team spent $663,000, just a bit more than the previous year. Three of those games were especially costly because they ended with losses: North Carolina Central, Lipscomb and Eastern Illinois.

Moving from baseball coach Tim Jamieson in 2015-16 to Steve Bieser last year was more costly, an increase in salary, benefits and bonuses from $319,455 to $545,747.

The department’s only severance payment was $450,000 to Anderson.

The football team spends the most money on recruiting, $644,161, up from $593,705 the previous year. The men’s basketball team spends the next-most, $271,853, way up from $216,793 the year before.

Likewise, the football team spent the most on travel, $1,407,101, followed by men’s basketball ($914,447), women’s basketball ($666,926) and softball ($510,331).

Only two teams spent five figures on promotions and marketing: volleyball ($24,362) and women’s basketball ($10,013).
Lastly, Mizzou’s cost of attendance figures have increased slightly, up for in-state students from $27,294 to $27,868 and out-of-state students from $42,576 to $43,456.

**Study says mental health screenings not enough to help young children**

Generated from News Bureau press release: [Current mental health screenings alone not accurate enough to help elementary students, MU study finds](#)

The Missouri Department of Mental Health reports more than 80 percent of the 97,000 young Missourians who needed treatment for serious mental health problems in 2015 did not receive public mental health support. Many educators, counselors and social workers are working to improve practices to identify children who need help through risk assessments, such as mental health screenings.

In a recent study, Melissa Maras, a research consultant at the University of Missouri Assessment Resource Center, found a high degree of variance between teacher reports when using these screenings. Creating a more holistic view of a student’s behavior may be the key to identifying more children who need additional support, she said in an MU news release.
“For many children, one risk assessment completed by a single teacher on any given day may not provide enough insight as to whether or not a child needs additional mental health supports,” Maras said in the release. “But if we can get input from several different sources, such as teachers, counselors, parents and other adults involved in a young person’s life, we may have a better understanding of their overall needs and resources.”

Maras says that building the capacity of schools’ mental health programs and investigating the accuracy of screening processes is crucial because many states, including Missouri, depend heavily on schools to meet the mental health needs of students.

The ratio of school-employed mental health professionals to students in Missouri presents significant challenges. The ideal ratio is 1 social worker for every 250 students; the ratio for the 2016-17 school year was 1 social worker for every 2,065 students. Statewide data shows Missouri also does not meet the recommended student-to-professional ratio for school counselors or school psychologists, the release said.

Data from three different risk assessments were collected from three samples of elementary schools in different states. Maras and her colleagues found that as much as 20 percent of the variance in universal risk assessments is due to teacher and classroom factors rather than student-level differences. Teacher factors include possible biases and personality differences. Classroom factors include how students are grouped in classrooms and the number of students with greater academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs.

“More research on best practices for identifying children with mental health needs must be done,” Maras said. “While it’s important to look further into what teacher and classroom factors are causing these discrepancies, it’s equally as valuable to devote time to honing multi-faceted ways to identify young people in need.”

Maras suggests schools may be able to strengthen current identification practices by supplementing assessments with other data, such as a student’s discipline referrals, attendance and academic performance over time.
“Strengthening school mental health programs to be as effective and efficient as possible increases the likelihood that young people will get the additional mental health supports they need to be successful,” Maras said.

“Differences between teacher reports on universal risk assessments,” was published in Advances in School Mental Health Promotion. The Assessment Resource Center is an outreach unit within the MU College of Education. Co-authors of the study include Joni Williams Splett, assistant professor at the University of Florida, and Kristy Brann, assistant professor at Miami University. Splett and Brann are MU alumnae.

Other authors of the study are Marissa K. Smith-Millman, doctoral candidate at Miami University; Paul D. Flaspohler, associate professor at Miami University; Aaron Luebbe, assistant professor at Miami University; and Hannah Dinnen, doctoral candidate at Miami University.

**Here's Why You Can Shut Out the Shock of Mass Shootings**

*Generated by direct pitch by MU Health Care.*

By JAMIE DUCHARME

It took only 23 days for the U.S. to witness its 11th school shooting of the year, during which a Marshall County High School student killed two of his classmates and wounded more than a dozen others. The Jan. 23 assault, in Benton, Kentucky, was the second school shooting of the week. It was only a Tuesday.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the recent frequency of such horrors, the story was somewhat lost in a news cycle dominated by Oscar nominations, the end of the government shutdown, and the impending sentencing of Larry Nassar. While the town of Benton was undoubtedly rocked by the incident, the rest of the country’s focus was largely elsewhere. “We have absolutely become numb to these kinds of shootings, and I think that will
continue,” former senior FBI official Katherine Schweit told the New York Times in the wake of the shooting.

That numbness undoubtedly has an impact on policy, politics and news coverage of shootings. But on an individual level, experts say, it’s not always apathy — it’s a hardwired protective instinct, at least to a degree.

“Because these things are so overwhelming, our central nervous system basically shuts down past a point,” says Dr. Bruce Harry, an associate professor of clinical psychiatry and forensic psychiatry at the University of Missouri School of Medicine. “The things that generally overwhelm the person emotionally or neurologically are events that we’re not accustomed to dealing with: severe automobile accidents, plane crashes, fires, the death of someone close to you, or witnessing the death of anyone. These are not things we’re hardwired to endure.”

When people are forced to confront these events, Harry says, the brain may try to shield them from potentially damaging trauma by providing emotional and cognitive distance. The mechanism by which this occurs isn’t well understood, Harry says. But he suspects it has to do with the amygdala, a part of the brain involved in processing external stimuli and emotions. Exposure to traumatic stress has also been shown to cause lasting changes in brain structure.

“It’s the brain’s way of trying to keep you healthy,” Harry says. “Unfortunately, it can get to a point where it numbs you to other experiences around you.” Some evidence has shown, for example, that exposure to violent media can make people less receptive to the pain and suffering of others in real life.

Whether people are becoming numb to mass violence at a societal level is a matter of debate.

Jack Levin, a sociologist, criminologist and the co-director of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict at Northeastern University, argues we’re not ignoring violent incidents. Rather, our collective fear of them is at an all-time high — a theory backed by American Psychological Association research. “We are seeing an epidemic of epidemic-thinking about violence,” Levin says, even though “mass killings, including those at schools and colleges, have remained very constant.” (However, that depends on how you measure them.)

But Jeff Temple, a professor and psychologist in the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Texas Medical Branch, says that steady exposure to violent news coverage and other media is likely contributing to mass desensitization, simply because it becomes so routine. What was shocking five or 10 years ago is now ordinary.

“Novelty in something is important in terms of us paying attention to it,” Temple says. “That’s why Sandy Hook was so impactful — because it was a new type of violence, in the sense that it was elementary school children.” When people are forced to reckon with 11 school shootings in 23 days, each event, though singular in its tragedy, may lose its shock value for people who aren’t directly affected.
On a personal level, it’s not inherently good or bad to feel numb in the wake of a tragedy, Temple says. “However someone feels after a disaster or a tragedy is okay, and they shouldn’t beat themselves up, however they feel.” But if your response to an emotional event causes you persistent anxiety — whether you’re worried that you’re reacting too strongly, or not strongly enough — he says that may be an indication that you should speak with a mental health professional. Temple also suggests taking the occasional break from the world’s news to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

“I would strongly suggest, as a psychologist, giving yourself vacations from the news and social media,” Temple says. “Whether that’s a day a week, a week a month — just something to escape that daily stress.”

YOU CAN’T TRUST FACEBOOK’S SEARCH FOR TRUSTED NEWS

BY: ADAM ROGERS

Do you trust me? Do you trust what you are about to read, assuming you keep reading? (Keep reading!) Do you believe that I comported myself ethically during my reporting, did not make anything up, did not use the work of others without credit?

Let me put that another way:

Do you trust that this article will make you feel better, or correct, about the world? Do you think that I, as the writer, have some connection to you, as part of a community? That I want you to be informed, sure, but also protected?

Both of those paragraphs define trust, but very differently. Which makes it both troubling and a little weird that last week the social network Facebook—in a news release attributed to Adam Mosseri, head of the company’s newsfeed—announced it would start prioritizing “trusted” news sources. “We surveyed a diverse and representative sample of people across the US to gauge their familiarity with, and trust in, various different sources of news,” the release says. “This data will help to inform ranking in News Feed.”

By one estimate, Facebook has 214 million US users, and is a major disseminator of news produced elsewhere. Some of that news is fake; the social network’s users are prone to spreading...
extreme content, and some of that content is literal propaganda. Russian agents used Facebook to disrupt the US elections in 2016, exposing 140 million people to their trolling. Even Facebook knows it has a problem—in a corporate post, the company’s product manager for civic engagement acknowledged that social media could “corrode democracy,” and he listed Facebook’s efforts to expose untruths and deter people from sharing misinformation.

The relationship between Facebook and the news media is, as the site might put it, complicated. Much of the ad money that used to go to independent news outlets now goes to Facebook—the company generated more than $27 billion in ad revenue in the first nine months of last year, topping Comcast and Disney—while advertising in newspapers and magazines fell off a cliff. Money that used to pay for news now pays for Facebook.

So the question you should ask next is not how Facebook can figure out what news organizations people trust. It’s not even whether that’s possible. The question is if that’s even the right question.

Facebook plans to gather its data with a poll. “As part of our ongoing quality surveys, we will now ask people whether they’re familiar with a news source and, if so, whether they trust that source,” writes Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg on, duh, Facebook.

This has turned out to be literally true. Buzzfeed published the complete poll on Tuesday. It asks which news outlets on a list users are familiar with and how much they trust those “domains.” That’s it. The five possible answers range from “entirely” to “not at all,” easy to code as one through five (or five through one). “The idea is that some news organizations are only trusted by their readers or watchers, and others are broadly trusted across society even by those who don't follow them directly,” Zuckerberg writes.

So, yeah. That’s probably not going to work.

In his 2002 book Trust and Trustworthiness, the late political scientist Russell Hardin writes that trust itself has at best messy definitions, not widely agreed upon. “Quarrels about what it ‘really’ means sound like the worst of Platonic debates,” Hardin writes. “There is no Platonically essential notion of trust.”

That doesn’t stop him from trying, though. “Trustworthiness,” Hardin says, is the raw stuff, the thing that a person or an institution might possess. “Trust” is what someone feels. It’s a three-part relationship: A trusts B to do X. If you only have two elements, that’s not really trust.

When it comes to news, solving for X is the tricky part. What does Facebook think its users trust news organizations to do? The company did not respond to requests for comment.

What Facebook seems to be asking about is not actually trust but trustworthiness—because, frankly, it should not matter whether someone trusts a news outlet. It should matter whether that news outlet is trustworthy. People trust other people and things for all sorts of bad reasons, Hardin points out, to do all sorts of bad things. “Members of a community may trust one another in ways that are commonly all to the good, and yet their trust may enable them to subjugate and brutalize a neighboring community,” he writes.
Of course, the appearance of trustworthiness can be gamed. “The legitimacy part is the one that gets gamed the most,” says Kimberly Elsbach, a professor of management at UC Davis. “Saying that you’re using a legitimate, well-known process, but not actually doing that.”

Worse, people tend to be more trusting of things that are familiar. They’ll distrust an expert but believe a friend or loved one. “A lot of people have a very local view of what they trust,” says Roderick Kramer, a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford. “Their local church, local institutions, local paper, their friends.” (Apparently people share news on Facebook with friends somewhat indiscriminately; an experiment where Facebook fact-checkers marked some stories as “disputed” didn’t cut sharing rates, though appending related news did—somewhat.)

Here’s the even deeper problem: Not only do people not trust the media much in general, but their level of trust emerges predictably from their political orientation.

Using data from an ongoing multi-subject survey out of the University of Michigan, a 2010 study in the journal American Behavioral Scientist said that three things predicted whether someone will trust the news media: how far they leaned to the left, politically; how trusting they are in general; and how well they think the economy is doing. This was before political polarization reached its current supercharged levels, and the survey asked about the news in general rather than particular sources. It’s safe to assume that people who bottom out on all those metrics still trust some sources of information, and presumably they’d upvote those on the Facebook survey.

Similarly, a Pew Research Center study from May 2017 said that 89 percent of people who identified as Democrats said the news media’s watchdog role kept politicians from doing bad things, compared with just 42 percent of Republicans. Seventy-five percent of Americans say the news media does fairly well or very well at keeping them informed, but that splits on party lines, too—88-69 Democratic.

Also last year, a researcher now at the University of Missouri polled audiences from 28 different news organizations about their level of trust. Mike Kearney, a journalism professor, asked the question differently, though.

“How likely are you to believe what you read, see, or hear from mainstream journalism organizations (however you define mainstream)?” Granted, these were people already reading news, but more than two-thirds said they were likely or very likely to believe. Kearney, too, found that liberals were more credulous. So were white people.

Kearney also asked about specific outlets, which may offer a preview of the Facebook newsfeed bump. At the bottom: Buzzfeed, Breitbart, social media, and Infowars. Most trusted: Reuters, public television, and The Economist. (WIRED didn’t appear on the list.) “Maybe in a highly salient political time, any type of controversy drives us to the more confirmatory. We choose a news source because it reinforces our pre-existing beliefs,” Kearney says. “What is trust or trustworthiness of a source? We don’t have a universal definition, even though we all understand the underlying concept. But for most of us it gets expressed in a way that reaffirms our worldview.”

That’s a fundamental problem. Unlike most trustworthy institutions, journalism isn’t supposed to reaffirm worldviews. Quite the opposite, in fact. Journalists are supposed to comport themselves
according to specific ethical standards, but those standards can seem at odds with societal norms—telling other people’s secrets, for example, or being impertinent to powerful people. Plus, today pretty much anyone can put on a suit and sit in front of a TV set that looks like a traditional newsroom or make radio or a podcast, and it all looks and sounds like Walter freaking Cronkite even if it’s actually Joseph freaking Goebbels.

All of which, at last, brings us back to Facebook. It’s not asking which news sources people believe are operating in good faith, providing relevant analysis, attempting to be fair but not falsely equivalent. And it’s not asking people who consume a lot of news about their experiences. It’s asking one deceptively simple question: Which news outlets do you trust?

It’s also reductive: Facebook users look at Facebook, so will likely name outlets most often seen on Facebook. (Distinguished Competitors, whatever you spent on that social desk is about to pay off!) Perhaps because my profession has done such a terrible job of explaining exactly what it is we do and how we do it, people are likely to distrust the places that do it the best. Still think this is going to work? Trust an expert: “Facebook and Google have popularized scurrilous news sources through algorithms that are profitable for these platforms but inherently unreliable. Recognition of a problem is one step on the pathway to cure, but the remedial measures that both companies have so far proposed are inadequate, commercially, socially and journalistically.” The source? Rupert Murdoch, the head of Fox News.

Junot Díaz lectures on subtleties of racial politics

*Story generated by MU News Bureau media advisory.*

By MICHAEL WILMARTH

Author and activist Junot Díaz spoke in Jesse Auditorium on Monday night as part of MU’s annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration.

Díaz was born in the Dominican Republic and his writing, while not autobiographical, is personal. His Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* tells the story of a family’s emigration from the Dominican Republic to the United States and contemplates racial identity. He has also been active in community organizations in New York City, such as the Dominican Youth Union and the Communist Dominican Workers’ Party.

Díaz began his lecture by taking inventory of the audience, asking those of Caribbean, Latin, African American and Dominican descent to raise their hands. Díaz was impressed by the numbers.
“OK, Missouri,” he said over laughter, “I had to check, because you guys have been in the newspapers lately.”

The racial inequality that put MU in the media spotlight in 2015 and continues to shape the nation’s socio-political discourse was the focus of Díaz’s speech.

Like his writing, his lecture presented complex ideas punctuated with slang that kept the audience laughing and interested. Díaz focused his lecture on a type-specific racial bias that was practiced by members of his own community, which he called the “logic of authenticity.”

“Oh, you grew up in the suburbs?” he asked. “You ain’t black, yo. Your mom is white? You ain’t black. You can’t dance? Bueno.”

Díaz called on all audience members to assume the responsibility of their own privilege, which he insisted everyone had.

“Your privilege is there to help in others’ liberation, not to help perpetuate it,” he said.

Díaz pointed out that the racial bias that disenfranchised people themselves hold can be more difficult to confront than the obvious examples in the media.

“We’ll flip the hell out about Donald Trump all day, but all of the active reservoirs where white supremacy really lives, we scarcely are interested in pursuing, examining, exploding them,” he said.

Ouma Amadou returned to campus after graduating last year to hear Díaz speak. She felt encouraged by Díaz’s words to continue to pursue her academic interests.

“His speech reinvigorated my own academic thinking, especially when thinking about the diaspora,” Amadou said.

Senior Lorena Fernandez felt that Díaz’s message was one that was important for MU to hear.

“I think he brought up a lot of topics and questions that MU specifically needs to be thinking about, in terms of defining privilege and solidarity,” Fernandez said.

For Fernandez, who is a second-generation Mexican immigrant with an Italian mother, Díaz’s words hit home.

“These questions of identity and belonging, of not being Latino enough, of not being American enough, and his talk about what identity is was really personal for me,” Fernandez said.

When asked where home was for him, Díaz employed a softer tone.

“It is in the nature of diasporas often to live in a permanent condition of journey… I’m in the journey always, and that is home for me,” he said.

The lecture ended with Díaz warning against the fear that has been instilled in young people by the old.
“If you understand that this is the sea in which you swim, you can begin to resist,” he said. “The day that young people feel their power and their strength more than they feel fear, the world will begin to change.”

Open forum hosted by provost search committee focuses on necessary experience, leadership qualities

By STEPHI SMITH

The search committee for MU’s next provost and executive vice chancellor held an open forum Monday in the Reynolds Alumni Center.

The provost position opened in November when Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Garnett Stokes accepted the position of president at the University of New Mexico. Jim Spain was appointed interim provost, effective Feb. 1.

Joi Moore, professor and director of the School of Information Science & Learning Technologies, and Marshall Stewart, vice chancellor for extension and engagement at MU Extension, hosted the event and prompted responses from the audience.

Moore and Stewart also co-chair the search committee, a group of 21 students, deans, faculty and staff members who “will work over the next six months to identify candidates for this important leadership role for Mizzou,” according to a statement made by Chancellor Alexander Cartwright on Dec. 20.

The forum was meant to gather input from community members at MU and ensure all aspects of the university are represented, Marshall said.

Audience members responded to three different categories posed by Marshall and Moore. The first was experience, and the co-chairs asked the room what they’d like their next provost to know before starting work.

Noor Azizan-Gardner, assistant vice chancellor for administration at the Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, said she would like to see a provost with a sense of “global awareness.”

The next category, leadership qualities, initiated several responses from audience members, including Azizan-Gardner again, who said being able to work with people is important to understanding the university and its culture as a whole.

“Culture is critical in implementing strategies we have as a university,” she said.
Additionally, graduate student Eric Scott said he would like to see a provost who is transparent in behavior and allows open discussion of their policies and behavior.

Finally, Moore and Marshall asked for other “key areas” the community would like to see addressed broadly.

Brittani Fults, an education and prevention coordinator with the Office for Civil Rights & Title IX, said she wants a provost who is able to adjust policies as MU sees fit rather than sticking to the status quo. She said a lot of the people she works with often don’t want to come forward during sexual assault and harassment incidents due to the process.

“How do we make sure that the academy is not only a place to grow academically, but personally as well?” she said. “So, how are we as an institution enabling a culture of silence by saying they need to go through this process and it’s just how [MU] does that?”

Fults said she would also like the next provost to bring new ideas to the university and be “someone who can bring people to the table who maybe weren’t at the table before.”

Moore explained the process for finding a new provost. She said there will most likely be other “listening sessions,” such as this forum and afterward; the search committee will begin recruitment after looking through the nominations. From there, the committee will look at screening the selection.

“If you have any other comments or questions, we welcome them,” Marshall said. “This is not the end; it’s actually just the beginning.”

Moore and Marshall advised people to follow the selection of the next provost at the chancellor’s website, where they said updates will be posted as frequently as possible.

**THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Michigan State President Resigns After Torrent of Anger Over Nassar Scandal**

**NO MU MENTION**

By ANDY THOMASON

Lou Anna K. Simon, the Michigan State University president who has faced a barrage of criticism for the university’s failure to respond to sexual abuse by Larry Nassar, resigned on Wednesday night, the university said in a statement.
“As tragedies are politicized, blame is inevitable,” wrote Ms. Simon in a university news release. “As president, it is only natural that I am the focus of this anger.” In a separate statement, the chair of the university’s Board of Trustees said that the board would accept Ms. Simon’s resignation and that it was “now time for change.”

The announcement quickly followed news that a second of the university’s eight trustees had called on Ms. Simon to resign. And that call quickly followed the passage of a resolution by the Michigan House of Representatives urging the embattled president to step down. Only 11 of the 107 voting representatives voted no.

“We have lost confidence in the ability of President Lou Anna K. Simon to lead a transparent investigation,” read the resolution, in part, “to implement changes that will ensure it never happens again, to protect students, and to lead Michigan State University forward.”

The rapid erosion of support for Ms. Simon followed a lengthy sentencing hearing for Dr. Nassar, the former team physician for USA Gymnastics and an associate professor in Michigan State’s College of Osteopathic Medicine. Dr. Nassar pleaded guilty to seven counts of sexual assault and has been accused by nearly 200 women of sexual abuse. For days, Dr. Nassar’s victims read passionate statements to a packed courtroom in Lansing, Mich. On Wednesday he was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison.

As national interest converged on the sentencing hearing, calls for Ms. Simon’s resignation intensified. Several of Dr. Nassar’s victims urged her to resign, as did the university’s student newspaper. On Friday the Board of Trustees issued a unanimous statement of support for Ms. Simon, but that was quickly undercut by Mitch Lyons, a trustee, who called on the president to resign.

What followed was a mess of confusion about the board’s intentions, with one trustee emphatically denying that the board had talked about Ms. Simon’s future for more than 10 minutes, and referring to the controversy as “just this Nassar thing.” Those statements were widely ridiculed and then publicly refuted by two trustees, who said the board had spent a majority of the meeting discussing Ms. Simon’s future and a possible succession plan. (The trustee who made the statements, Joel Ferguson, later apologized.)

The board has invited an investigation by the state’s attorney general, and the NCAA has also opened an investigation. The Detroit News reported on Wednesday that the board was discussing a possible succession plan for Ms. Simon in greater detail.

Ms. Simon’s support among students and faculty members had also appeared to be waning. On Wednesday the university’s faculty athletics representative, Sue Carter, stepped down from that post, citing a telephone conversation with the president about a critical statement Ms. Carter had made about the administration’s handling of the Nassar scandal.
“I no longer have the desire or the heart to support this administration going forward,” wrote Ms. Carter, who is a professor in the School of Journalism at Michigan State.