Report: Russia sparked fear at the University of Missouri during 2015 protests

By Rudi Keller

Russian Twitter trolls pounced on the University of Missouri’s woes in 2015 using the same techniques they applied to disrupt the 2016 presidential election, a U.S. Air Force officer wrote in an article published recently in Strategic Studies Quarterly.

In the aftermath of the Nov. 9, 2015, resignation of UM System President Tim Wolfe during protests over racial issues, some feared a violent white backlash.

It was fueled in part by a real post on the anonymous social app Yik-Yak from Hunter Park, then a student at Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla, that he would “shoot every black person I see.” The fear was enlarged and spread by a now-suspended Twitter account that warned “The cops are marching with the KKK! They beat up my little brother! Watch out!” that included a photo of a black child with a severely bruised face and the hashtag #PrayForMizzou.

The fear generated by the real and fake posts caused many students to stay home on Nov. 10, with several professors canceling classes and some stores along Ninth Street near campus closing their doors.

The tweet and photo were fake, Lt. Col. Jarred Prier, director of operations for the 20th Bomb Squadron, wrote in “Commanding the Trend: Social Media as Information Warfare” for the winter edition of Strategic Studies Quarterly. Prier’s article expands on the master’s degree thesis he wrote while studying at Air University for the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies.

Related content

Article on Russian involvement in fall 2015 events at MU

The Twitter account, with the handle @FanFan1911 and user name Jermaine while tweeting about Mizzou, was used to spread panic about a fake chemical factory fire in St. Mary Parish, La., in 2014 and fear of Syrian refugees in Germany in 2016, Prier wrote. The account’s original MU tweets were retweeted by an army of 70 robot accounts and hundreds of legitimate users and became part of the huge volume of tweets about the university at that time, he wrote.

“The rapidly spreading image of a bruised little boy was generating legitimate outrage across the country and around the world,” Prier wrote. “However, a quick Google image search for ‘bruised
black child’ revealed the picture that ‘Jermaine’ attached to the tweet was a picture of an African American child who was beaten by police in Ohio over one year earlier. The image and the narrative were part of a larger plot to spread fear and distrust. It worked.”

Payton Head, then-president of the Missouri students Association, took the bait, Prier notes in his article. In a Facebook post, Head warned students to stay away from windows in residence halls. “The KKK has been confirmed to be sighted on campus. I’m working with the MUPD, the state trooper and National Guard,” Head wrote.

Head quickly retracted and deleted the post, apologizing for sharing misinformation, which he said came from “multiple incorrect sources.” The Missouri National Guard confirmed it had been contacted about the rumored KKK presence on campus but an official said the Guard was “never working with anyone” to respond to the rumor.

“In a state of alarm, I was concerned for all students of the University of Missouri and wanted to ensure that everyone was safe,” Head wrote in his apology. “The last thing needed is to incite more fear in the hearts of our community.”

Prier is an MU ROTC graduate from 2003. In the article, he explains the techniques used by Russian online agents working to disrupt political life in democracies and why they are effective.

A human actor writes a fake post and it is automatically spread by robotic accounts created on the same platform. To spread the message, the post uses words or phrases that are getting a lot of attention, or trending, online. That inserts it into a conversation already underway, Prier wrote.

“One of the primary principles of propaganda is that the message must resonate with the target,” he wrote. “Therefore, when presented with information that is within your belief structure, your bias is confirmed and you accept the propaganda.”

To convince those not already disposed to believe, the key is repetition and having the story line pushed by the propaganda reported by a trusted media source, Prier wrote. Several media outlets reported on fears the KKK was on campus before the rumor was put to rest.

The episode helped create and maintain a false narrative that the MU campus was wracked by violence or experienced riots during the protests, which were peaceful.

Prier’s study “would certainly help explain the origin of that ‘news’ that we were trying to combat and in some cases continue to do so today,” MU spokesman Christian Basi said Tuesday.

The discovery of Russian trolls using events at MU to sew distrust isn’t especially surprising, said state Sen. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia.

“I think there are a lot of people out there, maybe they are Russian, maybe they are not, but there are a lot of people out there who want to instigate and divide people on Twitter and other places,” he said.
The selection of @FanFan1911’s tweet about the KKK to highlight in the study wasn’t entirely random. Prier noticed the original tweet about the KKK on Nov. 11, 2015, and responded by saying “stop spreading lies” and posting a link to a Huffington Post report from 2013 about the beating.

But @FanFan1911 wasn’t the only account he studied for the article, Prier wrote.

“I mention only one particular user in this article, but I also monitored a dozen or so accounts that contributed to that hoax,” he wrote. “Each account followed a pattern that also happened to align with noted Russian influence operations in Europe and eventually in the U.S. presidential election.”

The effort targeting MU may have been a warm-up for 2016. The Russian efforts to insert fake reports into the news articles covering the 2016 presidential campaign were extremely successful, Prier wrote. One of the most-shared stories about the election on Facebook was a false report that Pope Francis had endorsed Republican candidate Donald Trump, he states.

“Command of the trend enables the contemporary propaganda model, to create a ‘firehose of information’ that permits the insertion of false narratives over time and at all times,” Prier wrote.

COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE

Rowden: Greitens budget is ‘dead on arrival’

By Rudi Keller

NO MU MENTION

Gov. Eric Greitens is bereft of friends in the General Assembly, making his budget “dead on arrival” and endangering a once-in-a-generation chance for Republicans to enact their agenda, state Sen. Caleb Rowden said Tuesday.

In a breakfast gathering hosted by the Show Me Institute, Rowden, R-Columbia, was asked his thoughts on Greitens, who was plagued by a bad relationship with lawmakers before his marital infidelities sparked a criminal investigation of whether he had threatened a woman with releasing nude photos if she told anyone about their relationship.

“He doesn’t have any allies in the Missouri Senate right now and that is something he is going to have to work in a very intentional way to fix,” Rowden said.

Republicans hold a 24-9 edge in the state Senate, with one vacant seat, a 115-47 edge in the Missouri House with one vacancy and five of the six constitutional statewide offices. That gives
them a “generational opportunity” to enact a conservative agenda, Rowden said. Friction between the executive and the legislature and poor performance in Greitens’ office is endangering that opportunity, he said.

“At some point you have to govern and that is the one thing they as a team haven’t figured out yet,” Rowden said.

In his budget proposal, Greitens recommended cutting appropriations to state colleges and universities by 10 percent and he is proposing new spending on foster care and a matching program for local road projects, among other ideas.

“I thought his budget was, frankly, a bit lazy,” Rowden said.

The state is pinched financially by slow revenue growth and that means cuts in one place to fund other priorities, Rowden said. The proper way to do that is by scrutinizing spending in every program to find dollars that can be saved, he said.

“As opposed to kind of taking the short cut, which in our budget is to take money from higher education or take money from K-12 education, and then throw it to a bunch of new shiny new programs,” Rowden said.

Greitens chose higher education to find money this time, he said.

“Taking money from big kids is easier than taking money from little kids,” he said. “That’s the political reality that you deal with.”

Greitens’ office did not respond to an email seeking comment on Rowden’s remarks. Last week, appearing before editors and publishers gathered in Jefferson City, Greitens defended his budget choices. He said the budget sets a priority for local infrastructure projects, public schools and vulnerable children.

“Oh other people have different priorities and other people may see things differently,” Greitens said.

Colin McCarty, who asked the question about Rowden’s views of the governor, said after the breakfast that he was conflicted in his own feelings about Greitens. McCarty said he voted for Greitens but doesn’t like that he publicly attacks Republicans who disagree with him.

The character issues raised by his sexual relationship and other matters also raise doubts about Greitens, McCarty said.

“It does matter who somebody is, ultimately,” he said.

During his talk, Rowden said he wants lawmakers to enact a tax plan to support highways, either asking voters for a direct fuel tax increase or by an indirect sales tax to support the Missouri
State Highway Patrol and free fuel tax money for highway work. Greitens said last week that he opposes a fuel tax hike.

He also noted Greitens’ failed push to put Missouri on the list of finalists for Amazon’s new headquarters. If Missouri had somehow landed the project, Rowden said, the state doesn’t have the 20,000 trained personnel needed and would have trouble providing 5,000.

Greitens’ budget proposal means Missouri will continue to have difficulty providing a highly-trained technical workforce because higher education lacks resources, Rowden said.

His remarks about Greitens shouldn’t be taken as a personal attack, Rowden added.

“I bear him no ill will but he has made a lot of missteps,” he said.

KMOX-FM (Radio) – St. Louis, Mo.

**MU Research Reactor supplying radioisotope for new FDA approved cancer therapy**


Listen to story: [http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=c696e5b1-2651-4c60-9a5d-5b6d6dd827d6](http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=c696e5b1-2651-4c60-9a5d-5b6d6dd827d6)
JEFFERSON CITY — A proposal to expand Missouri’s sexual education curriculum to require discussion about consent, sexual assault and violence started with a meeting between a state lawmaker and a group of MU students.

“We want to make sure that everyone in Missouri is getting this education, not just those that can afford a higher education,” said Chelsea Spence, legislative director for the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, during a hearing Tuesday at the state Capitol. “It prepares students before they enter college.”

Spence was testifying in support of a bill sponsored by Rep. Holly Rehder, R–Sikeston, that would modify the state’s sexual education programs to include education regarding those topics. Rehder said the bill is a result of a collaboration with Spence and other MU students who reached out to her to draft the legislation.

The House Children and Families Committee heard more than an hour of testimony from 13 people in support of the bill. At least three members of the committee expressed strong support for the bill.

House Bill 2234 would add language stating: “An expression of lack of consent through words or conduct means there is no consent. Lack of verbal or physical resistance or submission resulting from the use of force, threat of force, or placing another person in fear does not constitute consent.”

The state’s statute was last updated in 2015, but it does not include a discussion about consent, sexual harassment or sexual violence. Currently, Missouri requires sexual education programs to be medically
and factually accurate. Additionally, schools must “present abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred choice of behavior in relation to all sexual activity for unmarried pupils.”

It is not mandatory for schools in Missouri to teach sexual education, but health and HIV/AIDS education is required. Local school boards make the decision whether the district will teach sexual education. Parents can also opt-out of their child receiving sexual education at school.

Twenty-four states require that public schools teach sexual education, but no states currently require consent education as a part of their curriculum.

Sean Whiting of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Missouri spoke in support of Rehder’s bill, stating that it is necessary to update Missouri’s sexual education programs.

“Missouri needs to do more,” Whiting said. “This is just a small step forward into bringing Missouri’s sexual education standards into the 21st century.”

A 2015 nationwide study conducted by Planned Parenthood found that many of those surveyed agreed that sexual education programs need to include how to ask for consent, how to give consent and how to say no to sex.

Spence stressed the importance of education when it comes to consent, saying that offenders often do not understand they have crossed a line.

“We have perpetrators who are on our campuses who don’t know that they are a problem,” Spence said. “We can’t bring people justice, and we can’t hold these perpetrators accountable when we never educated them on the criminality of this behavior.”

Tori Schafer, the director of MU’s It’s On Us chapter, said the bill falls in line with similar legislation being proposed nationwide. Schafer argued that teaching consensual sexual education in middle or high school will help prevent assaults when students reach a college campus.

Schafer said that a student’s first month on campus is a time when they are at their most vulnerable.
She said that “there’s not enough time for higher education institutions to teach these students about what consent is, and teach them about sexual violence and sexual assault,” she said.

“The (Association of American Universities) survey that Mizzou participated in said that 30.8 percent of our female students were sexually assaulted during their four years on our college campus, and that rate is higher than the national statistic,” Schafer said.

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives; one in five women and one in 16 men are sexually assaulted in college.

The data also shows that over 90 percent of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report their assault.

The legislation received no opposition from the public. The next step would be for the Children and Families Committee to approve the bill.

**Bill could require some schools to teach sexual harassment, violence, consent**

By: Lydia Nusbaum

JEFFERSON CITY - After hearing story after story from people experiencing sexual assault, students from the University of Missouri decided to try and create preventative measures at an early age.
Chelsea Spence, the legislative director for the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, helped lead the way, nearly a year ago, in creating a bill to teach students about what sexual assault, violence and consent are.

Spence said many girls in her sorority have told her they wished they knew where the “line” was when it came to sexual assault.

“I wish I knew in high school that the only way to sexual assault someone wasn’t rape,” Spence’s friends told her.

Spence, along with others in ASUM, helped write a bill to require public schools that already teach sexual education, to also talk about sexual harassment, violence and consent. Missouri lawmakers will talk about this bill Tuesday in a hearing at 5 p.m.

“There’s a lot of different kinds of sexual harassment and assault that we just aren’t educating our high school-aged students on or even college-aged,” Spence said.

Currently, schools that teach sexual education are required to teach students eight guidelines including topics like abstinence, sexually transmitted diseases and the dangers of sexual predators. The bill lawmakers are hearing Tuesday would add another guideline for schools to teach what consent, sexual violence and harassment mean.

The bill defines these three terms:

- **Sexual Violence**: Causing or attempting to cause another to engage involuntarily in any sexual act by force, threat of force, duress, or without that person’s consent.

- **Sexual Harassment**: uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature, especially by a person in authority toward a subordinate.

- **Consent**: A freely given agreement to the conduct at issue by a competent person. An expression of lack of consent through words or conduct means there is no consent. Lack of verbal or physical resistance or submission resulting from the use of force, threat of force, or placing another person in fear does not constitute consent. A current or previous dating or social or sexual relationship by itself or the manner of dress of the person involved with the accused in the conduct at issue shall not constitute consent.

The Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence said it has always supported comprehensive violence prevention education.
“Beginning to have these conversations early and often is really one of the best ways that we can prevent sexual harassment, sexual violence of any kind, from happening,” Matthew Huffman, the public affairs director for MCADSV, said.

“For anyone who does experience sexual violence, this can be a way of reinforcing that it wasn’t anyone’s fault, no one could have done anything on their own to prevent it,” Huffman said. The bill has garnered bipartisan support from more than 20 House lawmakers.

The most recent additional guideline to the statute about sexual education was back in 2015. It required schools to teach students about the consequences of inappropriate text messages. The proposed bill would add the new education requirements as a ninth guideline to the statute.

Bill looks to add information to sexual education classes in Missouri schools

By: Tommy Sladek

JEFFERSON CITY — A new piece of legislation would expand sexual education classes to include information about sexual harassment and violence.

House Bill 2234 sponsored by Representative Holly Rehder recommends the curriculum be added to classes involving sexual activity at the middle school grade level.

On Tuesday night at the Missouri State Capitol Rehder as well as more than a dozen supporters for the bill testified in front of the Children and Families committee.

Chelsea Spence, a senior at the University of Missouri helped draft the bill.
"This legislation will not only help potential perpetrators learn where the line of consent lies, but also about teaching every high school student on when they can and can't give proper consent," said Spence.

The president of the Associated Student of the University of Missouri wants the state to get ahead and educate before college.

"We know that sexual education is a key component in preventing sexual assault."

"When our college students aren't educated on it, it's only natural that more assaults are going to occur."

No opponents to the bill came forward to speak Tuesday night.

The bill says a parent would have right to remove the student from any part of the district's or school's human sexuality instruction.

Missouri school districts make the decision on their own whether to teach a sexual education class.

**Increase in applications could lead to higher enrollment**

*Story generated by MU News Bureau release: Mizzou applications are ‘roaring back’*

By Jacob Horton

**Freshman applications at MU have risen 16.8 percent in comparison with last year’s numbers at this time, according to an MU News Bureau press release.**

Christian Basi, director of the MU News Bureau, said increased recruitment and new affordability initiatives could have played a factor in encouraging more students to apply. MU has sent representatives to more high schools in Missouri and has tried to maintain greater contact with prospective students this year. The university’s new affordability initiatives, such as lower housing costs and scholarships for low-income and out-of-state students, have also made MU more attractive to some students, Basi said.

When asked if fading memory of the 2015 protests could have had an effect, Basi said it was hard to tell but that “we certainly feel we’ve done a lot of work to overcome those perceptions.”
As for the effects of the application increase, Basi said this will most likely lead to an increase in enrollment this coming fall. While it’s still unsure as to the size of this increase, the university will be working until the end of May to boost the percentage of accepted students who enroll at MU by keeping in touch with students and offering more help in the matriculation process.

In response to the likelihood of higher enrollment, MU announced in a UM System Board of Curators meeting that next year it will reopen six of the seven residence halls that were closed this academic year. Some of these closed residence halls were used by fans during football games, and next year the university plans to rent out the remaining closed hall, Responsibility, to MU Health Care as an administrative building.

The possible increase in enrollment would have a positive impact on MU’s current budget woes, but challenges unrelated to low enrollment, such as Gov. Eric Greitens’ proposed cuts in state funding to the UM System, are expected to persist, Basi said. These cuts are part of Greitens’ budget proposal, and while this proposal is by no means destined to be law, the governor would like to cut $43 million from the UM System’s funding for the 2019 fiscal year.

Students on campus are excited about the likelihood of increased enrollment, but they have their hesitations, most of which revolving around access to classes. Freshman Molly Stawinoga is worried because of the difficulty she already has trying to enroll in certain classes. While she is happy about the positives of a higher enrollment, she wanted to know whether MU could accommodate such an increase.

During a UM System Board of Curators meeting on Feb. 2, university officials discussed the issue of waitlists for classes. Although not in the context of the increase in applications, one possible solution given to this issue was greater access to online classes, which could allow more flexibility in the schedules of students and professors.

While many of the effects look promising, at this point officials of the Enrollment Management & Strategic Development advisory council said it’s too early to be certain about the causes and effects of this increase in applications. The council is holding off on drawing conclusions until it has more information about the situation, said Chrissy Kintner, assistant to the vice provost of EMS Development.

Environmental Leadership Office merges under MU’s Sustainability Office

By Jacob Robinson

The Sustainability Office has absorbed the Environmental Leadership Office in an attempt to divert confusion and keep focus on the mission of both offices.
“It’s confusing to everybody, and it has been for a long time, that we have a Sustainability Office in Virginia Avenue Garage and then we have an Environmental Leadership Office in the Student Center,” Communications Manager Karlan Seville of MU Operations said. “I think this just helps everyone understand that we all have the same goal.”

The Environmental Leadership Office has run many programs on campus regarding sustainability, including Mizzou Bike Share, Tigers for Community Agriculture and the Bike Resource Center.

“It’s the student arm of the Sustainability Office and it’s paid for by student funds,” Seville said.

The Sustainability Office holds numerous events on campus throughout the year to promote its mission of creating a more sustainable campus.

“The mission is to make the university more sustainable along social, environmental and economic lines,” Sustainability Office Manager Srinivasan Raghavan said.

With the goals and priorities of both offices being so closely related, Raghavan said the merge was made “primarily to avoid the confusion of two offices that seem to have similar missions.”

With the merge, the Sustainability Office has taken on the many projects and programs of the ELO, including Mizzou Bike Share and the farmer’s market, and will continue to work alongside students.

“We still have a staff member who focuses primarily on students,” Seville said.

Because sustainability is such a large issue on campus, the merge of the two offices will most likely alleviate the confusion of the missions of each as well as bring more efficiency to the Sustainability Office.

“[The merge] just clearly defines the Sustainability Office’s role,” Seville said. “I think overall, it just points everybody in the right direction.”

Becoming more efficient is especially important as the Sustainability Office prepares to submit this year’s STARS report.

The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System report is a system used to measure sustainability on college campuses. The report is reviewed by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Eight hundred eighty-four institutions participate in STARS worldwide.

“The most commonly used benchmarking tool within higher education in the United States is STARS,” Raghavan said. “So that tool provides an assessment of where a university campus stands with regards to sustainability.”

The last report, submitted in 2015, made the university one of two schools in the Southeastern Conference and one of 76 overall to receive a gold rating. The Sustainability Office is getting ready to submit the report again this year.
“It’s kind of a report card of where the university is,” Seville said. “What STARS does is compares it, basically, to other universities.”

Besides the gold rating from 2015’s report, the university also earned four “best practices” designations for programs on campus, including the Campus as a Living Laboratory, Support for Underrepresented Groups, the Energy Strategies Student Advisory Group and the Mississippi/Missouri River Advanced Biomass/Biofuel Consortium.

According to the MU STARS Status Report, there are still plenty of ways MU can improve its sustainability practices.

“[MU was] unable to claim more than 15 points in [academic research], and this will take a considerable amount of time to remedy,” according to the report. “We are certain that we can improve this score by capturing all of these relevant classes, programs and other sustainable practices by implementing a central reporting system.”

The university has been looking to improve sustainability knowledge among students, waste minimization and diversion among other issues on campus since the 2015 report. Raghavan hopes the new report will help alleviate some of these issues.

**Students’ business turns video games into tool for youth development**

By Galen Bacharier

Most students’ video game experiences take place in their dorm rooms or apartments with close friends. Juniors Ben Brooks and Joe Chee have something different in mind with their business Ukatsu: a youth development program for gamers.

Ukatsu, which uses the Japanese word “katsu” to create the play on words “you win,” describes its mission as “to encourage the positive problem solving and social interaction that comes from being a part of the gaming community.”

It was created as a successor to a previous video game-centered program in the summer that Brooks and Chee both worked at as camp counselors. After the original program ended, the two decided to start their own year-round program.

“We couldn’t bear the thought of leaving those kids without any kind of infrastructure,” Brooks said.

The business has a variety of programming, the most prominent being its summer camps, where participants compete and cooperate in various video game titles to build important skills.
coming summer, Ukatsu plans to put on six weeks of camps, up from the four weeks last summer in the business’s first year of operation, with each camp taking 30 participants, Brooks said.

This year, the camps will run out of the company’s new location on Grindstone rather than out of the Columbia Career Center, where they were held last year. Brooks said the camps, along with the rest of the business’s programming, serve children and teenagers ages 8 to 18.

“Obviously, we have to interact with them differently and with different kinds of curriculum … we segment our summer camps based on those ages,” Brooks said.

Besides the summer camps, Ukatsu has also hosted various gaming communities around Columbia, such as the Mizzou Smash and League of Legends clubs. Brooks said the organization’s main project at the moment, however, is an upcoming eSports event for the game League of Legends, partnering with Columbia and Jefferson City public schools.

Much of Ukatsu’s programming focuses around competitive titles such as League of Legends and Overwatch, and for good reason. Besides their immense popularity and easy access, they help build developmental skills, Brooks and Chee said.

“These competitive titles allow a lot of kids to be in a social environment where they can interact with each other in a team perspective,” Brooks said.

However, during summer camps, games such as Mario Kart are available for younger and less competitive gamers.

As the company continues to grow, expanding its programming and even gaining its own location to host camps in Columbia, Chee and Brooks, roommates and business partners, remain at the center of it all, providing much of its direction.

“My role and Ben's role are similar,” Chee said. “We do it all, really. A specialty I bring, however, is the media production. As a former photographer and videographer, I produce most of the media content that comes from the company.”

Ukatsu has also earned support from local Columbia business resources and already-established gaming communities.

“All the support we’ve had is community support, some of our parents and kids have been the most supportive in telling other parents to get our name out there,” Brooks said. “We’ve also had help from the [Missouri Innovation Center] and the [Small Business and Technology Development Center] downtown. There’s a lot of resources in Columbia that are designed to help emerging small businesses, and those have been huge.”

Chee and Brooks said they have no doubt there’s success in store for the company in the future and believe they will have a hand in defining the role of video games in youth and family development.
“We will one day be the community for young gamers and their parents to thrive in,” Chee said. “Whether it's a tournament, personal training, ‘life-coaching,’ it's going to make an impact through positive influence.”

According to Brooks, that positive influence will remain focused on one word that kept appearing: balance.

“That’s what it’s all about, is teaching balance through video games,” Brooks said. “They’re not going to go away, so we help connect parents to kids by turning games into a positive tool for growth.”

MU’s Relief for Africa chapter to provide latrines and education to communities in Ethiopia this summer

By Allison Cho

MU’s newly formed Relief for Africa chapter is aiming to send its members to Adama, Ethiopia, this summer. The organization hopes to build latrines there that will improve public health conditions as well as educate the community on environmental pollution and personal hygiene.

RFA is a nonprofit organization based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that seeks to better education, healthcare and living conditions for underprivileged communities in Africa. Many of its chapters are also in Michigan, which makes the MU chapter unique in its location and mission.

“The MU chapter is different because we focus on sustainability,” said Nisha Patel, president of the RFA chapter at MU. “Our goal is very, very clear: We want to go into a particular community in Ethiopia, and we want to build these latrines because Ethiopia faces open defecation as one of its major concerns. We saw the issue, and we want to fix it.”

However, funding is not easy for the new organization. It is planning to have a Valentine’s Day bake sale Feb. 13-14 and collect cans on Thursday and Friday nights, Patel said. It also hopes to organize a 5K run in the near future.

“We’re taking every avenue possible, but we are also talking to our local businesses and in contact with the Rotary Club in Columbia,” Patel said.

Stephen Jeanetta, MU chapter of RFA’s faculty advisor, touched on the possibility of reaching out to more groups in Columbia.
“[RFA’s] funding is a little nebulous at this point,” Jeanetta said. “There’s a number of groups in town they could approach that can support that kind of project as long as they feel like it’s pretty well-developed and going to make an impact.

Jeanetta is an associate professor at MU Extension whose work focuses on community development. According to Patel, Jeanetta’s experience in developing sustainable projects with students made him a great fit for RFA’s faculty advising position.

“I think it’s a neat group [that] has a lot of potential,” Jeanetta said. “I’ll do whatever I can to see them get some success out of it.”

The MU chapter of RFA’s long-term goal is to develop a strong connection with Adama while making an impact over time, Patel said. Locally, she talked about engaging citizens and students with the project, including reaching out to other student organizations.

“Since our organization particularly targets Ethiopia, we want to get different African organizations involved because a lot of them have a lot of great resources,” Patel said. “We don’t want to just go in and immediately think we can change the world. We want to understand the culture and the people.”

For Patel, RFA means more than a summer trip and community development. She sees it as an organization that “really defines you as an individual and leader.”

“It really instills that student leadership, not just in me, but in every member in RFA,” Patel said. “The fact that I'm seeing such amazing individuals come to me with these ideas and the belief that we can make our project work this summer are things I already appreciate from our organization.”

Individuals who are interested in getting involved can email the organization at rfamizzou@gmail.com or attend one of its biweekly Tuesday meetings at Tucker Hall from 7-8 pm in room 8.