"A Dying Town" is the kind of story that keeps a college president up at night. The challenges in rural Missouri are not unlike those facing rural America, but this unflinching look requires us to take stock of what we in higher education can do to help our citizens in places like Missouri’s Bootheel.

I am proud of the work our campuses in Columbia, Kansas City, Rolla, and St. Louis are doing, from preparing teachers for diverse classrooms to the extension programs that help Missourians benefit from our research in vital areas such as agriculture, nutrition, and entrepreneurship. To meet the critical need for access to rural health care, we started the Springfield Clinical Campus partnership to educate and train an additional 128 medical students to serve rural Missouri.

We must continue to connect with rural America and redouble our partnerships with other institutions and the state. We know that higher education confers many benefits, including a longer, healthier, and more financially secure life. As a university president, I have the privilege of meeting people every day who have benefited from the transformational power of higher education. That is something I want for all Missourians.

This fall, the University of Missouri at Columbia signed the Missouri Land Grant Compact, which guarantees that any student who qualifies for admission and is Pell Grant-eligible can attend the university tuition-free. This program is expected to provide access to thousands of students who otherwise could not afford college.

In The Chronicle’s sobering story, there were glimmers of hope — hope because of people like Freda Kershaw, who encourage Missourians to pursue higher education. She works for University of Missouri’s ParentLink program, which offers research-based strategies to engage families and reduce adverse childhood experiences.

This is work that every college can and should be doing. It’s our core principle as a land-grant university.

—Mun Y. Choi, president, University of Missouri system
Reports that Russian Twitter trolls stoked fears about the Ku Klux Klan’s presence during the 2015 student protests over racial issues at the University of Missouri are cause for alarm.

And they should be a call to action.

Social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook must do more to prevent the spread of misinformation. If they don’t, the social platforms are complicit in cyberspace attacks from Russians or any other bad actors.


He concluded that Russian trolls masterminded a tweet that fueled erroneous reports that the Ku Klux Klan was patrolling Mizzou’s campus during the protests.

Prier explains how a fake Twitter account dispatched a warning after “#PrayforMizzou” started to trend on Twitter in the wake of the protests.

“The cops are marching with the KKK! They beat up my little brother! Watch out!” the misleading tweet read. A photo of a black child with a bruised face accompanied the tweet.

The report was false, Prier wrote, but within minutes, the tweet had been shared and retweeted by at least 70 bot accounts.

Many fell for the ruse, including the members of the media, who took Twitter heat for not covering racists on campus.

The hoax was part of a calculated and government-supported effort by Russia to disrupt democracies, according to Prier, director of operations for the 20th Bomb Squadron.
The tweet also influenced then-Missouri Students Association president Payton Head, who warned students KKK members had been confirmed on campus. He later apologized after the reports could not be confirmed. But the tweet helped spread fear among concerned Missouri students and others.

The fake account was also used to spread false news about a chemical factory fire in Louisiana in 2014 and rumors about Syrian refugees in 2016, Prier wrote.

Prier compared the disinformation techniques used at Mizzou to measures used during the Cold War. Social media made it easier to spread, he wrote.

It’s past time for companies such as Twitter and Facebook to stop pretending they don’t serve the same role as radio, television and yes, newspapers.

They are conduits for news.

The mainstream media became a dominant force in keeping our democracy healthy precisely because, for all their foibles, professional journalists take their credibility far more seriously than critics on the right and left give them credit for.

All news organizations and publishers — even the social media giants that are loath to admit they are indeed publishers — have an obligation to police information posted on their respective platforms. If they don’t, the public’s trust in traditional and social media companies will continue to erode.

And that would adversely affect the checks and balances needed for a strong, vibrant democratic nation.

What Do Provosts and Deans Actually Do?

NO MU MENTION

By Michael Bugeja

You know something is amiss when offices of the provost have to explain what they do at comprehensive universities. And what they do -- or, more specifically, what many have failed to do -- is one of myriad reasons why budget cuts are occurring at large, often public, universities across the country.
You’ll find such cuts at institutions in Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas and Wyoming, to name a few. Cuts are not the rule, as Inside Higher Ed reported last year, showing modest increases last year in three-quarters of the states. But tuition keeps rising, debt keeps mounting and provosts and deans are at the forefront of containing costs.

Go ahead and google “What does a provost do?” You’ll find several websites trying to explain what the job at a major university actually entails.

One of my favorites is by Kerri Schuiling, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Northern Michigan University, who posted “What Exactly Is a Provost?”

“What is a provost?” asks the provost's office at the University of Michigan, which sees fit to include the dictionary meaning before describing responsibilities of the position (and yes, “keeper of a prison” is included above “high-ranking university administrative officer”):

pro-vost n [ME, fr. OE profost & OF provost, fr ML propositus, alter. of praepositus, fr L, one in charge, director, fr. pp. of praepone to place at the head] 1: the chief dignitary of a collegiate or cathedral chapter 2: the chief magistrate of a Scottish burgh 3: the keeper of a prison 4: a high-ranking university administrative officer

Emory University has a similar website, titled “What Does the Provost Do?” Better still, its president, Claire Sterk, a former provost at that institution, has a YouTube video by the same title, explaining the position.

Let’s be clear about the aforementioned executive officers: I do not know them. They are probably excellent administrators. Neither am I denigrating the provost's duties, which multiplied considerably when a number of presidents appended the title "vice president for academic affairs."

That is when troubles began. The VP title delegated to provosts the primary duty of president -- to be a visionary. This also effectively removed provosts as the advocate for and titular head of the professoriate. (That role has fallen to chairs of faculty senates and unions.) In the past, it was not unusual for provosts to be at odds with presidents if professors failed to get adequate compensation or if operations -- from technology to curricula -- inflated the budget. When it did, provosts held deans responsible.

In one of the early warnings about the dual title, “Vice President v. Provost,” authors Ray Maghroori and Charles Powers correctly state that “the two roles entail distinctly different and, at times, even conflicting responsibilities.”

University employees usually do not know what provosts do apart from being the voice of the administration. All too often, presidents and chancellors with inflated salaries are gallivanting across the country in university jets, fund-raising, hobnobbing with alumni and business leaders, attending athletic events, participating in educational organizations, networking with regents and legislators, and relying on vice presidents of diversity as buffers when multicultural crises arise.
Robert Sternberg, former provost and senior vice president at Oklahoma State University, and now a Cornell University professor, writes in a post subtitled “Wanna be a provost,” “The role of a provost actually is somewhat ill-defined. At some level, it is whatever the president or the chancellor wants it to be. Presidents often will delegate to provosts tasks that they do not want to do or that they see as outside their skill set. So provosts need to be ready to be something of a jack-of-all-trades.”

Central administration should focus on one paramount requirement: *keeping tuition reasonable*. In this, too, many have failed. Their core strategy is begging. Beg the Legislature for funding. Beg benefactors, too. Raise tuition. Tinker with the preposterous budget model used by a growing number of institutions called *responsibility-centered management*, which often rewards student credit hours rather than major enrollment, thereby inflating pedagogy.

**Explaining the Budget Model**

Here’s how the model typically works. The office of provost no longer is chiefly responsible for budget (centralized system); instead, college deans are responsible (decentralized system). Budgets are not pegged primarily to departmental enrollment as in the past but increasingly to tuition, with revenue generated by student credit hours. That puts departments in competition with one another, duplicating efforts and courses, as explained in the article “*Your Tub or Mine,*” leading to what one critic calls “perverse incentives, like engineering schools that want to teach English.”

As a result, duplication abounds, with course catalogs expanding each year. A traditional provost would monitor that in a centralized system. However, since many provosts are expected to be visionaries instead of accountants, with systems now decentralized, the new class of deans typically hasn’t a clue about accounting -- apart from relying on tuition and formulas for student credit-hour generation and, failing that, increasing fees for just about everything.

With *responsibility-centered management*, you can balance budgets as long as tuition and fees keep rising, because costs are passed on to students registering for classes. The longer you keep students in the institution, the better for the budget, explaining in part why only 41 percent of students graduate in four years, with a quarter of them dropping out because of cost, according to *The New York Times*.

*Story continues.*
Russian bots stoked racial tension during 2015 Mizzou protests: Report

By: Bradford Richardson

Russian bots spread misinformation to stoke racial fears during the 2015 protests at the University of Missouri, according to a new report.

On Nov. 11, 2015, a now-suspended Twitter account with the handle @FanFan1911 and the username Jermaine posted a picture of a severely bruised black child with the caption, “The cops are marching with the KKK! They beat up my little brother! Watch out!” and the hashtag #PrayForMizzou.

The tweet and picture were fake, according to Lt. Col. Jarred Prier, director of operations for the 20th Bomb Squadron. In an article he wrote for the winter edition of Strategic Studies Quarterly, Mr. Prier said the account’s tweets were shared by an army of 70 bots as well as hundreds of real users and became part of the narrative about the race protests.

“The rapidly spreading image of a bruised little boy was generating legitimate outrage across the country and around the world,” Mr. Prier wrote in the article, which was first reported by the Columbia Daily Tribune. “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.”

The tweet coincided with widespread fears that the KKK were marching on the University of Missouri campus.

Payton Head, then-president of the Missouri Students Association, wrote in a widely shared Facebook post that the “KKK has been confirmed to be sighted on campus” and that he was “working with the MUPD, the state trooper and the National Guard.”

Mr. Head later retracted the post and apologized, saying the information came from “multiple incorrect sources.”

“In a state of alarm, I was concerned for all students of the University of Missouri and wanted to ensure that everyone was safe,” he wrote in the apology. “The last thing needed is to incite more fear in the hearts of our community.”
Prior to the account’s suspension, @FanFan1911 had a long track record of spreading misinformation. The account reported a fake chemical factory fire in St. Mary Parish, Louisiana, in 2014 and spread panic about Syrian refugees in Germany in 2016. Mr. Prier is a 2003 University of Missouri ROTC graduate. The Strategic Studies Quarterly article expands upon the Master’s thesis he wrote while studying at Air University for the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies.

The KKK propaganda was so effective because it tapped into the biases of students at University of Missouri, Mr. Prier wrote, and was reported by several trusted media outlets.

“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.”

University of Missouri unrest stoked by Russian, domestic hackers, reports say

By: Ashley Byrd

The 2015 anti-racism protests at the University of Missouri were the target of outside, online intervention, according to national and local reports.

In the winter 2017 edition of Strategic Studies Quarterly, an air force officer wrote that robot accounts increased the panic around fake information tweets, which were then picked up by student leaders and the public.

The online narrative was different from the non-violent scene on the ground in Columbia–but its viral, widespread exposure was enough to contribute to the resignation of top officials and to impact the enrollment and reputation of the school.

A recent report in The Atlantic linked an American Nazi who trolled social media surrounding the Missouri protests, creating false discussions and inflammatory racist statements, and “tormented the University of Missouri during student protests against racist incidents on campus. He used Twitter hashtags to seed fake news into the conversation, falsely reporting that members of the KKK had arrived to burn crosses on campus and were working with university police.”
Rudi Keller reports in the Columbia Tribune that the writer of the article found a pattern that parallels noted Russian influence operations in Europe and the U.S. presidential election.

In a U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee hearing Tuesday, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats warned, “At a minimum, we expect Russia to continue using propaganda, social media, false-flag personas, sympathetic spokespeople, and other means of influence to try to exacerbate social and political fissures in the United States.”

Committee member Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri said he is worried that public opinion tampering is one of the two major cyber threats coming out of Russia.

Blunt urged the nation’s top intelligence directors to act quickly to protect election systems as well, especially at the local level.

Columbia vulnerable to Kremlin fanning flames of 2015 protests

EDWARD MCKINLEY 10 hrs ago (1)

At the height of the 2015 protests, Columbia provided a perfect breeding ground for a Kremlin Twitter disinformation campaign, said Mike Kearney, an assistant professor at the Missouri School of Journalism.

The campaign was of the same strategy used to influence the 2016 presidential election, according to a report in the winter 2017 Strategic Studies Quarterly, a peer-reviewed strategic journal of the U.S. Air Force. The campaign was deployed to incite confusion and polarization around the United States, as well as degrade public trust in news media.

The effect in Columbia, though difficult to quantify, seems to have shaped the legacy of the peaceful protests into a fictional one of violence and rioting — causing lasting damage to MU in enrollment, funding and public perception.

Kearney, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Twitter behavior during the 2016 presidential election, said news of Kremlin interference at MU is not surprising.

The Kremlin propaganda effort would have been ineffective if it were attempting to invent an entire narrative, according to the report, "Commanding the Trend: Social Media as Information Warfare," by Air Force Lt. Col. Jarred Prier. But, the campaign latches onto existing extreme
viewpoints and makes them seem more palatable to moderates, then slowly weaves more malevolent fiction into public understanding.

"People are trying to cause chaos and are pandering to our fears and misunderstandings about race," said Berkley Hudson, 2015-2017 chair of the MU Faculty Council Race Relations Committee and a scholar of American media history. "I just think they're exploiting fear and misunderstanding that already exists here, and there's plenty of it without them."

"People wouldn't be surprised to see people have racist thoughts about the world," Kearney said, but when there's many more of them than expected, it skews perceptions of what others think about the topic. That shifts the larger public understanding of a topic in a more extreme direction.

There was general racial uneasiness in the U.S. after a string of police shootings of unarmed African-American men, including in Ferguson two hours away, that led to riots. Columbia is a heavily media-saturated town for its size and has a high percentage of people ages 18 to 29 — the demographic most likely to use social media — and it's generally a Democratic-leaning island in a mostly Republican state.

News media and young people are more likely to be social media savvy than the average adult, Kearney said, but during an event like the 2015 protests where everyone is turning to Twitter to understand what's going on, people become vulnerable to misinformation. Despite their experience on social media platforms, young people and news media are, on balance, more likely to be affected by targeted disinformation than others, Kearney said. This is due in large part to their heavy exposure to so much content.

People usually build a slow understanding of the world through social media as they take in content, Kearney said, but during crises, Twitter makes an outsized difference. People are confused, checking Twitter for breaking news and to get information from people on the scene, so such situations are inherently more vulnerable to manipulation.

Journalists are also most likely to use social media in pursuit of breaking news, according to "The American Journalist in the Digital Age," a 2014 Indiana University study cited in Prier's report — they grow more likely to use social media posts as sources when they lack official or corroborated ones.

When what's happening is especially emotionally charged, Kearney said, people are even more likely to quickly hit "retweet" without doing their due diligence. When there's momentum and a growing chorus of people agreeing with a post, people are naturally inclined to think of that post as more reliable. This creates an expanding loop of disinformation.

The combination of actual protests on campus with fraudulent stories of riots, looting and violence combined to give the appearance of chaos. The tension on campus led to such a highly emotionally charged environment where disinformation was able to take root.
The Kremlin in Columbia

Prier's report looked back on events at MU in early November 2015:

A Twitter account with the handle of "Fanfan1911" told the world that at MU the "cops are marching with the KKK" and that they beat up his little brother, according to Prier's report. Fanfan's tweet included a photo of a bruised African-American child as evidence.

Payton Head, then president of the Missouri Students Association, posted the same day that the KKK was "confirmed" on campus and that he was working with the MU Police Department, the Missouri State Highway Patrol and the National Guard. Head soon deleted his post, apologizing for the misinformation — but it was enough for people across the country to think there was widespread violence at MU.

Missouri University of Science and Technology student Hunter Park posted on Yik-Yak, a social media app where posts typically remain anonymous, saying, "Some of you are alright. Don’t come to campus tomorrow" and that he planned to "shoot every black person I see." The language was inspired by a mass shooter in Oregon who had posted a similar message on the website 4Chan the night before committing violence.

No violence occurred. The only related arrest was of Park, who was in Rolla. The child pictured in Fanfan's tweet came from a 2014 story in the Huffington Post about police brutality in Ohio. The KKK was nowhere to be seen. And the Fanfan account was a bot — an automated account not affiliated with a human being.

Along with about 70 others monitored by Prier, Fanfan posted divisive, false information about trending news stories. The network of automated accounts automatically reposted each other and provided an increased appearance of legitimacy. Users could see under each tweet that dozens or hundreds of others had cosigned it. The accounts swam in streams of preexisting trending topics, so Twitter was unable to identify them easily as fake users.

From 2015 through 2016, the Kremlin bot accounts posted about Neo-Nazis and the KKK at MU, fictional rapes and murders committed by Islamic people in Germany, and right-wing conspiracies such as Pizzagate — where John Podesta, former Hillary Clinton presidential campaign chairman, was said to be running a child sex trafficking organization out of a pizza parlor, according to the report.

"They throw the kitchen sink at the wall and something sticks," Kearney said. Handlers of the bots aim for stories that are extreme enough to be inflammatory, he said, but grounded enough to be believable.

As Prier monitored them, the network of bot accounts posted in English, then German, then back to English. They posted false information on explosively controversial trending social issues such as police violence, anti-Obama sentiment and right-wing conspiracy theories in the United
States, as well as Islamic immigration in Germany. Their campaigns to shift public narratives "happened to align with noted Russian influence operations in Europe and eventually in the U.S. presidential election," the report stated, leaving little doubt of the Kremlin as the source.

**Measuring the damage**

After the protests, there was a failure to strongly and clearly communicate what actually happened and "who we are at Mizzou," Hudson said, which led to the emersion of a false narrative that students took over the school — ultimately causing blame to land on the protesters. This, for many people, had the effect of delegitimizing totally legitimate complaints of racism and mistreatment, Hudson said.

The report "provided some clarity as well as confirmation of the origin of the fake news out there at that time," MU spokesman Christian Basi said. "The vast majority of rumors were coming from people not on campus just trying to create a divisive atmosphere."

"If my mother were alive, she'd say it was the devil," Hudson said of the disinformation effort. "This could’ve all been over in, like, three days," said Rep. Donna Lichtenegger, R-Jackson, chair of the Higher Education Committee, in a November interview about the protests.

The leadership resignations, long-term critical press and football team strike should have never happened, Lichtenegger said, and false reports throughout the protests were never clarified, which damaged the school in the long term.

"The students on campus had no idea what was going on — they were never in danger," she said. "So, I think a lot of it was leadership, a lot of it was the press, and I think everything was handled wrong. ... The legislature never listened to me so that I could tell them exactly what did happen."

In spring 2016, millions of dollars were cut from the University of Missouri System budget as punishment for its handling of the protests.

**Fixing the fake news problem**

"Since the beginning of the story, there have been distortions of what happened," Hudson said.

There seem to be two basic schools of thought for how the public can fight against disinformation efforts going forward: Individuals can develop their own ability to read critically and suspiciously as they see the news, and social media platforms can take efforts to filter out disinformation and bots.

"Ernest Hemingway said the best tool a writer can have is a B.S. detector," Hudson said. "Well, that's the best tool a reader can have, too."

"Not everyone is an equal purveyor of news and information — and you're a fool if you think they are," he said.
Some of the best ways to tell if something is fake are to evaluate the source, read past the headline, seek corroborating sources and consider if your own biases are tinting your perception, according to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

"People are just getting more savvy," Kearney said of recognizing fictional news. "In the future, we'll just get better at it."

It's also important for journalists to hold themselves to a higher standard for evaluating a source's truthfulness, he said, as spreading disinformation from their role is far more damaging.

"There's pressure on journalists to be responsible in their social media use," Kearney said. "There's not pressure on the average citizen to do the same."

It could be particularly important for the public to learn to combat this problem going forward, he said. "If you're a politician or business owner, you now have a playbook," he said. "If someone wanted to repeat what happened, they could."

Some responsibility ultimately falls on Twitter and Facebook to prevent that from happening, Kearney said. "I think social media companies should own up to that."

Twitter has grown more diligent at identifying and banning fake accounts since 2016, Kearney said, mostly as a result of all the negative attention following the election. Ultimately, however, it's in Twitter's interest to be able to manipulate, to some extent, what people discuss on its platform.

The social media platform will work hard to try and stop third parties from manipulating conversation without paying for advertising, Kearney said, but they don't have much of an incentive to go beyond that.

"That's how they make money."
Report: Russians meddled in Mizzou protests using fake social media accounts

By NORA FARIS


COLUMBIA - Elections aren't the only U.S. democratic institutions intelligence experts say were influenced by Russian meddling. **Protests, specifically the 2015 protests on the MU campus, were also targeted by Russian operatives seeking to spread discord, fear and social unrest using social media.**


According to the study, a Russian propaganda Twitter account spread rumors of a violent KKK presence on the MU campus during the protests of 2015, sparking fears among local residents and the campus community.

The Russian account posed under the name "Jermaine" and used the handle @Fanfan1911. The account used the trending "#PrayForMizzou" hashtag to send false warnings that the KKK was wreaking havoc on the MU campus on the evening of Nov. 11, 2015.

The account tweeted, "The cops are marching with the KKK! They beat up my little brother! Watch out!" Attached to the tweet, which received hundreds of retweets, was a photo of a bruised and beaten black child.

According to the report, the photo was actually a picture of a black child beaten by police in Ohio more than a year earlier.

The rumor spread like wildfire, and it was soon taken up by people on campus, including student body president Payton Head, who warned students to "take precaution. The KKK has been confirmed to be sighted on campus."
The "Jermaine" account and other Twitter users continued to tweet with the #PrayForMizzou hashtag to chastise the media for not "covering the racists creating havoc on campus."

Head later apologized via Facebook for spreading misinformation and inciting fear, two things the study says the Russians intended to do with the fake accounts.

According to the study, the "Jermaine" account and its followers were all linked to about 70 bots that automatically retweeted those accounts' tweets. The tweets also used all of the moment's top trending hashtags, including #PrayForMizzou--an attention-grabbing tactic the study calls the "trend-distribution technique."

Jarred Prier, the Air Force officer who authored the study, said the Russians' plot was "smoothly executed and evaded the algorithms Twitter designed to catch bot tweeting."

"The narrative was set as the trend was hijacked, and the hoax was underway," Prier said.

MU spokesperson Christian Basi said university officials and law enforcement suspected, even at the time of the protests, that the rogue tweets were not published by members of the MU community.

"We knew at the time that we were dealing with individuals outside of the university, individuals whose only goal was to create divisiveness and to create a chaotic scene," Basi said.

According to CNN, Russians also played off of racial tensions in Missouri following the protests at Ferguson. Facebook "Black Lives Matter" ads were geographically targeted at Ferguson and were linked to the Russian government, which purchased the ads to sow political discord.
Report links Russian social media activity to MU protest rumors

By LUCAS GEISLER

COLUMBIA, Mo. - A new report claims social media rumors surrounding protests at the University of Missouri mirrored those of Russian-linked "disinformation" accounts.

The report from Lt. Col. Jarred Grier appears in Strategic Studies Quarterly, a publication put out by the Air Force's Air University. The paper discusses social media's role in spreading fake news and how people manipulate trending stories.

The paper uses protests on the MU campus as a case study for the Russian government's use of the tactic. It cites a tweet from a now-suspended account, @Fanfan1911, claiming the Ku Klux Klan was in Columbia, accompanied with a picture of a black boy with large bruises on his face.

"The cops are marching with the KKK!" the tweet read. "They beat up my little brother! Watch out!"

The picture, however, was of a boy beat by police officers in Ohio in 2013.

"The image and the narrative were part of a larger plot to spread fear and distrust," Grier said. "It worked."

The ploy had garnered hundreds of retweets from both real users and about 70 "bots," or fake social media accounts meant to spread certain content. Payton Head, then the head of the Missouri Student Association, wrote that he had contacted law enforcement about "confirmed" sightings of the KKK, which ultimately turned out to be untrue.

A few months later, Grier wrote, the Twitter account changed its name and began tweeting in German about Syrian refugees. Grier said the topic and point-of-view the account took played alongside propaganda the Russian government was pushing at the time about emigration throughout Europe.
MU spokesman Christian Basi said that the report gives them some insight into how some rumors started in late 2015. Basi said he isn't sure that the Russian government was behind the KKK rumor, but does help them look back on the situation.

"We knew pretty quickly that we were not dealing with individuals who had any ties to this campus," Basi said. "This study helped to clarify a little bit of that."

Campus police did investigate death threats made on social media surrounding the protests. Hunter Park, then a student at Missouri Science and Technology in Rolla, posted threats to black students at MU anonymously on Yik Yak.

---

Report reveals Russian Twitter-bots were behind 2015 protest scares at MU


Similar stories ran on KTRS (St. Louis) and KPTM-Fox (Omaha, NE).

---

Students who need help paying for college choose MSU over other Missouri universities

By: Claudette Riley

Megan Prather said her parents supported her decision to go to college but weren't in a position to write a check every semester to cover tuition, fees, books and living expenses.
She understood that to pay for an education, she'd have to rely on a mix of financial aid, loans and part-time jobs. For that reason, she compared the annual price tag at several in-state options before selecting Missouri State University.

"I definitely made the right decision," she said.

Students with the fewest resources to pay for college choose MSU in higher numbers than any other public four-year university in the state.

Prather, a senior in animal sciences and agricultural communications, said her expected family contribution is "zero," and she selected MSU, in large part, because of how much of her bill was covered by grants and scholarships.

"It's mainly the financial end of things," she said of the decision. "Economically, it's not a great time for families. They can't afford to send their children to college."

Missouri State leads the pack in students who qualify for the federal Pell grant program, which is only available to low-income undergraduates whose total family income is below $50,000.

However, most have an annual income that falls below $20,000.

"College attendance numbers have declined throughout the state and the country," said MSU President Clif Smart. "Meanwhile, Missouri State has set new enrollment records year over year ...That is due in part to our efforts to remain affordable."

Smart said undergraduate tuition and fees at MSU tally $7,306 for 30 hours — or 15 hours per semester — and that has been an effective recruiting tool for students from low-income and middle-class families.

The maximum Pell award is $5,920 a year. A portion of the low-income students who qualify for Pell are also eligible for help from the Access Missouri Scholarship Program, which offers an annual award of $2,000.

"This is more than $600 less than full Pell and Access Missouri, the two primary need-based programs that students utilize," Smart said. "The result is that MSU enrolls more Pell-eligible and Access Missouri-eligible (students) than any other four-year university in Missouri."

At MSU, 5,969 students — more than 20 percent, or one out of every five enrolled — receive the Pell grant.

**In comparison, there are 5,424 students with Pell at the University of Missouri-Columbia,** 3,647 at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, 3,489 at the Southeast Missouri State University, 3,443 at University of Central Missouri and 3,000 at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.
Kyle Bort, a senior in Spanish, grew up just north of St. Louis, in Illinois. He said the decision to enroll at MSU — 4-1/2-hours from home — was driven by the bottom line.

"It was actually cheaper to come to Missouri State than any college back home in Illinois," he said.

Bort, who wants to be a teacher, said the Pell grant "helped a bunch" and has helped limit how much debt he expects to have at graduation.

"Without the Pell grant, either I would have had to take our private loans or my parents would have had to take out private loans," he said.

Smart made his remarks in January while unveiling a series of cost-cutting measures at MSU, including lowering the minimum number of credit hours needed to obtain more than 75 percent of bachelor's degrees.

Other changes include freezing key residence hall rates, renegotiating the food service contract, exploring cheaper textbook options and expanding scholarships.

Smart made the announcement days before Gov. Eric Greitens proposed a state budget for fiscal year 2019 that, as expected, included another round of funding cuts for higher education.

MSU experienced a $6.7 million withholding of state funds in fiscal year 2017, followed by a $6.5 million cut and a $2.7 million withholding in fiscal year 2018.

Facing another funding loss if Greitens' budget is approved, Smart said MSU will likely raise tuition and fees while looking for additional ways to cut spending.

He said keeping MSU affordable is critical, especially for "students struggling to pay for college now."

**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

**Student journalists in Missouri would be shielded from censorship under proposal**

By Jack Suntrup

JEFFERSON CITY • In 1991, a young Eric Greitens wrote an essay to the Post-Dispatch. The senior at Parkway North High School was participating in a writing contest with the prompt “What the First Amendment Means to Me.”
The future Missouri governor said that while leaders since the country’s founding had “nourished” the First Amendment, recent events had “begun to erode the liberties which are the basis for freedom of thought.”

As one example, Greitens pointed to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the 1988 Hazelwood vs. Kuhlmeier case, which allowed school administrators to censor student publications.

“I am specifically concerned about the erosion of student rights protected under the First Amendment,” Greitens wrote. “We need courage and wisdom to stand against the mounting silence and reignite the freedom of expression.”

A quarter century later, Greitens, a Republican, may get the chance to help reverse the direction he said the country was heading. The Missouri House on Wednesday gave first-round approval to legislation that would largely shield student journalists from censorship by their schools.

The idea started to gain traction in the 2016 legislative session.

**Lawmakers were fuming at the time about a November 2015 incident at the University of Missouri-Columbia, when communications professor Melissa Click, during protests on a public quad, called for “muscle” to remove student journalists.**

The Cronkite New Voices Act, this year sponsored by Rep. Kevin Corlew, R-Kansas City, states that “material in school-sponsored media shall not be suppressed solely because it involves political or controversial subject matter.” The law would apply to public high schools and public universities and colleges.

For high schools, the measure allows teachers and administrators to use prior restraint when an administrator or an adviser “reasonably determines” the material is slanderous or libelous, invades privacy, violates the law, threatens violence, or is likely to disrupt order in the school, among other things.

College students would not receive protection for printing such materials.

The proposal also states that school staff cannot be disciplined for refusing to halt publication of lawful stories. For high schools, the measure allows districts to draft regulations on when and how students can express themselves, as well as rules forbidding vulgar or offensive language.

The legislation states that schools, faculty and staff could be held liable in court if they knew about or participated in promoting unlawful content. Students 18 or older could be held liable for publishing unlawful material.

Rep. Bryan Spencer, R-Wentzville, worried about who would be held accountable if rogue minor students published libelous pieces without editor knowledge. Corlew said there would be few cases of libel in general.
“I don’t think you’re going to see a lot of that,” Corlew said. “Our student advisers and student journalists are seeking to be professional.”

It is unclear whether Greitens has altered his views on student censorship in recent years. His spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment. Greitens has maintained an icy relationship with the press, dragging out open records requests and holding few news events during his first year in office.

His associates formed the group A New Missouri Inc., which acts as a sort of campaign committee but does not reveal its donors because of its nonprofit status.

Greitens and his team are also the subject of an ongoing probe by Attorney General Josh Hawley, a Republican, who is investigating the administration’s use of Confide, a cellphone app that deletes text messages after they’ve been read.

Perhaps offering a clue into Greitens’ thinking, in October he wrote on social media an open letter to his young sons, Joshua and Jacob. He was opposing a decision by a Mississippi school district to remove the book “To Kill a Mockingbird” from its curriculum.

“A culture of banned books leads to a culture of brittle people,” Greitens wrote. “If you avoid what might offend or bother you, you’ll also miss out on things that will stretch and strengthen you.”

---

Medical Center Set to Close Clinic in Holden, Eliminate Positions at Hospital

By SHOSHANA DUBNOW

Western Missouri Medical Center is set to close one of its family practice clinics in Holden on March 3.

Forty-one positions are set to be eliminated from the hospital in Warrensberg, too.

Chelsea Mudd, the marketing manager at Western Missouri Medical Center, said this was an administrative decision made to reduce costs after looking at patient volume and potential volume.
“There are different healthcare trends and methods changing right now,” Mudd said. “There’s a lot that rural health care organizations are up against. It was a primary goal of our administration to impact patient care as little as possible.”

**Out of the 41 positions, 33 were currently staffed. Dr. Patricia Alafaireet, assistant professor in MU’s Department of Health Management and Informatics, said that the community will notice the loss of jobs.**

“In a small town, that’s a big impact on the economy,” Alafaireet said. “And in some cases, particularly for rural hospitals, they are the primary source of employment.”

Mudd said that a letter will go out to all patients with information about the two next nearest Western Missouri Family Healthcare clinics in Concordia and Knob Noster. Medical records from the Holden clinic will be transferred if patients choose to visit one of those locations.

Alafaireet said that travelling the extra distance could create a financial burden for patients.

“Let’s look at this,” Alafaireet said. “How much in terms of opportunity cost is it going to cost someone to get a flu shot? And what impact is that going to have on the number of people who actually drive to get one?”

Mudd said Western Missouri Medical Center wants to hear feedback from the community on how to make the transition process easier.

MU Socialists holds meeting to organize against Gov. Greitens’ proposed cuts to higher education funding

By Mawa Iqbal

**Attendees at MU Socialists’ Feb. 12 meeting in Middlebush Hall discussed ways to demonstrate against Gov. Greitens’ proposed budget cuts to higher education spending.**

The meeting was held three weeks after Greitens unveiled his budget blueprint for fiscal year 2019 during a news conference. The proposal includes a $61 million, or 5.3 percent, cut to UM System funding.

However, this isn’t the first time the UM System has faced considerable blows to its budget. Greitens’ proposal comes nearly one year after an approximately $159 million, or 12 percent, cut to higher education spending during fiscal year 2018.
In January 2017, Greitens, who was a newly elected governor at the time, proposed expenditure restrictions on various programs. As a result, public universities faced nearly $56 million in cuts, while MU alone had $20 million slashed from its budget, according to a memo from then-interim Chancellor Hank Foley.

MU Socialists President Joseph Moore was sitting in on a UM System Board of Curators meeting on Feb. 2 when he came to an unsettling realization. One of the student representatives was discussing potential MU tuition increases when a board member asked the student if he was aware of how students felt about this issue.

“These people have no clue what we think, what our opinions are,” Moore said. “We need to make it known that the students at MU don’t want these budget and cuts and we don’t want tuition hikes.”

Students from across Missouri have expressed their disapproval of the past and more recent higher education cuts. Student representatives from six Missouri universities drafted a joint statement expressing their “deep disappointment” with Greitens’ proposal.

“Budget reductions of this magnitude would undoubtedly cause the rising cost of college to be placed squarely on the backs of students in the form of increased tuition and fees,” the statement read.

Joining the growing student voice against Greitens’ budget proposal are members of MU Socialists, who pointed to socialist ideology as why they opposed the cuts.

“Neoliberal ideology does not recognize education as a common good that must be publicly funded, but rather a commodity that should be bought and sold in the market,” Moore said. “As socialists, we believe public education is a public communal good and it should be free for everyone from kindergarten all the way up to graduate education.”

During the meeting, attendees discussed several ways to make their voices heard, including increasing awareness through the media and organizing public demonstrations.

Victoria Vitale, who facilitated the discussion, suggested protesting at the governor’s mansion either on the weekend of Feb. 24 or the weekend of March 3. Other members proposed sit-ins at MU’s Francis Quadrangle or hosting rallies at the Missouri State Capitol.

Amalia Dache-Gerbino, MU College of Education assistant professor, agreed with organizing public demonstrations but also said that more needs to be done to truly enact change. Citing experience researching student resistance movements in South Africa, Dache-Gerbino urged the importance of building coalitions across different communities.

“The student movements in South Africa were pretty sophisticated,” Dache-Gerbino said. “There were conversations happening with faculty and community members. It was workers, students and faculty all coming together.”
Based on her 10 years of research in the area, Dache-Gerbino maintains that the only way to change the system is to organize at the grassroots and to have a united front. Fellow member Shane Johnson expressed a similar sentiment.

“We want to organize a large group of people united around one idea: Who are we going to fight against these cuts,” Johnson said. “A small group of people in this room have a real opportunity to make a big statement about the cuts, and we have the opportunity to do it right here in Columbia.”

---

**What Do Provosts and Deans Actually Do?**

**NO MU MENTION**

By Michael Bugeja

You know something is amiss when offices of the provost have to explain what they do at comprehensive universities. And what they do -- or, more specifically, what many have failed to do -- is one of myriad reasons why budget cuts are occurring at large, often public, universities across the country.

You’ll find such cuts at institutions in Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas and Wyoming, to name a few. Cuts are not the rule, as *Inside Higher Ed* reported last year, showing modest increases last year in three-quarters of the states. But tuition keeps rising, debt keeps mounting and provosts and deans are at the forefront of containing costs.

Go ahead and google “What does a provost do?” You’ll find several websites trying to explain what the job at a major university actually entails.

One of my favorites is by Kerri Schuiling, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Northern Michigan University, who posted “What Exactly Is a Provost?”

“What is a provost?” asks the provost's office at the University of Michigan, which seems fit to include the dictionary meaning before describing responsibilities of the position (and yes, “keeper of a prison” is included above “high-ranking university administrative officer”):

**pro-vost** n [ME, fr. OE *profost* & OF *provost*, fr ML *propositus*, alter. of *praepositus*, fr L, one in charge, director, fr. pp. of *praepone*re to place at the head] 1: the chief dignitary
of a collegiate or cathedral chapter 2: the chief magistrate of a Scottish burgh 3: the keeper of a prison 4: a high-ranking university administrative officer

Emory University has a similar website, titled “What Does the Provost Do?” Better still, its president, Claire Sterk, a former provost at that institution, has a YouTube video by the same title, explaining the position.

Let’s be clear about the aforementioned executive officers: I do not know them. They are probably excellent administrators. Neither am I denigrating the provost's duties, which multiplied considerably when a number of presidents appended the title "vice president for academic affairs."

That is when troubles began. The VP title delegated to provosts the primary duty of president -- to be a visionary. This also effectively removed provosts as the advocate for and titular head of the professoriate. (That role has fallen to chairs of faculty senates and unions.) In the past, it was not unusual for provosts to be at odds with presidents if professors failed to get adequate compensation or if operations -- from technology to curricula -- inflated the budget. When it did, provosts held deans responsible.

In one of the early warnings about the dual title, “Vice President v. Provost,” authors Ray Maghroori and Charles Powers correctly state that “the two roles entail distinctly different and, at times, even conflicting responsibilities.”

University employees usually do not know what provosts do apart from being the voice of the administration. All too often, presidents and chancellors with inflated salaries are gallivanting across the country in university jets, fund-raising, hobnobbing with alumni and business leaders, attending athletic events, participating in educational organizations, networking with regents and legislators, and relying on vice presidents of diversity as buffers when multicultural crises arise.

Robert Sternberg, former provost and senior vice president at Oklahoma State University, and now a Cornell University professor, writes in a post subtitled “Wanna be a provost,” “The role of a provost actually is somewhat ill-defined. At some level, it is whatever the president or the chancellor wants it to be. Presidents often will delegate to provosts tasks that they do not want to do or that they see as outside their skill set. So provosts need to be ready to be something of a jack-of-all-trades.”

Central administration should focus on one paramount requirement: keeping tuition reasonable. In this, too, many have failed. Their core strategy is begging. Beg the Legislature for funding. Beg benefactors, too. Raise tuition. Tinker with the preposterous budget model used by a growing number of institutions called responsibility-centered management, which often rewards student credit hours rather than major enrollment, thereby inflating pedagogy.

**Explaining the Budget Model**

Here’s how the model typically works. The office of provost no longer is chiefly responsible for budget (centralized system); instead, college deans are responsible (decentralized system). Budgets are not pegged primarily to departmental enrollment as in the past but increasingly to tuition, with revenue generated by student credit hours. That puts departments in competition
with one another, duplicating efforts and courses, as explained in the article “Your Tub or Mine,” leading to what one critic calls “perverse incentives, like engineering schools that want to teach English.”

As a result, duplication abounds, with course catalogs expanding each year. A traditional provost would monitor that in a centralized system. However, since many provosts are expected to be visionaries instead of accountants, with systems now decentralized, the new class of deans typically hasn’t a clue about accounting -- apart from relying on tuition and formulas for student credit-hour generation and, failing that, increasing fees for just about everything.

With responsibility-centered management, you can balance budgets as long as tuition and fees keep rising, because costs are passed on to students registering for classes. The longer you keep students in the institution, the better for the budget, explaining in part why only 41 percent of students graduate in four years, with a quarter of them dropping out because of cost, according to The New York Times.

*Story continues.*

**MU Swing Society swings into love with Vintage Valentine's Dance**

By SANA MOORE

COLUMBIA - Valentine’s Day had some people swinging in the name of love.

**MU Swing Society held a dance class for the public to mark the holiday.**

“Valentine’s Day means getting together with good friends and just spending the day together and having fun,” said Danielle Griego, one of the hosts.

The room was filled with pink and gold streamers and a giant cut out of the moon.

Griego said, in the 40’s, the cut out of the moon was popular at carnivals.

“People would take a picture with the moon with the sky in the background,” Griego said.
She said the dance is not just for couples.

“It’s a chance to meet new people if you aren’t doing anything else on Valentine’s Day,” Griego said.

Before the dancers get a chance to show off their moves, an instructor teaches them a few moves.

One dancer said he enjoys swing and has been dancing for a while.

“I just enjoy to dance, I don’t care what day it is,” Adam Raines said.

During the class and social dance, people get to choose to learn Lindy Hop, Collegiate Shag or the Charleston.

When the class was over, dancers got a chance to live the vintage life by eating candy popular in the 30’s and 40’s. They were also able to take vintage-style Valentine’s Day cards.

People of all ages are encouraged to come to the group's upcoming class. Wednesday at 305 Providence Rd in Columbia from 7 p.m. until 9:30 p.m.