



**MU News Bureau**

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## Climate Change Skeptics Are Sending Disinformation to Teachers

This story was generated by an MU News Bureau press release: [Climate Change Misconceptions Common Among Teachers, Study Finds](#)

By Eric Mack

In the months since Donald Trump was elected, the world has continued to grow warmer on average and a Delaware-sized ice shelf grows closer to calving off of Antarctica. But the public's understanding and acceptance of the reality of man-made climate change is at risk of cooling as the United States moves to pull out of the Paris climate accord and purveyors of disinformation set their sights on the topic.

“We are under siege by fake information that’s being put forward by people who have a profit motive (such as oil and coal companies),” Ellen Stofan, former head scientist for NASA, told the Guardian in a recent interview. “I’m always wondering if these people honestly believe the nonsense they put forward. When they say ‘It could be volcanoes’ or ‘the climate always changes’... to obfuscate and to confuse people, it frankly makes me angry.”

I heard all of those lines when I proposed to re-open the discussion over what many of us who cover climate have treated as settled science for years. But now that those same fossil fuel interests are literally at the controls of the Environmental Protection Agency, the forces behind the disinformation campaign Stofan speaks of have become more bold.

The Heartland Institute, a think tank perhaps best known for attacking the climate consensus, is in the process of attempting to provide every science teacher in America with its own curriculum on the subject. Tens of thousands of teachers have been mailed a copy of a book titled "Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming" since the beginning of the year, along with a companion DVD and teacher's guide for using it in a classroom.

"I am writing to ask you to consider the possibility that the science in fact is not “settled,” reads a cover letter sent with the materials. "...students would be better served by letting them know a vibrant debate is taking place among scientists on how big the human impact on climate is, and whether or not we should be worried about it."

In my experience, that debate is taking place around the far-out fringes thanks to a very vocal but tiny minority of scientists who seem to be making a career of being very loud contrarians rather than providing *new* evidence-based research to back up their positions.

But there is actual science that backs up the Heartland Institute's disinformation campaign. That is to say, it's still full of disinformation, but a recent paper found that American science teachers could be fertile ground for seeding false doubt.

**A University of Missouri professor surveyed over 200 secondary science teachers and found that they hold many of the same misconceptions about climate change as the general public.** Study author Benjamin Herman doesn't fault teachers, though, given the long hours, lack of support and professional training opportunities many must deal with.

“Science teachers also need professional development directed at assisting them in their efforts to accurately and effectively engage students on this important issue,” Herman says.

Hopefully, teachers don't see that extra help as arriving in the form of a package from the Heartland Institute.



## **Report: Apartment complex tells students it will buy out dorm contracts**

Watch story: <http://www.komu.com/news/report-apartment-complex-tells-students-it-will-buy-out-dorm-contracts>

By Kyras Davis

**COLUMBIA – The Rise on 9<sup>th</sup> apartment complex refused to comment Monday on reports that it offered to pay to cancel on-campus housing contracts for incoming freshmen at MU.**

A report from the Columbia Missourian referenced a Facebook post from the student apartment's page that said, "A big thing a lot of people don't know is that WE WILL PAY TO BREAK YOUR DORM CONTRACT. That's right...living in the dorms is not a requirement."

When asked about the now-deleted post, Rise on 9<sup>th</sup> said it's not accepting interviews.

According to MU Residential Life, it could cost up to \$325 per resident to cancel on-campus housing contracts.

For written requests received for contracts submitted after December 31, 2016:

- by May 1, 2017, has no cancellation fee
- May 2 - 31, 2017, has a \$125 cancellation fee
- June 1 - July 15, 2017, has a \$225 cancellation fee
- July 16 - Aug. 15, 2017, has a \$325 cancellation fee
- Aug. 16 - 22, 2017, has a \$325 cancellation fee plus daily room rate, board and social fee charges through the official check-out or cancellation date
- Aug. 22, 2017, and after has daily room, board, and social charges plus 40 percent of the remaining contracted charges for the rest of the academic year.

MU policy makes it mandatory for incoming freshman to stay on campus.

MU News Bureau director Christian Basi said, "That policy won't change. We do have a few exceptions to that policy"

Some of the exceptions, Basi said, are students who are living in Greek housing, older than 20, living with a parent in Boone County or taking less than six credit hours.

For students who refuse to live in residence halls and do not fall into any of the exception categories, Basi said the university would meet with the student to discuss the benefits of living in residence halls.

Basi said he would not discuss the report about the Rise on 9th Facebook post.

He said the university's policies on student housing will be on the agenda next week when the Board of Curators meets.



## MU to enforce freshman dorm rule

By Dan Claxton

COLUMBIA — **The University of Missouri plans to increase enforcement of a housing policy that requires first-time freshmen to live on campus.**

The proposal is part of a budget plan approved last week by University of Missouri system President Mun Choi. The proposal says the Division of Student Affairs could generate \$750,000 by more strictly enforcing the policy.

A 10-story apartment tower with 430 beds, called The Rise, is under construction in Columbia. It is advertising that it will pay freshmen to break the dorm contract, saying living in the dorms is not a requirement.

Leasing agent James Holloway says a few freshmen have already accepted the offer.

Campus spokesman Christian Basi says first-time students are generally required to live in dorms, with some exceptions.

# THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

## Jim Sterk trumpets successful first year as Mizzou's AD

By Tod Palmer

**First-year MU athletic director Jim Sterk trumpeted a successful year at the helm of Missouri's college sports franchise Monday during an appearance at the Tiger Club of Kansas City Golf Tournament at Staley Farms Golf Club in Kansas City, Mo.**

Sterk beamed as he talked about junior distance star Karissa Schweizer's latest national title in 5,000 meters at the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships.

"With her third title, it ended up with women's outdoor track being 17th in the country," Sterk said. "That meant 10 of our 20 programs were in the top 25. That's significant, and probably our best year ever. We'll see where it ends up on the Learfield Cup, but it's a significant amount. A lot of great things have happened this past year, but I think the future is even brighter and I'm really excited about it."

That bright future includes resurgent interest in Mizzou men's basketball, which has endured a 27-68 stretch during the last three seasons but is poised to reemerge as a top-25 program led by new coach Cuonzo Martin and top 2017 prospect Michael Porter Jr.

"(Hiring Martin) got people excited about basketball and that was really the main purpose — to bring basketball back to a competitive level and get the state really excited about Mizzou basketball, like they've been in the past," Sterk said.

Sterk also expressed excitement about Missouri softball, which opened a new \$17.5-million stadium this spring and reached an NCAA regional for the 10th straight season.

The program didn't quite play to the lofty standards established under coach Ehren Earleywine, but Sterk said there's reason for optimism around the program.

"I had a good debriefing, end-of-the-season wrap-up and he's really excited about the upcoming season," Sterk said of Earleywine. "He has some momentum with a lot of players coming in. About half the team will be new next year, so he's excited about where softball's at."

Earleywine is entering the final year of his contract and will remain the Tigers' coach.

“He’s proven himself to be a really quality coach and then took it to heart, I think, what happened last year,” Sterk said. “I think he’s really working to improve ... but I think we have a good leader there that will continue to lead softball.”

Sterk said he’d encountered no issues similar to those that prompted an investigation in Earleywine’s conduct last spring under his predecessor, Mack Rhoades.

“It was a good year,” Sterk said. “We talked about some things that he had brought up. I think he’s got a great support in (assistant athletic director) Brian Brown, who’s his sports liaison. The three of us met after the season and we’re moving forward.”

Also moving forward is Mizzou’s joint investigation with the NCAA into allegations of academic fraud within the athletic department, which surfaced in November when former tutor Yolanda Kumar blew the whistle on herself.

Sterk said the investigation remains ongoing and MU won’t receive any notice of allegations from the NCAA until that process concludes.

“I really don’t have a timeline,” Sterk said. “I wish I did, but I don’t. The NCAA hasn’t given us any timeline on that. Hopefully sooner rather than later. ... It’s still in fact-finding. Until that happens and that’s done then we’ll be able to know a little bit more of what the timeline is, but I don’t have anything.”

He indicated in late April that he hoped the entire process could be wrapped up within the next six months — which might be ambitious, though he doesn’t anticipate anything as drawn out as the continuing saga at North Carolina.

“It will not be that long,” Sterk said with a laugh. “I can almost guarantee that. ... When it started, I would say, ‘We’ll have this wrapped up in three to six months,’ but now I don’t know. It’s nothing that’s negative or worse, anything like that, but it just takes it a long time for these things to go through.”

## U.S. attorneys' offices still under temporary leadership

By Alan Burdziak

Missouri is without a permanent U.S. attorney in both of its federal districts months after the White House changed hands, and it's unknown when permanent federal prosecutors will be named.

Trump has yet to nominate anyone to take over the seats, and all 93 federal districts are currently led by acting U.S. attorneys, most of whom were top deputies in their respective districts. About half of the U.S. attorneys quit soon after President Donald Trump's election, anticipating they would be fired, and the rest were asked to resign in March. It is not unusual for presidents to clear out appointees from previous administrations, experts said.

**The president appoints hundreds federal officeholders, all of whom serve at the pleasure of the president. Bill Clinton immediately asked for all but one of the 93 U.S. attorneys to resign after he defeated George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election, but Barack Obama and George W. Bush took more gradual paths to replacing U.S. attorneys, said R. Lawrence Dessem, professor at the University of Missouri School of Law.** Clinton had a more detailed plan for replacing them than Trump does, Dessem said.

"The planning would've been typically, for any position, you like to know who the successor would be before you get rid of the incumbent," Dessem said.

Presidents fill the seats with people who share their vision and will uphold the law as the president wants, said Mike Wolff, Saint Louis University School of Law dean emeritus. Trump's Department of Justice has increased its focus on immigration and Attorney General Jeff Sessions has said he wants more federal marijuana prosecutions in states with legal pot. It's likely future appointees would share those qualities.

"Here's the thing that people have to remember: elections have consequences," Wolff said. "If he wants to put people in there that have a focus on immigration enforcement, that's his prerogative."

It will take a while for Trump to fill all the spots, Wolff said, as senior senators usually give the president recommendations for who should take the jobs in their states. Once the president decides on someone for a U.S. attorney role, nominees are vetted by the Department of Justice, FBI and the Senate.

There is no telling when Trump will nominate someone to fill either role in Missouri or any spot across the U.S. In Missouri, Tom Larson is the acting attorney in the Western District of Missouri, taking over for Tammy Dickinson, and Carrie Costantin is his counterpart in the Eastern District, filling in after Richard Callahan left.

Not having a permanent boss has no effect on the day-to-day operations of a district, both Wolff and Dessem said. Dozens of assistant U.S. attorneys in each district are still working every day to prosecute federal crimes and defend the federal government when it is sued, said Dessem, who worked in the civil division for the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. for several years.

“We just defended the cases that were field and it didn’t matter who was president and I think that’s pretty typical,” he said.

However, Dessem said, once Trump has his people in place, that could make a difference in which cases are pursued and why.

“You have to have someone set policy at the top and that’s why we have presidential elections,” he said.



## [Punished for Anti-Racist Satire?](#)

A student at SMU said she was unfairly suspended for putting up fliers to respond to racist posters on campus.

By Jeremy Bauer-Wolf June 13, 2017

Southern Methodist University punished a student for tacking up fliers saying, “Why white women should date black men,” her response to racist materials that had been posted around campus urging white women not to date black men.

The institution deemed her fliers prejudiced, too, and indeed, they did contain potentially offensive statements that the student says were satirical. The incident raises questions about when and how a college should take stands on forms of expression.

Emily Walker, who will enter her senior year at SMU in the fall, was given a deferred suspension -- meaning she committed an offense so great that it would constitute a suspension,

but officials chose not to enforce the punishment. In the past weeks, she has started publicly discussing her experience with the campus judicial system, claiming the university only seeks to protect its image.

In November, she created and posted her fliers, a reply to posters that had been hung anonymously around campus that month with the header “Why white women shouldn’t date black men.”

The original poster claimed black men were more likely to carry sexually transmitted diseases and abuse their partners.

Southern Methodist quickly condemned the initial fliers, and the president, R. Gerald Turner, released a statement then, telling those who “[commit] to living a life of denigrating others” should find another place to live.

University statements do not specify whether anyone was punished for those fliers.

“The entire community must recommit to discouraging and eliminating such unacceptable behavior. There will be many tense moments nationally over the next few months. During these moments, the SMU community must be able to discuss our differences with mutual respect surrounded by a supportive campus environment for everyone. Anything less is unworthy of who we are,” Turner’s statement said.

...

The Education Department at the time was investigating a complaint filed against Berkeley that Jewish students were being discriminated against on campus.

Worrisome to Gary Pavela, an expert in higher education law, and the co-founder of Academic Integrity Seminar, is that the incident at Southern Methodist concerned a woman trying to protect minorities, he said. Pavela's organization tries to teach students the importance of social trust.

**Pavela referenced both the 2013 OCR letter to Berkeley and a 1973 Supreme Court case, *Papish v. University of Missouri Curators*, that ruled a student was inappropriately expelled for distributing a student publication with a risqué cartoon.**

The University of Missouri is a public institution.

“My reaction is that neither by OCR standards nor constitutional standards ... this meets no definition of unlawful expression I’ve encountered,” Pavela said of Walker’s case.

*Story [continues](#).*

## Can Dogs Have Autism?

By Kathryn Bowers

The first couple of spins are pretty funny. “Moon,” a white dog with a black spot over one eye, is chasing his tail. He looks playful, puppyish. But the next several circles start to wear thin, like a toddler repeating a joke. At 12 seconds, Moon has been spinning so much and so aimlessly you’re not laughing any more. The behavior seems off, even concerning.

The video belongs to Nicholas Dodman, a veterinary behaviorist at Tufts University and the author of *Pets on the Couch*, a book about animal psychiatry. Moon is a bull terrier, and Dodman believes the animal has a dog version of autism spectrum disorder.

Dog autism, like Moon’s spinning, may seem unserious. But investigating possible autisticlike behavior in canines could also help people. With ASD now affecting 1 in 68 human beings, psychiatrists are eager to find a faster, more accurate way of diagnosing and understanding the disease in people. At the moment, you can’t do a blood test to diagnose ASD. In fact, autism doesn’t have a definite lab test of any kind. For now, autism can only be identified by observing and then analyzing how a patient behaves. Two areas of behavior are scrutinized for telltale autistic patterns: sociability (both verbal and nonverbal) and stereotypies, which are repetitive, intense movements like rocking, spinning and hand-flapping, and fixations on objects or topics. To get a diagnosis of autism, a patient has to have multiple problems across both areas.

Delineating subtle behaviors requires as much art as science, and doctors would love to have a less subjective process, one based on biological markers like genetics or chemicals. Biologizing mental illnesses doesn’t just make diagnoses more accurate. It can also destigmatize psychiatric conditions, make them seem less like an individual’s fault.

Asking “Do animals get autism?” is one way to get at a biological understanding of ASD. Humans aren’t the only living creatures with complex social behaviors that range along a spectrum. From meerkats to California condors, animals in groups protect, instruct, compete with, and support one another. As for stereotypies, nonhuman animals often develop intense repetitive behaviors. Polar bears pace and bob; horses crib and huff; dogs lick their flanks or chase and chew objects.

Dodman is not the first scientist to wonder about autism in nonhuman animals. Laboratory rodents and primates have been studied, and in 1966 the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association published a paper titled “A Syndrome in the Dog Resembling Human Infantile Autism.” But lab environments (even putting aside ethical concerns) are poor places to study a complex neuropsychiatric condition that has a core element of anxiety and sociability. Pet dogs—loved, owned dogs that live in people’s homes—offer an intriguing comparative population. And Dodman is the first researcher to look seriously at that, starting with bull terriers like Moon.

Bull terriers have long, horsey faces and stout fire-hydrant bodies, but despite their tough reputations, the breed is notorious for odd behaviors and quirky personalities—none of which you see in most public portrayals of the breed. Bull terriers are surprisingly common in pop culture, and you reveal your age by which one you affiliate with. The Bud Light spokesdog Spuds MacKenzie is a bull terrier. So is the Target dog, Bullseye. The toy-terrorizing kid in Toy Story unleashes his bull terrier, Scud, on Woody, Buzz, and the rest of the crew. Gen. George Patton owned Willie, a bull terrier whose namesake was William the Conqueror. If you were reading picture books in the early 1990s, your iconic bull terrier might be Boodil, the eccentric protagonist of a children’s book by Swedish author Pija Lindenbaum.

Of the celebrity bull terriers, only Boodil reliably demonstrates what scientists call the “behavioral phenotype” of the breed. Boodil cowers at the sight of a vacuum cleaner; phobias are common for these dogs. “Trancing” bullies go into a sort of liquid suspension slo-mo state, stopping what they’re doing to stare blankly into a middle distance. Boodil does that, too. “Ghost-walking” or “moon-walking” is a distinctive gliding gait they snap into particularly when walking under shrubbery. Their episodic rage attacks can be directed toward human beings or other dogs. Stereotypies include obsessive tail-chasing, ball-playing, bone-chewing, and a wild rear-end-tucked-under running action bully enthusiasts affectionately call “hucklebutting.”

Dodman has found that as many as 85 percent of any bull terrier litter have compulsive tail-chasing behavior, indicating a strong genetic component. And certain other traits “travel with” the condition. Tail-chasers are predominantly male. They are prone to partial seizures, skin conditions, gastrointestinal issues, and fixations. Some of them seem socially withdrawn and avoid interacting with people and other dogs. “Not all of them do everything,” Dodman says, but “a light bulb came on” when he realized the clustered behaviors had “intriguing parallels” with human autism (which also affects boys and men more than women and girls).

Working with behaviorist Alice Moon-Fanelli, Dodman studied more than 300 bull terriers, about half of which had the autisticlike behaviors. They published the findings in a veterinary journal, but when Dodman approached a human medical journal he was turned away. The editors told him, “You can’t just say this ‘looks like’ autism; you need a biomarker.” So working with a physician at Tufts, he did a follow-up study on two blood chemicals (neurotensin and corticotropin-releasing hormone) that had been associated with ASD in a previous study.

Dodman and his team tested a new group of children and a new group of bull terriers. The autistic children and tail-chasing bull terriers had similar elevations in the same chemicals, which was not seen in the control groups. With the behavioral study plus the biomarkers, Dodman published the results in *Translational Psychiatry*.

Since that paper, Dodman has been working with canine genome experts at the National Human Genome Research Institute. Pinpointing genetic areas that underlie autism would be the gold standard for diagnostics and is something Dodman has done before. (He found a genetic basis of a canine version of obsessive-compulsive disorder in Doberman pinschers.) The autism study is still underway.

**Not too long ago, human researchers were resistant to this kind of comparative work, claiming that autism is too complex and too human to be described in other animals. But that's changing. David Beversdorf studies the condition at the University of Missouri.** He became interested in the idea of dog autism when his wife, a therapist and former show dog handler, noticed a subset of miniature poodles with repetitive behaviors that also had difficulties interacting socially with dogs and people. Beversdorf and an interdisciplinary team published a study describing autismlike behavior in poodles. Like Dodman's work on bull terriers, the behaviors seem relevant, but biomarkers are the next necessary step.

"It's still seen as somewhat exploratory," Beversdorf says. "But we do have some evidence that there is something here worth looking for."

When ASD's disease pathway is finally found, the first thing that may need to be rethought is the term disorder. Temple Grandin, the author and animal behaviorist who also has autism, points out that autism is a different way of seeing the world, one that connects us to other animals. "Autism is a kind of way station on the road from animals to humans," she wrote in *Animals in Translation*. "I think most of the time animal genius probably happens for the same reasons autistic genius does: a difference in the brain autistic people share with animals."