



# Missouri Department of Higher Education

## Higher Education Headlines

February 1, 2016

*Note: A link will no longer provide access to some news stories. Those stories appear in their entirety at the end of this document, as indicated.*

[Kendrick proposes plan to extend payments, cut interest on student loan debt, Feb. 1](#)

[David Steward resigns from University of Missouri Board of Curators, Feb. 1](#)

[Editorial: College education remains vital, despite enrollment drops, Jan. 29](#)

[Barbara Shelly: Why the University of Missouri is in big trouble, and why it will survive, Jan. 29 \(see story below\)](#)

[A push to finish on time, Jan. 29](#)

[Missouri Senate panel hears bills on removing campus concealed-guns bans, Jan. 28](#)

[Wolfe: School leaders tried to 'dig up dirt', Jan. 28](#)

[Senator calls for auditor to do a 'deep dive' into University of Missouri finances, Jan. 28](#)

[Nixon pushes for more Missouri college funding, Jan. 27](#)

[Our view: Invest in higher education, Jan. 27](#)

[Committee meeting on bill to remove gun ban at higher ed institutions, Jan. 27](#)

Legislative overreach is threat to MU, Jan. 26

Mizzou teacher charged with misdemeanor assault in confrontation with journalists, Jan. 25

Potential for extra college funding being viewed cautiously, Jan. 25

# Barbara Shelly: Why the University of Missouri is in big trouble, and why it will survive

BY BARBARA SHELLY

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In far-flung classrooms, labs and offices around Missouri, the essential work of a public university system hums on.

Researchers in Columbia just [received a patent](#) related to nuclear medicine in the treatment of cancer. Enthusiasm remains high for a downtown campus for the University of Missouri-Kansas City's Conservatory of Music and Dance. A new generation of engineers trains at Missouri Science & Technology and dozens of students on the St. Louis and Kansas City campuses strive to become the first in their families to earn college degrees.

This backdrop is helpful as we consider what's happening in the University of Missouri system's upper reaches. The governing structure is in a rough patch, to be sure. But an entire system shouldn't be defined by ex-president Tim Wolfe's [grievances](#), or by the [infamous video](#) of an enraged assistant communications professor, Melissa Click.

That's not to minimize the University of Missouri system's precarious situation with the state General Assembly. Walk the hallways of the Capitol in Jefferson City these days and it's difficult to find a legislator who isn't angry about what's been going on.

Some lawmakers are furious that Wolfe resigned in November in response to protests by black students. Others think he didn't leave soon enough. Still more Republicans are livid that Wolfe took former MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin out with him.

Republican lawmakers have vowed to punish MU because its medical center granted low-level admitting privileges to a physician who performed non-surgical abortions at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Columbia. Many Democrats are incensed because Loftin caved in to pressure from Republicans and revoked the doctor's credentials.

Lawmakers from both parties are questioning the Board of Curators' decision to pay \$10,000 a month to lobbyist Andy Blunt, son of U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, for crisis management intervention with the legislature. His salary is in addition to at least \$500,000 that the university system pays to other lobbyists and government affairs specialists.

Perhaps most polarizing is the furor surrounding Click, the assistant professor who was captured on video shouting for "some muscle" to help her stop a student journalist from recording events in a public space.

Click's unquestionably brutish actions turned her, in the eyes of many conservative lawmakers, into everything that is wrong with academia.

She sided with indulged students who thought they were entitled to a “safe space” in the middle of Mizzou’s quad. She threatened a student photographer. Then it became known that her media research includes work on popular culture phenomena like Lady Gaga, the “Twilight” series and “50 Shades of Grey.”

Nearly 120 Republican legislators signed a letter calling on MU interim Chancellor Hank Foley to fire Click. One lawmaker even filed a bill requiring mandatory free speech courses at all of the state’s public colleges and universities.

On Wednesday the Board of Curators yielded to the political pressure and [voted to suspend Click](#). In doing so, they badly undercut Foley, who earlier this week said the university had “good strong processes” in place to evaluate Click’s future with MU and would not be rushed.

The curators’ vote took place as people around Missouri were busy digesting a “confidential” email that Wolfe had sent to about 100 supporters, and which of course circulated like an airborne virus. He laid out a myriad of grievances about the way he was treated before and after his resignation and suggested the university system was in danger of collapse unless the curators gave him a generous severance package and freed him up to play a savior role from the outside.

Can I suggest that we all calm down a bit?

The General Assembly is not going to defund the University of Missouri system to the tune of more than half a billion dollars, as Wolfe warned in his email. Legislators might talk about it, but they’ll quickly find out how many loyal alumni live in their districts.

And the university system has not become so much of a pariah that no competent person will want to be the system president, something else Wolfe predicted.

The governance structure does need repair. Gov. Jay Nixon must move quickly to replace the two curators who resigned since the upheaval began in November. The right leaders are needed to conduct a transparent search for a system president with the ability to connect with constituencies as diverse as minority students and conservative state legislators.

People need to get their roles straight. Curators have no business getting involved in campus situations or personnel matters. By suspending Click to appease legislators, they courted faculty unrest and scrutiny from groups like the American Association of University Professors.

But the next president must be more engaged than Wolfe was. His refusal to meet with black students on the Columbia campus became his undoing.

The legislature has to stop using the university system as a political piñata. Railing about liberal faculty and spoiled students might resonate with some constituents, but it reduces a complex educational system to a few inflammatory talking points.

Lawmakers have a right to determine that the taxpayers’ dollars they allocate to the university system are well spent. But that right stops short of interfering with who gets privileges at university medical facilities, what courses are offered on campuses and the job status of any professor.

Legislators understand, as do most Missourians, the need for a strong university system. The University of Missouri's four campuses are economic engines, incubators of culture and ideas and a destination for bright young people in Missouri and beyond.

Those are assets you want to build up, not tear down.

<http://www.kansascity.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/barbara-shelly/article57192718.html>