

Student governments collaborate

Public institution student governments seek to restart MHEC

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After a year and a half of inactivity, student governments of Missouri's public institutions are gathering to relaunch the Missouri Higher Education Consortium.

Junior Isaac Robinson, former president of the Student Association, said he was interested in restarting MHEC last year during his presidency.

He said MHEC's goal is to as a collective body of student governments lobby Missouri legislators on behalf of higher education.

Robinson said MHEC lobbies for policy and funding issues and provides a voice for Missouri students.

He said Truman could use MHEC to gain a vote for the Board of Governors student representative and to find solutions for University funding cuts. He said Truman only would support a performance-based funding formula — a controversial issue. Robinson said Truman should also be pushing for construction projects.

Robinson, who is no longer a Senate member, said he was emailed by Scott Turk, Missouri State University's Student Government Association President, in August to get MHEC going again. Robinson said he attended a meeting with student government presidents and vice presidents of private and public Missouri schools in Jefferson City on Sept. 8. He said that following the meeting, student government representatives from Missouri State, Missouri Western State University and Northwest Missouri State University met to discuss MHEC.

When Truman State's MHEC was active between 2007 and 2009, the organization was able to get two out of five legislative pieces passed: veteran tuition caps and voting for student curators on various schools' boards of governors or regents, Robinson said.

Robinson said others involved in MHEC suggested the next meeting to be

in January in Columbia, Mo., but he said he thinks it should be in November — before the General Assembly goes into session.

Junior Ryan Nely, current Student Senate president, said Robinson gained permission to speak on behalf of Truman regarding the funding formula, which Nely said is the most important issue MHEC deals with. Nely said he couldn't attend the meeting because of academic reasons. He said he will become more involved with MHEC when it gets rolling.

"Basically, I see my role as being an equal part," he said. "Isaac is going to be the one that's sort of in charge of it, but that's just as a student leader."

Nely said not all Missouri schools agree about performance-based funding, but he hopes MHEC can come to a consensus.

"I can understand where schools who don't perform as well argue against performance-based funding, just because if you are representing your student body, you have to represent that interest," Nely said.

Jacob Scott, Missouri Western State University's executive vice president of the Student Government Association, attended the meeting.

"We work to enhance our student life on campus to basically sustain our costs and our operating expenses on our own as much as we can, because we know that the budget is a plenty difficult subject matter right now," Scott said. "We do our best to serve the state and to serve our students."

Scott said MHEC can provide for a valuable learning experience for Missouri student governments.

"The more we talk as student government associations, the more we're going to learn from each other and the more influence we're going to have in higher education if we're together," Scott said.

Nely said he would like to see every Missouri public college and university in Missouri become involved with MHEC.

"I'm hoping that we can get all 13 public schools on board with it, saying that this is something that every corner of the state agrees with uniformly, especially if we can get some more of the power players like Mizzou involved," he said.

Students tie-dye shirts



Jessie Poole/Index

Freshman twins Max Mcdermotter (left) and Tessa Mcdermotter tie dye shirts outside Centennial Hall on Sunday afternoon. The event was a program created by sophomore Kelly Cunningham, a student adviser in Centennial.

Risk management protects, raises liability

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A new requirement from the Center for Student Involvement can help student organizations reduce risk, while also increasing liability.

The CSI is requiring student organizations to include risk management policies in their constitutions with the intent of helping them prepare for potential problems.

If an organization fails to follow its policy and injury or damage occurs, it is more vulnerable legally and could face additional University sanctions.

"Our intention is to get everyone on the same playing field to think about if something goes wrong, who is going to be in charge of it and how are we going to respond as an organization," said Laura Bates, director of Student Involvement.

Organizations must list a risk management chair, steps they

are taking to minimize risk and a procedure for handling situations "when risk occurs," according to the CSI's guide to creating a constitution.

University lawyer Warren Wells said the main purpose of risk management is to avoid a potential problem in the first place. But another problem can arise if an organization doesn't enforce its policy and something goes wrong, he said.

For violating the risk management rules, it is more vulnerable to a lawsuit or additional University sanctions.

In the event of a lawsuit against a University-chartered

organization, the students can be held personally liable, not necessarily the University, Wells said.

"This is why I say they shouldn't just adopt these rules light-heartedly and walk away from them," Wells said. "This is serious business."

Bates said about 70 organizations have national oversight entities, like Greek and recreational organizations and already have risk management policies, but the remainder of Truman State's approximately 240 student groups do not.

Wells said in recent years, the national organizations of fraternities and sororities required

local chapters to adopt risk management policies to avoid lawsuits.

"If that national organization has policies in place, and can show that it enforces the policies when it hears about a violation, it can protect itself from being sued," he said.

Wells said it is possible to see similarities between the Greek national's risk management policy and the University's, although he said he thought the primary goal is to make students address risk.

It is unlikely that a student injured in a club event would sue the University, but the plaintiff would not have a strong case against the school if the CSI requires risk-management policies and enforces violations, Wells said.

Senior Emily Stephens served on the CSI committee of four students to review the entire chartering process and the risk-management policy last year, she said.

The Organizational Service Team researched more than 30 schools similar to Truman and compiled a data sheet to compare their risk management policies and write a policy for Truman.

"At the end of the semester, we'll go back and see how it worked and re-evaluate our own process for the next couple semesters," Stephens said.

The Showgirls already submitted its updated constitution, including a risk-management policy, to the CSI.

The policy includes a statement that the coach and team members will make every effort to reduce injury risk at practices and games as well as an emergency plan in the event of an injury.

Senior showgirls Andrea Martinez and Kara Jacquin said the risk management policy essentially is the same as the unwritten procedure the team follows when there is an injury anyway, so the CSI requirement does not effect the team much.

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— Laura Bates
Director of Student Involvement

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