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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

More Misery in Missouri

The university continues to struggle with fallout from the 2015 protests.



Mizzou Legacy Circle at the Mel Carnahan quad on the campus of University of Missouri - Columbia is seen in Columbia, Missouri, Nov. 10, 2015. PHOTO: MICHAEL B. THOMAS/GETTY IMAGES

By The Editorial Board

June 15, 2018 6:59 p.m. ET

Indulging protesters can be expensive, as the University of Missouri is discovering three years after students successfully demanded the resignation of the president and chancellor. Last week the school said it will have to eliminate 185 positions on top of 308 cut last year.

Apparently fewer parents want to send their kids to a school where activism eclipses academics. Between the fall 2015 and 2017 semesters, freshman enrollment dropped by 35%. Lost tuition accounts for \$29 million of the university's current \$49 million budget shortfall.

In response, Mizzou has had to lay off employees, decline to renew expiring faculty contracts, and leave positions unfilled after retirements. The university is also cutting back on travel and phasing out low-demand courses, among other austerity measures.

Mizzou claims more aggressive recruitment from neighboring states' schools has contributed to the enrollment decline. And it says growing maintenance, research and personnel costs have contributed to the budget strain. But "we know the perception of Mizzou was a key factor in the difficulties we had over the past two years," adds spokesman Christian Basi.

Much of the public outcry concerned free speech, and Missouri has tried to improve on that score. Since 2015, all campuses in the Missouri university system have adopted the Chicago Principles, which guarantee "the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn." But other speech policies at Mizzou remain ambiguous, earning it a mediocre yellow rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education that tracks free-speech on campus.

In May 2017, the university signed a \$1.3 million contract for three years of outside PR help. This year it has spent \$1.8 million on ads to recruit and enroll new students. The school has added \$8 million to its scholarship budget and will decrease the cost of student meals and housing next year.

But as of the first week in June only 4,577 incoming freshmen had paid tuition deposits. That's about 500 more than the same week last year, but about 500 fewer than in June 2015, before the protests. Mizzou now graduates more students than it takes in, so the total number of students is still shrinking.

8/1/2018

More Misery in Missouri - WSJ

Missouri is learning the hard way that most students and parents believe a university should be a place for open inquiry run by administrators who will insist on it.

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