UMKC defends against allegations of mishandling COVID-19 case

Lucas Kenney
Staff Writer

Although the mother of a UMKC School of Law student says she informed the administration that her daughter tested positive for COVID-19 on March 21, four days before the university informed the campus community on March 25, University officials denied those claims and said they informed the UMKC public as soon as they had confirmation of a positive COVID-19 case. The student’s mother, Louise Lynch, first came forward with these allegations in an article published by The Kansas City Star on April 1. Lynch’s voice mail to UMKC Chancellor Mauli Agrawal’s personal cell phone at 1:14 p.m. on March 21. As an outgoing message, the content of the voicemail were not available to be verified. Lynch also said that a School of Law professor insisted her daughter come to campus for a meeting on March 16, even though UMKC had switched to online classes, and the daughter requested a meeting via Zoom.

“Why was my daughter made to go to school on the 16th?” Lynch said. “Why are you even suggesting it when you know they just closed down classes? Knowing my daughter has disabilities accommodations, knowing my daughter has an undiagnosed autoimmune disorder, why? I have proof my daughter asked for a Zoom session.”

UMKC has denied allegations that it withheld information on a law student who tested positive for coronavirus.

“Have physical proof,” said Lynch in an interview with UNews. “I left a voicemail for the chancellor on his personal cell phone upon finding out.” Lynch’s phone shows that she left a voicemail to UMKC Chancellor Mauli Agrawal at 1:14 p.m. on March 21. As an outgoing message, the contents of the voicemail were not available to be verified.

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Students look for work during record unemployment

Lacey Clark
Staff Writer

With unemployment at an all-time high, many UMKC students are searching for alternative work. Students who have found themselves unemployed are now seeking jobs that may not be their first choice, but will keep them afloat financially.

“I am looking for alternative work because I am financially independent, and I have a lot of expenses that come with that,” said junior Rebekah Shackelford.

Other students are seeking employers that are taking precautions to protect their employees from the spread of COVID-19.

“I tried to find somewhere close to my apartment that would pay okay, and was taking preventive measures,” said Kelsey Keith, a junior communications major. Nearly 6.6 million people filed for unemployment last week, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Some states are offering additional unemployment benefits to help cover expenses. Additionally, the federal government is giving many Americans $1200 checks to bolster their bank accounts.

However, this may not be enough for some students. “I won’t get the stimulus check because my parents claimed me as a dependent on taxes,” Keith said. “I filed for unemployment, but it won’t be enough to cover my expenses.” Finding a job might be easier said than done. Shackelford says she hasn’t had much luck finding a job, but has found small freelance jobs to make extra cash.

“I have not necessarily found another job yet. I have been walking and grooming dogs for extra income, but honestly, that takes a lot of time and does not seem like it will provide enough to cover essentials like rent,” Shackelford said.

Keith and Shackelford said they didn’t consider using UMKC’s Career Services during their job search.

“Honestly, I didn’t even know they were doing anything,” Keith said. “I figured they were pretty much shut down.”

Keith was wrong. Despite coronavirus closures, Career Services is still offering help (albeit online) for those seeking work or internships.

“Our career services staff is available to help you find a new position, update your resume, or prepare for an interview,” said Career Center Director Tess Surprenant in a statement on Handshake. “Chances are it will be tough to find similar work, but if you need to earn something to tide you over, take a look at part-time, part-time, or flex-time positions. These can get you through the next couple months.”

To meet with a career advisor, you can schedule an appointment online via Handshake for a video meeting or phone call.
U-News wins best overall website at MCMA conference

Publication receives 12 total awards

U-News won first place for best overall website and 12 total awards at the Missouri College Media Association (MCMA) awards Tuesday night.

The newspaper, which competes in Division 1 against the largest schools in the state, doubled its award total from last year.

The 12 awards won and their recipients are:

• First Place, Website, Sam Capkovic, Ethan Evans, Lucas Cuni-Mertz and Jodi Fortino.
• First Place, Op-Ed page, Lydia Fultz, Carlos Mercado and Alex Fulton.
• Second Place, Op-Ed page, Lydia Fultz, Robert Zimmerman and Mason R. Dredge.
• Third Place, Investigative Reporting, Stephanie Klein.
• Third Place, News Writing, Lukas Kenney.
• Third Place, Feature Writing, Emily Reid.
• Honorable Mention, Feature Writing, Lukas Kenney.
• Honorable Mention, Editorial Writing, Caleb Wilson.
• Honorable Mention, Entertainment Review, Mason R. Dredge.
• Honorable Mention, Entertainment Review, Mason R. Dredge.
• Honorable Mention, Video, Darius Stewart, Abbey Higginsbotham, Sam Capkovic and Henry Gamber.

How students are handling everyday life amid COVID-19

Jasmine Jones
Staff Writer
Adriana Macias
Staff Writer

It's a month since UMKC moved all classes online to combat the spread of COVID-19, and since then students have had to adjust to life under quarantine. With no end in sight, students are weighing in on how they are coping with the sudden changes.

Thomas Murphy, a senior majoring in business administration, said he is more of a social person but has been doing more skateboarding to pass the time and get some exercise.

"I can still anti-socially skate the spots in my neighborhood for exercise," Murphy said. "Honestly I've been skate more in the last couple weeks than I have all year."

Adriana Colina, a junior majoring in communications, is also using exercise as a way to pass the time.

"This is a very hard task for me, because I'm a very active person," Colina said. "I feel like I've been home less often since the stay at home order; I find ways around not staying home. I've been skating more than usual; my boyfriend and I will skate in new parts of KC and people watch. I've been trying to bike and find new trails to walk on."

Some students feel the quarantine has given them time to focus on other hobbies.

"The lockdown orders have given me time to work on other activities," said Jacob Lee, a sophomore political science major. "It's a pain for sure to be stuck inside, but if it keeps us healthy and safe, I'm down."

Murphy said he is also taking time to pick up old hobbies. "Messing about with music has been great to fall back on," Murphy said. "I've lost my 'I don't have time' excuse."

A common notion between students is that they are feeling closer to their friends and family now more than ever. It's been lovely catching up with friends from out of state and out of country, many of them UMKC alums," Murphy said. "Hearing their perspectives on how the pandemic is progressing locally has been fascinating. It's interesting how the lockdown made close friends more distant, and distant friends more close."

Murphy has been hosting Zoom sessions with other students in what he calls "Friday night e-drinks."

Colina said Zoom has also helped keep her family connected in these times.

"Most of my immediate family lives in different countries and continents, so I'm already used to the conditions of not seeing them often," Colina said. "This epidemic has brought us closer. We meet on Zoom twice a week so all of us can talk to each other, and my dad will give us cooking classes and we will all cook together."

Lee emphasized the need for a positive mindset in these difficult times. "Staying motivated is key," Lee said. "Don't start skipping classes or not paying attention, and make sure you don't just stay in bed the last semester. We have five weeks left—let's keep it up Roos."

mertz and Jodi Fortino.

Students like Thomas Murphy have been finding activities they can pursue alone. Students like Thomas Murphy have been finding activities they can pursue alone.
Graduation blues: UMKC seniors react to postponed commencement ceremony

Amina Dalton
Staff Writer

The coronavirus has turned this semester into one unlike any before. With campus closed, students have to take all of their classes online. A city-wide "stay-at-home" order mandates that people only come out of their homes for essential items only. Libraries, restaurants, and stores have closed their doors until further notice.

Now, the one thing UMKC seniors look forward to the most is postponed as well.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UMCAP administration postponed its in-person commencement ceremony until December.

The cancellation has elicited some negative reactions from seniors.

"I've worked so hard to get to this point. Being able to be a part of a commencement ceremony," said Ama- ya Wilson, a senior studying psychology and criminal justice. "For it to be taken away from me because of some- thing out of my control has saddened me.

Jaelyn Brooks, a senior studying interpersonal communication, said, "It hurts having to accept that a major milestone in my life isn’t going to go as imagined. I never thought it would end up this way, but as things have pro- gressed, I'm starting to understand the severity of what the world is going through. This situation is affecting every- one’s life, and I’m no different."

According to UMCAP administra- tion, they have postponed in-person ceremony to ensure the safety of stu- dents, faculty members and staff of the graduating class. Instead of the traditional commencement ceremony, UMCAP plans on finding another way to commemorate the students for their academic achievements.

"In May, we fully intend to find a fun, creative way to celebrate your graduation and commencement virtual- ly. We have ideas, but want to hear yours," Chancellor Agrama said.

Though the university is trying to make up for the lack of a ceremony in May, some students had prepara- tions expecting a spring commence- ment ceremony.

"I'm very hurt that I can't walk the stage next month," said Ituwa Lubani, a senior studying bio- science. "I made a lot of preparations and my family was very excited to see me walk, but it is what it is.

UMKC sent out a survey to get stu- dents feedback about how to celebrate the students’ accomplishments virtual- ly.

In a press release from the Universi- ty of Missouri System, president Mun Choi addressed the UMC schools, all of the university’s campuses, and students.

"I'm sincerely disappointed our students, parents and families are that we won’t be able to hold our com- mencement ceremonies in May," Choi said. "Hundreds of UM faculty and staff take part in these ceremonies each year, and it brings us great pride to cele- brate our students’ accomplishments and to provide them and their families. This May, we will have to adjust how we celebrate to ensure the safety of our university communities.

Though the changes, UMKC seniors are still pressing forward to finish this semester well.

"I'm still proud of my accomplish- ments and finishing strong even through all of this," Lubani said.

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When the messaging matters: the fall of Bernie Sanders

Brenden Hill
Staff Writer

Though most news nowa- days is about the coronavirus, one story broke out of the coro- navirus-barrier: Bernie Sanders dropping out of the Democratic primary.

That was a time when it seemed that Senator Bernie Sanders was going to take it to hill. Instead, former Vice President Joe Biden, who bounced back on Super Tuesday after previ- ous losses. The New York Times, also rising in the polls. Warren had to also deal with pushback against a surging Sanders.

Sanders didn’t help himself either. She soon lost her momentum. Sanders was able clearly to outline his program, but instead was a progressive democrat instead of adopting the pro- bagage-laden title of democratic socialist.

That means that if Sanders is a democratic socialist, he has to be able to win elections. Some- times to do that, bridges have to be built and coalitions have to be formed.

The fundamental problem is that Sanders didn’t help himself in pursuing his message. When it comes to his mes- sage, this left him more open to the establishment’s push back and also likely hurt his ability to win over the vot- ers he needed to back him in important races.

This is most clearly seen in Sanders’s labeling himself as a democratic socialist. This label isn’t something that strikes fear in the hearts of many young voters, but for the electorate at large, self-assured voters and voters with significant baggage.

An NPR/PBS NewsHour/ Marist poll conducted in Feb- ruary showed that “Asked about their impression of social- ialism, 28% of adults said they have a favorable view, while 53% had an unfavorable one.”

Another poll conducted by Gunders in January showed that “Just one group tested -- social- ists -- receives majority opposi- tion. Less than half of Ameri- cans, 45%, say they would vote for a socialist for president, while 53% say they would not.”

However, Sanders as a per- son is quite popular among Democrats. As The New York Times points out, “His net favor- ability rating is 57%, higher than any other Demo- crat in the race.”

That means that if Sanders was able clearly to outline his reasoning for defining himself as a democratic socialist to the Democratic electorate, he might be able to lessen that hit he took for that label-ing.

In a 2019 speech, Sanders said, “Today, in the second decade of the 21st century, we must take up the unfinished business of the New Deal and carry it to completion.”

While inspiring, this speech does not demonstrate why Sanders sound like a progressive Democrat. This isn’t a problem, considering he would likely be even more popular and politi- cally successful if he did label himself as a progressive demo- crat instead of adopting the baggage-laden title of democratic socialist.

The fundamental problem is that Sanders didn’t help himself in pursuing his message. Sometimes to do that, bridges have to be built and coalitions have to be formed.

The most frustrating thing is that Joe Biden isn’t a strong candidate, and his push for the nomination has been built on weak policy agenda. Sanders has a clear progressive vision that is both all-encompassing and would help millions demo- cratically on top of its ambis- sious foreign policy ideas.

The fact that many late de- ciders on big voting days for Super Tuesday went with Biden shows that Sanders mes- saging didn’t help bring people into his fold, but instead was a factor that likely pushed more people to Biden.

To get that progressive vi- sion done, it would be more useful to not speak in terms of a revolution, but instead, talk about how these “radical” ideas are broadly popular with most Americans. These ideas are common across the world, and many have clear ties to legend- ary American historical figures like Teddy Roosevelt, FDR, Harry Truman, Eisenhower and even Nixon. One doesn’t want to romanticize that past by any means, but using the past to help connect these policies to people is clear value.

To get the needed progres- sive vision, Sanders must have to win elections. Sometimes to do that, bridges have to be built and coalitions have to be formed. Setting a clear goal is important, but we shouldn’t la- ter in the march of revolutio- n that we are never able to make that progressive vision a reality.

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UMKC defends COVID-19, cont.

Lynch’s phone shows an email exchange between her daughter and the law professor. The student suggested a teleconference and Lynch, back saying they would prefer an in-person meeting.

“She was kind of the teacher, so she said, ‘OK, I’ll go,’” said Lynch. As the daughter was in Kansas City, the student went to campus for the meeting, immediately went to her doctor and learned she had tested positive for COVID-19 and bacterial pneumonia. The student was admitted to the hospital on March 20 with a fever of 103.5 and low oxygen levels, and she tested positive for COVID-19 the next day.

After testing positive, the student gave her mother a list of those at UMKC who had tested positive for the virus, Lynch said. The mother then began asking those individuals as early as March 21.

Lynch said doctors informed her that her daughter had contracted the virus approximately five days before she was diagnosed with COVID-19 on March 23.

The university issued a campuswide notice on March 25, stating that a student had tested positive for COVID-19.

The letter did not mention that the student had tested positive for COVID-19 or that the student had tested positive.

“The letter did not mention that the student had tested positive for COVID-19,” said Austin. “I immediately notified the administration that we had a positive test.”

After learning of the positive test, the university followed the health department’s protocol and assisted health officials in reaching out to individuals who may have been exposed to the virus via contact with the infected student.

Lundgren also noted that, in any case, the university would not move forward with any information regarding a positive case of COVID-19 without confirmation from the health department.

“If an individual or their immediate family would come forward and tell UMKC they have COVID-19, we will contact their local health department and have the health authorities officially verify and then notify us, or ask the individual for permission for us to seek confirmation through the health department,” Lundgren said.

Additionally, Lundgren denied allegations the faculty member and student had been coerced to come to campus on March 16.

“The mother has portrayed the student as being coerced to come to campus for a meeting with a faculty member on March 16. That is another inaccurate statement,” Lundgren wrote in a letter to faculty, staff and students of the School of Law on April 6. “The student contacted the faculty member and asked for a meeting. They mutually settled on a meeting on campus. Keep in mind that on March 16, UMKC had just moved to online classes and faculty were still working on campus, with guidance to engage in CDC-recommended social distancing practices.”

President Chou’s stay-at-home order for campus did not begin until March 23.

Lundgren sent the letter to the School of Law after UMKC’s Student Government Association expressed concern about the allegations made in The Star’s article and the lack of information on March 25.

In a statement released via Twitter on April 1, leaders of SGA said UMKC provided no information regarding the allegations raised by the student’s mother. They called for the university to be forthcoming with all relevant, non-identifying information regarding the student who tested positive.

Lundgren told UNews the university had to comply with the privacy rights of both HIPAA and FERPA, and felt uncomfortable sharing specific information that could have made the infected student identifiable.

“We were not in a position where we wanted to or where we could share specific information about this student—she said Lundgren. “We were trying to balance protecting this student’s right to privacy with the protocol that the health department officials were having us implement.”

In the wake of this controversy, UMKC administrators met remotely with leaders of SGA and students in the Law School in attempts to ease some of the fear and anger regarding the situation.

On April 9, SGA president Justice Horn released a statement to UNews, in which he again criticized the university for not disclosing the law student’s academic unit.

“The only thing students wanted was clarity of information at the time the positive case was made public,” wrote Horn.

After asking point blank if the Health Department advised against releasing the academic unit of the student, the Interim Provost refused to give a yes or no answer,” said Horn. “I personally feel that this administration continues to put their reputation before the health and safety of students. Administration potentially imperiled the health and safety of 300-plus law students—and the families they call home—by not protecting themselves from unlikely litigation. That is simply shameful.”

“I am formally calling for upper administration to apologize to the entire UMKC student body,” Horn said.

Madalyn Weston
Staff Writer

The heart is a necessary and interesting requirement for human life. The size of an adult fist and weighing around one pound, the heart pumps close to 2,000 gallons of blood through your body each day. The cardiovascular system as a whole contains over 60,000 miles of blood vessels. This incredible system requires incredible care.

One woman in STEM tackling the challenge of imaging the cardiovascular system in Mya Jayasinghe.

Jayasinghe completed her undergrad- uate education, with first class honors, in biological sciences from the University of Auckland in New Zealand. In 2018, she was nominated for the UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship, a six-year scholarship from the Royal Microscopical Society. Jayasinghe also won multiple awards and grants throughout her career. In 2007, she won a three-year scholarship from the Auckland Medical Research Foundation, worth NZ$97k (almost $80k USD). In 2010, she won the Hubbard Memorial Prize from the Physiological Society of New Zealand. In 2018, she was nominated for the Medal in Life Sciences Committee of the Royal Micro- scopical Society.

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In honor to her decorated career in microscopy, Jayasinghe is also passionate about diversity and education. Her own experiences with homophobia and trans- phobia still impact her work to this day. In 2018, she became a fellow of the Higher Education Academy, U.K. In 2019, she joined TRIFERASTOM, a group developed to further discussion among research students from universities in the U.K. science, technology engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEM) education system.

Are you interested in empowering women in the STEM fields? The Women in Science (WiSci) group wants you! Email President Emily Larson (emily.larson@mail.umkc.edu) for more information.

mew9bc@mail.umkc.edu