

## NEWS

# What's Happening at the University of Missouri?

R. Bowen Loftin, the university's chancellor, will step down at the end of the year amid criticism of how the school handled racial incidents. His resignation follows that of Tim Wolfe, the university's president.



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**KRISHNADEV CALAMUR** | NOV 9, 2015*Update on November 9 at 6:19 p.m. ET*

Criticism over how the University of Missouri handled a series of racist incidents on campus this fall has claimed the jobs of two top officials: President Tim Wolfe and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin.

Hours after Wolfe announced he was stepping down, [a news release](#) from the UM System noted Loftin would stay in his position at the university's main campus in Columbia until the end of the year.

Starting next January, Loftin will take over as director for research facility development, leading the school's effort "to construct new facilities and renovate current facilities to meet the university's research needs," the statement said.

Hank Foley, MU's senior vice chancellor for research and graduate studies, was appointed interim chancellor. The statement said an interim system president will be announced as soon as possible.

The Columbia *Missourian* [adds](#):

Twenty months into his time as the leader of the university's flagship campus in Columbia, Loftin faced criticism for how he handled racism on campus, severed relations with Planned Parenthood, the loss of benefits for graduate students and the sudden resignation of the dean of the School of Medicine.

Last week the English Department made a vote of no confidence in Loftin's leadership. Today, nine deans signed a letter to the UM Board of Curators and to Wolfe saying Loftin had created a "toxic environment through threat, fear and intimidation," [according to the](#)

## Columbia Daily Tribune.

The two resignations capped a day of tumult at the University of Missouri, beginning with a walkout by faculty over the school administration's handling of the events this fall.

In announcing his decision to step down, Wolfe said: "My motivation in making this decision comes from love. I love MU, Columbia, where I grew up, and the state of Missouri. I've thought and prayed about this decision. It's the right thing to do."

There had been mounting criticism—including from Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, faculty, and students—over how incidents unfolded.

"I stand before you today and I take full responsibility for this frustration," Wolfe said. "And I take full responsibility for the inaction that has occurred."

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### What's Happening at the School?

As my colleague [Marina Koren reported Sunday](#), at issue is the school administration's handling of several racist incidents that occurred this fall. In September, Peyton Head, a senior and the president of Missouri Students Association, said he was called racial slurs as he walked near campus.

#### **FOLLOW-UP** **NOTES**

[e This Is the Real Ferguson](#)

"I really just want to know why my simple existence is such a threat to society," he wrote in [a Facebook post](#).

That incident was followed by one on October 5 when members of the Legion of Black Collegians were called

the N-word while rehearsing for homecoming festivities. Three weeks later, on October 24, a swastika was drawn with human feces at a university residence hall.

## The School's Response

The university, at first, was muted in its response. On October 10, members of Concerned Student 1950, a student group named for the year the first black graduate student was admitted to the university, blocked Wolfe's car as it moved through a homecoming parade. The *Columbia Missourian* newspaper [reports](#): "Wolfe did not respond to the group's concerns while he was in the car. His driver revved the convertible's engine, and the car bumped into" Jonathan Butler, a graduate student who is one of the group's members.

A week later, Wolfe met with members of the group, and on November 6 he apologized: "Racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable," he said.

## Too Little Too Late?

That's Butler's view. He began a hunger strike on November 2. He says he will continue it until Wolfe resigns or he (Butler) dies. Butler is being supported by Concerned Student 1950, but the group also has other demands. The *Columbia Missourian* newspaper [has more](#):

Concerned Student 1950 is pushing for the removal of Tim Wolfe from office, but the group has [several other demands](#).

According to previous *Missourian* reporting, the demands include:

- Enforcement of mandatory racial awareness and inclusion

curriculum for all faculty, staff and students, controlled by a board of color.

- An increase in the percentage of black faculty and staff to 10 percent by the 2017-18 academic year, and the development by May 1 of a 10-year plan to promote a safer, more inclusive campus.
- An increase in funding to hire more mental health professionals for the MU Counseling Center, particularly those of color, and more staff for the social justice centers on campus.

Butler does not share all of these demands. (For more on his view, read the *Missourian's* extensive coverage of this story.)

After Wolfe's resignation, Butler told his supporters: "You saw what we did here. We chose to fight for our community. We chose to do what was right during this time."

### **What Does Wolfe Say?**

Wolfe had until Monday refused to step down. He met with Butler last Friday, five days after the hunger strike began, and apologized in a statement.

"I regret my reaction at the MU Homecoming Parade when the Concerned Student 1950 group approached my car. I am sorry, and my apology is long overdue," he said. "My behavior seemed like I did not care. That was not my intention. I was caught off guard in that moment. Nonetheless, had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them perhaps we wouldn't be where we are today."

But as Marina noted, things went quickly south.

On Friday night in Kansas City, a group of University of Missouri students approached the school's president, Tim Wolfe, outside of a fundraiser at a performing arts center he had attended. They [asked him](#) to give his definition of systematic oppression.

"I will give you an answer, and I'm sure it will be a wrong answer," Wolfe said. Then, "Systematic oppression is because you don't believe that you have the equal opportunity for success."

The students reacted in shock. "Did you just blame us for systematic oppression, Tim Wolfe?" one shouted. "Did you just blame black students?"

On Sunday, Wolfe responded: "We want to find the best way to get everyone around the table and create the safe space for a meaningful conversation that promotes change. We will share next steps as soon as they are confirmed."

Those steps culminated in Monday's resignation.

### **Who Else Is Protesting?**

Besides the faculty who said they would walk out Monday, 32 members of the Missouri Tigers football team said they would go on strike. The school's athletics department's response:



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STATEMENT (1): The department of athletics is aware of the declarations made tonight by many of our student-athletes.

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(2): We must come together with leaders from across our campus to tackle these challenging issues and we support our athletes right to do so

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Upon receiving news of Wolfe’s resignation, the Tigers [said](#) they would play again. The team takes on Brigham Young University in Kansas City on Saturday.

**LATEST VIDEO**



**Visiting Day: The Unrelenting Stress of Family Prison Visits**

A short documentary follows a young woman as she visits her husband in a federal prison.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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