

Mizzou journalism faculty criticize MU chancellor for discouraging dissent

The following is a [letter](#) signed by 15 University of Missouri journalism faculty and sent to University of Missouri System president and chancellor Mun Choi. The letter came after Choi blocked students from his Twitter account.

Freedom of expression, scrutiny of public officials and open government are bedrock principles of a democracy and of institutions of higher learning. These values are central to our mission at the Missouri School of Journalism.

So, we, the undersigned faculty members, want to express our disappointment in a series of actions by University of Missouri System President and MU Chancellor Mun Choi that – intentionally or not – contradict the “Missouri Method” for which our school is justifiably famous. His move to block students and others from his Twitter account is the latest of these.

These actions include discouraging dissent – publicly and in direct private communications from the chancellor to faculty members – and singling out two of our colleagues in an interview with local media.

As the university confronts unprecedented financial challenges, and the likelihood of further layoffs

and

belt-tightening, an implied intolerance of dissent looms as a very real threat.

Already, a few colleagues and students have confided that they fear that speaking

out will put their jobs or scholarships at risk. A number of our colleagues

work in our community newsrooms, which cover the university.

Some may have

withheld signatures to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest.

That is why we feel it is important for us to

speak out about the potential for a chilling effect on the campus and on the

professional community news outlets staffed by MU faculty and students. If

President Choi's actions have not had that effect so far, it's only due to the

professional standards of the largely untenured School of Journalism faculty

and the courage of their students in upholding those standards – and the First

Amendment.

President Choi reversed his decision to block

students from his Twitter account under threat of a lawsuit.

Yet it should not

take eruptions of public outrage to force his compliance with the values of

free speech and public openness that are at the heart of what we stand for – as

a School of Journalism, as a public institution of higher learning and as

inheritors of a great democratic tradition.

Amidst the global crisis of the pandemic,

leadership of the campus that is home to the world's first

school of journalism
should be modelling transparency.

Twitter is not known as a forum for reasoned
and temperate discussion but leaders who choose to use it as a
means of
communication should not curb debate. Rather, they should
seize the opportunity
to create a teaching moment by modeling responsive governance,
open
communication and empathy with students whose lives and
routines have been
profoundly disrupted.

More than 100 years ago, Walter Williams, the
founding dean of the Missouri School of Journalism – and
future president of
this university – urged members of our profession to be
“stoutly independent,
unmoved by pride of opinion or greed of power, constructive,
tolerant but never
careless, self-controlled, patient, always respectful...” These
words should be
reflected in action, and we urge the administration to be more
transparent and
open in the information it shares with the campus and wider
community during
the coronavirus crisis. If we are all in this together – and
we are – we all
must have a voice in the process. And we all must listen to
one another.

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