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Kelly gives MU professors legislative rundown

By [Janese Silvey](#)

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University of Missouri faculty members need to better organize and boost their lobbying efforts if they want state lawmakers to better understand and perhaps fund the mission of the state's only land-grant university, state Rep. Chris Kelly told them this morning.



Chris Kelly

In what was part pep talk, part promise and part comedy act, Kelly spent more than an hour with 25 professors at MU. The informal discussion was sponsored by MU's chapter of the American Association of University Professors — a relatively small group that might have more members after Kelly's challenge today.

"You and your colleagues at Truman and Central Missouri and Missouri State University should be a vibrant political force," Kelly, D-Columbia, said, suggesting the AAUP could become a powerful advocating organization.

When AAUP President Victoria Johnson suggested some professors feel discouraged from lobbying, Kelly acknowledged: "People would not like it if you do that."

But lobbying and educating might be the only way to bypass uninformed mandates from the state, he said, such as Gov. Jay Nixon's degree review. That review is requiring universities to submit lists of programs that graduate, on average, fewer than 10 undergraduates, fewer than five master's students and fewer than three doctorate students a year. That report is due by the end of the year, with the indication that those degrees will be eliminated or reconfigured.

Nixon supports higher education, Kelly said, but the degree review fails to take important context into account. For instance, French professors might teach hundreds of students but award relatively few degrees. "You've got to have somebody teaching French anyway; you might as well have someone competent," he said.

In other areas, such as specialized engineering, a program might have few graduates but faculty members in those areas are doing world-changing research, he said.

Kelly suggested the university play along with the degree review program until Nixon finds another legislative priority.

“Hopefully” UM System President Gary Forsee and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton “are skillful enough to ‘yes’ him to death until he thinks about something else and doesn’t bother French.”

Kelly warned faculty members, though, that his colleagues from outstate Missouri — even those who represent districts with colleges — aren’t always interested in fact-based arguments. State decision makers include “legislators who think the Earth is 5,000 years old and fossils are from the devil.” To them, he told faculty members, “you guys are pointy-headed wastes of time.”

Several faculty members questioned whether lawmakers are interested in reviewing the number of administrators on campuses or their high salaries. Kelly warned taking that fight to lawmakers distracts from the bigger argument that Missouri is not funding the university’s education and research work adequately.

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