2016-2017 Public Affairs Conference Theme

***Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness:***

***Perspectives on democracy***

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

 These words from the preamble of the Declaration of Independence are familiar and oft quoted. Their meaning, however, remains open to interpretation and has continually evolved in the 250 years since they were written.

 Missouri State University’s public affairs theme for the 2016-17 academic year, ***Life liberty and the pursuit of happiness: Perspectives on democracy***, is rich with opportunities to engage the campus community in discussions that will explore both our rights and our responsibilities as citizens in a modern democracy.

 American society in the 21st century has little in common with the era when the founding fathers crafted plans for the foundling democracy. Ever changing demographics, cultural mores, values, technologies, and definitions of “unalienable rights” have raised important questions for our nation… What are the costs and benefits of the freedom our democracy affords? How do we balance majority rule with individual rights? What are the limits of free speech? What are the causes of political and social apathy? How have partisan politics impacted the conduct of our government? To what extent is economic equality promoted in our democracy? How has the digital world influenced life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? What role should the United States play in exporting democracy to foreign nations? Is the way America practices democracy the right or best way or can we learn lessons from other democracies around the world? Is access to healthcare an unalienable right?

These questions, and more, will serve as a vehicle for investigating the benefits and opportunities of our democracy.