

Saunders Hints at Future Cuts to Academic Programs

Fall 2010 Press Conference Q&A Reveals New Details

After USM president Martha Saunders and her executive cabinet made the decision to (1) eliminate academic programs at USM in deaf education, religion, philosophy, education technology, and other areas, and (2) terminate 29 tenured and tenure-track faculty – all in response to a state-mandated \$15 million budget cut – she held a press conference to inform local and state-wide media of the troubling fiscal situation at USM. A number of reports on that press conference have appeared in the various media outlets that assembled there and/or examined video of Saunders' statements. What has heretofore been neglected in the reporting is information about what was asked of Saunders by the assembled reporters, as well as how those media questions were addressed by Saunders. This particular report visits that subject.

The second question in the Q&A portion of Saunders Fall-2010 budget cuts presser is an interesting one. That question is inserted below, along with three screens depicting Saunders' body language as the question was being asked of her. Below the three screens is Saunders' response to the reporter's question, along with three screens depicting Saunders' body language as she answered this particular question.

Q: What do you say to those students who may be looking at USM maybe next semester, or even next year, as a place to continue their academics, but are scared to do that because this may happen again, and *their* program would be cut?



A: You know . . . that's a really good question. I think that we have identified through the priorities process those programs that may be at risk. I hope we never have to go through this again. And, I think those students would be very wise, though, if they had a specific major in mind to call in advance [and] let's talk through what the opportunities are there for them, because we would not want to ever . . . you know . . . disappoint a student."



As the information above indicates, Saunders was asked what she would say to a [prospective student](#) who might be interested in attending USM, yet is scared to do so because the USM academic program that he/she is interested in may be cut in the months ahead. After acknowledging that the question is a "really good" one, Saunders indicates that the list of USM academic programs with low enrollments that was developed during 2009-10 by the University Priorities Committee (UPC) would be a good place for this hypothetical student to begin an investigation of USM, because these programs would be in jeopardy should future budget cuts be required of USM. If the student is interested in a program that (1) survived the \$15 million budget cut announced in early Fall-2010, but (2) was ranked near the top of the UPC's list of

under-enrolled programs/majors, then the student should “call in advance” and “talk” to USM officials about the possibility that the identified program will be cut in the near future.

Saunders’ advice is reminiscent of the recent USMNEWS.net contribution entitled “[Out of the Shadows](#),” which provides practical guidelines for prospective USM students in order to avoid getting caught in [the traps](#) faced by [others](#). The advice also admits to future program eliminations and faculty terminations, as Saunders advises prospective students “to call in advance” before coming to USM and ultimately being “disappoint[ed]” by having their chosen academic program cut. Sources say this admission is not surprising, given reports that at least \$10 million in additional cuts are expected to be handed down by the IHL for FY2013. Finally, Saunders’ smiles above are reminiscent of yet another USMNEWS.net contribution. This one is entitled “[Grin and Bear Her](#),” and it argues that Saunders is using Mississippi tax dollars *and* her powers as university president to assist her in reliving her college days, only this time the way she wishes they would have been.