

31st & Pearl

Del Boca Presidentista

If interim USM president Aubrey Lucas is successful in hiring his replacement some time during the next 9 months, as he says he will be, then USM will have no fewer than 5 current or former college/university presidents among its faculty ranks. That would include the next USM president, Lucas, Martha Saunders, and Shelby Thames – each of whom has served as USM president at one time or another. The final member of the quintet is Frances Lucas, the former president of Millsaps College in Jackson. That has to put USM at the top of U.S. colleges and universities in terms of current/former presidents per capita.

Most college/university presidents who resign their posts move into retirement, to the presidency of another institution, or off to some other venture. Rare is the occasion when that resignation leads one back to the rank-and-file faculty. Somehow that rarity has occurred at USM often enough to (soon) have 5 presidents strolling around the institution's two campuses. It's as if USM is some sort of retirement community for former university executives. And it's always been that way. When Harold Doty took over the CoB in 2003, former CoB deans Tyrone Black and William Gunther were on the faculty. When Alvin Williams replaced Doty in 2007, Doty and Gunther were still around, and Black had only just entered private life. In 2008, when Lance Nail arrived, both Doty and Gunther remained, and Williams had only just departed for the University of South Alabama. Thus, the CoB is a microcosm of the greater institution when it comes to being a launch pad for the early-bird special at local eateries.

What a strange place USM is, and continues to be as it deals with budget scandals, administration turnover, and all sorts of other issues. How weird must the 100-year old institution in Hattiesburg be to leaders at Ole Miss and Mississippi State. At some point USM has to enter the modern age. The problem then will be that the rest of academia will have since moved on to the next evolutionary stage.