

31st & Pearl

Still Concerned

Still concerned. That's how USM interim provost Denis Wiesenburg characterized the Mississippi IHL Board's attitude regarding the USM Tabletgate scandal. Wiesenburg gave this characterization to the USM faculty senate on 27-Jan-2012. He added then that the IHL held an executive session on Tabletgate at one of its recent monthly meetings. As a result of that session, the IHL is now "casting a wider net" vis-à-vis how Mississippi's public universities use, or perhaps *misuse*, the technology fees that their students pay (as part of tuition) each academic year. As Wiesenburg put it, the fact that USM's *iTech* auxiliary came up with \$400,000 "on short notice" to finance the institution's purchase of 700 Samsung Galaxy Tabs has everyone in Jackson on edge.

So, IHL auditors will soon be snooping around in Oxford, Starkville, Itta Bena, Lorman, Jackson, Cleveland, and Columbus, looking for funny business surrounding technology fees, like the \$65 *iTech* fee that students in Hattiesburg fork over every year. What will they find? Surely something, though it's difficult to imagine it will be anything on the level found by the Mississippi State Auditor's office at USM. There's little chance anything like \$400,000 is laying around anywhere other than Oxford and Starkville. However, very little still surprises contributors to USMNEWS.net. Hearing that USM sent a Tab to Hank Bounds didn't, nor did hearing Wiesenburg tell the faculty senate that he too received one. Of course, both were returned.

University officials in Oxford, Starkville, Lorman and elsewhere must be nervous about what the coming weeks hold. After all, USM chief information officer Homer Coffman and USM contracts director Mike Herndon both lost their *high-paying* jobs as a result of Tabletgate. Former USM provost Robert Lyman also lost his administration position at USM, and was saved only by being a tenured faculty member. Still, even that academic tradition may be little protection for Lyman in this case, given faculty senate president Timothy Rehner's 27-Jan-2012 report to the faculty senate that the IHL is not pleased that Lyman seemingly escaped unscathed relative to what happened to Coffman and Herndon as a result of Tabletgate. Yet there's still hope for *presidents* of these other public institutions. USM president Martha Saunders hardly received a scratch over Tabletgate after claiming that none of the paperwork involved in the \$440,000 purchase ever crossed her desk. If that story can pass muster with the IHL in Hattiesburg, perhaps it can be replayed in Cleveland and elsewhere if necessary.

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