

31st & Pearl

Time for Giannini to GoGoBye

Reading Richard Giannini's [31-March-2011 defense](#) of the "complimentary" Caribbean cruise that lazily carried him, his wife Gayle, and a number of college football's "decision makers" to CoCoCay and back makes one a bit weak in the tummy. To buy into Giannini's response is to believe, I guess, that his blogs about how stimulating it was to discuss conference realignment, after parasailing of course, were necessary for USM to get to the "next level." Dan Wetzel, the award-winning **YAHOO!**SPORTS sports journalist, [isn't likely to believe](#) any of it. And, neither is Debbie Yow, the athletics director at North Carolina State University, who told *The Greensboro News-Record* that accepting free cruises from bowl organizations, like Giannini did in June-2010, "[c]ould be seen as a conflict of interest" in this case, and that she ". . . ha[s] always declined . . ." such complimentary activities.



Yow



Saunders

Reading Giannini's defense can be maddening for long-time followers of USMNEWS.net. He tells *The Hattiesburg American's* Alan Hinton that "[t]hese trips are an accepted practice, and do not violate any rule set forth by any regulatory authority. Until a decision is made that athletic directors traveling to bowl functions be deemed unethical or illegal, these trips will continue because this is where business is done." Like [former chairman](#) of USM's former economics department, George Carter, Giannini apparently believes that one's [ethics are established in a top-down fashion](#) by those members of an organization or group who are in positions of authority. Thus, and in a *Carterian world*, while Giannini may [set](#) the ethical [standards](#) for those in USM's athletics

department, the ethical standards he accepts are established by people like USM president Martha Saunders, his direct supervisor at USM, and officials at the NCAA who govern the activities of member institutions and their athletics representatives. Unlike Debbie Yow, who clearly sniffs the conflict of interest inherent in such Caribbean cruise junkets, Giannini has no such nose for the problematic, at least not independent of a memo or e-mail from somewhere on high.

The maddening continues when Giannini adds, "I want to make it very clear that we go to great lengths to [play within the rules](#), both on and off the field, and after these questions were raised today I even offered to withdraw from this committee if it would eliminate the questions and confusion. I was told that would be unnecessary." Who spoon fed Giannini the little ethics snack he refers to here? NCAA president, Mark Emmert? Not likely. Orange Bowl execs? Possibly. USM president, Martha Saunders? Probably, at least according to sources. If so, then Yow looks a lot more presidential than Saunders ever has, though that might not be saying very much.

Clearly, the dismal on-field performances of some of USM's athletics squads (e.g., soccer, softball, women's basketball) have not been enough for Saunders to remove Giannini from his post. Nor was Giannini's public relations gaffe back in 2004, during the citywide debate over combining the south end zone expansion of USM's M.M. Roberts Stadium with efforts to improve struggling parts of Hattiesburg – a [dreadful episode](#) that worsened race relations in the city – for an earlier USM administration. Today is a new day, however, and some believe it is now time for Saunders to govern more like Yow, and consider replacing Giannini with someone who can lead the athletics department down the straight and narrow. With all of her own ongoing controversies, who knows where Saunders stands with the Mississippi IHL at the moment. Testing the security of her current position by sticking with Giannini over something as oily as this current fiasco doesn't seem like the best move for her to make at the moment.

31st & Pearl is a series housed at usmnews.net that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB, and at USM, from a variety of columnists.