

## *31<sup>st</sup> & Pearl*

# **Circling the Wagons**

Noticed how the Martha Saunders administration is turning inward in filling high-level administrative positions at USM? The most recent example is the naming of Steven Moser to serve as the new dean of the College of Arts & Letters. Prior to having that position, Moser was interim dean. Before that, he was the associate dean of the CoAL. Denis Wiesenburg, the new provost at USM, was also serving in the interim provost role before being recently named to succeed Robert Lyman as the institution's new academic chief. The next example could easily be Jeff Hammond, the current interim athletics director who stepped into that role in Jan-2012 when Richard Giannini was forced out. The Hammond case is becoming even more interesting, given [the divisions](#) it is creating within the USM family. It's even more intriguing that these divisions have little to do with [recent accusations](#) that Hammond has harassed staffers within the USM athletics department.

It seems reasonable to conclude that Saunders' inward gaze is the direct result of all of the scandals that have developed under her leadership of USM since 2007. From tabletgate to the sorority blackface incident, the Saunders administration has been a comprehensive course in the types of issues that can arise at an institution of higher education, particularly one that is so poorly managed. In a fiscal era when the state's governor chooses to sell the state's jet in order to raise funds, the fact that Saunders is staunchly protective of her ill-advised decision to sign a \$2 million lease on her own university plane in the midst of a national recession speaks volumes about her priorities as steward of the taxpayers' contributions to higher education in the state.

Of course, at the center of "circling of the wagons" is the fact that national searches are little more than charades these days. This is all about protecting Saunders' position as president, and her legacy in that same role. Just how loyal these new appointees will be to that goal may remain to be seen, but many have already seen enough to judge which direction the wind is blowing on campus.

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*31st & Pearl is a series housed at [usmnews.net](http://usmnews.net) that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB, and at USM, from a variety of columnists.*