

31st & Pearl

USM President Say What?

In her recent Viewpoint editorial for *WDAM-TV News*, USM president Martha Saunders [said](#) that “[t]o meet our budget for next year, we’ve decided not to renew the contracts of several good *teachers* [emphasis added].” In using that one word – “teachers” – Saunders reduced a number of PhD-trained *scholars* to nothing more than K-12 educators (junior college educators). Yes, in one word Saunders diminished the same scholarly activities of the 29 tenured/tenure-track faculty that their current and former USM colleagues thought highly enough of to bring these faculty on board in years past. For someone (Saunders) who likes to boast that USM is the research leader of the Gulf South, this choice of words, in an ill-advised public relations ploy no less, surely set back the institution’s cause in the local and state communities.



In referring to these 29 USM faculty simply as “teachers,” Saunders played into the hands of those local “bidness” leaders who former USM president Shelby Thames often courted at white tent social affairs out behind the USM president’s mansion. As long-time followers of the trials and tribulations of USM are aware, Thames often pitted those local leaders against USM faculty in his effort to transform USM into some sort of technical institute. Whether or not Saunders shared, or shares, Thames’ old vision for the institution, her turn of phrase in the *WDAM-TV* video editorial sounded just like the local car dealers and asphalt producers of recent times. Yes, this latest episode shows that the USM community has a long way to go to shed the shackles of its past.

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