

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

## **The Clothes Don't Make the College**

According to the USM College of Business website (to view the public relations materials, visit [www.usm.edu/business/development/capital\\_campaign.html](http://www.usm.edu/business/development/capital_campaign.html)), current USM College of Business Dean Harold Doty was quoted on or before August 1, 2005, as saying that, "Our current building doesn't have the technology that students and faculty must have to keep up with a global business environment." Since he took over as dean in July 2003, Doty has spent an estimated \$400,000 (or about \$133,333 per year) on classroom technology, including document cameras, video projectors, DVD/VCR, and computer systems. One can only assume that Dr. Doty's technology expenditures were predicated on his stated belief that having technology in the classroom is a prerequisite for being a quality business school.

Examining the top undergraduate business schools in the 2006 Business Week rankings (at <http://bwnt.businessweek.com/bschools/undergraduate/06rankings/>) reveals an editorial statement that sums up students' feelings about each of the best business schools. Surprisingly, not one of the top 61 business schools had a tagline that included "technology" as being a major factor, according to students. Only 2 of 61 mentioned "facilities" as a major issue. Issues that did seem to matter more than technology or facilities were teaching quality, curriculum, quality of classmates, committed faculty, and on-campus recruiting, among others.

Examining the top ten business schools' individual pages at the Business Week website gives some additional insight into what students at "good" business schools think is important, reported by the College Prowler. Schools are graded on 18 different factors, one of which is computers, though no distinction is made regarding classroom technology. The other 17 factors include Safety and Security, Campus Dining, Night Life, and Weather. Perhaps Dr. Doty should start spending some of his Fun Money to hire security guards, or perhaps what Hattiesburg really needs is a disco funded by donations from the Business Advisory Council (no, not the Betsy Rowell entity).

Visiting these top five colleges' individual websites gives one a bit more insight into what the "best" business schools themselves consider important. Observation of photographs located on schools' websites reveals many depictions of faculty helping students in a one on one environment, faculty teaching using chalkboards, or students studying together. Less than a handful of photos even contain an image of a computer or other technology. Apparently, good business schools are marketing the quality of their faculties, the availability of faculty to students, and the peer learning environment. It appears that technology isn't a top priority to these schools' PR departments.

What all this really tells us is what those with an intellectual compass have known all along – the clothes don't make the College. Below average instructors using high tech equipment won't cut it when it comes to good students' opinions, and high quality instructors using low tech equipment can and do provide a real learning environment that good students crave. CoB administrators seem hell bent on making the CoB a factory, where discussion of news articles from the Internet displaces solid theoretical discussion. USM's CoB has a number of high quality instructors, though more and more frequently new hires are judged based on a nebulous set of factors rather than ability to deliver in the classroom and in the research arena, and marginal instructors are encouraged to utilize prepackaged PowerPoint slides as their main (only) source of lecture material rather than put the requisite time into course preparation. In a rapidly changing business environment, students need a strong foundation to support the types of application-based jobs most USM CoB students obtain. Dr. Doty seems to view the CoB as a trade school, training drones to perform mindless tasks, instead of a learning environment in which the "what" is as important as the "how". In fact, many managers are faced with the stark reality that expensive technologies become outdated before they are fully depreciated. How, then, can educators put the focus on technological training over conceptual comprehension? It boggles the mind.

Dr. Doty and other administrators apparently don't understand that companies have the budgets to train and retrain employees in the latest technologies, but they don't have a place on the payroll for individuals who cannot synthesize information, interpret results, apply newly developed concepts, or understand trends in a historical context. Quality educators understand that the mind is the greatest asset a human being has, and that an educated mind is capable of reeducating itself over time. Unfortunately, those who attend trade schools are becoming increasingly required to retrain at their own expense, including becoming retrained on new technology.

Dr. Doty, like many other administrators, focuses on creating the illusion of achievements so that his vita will be more attractive to his next potential employer, and his tenure at USM is rife with examples of this behavior. Emphasis is placed on the mode of learning rather than on whether any learning is taking place at all. One assumes that it's easier to provide a count of tech classrooms than it is to truly measure improved teaching effectiveness and increased student learning.

Perhaps those funds could be better spent as research support to encourage faculty to stay even more current in their chosen fields. Perhaps a new plan for expenditures could be created in conjunction with (not despite) faculty suggestions. Perhaps if Dr. Doty finally learns that the clothes don't make the College (or the Dean), he'll quit wasting precious funds on his favorite technological tailor.

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*31st & Pearl is a new series housed at [usmpride.com](http://usmpride.com) that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.*