

A Mock Letter to the USM Community

September 28, 2010

Dear USM Family,

After two years of the worst economic crisis the citizens of the United States have ever faced, state funding for Mississippi's colleges and universities is down. Families across the state are also falling on hard times. Tough choices are being made. Many families are extending their leases on European vehicles, dropping memberships in local country clubs, not eating out as much, scaling back their Mardis Gras krewes, skipping trips to the day spa, flying coach, going without mani-pedis, and the list goes on – all to make ends meet. Of course, this “cutting back” has an outward face. Those of us who live amongst families making these types of choices see it, and it's not pleasant for us to watch. To be sure, seeing people who once travelled in your upper circle tumble down the economic pyramid is definitely our cross to bear.

It is because of the sense of desperation, and even weakness, that the phenomenon described above portrays to others that my executive team made the decision recently to *not* give up the things that those who love USM take pride in seeing us enjoy. Thus, we will be keeping the airplane, and *using it even more* to travel to USM sporting events and other black tie affairs around the state. Additionally, I have been meeting with Joe Bailey to discuss additional renovations to the USM president's mansion on Jamestown. He agreed that we should proceed with plans to have a concert hall designed and constructed on the property. According to Russ Willis, the new USM chief financial officer, when the hall is not being used to entertain the first family of USM, it could be rented out to local groups for their use.

I have also put together an ad hoc group to look at the feasibility of extending the Centennial Gateway down the length of USM's Hardy Street frontage. Of course, decorative entrances will be added along that same route. Additionally, I am asking that the University Priorities Committee, the UPC, develop a plan for continuing the Gateway around the entire campus perimeter. I am also reconstituting the Academic Planning Group, the APG, to plan for a second year of Centennial activities and celebrations. This past year's Centennial activities have been so wonderful that not extending the institution's 100th birthday celebration across 2011 would be an opportunity missed. Finally, I have asked the two-man team of Chad Driskell and Joe Bailey to chronicle my presidency, both in the form of journal entries and as an illustrated history. To tie in with this idea, I am tasking the USM physical plant to use its remaining FY 2011 funds to “ovalize” my office in the Lucas Administration Building. In order to maintain the beauty of our campus, all tenured and tenure-track faculty who were targeted for elimination in FY 2012 by the faculty-driven UPC, *but who were saved from elimination by my executive cabinet*, will be required to spend every other weekend on campus beautification work.

These plans, and others that are currently on the drawing boards, will put a world class face on our beloved USM. Having that public face is important in this time of economic uncertainty. As Bo Morgan writes in his recently published book, *USM . . . Not Hardy High Anymore*, “When times are tough, USM administrators step up to the plate and make historic decisions. In that way, many have come to believe that USM administrators are ‘our most prized possessions.’ No salary is ever large enough, no frills ever do justice in compensating them for the work they do.” To my USM family, I close by reminding each of you that this is the Southern Miss I am shaping. You best get to work helping me out.

Sincerely,
Martha D. Saunders