

## ***A Walk Through the History of Southern Miss***

### **Part 6**

usmnews.net continues a new series revisiting nationally embarrassing events in the history of Southern Miss. This morning we continue with [Some Faculty Members Question Whether Changes at U. of Southern Mississippi Take Emphasis Away From Teaching](#). This article underscores many of the reasons Southern Miss seems perpetually mired in the fourth tier.

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[Some Faculty Members Question Whether Changes at U. of Southern Mississippi Take Emphasis Away From Teaching](#)

By ROBIN WILSON

The University of Southern Mississippi will pay bonuses to faculty members who attract outside research grants and use some of that grant money to pay a portion of their salaries. Some professors worry that this effort -- coming at a time of concern over how faculty members are evaluated at the university - - could shift attention away from teaching and toward research.

The plan -- which is to begin July 1 -- is being called the Model for Incentive Dollars for Augmenting Salaries, or Midas. Under the plan, which the university's trustees approved last week, a faculty member who uses money from a research grant to cover 25 percent of his or her university salary and turns the savings back to the institution will earn a bonus of 10 percent. Professors who use outside research money to cover all of their salary will earn a supplement equal to 30 percent of their university income.

For example, if a professor earned \$100,000 but used money from a research grant to provide a quarter, or \$25,000, of that, the university would retain the \$25,000 and in turn give the professor a bonus of 10 percent -- or \$10,000. The bonuses would not affect the "release time" from teaching that professors typically earn when they use money from a grant to cover a portion of their salary.

"There has not been an incentive for faculty to include their salary in their grant proposal, and this will encourage more of them to do that," said Angeline Dvorak, vice president for research and economic development at the university. She said the new salary plan was recommended by professors on the university's Research Council. "We've asked our research faculty what they felt would help not only increase the activity levels of existing research faculty who seek external funding, but what might be an incentive for others who might not have been as involved," said Ms. Dvorak.

Faculty members brought in \$63-million in research grants and contracts in 2002, said Ms. Dvorak, but she did not know how much of that was used to cover salaries and said the university does not yet have an estimate on how many professors will receive salary supplements.

Myron S. Henry, a professor of mathematical sciences and president-elect of the Faculty Senate, said the new plan "puts a premium on research" as opposed to teaching, by rewarding professors who use part of their grant money to buy release time from teaching. "Most parents and students support a public university through taxes not because of a research grant but because they think they can get good teaching and learning experiences," said Mr. Henry.

Faculty members at Southern Mississippi are also concerned about a new requirement that they file online reports summarizing their university work, including their research, writing, teaching, and service. D. Jay Grimes, provost at the university's Hattiesburg campus, sent an e-mail message to faculty members last Tuesday, saying the reports would be used to determine "merit pay raises [and] the evaluation of requests for tenure and promotions."

Professors said that when administrators first asked them to complete the online reports last fall, the officials said the information would be used by accreditors evaluating the institution. Not only are professors angry that the university plans to use the information internally, they are concerned that officials will take decision-making away from department heads and deans.

That might lead to uninformed evaluations, said Darlys J. Alford, an associate professor of psychology at the university's Gulf Coast campus. She travels to three different campuses to teach classes, she said, whereas her counterparts in Hattiesburg can typically walk down the hall to classes. "There is a huge discrepancy between what it means for me to teach and prepare for class and what it means for my colleagues in Hattiesburg," she said. An administrator who simply reads an online report of how many classes she teaches may not know that, she added. "When you override the local person's evaluation, you can't take into account all the unique qualities of a particular job," Ms. Alford said.

Tim W. Hudson, provost at the university's Gulf Coast campus, said the new faculty reports simply put online what has been available in paper form. He said administrators do not intend to cut department heads out of the evaluation process, and that while it is true that the institution initiated the reports to be examined by outsiders, their use is "evolving."