

AAUP-USM Taking a Stand

HATTIESBURG – The USM chapter of the AAUP is taking a stand against the Martha Saunders administration's process for terminating 29 tenured and tenure-track faculty in response to the \$15 million budget cut facing the institution. On 22-Oct-2010, AAUP-USM president Tammy Greer e-mailed USM faculty (see insert below), stating that the "budget reduction strategies" of 2009 and 2010 which were developed by Saunders et al. entailed "... LITTLE OR NO CONSULTATION WITH THE FACULTY."

From: Tammy Greer
Sent: Friday, October 22, 2010 2:07 PM
Subject: Message from AAUP-USM Chapter

Colleagues,

The budget reduction strategies of 2009 and, most recently, 2010 that were developed by the administration WITH LITTLE OR NO CONSULTATION WITH THE FACULTY have led to termination notices, two years in a row, for many of our tenured and tenure-track colleagues. As you know, the university has not declared financial exigency and, therefore, according to AAUP guidelines (see below), termination of programs and associated tenured and tenure-track faculty should occur only for educational reasons, not monetary reasons or variations in enrollment. The budgetary process that we have witnessed for two years now, has been a process where these determinations have been based, primarily it seems, on monetary considerations.

These budgetary strategies that have so devastated our colleagues impact all of us. It is obvious to many of us that this disregard of tenure status in administrative efforts to balance budgets year to year, even when that balancing act is difficult, puts all of us at risk for termination and, therefore, puts at risk, as well, all that is protected by tenure. This lack of regard for tenure status has the potential to become a very real threat to academic freedom. Without any real guiding principles to the budgetary situation from year to year and without the consideration of tenure status in our efforts to downsize and respond appropriately to budget fluctuations, we are all vulnerable to the political and the transient political and other non-academic pressures of the day. Because of this recurring lack of regard for the principles of tenure that protect academic freedom, and because we believe that this erosion of tenure will ultimately and inevitably affect academic freedom, we are in the process of circulating the following petition:

Given that in the absence of a declaration of financial exigency the faculty should have primary responsibility for decisions about academic programs and faculty terminations, we, the undersigned, oppose the administration's recently proposed elimination of academic programs and the pending termination of tenured and tenure-track faculty appointments. We believe that these cuts will irreparably damage the University's ability to fulfill its educational mission.

AAUP colleagues and other concerned faculty may approach you with this petition. Please consider joining with us in this effort to notify the administration of our concern for the lack of regard for AAUP principles that protect tenure and academic freedom in this difficult time.

We are now requesting and have always requested that the administration follow AAUP guidelines. I'm including those guidelines so that you are aware of the discrepancy between our Southern Miss processes and the AAUP recommended processes for terminating programs.

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As a response to the Saunders administration's attempts to bypass faculty governance channels in dealing with consecutive budget cuts (\$10 million for FY 2011 and \$15 million for FY 2012), the AAUP-USM is creating a petition "... oppos[ing] the administration's recently proposed elimination of academic programs and the pending termination of tenured and tenure-track faculty appointments." While the effect, if any,

of the AAUP-USM petition remains to be seen, sources say that this particular governance body is at least doing *something*. This assessment comes at a time when some USM faculty believe that the faculty senate has effectively surrendered to the Saunders administration on several fronts, including the administration's efforts to deal with USM's dire budgetary situation. Some USM faculty have even [commented](#) that the pro-administration science and technology faculty are dominating the faculty senate, and are effectively in control of the faculty portion (five-ninths) of the budget cuts appeals process. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that what seems to be transpiring on the Hattiesburg campus, with the science and technology faculty supporting the administration's two-year efforts to cut business, liberal arts, and education, is a continuation of the program that former USM president Shelby Thames put in place back in 2002. That 2002-07 administration is widely recognized as one of the worst in the 100-year history of USM. If sources are on point, then the Saunders administration will be associated with as many, if not more, of the types of problems that are associated with Thames and his lieutenants.