

In-House 'Up and Comer' Named Permanent VP

HATTIESBURG - According to Beth Taylor's 11-Feb-2011 USM [presser](#), USM's director of human resources and interim chief financial officer, Russ Willis, has been named vice president of administrative affairs at USM, pending IHL approval. Willis, pictured below, has, according to Taylor, been serving as USM's [interim](#) VPAA since August of 2010.



Willis' new *permanent* position within the Martha Saunders administration will begin on 1-July-2011, when he will take over control of "the overall financial management of the university and its physical plant." In taking on this new role, Willis will relinquish the title of human resources director. Taylor reports that a national search to fill the HR directorship will commence some time in the (presumably near) future.

USM president Martha Saunders told Taylor that "Russ Willis has been highly regarded as an 'up and comer' on campus for some time," and that she is "honored" to have Willis [on her team](#). Sources ask, however, why the permanent position of USM VPAA was not subjected to the rigors of a national search, as the HR directorship is apparently slated for in the weeks and months ahead. Surely, they point out, that such a lofty position would be made most [effective](#) if a national candidate pool were tapped, rather than the usual "up and comer" good ol' boy system of advancement at USM.

Finally, when Willis assumed the interim CFO role ([after](#) Joe Morgan's [resignation](#)), [Willis' salary skyrocketed](#) from \$93,450 to \$120,000 - an increase of more than 28% annually. One can only wonder, at least at the moment, whether it will again jump with his ascent to permanent VP.