

Lucas: Rules Don't Apply to USM Administrators

HATTIESBURG – Ed Kemp's 6-Oct-2012 [story for](#) *The Hattiesburg American* entitled "Thames' New Title Causes Stir at USM" has the Hattiesburg campus buzzing, and not because it has something to do with USM's controversial former president, Shelby Thames, who is mentioned in the title. No, Kemp's [latest masterpiece](#) has the USM campus abuzz over comments made by USM's current (interim) president, Aubrey Lucas. Members of the USM faculty senate, and faculty senator David Beckett in particular, learned recently that retired USM scientist Thames was awarded *emeritus* status by Lucas without first submitting Thames' application for *emeritus* status to faculty and administration in USM's College of Science and Technology. Instead, Lucas acted unilaterally in awarding *emeritus* status to Thames, and in doing so violated the *USM Faculty Handbook*, at least according to Beckett. During Lucas' 5-Oct-2012 presentation to the faculty senate, Beckett confronted Lucas about the situation. Kemp's article begins with these details:

"Shelby Thames, former University of Southern Mississippi president and polymer science professor is back as an employee of the university — with a new honorary title, 'emeritus professor.' The new title does not sit well with former Faculty Senate President David Beckett, who believes Thames was awarded emeritus status by interim President Aubrey Lucas in breach of the faculty handbook policy. Beckett, who now chairs the faculty handbook committee, questioned Lucas about it during a faculty senate meeting Friday at the Thad Cochran Center. 'Were you aware that there is a procedure for this?' he asked Lucas. 'Are you now aware that there is a procedure for this?' Emeritus status, which recognizes long service of distinction, is submitted to the state College Board of Trustees, at the president's recommendation. The College Board approved emeritus status for Thames at its last board meeting. But the Southern Miss faculty handbook states that an emeritus application must first go through a department tenure committee before being reviewed by the college dean and then the provost. It appears, however, that the application never went through those steps, as evidenced by Lucas' responses to Beckett's questions. Provost Denis Wiesenburg also confirmed that the application never passed through his office."

As Kemp [points out](#), it is clear from Lucas' responses to Beckett's questions that Beckett's allegation that Lucas acted unilaterally in awarding Thames *emeritus* status is accurate. It is here, at this point in Kemp's story, that things really unravel, at least for supporters of shared governance and integrity in leadership. As Kemp's report continues:

"Lucas implied at first that he did not know the handbook protocol: 'I was not aware that it had been totally approved as policy,' he said. But then he took a different tack. 'Let me help you out, even if it had been policy... I would have done what I have done,' he said slowly to a suddenly-hushed senate. 'Well that's fine. My response would be that even presidents need to follow the faculty handbook,' said Beckett, after a moment. Lucas at first stated his agreement with Beckett's response, but then questioned him whether the handbook applies to administrators. 'Oh absolutely, because it says right in the beginning of the faculty handbook that it covers the relationship between the faculty and the president — and the provost and the deans,' Beckett responded. Beckett and Lucas never identified Thames by name during their exchange, and many of the faculty senators seemed unaware about who was being discussed. However, there was consensus among senators who spoke that handbook policy must be followed. 'The intent, I think, of a lot that is in the faculty handbook, is to establish procedure to help us avoid having lawsuits,' said faculty senate president-elect Desmond Fletcher. 'By the administration violating that process, that simply sets the stage for further lawsuits.' 'Thank you for your advisement,' Lucas said. Wiesenburg spoke next to the senate. At senator Andrew Haley's prompting, he confirmed that the faculty handbook governs relations between faculty members and administrators, and that it must be followed for purposes of litigation. 'Judges have said that you don't have to have a faculty handbook. But if you have one, you need to follow it,' he explained."

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that it is clear from his comments to the faculty senate that Lucas believes that USM administrators are above the law, so to speak, and that he would, *even now, after Kemp's article*, still act unilaterally in the Thames *emeritus* situation if were on the schedule for the upcoming week instead of in the recent past. Sources also point out that Lucas is likely regarded by some of the faculty

senators in attendance on 5-Oct-2012 as USM's greatest-ever president. They also state, however, that it is well past time that USM faculty, particularly those in the faculty senate, cease in their reverence of USM presidents and other university administrators.

Meanwhile, attorney Kim Chaze, who represents an almost endless list of plaintiffs who have civil cases against USM and its administrators pending in various courts, must be salivating at Kemp's report of Lucas' comments. Chaze has had numerous successes against USM in the past, including cases involving Lucas, even without such comments as those made recently by Lucas to the faculty senate. Now, Chaze has invaluable material (i.e., Lucas' recent comments) to include on the first PowerPoint slide of every civil action against USM that he is involved with in the future.