

Texas-Tyler Descending into Darkness

HATTIESBURG – One [of](#) the [ugliest devolutions](#) that [can take place](#) in a university setting occurs when administrators develop a disdain for the first amendment. Such is [now the case](#) at the University of Texas-Tyler, [where current](#) president [Rod Mabry](#) brought in, during recent years, [a cadre](#) of former USM administrators in Peter Fos, Gregg Lassen, Harold Doty, and Stephen Bushardt. Fos, the former USM dean of health who came to UTT as provost, [recently accepted a job](#) at the LSU Health Sciences Center. Lassen, the former USM vice president for finance, took the same post at UTT a few years back, only to leave for Lamar University in February of this year (2011). That leaves [Doty](#), the former USM [business dean](#) turned UTT business dean, and Bushardt, the former USM management department chairman turned management department chairman for Doty at UTT. UTT's current descent involves the controversial 18-April-2011 firing of Vanessa Curry, the faculty advisor to *The Patriot Talon*, UTT's student newspaper.

PATRIOTTALON.com

According to Lea Christine's 3-May-2011 [editorial](#) in *TPT* entitled "Officials Attempt to Stifle First Amendment Rights," UTT communications department chairman, Dennis Cali, cited "egregious complaints" from *TPT* staffers as one of the bases for cutting Curry loose from *TPT* as of 18-April-2011, and from UTT altogether, as of 31-May-2011. Christine reports to the UTT community, however, that Cali failed to discuss the so-called problems involving Curry with any of *TPT*'s current staff, including its editor, Kamren Thompson. Christine also writes that it is the belief of *TPT* staff that the decision to oust Curry can be linked to a 22-Feb-2011 [editorial published](#) by *TPT* entitled "Secrets, Secrets." Thompson's own 3-May-2011 *TPT* [editorial](#) entitled "University officials suppress student voice," slams the UTT administration, arguing that it is prone to exhibit a condescending attitude, operate in secrecy, and display a generally unsupportive posture towards the student body. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that this characterization is not off base, given how many former USM administrators have recently blanketed the managerial ranks at UTT.



What should be disconcerting for Mabry in this latest episode is the involvement of television media, [which captured](#) Curry's story in a *KETK-TV News*' report entitled "UT Tyler paper protest." Curry, pictured above, told the NBC television affiliate that she was terminated by Mabry over the content published in *TPT*, and not because of poor job performance. According to Curry, UTT is violating its own policies in this case. However, as stated above, UTT argues that Curry was fired due to a number of complaints and poor job performance in other areas,

though *KETK-TV News* reports that the institution refuses to disclose the source(s) and content of the so-called complaints.

KETK-TV News also picked up on two other compelling aspects of Curry's situation. First, Curry provided the station with a copy of her latest performance evaluation review (see insert below). As the review points out, Cali, Curry's supervisor, rated Curry's job performance as "Superior," the highest evaluation metric used by UTT administrators.

III. OVERALL EVALUATION

Superior Performance ☒ Commendable Performance ☐ Satisfactory Performance ☐

IV. MUTUALLY UNDERSTOOD

Second, *KETK-TV News* reports that Curry is schedule to have brain surgery in the coming weeks. Other sources indicate that this surgery is to occur in early June-2011, just days after Curry's termination goes into effect, and her UTT benefits are cut. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that, though the situation is tied to Mabry, this last aspect of the story is easily the kind of emotional and physical distress that figures like Doty and Bushardt have no hesitation inflicting on someone. Thus, Mabry appears to be joining that category now.

Curry is scheduled to have a dismissal hearing on 12-May-2011. As always, stay tuned to USMNEWS.net for coverage of that event.