

Tablet Controversy Filters Down to USM Students

HATTIESBURG – The [recent scandal](#) surrounding the USM program to distribute 1,000 free Samsung Galaxy Tab™ 10.1 Tablets to various USM students has now filtered down to the general student body of the Hattiesburg-based university. In her 25-Aug-2011 [report for *The Student Printz*](#) entitled “Southern Miss . . . To The Tablet?,” Rachel Beech, a TSP staffer, has uncovered new aspects of the tablet program *and* identified growing pockets of discontent with it among the USM student body.

ON CAMPUS

Southern Miss... To The Tablet?

Rachel Beech
Printz Writer

USM forked out some serious cash for the thin, ever-so-sleek Samsung Galaxy Tablets. These devices have been given to Honors College students, SGA elected officials, McNair Scholars and Southern Style leaders this month.

Dave Davies, Dean of the Honors College, expressed to the Hattiesburg American how the tabs are a tremendous opportunity for students. These gadgets, similar to the iPad, are lightweight, complete with a camera, video recorder and WiFi.

Samsung Mobile announced that The University of Southern Mississippi will offer Galaxy Tab 10.1 mobile tablets to students participating in an Honors College pilot program this fall.

USM received a grant to buy 700 tablets for students earlier this summer.

Southern Miss is piloting up to 1,000 Galaxy Tab 10.1 devices to be distributed to selected Honors College, McNair Scholars and Gulf Coast students. The goal of this “mobile initiative” is to provide students with privately funded tablets focused on enhancing access to education. These tablets, loaded with Blackboard Mobile Learn, will fundamentally change the educational experience by giving students and educators mobile access to their courses, syllabi, content, e-textbooks, grades and more.

In a press release last week, Southern Miss officials announced that McNair Scholars, Southern Style members and SGA elected officials will also receive the tablets, which are valued around \$530 each. The recipients of the tablets get to keep them.

What about the rest of the student body?

Sally Axton, graduate assistant of HCo also received a tablet and is excited about what this new technological makeover has in store for the future of Southern Miss.

“I think it’s great,” said Axton.

“With this program, students and faculty can take advantage of the new technologies that are out there. Teachers and students will also be on the same page as far as what hardware they’re using. Most students just love new technologies, so I think using the tablets will also give them some extra interest in their schoolwork.”

Other students beg to differ. Garrett Ball, a senior coaching major, has a differing opinion of the gift.

“Well, I feel like they’ve given up on the rest of us,” said Ball. “It’s like the old Mark Twain quote, ‘everything has its limit—iron ore cannot be educated into gold.’”

Jordan Freeman, a senior political science major, thinks it’s fiscally irresponsible on the administration’s behalf.

“I am outraged,” said Freeman. “Unless this money was donated for a specific purpose and the money for these tabs are coming out of the general budget for USM, then it is a gross error on behalf of the administration.”

Although there has been ambivalence concerning the Galaxy Tabs, the president of Samsung Mobile explained how helpful the tablets can be for students:

“The Galaxy Tab portfolio is an attractive option for schools looking for devices armed with strong feature sets and access to a comprehensive selection of applications built to enhance the learning process,” said Dale Sohn, president of Samsung Mobile.

The Samsung tablets will enable students and faculty to experience and share audio, video and other learning materials to accomplish classroom goals. The devices will also aid to reduce the amount of paper used in the classroom.

“Tablets are like the Swiss Army Knife to academic excellence. By leveraging this new technology, we are committed to transforming the way students interact, engage and learn in the classrooms,” said Homer Goffman, Chief Information officer at USM. “The ITech department at Southern Miss is continually challenging itself to support emerging technology and find new ways to put information into the student’s hands.”

The Galaxy Tab 10.1 is a WiFi-enabled tablet that measures 8.6 millimeters slim, making it the thinnest large screen tablet currently available in the world. The Galaxy Tab 10.1 is powered by the Android™ 3.1 (Honeycomb) platform and features a 10-inch touchscreen and access to an array of applications through the Android Market™.

“We are dedicated to enabling educational institutions like The University of Southern Mississippi to provide their students with access to premium technology that enhances the learning experience,” said Tim Wagner, Vice President and General Manager of Enterprise Sales for Samsung Mobile.

Eligible Honors College students, SGA members, McNair Scholars and Southern Style leaders can look forward to sporting their new gadgets this fall while the rest of us, well, merely go about our business.

Original reports stated that anywhere from 700 to 1,000 USM students would be receiving these hardware tablets. Beech’s report confirms that the number will be around 1,000, and that only 700 of these are being funded through the Samsung program. Thus, the \$440,000 consulting fee being paid by USM to Blackboard to facilitate the program is only the beginning of USM’s expenses. At \$530 per tablet, USM will likely now be on the hook for an extra \$159,000 to cover the cost of the 300 additional tablets. This raises USM’s auxiliary funds commitment to \$599,000. Lastly, given that Beech’s report uncovers the \$530/per price tag, and not the \$499/per figure reported earlier by USMNEWS.net, the grant will be covering \$371,000 in expenses, and not \$349,300.

One of the reasons the project has grown from 700 to 1,000 tablets, thus raising USM’s cost by at least \$159,000, is the decision by the USM administration to expand the list of targeted recipients. Original reports indicated that McNair Scholars, Honors College students, USM-Gulf Coast students, and Southern Style participants would be receiving the hardware. Beech’s report, however, indicates that all elected officials of the USM

Student Government Association will be adding these Samsung Galaxy Tab™ 10.1 Tablets to their already long list of benefits, which includes regular interactions with USM president Martha Saunders and others in her administration. As expected, many USM students are unhappy with this latest scandal. Senior coaching major Garrett Ball told Beech that he “. . . feel[s] like they've given up on the rest of us,” and that “[i]t's like the old Mark Twain quote, ‘everything has its limit—iron ore cannot be educated into gold.’” Jordan Freeman, a senior political science major, stated in an interview with Beech that there is a perception that the Saunders administration is being fiscally irresponsible. Freeman went further by telling Beech “I am outraged. Unless this money was donated for a specific purpose and the money for these tabs are coming out of the general budget for USM, then it is a gross error on behalf of the administration.”



As Van Arnold’s 22-Aug-2011 [USM presser](#) points out, Saunders isn’t shying away from participating in this controversial program. Arnold’s photo, inserted above, shows Saunders distributing the tablets to those fortunate students on the Hattiesburg campus. This decision seems to confirm the sentiment in Susan Green-Lewis’ [most recent guest editorial](#) at USMNEWS.net. Saunders’ USM-GC lieutenant, Francis Lucas, is also getting in on the act, at least according to Charmaine Williams Schmermund’s 24-Aug-2011 [USM presser](#).

With the USM SGA now in on the largesse in this case, sources tell USMNEWS.net that the controversy will only grow more intense. Stay tuned to USMNEWS.net for additional reports.