

Building Better President

A Fun Viewpoint from Susan Green-Lewis

Some in the USM community have, in recent years, been disappointed with USM president Martha Saunders' apparent lack of knowledge about most matters relating to higher education administration. Perhaps those concerns have been addressed now that we know that Saunders recently successfully completed [an online course](#) in higher education administration and finance. Her instructor is a high-ranking university administrator, and the student-to-faculty ratio in the class was 1:1. These metrics suggest that Saunders' "education" is a quality one.



Saunders listens closely as instructor describes the various components of a university's overall budget.

During class, Saunders asked the instructor to explain the different components of a public university's budget, such as state appropriations, student tuition, etc. The instructor stated that the operating budget comes from two main funds – the education and general fund, and auxiliaries. Teacher then pointed out that the E&G is made up primarily of state appropriations and tuition receipts, while auxiliary funds come from so-called revenue centers around the campus.

in-class definition: *bond* – a financial instrument where governments can get money

Next, Saunders asked the instructor how universities can cut programs and other things on the academic side while at the same time build new facilities. The teacher's answer started simple – universities have different "buckets of money" – however, it then devolved into an eye-glazing lecture on the difference between *general obligation bonds* and *general revenue bonds*. That portion of the lesson did, though, include a tidbit about USM having a **separate legal entity** called the **Southern Miss Educational Building Corporation** (the SMEBC).

The USM community can only hope that Saunders was paying attention, and therefore got a lot out of her online course. It appears, at times, that she may have. However, there were moments when it looked as though she was thinking about recess, and there were other times when she was obviously playing teacher's pet. As is often said around USM, only the future will tell.