

‘Clear Eyes, Full Hearts’

NEW INTERIM PROVOST LIKE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

New interim provost Denis Wiesenburg walked into the USM faculty senate meeting room on 2-Dec-2011 and delivered “the provost’s message” like he has held the job for most of his career. In doing so, sources tell USMNEWS.net that he spoke openly and critically about many subjects, making him like a breath of fresh air in arguably one of the more closed environments in academe. Wiesenburg reported that USM’s faculty allocation committee had been asked to allocate \$1,026,000 in salary pool funds, and that it had decided upon 16 positions in various colleges. To that, Wiesenburg added that he is looking to find funds with which to provide as many additional faculty lines as possible in order to deal with transitional problems caused when some colleges suffered a net loss of resources.

It was at this point that Wiesenburg informed the faculty senate that his initial look at the USM budget revealed that (1) much of USM’s money is “badly distributed,” meaning that administrative services has far more of the overall budget than it should have, and (2) while the academic side of the institution trimmed millions of dollars in the latest budget cutting processes, it appears that administrative services dodged cuts for the most part. Both statements surprised many senators, leading Wiesenburg to reiterate that administrative services somehow found, during the Tabletgate scandal, \$440,000 to purchase the Samsung devices after the private donor bailed on the project. He then asked (rhetorically) just how many academic areas had that kind of money simply laying around. Of course, the response was that there were not any, including Wiesenburg’s own research area.

The new interim provost also informed senators that USM is in a less-than-comfortable position when it comes to employing tenure-track faculty, noting that the recent waves of hiring have added a number of adjunct faculty and instructors. As Wiesenburg pointed out, it takes tenure-track faculty to push a university’s research profile upward. It was here that he referenced USM president Martha Saunders’ favorite mantra about USM being the premiere research university of Gulf South. According to Wiesenburg, if the institution ever wants to be just that – alluding to his belief that USM is *not* such at the present time – it needs to shore up its permanent faculty ranks.

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that the USM faculty senate has to feel like the provost’s office at USM is in good hands, at least for the time being. Wiesenburg informed senators that he would hold the interim title through the end of the 2011-12 academic year. This statement followed senate president Timothy Rehner’s revelation that Saunders was not planning to even initiate a search for a new provost until the summer of 2012, meaning that a new provost would not likely be in place until the beginning of fall 2013. One has to wonder, then, if Saunders will similarly not begin a search for a new USM football coach until summer of 2012. The disparate emphases in these two vacancies has to give USM faculty, including interim provost Wiesenburg, pause concerning Saunders’ view of USM as an institution of higher learning.