

*DEAR USMNEWS.NET*

Dear usmnews.net,

Like the folks at usmnews.net, the secrecy surrounding university activities has always troubled me. As [United States Supreme Court] Justice [Louis D.] Brandeis wrote "Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman." However, the University of Southern Mississippi has just named Rodney D. Bennett as its tenth president. What do we really know about Dr. Bennett? The answer is very little. Like you I searched for a vita, publications -- anything that might suggest what makes this man a suitable president. I found nothing except for an apparently self-authored [profile page](#) at the University of Georgia.

While we all hope Dr. Bennett is the person for the job and that he will do a fine job, nothing the IHL or the University has told us gives us any evidence to support that hope. The faculty, staff and students find themselves exactly where they were when Martha Saunders arrived at the University of Mississippi -- without a shred of evidence -- and hoping that she was the one to put the turmoil of the Shelby Thames presidency behind us. Given the secrecy surrounding Dr. Bennett's appointment and the total absence of information concerning his qualifications, I fear it [hope that Dr. Bennett is the right person] is only wishful thinking. Or, to paraphrase Samuel Johnson, it is the triumph of hope over experience.

Name withheld by request

Dear Name withheld,

Unfortunately, neither the IHL nor Dr. Bennett has chosen to provide little beyond glittering generalities. The IHL [press release](#) is long on praise and short on specifics. Let's *hope* Dr. Bennett voluntarily releases more information than is found on his University of Georgia profile page. That would go a long way toward instilling confidence that he actually is the right person and intends to act in the spirit of shared governance.

In the meantime, about all we can do at this point is *hope* for the best and plan for the worst. However, as a [commenter to an article](#) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* said,

I used to think that Shared Governance and Academic Freedom were myths, like the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus...but I've actually seen a lot more evidence of the existence of the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus.