

Declining Student Attendance Hits Georgia. (At campuses across the country, more reasons to skip the game.)

The Wall Street Journal's Ben Cohen hits a nerve with his article about [students' declining interest](#) in attending university football games.

Declining student attendance [at football games] is an illness that has been spreading for years nationwide. But now it has hit the Southeastern Conference, home to college football's best teams and supposedly its most fervent fans, giving athletics officials reason to fret about future ticket sales and fundraising.

If the University of Georgia, a perennially nationally ranked wealthy football program, has a cold (is experiencing declining student attendance), Southern Miss, very rarely nationally ranked—count the number of times on one hand over the past 100 years—can expect pneumonia (empty student bleachers).



Add insult to injury, Southern Miss has the longest losing streak of any D-1 team in the country and lost last Saturday to Florida International, a team that was supposed to be the worst team in the nation.

It doesn't take expert analysis to understand USM football is in a death spiral. For example, recruitment will be poor for the foreseeable future. The best high school players will be snatched up before USM can identify them, much less try to compete for their services. That spells more disaster, practically guaranteeing losing teams. Furthermore, a negative consequence—like writing a contract in which USM must continue to pay a fortune for a

coach it fired last year—portends more negative consequences—not having enough money to currently pay for a quality coach. We could go on and on, but you get the idea.

And what will USM administrators do? They're proposing spending millions and millions to try to compete with the likes of the University of Georgia. They would make better sense to flush your money down the toilet. That would be slightly less embarrassing.

Administrators are proving they have no idea that USM is an academic institution. Since they are focusing so much effort and student and taxpayer money on football, an activity irrelevant to its academic mission, they are in effect promoting their educational death spiral, too. After all, if you are a student, why not take internet courses from the University of Alabama and drive over once in a while for a traditional class. Then you could get just as good, if not better education, and root for a real football team, too. It could already be happening. Maybe USM is seeing this phenomenon in the significant decline in its student enrollment this year.