

Fewer Programs = Better Programs

by Duane Cobb

If someone told me that USM sold the CoB's 9 economists (the current ones) for \$1 million per year into perpetuity, I would have told him or her that I thought that the buyer got played. Though there is no real buyer, selling the CoB's economists and economics majors for \$1 million per year into perpetuity is precisely what USM has done with its proposal to cut \$8 million from the budget. And in defending that proposal USM provost Robert Lyman said it well when [he told](#) Meryl Dakin of *The Student Printz* that, with scant resources, USM can't afford to be all things to all people. He also added that he would like to see the \$1 million go toward increasing the quality of the remaining programs.



It's plain and simple – Lyman is right on here. What he said is: fewer programs = better programs. Most of the USM campus understands the concept. The local (Hattiesburg) community will get the message. Mississippi taxpayers will not only get it, they'll embrace it. The question now is: why can't *economists* understand it?

As bad as things now seem, the elimination of the CoB's economics majors, and its 9 tenured/tenure-track faculty might soon become a footnote. USM administrators are banking on a mid-year budget cut in the millions. If that happens, the CoB may have to get

the gardening tools out and uproot other programs. CoB dean Lance Nail told Dakin that management information systems is the next candidate. If the bottom truly falls out, both fashion merchandising and tourism management will be on the block. There you're talking about another 15 or so CoB faculty, or about 50% more than the figure we are now considering.

Those programs were spared the first round because, unlike ECO, they either improved their standing or developed specific plans for doing so. The economics unit failed in this regard, no doubt in large measure from having George Carter as its chairman. To hear Carter tell it (to Dakin), ECO tried to do what Nail said the others did. Examples? Carter lists joint programs with *philosophy* and *history*, and building up the B.A. in economics. So, much like Mark Klinedinst's [Econ is Kewl](#) brochure, Carter's efforts to grow economics majors within the CoB entailed growing them in the CoAL (instead).

How many times do the CoB's economists have to be told that Carter is the bizarro world's Midas, where everything he touches is a gaffe. That bad judgment likely contributed to ECO's travails. At some point, however, mistakes – particularly \$1 million per year ones, have to stick.