

## USM's enrollment is down significantly -- again

Last year The Hattiesburg American reported:

### [State college overall enrollment falls, but some programs still climb](#)

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Southern Miss is focusing “on the quality of the student body ... (by) enrolling students it is confident can succeed in progressing and graduating” according to a September news release.

With overall enrollment numbers down to 15,325 compared to last year's 16,468, Southern Miss has put an emphasis on gaining scholars who exude excellence.

According to the IHL, USM's “unduplicated headcount” once again dropped from 15,249 (Fall 2013) to 14,845 (Fall 2014). This change represented a 2.6% drop in enrollment. usmnews.net readers may recall that enrollment dropped from 16,468 students (Fall 2012) to 15,325 students (Fall 2013) for a devastating 2013 6.9% drop in enrollment. Stated a little differently, since Fall 2012, enrollment has declined by over 1600 students, or roughly ten percent of the student population. However, if you accept the numbers published by [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), the picture is even worse.

#### 3 largest institutions by enrollment

Institution	Mississippi
Mississippi State U.	17,010
U. of Mississippi	16,949
U. of Southern Mississippi	12,804

This year, President Bennett told the same sad story -- Southern Miss was emphasizing “quality.” As a result of the alleged flight to quality, Bennett is now acknowledging that the University must make significant cuts. The real measure of how bad things are is what is found in [Dr. Bennett's statement](#) to the University community, “As a consequence of these factors, we must make budget adjustments in order to live within our means when we have a decline in enrollment. In other words, we must reduce planned expenditures when we have reductions in these revenue streams.”

From administrators' points of view the loss of students translates to \$9,600,000 per year in lost income from tuition alone. (\$6000 annual tuition x 1600 missing students = \$9,600,000). Dr. Bennett actually acknowledges a

“target spending reduction of \$6.79 million per year from the Educational and General Budget”, an amount which sources tell usmnews.net wildly understates the loss of income from tuition, alone. Sources also report that the financial black hole acknowledged by Bennett does not include the loss of income associated with sports fees, parking, residence hall occupancy, etc.

You may be tempted to believe USM PR blather. If you believe USM’s rationalization, you’ll have to believe that Ol’ Miss, MSU, etc. did not experience enrollment decline because (1) they do NOT “focus ‘on the quality of the student body...(by) enrolling students it is confident can succeed...” or (2) that USM has historically admitted – and taken money from -- students whom it was not confident could succeed.

USM administrators and their PR folks are so focused on rationalizing the significant drop in enrollment that they fail to see their PR blather is either insulting their sister institutions in Mississippi or admission of historical malfeasance.

USM can prove our view is false—that they are not just rationalizing disagreeable facts—by showing details of past and current ACT and SAT scores, and, comparing them with other state schools to demonstrate that their focus is indeed on “quality of their students” and other state schools are not focused on “quality of their students.” If USM has historically admitted students with little chance of success, taking tuition dollars – far too many of which were borrowed, then students and taxpayers are entitled to know the scope of this reprehensible conduct and who is responsible for it.