

# Is Saunders Losing Control?

MORE ON THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AT USM

The recent revelation that the USM administration has accepted the CoB economists' plan to have its five mostly senior professors retire so that the remaining four can be saved (and moved into the CoAL) has many USMNEWS.net readers questioning "what's going on over there?" at USM. Now, with the 3-Sept-09 publication by *The Hattiesburg American* of two articles about happenings on the Hattiesburg campus, more questions are certain to arise, and many of these will be aimed at USM president Martha Saunders.



USM President Martha Saunders

It was only days ago that the editors of *THA* were noting the irony in the fact that right next to an article they published about the three USM ed-tech professors who were terminated was an article they published about the explosion in the number of high school students signing up for ed-tech courses, presumably as a result of the nation's deep recession. Now, with the 3-Sept-09 edition of *THA*, another irony almost appeared in print, and perhaps should have, that would have been at least as bad for the Saunders administration as the first, if not worse. The first of these articles is *THA* higher education reporter Ed Kemp's story entitled [USM chief tackles budget](#), wherein Kemp discusses Saunders' recent budget crisis speech to her extended cabinet. USMNEWS.net covered this story on 2-Sept-09 with its **breaking news . . . breaking news** report [USM President Throws Down Gauntlet on CoB ECOers](#). Kemp's story indicates that Saunders told the extended cabinet that many indicators are up, including enrollment, retention and private giving. If Kemp had examined [Saunders' address](#) more thoroughly, as did USMNEWS.net reporters, he may have also discovered that Saunders reported that USM currently has "a healthy research enterprise."

What did Kemp miss? In not reporting the full story on Saunders' address, especially the part about the external research support enterprise, *THA* missed out on another irony, the second half of which would have come from Kemp's second article of the day, which is entitled [Burge retiring from USM post](#). In this article Kemp presents some external research funding data from USM sources. According to USMNEWS.net sources, these data show an alarming trend, and call into question the truthfulness of Saunders' address to the cabinet. The data are presented below:

Table 1 – USM’s External Research Funding, 2005-09

Fiscal Year	External Research Funding at USM
2009	\$91 million
2008	\$98 million
2007	\$102 million
2006	\$71 million
2005	\$69 million

As the Table 1 data indicate, former USM president Shelby Thames ran USM’s external research funding all the way up to \$102 million by the time he departed office in May-2007. Since that time, however, Saunders has succeeded in *reducing* USM’s external research funding footprint by \$4 million and \$7 million in successive years, for a total loss of \$11 million. Put differently, while the last two growth rates in external research funding under Thames were +2.9% and +43.7%, the first two under Saunders have been -3.9% and -7.1%. Nothing about these data suggest that the trend line on USM’s external funding support is a picture of health.



USM VP for Research Cecil Burge

Many USM constituents are awaiting the release, accompanied by USM VP of Student Affairs Joe Paul’s explanations, of the fall 2009 enrollment data for USM. While the general consensus is that it will be higher than fall 2008, there is great disparity in the forecasts about how much. Will these data call Saunders’ recent address into further question? Sources also tell USMNEWS.net that it is not likely that private giving to USM is up. It is more likely, in their view, that Saunders is attempting to capitalize further on the *recent* gifts to fund the new Centennial Gateway to USM’s Hattiesburg Campus. One of the gifts to fund this project came from the Gold Leaf, a secret society. As one USMNEWS.net reader recently put it, it seems USM has many secrets these days.