

Is the Saunders Administration Undermining Title IX?

Data Tell the Story of a Program Geared Toward Only Male Success

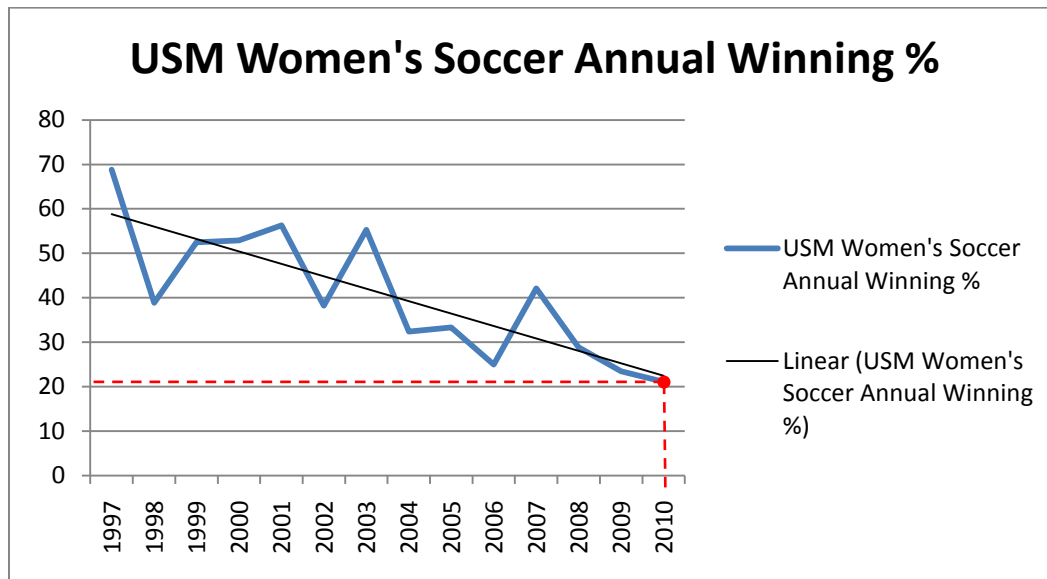
Two days before USMNEWS.net released its [investigative report entitled](#) “Sex, Sports & Secret Summits: USM’s Approach to Intercollegiate Athletics under Modern Day Presidents,” *The New York Times* published Katie Thomas’ 25-Apr-2011 [report entitled](#) “Gender Games: College Teams, Relying on Deception, Undermine Gender Equity.” The USMNEWS.net report concluded: “Though USM may comply with Title IX when it comes to athletics participation (via scholarship numbers, etc.), it certainly does not appear to be putting forth the same level of attention/effort across men’s and women’s sports programs. It seems as though the women’s programs are being allowed to flounder so that resources can be freed to instead provide support for the men’s programs.” This startling conclusion is reached on the basis of a treasure trove of performance data presented in that investigative report. Interestingly, Thomas’ story for *TNYT* examines the same issue as that covered by USMNEWS.net, as she opens by stating that many universities are resorting to subterfuge in order to make it appear as though they are supporting women’s sports to the same degree as they are supporting men’s sports.

One story told by Thomas concerns the women’s tennis team at Marshall University, which bolstered its roster by adding three unqualified freshmen walk-ons, who were told by the coach that practice was optional for them, and that they did not have to travel with the team to matches if they did not desire to do so. In this way, Marshall’s female participant numbers were inflated by three, allowing additional male athletes to compete for the institution. Thomas also reports that a federal loophole allows institutions that use male practice players in certain sports to count them as female participants, thus broadening the scope universities have for adding athletes to men’s teams. Thomas points out that this loophole allows Cornell University to count all 34 of the fencers on its women’s fencing team as women, even though 15 of them are male. Duke University and Texas A&M University both use this loophole for women’s basketball. Finally, Thomas also explains how the University of South Florida cooked its participation books back in 1997, when the institution added varsity football. Despite a gender-equity consultant’s advice to add women’s swimming, USF officials dealt with the additional 100 male athletes (football players) by increasing the women’s cross-country team’s roster from about 25 to 75. In 2009-10, only 28 females completed in at least one race, out of a 71-woman roster. One way institutions balloon the size of cross-country rosters is by cross-listing athletes from the rosters of indoor and outdoor track and field teams. In USF’s case, several of the 71 women did not even know they were on the school’s women’s cross-country roster.

Though these and other practices described by Thomas could very well be occurring at USM under president Martha Saunders and athletics director Richard Giannini – after all, Marshall is a Conference-USA sister, while USF was once a C-USA member as well

– the USMNEWS.net report referenced above looks at possible/potential Title IX deception practices that extend beyond those examined by Thomas. Insert 1 below continues the previous examination done by USMNEWS.net by looking more closely at USM’s soccer program.

Insert 1 – USM Soccer

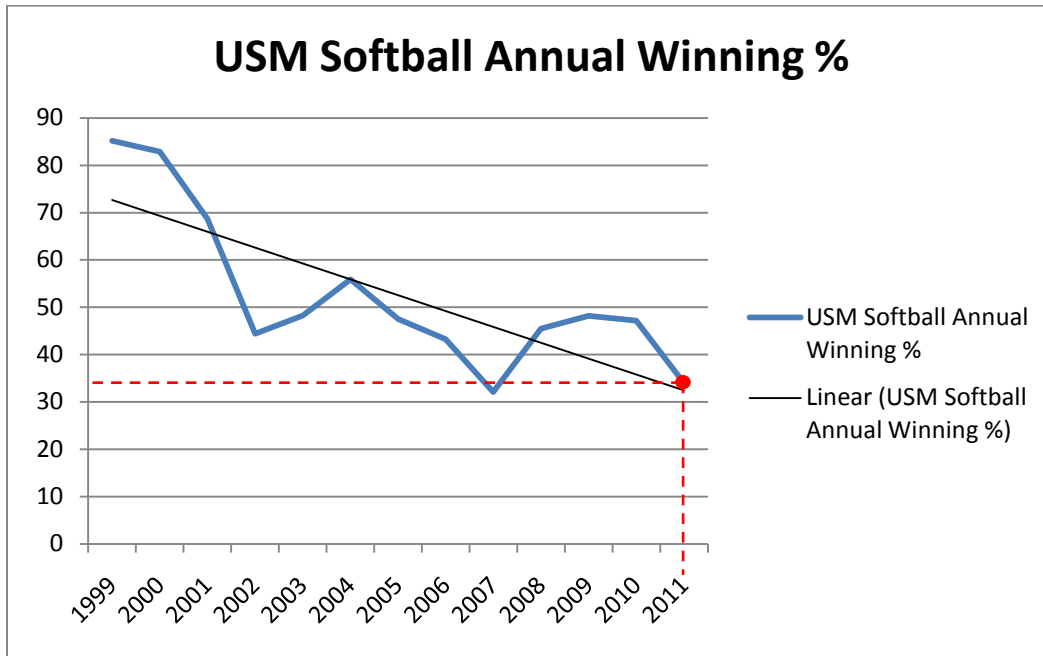


As the linear trend shows, USM soccer has been on a dramatic slide since its inception back in 1997. Of course, any resources saved by (1) not hiring capable soccer coaches, (2) not having adequate recruiting budgets, or (3) not promoting the sport as well as men’s sports are promoted can be directed toward men’s sports. The 2010 women’s soccer season ended with the worst record in the history of the program, as just barely more than 20% of the contests resulted in wins (counting ties half). Current head coach Scott Ebke had never held a permanent head coaching position prior to coming to USM before the 2008 season. His assistant coaches, Megan Forester and Holly Cox, had little to no coaching experience before coming to USM. Forester served *one year* as a *volunteer assistant coach*, while Cox’s *USM coaching career began immediately after her USM playing career ended*.

Insert 2 below examines USM’s women’s softball program a bit more closely. Like soccer, the second stint of this program has been on a steady slide since it began back in the late 1990s. The current season, if it ended today, would provide the second worst result since the late 1990s, and sources say the remaining schedule will likely lead to a lower level of performance than reached to date. The team will likely eclipse 35 losses this year alone. Head coach Howard Dobson came to USM in 2007, after five seasons as an assistant coach at Oklahoma. That credential easily explains how he might have landed a position at a C-USA school like USM.

One of Dobson’s assistants, Melissa Inouye, spent three seasons as an assistant coach at the University of Kentucky before joining Dobson at USM. The other assistant, Gessica Hufnagle, spent only one season as an assistant coach at Bethel College prior to coming to USM.

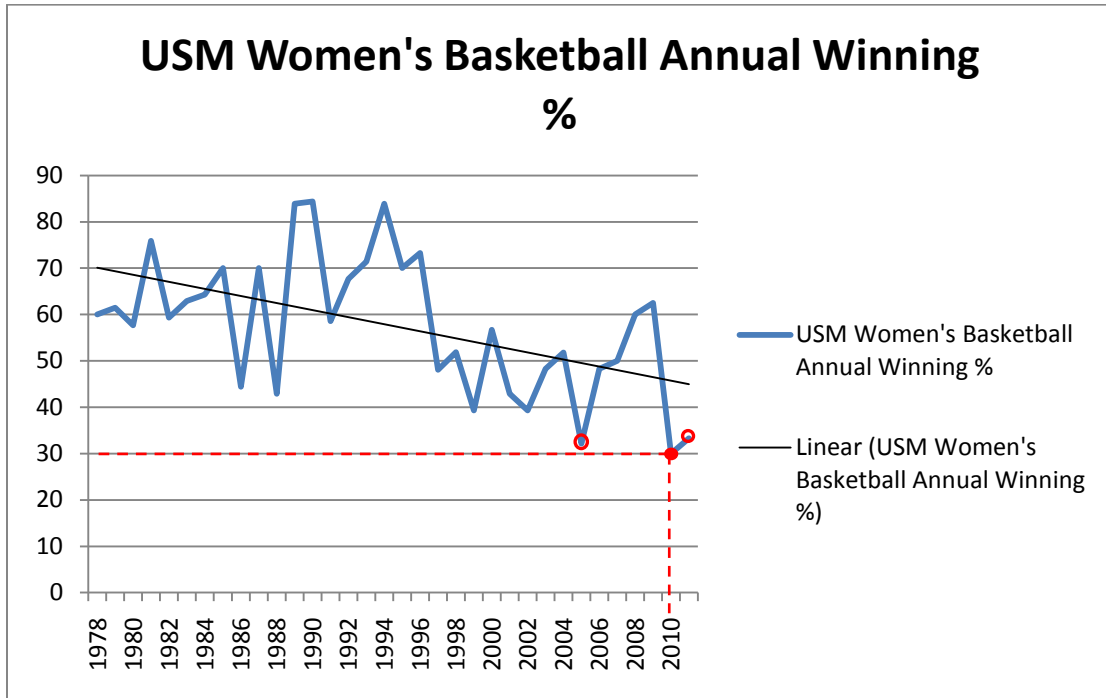
Insert 2 – USM Softball



All things considered regarding coaching, the USM softball program has selected individuals who have, at least on paper, the types of credentials/accomplishments that one would expect out of a hiring process. Perhaps the slide in softball, then, is due to support factors other than coaching. It is well known that Giannini took several years to complete the team’s softball complex, which is not well-located relative to the male sports venues on campus. And, during the time that the softball complex was waiting for its final pieces, major renovations were made to M.M. Roberts Stadium and Pete Taylor Park, suggesting again that resources that could have supported a women’s sport were directed instead toward men’s sports programs at USM.

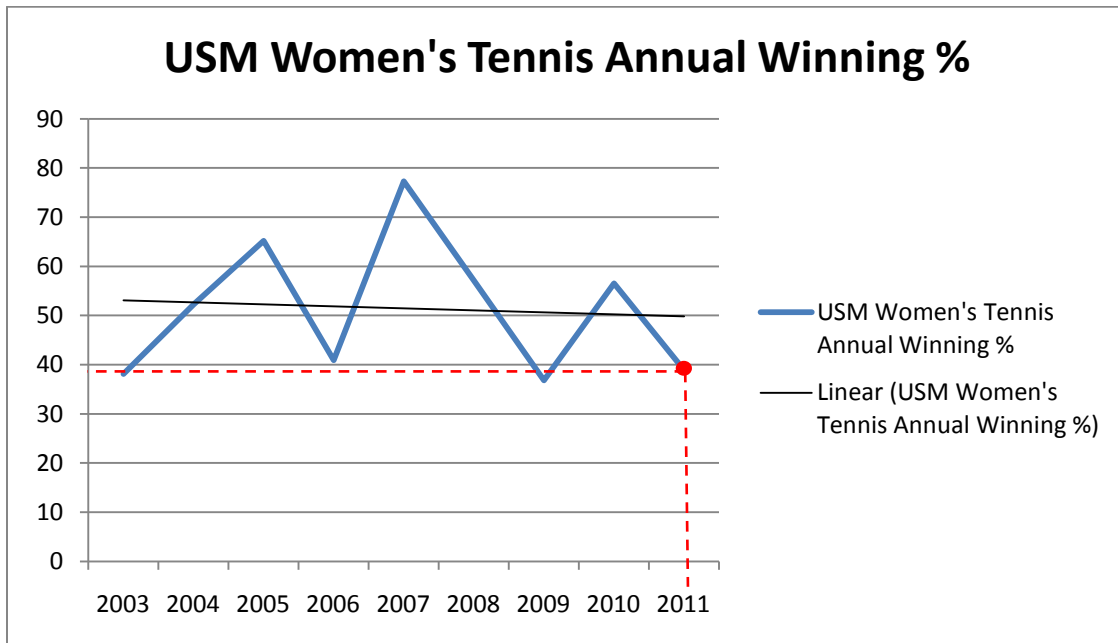
As Insert 3 below shows, the USM women’s basketball program has been sliding since its inception back in the mid-1970s. The only problem is that the program didn’t know it was sliding until after Kay James departed as head coach during the late 1990s. James was replaced by Rick Reeves, who was himself later replaced by current head coach Joye Lee-McNelis. Each took what James built and reduced it a notch, including the three worst performances in program history (since James began) under Lee-McNelis. The single worst of these occurred last year (2010), while the third worst just ended this year (2011). The remaining low point came back in 2005, Lee-McNelis’ first year at the helm.

Insert 3 – USM Women’s Basketball



Lee-McNelis had the credentials to succeed Reeves. The struggles of the USM women’s basketball program trace directly back to Saunders and Giannini, who refuse to replace a coach who is clearly taking the program to new lows. Again, one program’s struggles may translate into another’s success, as resources are freed to travel from point A to point B within the athletics department’s budget.

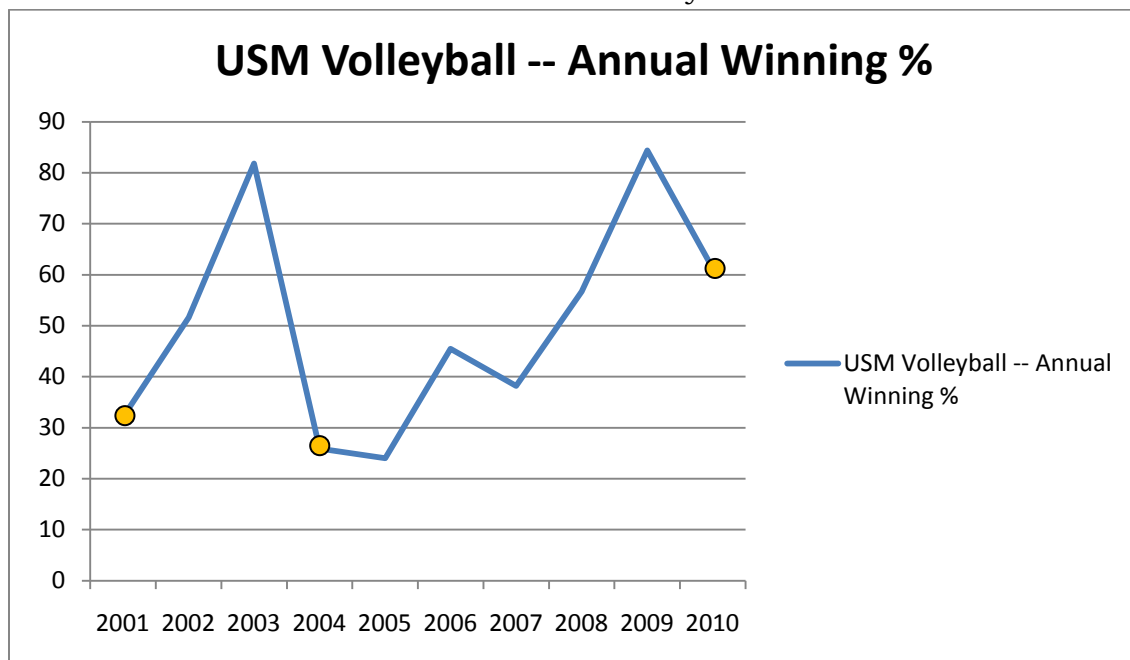
Insert 4 – USM Women’s Tennis



Former USM head women's tennis coach Randy Rowley produced the best (in 2007) and third best (in 2005) seasons in USM women's tennis history. Unfortunately, a sexual harassment situation ended his career at USM before the 2010 season began. As Insert 4 above indicates, the program's slow slide since the beginning of Rowley's tenure is being accelerated by Rowley's replacement, current head coach Raynie Theis. The 2011 season ended under Theis as the third worst performance since 2003. Her overall record at USM is now below 50% (in terms of wins).

Theis came to USM before the 2010 season, after serving *only a single year* as the *graduate assistant* for the women's tennis team at the University of Massachusetts. Thus, she was nowhere near qualified to hold the head coaching position at USM. Compounding this situation is the fact that Theis has only one assistant coach in *graduate assistant* Tanyaradzwa Gombera. Thus, Saunders and Giannini are giving the USM women's tennis program very little chance of ever succeeding.

Insert 5 – USM Volleyball



Current USM head volleyball coach Abbey Sutherland succeeded the two greatest coaches in USM history. Santiago Restrepo guided the Lady Eagles to a 52-40 record from 2001-03, culminating in a 27-6 record in 2003 that propelled Restrepo into the head coaching slot at Oklahoma. Restrepo was followed by volleyball icon Ricci Luyties, who guided the program to its only C-USA Championship in 2009, a year that ended at 27-5 and concluded a two-year run at 44-18. Luyties used these achievements to depart for the University of California at San Diego after the 2009 season.

With the hiring of Sutherland, however, the Saunders administration, including Giannini, seems to have thrown in the proverbial towel on the women's volleyball program. Sutherland's coaching experience leading up to being named head coach included two years as a graduate assistant and four years as an assistant – all at USM. Sutherland's only assistant, Amanda Berkley, spent just two seasons as a *graduate assistant* at UW-Whitewater before joining Sutherland's staff. On paper, this is not what you want to see as a supporter of USM women's sports. As a men's sports supporter at USM, perhaps it is.

The gold points in Insert 5 above depict the first season for each of the past three head volleyball coaches at USM. Both Restrepo and Luyties were handed bare cupboards, yet both took the program to unprecedented heights. Sutherland, however, was left with a significant source of talent by Luyties, yet the team's performance dropped more than 20 points from 2009 to 2010. Some of the talent Luyties left behind for Sutherland is now gone. One has to wonder if pre-2001 performance levels are in the very near future for USM volleyball.

The kinds of Title IX transgressions that Thomas reports on (see above) are relatively easy to spot. The types that may be going on at USM – at least as suggested by the data here and elsewhere – and that may be going on at a host of other institutions, are lurking more in the shadows. As such, uncovering them requires more analysis of the information that resides in the public realm. In many ways, these more invisible types of Title IX shenanigans are much worse than those Thomas uncovered, because they represent instances where the dreams of so many women's teams are being sacrificed at the altar of men's sports like football and baseball.