

Martha Saunders, Under Oath

"Don't count her out yet. There are plenty of low level colleges where she could rise again."
[Name withheld](#)

If there is a chance that Martha Saunders can repeat her incompetence as an administrator at another college or university, its faculty and administrators should have a clear picture of her conduct as president of Southern Miss. This series provides a rare opportunity for the Southern Miss family, as well as potential employers, to consider Martha Saunders' words, under oath.

Martha Saunders didn't just squander millions of dollars in student and taxpayer money on an airplane, or hundreds of thousands decorating the Presidential mansion's bedroom, or hundreds of thousands on a misguided, illegal computer tablet give-away scheme, or at least a million in mismanagement on athletics that we know of, etc. She spent approximately two and a half million dollars trying and failing to fire me for opposing and exposing the questionable conduct of USM faculty and administrators.

It's your money -- your millions and millions of dollars. Taxpayer and students' money. If you care to understand just how incompetent Martha Saunders is, take a front row seat at her deposition. You don't have to take anyone's word. Observe it for yourself.

Part 5

Questions directed to President Martha Saunders at her deposition on April 12 and 13, 2010--Q is question; A is President Saunders' answer.

Q. Dr. Saunders, in your experience, have you ever heard of anybody being falsely accused?

A. Yes.

Q. And could you give me an example?

A. Well, the most -- the ones that stick in my mind usually have to do with sexual harassment or some kind of gender or racial discrimination.

Q. Have you taken any steps to determine if the claims against Dr. Depree were false other than the ombudsman [who, as admitted in President Saunders previous testimony, found no evidence supporting the accusations against DePree]?

A. No.

Why hasn't Dr. Saunders taken any steps to determine if the claims were false? Is it because she already made up her mind and needed no evidence to support her decision? If she disrespects

tenure and evidence to this extent, do you believe that your hard-earned award of tenure is safe in the face of such caprice?

Part 6

Q. In paragraph four of your [President Saunders] letter, you state that on August 21 [2007] you received a letter from Dr. Williams, interim dean of the college of business. Would you tell me what you said there?

A. On August 21st, 2007, I received a letter from Alvin J. Williams, interim dean of the college of business. Dr. Williams' letter indicated that quote: Over the past several years, Dr. Depree has engaged in behaviors that have severely constrained the capacity of the school of accountancy and information systems and the college of business to function at levels necessary to foster an appropriate learning environment for students and a collegial atmosphere for faculty to teach conduct research and perform professional service. The letter also said that Dr. Depree has helped create an environment in which faculty members and students do not feel safe to go about their usual business in Joseph Greene Hall. Dr. Williams' letter described additional negative and disruptive behaviors.

Q. Let's go back and look at this in some detail. What behaviors did Dr. Williams tell you that Dr. Depree had engaged in that constrained the capacity of the schools to foster an appropriate learning environment?

A. I don't recall.

Q. You have a copy of his letter attached to your deposition, I believe, the deposition, Dr. Saunders.

A. (Saunders looks at document.)

Q. Could you tell me specifically what conduct that Dr. Depree is alleged to engage in that severely constrained the capacity of any portion of the college of business?

A. One of the things Dr. Williams mentions is the -- that Dr. Depree used what was perceived as a recording device without permission to record conversations between faculty members as well as faculty and students.

Q. Let me stop you there. He says perceived does that mean he had a recording device?

A. It does not.

Q. Does that not throw up a red flag that it might not be true that there wasn't a recording device?

A. It could not be true.

Q. And do you have any evidence to believe that Dr. Depree recorded anyone in the college of business?

A. I have the allegations and no evidence.

Q. And actually Dr. Depree -- you were present when Dr. Depree testified at the temporary restraining order hearing, were you not?

A. Yes.

Q. And what did Dr. Depree say?

A. My memory is a little fuzzy, but as I recall he said he did not use a recording device.

Q. And again you did not review the depositions of anyone to see if they testified --

A. No.

Q. -- that they had observed him?

A. No.

Q. And if I told you within the content of these depositions there was no one that ever observed Dr. Depree record, would you disagree?

A. I couldn't.

Q. And if no one saw him record them and if he says he didn't what evidence do you have?

A. I would have none.

President Saunders did not have any evidence that DePree ever recorded anyone at USM. More importantly, as an indication of her competence to be president of a university, she did not care to look at the evidence that was readily available to her. If President Saunders' other decisions appear haphazard and not well grounded, now you know why. Facts and evidence don't matter.

Part 7

Q. What else does he [Interim Dean Williams in August 2007] allege that Dr. Depree has done that severely constrained the capacity?

A. He said that Dr. Depree engaged in disruptive behaviors this had to do with a faculty meeting by cursing and storming out of the meeting in a manner that left faculty members fearful.

Q. Now have you made any inquiry about that faculty meeting?

A. No.

Q. Are you aware that there is recording of that meeting prepared by Dr. Frank Mixon?

A. I seem to recall that when we were at the hearing.

Q. And have you listened to that recording?

A. No.

Q. And do you recall reviewing Dr. Cannon's report saying that he had heard worse here at this campus?

A. Yes.

Q. Yes, you recall Dr. Cannon saying that?

A. I recall that in the ombudsman's report.

Q. So do you have any evidence that Dr. Depree behaved in a manner at that meeting that could have made a reasonable person fearful?

A. No.

However, President Saunders acted on Interim Dean Williams' unfounded accusations to punish Dr. DePree, just as if she had a shred of evidence for them. She refused to review the underlying data that demonstrated that her decision had no basis in fact.

What do you call someone who acts on unfounded accusations? What do you call someone who acts to punish someone based on unfounded accusations?

Part 8

Q. Are there any specific allegations in there [Interim Dean Williams' letter to President Saunders] of misconduct by Dr. Depree?

A. Well, the allegations are that he recorded without permission, the allegations are that he engaged in disruptive behavior.

Q. You have allegations. What evidence do you have to support those allegations?

A. None here.

Q. Do you have any evidence anywhere to support those allegations?

A. I do not.

Q. Have you looked for any evidence to support those allegations?

A. No.

Q. Do you intend to look for evidence to support those allegations?

A. I don't, no.

Q. Are you not concerned that the possibility that a senior faculty member at this university could be falsely accused?

A. That is a concern.

Q. What action have you taken to determine if he has been falsely accused?

A. I asked for an investigation by an ombudsman.

Q. And that's all?

A. That's all.

Q. And was [ombudsman] Dr. Cannon able to confirm any of these statements?

A. He was not able to confirm them.

As you read the questions and President Saunders' answers, it's hard to believe anyone in a position of responsibility cares so little about having evidence and reasons for important decisions. Who holds her accountable for her unsupported decisions? Or do the people to whom she reports fail to apply reason and evidence to their decisions, too? If the answer is no one holds her accountable and no one at the top requires reason or evidence for decisions, just what is your hard-earned tenure really worth? All it takes is a little malicious gossip that has no basis in fact, and Dr. Saunders may order you from your classroom and offices while she tries to cook up a reason to fire you. What are A-level publications worth? What are outstanding teaching evaluations worth? If Dr. Saunders wants you gone, absolutely nothing.