

Message From President Bennett

Let's take a critical look at USM [President Bennett's](#) recent message (which is copied in full below).

Here's common knowledge:

$B = f(E)$: e.g., the greater the enrollment, the greater the budget.

For a school like USM, the better the quality of students, i.e., the higher the admission standards, the fewer the number of students enrolled, i.e., admitted.

So, assuming an increase in quality was in fact planned and in fact occurred, what didn't Bennett understand when he planned to increase the number of quality students? And by extension, what are President Bennett's plans for the future? Does he plan to make USM the Harvard of Mississippi and continue to increase admission standards and significantly reduce the student population? Is he going to outsmart Ol' Miss and Mississippi State to capture more of the declining population of students and quality students? Tell us your plan, Mr. Bennett, to shrink USM to the size of 10,000 students? 5,000 students? 2,500 students? What is the loss in revenues given these increases in the quality of students admitted? What happens to the faculty population and the curriculum? Or will you oversee the huge increase in tuition and fees to cover the decline in state support?

A personal note: I've observed calls for USM to "live within our means" as President Bennett dictates and every time I offered suggestions to actually "live within our means," everyone from the lowliest instructor to the President continued to spend like drunken sailors. Good luck this time, President Bennett. By the way, what cost cutting are you undertaking?

Back to President Bennett's "Message." Let's assume an increase in quality didn't in fact occur, that it was merely manipulating statistics, what is the cause of the decline in enrollment? Mr. Bennett is so quick to attach quality as an explanation for a decline in enrollment, he seems to be rationalizing the decline in enrollment rather than explaining its cause. ["...enrollment numbers for Fall 2014 are lower than we hoped even though we increased the quality of our student body by enrolling the most academically talented freshman class on record."]

Why has there been a decline in enrollment for the past couple years and not just this year, President Bennett?

One last comment: President Bennett promises he'll be "open and transparent." That language is dated. In current parlance and usage, claims of "openness and transparency" by administrators are widely viewed as a joke and means just the opposite of openness and transparency.

Message from the President: University Budget Update

Sept. 24, 2014

Dear Southern Miss Community:

In recent weeks, there have been several conversations about the University's **budget** and its relationship to enrollment numbers. If you attended or heard summaries from the Faculty Senate retreat on August 15, the Staff Council meeting on September 4, the faculty meeting hosted by the Provost on September 11, or the Council of Chairs meeting on September 15, you are aware that our enrollment numbers for Fall 2014 are lower than we hoped even though we increased the quality of our student body by enrolling the most academically talented freshman class on record. Given the final enrollment counts that became available on September 10, we now know the associated revenue loss, and I want to provide you with an update on the University's budget.

It is important to understand two significant factors that impact the financial environment in which we are operating:

1. Like most public universities across the nation, tuition has replaced state appropriations as our largest revenue source. Additionally, state appropriations for Mississippi's public universities are allocated almost exclusively on the basis of credit hour production. As a result, our two largest revenue streams are directly impacted by fluctuations in enrollment - both in the number of newly enrolled students and the success of currently enrolled students.
2. The market for recruiting in-state students is declining; there is an increased cost for recruiting out-of-state students; and the competition for all students has steadily increased.

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. In the future, the work of the University's Strategic Planning Council should provide strategic directions that can be used to guide investment decisions as we develop a long-term resource allocation model that will meet our strategic goals. In the near term, however, the University has initiated a process designed to help us align expenditures with revenue.

Last week and earlier this week, specific budget briefings continued at the Executive Cabinet, Vice President, and Dean levels so that each administrative manager has the opportunity to hear and understand more detail about the level of reduced spending we need to achieve in order to balance our budget. Each senior Executive Cabinet officer has been asked to provide a proposed plan for the current fiscal year (FY 2015) and the next fiscal year (FY 2016) based on the overall target spending reduction of \$6.79 million from the Educational and General budget. Each Vice President and Dean will have the opportunity to determine how reductions could be applied across their units while considering impacts to service levels and program delivery. The resulting proposals will be evaluated and discussed as a whole before final decisions are made and implemented.

In the coming days and weeks, Dr. Douglas Vinzant, our Vice President for Finance and Administration and chief financial officer, as well as other Vice Presidents and Deans, will be providing additional information and updates to the campus community to ensure that all parties understand the challenge we face and the process and steps we will take to ensure we bring spending in line with available revenue for both the current and next fiscal years.

As we address this financial challenge, our choices will not be easy, but they must be well thought out, and our ability to engage in productive dialogue will be critical. Throughout my tenure as President, I have been open and transparent in communicating with our campus

community. You can be assured that I intend to maintain that standard as we work through this process. As always, your support and efforts in making our University better are deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,

Rodney D. BennettPresident