

## “Missed the Boat”

### *The Saunders Administration’s Plan to Save USM’s Psychology Program*

Amid dealing with all of the budget cuts that the Martha Saunders administration of USM has been faced with for fiscal years 2011 and 2012, several USM psychology faculty have been courted by other U.S. institutions of higher education. It was only a few weeks ago, on 23-Jan-2011, that USMNEWS.net columnist Duane Cobb editorialized about Elizabeth Crisp’s article for *The Clarion Ledger* that pointed out that one-third of the USM psychology department held, at that time, offer letters from other universities. Since then, stories have circulated around the Hattiesburg-based campus that Saunders and her provost Robert Lyman have been mulling counteroffers in an effort to save USM’s psychology programs, which extend all the way through the doctorate level.

In his 28-Jan-2011 presentation to the USM faculty senate, Lyman confirmed stories indicating that a number of USM psychologists had received job offers since fall of 2010. According to Lyman, at least five psychology faculty held firm offers, and one other was expecting an offer, while yet a sixth member of the unit announced plans to retire after 2010-11. However, contrary to some reports, Lyman indicated that only one counteroffer had been made by USM, while the other four offers were not addressed by USM officials. With offers coming from places like Oakland University, Washington State University, and Georgia Southern University, Lyman reported to USM faculty senators that he expected the department to lose up to 25% of its current faculty ranks to other institutions and PERS retirement.

Lyman then explained to faculty senators that USM’s “first effort” to keep the psychology program from “crash[ing] and burn[ing]” is to (1) recognize that USM’s University Priorities Committee (UPC) had characterized psychology as a Tier 5 program of excellence, worthy of whatever forms of “enrichment” that the USM administration could provide, and to (2) allow this unit some flexibility, from a budgetary standpoint, in dealing with its current situation.<sup>1</sup> Lyman then reported that USM has begun using [CUPA surveys](#) to target mean salaries by discipline. Here, he noted that the target for new assistant professors of psychology is \$55,893 per year, well above what USM currently offers. Though replacing the 4 to 5 losses with permanent hires is out the question for fall 2011, Lyman noted that USM has committed \$50,000 (each) for news hires in psychology for fall 2012. As he explained, initial funding for this commitment comes from a vacant line in that department – one that also has an administrative stipend attached to it. Lyman also informed the senators that remaining monies from this vacant line will be used to provide a \$3,000 annual raise to each and every member of the psychology department who remains at USM after 2010-11. With 28 to 30 individuals currently in the department, USM is now committing \$69,000 to \$75,000 in *raise money* for USM’s psychologists.

As expected, Lyman’s announcement did not go over so well among faculty senators. One commented that he thinks that “[the USM] administration has really missed the boat” with this plan. Another warned that the idea was divisive, and would only serve to worsen morale on the already markedly demoralized USM campus. Lyman retorted that all departments at USM would soon be able to utilize a similar strategy in dealing with (1) low starting salaries (offers), (2) salary compression, and (3) salary inversion. Some senators, however, pointed out that “cannibalizing” open lines would not be possible in faculty-deprived areas of the institution. To one such comment, Lyman responded by telling a senator that he (Lyman) didn’t exactly know what to say, generating further discomfort among those senators in attendance.

Stay tuned to USMNEWS.net for more as this story unfolds further.

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<sup>1</sup> Lyman indicated that psychology is one of USM’s stronger departments, generating more PhDs than any other unit, while also boasting one of the top three enrollments at the B.S./B.A. level within the institution.