

No Payne, No Gain


Hiring of New Alumni Affairs ADEA Looks Sketchy . . . Again

The 7-Dec-2010 announcement that Jennifer Payne was [hired as](#) the USM alumni association's new associate director for external affairs came at a time when 29 tenured and tenure-track faculty at USM were operating on the assumption that they would not return to USM in 2011-12. That assumption was the correct one for them to make at that time, because the Martha Saunders administration had only weeks earlier delivered terminal notices to them in an effort to deal with an expected budget cut of \$15 million for FY2012. Thus, the news that USM's central administration was continuing to grow at a time when faculty were suffering was disheartening to many USM faculty and students.



The follow-up report at USMNEWS.net indicating that some [curious restructuring](#) had occurred in late Nov-2010 in USM's communications office only added to faculty concerns about the administration, given that the restructuring appears to have been essential to bringing Payne, the former centennial celebration coordinator, into the USM fold on a permanent, and presumably relatively highly-paid, basis. The details in this particular report pointed toward what sources refer to as [the traditional USM practice](#) of hiring relatives of influential locals to hold intermediate- and high-level administrative/staff positions at USM. This argument was deflected somewhat by a [letter from a USMNEWS.net reader](#) suggesting that Payne's connections to USM may not be as strong as required for the argument in the earlier USMNEWS.net reports to hold water. The anonymous reader/writer indicated that Payne's husband, Abb Payne, runs a home healthcare company in Hattiesburg, and that her father-in-law, W.A. Payne, is a retired supporter of USM, though not someone nearly as prominent as the members of the more well-known Payne family of USM backers.

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Recent information sent to USMNEWS.net reveals, however, that Jennifer Payne's connection to the Saunders administration is much stronger than described by the anonymous letter sent to USMNEWS.net a few weeks ago. According to [information sent to USMNEWS.net](#), Payne's husband, Abb, is an Executive Committee member of the USM Foundation's 2010-2011 Board of Directors. In addition, Abb Payne currently serves as the BoD-EC's Current Giving Committee Chair, as the link above and the insert below indicate.

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Clearly, membership on the USMF's BoD easily provides one with the clout necessary to influence decisions regarding the employment of middle-level executives/administrators at USM. Sources also say that, because his status in the community qualified him for a position on the USMF's BoD, Abb Payne was also likely in the position before 2010 of having his wife serve in the lower-level capacity of coordinating USM's centennial celebrations, a job she performed for *three years* leading up to, and including, 2010.