

# Out of the Shadows

A Practical Guide for Prospective USM Applicants/Students

High school students across Mississippi and beyond are navigating the college application process. Many potential USM applicants are likely circumspect with regard to the \$25 million in budget cuts that USM executives have effected since 2009, not to mention the additional cut of \$10 million to the institution's FY 2013 budget that is being talked about around the state. With 29 tenured and tenure-track faculty being eliminated after 2010-11, a loss coming on the heels of about 12 similar termination notices being delivered in Sept-2009, this Guide has been developed to provide prospective USM applicants/students with a set of five simple questions to put to USM administrators on their campus tours and interviews. Hopefully, these questions, and the answers given to them, will assist prospective applicants/students in making the best decisions for themselves, their families, and other supporters.

**1. How many students are majoring in my area of interest?** Don't neglect to ask this key question. If the number is single digits, and the major has nothing to do with plastics or rivers, streams, lakes, and/or oceans, then consider furthering your studies elsewhere. If the number is anywhere from 10-25, be on the lookout for other signs that may provide information on the viability of your planned major/degree at USM. Ask USM officials what the "cost per major" savings would be if the university happened to eliminate your major. Also, talk to faculty in the particular department in order to gauge their feelings about a potential cut. If you do happen to catch a glimpse of marked-up copies of vitae on their desks, that's a sign that a faculty migration is in the offing. Be wary of any positive prognostications you hear about that unit from that point onward. (Your parents can help you here – have them observe the professors' desks while you interview the professors.) One final word about this question – if your area of interest is history, psychology, political science or one of the other staples of a higher education, don't feel safe with regard to question #1 above. Since 2009, USM has slashed economics, Greek, Latin, philosophy, and religion. Most would categorize these as [staples](#) as well.

**2. Are USM administrators planning athletics expansion?** Currently, the USM administration transfers about \$1 million from the general education fund to the athletics department each year. On top of that, student tuition at USM includes [athletics fees](#) that result in several million dollars in transfers to athletics each year. If the number of athletics teams expands, those transfers will have to be increased, meaning that tuition will need to go up substantially. Possible new programs are men's and women's swimming. Currently, universities in states surrounding Mississippi support these two programs. USM already has a natatorium. Thus, it wouldn't be out of the realm to suggest that talks of expansion in these areas are already going on. Women's gymnastics is another sports program that many are surprised that USM doesn't currently support. Gymnastics meets can easily be held in either Reed Green Coliseum or the Payne Center. These are just a few of the possibilities. Ask your tour guide to put you in touch with athletics administrators so that you can get some feel for possible expansions like those mentioned above.

**3. Is president Saunders planning on upgrading the USM plane?** It has already been [reported](#) in many places that USM president Martha Saunders leases an airplane from the USM Foundation. USMNEWS.net has calculated that more than \$500,000 in general funds were spent in the first 17 months of this lease. That plane is a Beechcraft King Air – a twin prop that seats only a few passengers. In fact, the pilots

of that plane had to make two trips between Hattiesburg and Omaha, Nebraska, back in 2009 in order to transport all of the “guests” that president Saunders wanted to accompany her to the 2009 College World Series. The two-trips [scenario](#) meant that the guests were split into two groups, an outcome that was likely embarrassing for president Saunders. As a result, there is a chance that she is now considering a small jet or a much larger prop plane. If she leases one of these, an additional 29 or more tenured/tenure-track faculty may have to be eliminated. This eventuality brings us back to a familiar issue – the viability of your academic area of interest. Remember, *you have choices*. This is obviously a tough question to ask, and if it is asked of president Saunders, she might not react well to it. Given that possibility, have your parents ask this one if possible.

**4. If I come to USM and my major is cut, what happens next?** This is a must-ask question. In their answers to you, USM administrators will discuss the concept being referred to as “teaching out.” This began with the elimination of the business school’s economics programs in 2009-10. Former economics major, Zach Mansell, wrote a cogent piece in *The Student Printz* that [explains](#) “teaching out.” “Teaching out” simply allows students majoring in an area that has been eliminated to complete courses in some other area, and to have those course credits counted in place of the course credits on the curriculum sheet of the program that was terminated. As Mansell points out, however, you will not have a degree in your new area of competence, but you will have a degree in the area you wanted to specialize in, yet were prevented from doing so by the elimination of the program. You’ll have to judge for yourselves whether this is an appropriate outcome. (Barring further financial investment, you will be stuck with this outcome for the rest of your lives.)

**5. Are there any programs that are immune to elimination?** If you ask USM provost, Robert Lyman, this question, you will probably be responded to with – “What do you think we’re going to do, *not* teach history?” Maybe not . . . maybe so. It’s kind of [difficult to find](#) a good economics class on campus these days, and next year religion courses will likely be somewhat of a circus themselves. Despite what has been happening since 2009 in economics and religion, there are still some areas that are probably immune to cuts. Take mass communications and finance, for examples. The University Priorities Committee provided data indicating that these areas are bleeding the institution of resources. However, they were not cut by Saunders’ executive cabinet. Mass communications is Saunders’ own area, while finance is CoB dean Lance Nail’s specialty, facts that provide shelter to these programs. Thus, political science (CoAL dean Denise von Herrmann’s area) and a few other degree programs are probably safe as well. Do some research to discover those programs that are also on this list before coming to campus. If you’re picking one on this list, things will likely work out for you.

Of course, this guide could have contained so many more questions to advance your campus tours and interviews. Including them, however, would have defeated the aim of having a manageable guide. If you have any additional questions or concerns, or just want some clearer answers, contact the [high school students](#) at Saint Andrews Episcopal High School in Jackson, Mississippi. They’ll likely be happy to help you out.