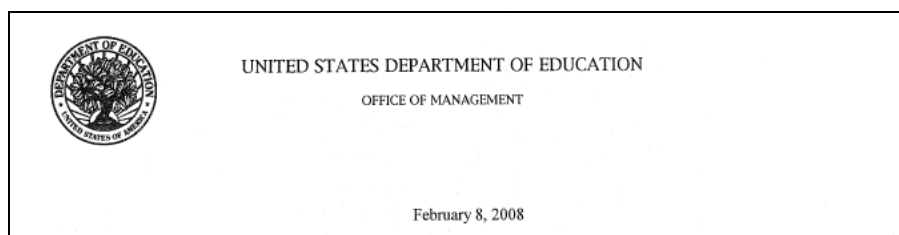


“Puffery”

Part I of a Look Back on Farhang Niroomand’s BIE Incubator

On 8 February 2008, reporters at USMNEWS.NET received a response from the U.S. Department of Education’s Maria-Teresa Cueva to a request, through 5 U.S.C. § 552 – *The Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA) – for documentation regarding former CoB Associate Dean, Farhang Niroomand’s, application for a Business and International Education (BIE) grant.



That DoE program, CFDA #84.153A, has provided Niroomand with tens of thousands of dollars throughout the years for use in setting up a business and international education “incubator,” a project that Niroomand has used time and again as a [self-promotion tool](#) within USM and beyond. This report, Part I in a series, looks at the “puffery” employed by Niroomand (in his grant application) in order to secure the DoE funds used to set up the BIE incubator at USM.¹



Farhang Niroomand

The first document presented here by USMNEWS.NET reporters is what DoE refers to as the **Standard Face Sheet** in the Application for Federal Education Assistance. That SFS, which is inserted at the top of the following page of this report, establishes that Niroomand applied for a BIE grant from the federal government in the fall of 2004. Niroomand’s project, entitled “From Local to Global: The Internationalization of Business in Mississippi,” was estimated (by Niroomand) to require \$96,754 in federal funding over the period running

¹ As long-time readers of USMNEWS.NET will recall, “puffery” is a term former USM economist, Charles Sawyer, used to describe EFIB Chair George Carter’s [dubious claim](#) to have been the [Interim MS IHL Commissioner](#) in 1987.

from 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2007. The program was, according to the SFS below, supported by Connie Wyldmon, a grants procurement official at USM.

Standard Face Sheet Page 1 of 1

Application for Federal Education Assistance

U.S. Department of Education
Form Approved
OMB No. 1875-0106
Exp. 02/28/2005

Applicant Information

1. Name and Address
 Legal Name: University of Southern Mississippi
 Address: 118 College Dr. #5157
 Hattiesburg, MS
 City State

2. Applicant's D-U-N-S Number: 623335775

3. Applicant's T-I-N: 646000818

4. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance #: 84 153A

5. Project Director: Farhang Niroomand
 Address: 118 College Dr. #5021
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406 - 0001
 City State ZIP Code + 4
 Tel #: (601) 266-5028 Fax #: (601) 266-5814
 E-Mail Address: FARHANG.NIROOMAND@USM.EDU

6. Novice Applicant: No

7. Is the applicant delinquent on any Federal debt? No
 (If "Yes," attach an explanation.)

8. Type of Applicant (Enter appropriate letter in the box.) G
 A. State G. Public College or University
 B. Local H. Non-Profit College or University
 C. Special District I. Non-Profit Organization
 D. Indian Tribe J. Private, Profit-Making Organization
 E. Individual K. Other (Specify)
 F. Independent School District

9. Type of Submission:
 --Application
 Non-Construction

10. Is application subject to review by Executive Order 12372 process?
 Yes (Date made available to the Executive Order 12372 process for review): 11/03/2004
 No (Provide Assurance #, if available):

11. Proposed Project Dates:
 Start Date: 07/01/2005 End Date: 06/30/2007

12. Are any research activities involving human subjects planned at any time during the proposed project period? No (Go to item 13.)
 12a. Are all the research activities proposed designated to be exempt from the regulations? No
 Yes (Provide Exemption(s) #):

13. Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project:
 From Local to Global: The Internationalization of Business in Mississippi

Estimated Funding		Authorized Representative Information	
14a. Federal	\$ 96,754 .00	15. To the best of my knowledge and belief, all data in this preapplication/application are true and correct. The document has been duly authorized by the governing body of the applicant and the applicant will comply with the attached assurances if the assistance is awarded. a. Typed Name of Authorized Representative Connie V Wyldmon b. Title Director, SPA c. Tel #: (601) 266-4119 Fax #: (601) 266-4312 d. E-Mail Address: CONNIE.WYLDMON@USM.EDU e. Signature of Authorized Representative	
b. Applicant	\$ (b)(4)		
c. State	\$		
d. Local	\$		
e. Other	\$		
f. Program Income	\$		
g. TOTAL	\$		

REV. 11/12/99 ED 424

http://e-grants.ed.gov/e-App/viewforms/eaF424v2_View.asp?PRAwardNo=P153A050021... 1/24/2008

Next, we turn to Niroomand's statement "in Satisfaction of Section 427 of GEPA," which is meant to ensure equitable access/participation of "underrepresented groups in international business." To this request Niroomand focuses on the involvement of assistant professor of management, Jennifer Sequeira, who Niroomand refers to (see below) as "a female African-American faculty member" in the CoB. According to sources, Sequeira is a human resources faculty who resides in USM's Department of Management and Marketing. The IB faculty are instead housed in the CoB's Department of Economics, Finance and International Business, Niroomand's home department. It is interesting that Niroomand sought to use Sequeira's minority status to help in his desire to fulfill Section 427 requirements, especially given

that Niroomand would later thwart the EFIB's attempt to hire Phyllis Keys, another African-American female. As long-time readers of USMNEWS.NET are aware, Niroomand presided over a CoB administrative offer of only \$85,000 to Keys, who (understandably) turned down the offer. Shortly thereafter Niroomand offered two white males – Stephen Haggard and Matthew Hood – \$97,000 to begin their EFIB finance careers.

Satisfaction to Section 427 of GEPA

The University of Southern Mississippi is committed to ensuring equitable access to and participation in its federally assisted programs for students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs. USM has been proactive in removing the GEPA barriers which can impede equal access or participation, including gender, race, national origin, color, disability, and age. The University will continue to identify and remove such barriers, especially those affecting African- Americans and Americans with disabilities, in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Our proposed projects will ensure equitable access and participation of those underrepresented groups in international business as highlighted by Section 427 of GEPA. Our faculty team includes a female African-American faculty member, Dr. Jennifer Sequeira, whose research focuses on diversity in organizations, social capital, and topics pertaining to immigrant, minority, and women entrepreneurs. The faculty involved with the proposed projects also represents members with different country of origins such as China, Iran and Trinidad. Finally, as mentioned in the part of operation plan, once the reputation of the IBIT certificate program is established, the curriculum will be moved online so that people with disabilities or elderly people with difficulty of transportation are able to participate in our programs.

The BIE Narrative Abstract provided by Niroomand to DoE officials contained some whopping examples of puffery. In it, Niroomand states that his “IT incubator . . . can equip [business enterprises in Mississippi] with the know-how and skills critical” to globalizing their businesses. This is a subject Niroomand knows little-to-nothing about. Next, Niroomand describes to DoE officials how the “nationally renowned faculty team of IB and information management at [USM]” has the “ability and expertise to improve” the functioning of the targeted Mississippi business entities. Finally, by counting only international business and information management faculty among the “renowned faculty team” in the CoB, Niroomand’s BIE Narrative Abstract essentially excludes Sequeira from those top-notch CoBers who will be making the BIE incubator the success Niroomand hopes it is to become. As with the other documents, the BIE Narrative Abstract is inserted in this report (at the top of the page below).

BIE Narrative 2004

ABSTRACT

Recent trade statistics reveal that the exporting performance of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Mississippi was ranked very low nationally (#46 out of 50 states in the United States), although Mississippi boasts one of the largest percent of SMEs in all businesses (about 97%) in the nation. In contrast to the lackluster exporting growth by SMEs in Mississippi, SMEs in the nation as a whole have been the major driver for the recent growth in U.S. exports. One principle reason leading to this surge of exports by SMEs is the development of information technology (IT), which has significantly reduced the communication costs for international transactions to match buyers and sellers over long distances. Modern day IT, such as Internet-based tools, also helps SMEs in introducing their products/services to customers who are not capable of being reached through the use of more traditional channels. The shrinking of the globe, through the improvement of communication and transportation technology, has dramatically changed the landscape of global business.

Given the importance of IT and e-business for international business (IB) today, we propose to create an IT-incubator that can equip SMEs in Mississippi with the know-how and skills critical to fulfilling this export function. With our nationally renowned faculty team in IB and information management at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), we have the ability and expertise to improve the exporting performance of SMEs in Mississippi through the IT incubator. By providing workshops and step-by-step instructions for local SMEs, we will be able to eventually develop an IT certificate program for long-term IB education in the state. Finally, the IT incubator will help us establish an internship program for USM students majoring in IB so that a permanent connection between USM and the SMEs is established.

In the “Extent of Need of [the] Project,” which is inserted below, Niroomand uses the puffery catchword for CoB administrators – “synergy.”

I. EXTENT OF NEED OF PROJECT

How section 611 Needs are addressed by this project?

The proposed grant for creating an international business IT incubator (IBITI), international business IT certificate (IBITC), and international business IT internship (IBITint) fits strongly into the mission of 611(b). The proposed grant will add capacity in the understanding of how to efficiently use IT infrastructure to better promote international business by local businesses, students, and faculty. Further, the grant creates a strong synergy between the University and the business community by rapidly developing an IT incubator based on existing resources in the state and nation for SMEs development. The IBITI, IBITC, and IBITint all fit well into 611(b) due to the fact that they enhance international education and training for businesses at various stages of development.

According to Niroomand, the proposed BIE incubator will create “a strong synergy between [USM] and the business community.” However, as Niroomand explains to the DoE, the advantages of this synergy are realized only if the incubator is developed “rapidly.” One must suppose that another institution, Ole Miss perhaps, has an incubator they wish to bring on line. In any event, the moral of this part of the story is that, in the CoB at least, “synergy” = “puffery.”

In the next passage, we are able to see how far Niroomand is willing to go with his puffery of CoB faculty quality in order to secure the DoE funds for a BIE incubator. According to Niroomand (see below), he will “pool [the CoB’s] outstanding faculty from International Business, Information Management, and Marketing” to serve in the incubator.

At USM, we are able to pool our outstanding faculty from International Business, Information Management, and Marketing to provide workshops and training programs to SMEs. These workshops and training programs will eventually become an international business certificate so that not just the existing firms, but also those who are considering starting businesses in the future will have a place to begin.

Moreover, USM has the oldest International Business program in the State of Mississippi. About 70-80 students currently major in IB, and there is an increasing trend for students who are interested in the IB program. We also have more than 180 students in a well-established Management Information Systems program in which many faculty members have experience in applying e-business-related technologies in the real world settings. In addition, we have a group of international faculty who maintain close relationships with businesses in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce⁴, 86 percent of U.S. exporters to China were SMEs in 2001, and the number of SMEs exporting to China surged by 310 percent since 1992. In addition, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan were the 7th, 8th, and 10th largest foreign market for SMEs in 2001. Therefore, we are able to develop an IBITC program with a regional focus on the fastest growing market in the world, the great Chinese market, for SMEs in Mississippi.

Niroomand also states that USM has the “oldest International Business program in the State of Mississippi.” The operative word is “program,” as the CoB’s IB major is relatively new. Also, the IB program at Ole Miss is vastly more resource-endowed than is the CoB’s, and, according to some sources, UM’s is superior as well (in terms of quality). Finally, Niroomand states that “many [MIS] faculty members have experience in applying e-business-related technologies in real work settings.” USM’s business school doesn’t even have *many* MIS faculty, so Niroomand’s claim falls apart at the outset.

Arguably the most entertaining examples of puffery in Niroomand's application involve his descriptions of the "key [faculty] personnel" who will be involved in the BIE incubator project. That section of the SFS is set up by the following introduction from Niroomand:

III. QUALITY OF KEY PERSONNEL

The faculty of the College of Business at USM bring years of experience working in international business and information technology. In addition, our faculty team represents a diverse group of racial and ethnic minorities, and women who have traditionally been under represented. The seven faculty members who will be involved with the proposed project include one African-American and one Asian female. Below is the description of the faculty members and our partner members participating in the IBITI, IBITC, and IBITint. Detailed curricular vitae of the faculty members are provided in the Appendix.

The first passenger on the puffery train is Niroomand himself:

Project Director

Farhang Niroomand, Ph.D. – 10% of time spent on projects

Dr. Niroomand is the Associate Dean of the College of Business and professor of Economics and International Business. Dr. Niroomand has been at USM since 1984 after earning his Ph.D. from Michigan State in 1983. His teaching experience includes both undergraduate and graduate classes in international trade and finance at Michigan State University, the University of Connecticut, and the University of Southern Mississippi. Moreover, Dr. Niroomand has numerous accomplishments in the areas of teaching, research and service. His teaching performance is outstanding and has been recognized through the coveted BellSouth Outstanding Faculty Award. Dr. Niroomand is a two-time recipient of the University of Southern Mississippi's Excellence in Teaching Award. He has served as faculty advisor for Omicron Delta Epsilon (International Honor Society in Economics) for ten years as well as the student academic advisor for the international business program. The tremendous growth in the College of Business' international business program can be attributed to a great extent to the untiring

His (partial) self-description above indicates that:

- he has "numerous accomplishments" in teaching, research and service
- his teaching has recognized through "the coveted BellSouth Outstanding Faculty Award"

- Niroomand serves (for past 10 years) as the ODE faculty advisor as well as academic advisor for the IB program

The first item above is bread-and-butter CoB administrator puffery. As for the second item, Niroomand is stating that an award that has been [politicized](#) by CoB administrators is actually “coveted” by CoB faculty. Finally, sources tell USMNEWS.NET reporters that Niroomand’s third claim is [false](#) on both counts: former CoB economist Franklin Mixon was the ODE faculty advisor in 2004, and the CoB’s office of Undergraduate Services advises students in the IB program, and has been doing so since the late 1990s.

Notice how the partial insert above ends with something about “[untiring](#)” (great puffery term) efforts from someone in building the IB program in the CoB. Who was that?

efforts of Dr. Niroomand. Furthermore, he has been instrumental in the transition at the University of Southern Mississippi in the formation and successful solidification of the new College of Business.

Dr. Niroomand's research record is just as impressive. His national and international reputation is demonstrated by the appearance of his articles in reputable international journals in Germany, Switzerland, Korea, Great Britain, and Spain; his regular participation in international conferences; and his presentation at universities in Spain, Poland, Iran, and Japan.

Active in providing service to his profession and community, Dr. Niroomand has served on various committees at the departmental, college and university levels. Professionally, his service as coordinator, moderator, and discussant at numerous national and international conferences, as a manuscript and textbook reviewer, and as a seminar and workshop leader indicates his enthusiasm and dedication to his work in international business. Dr. Niroomand has been actively involved in the implementation of the former CBA's Network Project Phase I and II, which were funded by the USDE, Title VI-B International Business Programs. He served as seminar leader for the Seminar Series in International Business Program 1991-1993 and 1994-1996. As coordinator of the capstone session he was actively engaged with the business community in selecting internationally experienced businessmen and businesswomen for participation as presenters for the series.

In addition to his work in implementing the above programs funded by USDE, he was an active participant in the BIE Project Director's meetings in Miami, Brussels, Prague, Monterrey, and Calgary. Dr. Niroomand is a member of the Academy of International Business (AIB) and attends AIB meetings on a regular basis. Additionally, Dr. Niroomand has traveled extensively to many parts of the world. Over the past ten years, he has served as professor of record for the

As the completed text above reveals, that person was none other than Niroomand. Niroomand was the key figure in what he calls “the successful solidification” of the **new** College of Business. And we thought that ordeal was only about a name change (from CBED to CoB). Apparently not so.

As Niroomand indicates, [his research](#) is just as impressive as his invention of USM's College of Business. Niroomand's "national and international" [reputation](#) is demonstrated by "the appearance of" his articles in journals from countries all over the globe . . . and in his [participation](#) at conferences all around the world . . . and in his presentations at various worldly universities. Somehow through it all Niroomand forgot to mention his [three](#) mysterious and successive "Academic Visits" to Atlanta, Georgia.



Does Niroomand (far left) look like the academic superstar he says he is?

To wrap up Part I, note that Niroomand states that he has been "active" in "providing service to his . . . community," yet he fails to provide any examples. Maybe in the next report we'll learn that Niroomand thought of the "Festival of Swans" fundraiser idea implemented by the Area Development Partnership, and that shortly after Hurricane Katrina devastated south Mississippi, he, and he alone, diverted a FEMA 18-wheeler packed with melting ice to the water-deprived Sunrise Community outside of Petal.