

# Saunders' Communications Mechanics

Michael Forster's Recent Blog Reveals much to those who are Paying Attention

by Victoria Tyler

With its “yes man” tone, the 31-October-2010 [blog](#) from College of Health dean Michael Forster entitled, “Fasten your seat belt, please,” has me humming the tune to Paula Cole’s “Where Have All the Cowboys Gone?” As one of the USM central execs who blogs, several of us have been following, with much interest, Forster’s take on the past two years of news regarding USM. His most recent words really reveal a lot about Forster’s ideology vis-à-vis university governance. First and foremost is Forster’s take on [the recent](#) Staff Town Hall Meeting – “. . . our leader [Saunders] showed reassuring empathy for anxious staff, but was compelled to plead for patience in the face of frightening budget uncertainties.” So, to borrow an infamous phrase, *Saunders feels your (staff) pain*. Would that it were true, but we’ve [since learned](#) that in the weekend leading up to the 26-Oct-2010 Staff Town Hall that Forster’s *empathetic leader* (1) flipped the coin to start the Hattiesburg-Oak Grove football game, (2) finished a book chapter (many faculty no longer have time to produce articles/book chapters, thanks to all of the “justification of their USM existence” work Saunders continually requires of them), and (3) travelled south to enjoy the New Orleans Saints football game. To top it all off, she told the world about her wonderful weekend in a blog that ended – “Life is good.”

Forster concludes his own little Saunders PR blog by providing his take on the 29-Oct-2010 [graffiti incident](#), wherein some USM students chalked and (water-soluble) shoe polished their way across campus spreading their “Impeach Saunders” opinion. Of course, Saunders and her university police force are referring to the incident as “vandalism,” though without addressing what they would all be saying if the graffiti [had read](#), “Congratulations on 4 more years, President Saunders!” Surely what is now called “vandalism” would have then been referred to as “spontaneous student satisfaction,” or something of the kind. Remember, this is the same president who tells those who will listen, including the captive staff at the Town Hall, that all of the metrics that matter, including *student satisfaction*, are up (never mind the “Impeach Saunders” graffiti). Forster goes further than the USM police in defending Saunders’ honor by characterizing last week’s graffiti episode as “[a] sophomoric – nay, juvenile, if not infantile – spasm of campus vandalism . . .” Let’s not cut Forster off here – he goes on to conclude that “[c]learly, we’ve failed to instruct our students in either the practice or the ethics of effective protest!”

The only thing clear about this episode now is that we’re all fortunate Forster wasn’t mingling amongst our Founding Fathers back in 1776, else he would’ve blogged about those miscreants who just signed a reckless, not to mention unethical, Declaration. Yes, Saunders is doing her best to keep her communications machinery up and running, and Forster appears to be one of her most energetic mechanics. He derides USM students’ ethics, yet himself forgets that his “empathetic leader” – the same president who signed a [\\$2 million airplane lease](#) during the worst recession since the Great Depression – just slashed and burned the students’ philosophy department, which is home to their ethics educators/scholars. Long-time USM faculty and USMNEWS.net readers likely recall that all of the loud-mouthed supporters of former USM president Shelby Thames once ranted and raved about the inmates running the asylum over at USM. After checking out some of these administrators’ blogs, I’m starting to wonder if the Thames supporters were on to something after all.