

Saunders Quiet, Students Angry

Latest Race Controversy at USM Stirring Debate, Thought

As Mary Margaret Halford's 15-November-2011 [report for](#) *The Student Printz* entitled "Students on probation after blackface incident" points out, some USM students are angry about events involving Phi Mu sorority members attending an off-campus party in blackface, an attempt to portray cast members of the retired television sitcom, *The Cosby Show*. One of those is senior news-editorial major Amber Grubbs, who spoke with Halford:

"Whenever you live in a region that can be racially hostile, you have to take certain things into consideration. Blackface is still considered offensive by many people. You can't go poking the flames of racism and hope that nothing happens."

Halford also reports that some students, such as junior criminal justice major Kirsti Potts, were disturbed that the episode has also been picked up by national news outlets like *The Washington Post*. As Potts told Halford,

"People think the South is so racist because of incidents like this. There are no African-American girls in their sorority. Why would I be surprised?"

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Potts' comments not only address the offensive nature of the local Phi Mu episode, they also shine some light on the idea that USM's sorority system is organized largely along racial lines, yet another topic for national news outlets to focus on as they visit Hattiesburg in order to investigate this latest race scandal.



Martha Saunders

Meanwhile, USM president Martha Saunders [has been virtually silent](#) on this scandal, leaving her administration's position on the matter to be articulated by USM vice president for student affairs, Joe Paul, and USM dean of students, Eddie Holloway. Holloway [has spoken very critically](#) of the six Phi Mu members and their actions related to this episode, stating that the six Phi Mu sisters "clear[ly] . . . had little cultural awareness or competency." Paul has also spoken out against the Phi Mu sisters, though less vigorously.