

Less than a year ago, usmnews.net received and published the following letter to the editor. For those who may not remember, Shirley Sherrod was forced to resign from her position as Georgia State Director of Rural Development for the United States Department of Agriculture. (For additional details, please see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resignation\\_of\\_Shirley\\_Sherrod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resignation_of_Shirley_Sherrod))

With the Saunders' administration having forced between three and six faculty from their classrooms, this academic year alone, the author has contacted usmnews.net and asked that his letter to the editor be republished. The request was accompanied by the following comment: "I would guess that the faculty who found themselves summarily punished, with no due process, never thought it could happen to them. But it has. Freedom of speech and tenure have provided little or no protection. Who is next on Saunders' execution block?"

*Dear usmnews.net,*

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This morning, as I watched the Sunday news reports concerning Shirley Sherrod, former director of rural development in Georgia, the comments about how badly Ms. Sherrod's forced resignation were handled were troubling, particularly since it so closely parallels the manner in which the editor of this news blog was forced out of his classroom. Each of the news programs repeatedly raised the same issues:

An employee disciplined without the courtesy of being asked his/her side of the issue

Failure to review a recording which would have disproved the allegations underpinning the demand for termination of employment

A rush to judgment in an atmosphere of hysteria

Failure to review readily available materials.

As reporters in the Sherrod matter repeatedly stated, "facts do matter." A consistent refrain among the reporters was "I would like to think my boss would have shown me the courtesy of talking to me face to face;" "why the rush to judgment?" However, ultimately, Ms. Sherrod's bosses did take time to review the records, talk to her, and try to repair the damage.

Dr. Saunders, however, continued to insist on ignoring facts and punish an employee based on false claims. Dr. Saunders has proved that she is not interested in facts. As of April 2010, she admitted she hadn't shown Dr. DePree the courtesy of talking to him. She admitted that after three years she did not check underlying records, including the sworn testimony of the faculty that demonstrated that their claims were false, listen to a recording of actual events, or determine

if there was even one bit of evidence against Dr. DePree. And, I can't help but think that the same thing could happen to me or any other faculty.

While faculty and programs are being eliminated, Dr. Saunders wastes millions of dollars to punish the editor of usmnews.net. She wastes money so that she can have a private plane. She wastes hundreds of thousands of dollar to upgrade the bedroom area of the presidential mansion. Dr. Saunders has presided over an exploding number of overpaid administrators; and money is no object when it comes to paying her athletic hires.

Dr. Saunders is not only an embarrassment; she is an unmitigated disaster for the University of Southern Mississippi. It is long past time that the IHL replace Dr. Saunders. If the University is to recover from its fourth tier status, hire and retain outstanding faculty, build successful colleges and programs, it must be with a president who is more interested in building the future of the University than public relations and self-aggrandizement.

Name withheld by request