

Shaking the Trees on USM's Budget Crisis

If you're searching around for more news about the USM budget crisis, you're not likely to find any on the USM Faculty Senate's [homepage](#). That's a real shame because the FS represents the faculty and is in a position to know more than the average USM constituent about what is going on around the USM campuses. One would think that there would be some sort of flashing bulletin(s) there, especially given that the FS felt the need to hold an emergency meeting on 22-July-09 to discuss the crisis. Apparently, this is wishful thinking.

Now, a number of USM faculty are criticizing the Martha Saunders administration's lack of transparency, and considering past extravagances, such as Saunders' decision to lease a twin turbo prop airplane, in a new light. Today, *The Hattiesburg American's* editor [got in on the action](#) with an editorial entitled "Coming months key to life of universities." In it, *THA's* editor stated "[o]ur only hope is that university leaders will maintain a transparent process that keeps all faculty and staff up to date on what is happening and remain open to suggestions." That editorial concluded by saying that the next several months could be crucial to the life of USM. (Ya think?)

THA higher education reporter Ed Kemp has certainly been doing his job, following the breaking events with a two-part piece (on 23-July-09 and 24-July-09) entitled "USM prepares for budget cuts." As reported by Kemp and by reporters here at USMNEWS.net, USM's deans are each searching for ways to cut \$2 million from their respective annual budgets. Kemp's most recent [installment](#) lays out the plan settled on by the CoAL's Denise von Herrmann. Her plan includes the cuts listed in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1		
CoAL Budget Cut of \$2 Million by Category		
Budget Item Cut	\$ Cut	Cumulative \$ Cut
Vacant Lines	\$700,000	\$ 700,000
Performances	\$500,000	\$1,200,000
Scholarships	\$350,000	\$1,550,000
7 Positions	\$442,500	\$1,992,500

According to what von Herrmann told Kemp, the 7 positions shown above come from the elimination of two departments that were not part of the core curriculum and that did not impact remaining degree programs. Among these 7 positions, however, are some tenured faculty members. The \$700,000 in line one of Table 1 above reportedly comes from 15 vacant faculty lines.

According to Kemp, IHL rules require that any tenured faculty targeted for termination must be notified by 1-September-09 in order to be placed on terminal contracts for 2010-11 and off the USM payroll by the start of 2011-12. If, however, tenured positions are cut prematurely, USM officials have until 30-June-10 to revoke those decisions and have the faculty back in place for 2010-11 and thereafter, should those faculty choose to stick with USM. USM Faculty Senators Amy Young and Michael DeArmey argue, however, that many of these faculty will be out of the loop should a revocation come at some later date. Young asked Kemp "[h]ow many people are going to be sitting around for that?" while DeArmey responded with "They're going to be gone. They're going to have houses on the market . . . [and] their vitas out there."

DeArmey's concerns sound reasonable, though things may not be so simple. USMNEWS.net reporters have been following the "houses on the market" situations facing former CoB faculty Harold Doty (MGT) and John Clark (FIN). Doty, the former CoB dean (2003-07) who recently (early May-09) took the same position with the University of Texas – Tyler, put his Canebrake home on the local real estate market almost three months ago. His home still sits there today (at its original price of \$364,000). Clark informed CoB officials about a month later of his intention to join the University of Missouri – Kansas City, his previous employer. Though Clark's Woodstone home has been on the Hattiesburg real estate market less time than Doty's has been there, Clark's home has yet to sell despite a price reduction (from the lower \$300,000s to the upper \$200,000s) after just a few short weeks of inactivity. Each of these former CoBers earned well over \$100,000 per year at USM, a fact that may afford "carrying" two mortgages for some period.¹ How many other USM faculty can make such a sacrifice?

¹ For some indication of how CoB faculty might be able to weather such a storm, readers may want to consult the earlier USMNEWS.net report entitled [CoB Castles](#). Though some of the data there are dated, much of it remains relevant. In the Doty and Clark cases, some information about potential capital gains/losses is gleaned.

The 1-Sept-09 deadline for terminating tenured faculty is only about 5 weeks away now. That means the next month or so will be a rocky ride for all members of the USM family.