

## Special Report

### All about the Numbers

#### A Re-Examination of USM's Enrollment Drop of Fall 2007

The recent 2007 (12-Sept and 13-Sept) reports of USM's enrollment decline have produced data that allow for an interesting comparison in the way the episode is being described. Table 1 below compares the way USM's Public Relations officials, the Mississippi IHL, and *The Hattiesburg American* are describing the situation:

**Table 1**  
**3 Ways to Tell a Story: USM's Fall 2007 Enrollment Decline**

<b>Enrollment Reporting Period</b>	<b>USM Public Relations</b>	<b>MS IHL</b>	<b><i>The Hattiesburg American</i></b>
Fall 2007	15,538	14,592	14,592
Fall 2006	15,676	14,777	> 15,000
Change from F06 to F07	-138	-185	-409 (see text)
%-Change from F06 to F07	-0.9%	-1.3%	-2.7% (see text)
Reporting Technique Used:	“duplicated headcount”	“unduplicated headcount”	“unduplicated headcount” & published reports

**Notes:** The “duplicated headcount” method used by USM's PR department counts some USM students twice. For more on the USM PR's method/data, see [USM Public Relations Presser on Fall 2007 Enrollment Decline](#). For the IHL's press release, see [IHL Presser on Fall 2007 MS IHL Enrollments](#). Finally, for a look at *The Hattiesburg American*'s reporting on USM's enrollment decline, see ["USM sees enrollment decrease"](#).

The results found using the various reporting methods are strikingly different. The Public Relations group at USM shows a Fall 2007 enrollment of 15,538 using the “duplicated headcount” method – a figure that is 946 “students” more (or 6.5% more) than the enrollment figure from the Mississippi IHL of 14,592. However, the IHL uses the “unduplicated headcount” method. Of course, USM officials would not want the public to think that there are any issues/problems brewing on campus, so the “duplicated headcount” method works best for them. The IHL, which manages eight public institutions, has broader interests than USM officials. The “unduplicated headcount” method is most appropriate for the IHL, and across all eight public universities “total enrollment” is up 859 students, or 1.2 percent. Finally, the public expenditures-hawking readers of *The Hattiesburg American* have their own perspective. *THA*'s data, which supplements the “unduplicated headcount” figures from the IHL, indicates that USM's enrollment has fallen by at least 2.7 percent (409 students), if not more, between Fall 2006 and Fall 2007. If one uses a figure like 15,499 to represent the “more than 15,000” students claim in *THA*, then USM's enrollment may have fallen by 5.9 percent (907 students) from Fall 2006 to Fall 2007.

Also part of this story is the fact that new USM President Martha Saunders told Hattiesburg Rotarians in early Aug-07 that USM's enrollment was up by 10 percent. Thus, Saunders, a *communications* professor by training, missed on the high side with her prediction by anywhere from 11.3 to 12.7 percentage points.