

Special Report

Any Way You Slice It

Russ Willis' New Title and Salary Contributing to Malaise at USM

When (in May-2010) USM chief financial officer Joe Morgan [announced his impending resignation](#), the USM community was shocked. There were no signs indicating that such a move was coming. When USM president Martha Saunders indicated that on 1-Sept-2010, one day after Morgan's resignation would become effective, USM human resources director Russ Willis *would add the title* of USM's interim-CFO, the initial shock was ratcheted up again. Then, when Willis assumed the additional title, [his salary rose](#) from \$93,450 to \$120,000 per year. This represents an increase of 28.4%.

Shortly after 1-Sept-2010, USM officials began referring to Willis as interim-vice president of administrative affairs, *not* interim-CFO. USMNEWS.net [broke the story](#) about Willis' supposed title change in a **breaking news** report about Saunders' four-year contract extension. The *supposed* title change became [an official title change](#) with USM's Feb-2011 [announcement](#) that Willis would become permanent VPAA on 1-July-2011. By the time the Mississippi IHL's Feb-2011 monthly meeting was over, Willis' USM salary was pushed up to \$185,000, effective 1-July-2011.

Table 1 - Russ Willis' Christmases in Sept-2010 and July-2011

Date	Salary	\$ Raise	% Raise
31-Aug-2010	\$93,450	--	--
1-Sept-2010	\$120,000	\$26,550	28.4%
1-July-2011	\$185,000	\$65,000	54.2%

The July-2011 raise coming to Willis amounts to a 54.2% increase from his current salary of \$120,000. That makes two raises in 10 months for Willis, one of 28.4% (\$26,550) and the other at 54.2% (\$65,000), as shown in Table 1 above. Willis' total raise of \$91,550 represents **an increase of 98%** from his 31-Aug-2010 position as human resources director, which paid \$93,450 per year. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Willis' 10-months of advancement between 31-Aug-2010 and 1-July-2011 is unconscionable, any way you slice it, given USM's current financial difficulties, which have been ongoing since 2009. To sources at least, the current dismal morale situation on campus makes perfect sense.