

“The magic number is four.”

USM President Rodney Bennett

The Hattiesburg American continues its role as head cheerleader for USM and its administration with a [rather bizarre](#) recent opinion piece, “Bennett has solid vision for USM.”

“Bennett visited with the Hattiesburg American editorial board on Wednesday, and we couldn’t have been more impressed with Southern Miss’ 10th president....Bennett’s desire for students to graduate in four years made a big impression. It shows that his focus is truly on students and their education. ‘We need to make sure that students move on from year one to year two on towards graduation in four years. I really want our community to have a conversation about four years in college, not this idea of six years or seven years or any number,” he explained. “The magic number is four.”

THA appears to accept Bennett’s representation, any representation, without a single question to delve into details. (Which raises another question, is this responsible behavior from the perspective of a reputable news organization?)

Here are a few facts of which the Hattiesburg American editorial board should have been well aware:

Many, if not most, of USM’s students have to work. (USM is not a school of rich kids.)

Students fail classes.

Students drop out of classes.

Students change majors.

Students have family problems that interrupt their education.

Students transfer from other schools and not all credits transfer.

No matter what Bennett wishes or plans, he can’t wish away or plan away those facts. No hopes, wishes, or USM presidential plan can change the facts. What Bennett actually can do to be successful meeting his “magic number four plan” is “encourage” faculty to give away grades and diplomas. Since USM has been firmly mired in the fourth tier for many years, he may wonder if it really makes any difference.

If President Bennett’s “magic number 4” plan isn’t enough nonsense, consider the Hattiesburg American’s conclusion:

“Southern Miss has experienced some rocky times during the past several years, but — with Bennett at the helm — we feel the university’s future is bright.”

Isn’t that what *THA* dutifully reported about Martha Saunders? Now, apparently even *THA* has come to see Saunders’ stint as USM president didn’t pan out as too “bright” after all.