

USM Chief Financial Officers Come and Go As Often As USM Presidents

The University of The Banana Republic?

USM's new President, Rodney Bennett, has named his paramount task to find a new CFO. Why is the selection of another new CFO so important?

Last week we took a look at an example of USM's recent history of unexpected departures of CFOs: 'The Morgan Resignation'--Does Something Smell?. The next CFO, Russ Willis, lasted for a shorter time than did Morgan. Of course, there were no financial problems officially reported. Then again, when has the IHL, USM president, or any official ever revealed anything beyond public relations blather?

[Click here](#) for the usmnews.net report pictured below from our archives about former-CFO Russ Willis or run a search on usmnews.net's custom Google® search box:

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Willis Out, Driskell In . . . Even Deeper

HATTIESBURG – USM vice president for administrative affairs Russ Willis communicated with USM faculty and staff (via e-mail) late on 23-Jan-2012 (4:23 pm) about his recent decision to leave the VPAA position for another in the USM Foundation. According to Willis, this transition will be completed/effective on 1-Feb-2012, just one week from now. Willis' e-mail communique is inserted below:

From: all-factstaff-bounces@usm.edu [mailto:all-factstaff-bounces@usm.edu] On Behalf Of USM Mailout
Sent: Monday, January 23, 2012 4:23 PM
To: all-factstaff@usm.edu; all-students@usm.edu
Subject: [All-factstaff] Vice President for Administrative Affairs Transitioning to USM Foundation February 1

Effective February 1, 2012, I will be transitioning from the position of Vice President for Administrative Affairs to enter a role with the University Foundation. I truly appreciate my time both as the Vice President for Administrative Affairs and Director of Human Resources, and I appreciate the support of Dr. Saunders and the entire University community. I made this decision only after careful consideration over an extended period of time, and have come to the conclusion that the vice president's role would be better served at this time by a person who could see a large number of exciting but complex building projects to fruition. I look forward to working with the University Foundation as its Assistant Director for Fundraising Initiatives and Planned Giving, and I wish my interim replacement Chad Driskell and my permanent replacement the best of luck.

Russ Willis

According to Willis, the decision to move to the USMF was made “. . . only after careful consideration over an extended period of time . . .” Willis curiously added that he “. . . ha[s] come to the conclusion that the vice president's role would be better served . . . by a person who could see a large number of exciting but complex building projects to fruition.” Sources, as well as readers who have contacted USMNEWS.net about this story, characterize this comment by Willis as strange. Going further, the general consensus is that Willis' comment about the VPAA's role is a slap at, or an indictment of, the Martha Saunders administration of USM.



Russ Willis

Martha Saunders

The Saunders administration's take on Willis' decision [came via](#) Van Arnold's 23-Jan-2012 presser. In it, as in Willis' e-mail, Saunders explains that Willis is leaving the VPAA post to assume the role of assistant director for fundraising initiatives and planned giving in the USMF,