

USM English Faculty 'Jaded' Heading into 2010-11

Fallout from Saunders Administration's Actions Regarding Center for Writers Continues

Though USM's liberal arts dean Denise von Herrmann argues that USM doesn't actually have a creative writing center, faculty morale continues to sink as a result of the Martha Saunders administration's decision to sever employment ties with the USM Center for Writers director Frederick Barthelme. Barthelme, a nationally acclaimed author of almost 20 books, has departed USM, along with Rie Fortenberry, the editor of the CfW's *Mississippi Review*. Ed Kemp, the higher education reporter for *The Hattiesburg American*, sums up recent events surrounding Saunders' decision in his 17-July-2010 [news story](#) entitled "Concerns remain for USM center." In his report, Kemp informs readers that Steven Moser, the interim chair of USM's English department, recently met with remaining CfW faculty to inform them that the USM administration has decided to move forward with its plan to hire a visiting writer-in-residence at a salary of \$43,000 per year. This visiting faculty would serve as Barthelme's temporary replacement.

Poetry professor Julia Johnson and other CfW faculty told Kemp that finding a writer-in-residence will be next to impossible given the stated \$43,000 salary and the lateness of the search (vis-à-vis the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year). The CfW faculty who met with Moser are Johnson, Steve Barthelme, and Monika Gehlawat. Steve Barthelme, the brother of Frederick, is described by Kemp as the sole remaining fiction writer affiliated with the CfW. Kemp also reports on a conversation regarding faculty concerns about the CfW that he had with von Herrmann two weeks ago. He reports that von Herrmann disputed any notion of a "separate status" for the CfW. According to sources, von Herrmann's statements, inserted below, are bizarre, and call into question her capacity to serve as administrator. According to von Herrmann,

"There's a terminology concern here. The Center for Writers – I'm not sure quite what that is? There's no budget for the Center for Writers. There's no standalone entry called Center for Writers."

CfW faculty countered von Herrmann's shaky claims, pointing out that even the Mississippi IHL – the governing authority of Mississippi's public colleges/universities – acknowledges the existence of the Center for Writers. Additionally, USMNEWS.net reporters easily found existence of the CfW acknowledged by USM's own website. The CfW's web page is [linked](#) to the USM "Centers and Institutes" [page](#), which can be found from "Academics" bar on the left side of www.usm.edu, USM's homepage. Reporters also state that the CfW page is one of the nicer web pages affiliated with USM's Internet home.

According to the *THA*, since receiving the quotes above from von Herrmann, the CfW's office space has been surrendered, as has its control over its e-mail listserv and academic records. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that the listserv aspect of this story is reminiscent of how former CoB dean Harold Doty assumed administrative control, in an effort to quell faculty dissent, over CoB listservs during his 2003-07 tenure. Kemp also reports that the next editor of the CfW's *Mississippi Review*, who reportedly will be chosen by Moser and perhaps other USM faculty, will possibly be a USM faculty from outside of the CfW, a move that has puzzled Steve Barthelme and other CfW faculty. As expected, CfW students are "nervous" about the future of creative writing endeavors at USM, and Johnson informed Kemp that CfW faculty, and perhaps other USM personnel, "feel . . . jaded" by recent decisions made by USM administrators.

Once again, reports on this situation are generating a number of protests from *THA*'s online readers. One of them, added by "Gator_McCloskey," points out that with a huge endowment from famed novelist John Grisham, Ole Miss is poised to completely "overshadow" USM in yet another academic area. Others continue to point out the weaknesses in USM's central administration. With the institution staring at \$15 million in budget cuts, many are asking: What's next?