

USM Galaxy Tabs Crashing back to Earth

Students Report Little Use of Tablet Devices

Tyler Hill's 16-Jan-2012 [report](#) for *The Student Printz* reminds the USM community that the Mississippi State Auditor has set a mid-January 2012 deadline for USM officials to tag/inventory the 700 Samsung Galaxy Tab devices that were inappropriately provided to members of USM's student government association, honors college and other student divisions back in Aug-2011. Further complicating what is being called "Tabletgate" is the Martha Saunders administration's ill-advised decision to ship one of the \$530 devices to Hand Bounds, the commissioner of higher education in the State of Mississippi.

State auditor gives two weeks to tag tablets

Tyler Hill
Printz Writer

Southern Miss has two weeks to inventory the remaining Samsung Galaxy tablets or pay the price, literally.

According to Vice President of Student Affairs Joe Paul, last week 14 tablets were left to be inventoried by Southern Miss officials.

"We fully anticipate having all the tablets accounted for and inventoried this week," Paul said.

In late August, Southern Miss officials issued 700 tablets, each valued at \$530.

Originally, the tablets were presented as gifts to Honor College students, McNair Scholars, Southern Style members, SGA elected officials and some faculty members, but after an investigation led by a USM attorney and a Mississippi internal auditor, it was discovered that the tablets were state property

and couldn't be given away.

A state law prohibits institutions from giving state property away as gifts. Students were told they could no longer keep the tablets upon graduation, and each tablet had to be brought to iTech and tagged as state property.

Following the error, Director of Procurement Mike Herndon and Chief Information Officer Homer Coffman were placed on administrative leave, and Bob Lyman resigned from his position as provost and placed on administrative leave.

Once all the tablets are inventoried, Southern Miss will be cleared by the state auditors office, and the tablets will be tracked, Paul said.

"We will have completed our obligation to the state auditor, but we will keep up with the tablets for an on-going basis," Paul said.

"Students are free to use those for their entire time at Southern Miss, and before graduation, they must return them."

Some students chose to return the tablet altogether, but others, like sophomore Ann Marie Chilcutt, decided to keep the tablet, only to find little to no use for it.

"When I first heard about us having to return the tablets, I was pretty surprised and disappointed," Chilcutt said. "I was looking forward to figure out how to utilize it in a classroom, but now that the device is tagged, I have really lost all motivation to figure out how to use it because I will just have to turn in to the school in a couple of years."

Chilcutt expressed her approval for the program, but she said it needs to advance in the classroom.

"I still think that the program itself is a really great idea, but I believe that the USM campus and teachers need to be more tablet friendly before going any further with the process," said Chilcutt. "Unfortunately, I never use that tablet-ever."

In a phone interview, Paul thanked those students in-



As of Friday, all but 14 Samsung Galaxy Tabs issued to students in August had been tagged. USM has until the end of this month to account for the remaining tablets.

involved in the predicament.

"I want to commend our students for being so cooperative," Paul said. "Many of them were rightly upset about this unfortunate situation, but they were tremendous in being responsive,

bringing the tablets in and helping us resolve this situation."

It is still unclear as to whether or not students will be reimbursed for such additional money they spent on their tablets as apps and accessories.

As Hill recounts, the misguided decision to use state funds to provide these gifts to several hundred USM students resulted in three USM officials – former provost Robert Lyman, chief information officer Homer Coffman, and contracts/procurement director Mike Herndon – being placed on indefinite administrative leave. Lyman resigned his administrative post, while sources tell USMNEWS.net that Coffman will likely never see his name restored to the CIO position at USM. Hill's recent report also uncovers some new troubling aspects of the scandal that has rocked the institution since Aug-2011. According to Hill, when asked to bring the tablets to USM for tagging and inventory, some students simply chose to return them altogether while others are now reporting little-to-no use of the Samsung devices. In the latter category is Ann Marie Chilcutt, who reports having lost all motivation to hone her skills on the device given the University's decision to rescind the gift(s). Chilcutt informed Hill that she now has little use for the portable device. According to Chilcutt, "[u]nfortunately [since we were asked to bring back the devices for tagging,] I never use that tablet – ever."

This latest unfortunate turn of events compounds the scandal, particularly given that USM appears to have initially overpaid for the devices, at least according to sources. A recent search indicates that the devices can now be purchased new at various prices under \$400. Used Galaxy Tabs – a description fitting the 700 devices that USM (Mississippi taxpayers) now owns – can also be found at prices as low as \$225. As such, if all of the devices were damaged today, USM's insurance carrier would presumably provide coverage of only \$157,500, even though \$371,000 in taxpayers' dollars were used *just six months ago* to purchase these same devices. As sources point out, just as this scandal appears to have reached a plateau, something new is uncovered that escalates matters even further.