

USM Swarmed by Scandals

Events of the Last 10 Days Have Rocked 100 Year Old Institution

Late on 21-Nov-2011 *The Hattiesburg American* [reported that](#) USM Lady Eagles basketball star Rachel Vigers has been dismissed from the women's basketball team. The dismissal stems from Vigers' 19-Nov-2011 arrest by Pearl River County Sheriff's officials on an *intent to distribute marijuana* charge that was based on possession by Vigers of about 2 pounds of the illegal drug. Vigers was the leading scorer on last year's edition of the USM Lady Eagles, averaging 16.4 points and 6.5 rebounds per game. Vigers scored 18 points and had 6 rebounds in USM's season-opening victory on 14-Nov-2011. She has not played since that game, and the Lady Eagles are 0-2 since that win.



Rachel Vigers

Vigers' troubles come on the heels of the Martha Saunders' decision to place three high-ranking USM administrators on leave for their potential involvement in [a scandal surrounding](#) USM's new Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 program. Those administrators are Robert Lyman, USM provost, Homer Coffman, USM chief information officer, and Mike Herndon, the director of procurement and contract services at USM.



Lyman

Coffman

As Mary Margaret Halford's 19-Nov-2011 [report for](#) *The Student Printz* indicates, the 700 students who were given new Samsung tablets at the beginning of fall semester 2011 were recently informed by USM administrators that the tablets were not gifts to the students as previously stated, but are instead considered state property that the recipients must relinquish upon graduation or otherwise termination of their studies. USM vice president for student affairs Joe Paul informed these students that "[i]n our excitement and haste, we failed to properly inventory the tablet devices before distributing them to you." Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Paul's statement is essentially meaningless, given that students were told

that the tablet devices belonged to them, not USM. As such, no inventory process would have been needed at the time USM administrators were “excited” about distributing them. In fact, USM Honors College dean David Davies informed Honors College students via e-mail back in August of 2011, the month when this [highly controversial](#) (even at [that time](#)) program [began](#), that the Samsung tablets were “. . . yours to keep should you remain enrolled in the Honors College for the 2011-12 year . . .” Halford’s news story also states that the accounting improprieties involving the Samsung tablets were discovered by USM counsel Jon Mark Weathers via an audit that showed that the devices were purchased with state money. **This fact directly contradicts earlier claims (see links above) that the tablets were purchased with private funds, and that state money would be used only to support the consultants.** Earlier reports at USMNEWS.net also point out that 1,000 students, not 700, were provided with the devices once Student Government officials and others were added to the program by the Saunders administration.

Meanwhile, Saunders appears to have breezed through this scandal, as there has been no mention of her being put on administrative leave by the IHL. This is so even though her hands are on this scandal, both figuratively, as in the Tweet below, and literally, as in the photo below showing her *excitedly* distributing the devices to various USM students.



Saunders Tweets about her excitement regarding the Tablet giveaway.



Saunders excitedly distributes Galaxy Tabs at USM.

USM provost Robert Lyman [resigned his administrative post](#) at the beginning of the 14-Nov through 18-Nov work week, [a move that](#) sources now state appears to have been an attempt to preempt any link between him and the Samsung tablet scandal. As reported by USMNEWS.net and other outlets, Saunders cited “personal reasons” in accepting Lyman’s resignation as provost. Earlier USMNEWS.net reports on Lyman’s resignation also mentioned the possibility that Coffman would resign. Coffman was instead placed on administrative leave.



Lyman resigns as USM provost

Mary Margaret Halford and Jonathan Andrews
Printz Staff

University of Southern Mississippi Provost Robert Lyman has resigned from his position, effective immediately, according to an email sent to faculty and staff Wednesday night.

The email, penned by President Martha Saunders, said Lyman resigned “citing personal reasons.”

“I have accepted that resignation, and effective immediately he will return to the faculty as a professor of psychology,” Saunders said in the email.

Vice President for Research Denis Wiesenburg will take over for Lyman as well as maintain his position as head of research at the university. Wiesenburg said he was approached by Saunders to fill the position when Lyman announced his resignation.

“I told her I would do whatever was needed of me for the university,” Wiesenburg said.

As far as specifics regarding Lyman’s resignation, Wiesenburg said, “I read the same email you did.”

Lyman became provost and vice president for Academic Affairs in July 2008. Before coming to Southern Miss, he served as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C.

The university provost “oversees academic planning and budgeting and works with the Vice Presidents to accomplish positions would be cut when the university was forced to reduce the school’s budget. After six months of appeals, 17 academic programs were cut.”

Tim Rehner, the director of the School of Social Work and the head of the faculty senate, served as the co-chair of the UPC and worked with Lyman through the budget cuts. He was shocked to hear of the resignation.

“I was absolutely surprised,” Rehner said. “I don’t believe he expected to do this when he came to work this morning.”

Rehner expects a difficult transition and thinks that Wiesenburg has his hands full with both jobs.

Though Lyman will no longer work in the administration, he will remain a faculty member as a professor of psychology.

“Bob Lyman has led the academic division ably through some very difficult times,” Saunders said in her email. “I respect his decision to step down and wish him the best in all future endeavors. He will be missed on my executive team.”

Of course, as regular readers of USMNEWS.net are aware, these scandals [follow the](#) “Phi Mu blackface incident” [that occurred before](#) 14-Nov-2011, and that has had [national media](#) of all sorts [following events](#) in Hattiesburg since then.



Sources point out that one common theme in USM’s handling of these latest scandals is how little involvement Saunders has had when it comes to speaking to the media and explaining to Mississippi taxpayers just how she plans to continue serving as a steward of a major public institution in the state. When she has spoken out, all that has seemingly been accomplished is throwing Lyman under the proverbial bus.