

# We've [USM] Won The Silver Anvil Award!

## Part 4

[See also, [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#).]

**Hold it:** You may want to read the small print.

As promised at the end of Part 3, in Part 4 we'll consider what good is a subcategory "award" from a public relations organization that costs tens, maybe hundreds, of thousands of dollars? Has it advanced the education of students? USM is an educational institution, isn't it?

Let's put the "award" and its costs in perspective. June 17, 2011's [Clarion Ledger](#) reports, "The [Mississippi] Legislature's inability to increase university funding during the budget crisis has spurred repeated tuition hikes. This fall, tuition again will rise an average of 6.9 percent in the second of back-to-back hikes. 'The burden for students has grown significantly over time,' [Institutions of Higher Learning Commissioner] Bounds said. The state College Board agreed Thursday to ask for a 10 percent increase in funding from the state Legislature for fiscal 2013. The repeated tuition increases could throw off students and parents who have planned college costs down to the dime and nickel."

Another increase in the cost of higher education in Mississippi. The same story for more than a decade, not just a two year period. When tuition isn't increased, fees are increased. In other words, the cost of higher education increases every year. More some years than others but increases nevertheless.

Now, consider the activities of President Saunders and her public relations "award." Does it advance the education of USM's students?

Let's consider another piece of the story. Marc Bauerlein reports in the Chronicle of Higher Education that, "Arum and Roksa's [Academically Adrift](#) continues to spark commentary and discussion both in public life and in higher-education circles... They took the complexities of the campus environment and cast the learning situation in stark, adamant terms, for instance, stating in response to the question of how much students actually learn: 'The answer for many undergraduates, we have concluded, is not much.'... 'Policy makers and practitioners have become increasingly apprehensive about undergraduate education as there is growing evidence that individual and institutional interests and incentives are not closely aligned with a focus on undergraduate academic learning per se.'" This is a particularly disturbing assertion because it says that poor academic learning outcomes for undergraduates are not the result of faculty failure or dereliction or incompetence. ([http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/the-challenge-of-academically-adrift/36173?sid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/the-challenge-of-academically-adrift/36173?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en))

Let's repeat a relevant observation: "individual and institutional interests and incentives are not closely aligned with a focus on undergraduate academic learning."

Quite simply put, what in hell does a subcategory of a “Silver Anvil Award” have to do with advancing the education of USM students? Here’s the problem. What is President Saunders’ competence to improve or even attempt to improve the education of USM’s students? Her publicly claimed area of expertise is communications and public relations. Puffery. So, she does what she feels comfortable doing, chasing public relations awards. IHL Commissioner Bounds supports President Saunders’ education leadership. (Has anyone forgotten the fact that Commissioner Bounds previously presided over the worst K-12 education system in the United States?) Mississippi citizens continue to get a third rate system of higher education.

Mississippi desperately needs effective education of its college students at an efficient cost. Students need substance. They need basic skills: readin’, riting’, and rithmatic. No-nonsense education. Not the puffery President Saunders is squandering student and taxpayer resources on in a subcategory of a “Silver Anvil Award.” (Note, we haven’t outlined the costs of the puffery activities Saunders actually undertook to “earn” this award. For example, all the videos she stars in—each very expensive.)

As some of our readers recently characterized President Saunders—no substance, no gravitas, no bottom.