

A Cautionary Tale about Public Relations Fanfare

On December 28, 2011, [the Hattiesburg American](#) offered its readers, “Auditor: USM has 3 weeks to gather tablets.”

It reported that “Southern Miss purchased 700 Samsung computer tablets for more than \$400,000 this summer and distributed them as gifts to faculty and students. That transaction, which was not bid upon and conducted without college board approval, has since come under scrutiny for college board and state bidding law violations.”

With great public relations fanfare, President Saunders handed out the Samsung tablets to select and privileged students and others. She was dressed up and all smiles for the cameras as she reveled in the credit while “gifting” them to the select. She was too busy to ask whether the “gifts” made any sense. She did find time to punish three of her top administrators when she learned, and it was publicly revealed, what she should have asked before partaking in the extravagant public relations opportunity. Does this “gift” make any sense?

During depositions she was asked about her [understanding of rules](#) that govern her performance and she was [woefully ignorant on many issues](#). She apparently [has not made](#) any effort [to learn](#) from her mistakes, but [Dr. Saunders](#) most certainly knows how to [humiliate and punish others](#) for her failures.