

Tone Deaf University Presidents? It's A Lot Worse Than That

A recent Chronicle of Higher Education offered the following report:

College Presidents on Value: Tone Deaf or Lacking Confidence

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By [Jeff Selingo](#)

Say you asked the CEO of any major company whether they believed their products were worth the price customers paid.

Think two out of five of them would answer no? Probably not.

Yet that's exactly what college presidents said about the educational product of higher education in [a poll](#) released this month by *Time* magazine and the Carnegie Corporation. Forty-one percent of higher-education leaders agreed that "at many colleges, the education students receive is not worth what they pay for it." Let's hope they weren't thinking about their own institutions when they answered the question.

More worrisome is that in the same survey, college presidents were far outnumbered in their opinion by the public: Eighty percent of the general population said the education at many colleges wasn't worth the price. This value gap between presidents and the public is similar to one *The Chronicle* and the Pew Research Center found through [companion surveys](#) in 2011...

Whatever tools we settle on [to measure the worth of higher-education], the efforts to measure value start at the top of the institution and the groups that represent higher education. And right now, college presidents are either tone deaf to the concerns of the public or they don't believe in their own product...

"Efforts to measure value"? Start at the top?

Let's start at my school. You can do the same at yours. At the University of Southern Mississippi, measuring value for dollars spent is -- like your school -- difficult. We collected information via Freedom of Information requests. It was like pulling teeth. And, there was a reason USM was reluctant to provide information.

Here's some of what we learned: Then-President Martha Saunders bought, with taxpayer and student money, a multi-million dollar airplane for convenience and junkets while she fired dozens of tenured faculty during the Great Recession. Hey, she's not done yet. She's a finalist for the position of provost at the University of West Florida. Go get 'em Martha!

Let's measure more administrative value added to the education of USM's students: Saunders'

multi-million dollar airplane is used for admin junkets to ball games. She also led USM to a million dollar shortfall of the Athletic Department. (When this was made public, she was fired or retired--it's a secret.) After a hundred years of proud football tradition, USM is zero wins and 8 losses this season--so far. Student fees to support big money sports wasn't enough to overcome the shortfall. There's also nearly a million Saunders funneled to her friend Mona Amodeo for public relations services at USM. No substance, just puffery. Let's not forget the financial debacle when she gave away computers to a select group of students...All this while firing tenured faculty.

"Forty-one percent of higher-education leaders agreed that 'at many colleges, the education students receive is not worth what they pay for it.' " At USM, Martha Saunders and her bosses at the Institutions of Higher Learning know why. They're blowing through taxpayer and student money without improving the education of their students. No wonder they don't want anyone to know the cost of their activities. Or that it adds no value to student education.

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