

Who's Next?

Predictions from a USMNEWS.net Reader

With the Southern Miss community dealing with the surprise resignation of President Martha Saunders, now is a good time to begin preparing for the next President of the university. This column offers a list of potential successors to Saunders, in no particular order of course.

Frances Lucas

The campus community has expected this one for many years, going all the way back to before the Shelby Thames administration. Then Frances Lucas was President of Millsaps College in Jackson, but her father, Aubrey Lucas, had served for many, many years as Southern Miss President. I thought she was being groomed as her father's successor, but that did not work out with the hiring of Thames in 2002. When the Thames administration went bad early on, I was part of the crowd that believed that the IHL Board would bring her down to take over the campus and return some normalcy. That didn't happen either. Saunders did hire her from Millsaps to run the Long Beach campus of Southern Miss, and from all reports things are going well there. This situation, plus having many in the Southern Miss family waxing sentimental about Aubrey at the moment, could give her the inside track.

Editor's Note: USMNEWS.net [predicted this possibility](#) when Lucas was hired to replace Pat Joachim on the Coast.

Denis Wiesenburg

Current Southern Miss Provost Denis Wiesenburg has been back at Southern Miss for two years now. He was a faculty at the Coast during the Thames regime, but fled the oppression back then, as did hundreds of other faculty. I think he might be the right person at the right time for Southern Miss. He has been candid about the "Tabletgate" controversy, and supportive of shifting funds out of university administration and into academics. This is exactly what Southern Miss needs right now. If Wiesenburg is willing to do it, and if the IHL Board would go along, this could be great for the Southern Miss family. Getting the IHL Board to go along is probably a long shot, but who knows?

Hank Bounds

Hank Bounds is the current IHL Commissioner in Mississippi. He got frustrated by Faculty Senate President Tim Rehner's comments at the resignation announcement last week, and reminded the public that he, too, is a Southern Miss alum. There is little question that having been IHL Commissioner would smooth the way for getting him a university presidency in the state. The problem I see for faculty and students is that the IHL time represents the sum total of his higher education experience, and we all know that the work at the IHL doesn't necessarily provide someone with the experience they need to administer a large university. I don't think he's the best choice, but he may be the likeliest one. Waiting to conduct the interviews and search process until 2012-13 certainly provides the waiting time necessary to slide him over with less scrutiny than would have occurred if he took over as soon as Saunders leaves on June 30, 2012.

Editor's Note: On-campus speculation [about Bounds succeeding](#) Saunders was reported by USMNEWS.net back in March of 2010. That speculation included stories about Saunders being forced out of the presidency at USM, perhaps by Bounds himself. USMNEWS.net also added the idea that being the USM president is a better gig than is serving as IHL commissioner.

Lance Nail

I don't necessarily feel all that confident that this is even a possibility. However, the current business college Dean just got the college accredited nationally. He also secured the largest-ever donation from a USM alum when Charles Scianna gave \$5 million to Southern Miss. That money is going towards a brand new business building on the east side of campus that will be named for Scianna. The problem is that Dean is the highest position he's ever held, and

he's held that position only at Southern Miss for about four years. Perhaps even a bigger problem for him is that he's "a Saunders guy," which will not go over well with the decision-makers who have put Southern in its current situation.

Tim Hudson

You know Tim Hudson is already making phone calls to Jackson to inquire about the new opening at Southern Miss. Sure, he just accepted the top job at Arkansas State University, and hasn't even started there yet. Still, everyone knows not much would deter Hudson from chasing "the next best thing." The timing of Saunders' resignation will play to Hudson's advantage. He can serve out a year at Arkansas State while Southern Miss looks for a president. He can secretly (at least he would hope) interview for the Southern Miss presidency all the while. Hudson is also **not** "a Saunders guy," something that would work against someone like Lance Nail. His Thames connection – Hudson was the Southern Miss Provost under Shelby Thames for a few years starting in 2002 – wouldn't go over well on campus, but it would probably be a big plus in the local community and in Jackson, *where it counts*. I don't think this will happen, but I would keep my eyes on it (very closely).

Denise von Herrmann

This is an intriguing possibility to me. She was the College of Arts & Letters Dean for a few years at Southern Miss. Now she is the Provost at Oglethorpe University. That's a fairly attractive resume, which puts her ahead of Lance Nail in my estimation. It would remain to be seen how the COAL faculty would react to a von Herrmann candidacy. My guess is that reaction there will be mixed-to-positive, which might work out for her should she aspire to the position. The money might also be attractive to von Herrmann, but it would probably have to be to get her to relinquish the Provost position at Oglethorpe. That sounds like a good academic gig to have – Provost at Oglethorpe. Being seen as Saunders' protégé – accurate or not, as she rose to authority during the Shelby Thames administration – would also probably stand in her way a bit with the powers-that-be.

Joe Whitehead

Joe Whitehead is the Dean of Southern Miss' College of Science & Technology. He would get the support of the Shelby Thames-led USM science community. He might also get a lot of support from the Hattiesburg business community, which is very influential. Whitehead would also be a good choice to the powers-that-be in Jackson, where the IHL sits. On top of all of this – which is "all good," – Whitehead would become the first black President of Southern Miss in its more than 100 year history. With that history, and the university's recent issues, a Whitehead appointment would refocus the community's and state's attention on something very far away from the troubles under Saunders and Thames. However, that same history might also shelve any initial talk of a Whitehead presidency.

Haley Barbour

Don't laugh, crazier things have happened. The former governor's decision to pardon a bunch of convicted felons who served him as governor will not help in getting him the presidency of a Mississippi university. That national scandal is still stinging Barbour and the state. With the pardon controversy going on, Barbour has little chance. Had it never occurred, this would be as in play as some of the other possibilities in my list and elsewhere.