

Why USM-Gulf Coast for Saunders?

A Guest Editorial

With the recent resignation of Martha Saunders as USM president, along with her announcement about moving to the USM-Gulf Coast faculty, many at USM are dazed and confused. One of the many questions that keeps popping up concerns not only her decision to return to the USM faculty, a common question in editorials at usmnews, but why she has chosen to join the USM-Gulf Coast campus instead of the main campus in Hattiesburg. I think this particular question is both a legitimate and interesting one, and it is deserving of more from Saunders, the IHL, or someone in a position to provide relevant information to the faculty and staff at USM. I also think I have some good ideas as to why she has made that choice.

I list below some of the answers to this particular question that came to mind when I heard Saunders' announcement. They are presented in no particular order.

A. Everything's Easier at USM-GC - If Saunders had moved to the Hattiesburg faculty, she would have been immediately under the spotlight. No matter how many press releases she issues about being a communications expert and/or a distinguished scholar, it is *not* so, and the Hattiesburg faculty (and probably even the USM-GC faculty) knows as much. That spotlight would have been too bright, and too hot, for Saunders. At the first instance when she would have been eligible for a post-tenure review, initiation of one would have been a serious threat to enter her e-mail inbox. The Long Beach campus is much more laid back. The faculty there can say that their environment is as collegiate as the one in Hattiesburg as many times as they want and it still will not make it true. Saunders can blend right in to the Long Beach scene, and nobody will notice. It's the perfect choice for her from a professional perspective.

B. Proximity to Bliss - By now just about everyone who follows Saunders and the latest happenings at USM knows that she owns a beach home in Gulf Breeze, Florida. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that getting to Gulf Breeze (Pensacola) is much easier from Biloxi or Ocean Springs than it is from Hattiesburg. There are reports on this website explaining that some USM faculty live in locales stretching from Panama City Beach to Mobile and yet are able to drive to the Coast campus when they have to teach a class or two. Saunders' beach house is in between these two. It's a piece of cake . . . really. She'll have her retirement and a high-paying job all at the same time. Mississippi taxpayers will cover the freight.

C. Pretty in Camouflage - For far-away readers, Hattiesburg is a college town. Much of what goes on in Hattiesburg involves USM. The Mississippi Gulf Coast is not a college locale in nearly the same way - it's a much more diverse situation. Given that her administration ended in meltdown, Saunders would not want to serve out the remaining years of her USM career in Hattiesburg, where she is easily recognizable. With all of the tourists roaming around the Gulf Coast, Saunders can blend into the native environment with ease.

These are but three of the possible reasons why USM-GC won out, for Saunders, over USM-H. No single one likely tipped the scales. All three pointed in the same direction, however, so no single one had to such.