

Williams: Digging With a Spoon

So far, the number is two. Two? Two what? Two fluff articles about the CoB in the *Hattiesburg American*, that's what. First it was John Lambert doing online surveys about Mississippians' attitudes toward insurance companies (Look out, *Journal of Risk and Insurance*!). Then it was a piece from "submitted reports" highlighting the CoB's efforts at British Studies, featuring everybody's favorite scholar, Dave Duhon. As PR pieces go, they're not too bad, but they reek of something that makes the entirety of the CoB seem very un-scholarly: desperation.

It's no accident that the very types of articles that were so visibly absent during the Doty regime are resurfacing under interim dean Alvin Jerome Williams, because these types of articles are pages from the Joe Greene playbook. Williams knows that the *influential* faculty don't want to spend money on wasteful items like sponsoring receptions at national academic meetings or raising the visibility of the CoB by sponsoring travel to real scholarly conferences. No, the good old boys just want to be respected and revered in their own town of Hattiesburg, and these fluff pieces in the *American* are giving Bushardt and Carter exactly what they want. Expect more of this type of propaganda in future issues of the Hattiesburg rag.

Williams, however, just doesn't "get it." By using the same old tactics, Williams is essentially trying to dig his way out of a thirty-foot-deep hole with a spoon. You see, these articles are the kind of stuff that keeps a business school's image buoyed when it's already afloat, but the CoB's image is somewhere in the neighborhood of Davey Jones' Locker. On the one hand, you've got students and parents of students reading about Lambert doing some insurance surveys and Duhon talking about British Studies. On the other hand, those same students will be sharing with those same parents the gospel of fall 2007: the CoB is overrun with adjuncts, instructors, visiting professors, and ABDs. It's not unreasonable to think that the CoB Class of 2009 could have fewer than three terminally qualified, full-time, tenure track faculty members for their CoB core courses. When John Q. Public starts telling his family about his courses, expect the stories to include statements about how "Jones (County Junior College) was way harder," "All we do is watch movies in class," and "My professors don't speak good English," but that "The tests are a breeze." Sadly, these comments are grounded in more truth than most of us would like.

What Williams apparently won't acknowledge is that the CoB's reputation is as low as it has ever been, and PR stories in the local paper isn't going to overcome years of slippage and a current faculty roster that more closely resembles USM 1979 than USM 1999. With tuition charges rising every year, it's ludicrous to think that students aren't noticing that they aren't even getting the *illusion* of a real college education, which they want, along with the CoB grade inflation, which they want and ARE getting. Employers are even figuring it out, hiring students from CoAL and CoST to do jobs that used to go to CoB grads.

The Williams PR campaign may make some old CoBers feel better, but it's not a solution to the long-term problem: the CoB is a glorified community college and its dean is trying to dig it out with a spoon. A teaspoon.

Hey, that's the way Joe Greene would have done it.