

## **You're *Really* Not Going To Believe This**

### **Part 2**

Part 2 continues our dialogue with USM and one of its Associate General Counsel. The topic: a Mississippi Open Records Act request for, among other things, Dr. Rodney Bennett's vita. As an academic, he has one. It reports his public activities like research, which is done and published in public; teaching, which is done in front of students, i.e., publicly; and administrative duties, which are also done in public.

We ended [Part 1](#) with the following dialogue with one of the University's Associate General Counsel:

Among other requests, we asked for "Curriculum vita of Dr. Rodney Bennett."

We got our reply: \_\_\_\_\_

That's right, no reply, no response, nothing. So, we followed up: "No documents were provided [with regard to Bennett's curriculum vita]. If there are no such documents, would you please advise me. If such documents exist, please provide them."

The Associate General Counsel at USM responded: "No records are available [with regard to Bennett's vita]."

We followed up on the Associate General Counsel's carefully worded claim that "No records are available" with a simple question "You really don't have a copy of Dr. Bennett's vita?"

USM's response: "Neither our Communications department nor Human Resources has a copy of the vita."

(The interesting thing is, no one asked for documents in the possession of the Communications department or Human Resources. The Open Records request was for documents in the "possession, custody and control of The University of Southern Mississippi.")

So, we asked the next logical question: "Does anyone have a copy?"

Yesterday, the dialogue continued. The same Associate General Counsel wrote: "We have been unable to locate a copy of Dr. Bennett's vita. Also, this document is exempt from disclosure under Miss Code Section 25-1-100.

Our response: "I can find nothing in the Code section cited that would take a vita outside the Open Records Act. In fact, the University has previously provided vita of other faculty and administrators in response to Open Records Requests. How is Dr. Bennett's vita different than anyone else's?"

Their response: Silence.

We took the initiative (which we will continue to do): “Why don’t we simplify this? Can you think of any reason why I can’t just contact Dr. Bennett directly and request a copy of his vita?”

Each question we ask takes the Associate General Counsel longer and longer to respond. We invite our readers to offer their best guesses why.

We’ll continue to report what we learn as well as the comments of colleagues around the country who are amazed to hear that a University is claiming it’s new President’s vita is TOP SECRET.