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Jeff Hammond is Back

Hattiesburg-- Close on the heels of Rodney Bennett announcing that Bill McGillis was hired to [replace Jeff Hammond](#) as Athletic Director for USM, Jeff Hammond has accepted the newly created position of Special Assistant to the President for Military and Veterans Student Affairs at Southern Miss. The question is what the new Special Assistant will be doing. According to a [Jim Coll presser](#), Hammond's job description includes:

- Working to secure additional federal and private dollars to support veterans and their dependent family members pursuing a Southern Miss degrees;
- Serving as a Southern Miss liaison to Camp Shelby and Keesler Air Force Base;
- Along with the University Provost, exploring ways to best facilitate the transfer of academic credits and similar academic training completed in conjunction with military service;
- Taking a lead role in the development of a veterans student service center on the Hattiesburg campus;
- Assisting the University president with additional military and veterans initiatives as they arise.

Sources point out that no mention was made of two harassment claims filed by two former USM employees against Hammond. [Senior associate athletic director Sonya Varnell](#), filed a complaint involving, according to her attorney, "intimidation and bullying" at the hands of Hammond, much like the allegations of a [related complaint](#) from Diane Stark, a former senior associate athletics director for internal affairs. Stark's attorney, [Kim Chaze](#), told *The Hattiesburg American* that

Hammond harassed Stark and others in the USM athletics department, resulting in Stark's involuntary departure from the university. Chaze also pointed out that USM president Martha Saunders failed to provide Stark with relief from Hammond's malicious treatment of her (Stark), commenting that Saunders reportedly stated that if Hammond did indeed yell and curse at his subordinates in the USM athletics department, "[t]hey probably needed to be yelled at." (Stark's complaint is [currently pending](#).)

Sources tell usmnews.net that many in the University community wonder what possessed Bennett to place Hammond in a position where he is charged with interacting with veteran students and their families. Some sources believe the position is largely titular and intended to silence Hammond's supporters among the sports fans. Others suggest that the position is intended to keep Hammond "on the farm" while two troubling legal matters are being resolved, after which he will quietly retire.

usmnews.net will continue to report as the facts develop.