

“One Voice In Unison”

What One Voice Might Mean for Taxpayers And Students

In this report, we follow up on another angle of the April 6, 2013 story from Ed Kemp at the *Hattiesburg American*, [“USM faces \\$80M funding cut from state.”](#)

At the end of the article, Kemp reports that

“Bennett responded [to faculty Senator Conville] that all strategies are on the table. He urged faculty members to give suggestions, channeled through Faculty Senate President Mary Ann Adams, to bolster Southern Miss’s funding case.

‘Our position is much stronger when we speak together as one voice in unison,’ he [Bennett] said.”

Let me repeat President Bennett’s comment: “Our [faculty and administrators’] position [with regard to their funding case] is much stronger when we speak together as one voice in unison.”

Sounds pretty good, right? Everybody pulling together. Common interests to advance USM to the next level. Do it for good ol’ USM! SMTTT! And, don’t forget, collegiality, an opportunity for faculty to act in unison with administration.

The reality?

Here’s what admin-speak means and leads to for taxpayers and students:

One of my first encounters with university financial irresponsibility—from both faculty and administrators—was as an assistant professor. Like most assistant professors, I focused on teaching and research, successfully I might add. Very early on, however, as part of my service responsibilities, I witnessed “one voice in unison”—in taxpayer terminology—an appalling waste of resources.

I was library liaison for our School of Accountancy during a time of reduction in state funding. Faculty was well aware that USM needed to conserve resources during that period of financial hardship. And, friends at our library had studied the use of journals by every department. Their study reported that about \$10,000 of School of Accountancy’s journals were never used.

Let me repeat, expensive journals *never used*.

I recommended that we stop buying them. That we do our part during difficult economic times and reduce spending on journals we didn’t use. Colleagues and administrators were outraged. I learned what it felt like to be mobbed by colleagues and administrators in the School of Accountancy and College of Business. For example, Rod Posey, long time

administrator, was furious. He and others took me off the Library Committee and, behind my back, accused me of failing to do my job. My evaluations and pay suffered at their hands. I learned what Posey said and did when we deposed him years later under oath.

I had recommended honesty: that if we were honest with our use of resources and acted accordingly, in the future, we could ask for more money when it was needed. Faculty and administrators insisted on spending every cent of what we were budgeted regardless that it was a total waste of money. Their reasoning was that if we spent every cent, we could ask for more next period. And, in my view, waste it, too.

I argued that USM had an effective interlibrary loan system and advised colleagues that we would not be wanting if anyone needed a journal I proposed for cancellation. I had used the interlibrary loan system and it work quickly and efficiently. My colleagues and the administrators were offended by my arguments. I was voted down. That was the democratic process of the Library Committee. I was disappointed but sometimes you get voted down. Simple as that.

Consider the implications. If other departments at USM did the same as I was proposing for our School of Accountancy, USM could save a fortune. By extension to other university functions, you can imagine, given the hundreds of millions in USM's total budget, the spend-every-cent informal policy squanders millions every year. Students and taxpayers suffer from such faculty and administrator attitude of spend-every-budgeted-cent.

The \$10,000 of waste I observed first hand early in my career as an untenured assistant professor and library liaison was dwarfed by the financial waste and incompetence I observed over three decades as a professor. Our presidents, provosts and deans lead the way. The difference between faculty and administrators' waste is that the greater the authority the greater the waste and incompetence. I now report the waste and incompetence on usmnews.net.