

5 to 25

How Everything that *Can Be Good* at a University *is Bad* at Southern Miss

The 3-Sept-09 USMNEWS.net report entitled [Is Saunders Losing Control?](#) highlighted the simple fact that USM's external funding has fallen off by 10.8% since current USM president Martha Saunders took the institutional reins in mid 2007. That fact exists despite Saunders' 31-Aug-09 proclamation (before her extended cabinet) to the contrary, and things promise to get worse given the 3-Sept-09 announcement that USM vice president of research and economic development, Cecil Burge, will be retiring at the end of December-2009. With these bits of bad news, reporters at USMNEWS.net decided to check on how things are progressing at USM with regard to the four most commonly examined metrics of a higher educational institution's overall health.

Of course, the most important aspect of a university is the educational one. As Table 1 below indicates, USM's placement in *U.S. News & World Report's* academic tier system took a nose dive just last month when the publication announced that USM has fallen back into the bottom tier – Tier 4 – for national universities.

Table 1 — The Academics Trend

Year	<i>U.S. News & World Report</i> Tier	% Change from Previous Year
2010	4	-25.0%
2009	3	

Note: The *USNWR* rankings are dated one year in advance.

Using the four-tier system as a guide, we computed USM's drop in the academic world at 25%, representing a near-disastrous decline.

Of second-most importance to many is the overall condition of a university's private giving arm, or in the case of USM, the USM Foundation's endowment. The data from the past two years is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2 — The Endowment Trend

Year	USM Endowment	% Change from Previous Year
2009	\$62.3 million	-21.8%
2008	\$79.7 million	

Note: The 2008 figure comes from USMF reports, while the 2009 amount comes from the 2010 edition of the *USNWR America's Best Colleges*.

As the information in Table 2 shows, the USMF manages an endowment that has fallen off by a whopping 21.8% over the year since June of 2008. At this rate the endowment will come in below \$50 million in the summer of 2010.

Next, we re-present the trend in external research support that was the focus of the previous USMNEWS.net report linked above. These data are repeated in Table 3 below.

Table 3 — The External Research Funds Trend

Year	External Research Support	% Change from Previous Year
2009	\$91 million	-7.1%
2008	\$98 million	

Many would call this the third most important vital sign of a university. In USM's case, that statistic is down 7.1% from last year.

Finally, reporters took a look at what has been occurring across USM’s athletics fields. To do so we examined the athletics success rates from data housed in the “Banner Year” series here at USMNEWS.net. The athletics success rates at the end of the past two academic years are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4 — The Athletics Success Rate Trend

Year	Athletics Success Rate	% Change from Previous Year
2008-09	0.486	-5.8%
2007-08	0.516	

As the table above indicates, athletics success rates at USM were down 5.8% after 2008-09 (compared to 2007-08). USM’s overall sports program garnered more defeats in 2008-09 than victories, which was not true of 2007-08.

Starting from the bottom of this report and working up, we examine the four prime indicators of a university’s health. As the indicators increase in importance, as they do from the bottom up, USM’s performance worsens, from losses around 5% to those hovering near 25%. The data paint a scary picture for the USM family. Just what will be done about them remains to be seen.