

From the Cheap Seats: Lowlights from Fall '08 Convocation

by Duane Cobb

Take it from someone who heard every word, there are quite a few lowlights from the USM Fall 2008 Convocation last Wednesday. It all started with the introduction video, which contained a number of oddities. For one, the video behind the narrative of USM's new Saunders-Amodeo mantra "Creative . . . Bold . . . Determined" was carelessly put together. When the narration got to ". . . Bold . . .," the football video in the background was from USM's 27-34 loss to Marshall just last Saturday. One wouldn't ordinarily associate USM's first-ever loss to Marshall, and its first-ever loss in a Conference USA opening game, as a **bold** statement. Just sloppy.

Beginning that video with the news that Phil Bryant became Lt. Governor was also cheesy, as was the footage of Roger Wicker coming to USM to visit Shelby Thames. How about the snippet from Pat Joachim, the grade school specialist turned USM-GC administrator? The announcement by President Martha Saunders, that USM had to hire 92 new faculty for 2008-09, also does not inspire confidence, especially when you consider that budget difficulties probably meant that 92 was only about two-thirds of the number of new faculty USM needed to maintain past levels.

Going over the *staff* accolades before any mention of *faculty* accolades, as Saunders did, is typical USM stuff. The joke about CFO Joe Morgan's response to the state of the institution's financials is also way too tiring at this point. That

the slap at the University of Alabama's grant-raising total vis-à-vis USM's was too insecure by half kinda goes without saying.

How about pushing the United Way on faculty and staff, as Saunders so tactlessly did on Wednesday? Never mind that the UW supports, what some believe on religious and other grounds to be, various sketchy organizations. Not to worry, however, as Saunders tasked CoB instructor Dolly Loyd, the *devoted campus leader*, with exceeding USM's UW goal of \$100,000 for the year.

University Clubs? You heard her. Saunders plans to construct a UC on each of USM's two main campuses – Hattiesburg and Long Beach. Some would say that USM-GC actually *is* a University Club – no need to construct an actual building for it. Saying this idea is fraught with peril is stating the obvious.

Saying USM is the premier research university in the Gulf South is pulling one's leg. It is humorous, though. Saunders also gave us her four personal pet projects, but she didn't order them in importance. Allow me: (1) 100th Year Birthday Party in 2010, (2) Gulf Coast campus rebuilding, (3) student retention and (4) employee salaries.

Instead of trying to give ourselves raises (4), why don't we just all stand up and remind each other that we are doing a good job?