

# One Hundred Minus Ten

by Duane Cobb

Institutions that get to 100 years deserve to celebrate. This year, 2010, Southern Miss made it to that point. During the first few months of this year there were celebrations here and there. Then, on 30-March-10, there were numerous celebrations, including Founders' Day 2010, the Centennial Convocation, dedication of the Centennial Gateway, and more. With still more to come, let's hope some of the rhetoric is toned down, at least a bit. Hearing over and over about things like "exceptional excellence" begs for a more accurate recounting of USM history. Let's focus on just one aspect of it – the past 10 or so years. This decade has been, to put it mildly, catastrophic. Even a back-of-the-envelope style trip down memory lane is enough to remind those in and out of the USM family just how disastrous the most recent 10 years have been for the institution.

In the Shelby Thames administration (2002-07), USM had arguably its worst cabinet in history. Thames moved to fire two respected faculty, Gary Stringer and Frank Glamser. The whole sordid episode put USM in the national spotlight, and not in a good way. Blogs, national media and everything in between got to see worst in academia. Roy Klumb, the IHL, in-state pettiness – all open to the world. Amidst all of this, the CoB acquired Harold Doty, easily the worst b-school dean USM has ever known (2003-07). Doty retained Farhang Niroomand, the CoB's worst-ever associate dean (1998-2007). Through it all, the CoB was put on AACSB probation in 2007 (on Doty's watch). Doty and Niroomand mysteriously "resigned" their posts in April of that year. During the 2001-present period, Cherylynn Becker – a Doty hire – would become one of the worst chairs the b-school has ever seen, while accounting would continue with its own string of pitiful SoA directors in Stanley Lewis and Steven Jackson.

Of course, all of this CoB nonsense followed USM's own SACS probation, which led to *U.S. News & World Report's* demotion of USM to the bottom tier of U.S. national universities. These situations combined

with all sorts of accreditation-type issues across campus. The exodus of faculty from both the CoB and USM in general has been of near-biblical proportions.

Even with Martha Saunders, things have yet to improve. Every other day USM constituents face budget cuts. Despite pulling USM back into Tier 3, the institution fell back into the bottom tier just this past August (2009). As reported here already, no one at USM is even paying attention to the *U.S. News* rating any more. Saunders leased a \$2 million plane in the dark of night, and amidst a budget crises. She eliminated all of the CoB's economics programs and faculty.

On the athletics side, Saunders fired head football coach Jeff Bower, who brought the USM gridiron program to unprecedented heights. Without a doubt, Bower was the face of the institution in so many ways, as well as a pillar in the community. On the basketball side, the controversial (and under-producing) Larry Eustachy remains at the head of the men's program. The athletics program overall has been spiraling down under the Saunders administration (since 2007).

In case you hadn't noticed, external contracts/grants totals have been diminishing since Saunders arrived. Some of this has been chronicled here. In the CoB, new dean Lance Nail is rebuilding, almost from scratch, the Business Advisory Council. At the same time, all CoB constituents hear about these days is the new CoB Honors House. Almost one hundred percent attention on such a select few smacks of an elitism that will likely become problematic for the CoB. To top all of this off – and this is not the whole of it – in 2005 USM was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, the worst hurricane in U.S. history. USM's campus was under water in the literal sense, not the figuratively under water sense that currently describes all of the assets in the USM Foundation. One can only hope the first 10 of the next 100 find USM in a better way.