

It's the Thought that Counts

Comparing USM President Martha Saunders' Blog to Those of Her Peers

A report posted to USMNEWS.NET in recent days focuses on the 34 university and college presidents who currently blog on a periodic basis. That report showed that only a handful of the "national universities" catalogued in *U.S. News & World Report's* best institutions guidebook (2008) have top executives who participate in the blogosphere. One of those is, of course, USM's own Martha Saunders. This document compares the *quality* of Saunders' periodic blog to those produced by the presidents of other Tier II, III and IV (national) universities. We begin with the December 22, 2007, entry of Arizona State University's Michael M. Crow.

The President's Post

Michael M. Crow, Arizona State University President

The Question of Tuition

December 22nd, 2007

It's been about two weeks since the Arizona Board of Regents approved ASU's tuition proposal for the coming year and even though the rationale behind our requests has always been consistent, there are some who continue to voice their uncertainty about why an increase is necessary and for what purposes tuition is used. I've addressed this issue here before and our simple tuition objectives remain unchanged.

Additional resources are needed in order 1) to enhance ASU in terms of excellence and to advance the institution by providing students with the highest quality education, more specifically the best programs, faculty, facilities, and support services possible; and 2) to increase access to higher education in Arizona as necessitated by our rapidly growing state and the increasing demand for service.

As I mentioned at the ABOR tuition hearing earlier this month, any ASU student who requires tuition assistance will receive it as we continue to work together to move the university forward. Tens of thousands of students have taken advantage of this articulated commitment over the last several years and . One of the sources of revenue we have for this assistance is tuition revenue and many students have conveyed their support.

It is also important to understand that ASU is advancing a tuition philosophy that does not categorize tuition as an expense, but as an investment that provides tangible returns to the individual and to society. As a function of that, we believe in a "co-investment model" whereby the student (and/or the student's family), and the university all make investments in the student's education as a means of preparing him/her for future success. This means investing in the quality faculty, leading-edge programs of study, state-of-the-art facilities and technology, and the kind of customized services that help to facilitate

student success. We are serious about providing this kind of living and learning environment at a good value to our students and we are making meaningful progress everyday.

[Compare Crow's lengthy and thoughtful blog about ASU's views on tuition to the blogs that Saunders produced at about the same time, which are inserted below:](#)

DECEMBER 19, 2007

Big Day On The Coast

I'll be attending the Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Change of Command Ceremony at Stennis Space Center today. I love pomp and ritual and this promises to have plenty of both. After a few other appointments I'll have coffee with some of our local legislators about Southern Miss and higher ed. needs for the coming year.

At this busy time of year I find myself grateful for small blessings. Yesterday's included getting home just as the pizza delivery man arrived (thanks to my husband's impeccable timing) AND a hairstylist who stayed late to work me in.

Posted by Dr. Martha Saunders on December 19, 2007 5:57 AM | [Permalink](#)

DECEMBER 20, 2007

Holidays Start Tomorrow

Today is the last day of work before we close for the holidays. Needless to say, our spirits are bright.

Yesterday's Change of Command ceremony at Stennis was really nice. The Navy has some great traditions. When a member of the platform party arrived at the stage, they blew a whistle, announced his arrival, and the band played a really lively tune. The more important the person, the longer they played. I think that would be a great greeting for one's arrival at work everyday but it might take too long. The band would play for hours for Polly and Jewel.

Posted by Dr. Martha Saunders on December 20, 2007 5:25 AM | [Permalink](#)

DECEMBER 21, 2007

Bowl Game Fever

Golden Eagle fans are on their way to Birmingham for the papajohn.com bowl. Bowl Games are all about the players and provide priceless memories for them. A few tickets are still available and would provide a great holiday outing for you and your families.

Posted by Dr. Martha Saunders on December 21, 2007 6:27 AM | [Permalink](#)

[While Crow explains \(to various constituents\) ASU's "co-investment \[tuition\] model," Saunders blogs about getting home from the hair stylist \(who stayed late to work her in\) just in time to meet the pizza delivery man.](#)

[Next, we turn to the October 25, 2007, blog from Lou Anna K. Simon, the President of Michigan State University \(see below\).](#)

From the President's Desk

Thursday, October 25, 2007

Free exchange of ideas

In recent weeks, there have been incidents on campus that once again compel us to look at the issues of free speech and how we as a campus community engage with one another in ways that respect the views of multiple groups and individuals. I've written about this topic often because it is at the heart of academic freedom and the notion that a university should be an open marketplace for the free exchange of ideas. I'm writing again today because recent acts on campus challenge these ideals and seek to exert the rights of free speech for some while prohibiting the rights of others.

There are individuals who speak at campus events whose rhetoric and ideas I find reprehensible, and although I may not appreciate their positions, I do respect their right to share their views. The more extreme the view, in either direction, the more it tests us. And, it is certainly true that it is harder to avoid behaviors that compromise the marketplace of ideas when we are deeply offended. We must, however, collectively deny inappropriate behavior in all forms in order to protect the rights we all hold dear.

Although we may disagree with one another's positions, we must respect the rights of individuals to express their positions without fear of intimidation and/or physical harm. Michigan State University's philosophy on campus dissent is a belief that the rights guaranteed in the First and Fourteenth amendments of the Constitution must be protected. Acts intended to prohibit the free speech rights of any individual or group, such as destroying informational materials, preventing access to an event, or shouting down a speaker do not support this philosophy and undermine our efforts to encourage robust intellectual discourse.

There are constructive ways, however, to express disagreement with the views or ideas of a particular group or individual that respect the rights of everyone. Sponsoring an event that highlights an opposing view or peacefully protesting at an event by simply and silently walking out are two excellent examples of recent campus "protests."

The university has worked for decades to establish a community consensus on the scope of intellectually productive and constitutionally protected dissent, and to distinguish it from impermissible disruption. Destructive and intimidating behavior not only threatens the safety of our community but inhibits opportunities for productive civil engagement.

To read more about issues of and policies concerning free speech at MSU, please read my statements on free speech rights and responsibilities, discovery and discourse, and upholding the right to free speech.

Simon's blog is an egaging discourse on the importance of free speech and the relevant portions of the U.S. Constitution. In it Simon states that even views that are reprehensible to her, holders of those views have a right to make them known to others.

Three days later, on October 28, 2007, Saunders provided this gem:

OCTOBER 28, 2007

Things to do on a glorious day

The weather is spectacular! Makes me want to just sit outside and conjure up ideas for the fall garden. But daydreaming will have to wait today. We're on our way to church, and will spend the afternoon cheering for the Golden Eagles to win at volleyball AND football. I'm looking forward to a special Old Timers Hall of Fame Induction at the M-Club this afternoon. This is an annual event celebrating the first 30 years of Southern Miss football -- 1912 to 1942.

Posted by Dr. Martha Saunders on October 28, 2007 10:35 AM | [Permalink](#)

In the blog above, Saunders laments not being able to take the day off to enjoy the nice weather and conjure up (daydream about) ideas for the fall garden. Sadly, Saunders will spend the afternoon at the Old Timers Hall of Fame Induction at the M-Club. Do you ever wonder what Saunders' views on free speech and the U.S. Constitution are?

Just recently, on January 28, 2008, University of Connecticut President, Michael Hogan, used his blog as an attempt to clear up what he refers to as misperceptions about the University's Guaranteed Admission Program (GAP) that was editorialized in the student newspaper. That blog is inserted below:

January 28, 2008

Guaranteed admission program

Filed under: Outreach, News and Info, Academics, About UConn — [pressoffice](#) @ 12:24 pm

Last Friday (Jan. 25) the *Daily Campus* editorial was critical of the newly created Guaranteed Admission Program (GAP) between UConn and Connecticut's community colleges. I'd like to provide some details about the agreement that may help dispel misperceptions that the GAP somehow lessens the value of a UConn degree by admitting students who are not qualified.

GAP students *do* apply to the University through the GAP. They commit to the University early in their community college careers, establishing their intention to earn the associate degree in a liberal arts transfer program at a Connecticut community college, then complete a major at UConn in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences or the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources. Our GAP students are no less prepared than any other transfer student admitted to the University: they complete a rigorous two-year postsecondary degree with a cumulative average of at least a 3.0.

Our community college transfer students hold jobs, earn transfer scholarships, are military veterans, are members of a national honor society for transfer students, and are in every way prepared to meet the challenges and requirements of a public research university. These students satisfy our own transfer-admission requirements upon entering the University, and satisfy the same general education and major requirements that *all* UConn students must satisfy to earn their degree from the University.

UConn's mission as a public research university includes providing avenues of access to quality higher education to able, high-achieving students from families facing very challenging financial situations. The GAP provides these students the option of starting their college career elsewhere and then transferring to UConn to complete a four-year degree. It also encourages access to the University for students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. A diverse educational community is an important component in the education of all UConn students.

I hope this helps clarify the nature of the Guaranteed Admission Program. Able students who transfer into UConn, whether from community colleges or other universities, bring valuable talents, skills, and insights to our academic community. I'm pleased to welcome them to our campuses, and I hope you will, too.



Saunders cracked open the month of January 2008 by describing her thrill upon being designation a “Colleen” for the Irish-Italian festival. Later, on the day Hogan described UConn's GAP, Saunders told the USM about her efforts to help USM football coach, Larry Fedora, with recruiting. She also thanked the men's basketball team for the “blessing” that was beating Rice. These are all inserted below:

JANUARY 5, 2008

It's Keen to be a Colleen



I'm looking forward to the Irish-Italian festival at St. Thomas Church March 15. I promised Father Tommy and Mayor Dupree to do my very best to fulfill my duties as Coleen of the event. As I told the group yesterday, I have been a dean, a provost, a chancellor, a president, and even a little league queen...but I've never before been a colleen.

Posted by Dr. Martha Saunders on January 5, 2008 7:37 AM | [Permalink](#)

JANUARY 28, 2008

A Productive Weekend

I spent Saturday morning greeting a big group of prospective Golden Eagle football players. I enjoyed meeting the new assistant coaches and watching Head Coach Fedora engage the group. I learned a bit more about how it all works and can sympathize with the nail biting surrounding signing day.

The men's basketball team blessed us with a win over Rice that evening to an enthusiastic crowd.

On tap this evening: I'll be the keynote speaker at the fourth annual Family Pathways Night in Petal. This year's family night theme is "What Kids Need to Succeed."

Posted by Dr. Martha Saunders on January 28, 2008 3:03 PM | [Permalink](#)

JANUARY 31, 2008

Noel-Levitz Here Today

Consultants from Noel-Levitz will be on campus today talking with the Executive Cabinet and others about our enrollment goals. Noel-Levitz has been in the business of helping campuses reach and exceed their goals for enrollment management, marketing and student success for more than 30 years. I have worked with them before and have a number of colleagues who sing their praises. We have asked for help, specifically, in the area of maximizing the financial aid available to us.

Today's visit is only the first of several. Stay tuned.

Posted by Dr. Martha Saunders on January 31, 2008 6:16 AM | [Permalink](#)

[Finally, we take a look at how West Virginia University President, Mike Garrison, described how biometrics technology – and WVU's biometrics research partnership with the FBI, will affect West Virginia and the rest of America. That lengthy "Mike's Notes" blog from February 18, 2008, is inserted below:](#)

How will biometrics technology affect you?

February 18th, 2008 at 8:53 am

WVU has signed an agreement with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to become the FBI's lead academic partner in biometrics research. This historic agreement has worldwide significance and will provide WVU students with an academic opportunity unmatched at any other institution in the United States.

WVU biometrics research will support the new FBI Biometrics Center for Excellence and its law enforcement partners in protecting national security, and the University will also act as a liaison between the Bureau and biometric researchers nationwide, bringing together the nation's best minds to address tough national security issues.

I'm very proud of the faculty and students who have conducted internationally recognized research through WVU's National Science Foundation Center for Identification Technology Research (CITeR). As Eliza Purvis-Lemasters, president of WVU's Student Society of the Advancement of Biometrics, told the Daily Atheneum recently, our University has one of the best biometrics departments in the world, and this partnership will only increase the program's popularity with students.

Biometrics involves identifying people based on unique physical characteristics.

The FBI's biometrics initiative will include building a huge database of people's biometric markers. In addition to the 55 million fingerprints already stored at the FBI's Clarksburg facility, the database will include such characteristics facial shapes, palm prints, and iris patterns.

Bojan Cukic, CITeR co-director, told [CNN](#) recently that, by using various biometric markers in combination, the FBI can identify people more accurately. His fellow co-director Larry Hornak said biometric identification's greater accuracy can help to protect people from identity theft.

Some people, however, worry that biometric technologies are a threat to privacy. The tension between security and privacy has surfaced repeatedly in the years since 9/11. Barry Steinhardt, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Technology and Liberty Project has been harshly critical of the FBI's plans for a biometrics database.

I'd like to hear from you: How do you think this technology will affect you? As the leaders of the research that underlies the FBI's biometrics effort, what role should WVU faculty, staff and students take in the debate over how this technology is used?

[Permalink](#) [No comments](#) [Reply to article](#)

[Just the day before Garrison's blog, Saunders was judging a chili cook-off at the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity house. She blogged about the entries that same day:](#)

FEBRUARY 17, 2008

[Sigma Phi Epsilon 2008 Chili Cook-off](#)



I remember from my student days the men of Sigma Phi Epsilon to be fun-loving guys. They still are. At yesterday's chili cook-off, they had a lot of fun AND did a lot of good by raising money for the youth AIDS program. The fine weather inspired a good crowd and the chili was excellent. I know, because I sampled all 23 entries as one of the judges and lived to tell the tale.



The judges included a chef, a nutritionist and a university president. Two of them know food. One just likes to eat.



Presentation was a factor in determining the winners.

Clearly, Saunders' blog is nowhere near the depth of those of ASU's Crow, MSU's Simon, or WVU's Garrison. It comes closest to that of UConn's Hogan, though the sample chosen for this document shows how wide the gap still (in terms of depth) is between Saunders' blog and that from Hogan.