

# Just Who Does Southern Miss' CoB Think It Is?

## Part 10

Former USM President, Shelby F. Thames, was fond of referring to USM's faculty and programs as being of "world class" stature. He said it early, and he said it often, while serving as the top executive of the now 98 year old from 2002-2007. However, amidst the many scandals that shook the university during his reign (e.g., SACS probation, the firing of two tenured faculty, and an enrollment inflation episode, to name just a few), the USM faculty at-large spoke out against Thames' inappropriate use of the phrase "world class." Much of the protest occurred on the pages of the *USM Forum -- No Quarter Message Board*, where USM faculty not only criticized Thames' use of the term, they also criticized the manner in which Thames delivered it. To that end, the numerous references in Thamesian dialect to the phrase "wurl class" available at *USM Forum -- No Quarter Message Board* serve as a lasting reminder of the destruction Thames wrought on the institution.

For far too long USM administrators have substituted empty references to academic quality for actual commitment to the same. Unlike many previous administrators, Thames was called out and demeaned for doing so. However, with the installation in 2008 of new President, Martha D. Saunders, those empty references seem to be enjoying a rebound:

"The inauguration of a new president is really a celebration of the university she serves. I am honored today to serve my alma mater, Southern Miss, one of the finest institutions of higher learning in the world."

The line above was spoken by Saunders near the beginning of her inauguration speech in March of 2008. In it she says the same thing about USM that Thames had said throughout the 2002-2007 period by way of his "world class" phrase. Unlike the case with Thames, there are no dissenting voices now vis-à-vis Saunders' inappropriate phrase ("one of the finest institutions of higher learning in the world. Saunders, it seems, is being given a free pass simply because she's not Thames. This series has, by pointing out shortcomings in each of the CoB's seven traditional academic areas, in its administration, and in the institution itself, provided evidence that Saunders' statement is as inaccurate as Thames' previous one. In doing so, this series is made up of 10 separate installments, a number that could easily have been 100, or more.

For far too long, USM's administrators have substituted words for deeds when it comes to academic quality at the institution. To them, saying it's so is much more expedient than making it so. However, and as we all know, only making it so truly makes it so.