

Special Report

Martha Saunders and Race

A Look at an Issue that Continues to Pop Up These Days

Early in his 2-Sept-2011 address to the USM faculty senate, new faculty senate president Timothy Rehner recounted some issues that he had recently discussed with USM president Martha Saunders. As Rehner recounted:

“Another issue that came up was some concern about how students seem to be ‘clustered’ on campus. At least some of the information that I had just randomly, coincidentally gotten was that the residence halls on this east side of campus really were accommodating students somewhat different from the ones that are on the north side of [campus] . . . And [I] had concerns just about what’s the ‘clustering’ of students, and then what services are available to those students. [President Saunders] agreed that the students who were on this east side of campus really had some different ACT scores, different demographic characteristics as well, but that it had really been unintentional.”

It seems clear to some that Rehner is pointing out, through the phrase “some . . . different demographic characteristics,” that Caucasian students are being housed in dorms on the north side of campus, while African-American students are showing up on the rolls of those dorms on the east side of campus. As long-time readers of USMNEWS.net, and those familiar with USM from other experiences, are aware, the dorms on the north side of campus are new and much more luxurious than those on the east side of campus. Thus, in addition to general concern about what appears to be racial segregation, Rehner shows concern through the statement above that perhaps those living on the north side - presumably Caucasian students - are getting more in the way of services (luxury) than those housed on the east side, again presumably African-American students.

To some, any doubt in the above interpretation Rehner’s remarks is removed by the way he ended this part of his presentation:

“I think it’s something that we need to just pay attention to, about what is our residential arrangement - where students are, who is there. And we can follow up with that, but I think that’s just an issue about who we are as an institution.”

When Rehner indicates that he “think[s] that’s just an issue about who we are as an institution,” he makes a statement about the seriousness of the issue, leading some to almost certainly conclude that race is a variable in this situation. Of course, this raises the question - Just what is Saunders’ record on race?

To some degree, that question is addressed in a recent **... Breaking News ...** item [here](#) at USMNEWS.net entitled “Saunders Dragged Back into Federal Court.” That story details a federal court suit by former USM student Maria Salcido of Wisconsin, who alleges that Saunders and other USM officials are guilty of racial discrimination in

preventing her from completing her master's degree in marriage and family therapy. The suit was filed on behalf of Salcido by attorney Kim Chaze, and seeks actual, compensatory, and punitive damages, all to be determined by a federal court jury. The USMNEWS.net report on this case also references a racial discrimination complaint against Saunders that was based on an incident that occurred while Saunders was the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater. Former UW at W graduate studies dean Lee Jones, an African-American, [filed suit](#) against Saunders in January of 2007, [alleging](#) that she targeted him for an audit - one that erroneously led to his demotion - simply because of his race. Jones' racial discrimination suit against Saunders was followed by a separate racial discrimination [claim against](#) her that was filed by Howard Ross, an African-American liberal arts dean at UW at W who was also demoted by Saunders following an audit. Jones' case [was settled](#) without him having to pay reimbursement costs sought by UW at W. A federal judge [dismissed](#) UW at W's monetary claims against Ross, and also cited UW at W's lack of evidence (from the audit) in denying the institution the right to sue Ross on the grounds of misrepresentation.

With these situations involving her at both UW at W and USM, Saunders' record on race is anything *but* solid. Stay tuned to USMNEWS.net for more on this and other stories at USM.