

# RODNEY D. BENNETT

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## PHILOSOPHY

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*Higher education has the transformational power to enhance the lives of individuals and to shape the trajectory of communities across our world. Bold, unapologetic leadership is required to continue advancing core missions of teaching, research, and public service while navigating increasingly complex challenges. Three critical components are necessary in moving an institution forward:*

- 1. A deep conviction for the institution and its mission.*
- 2. A strong commitment to students and to advancing institutional priorities with a vision for the future and an eye toward sharing intellectual property with the world.*
- 3. The ability to build high-performing teams to execute priorities across the enterprise.*

## SERVICE AS PRESIDENT | THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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April 2013-July 2022

Hattiesburg, Mississippi

### THE POSITION

- Served as the institutional executive officer and principal educational officer of the university. Reported to the Commissioner of Higher Education for the State of Mississippi.
- Charged with management and administrative oversight of every facet of institutional operations on two campuses and additional teaching and research sites, to include implementing system policies, sustaining and enhancing the institution's mission and overall operations, and fostering and building upon the existing traditions, distinctiveness, and strengths of the university.
- Held responsibility for ensuring that budgetary expenditures are in compliance with the budget authorized by the Board of Trustees for the State Institutions of Higher Learning.
- Maintained final authority over all university personnel and standards of student conduct.
- Defined the university's educational policy and academic standards in coordination with the Commissioner and Board of Trustees.
- Built, cultivated, and maintained relationships with all internal and external stakeholders, to include faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, community partners, and other affiliates.
- Advanced the research agenda of the university.

## **THE INSTITUTION**

The University of Southern Mississippi is one of only 14 R1 institutions in the nation that also compete at the NCAA Division I level and maintain accreditation in all four major areas of the Arts. As a comprehensive public research institution, USM has campuses in Hattiesburg and Long Beach, in addition to five teaching and research sites along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. USM students have earned their place among national scholarship award winners, to include 4 Truman Scholars, 37 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellows, and leading Mississippi with 27 Goldwater Scholars.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Achieved R1 status in 2018</li><li>• 17 Division I athletics teams</li><li>• 14,146 students representing 75 countries</li><li>• 16:1 student faculty ratio</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2,715 employees</li><li>• 1,846 acres, including a 52-acre beachfront campus</li><li>• 243 buildings comprising 5.5 million square feet</li></ul> |
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## **SELECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **ACADEMIC PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

*Philosophy: Delivering distinctive, relevant, high-quality academic programs that effectively prepare students for life after graduation through graduate school or employment is the cornerstone of enabling an institution to remain competitive in the evolving global higher education landscape.*

- Positioned USM's academic enterprise to be responsive to changing student, societal, and market needs.
  - Expanded or created academic programs in projected growth areas, including computer engineering, ocean science and engineering, business, forensic science, cybersecurity, and nursing.
  - Analyzed current academic programs to address degrees and emphasis areas that were no longer meeting Board standards for program productivity.
  - Enhanced and expanded online program offerings to meet new demand, with [USM becoming the top ranked institution in Mississippi](#) for online bachelor's degree programs.
  - Developed the framework for offering digital proficiency badges and micro-credentials for specific skills and competencies.
  - Visited Study Abroad sites in England and Spain to discuss opportunities to expand USM's storied British Studies program and increase [collaboration with the University of Cádiz](#).
  - Collaborated with other institutions to develop pathway agreements for students to complete degrees from USM.
- Achieved regional accreditation reaffirmation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, without condition or provision.
- Maintained and, in some cases, earned individual accreditation for a wide variety of high-quality, prominent academic programs. Select examples:

- USM is among only 190 institutions in the world to earn dual accreditation in both business and accounting from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).
- All USM teacher education programs recently earned full accreditation from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), following a comprehensive update to CAEP accreditation standards. USM is ranked number 12 in the nation for producing new National Board certified teachers.
- USM is one of only 39 institutions in the nation accredited in all four major areas of the Arts: theatre, art and design, dance, and music.
- Expanded or created new initiatives, centers, and institutes in areas of emerging scholarship. Select examples:
  - The Hatchery, a business innovation center providing dedicated space for students and faculty for the advancement of entrepreneurship education.
  - Center for Digital Humanities, an interdisciplinary center connecting the humanities and its modes of inquiry to digital technology, media studies, data science, and computational industries.
  - Eagle Maker Hub, a makerspace supporting hands-on math education through digital fabrication, rapid prototyping, and coding.
  - Arts Institute of Mississippi, a collaboration among USM arts units and community organizations to increase arts awareness and identify additional funding opportunities.

## **RESEARCH**

*Philosophy: A strong foundation in research enables an institution to recruit and retain high-quality faculty who have the skills and vision necessary to imagine, conceptualize, operationalize, validate, and formalize the final phases of research or creative development that improves the quality of life in our communities and shapes our world.*

- Positioned USM to earn the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education [R1 designation](#) (awarded in 2018 and renewed in 2021).
  - Elevated the role of research across the institution by moving the position of vice president for research, which reported to the provost, to become a direct report to the president.
  - Increased research funding 134%, from \$52.1 million in FY13 to \$122 million in FY21.
  - Increased the number of funded awards 40%, from 255 in FY13 to 357 in FY21.
  - Increased recovered F&A 46.7%, from \$8.2 million in FY13 to \$12 million in FY21.
  - Supported a rich tradition of faculty research excellence through expanded proposal development grants, competitive research start-up packages for new faculty, and internal project funding opportunities.
  - Enhanced a culture of research productivity through restructuring technology commercialization efforts into a dedicated Office of Technology Development, improving the process for managing start-up companies associated with faculty research, prioritizing new hires for research support staff, and supporting work toward targeted research awards.

- In the past five years, USM junior faculty have earned five National Science Foundation CAREER grants. One of those faculty members also earned an Early Career Research grant from the United States Department of Energy.
- A USM junior faculty member was named to Forbes magazine's 2022 30 Under 30 in Science list for his work on developing sustainable solutions for plastic waste management, water pollution, and climate change.
- Three USM faculty projects recently earned SMART Business Accelerate Initiative funds, designed to stimulate economic growth and job creation by translating the State of Mississippi's intellectual property into new commercially viable technologies. Two projects are associated with conducting polymers, respective photodetector applications, and emerging optoelectronics; one project is for an enhanced oral suction device designed to minimize patient infection risks due to aspirations and sputum overflow.
- Supported advancements across USM's three primary areas of research: polymer science and engineering, ocean science and engineering, and large event venue safety and security. Select faculty research projects:
  - Developing polymer composites [supporting the United States Air Force](#), following many years of work to [improve helmet cushioning for war fighters and athletes](#).
    - Faculty in USM's nationally recognized School of Polymer Science and Engineering hold more than 60 patents.
  - Supporting increased activity in the maritime sector to grow Mississippi's Blue Economy, from the testing and evaluation of underwater autonomous vehicles to the enhancement of aquaculture.
    - USM has [partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#) and will soon house NOAA's Office of Marine Aviation Operations Uncrewed Maritime Systems headquarters.
  - Developing international training curricula [in partnership with INTERPOL](#), including an on-site visit at INTERPOL headquarters in Lyon, France, to secure the most important large event venues in the world, through the National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security (NCS4) housed at USM.
    - NCS4 at USM is the nation's only academic center devoted to the study and practice of spectator sports safety and security.
- Facilitated advanced development of The Mississippi Polymer Institute, which is housed at USM, and The Accelerator, USM's research incubator providing a dynamic ecosystem for research, innovation, and commercialization.
- [Launched Gulf Blue](#), a USM-led research and innovation framework to enhance collaboration among scientists, federal agencies, industry partners, and entrepreneurs to advance Mississippi in the global ocean economy.
- [Secured the lead role](#) in operating the forthcoming 199-foot, \$100 million Regional Class Research Vessel *Gilbert R. Mason* from the National Science Foundation.
  - RCRV *Gilbert R. Mason* is the third of three new NSF vessels and has been designated to carry out large-scale research in the Gulf of Mexico as the nation's third critical body of water, as well as the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. USM researchers will set the scientific direction for the vessel, which will be equipped with the most advanced ocean science technology to date, in partnership with the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON).

- The acquisition of RCRV *Gilbert R. Mason* was made possible by USM's successful management of the Research Vessel *Point Sur*, a [135-foot vessel acquired in 2015](#) through a grant from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality. In partnership with the Port of Gulfport, USM secured the grant, navigated travel with the vessel from its former institution in California through the Panama Canal to the Gulf, and developed processes to manage the ship as well as make it available to other institutions needing access to the Gulf to conduct research. At the time USM acquired RV *Point Sur*, it became the only oceanographic class research vessel in the northern Gulf of Mexico, east of the Mississippi River.
- Supported the growth of initiatives, centers, and institutes as well as the dissemination of faculty expertise in key research areas. Select examples:
  - USM faculty were instrumental in responding to the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, leading to the university's selection as the lead institution for the [Mississippi Based RESTORE Act Center of Excellence](#). USM faculty have continued to serve as researchers and subject matter experts on ongoing effects of the oil spill on the marine environment over the past decade. In addition, USM faculty are frequently invited to advise on a multitude of environmental impacts prompting changes in the region's aquatic ecosystem, including being asked to take the [scientific lead in investigating the effects of the re-opening of the Bonnet Carré Spillway](#) on the Mississippi Sound in 2019.
  - Faculty in USM's School of Computing Sciences and Computer Engineering are [partnering with the Mississippi Coding Academies and the City of Biloxi](#) to provide access to software development and cybersecurity skills training for adults to prepare them for entry-level cybersecurity industry certification.
  - USM faculty leadership in the Mississippi IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE), a statewide center housed at USM, developed and hosted the [inaugural Mississippi Health Disparities conference](#) to bring together healthcare professionals, researchers, and industry leaders to address health disparities in the state and the region.
- Expanded undergraduate research through a dedicated center providing students with the opportunity and faculty mentorship to collaborate on faculty projects or develop their own research and creative work.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

*Philosophy: Universities are uniquely positioned to elevate the quality of life in their host cities and beyond by extending academic and research activities through collaborative partnerships, economic development initiatives, and services that would otherwise not be available.*

- Strengthened relationships and collaborative opportunities between faculty work and business and industry partnerships by realigning institutional economic development and outreach functions, which were previously housed with government relations, to report to the vice president for research.
- Commissioned USM's first economic impact study to measure the university's role as an economic driver for the state of Mississippi.
  - USM's [annual economic impact increased 10% over three years](#), from approximately \$600 million to more than \$663 million annually.
  - USM supports nearly 7,500 jobs throughout the state.
  - Approximately 60% of USM students remain in Mississippi following graduation.

- Traveled to Israel with Mission Mississippi to support state-wide efforts to attract more international companies to Mississippi and to discuss potential academic partnerships and student exchange opportunities with Israeli universities.
- Earned renewal of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, demonstrating an ongoing institutional commitment to community engagement.
- Community-based partnerships supporting economic development and community engagement in the Hattiesburg area include:
  - USM's ongoing work as the leading economic development resource in the region through the Trent Lott National Center for Excellence in Economic Development and Entrepreneurship, which provides economic development training and research serving public entities, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals.
  - Working with the City of Hattiesburg and the Area Development Partnership, a large chamber of commerce-style organization covering the Greater Hattiesburg area, on the [conceptualization and construction of a large, private mixed-use development](#) adjacent to USM, which now houses retail, dining, and apartments.
  - Partnering with city and county officials to develop a comprehensive [site plan for USM's Innovation and Commercialization Park](#), which will ultimately provide research, development, and light manufacturing real estate and office space in close proximity to USM experts to attract additional companies to Hattiesburg.
  - Collaborating with the City of Hattiesburg to add [an on-campus bus route](#) with connections to the city's transit services, which is free to students, faculty, and staff.
- Community-based partnerships supporting economic development and community engagement along the Mississippi Gulf Coast include:
  - Forming the Gulf Blue Initiative coalition comprised of more than 40 partner organizations representing state, federal, non-profit, and industry sectors to compete for the United States Economic Development Administration's Build Back Better Regional Challenge, the primary component in the \$1 billion American Rescue Plan program.
    - USM was [named one of 60 national finalists in Phase 1](#) of the application process.
  - Developing critical port, shoreline, and vessel docking infrastructure in partnership with the Port of Gulfport to springboard USM's research activities to elevate Mississippi's Blue Economy.
    - Related capital projects include the [Marine Research Center](#), which serves as a hub for advancing uncrewed maritime systems and ocean data science, and the forthcoming [Roger F. Wicker Center for Ocean Enterprise](#), which will house a comprehensive research and development partnership program focused on blue technology innovation.
  - [Leveraging the Gulf Blue framework](#) to create the Gulf Blue Navigator Program to support innovation and blue technology development.
- Community-based partnerships and services supporting health care outcomes include:
  - Developing an innovative, two-phase model to address the nursing shortage through USM's College of Nursing and Health Professions by partnering with leading healthcare facilities across South Mississippi.

- [Phase 1 of the program launched in January 2022](#) and utilizes existing nurses as embedded clinical faculty to teach USM nursing students at their respective healthcare facility.
- Phase 2 is expected to launch in 2023 and will include designating leading healthcare facilities as official hospital-based teaching sites.
- Leading immediate community response to the COVID-19 pandemic through USM's College of Arts and Sciences.
  - In March 2020, USM faculty [partnered with Forrest General Hospital and Hattiesburg Clinic](#), the two largest healthcare organizations in the Greater Hattiesburg area, to produce the viral transport media necessary for transporting COVID-19 test samples to outside labs and to [perform up to 50 high-priority, on-site tests per day with a 24-hour turnaround time](#).
  - In April 2020, a team of USM faculty, students, staff, and researchers [utilized a thermal molding process to produce respirator masks](#) suitable for use by medical professionals during the height of the nationwide respirator shortage. Masks produced by the team were distributed to medical professionals across the area.
- Providing a variety of services available to the public through on-site clinics and development centers, to include the Center for Family Therapy, the Children's Center for Communication and Development, the DuBard School for Language Disorders, and the Institute for Disability Studies.
- USM serves as a designated evacuation shelter for natural disasters. In addition, USM has entered into extended agreements with other nearby higher education institutions to house residential students, provide faculty office space, and host classes for extended periods of time when those institutions experienced the impacts of natural disasters on their campuses.

## **GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

*Philosophy: The ability to develop strong relationships with and communicate a compelling institutional narrative to local, state, and federal decision-makers equips those individuals with the tools they need to advocate for and secure critical funding and other assets that advance the institution's mission.*

- Cultivated strong relationships with federal, state, and local officials in support of institutional goals. Select examples:
  - Obtaining federal support for a wide variety of research and economic development grants, including the United States Economic Development Administration's Build Back Better grant proposal.
  - Working with the statewide legislature and system colleagues to secure funds for faculty and staff salary increases in critical areas with the greatest need.
  - Providing faculty expertise to advance statewide blue economy initiatives managed through the Governor's office.
  - Collaborating with the Mississippi Department of Transportation to secure federal Transportation Alternatives Program funds for nearly \$4 million in sidewalk and pedestrian pathway projects across USM campuses through an 80/20 grant program, with USM responsible for the 20% share of costs.
  - Partnering with federal, state, and local officials to [prevent closure of USM's ROTC programs](#) after receiving a discontinuation notice, without an opportunity to improve performance metrics, shortly after arriving at USM in 2013.

- After successfully advocating for the opportunity to address concerns, USM's ROTC programs met required performance metrics and continue to thrive.
- Developed productive working relationships with system colleagues to ensure coordination and consistency in advocating for broad legislative changes or other issues affecting the system as a whole.

## **ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, AND COST OF ATTENDANCE**

*Philosophy: Every interaction with a student provides an opportunity to create pathways from initial enrollment to timely degree completion. Institutions must invest in programs and initiatives while being mindful of cost of attendance.*

- Implemented new strategies to recruit more academically prepared students.
  - Increased incoming freshman GPA from 3.21 to 3.50.
  - Increased incoming freshman ACT score from 22.07 to 23.03.
  - Enhanced programming offered through USM's Honors College, one of the oldest public honors colleges in the nation. Current Honors College students have an average ACT score of 30.
- Invested in programs and initiatives to support student success and retention, as approximately 30% of USM students are first-generation. Select examples:
  - Creating a centralized student advisement model with professional advisors who help ensure all freshmen and first-year transfer students have consistent access to resources that best support their academic goals. Later in their course of study, students are transitioned to a program-based faculty advisor model for discipline-specific guidance.
  - Addressing historically difficult gateway courses through a robust Quality Enhancement Plan designed to reduce the number of students who received a D, F, or Withdrawal (DFW) grade from 2016 to 2021.
    - Decreased DFW rate for biological sciences from 42% to 33%.
    - Decreased DFW rate for anatomy and physiology from 41% to 35%.
    - Decreased DFW rate for general chemistry from 38% to 22%.
    - Decreased DFW rate for history of world civilizations from 43% to 27%.
  - Developing programs to help first-time students assimilate to the collegiate learning environment, including residential learning communities, opportunities to participate in early start programs the summer before freshman year, and a dedicated Center for Student Success that delivers specialized student support services.
  - Revising the academic integrity policy and related processes to include a greater emphasis on student education and awareness.
- Increased USM's six-year graduation rate from 46.9% to 51.68%.
- Implemented strategies to balance cost of attendance with students' ability to pay, as approximately 50% of USM students are Pell eligible. Select examples:
  - Limiting increases to tuition, room, and board.



- Optimizing institutional scholarship models to provide financial resources to as many qualified students as possible.
  - USM issues approximately \$23.3 million in institutional student aid annually.
- Adjusting tuition pricing strategies to remain competitive for out-of-state students.
- Implementing a [new textbook and course materials program](#), through a partnership with Barnes and Noble College, to reduce the overall cost of course materials for undergraduate students with a flat fee per credit hour, with no restrictions on faculty course material selections.
- Developing a new payment policy requiring students either pay in full or enroll in a payment plan prior to the start of each semester.
  - This policy addresses historical patterns of students who were not financially able to pay, but who remained enrolled for one semester, then were forced to drop out for non-payment, resulting in a disservice to the student; a backlog of bad debt that eventually had to be written off for the institution; and impacts to long-term enrollment and retention.
  - The balance of student accounts receivable has decreased 36% over four years since implementation of this policy.
- Enhanced academic, financial, and professional development support for graduate students. Select examples:
  - Launching the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition at USM, an academic research communication competition developed by The University of Queensland, Australia, to help graduate students concisely articulate the significance of their research projects to a general audience.
  - Implementing a one-year professional development program for graduate students to develop cross-disciplinary skills in leadership, problem-solving, project management, communication, and professionalism. Upon completion of the program, graduate students may choose to obtain a digital badge that can be viewed by prospective employers and hiring committees.
  - Developing a three-year plan, beginning Fall 2022, to increase graduate assistant stipends to assist in graduate student recruitment and support while maintaining financial feasibility.

## **STUDENT LIFE**

*Philosophy: The student experience begins with a student's initial interest and culminates when students have utilized their high-quality education to enjoy hard earned success, and then returned as engaged alumni and donors.*

- Opened a [new student health clinic](#) with expanded services on the Hattiesburg campus. Extended health services and fitness center programming to campus locations on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
- Invested in additional resources supporting mental health, including funding additional counselor positions, expanding counselor service hours, and increasing mental health awareness and education initiatives.
- Supported enhanced safety resources across campus locations.
  - USM's University Police Department is accredited by both the Mississippi Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission and the [Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies](#), known as "The Gold Standard in Public Safety."

- Launched a multi-phase ESports program, as part of the National Association of Collegiate ESports and the National ESports Collegiate Conference, to provide a quality cyber-based community for USM students and introduce opportunities for collaboration with related research and academic areas.
  - USM's ESports program secured its [first national championship](#) in the final for the 2022 National ESports Collegiate Conference's Emergent League title.
- Partnered with the Student Government Association to implement small student activity and capital improvement fees to support additional student-centered programming and projects.
  - Examples of supported projects include a [new 324-seat theater and auditorium](#) as well as renovations to the [student union plaza](#).
- Supported a multi-year Student Government Association proposal, developed in conjunction with USM Honors College leadership, to enable all students to earn traditional Latin designations based on academic grade point averages, in alignment with national best practices.
  - Previously, Latin designation at USM was only available to students enrolled in the Honors College.
- Invested in new initiatives to support Greek organizations.
- Constructed a \$57 million housing complex with high-demand residence hall amenities.
- Implemented significant [improvements to on-campus dining and food services](#) based on student input.
- Expanded programs and services supporting military veterans, service members, and families.
  - USM is now a Top Ten Military Friendly institution and was ranked [first in the southeast and third in the nation by Military Times](#) in its 2021 Best for Vets list.

## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING**

*Philosophy: [The only future worth shaping is one in which all individuals are offered equal opportunities to succeed](#) – regardless of where they choose to learn, work, or raise their families. Enhancing diversity and inclusion is critical in advancing individual and community success, lifelong learning, and a true sense of belonging.*

- Advanced efforts to [change Mississippi's state flag](#), which flew from 1894 to 2020, over a five-year period.
- Revised USM's non-discrimination statement to include protections for genetic information and pregnancy.
- Updated policies and protocols supporting freedom of expression, which resulted in [USM earning a Green Light rating](#) from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), and supported student protests for a wide range of social justice issues.
- Invested in additional student-focused diversity resources and services, including creating the Prism Center supporting LGBTQIA+ students and a dedicated Office of Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement, as well as increasing [recognition of underrepresented international and Indigenous students](#).
- Implemented targeted programming to enhance the pipeline of women and minorities in STEM disciplines, including additional support and resources for [women in STEM fields](#) and an innovative [Hackathon competition for female African American high school students](#) to develop coding skills.
- Supported the addition of a Land and Labor Acknowledgement statement for course syllabi, developed in part by USM's [Center for American Indian Research and Studies](#).
- Created USM's first institutional Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer role.

- Increased the number of women in administrative positions. As of FY21, approximately 58% of USM positions with high-level decision-making authority are held by women, above the market availability average of 53%.
- Developed new faculty and staff hiring toolkits as well as training for hiring committees to ensure consistent job posting, applicant screening, and interview processes are followed.
- Expanded employee action-oriented programs as outlined in USM's federal Affirmative Action Plan documents, including an intensive review of all job descriptions for benefit-eligible staff to ensure duties and minimum qualifications do not create artificial barriers to diverse applicant pools.
- Honored prominent individuals for their sacrifices to advance Civil Rights in Mississippi and the American Civil Rights Movement. Select examples:
  - [Installed a historical marker](#) and [awarded a posthumous honorary doctorate](#) honoring the life and legacy of Clyde Kennard, who was denied admission to USM in the 1950s.
  - [Awarded an honorary doctorate](#) to Ellie Jewel Davis Dahmer, in recognition of her lifetime of service and her activism alongside her late husband, voting rights icon Vernon F. Dahmer, who was killed by a firebomb to their home during the height of the Civil Rights Movement.
  - [Named the forthcoming National Science Foundation Regional Class Research Vessel](#) in honor of the late Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., a pioneering Civil Rights leader for the Gulf Coast, who is most widely known for his role in the historic public "wade-ins" in Biloxi to open beaches to all citizens. The slogan for the new vessel will be *aequa mari*, meaning "equal access to the sea."

## **FISCAL MANAGEMENT**

*Philosophy: Fiscally conservative practices, with a focus on achieving measurable progress for long-term financial stability, position an institution to make strategic investments with moderate, calculated risk – when proposed investments are accompanied by a plan for a meaningful return.*

- Stabilized the institution's \$430 million budget despite increases in fixed costs, periods of significant budget reductions, and limited new funding.
  - Increased one-time reserves 145%, from \$18.8 million to \$46 million.
  - Increased recurring reserves 425%, from \$0.8 million to \$4.2 million.
  - Reduced historical internal debt from approximately \$7.5 million to approximately \$2.7 million, with complete pay-off scheduled for FY24.
  - Refinanced bonds at a lower rate to capture benefits from market changes.
- Achieved compliance with three new metrics first prescribed by Board policy in April of 2017.
  - Metric 1: Days of Cash on Hand – Required Benchmark: 90 Days
    - Increased from 91 in FY17 to 163 in FY21.
  - Metric 2: Reserve Adequacy – Required Benchmark: 1.50
    - Decreased from 3.4 in FY17 to 1.3 in FY21.
  - Metric 3: Debt Service Coverage – Required Benchmark: >1.5x
    - Increased from 1.6 in FY17 to 3.8 in FY21.

- Realigned limited resources with institutional priorities to support strategic growth, mitigate risk, or facilitate necessary technology and infrastructure improvements. Select examples:
  - Investing in new academic programs.
  - Creating and staffing a new student advisement center.
  - Expanding safety and police functions to additional locations along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
  - Expanding library resources to support student and faculty research.
  - Upgrading wireless internet infrastructure and service.
  - Replacing critical aging systems in select facilities where the greatest risk of failure was present.

## **FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

*Philosophy: Faculty are among the most influential individuals in the lives of students, not only because of the amount of time spent in the classroom focusing on their subject matter expertise, but also because of their ability to inspire, encourage, and motivate students.*

- Supported faculty recruitment and retention. Select examples:
  - Fostering a culture of collegiality and interdisciplinary collaboration.
  - Investing in new faculty positions in areas of projected growth.
  - Offering competitive start-up packages and salaries for new hires.
  - Developing a methodology to address salary compression and inversion based on best practices and market data.
    - USM's average full-time faculty salary has increased 10.2%, from \$65,263 to \$71,914.
- Supported investments in resources and programs to enhance faculty development. Select examples:
  - Developing clear promotion pathways for non-tenure track faculty through the creation of a teaching track promotion framework and related review processes.
  - Expanding the Center for Faculty Development, which provides services and resources supporting pedagogy, procedures, and methods for academic discovery and engagement.
  - Establishing Faculty First Week, an internal professional development conference developed to welcome new faculty and leverage internal expertise to offset travel limitations due to budgetary constraints.
  - Launching the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) Faculty Development Institute at USM, an intensive professional development program designed to enhance teaching practices, support educators, and promote student success.
    - USM quickly achieved the highest completion rate in the country for faculty participants, and evidence-based outcomes supporting student success are outlined in [ACUE's featured case study on USM](#).
    - Upon completion of all three ACUE courses, faculty earn the USM distinction of ACUE Distinguished Teaching Scholar as well as a Certificate in Effective College Instruction, endorsed by the American Council on Education.

- A new study conducted in partnership with ACUE demonstrated a first-year student retention rate that was 3.7 percentage points higher among USM students taught by faculty who completed the ACUE Faculty Development Institute.

## **STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

*Philosophy: Institutions must recognize the undeniable impact staff have across all disciplines, functions, and service areas, ensuring staff are supported for their contributions to student growth and development.*

- Supported significant human resources initiatives to recruit, retain, and develop staff. Select examples:
  - Implementing a customer-service partnership model to pair USM human resources leaders with individual units for personalized guidance and support.
  - Developing the university's first comprehensive staff classification and compensation system to ensure consistency in hiring and promotion decisions. Increased salaries in accordance with the new system and increased the minimum wage for hourly employees.
  - Creating an innovative performance management program focused on an employee's future development to replace an ineffective traditional model for annual evaluations.
  - Enhancing mental health resources available to all employees, including the addition of an Employee Assistance Program administered by ComPsych/Guidance Resources.
- Positioned [USM to be ranked by Forbes magazine](#) as the number one workplace in Mississippi in the Education category and the sixth-best overall workplace in the state in 2021.
  - The Forbes survey-based ranking considered working conditions, salary, growth potential, and diversity, among other key indicators, and included 20 employers from Mississippi.
  - Employee focus groups conducted by human resources developed an employer value proposition to utilize in the recruitment of new faculty and staff. The [Southern Miss Employee Advantage](#) framework articulates six key areas current employees self-identified as tangible and intangible benefits of working at USM: quality of life; rewards and benefits; diversity, equity, and inclusion; points of pride; location; and university culture.

## **SHARED GOVERNANCE**

*Philosophy: Shared governance is a key tenet of academia, and a university benefits the most when each individual's perspective and expertise are valued. Executive leadership that does not involve stakeholders is reckless and counterproductive.*

- Fostered a culture of shared governance through intentional stakeholder engagement in rich dialogue, requests for input, and consistent communication, especially when consensus cannot be achieved.
  - Recent focus groups conducted by USM's department of human resources found that faculty and staff indicated a deep appreciation for the ways in which they are engaged in decision-making processes.

- Expanded USM's Executive Cabinet to include representatives from Faculty Senate, Staff Council, and the Student Government Association in 2014. Each organization was charged with developing their own process for identifying their representative to ensure autonomy and flexibility.
  - This group was expanded again in 2020 to a broader Senior Leadership Team model, which now includes the academic deans, coastal leadership team, chief diversity officer and additional representatives from student life, human resources, and communications.
- Developed processes for working with USM's internal governance bodies to resolve issues as they arise, including concerns about Employee Handbook and Faculty Handbook policies as well as promotion and tenure guidelines.
- Developed regular meeting schedules to engage with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, which is comprised of faculty-elected representatives, and the Council of Directors, which is comprised of administratively appointed school directors.
- Participated in quarterly Staff Council meetings, as invited.
- Collaborated with each Student Government Association president to help advance annual SGA priorities.
- Developed ways to be accessible and approachable for students who are not in positions of leadership with traditional access to executive leadership by maintaining visibility on campus, in student dining facilities, at athletic events, and at a wide range of activities supporting student growth and development.

## **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

*Philosophy: Executive leadership must have a strong conviction for following the letter and spirit of applicable policies, statutes, and regulations, for sound stewardship of public and private funds, and for effective stakeholder communication, especially when topics are particularly complex.*

- Fostered a culture of transparency and accountability through a visible commitment to stewardship of resources at every level. Select examples:
  - Maintaining clean financial audits with unqualified audit opinions.
  - Developing a new gift counting policy to ensure consistency and confidence in private giving and investment data.
  - Implementing new systems and processes for managing official complaints and reports of care and concern to ensure inquiries are resolved appropriately and in a timely manner.
  - Meeting monthly with USM's internal auditor to review reports of concern.
  - Enhancing compliance practices in the areas of business services, information technology, and research funding.
- Expanded USM's Office of Compliance and Ethics to accommodate changes in federal and state requirements. Select examples:
  - Separating the roles of Title IX Coordinator and Equal Employment Opportunity Director, which had previously been combined, and adding new staff in both areas to provide more robust education and awareness programming while maintaining timely responsiveness to reported issues. This effort also included the expansion of a visible Title IX/Sexual Misconduct presence on coastal campuses.

- Adding staff to support the implementation of requirements from the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA).
- Enhanced USM's commitment to understanding and complying with NCAA rules and expectations through close collaboration with the athletic compliance office. This included final resolution of significant previous NCAA infractions.
- Implemented consistent communication strategies to maintain transparent communication with internal and external stakeholders.

## **POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PROCESSES**

*Philosophy: Thoughtful policy development and implementation, along with clear and efficient processes, provide structure while removing barriers to productivity.*

- Updated processes for new policy development and approval to ensure appropriate stakeholder groups are engaged in all stages of development.
- Developed a first read/second read workflow for executive leadership approval of new or revised policies to ensure adequate time for final vetting of proposed changes and review of compliance with Board policy.
- Implemented web-based policy tracking and management software to enable greater access to current policies and increase efficiencies in the review process through electronic workflows.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

*Philosophy: A compelling mission and vision clarify purpose and strategic direction, unite individuals in the pursuit of common goals, and enable shared accountability for achieving progress.*

- Developed the President's Vision and supporting priorities based on initial input from key institutional stakeholders.
  - Vision: The University of Southern Mississippi will be the model for public higher education across the country.
  - Priorities: Ensure Student Success; Expand Enrollment Strategies; Enhance Academic Instruction; Foster Greater Focus on Research; Bolster Economic and Community Partnerships; Maximize Human Potential.
- Formed a representative Strategic Planning Council to revise the full institutional mission, vision, and values under the broad framework of the President's Vision.
  - The updated mission, vision, and values were completed in 2015 and have since served as the foundation for division-level strategic plans developed by executive leaders across the institution.
  - The most comprehensive division-wide strategic planning effort, designated as Vision 2020: The Plan for Academic Reorganization, was developed to enhance the distinctiveness of academic programs and create a sustainable model for academic program growth. Faculty proposals were solicited to reimagine USM's academic structure in alignment with changing student and market needs while elevating opportunities for advanced interdisciplinary teaching and research.

- This plan reduced the number of degree-granting colleges from six to four, with each new college comprised of multi-disciplinary schools led by faculty directors.
- USM has been contacted by multiple institutions across the country for advice and guidance on how they can implement similar initiatives, and the underlying data methodology is highlighted in a [HelioCampus featured case study](#).
- The core concepts of the original academic reorganization model were adapted to analyze USM's coastal presence. A resulting strategic plan for USM's Coastal Operations was developed under the framework of three foundational pillars to harness USM's existing momentum in the maritime sector and compete in the global ocean economy.
  - Pillars: Understanding the Ocean and Coasts; Improving Coastal Resilience; Supporting the Blue Economy.
  - This plan has already resulted in the implementation of a more robust leadership structure for Coastal Operations, which improved collaboration and communication across sites that span Mississippi's entire coastline, and the formation of three new academic school structures to develop high-demand programs supporting business and industry needs.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT**

*Philosophy: Cultivating rich, productive relationships with alumni and donors allows for strategic investments that serve as a catalyst for student and faculty success while deepening generational connections to the institution.*

- Re-established a culture of philanthropy by implementing critical recommendations from a campaign feasibility study conducted in 2014. Select examples:
  - Investing in a more robust model for recruiting and retaining professional development staff, which most recently includes the development of a retention incentive program for strong employees who meet established, objective criteria for a specified length of time.
  - Merging multiple disparate processes and practices between the general university foundation and the athletic foundation, enabling donor gifts to be counted consistently and significantly reducing duplicate requests of donors.
  - Expanding alumni and donor information research methods.
  - Implementing targeted communication plans for alumni and donors.
  - Developing a case for support focused on the true impact of donor gifts.
  - Engaging academic leaders in direct fundraising initiatives.
- Supported the achievement of significant fundraising milestones.
  - Increased endowment values 98%, from \$68.8 million in FY13 to \$136.1 million in FY21.
  - Raised \$39 million in FY20, the largest single-year fundraising total since the USM Foundation was created in 1959.
  - Completed construction on the [first building that was fully privately funded through the USM Foundation](#), a \$3.1 million 5,500 square-foot facility designed to house USM's Center for Military Veterans, Service Members, and Families.



- Publicly [launched the largest organized, comprehensive campaign in USM history](#) in March 2022.
  - Despite the impacts of the pandemic, USM raised 73% of the \$150 million campaign goal during the campaign's silent phase.
  - By the end-of-June financial close, the campaign total had increased to just under \$125 million.
  - The final goal is expected to increase prior to the campaign conclusion in 2025.
- Developed a new strategic direction for the USM Alumni Association with five areas of focus: recruitment, networking, service, support, and young alumni.
  - This work led to the creation of an innovative alumni outreach program to replace a more traditional geographic "chapter" model. The new program is designed to provide unique opportunities for alumni to connect with USM in areas of specific interest to them.
- Implemented a virtual communication strategy to maintain personal connections with alumni and foundation leadership throughout the pandemic.

## **FACILITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, AND PHYSICAL PLANT DEVELOPMENT**

*Philosophy: Facility development and utilization are key components in student recruitment and well-being, effective pedagogy and research, and workplace productivity. Each of us bear responsibility for ensuring sound stewardship of resources extends through the implementation of key sustainability practices.*

- Provided oversight for nearly \$300 million in new construction, existing facility repair and renovation, and grounds projects, while incorporating sustainable building practices whenever possible. Primary categories:
  - \$134.6 million for academic facilities.
  - \$29.1 million for research facilities.
  - \$65 million for student life facilities.
  - \$15.5 million for athletics facilities.
  - \$13 million for grounds, wayfinding, and pedestrian pathways.
  - \$12.5 million for administrative facilities, envelope, and utility systems.
  - \$8.9 million for parking.
  - \$3.7 million for eligible water, sewer, and broadband projects under the American Rescue Plan Act.
- Developed updated master plans for all campuses.
- Implemented utility setback programs to reduce energy costs.
- Expanded sustainability practices, education, and programming, including facilitating the diversion of more than 3 million pounds of recyclable material from landfills.
- Maintained the Arbor Day Foundation's [Tree Campus Higher Education](#) designation.
- Led USM's rebuilding and recovery efforts following an [EF-4 tornado](#) that caused more than \$30 million in damages three days after being named president.

## ATHLETICS

*Philosophy: Athletics is often the most visible aspect of an institution's brand, and student-athletes serve as key ambassadors across the country. Investing in the health, well-being, and academic and competitive success of student-athletes is critical in supporting their growth and development, but also in positioning athletic programs to win championships.*

- [Completed conference realignment](#) to position USM athletics programs for future growth.
- Supported student-athlete development. Select examples:
  - Enhancement of academic advising support and construction of an [expanded academic center for student-athletes](#) as part of a \$12.1 million renovation to USM's main library.
    - The new student-athlete academic enhancement center is now co-located with the University Advisement Center, Center for Student Success, Speaking Center, and Writing Center, among other academic support areas.
    - USM student-athletes earned their highest overall GPA in recorded history at the end of the 2021 academic year, with a 3.1 GPA average across all sports. The average GPA for football was also the highest on record, with a 2.75 overall average.
  - Expansion of student-athlete wellness support through the addition of a dedicated mental health counselor available to student-athletes.
  - Collaboration with statewide leadership to provide feedback regarding the NCAA name, image, and likeness policy, keeping in mind the impact of the policy on student-athletes as well as the necessity to address the issue within the purview of state law.
  - Collaboration with conference leadership to minimize the amount of time student-athletes are away from the classroom and academic instruction for competition travel.
- Supported exceptional student-athlete performance at the highest levels of competition. Most recently:
  - USM's Women's Soccer team won the Conference USA West Division Championship in 2021.
  - USM's Women's Indoor Track and Field team captured their second consecutive Conference USA Indoor Championship Title in February 2022 – the first two Indoor titles in USM history.
  - USM's Baseball team advanced to the 2022 NCAA Super Regional, following their sixth straight regional appearance, with USM hosting the Super Regional for the first time in institutional history.
    - USM hosted significant baseball events three weekends in a row for the 2022 season, beginning with the conference tournament, followed by the NCAA Regional and Super Regional. This marks the first time in 16 years that a city hosted all three events, with an [initial estimated economic impact of \\$20 million](#) on the City of Hattiesburg.
- Invested nearly \$20 million in athletics facilities to provide the highest level of support for competition, with approximately 70% of funds generated through private giving. Select examples:
  - Construction of three NCAA regulation beach volleyball courts.
  - Renovation of women's basketball locker room.
  - Renovation of football locker and weight rooms.
  - Installation of a synthetic baseball turf and enhanced drainage system.

- Partnered with the City of Hattiesburg to develop a model for [a special 1% tax](#) on the gross proceeds of hotels and restaurants, which would be split between the city and the university. The proposal was subject to legislative approval and public vote.
  - USM's share of the funds is designated for renovations to Reed Green Coliseum, an aging basketball arena with the potential to become a significant destination for large community events.
- Partnered with the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) to host their Football Championship games in 2018, 2019, and 2021.
- Developed a new athletics logo to resolve a prior legal dispute over the former logo.
- Served as a founding member of the College Football Playoff Board of Managers.

## **MARKETING AND BRANDING**

*Philosophy: An institution's story influences the ability to be successful in every category, from recruiting prospective students to earning and maintaining its academic and research reputation.*

- Enhanced the quality and recognition of USM's brand and the equity that is now inherent in the brand. Select examples:
  - Engaging external agencies to assist in refining core messages and marketing strategies.
  - Eliminating the use of competing institutional markings.
  - Optimizing the use of key social media platforms and analytics to improve messaging effectiveness.
    - USM consistently achieves higher rates of positive engagement than larger institutions in the state.
  - Launching a new USM website focused on the student experience in 2019. This replaced multiple legacy websites that were not compatible with mobile devices.
- Realigned advertising strategies and budgets with institutional priorities.
- Expanded the marketing communications team, enabling USM to design its first dedicated video studio supporting institutional communications.
- Implemented robust video and social media communication plans to keep students and families engaged throughout the pandemic.
- Achieved consistent state and regional recognition for targeted marketing and branding initiatives. Select examples:
  - USM earned the Southern Public Relations Federation Best in Show Award for strategic marketing and public relations campaign work, recognizing the top public relations work among universities, businesses, corporations, and agencies in a four-state region.
  - USM earned two statewide awards from the Public Relations Association of Mississippi for a campaign emphasizing USM's commitment and capacity to deliver a high-quality student experience upon returning to in-person classes in Fall 2020. USM excelled beyond more than 70 statewide entries from other universities, businesses, non-profits, government entities, and other organizations across Mississippi.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT**

*Philosophy: Institutions that continue to invest in, utilize, and master technology in innovative ways have the greatest chance of advancing their mission and vision.*

- Converted critical manual processes to electronic workflows. Select examples:
  - Digitizing faculty credentialing, faculty evaluations, and annual promotion and tenure review processes through the Faculty Success platform (formerly Digital Measures).
  - Implementing new curriculum management software and processes through Curriculog.
  - Moving the majority of human resources paperwork to electronic workflows and implementing more robust applicant tracking software for job postings.
  - Implementing a budget management software package to standardize and automate many routine financial processes that were being completed manually.
- Implemented HelioCampus, a comprehensive data analytics package, to measure and adjust key performance indicators and costs associated with individual academic programs.
  - HelioCampus has improved efficiency and effectiveness across all academic units by enabling academic leadership to make more informed decisions. Its implementation is currently being expanded to include the capability to analyze resource models for non-academic units and to explore opportunities to integrate HelioCampus with Faculty Success for greater data analysis and workflow capabilities.
- Migrated from Blackboard to Canvas for online delivery of course materials.
- Upgraded wireless internet access, office telephone systems, and outdoor emergency phones across all campuses.

## **SERVICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA | ATHENS, GEORGIA**

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- **Vice President for Student Affairs/Associate Professor (Tenured) – July 2004-March 2013**  
*(Interim Vice President July 2004-2005)*
- **Dean of Students – July 2001-June 2010**  
*(The position of Dean of Students was combined with the position of Vice President July 2004-June 2010.)*
- **Interim Associate Provost for Institutional Diversity – October 2002-July 2003**

## **PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Served as the senior administrator charged with developing, administering, and maintaining student services and programs for an enrollment of more than 34,000 students.

- Directed an annual budget of more than \$86 million.
- Managed complex personnel matters for a division of approximately 525 full-time employees, 90 part-time employees, and more than 650 student employees.
- Provided leadership in the design of student services and co-curricular programs that emphasize experiential student learning.
- Developed and maintained positive collaborative relationships with faculty, staff, students, alumni, local and state leaders, and parents.
- Provided oversight and leadership for private fundraising activities within the Division of Student Affairs.
- Provided leadership and supervision for Student Affairs operations on three UGA extended campuses.

### **SELECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Provided ongoing support to the University Health Center, resulting in continued re-accreditation by The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). In 2010, the University Health Center also received the Governor's Commendation for Excellence in Customer Service for the implementation of the medical home.
- Provided leadership and oversight for approximately \$150 million in capital projects, including a \$58 million student center expansion; a \$50 million expansion of student housing facilities; a \$17 million expansion of the health center; a \$4 million expansion of the student fitness center and club sports complex; and a \$20 million Greek housing project.
- Increased fundraising to the Division of Student Affairs and generated more than \$6.1 million in private funding, including a \$2 million gift to create an alcohol awareness and education center.
- Collaborated with the UGA Athletic Association to establish a UGA football game day management group.
- Implemented key sustainability measures and green initiatives through the Division of Student Affairs, including earning the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification for a new 550-bed residence hall; recycling several hundred thousand pounds of non-hazardous waste materials through facility construction, upgrades, and repairs; construction of a new club sports complex featuring a parking lot paved with recycled concrete and lighting powered by solar panels; implementing water conservation practices and fixtures in key facilities; and implementing green housekeeping practices for building maintenance.
- Provided functional leadership to re-establish the Dean of Students office after more than two decades, including serving as the primary advocate for students; developing partnerships with faculty and staff in each of UGA's 16 colleges and schools; assisting with fundraising initiatives that produced \$2 million in gifts and pledges; and creating the Dean of Students Cabinet for Diversity to bring together a diverse group of student leaders for dialogue on diversity and multicultural issues.
- Increased the number of professional staff members in Counseling and Psychiatric Services, Student Support Services (student hardship scenarios), Greek Life, International Student Life, the African American Cultural Center, and the Office of Student Conduct.
- Created multiple centers designed to enhance the student experience, including the Volunteer UGA Office, the Office for Relationship Violence Prevention, LGBT Resource Center, and broader Office of Intercultural Affairs.

- Developed policies, standards of conduct, and educational programming related to alcohol awareness, including a mandatory online alcohol awareness class for all new and first-year students. Obtained grant funds to create the Georgia Network: Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues, a statewide office then housed in the Division of Student Affairs on UGA's campus.
- Increased student satisfaction with the residence life experience as indicated by data acquired from the Education Benchmarking, Inc. (EBI) survey. Collaborated with Academic Affairs to maintain eight learning communities in on-campus housing facilities.
- Chaired and provided ongoing leadership for the Behavioral Assessment and Response Council, which was created to address students in distress.
- Increased the number of women serving in leadership positions and implemented a salary equity plan that aligned compensation among similar positions within the same unit(s).
- Provided leadership and supervision for the UGA Parents & Families Association.
- Provided leadership and financial support for UGA's first overnight program for admitted minority students to increase the student yield from underrepresented populations.
- Worked to re-activate the Committee on Student Affairs, a standing committee of University Council, UGA's internal policymaking body.
- Created learning and development objectives to integrate general education outcomes for the university, learning outcomes as defined by Student Affairs literature, and the practical experience of Student Affairs directors, to guide staff toward intentionally facilitating students' out-of-class learning and enhance their individual growth and development.
- Provided oversight for two "clean" audits in the Office of Student Financial Aid. The first audit was conducted by the Annual State Audit of Federal Aid Programs. The second audit was conducted by the Internal Audit Division of UGA. At the time of the audits, the Office of Student Financial Aid was awarded more than \$200 million in student financial aid annually.
- Provided leadership to establish the New Dawgs Check List, an initiative that communicated to newly admitted students the important tasks that must be completed in order to successfully enroll. This initiative received the Governor's Award and Chancellor's award for Customer Service.

## **ACADEMIC RANK, COURSES TAUGHT, AND DEPARTMENT SERVICE**

**Associate Professor (Tenured)** – July 2004-March 2013

*Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, University of Georgia*

- ECHD 9460, Issues in Student Affairs Administration (Doctoral Capstone).
- ECHD 7640, Administration of Greek Life Programs (Graduate Seminar).
- ECHD 7460, Issues in Student Affairs Administration.
- ECHD 7440, Administration in College Student Affairs.
- FYOS 1001, First Year Odyssey Seminar.
- Faculty member of record for two ECHD 7460 Graduate Seminars: (1) Leadership Development Programs and (2) Judicial Programs.

- Served on the Master's Student Steering Committee to evaluate prospective students for admission.
- Served as a member of publishable paper and dissertation committees for doctoral students.
- Served on the screening committee for a full-time assistant professor in the Department of College Student Affairs Administration.

## SELECT PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND BOARDS

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- American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Peer Review Advisory Board (Past Member).
- College Football Playoff Board of Managers (Founding Member; 2014-2021).
- NCAA/Conference USA (Board Chair 2017-2019).
- The First Bank Board of Directors (2015-Present).
- The First Bancshares, Inc. Board of Directors (2017-Present).
- Mississippi Aquarium Board (2015-2022).
- USM Alumni Association Board (2013-2022).
- USM Athletic Foundation Board (2013-2022).
- USM Foundation Board (2013-2022).
- USM Research Foundation Board (2013-2022).
- St. Mary's Health Care System Board of Directors; Athens, Georgia (2004-2011; Vice Chair 2009; Chair 2010; Past Chair 2011).
- Catholic Health East Board – Mission, Ministry, and Advocacy Committee; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (2012-2013).
- UGA NCAA Certification Review and Self-Study (Chair; 2009-2010).
- UGA Athletic Association Executive Committee (Past Member).
- UGA Enterprise Information Technology Services Executive Management Team (Past Member).
- Classic Center Cultural Foundation/Authority Board; Athens, Georgia (Past Member).
- Northeast Georgia Girl Scouts of America Board of Directors; Co-Chair of the Fund Development Committee; Athens, Georgia (Past Member).
- Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, The Boulé (Past Sire Archon).
- Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

## SELECT HONORS AND AWARDS

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- Congressional Record of the 117th Congress, Second Session, entered by The Honorable Steven M. Palazzo of the Fourth District of Mississippi, Washington D.C., honoring outstanding service as President of The University of Southern Mississippi (2022).
- Black Hardy Street Capital Investment Club Man of the Year (2021).
- Mississippi Distinguished Civilian Service Medal (2019).
- Mississippi Top 50 (2019).
- Honorary Doctorate from William Carey University, for work in communities across south Mississippi, including leadership of USM's response to a January 2017 tornado that struck William Carey (2017).
- EBONY Magazine Power 100 List (2013).

## PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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### **Winthrop University – Rock Hill, South Carolina**

- Dean of Students – July 1998-June 2001

### **Middle Tennessee State University – Murfreesboro, Tennessee**

- Associate Dean of Student Life – July 1997-June 1998
- Assistant Dean of Student Life – June 1993-July 1997

## EDUCATION

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<b>Doctor of Education – Educational Administration</b> Tennessee State University; Nashville, Tennessee	<b>December 1996</b>
<b>Specialist in Education – Educational Administration</b> Middle Tennessee State University; Murfreesboro, Tennessee	<b>May 1993</b>
<b>Master of Education – Educational Administration</b> Middle Tennessee State University; Murfreesboro, Tennessee	<b>August 1992</b>
<b>Bachelor of Science – Mass Communication</b> Middle Tennessee State University; Murfreesboro, Tennessee	<b>December 1990</b>



## BIOGRAPHY

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Dr. Rodney D. Bennett served nearly ten years as President of The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), a comprehensive public research institution delivering transformative programs to more than 14,000 students on campuses in South Mississippi and along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. His appointment made history, as he became the first African American president of a predominantly white higher education institution in Mississippi.

Dr. Bennett established the vision for The University of Southern Mississippi to become the model for public higher education across the country, with six key institutional priorities: ensuring student success; expanding enrollment strategies; enhancing academic instruction; fostering greater focus on research; bolstering economic and community partnerships; and maximizing human potential. Under his leadership, USM achieved R1 status; reached significant fundraising milestones; enhanced community partnerships; expanded operations along the Mississippi Gulf Coast; supported innovations in healthcare; invested in new faculty positions, diversity and inclusion initiatives, student success programming, and nearly \$300 million in capital improvements; and worked to increase access to quality education and research programs to serve the needs of the state of Mississippi and beyond.

USM is now one of only fourteen R1 institutions in the nation that also compete at the NCAA Division I level and maintain accreditation in all four major areas of the Arts: theatre, art and design, dance, and music. USM's research enterprise includes experts in ocean science and engineering, polymer science and engineering, and large event venue safety and security, among others. As an economic driver, USM generates an annual economic impact of more than \$663 million across the state.

Dr. Bennett previously served more than a decade in senior level positions at the University of Georgia in Athens, where he chaired the institution's NCAA certification review and self-study process; completed more than \$150 million in facilities projects; implemented emerging sustainability best practices; re-established the Dean of Students office after more than two decades; and managed oversight of a robust on-campus health center with more than 20 healthcare providers, which was continually accredited by The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, as well as a dedicated student counseling services unit.

Throughout his career, Dr. Bennett has demonstrated a strong commitment to community leadership and service, including board membership for the Mississippi Aquarium; The First Bank (Hattiesburg); the Classic Center Cultural Foundation and Authority Board (Athens); the Northeast Georgia Girl Scouts of America; Catholic Health East (Philadelphia); and St. Mary's Health Care System (Athens), which included a 196-bed hospital, 134-unit senior community, 34-bed Alzheimer's facility, 12-bed hospice house, home care agency, medical group, and ambulatory care outpatient center. As President at USM, Dr. Bennett also chaired the athletic conference board and represented the conference as a founding member of the Board of Managers for the College Football Playoff national championship. He is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and Past Sire Archon for Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, The Boulé.

A native of Knoxville, Tennessee, Dr. Bennett, 56, holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Administration from Tennessee State University in Nashville and specialist, master's, and bachelor's degrees from Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro.

Dr. Bennett's wife, Temple, is a member of The Links, Inc., an international women's social and public service organization founded on the principles of friendship and service, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She holds a Master of Business Education and a Bachelor of Business Administration from Middle Tennessee State University. The couple has two adult daughters, Colby and Logan.