

# RODNEY D. BENNETT

[@RDBEdD](#)

## 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.

THEINSTITUTION

- x 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).
- x 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.
- x 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.
- x Expanded or created new initiatives, centers, and institutes in areas of emerging scholarship. Select examples:
  - x The Hatchery, a business innovation center providing dedicated space for students and faculty for the advancement of entrepreneurship education.
  - x 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.
  - x EagleMaker Hub, a makerspace supporting hands-on math education through digital fabrication, rapid prototyping, and coding.
  - x 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 highly qualified faculty who have the skills and vision necessary to imagine, conceptualize, operationalize, validate, and disseminate the final phases of research or creative development that improve the quality of life in our communities and shapes our world.

- x Positioned

x In the past five years, USM junior faculty have earned five National Science Foundation  
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- x The acquisition of RCRV Gilbert R. Mason was made possible by h ^ D \$ 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



- x [Phase1 of the programlaunchedin January2022](#) and utilizes existingnursesas embedded clinicalfacultyto teach USMnursingstudentsat their respectivehealthcarefacility.
- x Phase2 is expectedto launchin 2023andwill includedesignatingeadinghealthcarefacilities asofficial hospitalbasedteachingsites.
- x Leadingimmediatecommunityresponseto the COVID19 pandemicthrough h ^ D Collegeof Arts andSciences
  - x In March 2020, USMfaculty [partneredwith ForrestGeneralHospitaland HattiesburgClinic](#), the two largesthealthcareorganizationsn the GreaterHattiesburgarea,

x



x Optimizing institutional scholarship models to

- x 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

- x Increased the number of women in administrative positions. As of FY21, approximately 58% of USM positions with high-level decisionmaking authority are held by women, above the market availability average of 53%.
- x Developed new faculty and staff hiring toolkits as well as training for

- x Realigned limited resources with institutional priorities to support strategic growth, mitigate risk, or facilitate necessary technology and infrastructure improvements. Select examples:
  - x Investing in new academic programs.
  - x Creating and staffing a new student advisement center.





- x Adding staff to support the implementation of requirements from the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NCSARA).
- x Enhanced 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.
- x 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 efficient processes, provide structure while removing barriers to productivity.

- x Updated processes for new policy development and approval to ensure appropriate stakeholder groups are engaged in all stages of development.
- x 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.
- x Implemented web-based policy tracking and management

- x 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.
- x 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](#).
- x The core concepts of the original academic



x Publiclylaunchedthe largestorganizedcomprehensive

## ATHLETICS

Philosophy: 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.

- x Completed conference realignment to position USM athletics programs for future growth.
- x Supported student-athlete development. Select examples:
  - x Enhancement of academic advising support and construction of an expanded academic center for student-athletes as part of a \$12.1 million renovation to the main library.
    - x 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.
    - x 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.
  - x Expansion of student-athlete wellness support through the addition of a dedicated mental health counselor available to student-athletes.
  - x 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.
  - x Collaboration with conference leadership to minimize the amount of time student-athletes are away from the classroom and academic instruction for competition travel.
- x Supported exceptional student-athlete performance at the highest level of competition.



## TECHNOLOGY AND SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

Philosophy:

- x Directed an annual budget of more than \$86 million.
- x Managed complex personnel matters for a division of approximately 525





## SELECTIONS AND AWARDS

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- x 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).
- x Black Hardy Street Capital Investment Club Man of the Year (2021).
- x Mississippi Distinguished Civilian Service Medal (2019).
- x Mississippi Top 50 (2019).
- x Honorary Doctorate from William Carey University, for work in communities across south Mississippi, including leadership of the response to a January 2017 tornado that struck William Carey (2017).
- x EBONY Magazine ET Q q 0 0 612 792 re W\* n BT 0 g /TT0 11.04 Tf 263.45 l18 (k)TJ ET Q q 0 0 612 792 re W



## 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 Coast. His appointment made history, as he became the first African American president of a predominantly white higher education institution. ]4 (t (cd)3.995 (i)4.004 (as).996 p6.006 (m)3.007 (p).