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**Contact: Keith Ayers**

**USA Director of Public Relations**

[**kayers@usouthal.edu**](mailto:kayers@usouthal.edu)**; (251) 460-6211**

(Pronunciation note to media: Gautier: “Go-SHAY”)

**USA SUSPENDS PLANS FOR GAUTIER, MISS., CAMPUS**

University of South Alabama officials say they have decided not to accept an invitation at this time to place a satellite campus in Gautier, Miss., but USA will continue to provide the same educational services as in the past for students in coastal Mississippi.

The USA Board of Trustees in March voted to support the establishment of a USA satellite campus in Gautier after Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) sought a formal partnership following consultations with civic and business leaders in the Mississippi Gulf Coast region. Since that time, conflict has arisen among institutions within the higher education system in Mississippi.

“While USA appreciates the invitation to partner with MGCCC and remains committed to meeting the educational needs of the upper Gulf Coast region, the proposed satellite campus has been the subject of unanticipated discord within Mississippi,” said USA President Gordon Moulton.

“For this reason, and as a demonstration of good faith, we have decided not to move forward with the Gautier campus at this time, but our door remains open. As in the past, we will continue to meet the needs of the people of the Mississippi Gulf Coast through our traditional and online programs and by serving as a major provider of degree programs to students who transfer to our campus.

“USA’s objective remains the same – providing ready access to students in the Mississippi Gulf Coast region and at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College who need our diverse and high quality academic programs.”

“Southwest Alabama and Coastal Mississippi are the same community when it comes to industry, commerce, education, health care, and recreation,” Moulton said. “Mobile and Gautier are only 37 miles apart, and people from both areas commute in both directions every day.

“It is crucial that USA continue to work with Mississippi to meet the educational needs of our region, at the same time increasing our enrollment and tuition revenue, which will help to defray the costs of educating Alabama students in these times of declining state funding,” Moulton added.

USA currently enrolls 14,757 students, with 1,533, or about 10 percent, coming from Mississippi, predominantly from the coastal area.

Gautier is in Jackson County, which borders Mobile County, home of the main campus of USA. USA is the closest four-year public university to Gautier, and MGCCC is the second largest source of transfer students to USA, with 200 students transferring annually. Alabama law permits Mississippi students within a 50-mile radius of an Alabama university to attend at the resident tuition rate.

Dr. Willis H. Lott, president of MGCCC said, “I am extremely disappointed that USA has decided to suspend their decision to offer classes at our Jackson County Campus. However, I certainly understand their decision. It is unfortunate that some of the leadership in Mississippi have not supported the opportunity to bring bachelor’s degree programs to the people of Jackson County. We look forward to the day that USA offers classes on campus in Gautier.”

Since its founding in 1963, USA has been one of Alabama’s fastest growing universities and offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate academic programs in Allied Health Professions, Arts and Sciences, Mitchell College of Business, Computer and Information Sciences, Continuing Education and Special Programs, Education, Engineering, Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy with Auburn University. USA has awarded more than 66,000 degrees.

In addition to teaching and research, USA is one of the largest health care providers in the region, providing more than a quarter million patient encounters annually through its faculty physicians, two hospitals -- Children’s & Women’s and USA Medical Center -- and the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, a public, comprehensive community college serving over 37,000 credit and non-credit students, has been meeting the educational needs of its four-county district for almost 100 years. In 1965, the college opened the Jackson County Campus which has grown to more than 4,000 credit students since its inception. Educational offerings include academic, technical, career, continuing education, and workforce development. The college annually graduates more than 1,500 students who have attended one or more of the college’s eight locations. MGCCC is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC).