

31st & Pearl

CoB's Journal Ranking Process Politicized

In last Friday's CoB faculty meeting, interim dean Alvin Williams stated that a new journal ranking was eminent and that the journal ranking committee would begin work at 8 A.M. on Tuesday, September 04, 2007. Should we, observers of the CoB chaos, expect a positive outcome from this newly-discovered dedication to journal ranking? Hardly.

Back in the mid-1990's, a group of research-driven faculty were named to create a journal ranking list that would reward quality research over the quantity-driven system that had ruled the CoB for the previous 5+ years. This system, refined, reviewed, and legitimate though it was, was quickly abandoned by Ty Black's regime to the benefit of the long-timers who value "collegiality" over productivity. Such a culture has ruled the CoB since, even though faculty recruiters continue to laud the CoB's *research culture*. This new journal ranking effort is supposed to define and rekindle the CoB's research efforts.

To determine what we should expect in this defining process, let's take a look at the journal ranking committee itself: Burgess, Carr, Chen, Dakhliya, Jordan, Lindley, and Wittmann. That's 3 tenured faculty and 4 *untenured* faculty. Why are *untenured* faculty being allowed, in essence, to define their own tenure requirements? That's a good question. A better question is why only 2 of the 7 (Carr and Lindley) have produced a considerable quantity of research that contains a respectable quality of publication necessary to build a national reputation in a field. If we examine each of these individuals closely, we may find out more troubling information.

Start with the chair, Sami Dakhliya, the second-year *untenured assistant* professor of economics whose research record was, according to a now-retired CoB faculty member, "woefully" short of the requirements for tenure and promotion at his previous institution, University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa, where Dakhliya fell short in his tenure run three years ago. Since arriving in Hattiesburg, Dakhliya has made every effort to create the broadest possible definition of quality research, reportedly by roughly doubling the number of

“A”/high quality journals in the economics journal ranking list. It seems, then, that Dakhli’s chairmanship of this committee creates a clear conflict of interest – an untenured faculty member, 8 years removed from his degree date, with fewer than 1 publication per year to show – as he gets to help decide his own tenure requirements going forward.

Next is Quo Lane Chen, whose atrocious English speaking got her tenure & promotion dossier remanded to the college for further review and who, at this time, was floundering in the T&P process. Chen hasn’t gotten close to a real A publication in MIS; an external review of her vita would only serve to embarrass an already notably weak component of the CoB. Sure, Chen has quantity, but can she produce outside the sphere of influence of Chang Hsieh? Even if she can, what qualifies her to sit on the journal ranking committee? This is another example of an untenured faculty member in a conflict of interest situation.

Brigitte Burgess is somewhat of an anomaly. Burgess seems to show promise in research, if only she were allowed to teach fewer than 12 hours per semester and 7 preparations per year. Of course, Burgess is the “old lady” in fashion merchandising, that is, if you exclude Cynthia Easterling-Moore and count 5 years’ seniority as “old”. Burgess is the only reasonable member from FM, even though she’s untenured and, once again, getting to write her own ticket.

Charles Jordan. King in quantity, pauper in quality. If the *Oil and Gas Tax Quarterly* has less than a 20% acceptance rate, I’ll eat my hat. Likewise for the *Journal of Business and Economic Perspectives*. Jordan is a producer of low-level applied accounting research, and he has made a fine living parlaying this product into a six-figure salary and multiple turns at the Morgan Professorship at USM. Can we really expect Jordan to subjugate his journals to the *Journal of Accounting Research* in an effort to elevate the research culture in the School of Professional Accountancy? Well, maybe after Mary Anderson gets the 3 generic refereed publications in 5 years that she’s been told she needs for tenure & promotion.

Now for Mike Wittmann, the Draughn Chair in Pharmaceutical Sales. The chair without a chair’s resume. An eminent scholar without portfolio. Wittmann ignores the major reasons he DOESN’T produce high quality research; he’s in the old CoB system, following the “gameplan”: go eat lunch with the boys, grab coffee, talk in the hall, do a passable job in the classroom, and do whatever service is asked of you. NOT part of this plan is hitting the top marketing journals, which, by the way, does NOT include the *Journal of Business Research’s*

marketing section. Wittmann is the final member of the conflict of interest club, as his *untenured* status creates yet another committee member with a vested interest in having easy tenure hurdles and, therefore, a liberal journal ranking list.

As previously mentioned, John Carr and Tom Lindley have portfolios to bring to bear. Carr has been the most productive young management faculty member over the past 10 years, hitting several quality journals and producing quite a bit of research that actually builds a resume. Lindley is the CoB's bellwether for establishing a research culture based on quality of research rather than quantity of research. Lindley has premier publications in economics (*American Economic Review*) and finance (*Journal of Finance*), something few in finance nationwide can claim. Unfortunately, Carr is often unable to separate business from personal, and his friendship with Wittmann and others may cause him to err on the side of creating an easy journal ranking. Lindley will no doubt continue (as he has for the past three decades) to support a quality culture, though he is vastly outnumbered.

Look for this committee to produce a weak journal ranking list, with journals commonly considered to be B-level outlets by respectable institutions ranked as A-level outlets for USM. Such a ranking will open the CoB up to a continuation of the same old, same old rewards system that has nothing to do with teaching, research, or service and will allow the gamers to game the system yet again. Also, look for other marginal producers and *untenureds* to stick their noses in the process in an effort to weaken the requirements for tenure and promotion and to create a more palatable atmosphere for their marginal research productivity.

Why can't the CoB just adopt an honest journal ranking list? Because many CoB faculty are incapable, even if working at 100% effort, of publishing articles in real A-level journals. Instead of adopting the attitude that B's are good, but A's are better and allowing the real researchers to distinguish themselves, the CoB must protect the delicate egos of those who can only get research published in regional and narrowly defined specialty journals and/or pedagogical journals. In so doing, the *Journal of Marketing Education* becomes equivalent to the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* when the author is a senior professor who "can't be expected" to publish in true research outlets. Of course, this also opens up the possibilities for Susan Doty to become tenured at USM based on a handful of pedagogical economics articles or John Lambert to be tenured based on some pay-for-play journal publications. Rather than just being happy with who they are, CoB faculty must create a fairy tale journal ranking to make themselves feel

better, since everyone will have a chance to hit an A-level journal, even if that journal is on the C- or D-list in Baton Rouge.

Of course, this is all thanks to the leadership of Harold Doty who, when interviewing for jobs, lauds his research prowess, and who, when put into a dean's chair, does anything and everything to erode a real research culture and to devalue real scholarship. Plus, he had accomplices in Babin, Babinette, Bushardt, Carter, Daniel, Pate, Posey, Williams, and others, who have always been willing to sell out for a nickel, especially if it meant less work in the long run for them. After all, in the CoB, "lazy" is the new "diligent," and the *Journal of Hattiesburg Business Studies* is the new premier interdisciplinary journal.

31st & Pearl is a series housed at usmnews.net that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.