

Boilerplate Language?

An Investigation of Citation Usage in Administrative Functions

As has been reported in this forum, the USMNEWS.net editor, Dr. C.M. DePree, Jr., filed a complaint with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and with USM regarding CoB administrators' plagiarism of materials from Central Missouri State University and Syracuse University.

CoB administrators and their sycophants defend their academic dishonesty by rationalizing that such materials are "boilerplate language" and that such materials do not constitute academic research product. Since the materials are not academic research, apologists say, they do not warrant citation or attribution.

Without much effort, USMNEWS.net reporters found two interesting instances of USM administrative documents that (1) have been used at length within USM and (2) contradict the dishonest stance taken by those who would overlook a serious academic transgression. Scans of these two documents are attached in their entirety as Appendices A and B. For convenience, only portions are included in the body of this report.

Appendix A presents a document that is well known to those who predate 2005 at USM. This document is the former open-ended comment form used in USM student evaluations before online student evaluations were instituted. The form asks the student to discuss rather routine features of a specific course, including particularly positive features of the instructor and course and how the instructor and course might be improved. None of these questions represents sensitive outcomes based on academic research. Now examine the portion below:

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The attribution that appears above was photocopied hundreds of thousands of times each academic year, as it appeared on every form prepared for every student to complete for every class and instructor evaluated.

Now examine Appendix B, a lesser-known document. This document is a copy of teaching portfolio instructions/guidelines disseminated to faculty at USM during the Thames Era. Teaching portfolios are a common feature at every institution of higher learning, and the material contained in Appendix B is simply an organized presentation of materials common to professors' teaching portfolios worldwide. Yet, the document commences with the following blurb:

This handout was adapted from one developed by the team at Mankato State University and provides an outline for the structure of a teaching portfolio. While a portfolio used for personal purposes, this portfolio was developed for evaluation of your teaching.

In a document that contained no “new” information – certainly not sensitive academic work product – the USM “borrowers” decided that it was appropriate to credit Mankato State University with development of the precursor to this document.

Why, then, is it appropriate to copy direct, lengthy passages from policy documents at CMSU and SU without attributing or acknowledging the sources? Some suggest that acknowledging such copying would have flashed a bright light on the fact that former CoB dean D. Harold Doty lacked interest in – and the ability to produce – original documents along the lines of the plagiarized documents. Others suggest that, with most faculty distracted by USM events or bought off by soft money “bribes,” CoB administrators simply thought they could sneak one past the college watchdogs. Of course, Belva Farnsworth’s thumbprint ruined that ruse.

The Internet website plagiarism.org, a website that, by its own statement, is “designed to help educators and students develop a better sense of what plagiarism means,” presents the following information:

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to “plagiarize” means

1. to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
2. to use (another's production) without crediting the source
3. to commit literary theft
4. to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

In the case of CoB, definition 2 most closely fits the AACSB/Academic Integrity Policy situation. The AACSB document was (ostensibly) created by faculty and staff members at Central Missouri State University, and the Academic Integrity Policy was (again,

ostensibly) created by faculty and staff members at Syracuse University. CoB used these documents without crediting the source. Notice that Merriam-Webster fails to note the Charles Jordan-inspired “permission to copy without proper attribution” alternative; it is incumbent on an individual who uses another’s work, whether academic in nature or otherwise, to attribute those thoughts and ideas to the individual or institution from which they were taken.

It is obvious from the two examples presented in this report that USM once held academic integrity in high regard. It is also clear from the actions of current and former CoB faculty and current and former CoB and USM administrators (including Harold Doty, Farhang Niroomand, Stan Lewis, George Carter, Barry Babin, Laurie Babin, Jay Grimes, Shelby Thames, and Martha Saunders) that plagiarism is “okay” at USM. In their eyes, there is “criminal” plagiarism and there is “pedestrian” plagiarism, and the difference is whatever they (the ruling class) want it to be.

This makes some of the USMNEWS.net reporters wonder if Martha Saunders taught her seven now-grown children that it is okay to steal, as long as the stolen item costs less than \$5. Perhaps she told her grandchildren that it’s okay to lie, just as long as nobody can bear witness against you. One thing is clear from Saunders’ failure to discipline CoB faculty and administrators for their involvement in this plagiarism scandal: she thinks it’s okay to cheat, just as long as you don’t get caught; if you get caught, however, you should say that “everybody else does it,” and that will make it okay. Better still, if you silence those who would expose your cheating, it’s as if the cheating never happened. Isn’t it?

Appendix A: USM Open-Ended Student Comment Form, ca. 2004

OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

INSTRUCTOR'S NAME

DEPARTMENT NAME

COURSE NUMBER

INSTRUCTOR:

Please indicate the important characteristics of this instructor which have been most valuable to your learning experience.

Please indicate characteristics of this instructor which you feel are most important for him/her to work on improving (particularly aspects not covered by rating items).

COURSE:

Please indicate the important characteristics of this course which have been most valuable to your learning experience.

Please indicate areas where you feel the course could be improved.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Please use the space below (and the back of this page if necessary) to clarify any of your responses or to make other comments.

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Appendix B: USM Teaching Portfolio Handout, ca. 2005

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

This handout was adapted from one developed by the team at Mankato State University and provides an outline for the structure of a teaching portfolio. While a portfolio used for personal purposes can be structured any way you want, most teaching portfolios developed for evaluation of your teaching by others contain information on: (1) teaching responsibilities, (2) teaching philosophy, (3) evaluating teaching effectiveness, and (4) description of instructional improvement methods. The actual written document is not very long (3-8 pages or so, but some can be longer), and documentation is usually provided in an appendix or made available upon request.

Since each individual will develop his/her own personal teaching portfolio, all will contain different information, and probably no individual portfolio will contain all the information outlined in each of the following sections. However, if portfolios are to be implemented as requirements for evaluating teaching, minimum criteria should be set so that faculty are aware of what must be included, and administrators should develop policies regarding how portfolios will be used to evaluate faculty members.

Teaching Responsibilities

This section is basically descriptive. Not only does it describe what you teach, but who you teach.

Possible content to include in this section:

1. Courses taught
2. Number of different preparations
3. Number of students in each class
4. Level of students taught
5. Ratio of majors to non-majors in classes
6. Discussion of and hours per week spent on teaching-related activities
7. Course content
8. Off-campus, overload, and summer teaching
9. Advising and office hours
10. Internship or mentoring responsibilities (i.e., directing a student's honors' thesis)
11. Nature of class schedule and how this impacts on your course content and methodology
12. Other information related to your teaching responsibilities

Teaching Philosophy

Basically, this section discusses what you do in the classroom and why you teach the way that you do. This section is a description of how you conduct your classes (i.e., lecture, discussion, cases, etc). Also discuss why you teach that way. What are your underlying principles regarding your teaching?

Possible content to include in this section:

1. Basic goals and outcomes desired for students from your courses
2. Your image of students
3. Different goals and missions for different courses
4. Role of your discipline in the lives of students - why does your course matter?
5. Teaching style
6. Lessons from mentors and role models
7. Other information