

## **Dr. Dakhlia on the First Amendment**

### **A Look at Sami Dakhlia's Grievance Against USMNEWS.NET**

Two weeks after standing before CoB faculty and staff, who were assembled for the end-of-year CoB meeting, and presenting a proclamation that disparaged Marc DePree, assistant professor Sami Dakhlia filed a grievance against DePree, editor of USMNEWS.NET. Dakhlia's grievance was filed on 17-May-07 with USM Provost Jay Grimes and Interim CoB Dean Alvin Williams. The e-mail from Dakhlia containing that grievance is inserted below.

From: Google Documents [mailto:noreply@google.com] On Behalf Of [Sami.Dakhlia@gmail.com](mailto:Sami.Dakhlia@gmail.com)  
Sent: Thursday, May 17, 2007 5:32 PM  
To: Alvin Williams; [jay.grimes@usm.edu](mailto:jay.grimes@usm.edu); [Sami.Dakhlia@gmail.com](mailto:Sami.Dakhlia@gmail.com)  
Subject: Grievance against Dr. DePree

Dear Provost Grimes, dear Dean Williams:

Please find attached my grievance against Prof. DePree.

Sincerely,

Sami Dakhlia

The USM grievance process begins with department chairs. Dakhlia's department chair is EFIB Chair, George Carter. Dakhlia chose to skip this step in the process, instead going directly to Grimes and Williams. Perhaps Dakhlia chose this route because Carter is not directly tied to DePree in the CoB organizational chart. In that case, Dakhlia could have begun the process with DePree's chair, SAIS Director Steven Jackson. Still, he (Dakhlia) did not.

Dakhlia's 4-May-07 "proclamation" against DePree came at the end of the Spring 2007 CoB faculty meeting, and it was not part of the formal meeting agenda. However, we have learned that Williams knew prior to that meeting that Dakhlia wished to present a statement against DePree, and that Williams gave Dakhlia permission to do so. And, Williams chose not to amend the meeting agenda, even though he (Williams) approved Dakhlia's submission. The relationship that Dakhlia had developed with Williams likely led Dakhlia to begin the grievance process with Williams. Other documents in USMNEWS.NET's library show that Grimes had been working against DePree for quite some time, a fact that Williams was aware of, and one that offered Dakhlia a good reason to include Grimes in the first stage.

The opening of Dakhlia's grievance against DePree and USMNEWS.NET is inserted below:

Dear Provost Grimes, dear Dean Williams,

I am addressing this letter to you to ask that you take formal disciplinary action against my fellow colleague Professor Chauncey Marcellous DePree.

Dakhlia's letter to Grimes and Williams gets straight to the matter at hand and doesn't mince words. Dakhlia wants the two USM administrators to "take formal disciplinary action against . . . DePree." Why was that? The remaining sections of Dakhlia's letter tells us. The second section is inserted below:

On March 6, 2007, Dr. DePree first "broke" a story on his USMnews.net website about my teaching in France, almost 5 months after my trip. There was nothing secretive about the trip. Indeed, I had informed the chairman of my department as well as the former Dean about my impending trip and was commended and further encouraged to participate in international cooperation to further the international reputation of USM. I was also careful to minimize the impact of my week-long trip on my USM students, who ended up only missing one day of class.

I should point out that Dr. DePree never contacted me about this prior to his publication, thus failing a major deontological test of respectable journalism. Colleagues showed me the article a few days later. I chose not to respond as I considered such childish behavior beneath me.

Section two above gets to the heart of Dakhli's grievance. According to Dakhli, USMNEWS.NET published a story on 6-March-07 about a teaching trip to France that Dakhli took in the fall of 2006. Dakhli makes a point to state that USMNEWS.NET's report came "almost 5 months after [Dakhli's] trip," as if the lateness of the report about the trip somehow discredits the report. If that were true, former President Bill Clinton would have had a built-in defense against the 1990s reports of his activities in Arkansas during the 1970s and 1980s. The report Dakhli refers to was based on information from sources that was not made available to USMNEWS.NET prior to spring 2007. The same could be said of many of the 1990s reports about Clinton's 1970s and 1980s activities.

Next, Dakhli informs Williams and Grimes that "there was nothing secretive about the trip. Indeed, I had informed the chairman of my department as well as the former Dean about my impending trip and was commended and further encouraged to participate in international cooperation to further the international reputation of USM." Let's get this straight: Dakhli took on a week-long intensive teaching gig in France, not a United Nations mission to bring together two warring factions for peace talks. The line about "international cooperation" sounds like the way a consulate might describe Dakhli's teaching activities, not a serious academic. Straight talk number two: Week-long intensive teaching gigs in France do nothing to further a school's international reputation, at least not in a positive way. If that were so, then David Duhon, Farhang Niroomand et al. would have long ago gotten USM's business school into the Top 100 based on their British Studies activities alone. Note number three about Dakhli's week-long teaching gig in France: Dakhli is French, so he was simply going home.

The passage above also indicates that Dakhli informed Carter and former CoB Dean Harold Doty about the "impending trip," and that they commended and encouraged him. At the time Dakhli made the trip, he was being paid \$71,000 per year by Mississippi's taxpayers. He took a week off from his USM teaching duties (more on that "week" below) to teach, for pay, in France. Some call this double-dipping, which violates State of Mississippi statutes. Dakhli would say he had permission to make the trip and complete the teaching gig. However, as we all know, neither Carter nor Doty can give Dakhli or anyone permission to violate State statutes, just as Dakhli can't give his children permission to drive before they are old enough (legally) to do so. This part of Dakhli's grievance rings hollow, which is probably why, according to sources, that Dakhli described the gig as one might describe an international peace trip by former President Jimmy Carter.

According to Dakhli, the trip was arranged so that its impact on USM students was minimized. This is partially true. The Monday-Friday trip included the Thursday-Friday Fall Break 2006 at USM. Thus, no class periods were missed on these two days. Dakhli taught a MWF schedule that semester, which leaves Monday and Wednesday unaccounted for. Dakhli says he missed only one day of class. By "class," Dakhli means "lecture," because he gave an exam on that Wednesday. This means he missed two class periods, but only one (potential) lecture. Students pay thousands of dollars in tuition each semester. One would think they might like to have their

professor-of-record in the room on exam day in order to address any questions. Dakhliya disagrees -- it's only on lecture days that he really needs to be there. Let's also not forget that school holidays are for students, not professors. As such, Dakhliya missed five days in order to go home to teach a week-long class for another university. That's it in a nutshell.

Finally, Dakhliya makes a point to tell Grimes and Williams that he was never contacted by DePree about the story before it was posted to USMNEWS.NET. According to Dakhliya, "Dr. DePree never contacted me about this [story] before publication, thus failing a major deontological test of respectable journalism." Dakhliya, who took pay from USM while teaching in France for pay, is, in this passage, instructing Williams and Grimes on deontological tests of respectable journalism. As much as anything else on this website, this shows readers outside of USM just how perverse things are at USM.

On March 19, 2007, Dr. DePree published a follow-up:

"This source was unable to speak about the "teaching in France" portion of this developing story (see below), but did confirm information from two other sources indicating that Dakhliya was not in the CoB (Greene Hall) over the period 12/13 October 2006 through 18 October 2006 (i.e., Dakhliya missed a full week of teaching his MWF fall 2006 schedule)."

Dr. DePree thus claims, among other things, that I was absent Friday, October 13, 2006, and that no fewer than three sources could confirm this. Fact is, I was at CoB that day and taught my classes.

This raises some troubling questions: (a) either Dr. DePree is just making stuff up or (b) some of our colleagues keep a daily log of everybody's activities. Recall that by then, five months had gone by, and sources still claimed to know something about my whereabouts on a specific Friday.

Alternative (a) is inexcusable; (b) would go a long ways towards explaining why faculty members are closing their doors, no longer talk to one another, and no longer know whom to trust. By the way, while I did teach my classes in the morning, I never went to my office. This might be where Dr. DePree's observers got confused.

The next section of Dakhliya's grievance is inserted above. This section concerns a follow-up story on Dakhliya's teaching junket in France. Here Dakhliya is concerned that USMNEWS.NET sources included the previous Friday, 13-Oct-06, to his week-long trip. According to Dakhliya, he taught his classes that day, though he does admit that he did not enter his office that day. One might think that he taught his courses and then left the campus to prepare for the trip. In this case, Dakhliya has allowed the France trip to intrude upon his responsibility to Mississippi taxpayers on yet another day, whether he taught his courses that Friday or not.

In my opinion, Dr. DePree's public diffusion of lies about me constitutes defamation on one hand and harassment at the workplace on the other. I ask that the University of Southern Mississippi, as my employer, take any action necessary to stop Dr. DePree from further damaging my reputation, that of our college, and this University in general.

If no disciplinary action is taken and Dr. DePree is allowed to continue defaming his fellow colleagues in a public forum, then the proper operation of our college is at risk.

Respectfully submitted,

Sami Dakhliya, Ph.D.  
Assistant Prof. of Economics  
College of Business  
University of Southern Mississippi

The final piece of Dakhlia's grievance is inserted above. There Dakhlia resorts to referring to the previous USMNEWS.NET reports as a "diffusion of lies" about Dakhlia, constituting "defamation . . . and harassment at the workplace . . ." This is probably all so strange to many readers. It's sad it's typical for USM.

Dakhlia is seeking disciplinary action against DePree because he (Dakhlia) did not like two reports about him that appeared on USMNEWS.NET. To Dakhlia, First Amendment be damned! Dakhlia's regard, or disregard, for the First Amendment is not the real issue now. The real issue involves the subsequent actions taken by USM officials. For more on that, USMNEWS.NET readers will have to stay tuned . . .