

Editorial

I doubt our Interim Director of the School of Accounting and Information Systems, Steve Jackson, has a clue why professors at the Annual American Accounting Association Meeting thought it was disgusting and outrageous that he, a University of Southern Mississippi administrator, recorded research presentations. (The title of my presentation was, “Does Accreditation Provide A Reliable Authority On Academic Quality?” A participant characterized the research as a report on the “malfeasance” of USM administrators.) Dr. Jackson’s behavior goes to the heart of bureaucratic ignorance. Interim Director Jackson, like other administrators, act on behalf of a powerful institution and his behavior is backed by, at a minimum, an implicit threat. At USM, the threat quickly becomes punishment for speech they consider outside the bounds of being a “team player.” So, when Interim Director Jackson recorded a meeting where academics were presenting their research, he acts with the full authority of a powerful institution and all the potential bureaucratic tomfoolery and misconduct that implies. The participants at the meeting understood this. The China/Soviet Union analogy by one of the participants is quite accurate: Interim Director Jackson acted like an Apparatchik bully who’s not smart enough to exercise authority through reason, evidence, and persuasion. (President Saunders shared her summer reading on her blog. Let me suggest she and our administrators review the history of why our Founding Fathers were so adamant about Checks and Balances in government and a Bill of Rights for its citizens.)

Compare the circumstances where an administrator records a faculty member with its converse. When a faculty member records an administrator, s/he is doing it as a relatively powerless individual. Furthermore, s/he may be protecting him/herself from a powerful and possibly vindictive bureaucrat who has proven him/herself untrustworthy and quite eager to recklessly exercise whatever authority is at his/her disposal.

Aside from the fact that recordings are legal—and that I don’t mind if Interim Director Jackson records me, I put my name on everything anyway; I’m open. So, Interim Director Jackson and his fellow bureaucrats can’t leverage their power by recording or bushwhacking me. Just the opposite, as a matter of fact: the recordings are a standard against which objective observers can assess administrators’ words and compare them to their deeds. And when bureaucrats inevitably get caught abusing their authority, like Interim Director Jackson recording researchers’ presentations at an academic meeting, they appear to be what they are: bureaucrats involved in petty corruptions or worse.

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