

We continue a series recounting what a number of readers have characterized as misconduct and stupidity of past and current University of Southern Mississippi faculty and administrators. The facts underlying these conclusions have been fully documented. When one reader suggested this series, he opined “before someone comes to Southern Miss as a student or puts a career on the line as faculty member, “Ethics, Power and Academic Corruption” should be required reading.” The tenth installment follows. (See, the [first](#), [second](#), [third](#), [fourth](#), [fifth](#), [sixth](#), [seventh](#), [eighth](#), [ninth](#), [tenth](#), [eleventh](#) and [twelfth](#) installments here.)

Plagiarism Aided and Abetted by a Failure to Investigate

Colleagues had asked the AACSB to consider two issues: whether the copied documents constituted plagiarism and whether USM Faculty Handbook representations to investigate allegations of misconduct were reliable. These two propositions are squarely within the standards AACSB represents as requirements for its members. Colleagues provided the AACSB with documentation to support that their concerns were well-founded. (Also see, Part 2 of this report.) So, what did the AACSB actually do when challenged with evidence of a member’s alleged violation of its standards and procedures implicating misconduct? Did the AACSB persuade USM to comply with its standards and advice?

The AACSB publishes many ethical admonitions and proclamations. Among them is that the AACSB unambiguously states that universities are to “operate with integrity.” It advises that universities should not only have codes of ethics, but also have procedures to confirm that their codes are followed and provide evidence that the procedures are indeed followed.

Although colleagues were required by the AACSB to provide detailed evidence and documentation for their claims—and rightfully so—the AACSB decided, without any discussion or offering any reasons, that the College did “not violate AACSB standards.” The AACSB was quite clear about limiting what was said publicly. In an email to the AACSB Peer Review Team and Dean Doty, which was obtained in a freedom of information request, AACSB’s Executive Vice-President and Chief Accreditation Officer, Jerry Trapnell, instructed the Peer Review Team:

Your transmittal messages to the school should be short with no opinions rendered. The addendum will speak for itself.

The AACSB’s “Addendum To Team Visit Report, Maintenance of Accreditation Review” stated that:

[The] AACSB and the peer review team ... has carefully evaluated all materials submitted and all discussions held in regard to the complaint filed ... and the team’s opinion is the host school has not violated AACSB standards...

At least one AACSB official recommended caution with regard to “making a ‘ruling’ on a faculty complaint.” A secret email from Richard A. Cosier, Perdue University, to Jerry Trapnell, Ted Cummings, and C. Edward Arrington, offered an alternative wording.

“I am wondering if we want to state in response to this complaint that ‘the host school has not violated AACSB standards.’ It seems to me that it would be more appropriate to conclude that ‘the team is satisfied that the University and Business School have properly addressed these concerns’, or ‘AACSB believes that the College of Business at Southern Mississippi has proper processes in place to address faculty grievances, including allegations of plagiarism.’ My point is that we are making a ‘ruling’ on a faculty complaint and this may really not be the purview of the AACSB visitation team.

Rick”

Trapnell, Cummings, and Arrington ignored the advice. Although AACSB claims its member institutions are accredited through “a rigorous and comprehensive peer review.” (www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/. Last accessed June 2011.), the decision to ignore USM’s violations of its own rules and the AACSB’s, too, was not unbiased. For example, C. Edward Arrington, who was the Vice Chairman of the Visitation Team, had both undergraduate and graduate degrees from USM. Arrington, a professor at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, prominently promotes his USM degrees on his website biography.

At the time, colleagues had no knowledge of these secret communications between AACSB and USM administrators. Colleagues did know, however, that they had no input in the decision beyond their original written information. They had offered to be available to talk to members of the Peer Review Team at their convenience. No one from the AACSB or Peer Review Team accepted the offer. In fact, neither the AACSB nor Dean Doty was obligated to talk to colleagues, unless they followed their own advice:

As noted in the literature, executives [we assume that includes University and AACSB administrators] become moral persons by ... applying their own ethical decision-making skills to organizational decisions in ways that are *transparent*.

(Emphasis added.) (AACSB, 2004)

Based on documents obtained through an open records request, colleagues learned from emails between Dean Doty and AACSB officials that a number of communications were scheduled in person or by phone. In their private discussions, they may have decided that the instances of copying “without proper citation” were not plagiarism. They may have given USM special dispensation for not following its procedures to investigate potential misconduct. Colleagues did not know details about what the AACSB decided or why. Certainly, there was no transparency...