

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](#), [twelfth](#) and [thirteenth](#) installments here.)

Discussion

Colleagues were left to speculate about AACSB’s decisions and reasoning. If, for example, the AACSB or USM’s COB administrators had evidence or argumentation that the copied materials were boilerplate, then they should let everyone know, as the AACSB does in recommendations regarding public relations news releases. Consider the following AACSB guidance:

Sample Press Release The links on this page can help you spread the good news to the stakeholders in your community. One is a generic, “fill-in-the-blank” press release, designed as a model with correct figures and accreditation terminology...Fill in the appropriate information and include quotes from your school dignitaries...

(www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/promotion/default.asp. Last accessed June 2011.)

... (Insert the name of your institution) has achieved (choose: accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation) of its (choose: bachelor’s/master’s/doctoral) degree program(s) in (choose: business administration/ accounting) by recent action of the Board of Directors of AACSB International - The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. The official announcement was made (insert date) in (insert location).

(www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/promotion/press-release.asp. Last accessed June 2011)

The AACSB also provides “templates.” For example, see Team Visit Report—Sixth Year Review. (www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/process/process-toc.asp.) However, the AACSB offers no “insert-the-name-of-your-institution” recommendation to accredited members or applicants with regard to “Guidelines”, “Academic Integrity Policies”, or similar documents submitted in compliance with AACSB standards.

Plagiarism is Still an Open Question at USM

Colleagues did not set out to find questionable documents during our AACSB reaccreditation process, nor did they search for others after they discovered the first instance. The first questionable document seemed like a chance occurrence, a simple

mistake easily corrected or explained. Colleagues were aware that the Accreditation Committee could have said, “Oops! We forgot to include a citation.” Or, “It’s customary for schools to copy from the accreditation documents of other, successful schools.”

The second instance of copying “without proper citation” was found coincidentally in efforts to learn what other schools think about plagiarism. Its discovery, however, was more worrisome given the citations included in the original document but not USM’s copied version. Nevertheless, USM’s administrators, involved faculty, and AACSB might have made a case that an Academic Integrity Policy was boilerplate. They might have simply and publicly stated for the benefit of all AACSB institutions that accredited members were free to copy other Colleges’ submissions to the AACSB and publish them without citation. However, they did not.

The author had early on recognized that the events unfolding were a proper subject for study regardless of the outcome. If USM and AACSB embraced transparency and an open discussion, it would have been an inspiring case report about how they worked to improve the ethics and understanding of all AACSB members. More importantly, the report would have provided the dialogue and conclusions with regard to practical details of the parameters of plagiarism. Alternatively, if the administrators at USM and AACSB chose secrecy, refused to build an understanding of plagiarism to the benefit of all AACSB members, and failed to persuade USM administrators to follow its standards and advice, the study would be a cautionary report that the AACSB does not signal academic quality. The choice was USM’s and AACSB’s.

Note that the choices USM and AACSB administrators made and are chronicled in this case study continue to be relevant today. The USM COB’s copied “Academic Integrity Policy” remains posted on its website without the original school’s lengthy list of citations. (<http://www.usm.edu/business/academic-integrity-policy>. Last accessed June 2011.) Anyone who reads the “Academic Integrity Policy” on USM’s website is led to believe that it is original work. Thus, in the absence of an investigation or open dialogue, the question whether “Guidelines” and “Academic Integrity Policy” constitute plagiarism remains explicitly unanswered. This was a choice USM administrators and AACSB officials made. Furthermore, USM’s COB recently passed another round of AACSB reaccreditation. Did the College Accreditation Committee copy “without proper citation” “Guidelines” and other documents and submit them to the AACSB as their own? Did the AACSB continue to approve in secret copying other member’s documents “without proper citation”? Can any AACAB school copy and represent Whitman School’s Academic Integrity Policy as their own “without proper citation”? USM can and does...