

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 fifth installment follows. (See, the [first](#), [second](#), [third](#) and [fourth](#) installments here.)

What Is Plagiarism?

The questionable document [a colleague found] was titled “Guidelines for Participating and Supporting Faculty” (“Guidelines”). It had been copied from HCBA’s reaccreditation submission to the AACSB. But, was it an instance of plagiarism?

USM College of Business Academic Integrity Policy included a definition of plagiarism:

copying words, concepts, or ideas *from any source* and submitting the material as one's own without acknowledging the source by the use of footnotes, quotation marks, or both. (Emphasis added.)

(<http://www.usm.edu/business/academic-integrity-policy>. Last accessed June 2011.)

“[F]rom any source” seemed definitive. Moreover, USM’s online plagiarism tutorial explained how to provide citations for quotes or paraphrases. (www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/whatisplag.php. Last accessed June 2011.) No exceptions were provided for boilerplate, official administrative communications, or other acts of copying without attribution.

COB’s Academic Integrity Policy and guidance provided by USM’s plagiarism tutorial indicated that copying “Guidelines” without attribution violated COB’s definition of plagiarism. The evidence seemed to implicate a serious event, but, from an abundance of caution, colleagues sought further advice.

The USM Faculty Handbook provided the following statement of policy and mandate:

SCHOLARLY INTEGRITY The University is dedicated to the discovery and dissemination of truth *in research and in all other scholarly and creative activities*, whether University-sponsored or conducted individually by members of the academic staff, by *administrative officers and staff*, or by students. Hence *plagiarism* or other misconduct in research or in *any other scholarly or creative activity* is strictly prohibited. *Every student and University employee* is responsible not only to abide by the highest standards of integrity and professional ethics themselves but also *to report violations* when they are known or reasonably suspected to have occurred. Alleged breaches of scholarly integrity are investigated

promptly and fully by the University... (Emphasis added.)

(The University of Southern Mississippi Faculty Handbook, <http://www.usm.edu/provost/>. Last accessed June 2011.)

“SCHOLARLY INTERGRITY” also supports the proposition that the “Guidelines” were an instance of plagiarism. On the other hand, some colleagues offered an alternative view: “Guidelines” could be construed as an administrative communication, like attorneys using boilerplate in the practice of law. They proposed an interpretation that “Guidelines” were neither scholarly nor creative. So, it seemed relevant to get the perspectives of administrators and involved faculty.

Colleagues tried to engage USM administrators and the faculty involved in copying the HCBA’s “Guidelines” but to no avail. They refused all efforts to discuss the documents. Regardless, at this time, one observation was unambiguous. The USM Faculty Handbook admonished “every student and University employee...to report violations when they are known or reasonably suspected to have occurred.” It was also explicit about how to initiate allegations:

Parties having reasonable cause to believe that a University employee or student has committed an act of scholarly misconduct must first consult informally with the University Research Ombudsman.

(The University of Southern Mississippi Faculty Handbook, <http://www.usm.edu/provost/>. Last accessed June 2011.)

Ombudsman, Vice President for Research, EEOC, Provost, President, et al.

Responding to the requirement in USM’s Faculty Handbook, colleagues provided the copied document, and the document from which it was copied, to USM’s Ombudsman...