

Local Academicians Comment on Plagiarism

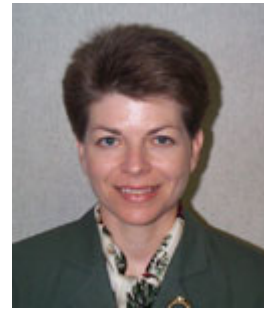
Reporters at usmnews.net have provided a number of reports and analyses of what appears to be at least two major cases of plagiarism within D. Harold Doty's Administration (2003-2007) of USM's College of Business. These two cases involve copying by CoB personnel of (1) AACSB documents written by officials at Central Missouri State University and (2) an academic honesty code written by officials at Syracuse University, Doty's previous employer. As reported earlier, these cases appear to have involved a number of CoB faculty as well, including those shown below (for access to those reports, see <http://www.usmnews.net/plagiarism.html>):



George Carter



Charles Jordan



Laurie Babin

In recent days, various Hattiesburg-based media have reported on the issue of plagiarism by students and professionals.



One of these reports comes via an Op-Ed (inserted above) written for the *Hattiesburg American* (4/9/2007) by James Hutto, the Superintendent of the Petal School District. Hutto's basic message is to "[a]lways give credit for the ideas you borrowed from someone else . . ." This is sound advice. Unfortunately, it was not the advice from CoB Dean Harold Doty when it came to the AACSB reports submitted by the CoB in 2006-07. As reports at usmnews.net have demonstrated (see link above), personnel in USM's College of Business copied the AACSB work of Central Missouri State University. When caught, Doty advised, contrary to Hutto's message, Charles Jordan (USM accounting professor) to seek permission from CMSU to use their AACSB materials "without proper citation." It appears from this single episode at least that Hutto would make a better CoB Dean than Doty.

Next, in the 4/10/2007 issue of USM's own *The Student Printz*, Dr. Lawrence Mead responds (by letter) to Adam Chance's 4/5/2007 column about a lawsuit involving www.turnitin.com. Mead's letter is inserted below:

Letter to the editor: Writer's math flawed

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In a piece on Thursday, Ap. 5, Adam Chance states that given so many colleges assigning so many term papers the odds were strong that the same paragraphs would be written. With a bit of math, let us test that hypothesis on the very paragraph in which he writes it.

The second paragraph in his piece has about (in round numbers) 300 letters, including blank spaces. There are about 40 symbols that might normally be used, so that the number of such paragraphs which could be constructed are $40 \times 40 \times 40 \dots \times 40$ with 300 such multiplications: in the usual math language, 40^{300} . Now only perhaps 1 in 10,100 of those would have some meaning, but even so: if all the 5 billion people in the world wrote opinion paragraphs, one each second for the age of the universe, 14 billion years, the number of paragraphs so written would be utterly tiny in comparison with the remaining $40,250$ or so. No sir, identical (or nearly identical) paragraphs in student (or professional!) papers IS plagiarism: intellectual dishonesty.

Lawrence R. Mead Ph.D.

Mead, a professor of physics at USM (Ph.D., Washington University, St. Louis; shown below) illustrates that Chance's earlier assertion --- *that the innocent production by students of similar (or even identical) written work is a phenomenon that could easily become somewhat common over time* --- is not supported by science.



Lawrence Mead

As Mead concludes, “identical (or nearly identical) paragraphs in student (or professional!) papers IS plagiarism [sic]: intellectual dishonesty.” Perhaps USM should consider Mead for the USM Ombudsman post.

There is little doubt that the copying of documents that took place prior to the CoB’s 2007 AACSB Peer Review played a part in the AACSB’s finding of probation (continuing review) for the CoB. Hutto’s position above appears to be sound advice that should serve the CoB’s new Interim Dean Alvin Williams well as the College begins to prepare for the 2008 Peer Review process.