

A Sense of Humor

Ya gotta have it!

You have to have a sense of humor, especially when living with people like my former colleagues at the University of Southern Mississippi. I personally keep my sense of humor by writing. For my academic work—non-fiction—I use my formal name, Chauncey M. DePree, Jr., DBA. See, for example, “Ethics, Power, and Academic Corruption” available at Amazon.

For my fiction, I use my informal name, Marc DePree. For example, see “TobaccoPharm.” “TobaccoPharm” is contemporary science fiction and is not intended to be funny. And isn’t funny. My sense of humor is also vented in my fiction. Let me give you a flavor from “Rufus McCoy and Profiteers in the Ivory Tower.” It’s being revised—updated—and will be published in the next couple of months. The excerpt is apropos a recent article about accreditation in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, namely, [“Accreditation in Action: Inside a Site Visit.”](#)

Rufus McCoy and Profiteers in the Ivory Tower

Somewhere in Chapter 2

“Toothpaste back in the tube!”

Dean Tyrone Overstreet felt pretty good about prospects for the upcoming accreditation decision. After months of preparing AACSB reports, which he and his assistant and associate deans plagiarized from other recently reaccredited business schools, and after dodging political land mines like Kirk and Bowie created endangering his deanship, he could finally relax. All the paperwork was completed. *All the i-s dotted, all the t-s crossed*, he thought. *A vacation seems about right.*

A short early morning conference with his department chairmen and chairwomen and assistant deans and associate deans took precedence over planning his vacation. It was a wonderful meeting, though; he wouldn’t have missed it for the world. Coffee and fresh donuts aplenty. The dean helped himself to the gooy cinnamon kind. He spilled a little coffee and goo on his tie but he wasn’t about to let that spoil his day. The department chairs took turns congratulating the assistant deans, the assistant deans took turns congratulating the associate deans, and the associate deans took turns congratulating each other. All good cheer on the fine job they did with the visiting accreditation team from a nearby peer school—taking them to diner at the best restaurants in the Hub City, plying them with alcohol, generally a good time for everyone. And, most important, they promised to do the same for the peer visitation team when next they evaluated their school for accreditation in the very near future.

Sidebar: Accreditation is a peer review process. In other words, faculty and administrators at one school evaluate faculty and administrators at another school and vice versa. Like students grading each others' papers and exams. Totally independent, objective, honest evaluations, or so accreditors and accreditees advertise.

Near the end of the meeting, the chairmen and women and assistant deans and associate deans rose and gave the dean a rousing ovation. A real bonding experience. Almost brought tears to the dean's eyes. As pleasant as that was, the dean didn't linger with his bonding-mates after the meeting. Vacation was calling.

"Sorry, I've gotta run," Overstreet announced, all smiles, eyes still moist. "A conference call is scheduled with a donor." It wasn't true, but that's not the point. A call from a donor sounded impressive. "A duty I *must* take care of."

This is turning out to be a great day, he thought, as he hurried back to his office.

Overstreet sped through one website after another, looking for just the right place. It took a few minutes to find his kind of vacation. There he was, drooling over a website of an exotic Bahamas beachfront hotel and spa. It wasn't the hotel that was drool-worthy, however. A bikini-clad curvaceous doozy lounged on sand and seemingly invited Tyrone with a come-hither allure. He could almost feel the warm breeze against his skin. *I deserve this. I've earned this.*

A quick, light knock announced his secretary's entry into Dean Overstreet's office. Ms. Anderson never waited for permission to enter. Overstreet nonchalantly pressed a key to close the window before she got to his desk. She sniggered at his effort to conceal what he'd been looking at on the computer, sat a bundle of letters in front of him, and immediately left. The most important was directly on top. Ms. Anderson knew he'd be keenly interested in it. The return address included the acronym, "AACSB."

Overstreet's heart skipped a beat even though he was confident that he, or rather his College, had passed; in the vernacular, State University's Business College had earned reaccreditation by the AACSB. *Congratulations to me*, Overstreet sang to himself.

He carefully lifted the top letter. It seemed a bit light. *One page at most.*

A twinge of concern edged into his consciousness. Even positive reaccreditation notices always included several pages of recommendations for program betterment, making the letter a bit fat. AACSB's habit was to emphasize the value of peer-review and simultaneously offer a tip-of-the-hat to the latest buzzword, which, at this time in its history, was *continuous improvement*. Included was the usual rah-rah admin-

blather: “As a member of the most virtuous and ethical worldwide accreditation organization, AACSB, you are expected to upgrade hard cover books in the library, improve faculty attendance at AACSB sponsored conferences (make checks payable the AACSB), use only AACSB approved public relations announcements of membership, increase administrative staff to effectively accomplish the ever changing improvements and standards required by the AACSB, et cetera, et cetera.”

Why's the envelope not thicker? Tyrone wondered. He grabbed his pearl handled letter opener and slit the top of the envelope. His eyes quickly located the relevant paragraph:

AACSB International is the world's premier accreditation organization. We consider applicants and their programs through the documentation they submit. In accordance with our procedures, your application for reaccreditation is under review. Chief Accreditation Officer, the Chair of the Maintenance of Accreditation Committee and the Chair of the Accounting Accreditation Committee diligently study all documents. The Committees have determined that your documents have not been submitted. In accordance with AACSB Standards, the Committees have placed your college on **probation**. They recommend that you submit all required documents at your earliest convenience.

Cordially yours,

Jerry Ditznel

Executive Director

PROBATION!? screamed through his mind.

“Oh my God!” Dean Overstreet's eyes darted to an outbox at the end of his desk. “There it is!” A very thick folder addressed to the AACSB had *not* been mailed. “Oh my God!” he screamed at the top of his voice.

Ms. Anderson rushed into the office—without knocking. “Are you okay! What's—”

“Out! Out! Out!”

She turned and scurried out of the office. Frightened. She'd never seen Dean Overstreet so upset. *Something's really wrong*, she thought.

Overstreet called to Ms. Anderson, "Close the door!"

She scurried back—tripping but not falling—and closed the door.

In a blind panic, Dean Overstreet fumbled through his Rolodex, searching for the AACSB's phone number. He quickly flipped card after card all the way to the end. "I know it's in here," he said to himself. "Damn." Tyrone paused, took a deep breath, and began looking through the Rolodex, again. Slower this time. Suddenly, pressure and tightening within his chest made him stop with the Rolodex, again. Sharp pains radiated down his arms. He opened the top drawer of his desk, found his bottle of aspirin, fumbled with the top until it popped off and fell to the floor, spilled out several tablets, tossed them down his throat, and swallowed hard. "Jesus, is this the way I'm to end my life?" He closed his eyes and began to hum a yoga song. Soon, he felt strong enough to go at the Rolodex, again. Second time around he found AACSB's number. Overstreet didn't ask his secretary to make the call. He didn't want anyone to "accidentally" overhear the conversation. It took several tense minutes to get through to the AACSB's Executive Director, Jerry Ditznel. He had as many buffers who ran interference as Dean Overstreet did. It was frustrating to be on the receiving end.

Overstreet began with pleasant small talk: Hey, how goes it, Jerry? But Ditznel would have none of it: "I'm busy."

Overstreet began an explanation: "I have to confess, Jerry, I've screwed up. I'd like to—" But Ditznel would have none of it: "I'm busy."

Ditznel knew why Overstreet called. Overstreet knew Ditznel knew why he called. So, Overstreet was forced to get to the point. "I've got 'em right here, Jerry, all the documents, our AACSB documents," he implored the Executive director to believe him. "They're good. We've done everything we're supposed to have done. Trust me. I wouldn't lie."

Silence.

After a short pause, Overstreet asked, "You there?"

"Yes."

"Jesus, Jerry, I don't know how they didn't get mailed. They were in my outbox."

Silence, again.

Overstreet was sweating and it was peeking through his shirt.

"We've been friends for years."

Ditznel knew Tyrone. They were indeed friends. Or had been. Their history went way back to the days they were in graduate school. They had been close friends then, even sharing crib notes during the written portion of the comprehensive exams. Now, Ditznel was a very important person and Overstreet was on his knees. The long and short of it: Overstreet needed Ditznel's help. Ditznel knew Overstreet needed his help. And, Overstreet knew Ditznel knew Overstreet needed his help. Badly. But Overstreet didn't know quite how badly, yet.

Overstreet broke the silence. "I've got 'em right here, Jerry. I could email 'em right now."

"You know that's not the way we do things."

Okay, yeah, I know. But I thought we might make an exception this time."

"No."

"Okay, okay. I've got 'em here, Jerry. All the documents are right here in my hands. They're even in an envelope. For some reason they didn't get in the mail. I'll overnight 'em via Express Mail. Special delivery, overnight."

"Good. But you have to appreciate that, because of your late submission, you're status is probation until we get them and review them."

"For God's sake, Jerry, don't do that!"

"It's already reported on our website."

"Take it down! Please! Jesus, Jerry!" Overstreet paused, gathering his thoughts, fixing his mind on what he had to do, then said, "I'll owe you, Jerry. Big time. You name it."

Ditznel thought that he might be able once again to use Overstreet's "crib sheets," so to speak. "I've got a little something you can help me with. We'll discuss that later. I'll call in a couple of days with details."

A sigh of relief passed through Tyrone's mind like the tropical breeze he'd imagined for his vacation just a few minutes ago. His implied, but as good as gold, quid-pro-quo proposal worked. He'd worry about what he'd have to do later. Nothing was more important to the school, and his salary, as AACSB accreditation. There was still a not so minor problem: "So, you'll take it down?"

"Take it down?"

"From your website. You gotta keep this confidential."

"I'll see what I can do."

"The documents will be in the mail in an hour and arrive first thing tomorrow morning. I won't forget this, Jerry." Tyrone's shirt was now sweat-soaked through and through.

"First thing tomorrow morning, then," said Executive Director Jerry Ditznel, as he ended the call.

The phone still in his hand, its dial-tone buzzing softly, Overstreet rested back in his chair, let loose a quiet sigh, "Phew," and whispered to himself, "Thank ya' Jesus."

A knock on the door disturbed his quiet moment, just as his chest pain had begun to subside.

"Yeah."

His secretary was already in the room. "The president on line two."

No sooner had Overstreet pressed line two than a loud, shrieking voice yelled, "Have you seen *The Hub City Ledger*?!"

That banshee could wake the dead, Overstreet thought. "Nooo," he said slowly, but respectfully to State University's President, Martha Bloomly.

"The headline says, 'State University's Business College Placed on Probation.' What's going on over there? I thought you had it all wrapped up. 'No problem,' you said. 'In the bag,' you said. Now I read this crap in the newspaper, IN THE FUCKING NEWSPAPER!" President Bloomly paused a mere second to catch her breath then quickly continued her line of thought. "Along with thousands and thousands of other readers!" The second "thousands" was louder than the first. "And most actually believe what's printed in newspapers! Jesus, Overstreet, what in hell's—"

"It's all a terrible mistake," Overstreet squeezed in edgewise as calmly as he could while getting her attention. "I've already taken care of it."

"You have?" Martha's voice came down a decibel but sarcasm permeated "You have?"

"Yes."

"Then how are you going to expunge this *mistake* from the memories of all those readers? The thousands and thousands of readers of our local rag? And then there are the morons who listen to the readers repeat the damn story. 'Did ya' hear? State's Business College is on probation.' It'll take on a life of its own. A total embarrassment. To students. To faculty. To the citizens of our great state. *TO ME!*"

She paused, calming herself. She had to deliver her most important question with composure: “How are you going to put the toothpaste back in the tube?”

Overstreet was stunned. He wondered, *Did I hear that right?* All he could think to say was, “Toothpaste back in the tube?”

“Yes, toothpaste back in the tube. How?”

“Toothpaste back in the tube?”

“Yes! Toothpaste back in the tube! How?!”

“I...I don’t know. Can’t we alert the newspaper that it was a mistake, that there was a simple glitch with the paperwork? That we’re not really on probation.”

“Yes. Yes I can. And that’s exactly what’s in process. But I didn’t need you for that brilliant insight. My PR people have already started that routine. The simple truth is that won’t put the toothpaste back in the tube.”

Tyrone genuinely wondered, *How do you put toothpaste back in the tube? Physically, that is?*

President Bloomly paused. *He’s gotta go*, she thought. “I think it’s time for you to return to your first love, Dr. Overstreet.” With that salutation, President Bloomly abruptly hung up.

“Huh?” Dean Overstreet had a spanked-on-the-butt-with-a-wooden-paddle look on his face. That metamorphosed to a numb frontal-lobotomy stare in his eyes.

During the short period of ten minutes, Overstreet had flipped from pleasant thoughts of the beach and Ms. Doozie, to blind panic, to grateful relief, and lastly settled in a state of stunned shock. Extreme unhappiness. He mumbled to himself, “After all I’ve done for her. After all the years of loyal service.”

President Bloomly summarily, right then and there, relieved Dean Overstreet of his administrative duties. With those dozen simple words—“I think it’s time for you to return to your first love”—Dean Overstreet was no longer Dean and, as noted in a State University PR release, and picked up by *The Hub City Ledger* a few weeks later, President Martha Bloomly recounted his valuable contribution: “Dr. Tyrone Overstreet requested that I accept his resignation as dean. With a heavy heart and given the forthcoming time-consuming *sixth year review* by the AACSB, he wanted to spend more time with his family. So, he asked to return to his first love, teaching. With reluctance, I did so. We are grateful for his service to the Business College and State University.”

Joe Washington, Associate Dean and Professor of Accounting, assumed the position of Interim Dean. Even though Joe was Interim, President Martha Bloomly made public relations hay by announcing that he was the first Black Dean at State University's Business College. She had her picture taken with Joe, too—all smiles, shaking hands, of course—and offered it and the announcement for immediate public release. All the newspapers in the state snapped them up and placed them on their front pages. Proof positive that Mississippi was no longer a racist state, or at least in President Bloomly's mind State University was no longer racist. She left the PR hand-shaking duty holding her nose with her left hand, her right hand out in front of and away from her as if she had shit all over it. "Does he ever take a bath or do they all smell that way?"

Joe Washington, however, was not to mess in any substantive Business College decisions. Martha advised Interim Dean Joe Washington, "Your one and only duty is to head up the Search Committee for a permanent Dean. Period." Most definitely he was not to lift a finger with their AACSB **"six year review."** President Bloomly hired a consultant—for \$500,000—to remove the stigma from the reputation of the Business College. The consultant earned his keep by creating a new word for probation: **sixth year review**. "Well worth the half mil," she told her Vice Presidents at their weekly meeting. "Absolutely," VP 1 said. "Well done, President Bloomly," VP 2 said. "Stroke of genius," VP 3 said. Et cetera, et cetera.

It took months for Interim Joe Washington to figure out how to publish notice of the available dean position, vet applications, set up interviews, and offer the "best" candidates for President Bloomly's consideration. Of paramount importance was finding the "right fit" for the Business College and State University. And for President Bloomly. Joe had been around long enough to know what President Bloomly meant by "right fit": Young, younger than Bloomly. And handsome, if at all possible. Plus the usual credentials.