

## ***Special Report***

### **Are We on the Eve of a National AACSB Scandal?**

#### **An Investigation into the Ethics Lapses at the Top of the CoB**

With the recent statements made by the CoB's AACSB consultant, Dr. Karen Tarnoff of East Tennessee State University, USM's College of Business appears to be in the center of an AACSB scandal whose tentacles perhaps extend nationwide. Here is the sequence of events that have put the CoB in the position it sits today:

- On 10 November 2006, EFIB Chair George H. Carter e-mailed an AACSB document to all CoB faculty. That document presented the Participating/Supporting Faculty and the Academically/Professionally Qualified Faculty (AQ/PQ) definitions that Carter's AACSB Accreditation Committee wanted the CoB faculty to consider for adoption (regarding the upcoming 2007 re-affirmation process).
- Within a few days of Carter's e-mail transmission, usmpride.com uncovered evidence indicating that the definitions and other language included in the documents that Carter had e-mailed had been copied from similar documents available on the website of the Harmon College of Business at Central Missouri State University. This revelation was not only turned over to AACSB headquarters by usmpride.com, it was also made public via reports available on this website.
- At the 8 December 2006 CoB faculty meeting, associate professor of management Jon Carr gave an oral presentation about his AACSB visit to Western Illinois University. Carr remarked that WIU had hired a former CMSU administrator (and one who was working on accreditation-related documents, etc., at WUI).
- Shortly after Carr's presentation, Carter stood up in the back of JGH 303 and asked that the CoB consider the adoption of the AQ/PQ, etc., definitions that were included in his 10 November 2006 e-mail. During the "discussion" phase of this presentation, Carr remarked from the gallery that the definitions and language used in the document distributed by Carter looked much like the documentation he was shown by an official at Western Illinois University -- the one who recently moved to WIU from Central Missouri State University. To this comment Carter responded by saying that the documents he (Carter) emailed to CoB Faculty on 10 November 2006 were not just similar, they *were actually written by* the former CMSU official (now at WIU). Thus, Carter admitted to a crowded JGH 303 that the definitions he was asking that the CoB adopt were written by someone at another institution. Carter also remarked that sharing of such documentation was something that a number of business colleges were doing as they recorded their own AACSB activities.

Thus, while not fully addressing the ethics of the "copying," Carter also admitted that the copying was potentially widespread.

- During her 19 January 2007 presentation on the AACSB's Assurance of Learning (AOL) processes, Dr. Karen Tarnoff was asked by marketing assistant professor Talai Osmonbekov if USM's CoB could simply copy the AOL work that Tarnoff's school, East Tennessee State University, had done. That question gave Tarnoff the opportunity to point out to everyone in the CoB that adopting the AACSB work product, including but not limited to the "definitions" (e.g., AQ/PQ) within that product, was unacceptable. In doing so, Tarnoff used language that expressed this prohibition clearly (e.g., "a real danger," etc.). As part of this discussion, Carter defensively suggested that what the CoB may have "learned" from peer/aspirant visitations should be incorporated within the CoB if doing so results in an improved service. To this, Tarnoff reiterated her earlier admonition, again in no uncertain terms.

The last link in the chain above indicates that the CoB's actions, in copying the AACSB work-product of Central Missouri State University, had breached an ethics firewall. Tarnoff's admonition, when combined with the Carter-Carr exchange of 8 December 2006 that is also detailed above suggests that this ethics breach extends well beyond the boundaries of USM's College of Business.

Are we on the eve of a national scandal involving AACSB? It appears as though that is not only possible, it may be likely. The credibility and integrity of the AACSB are at stake here, and although the revelations began with USM's involvement, the problem highlighted by Tarnoff's presentation does not appear to be confined to Hattiesburg. This issue stretches across at least two states in the Midwest, and likely many more.