

Special Report

Memo to Martha, Part II

A Look at Alvin Williams' Role in the Mobbing of Aug-07

Reporters at usmnews.net have received a copy of a memo sent by Interim CoB Dean Alvin Williams to USM President Martha Saunders, through Interim Provost Bobby Middlebrooks, asking Saunders to terminate the employment (at USM) of USMNEWS.NET editor and accounting professor, Marc DePree. Williams' memo is dated 21 August 2007, the same day that Saunders penned a letter to DePree advising DePree that he was being relieved of his teaching and services responsibilities to USM during the fall 2007 semester.

Part II in this *Special Report* series investigation picks up where Part I concluded, with paragraph 2 of page 2 of Williams' memo to Saunders. This part of Williams' memo, inserted below, continues to describe the CoB accountants' fear of DePree.

This fear of Dr. DePree's behaviors has prompted some SAIS faculty members to request office relocation from the SAIS suite. In July 2007 a SAIS faculty member formally requested that I relocate his office outside of Greene Hall (JGH). If this accommodation could not be made, he requested to be moved to the third floor of JGH. He indicated that other SAIS faculty members would make similar requests if no action is taken against Dr. DePree. Limited office space in JGH precludes relocating the entire SAIS. This same space limitation exist campus wide. It is clearly disruptive and counterproductive when faculty members do not feel physically safe to work in proximity to a colleague.

To add to the air of fear and intimidation, I am told that Dr. DePree manages a web site that routinely disparages the University, administrators, and fellow faculty members. The departure of some faculty members from the College of Business has been facilitated by the vile, unprofessional, and damaging comments made about individuals on this web site. Given the widespread dissemination of this web site, professional reputations have been injured in the academic marketplace. This site is viewed by fellow academicians and administrators at other institutions, friends, alumni, and prospective donors to the University. It provides a false representation of the College of Business and the University of Southern Mississippi.

In addition to the above behaviors, Dr. DePree fails to engage in the scholarly or professional activities necessary to be labeled 'academically-qualified' or 'professionally-qualified' by our accrediting agency, AACSB. During the Maintenance of Accreditation visit to the University of Southern Mississippi by the AACSB Visitation Team in February 2007, Dr. DePree was the only Accounting faculty member deemed neither academically- or professionally-qualified. Given our separate Accounting accrediting designation by AACSB, it is essential that faculty members be academically or professionally qualified. Dr. DePree has been warned by various Directors of the SAIS to devote time to scholarly research. He has consistently received lower than average research ratings for the past several years.

According to Williams, fear of DePree has prompted some SAIS faculty "to request office relocation from the SAIS suite." The SAIS faculty suite is located on the first floor of Greene Hall, near the north exit of the building. It routinely floods, and large, industrial fans have to be brought over from USM's Physical Plant in order to clear out the water, which is substantial. Of course, none of the accounting faculty would be desirous of leaving the SAIS suite for this reason.

Williams also notes that SAIS faculty are requesting to be relocated to the third floor of JGH, but Williams is precluded from complying due to space constraints. What Williams and the SAIS faculty ignore is that, if DePree were truly a menace to CoB faculty as they (SAIS faculty, Williams, et al.) claim, then CoB faculty located on the third floor of Greene Hall would face the most difficulty in avoiding/escaping a confrontation with DePree given that they would have to first make their way to the first floor in order to access an exit to the building. Why would these accounting faculty want to leave the first floor office suite, in which DePree is rarely ever located, and put themselves on to the third floor instead?

Williams' next paragraph begins with a real gem:

To add to the air of fear and intimidation, I am told that Dr. DePree manages a web site that routinely disparages the University, administrators, and fellow faculty members. The departure of some faculty members from the College of Business has been facilitated by the vile, unprofessional, and damaging comments made about individuals on this web

Williams states: "I am told that Dr. DePree manages a web site that routinely disparages the University, administrators, and fellow faculty members." Of course, as readers you are familiar with this website – USMNEWS.NET – and its content. Some of you have even contacted the site to remark about the quality of the reporting and evidence that is brought to our pages on a daily basis. Many of our reports are based on documentation obtained through *Freedom of Information Act* requests and they discuss issues that USM and CoB administrators want to keep secret. So, you can, and probably do, understand Williams' frustration with USMNEWS.NET, and his desire to silence it.

What struck USMNEWS.NET reporters in particular is Williams' phrase "I am told that Dr. DePree manages a web site . . ." Williams is indicating that before 21-Aug-2007 that he (Williams) was either unaware of the existence of the website or that he had never visited the web site – USMNEWS.NET. Do you believe either one of these? We don't, and why should we? Discussions of USMNEWS.NET have dominated talk along the Greene Hall "grapevine" since at least July of 2006, if not before. As of today, USMNEWS.NET has been visited almost 1,050,000 times, and all of this has occurred since only the spring of 2006. The list of colleges and universities visiting the web site is multiple pages long, and growing. Many, if not most, academic visitors visit daily. How could it be that someone in the middle of so many stories that USMNEWS.NET reports on would not know about it (USMNEWS.NET) or not have visited it (USMNEWS.NET). Is Alvin Williams being disingenuous? Let's assume he's not. If not, wouldn't he have to qualify as the least observant university Dean in the U.S.? Wouldn't that be akin to receiving a memo from your financial advisor wherein he/she tells you "I am told that there is a newspaper called *The Wall Street Journal* that reports daily on all things financial . . ." Wouldn't you ask: "Disingenuous? Or, hasn't a clue?" Neither option paints Williams in a good light.

Williams actually makes our point by listing the people who visit USMNEWS.NET: academicians and administrators at other universities, USM students, alumni, and donors.

In other words, everyone but Alvin Williams (apparently). And, for someone who did not know until recently about the site, or who has never visited the site, Williams seems to know a lot about USMNEWS.NET. According to Williams, “[USMNEWS.NET] provides a false representation of the College of Business and the University of Southern Mississippi.” He’s right – and here’s a more accurate representation:

U.S. News.com *America’s Best Colleges 2008*

National Universities: Tier 4

[University of Southern Mississippi](#) *

USM in Wikipedia

Recent Developments

On May 1, 2002, Dr. Shelby Freland Thames became The University of Southern Mississippi’s eighth president.
. Thames inherited a university in financial crisis with multi year cuts, some of 5 million dollars, by the state legislature. Twenty years ago, the state of MS funded 80% of operational costs, now only 20%. One of his first moves was to successfully advocate a restructuring the funding formula used by the state College Board. The formula is now based on the number of undergraduates. This change put USM on equal footing with the other comprehensive universities in state for the first time. Another move was to reduce the number of colleges at USM from nine to five. While this was an unpopular move with faculty, the state college board and retired president Dr Lucas endorsed the cost cutting move as reported in the Hattiesburg American.

Controversy erupted on campus when Dr. Thames attempted to fire two tenured professors, locking them out of their offices on March 4, 2004. The backlash from President Thames’s actions resulted in a 40-0 vote of no-confidence in Dr. Thames by the Faculty senate. The full faculty responded days later with a vote of 430-32. The Hattiesburg American reported approximately 1,000 students and faculty protested against Dr. Thames in the immediate aftermath of the vote, while approximately 250 students and faculty rallied for Dr. Thames. Impeachment proceedings followed, as well as extensive debate among the public and the members of the state College Board. Eventually, it was agreed that Thames would serve as President until 2007, when he will return to being a professor. The two professors were placed on paid leave for two years, with instructions that they could be fired after their leave ended.

Another minor scandal during Thames’ tenure involved the reporting of enrollment. Eventually, a mid-level administrator admitted using an overly simplistic counting methodology for graduate students and was demoted.

In a separate incident, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools [SACS] placed USM on a one-year accreditation probation in December 2004 because of concerns about distance education programs. The probation was lifted in December 2005. Using open records law, the Hattiesburg American obtained letters from SACS to Dr. Thames dating over several years. These documents indicated that SACS did not express concerns about the distance learning program until December 2004, and that the probation represented a complete surprise to the University.

The University experienced an unexpected, highly-publicized drop from "Tier 3" to "Tier 4" in the U.S. News and World Report college rankings beginning in the 2004 edition.

From *The Hattiesburg American*

USM sex columnist gets sacked

By NANCY KAFFER

The writer of the University of Southern Mississippi's controversial sex column has been

fired, but the newspaper's editor says she plans to keep the dirty talk coming.

Student Printz editor Ashley Bryan wrote in a Sept. 13 column that longtime Pillow Talk scribe Glory Fink would no longer pen the column, which will continue to run in the paper.

EagleTalk.net on 5-Oct-2007

Topic	Author	Time	Replies	Views
Southern Miss has not scored in the 1st quarter in 3 straight games!!!!!!!	GOLDSOUNDS	10/5 10:02 PM by GOLDSOUNDS	18	187
Let's play conspiracy theorist here.... What if C-USA caused the loss	emn87	10/5 9:06 PM by Gulfo... Texas	8	275
SP3 OB 0 at the half!	hbriteup	10/5 8:56 PM by hbriteup	3	78
I have said it once and I'll say it again.....	Insomniac Eagle	10/5 8:35 PM by Insomniac Eagle	3	151
I can't wait until we start winning again so.....	GeauxEagles	10/5 7:48 PM by Dothan Eagle	10	236
Just for the record....Rice was ranked in 4th in ESPN's	usmgold	10/5 5:25 PM by usmgold	3	168
Internal Strife	kick off	10/5 5:24 PM by dylan7	12	589
CUSA	kick off	10/5 5:11 PM by kick off	1	61
Does anyone know the status on Jeremy Young????	chancey	10/5 4:53 PM by hbriteup	9	327
One name if we're going after a new head coach!!!	chancey	10/5 3:04 PM by PaulDel	9	395
Here is how one sprotos reporter feels about it.....	Insomniac Eagle	10/5 3:02 PM by hotrock11	6	445
A sad morning for me.....	EasyEagle	10/5 2:58 PM by hotrock11	22	603
Why are people defending our defense?	Eagle In 'Yune	10/5 2:56 PM by NastyBunch2002	10	218
It was not Bowers fault, the players fault, or the referees	Coastal Eagle	10/5 2:54 PM by NastyBunch2002	8	177

FireThames.com

Topic	Started By	Replies	Views	Last Post
STICKY: sticky: THIS BOARD WILL CLOSE ON FRIDAY MAY 28 (Review)	Fire Shelby	31	1352	May 27, 2004 by Fire Shelby
URGENT MESSAGE FOR FIRE SHELBY! (Review)	truth4usm/AH	4	690	May 27, 2004 by Fire Shelby
FS still here? (Review)	foot soldier	1	290	May 27, 2004 by Fire Shelby
HA article: Fire Shelby to shut down (Review)	truth4usm/AH	10	657	May 27, 2004 by Fire Shelby
Writing to Robin Robinson and the IHL (Review)	foot soldier	1	314	May 27, 2004 by foot soldier
USM departures 5/27/2004 (Review)	babbs	0	275	May 27, 2004 by babbs
Mader & Co. Win Awards (Review)	van dyke	11	691	May 27, 2004 by not.home.sick.anymore
SFT in disbelief that people don't believe him (Review)	truth4usm/AH	2	467	May 27, 2004 by Invictus
Letter to ad: Meet us halfway, SFT (Review)	truth4usm/AH	10	623	May 27, 2004 by Invictus
CRFD: House of Sand and Fog (Review)	broker	29	1300	May 27, 2004 by Sad about the mess
What would Bob Dylan say? (Review)	truth4usm/AH	10	572	May 27, 2004 by Invictus
Letter re: tenure/evaluation by USM faculty member (Review)	USM Sympathizer	0	283	May 27, 2004 by USM Sympathizer
Zorro (Review)	Zorro	0	353	May 27, 2004 by zorro
another scandal (Review)	PhD for sale	2	672	May 27, 2004 by Malapropism
PUC in the Clarion-Ledger (Review)	tvscene	0	324	May 27, 2004 by tvscene

Robert Campbell's "Liberty & Power" Blog on the *History News Network*

The screenshot shows the History News Network (HNN) website in a Mozilla Firefox browser. The page title is "History News Network - Mozilla Firefox" and the URL is "http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/9495.html". The HNN logo is prominently displayed at the top left, with the tagline "Because the Past is the Present, and the Future too." The main content area features a blog entry by Robert L. Campbell titled "Liberty & Power: Group Blog". The entry is dated "Amy Young Gets to the Heart of USM's Accreditation Crisis". The text of the entry discusses the accreditation crisis at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) and mentions that the *Hattiesburg American* published an op-ed in its paper but (rather unusually) has chosen not to run it in the online edition. The author, Amy Young, is mentioned as the president of the AAUP chapter at the University of Southern Mississippi. The entry is categorized under "Thames Puts USM at Risk" and "Amy Young". The right sidebar contains a "Roundup Top 10" list of articles and a "McKay et al." advertisement for "A History of Western Society". The left sidebar contains a "BREAKING NEWS" section and a "Departments" list.

Signifying Nothing

The screenshot shows a blog entry on the "Signifying Nothing" blog. The browser title is "USM: Thames blames the AAUP (Signifying Nothing: Tell 'em about it, Joe-Joe!) - Mozilla Firefox" and the URL is "http://blog.lordsutch.com/archives/1363". The blog title "Signifying Nothing" is displayed at the top left. The entry is dated "Tuesday, 9 March 2004". The main text of the entry reads: "USM: Thames blames the AAUP: USM president Shelby Thames is now blaming the whole mess on the American Association of University Professors, a group whose combined national membership isn't that much bigger than his campus' student enrollment." Below this, the author writes: "Ah, well, it could have been worse; he could have blamed outside agitators and sicced the Sovereignty Commission on them." The entry is attributed to "By Chris Lawrence @ 5:23 pm CST (0)". A "Manual TrackBack URL" is provided: "http://blog.lordsutch.com/tb.cgi/1363". The entry is tagged with "Academe", "Mid-South", and "Southern Miss". The right sidebar contains a "Like what you're reading?" section, a "Chris' shared items" section, and a "Sign up for faster shopping with Google Checkout" advertisement.

Critical Mass

Critical Mass - More on Gerard, USM, and due process - Mozilla Firefox

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http://www.erinocconnor.org/archives/2004/03/more_on_gerard.html

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Critical Mass. ABOUT CRITICAL MASS WRITINGS REVIEWS CONTACT

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March 12, 2004

More on Gerard, USM, and due process

Michael Berube has posted a long and thoughtful piece on whether the Nona Gerard case may be compared to the case at the University of Southern Mississippi. Bottom line: they can't be fairly compared, because Penn State observed the principles of due process in revoking Gerard's tenure while USM president Shelby Thames simply and summarily fired two tenured professors because it suited him to do so. "I have to think that there really isn't any plausible linkage between a Penn State case that respected due process and came to a debatable conclusion, and a University of Southern Mississippi case that involved a patently look-out-for-two-professors-who-were-involved-in-an-incestuous-relationship-of-a-senior-member-of-the-administration," Berube writes; "there's a world of difference between a questionable decision and a manifest outrage. The Penn State decision should be pursued, and the grounds for Gerard's dismissal made available for broader review. And the USM decision should be simply and unambiguously denounced."

That strikes me as a fair distinction, though I would qualify the claim that Gerard received due process. Gerard has noted that the structure of her hearing was changed at the last minute, without notice, and that as a result she was unable to present the full case for her defense.

Moreover, it's worth noting how exceptional it is for a university to fire a teacher mid-semester. Unless the teacher poses an actual danger or threat, he or she is typically allowed to complete the term (the idea is that this is what's least disruptive for students). The manner of Gerard's dismissal--she was fired mid-term, and substitutes have now taken over her courses--is unusual enough that the AAUP has become involved. "We're very concerned about several issues regarding the dismissal and how it was conducted," Anka Levy, once a Vice-president at the University of Rochester and now an associate secretary with AAUP, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "We don't make a judgment on the substantive issues of the case," she noted, explaining that the AAUP's concern is strictly procedural: "Generally, if there's no such indication of urgency, it's unusual to have a faculty member removed in that manner. ... In this particular case, especially given the level of support Professor Gerard had (among students), there didn't seem to be any indication there was a reason to get her off-campus quickly."

It's important to distinguish among kinds of administrative and academic malfeasance. And, as Berube notes, it's important to recognize when you don't really know enough facts to make an informed judgement about what really happened. But it's also important not to argue real problems out of existence or to allow the lack of transparency surrounding cases like Gerard's to arrest the quest for clear, unambiguous answers about how the decision to fire her was finally reached. As Berube says, "the Penn State decision should be pursued, and the grounds for Gerard's

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Bowl Schedule
Notre Dame
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DI-AA

April 18, 2005

Southern Miss offers scholarship to convict

Southern Miss president Shelby Thames (Shelby.F.Thames@usm.edu) sat down with the man who plead guilty to his role in the beating death of a high school student. The talk went so well, Southern Miss will offer the convict a football scholarship and a "second chance".

LB Marcus Raines plead guilty to involuntary manslaughter for his role in the fatal beating of Christopher O'Leary at a May 19, 2000, party in Palmdale, CA. After a confrontation, Little Rock QB Richard Newton hit O'Leary, knocking him to the pavement. Future Golden Eagle Raines kicked him in the head "like a football" as O'Leary's girlfriend tried to revive him. O'Leary would die from the wounds days later.

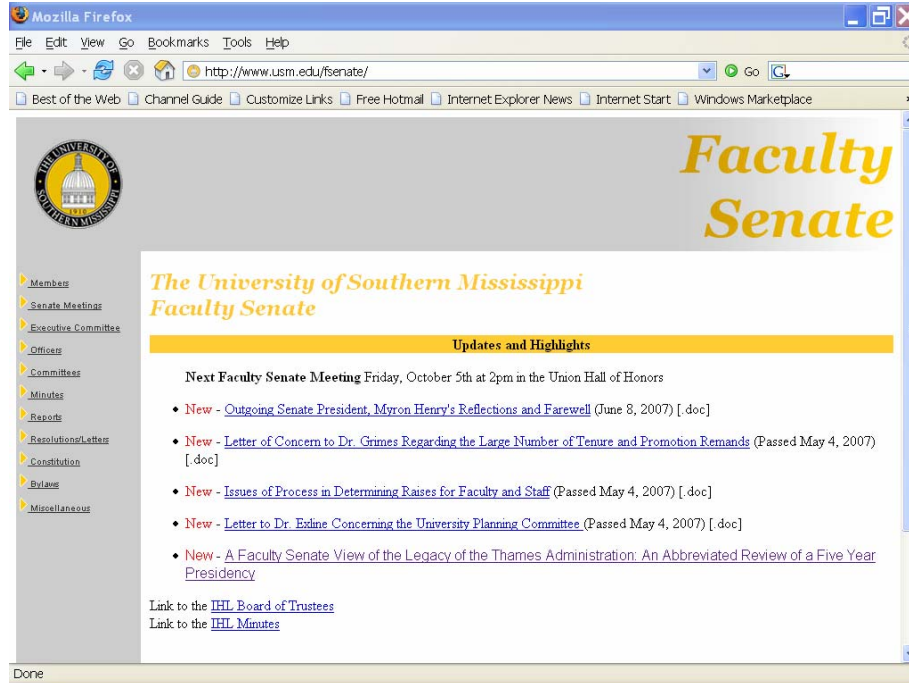
Raines served one year in a juvenile institution and two years in a boot camp before enrolling at Pasadena City College. Raines committed to Kansas State in December, but the scholarship offer was rescinded after booster backlash resulting from Raines's criminal record.

Following the meeting with Southern Miss, Raines announced that USM had extended the scholarship offer:

"They believed in my character and decided to scholarship me," Raines said of Southern Miss by phone Monday from Pasadena, where he is still attending junior college. "They

Done

Latest Words from USM's Faculty Senate



Of course, these *are* accurate representations of things that have been going on at USM, and much of what is published at USMNEWS.NET pales in comparison. If Williams and Saunders wish to control the dissemination of news about the bad things that are occurring at USM, they have a lot of memos to write. Of course they can't control the dissemination of news, thanks to the *1st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*.

Williams' final paragraph on page 2 assumes that faculty evaluations of research in the CoB are conducted judiciously. If that were the case, would Talai Osmonbekov have gotten the paltry raise he was awarded in spring of 2007.¹ Of course not, and now the CoB might lose Osmonbekov because of it. And, to counter Williams' statements about the lack of DePree's research, simply examine the documentation regarding the accountants' research throughout the pages of USMNEWS.NET.

Williams concludes his 3-page memo to Saunders by alleging that DePree engaged in efforts to "derail" the CoB's AACSB Re-accreditation efforts by contacting the AACSB office with allegations about the CoB's activities that "were not based on facts." True to form, Williams is not bothered by the lack of facts in his own memo alleging that DePree attempted to derail the CoB's AACSB Re-accreditation work with baseless allegations. As readers of USMNEWS.NET are well aware, the CoB's AACSB officials copied accreditation work-product from Central Missouri State University, and only later sent

¹ For a primer on various 2007 merit raise controversies, see [Did Dakhli & Marvasti Hit the Powerball?](#), [USMNEWS.NET's New "Your Value-to-Wittmann's Value" Calculator](#), [The Case for the Dakhli and Marvasti 2007 Merit Raise Gets Worse](#), and [Memo to Osmonbekov: You're Not Valued Here](#).

accounting professor Charles Jordan on a diplomatic quest to obtain *ex post* permission from CMSU to use the AACSB work “without proper citation.” For more on plagiarism in the CoB, see the [Administrative Plagiarism](#) page in the USMNEWS.NET Archives.

We wrap up this report, Part II in a series, with Williams’ 21-Aug-07 memo in its entirety.




The University of
Southern Mississippi


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August 21, 2007

TO: Dr. Martha Saunders
President

THROUGH: Dr. Bobby Middlebrooks 
Provost

FROM: Alvin J. Williams, Interim Dean 
College of Business

RE: Employment Termination for Dr. Marc DePree, Associate Professor,
School of Accountancy and Information Systems (SAIS)

Over the past several years Dr. DePree has engaged in behaviors that have severely constrained the capacity of SAIS and the College of Business to function at levels necessary to foster an appropriate learning environment for students and a collegial atmosphere for faculty to teach, conduct research, and perform professional service. Dr. DePree has helped create an environment in which faculty members and students do not feel safe to go about their usual business in Joseph Greene Hall. This has impacted negatively the ability to do the usual things, such as conduct departmental faculty meetings, hold College faculty meetings, convene committee meetings, and interact with students. For practical purposes, the SAIS has had very few departmental meetings, in part, due to the perceived intrusiveness posed by his recording devices. By virtue of the type of work that faculty members do, the ability to get together and exchange ideas and thoughts on teaching, research, and service represent the core of the academy. The ability to engage in this exchange was thwarted by Dr. DePree.

More specifically, Dr. DePree has used what was perceived as a recording device, without permission, to record conversations between faculty members as well as between faculty and students. Knowledge of these behaviors made faculty less reluctant to engage freely in exchange that is associated with a collegial academic environment. When faculty members fear talking about research projects, university activities, and instructional topics because of their likelihood of being recorded for unknown purposes, it poses a real danger to the atmosphere so characteristic of a university work environment.

At the May 4, 2007 College of Business faculty meeting, Dr. DePree engaged in disruptive behavior by cursing and storming out of the meeting in a manner that left faculty members fearful. This unbelievable tirade and outburst made most College of Business faculty members nervous, fearful, and at the very least, uneasy about his presence in meetings. In fact, a number of faculty have expressed reluctance to attend the first faculty meeting of the fall 2007 semester, if Dr. DePree is in attendance. Due to his behavior at the May meeting, plans are already underway to have the University Police on standby for the August 31st faculty meeting. Faculty members should not have to fear for their safety when attending regularly scheduled University meetings and functions. Police presence should not be necessary for a faculty meeting.

This fear of Dr. DePree's behaviors has prompted some SAIS faculty members to request office relocation from the SAIS suite. In July 2007 a SAIS faculty member formally requested that I relocate his office outside of Greene Hall (JGH). If this accommodation could not be made, he requested to be moved to the third floor of JGH. He indicated that other SAIS faculty members would make similar requests if no action is taken against Dr. DePree. Limited office space in JGH precludes relocating the entire SAIS. This same space limitation exist campus wide. It is clearly disruptive and counterproductive when faculty members do not feel physically safe to work in proximity to a colleague.

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In addition to the above behaviors, Dr. DePree fails to engage in the scholarly or professional activities necessary to be labeled 'academically-qualified' or 'professionally-qualified' by our accrediting agency, AACSB. During the Maintenance of Accreditation visit to the University of Southern Mississippi by the AACSB Visitation Team in February 2007, Dr. DePree was the only Accounting faculty member deemed neither academically- or professionally-qualified. Given our separate Accounting accrediting designation by AACSB, it is essential that faculty members be academically or professionally qualified. Dr. DePree has been warned by various Directors of the SAIS to devote time to scholarly research. He has consistently received lower than average research ratings for the past several years.

Dr. Martha Saunders
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Dr. DePree worked exceptionally hard to derail our attempts at AACSB accreditation. He contacted the AACSB office and made allegations about our programs and processes that were not based on facts. This type of behavior is injurious to the College and the University.

Based on the information above and consistent, corroborative, and substantive input from long-time faculty members in SAIS and former College of Business deans, it is my recommendation that the University proceed immediately to remove Dr. DePree from his teaching, research, and service responsibilities in SAIS. It is the obligation of the University to provide a safe working environment for students and faculty members. This obligation is sorely compromised if no action is taken.

Should you require additional information regarding this request, do contact me. On behalf of the entire College of Business, thank you for your consideration.