

## **University of Southern Mississippi – A Tribal Moral Community**

In this new series, we will review the peculiar behavior of faculty at USM -- peculiar because it is inconsistent with their extensive education and training. We shall show how science-trained colleagues totally ignored their long years of education and research in favor of irrational behavior. Was their irrationality personal weakness from illicit sex with students or the unjust assignment of low grades to students who espouse a different worldview? Not that we know. That is, we have no evidence for these behaviors. The irrationality reviewed in this series arises from strict allegiance to the "[Tribal Moral Community](#)." Unlike the tribal morality of some USM faculty and administrators, we are concerned with evidence, reason, and understanding.

A framework to understand our colleagues' irrational behavior is "Tribal Morality" which was recently discussed in several widely published articles. For readers' convenience, we'll apply "Tribal Morality" from the perspective contained in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* report entitled, "[De-Tribalizing Academe](#)" by Peter Wood.

The faculty behavior reviewed will begin with Gordon C. Cannon and K. E. "Skip" Hughes II. Their behaviors, like other USM faculty to be considered, are selected because they were subject to sworn depositions or they themselves insisted on recording conversations. In other words, we report evidence based on their words.

### **Part 1: Gordon C. Cannon, Ombudsman, University of Southern Mississippi**

Dr. Gordon C. Cannon, Ph.D., Chemistry professor at University of Southern Mississippi, has never studied the subject of plagiarism. As USM ombudsman, he investigated an allegation of plagiarism.

His method:

He asked a couple of colleagues/friends the following question. Would you consider copying bureaucratic boilerplate as plagiarism? Dr. Cannon did *not* provide the original or copied documents, which he had at his disposal, or any context to his friends.

His colleagues, not too surprisingly, responded, "copying bureaucratic boilerplate is not plagiarism."

Dr. Cannon reported his finding to President Martha Saunders:

Keep in mind that we learned of Dr. Cannon's evidence, reasoning, and assessment

process (or lack thereof) through his deposition taken under oath. (You may email the editor at [marcdepree@gmail.com](mailto:marcdepree@gmail.com) for a copy of Dr. Cannon's deposition.)

Dr. Cannon did not disclose to his friends/colleagues two documents and their source documents submitted to the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) by USM's College of Business during its last reaccreditation. One submission to the AACSB was entitled "Guidelines for Participating and Supporting Faculty." Charles Jordan had asked Central Missouri State University for permission to copy it "without proper citation" after it had been copied and the College of Business had been caught copying it "without proper citation." ("Without proper citation" is Professor Jordan's phrase and implies that the copying was improper—not in accordance with rules.) The other submission to the AACSB was The Academic Integrity Policy USM's College of Business faculty copied from Syracuse University. The portion of the Academic Integrity Policy not copied from Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy was Syracuse's extensive list of sources for its "Academic Integrity Policy." Then-Dean Harold Doty reported to the AACSB, after getting caught, that copying Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy was simply "benchmarking." (Benchmarking is defined as comparing something to a standard, not copying documents verbatim.)

Gordon C. Cannon, Ph.D., Chemistry professor at USM, had this evidence, complete with independent documentation, at his disposal. He did not reveal it to his colleagues/friends during his investigation.

What would Gordon C. Cannon, Ph.D., have done if he were applying the principles of science, *i.e.*, a careful description and consideration of facts and evidence? At a minimum he would have provided his colleagues/friends the details and documents discussed above before asking their opinion whether they were instances of plagiarism.

Does Dr. Cannon believe that principles of science, facts, and evidence are not applicable tools to advance knowledge outside his field of chemistry?

### **A Community of Tribal Morality**

This series will advance the notion that USM is a Tribal Moral Community to which Gordon C. Cannon, among others, pays strict allegiance. A Tribal Moral Community has an overarching "moral system ... built on 'shared devotion to sacred objects' ... and the devotion closes [Gordon C. Cannon's and others'] eyes to some important things. The sacredness [of USM] means [it is] ... granted a special status that exempts [it] from questioning." (Woods)

Let's assume that Gordon C. Cannon understands that the principles of science, evidence, and reason advance knowledge in areas outside Chemistry. It follows that there may be another process underway that helps us understand his seemingly irrational behavior.

**Consider Gordon C. Cannon's behavior from the perspective of Tribal Morality.**

Researchers who put forward the question of plagiarism by several USM faculty and administrators had violated the sacredness of USM. President Saunders assigned Gordon C. Cannon, a devotee to the sacredness of USM to, among other things, investigate the allegations of plagiarism. With the choice of applying scientific principles or following the principle of sacredness of USM, Cannon chose the sacredness of USM. USM, The Dome, President Saunders—especially through her massive public relations campaign of aligning herself *as* the University of Southern Mississippi—“...had been raised to the status of sacred [symbols]—shared devotion, exempt from questioning—there was no room among the devotees, [like Gordon C. Cannon], to give thoughtful, rational consideration to...” the evidence given to him of plagiarism.

“When the sacred kicks in, [Gordon C. Cannon's] rational capacity gets detoured: ‘[He] use[s] [his] reasoning not to find the truth but to find ways to defend what [he] hold[s] as sacred.’”

The result? An irrational Gordon C. Cannon, Ph.D.