

Corrupting the Language of Ethics, Integrity, and Right Conduct

Past is Prelude

In a January 5, 2012 “message from the President: Southern Miss Hotline” to “All-facstaff,” Martha Saunders announced

“Southern Miss has long maintained a strong commitment to our core values of integrity and ethical behavior. In order to maintain the highest standards of responsible behavior, I invite you to become familiar with the Southern Miss Hotline, scheduled to activate January 9, 2012. This new initiative, in partnership with EthicsPoint, provides an easy way to discreetly and confidentially report activities that may involve criminal, unethical or otherwise inappropriate violations of University policies.

Although the Southern Miss Hotline is not a substitute for established channels of responsibility, it does provide opportunities for reporting behavior when those mechanisms are not suitable. The Southern Miss Hotline is operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and can be accessed either through the website www.southernmiss.ethicspoint.com or by calling 877-310-0424.

Thank you for your constant support of right conduct.”

When Saunders talks about “right conduct,” “integrity,” and “ethical behavior,” what does she mean? What exactly does she mean in terms of her own behavior and the administrators over whom she exercises administrative authority? This series will advise readers what “right conduct,” “integrity,” and “ethical conduct” mean based on Saunders’ behavior and actions. In this way, readers are forewarned what to expect when Saunders or her subordinate administrators talk about ethics, integrity, and right conduct.

This series will be based on sworn testimony that reveals Saunders’ perception and behavior as it relates to “ethics,” “integrity,” and “right conduct.” In this report you will learn what to expect when you put your career on the line in the belief that Saunders’ understanding of “ethics,” “integrity,” and “right conduct” is the same as yours.

A young assistant professor testified under oath as follows in Federal Court:

I had -- I was -- I had an incident in Farhang Niroomand ‘s office, who was the associate dean at the time [Niroomand is currently dean at the School of Business Administration, University of Houston at Victoria], and he was very agitated at me about an e-mail I had sent requesting clarification over something that had been discussed in a faculty meeting the previous week...I thought maybe we need to have a discussion about this...Dr. Niroomand was not of that opinion. And he let me know that

when he berated me for an hour in his office as I stood. He never offered to let me sit down. He didn't try to approach it from the standpoint of, you know, let me talk to you about this. He was very agitated. He was very red faced. And I remember him pointing his finger at me and saying, "I ought to kick your ass." [See [other reports](#) about Niroomand's misconduct.]

(The young faculty member was driven away by Niroomand and then-dean Harold Doty even though he had demonstrated exemplary teaching and research performance.)

Farhang Niroomand sat in the courtroom, listening to this testimony. He could have, but chose not to, testify under oath. President Martha Saunders was in the courtroom, listening to this testimony. Saunders could have, but chose not to, testify under oath to rebut or clarify the sworn testimony of a junior faculty member who claimed to experience unethical conduct at Niroomand's hands. In fact, President Saunders chose not to investigate this or other unethical conduct of Niroomand. Saunders actual conduct does not measure up to her verbal claims couched in the language of "ethics," "integrity," and "right conduct." In fact, one might say her conduct is critically at odds with ethics, integrity, and right conduct.

What does President Saunders mean when she says, "Southern Miss has long maintained a strong commitment to our core values of integrity and ethical behavior"?

It's simply admin-blather with the potential of entrapping the uninitiated. When she invites you to participate in an "ethics hotline," it may not mean what you think it does. Be careful. She prefers to get rid of the messenger and keep the miscreant.