

The Intolerance at the University of Southern Mississippi is No Mystery

An April 17, 2012, *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, "[Studying Bioethics at Scandal-Plagued Universities](#)," by Carl Elliott is must reading for anyone interested in science, ethics, and the behavior of university administrators and faculty. A key question Mr. Elliott asked and answered was

[W]hy is it so rare to find a bioethicist taking a principled stand about ethical wrongdoing at his or her own institution[?] The answer is no mystery: It is because that person would probably be punished. Most bioethics programs are built in a way that makes retribution easy.

The answer is no mystery for other disciplines, either. And you don't have to assume the truth of Mr. Elliott's propositions.

For example, see our research entitled "University and AACSB Diversity" (diversity in the sense of freedom of speech, namely, speaking truth to power). What makes this research compelling and its conclusions fully supported is that we had access to depositions taken under oath, court testimony also under oath, and documents created by the institution, its administrators, and faculty, and obtained through open records requests. (Institutional compliance to open records requests was reluctantly provided after our attorney insisted.)

Conclusions from "University and AACSB Diversity" include:

As hypothesized in this case research, if AACSB applies its diversity standard, then its accredited members "must show that within this (educational) context its business programs include diverse viewpoints among participants...Accredited programs must demonstrate commitment and actions in support of diversity in educational experience." Also as hypothesized in this research, if the University [of Southern Mississippi] puts into practice its diversity standard, then its administrators and faculty "cherish the free exchange of ideas, diversity of thought, joint decision making, and individuals' assumption of responsibility" ... and ... "protect freedom of inquiry and speech.

Faculty and students must be able to study, learn, speak, teach, research, and publish, without fear of intimidation or reprisal, free from political interference, in an environment of tolerance for and engagement with divergent opinions."

University [of Southern Mississippi], its College of Business, and School of Accountancy was and is an accredited member of the AACSB and it not only did not demonstrate a tolerance for diverse ideas, it punished different ideas. The author was suspended from teaching and service. He is not permitted to enter the business building and is not permitted to participate in research seminars or in governance of the College or University among other activities of all full professors. Furthermore, the AACSB was not the least concerned that University

failed to “demonstrate commitment and actions in support of diversity” at University. Therefore, neither University [of Southern Mississippi] nor AACSB abide by their diversity principles and standards and are not to be depended on to support diversity.

Advise Silence

Since University [of Southern Mississippi] enforced silence and punished speech about important internal failings and misconduct, insiders at less free, more controlling organizations cannot expect to be protected when they “speak truth to power.” Society should not expect its citizens to break silence for the betterment of its institutions or its other citizens. In the current environment, professors should advise their students and professional accountants to be silent until effective protections are guaranteed.

The administrators and faculty who were involved in the misconduct or covered it up included President Martha Saunders, Dean Harold Doty, Interim Dean Alvin Williams, and Accounting Professor Charles Jordan.

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