

## **You Can't Make Up This Kind Of Self-Destructive Nonsense**

A January 1, 2012 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, entitled "[Penn State Scandal Encompasses Faculty, Too](#)," reports that "Penn State's Faculty Senate, which has long felt unempowered on a campus where professors believe academic concerns are overshadowed by big-time sports, has become reinvigorated, holding spirited meetings and challenging decisions by both administrators and the Board of Trustees...The sports scandal, they say, has empowered professors to try to be more vigilant when it comes to any kind of wrongdoing on the campus and to take a more active role in university affairs."

### A Problem

We're all familiar with the screaming, enthusiastic crowds at Penn State football games, and other universities, including Southern Miss. It's quite empowering to university leaders, too. Remember other screaming, enthusiastic crowds? Some of those memories are not pleasant. Mid-twentieth century Germany, among the most recent? Images of crowds at Nazi rallies, shouting the name of Adolph Hitler occur whether we seek them consciously. They are facts. And, we should not forget them.

However, one cannot help but wonder -- did those crowds provide Hitler license for his wildest excesses -- excesses which culminated in a World War and death of tens of millions of human beings? Do other faithful, cheering crowds provide license to other tyrants, or to, by comparison, lesser but still disgusting, leaders like those at Penn State, or who may be found at other universities?

How do we control the crowds? How do we control the license they provide to leaders and the amoral leaders that feed on them? The crowds cannot walk away as innocents, can they? The crowd is made up of individuals. Therefore, it seems reasonable to infer that individuals at Penn State are not innocent. Stated a little differently, the administrators and the cheering crowds must share in the culpability for wrongdoing.

Nor are faculty innocent. Over many, many years, faculty has witnessed crowds and "license" they provide to unprincipled leaders on our campuses. Faculty have seen over and over how these administrators run amuck, time and again. The faculty knows better -- no ifs ands or buts.

### Another Problem

Another recent news report—January 4, 2012, this one by The Associated Press, is entitled, "[Amid Sandusky sex abuse scandal, Penn State worked on messages of 'remorse, humility and resolve'](#)." It says,

"Four memos sent Nov. 14-18 and released to the AP this week describe the school's scrambling response less than two weeks after former assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky was arrested on child molestation

charges. Two Penn State administrators also were charged with lying to a grand jury and failing to properly report suspected child abuse.

In the first memo, issued nine days after the charges were filed, new school President Rodney Erickson told the 47-member Board of Trustees that the public-relations teams of the university and the athletic department had met to “align our messages” and that he had received positive feedback after two network television interviews.

‘This is another indication that we are taking control of the narrative of our story,’ Erickson wrote.”

“Taking control of the narrative of our story.” Notice Erickson did not say we are from this time forward telling the truth, whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

This is the same President Erickson, who, when he took the reins at Penn State pledged truth and transparency. He didn’t publicly promise public relations half-truths. However, that is exactly what he was up to behind the scenes “taking control of the narrative” with his “public-relations teams.”

We all license the public relations deceptions -- large and small – that our institutional leaders perpetrate on students and the public. None of us are ignorant of this reality. But, we let it slip by. My guess is that many individuals at Penn State will, directly or indirectly, pay a price for their participation, however remote, in the child-abuse scandal. Do they deserve blame and censure? Did they participate in, or stand idly by, giving license to miscreant leaders and uncontrolled, screaming fans?

My guess is that if Penn State’s administrators, faculty and alumni don’t take this opportunity to eliminate big-money sports, they don’t get it, yet. We’ll see what they actually do, but the prospects are not promising.

I don’t have to guess about the University of Southern Mississippi. It clearly doesn’t get it. USM acts as if its football program is on a different planet than Penn State’s. Super scandals can’t possibly happen here. (After all, the University controls dissemination of information —see, news reports about three USM football players who were shot outside a Hattiesburg night club on November 14, 2010.) As funny as it sounds, USM is racing desperately, quite willing to squander hundreds of millions of dollars over the years, in an effort to overtake successful football institutions.

You simply can’t make up this kind of self-destructive institutional nonsense.