

usmnews.net has received several editorials concerning Dean Nail and his administrative assistant. Such concerns should be addressed by CoB leadership especially if they are false or simply overstated. I encourage Dean Nail and/or his administrative assistant to provide their views.

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The Realities of Antonyms

Many in administration at Southern Miss like to use similar words when they describe their own actions, and what they have directed others to do for them. Currently popular words include “transparent”, “efficient”, “friendly”, and “fair”. The irony is the reality of performance is the opposite of these. This is true of many in the dome and in the colleges. Taking the College of Business as just one example, Dean Lance A. Nail has chosen – by action and inaction – to make Sonia Gaines-Littles his face of the College. No one knows why an associate or assistant dean or a department chair was not selected. It is very curious that a staff person, inherited from the last ousted (“retired”) dean, would be tapped for this role. She appears to have some of the skill set needed for the job but that potential has thus far been unfulfilled at least as far as anyone outside of the dean’s office can tell.

Examining these words illustrates some of the issues in the College of Business. “Transparent” is an *uber*-trendy word. Everyone doing anything from teaching, research, and service to faculty searches to accreditation work is supposed to be transparent in his or her actions. Dean Lance Nail says he is transparent but in reality he makes all decisions, normally by himself, and rarely communicates these decisions in a timely manner. The next new buzz word may be “hypocritical”. The follow-through on these opaque decisions is usually left to Sonia. She parades the JAG halls telling department chairs what they need to do; is it any surprise that many, if not all, department chairs bristle at this? Apparently it is outmoded for a College of Business to have a chain of command and use it. Sonia gives the chairs vague guidelines for what to do with a “Lance says” thrown in here and there for deflection purposes. The chairs are perplexed because frequently they have not heard of these action items previously. To paraphrase an old maxim: transparency should start at home.

“Efficient” is what everyone must be because of decreasing budget dollars. This word’s definition in the College of Business seems to be what Sonia says it is. The secretaries are said to be ineffective people who do very little. It is interesting that many of these “secretaries” are classified as administrative assistants, though they seldom fuss if called a secretary. Let someone refer to Sonia as Dean Lance Nail’s secretary, and she would explode. She frequently spouts about her college degree, but several of the secretaries (the term used for simplicity) have college degrees and some from much better schools than Sonia attended. The classical secretary position is the “right arm” of the boss; is that not what Sonia is? If the only way a person can “rule” and try to get things done is the brute force approach, that person is not ruling, efficient, or strong; that person is in reality impotent, weak, and disillusioned.

“Fair” and “friendly” can be discussed together. Fair can suggest equal treatment and a sense of tolerance within the employment context. Friendly is at least professionally sociable and the able

to work positively with other people. Again reality flares in disagreement. The consensus on the dean's office personnel is that – collectively – they are antagonistic, aloof, and selectively prejudiced. There is a true “us versus them” mindset where the “them” is everyone outside of the dean's office. These attitudes have increased at an increasing rate since the infamous email instructions to all College of Business faculty and staff to not come down to the dean's office unless you make an appointment first and be cleared to approach the “us”. Decisions affecting many are made by few with little or no outside input. Communication from the dean's office to anyone inside the College is virtually non-existent. Issues of prejudice arose on the economists “retiring” and “restructuring” decision for these reasons. Was it really done because Dean Lance Nail does not like the economists, or were there other reasons? If anyone inquires about a decision or a situation that needs to be addressed, that person is commonly stonewalled and shunned. The “us” system does work: email us to get an appointment and we can ignore the email. It seems that any question about anything Sonia does or did is met with a reaction that is mismatched to the question. Sonia is known to threaten to call, or actually call, parties outside of the College when “threatened” with a legitimate question. Her hyper-sensitivity to work-related issues collides with a friendly, efficient work environment creating a far less productive atmosphere. It is commonly wondered (by those inside and outside the College of Business who are familiar with the situation) how long Dean Lance Nail will tolerate this combustible situation that could cause him grave difficulties in the future. If he does not correct this problem, he further erodes any remnants of transparency, efficiency, fairness, and friendliness in the College of Business.