

Unconscious and Conscious Plagiarism There's a Readily Discernable Difference

Plagiarism, as implied in Rachel Toor's article—"[Unconscious Plagiarism](#)"—is more complex than we often assume. That makes the plagiarism topic a bit more interesting than is often assumed. For example, what if a freedom of information request unearthed the following?

"From: Charles Jordan
Sent: Friday, December 01, 2006 2:41 PM
To: Harold Doty and George Carter
Subject: FW: Re: Participating/supporting faculty

Dean Harold Doty and Professor George Carter,

Attached is my correspondence with Dean Joan Neal-Mansfield of the Harmon College of Business Administration, Central Missouri State University regarding permission to use CMSU's definitions in our reports. As you can see, I clearly asked permission to use the adopted maintenance reports without proper citation and Joan granted us permission. I sent her a reply thanking her and telling her a formal letter was not necessary since her email response would suffice.

Charles Jordan"

This occurred at the University of Southern Mississippi with knowledge and/or approval of the Thames' and Saunders' administrations.

Why did Charles Jordan write for permission to copy "definitions"? Why did he choose to characterize it as use "without proper citation"? Is asking to copy "without proper citation" a request to plagiarize? Does asking, and getting permission, to copy "without proper citation" legitimize plagiarism or sidestep questions of misconduct? And, since this email was meant to be secret (FOIA was required to obtain the email), does it mean that private approval warrants copying "without proper citation"?

I thought these were interesting questions. The University of Southern Mississippi spent approximately \$2.5 million to fire me for asking them. They failed--but they were successful in deflecting the questions. Nevertheless, I still find them interesting. As mentioned above, plagiarism

is more complex than we often assume, which in my view makes the questions all the more interesting.

For details see "[University and AACSB Diversity](#)."

Relevant, and an embarrassment to USM, is the way Thames' and Saunders' administrations responded to questions of plagiarism. Consider another recent article which reported how a good school, an ethical school, University of Alberta, addressed plagiarism.

"University of Alberta Medical Dean Steps Down"

"(Edmonton) University of Alberta President Indira Samarasekera announced today the resignation of Philip Baker, dean of the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, from his position, effective immediately."

"There have been allegations of plagiarism directed at Baker after parts of a speech he gave to honour the 2011 graduating class of medicine and dentistry students was said to have come from a speech given by surgeon Atul Gawande at Stanford University in 2010."

"We have been careful, thoughtful and deliberate in reaching this conclusion, and our board of governors has approved it," Samarasekera said.

"When asked about the university's reputation going forward, Samarasekera said, 'The main point to remember is that the university responded appropriately. ***What I'm most pleased about is that the reputation of the university is determined largely by how it handles crisis.***' [Emphasis added.] 'We are a big and complex institution and I'm very proud of the way this situation has been managed—quickly, fairly, expeditiously.'"

'Our reputation,' said Samarasekera, 'is about academic integrity, fairness, thoroughness.'"

Applying the comparison, many usmnews.net readers contend the University of Southern Mississippi's reputation is for academic dishonesty, deception, and corruption.

Marc DePree
Editor