

*An Editorial*

**Does Evil Lurk In Our Community?**

by Marc DePree



Steve Jackson

A recent [breaking news report](#), Another (Dangerous?) USM Professor Steps Forward, published at usmnews.net, reminded me of the [apparent ease](#) with which University of Southern Mississippi faculty are accused of being dangerous. All too often forgotten are the mobbers, the "colleagues" who lurk behind the scenes and act in an effort to destroy the lives and careers of colleagues with whom they disagree. They don't just disagree with co-workers, they are so furious and intolerant they conspire with like-minded "colleagues" to destroy lives and careers.

In the series, "Does Evil Lurk In Our Community?", usmnews.net will report on several mobbers. After all, why should innocent people who are mobbed get all the attention and the horrendous publicity that inevitably accompanies accusations of "dangerous" behaviors? Those who mob deserve to be pulled from the darkness where they lurk and be seen in the bright light of sunshine.

The nightmare for the person mobbed begins in earnest when shortsighted administrators overreact or, in Jackson's case, sell their soul. (The first editorial concerned [Mary Morgan Anderson](#).) Everyone understands that just the accusation of being "dangerous" destroys the accused colleague's career and potentially his life. And, because of the nature of the accusation, there is no pretense of due process. (In future reports, we'll review the deposition of Martha Saunders for a discussion of administrative breach of due process.) Of course, the accusers know this, and as a number of them testified in my case, the dirty business was orchestrated and coordinated by University lawyers.

You don't have to take my word for any of this. Unlike faculty who cannot afford to take legal action against mobbers, I was fortunate to be able to take their depositions. As a result, I remain a tenured full professor.

Steven Jackson, at the date of his deposition, was an Associate Professor (untenured) and **interim director** of the School of Accountancy, College of Business, University of Southern Mississippi. From 1992 through 1996, Jackson was an assistant professor at USM. He left USM because he did not have a [research record](#) to successfully be tenured at USM. Jackson returned to USM in January 2007 as an associate professor (untenured) and became interim director of the School of Accountancy in August 2007. A search of the IHL Minutes does not indicate that Jackson has been tenured or promoted.

The following is the actual sworn testimony of Steven Jackson, taken on July 7, 2008, in the case, *DePree v. University of Southern Mississippi* (Q. is my attorney's questions directed to Jackson; A. is Jackson's responses):

Q. ...[H]ow often did you interact with Dr. DePree?

A. Probably two or three times. And I don't remember specifically but not often...

Q. And so how would you describe your relationship today.

A. I don't think we have a relationship.

Q. Would you say you get along with him?

A. I don't know if I get along or don't get along. I haven't talked to him – until this morning when he said hi...

Q. Now at some point in August, late August [2007], you wrote a letter to the interim dean Alvin Williams requesting the termination of Dr. DePree; is that correct?

A. Yes...

Q. [D]id you meet with individuals [before writing your letter]?

A. I spoke with counsel (Lee Gore, et al.) who told me—

Outside university counsel interrupted: Don't tell them what we told you...

Q. Had you had discussion about Dr. DePree with other faculty?

A. Mary Anderson, Charlie Jordan...Rod Posey. I think Patty Munn...

Q. Now, as far as the conversations you had with Mary Anderson, what specifically did you guys talk about?

- A. She is the one that told me to be very careful what I said in the hallways, be very careful what I said to Marc. Buy a radio for my office so conversations would be muffled.
- Q. Did she give you reasons why she gave you this warning?
- A. Everything I said would probably end up on the website [usmnews.net].
- Q. What else did you discuss; was that it?
- A. That's it about Marc [DePree].
- Q. Now you referenced a conversation or conversations with Charlie Jordan.
- A. To be honest with you, everybody else on that list I really don't remember specifics. They were very general conversations...But the same theme.
- Q. Talk to me about the theme.
- A. Be careful what you say.
- Q. So it's really the general theme was about the website [usmnews.net]?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Let's talk about your letter [recommending termination of Dr. DePree's employment] that Dr. DePree had a destructive impact [on the School of Accountancy]. What did Dr. DePree do to have a destructive impact.?
- A. The atmosphere in the accounting suite...
- Q. How did Dr. DePree cause that?
- A. I was told [by Anderson, Jordan, Posey, Munn] ... because of Dr. DePree.
- Q. Did you observe anything which led you to believe that he [DePree] was having a destructive impact on the College of Business or in the school of accountancy?
- A. No.
- Q. Now, this purchasing of a radio to turn on while meeting with other faculty, what would have been the purpose of that...?

A. I was told that folks thought he was recording conversations and so with a radio in the background recording would not be able to pick up conversations, that's what I was told.

Q. So you thought that he was bugging offices?

A. Not bugging, just having a tape recorder. He is only two doors down with doors open sounds carry.

Q. Did you ever see him record anything?

A. No.

Q. Did you ever ask him if he was recording anything?

A. Yes, I did as a matter of fact.

Q. What did he say?

A. He told me it was a BlackBerry and it didn't record. Yeah.

Q. But you didn't believe him or—

A. I believed him, but I bought a radio for my office...

Q. Now, in paragraph 4 of your letter your first sentence, "while I've only been interim director for 21 days and on faculty [since] spring summer of 2007, I completely support the faculty request for his [DePree's] dismissal."

Did you undertake any investigation prior to coming to the conclusion to support the termination of Dr. DePree?

A. No.

Q. And you don't think you should have?

A. No.

With that sign-off, Jackson explained he is a willing participant in any mobbing, for any reason accusers put forward.

Why would Jackson act in contradiction to his own observations, however limited they were? And why would Jackson, as interim director, not conduct an investigation before he requested termination of a tenured full professor?

Jackson's recommendation to terminate my employment was done as cavalierly and trivially as a recommendation to see a movie -- as if his recommendation has no significant consequences for a colleague, the School of Accountancy, College of Business, and USM. As if an accusation to terminate another individual's career is not worth his time. As if as an interim director he had no responsibility at all for signing off on a serious decision. Jackson said it best: "I really don't remember specifics."

Then again, perhaps it was an easy decision for an untenured associate professor who has a weak research record. Jackson may have believed that joining the mobbing without a second thought about the veracity of accusations might be an alternative, easy path to getting tenure. Perhaps he believed that if he did not join in he might be Anderson's next victim. Only Jackson knows for sure.

In addition to evil, words like cowardly and corrupt come to mind. Who is worse, Mary Morgan Anderson who fabricates "Virginia Tech" danger stories to fire a colleague or Steve Jackson who, as a "leader," blindly follows Anderson and others in mobbing a colleague without the least concern for the accuracy of their accusations? Anderson makes a mockery of accusations of danger. Any expert in the field of forensic psychiatry will say predicting who is dangerous is impossible. Anderson's indiscriminant accusation of danger makes the process of assessing real danger just that much more precarious and fraught with uncertainty. She hurts all of us with her casual evil. However, in my opinion Jackson is worse. He proved he would sign a pact with the devil.