

An “Amazing Legacy” of “World Class” Failure of Integrity

President Saunders’ blog, October 6, 2009, included “He [Cecil Burge] is leaving an amazing legacy as our VP for Research and the bar is set very high for his successor.”

The “very high” bar set by Cecil Burge is like President Saunders announcing USM is a “world class” university. If you have to announce your school is “world class,” you are not “world class”. It is merely public relations and embarrassing to everyone, except puffery specialists like leaders at average schools. The puffery, in fact, reminds everyone the school is not “world class.”

Let me share with you part of the “amazing legacy” Cecil Burge has earned and with which I’m personally familiar:

From: MARCDEPREE@comcast.net
Subject: No system to investigate alleged violations of integrity
Date: December 4, 2006 4:49:25 PM CST
To: accreditation@aacsb.edu
Cc: john.harsh@usm.edu, Harold.Doty@usm.edu, Cecil.Burge@usm.edu, jay.Grimes@usm.edu, Shelby.F.Thames@usm.edu

MEMORANDUM

TO: AACSB International Accreditation Services
FROM: Chauncey M. DePree, Jr., DBA
DATE: December 5, 2006
RE: A Follow-Up to Allegations that the conduct of the University of Southern Mississippi College of Business is contrary to AACSB accreditation standards

On December 1, 2006, I advised AACSB International Accreditation Services of allegations of plagiarism at the University of Southern Mississippi College of Business. This follow-up memorandum is intended to inform the AACSB about the system for investigating the allegations.

In a December 1 memorandum of complaint, I informed the AACSB that I had “begun the process specified in our Faculty Handbook to investigate copying another school’s AACSB documents without providing attribution.” On November 13, 2006, in accordance with USM Faculty Handbook, I wrote Dr. Cecil D. Burge, Vice President of Research and Economic Development. The first paragraph stated: “The following informal request for consultation is directed to you because I was unable to identify our University Research Ombudsman. If you will provide me with the name of the Ombudsman I will forward it to him. Alternatively, please consider this letter an informal request for consultation about “possible scholarly misconduct.” (The Faculty Handbook, 11.2.2)

It now appears that there is no process at the University of Southern Mississippi for

investigating allegations of faculty plagiarism.

I was advised by Dr. Burge that the University Research Ombudsman was Dr. John Harsh. I had a preliminary discussion with Dr. Harsh in accordance with the guidance in The Faculty Handbook. Dr. Harsh at that time was not sure whether allegations of plagiarism fell within his responsibilities. Dr. Harsh consulted with Dr. Burge and he advised me the following:

From: john.harsh@usm.edu
Subject: RE: AACSB accreditation documents
Date: December 4, 2006 1:11:15 PM CST
To: MARCDEPREE@comcast.net

Hi Marc

I had the opportunity to speak to Cecil Burge about an appropriate “ombudsman” for issues like this... He agrees that we don’t have such a person on this campus. He suggested that I pass along to you that you might consider talking to the EEOC person on campus (Becky Woodrick – phone 6-6618).

I am going to continue to explore this. I’m reasonably certain that the most common response I am going to get when I bring it up is that such matters should first be discussed by the faculty member with a concern and the administrator who is the source of the concern.

John

I understand, and my attorneys confirm, that the EEOC is totally irrelevant to issues of plagiarism. I had previously advised Drs. Burge and Harsh why I had come to them for an investigation. The following email is one of my discussions about why I believed they were the appropriate faculty to consult.

From: Marc DePree [<mailto:MARCDEPREE@comcast.net>] □
Sent: Wednesday, November 29, 2006 02:30 PM □
To: Dr. John Harsh □
Subject: AACSB accreditation documents

John,

Let me give you the citations that I referred to that led me to seek advice through the procedures set out in The Faculty Handbook.

"7.3 SCHOLARLY INTEGRITY

The University is dedicated to the discovery and dissemination of truth in research and in all other scholarly and creative activities, whether University-sponsored or conducted individually by members of the academic staff, by administrative officers and staff, or by students. Hence plagiarism or other misconduct in research or in any other scholarly or creative activity is strictly prohibited. Every student and University employee is

responsible not only to abide by the highest standards of integrity and professional ethics themselves but also to report violations when they are known or reasonably suspected to have occurred. Alleged breaches of scholarly integrity are investigated promptly and fully by the University and may lead to University administrative proceedings and disciplinary action through Scholarly Misconduct Proceedings." (The Faculty Handbook, January 2006, p. 50, emphasis added.)

"11.2 SCHOLARLY MISCONDUCT PROCEDURE

11.2.1 Initiating Allegations. *Parties having reasonable cause to believe that a University employee or student has committed an act of scholarly misconduct must first consult informally with the University Research Ombudsman." (The Faculty Handbook, January 2006, p. 93)*

Thanks again for taking the time to consider the apparent plagiarism in CoB's AACSB accreditation documents.

Marc

My understanding is that "Responsibilities of Institutions with AACSB International Accreditation" include ensuring "that programs promote and operate with integrity," "Develop and follow consistent practices that insure integrity in the representation of information about programs and the institution," and "Report program data and information accurately to external parties." I believe that without procedures to investigate accusations of failures of integrity, like plagiarism, the University of Southern Mississippi cannot ensure that its "programs promote and operate with integrity." The problems at the College of Business are more fundamental than an allegation of plagiarism and the potential scope of that type of behavior. The nonexistence of a means to investigate allegations of faculty plagiarism indicates the failure of commitment to the words in The Faculty Handbook:

*"plagiarism ... is strictly prohibited. Every student and University employee is responsible not only to abide by the highest standards of integrity and professional ethics themselves but also to report violations when they are known or reasonably suspected to have occurred. **Alleged breaches of scholarly integrity are investigated promptly and fully ...**" (7.3, emphasis added.)*

As acknowledged by the Vice President of Research and Economic Development and the University Research Ombudsman, there is no system to investigate alleged violations of faculty integrity; there is no system to ensure the College of Business follows "practices that insure integrity in the representation of information about programs and the institution." (AACSB, Responsibilities of Institutions with AACSB International Accreditation)

Therefore, I respectfully request that the AACSB not only "receive and review" the allegations of plagiarism and consider the potential scope of the failure to provide

accurate documentation to the AACSB as reported in the memorandum dated December 1, 2006 but also “receive and review” the more fundamental problem of this University and the College of Business, that is, they have no procedures to “insure integrity in the representation of information about programs and the institution.” (AACSB, Responsibilities of Institutions with AACSB International Accreditation)

Respectfully submitted,
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cc: Dr. John Harsh, University Research Ombudsman (via email)
Dr. D. Harold Doty, Dean (via email)
Dr. Cecil Burge, Vice President of Research and Economic Development (via email)
Dr. Jay Grimes, Provost (via email)
Dr. Shelby F. Thames, President (via email)