



THE UNIVERSITY of
MISSISSIPPI


Interoffice Memorandum

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TO: School of Journalism and New Media Faculty and Staff

FROM: Dr. Noel Wilkin, Provost and Executive Vice
Chancellor for Academic Affairs 

DATE: October 23, 2020

SUBJECT: Ongoing Anonymous Email

Dear Faculty and Staff,

These are truly difficult times. As we adjust everything that we do to be responsive to our missions of teaching, service, research, and scholarship due to the pandemic, we are all facing personal challenges and hardships that the pandemic and its restrictions impose.

For you, this has been further aggravated by ongoing, persistent, and accusatory emails from an anonymous source. The nature of the anonymous allegations and the questions asked seem to indicate that those behind the emails do not understand our policies, our practices, or the definitions of terminal degrees. They ignore, or fail to understand, the role that you, the faculty, play, in addition to the administrative offices, to ensure compliance with those policies, practices, and standards. They also have failed to notice relevant external facts that support our policies and practices, like the fact that the credentials of our faculty mirror those found at other public, flagship research universities in the appropriate disciplines. I am sure all of us would be happy to explain our processes and practices. After all they are public, and we all have a responsibility to embrace, adhere, and explain them. Yet, the emails persist.

At an educational institution, our work is based on the free exchange of ideas in a civil and open environment to advance truth and knowledge, which are core to our mission. This anonymous approach violates the very core of academic discourse and transparency.

A hostile work environment allegation was filed by members of the faculty against the

individuals responsible for the anonymous communications. It is my understanding that the Office of Equal Opportunity and Regulatory Compliance is conducting an investigation in response to your request. Additionally, the tenured faculty (with 2 absent and 1 abstaining) within the school filed a grievance claiming hostile working conditions that resulted from these behaviors as it “has increasingly created a chilling effect on faculty speech, dampened faculty collegiality, interfered with teaching and scholarship, and caused several to express they feel they work in a hostile environment.” While the EORC investigation takes place, I am exploring mechanisms to give faculty some relief from this barrage of anonymous allegations in the workplace. These efforts take time, and we appreciate the faculty’s patience and resolve while we do this work.