

Special Report

Eight Hundred Thousand Bones

How the FCCC Jury Saw Davida Williams' Case

The recent USMNEWS.net report entitled [USM 'Sends a Terrible Message' to College Co-Eds](#) lays the groundwork for a multi-part series on the Davida Williams v. USM, Rex Stamper, et al. case that was brought to Forrest County Circuit Court back in 1996. Williams alleged in the suit that USM officials wrongly and malevolently prevented her from receiving her doctorate degree, and caused her serious mental and emotional anguish. Williams also alleged that USM English professor Rex Stamper sexually harassed her over a relatively lengthy period of time.

This *Special Report* examines more of the 2005 court documents regarding the Williams-USM et al. situation. The text below presents a summary of the conclusion reached by Forrest County Circuit Court jury back in 2002:

On July 16, 1996, Davida Dawn Williams, a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), filed suit in the Forrest County Circuit Court against USM, as well as USM professors Dr. David Huffman, Dr. Glenn Harper, Dr. Harry McCraw, and Dr. Rex Stamper, in their individual and official capacities. . . . Her complaint alleged that the defendants jointly and severally engaged in a wrongful and malevolent course of conduct which prevented her from receiving her doctoral degree and caused severe emotional and mental anguish. In addition, she alleged general deprivation of unspecified property interests and contractual and constitutional rights. Six years later, in July 2002, after lengthy delays, nominal activity in the case, continuances, and resetttings of trial dates, the case was tried before a jury which returned an 11-1 general verdict for Williams, in the sum of \$800,000 "actual damages." The trial court entered judgment in accordance with the verdict.

Clearly the FCCC jury overwhelmingly felt that USM et al.'s behavior vis-à-vis Williams was nothing less than despicable. To them, a whopping \$800,000 was necessary to make her whole. That USM finds itself in such a predicament so often is, to some at least, itself despicable.