

Special Report

So Many Years, So Many Committees

How USM Breached its 'Contract' with Davida Williams

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 v. USM et al. case. The text below contains the court's summary of part of the account of how USM breached its "contract" with Williams:

Dr. Rex Stamper was the committee chair [for Davida Williams] and is from time to time in the record referred to as chair, major professor, or dissertation director. Members of the initial committee were Drs. David Wheeler, Harry McCraw, Thomas Richardson, and Kenneth Watson. There was testimony from Dr. Wheeler that there may be two committees involved in the doctoral process, the exam committee to evaluate the exam and a different dissertation committee. He then went on to say that Williams had a doctoral committee, and whether this was her dissertation committee or not, he didn't know. There is no reference in the record to indicate a different "exam committee", and it appears that the terms "doctoral committee" and "dissertation committee" are used interchangeably. There apparently was an initial dissertation committee as stated immediately above, and at some time after the September 1990 meeting at which Williams voiced her complaints and asked for a new chair of the committee, Dr. Anne Wallace was added, and Dr. McCraw was named the new chair or director. Dr. Will Lyddon, who was requested by Williams, was never added, and the second rejection of the dissertation was approved by Drs. McCraw, Wallace and Watson only. Drs. Richardson and Wallace were the only two witnesses called to testify on behalf of USM and the professors. Both of them denied being on Williams's dissertation committee, although contradictory evidence is also found in the record.

Much has been made (through this investigative series) of how USM acted in ways that made a shambles out of Williams' efforts to complete her dissertation. A previous report in this series provided court documents indicating that former liberal arts dean Glenn Harper claimed to have added Will Lyddon (of psychology) to Williams' dissertation committee. Lyddon testified, however,

that he was never asked to serve on the committee, nor was he ever provided with a copy of Williams' dissertation. Here (above) we learn that both professors Richardson and Wallace testified to never having been appointed to Williams' committee either, although the court does reference contradictory evidence that can be found in the record. Long-time followers of USM will recognize Wallace as one of the primary detractors of the infamous Shelby Thames administration. Her involvement in this scandal, however, likely tarnishes some of her reputation.