

USM 'Sends a Terrible Message' to College Co-Eds

Comments from the Stamper-Williams Court Proceedings

On 16-July-96, USM doctoral student Davida Williams filed suit in Forrest County Circuit Court against USM and English professor Rex Stamper, among others. Williams' 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." Part of Williams' case against Stamper also involved accusations of a lengthy course of sexual harassment. Given [recent events](#) surrounding the CoAL's Center for Writers, and the behind-the-scenes tensions between literature faculty and creative writing faculty, USMNEWS.net reporters decided to visit the Williams-Stamper court documents. Over the next several days, we will be providing reports containing details from those documents.

This report simply presents the first half of the final paragraph of one judge's opinion on a portion of that case. That text is inserted below:

"USM's indifference to the adverse conduct towards Williams sends a terrible message to all women on every college campus. USM had a duty to protect all of its students and staff, regardless of gender or position. Discrimination and harassment by USM staff towards a student cannot be tolerated. USM's actions or lack of action in this case has made Williams a victim."

The judge's comments reference the Williams timeline, which contains numerous notifications of various USM officials that she was allegedly being sexually harassed by Stamper. In reading Williams' account, one is also reminded of the recent *31st & Pearl* column, ['Like Virgil Led Dante'](#), concerning the comments that online readers of *The Hattiesburg American* made about the USM literature professors. In responding to *THA* reports about the disarray in USM's Center for Writers, *THA* readers commented that there appears to be a sense of entitlement among some of the USM English professors when it comes to engaging in sexual relationships with one-another and with their students.