

## **Lawsuit against Iowa Central goes on**

---

Iowa Court of Appeals reverses lower court's dismissal of professor's grievance

By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer

POSTED: July 19, 2008

legal struggle between Iowa Central Community College and a former instructor continues.

The Iowa Court of Appeals recently ruled that a lawsuit Mary Conrad filed against the Fort Dodge-based college must go to trial again. The case in which Conrad accused the college and its president, Robert Paxton, of interfering with her career, was dismissed last year by District Court Judge Joel Swanson.

The case was spawned by a transcript-fraud scandal that erupted in 2002 and ended with three college officials pleading guilty to charges that they tampered with records.

"Mary Conrad was very, very vocal in speaking out at that point and was wanting the people involved to be placed on leave," said Conrad's attorney, Jill M. Zwagerman, of Johnston. "We believe that was part of the motive of getting rid of her."

Conrad, of Fort Dodge, had retired from the community college prior to the transcript scandal, but was working as an adjunct professor at the local campus of Buena Vista University. That campus is on the grounds of Iowa Central.

Conrad claimed that Paxton told Buena Vista leaders to stop employing her.

"He told Buena Vista University that he didn't want me on his campus anymore and since they were getting free or nearly free accommodations, the accommodations were more important than me," she said.

She added that Paxton had a "hatred and animosity" for her.

"The thought of going to trial again is distressing, but I feel vindicated," Conrad said.

Zwagerman called the Court of Appeals ruling "the right thing to do."

Mark Crimmins, president of the college's board of trustees, said he was "obviously disappointed" by the ruling. He said he's confident that jurors will rule in favor of the college when the case comes to trial again.

Paxton declined to comment.

A call seeking comment from Steve Kersten, the attorney for the college, wasn't immediately returned.

A new trial date hasn't been set.

The transcript case involved complaints that the grades of some athletes were changed. The original complaint focused on football player B.J. Van Briesen, who was reportedly given credit for courses he didn't complete in order to make him academically eligible for the 2000 season.

After a year of investigation, a grand jury indicted Paxton; Tom Beneke, vice president of enrollment management and student development; Dennis Pilcher, athletic director; and Kevin Twait, the head football coach.

Charges against Paxton were dismissed.

Beneke pleaded guilty to two counts of tampering with records and Pilcher pleaded guilty to one count of the same offense. Twait pleaded guilty to one count of aiding and abetting tampering with records.

All three were required to complete 60 hours of community service. College leaders suspended them for two weeks without pay and placed them on administrative probation.

Contact Bill Shea at (515) 573-2141 or [bshea@messengernews.net](mailto:bshea@messengernews.net)