

6 Years of Ph.D. Work Denied, So He Sues

Peter Beckway spent six years working toward a Ph.D. in English literature, racking up nearly all A's, winning a prestigious teaching assistantship, and earning 3.88 grade-point average.

All that remained were the final exam and oral presentation, each to be scored by a panel of professors he chose.

So Beckway was "devastated" when that panel ridiculed his written work and said he wouldn't get the chance to deliver his oral presentation.

And, they added, he wouldn't be getting a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Chicago or anywhere else.

Now, Beckway is suing the five professors on the panel, saying he was "ambushed" by their criticism and denial of the one thing he'd worked toward for so many years.

"I worked closed with them for six years and never had any problems with any of them," he said. "They had always been very complimentary of my work. Then this happened. They destroyed my career."

Professors Michael Lieb, Mark Canuel, Ned Luckacher, Mary Beth Rose, and Robert Williams did not respond to requests for comment. A UIC spokesman declined comment on the suit.

Beckway's attorney, Gene Hollander, said the professors are responsible for the distress Beckway endured and says they didn't put his interests first, as required.

Beckway, 36, says he regularly met with the professors, taught for Canuel and chose them to review his work based on the praise they'd showered him with over the years. But they told him he used "too much secondary material" and didn't go into enough detail" in his written exam, saying his interpretations were "vague at best."

Like that, his dreams of becoming a professor were done.

He's now teaching English on the East Coast.

And while he hopes to recover some of the \$114,000 in debt he says he accumulated during his school years, he also hopes to get answers about why he was blindsided.

"This has been incredibly difficult for me," he said.