

MURIEL HARRIS OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD FOR THE IWCA: HISTORY & ANNOUNCEMENT

“Leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it.” —Marian Anderson

In the 1970s, when many were focusing on the singular desire to “be myself” or to “discover me,” Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) put forth the concept of the servant leader. Although the notion of leading while also serving is certainly an ancient one, Greenleaf articulated the characteristics of servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and community building. While leaders may choose to follow this philosophy in their behaviors, often they emerge as others recognize their qualities.

The career of Muriel Harris as editor of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, Professor Emerita of English, and Director (retired) of the Writing Lab at Purdue University and her contributions to the writing center community exemplify this pattern of servant leadership. As Michael Pemberton (2003, 22) noted in his “The *Writing Lab Newsletter* as History,” it was at the 1977 CCCC session that a critical mass of people interested in writing centers gathered at a session that featured Harris, Joyce Steward, Janice Neuleib, and Mary Croft and wrote their names and addresses on an impromptu sign-up sheet so that Harris could organize a newsletter to “continue the conversation.” From the initial mailing of 49 to the current list of well over 1,000, the *Writing Lab Newsletter* has been the primary means of communicating among writing center professionals. Propelled by the *Newsletter*, many others began joining Harris in building the community, which quite naturally resulted in the formation of The National Writing Centers Association (later renamed the International Writing Centers Association). A formal constitution was written and edited at the first board meeting at NCTE in Denver in 1982, building on the designation as an assembly of NCTE.

One of the first acts of the nascent group was to establish an award recognizing individuals who have made significant contributions in the service of writing centers. Appropriately, the first recipient was Muriel Harris in 1984. The inaugural award was spontaneously decided by the entire NWCA membership. The Outstanding Service Award was renamed in honor of its first recipient, and tribute has been made to others on a periodic basis for their ability to listen, empathize, persuade, steward, and support others. As NWCA grew and then became international, the number of nominees increased as well. At the same time, the fair and equitable handling of those nominations by an independent committee became more important than ever. Each new recipient becomes part of a committee and adds essential new perspectives to the selection process.

Each of the recipients has made significant, varied, and continuing contributions to writing centers. Joyce Kinkead served as the first executive secretary of the National Writing Centers Association (that later became the International Writing Centers Association), helping to build the infrastructure of the promising organization and solidify it over an eight-year period; she also served for six years as co-editor of the *Writing Center Journal*, one of the two publications of the National Writing Centers Association, along with Jeanette Harris, the second NWCA President. Kinkead and Harris, along with Jeanne Simpson, believed that NWCA could expand the tiny early professional network into a larger and more broadly supportive organization. In addition to initiatives such as writing center starter kits, statements about the profession and principles were developed, notably a position statement authored by Simpson that was widely circulated and frequently used by others in need of such a statement. Simpson was also instrumental in forming the first writing center organization (that later became the East Central Writing Centers Association). Lady Falls Brown saw the power of the Internet to continue community building, and developed WCenter, the very valuable online listserv for conversations about writing centers and tutoring that continues to be the mode for daily discussions among writing center people across the nation and the globe. Byron Stay built the NWCA Press out of thin air to ensure that scholarship, research, and practice had a forum for publication. A pioneer in writing centers in the secondary schools, Pamela Farrell Childers edited the first publication on this topic and has continually reached out

to teachers in the schools. She has mentored dozens of people as they build and expand high school writing centers and has ably presented the work of writing centers to our European colleagues. Al DeCiccio saw the need to engage tutors directly in our professional conversation and led in the creation of the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, a thriving conference that now attracts hundreds of tutors to present and share their work; likewise, with Joan Mullin, he also served as co-editor of the *Writing Center Journal*.

The combination of historical awareness and of new achievements has steadily strengthened the committee and provided a diversity of perspectives needed to maintain objectivity when considering nominations. Each time the committee meets, they learn more about colleagues nominated for the award and about the values of the writing center community.

Any member of the writing center community may nominate. We encourage nominators to follow the guidelines and to offer high quality materials to support the nominations, commensurate with the work of the servant leaders to be recognized. Well-researched and carefully written nominations are key to sustaining the integrity of this award. Over the 25-year history of the award, the candidates have been noteworthy.

Writing centers enjoy strong community and growing scholarship. But these resources did not and could not come into existence without the work of servant leaders. Nor will writing centers thrive without continuing the tradition of encouraging and recognizing servant leaders, and that is the goal of the Muriel Harris Outstanding Service Award.

It is time once again for a servant-leader to be recognized. The committee issues a call for this career achievement award, and, in fact, the call for nominations ends this article. In order to remain objective, committee members do not nominate or provide support for nominations; in addition, they are excused from review and deliberation if a nominee is located at a committee member's home campus. The most recent recipient of the award chairs the selection committee and presents the award at an appropriate future IWCA Conference. Although the award was first given 25 years ago, the recipients continue to be active in the writing center community—even when retired. Their work on this selection committee reflects a spirit of service. In that spirit, please read carefully the guidelines below and consider making a nomination.

IWCA MURIEL HARRIS OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD INSTRUCTIONS FOR NOMINATIONS

Named after its first recipient, the Muriel Harris Outstanding Service Award recognizes outstanding service that has benefited the international writing center community in significant and broad-based ways. The award is given at every other IWCA conference. All nominations should be submitted electronically to Al DeCiccio, chair of the committee, at adeciccio@svc.edu and include the following:

- A letter of nomination that includes the name and institution of the nominee, your personal knowledge of or experience with the nominee's service contributions to the writing center community, and your name, institutional affiliation and e-mail address.
- Detailed support documents (maximum of 5 pages). These may include excerpts from a curriculum vitae, workshop or published material, stories or anecdotes, or original work by the nominee.
- Other letters of support (optional, but limited to 2)

All materials must be received by Al DeCiccio, chair of the IWCA Muriel Harris Outstanding Service Award committee, by July 1, 2010. The winner of the Award will be announced at the 2010 IWCA/NCPTW Conference, in Baltimore.

Works Cited

- Greenleaf, R. K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York: Paulist, 1977. Print.
- Pemberton, Michael. "The *Writing Lab Newsletter* as History: Tracing the Growth of a Scholarly Community." In *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship*. Ed. Michael A. Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead. Logan: Utah State UP, 2003. Print.