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With Remarks from Caroline Forell†, Ralph L. Brill‡ & Anne Kringel§  

Honoring Professor Emerita Mary Lawrence: 2013 Recipient of the Burton Award for Outstanding Contributions to Legal Writing Education  

The Burton Awards for Legal Achievement were established in 1999 to recognize outstanding achievement in and contributions to the law, particularly in effective legal writing but also in legal publication and law reform. Those honored by the Burton Awards include law firm partners and associates, law school students, and legal writing educators. These individuals are recognized for their use of—and insistence on—plain, effective, and concise writing. They are on the front lines and in the trenches of the Plain English movement that is carrying us from long, dense, obscure, dull language, to clear, concise, modern writing. The founder of the awards, William C.

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§ Professor, University of Pennsylvania Law School. These remarks were part of the formal presentation of the award to Mary Lawrence at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. They were delivered by Anne Kringel, who was then Vice Chair of the Academic Board of the Burton Awards and Legal Writing Director and Senior Lecturer at University of Pennsylvania Law School.
Burton, is an accomplished lawyer and the author of *Burton’s Legal Thesaurus*. He is also an inspirational speaker, as many of us saw in 2010 when he received the Legal Writing Institute’s Golden Pen Award.

In June 2013, the Burton Award for Outstanding Contributions to Legal Writing Education was presented to Professor Emerita Mary Lawrence of the University of Oregon School of Law. The Burton Awards Fourteenth Annual Awards Program and Gala was held at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Few of us were able to attend, so we are celebrating Mary’s most recent award here at home with a wonderful collection of her national friends, Oregon colleagues, former students—and we comprise just a small portion of the nationwide Mary Lawrence Fan Club.

While many people would be honored to make a public tribute to Mary, we are keeping the presentations today short for two reasons: (1) we all know Mary and appreciate her many accomplishments, and (2) we’d rather spend time talking to her individually at the reception to follow. We have two speakers today: Caroline Forell is the Clayton R. Hess Professor here at the University of Oregon; she will speak about Mary’s contributions at Oregon, beginning in 1978 when Mary founded our Legal Research and Writing Program. Ralph Brill is a renowned professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law, and he will speak to Mary’s impact nationally.

In recognition of Mary Lawrence’s contributions to the University of Oregon School of Law, Caroline Forell had the following to say:

Mary Lawrence and I go back a long, long way. In 1978, I was hired to teach in the newly established University of Oregon Legal Research and Writing program directed by Mary. I was selected for this challenge, sight unseen, upon graduating from the University of Iowa Law School, based solely on my grades, resumé, and a short conversation with then Dean Chapin Clark. I literally went from one side of the classroom to the other with no law practice experience. My preparation for teaching LRW was woefully inadequate since my law school taught legal writing and analysis as an add-on to a substantive course and “taught” legal research through a series of ungraded...
library exercises with no oversight. Teaching LRW was trial by fire, but Mary made sure I succeeded.

Happily, upon my arrival in Eugene, I learned that in addition to being an LRW whiz Mary was a gourmand who made sure that I got to know the Excelsior Restaurant almost as well as the law school. Mary taught me a new word to describe bad food. She dined at the Excelsior because the food was never “execrable.”

The LRW team during that first year of the program consisted of Mary, myself, and Dale Goble, a 1978 graduate of the University of Oregon Law School who is now the Margaret Wilson Schimke Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Idaho College of Law. We were pioneers, inventing as we went along.

To say Mary started out ambitiously is an understatement. Both Mary and Dale are workaholics. I have never worked harder in my life, before or since. And I’m no slouch! We gave the students five graded assignments first semester. I had 83 students and therefore more than 400 papers and conferences in Fall 1978. Spring didn’t get easier: we assigned the usual appellate brief and oral argument, but for good measure we had them write a case note! I suspect no group of LRW students anywhere has had so much legal writing, analysis, and research in their first year of law school. They and I learned so much.

Starting out in this new field called Legal Research and Writing was not for the faint-hearted. We worked as hard as the other law teachers but as LRW instructors we were, for the most part, invisible. My contract was for nine-months and my pay for that period was $12,000. We were clearly second-class citizens. But when the going got tough, as it did during that first year, I learned about integrity and true grit from Mary.

Throughout her long career as the Director of LRW at Oregon Law, Mary fought tirelessly for the status of her LRW teachers and the LRW Program. It was very much a two steps forward and one step back process that fluctuated wildly depending upon who was dean at the time. But Mary laid the foundation so that after she retired and Suzanne Rowe became Director, LRW teachers came to be viewed as on par with those of us on the tenure-track.

Mary never lost her sense of humor. We would laugh together at our predicament and the absurdities of the challenges we faced. Often we met at the Excelsior, of course. We talked frequently about the need to redraw the imaginary chart of the various faculty factions as
the balance of power shifted to and fro. Mary’s wit was subtle and I still smile when I think of some of the comments she would make, so softly but sharply.

After that first year of teaching LRW, I moved over to the Assistant Dean for Students position half-time while still teaching one section of LRW for another two years. I then retired from LRW into a tenure-track position. But Mary and I kept our friendship and Excelsior meals going through the years. Mary is one of my heroes, and I couldn’t be prouder of her many accomplishments and honors. I am so fortunate to have worked with one of the founding mothers of LRW. Mary Lawrence is the best!

In recognition of Mary Lawrence’s national impact, Ralph L. Brill had the following to say:

The title of this session of the Program—“Innovation: The History and Future of Legal Writing”—is so apt because it epitomizes Mary Lawrence and her long career, and encapsulates the reason we honor her today. She early was and continues to be a great innovator on methods of teaching Legal Writing. She has written a biography of the birth and growth of the Legal Writing Institute. Her joint interview with another pioneer, Marjorie Rombauer, reviews all of the major conferences that have been held, who the speakers were, and what major ideas were developed. She has an incredible memory. And I have heard many of the speakers earlier today allude to methods Mary espoused, especially those based on her “spiraling” concepts.

Mary came to legal education as an established Writing and English teacher. With a B.A. and an M.A. in English, she, for many years, taught at Michigan and was Coordinator of Writing Classes, Michigan English Institute. She published two landmark books: *Writing as a Thinking Process* and *Reading, Thinking, Writing: A Text for Students of English as a Second Language*. These books

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3 Karin Mika, Legal Writing History Video (Marjorie Rombauer and Mary Lawrence), YOUTUBE (June 26, 2009), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIYxAx9TZQE&list=UU0EMbHqIE2cDJKfeGnPE8Q&index=42.


were adopted at many universities in the United States, but also in other countries, such as Japan, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and others.

She began the Legal Writing Program at the University of Oregon Law School in 1978, and immediately implemented the then radical notion that Legal Writing courses should focus on the process of thinking and writing, and not just on the format of a legal document. She called this process “spiraling.”

Mary knew that students could not learn well a concept or skill from a single encounter. She offered that the concept or skill could be learned much better by offering the student an initial encounter with a problem in a simple setting, then spiraling through the concept or skill again and again through further, more complex problems. As she once explained to Susan Brody, 6 “[t]hey are unlikely to learn it well if you teach it only once.”

Thus, in the Oregon program, students were taught the core principles of research, analysis, and writing, and then required to circle back—to spiral—through similar, more complex problems. At each step, she added such resources as statutes and administrative processes, as well as further policy considerations.

The Oregon program quickly became one of the leaders in the field. She supervised full-time teachers. Many were her former students. And she trained each to her very high standards.

She assumed leadership roles in the relatively new nationwide field of Legal Writing. As an early chair of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) Section on Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research, she planned and presented two annual conference programs. She used her great persuasive powers to induce to the AALS to put on a three-day conference on Legal Writing, something that was not easily granted from an association controlled by doctrinal-oriented teachers and deans. At that conference, she presented some of the leading up-and-coming stars as speakers.

Mary was a frequent speaker at the biennial conferences of the Legal Writing Institute, and later for the Association of Legal Writing Directors (ALWD). She wrote many articles in the Legal Writing Institute Journal, The Second Draft, Perspectives, and for several school law reviews. Even today, she continues to serve as Senior Editor for The Journal of the Legal Writing Institute.

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6 Susan L. Brody is a pioneer in the LRW field and a professor at The John Marshall Law School.
One of her greatest impacts on the growth of the field came as a mentor to Legal Writing teachers from all over the country. At every opportunity, she organized elegant dinners and invited six to eight teachers and directors, established or up-and-coming, to share ideas and experiences over glasses of the finest wine and the best food.

In 1996, Mary received the first Distinguished Service Award from the AALS Section on Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research. In 2000, she received the inaugural Marjorie Rombauer Award from ALWD. In 2010, the Legal Writing Institute established the Mary S. Lawrence Award for Excellence in Legal Scholarship.

Her own school, Oregon, gave her the first Orlando John Hollis Award for Outstanding Teaching. Later, it endowed a scholarship in her name. And in 2010, ten years after her retirement, Oregon presented Mary with an award for Meritorious Service to the School and to the Profession. When the award was presented, she also received a reprint of tributes written by sixteen of the leading Legal Writing teachers and directors, published in the LWI Journal, *Legal Writing*.

Last year, at the AALS Meeting in New Orleans, Mary was surprised to receive a joint LWI/ALWD Lifetime Achievement Award. And in the summer of 2013, Mary was honored to receive the Award for Outstanding Contributions to Legal Writing Education from the prestigious Burton Awards.

The sub-title to the Burton Award for Legal Writing Educators is “Legends in the Law.” Mary truly deserves that title: She is truly a LEGEND IN THE LAW and IN LIFE.

To conclude, I’m going to read the brief statement of Professor Anne Kringel of the University of Pennsylvania at the June Burton Award celebration at the Library of Congress:

I am honored to present this award to Mary Lawrence, Professor Emerita at the University of Oregon School of Law.

Mary Lawrence put the “writing” in legal writing. Her first career was teaching composition and English as a second language. Her early books, *Writing as a Thinking Process* and *Reading, Thinking, Writing: A Text for Students of English as a Second Language* were groundbreaking and popular books in those fields. Lawyers in the

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7 *Writing as a Thinking Process*, supra, note 4.
8 *Reading, Thinking, Writing*, supra, note 5.
room will recognize that this was a valuable background when Professor Lawrence founded the Legal Writing program at the University of Oregon School of Law in 1978. Law has its own language and lawyers must be translators for many of their audiences. But the focus of most legal writing was not on the audience. Legal writing was taught as a series of document forms that students should mimic.

Professor Lawrence used her writing and discourse expertise to change the course’s focus from the product to the process of composing. She taught her students to recognize that writing was not just something done to memorialize a final answer after all research and analysis were done. Writing was thinking. She developed a course that integrated analysis, research, and writing, teaching them together first in simple assignments and then spiraling back in increasingly complex assignments. This spiraling was a concept she had earlier introduced to composition theory, but it was truly radical for legal writing pedagogy.

That’s hard for us to understand now because writing as a process is so firmly embedded in all the leading textbooks and in the legal writing courses taught at all law schools today. Our students are not just given a brief format and told to copy it. They are instructed in rule formulation and synthesis, the application of rules to facts, and the essential structure of legal analysis. Their professors intervene in the writing process to critique, question, and clarify the thinking and writing that they do.

Professor Lawrence did something else almost unheard of in the legal academy. She innovated in her classroom teaching. She incorporated statutes from the beginning of her course at a time when the first year of law school was almost exclusively about the common law. Rather than just lecture, she used visual aids and mnemonics, trying to reach students with different learning styles. Legal Writing faculty now pride ourselves on being some of the most innovative teachers in law schools, and that’s a tradition we can trace to Mary Lawrence. She built a program at Oregon that continues her proud tradition as one of the best in the country.

Having created that program, she set about to share her ideas with the nascent legal writing world. Those who were teaching legal writing were mostly lawyers without her English language and writing background. At countless conferences and in countless articles, she introduced them to that world and served as a mentor to
most of those who became leaders in the field. She was a leader of the Section on Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research of the Association of American Law Schools and received its first “Distinguished Services to the Profession” award in 1996. She has since received almost every possible award for teaching and service from our field and from her institution. In fact, the Legal Writing Institute gives an award for scholarship that bears her name. I hope she is able to find room on her shelf for this latest—the Burton Award for Outstanding Contributions to Legal Writing Education.