



# The University of Georgia®

Franklin College of Arts and Sciences  
*Department of Communication Studies*

June 4, 2016

Dr. Abbey E. Wojno  
Past Chair, NCA Women's Caucus  
[wpo2@cdc.gov](mailto:wpo2@cdc.gov)

Dear Dr. Wojno and Members of the Selection Committee:

It is with unqualified enthusiasm that I nominate Dr. Joan Faber McAlister for the 2015 Francine Merritt Award. I have had the pleasure and honor of working with Dr. McAlister for more than fifteen years. Over those years, I have also had the privilege of working with many of the very best teachers and scholars making their way through our academic ranks. Of this, I am absolutely certain: I know (of) no other individual of her generation or the next who—through her mentoring, service, teaching, and scholarship—has made such a sizeable difference in the lives of so many. Indeed, Dr. Faber McAlister has labored tirelessly and with exemplary grace in multiple roles—teacher and mentor; editor and officer; and scholar—not only to transform individual lives but also to challenge and change the structures (institutional, political, social, and cultural) that make the field a less than hospitable place for far too many of us.

Teacher and mentor: Since earning her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, Dr. Faber McAlister has been a member of the Drake University faculty—a small, private, liberal arts college in Des Moines, Iowa. The place matters. This is not R1. Instead, heavy teaching loads; high expectations with respect to department, college, and university service; fewer than three permanent faculty in her area (rhetoric), folded into a larger unit called the “Department for the Study of Culture and Society,” and no graduate program. And yet, by force of extraordinary will, imagination, and hard work, Joan has turned this space, almost single-handedly, into a first-class training ground for future graduate students and faculty. A wonder, to be sure, but hardly a mystery since Joan spends time at it, lots of time: holding countless office hours; conducting an annual Rhetoric Reading and Writing Group that, as one of her supporting letters duly notes, “gives students the opportunity to be treated as peers, empower[ing] them to develop their own critical voices as scholars and writers;” working one-on-one with students to develop panel proposals and revise single-authored papers for conference presentation and, then, helping the students to network at regional and national conventions; work-shopping lecturers’ dissertation chapters for defense and publication, and helping them to retool letters and c.v.’s in order to land a tenure-track job. So many whose lives have been enriched by Joan at Drake: Aya Hijazi who, after graduating from Drake went on to earn her MSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science; Shelby Bell who, after completing her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota, has returned to Drake as a University Teaching Fellow in the Law, Politics, & Society Program; Virginia Ferrer who is now pursuing her M.A. in rhetoric at Syracuse; Marissa Fernholz, who is now pursuing her doctoral degree in rhetorical studies at the University of Wisconsin—Madison; and Katherine Lavell (tenure-track faculty at the University of Wisconsin—Lacrosse), Denise Oles-Acevedo (full time position at Iowa State), Meryl Irwin (James Madison University), Ozge Girit Heck (tenure track, Ithaca College), and Alyssa Samek, California State—Fullerton).

However, it is not only at her home institution that Joan’s impact as a teacher and mentor has been felt. She has delivered seminars, conducted workshops, and held office hours at institutions across the country, on every occasion, as another of her letter writers aptly puts it, appearing “as fully *herself*: as a thinker-writer-teacher-activist who has a history, a body, affective attachments and political investments.” Without exception, on each occasion “she ha[d] important things to say, but she also skillfully [made] space for others’ voices to be heard.” Important things to say: at this year’s NCA inaugural Networked Online Writing Retreat about “what editing taught [her] about publishing;” in 2015 at the University of San Francisco about sexism and feminism in the academy; before

that, at the University of Georgia a graduate seminar focused on Luce Irigaray's place in psychoanalytic theory, followed by an evening-long discussion of gender, sex, and the academy; at the University of Iowa an extended lecture and workshop for graduate students and junior faculty on publishing feminist communication scholarship; at LSU and Texas A&M, one-on-one meetings with graduate students and junior faculty who brought their concerns and questions to the table. I could go on. For the sake of time and space suffice it to say that, without a doubt, Joan is a master in the delicate arts of teaching and mentoring, both of which require, above all else, two of her most visible and contagious virtues: heart and hope.

Editor and officer: If Joan had done absolutely nothing else over the past five years, her exemplary service as editor of *Women's Studies in Communication* warrants her being named the recipient of the 2016 Francine Merritt Award! In her letter supporting this nomination and from the singular perspective of being the journal's editor-elect, Dr. Kristen Hoerl writes,

Dr. McAlister's most visible contribution to the lives of women [in communication] is her outstanding work as the current editor . . . . She has moved the journal in important new directions by including a greater diversity of women's experiences and a broader range of perspectives on feminism and gender in communication studies. [She] has sought and promoted innovative scholarship, particularly pertaining to growing areas: queer rhetoric, transnational feminism, postcolonialism, critical race studies, dis/ability studies and reproductive agency. As a result, Taylor and Francis reports that the journal's readership has grown at a rate that has far exceeded its targeted goals over the past two years.

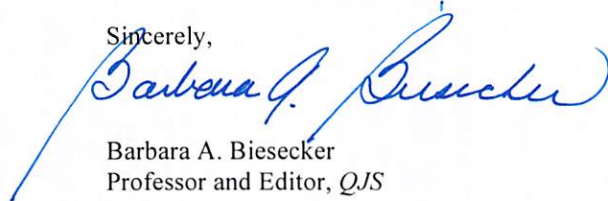
I could not agree more, albeit with the following caveat. It just so happened that my tenure as editor of *Quarterly Journal of Speech* coincided with Joan's of *WSIC* and, so, we talked regularly by telephone or face to face at conventions about how the work was going. Now, it is true that the most visible trace of that labor is the published issue: it's there, you can hold it in your hands, and after a bit of time, you can even begin to stack them one atop another. But what the published issue in every case effaces is the generosity of spirit and time the editor has put into its production: not only reading and responding to all of the other submissions that did not make it into those pages; not only line editing—in some cases—nearly *every* sentence and catching proof-page errors that even an essay's own author has missed. But also in Joan's case: scouring conference programs in advance for promising work for the journal and attending those panels rather than others that potentially would advance her own research agenda; working closely with six different undergraduate women as editorial assistants, putting the journal to use as a opportunity to mentor them (the categories are never air tight!) into research; and conceptualizing and orchestrating a new "forum" section of the journal that made it possible for diverse groups of junior scholars to see their work to print on a vast array of topics such as space and place, FEMEN, reproductive agency, and the legacy and future of *WSIC* itself. From the editor's point of view, then, every issue merely the trace of those labors of love. But, of course, editing the journal was not only what Joan did. She also began serving as the Membership Officer for the Rhetoric Society of America, as a member of the Alta Advisory Board, as a member of the Western States Communication Association Publications Committee, as a book manuscript reviewer for Routledge, Lexington, Rowman & Littlefield, and Kendall Hunt press's Race, Gender, Class, and Media book series. She vetted conference submissions for multiple divisions of NCA, served as Chair of Drake University's Diversity Committee and as member on its Women's Studies Steering Committee. And so much more.

Scholar: All of Joan's work as a mentor and teacher, editor and officer, indeed, citizen of her local and national professional communities, is informed by scholarship that, as Dr. DeLaure poignantly puts it, is "driven by an ethical and political urgency to shed light on texts and practices that limit, occlude, oppress, and exclude." From her first published essay to her most recent, Joan's work is methodologically ground breaking, seeking always to render the field of rhetorical criticism and theory other to itself. For example, Joan has long been an active participant at the Alta Conference on Argumentation, a space of intellectual production and conversation that is not known for being particularly open to critical-cultural, feminist, and/or queer work. However, with unprecedented finesse, Joan has not only delivered but also published five essays in that group's conference proceeds: "Restoring the Place of Woman in Republican Rape Rhetoric," "Smackdown! Michelle vs. Oprah: White Masculinity and the Pornographic Pleasure of the Black Catfight," "Transcending the Scientific Rationality/Religious Morality Divide: The Post-Secular Deliberative Sphere in President Obama's Stem Cell Statement," "Nativity vs. Mortality: Gender and Embodiment in Hannah Arendt's Political Philosophy," and "The Savvy Victim: Cyberporn, Girls, and the Status of the Child as Sexual Subject." By political design, Joan has published other cutting-edge essays in a wide array of scholarly journals, sparking conversations across multiple communities: from "Collecting the Gaze:

Memory, Agency and Kinship in the Women's Jail Museum, Johannesburg" published in *Women's Studies in Communication* and recipient of the Visual Communication Division of NCA 2013 Article of the Year Award to "Domesticating Citizenship: The Kairotics of America's Post-9/11 Home Makeover" which appeared in the pages of *Critical Studies in Media Communication*; from "Good Neighbors: Covenantal Rhetoric, Moral Aesthetics and the Resurfacing of Identity Politics" published in the *Howard Journal of Communication* to "\_\_\_ Trash in the White House: Michelle Obama, Post-Racism, and the Pre-Class Politics of Domestic Style" which appeared in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. Additional essays by Joan have also been published in the *Southern Journal of Communication* ("Figural Materialism: Renovating Marriage through the American Family Home" was awarded the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies Division's 2013 Monograph of the Year Award), *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, and multiple edited scholarly collections. And despite all of her other commitments, Joan has never passed on the opportunity to deliver original scholarship at international, national, and regional conventions (she is not a recycler), and it comes as no surprise that she always draws a crowd—students, colleagues, and strangers who by the time of leaving are energized and edified by her fierce intelligence and collaborative style.

For all of these reasons and so many more, I urge the committee to name Dr. Joan Faber McAlister the recipient of the 2015 Francine Merritt Award. Per instructions, I have included in this nomination packet the following: Dr. Faber McAlister's Vita, including current contact information, four additional letters supporting this nomination, and a letter from the nominee accepting the nomination and agreeing to attend NCA's convention in 2016 in Philadelphia.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Biesecker  
Professor and Editor, *QJS*