

# **Honoring Our Past: The Founding of NCLCA**

**By Johanna Dvorak**

I have found myself in a unique position, having helped found the Midwest College Learning Center Association in 1985-86, and having served as its president twice, once in 1993-94 and again in 2003-04. I have also served as a conference chair three times in 1990, 1993, and 2003 and as recording secretary, professional development chair, and as the 1995 Summer Institute Chair. This article, then, is my reflection of our organization from its inception in 1985-86 until today.

Wisconsin is the founding state for the Midwest College Learning Center Association (MCLCA) largely because our leader, Carol Cashen, was the Director of Educational Program Support at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Carol, a strong advocate for learning assistance, had already been hosting conferences and bringing in top speakers to UW-Parkside such as Alexander Astin and Claire Ellen Weinstein. Professionals also shared their expertise in breakout sessions. Carol lamented that the Midwest did not have a professional organization such as WCRLA, the Western College Reading and Learning Association.

The stage was set in October 1985 when a group of Wisconsinites met in Madison to consider and to design plans to begin the Midwest College Learning Center Association (MCLCA). After that meeting, a small group of us were selected to draw up bylaws and plan the first meeting. Members included Chair Carol Cashen; Brad Hughes, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Michael Marinetti, UW-Green Bay; Richard Behm and Susan Casper, UW-Stevens Point; and me from the UW-Milwaukee.

This group met in the winter of 1986. I can remember sessions with us hashing out details around a conference table in Brad Hughes' office overlooking Lake Mendota. Led by Carol, the group was very cohesive and organized with a strong sense of purpose. As a young professional, I had a wonderful feeling to be part of the creation of a very special organization.

We held our first organizational meeting in October 1986 at UW-Parkside to vote on the bylaws and officially begin MCLCA with Carol Cashen as our first president. UW-Parkside lent support as we launched our organization, and our second president, Sandra Burmeister (1987-88), was also from Parkside. She chaired our next MCLCA conference in October 1987 in Milwaukee at the Hyatt Regency Hotel with keynote speaker Arthur Whimby. This started a trend of outstanding keynote speakers; some of these have been Martha Maxwell, Frank Christ, John N. Gardner, Stephen Brookfield, Blythe Clinchy, Patricia Cross, Wilber McKeachie, Ernest Pascarella, Sheila Tobias, Vincent Tinto, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Anthony Grasha, Martha Casazza and Sharon Silverman.

MCLCA focused on an 11-state region: Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, North and South Dakota, Kansas, and Missouri. Because Chicago was our largest city,

we chose to alternate conferences between Chicago and another city in the Midwest. The conference was hosted in Chicago or Evanston, and Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, the Quad Cities (Bettendorf), and Madison.

National Louis University (formerly National College of Education) provided strong support for MCLCA. Martha Casazza became our 3<sup>rd</sup> President followed by Carol Eckermann from National Louis. The college also provided financial support to begin our journal, *The Learning Assistance Review*. Past Presidents Martha Casazza, Karen Quinn, and Nancy Bomstein made a great contribution as editors for *The Learning Assistance Review*. Since 2003, the journal editors have been Jeanne Higbee and Irene Duranczyk, both from the University of Minnesota.

UW-Parkside has held several Summer Institutes for learning center professionals. A memorable one for me was the summer of 1988 when Frank Christ, Martha Maxwell, and Brad Hughes were mentors. A friendship began when I was able to provide Frank a bike to ride around the scenic campus. The Summer Institute continues to provide an opportunity for professionals to develop a mentoring relationship with key leaders in our field. MCLCA Past President Nancy Bomstein (Alverno), Jan Norton (UW-Oshkosh), and Brad Hughes (UW-Madison) all were involved with NCLCA from its beginnings, were among the mentors at the Summer Institute this past June at UW-Parkside. Past Presidents Charlotte Short (UW-Parkside) and Jackie Robertson Harris (Ball State University) have co-chaired the past three Summer Institutes in 2001, 2003 and 2005.

Professionals from many other two-year and four-year institutions in the region have taken an active part in MCLCA. We have developed white papers and resource directories, presented at conferences, participated on committees, collaborated with other organizations, conducted research, and written for publications. When our participants in Summer Institutes and conferences started coming from other states, the membership decided to become a national organization with a focus on learning center management. President Shevawn Eaton, Vice-President Jacqueline Robertson Harris and their executive board were instrumental in this process in 1998-1999.

Past Presidents have continued to be very active in NCLCA, providing advice, heading projects, continuing on committees, mentoring, presenting and sharing at our Past Presidents' panel at our yearly conference. We have named scholarships and awards in honor of members whom we have lost to terminal illness: Past Presidents Brenda Pfaehler, Karen Quinn, and Summer Institute mentor Julia Visor.

As I think back on the growth of our organization with pride, my hope for the next twenty years is that we continue to grow and share our enthusiasm about the field of learning assistance with newer professionals in this field. NCLCA has been known as a friendly, caring, and hardworking group. My wish is that they will follow our strong tradition.