

## **Remarks on the occasion of receiving the Habermann Award**

**Anne Condon, July 16, 2010**

Thank you, Andy. Thanks to members of the CRA staff and board for all that you do to nourish our research community and for establishing this award in honor of Nico Habermann. Nico was an outstanding researcher and an outstanding mentor. I never knew Nico but I have learned his secret: that excellence in research and excellence in mentoring go hand in hand. I'll tell you about some extraordinary role models and mentors who taught me this, and then I'll enlist your help in extending Nico's mentoring legacy to all researchers in our field.

First, my PhD advisor, Richard Ladner at U. Washington. Richard is a wonderful theoretician who has been very effective in supporting people with disabilities. Because of this, Richard has always impressed me as an independent thinker who knows what's important. He was ahead of his time in looking beyond stereotypes to uncover talent, and indeed he is now working on exciting research problems in accessible computing. I may be the first recipient of the Habermann award whose advisor has already received it. Richard obviously inspired me!

Second, my distinguished friends on the Computing Research Association's Committee on Women. They coached me in managing my first project of national scale, the Distributed Mentor Project, and helped me develop diverse skills such as advocacy and fund-raising. Because they act with conviction to eliminate barriers that others face, I can better identify and address challenges that I face as a woman in computing. The leadership skills and the confidence that I gained were directly useful in managing and expanding my research program. Thanks to my friends here this evening—Carla Brodley, Carla Romero, Annie Anton, Mary Jean Harrold, Kathleen Fisher, Jan Cuny and especially Mary Lou Soffa—for all that we have achieved together.

Richard and my friends on CRA-W helped me realize how mentoring would actually enhance my own research success and satisfaction. Maria Klawe convinced me that the University of British Columbia is a great place to pursue these goals. Maria was right! At UBC, my colleagues consistently communicate respect for my research and mentoring efforts, often in spontaneous and therefore very genuine ways. The support of my colleagues, together with my own respect for their judgment and high standards, give me the freedom to take risks, the courage to ask for their feedback, and ultimately the ability to do better work.

I am fortunate to have role models like Richard, a community like CRA-W, and a work environment like UBC that have helped me combine research and mentoring. But I am especially grateful for the support of my family. My husband Scott is here this evening. Scott's a man of many talents who has supported me for over 25 years, from doing the laundry to being my personal technical guru. And he makes fabulous desserts, which greatly relieve the stress of research deadlines -- did you know that the word 'desserts' is 'stressed' spelled backwards? Thank you for everything, Scott!

Because I believe that research excellence and supporting the next generation go hand in hand, I'd like to close with some thoughts on our research community, and make a request of each one of you. I'm proud that we honour people like Nico Habermann. I'm proud of our career mentoring programs, and the Grace Hopper and the Richard Tapia Conferences. But, as Moshe Vardi, Jeff Naughton, and others have recently noted, some practices at the core of our research culture, such as poor reviewing and super-low conference acceptance rates, are hampering creativity and send the message that high standards are synonymous with hyper-criticality. I'm concerned that we are squandering valuable mentoring opportunities, and that this disproportionately impacts individuals from underrepresented groups. Our community has started an important conversation as to how we can do better.

So, here is my request. As leaders and senior researchers we have enormous influence on the computing research culture. We need to extend Nico Habermann's legacy of mentoring and support to all researchers entering our field. We're busy people, but simple actions can make a world of difference. What actions can each of us personally take now, in the context of the work that we do? It takes just a moment to send a personal note of recognition for a thoughtful paper review. We can recognize outstanding mentoring efforts, particularly those that include individuals from underrepresented groups, and reward such efforts in our institutional merit processes. We can challenge comments that detract from productive and respectful exchange of ideas. We can articulate the value of formative mentoring experiences in our research review and publication processes, as we consider how to restructure them. We are already doing some of these things, but we need to do them visibly and with conviction, every day in our institutions and organizations, so that the next generation of researchers knows that mentoring matters.

As with Nico's example, our actions can create a ripple effect, where others follow our lead. We can help ensure that the people we most need—talented people who have different life experiences, who have fresh perspectives, who have innovative ideas—that these people will stay and will enrich our community and that these people will thrive. Our future is their future. Will you join me in strengthening mentoring practices in our research community? We will all be happier and more productive if we do. Thank you.