

The Marsha Houston Award For Outstanding Student Work in Social Justice and Diversity

Award Rationale

This award celebrates the contributions and legacy of Dr. Marsha Houston, a pioneer of the communication studies discipline in the areas of civic engagement, social justice, community activism, social change, and diversity. A longtime faculty member and former chair of the Department of Communication Studies, Dr. Houston dedicated her professional and personal life – spanning nearly 40 years in academia – to theorizing about the importance of social consciousness in political and everyday contexts. This is reflected in her research, which yielded two books, 22 articles and chapters, scores of presentations, and numerous editorial responsibilities as a series editor and special issues editor. Vitality, Dr. Houston merged her scholarship with on-the-ground service to improve the ways that the communication studies discipline has re/considered un(der)represented groups and to motivate empowering ways that our local, regional, national, and global communities have attended to issues of diversity. Evidence of her commitment to these goals can be seen in the many organizations she helped found and/or lead, her popular dialogue projects on women’s issues, African American voice, and “Black Women’s Talk,” and the intercultural training and project materials she authored and taught to community groups around the nation.

Considered a “black pioneer in communication research” (Ronald Jackson and Sonja M. Brown Givens), Dr. Houston was instrumental in helping foster the African American Communication & Culture Division and the Black Caucus of the National Communication Association (NCA). Her mentorship of women and people of color in these areas – along with her roles as founding editor of the *Communication & Culture in the African Diaspora* book series (Hampton University Press) and organizer of such forums as “Difficult Dialogues: Gateways and Barriers to Women’s Communication Across Cultures” (Georgia State University) – has been awarded considerably throughout her career. Dr. Houston was the recipient of the *Francine Merritt Award for Distinguished Service to Women* (NCA), two Distinguished Book Awards (NCA), the prestigious *Faculty Outreach Award* (Southern States Communication Association), and the *Outstanding Alumna Award* (DSR-TKA Forensic & Debate Honor Society). In addition, she was the first holder of the *Reeves Dreux Chair in Women’s Studies* at Tulane University, invited as a visiting professor by four universities, asked to contribute to the national *Women’s Studies in Communication Archive* (University of Oregon), and selected by the U.S. Department of State to help lead a women’s delegation to South Africa (*People to People Program*). Recently, Dr. Houston was honored by her peers, former students and mentees, and notable women’s studies and communication/culture scholars with two full panels dedicated to her service and research (NCA). She considers the “Giving a Sistah Her Due” panels one of the most affirming privileges and accolades of her career as a self-professed “unreconstructed revolutionary.”

The Award

Winners will be recognized at the Lambda Pi Eta awards ceremony and will have their name listed on a public plaque in the Department of Communication Studies.

Eligibility and Criteria

The Marsha Houston Award for Outstanding Graduate Student Work in Social Justice and Diversity is given to a M.A. student in the Department of Communication Studies whose work reflects social justice issues and diversity, including but not limited to research, teaching, or citizenship. Successful candidates must demonstrate academic excellence, leadership potential, and a commitment to

community involvement and social responsibility. Diversity would include any focus on marginalized or un(der)represented populations and initiative to improve our local, regional, national, or global community. The award recipient is honored for following Dr. Houston's communitarian example.

Candidates for the Master of Arts degree who are eligible for this award must --

- Have completed a minimum of 12 graduate hours in the M.A. program in Communication Studies program or be in their second year of that program
- Have a minimum 3.5 GPA, as evidenced through the submission of an academic transcript
- Have a primary research interest or focus on some issue of diversity or social justice, including but not limited to research, teaching, or citizenship, such as community outreach, extracurricular activities, community service, or activism
- Be committed to forwarding issues of social justice through future scholarship or professional work
- Exhibit superior skills of leadership and conscientiousness
- Have a personal commitment towards community involvement

Application Process

Those eligible for the award who wish to apply must submit a letter of intent, along with the required application materials, no later than **20 February 2011, at 4:45 pm.**

Award applicants must submit the following materials by the above deadline:

- A current UA transcript
- A letter of recommendation from a core faculty member
- Evidence of exceptional scholarship or community engagement that focuses on an issue of diversity or social justice (NOTE: Evidence might include any ONE or more of the following range of things including, but not limited to a 1-2 page excerpt from a class paper or publication, materials from community work or activism with which the applicant was directly involved, or a letter of reference from someone in the community with whom the applicant has worked)
- A resumé or CV
- A two page letter of intent that explains how the applicant has the qualifications for the award and is committed to Dr. Houston's legacy (refer to the rationale for the award).

Application materials can be hand-delivered to the Department of Communication Studies, 203 Reese Phifer Hall, or mailed to:

Department of Communication Studies
c/o Angela Billings, Faculty Advisory Committee
Box 870172
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0172