

The **Association of Legal Writing Directors** and the **Legal Writing Institute**  
are proud to announce the winner of the

**2026 Thomas F. Blackwell Memorial Award  
for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Legal Writing**



**Tamara Herrera**

Dean Herrera is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and holds a Distinguished Endowed Professorship in Legal Methods at Arizona State University's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, where she has taught since 2001. She served for many years on the Board of Directors of the Association of Legal Writing Directors, including many years as the Board's Secretary, and has contributed to countless national committees. She also serves on the Steering Committee for the

Rocky Mountain Legal Writing Conference. For almost twenty-five years, Dean Herrera has been a warm, wise, welcoming presence in our community and the profession, whether she is guiding students on the path to becoming effective lawyers, mentoring school or national colleagues, building a more competent and knowledgeable profession through her publications, or leading in national organizations.

The Thomas F. Blackwell Award is presented annually to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to improve the field of legal writing by demonstrating (1) an ability to nurture and motivate students to excellence; (2) a willingness to help other legal writing educators improve their teaching skills or their legal writing programs; and (3) an ability to create and integrate new ideas for teaching and motivating legal writing educators and students.

Dean Herrera has been an exemplary teacher, routinely earning perfect or near-perfect student evaluation scores and often serving as a literal model for other professors. Indeed, as one nominator mentioned, administrators regularly suggested that law faculty with challenges in their own classrooms “sit in on a few of Professor Herrera’s classes to observe a really excellent teacher.” And Dean Herrera’s work nurturing and motivating students to excellence in legal writing extends well beyond the law-school classroom: she also guided students as a volunteer moot-court judge, as a faculty advisor for the law review, as a supervisor for student scholarly writing, and more. Her dedication to students is legendary, and she gives selflessly of her time and energy. As one nominator observed,

*...whatever time it was, students were always in her office. I never knew when her actual office hours were because from before 8:00 in the morning (and often until 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening), students would be meeting with Professor Herrera to ask questions, review her comments, seek job advice or recommendations, or just visit with a friendly mentor.*

As a former student elaborated, Dean Herrera’s nurturing and motivation extends far beyond both the four walls and three years of law school:

*Tamara never turns away students seeking assistance and goes out of her way to help guide students through the law school process. She never hesitates to connect her students to her own, personal network. Tamara listens to her students with compassion and never tires of providing encouraging words and/or hugs when they’re needed most.*

That investment in student success paid dividends. One student called her “the single most important and influential person in developing my legal writing.” More than one former student noted that they consistently receive compliments on their legal writing, and they credit the time and energy Dean Herrera devoted to their learning. Her impact extends well beyond her own students; Dean Herrera also

*...goes above and beyond for student groups that have too often been overlooked. She has co-taught—as an overload—a course on Indian Legal Research almost every year of her teaching career. Early in her career, she taught summer pre-law courses for CLEO, the Council on Legal Education Opportunity. She also has advised the Disabled Law Students association.*

Dean Herrera's transformative teaching earned her many awards, including the Outstanding Faculty Award, from the law school's alumni association; Outstanding Faculty Advisor and Outstanding Faculty Support for the Arizona State Law Journal; Outstanding Faculty Member as voted on by the graduating class, and Moot Court Coach of the Year. The students even created an award to recognize her volunteer service before she became a full-time professor, giving her the Moot Court Judge of the Year Award in 1999 and 2001.

Dean Herrera's many publications also showcase her singularly supportive voice and ability to "speak directly to students in a clear, inclusive manner," even long after those students have graduated and entered the profession. Her work as author of four editions of *Arizona Legal Research* not only guides students and practitioners but inspires other scholars. Her longtime monthly column on legal writing in *Maricopa Lawyer*, the bar journal for the largest local bar association in Arizona, reaches tens of thousands of practicing lawyers, including almost twenty-five years of her own former students.

Dean Herrera's contributions to her ASU and national legal-writing colleagues are no less notable. She served on the ALWD Board for many years and was elected Board Secretary twice. In that role, Dean Herrera "was a steady and trusted colleague and advisor" with "an extraordinary ability to balance institutional memory with openness to new ideas," helping the organization to provide stronger support to legal writing educators. Her refrain, "put me where you need me" reflected the "diligence, skill, and good cheer" with which she approached service to the discipline. Her committee service for both ALWD and LWI has been exemplary, and she "has long been a friendly face welcoming new members and new directors at national conferences." She served on the steering committee for the Rocky Mountain Legal Writing Conference for many years and was recognized with the Rocky Mountain Award for "contributions beyond measure" to the legal-writing community.

Dean Herrera also spent "countless hours" on individual mentoring and support for other legal-writing professors, whether that be "on-boarding" those new to the field, supporting colleagues in times of need or crisis, serving as the first coordinator of the legal-writing faculty at her school as part of a transition to a directorless model, or contributing her labor and insight to "evergreen discussions of status, curriculum, and other topics that legal writing faculty strategize about." Colleagues characterize her as a "genius at course design," always happy to "noodle" over new courses, redesigns of existing courses, or a new assignment or exercise. She also regularly organizes and presents at teaching workshops and conferences.

As many of her nominators observed, some of Dean Herrera's most impactful contributions to others come in small but regular acts of support and collegiality emblematic of her "perpetually

positive presence”—things like listening to colleagues process a teaching experience, finding the best place to grade papers on campus, sitting with a new colleague at a conference or workshop, collecting materials in the most convenient format, or offering practical and logistical advice, all with “limitless generosity and patience.” Indeed, one nominator characterized Dean Herrera’s signature trait as “her warm and welcoming heart,” elaborating that:

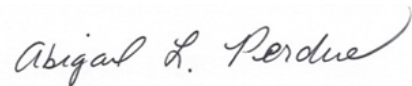
*Tamara knows everyone in the building (and it’s a large building) regardless of the position they hold. She takes the time to get to know everyone and makes them feel valued. She has done this for as long as I’ve been at ASU and well before she became an associate dean. She has a way of making everyone feel seen and appreciated—from students to new faculty (and adjuncts) to staff members and more.*

*In Ralph Brill’s eulogy for Tom [Blackwell], he stated: “The condolence messages described Tom as: caring about students as people; nurturing; witty; demanding but fair; selfless; hard-working; innovative in developing teaching techniques; possessed of a passion for excellence; enthusiastically generous in sharing his ideas and assistance to other teachers; a man who never hesitated to volunteer for what he regarded as a useful project.” I believe all those statements describe Tamara, but the terms nurturing and enthusiastically generous jump out as key ways in which Tamara lives the legacy that Tom left behind.*

These represent just a small sampling of the many accolades and words of appreciation that supported Dean Herrera’s nomination. If you would like to offer your congratulations to Dean Herrera, you can contact her off-list at [tamara.herrera@asu.edu](mailto:tamara.herrera@asu.edu). Please help us celebrate her by joining us at the Blackwell Award Reception at the AALS Annual Meeting in New Orleans in January. The Blackwell Reception committee will be sharing details regarding the time, date, and location of the event soon. Don’t miss out on the chance to celebrate with your legal writing colleagues and let Dean Herrera know how much her contributions to the field are appreciated.



Tenielle Fordyce-Ruff,  
ALWD President



Abby Perdue,  
LWI President