

THE PAUL AND MELBA BRANDES COURSE DEVELOPMENT AWARD

CREATED IN 1990

The Paul and Melba Brandes Course Development Award was created in 1990 by Melba Brandes following the death of her husband, Professor Paul D. Brandes of the (then) Speech Division of the Department of English. The fund grants stipends to UNC Chapel Hill professors who wish to design a new course, improve an existing one, or bring an intermediary-level course up to Honors status. Innovative teaching techniques in the design of the course are requisite for consideration.

Paul Dickerson Brandes was from Kentucky, served in the European theatre as a U.S. Army translator during World War II, and received his Ph.D. in speech from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. After meritorious years of service to the University of Mississippi and Ohio University, Paul Brandes came to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1966 as a full professor in the Speech Department (now the Department of Communication Studies).

Brandes was a scholar of the rhetoric of the French and American Revolutions and the extant manuscripts of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. He sustained a dynamic teaching style throughout his career, challenging his students to examine public speech, their own and that of others, and how that rhetoric affects their lives and national and global politics and policies. He and his students designed and delivered workshops for inmates of the North Carolina prison system on verbal and non-verbal communication issues they faced every day with lawyers, judges, social workers, and others. He taught public speaking, psychology of speech, dialect, debate, and oral interpretation of literature, but his focus in all of his classes remained the examination of ethical and moral questions and obligations that individuals have when they communicate with others. He taught his students not only specific skills, but encouraged them to nurture the moral fiber in themselves to discover truths and stand for those truths publicly even in the face of stern and unyielding opposition. Brandes was also an expert on parliamentary procedure and was occasionally a parliamentarian for the UNC Chapel Hill administration during the student unrest of the 1960s. He was one of the first professors at UNC to use computers for research and teaching and to teach his students how to use them. While still teaching full time in the 1980s, he entered the UNC School of Law and received his law degree in 1983. He became a member of the North Carolina Bar and practiced law briefly before his death. In the 1980s, he added fluency in Spanish to his previous facilities in French and German. In the classroom, a teaching style combining leadership, democratic practice, and innovative techniques gave Brandes an extremely distinguished reputation with his students, placing him in the community of great UNC Chapel Hill teachers like Edward Kidder Graham, Horace Williams, John Manning, Collier Cobb, and J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton.

The Brandes-Madry family recently received a letter from a former UNC Chapel Hill student of Dr. Brandes who said that for many students, Dr. Brandes was not just “a” professor, he was “the” professor.

Sarah Brandes Madry, the only child of Paul and Melba Brandes, added her mother’s name to the fund just before Melba Brandes died in March 2001. Melba Sherman Brandes, a Mississippian, was a superlative English teacher and author whose career included teaching at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Alumni from Mississippi secondary schools, the University of Mississippi, Ohio University, UNC Chapel Hill, and North Carolina Central University took courses from her in composition and English literature and remember her with great admiration as a caring and meticulous teacher.

Sarah Brandes Madry 1971, 1981, her husband, Scott Lynndon Hathaway Madry 1978, 1983, 1986, and the Brandes’ grandchild, Adrienne Ellen Dickerson Madry, are pleased that the penetrating scholarship, invigorating teaching style, and empathetic guidance that Paul and Melba Brandes practiced in their classrooms during their lifetimes are stimulated and encouraged in the academic lives of current professors at Carolina through the Paul and Melba Brandes Course Development Award.

Text by Sarah Brandes Madry
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