

**CONTACT**

101 Brangin Boulevard
Pulliam School of Journalism
Shirk Hall, Room 022
Franklin, Indiana 46131
@IHSPAnews
ihspa@franklincollege.edu
www.ihspa.net
317.738.8199

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Plainfield educator recognized as state's best in scholastic journalism**

Oct. 24, 2019

FRANKLIN, Ind. — Michelle Burress, Plainfield High School student media adviser and journalism educator, received the Ella Sengenberger Adviser of the Year Award during the Indiana High School Press Association's state convention at Franklin College last Friday, Oct. 18. The IHSPA annually recognizes an adviser who has made outstanding contributions to scholastic journalism both in their own classroom and across the state.

The award honors the memory of one of the founding members of the organization, Ella Sengenberger, a nationally recognized adviser at Indianapolis Arsenal Technical High School. Therefore, each recipient must possess the qualities of an outstanding secondary educator and exhibit commitment, leadership, and sound ethical practices while supporting their students and community.

Burress has shown such dedication and professionalism throughout her years at PHS and has earned the honor of being named Indiana's top journalism educator. Under her guidance, Plainfield High School students and publications have been awarded numerous honors on the state and national levels. Therefore, it was of little surprise when the five-person selection committee comprised of the nation's top minds in scholastic journalism selected Burress as the 2019 Sengenberger recipient.

"I thoroughly enjoyed reading all of the nomination letters in support of each candidate, but Michelle stood out as most deserving," said Sarah Nichols, Journalism Education Association president and Sengenberger selection committee member. "The variety of letters demonstrated her passion and expertise along with going above and beyond a typical adviser's role. Michelle has the support of her students as well as esteemed colleagues from around the state."

While presenting Burress with the adviser-of-the-year award during the opening session of the 2019 high school journalism state convention, former IHSPA Executive Director Diana Hadley listed many reasons as to why Burress has earned such respect from all Hoosiers. In particular, one anecdote captured as to why the Plainfield adviser is worthy of the honor bearing Ella Sengenberger's name.

"An adviser from a neighboring school says that when her yearbook staff's editor was tragically killed in a car accident last year, (Burress') staff sent them a huge care package of treats and a tin of cards with uplifting and encouraging words that they needed that day, and days to come, as they worked through their grief to finish the yearbook," Hadley said before announcing Burress as the Sengenberger winner.



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This selfless passion for people and the betterment of others is what makes Burress much more than a journalism teacher. It's what makes her an example for all, both in and out of the student media lab, to follow.

"She puts all of her students before herself even when she's going through unimaginable circumstances," former Plainfield High School student Kyra Howard said in her nomination letter for Burress. "(Burress) recently lost both her mother and father. Not once in her hard times has she taken a step back. She shows up and goes above and beyond what is expected of any teacher."

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PHOTOS FOR DOWNLOAD:

Michelle Burress 1.png - <http://bit.ly/BurressPhoto1>

Michelle Burress 2.png - <http://bit.ly/BurressPhoto2>

Credit: Tabby Fitzgerald, Indiana High School Press Association

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

Michelle Burress 1.png - Plainfield High School student media adviser and journalism teacher Michelle Burress (pictured right) receives the 2019 Ella Sengenberger Indiana Adviser of the Year Award from retired Indiana High School Press Association Executive Director Diana Hadley during the opening session of the state high school journalism convention at Franklin College Oct. 18. Hadley was one of several educators and students who nominated Burress for the award. "Burress would be the perfect recipient for the Ella Sengenberger Award because Michelle represents all of the IHSPA core values: truth, freedom, courage and integrity," Hadley said in her nomination letter for Burress.

Michelle Burress 2.png - Former Plainfield High School student, and current Franklin College journalism major, Kyra Howard (pictured right) hugs her former high school student media adviser, Michelle Burress, after Burress was named the 2019 Ella Sengenberger Indiana Adviser of the Year during the opening session of the state high school journalism convention at Franklin College Oct. 18. Howard nominated her former teacher for the recognition because of the role Burress played in her life. "She allowed me to see my talent and potential," Howard said in her nomination letter for Burress. "Outside of the classroom, (Burress) has been there for me through my brother passing away and so much more. She may just be a high school teacher, but she is one of the most important people in my life. I can always count on her for whatever I need even if it's not about schoolwork. She loves her students unconditionally and loves journalism just as much."

PORTIONS OF NOMINATION LETTERS:

"Her commitment to her students and their publications is evident as she works side by side with them to accomplish their goals. You can find Mrs. Burress at school late many nights assisting kids with their projects

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or on weekends standing in a parking lot for a fundraising bake sale. Her dedication to her students is undeniable, and she has maintained very close relationships with her students even after they graduate.” – Liza Payton, Plainfield High School English department chair.

“What impressed me most during this time was that although we did not teach the same courses, Michelle was always willing to share with me, and others, strategies that proved to be engaging and positive experiences for students. And while the hard work and enthusiasm of some teachers tends to wane over time, Michelle’s has not only remained in the 17 years I have been fortunate enough to work with her, it has increased. Every year, I am amazed at the creative and truly motivating ways she builds relationships both with and among her journalism and publications students, while consistently – and successfully – pushing her student publications staff to produce award-winning news magazines and yearbooks. I’m not sure where she gets it; but I do know that her commitment to her staff and their right to express themselves about issues that matter to them is a driving force in her seemingly boundless energy.” – Carrie Farris, Plainfield High School English teacher

“As her student, I can only hope to be half of the leader and inspirer she is when I’m older. She has earned a special place in the hearts of her students, and we all consider her to be like a mother to us (we even call her Mama Burr!). She puts her students first, and works relentlessly to make sure that she can provide us with the best education possible, even when the environment we are in doesn’t always allow her to do so. She loves every single one of us as if we were her own children, and makes sure that her classroom is the ‘safe place’ in our school. Without Michelle Burress, my staff and I would have never blossomed into the brave young adults we are today, and we would never be able to find the courage, strength, and fearlessness we needed without our amazing teacher and all that she has done for us.” – Anu Nattam, former Plainfield High School student

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