MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

LaVerta Terry
(1926-2016)

LaVerta Lorene Terry was the second director of the Groups Scholars Program at Indiana University Bloomington from 1982 until 1992. Indiana University hired LaVerta in 1968 in anticipation of the first “Group” of students who were scheduled to begin courses that fall. LaVerta was named Assistant to the Dean of the Indiana University Junior Division’s Educational Opportunities Program for disadvantaged students.

LaVerta was born November 10, 1926 in Brazil, Indiana. Reverend William Buckner and his wife Mary encouraged LaVerta and her four siblings to finish high school and college. As a child, she sang in special programs at church and continued to sing all of her life. As a teenager, LaVerta won first place in a Metropolitan Opera audition. Consequently, after graduating from Greencastle High School Terry received a scholarship to the IU Jacob School of Music. Upon arrival, luggage in hand to the dormitory, LaVerta was denied a room because of her race. In a 1990 interview for the Indianapolis Recorder, Terry reports, “We learned not to let obstacles deter us in our quest”.

Terry went on to attend Tougaloo College in Mississippi for two years, after which she received a Bachelor of Arts degree and teaching license from Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, Texas. Later, LaVerta completed a masters degree in education at Indiana University while raising three children with her husband Henry Terry and working in factory jobs at Otis Elevator and RCA. On April 10, 1976, Bloomington got fifteen beautiful, talented, goal-oriented women who were pillars of the community who came together to form the Sisters of Ivy, chartered as the Kappa Tau Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. She was one of the women who helped form the chapter, charter member LaVerta Terry.

As a former Monroe County School Corporation elementary educator, Terry had life experience that prepared her to work for the betterment of the students. LaVerta would tell them about her own history and this would allow them to gain a sense of camaraderie with a pioneer. She would provide the caring and supportive qualities of a mother while being ready to straighten out a student with significant misconceptions about the parameters of the University and the Groups Program. Prior to the arrival of the first group of students, LaVerta went on meetings held in various areas of Indiana to allow the Groups personnel a chance to get acquainted with the parents and teachers of the new students seeking enrollment for the fall term. The contacts established during those initial visits solidified the picture of Groups Personnel to all who attended the visits that would be later called “Area Visits.”

Once the founding director of the program of the Groups Program, Rozelle Boyd, was promoted to the position of Director of the University Division, LaVerta became its director. LaVerta was a key player in
providing support for new students who were angry or frightened because she understood what dynamics these students faced, as she had faced the same challenges. She was witness to how students had to succeed academically in spite of the distance between their own understandings and the mistaken notions of the majority. If the student had returned home, LaVerta was able to ascertain the root causes of the student’s withdrawal. Her supportive and caring stance might be all that was needed to get the student on the way back to campus.

At Indiana University, perhaps the most challenging responsibility a director faced was the renewal of the grants from the federal government to continue funding the Groups Program. LaVerta often recalled stories about the times when she and Rozelle provided support and discipline to ensure the renewal of the federal grant every three to four years. The application for federal grants were often fifty pages in length and required the submission of quantitative data. She delivered humor and experience to those who were crunching numbers and providing explanations of the data to the United States Department of Education.

Mrs. Terry worked tirelessly to improve the stature of the Groups Program and the students. She worked with the Office of Financial Assistance on an annual basis to provide accurate student award package information while establishing contacts who became significant allies to the Groups Program. In addition, LaVerta handled relationships with the cafeteria personnel in nearly every housing group on campus. She never tired of explaining what the Groups Program was to whoever was confused about its relation to the University and to the federal government.

Her ready smile, her sense of humor and her love of her students made her an exemplary model of an excellent administrator for the University. LaVerta valued Indiana University as a wonderfully challenging place for her students and for members of various minority groups on campus. LaVerta brought to the Groups Program her humanity, her loyalty to her students and staff, and her humor that would reassure a student in almost any kind of bind. She comforted those who were upset or lonely and cared passionately about the dignity of the individual. LaVerta was an avid supporter of education and instrumental in creating a culture of care in the Groups Program.

We request that this memorial tribute to LaVerta Terry be presented to the members of the Bloomington Faculty Council, that it be preserved in its minutes and archive, and that after its presentation copies be sent to members of her family.

Gordon Hershey, Groups Scholars Program IUB
Lauren McCallister, Groups Scholars Program, IUB
Mary Stephenson, Director, Groups Scholars Program IUB