2010 ICCTA Outstanding Part-Time Faculty Member Award
Nomination Form

Name of nominee: Mary Decker
Community college: Kankakee Community College
Discipline taught: Humanities
Mailing address: 100 College Dr., Kankakee, IL 60901
Telephone #: 815-802-7007
E-mail address: mdecker@kcc.edu

Please describe how the nominee meets each of the following criteria:

1. In what ways has this educator demonstrated excellence in teaching? Mary began as an adjunct faculty member teaching speech at KCC in 1999. She soon moved into teaching English I and English II. With almost 40 years' experience as a K-12 educator and administrator, Mary was a 'natural' pick for teaching in the new education curriculum. This year, she is teaching Educational Psychology and Introduction to Public Education courses. Mary will be teaching Diversity in Education online in fall 2010.

Mary prefers to assess at the top level of Bloom's taxonomy. She uses authentic assessment in her courses to evaluate student understanding of material. As an example, in fall 2009 Mary taught an Introduction to Mass Communication course which she also developed. This course culminated in a group media project. Each student contributed articles towards a magazine entitled "The Konnect: For KCC Students By KCC Students." Articles included "Inside the Teacher's Lounge," "Goin green," "University Life," "Design on a dime," "For the Love of Music," "Tech at Konnect," "Ravaged by War," and "Nick n' the News." The stories were a mix of interviews, KCC things to know, tips for how to succeed as a student and news highlights of the fall.

When asked about working with students, Mary said that she tries to include diversity in the classroom and make students aware of demographics. Some of the results of her efforts can be seen in the contents of The Konnect.

Mary spends many extra hours at KCC to provide accessibility to students and faculty. Former student, Jordan Nugent, said "The best thing about Mrs. Decker is she will always lend a helping hand and is very willing to go out of her way for her students." Because of her hours on campus, students can easily find Mary. Fellow adjunct instructor, Ronald Shank, commented "Mary starts with students where they are and not where they should be. She builds them from there."

Excellence in teaching can be demonstrated through excellence in learning. Former student Erin Couch wrote: "When I first walked in to Mrs. Decker's English II class, I was extremely arrogant about my abilities as a writer. I believed I was at the peak of my talents and there was nothing I could learn from her class. Within the first three weeks of her class, my arrogance and ego had vanished completely. They were replaced with a great sense of humility, a desire to improve my writing skills to meet her high standards, and a deep sense of admiration, respect, and affection for her as a teacher." Jordan Nugent wrote: "Mrs. Decker expects the most out of her students and does not settle for less. She strives to make her students better. I will always remember her as the person who showed me the drive for learning and wanting to be better in everything I do. What more could you ask for from a teacher?"
2. What has this educator initiated or helped to develop in the area of innovative programs used in two-year postsecondary institutions?

In 2003, Mary worked with other adjunct faculty members to design an adjunct version of a faculty training course. Mary was one of the first adjunct attendees in 2004. When an opportunity arose in summer 2009 to redesign the full-time faculty program to work better for adjunct faculty, Mary provided input and feedback to the director in charge of expanding the program to a virtual audience. She also assisted in recruiting adjunct faculty for the course. In fall 2009, seven adjunct faculty members began attending the 'virtual' course. In each of the previous two years, only one adjunct faculty member had completed training. All seven adjuncts are on target to complete the course in April 2010.

Mary developed an Introduction to Media course. It introduces students to all genres of media include newspapers, TV, radio, magazines, video games and web resources. The final project is described in question 1. In addition, Mary is developing an online version of Diversity in the Classroom. It is scheduled to be taught in fall 2010.

3. How has this educator served on technical or special committees serving two-year postsecondary education, and how did this effort affect the college program in the community, state or nation?

Our area has the 2nd highest unemployment rate in the state. KCC has higher than normal enrollments. The stress level for returning students is high. One outcome of the high unemployment rate is that classroom management has become an issue. For the past two years, Mary has been part of a Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT). This team, which is led by the Dean of Student Services, developed a behavioral intervention policy. Following policy development, the group created and tested a pilot program for intervention, training for team members and marketing of the program. Group workshops were held in 2009 for staff, faculty and students. In summer 2009, 12 students were involved in a pilot. Adjunct and full-time faculty members were introduced to the program fall 2009. In addition, campus-wide marketing occurred. Between 15 and 16 students were assisted in the fall. As a result of this group’s efforts, KCC has hired a full-time social worker/guidance counselor.

4. How has this educator provided leadership in helping to solve challenges to two-year postsecondary institutions?

See #3 above related to the Behavioral Intervention Team.

Mary has been an advocate for all adjunct faculty members. She served on the Adjunct Advisory Committee in the summer of 2007. This committee was charged with improving interactions between adjunct and KCC administration as well as with full-time faculty. This committee successfully created a merit increase structure consisting of three levels of pay for adjunct faculty. Mary has worked with KCC administrators to create a second office for adjunct faculty and to upgrade computers within both offices.

Within the college, Mary has been active with the faculty development team since 1998. She worked with the team to create effective in-service training for both full-time and adjunct faculty. With Mary’s assistance, a faculty development series became 'virtual' this year. (See question 2)
Mary was invited to join the College Council in 2009. The College Council provides a monthly forum for an interdepartmental exchange of information. Council members represent all areas and staff levels of the college. In describing her role on the committee, Mary said "I am the earpiece for the adjunct." She provides two-way communication between the adjunct faculty and members of the College Council.

5. How has this educator been active in developing, organizing, or supporting state and/or national two-year postsecondary education associations?

Mary is active on two or three KCC committees a year. At the local and state level, Mary has continued to support K-12 associations and institutions in Illinois and Iroquois County (a feeder county for KCC). Mary remains active in the Iroquois County Principal's Association, the IPA Cornbelt Region Executive Board, the Illinois Principal's Association and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. With her awareness of KCC student educational trends and KCC policies, Mary is an effective advocate for postsecondary education in the K-12 associations.

Where possible, Mary supports postsecondary associations. As an example, in 2006 the Illinois Humanities Council selected Mary and full-time faculty member Penelope Stickney to develop a series of presentations related to slave codes found in American quilts. Presentations were made to educational organizations and affiliated groups throughout Iroquois and Kankakee counties. Mary and Penelope presented at the Illinois Humanities Council annual meeting. As a result of the Illinois conference, Mary and Penelope were invited to present at the national conference. Mary presented “Slave Code Through Quilts” at the National Humanities Council of Humanities Conference on behalf of the duo.

6. What awards or honors has this educator received in recognition of leadership in the college or community?

In 2007, Mary was asked by the adjunct faculty to serve as a leader on a team investigating the possibility of forming an adjunct union. She was a member of the contract negotiation team for the first KCC Adjunct faculty contract in 2008. Mary is the current vice-president of the adjunct union.

Within the community, Mary is this year’s president of the Sugar Creek Symphony and Song Opera Guild. Sugar Creek Symphony and Song, LTD was established in 2002 to “bring world-class arts out of the city and into the country.” (http://www.sugarcreekfestival.org/index.html) To paraphrase the website, annual events include an affordable opera (with free passes for K-12 student), an art fair and educational seminars. These events are held in Watseka, IL in an attempt to spur economic development, provide educational and cultural opportunities to youth and adults and introduce students to careers in the arts through a Young Artist Program. Mary has been involved with the organization for several years.

7. How does this educator keep pace with current theories and practices in the nominee’s discipline?

Mary attends KCC sponsored faculty development opportunities including attending a 13 session series of workshops for new/adjunct faculty and a four series workshop on ANGEL, the learning management system. She regularly attends faculty in-service sessions in August and January along with KCC in-service sessions.
Mary is taking the Illinois Online Network (ION) course “Online Learning Overview” as part of her personal development. She maintains membership in the Illinois Humanities Council, Illinois English Teachers Association and the Illinois Speech and Theater Association. According to Mary, one of her best practices is to work with her daughter, an assistant principal, to brainstorm issues and discuss current trends.

Supplemental Material

Decker, Mary and Penelope Stickney. “The Piece Makers [Quilts and African Folk Tradition].” 


[http://www.kcc.edu/FacultyStaff/departments/ktlc/Documents/deckerthekonnect.pdf]


[http://www.kcc.edu/FacultyStaff/departments/ktlc/Documents/deckerarticle.pdf]

Philosophy of Education

I have had the privilege of teaching young minds for thirty eight years. Teaching children, young adults, college students, returning students or second language students is a task which I do not take lightly. Each day is complete with challenges, frustrations, and responsibilities. I fervently believe all children are capable of learning, if they have the proper motivation and direction from a teacher. As a mature educator, I strive to constantly be aware of new learning styles and developmental theories.

I strive to create a classroom community which provides a safe learning environment. If students do not feel comfortable their defense systems will increase and learning will decline, if not shut down. It is important for me, students, other teachers, administrators, and people in the community to see me as someone they can approach, who will be fair and nondiscriminatory.

Classroom organization and preparation are also key elements. If students are in a classroom which is unorganized it is not a good situation for anyone. I seek creative ways to arrange the classroom to assist my students in their quest for knowledge. I teach content which is meaningful, applicable to the real world, and inviting to students. I believe in high energy levels for myself and the students and sometimes must model the concept. I also believe when I enter a classroom, I must put aside my personal problems and adopt a positive attitude which sets the pace for a successful learning environment.
March 8, 2010

Illinois Community College Trustees Association
410 E. Capitol, Suite 200
Springfield, IL  62701-1711

RE:  2010 Outstanding Part-Time Faculty Member Award
     Mary Decker, Nominee

This letter is in support of Mary Decker as Kankakee Community College’s nominee for the 2010 Outstanding Part-Time Faculty Member Award for the Illinois Community College Trustees Association. Mary is a dedicated faculty member in the college’s English and communication programs.

In addition to being an outstanding part-time faculty member, Mary has been one of KCC’s most active faculty members outside of the classroom. She is highly committed to our students and has demonstrated her expanded leadership and involvement through the production of KCC’s Connections publication. Connections is a compilation of writings, stories and poems which allow our students to showcase their talent to the rest of the college community.

Likewise, Mary is actively involved as an officer of the Sugar Creek Symphony and Song organization in our community which provides performances by world-class musicians in classical music and opera to our residents. Mary is the leader in exposing these musical experiences to our students.

Mary has continued to display a strong commitment to the mission of the college and strives to continue to provide educational opportunities to meet the needs of the college community. Based on these examples and so many more, Kankakee Community College is pleased to nominate Mary Decker for the Outstanding Part-Time Faculty Member Award.

Sincerely,

John Avendano, Ph.D.
President

www.kcc.edu
March 23, 2010

Illinois Community College Trustees Association
Outstanding Part-Time Faculty Member Award Committee
401 E. Capitol, Suite 200
Springfield, IL 62701-1711

Dear Selection Committee,

On behalf of the Kankakee Community College’s (KCC) Faculty Development and Instructional Support Committee, we are extremely pleased to support Mary Decker’s nomination for the first ICCTA Outstanding Part-Time Faculty Member Award. Mary is an enthusiastic, long-term adjunct faculty leader who is dedicated to helping her students succeed. Her contributions to KCC include support of students, participation on college committees and advocacy for fellow adjuncts. Mary is a conduit to outside educational communities. Mary's education background includes 38 years in K-12 teaching and administration followed by 11 years with KCC as an adjunct instructor.

The faculty development committee consists of two administrators, one adjunct faculty member and six full-time faculty members from four divisions. We received nominations from full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, division chairs, the dean of instruction and the vice-president of instruction and student services. In reviewing the criteria and the list of nominees, Mary was an obvious fit for this award.

Mary has been involved in committees, new courses and adjunct communication for her entire career with Kankakee Community College. The application highlights a few of her contributions to the college. As an example, Mary is a committee member with the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT). This group has implemented policies and training for faculty this past year. Student support has been provided. The work of this committee has resulted in funding for a college counselor position. In addition, part of the fall faculty in-service will center on student civility/incivility and options (including working with the new counselor) available to faculty. To help demonstrate Mary’s excellence in teaching, her application includes quotes from former students.

The Faculty Development and Instructional Support Committee members fully endorse Mary Decker as an exemplary example of how adjunct faculty contribute to excellence in education and support the community college.

Donna J. Smith
Director, Instructional Technology,
Faculty Development and the Library

Ronald Shank
Adjunct Faculty member
Humanities & Social Sciences Division

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Mary has continued to display a strong commitment to the mission of the college and strives to continue to provide educational opportunities to meet the needs of the college community. Kankakee Community College is pleased to nominate Mary Decker for the Outstanding Part-Time Faculty Member Award.

Sincerely,

Hugh VanVoorst  
KCC Board Chair