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Dean Alcorn, Public Services and Outreach Librarian

Nominated by Jennifer Lyon

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

When I think of my time here, and how much of it I spent in the library studying, I always come back to Dean Alcorn and the support he gave. Every single time I saw him he would ask about nursing classes, he was a wonderful listener when things were hard, and he was ALWAYS supportive and positive.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

I think more than anything his positivity and support stand out to me as being exceptional. Some days were extra challenging (as I expect them to be), yet Dean was always willing to listen to my gripes or concerns and offer suggestions and perspective. Having support from those not even in the nursing program is very much appreciated and certainly has helped me in my journey to becoming an RN.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

Dean would offer to track down books I needed for research or for the NCLEX-PN and would call to other libraries in the area to check availability. He would send articles pertinent to the subject I was researching, he'd call other areas on campus for clarification on different topics, and he always did it with such a willingness of spirit. I never felt like a burden (even though I probably was, lol) and I truly appreciate his kindness and support every day. His commitment to helping the students is always priority to him and it shows in how he interacts with us.

Debra Buck, Nursing Faculty

Nominated by Sandra Hemenway

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Dr. Buck has been very supportive throughout my time with her in the nursing program. Though there have been a handful of instructors throughout the program whom have been wonderful, she has so much knowledge to share and makes you feel right at her level. She is quick to discuss with you if she has concerns and very helpful with guiding you through situations and questions while always having a calming presence.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

Dr. Buck has a ton of knowledge to share and does it with grace and patience. She is an amazing instructor, and I am glad to have been able to get to know her and to have her for 2 of my classes throughout the program.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

As above, lots of experience to draw from when teaching, very knowledgeable, and is great with instruction.

Joanne Colyn, Process Specialist, Davidson Building

Nominated by Clara Lowe

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

She is the most hardworking, polite, and driven person I have ever met. The Davidson building would collapse without her. She had a genuine desire to help people and is always willing to go above and beyond, staying late and doing more than her job asks of her.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

She has made the transition to college much easier. She keeps everything in Davidson running smoothly and she has always made sure everything I need is working and available. She's always asking if I or others need help and is happy to share her knowledge.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

She has stayed late to help students a myriad of times, gone above and beyond categorizing and giving out the equipment. She's always ready to go downstairs and fix the printer when it fails. She talks to students who need help fitting in and tried hard to stay up to date with names and people's lives. She does so many more small things that most people don't notice or acknowledge that listing them all would require writing an entire essay.

Ron Davis, English Faculty

Starfish Award Recipient: 2018

Nominated by Savannah Whitney

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

I had Ron Davis for an English course in 2022. He was overall amazing. Level-headed, smart, and always had something unique to say about each person's assignments. I can speak for his whole class that semester; he was an astounding professor.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

I never enjoyed writing essays, that is why I am not an English major.) However, Professor Davis helped me realize the importance of gathering information, arranging, and discussing it in a way to which I seemed fit. With most of the assignments he gave out, the essays were allowed to have opinions. This way of essay writing helped me actually understand, and perceive different topics in a better way, fitter for my style of learning.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

As said above, he helped his students slow down and read different subjects, helping them develop a well-thought opinion. He let us to debates in a class of our opinions, which brought many students out of their shells. He helped me strengthen my writing form. Overall, one of the best professors I have ever had at KCC.

Kellyann Garthe, Nursing Education Instructor

Nominated by Shirley Hill

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Kellyanne is kind and caring. She made me believe in myself. She really cared about your success. She took the time to make sure the students understood the material.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

Kellyanne made me believe that I could do this at 60 years old. She took time with the students, making sure they understood things.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

This allowed me to graduate with confidence because Kellyanne put faith in me, helping me believe in myself.

Kellyann Garthe, Nursing Education Instructor

Nominated by Mackenzie Merchant

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Kellyann is kind and very supportive. You can tell she genuinely cares about her students and wants us all succeed. She is one of the best teachers I have ever had, and I truly benefited from having her as a teacher.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

She takes the time to explain things so I can understand. I know that I can ask any question and she will answer it without any judgement. I feel more confident this semester than I have in any other class.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

She not only cares about academics but she asks how I am doing and genuinely is interested in the answer. I had a baby this semester and she has helped me to make sure that I stay on track and graduate.

Kellyann Garthe, Nursing Education Instructor

Nominated by Reina Reyes

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

She always made time to help me no matter if her schedule was full she would always find time to answer my questions.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

I was able to graduate because of all the words of wisdom, encouragement, and empathy she showed me. She truly has a gift to teach.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

I am confident at my job because of the tips and tricks she showed me during sims. I can start IVs because she made time to practice with me one on one.

Eric Laskovy, Physical Education Faculty/Baseball Head Coach

Nominated by Noah Warren

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

This person has pushed me and others to be better people and better students.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

He has made the biggest impact on me out of every staff member at KCC. Everyday myself and others are pushed to better ourselves.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

He keeps up with us academically, as an athlete, and as a person. On the field, during practice, and during leisure time, he helps us an extraordinary amount.

Eric Laskovy, Physical Education Faculty/Baseball Head Coach

Nominated by Austin VandenBrink

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

He is a great person when he coaches baseball or even when he teaches the class. Nothing changes about his energy either and that's why I'm nominating him.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

He has made a huge impact on me.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

He has helped people with his own money when we didn't have enough food multiple times. Nobody really sees it or talks about it but we know.

Matthew Samra, English Faculty

Starfish Award Recipient: 2021, 2010, 2002

Nominated by Leah Tharp

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

I took Professor Samras' Freshman Composition Class during my first semester at KCC. I was never the biggest fan of school and had attended Grand Valley State University two years prior to KCC. I was feeling defeated because of my transfer and was not ready to put in the necessary effort that was required for any college course. When I looked over the first four classes that I would be taking at KCC, my first thought was, which class would I be able to succeed in without exerting too much effort. The class that stood out initially, was Professor Samras' class. However, this was not the case. Professor Samra was clearly invested in his students from the start and challenged us daily. Throughout the course of the semester, we would be tasked with writing two papers. I chose my topic wisely, something I was interested and passionate about. I wrote a decent paper; I followed the guidelines and did my homework accordingly. I've never struggled writing papers before, and usually get pretty invested in them. However, my philosophy with papers had previously been to get it as good as possible the first time so that the final draft didn't need any changes. At Grand Valley, the class sizes were larger, the competition between students was more prevalent, and the professors were very unlikely to become mentors. So, up until my class with Professor Samra, I had pretty much coasted my way through with mediocre grades and lackluster performance. When the first draft of one of our papers was returned to us, I remember feeling very content with my grade, it wasn't perfect, but it would certainly pass the class. Instead, I would have to do something I had never done for a professor, let alone a class before. I would have to try harder. Professor Samra pulled each student aside one by one for revisions, but immediately recognized my plan to submit my final draft just as he had seen it originally. There are many details of that conversation that I have now forgotten, but what I do remember are the words, "I think you can do better." Never have I heard those words genuinely spoken to me before by a professor, or a teacher. At first, I was defensive, even frustrated. I had participated in the class, done the homework, and written a solid paper. Still, I knew as soon as he caught on to my plan, he managed still to believe in me. It was inspiring knowing that he knew I was just trying to coast by, but still believed in me. It was something I had never experienced before, even if he didn't realize it. While taking his class, I started a job at Kinderhaus Montessori in Marshall. The preschool was run by none other than Becky Samra, Professor Samra's wife. Not only did Professor Samra empower me intellectually, but he also encouraged me to reach out to his wife after we spoke about my ideal future working with children. Again, another gesture that was completely foreign to me. Working at Kinderhaus has changed my life in the best way possible. I will be working as a lead at Kinderhaus for the Pre-school Summer Camp program and will be graduating this semester at KCC. Professor Samra

changed my outlook on school, work, and my confidence in my academic ability. I was always envious of those who had stories on teachers or professors that truly impacted them during their years of schooling, and now I can confidently say I have mine. Thank you, Professor Samra and Becky Samra, you are two of the best, kindest people I have ever met.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

Professor Samra provided me with knowledge on writing that has significantly impacted me. I truly believe I am a better writer now that I have taken his course. The lessons were very straightforward but complex and allowed the student to really think about their writing material and how to convey a specific message or idea.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

Professor Samra believes in all of his students. He has ideas and philosophies that were so helpful when I was learning in his class. He makes sure that every student feels included during discussions and remembers each student's name. Also, he makes sure to ask students how they are doing before class. Professor Samra is not one to let a student down as long as that student puts the work in..

Matthew Samra, English Faculty

Starfish Award Recipient: 2021, 2010, 2002

Nominated by Caleb Halder

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Professor Samra has had an enormous impact on my academic development. I first learned how to write a proper research paper in his English 152 class. In Mr. Samra's LITE-217 class I learned how to dissect and analyze cinematic productions, and this was the funniest class I have ever taken at KCC. Finally, in LITE-105 Professor Samra taught me how to interpret short stories, plays, and poems in a practical way. Overall, I feel that Mr. Samra is deserving of the Starfish award because he has a unique talent to push his students and to give them knowledge that proves beneficial to them for the entirety of their lives.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

Professor Samra had taught me how to write a research paper, how to write a paper that grabs the attention of readers, how to examine a film from many different perspectives, and how to interpret short stories, poems and plays.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

Professor Samra has shown significant dedication to his students in all of the classes that I have had with him. Grades are always posted in a reasonable amount of time, and proper feedback on every assignment is always given. He grades assignments somewhat critically at times, but he always explains why. Critical grading, while annoying when it happens, provides the best learning outcome for students in the long run. In short, Mr. Samra's teaching tactics provides the optimal outcome in students.

Krissy Stolz, Marketing and Communication Specialist

Nominated by Eve Hibbard

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Krissy is deserving of any and all awards and praise for her contributions to KCC on the whole. Not only does she manage to help in so many different facets but on top of working at KCC she is also a KCC student and a mother. Krissy is an absolute rockstar and is beyond motivated to improve KCC for students and staff. Krissy definitely works more behind the scenes, but she is a vital puzzle piece to our community.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

I first knew Krissy as the person taking pictures at any given event and then the friendly face behind the desk at Marketing and Communications. But, as time progressed, she became involved with Environment Club more and our relationship grew. I then knew her as an amazing individual who was passionate about KCC's environment and community. She came to every meeting with fresh ideas and inside details about the college that we could have not gotten elsewhere. Outside of her remarkable influence on our club, she is also the person to always gives you a smile in the hallway and always be willing to help in any way possible. She has done so many things, not only for me but for those around me that she is well deserving of this reward.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

Krissy is always able and willing to lend a helping hand. She provided me with pictures for my monthly report to the board, as the student representative multiple times. She is also a driving force in Environment Club. Most recently, she was able to collect data about the current state of the recycling bins, taking time out of her own day to ensure the progression of our recycling program at KCC. This is just one example of many of how she has directly furthered the integrity of our club. She is also ever-present at any KCC event to volunteer or just to be the bright, smiling face that she is. I cannot express how deeply deserving Krissy is of all this praise and more.

Liia Thatcher, Nursing Faculty

Nominated by Leyna Everline-Bailey

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Lila was fully submerged in our experience. She taught our clinical when our instructors were not available. She encouraged our critical thinking skills and we even got to learn about things that were not directly related to the syllabus. Her blueprints for exam review were phenomenal. I wish I could have her every semester and I hope the other teachers foster our growth as much as she has.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

I felt completely at ease with her. She was easy to talk to and address questions to. Because of that I felt brave enough to participate in class discussions where in the past I've felt awkward. I was able to understand the content better when I participated.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

During her substitute clinical we talked about a hard topic. She was able to regulate our conversation to foster learning and dispel negativity. She explores questions directed to her in class and allows discussion.

Sierra Thurmond, Department Assistant, Student Life

Nominated by Ella Smith

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Sierra has only been working as the department assistant in Student Life since the Summer 2022 semester, and yet, her impact on the students and community here at KCC has been insurmountable. She is a constant, positive presence here in Student Life, and is consistently working with students. Sierra also has a unique understanding of the students with whom she works, as she was a student here at KCC in the past and shows a great deal of empathy and support to the students who are currently attending.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

As someone who is in leadership positions of multiple clubs on campus, I have been working closely with Student Life since my very first semester. Now, as a student employee in this department, I have gotten a unique insight into the hard work that Sierra has put into her time here at KCC. Coming in to Student Life is a part of my daily routine, whether that be to work or just to find a safe space amidst the chaos of college, and Sierra is an integral part of the support in this department. She has actively worked to support all of the club endeavors which I have taken on and makes it possible for many students to be a part of the activities here at KCC. There have been many instances in which I have needed extra support to make RSO activities happen, and Sierra has no second thought when it comes to helping students. I would not be able to be as involved in the KCC community without the help of Student Life, and Sierra has proven herself to be an invaluable addition to the department and campus as a whole.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

Sierra has proven her commitment to helping students every single day that she has been in Student Life. Student Life has the large task of creating a safe and welcoming place on campus, and Sierra has greatly contributed to making students feel comfortable and empowered. I have seen her offer support to students on a daily basis in two primary ways. First, she is consistently helping students achieve their goals. Whether this be through resources here at Student Life or directing them to the department that can make it happen, Sierra jumps into action when a student asks for help. Second, Sierra is one of the most supportive and friendly employees on campus. I have seen students stop in just to say hi to her, update her on how their assignment went, or have a quick conversation in between classes. It is obvious that Sierra has made a positive impact on the success and support of many students.

Faith Vrugink, Math and Science Faculty

Starfish Award Recipient: 2019

Nominated by Caleb Halder

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Professor Vrugink was my Physiology teacher in the fall of 2022. As a past student of her physiology class I can attest, from a first-hand account, that her hands on approach to teaching has an impactful and long-lasting outcome on her students. During lectures and labs, I was always prepared to be broken up into a small group to solve problems, and occasionally to perform a group quiz. When learning something for the first time there are two critical aspects to fully achieving an understanding of the given matter. This includes an explanation from an expert (in this case Professor Vrugink) and attempting to explain and practice the newly learned thing yourself. Professor Vrugink performs this practice excellently, after explaining a new concept in multiple different ways (which is very helpful considering everyone's brain works differently), working in groups was expected. In short, Professor Vrugink has a unique talent to teach her students difficult material in a way that allows students to remember and apply the given content.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

Professor Vrugink has taught me how to learn difficult concepts by applying them to practical situations, by explaining the concepts myself in small groups, and by using visual aids in presentations during lecture. Thus, Professor Vrugink's impact on my education has been very positive, as I left her Physiology class with a far greater understanding of the functions of the human body than I had when I entered her class.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

One thing in particular about Professor Vrugink that proved to be impactful was her dedication to her students, and her desire to see them succeed. After my first exam in Physiology, Professor Vrugink insisted that every student come to see her during her office hours for a breakdown of the questions that they got wrong. By doing this I was able to understand what I had not understood when taking the exam. This is just one example of Professor Vrugink that shows how she stands out from other professors in her dedication to her students.

Tracy Wood, Physical Therapist Assistant Faculty/ ACCE

Starfish Award Recipient: 2012

Nominated by Dalia Awshana

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

I always appreciate her quick and helpful responses either on Remind, in class, or over email.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

The quick responses saved me a lot of stress and worry when I was trying to get assignments done or had urgent questions.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

Whenever I have a question about my time at a clinical rotation, a school project, or exam, she makes me feel heard and always answers in a simple, informative, and understanding way.

Michelle Wright, History Faculty

Starfish Award Recipient: 2012

Nominated by Reba Lewis

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

Michelle has continually gone above and beyond to help and many others. Whether it is running independent studies or providing snacks for the study tables she runs (and anyone that pops by her office), she truly wants the best for students and is willing to do anything to help them.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

She has helped push me and reassure me that I can accomplish my goals even though I came back to school about 10 years after I should have originally graduated.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

She finds ways to relate course material to your individual situations. She is willing to work with you to get you to where you need to be. She is a genuine caring individual.

Michelle Wright, History Faculty

Starfish Award Recipient: 2012

Nominated by Colton Rainwater

Why are you nominating this person for a Starfish Award?

They have always supported my decisions and helped me through my time at KCC I would be lost without her.

What significant impact has this person made on your educational experience at KCC?

She has led me though not only her history class, which was the best class I have ever taken, but has always been available for any questions I have had about not only her class but my time at KCC in general.

Please provide some examples of how this person has made a difference.

Whenever I ask to meet up and talk about problems, she is always available and excited to dive into things and help. She has never complained nor turned me away. I don't know where I'd be without her.