



March 19, 2025

Illinois Community College Trustees Association

401 E. Capitol, Suite 200

Springfield, IL 62701-1711

Re: 2025 Outstanding Full-Time Faculty Member Award

Dear ICCTA Awards Committee,

The Illinois Valley Community College Board of Trustees is pleased to recommend Samantha Whiteaker for the ICCTA 2025 Outstanding Full-Time Faculty Member Award.

The Stephen Charry Memorial Award for Teaching Excellence honors instructors and counselors who have been employed full time at IVCC for at least three years and was established to recognize instructors and counselors for outstanding service in teaching, leadership, professional development and contributions to the College and the community.

Our internal process to select our faculty recipient is a multi-faceted process. Nominations are first solicited from students and are evaluated by a subcommittee made up of the awardees from three previous years. This subcommittee screens nominations to ensure that all candidates meet the minimum requirements and then nominations are voted on by students and employees.

Samantha was selected through this rigorous process as the 2025 recipient of the Stephen Charry Memorial Award for Teaching Excellence from a strong pool of candidates. For these and other reasons outlined in our nomination, the IVCC Board of Trustees wholeheartedly recommends Samantha Whiteaker for the 2025 Outstanding Full-Time Faculty Member Award.

Sincerely,

Everett Solon
Board Chair, Illinois Valley Community College

It is our pleasure to nominate Samantha Whiteaker for the ICCTA 2025 Outstanding Full-Time Faculty Member Award. This recommendation is based on her nomination for our IVCC faculty excellence award, as well as from her tenure recommendation in 2024. She has shown herself to be a dedicated faculty member and is a well-respected instructor by both students and colleagues. Samantha was a tenured faculty member at IVCC from 2013 through 2016, before accepting a position in another nursing program. Samantha returned to IVCC in 2021 and was granted tenure in 2024. Ms. Whiteaker holds a Bachelor's of Science degree in Nursing from St. Francis and a Master's of Science in Nursing from Lewis University.

Criteria 1: In what ways has this educator demonstrated excellence in teaching?

One of the most telling quotes from Samantha is when she equated the process of becoming a registered nurse to the blooming of a flower. She stated, "... we can appreciate the beauty and complexity of the educational journey and celebrate each stage of growth as a vital step towards creating a flourishing garden of skilled and empathetic nurses." This powerfully illustrates her approach with students and how she embraces the unique skills and abilities of all students. One of the students who nominated Samantha stated that, "Samantha always challenges her students by creating an active learning environment where we are motivated to take initiative and succeed. For example, she ensures that we complete all nursing tasks independently in the clinical setting while providing guidance and support. By allowing us to handle real-life scenarios such as administering medication or assisting with nursing tasks, Samantha promotes our ability to think critically and make decisions. She also inspires us to establish high standards by urging us to strive for excellence in our nursing careers and making sure we provide the best patient care."

In addition, she encourages learning through dialogue. Samantha engages students in learning situations in various ways so everyone gets a chance to see what the nursing field is about and will give realistic scenarios that can happen and then educate students on how to handle them properly, according to another student nomination. Former Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Gary Roberts stated in his review that, "I enjoyed observing the level of instructor-student engagement. It is very evident that students have a good rapport with [her] and can freely ask questions."

Samantha continues her education in the field of nursing, including International Board of Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) courses, Neonatal Resuscitation Advanced Provider certification, RNC-OB Certification, and Birth Emergency Skills Training (BEST). Samantha has also continued her learning beyond her field. She has participated in the Excellence in Online Teaching course, Assessment and Institutional Learning

Outcome courses, and a Brightspace Essential course as ways to improve her technology and assessment to enhance student learning.

Criteria 2: What has this educator initiated and helped to develop in the area of innovative programs used in two-year postsecondary institutions?

Samantha infuses real-world applications and discussions in her classrooms. According to one of her student nominees, “She engages us in conversations on meeting patient needs that go beyond medical care, such providing emotional support and having good lines of communication with families for instance. Her focus on comprehending the various patient histories inspires us to think about how we might help our communities’ healthcare systems. By setting an example of this method, Samantha gives us a sense of accountability and dedication to provide professional and compassionate service to our community.” By encouraging students to think holistically about their patients, she moves away from traditional lecture and encourages a more interactive learning process.

Criteria 3: How has this educator served on technical or special committees that have positively affected the community, state, or nation?

Beyond her role as an educator, Samantha is also actively involved in charity work at Abigail Women’s Center, where she contributes her time and skills to support women in need demonstrating her dedication to making a positive impact both professionally and personally. Abigail Women’s Center is a non-profit organization with a goal to serve and benefit our community by providing compassionate care, practical help, and accurate information to men and women facing pregnancy decisions. The value in this work is best summarized by Samantha, saying “I am passionate and active in the local birth community, as is demonstrated in my teaching and personal outreach efforts. Since 2017, I have led an independent birth and breastfeeding support group that meets twice a month. I am proud to be a point of contact for women seeking resources in our community. Outside of the meetings, I often receive messages and phone calls and have the pleasure of counseling women and connecting them with the right care provider for their needs.”

Outside of this work, she has been involved with La Leche as a League Leader, as a co-founder of the Illinois Valley Childbirth Collective, and as a leader for Illinois Valley Birth and Breastfeeding Support Group. To keep her skills current, she works PRN as a Registered Nurse and Midwife Assistant for several homebirth practices. She has also assisted with diaper drives on campus to benefit the local community.

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

Samantha describes in her philosophy of education what she sees as a challenge for community college students. She states, "At the top of challenges facing two-year postsecondary institutions is outdated curriculum. I've been instrumental in maintaining current and dynamic curriculum for our students. Our institutions are also often plagued with teacher shortages, and I have supported my peers and our students by taking on extra classes and lending a helping hand anytime there is a need." Samantha shows her commitment to making our community, state, and nation by making a difference one student nurse at a time. Samantha has been a tremendous advocate for community college students in our community. As a newer faculty member, she has not been active at the state level to advocate for postsecondary institutions.

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

Samantha has been involved in AWHONN (Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses), the NLN (National League for Nursing), and the ATMCH (Association for Teachers of Maternal/Child Health).

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

The Stephen Charry Memorial Award for Teaching Excellence honors instructors and counselors who have been employed full time at IVCC for at least three years and was established to recognize instructors and counselors for outstanding service in teaching, leadership, professional development and contributions to the College and the community. Samantha was selected through this rigorous process as the 2025 recipient of the Stephen Charry Memorial Award for Teaching Excellence from a very strong pool of candidates. During her time at IVCC, Samantha has been involved with Assessment Committee, Wellness Committee, College Republicans, Teaching and Learning Committee, and the Women's Health and Wellness Student Group as the Faculty Advisor.

Summary

We thank you for considering Samantha Whiteaker for the ICCTA 2025 Outstanding Full-Time Faculty Member Award. We are incredibly proud of the impact she has made on students and our institution over

the eight years of her career and we look forward to a great future with her as one of our committed nursing faculty members.