

Individuals

Sandra Lipnoski
Edgerton Center
Serving the Client

“Sandi” is the Administrative Officer at the Edgerton Center. She is everyone’s point of contact for all administrative issues such as; “I need a new desk.” “Can you help me order more toner cartridges?” to “How do I feed 20 workshop attendees tomorrow?”. She also monitors the credit cards not only for the staff but also for the additional 20+ clubs & teams our Center supports. She is our students’ point of contact for employment through our Center, finding their timesheets, and guides them through Student Financial Services and MITemps issues. She is “team mom” to our clubs & teams, the one that they turn to for problems big and small, administrative and personal. She is both staff and students’ contact for Travel, including Travel cards, setting up flights, collecting all receipts for reimbursement... Oh, and once the students are on their way, Sandi continues on as the point of contact for all of the team’s actual parents. Calmly reassuring them that even though their children aren’t answering their texts, they are where they are supposed to be, and (safely) having the time of their lives.

Sandi routinely extends herself in many ways beyond her AO job description. Coming in early to set up for workshops, ensuring visiting Middle School Students from China have a taste of home during meals but also with some fun “American” junk food to try, grabbing her SUV to make a last minute airport runs, during rush hour, when the team forgot to book a ride to Logan.

Sandi makes certain that everyone who comes in contact with the Edgerton Center understands how much they matter to us, and the magnitude of their accomplishments. We may not offer a degree or even a minor, but Sandi takes the time to make us all feel appreciated.

Most recently, Sandi went into overdrive to help our students as they made plans to leave campus due to COVID-19. She reached out to all our students to help them with shipping things they wouldn’t be able to take with them on the plane. She volunteered to help with move out procedures. She helped everyone navigate policy but fought to make sure our student teams could still have hope for the future.

Sandi is simply and fully the heart and soul of the Edgerton Center. She lifts everyone up from students to staff to visiting groups. She is truly deserving of an OVC Infinite Mile Award for Serving the Client, Congratulations, Sandi!

Erik Pavesic
Career Advising & Professional Development
Serving the Client

For Erik Pavesic, first-years are clearly first! He is responsible for creatively engaging and serving first-year undergraduates in career and professional development. He's shown excellence in service by developing tailored programs to address first-year undergraduates' specific needs, implementing the Explore MIT webinar series and creating a First-Year Student Advisory Board. He even personally paid to ship back more than 100 books from a conference on first-years to enhance his awareness of how to best serve them!

Erik's efforts to create the Explore MIT, highlights various campus resources and came from a desire to have evergreen content online to be flexible for a student's busy lifestyle. The YouTube series aligned with the Institute and CAPD's desired direction of providing more education online and is highly valuable, now more than ever, as MIT has become a remote campus.

When he started, Erik was tasked with reimagining services after the dismantling of a long-standing first-year program called F/ASIP, which had a 20-year history at the Institute. Looking at how to go about that, Erik understood the value of student input and developed the office's first-ever Student Advisory Board, specifically focused on first-year undergraduate student needs. He quickly recruited a diverse group of six sophomore students to help CAPD float and collect new program and service ideas to support our over-scheduled and highly-stressed students.

The Advisory Board members requested to bypass formal professional development programs offered and instead have quality one-on-one advising/coaching sessions with Erik. They wanted to sit with Erik, talk about life, reflect on their MIT experience, develop their relationship building skills, networking and more. AKA an administrator's dream! Advisory Board member, Natasha Stamler, described her experience with Erik: "He has made it clear that he is there to support us as we navigate our own journeys through the MIT firehose and the professional world beyond." A true testament to the depth of the relationships he's developed.

Erik has also been a key contributor to campus-wide committees and was quickly drafted to be a member of the OVC Career Exploration Committee. His insight, ideas, and work with first-year students were critical to better understand the career exploration ecosystem at MIT.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, Erik is well deserving of an OVC Infinite Mile Award for his excellent work to go above and beyond to build rapport, seek new levels of excellence in service and creatively responds to student needs and I am pleased to be able to present him an award for Serving the Client!

Chris Mayer
Edgerton Center
Innovation and Creativity

Over the past year, Chris Mayer has consistently gone above and beyond the call of duty in devising innovative and creative solutions to the myriad changes we have faced.

At 4 PM on Tuesday, June 18, the fire alarm went off in Building 4. Our Hyperloop student team was testing their latest device. The battery pack on the Hyperloop pod had caught fire. A cross-disciplinary response group was drawn from Facilities Engineering and R&M, EHS, the Provost office, and Edgerton. Chris was a key member of the group, providing his insight and ideas in devising a path that would allow the Hyperloop team to rebuild their system in a way that all parties would consider prudent, managing the risks in an intelligent manner.

Senior leadership gave the go-ahead to rebuild one week before the students' deadline for shipping their system to the Hyperloop competition. Throughout that re-engineering process there were many times where it wasn't clear how the students could carry out a task under the safety protocols. Often, it was Chris who saw the way forward. The students went to competition one month after the fire and were the highest-placed US team at the international Hyperloop competition.

After that crisis, "Milkdrop" got an overhaul. Chris teamed up with the AO to spruce up our "Milkdrop" student maker space in N52. He identified a way to accommodate new teams who only needed a bench and a soldering iron to do their work, ordering heavy-duty steel shelving and plastic bins to create storage for those teams. With this change, we freed a little-used room to be reconfigured a conference/meeting room for all of our teams to benefit from. Simultaneously, we sponsored (in collaboration with the IDC and D-Lab) two upgrades to Milkdrop. One was the purchase and installation of a large spray booth and ventilation for painting. The other was the installation of an air compressor in our space to supply all three labs.

Chris was there the whole time, solving problems as they arose. Some problems were physical, such as how to design the layout with the new shared equipment, and some problems were programmatic, as when he crafted the operating procedures for the spray booth in a way that satisfied the apparently conflicting requirements of EHS, our collaborators, and our students.

All of this represents one half of Chris's job. The other half is working with our K-12 outreach, where he leads some activities and supports others. Chris Mayer has consistently gone above and beyond the call of duty in devising innovative and creative solutions to the myriad changes we have faced. It is my pleasure to present Chris for the OVC Infinite Mile Award for Innovation and Creativity.

Elizabeth Cogliano Young
Office of First Year Advising and Programs
Everyday Leadership

Elizabeth Young has been at MIT for 25 years and is the Associate Dean & Director First-Year Advising & Programs. The Office of the First Year is responsible for the pre-orientation and orientation programs for first-year undergraduate students, first-year advising programming, overseeing the first-year staff and faculty advisors, First Generation Program, advanced placement and transfer credit, and the Committee on Academic Performance.

During Orientation, Elizabeth manually assigns each student to their advisor based on their preferences or similar interests such as music selections or hobbies. Elizabeth has a short window of time to assign each student to an advisor while also answering the many emails from incoming students with questions and concerns about coming to MIT. No matter what time, Elizabeth would respond to each request in a timely fashion so that the student felt reassured and their questions were answered. Elizabeth also utilizes this time to encourage her staff to take the lead on certain aspects of Orientation.

When the CUP Experiment for the Class of 2022 was launched, Elizabeth effectively put processes in place to support the academic changes impacting the incoming class. When the 2nd phase of the Experiment was announced, Elizabeth spearheaded an action plan to address these major academic changes. She equipped first-year advisors and the OFY Advising Team with the resources they needed to advise students. The change involved the GIRs and the grading system for first-year students. Elizabeth embraced it all and got her staff up to speed with all the changes that were happening during our staff meetings. Elizabeth set up a plan to have mini-advisor trainings starting in May and throughout the summer to update the first-year advisors on the changes to their new advisees. The faculty and staff advisors attended a session that fit their schedule and were prepared to advise their students in August. Elizabeth led each training and even provided 1-on-1 trainings when necessary.

Her ability to troubleshoot large amounts of information quickly and clearly is unparalleled. She has been the force behind the restructuring and growth of first year orientation and advising.

Elizabeth has never hesitated to help out at a moment's notice. Whether responding after hours to students, volunteering to help with Institute events or leading individual trainings, she always steps in to help. It is with great pleasure that Elizabeth is a recipient of the Every Day Leadership, OVC Infinite Mile Award!

DJ Rock (pronouns They/Them/Theirs)
Admissions
Diversity & Inclusion

DJ's professionalism and care at work is matched by their time after work and on weekends attending events run by students and partner organizations because they believe deeply that representation, building connections, and collaborating matters and makes the MIT community better.

When DJ first joined the Admissions office, they oversaw the Shadow a Student program, which invites prospective students to spend a day with an MIT undergraduate student. The program faced certain challenges, namely that requests from students from underrepresented populations primarily women and underrepresented students of color were being underserved by the program, and the pool of volunteer student hosts lacked the diversity of our undergraduate population. To remedy the situation, DJ reached out to existing communities on campus to build partnerships with groups and individuals who would be interested in hosting prospective students. After implementing these partnerships, the percentage of requests approved from Black prospective students increased from 25% to 76% and requests approved from Latinx prospective students increased from 21% to 82%.

Last year due to a vacancy on the Admissions staff, DJ ran the Spring Break Ambassador program, which sponsors MIT undergraduates from hometown communities with large populations of underrepresented students to travel home over Spring Break to give presentations about MIT to prospective students at high schools and community-based organizations.

As a featured blogger on the Admissions Blog, DJ's posts infuse application advice with astrology and their experience as a queer person of color, so applicants know the people making admissions decisions are real, relatable, and marginalized, too.

Beyond the Admissions Office, DJ is a mentor and role model for all students, but particularly for underrepresented students of color and those with marginalized identities. Reimi Hicks, Manager of Programs in the Office of Engineering Outreach Programs (OEOP) said, "DJ has been a tremendous champion for the work we do in the Office of Engineering Outreach Programs. DJ has been instrumental in helping us create access for students from underrepresented and underserved communities across the country."

Colleague Leah McDermott shared, "DJ has a magnetic personality that combines sharp intellect, quick wit, affable charm, and genuine care and compassion." They have served the whole MIT community with integrity, leadership, and creativity. For that and more, we are happy to present DJ with an Infinite Mile Award for Diversity & Inclusion!

Tamara Menghi
Career Advising & Professional Development
Innovation and Creativity

Tamara embodies the characteristics of the Innovation and Creativity category with her fearless appetite to try new approaches, her innate desire to improve processes into every program, her dedication to long term solutions, and her ability to build consensus.

Tamara's volunteer activities on the Career Exploration Committee and her steadfast work in creating a coordinated system to enhance the student and employer recruiting experience has dramatically improved our programs and processes. Furthermore, Tamara has a deep ability to empathize that enables her to build trust and consensus with students, staff, faculty, and employers on a wide range of complex issues. In short, through her combination of persistence, creativity and leadership, Tamara has been the key driver behind recent and on-going improvements in our student's abilities to explore their careers.

Since 2015, Tamara has advised student-run career fairs, where she recognized that students needed infrastructure and support to carry out events. She thus created a fair event application process, guidelines for events, a transition process for student leaders, and increased support for event organizers. In 2018, Vice Chancellor Waitz charged a faculty-led committee to review career exploration and career fair activities. Tamara was the driving force of the Career Exploration committee, as she focused meeting agendas to ensure the committee progressed, as well as added important insights she had learned from prior work. Tamara's work with the Career Exploration Committee did not end once the report was written. At that point, she then organized an extensive set of meetings with key stakeholders to refine conclusions and develop buy-in.

Tamara's strengths lie in influencing others as they innovate. The Fall Career Fair organizers benefited the most from Tamara's expertise as she developed them as leaders, while also shaping them to implement long term solutions. Further, we believe without the trust that the Fall Career Fair student leaders have in Tamara, these significant and positive changes would not have been possible, in particular with the relative smoothness that they occurred. While much remains to be done as MIT moves forward with improving student career exploration, the foundation has been set by Tamara.

For her persistence, creativity, and leadership to improve student career activities, we are presenting Tamara with the Infinite Mile Award for Innovation and Creativity! Congratulations!

Rosanne Santucci
Registrar's Office
Collaboration and Communication

Rosanne's exceptional communication and collaboration with Registrars Office and IS&T colleagues directly resulted in the successful deployment of three mandates on extremely tight time frames: CUP experiments, changes to commencement, and COVID-19 grade adjustments.

Rosanne's responsibilities include monitoring, analyzing, enhancing, and testing each of these systems. Her abilities to absorb business processes, learn technical skills, collaborate with colleagues — all with the deep motivation to serve end users — are beyond compare.

Her work with these mandates, completed within very tight timeframes, required clear and concise communication and collaboration with colleagues in the Registrars Office and IS&T that is unmatched. Rosanne's work in cataloging requirements, collaborating with colleagues, drafting and executing test cases, keeping track of details, and fervently advocating on behalf of end users such as students and advisors was unparalleled.

It is not an exaggeration to say that, without Rosanne, we would not have implemented the system changes required by the P/NR grading experiment. She took the lead in executing test cases, working long hours to ensure everything was working as it should.

The opinions of her IS&T colleagues speaks volumes to Rosanne's persistence and collaborative spirit: "Be it requirements gathering or testing, Rosanne can be counted upon to ask relevant questions, be thorough, ramp up quickly and test every scenario, working after hours and weekends to get the job done. Rosanne ROCKS!"

Most recently, disruption caused by COVID-19 required swift and complex system changes, particularly around grading options for instructors and teaching staff at the end of this spring term. She is quickly comprehending faculty mandates and is working with Registrar's Office and IS&T colleagues to ensure that the correct grading options are available at the end of the term. The recent announcement canceling in-person Commencement exercises also demanded rapid adjustments to our online degree application, and Rosanne is once again at the forefront in helping us meet this unexpected challenge with determination and grace.

For her dedication, collaboration, and sheer drive to get the job done in the right way, even (and maybe especially) under very pressured circumstances, I am honored to present her with an OVC Infinite Mile award for Collaboration and Communication.

Chris Peterson
Admissions
Innovation and Creativity

Chris has worked tirelessly on enumerable projects in the Admissions Office since starting as an Admissions Counselor over a decade ago, and his continuing, non-stop energy and enthusiasm has been instrumental in our office operations.

He's a great writer when it comes to connecting with our prospective students. He creates honest and clear prose with just the right tone and hooks that resonate with our target audiences. And he's fast. He is able to quickly produce language that is appropriate for the moment at hand, in a way that is accessible and clear. Some recent examples include his heartfelt blog-post regarding the death of a beloved Admissions colleague, and his ongoing lead role communicating with our admitted students about our response to the current pandemic. In addition to his writings in his name, he has also ghost written or edited Dean of Admissions and Student Financial Services Stu Schmill's posts, playing a lead role to ensure that Stu's formal office communications are accessible to our applicant pool.

Chris also brings to the office a level of technical expertise and understanding of computer and web systems and software that has been an invaluable resource for the office in times of need. On several occasions his hacks and workarounds have helped us solve immediate problems for the office (and saved us "boat-loads" of money since we didn't have to hire outside consultants!)

More recently, Chris has played a lead role in the development of branding in the MIT Welcome Center in Kendall Square. His innate understanding of the compelling quirks of MIT has been invaluable, and he's been able to help both MIT senior management and external design firms understand this unique culture, and what sets MIT apart from the typical STEM institution. While some administrators may have been drawn to emphasize the more cliché aspects of MIT – computers, robots, ancient hacks – Chris has been able to articulate a different vision, advocating for the more artsy, creative, and human side of MIT in the branding efforts. It's what makes MIT unique, and Chris' leading voice on this essential, ad hoc committee has been invaluable.

The creation of this video is now an annual event for the office and MIT, where Chris essentially plays the leading role at every level of the production; from creative developer, writer, producer, director and editor, right down to make-up artist or key grip. We hear from prospective students that they look forward to these videos, even if they still have years yet before they are eligible to apply. If you haven't seen them go have a look.

In short, Chris has been a dynamic presence in the Admissions office since he arrived in the office a decade ago. He is well deserving of an Infinite Mile Award for Innovation and Creativity.

David Elwell
International Student Office
Collaboration and Communication

In the few years that he has been at MIT, David has revolutionized the ISO and the services we offer to students, our administrative colleagues, and the Institute in general. Because of his leadership and expertise, the ISO team is more knowledgeable, more organized, more competent, and thus much more responsive to the needs of MIT in general, and our international student community in particular.

With the increasing changes in immigration, the ISO is constantly trying to keep up with all of the new regulations but one thing you can always count on, is for David to always be two steps ahead. He does whatever he needs to do - give presentations at meetings, meet with individuals, visits departments, send newsletters, research arcane details - to make sure the international students of MIT and the staff who support them are able to do what they need to do and stay within the law.

David is the calm, collected center during any and every major and minor crisis, keeping everyone... aligned and focused on the priority (providing excellent support to our students, staff, and faculty) all the while remaining positive and encouraging. Given the complexity, intensity, and so often, after-hours nature of many situations, David's ability to wrangle policy and people with wisdom, professionalism, and care is simply stunning.

Even before COVID-19 came on the scene, David was constantly dealing with issues that would arise for international students due to the frequent updates in immigration policies. Throughout any changes that are occurring, he communicates pertinent information as thoroughly and quickly as he can both to staff and impacted students.

David often pitches in and steps up in ways that are not expected or required. Whether it is stepping up to covering the front desk and answering phones on a regular basis when the need arises, or going as far as to use himself like an UBER driver to pick-up students at the airport after they were detained due to the new travel/visit restrictions.

His current effort to expand access to internships for international students is a prime example of collaboration. He is actively working with both the Institute and the individual departments to gather best practices, encourage positive changes, and advise on details. His work reduced the tuition load for summer internships several years ago. This made the summer internship for our department even more accessible, not just for international students, but for everyone. That pretty much sums up what David does - he makes it better for everyone.

It is an honor to award David an Infinite Mile Award for Collaboration and Communication!

Suraiya Baluch
Office of Graduate Education
Collaboration and Communication

Suraiya seeks opportunities to partner with and contribute to the work of the team, whether it is within OGE or with business partners across the institute, taking the initiative to reach out and bring people together. She is selfless in doing so, gives praise freely to others and is incredibly gracious. She always acknowledges the specific contributions of her colleagues.

More and more, Suraiya has been invited to partner with colleagues in conducting training on good advising and support practices for faculty in various academic departments. The feedback to me is consistent...."We're so glad Suraiya and X came to speak with our faculty. She is so warm and open. We love her style and she should do this for every dept."

This past Fall, in the midst of the worrisome saga about Jeffrey Epstein and the Media Lab, Suraiya was called on to collaborate with a faculty member and another colleague to speak to the Media Labs faculty who were in turmoil and pain.

At the end of this past Summer, Suraiya became the point person for graduate student support cases, hearing from and responding to the needs of our students who relied on us for advice and consultation regarding academic, financial and personal concerns. Suraiya readily absorbed many additional student cases without missing a beat.

In recent months as the coronavirus has disrupted the lives of us all and our work has become relentless. Suraiya has again stepped forward to give her all to the office, to our students and to colleagues in the OVC who have special projects to create and implement. On any given day, she would thoughtfully send us an article or create a useful, informative document for us to share with other colleagues or with students. She would see a need and fill it, no matter whose responsibility the task was, no matter how full her own plate of "to do's" was. She has been called on by senior officers to help, and she always does so with grace and a strong, awe-inspiring delivery of service.

Suraiya always strives to contribute to the greater good and we are grateful to have her supporting OGE, OVC and MIT as a whole. It is with great pleasure that we are able to celebrate Suraiya as a recipient of the Collaboration and Communication, OVC Infinite Mile Award!

TEAMS

Student Financial Services FinAid Team

Serving the Client

Gary Ryan, Matthew Cromie, Chrissy Monaco, Nicole Piper, Andre Barbosa and Henry Rea

The Financial Aid Team of; Gary, Matthew, Chrissy, Nicole, Andre and Henry have responded nimbly to two recent crisis scenarios. They reacted by improving service to impacted students in highly responsive ways during times of great anxiety.

Grad students living in Eastgate were struggling with the fact that they had to move out and many of these students were left feeling upset, confused and vulnerable. Gary and his team partnered with staff from DSL and met with students and listened to their concerns and heard their needs. SFS processed about 120 appeals from students who requested assistance in affording a new, higher cost dorm. Most of these appeals were able to be turned around in less than 24 hours! The staff did a wonderful job working with these students, helping them through a stressful and chaotic time with compassion and empathy.

Two weeks later, this team had to kick into overdrive to meet the deadline to finish reviewing all completed financial aid applications for prospective first year students, Class of 2024.

And then Covid-19 hit and the decision was made to have all undergrads (who could), leave campus, and to do so quickly. MIT was highly responsive to students needs and made the generous decision to replace a portion of the spring job expectation within their financial aid award with MIT Scholarship. This task fell primarily to Gary and his team and they dug into this immediate and time sensitive project just the day after all the prospective student awards were posted. Understanding that students needed this money, they moved through the process as quickly as possible, individually reviewing approximately 2,500 awards and making appropriate award adjustments. They did this work while also receiving and responding to the expected annual influx of inquiries from prospective students/parents about their financial aid award.

Stu Schmill shared; "In normal times, Gary and his team do great work this time of year evaluating financial aid award applications and making sensitive decisions. But with these two new situations required them to adapt quickly- responding to a lot of students at an emotionally fraught time, they really stepped up and served our students and families well. I am so appreciative of all their efforts."

The team worked tirelessly to meet the needs of the students thorough an extraordinary period of time that was stressful for students, parents, and themselves. We are very happy to award the SFS Financial Aid Team the Infinite Mile Award for Serving the Client.

OVC Finance Team
Serving the Client
Jeanne Hillery, Bill Connelly, Ximena Forero- Irizarry

The OVC Finance Team is the epitome of “attention to detail” and under the support and direction of Jeanne Hillery, it is no wonder. The team truly takes the time to listen and more importantly to “hear” what each person’s/office needs are and builds thorough supporting plans around those needs. The financial systems at MIT are extremely complex with the various programs across OVC and the intricacies of the numerous grants, special funding, etc. this team plays a vital piece in keeping OVC and all its offices on track and moving forward.

Jeanne Hillery is one of the hardest working women at MIT. She is an incredibly knowledgeable and talented financial director who has made major contributions to the Office of the Vice Chancellor. Her dedication to the success of each office and the overall organization is unmatched. Due in large part to her oversight, guidance and ability to hone the skills and ability of her staff, the OVC Financial Team is equally dedicated to providing excellent customer service to the OVC units and every single one of us in the organization benefits directly from the great care this team takes to meet all of our needs.

This past year Jeanne and Bill literally moved mountains to ensure the OVC HQ team was well supported as we renovated the OVC HQ suite. They put the HQ staffs needs above their own, and ensured we all had the space and materials we needed to seamlessly do our work and continue to serve the organization during the whole process. As one colleague noted, “I am so appreciative of how the Finance Team managed the 7-133 office renovation. So much thought and care went into planning the details of the space. The move in and out of temporary space during the renovation was brilliantly executed. Best MIT reno EVER!”

In addition to Jeanne, Bill and Ximena’s individual specialties, they have years of experience and knowledge on all things financial, they have worked hard to build trust and nurture positive relationships with those across OVC doing financial work, and have evaluated processes and policies and recommended changes to improve efficiencies - always with the intent of making things simpler or easier for others.

They work quietly behind the scenes to support offices and staff, and work side-by-side with new financial administrators to train and mentor them, with the goal of ensuring these staff have the tools and training they need to be successful. Every day they go above and beyond, in little and big ways. They do so with kindness, caring for the individual, incredible patience, an abundance of positivity, and humor.

I am thrilled to present the OVC Financial Team with an OVC Infinite Mile Award for Serving the Client!!