Debb Hodges-Pabon, the Human Resources Administrator for the Microsystems Technology Laboratory (MTL), is a well-known member of the MTL, EECS and the MIT communities. Although she is responsible for all personnel matters in MTL, she is also involved with overseeing space renovations and serves as the primary event coordinator for MTL. We learned through the nomination materials that Debb has “truly an extraordinary gift for organizing community events. The Microsystems Annual Research Conference (MARC) is an annual gathering designed for MTL students and postdocs to have an opportunity to showcase their research through short talks and posters. Faculty members and industrial sponsors are invited. With more than 200 participants, MARC is unique because it is an event organized by the students with support from the administration. Debb masters the fine interaction by giving plenty of room for the students to take charge while being at the ready to support them if the need arises. Last year, she was the chief organizer of the MTL 30th Anniversary Celebration which required thoughtful planning and attention to many protocol issues since it included the participation of the President, Provost and a former President, among other dignitaries. The anniversary celebration flowed without a glitch and was a huge success. This was all due to Debb and her amazing organizational skills. What is truly remarkable about Debb is that she can at the same time plan and manage complex issues involving many moving parts yet she has the insight and attention to detail to be concerned with individual needs.”

In 2013, she assisted with running the Rising Stars Workshop. A workshop that invites top graduate and postdoc women for two days of scientific discussions and informal sessions aimed at navigating the early stages of an academic career. Thanks to the hard work of a number of people, of whom Debb is one, the workshop has generated significant interest nationally. Nominators shared that “She has a solid work ethic and always does her best to understand what needs to be done and how to
get it done in a timely fashion. In the middle of chaos, Debb remains calm and collected, focused on making sure the program succeeds.” She brings a sincerity and general interest in everyone’s well-being and “goes out of her way to help others even when it is outside her normal job functions. She is totally dedicated to helping students and co-workers. She has counseled many students on matters ranging from trouble with friends to career choices and life in general. She is a good resource and a wonderful sympathetic ear. Her door and heart are always open to anybody in need of a mentor or friend. Debb, is the primary reason why the MTL community feels like a family.” Debb it is an honor to present you with an Infinite Mile Award for Diversity and Community.
Our next recipient, Rebecca Hailu, is described as the calm backbone of the Chemical Engineering Department. As the web developer for the Department, Rebecca is officially responsible for all technical aspects of the department’s website, as well as mid-semester class surveys, the development of faculty and class websites, and other sundry online needs.

Unofficially, she tackles much more than that. Rebecca is always striving to learn more and do more to make the online presence of ChemE’s people the best it can be. She is highly professional in all her dealings, pleasant to everyone with whom she interacts, all while handling a tremendous amount of information and data. Moreover, she cares about people and their projects.

One lecturer in the department said, “I do not know how to fully express my thanks for the gift she gave me. Knowing I wanted a professional website for the course 10.26, she surprised me and created it. She sent the URL to me once the site was finished. It was the greatest surprise and gift I have ever received.”

One of her co-workers said, “I work closely with Rebecca day-in and day-out, and can’t think of a better colleague. She is thoughtful in the design, layout, and execution of every project she does. She continually studies and researches to learn the best design elements, software and platforms, and trends in the field. Along with her strong work ethic, Rebecca also makes sure we have balance in our office. Each afternoon, she announces “teatime!” and we take a little break to clear our heads, and take a breath. Rebecca not only helps our Departmental projects to be the best, but she indirectly helps my other projects as well, through her friendliness, support and reminder to take a breather every so often.”
It is clear that Rebecca has a practice of going beyond what is asked; she improves things, seeks our resources, finds tools, learns new skills, and delivers value. She is clearly a model worth imitating. And that is why we are presenting Rebecca with an Infinite Mile Award today.
As those of you who attended this ceremony last year may recall, Building 39, which houses the Microsystems Technology Laboratories, is one of the most, if not the most complex building on the MIT campus. This is the place where researchers are required to wear what look like space suits, but are referred to as bunny suits.

In addition to the research laboratories of 13 faculty members, MTL’s facilities encompass more than 140 unique fabrication tools spanning a wide range of operating procedures. They support the research of over 550 authorized users from multiple departments. Researchers in the MTL use toxic gasses, corrosive acids and other safety hazards including radioactive materials and lasers. Thanks to our next Infinite Mile Award winner, Pat Burkhart, the MTL has an impeccable safety record. In fact, according to the Director of MIT’s Environmental Health and Safety Office, the MTL is one of MIT’s best DLCs in terms of overall EHS performance. And how has Pat managed to work this miracle, for which we are all grateful?

Here’s how.

Pat is the MTL’s Environmental Health and Safety Coordinator, an incredibly hard job for which people rarely win popularity contests and yet Pat is widely liked and respected. Her style is such that she is seen by the faculty and students as an essential collaborator. She always has the faculty, staff and students’ best interests in mind and this makes it possible for her to work effectively with large numbers of people from varying units. She is creative in coming up with effective and manageable solutions and processes. These qualities, taken together with her enviable ability to relate to and communicate with people, enable her to coax PIs and their representatives to provide data, clean up their labs
and make sure their experiments are safe and in full compliance with environmental health and safety regulations. Her tact and deep knowledge of MTL and MIT also come fully into play for these tasks.

Pat is very detail oriented. She is thorough and logical and understands the science behind the experiments and thus the implications of her recommendations.

Several letter writers commented on her uncompromising but collaborative approach. Pat holds tight to her convictions while working closely and congenially with folks inside and outside the MTL.

Pat is described by those who work with her as trusted, reliable, creative, respected and a real team player. She has great energy and is generous with her time and knowledge. She works tirelessly to instruct and remind faculty, staff and students of the best practices.

Pat, it is indeed a pleasure and honor for us to present you with a School of Engineering Infinite Mile Award.
IMA CITATION
Joan Hutchins

Joan Hutchins began her career at MIT in 1973 and joined the Department of Mechanical Engineering in 1998 as Senior Office Assistant. She currently serves as Financial Assistant in the department. Joan plays a critical role in the financial office. Her attention to, and memory for detail has saved the department on many occasions. She ensures that no question goes unanswered and no one is ever turned away. Her dedication, calm demeanor, and unflappable good cheer, creates an oasis of calm in the midst of a hectic office with constant interruptions.

In the nomination materials, we learned that Joan is a take charge person who is able to present creative ideas, communicate the benefits, and is a joy to work with. She will go out of her way to get any situation resolved. A faculty nominator and former student writes “She is always kind and helpful, guiding me through the complexities of MIT’s financial system. She continues to be a great ally since I joined the faculty, helping our team structure the finances and frequently assisting my graduate students and me on tricky purchases. I go to her frequently for advice, and she is always upbeat and a pleasure to work with. Joan is a great asset to Mechanical Engineering and embodies the spirit of MIT with competence, pragmatism, and kindness.”

We are told that Joan is the unofficial trainer for new support staff and temps on pro-card and purchase order processing. Even though it is not her job, if other staff members are out of the office she steps in to assist students with their funding questions. If there have been too many interruptions during the day, she often works late into the evening to catch up so that she is not too far behind.

Another faculty nominator tells us that “Joan is an outstanding employee. Since she essentially is my accounting interface with MIT, I would be lost without her. Joan can glance at a complex spreadsheet or a whole
stack of receipts and see the critical numbers in an instant. She remembers account numbers better than I remember family names. In short, she has some very unusual talent.” Another faculty member shares “Joan has been a great help to me (and I’m sure many others) over the years. She has been an unfailing source of gracious and competent assistance that is most welcome.”

Joan for being so invaluable to so many people and for your crucial role in maintaining the financial well-being of the department and school, we present you with an Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
Our next recipient began working at MIT in May of 2012 as an administrative assistant in AeroAstro headquarters. Joyce Light’s initial responsibilities included the support of the department head and associate department head, staffing various committees, and general support for Headquarters activities. However, it became quite clear, very quickly, that Joyce’s contributions would far exceed initial expectations. Joyce has since played a major role in a number of departmental efforts and she makes it all look so very easy.

In the spring of 2013, she organized the Women in Aerospace Symposium. This would have been a notable contribution on its own, but her efforts became even more remarkable due to the tragic events that occurred on campus that day in April. Officer Sean Collier was shot, and the city went into lockdown. At a time when our campus was scared and in mourning, Joyce rose above the emotions and fear and worked tirelessly to be in constant contact with the young women we had invited to campus for the symposium. She reassured them by phone and email, and worked with the hotel and restaurants to ensure that they were safe and taken care of during the citywide lockdown.

On a happier note, last year the department organized multiple events as part of the AeroAstro Centennial Celebrations. Joyce was central to every activity. One nominator said, “We all know how many hours she worked leading up to the event, and how seriously she took that work, so I’m convinced that we wouldn’t have enjoyed the 100% positive feedback we received had she not gone the extra mile to make that event a success.”

Joyce was also very helpful in the planning and execution of the visiting committee meeting and the ABET visit. Despite the fact that she was
brought into the process quite late, she stepped in with energy and commitment.

Joyce is also a resource for students. The President of the undergraduate association writes, “It has been a very crazy semester, with some rough times, but Joyce always asks how I am doing and offers her personal support. She provides words of encouragement that really mean a lot to me and have helped keep me going. I always feel welcome and cared for whenever I step into the Department HQ.”

She does all this and she does it with excellence. She is extremely thoughtful and displays an extraordinary level of initiative. Joyce clearly exemplifies the qualities of the Infinite Mile Award for Excellence and we are thrilled to present her with one today.
Our next Infinite Mile Award goes to the Mechanical Engineering Undergraduate Teaching Lab Team of Tasker Smith, Steve Haberek, Jim Dudley and Bill Cormier, known in Course 2 as the Pappalardo Lab Team.

One faculty member writes, “the Pappalardo Lab staff demonstrate every day of every semester (and often late into the night at the end of the semester), an invaluable combination of skills. First and foremost they are makers - skilled craftsmen who create marvels using the tools in the Pappalardo lab. Second, they are artists, who combine their abilities as fabricators with an understanding of how the aesthetic value of an engineering project can enhance the educational experience of the students.” Third”, (they) are teachers. They patiently work with students of all levels of experience to improve the students’ abilities to conceptualize, analyze, fabricate, and execute mechanical engineering.”

Another faculty member writes, “they are active participants in thinking about how to improve the class, and will work long hours, into the evenings and on weekends working with me to develop new educational materials.”

The Pappalardo lab typically hosts 160-200 students each semester, and the staff is available all day, every day to assist students with their design projects. Like most virtuoso performances, the Pappalardo staff make their work look too easy, MASKING the extent of the behind-the-scenes effort that makes MechE’s hands-on courses so motivating and inspiring. In addition to their core hands-on teaching responsibilities, the staff spends countless hours after hours and weekends devising, constructing, preparing, maintaining, and transporting course materials, props, contest tables, and stage sets for lectures, labs, presentations, and special events at Kresge and the Johnson Arena. Their work has also been featured on Discovery Channel's Myth Busters and WGBH's
Design Squad.

In addition to the core fall and spring design courses, Bill, Jim, Steve, and Tasker teach approximately 80 students throughout IAP and support summer programs such as MIT Women's Technology Program, where female high school students explore engineering through hands-on classes and labs, and Discover Mechanical Engineering, where freshmen are introduced to mechanical engineering at MIT.

Beyond their concrete technical contributions, Jim, Bill, Tasker, and Steve have developed a strong culture of safety and creativity, as they work with students to develop their skills and confidence as young innovators. A recent alumn wrote, "I couldn't imagine 2.007, or even Pappalardo for that matter, without the shop staff . . . (they) want you to succeed, just as much as you do, and that is truly amazing. They not only teach you how to build things, they also teach you how to be a better person."

Jim, Bill, Tasker and Steve, the Department, the School and MIT are indeed fortunate to have you and it is with pleasure that we recognize you today with this Infinite Mile Award for excellence.
IMA CITATION
Irene Huang

Irene Huang is the Senior Financial Officer for IMES, the Institute for Medical Engineering and Science. She joined the Health Science and Technology (HST) division in 2005 and has been with HST through its transition to what we now know as IMES. Nominators tell us Irene is one of those rare and amazing people who remain calm and deliberate in the face of overwhelming demands on their time. She attends to detail while keeping the big picture in sight, and her actions reflect thoughtful consideration of individuals and organizations. She is a terrific role model.

Irene began her career as a grants administrator and nominators tell us she quickly became a valued colleague because she is so knowledgeable, always helpful and extremely pleasant. In short, the type of person you look forward to interacting with at any time and on any topic. Through leadership transitions over the past decade, Irene has remained a dependable member of the HST and now IMES community. She has tremendous integrity and makes principled decisions regardless of who is asking.

One faculty nominator writes, and I quote, “like other excellent financial officers, Irene is unwavering in her attention to detail. She takes personal responsibility for the timely and accurate preparation of each research proposal generated by IMES. This commitment, which extends beyond ‘regular’ working hours, forms the foundation for the deep trust the IMES faculty have in her team. I believe Irene is amongst the most talented, most dedicated and most competent members of the distinguished cadre of MIT staff members. She believes, and she is correct, that staff at MIT are an integral part of the success of our faculty and students – she has made herself indispensable to our mission.”

Another faculty nominator tells us “Irene is our guide within MIT and our ambassador to the outside world. She shepherds us through the maze of grants management and financial planning and smooths the way for all
things big and small. She knows MIT rules and procedures and
understands sponsors to such an extent that she can help us tailor every
proposal submission maximally. Our “hit” rate when she is involved is
so much higher than when she is not and our sponsors are well aware
when Irene is a part of the process. It is amazing that some sponsors ask
that she be involved in the interaction as they themselves are conscious
of her expertise.”

Another nominator shares, “Irene works extremely hard however during
the last several months, she has been doing multiple jobs since the
departure of several members of the finance team. In the evening, well
after all the other E25 offices are dark, her office light is on and the door
open. She continues working into the evening, and I have often received
email responses from Irene after midnight and on weekends. She never
complains of the workload and is always good-humored, she is always
focused but very willing to be interrupted to answer a question or help
out with an urgent deadline. She is simply amazing.”

Irene, in recognition of your superb and critical contributions to IMES,
we are pleased to present you with an Infinite Mile Award for
Excellence.
IMA CITATION
Myung-Hee Vabulas

I used to work in EECS headquarters and so I have witnessed the extraordinary work ethic and tranquil demeanor of the next recipient first hand. Myung-Hee Vabulas brings a high degree of excellence to all of her activities, making her invaluable to the EECS headquarters team. She has the ability to simultaneously track, prioritize and flawlessly execute a tremendous range of tasks that are critical to the department’s operation.

One nominator said, “when tackling projects, she often looks months in advance to make sure that all components will be addressed with room to spare. She has a wonderful eye for detail and foresight--which has enabled her to identify potential problems and conflicts before they occur. As such, her work always comes together smoothly.”

Myung-Hee’s excellent communication and interpersonal skills are also a great asset; this has been of particular value in interactions with important visitors to MIT, such as faculty candidates and corporate sponsors.

This past year, Myung-Hee went beyond the call of duty, supporting the department in ways that were not originally envisioned for her position. Specifically, she has taken on handling all of the promotion and tenure cases in the department—a gargantuan task that was formerly split among multiple people. As with everything else, she brings great skill and dedication to this complicated process. Having a single person responsible for such a delicate and important task speaks to the high degree of trust the department places in Myung-Hee. And rightfully so. Likewise, she happily agreed to support the management of the EECS laboratory facilities. She even spent some time in the Engineering Design Studio building circuits in preparation for the EECS visiting committee meeting this past April. I’m told by a nominator that she was
the most talented of everyone on his team in circuit assembly…though this is definitely not in her job description.

One nominator pointed out that Myung-Hee is a true pleasure to work with—and this I cannot stress enough. She has a calm, pleasant and warm demeanor. She is always helpful, friendly, and never frazzled. I mean that, I’ve never seen her frazzled. For all of these reasons and so much more, I am absolutely delighted to present Myung-Hee with the high honor of the Infinite Mile Award today.
Our next recipient has been on campus since 2014. During his brief tenure he has made a significant impact. Marwan Cheguenni is a Financial Assistant in the Administrative Service Organization (ASO) which supports the Departments of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science and Engineering. Marwan’s extraordinary Microsoft Excel skills and his deep understanding of the MIT databases has been the critical foundation for the work he has accomplished. In addition to these endeavors, we are told that Marwan is very generous in sharing these skills and knowledge with others and is always willing to help with problems as they arise. He can always be called upon for assistance and he goes out of his way to go above and beyond to use his creativity and resourcefulness to find solutions.

In close collaboration with the ASO’s Senior Financial Officer (SFO), he has created a programmed spreadsheet tool to organize accounts, track expenses and manage personnel appointments in a streamlined and automated way so that Principal Investigators are able to receive monthly reports in a consistent manner with easy to read summary graphs. While this project has been an effort, envisioned and initiated by the SFO with participation of the entire ASO research administration team, it would not have materialized without Marwan’s remarkable understanding of databases, his exceptional knowledge of Excel, and his innovative approach to problem solving. I have been lucky enough to see a demo of this tool and I think it will revolutionize the way we manage finances on campus in the near future. Marwan and his work have received rave reviews from faculty members and administrative assistants.

A faculty nominator tells us “I have grown to trust and value these budgeting tools so much that I no longer find a need to keep my own records; all of the information I was originally looking for is now at my fingertips.” Another faculty nominator writes “Marwan has already been
influential in helping me get my grant application machine running much more smoothly. Not only has he shown a remarkable level of commitment and dedication to help but also he has developed a budget projection tool that makes financial planning exceedingly less complicated. I cannot express just how much it matters to have a coworker like Marwan that not only goes above and beyond to help you but who also provides his services with extreme competence, punctuality, and always with a smile on his face. It is very clear Marwan is a tremendous asset to MIT.”

Marwan we completely agree with all of your nominators and want to recognize you with an Infinite Mile Award for Excellence.
Today, it is also my honor to present an award to another team with which I used to work side by side: the administrative team of the EECS graduate Office. The team includes Clare Benoit, Alicia Duarte, Janet Fischer, Kathleen McCoy and Jocelyn Thompson.

Let’s begin at the end. It’s late May and a graduate student enters the EECS graduate Office, tired but elated as they present their signed PhD thesis. They are met with the smiling faces of five people who they have now known and worked with for years. The Graduate Office team welcomed them to MIT years ago, and encouraged them during the inevitable hard times. Kathy, Claire and Jocelyn guided them before and during the admissions process, while Janet and Alicia walked them through the official, and often confusing, qualification procedures. This student learned early on that the Graduate Office staff sees everyone who walks through their door as a cherished and important member of the MIT community.

Now, in a place like EECS, that is a lot of people walking in and out of their door. Since this is MIT, and we are data driven people, allow me to share some numbers.

In 2015, EECS received 2,779 applications; they admitted 191, and they anticipate 125 students will matriculate in the fall term. Approximately 50% of this newly admitted class will receive fellowship support. The EECS current graduate student body is 623 students, with 171 research supervisors, and 37 supervisors residing outside of EECS, as well as 62 graduate counselors for advising. These statistics were supplied by a nominator, and I share them now not to remind you of how massive Course Vi is, but to underscore the magnitude of the service offered and demanded by the EECS graduate office, as well as to highlight the significant impact to the MIT community.
Lastly I want to add, that after many weekends of blizzards, when the MBTA was shut down, roads were blocked, and most of us were all shaking our fists at the moon, the Graduate Office team was here. Some members I’m told even slept at hotels to ensure they would be able to make it to campus. They showed up, stepped up, and delivered—like they always do. As a result, no task was left undone, and no lapses in service occurred. Every single member of the Graduate Office team went the extra infinite mile to deliver service. They are an office that demonstrates every day the true definition of the word “teamwork”.

For all these reasons, we believe wholeheartedly that the EECS Graduate Office deserves the 2015 Infinite Mile Award.
This year’s recipient of the Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service is Dorothy Curtis. I met Dorothy (via email) 10 years ago, and for ten years, she has continued to amaze me.

Dorothy is a research scientist in CSAIL and the data officer for EECS. She also plays a pivotal role in important administrative processes across the School and the Institute. To say there is a lot at stake in what Dorothy does is to put it very mildly.

It started with EECS’s on-line faculty search site. EECS receives about 500 applications from prospective faculty members every year, and the department’s two search committees are correspondingly large and complex, involving almost 30 faculty members between them. You would think that would be enough chaos for one person. But no. Thanks to Dorothy, the on-line faculty application process is now used by every department in the School of Engineering (comprising 12 separate searches this year) as well as the Dean’s Office, and the Sloan School. Consequently, we have been able to streamline this complex process and reduce the turnaround time, often a critical factor in faculty recruiting.

But there’s more. In the spring of 2011, the Institute decided to put the faculty promotion and tenure case process on-line and Dorothy was the obvious choice to implement the system. Four and a half months later (that’s right I said four and a half months, not four and a half years), MIT’s first digital promotion case was uploaded. The lightening speed with which this critical but cumbersome paperbound administrative process was transformed into a streamlined and secure digital system was due entirely to Dorothy’s remarkable abilities and the confidence we all had in her.

Support for Dorothy’s nomination for this award flowed in from department heads, search committee chairs and their administrative
assistants from across the School. Here are some representative comments:

And I quote, “I've been on the . . . Faculty Search committee for many years and its chair in the last two. When we first introduced the web-based application and review process . . . the time savings (for) our faculty and the committee were quite dramatic . . . Her design and implementation streamlined each step of the process and resulted in significant overall improvements . . . In addition, Dorothy has always and continues to go out of the way to respond immediately to any issues as well as to any requests for new features or modifications. If I have to identify a single item in my thirteen years at MIT that has contributed to reducing bureaucracy and improving administrative processes that members of the faculty are directly involved with, I will surely come up with the web-based system for faculty application.”

Another faculty member wrote, “I have never heard (Dorothy) say something may be impossible – her typical response is to give several potential solutions to choose from and then before you know it, she has implemented one of them.”

And I might add that it doesn’t matter who is seeking help from Dorothy – she is amazingly responsive to department heads, search chairs and their administrative assistants, and to assistant deans. One department head’s administrative assistant wrote, “Dorothy is incredibly knowledgeable, technically fearless, remarkably intuitive and anticipatory, and seems to have boundless patience -- especially with us technophobes! She is truly an exceptional colleague.” Another wrote, “I love Dorothy! . . . She is always there when you have questions or need help. She is extremely helpful and genuinely cares about making sure that everything is working properly so that we can process things in a timely manner. She is extremely dedicated to her work and very skillful at her job.”

Speaking for myself, I second all the praise we received for Dorothy and would add that she provides much more than technical support, valuable
as that is. Dorothy also participates in and thinks carefully about the implications of proposed enhancements or changes and their impact on reviewers and candidates alike.

Dorothy is a joy to work with. She is incredibly responsive and patient. Her technical skill and the thoughtfulness with which she approaches every task inspire confidence. These qualities, combined with her amazing work ethic and dedication make her a more than fitting recipient of the Ellen J. Mandigo Award for Outstanding Service. Congratulations Dorothy.