

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Department of Materials Science and Engineering
College of Engineering
1304 West Green Street
Urbana, IL 61801 USA



David G. Cahill
Willett Professor of Engineering
Professor of Materials Science
phone: (217) 333-6753
email: d-cahill@illinois.edu

July 9, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to nominate Ms. Allison Sutton, Assistant Director of Business Operations in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering (MatSE), for recognition by the Sponsored Programs and Research Compliance (SPaRC) Outstanding Service Award. The high quality and exceptional productivity and of her service in research administration makes her highly deserving of this recognition.

I was department head of MatSE from 2010 to 2018 and worked closely with Ms. Sutton since the time she joined MatSE as Business and Finance Coordinator in July 2014. (Prior to her position in MatSE, Ms. Sutton worked in the Materials Research Laboratory in a similar role.) She was promoted to Assistant Director of Business Operations in late 2017. At about the same time, a long serving assistant to head retired from MatSE and Ms. Sutton assumed responsibility for all aspects of research administration and supervision of six office staff. She also coordinated activities across the department with the staff responsible for facilities, human resources, communications, and advancement.

She is a professional and has expertly advised faculty on many difficult issues concerning the administration of the research grants to the great benefit the faculty member and the MatSE department. I particularly admired her dedication to providing the highest level of service to MatSE faculty, staff, and students. She has been deliberate and thoughtful in developing her skills as a supervisor and the staff have greatly benefited from her guidance. Ms. Sutton has been proactive in seeking training for both her roles as a research administrator and supervisor. The MatSE department has never before run so smoothly. Due to Ms. Sutton's leadership, the feedback I received from the faculty on the quality of the MatSE business operations was uniformly positive and Ms. Sutton was often highlighted in their praise.

In just the past few years, Ms. Sutton initiated an astonishing range of activities to improve research administration in the MatSE department. Here is a small selection of initiatives that she led or was involved with related to research administration. (There are many others related to educational programs, communications, advancement, and facilities.)

- Implemented a purchasing tool in my.matse.illinois.edu
- Started a rigorous program of property accounting compliance
- Served on University-level solicitation committee to request bids for the most favorable contracted catalogs for life science suppliers
- Developed and communicated department policies for faculty departures compliant with university policy

- Implemented procedures for purging obsolete documents
- Developed processes for the review and finalization of expenditures on completed research grants
- Initiated a program for managing rental gas cylinders
- Launched the my.matse inventory application
- Developed on continuing process of purging grants that have terminated and purging unused gift accounts
- Served on multiple search committees and the SPaRC ED planning committee
- Created a policy for PI academic time charged to research grants

Throughout her time in MatSE, including some very challenging times when we were severely understaffed, Ms. Sutton maintained an optimistic and positive attitude—and a healthy approach to work-life balance—that served as role model for all of us. Ms. Sutton has a truly outstanding record of accomplishments in research administration and is an exceptional candidate for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award.

Sincerely,



David Cahill
Willett Professor of Engineering
Professor of Materials Science and Engineering



SPONSORED PROGRAMS ADMINISTRATION

1901 S. First St., Suite A, MC-685
Champaign, IL 61820-7473

May 21st, 2019

Dear SPaRC Outstanding Service Award Committee:

I am pleased to provide this letter in support of Allison Sutton's nomination for the SPaRC 2019 Outstanding Service Award. I first worked with Allison while serving the Materials Science and Engineering Department as a proposal coordinator for Sponsored Programs during the 2015-2016 academic year. In that time, Allison proved her dedication to providing faculty in her department the best possible guidance. One of the traits that stands out to me most is her knack for balancing short-term needs with long-term goals. She deftly navigated the often hectic work of preparing a submission while still seeking to address problems proactively, always with an eye towards reducing the administrative burden on her PIs and colleagues.

Furthermore, Allison is eager to share her knowledge and experience in service to others, yet unafraid to ask questions and learn from other administrators. I appreciated (and dreaded!) when she would come to me with a proposal submission question, because it was a near certainty that she had exhausted every possible resource prior to contacting our office and was going to ask an incredibly difficult question; probably one that was several levels above my head! Her willingness to ask difficult questions and work to track down the answers benefitted me massively when I started in research administration, and even more important for the PIs she works with on a regular basis.

Since then, as I have become more involved with software that underpins the administrative process I have been able to experience what Allison offers to the research community far beyond her own department. Allison actively and critically engages with our research admin systems, most notably the myResearch Portal and our reporting tools, always providing constructive feedback and a unique perspective. She goes above and beyond when offering suggestions, indulging our development teams in sometimes lengthy conversations as we try to better understand the issues department users face. She is fantastic at both providing details about the specific challenges she is trying to tackle, and offering helpful ways in which the tool could better meet the needs of users in similar roles.

Above all, Allison communicates with infectious positivity and good humor that makes her a pleasure to work with. Thank you for your consideration of an excellent candidate for the 2019 Outstanding Service Award.

Sincerely,

Bryan Bachman
Assistant Director, Data and Systems