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Meet some EECS Staff Members

A Conversation with Kathleen McCoy



Q Have you always lived in the Boston area?

A I am Boston born, and bred — one of eight (six girls and two boys). My parents were also from Boston. My dad's father was literally the first person in his neighborhood to have electricity and had to bring the wires to his street/house in Jamaica Plain by himself. His dad, my grandfather, worked at Haffenreffer Brewery and was responsible for the maintenance and boiler at the brewery.

Rumor has it that Babe Ruth and his teammates would play poker and consume large quantities of alcohol that had to be syphoned off the product from the brewery so it could be sold as non-alcoholic beverage during prohibition. My dad and his brother were the kids who brought the pitchers of illegal refreshment to Babe and the others from the back. I suspect that's how my dad got his job selling peanuts at the ball game too!

I learned to sail at Community Boating on the Charles and then worked there through high school and college. My fondest memories are the regattas on the Charles or against other local sailing teams, walking to Fenway after working all day and catching a night game when the bleacher seats were just \$2.00 per ticket, and spending each 4th of July either at Community Boating or at the Hatch Shell, as the views for fireworks were the best in the city. I even sat for 6 hours in the pouring rain at the Hatch Shell for the Arthur Fielder Memorial concert. I guess the Charles River just called me back home and that's why I'm at MIT!

After graduating from Simmons College with a degree in management with a specialization in retail, I interned at Filene's at Downtown Crossing and then worked for many years with Star Market — where I met my husband. We have 3 daughters.

In High School and at Simmons I always held leadership or mentor roles. I served as a commuter representative, student advisor and PE Sailing teacher. I loved being in a higher education environment. I knew I would work for a college or university. When my kids were all in school I was offered a position in continuing education at Bentley College (now Bentley University) back in the 90's. I have been working in some form of education ever since. I earned my MBA from Bentley back in 2000.

Q What are the things you really like about the EECS department and your work in the Graduate Office?

A First of all the faculty, students and staff are all brilliant! Not only that, but they are genuine. It seems the community is filled with people who have a passion for what they do whether studying, researching, advising or supporting faculty and staff, the folks at MIT are here because they want to be the best they can be. There is a feeling of family in the department. I believe that EECS is very service oriented and this is especially true of those who work in the headquarters, the UG office and the Grad Office. It really is very uplifting to come to work every day. Even when there are problems that may arise, you always know help is there, all you need to do is ask. It is an extremely welcoming environment and it's great to be part of this community.

Q Outside of work, what do you love to do?

A I love the little things like walks or cool breezes or even a summer rain shower. I am amazed at children and how fast they learn. I was a Girl Scout leader for about 10 years. It was just cool spending time with these girls and watching them grow into caring young women. My knot-tying skills from sailing were helpful as our troop worked on several troop badges. My extended family is pretty close, not only do we spend many holidays together, but we have had excursions to Ireland, Alaska, Disney World and Hawaii. On these trips we have had from 15 to 40 people traveling with us. When my daughter lived in Paris for a spell we all rotated our visits as she lived in a one-bedroom apartment across the river from Notre Dame. But we all visited at some point during her stay, cousins, aunts, uncles, sisters and parents made the trek across the pond and then shared notes on our trips for the next group. We hope to visit Scandinavia as a group perhaps on a cruise in 2016.

Meet some EECS Staff Members

A Conversation with Bill Tilden

Q What attracted you to working at MIT?

A I originally arrived at MIT after finishing graduate school back in 2006. Being a political science major, I was torn between seeking employment here at home in New England or migrating to Washington DC. I was fortunate enough to spot a job opening at the MIT Political Science department and was able to put many of my skills and much of my knowledge to good use there. I had no idea that I would continue to be working at MIT nine years later with tours of duty at Political Science, the Media Lab, and now here at EECS. It's been quite interesting to see both the similarities and differences at each department. Like any large organization, each department at MIT has its own individual office cultures and ways of doing things. Yet the overwhelming majority of the people that reside in these departments share the ethic of hard work, modesty, and can do spirit that makes MIT the formidable institution that it is.



Q What do you do in your position at EECS Headquarters?

A Throughout the year I am responsible for tasks such as faculty and staff parking, coordinating faculty and EE lunches, and processing HQ staff payroll. But the task I focus the most on is verifying and processing Research Assistant (RA) appointments for the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters. About two months before the beginning of each term, the labs send me their RA request forms. Being meticulous and organized is a must as we are reviewing hundreds and hundreds of RA requests. Taking part in this task three times a year gives my job a nice rhythm. As the term approaches, the intensity increases as my job gets more and more busy. After the term has begun, there is a nice de-escalation period for a month or two where I can catch up on other tasks.

Q What are some of the things about EECS that you really like?

A The thing that continues to impress me here at EECS is the quality of students that this department attracts. The way I know this is due to the interest that companies, from Silicon Valley to here in Massachusetts, continue to express towards our students. As most people know, reputation will only take you so far in life. There comes a point in time where one needs to display both the talent and drive that is necessary to become successful in life. It is this winning combination of aptitude and motivation that I see on a daily basis in the hallways of EECS.

Q You really like to travel. Can you describe what motivates you to take solo trips worldwide?

A Over the past few years I've become more and more involved in international travel. This recent aspect of my life has come as a bit of a surprise to both my family members and indeed to me. Before the age of 30, I had only left the country a couple of times during my undergraduate days. In the past four years, however, I have travelled to six countries in Europe and Asia. During my youth, I never gave much thought to the idea of travelling the world. Everything I thought I needed to see could be found here in the 3.8 million square miles of the U.S. The idea of sitting in an airplane for over 7 hours to go to Europe or 15 hours to go to Asia was not one that got me too excited. Thanks to the friends I made in graduate school, however, I now have an excuse to visit the various world capitals that they inhabit.

I think the thing that keeps me looking for more and more countries to explore is the perspective I gain from these trips. It is one of life's ironies that in order to better understand yourself and where you come from, you often need to get away from your roots for a while and see how things are done elsewhere.

A Conversation with Myung-Hee Vabulas

Q How did you come to be working in MIT EECS Headquarters?

A I grew up in Port Washington, which is on the north shore of Long Island in New York. I moved to New Hampshire to study biology at Dartmouth College, where I met my husband, Shin. After graduating, I worked at a local bookstore while Shin finished his PhD, and we also had our first son, Eita. We moved to Cambridge in 2008, at which point I became a full-time stay-at-home mom. Our younger son, Kai, was born here in 2010. During this period, I started a small business making and selling quilts. Running a business was eye-opening and a lot of fun—I really enjoyed having a hand in everything from photographing the quilts for my online store to doing the taxes.

By 2013, my kids had become more independent, and I was ready to take a part-time position outside the home. I worked briefly at the Whitehead Institute and then in RLE, before I started here in EECS headquarters. One of the things I was looking for was being able to interact with other adults every day, something that I missed during my years at home. I'm happy that I was able to find that here—I feel lucky to be working with such a great group of people.

Q What are the things about your work that you really enjoy and appreciate?

A EECS is an exciting place to be. It's the largest department at MIT and has so many brilliant faculty members and students. I can't claim to fully understand their research, but it's rewarding to feel like I'm contributing in some small way to this environment at MIT that supports their success.

The other thing that stands out is the quality of the staff working here in EECS headquarters. I have learned so much from my coworkers—many of them have years of experience at MIT and are happy to help and advise me as a relatively new employee here.

Q What are your favorite things to do outside work and how do they contribute (indirectly) to your work?

A I love to bake—breads, cookies, cakes, pies. My latest go-to recipes are for brioche and a rustic sourdough bread. The process is very detail-oriented, which relates to my work here at MIT. Especially when baking, you have to follow the recipe precisely or you risk having something turn out poorly. At the same time, over the years I've gained enough experience that I feel more comfortable now manipulating temperatures and rising times to make a bread recipe work for my schedule rather than the other way around. I think a lot of this is applicable to my work life in that you often have to decide what is critical for a project's success and which variables are more flexible.

In terms of other activities outside of work, they mostly revolve around my kids. Actually, we're at the Z Center every weekend for their swimming lessons, and last weekend we also watched the MIT men's basketball team get a win over Fitchburg State. So I often find myself at MIT even on my days off!

