

Bob: Hello and welcome to the Illinois professional. A campaign created by Illinois Human Resources to showcase the diverse ways that employees carry out and support the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign mission. There are many jobs that come with hidden perks, but very few in Central Illinois, which can boast the perk of potlucks with cuisine from around the globe. I'm Bob Dignan and in this episode, we'll hear from Terri Gitler the Office Support Specialist with not one, but two centers on our campus. Terri had some glowing nominations from her coworkers, describing her as the glue on her respective teams. In March of 2020, Terri received the Chancellor's Distinguished Staff Award. The award is designed to annually recognize civil service staff employees for their exceptional accomplishments and service to the university. Through this program, outstanding performance is encouraged in all civil service staff employees as they strive to win this prestigious award. Enjoy a glimpse into Terri's world with these few minutes all about her.

So Terri, thank you so much for being here. Thank you.

Terri: Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Bob: Yeah, definitely. So the whole point of this series, as we want to know more about what you do at the university and how long have you been at the university? You are one of the award winners. So I imagine this isn't your first month working here. So could you tell us a little bit about what you do and how long you been here.

Terri: I am an office support specialist for two of our international centers on campus. So I work for both the Center for African Studies and the Center for Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies. We are under the umbrella of Illinois Global Institute as a part of LAS. I've worked here since the end of September of 2011. I actually worked for the University a couple of years between undergrad and grad school. So it's my second time at the university, but by first-time really with this career as it were.

Bob: Excellent, great. Well, I like that kind of storied past that you've got lots of different touch points, it sounds like. And I'm actually familiar with those centers our team records events, and back to you know, non-pandemic times. If you're listening to this where we're currently in a pandemic. So there's not very many live events happening.

Terri: Right.

Bob: But our team would go to events out of these centers. And that would feature speakers from around the world and coming through Champaign-Urbana and giving talks. And I just want to promote that because there are some fascinating people that come through that grant support the center of inviting speakers in and talking about all sorts of different topics and viewpoints. And I don't know if you

get it. You probably are scheduling all these. I don't know if you ever get a chance to watch or listen to them.

Terri: Absolutely. I attend as many of those as I can. We also have, from both centers, we have musicians come from around the world. And that's been really wonderful too. We've had great African musicians, musicians from the Middle East. We help promote cinema from different parts of the world. So it's really, really a broad spectrum of art as it were, as well as research and scholarly information. It's really fascinating and very, very nice. And of course there are many international centers, so we're only two of many.

Bob: Right. And so I gotta predict that with a job role of office support specialists, you might hear that and think, oh, that's probably just kind of the same old, same old every day. But as you mentioned, small centers trying to accomplish a lot with a little connected to campus, partnering with Krannert or other international centers or other academic unit. You probably have different challenges and things. You're booking musicians. I mean, who would've thought.

Terri: Yeah, It's true.

Bob: So what are the various different things that you're doing for the centers?

Terri: Some of the more routine things are that we, when we're not in a pandemic and we can bring people here than I help, of course, with all the travel arrangements and the lodging and all of that sort of thing, and the schedule when they're here, making sure they have things to do at all the times that they're here during the pandemic, then we want to make sure everything goes smoothly with zoom which has been of course, a challenge of its own, but we're learning to do that. I think one of the benefits, one of the benefits of Zoom versus in person is that we, as you said, a small center, more limited resources. But we can open up our audience much more than we might have been able to before, where we could afford to have maybe one or two people internationally come visit us. With zoom, we can open it up to a much wider audience. Of course can come and listen to us. So I'm involved with that. We, as I work with banner a lot at anybody listening will know that that's a very robust system because they say.

Bob: What a diplomatic way of saying that.

Terri: Robust, yes, I like that too. I helped to maintain our website with a lot of support from our IT people. Of course, they're all wonderful, but I helped to do that. I also, which is a lot of fun for me, is I help to copy, edit all of the communication that goes out. So whether it's an email or a newsletter or

whatever, I'm allowed to do that and that's sort of the thing I'm very interested in. So that's a lot of fun for me. No two days are ever alike. And although I hold the same title in both centers, and you might think that the job would be exactly the same in each center. That's not the case. They're always subtle differences between the two. And that's fine. So it's really, it's a lot more stimulating position than you might think by just hearing the title and looking at the formal job description, I'm never bored.

Bob: Yeah. Right. Right. I was going to say, you're listing so many different things all the way from like university international diplomat and a sense of working out all these arrangements and being a host all the way down to website and copy editing. That's such a and I know because I've seen a little bit of denomination description from the award that you're really a member, that's a glue for the center that you kind of hold everything together and a lot of people rely on you and the functions of the center rely on you. So I know you're not going to come right out and say that. So I know I have to step in and say, we're grateful that you're playing that role.

Terri: But I think all of us in these positions are certainly not true only for me. That's the position. So yeah,

Bob: Right. Right. The glue is kind of working title there. So you got an award, Chancellors Distinguished Staff Award. Congratulations. You said you've been working her awhile. But what did it feel like to find out? Paint us a picture. Where were you or that you found out you won a campus an award.

Terri: Okay. Well, I'll tell you in March, right before all of this happened, right before all of this happened, we were my husband and I were scheduled to visit our kids in New York City. So we had to cancel that trip on that same weekend. That was then the week that the University decided we would be closing and everyone would be working from home. So I was, you know not at maybe the greatest mental state. And I got the call that I had won and it was quite an amazing and wonderful phone call. So it was really great, it was really great.

Bob: That's awesome. It's almost like a dove coming out at all of the pandemic and canceling the trip and all this. You're like, oh, something wonderful can happen.

Terri: Something wonderful yep, truly.

Bob: that's excellent. Well, you're being recognized for, for really great work. And one of the questions that we have that we're wondering is, why did you choose to work at the university?

Terri: I am a graduate of the University as is my husband and our two children. So we are definitely U of I folks in our blood. Yeah, exactly. I had worked in the public sector for many years. And when I wanted to switch to something different, I couldn't imagine a place that was more diverse, had more stimulating kinds of topics to investigate. Over the years when I wasn't affiliated with the university, we still loved going to the lectures and the performances and all of that sort of stuff. And so to somehow be affiliated with this institution, it just seemed like a wonderful opportunity to me. I really wanted that. And I've been happy with it.

Bob: Yeah, that's great. Because we're also wondering, you know, how you see your role and what you're doing contributing to the big mission of this huge place that's got so many gizmos and offices and centers and research labs worrying away, you know, day in, day out. So how do you see that?

Terri: Well I'm not a scholar of African, I'm not a scholar of Middle Eastern or South Asian academia, but I see my job as helping those people who are. And so my Director and Associate Director and outreach coordinators there, all the people that really drive the academics. My job is to help them to make their lives as easy as possible. And I work for wonderful, wonderful people. And so it's a pleasure to do that and to help them achieve their goals.

Bob: That's excellent. Again, having read the nomination language, I can, I can assure you that view and you playing that role is definitely felt and seen. A reason why you've got the award. You've talked a lot about some really interesting aspects of your job, but I thought I might ask if you can think of and want to share any other ones that are more interesting or unique or things that maybe people don't realize that you're doing or that the center is doing.

Terri: Well, let me think for a moment. When we had a couple of musicians come from various African countries. And while they were here, I got to accompany them while they did sound checks at Krannert. I got to show them around campus a little bit while they were here. In addition, of course, to getting to hear them and all of that, that was just, I never thought I'd have an opportunity to interact with, you know, international musicians. We had an ambassador come at one point and so I was able to talk to him a little bit and help him with his itinerary. I mean, it's just- and the students. I have to say the students from all over the world are just such a joy to work with and get to know. And it's bittersweet when they graduate. Of course, we're glad for them. They go on to have their own wonderful careers and do great things. But it's sad at the same time because they're leaving us and going all over the world. So anyway, those are some of the things that I do and then I have been doing.

Bob: Your connection with students. Is probably pretty prominent? And I would imagine centers with mission like you guys have, you have some grad student

Terri: Yes.

Bob: That also are involved in your center handles. But what's nice about them is they might stay a little bit longer than maybe some Undergrad, two postdocs or things, but still, you always face that inevitable like, well, what we did was prepare you for the next thing. So we have to pass you along.

Terri: That's right. Yes.

Bob: Something I think that you said is is completely right and interesting as you would never expect small little town in the center of Illinois months all the cornfield to have this much international traffic back when we could be flying around and bringing people in. You're really seeing the world just by staying put here Champaign-Urbana. And they're coming to you and you get all these extremely unique and diverse experience.

Terri: And we have great potlucks.

Bob: That's true. I bet you're sampling food from all over the world basically. Do you ever get people sampling, you're cooking and going, oh, great, I get a little bit of that too.

Terri: I try to do that occasionally, but I'd prefer to eat, there's.

Bob: Have you adopted any recipes that you've kind of grabbed onto over the years.

Terri: I don't make any of them, but I will gladly eat all of them.

Bob: Gotcha. And leave the cooking and expertise to though that's that's excellent. If you can think of a day that you felt most proud to be a professional working at Illinois. Can you think of one of those? What was it? What did it feel like?

Terri: Yeah, I knew that question might come, of course. And, you know, there are many good days for sure. But the thing that I'm I'm, we're in the midst of this very unusual situation. And what I think of is the University of Illinois has had researchers at the forefront of trying to fight with the testing and find cures and all of that. Our researchers, our faculty that has been put in a very different situation where

they now have to teach through zoom and just, do any other methods? My colleagues who have to make their jobs work, from home sometimes or going into the office when they can. But again, doing everything in a different way than they were trained to do or prepared to do. And finally, of course, our students who for the most part have taken this very seriously and have made Illinois you know really, really make it so that we can function our administrators. And so rather than saying one day that I'm proud of, and again, there are many. I think this whole difficult situation has really shown a positive light. At the university and I am grateful to all of those different people. And there are different roles for working as hard as they do. And it's cheerfully as they do more times than not.

Bob: Right. There are so many reasons to be down and to continue to forge ahead in the spirit that we've seen on campus. Truly remarkable.

Terri: Yep

Bob: That's fantastic. Well, is there anything else you'd like to add that people might not know about the centers or what's going on?

Terri: I just want to, I don't want this to sound like an Oscar award acceptance speech, but I do definitely, there's no way at all that I could be even a little bit successful at my job without the wonderful people I work with and for not a day goes by that I don't reach out to them in some capacity needing help, needing their advice, whatever, and they are almost without question, always there for me. And I thank them.

Bob: Well, that's such a wonderful note to end on, and I really appreciate you taking the time to join us and to talk about your experiences here. And I hope there could be many good things and that we can eventually get some international musicians back on campus.

Terri: Absolutely.

Bob: Alright, thank you so much, Terri, appreciate it.

Terri: Sure.

Bob: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Illinois professional. If interested in nominating someone for a campus staff award. There's a link in the description with more information. And be sure to follow @IllinoisHR on Twitter for informational and inspirational posts.