



Laura Odell Receives Society of Women Engineers Spark Award

ALEXANDRIA, VA (September 2020)—Laura Odell, an assistant director in the Information Technology and Systems Division (ITSD) of IDA’s Systems and Analyses Center, has been named a recipient of the WE20 Spark Award, which the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) awards to honor individuals who contribute to the advancement of women by mentoring those around them.

“Everyone needs an advocate to offer up their name when opportunities arise, a coach to help them understand what they don’t learn in textbooks and classrooms, and a mentor to understand their vision for themselves and guide them through the progression of their career aspirations,” said Odell. “I believe we can have it all! We just can’t get it all at once and need others to help us along the way!”

Odell has demonstrated leadership and initiative through recruiting, coaching, and advocating for a growing team of researchers and project leaders with various experience levels across IDA. She dedicates her efforts to mentoring and supporting these individuals as they progress in their careers, helping them find opportunities to succeed, and creating prospects for them to expand their skills.

“I am so proud of Laura for her contributions to advancing women professionals at IDA,” said Margaret Myers, ITSD director. “She’s taken the initiative to support these individuals and their development while creating an inclusive and collaborative environment where they thrive.”

For Odell, helping others succeed and seeing them move forward is most rewarding. One example she shared is that of Cameron DiLorenzo, an ITSD research staff member who she has mentored for years. “Cameron started at IDA fresh out of college as a research associate and now she leads her own projects,” said Odell. “Watching her and other high-potential performers transform into high-performance leaders is quite gratifying.”

As a hands-on, operationally focused leader, Odell says she is optimistic about the next generation of leaders. She has found that offering leadership opportunities, pushing individuals forward, asking for ideas, and over-including are imperative for ensuring the professional experiences of young people are actively leaning toward an inclusive and uplifting environment.

Odell will be recognized during a virtual awards ceremony at SWE’s WE20 Virtual Conference and Career Fair, November 2–13, 2020.

Odell holds two master’s degrees from the Florida Institute of Technology, one in contract acquisition management and another in management. She earned her bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from the University of Minnesota College of Science and Engineering.

She is a member of the Acquisition Professional Community and the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers; a board member of ThanksUSA; and a graduate of the MIT Seminar XXI and the Harvard Kennedy School executive course in Cybersecurity: The Intersection of Policy and Technology.

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