



Focus on Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) is a top tier college in Worcester, Massachusetts, primarily for students interested in STEM fields. Everyone enters “Undeclared” even if they think they know what they want to study, and there are several courses specifically designed to help them explore their options before declaring a major.

Presently 59% of the 4,000 undergraduates are majoring in Engineering, 18% in Science or Math, and 13% in Computer Science, including Interactive Media and Game Design. Eight percent are majoring in Business, generally with a STEM focus, and 2% in Liberal Arts. Liberal Arts is the largest department on campus, however, because everyone is required to take some coursework in it, and a wide variety of options are available.

WPI is known for its academic rigor, but the atmosphere on campus is friendly and supportive. The students’ excitement at their opportunities is notable as they praise the state-of-the art technology they get to work with (which they say makes them particularly marketable) and the mentoring of faculty who are devoted teachers as well as researchers.

WPI students take three classes at a time for four seven-week terms each year. An optional summer session is also available for an extra fee if they want to take even fewer courses at a time. Classes meet 4 days per week, some with an additional 3

laboratory or conference sessions per week, so students move through the material quickly but can focus on fewer subjects and prepare for fewer tests at a time.

The grading system is a bit unusual as well, with the only grades being A, B, C or NR for No Record. In other words, there are no plusses or minuses, and anything below a C does not appear on the student's transcript. Students can graduate on time even with 3 NR's, but most re-take any courses they didn't pass the first time. The support services are strong for students both with and without documented learning differences.

Much of the learning at WPI is hands-on and collaborative, and all students are required to do two projects in the course of their four years. The first is done with a team of three to five students from different majors and is usually outside everyone's area of specialization. Professors design the projects and list them on a database students can search to find what appeals to them. Many are abroad at one of WPI's 39 global project centers; as a result, over fifty percent of WPI students study abroad, usually going for 8 weeks so they have time to travel and explore for a week after the term is over.

Everyone also does a senior project in his or her major. A display of some that have made it to market includes a scrolling electronic picture frame, a hand-held breast MRI machine, a firefighter tracker, and a NASA moon rover. Another one everyone on campus enjoys is a centrally located fountain for which the height of the waterspout is determined by a wind monitor on a nearby building.

The WPI student body is diverse in terms of ethnicity, geographic origin and also interests. Students say it's a place everyone can feel at home, whether their idea of fun is playing board games or attending parties. A third of the students go Greek, joining one of thirteen fraternities and six sororities. These sponsor lots of service projects in addition to the usual parties. WPI students also enjoy D-3 Varsity, Club and Intramural sports and over 300 campus clubs and organizations. Music is a popular pursuit with five instrumental ensembles, numerous a Capella groups, and a strong theater program.

Freshmen all live on campus in residence halls with both single sex and co-ed options. They are not allowed to have cars their first year, but after that two-thirds of the students move off campus or into Greek houses, and many keep cars, which make it easier for them to get around Worcester (home to many great restaurants) and to Boston, which is 45 minutes away.

After graduation, 70% of WPI students go directly into employment, their average starting salary ranking fifth in the nation according to Payscale.com. The rest go to graduate or medical school. Some stay on campus a fifth year to earn a combined Bachelor's and Master's degree that otherwise would have taken them six years. This is most commonly earned in Business.

WPI admissions have become increasingly selective over the past few years. About 10% of applicants opt to submit a substantial project like an internship research paper in lieu of standardized tests. For the rest, the median SATs are 1850 to 2150 and median ACTs are 28 to 32. The average admitted student has a 3.9 GPA and is in the top 10% of his or her graduating class. Admissions officers want to see strong courses especially in math and science even if it means the GPA is a bit lower. Applicants need to have taken at least pre-Calculus, but most admitted students have taken Calculus too.

The application deadlines are November 1st for Early Action I, January 1st for Early Action II, and February 1st for Regular Decision.

