



WPI

POSITION SPECIFICATION

○— Search for Vice President, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer —○



WPI transforms lives, turns knowledge into action to confront global challenges, and revolutionizes STEM education through distinctive and inclusive project-based learning and groundbreaking research.

THE SEARCH

Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) seeks an accomplished, creative, and well-regarded leader to serve as its next Vice President and Chief Marketing and Communications Officer (VP CMCO). This is an exciting opportunity for a strategic thinker and effective leader to increase the national and global visibility of a truly distinctive STEM-focused university that produces purpose-driven high-impact research and has been the pioneer in project-based learning for more than 50 years. WPI's unique curriculum develops students as leaders, collaborators and problem solvers through real-world projects and provides an education that fosters a culture of innovation, inquiry, and academic excellence at the highest caliber. As a key strategic partner to President Grace Wang, the next VP CMCO will have the opportunity to showcase the university's rich history, distinctive educational approach, impactful research and innovation, and highly immersive, inclusive campus environment; amplify its distinguished brand; and be a unifying voice at an innovative institution that is a leader in transformative education and research.



WPI faculty include fellows of professional societies, Fulbright Scholars, and 41 National Science Foundation Career Award winners. Annual research expenditures have tripled over the past decade and the university has received multiple national awards for educational innovation and global engagement. Approximately 65 percent of entering students had a high school GPA of 4.0 or higher. As the university builds on this momentum, the VP CMCO will help sustain and strengthen its standing among the nation's leading institutions and advance its strategic goals.

The VP CMCO will bring the expertise, drive, and a creative and innovative spirit to articulate WPI's distinctive identity and develop strategies that powerfully communicate the university's outsized impact and unique educational experience, promote WPI's research and innovation accomplishments, and elevate institutional brand awareness at a national and international level. With expert knowledge of both traditional and digital media, the VP CMCO will understand the changing nature of communications, marketing, media, and technology, and be able to communicate and engage diverse audiences within this rapidly evolving environment. A critical thinker with a keen understanding of academic culture, the VP CMCO will bring experience differentiating and tailoring communications for a variety of constituents in a concise, clear, and transparent manner.

Key experience will include building and leading teams, supporting and developing people, and implementing multi-faceted communications and marketing programs for an organization with many audiences. The VP CMCO must also have a collaborative and collegial nature, high emotional intelligence, and intercultural competence; and be committed to building relationships within a tight-knit university community. They will be intellectually curious and strive for excellence. They will be data driven, focused on the metrics, and capable of prioritization in a fast-paced environment.

WPI has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search and to help identify outstanding candidates. All inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed to the search firm in confidence as directed at the end of this document.



ABOUT WPI

Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) was [founded in 1865](#) on the principles of theory and practice. For nearly 160 years, WPI has been at the forefront of engineering, science, technology and business education. Its founders were the first to introduce a radical new curriculum that focused equally on theory and practice. This unique approach aimed to prepare the professionals and leaders who would make discoveries, invent technologies, and build companies needed to drive the development of a young nation.



In the 1970s, WPI reimagined that model and—while staying true to its founding vision—pioneered an approach to undergraduate STEM education grounded in project-based learning that emphasizes the impact that technology has on society. Known as the [WPI Plan](#), the method requires students to work in interdisciplinary teams, learn how to solve problems in the process, and collaborate with partners in communities around the globe as they seek viable and sustainable solutions to real-world, meaningful problems. This project-based, flexible, well-rounded curriculum empowers students and calls on them to be interdisciplinary and global in their thinking while giving them experiences that prepare them to succeed in their careers as leaders, collaborators, and innovators. Similarly, WPI's research strengths result from faculty, staff, and students collaborating across a spectrum of disciplines to address global

challenges ranging from human disease and sustainable development to the future of work, clean energy, and materials of the future.

Within the crowded higher education landscape, WPI stands out as a place where cutting-edge research, innovative education, and informed practice intersect and complement one another to the benefit of students, faculty, and society. WPI offers more than 70 [degree programs](#) at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels across [18 academic departments](#) in science, engineering, business, the social sciences, and the humanities and arts.

The university is a recognized leader for engaging undergraduates in research and a pioneer and global leader in project-based learning; no one does projects—or global experiences—at the same level of scale or quality. Through a meaningful combination of theory and practice, every WPI student achieves intellectual breadth through degree requirements and mandatory hands-on projects. The [Humanities and Arts Project](#) allows students to become immersed in art, theatre, music, and other forms of creative expression through a self-selected series of courses. This approach allows students to explore themes of complexity, diversity, and the richness of human experience by examining art/architecture, history, languages, literature, philosophy, or religion—the goal being to build well-rounded, globally aware graduates with superior critical and analytical thinking skills and a handle on ambiguous problems.

The [Interactive Qualifying Project](#) (IQP) is a highly effective teaching and learning methodology that calls on undergraduates to work in interdisciplinary teams to solve an important problem or fill a need that lies at the intersection of science and society. Through the IQP, students work at project centers around the globe or on campus. During the 2022-23 academic year, 1,114 students – representing 85% of the class – traveled to 54 project centers in 30 countries on six continents. As the global leader in project-based learning for higher education, WPI continuously works to modernize its educational model to respond to today's rapidly changing world. WPI is a recipient of the [NAFSA 2024 Senator Paul Simon Spotlight Award for Campus Internationalization](#) and, in 2023, won the IIE Heiskell Award for Innovation in International Education.



WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

The project-based curriculum culminates with the [Major Qualifying Project](#) (MQP), which provides students a discipline-specific opportunity to gain authentic, professional-level, team-based research and/or design experience within their major field, developing skills that employers and graduate schools value.

WPI graduate students also have many opportunities to work in teams, receive personalized mentoring from experts in their fields, and engage in multidisciplinary research projects that solve important problems. Doctorate, Master's and certificate programs are offered both on campus and online, and comprehensive education and development programs provide graduate students with a foundation for success in both industry and academia.

WPI's 95-acre campus sits atop Boynton Hill in Worcester, Massachusetts—New England's second-largest city located an hour west of Boston. With its storied history and recent emergence as a leader in healthcare, higher education, life sciences, and robotics, Worcester itself is the perfect backdrop for the innovative spirit of WPI's students, faculty, and staff. The city is also a hub of arts, culture, nature, sports, and more, ensuring that WPI students gain not only invaluable professional experience but also fond personal memories.



The campus is a lively, highly engaged, close-knit community with more than 5,400 undergraduate students and 1,900 graduate students hailing from 48 states, two U.S. territories, and 92 countries. It is home to approximately 500 faculty and 800 staff members. Buildings rich with history stand side-by-side with leading-edge labs, makerspaces, and classrooms.

LEADERSHIP

Grace J. Wang, PhD, began her tenure as WPI's 17th president on April 3, 2023. She is also a professor in the Department of Mechanical and Materials Engineering at WPI.

Before coming to WPI, President Wang served as Executive Vice President for research, innovation, and knowledge at The Ohio State University and was a professor in Materials Science and Engineering. At OSU, President Wang brought a strong focus on supporting faculty, staff, and student researchers, innovators, and entrepreneurs. Her efforts helped expand the university's research and innovation ecosystem, achieving \$1.38 billion in annual R&D expenditures during her tenure.

After earning her PhD in Materials Science and Engineering at Northwestern University, President Wang began her career at IBM/Hitachi Global Storage Technologies, focusing on research and development of thin-film magnetic recording media and carbon overcoat for data storage. She holds seven U.S. patents.

In 2022, President Wang was appointed by the White House to serve on the National Quantum Initiative Advisory Committee. She is a council member of the Government-University-Industry Research Roundtable (GUIRR) at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and a member of the Board of Governors for the New York Academy of Sciences.



FACULTY AND STAFF

WPI's faculty consists of about 425 full-time members and approximately 75 part-time members. In addition to their multi- and inter-disciplinary research and teaching, WPI faculty play a pivotal and active role in students' learning and growth. The WPI faculty have received national recognition for combining scholarly research with classroom instruction, working closely with students across a range of educational and research experiences. Some act as on-campus advisors, helping students navigate the course selection process and determine the best academic path; others serve as project center directors, traveling to sites across the nation and globe to guide students in their project work.

WPI's 800 staff members are true professionals who dedicate themselves to the University's mission. From offering expert guidance around course registration and campus life to providing advice on financial literacy and career planning—or simply giving students a friendly “you’ve got this” during finals—WPI's staff members provide an essential, supportive structure to the university community, creating a welcoming environment for students and their families, alumni, visitors, and corporate and government partners.



STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

With a 13-to-1 student-to-faculty ratio, WPI students are given support, knowledge, and in-depth learning experiences to create their own academic paths and follow their passions. WPI's first-year retention rate was 94 percent, and 89 percent of students graduated within six years.

The WPI student experience focuses on solving important, meaningful problems through team efforts, instead of competing against one another. Undergraduates generally take three classes in each of the four seven-week terms per academic year, allowing for more intensive engagement, which creates space for the cooperative, open-ended project work at the core of the WPI Plan. The academic schedule allows for deeper dives into fewer courses and intensive student engagement, which creates space for the cooperative, open-ended project work at the core of the WPI Plan. (Graduate courses follow the semester schedule.) For undergraduates, there are also no failing grades due to a grading system that includes an NR (No Record) grade that can be assigned by a faculty member for course or project work for which credit has not been earned. The NR grade does not appear on the student's official transcripts, nor is it used in the calculation of satisfactory academic progress. This unique grading system encourages students to branch out, experiment, and cross disciplines.

Students have the opportunity to participate in more than 235 clubs and organizations ranging from the High Powered Rocketry Club and the Society of Magicians to the Equestrian Team and Greenhouse and Horticulture Club. There are 50 professional, career, development, and honors societies and 20 Division III varsity sports. More than 650 varsity athletes compete on WPI teams and 3,000 students participate in club sports and intramurals and have the opportunity to choose from more than 120 physical education and wellness classes.



WPI has a vibrant, service-oriented Greek system with 13 fraternities and 7 sororities, including five National Panhellenic Conference sororities, one associate-member multicultural sorority, and one associate-member Pan-Hellenic sorority. Fraternities and sororities are founded on the principles of scholarship, leadership, and community service.

Students also have access to a wealth of resources and support systems ranging from academic advising and guidance to career support—through the Heebner Career Development Center—to well-being, health, and counseling services, all with the common goal of helping each student make their experience exactly what they need. As an integral part of the university's efforts to support campus mental health and wellness, WPI's Center for Well-Being opened in Fall 2022. The center applies evidence-based practices to promote well-being for students and the broader WPI campus community, recognizing the importance of faculty and staff in creating, maintaining, and modeling a healthier environment for all.



Over the past several years, WPI has worked steadily to infuse diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) into every aspect of the university experience, inside and outside the classroom and the workplace. It has centered this work in its strategic plan and continues its [commitment](#) to fostering an environment in which all members belong.

WPI offers extensive connections with regional industries (biotech, aerospace, defense, and robotics with full-time practitioners pursuing master's and PhD degrees) to support experiential learning and post-graduate outcomes. Graduate student workers are members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union.

The class of 2023's first destination success rates (employed or in graduate school 6 months post-graduation) and their average starting salaries were:

- 88% success rate for Bachelor's; \$82K average starting salary
- 94% success rate for Master's; \$96K average starting salary
- 93% success rate for PhD; \$96K average starting salary
- 27% of bachelor's students go on to graduate school, with a large majority choosing to study at WPI

The WPI alumni community is active and thriving, boasting a worldwide network of more than 40,000 alumni who live in more than 100 countries and work in diverse fields and professions. This illustrious group of innovative problem solvers and STEM leaders is always breaking new ground, seeking better solutions, and creating positive changes in the world. GOLD (Graduates of the Last Decade), International Chapters, Voyagers, Student Alumni Society, and The Women of WPI provide ways to network with friends and stay connected to WPI.

SCHOOLS

The [School of Arts and Sciences](#) weaves together the scientific, technological, artistic, and humanistic innovation found in all corners of WPI, and students are encouraged to explore and pursue music, art, and design thinking. While WPI is STEM-focused, the opportunity to seek out other perspectives promotes discovery and communication, advances knowledge, and allows human-focused scientists and engineers to have a long-lasting and valuable impact in the world.

The [Business School](#) bridges the worlds of business and technology to develop adaptive leaders who impact the world—all with a STEM focus. Whether students aspire to lead a tech company, start a business, expand on a patent-worthy idea, move into the C-suite, or pursue another goal, the university's business programs work at the cross-section of business, innovation, STEM, and society to provide a distinctive and transformative skillset that such future leaders need. In July 2023, The Business School was re-accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB); fewer than five percent of the world's business programs are currently accredited.

[The Engineering School](#)—the university's largest school—offers more than a dozen departments and programs, through which students gain the skills and invaluable experience needed to adapt to an ever-changing and always-challenging global environment. Students leave WPI with technical expertise and a thoughtful approach to how technology impacts society.

Faculty and students work through [The Global School](#) to co-create effective solutions to build a more secure, sustainable, and habitable world. Within the distinctive Global Projects Program, all undergraduate students work to address social, technological, ecological, and economic challenges through interdisciplinary, purpose-driven research. On-site work through a network of more than 50

project centers around the globe provides a perspective that many students describe as life-changing. The approach also strengthens the university's many partnerships with communities large and small.



STRATEGIC PLAN AND FUNDRAISING

The university's current strategic plan, [*Lead With Purpose: 2021 – 2026*](#), directly addresses issues of student well-being, access, and affordability and commits to building a thriving community of diverse learners and doers. It revolutionizes what it means to be a successful STEM professional by enhancing the interdisciplinary project-based approach to student development and by strengthening the university's infrastructure to support student success. It reaffirms WPI's commitment to a culture of inclusion, belonging, well-being, and respect that attracts and nurtures diverse minds and provides the support necessary for all to thrive. In 2021, WPI publicly launched [*Beyond These Towers*](#), a \$500 million campaign that has raised approximately \$425 million in philanthropy and research funds to date.

RESEARCH

WPI emphasizes purpose-driven, high-impact, interdisciplinary research. With experts who have a passion for hands-on learning and inquiry, the university's research enterprise continues to experience significant growth in external funding; FY2023 research expenditures totaled \$66 million, which represents a 16 percent increase from the previous year and a tripling of expenditures since 2014. Faculty research is broad ranging, with recent grants to support work to develop a number of innovations, including a new compound alternative to concrete, a smartphone app to detect wound infections, an autonomous flying robot to pollinate plants, transparent wound dressing, and a robotic laser probe for endoscopic larynx surgeries. Along with state, corporate, and foundation support, researchers are funded by a variety of federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education, and Department of Energy. Led by the Office of

the Vice President and Vice Provost for Research, WPI continues to invest in state-of-the-art equipment and facilities that align with the university's strategic priorities.

WPI is host to a diverse portfolio of [research institutes and centers](#) that serve as critical points of convergence for WPI faculty, students, and staff, including the health care training center PracticePoint, the Biomanufacturing Education and Training Center (BETC), the Cell Engineering Research Equipment Suite (CERES), and the Autonomous Vehicle Mobility Institute, among others. The university also fosters valuable and productive partnerships with industries and organizations that seek out WPI's hands-on expertise in emerging research areas, including commercial robotics partnerships through the NSF-funded multi-center ROSE-HUB.

Work by WPI researchers translates into commercial impact. In FY 2023, their work resulted in 63 new invention disclosures, 13 new patents, 7 licenses executed, and 3 new startup companies. Over the last 10 years, WPI start ups have raised a total of \$1.7 billion and created 529 new jobs.



ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Serving as a member of the senior cabinet and reporting to the President, the VP CMCO is the senior marketing and communications executive at WPI and is responsible for all strategic marketing and communications efforts at the university. Overseeing a division of about 35 people organized across areas

of Strategic Communications, Marketing and Creative Strategy, and Marketing Operations, the VP CMCO provides leadership and strategic direction to a team that plays critical roles in the pursuit of university goals—including increasing visibility and elevating WPI’s reputation in the world, driving revenue, and building community. The division offers expert counsel and agency-level services that include digital marketing operations and analytics, content strategy and publications, photography and video production, public relations, strategic and crisis communications, as well as website and marketing support for WPI campus partners.

The VP CMCO plays an active role in strategic matters critical to the university, including presidential communications, the university’s strategic plan, launching important new programs and initiatives, and the expansion of the university’s digital footprint. The VP CMCO is responsible for ensuring appropriate and efficient use of university resources, stewarding and increasing the visibility of the institution's brand, and identifying and recommending changes to structure or strategy to achieve university goals.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Lead and empower a strong communications and marketing team that serves as a strategic partner across the university.

The VP CMCO will oversee the strategic vision, structure, staffing, and operations of the Division of Marketing and Communications to ensure their efficiency and effectiveness, including attracting and developing talented professionals and cultivating a culture of inclusion, belonging, transparency, and respect.



As the leader of a division that proactively supports partners across the university—including communications and marketing professionals embedded in schools and units—the VP CMCO sets the tone and strategy for internal and external communications across campus. They must be a collegial, decisive, and compelling leader who can persuade, communicate, and collaborate, receiving feedback and surfacing ideas from a variety of stakeholders. The VP CMCO will balance the need for a cohesive strategy and standards of communication with the flexibility to empower experts across campus to communicate important messages in a timely manner and celebrate the great work being done at WPI. It will be critical to develop strong, collaborative, and mutually supportive partnerships with academic affairs, admissions, advancement, student affairs, and athletics, identifying and building consensus about areas of strategic focus and ensuring that they can communicate with their audiences across all media in engaging and consistent ways. They will also support internal communications, particularly to convey a consistent brand message to the campus community and to grow campus understanding of the role and impact of the Marketing and Communications Division.



Support undergraduate and graduate student recruitment.

WPI has a well-deserved reputation for educational innovation and excellence that drives strong student demand at the undergraduate and graduate level. But with demographic changes creating a shrinking and changing pool of prospective students in an already competitive higher ed landscape, the ability to differentiate and amplify WPI's message more broadly and powerfully is critical. In particular, they will partner closely with admissions and enrollment management and leadership from each school to bring greater awareness of WPI to undersaturated markets, especially outside of the Northeast. The VP will guide the development of creative and tailored marketing efforts to identify and recruit undergraduate and graduate students to WPI in alignment with a targeted strategy for enrollment at the unit and university levels.

Develop and implement a strategic, comprehensive vision for marketing and communications.

The VP CMCO will work with leadership across the university and within the division to develop modern, data-driven marketing strategies that enhance national and global awareness of WPI. These efforts will include national media relations, promotion of research, positioning faculty as subject experts, and maintaining a robust online news and information presence. They will ensure strong and clearly articulated crisis communications plans that can be immediately accessed, deployed, and sustained as situations require. They will be finely attuned to anticipating and managing challenging and sensitive issues that may emerge.

The VP CMCO will bring experience and innovative ideas to elevate brand awareness through earned media and other impactful marketing strategies. To ensure success in this area, the VP CMCO must know how to lead change, generate buy-in, and respond with care to a complex array of constituent needs.



Serve as a key member of the President's leadership team, providing sound and impactful guidance on all communications and marketing matters.

Partnering with the President in her role as chief spokesperson for the university, the VP CMCO will serve as the President's leading advisor on matters related to the university's reputation, presidential visibility, and crisis communications. They will support the President through clear, concise, and timely

communications while thinking critically to anticipate the information needs of a wide variety of audiences.

The VP CMCO will guide and support other senior leaders across the university, ensuring all communications are clear and aligned. They will place special emphasis on working with deans of the schools to recognize and promote the mission and success of each in ways that are consistent with and reinforce the mission and success of the university as a whole.

Enhance internal communications to increase community cohesion.

Marketing and Communications currently has a variety of ways to communicate with the campus community, including an app with 8,000 users, a daily employee newsletter, 50 digital screens across campus, and have even started creating vertical ads on the university website, but still experiences challenges in effectively conveying content and messaging to internal campus constituencies. The next VP CMCO must be a forward-thinking communicator who embraces new ideas and new technologies to reach a variety of audiences to convey important information and produce ambassadors with a clear understanding of the university's communications and marketing goals.



QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The VP CMCO must have excellent marketing strategy skills, strong knowledge of communications, and the ability to lead a large and diverse team within a complex organization. The successful candidate will have a demonstrated knowledge of the higher education landscape and academic culture and a record of high-quality and effective strategic leadership in marketing and communications. They will possess the highest personal and professional integrity. In addition, the following characteristics are critical:

- Experience in leadership positions in marketing or communications that demonstrate the highest domain expertise;
- Success in leading transformative change with demonstrated ability to inspire others to move from the current to the desired vision state with clear demonstration of results;
- Demonstrated ability to strengthen cross-organizational marketing and communications impact with the development of clear metrics aligned across the executive team;
- Demonstrated ability to proactively develop strategic communications plans and presentations that align with leadership's priorities and style;
- Demonstrated ability to develop reasonable priorities that are aligned and serve the key strategic goals of the institution, and leverage available resources effectively;
- Demonstrated leadership and expertise of crisis communications and issues management, which have implications on an institution's strategy, direction, and reputation;
- Demonstrated ability to communicate clearly and compellingly, orally and in writing;
- Ability to cultivate and enhance meaningful relationships with a broad range of audiences and stakeholders, including internal clients and external partners, the media, and other key influencers locally, nationally, and internationally;
- Demonstrated ability to establish a strong brand presence leveraging multiple marketing and communications channels, including leading-edge channels and tactics, creatively and proactively to achieve positive results within budgets;
- Success leading, directing, and developing teams to deliver world-class results while maintaining a high level of employee engagement and growth;
- Demonstrated success with the cost-effective implementation of contemporary systems, processes, and marketing technology tools that enhance departmental ability to deliver the highest quality client service, create team efficiency, and drive proactive response and impact;
- Approachability as a leader with high energy and motivation to excel in a fast-paced environment and the ability to partner with important constituents across the university;
- Budgetary expertise and experience; ability to allocate financial and human resources and prioritize resources in alignment with long-term institutional goals;
- A bachelor's degree in marketing, communication, journalism, business, or a related field; an advanced degree or commensurate experience preferred;
- Proven record of ensuring follow-through to actions, delegating authority when appropriate, and managing confidential matters effectively; and

- An effective and wise blending of patience, persistence, compassion, and urgency.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications (including resumes and two- to three-page letters of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search:

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/worcester-polytechnic-institute/vice-president-marketing-and-communications>

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WPI is an Equal Opportunity Employer that actively seeks to increase the diversity of its workplace. All qualified candidates will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, veteran status, or disability. It seeks individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences who will contribute to a culture of creativity, collaboration, inclusion, problem-solving, innovation, high performance, and change-making. It is committed to maintaining a campus environment free of harassment and discrimination.

