Dr. Terri Camesano, Professor, Chemical Engineering
2012 Coleman Fellow

For someone who professes not to be all that entrepreneurial, Terri Camesano seems to be doing a pretty good job at becoming one. A professor of chemical engineering researching bacterial adhesion antimicrobials, she had a hunch that her work and the research being done in her graduate program might have commercialization potential, so she thought it would be a good idea to introduce her students to the concepts of entrepreneurship.

“My background is a little different than some of the other Fellows,” said Camesano. “I don't have my own company and I am not an active entrepreneur on my own, but I wanted to learn about it.”

At the urging of WPI's Paul R. Beswick Professor of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Frank Hoy, who also runs the Coleman Fellowship Program on campus, Camesano became a Coleman Fellow and used the program's resources to help introduce an entrepreneurial component into a new graduate training program she was helping develop. The timing couldn't have been better -- her program had recently received a $3 million grant from the National Science Foundation to fund 25 PhD students in biomedical engineering as well as other engineering and science disciplines and Camesano was eager to use her Coleman program experiences to augment her graduate program teaching.

“All the students in our program are pursuing a PhD in some engineering discipline and there is normally no room to take courses in the business school or take the specialized courses that would teach them about entrepreneurship,” added Camesano. “At the same time, we knew there was a big demand for it -- a lot of them are entrepreneurial and go on to start their own companies. Even if they go into an established company, they need entrepreneurial skills and an entrepreneurial mindset to be competitive.”

Working closely with the WPI School of Business, Camesano and her colleagues are developing a comprehensive program designed to immerse her PhD students in the entrepreneurial world. “When the new graduate students started in August, we put them through a one-week boot camp, introducing them to creativity and innovation, preparing them for an introduction to entrepreneurship,” stated Camesano. “Then starting next summer our students will be doing either an internship or getting involved in an international experience that will allow them to directly apply what they are learning.”

All this entrepreneurial talk is starting to rub off on Dr. Camesano. Working with one of her students in the new graduate training program, she’s hoping that some of the research they’re conducting may have some commercial possibilities. “If we can optimize this one procedure that we’re working on now we’re thinking it could be used as an anti-microbial coating and there might be a business opportunity around that,” she said.