To say that Jennifer deWinter has wide-ranging personal interests and academic pursuits would be an understatement. The assistant professor of rhetoric and co-director of the professional writing program has a BA degree in Japanese language, culture and art; two MA degrees and a PhD in rhetoric, composition, technical writing, and teaching English; and research interests in computer game theory and development.

“It's a little schizophrenic, I have to say,” jokes deWinter.

However, deWinter's innate curiosity and "lack of disciplinary identity", as she calls it, have served her well as a Coleman Fellow. Noticing that many WPI students studying game development graduate with the skills to join an existing software company, but often lack the business acumen and know-how to start their own companies, deWinter began the processing of instituting an incubator with the intention of identifying strong Major Qualifying Projects (MQPs) and helping those students bring them to market, backed by WPI's in-depth resources. Her entrepreneurial activities came to the attention of WPI’s Director of Interactive Media & Game Development Mark Claypool, who recommended deWinter as a Coleman Fellow to Professor Frank Hoy, WPI’s Paul Beswick Professor of Entrepreneurship, Director of the Collaborative for Entrepreneurship & Innovation, and Coleman Fellows program manager at WPI.

A former entrepreneur and small business owner herself, deWinter believes that entrepreneurship holds a particular attraction to students and the young in general. “They’re full of energy and their lives are still spread out ahead of them as a series of possibilities,” she says.

While many entrepreneurs feel compelled to use the words “passion” and “innovation” whenever possible, deWinter’s approach to entrepreneurship takes a different tack. Two words she uses frequently instead are “practical” and “analysis”.

“Bringing entrepreneurship to our students involves taking their passion and grounding it in market analysis and analytically-based opportunity,” says deWinter. “It involves coming up with systematic plans to ensure that what you’re launching is practical, can lead to a sustainable model, and can pay your health insurance. Entrepreneurship is market-driven. It’s not simply about following your passion, it’s being interested in doing something with your skills based on market needs. I don’t think you always need innovation in terms of inventing something new – I think you need innovative ways to adapt things for entrepreneurship. It's more often about small adaptations that lead to new ways to use things.”

Even if her students don’t become entrepreneurs, deWinter sees value and practicality in instilling an entrepreneurial mindset. “To give someone an entrepreneurial mindset means that you’re giving them a set of analytical tools and a way of understanding the world that, no matter what, they can bring to any design or business situation.”

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