It was 1966, a time of turmoil and social upheaval. Across the Pacific in Southeast Asia, a bloody war dragged on, while back home demonstrators staged ever larger protest rallies, boycotts and moratoriums. Around the nation, a new generation was awakening to the realities of poverty, sexual inequality and environmental degradation. It was an age of transition, experimentation and excitement—a time when anything might be possible.

For Professor William Grogan '46, all of that seemed a million miles away. WPI, where he had earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering (the former under the U.S. Navy's wartime V-12 officer training program) and to which he had devoted the last two decades of his life, was stuck in neutral. While change swirled all around it, the Institute on Boynton Hill seemed firmly anchored to the past. Grogan had had enough.

It was time to get out—to jump ship while the ship was still afloat. "I was a month away from leaving WPI and taking a post with the Navy Department in Washington," he says. "From my perspective, WPI was dead in the water. There was simply no reason to stick around."

Fortunately for Grogan and for WPI, his dissatisfaction was shared by a fellow military officer, retired Army Lieut. General Harry P. Storke. A 1926 West Point graduate, a veteran of World War II and the Korean War, and the recently retired commander of NATO's land forces in southern Europe, Storke had become WPI's 10th president in 1962. He quickly sensed the stagnation that had taken hold of the Institute and decided—for WPI's own good, and perhaps for its very survival—he had to try to shake it out of its decades-long slumber.

It would take nearly 10 years to bring that goal to fruition. In that time, "Worcester Tech" would be turned inside out, becoming an educational institution unlike any other in the country. The roles of students and faculty members would completely change, as a traditional, rigid engineering school became a model of flexibility and innovation, one that still serves as a beacon to other educators.

Before it was over, Harry Storke would retire and WPI would inaugurate its 11th president. Many longtime faculty members would depart—disgruntled or disheartened over what their beloved school had become. But Bill Grogan would remain. Tipped by Storke to begin the process of loosening up the curriculum, he would find a new reason to believe in his alma mater. He would go on to help create the spark that ignited a powder keg of change. And having turned WPI upside down, he would spend the better part of his academic career harnessing and channeling the force of that blast into a workable and effective educational program—a program that would become known as the WPI Plan.

"What we've got here is a failure to communicate."
—From Cool Hand Luke, 1967

As one looks back from the perspective of the 1990s, it is hard to imagine how different a place WPI was in the 1960s. For students, the college bore an uncomfortably close resemblance to the high schools they thought they had left behind. WPI seemed reluctant to believe that students could make decisions for themselves, so it gave them few to make. In a typical four-year curriculum, most undergraduates had only two electives. Class attendance was mandatory. Saturday mornings were spent in classes, or in drills for ROTC, which was required of all students. Women guests (there were not yet female students at WPI) were prohibited from residence hall rooms without supervision.

For the faculty, WPI was a warm and supportive community, a small college where everyone knew everyone else and everyone's problems. It was a place where the faculty harbored intense feelings of loyalty and concern for the school where many had earned their academic degrees. And though there was no tenure system, there was an unspoken guarantee of job security.

The Story of the WPI Plan, Part I. By Michael W. Dorsey

More than 25 years ago, something quite remarkable happened on Boynton Hill. With a single vote of the faculty, WPI became a completely different kind of institution. The creation of the WPI Plan was the single most important event in WPI's recent history. This is the story of how, in the words of the Plan's founders, a good college became an excellent one.
But WPI was also a place where the power over virtually everything—including the curriculum—resided in the hands of a very few senior administrators and department heads. There was no faculty governance system. The agenda for the (quite rare) faculty meetings was drawn up by the Executive Committee of the faculty—the heads of the academic departments—and consisted largely of announcements of decisions that had already been made behind closed doors.

It was within this structure that President Storke set out to create change. In late 1963, he outlined a 10-year plan for WPI that encompassed major campus improvements (including a new field house and a modern library) that he and the trustees believed were needed to move the college forward. The plan became the basis for the Centennial Fund, a $1 million capital campaign that culminated in 1965, WPI's centennial year. "The next two years or three years will help shape Tech's destiny for many years," he said in a Nov. 2, 1963, address to alumni. "It will provide each of us with an opportunity to participate in a program that will give to our heirs the kind of institution we inherited from our predecessors and to the generations of future students the kind of education needed for tomorrow's world."

He called on the department heads to help define that new kind of education, but they resisted. That December, Storke and Dean Lawrence "Cookie" Price asked the department heads to join them for a retreat at a hotel in nearby Bigelow's Tavern—"to talk about education and their (at least for WPI) radical notions about teaching and learning." In time, this group, which eventually included Owen Kennedy '44, Romeo Moruzzi, Harit Majmudar, William Eggimann, Donald Enstein '48 and George Stull '48, welcomed fellow travelers from other departments, including Boyd, Charles Heventhal, a professor of English who arrived in 1963, and Stephen Weininger, a chemistry professor who came on board in 1965.

Storke also chaired a study committee in the Electrical Engineering Department that in the spring of 1966 presented a revised and somewhat liberalized electrical engineering curriculum to the faculty Executive Committee. The report, which was approved, generated some discussion at a faculty meeting, something that had never happened before.

Despite this step forward, Storke saw little prospect for campuswide change. But later that year Storke decided to appoint a faculty-based Curriculum Study Committee to accomplish what the department heads refused to do. Catching Storke on the verge of resigning, Starke asked him to chair it.

"You're either part of the solution or part of the problem."—Eldridge Cleaver, 1968

She asked each department head to submit a list of three department faculty, from which he would choose one member to be on the new committee. From the lists he received, Storke selected Leighton Wolfman, a 16-year veteran of the Mechanical Engineering Department, later Swischel, a recent addition to the Chemical Engineering Department, and Jan van Alstyne, who had been at WPI for 20 years, Robert Fitzgerald '53, a new professor of civil engineering, Nicholas Orosuto, professor of economics, and John van Alstyne, who'd been teaching mathematics at WPI since 1961.

As chair, Grogan made regular reports to the department heads on the committee's ideas. "It was like running into a room full of feathers," he said. "They never got upset about our ideas, but they gave us no encouragement, either." The following February, the committee presented its initial recommendations to the Executive Committee, which reluctantly brought them to the faculty.

The committee wanted to revamp the freshman and sophomore curriculum by offering (unadulterated) elective courses in the freshman year, making mathematics a degree program and introducing an optional program in English, history and humanities and technology. They also recommended the establishment of a new Computer Science Department. The proposals were ultimately approved, but not before a hard-fought battle over whether to make freshman graphics optional.

"Six hours of drawing in India ink was required of every single student, no matter what his major," Grogan says. "The Mechanical Engineering Department, which employed a large cadre of drawing instructors and which clung to the belief that drawing was a basic requirement of engineering education, bitterly opposed eliminating this requirement. In the end, the recommendation passed by a margin of only four votes. After that vote, the olive was out of the neck of the bottle. If we could make that seemingly minor change in freshman year programming (but one with enormous philosophical implications), anything seemed possible. The stage was set for even greater change."
The order is / Rapidly fading / And the first one now / Will later be last / For the times they are a-changin'.

—Bob Dylan, 1963

A t the end of the decade neared, change was in the air at WPI. In October 1967, the trustees approved part-time hours in the residence halls for undergraduates. In short order, mandatory ROTC and Saturday classes were studied, debated and eliminated. It seemed things were a-changin'.

Storke telephoned Shipman's office. "I'm here," Storke said when Shipman answered, "and I want to be there. Are you going to be there?" He walked over and told Shipman he had decided to appoint a faculty planning committee and he wished Shipman to serve on it. He said he wanted Storke to serve, as well, but this plan was free to choose the rest of the members.

...
Hearing the news, "Storke was horrified," van Alstyne says. "Arms are not run in a democratic fashion. But he notes that the faculty was also becoming concerned over the dramatic—perhaps radical—twist the committee seemed to be charting. As a rule, few ran for election to the committee's six slots. Weinger, the dean of completing his textbook and of preparing his tenure file weighing heavily on his mind, chose not to serve again. When the votes were tallied, Shipman, van Alstyne, Hentzel and Boyd were re-elected, but Rosenthal was not.

In a bit of poetic justice, the last two slots would be filled by two electrical engineering professors: Grogan, who had chaired the curriculum committee that had ignited the drive toward change, and Mousavi, a member of the tenure committee that had unleashed the faculty governance system. As Grogan would later recall, as assistant director of admissions required that he step down.

"That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."

—Neil Armstrong, July 20, 1969

That summer, while Protestants and Catholics fought in the jungles of Vietnam, the "Chicago Eight" were tried in Judge Hoffman's courtroom, and "Belfast, children starved in the schools." Neil Armstrong, July 20, 1969

"The next time the committee heard from him after the final plan was submitted. He wrote us a letter in which he said he was surprised as he could have imagined. Storke hoped all along to make WPI worthy of being in the private sector-and to innovate."

"You can't always get what you want. But if you try sometimes, you just might find/You get what you need."—Mid-Jagger and Keith Richards, 1965

A press release from the publication of the first report, an all-caps Planning Day was held to get input from the entire community on the 12 options. Several trustees, most of the faculty and many students came and met in small groups to voice their opinions and, in some cases, vent their frustrations and express their elation that a tidal wave of change seemed to have been set in motion. To assure that everyone could attend, Storke declared that all classes would be canceled for the day. Nothing more could recall ever having happened at WPI.

The committee continued to get input from the community through an ambitious series of meetings with faculty, administrators and students. In the process, committee members dined in everyone, eating in fraternity houses. Their objective, Shipman says, was to be sure that anyone with a point to make or an idea to contribute would have a voice to hear, and that in the end, no matter what form the committee's final recommendation might take, everyone would be able to see it and understand it in the broadest sense. For Hentzel, this exhaustive procedure might be the greatest legacy of the Planning Committee. "When you read our reports, you will see that we were really talking about was process," he says. "This was just as important as the ideal vision for WPI. The process of planning was something WPI needed in a time of crisis. The committee needed a way of looking inward and the possibilities for what it might become, and it needed to know that it had the power to bring about change."
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NING COMMITTEE
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WPI's 11th president, arrived to hear about the
ning Committee that turned the tide with Haz­
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On July 19, as Apo ll o 11 astronauts Neil
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In the report, the y outlined a new struc­
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define a humanities and arts program that would

As an undergraduate, he must demonstrate that
he can learn and trans­late his learning into worthwhile action. He
must learn to teach himself how to do things that are needed to make
his actions socially sig­
nificant. A WPI educa­
tion should develop a strong degree of self­
confidence, an eager­ness to contribute to the community beyond oneself, and an intellec­
tual restlessness, a spur to continual learning.

As the summer wore on, Shipman felt
comfortable that the committee had accom­plished its objective and should commit it to
to the faculty.

On July 19, after dinner , everyone retired to the living
room of the inn for the presentation. The presi­
dent and academic dean seemed enthusiastic; in fact, both men would become strong ad­vocates for the Plan and critical forces to assure its

I arrived, the humanities program was quite limit­
ed and the department was really a service depart­ment. I felt as though these cases were really fail­

I really respected him for that .”

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"To dream the impossible dream, to
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Joe Darlin, from Man of La Mancha, 1969

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allowing closely on the heels of the third
report was a second all-campus Planning Day.
The committee also called for the
establishment of nine subcommittees,
made up of 74 faculty members and 90 students,
to explore various aspects of the proposed model.

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By some, the committee was criticized for over-representing the structure of the Institute's top-down organization, leaving in its place a faculty in awe of its newfound power. Although some of those who opposed the Plan felt that it was a personal attack on their colleagues, others became some of the Plan's greatest boosters, in their favor, the tension was still high as the faculty filled out their written ballots. When the secretary of the faculty, announced the tally: 97 in favor, 46 opposed and 3 abstaining. After the vote, the victors retired to Putnam and Thurston's for a real blow-out, a celebration party they'd never forget.

Some of those who opposed the Plan left WPI in the weeks and months that followed, working against the clock and with some of them became some of the Plan's greatest boosters, and others became some of its most adept practitioners. In the end, nobody was left unchanged by the educational earthquake called the WPI Plan. But, the man who designed WPI as still, strengthened from the experience, and in many ways a better institution than it had ever been. The earthquake only served to strengthen the core of the Institute's top-down organization, leaving in its place a faculty in awe of its newfound power. Romeo Moruzzi served as secretary of the faculty from 1983 until 1987, when he retired. He died in 1994. Bill Roadstrum, who retired in 1980, died in 1997.

Charles Heventhal became head of the English Department and spent several years building a humanities program and organizing the faculty around the idea of the Sufficiency—one that could provide students the exposure to the humanities and there was room for everybody. He retired in 1990 and lives in Vermont. Jack Boyd, who retired in 1994, divides his time between Worcester and Maine. He became one of the Plan's most passionate advocates and watchdogs, at one applying its principles to his own school, later converting them to the idea that changes that gradually seemed to steer the Plan away from those principles. Steve Weininger continues today as professor of chemistry. In recent years he has become actively involved as an advisor in WPI's Global Perspectives Program, through which students can complete their WPI Plan projects at sites around the world. Bill Shipman became dean of graduate studies. One of his first tasks was to head a committee that set out to revitalize the graduate program—create, in essence, a WPI Plan for graduate students. In the end, though, the Institute, perhaps still reeling from the dramatic change it had undergone, was unprepared to implement its suggestions. By the time the committee's report was released, Shipman had already decided to resign as head of the Education Department, where he continued his groundwork in making the Plan work in combustion. It now lives in Maine, out far from the cottage where Boyd spends his summers. Even before the Plan vote was taken, President Hazard asked Bill Grogan to become the first dean of undergraduate studies. In the process, he became WPI's first dean who had never been a department head. The man who describes himself as a "good amateur" and a "weak person" who was "never in a leadership position" at WPI, the eminent Harvard professor of social science who served on the NSF visiting committee that evaluated the Plan, called "the Harry Truman of education; its small, cohesive and supportive community, its unchallenged reputation and its financial situation, which while not unmissed, was certainly troubling—that made the Plan possible. It may well be true, as Seaborg believes, that it could not have happened at another institution, and, in fact, could not have happened at WPI.

much of the credit must go to the Planning Committee itself, an extraordinarily well-matched and formidable group of individuals. "We were a group of strong personalities, all a lot contric in our own ways," Boyd says, "but there were no hidden agendas, no competition for power—in a short time, we gained complete trust in one another, and I never knew why. We felt we had a mission, a cause and a process of fulfilling it we became more than the sum of our parts. It was the kind of committee activity you dream of, but which I never knew before and have never known since.

"We all cared very much about teaching, about our students and about education in general," van Alstyne says. "We were college faculty first, and department faculty second, and we had friends in all the departments. What's more, everything we proposed was based on something that could and should be done, and having all of us, with our different backgrounds and interests, find agreement gave us impetus to continue to the end." After the Plan was approved, the members of the committee moved on to other challenges. Roy Seaborg went on to become director of special admissions, helping expand WPI's repulsion around the world. He retired this year and was honored at Reunion for his service and devotion to WPI. Boyd, Heventhal, Moruzzi, Roadstrum, Alston and Weininger returned to their lives as teachers and scholars, earning distinction as both. Romeo Moruzzi served as secretary of the faculty from 1983 until 1987, when he retired. He died in 1993. Bill Roadstrum, who retired in 1980, died in 1997.

John van Alstyne became dean of academic advising in 1971 and spent more than a decade and a half making a profound difference in the lives of hundreds of WPI students. He retired in 1987 and lives in North Carolina.