The Inauguration of

Grace J. Wang, PhD

17th President
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Friday, March 22, 2024
President Grace J. Wang is an accomplished materials scientist and esteemed leader in higher education, government, and industry. Elected by the WPI Board of Trustees after an extensive national search, she began serving as the 17th president of WPI on April 3, 2023. Honoring our rich history and traditions, she will guide WPI toward the future by championing community and inspiring innovation.

President Wang has a deep background in empowering STEM leadership, education, and industry. Prior to WPI, she served at The Ohio State University (OSU) as executive vice president for research, innovation, and knowledge, and as a professor of materials science and engineering. Wang helped expand the university’s research and innovation ecosystem by supporting curiosity-driven research, attracting external funding for research centers, launching campus-wide entrepreneurial activities, and enabling experiential learning opportunities.

Before OSU, Wang held a series of leadership roles within the State University of New York (SUNY) System. As senior vice chancellor for research and economic development, she advanced the research enterprise’s growth strategy, significantly expanded research capacity in key areas, and was instrumental in fostering tentpole university-industry partnerships. During this time, she also served as SUNY System interim provost for one academic year and as SUNY Polytechnic interim president for two and a half years.

Earlier in her career, Wang held multiple positions at the National Science Foundation (NSF). She started as a program director, focusing on investing in small businesses in the areas of nanotechnology, advanced materials, and manufacturing. Then, she directed the Industrial Innovation and Partnerships division. Later, she served as acting assistant director for engineering, where she invested in research, education, and commercialization.

In 2022, 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; a member of the Board of Governors for the New York Academy of Sciences; and a member of the Board of Directors for the Massachusetts High Technology Council (MHTC).

Wang has a PhD in materials science and engineering from Northwestern University and holds seven US patents.
Congratulations, President Grace J. Wang, PhD

A visionary leader for a world-leading university

Johnson Controls recognizes the leadership of Worcester Polytechnic Institute at the forefront of STEM research and technology. Through collaboration and innovation, you’re shaping the future scientists, engineers, researchers and business leaders that the world needs right now.

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Many congratulations to President Wang on her role as leader of the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers and technology pioneers.

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Inaugural Ceremony

Seating
Medwin Honors String Quartet

Prelude
Led by Faculty Marshal
Art Heinricher, Interim Senior Vice President and Provost

Processional
WPI Brass Ensemble
Grand March From “Aida,” Guiseppe Verdi
“Where'er You Walk,” George Frideric Handel

Fanfare for the President
WPI Brass Ensemble
“Limitless,” Composed for the Inauguration by Robbie Oleynick ’24

National Anthem
WPI Festival Chorus

Invocation
Rev. Debora Jackson ’89 (MS), ’00 (ME)
Dean of WPI Business School

Opening Remarks
William Fitzgerald ’83, Presiding Officer and Chair of WPI Board of Trustees

Welcome From the MA Senator
Sen. Edward Markey

Welcome From the WPI Undergraduate Student Body
Gabriella Rios ’24, Biomedical Engineering

Welcome From the WPI Graduate Student Body
Jezabel Aleyda Aponte Figueroa ’24 (MS), Science and Technology for Innovation in Global Development

Welcome From the WPI Alumni Association
Pamela (Giasson) Lynch ’05, President of WPI Alumni Association

Welcome From the WPI Staff
Rev. Kalvin Cummings, Assistant Director of Religion and Spiritual Life

Welcome From the WPI Faculty
Mark Richman, Associate Professor of Aerospace Engineering; Secretary of WPI Faculty

Welcome From the City of Worcester
Joseph M. Petty
Mayor

Remarks
Terrence Sejnowski, PhD
Francis Crick Chair, The Salk Institute for Biological Studies

Investiture
William Fitzgerald; Mark Richman; George Heineman, Associate Professor of Computer Science, Chair of WPI Faculty Committee on Governance

Inaugural Address
President Grace J. Wang, PhD

Conferring of Presidential Medals
President Grace J. Wang, PhD

Closing Remarks
Art Heinricher

Recessional
WPI Brass Ensemble
“Trumpet Voluntary,” Jeremiah Clarke
“Bugler's Holiday,” Leroy Anderson

Postlude
WPI Marching and Pep Band will line the walking path to the reception on the third floor of Rubin Campus Center
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Academic Costumes and Degrees

The tradition of academic attire stems from medieval European universities, where gowns served as everyday attire. Beyond distinction, they likely provided warmth during extended study hours in unheated buildings. Today, on American campuses, academic attire graces formal occasions like commencements, Founder’s Day celebrations, dedications, and inaugural ceremonies.

An established Academic Costume Code, adopted by most universities since 1895, facilitates the identification of a wearer’s degree, awarding university, and field of study. Key distinguishing features include the cut of the gown, length and color of hood, and color of tassel.

Gowns signifying bachelor’s and master’s degrees are typically plain black cotton, lacking adornment. The bachelor’s gown has long, open sleeves, while the master’s has longer, closed sleeves with elbow slits. The doctoral gown has black or colored velvet facings and three matching bars on the sleeves, which are bell-shaped and extend to the wrist.

Hoods are made distinct by their length and color. A bachelor’s hood measures 3 feet long; a master’s, 3.5 feet; and a PhD’s, 4 feet. The color of the hood’s velvet trim, wider for degrees above bachelor’s, corresponds with the subject area. Doctoral hoods are the exception, as they are typically dark blue regardless of subject. The hood’s lining displays the official colors of the awarding institution.

A black mortarboard cap with a tassel accompanies each gown type. Bachelor’s and master’s degree recipients traditionally wear black tassels, while doctoral graduates wear gold tassels. However, in recent years, it has become customary to adopt colored tassels reflecting the graduate’s field of study.

Variations to traditional costumes are occasionally seen. For instance, certain academic processions may feature attire deviating from the standard. Academic administrators often wear gowns that incorporate a gold braid. Faculty members who hold degrees from foreign universities may follow distinct attire requirements.
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1780
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1787
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1793
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Warner Fletcher

1815
Nichols College
William Pieczynski

1829
Rochester Institute of Technology
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1843
College of the Holy Cross
Vincent Rougeau

1851
Northwestern University
Robert Creamer

1852
Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University
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1898
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1946
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1959
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Happy Inauguration Day!

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Dennis D. Berkey 2004-2013
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History of WPI

Worcester Polytechnic Institute is the nation’s third-oldest private technological university. Founded in 1865 amid the bustle of the American Industrial Revolution, the Institute took a unique approach to preparing the professional scientists and engineers who would make the discoveries, invent the technologies, and found the companies needed to drive the development of a young nation.

WPI’s distinctive approach to education began with a compromise that led to a breakthrough. John Boynton, a successful tinware manufacturer, wanted to start a college that would provide a scientific education to young people destined for emerging technical careers. Ichabod Washburn, who built the nation’s largest wire-making enterprise in Worcester, dreamed of starting a school to elevate the traditional apprenticeship system for mechanics and other technical tradespeople.

Theory and Practice

By blending these visions, WPI created a new approach to higher education unlike any that had come before—one that combined theory with practice.

This groundbreaking model took concrete form in the university’s first two buildings. Under the clock tower of Boynton Hall, students learned the theory of engineering and science in classrooms and labs. Next door in the Washburn Shops, with its cupola topped by an arm-and-hammer weathervane, they applied that theory in a working manufacturing plant.

This Two Towers Tradition has guided the Institute for more than 150 years. It lives on today in the form of the half-century-old WPI Plan, the university’s groundbreaking undergraduate program.

Ever since, like-minded men and women have invested their ideas, their labor, and their fortunes in WPI, assuring that it could continue to prepare graduates with the knowledge, the practical skills, and the passion to change the world for the better.
Search Committee for the 17th President

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A trailblazer in neural networks and computational neuroscience, Terrence Sejnowski seeks to understand the principles linking brain and behavior. Using both experimental and modeling techniques, Sejnowski examines the biophysical properties of synapses and neurons, as well as the population dynamics of large networks of neurons. He has developed new analytical tools and computational models to uncover how the brain stores information for different activities and forms new representations of the world. Drawing from his extensive research, he has published over 300 scientific papers and 12 books, most notably *The Computational Brain*, with co-author Patricia Churchland, and *The Deep Learning Revolution*.

Sejnowski earned his PhD in physics from Princeton University in 1978 and completed his postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard Medical School in 1981. A former faculty member at Johns Hopkins University, he now holds the Francis Crick Chair at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. He is also a Distinguished Professor of Neurobiology at the University of California, San Diego, where he serves as co-director of the Institute for Neural Computation and co-director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Temporal Dynamics of Learning Center.

Sejnowski is the president of the Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) Foundation. He is also a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), and a former investigator with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. In addition, he serves as the founding editor-in-chief of *Neural Computation*, a monthly journal from MIT Press.

Throughout his career, Sejnowski has won several prestigious awards, including the Young Investigator Award from the NSF, the Wright Prize for interdisciplinary research from Harvey Mudd College, the Neural Networks Pioneer Award from the IEEE, and the Hebb Prize from the International Neural Network Society. He is one of only 10 living individuals elected to all three national academies: the Institute of Medicine, the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Academy of Engineering.
Since 2001, the Presidential Medal has honored outstanding individuals from all backgrounds and disciplines who, through their professional or personal accomplishments, embody the “technological humanist,” an ideal that has been at the heart of WPI’s approach to education since its founding in 1865.

Keep reading to learn about the two individuals selected by President Wang to be her first medalists.
After earning a BS in civil engineering at WPI, Judith Nitsch spent the next 45+ years in the field, becoming a registered professional engineer in 27 states and a LEED Accredited Professional. As a civil engineer, she has focused on designing, permitting, and managing projects related to site development and infrastructure.

In 1989, she established Nitsch Engineering, Inc. Today, the firm comprises 125 people with three offices in Massachusetts and one in Washington, D.C. Much of the firm’s civil engineering work specializes in designing and consulting for the sustainable aspects of green building projects.

Also in 1989, Nitsch became the first alumna elected to WPI’s Board of Trustees, where she served for 23 years, including 16 years as chair of the Facilities and Campus Infrastructure Committee. During this time, she oversaw the development and construction of multiple LEED-certified buildings on campus.

She received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy in 2010 and an honorary Doctor of Engineering from WPI in 2015.

Nitsch is a fellow of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC), Society of Women Engineers (SWE), and Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS). She has served as president of several organizations, including the national CREW (Commercial Real Estate Women) Network, ACEC of Massachusetts, Boston Society of Civil Engineers Section (an ASCE chapter), and SWE Boston. Currently, she’s chair of the Board of Trustees at The Boston Architectural College, her late husband’s alma mater.
Diran Apelian is a Distinguished Professor of Materials Science and Engineering and director of the Advanced Casting Research Center at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). There, he serves as a senior advisor to the dean of engineering. He is also provost emeritus and founding director of the Metal Processing Institute at WPI. Apelian received his BS in metallurgical engineering from Drexel University in 1968 and his ScD in materials science and engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1972.

He is recognized for pioneering work in solidification processing, metal processing, powder metallurgy, and digital manufacturing. Founding editor of the *Journal of Sustainable Metallurgy*, he has significantly contributed to the establishment of research in resource recovery, reuse, and recycling. During his tenure as WPI’s provost from 1990 to 1996, he was instrumental in establishing the Metal Processing Institute, which has become one of the largest industry-university consortia in North America.

With over 700 publications and 22 patents to his name, Apelian serves on several technical, corporate, and editorial boards. He has partnered with colleagues, including former students and WPI alumni, to co-found widely known companies like Materials Strategies, Ascend Elements, Melt Cognition, and Solvus Global, among others.

Throughout his career, Apelian has received many distinguished honors and awards, both national and international. He was recognized as WPI Innovator of the Year in 2018 and received the same honor from UCI in 2020.

In addition to being a researcher, innovator, and entrepreneur, he has also been an active leader of multiple professional organizations, serving as president of The Minerals, Metals & Materials Society (TMS) in 2008–2009 and as chair of the ASM Educational Foundation Board of Trustees in 2016–2018. He is a fellow of TMS, ASM, and APMI International, as well as a member of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE), National Academy of Inventors (NAI), European Academy of Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Armenian Academy of Sciences.
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Celebratory Video

Composed by Professor David Ibbett  
Humanities & Arts

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ROTC Color Guard

Quinn Mullaney ’27  
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Medwin Honors String Quartet

Matthew Scinto  
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WPI Festival Chorus

Joshua W. Rohde  
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Douglas Blinn ’26

Ricardo Croes-Ball ’26  
Nic Culkin ’24

Vivek Voleti ’25  
Erik Breiling ’25

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Emma DeMartino ’25  
Maxwell Brown ’26

Haley Day ’27

Grace Audette ’25  
Nicole Calandra ’25

Ryan Dieselman  
*Graduate Student*

Anna Balin ’25  
Riley Chin ’27

Joe Dumas ’26

Adam Bartlett  
*Graduate Student*

Grace Connell ’27  
Caleb Cotoia ’26

Gavin Elwell ’27

Joey Berthiaume ’25  
Grace Connell ’27

Carys Evans ’27
WPI Festival Chorus (continued)

Abigayle Fadgen ’27
Ryan Fish ’27
Brian Fried ’27
Tyler Garofalo ’27
Emily Gjergo ’25
Hayden Glass ’27
Jonathan Golden ’24
Sophia Gross ’26
Natalie Hannoush ’27
Mele Hooper ’27
Chima Ibebunjo ’25
Matt Jauchler ’27
Liany Kasten ’27
Mia Katz ’25
Ellie Kim ’26
Tom Kohen ’26
Yonatan Konstantine ’26
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Mukundan Srivasta ’26
Annika Swanson ’27
Natalie Sysko ’27
Gabrielle Van Kammen ’25
Prior Waskan ’26
Brody Watson ’27
Jay Weil ’26
Ilana Whittaker ’24
Aria Yan ’24
April Zingher ’27
WPI Brass Ensemble

Robbie Oleynick  
Trumpet

Nathanial Rubin  
Trumpet

Christian Rua  
Trumpet

Kyle Schmottlach  
Trumpet

Tommy Kneeland  
Horn

Heath Bastow  
Horn

Connor Ehrensperger  
Trombone

Ethan Lockhardt  
Trombone

Jack Ostrander  
Trombone

Matthew Resmini  
Euphonium

Nicholas Culkin  
Tuba

Anthony Berry  
Tuba

Jonathan Martin  
Percussion

Keith Mesecher  
Timpani

Rubik’s Cube Mosaic by the 2023–24 WPI Rubik’s Cube Club

Madison Brown ’24  
Jeffrey Li ’26  
Sequoia Truong ’24

Daniel Cappuccino ’26  
Joshua Meesarapu ’27  
Krish Shah-Nathwani ’24

Harshith Iyer ’25  
Sofia Murphy ’27  
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Nathan Nguyen ’27

Tim Kwartler ’25  
Damon Ren ’27
LEGO Club Podium Piece

Andrew Gattineri ’26  Patrick Nieman ’23  Andrew Salls ’24

Built by: Members of the 2023–24 LEGO Club

Special Thanks

Justin Amevor  
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Arthur Carlson  
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