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GPS sowing seeds of the future

Taking your communication to the next level

Katie Picchione
 Article Contributor

Dear Incoming Freshmen,

Throughout the college application process, information sessions, word of mouth, Facebook, course registration, and now New Student Orientation, you have heard much about the Great Problems Seminars (GPS). These project-based classes give first-year students the opportunity to gain teamwork experience and solve real-world problems related to water, food, energy, sustainability and other timely issues.

As a freshman, you may be asking yourself, "Why should I take a Great Problems Seminar?" Many past GPS students (and some who were not in a GPS) will tell you that the class is challenging, hard work and time consuming. Some will say the class is not worth it. I am not writing this article to dispute those claims, dear freshmen, but rather to broaden your perspective. I took Power the World a year and a half ago, and as a rising junior, I have already seen the positive impacts that class has had on my life. I have had opportunities to explore subject areas that I was previously unaware of, learn about new technologies and network with field-experts, professors and other groups around Worcester and beyond.

Allow me to digress for a moment to congratulate and welcome you to WPI. Being accepted to this institution means that you are a good student, have some area of technical or scientific enthusiasm/experience and are highly intelligent. You were probably towards the top of your class in high school and excelled in various academic and extracurricular areas.

WPI will encourage you to continue to engage in myriad academic, personal and professional development opportunities.

Yes, WPI will be hard work. This school will challenge you to grow. You will spend countless nights devoting your time, energy and passion to doing projects and solving problems. In my experience, most students at WPI are eager to be challenged and embrace every chance to passionately put their hard-learned and widely varied skills to work. If you are like me, you chose to come to WPI because you know that you will leave this university with experience and skills to thrive in the "real world" and be successful throughout life, both personally and professionally.

Great Problems Seminars sow the seeds of these skills early in your academic career. These revolutionary classes give you the opportunity to build upon their knowledge and problem-solving skills to solve real issues and make an impact from the first day. In a GPS, you will gain experience in researching,

writing and presenting (both posters and PowerPoints). You will get constant feedback from peers and professors on ways to improve. You will learn to work on a team—an activity that may be trying and tiring at first. Like riding a bike, working on a team becomes easier with practice. Regardless of what field you go into, it is almost certain that you will be working on teams, writing, presenting, communicating ideas effectively and engineering solutions to problems throughout college, careers and other life-long pursuits.

From experience, I can tell you that it is not always easy to learn where your weaknesses lie and then strengthen yourself in those areas. However, I encourage each of you to consider taking a Great Problems Seminar. Many students revisit their GPS projects in IQPs and MQPs, carrying that passion throughout their work at WPI. The interdisciplinary approach can broaden one's mind to think about different sides of the same issue and discover new, unheard-of solutions. What mark will you make on WPI? What mark will you make on the world? It might start by embracing solutions to these great problems.

Sincerely,

Katie Picchione

I have been orientated

A new student's perspective on NSO

Lucas Zuccolo
 Towers Staff

Classes started on Monday. I mean Thursday. I mean – that's confusing. August 28. That's what I mean. Yeah.

But before that, the WPI campus was already abuzz with activity. Sports, music, connections – several groups were already on campus. By far the largest group was the Class of 2018 that underwent the NSO ordeal the four days prior.

Actually, there was a thing before that – move-in day on Sunday morning. Though I personally was moved in already, praise for the help of Greek upperclassmen was universal. That was awesome, guys. Super brownie points for you all.

The NSO activities picked up that afternoon, with the Welcome Assembly. President Leshin and SGA President Alex Hyman were the first to officially welcome us to WPI, but far from the last. Seriously. Pretty much every single person who talked to us during NSO said welcome, which was a lot of people. Next up was a welcome BBQ – the food wasn't super special, but my older brother had already taught me the first rule of college: free food is free food. At night we met our RAs, CAs, FAs... yeah, yeah, you guys are really fond of acronyms, I guess. My insight team spent an hour coming up with a name and chant – evidently not enough, as we failed to get so much as an honorable mention at the chant competition – but more on that later. And then on to our first SocComm event (of many yet to come, I should hope).

Monday featured our first breakfast at DAKA. No, not PoD; fight the system! Stick it to the man! Plus, all the upperclassmen call it DAKA, and well, they're upperclassmen. For some, there were placement exams, not fond of exams at 8 a.m. on my first day, but the opportunity to skip a chem class? Deal me in.

The next event more than made up for it, though: Orientation Olympics. My oh my. I'll admit, I still have no idea how the scoring system worked, and our team completely forgot to sign up for events beforehand, but between sprinting in flippers, navigating an inflatable obstacle course and throwing a rubber chicken, I had way too much fun to really care about winning.

Following lunch, we had a series of aptly named "You'll Be Glad To Know" sessions. Using the tried and tested jigsaw system which high school familiarized me with, we each went to three of the nine sessions, and reconvened to share tips in matters as varied as groupwork, studying and networking. I have no idea what happened to the whole "best list gets a pizza party" thing (I'm starting to think it might have been a trick), but the tips were useful regardless. The night was for chilling, which was good, because the next morning, we'd be sitting in the auditorium for two and a half hours straight.

Now, the presentations on Humanities and Arts, Mathematics, and Global Perspective Programs was a lot to take in at once, in a crowded, hot, musty auditorium on a Tuesday morning, so our CAs broke it up with the Chant.

Competition and an impromptu dance party. The dancing was okay (though I was already starting to grow tired of "I'm Ready"), but the Chant Competition irked me greatly. We had CLEARLY been told that we would have the floor as a stage to present our chant; my team planned our entrance, our choreography, our presentation. But on the spot, it was declared that we would have to remain in our places while presenting; our showmanship ruined, only the groups with catchy lyrics succeeded. That was rigged, bro. Fool me once and all that.

The afternoon featured another insight team meeting (many funny videos we watched that day), introduction to GPS courses for people taking them, and the Bystander Intervention Training program. Now, let me be the first to say that, in an all-guy group, that program was extremely awkward. But it's an important issue, and I appreciate WPI's involvement in it.

After dinner, the scavenger hunt commenced. What started as a mad rush to solve clues and answer riddles quickly died down into a leisurely stroll with bouts of Googling. But while the fun facts about WPI's history might not have sunk in, getting a better feel for the layout of the campus was a success. Curtis Zimmerman's presentation was both entertaining and inspiring, though it did reveal my utter inability to play Simon Says or juggle. Curse you, unwieldy hands.

The night was once again for relaxing, though by this point I was already growing tired, and went to bed at a meager 1 a.m.

Wednesday accommodated a wide variety of sessions – Greek life, music opportunities, community service, pre-health, you name it. But the real fun started at 3:00 p.m.: the activities fair. The Quad was inundated with a jaw-dropping amount of clubs, activities and organizations on campus. I spent an hour and a half roaming around, signing up for things, and gathering free stuff. Second rule of college, bro. Luckily, I kept the sage advice of my CA in mind and signed up for only four different things; already burdened by dozens of e-mails daily, I shudder to think what came of those who went on sign-up sprees.

Ah, but the best was yet to come. The grand finale of NSO, the pièce de résistance our CAs' had so diligently been working late hours on during the last week and a half – "Can We Talk?" Now, my CA had made it clear that the performance was popular enough that it warranted arriving half an hour earlier to snag a good seat. And I thought I was being conservative by arriving a full hour before the start time. And yet, Alden Hall was already more than half full by that time. Luckily, when the torrential downpour started, the powers that be had mercy on our souls and opened the doors so we could seek shelter. We jammed out to some tunes until the performance started, at which point... well, I was blown away. Seriously, words don't do justice to the comedic gold that filled the following hour and a half. The laughter was so uproarious that at one point, one of the performers had to take a few seconds to recompose himself before continuing. If by some cruel twist of fate you were unable to watch, do try to find it online. It was streamed, so there is some hope.

And with the ceremonial crossing of Earle Bridge and our receiving of the (commemorative edition) beanie and tech bibles, we became an official part of the WPI community.

NSO was a ton of fun. I may have dreaded waking up at seven every day, or been heartbroken upon discovering the Lego event had been canceled, but ultimately, it was a great way to kickoff a new chapter of our lives. Here's to a fantastic four years.