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Welcome to the 1st edition of *[re]connect: WCPC in Action!*

An E-News update for alumni and friends of the Worcester Community Project Center: A Center for Community Empowerment and Environmental Responsibility

The Worcester Community Project Center (WCPC) continues to grow and we want to share our success with alumni, sponsors, and friends through a periodic e-news update. We have titled this e-newsletter [re]connect: WCPC in Action as we hope that it will connect sponsors and community members to the full breadth of projects and issues that students and the WCPC work on. We hope that this e-newsletter reconnects WCPC alumni and past sponsors with recent projects and with other engaged members of the greater Worcester community.

In recent years, WCPC has expanded in response to demand both on and off campus. In the Worcester community, word has spread about the high quality research WPI's WCPC students are conducting in partnership with community organizations and local government leaders. As a result, our slots for projects are filling up fast, often a year in advance.

In the last three years, we have welcomed 17 new sponsors to our network. We are delighted that we have been able to expand our collaboration to more corners of the City and are always seeking new ways to share the valuable research outcomes with the Worcester community.

The WCPC website, launched in 2012, has background information on student projects, links to final reports, and includes many informational videos highlighting research findings and the sponsoring organizations. We recently added a new section to our website called "Community Resources" where we feature student project deliverables that community organizations might find particularly useful. Some recent examples include: an energy reduction blueprint for the Worcester Green Low-Income Housing Coalition; an adaptive bicycle resource guide for children and adults with cognitive disabilities; and an assessment of unequal distributions of environmental hazards in five Worcester communities.

On campus we have seen an increase in the number of students choosing to complete their IQP with the Worcester Community Project Center. This increased demand for projects with the WCPC has challenged us to find ways to add new capacity to host more student projects. In 2014-15 we operated in three terms, serving 57 students and completing 15 projects. In the next year, we will further expand to four terms with a capacity of 96 students and 24 projects annually.

We have also added a new part-time Assistant Director to assist with community outreach, marketing, communications, site management, and other administrative functions. Welcome to Laura Roberts, WCPC Assistant Director. Prior to joining WPI, Laura worked in fundraising at various nonprofits in Boston including Year Up, a one-year, intensive training program which provides low-income young adults, ages 18-24, with a combination of hands-on skills development, college credits, and a corporate internship.

We are thrilled with the rapid growth of the WCPC and its increased capacity to assist more community organizations and connect a larger number of WPI students with the vibrant Worcester community just outside their door. We hope you enjoy the project updates in our inaugural e-newsletter and look forward to [re]connecting with you in future editions!



The Worcester Art Museum (WAM) sponsored two student projects this year including an Accessibility Assessment that identified potential areas for increasing the level of accessibility for those with physical impairments and for improving the visitor experience for all constituents and an Evaluation of their Renaissance [remastered] Gallery to determine how traditional versus "high-tech" galleries affect the visitor experience.

The Blackstone Canal District Alliance partnered with three student groups this year to conduct a cost and benefit analysis of different revitalization options for the Blackstone Canal, to analyze and determine the feasibility of ameliorating the Combined Sewer Overflow affecting the section of the Blackstone Canal running between Union Station and Kelley Square, and to create a short documentary film highlighting the past, present, and future significance of the Blackstone Canal.



The students who collaborated with Worcester Earn-a-Bike in Spring 2014, to prototype an adaptive bicycle for people with cognitive disabilities, were selected as finalists for the 2014 President's IQP Awards. The students designed a safe, comfortable, user-friendly, affordable, and upgradeable bicycle prototype that can be used by Earn-a-Bike patrons. They also produced a brochure to educate children and adults about adaptive bicycle options.

Dismas House of Massachusetts, a new sponsor, worked with WCPC student researchers on two projects this year. In Fall 2014, students developed an Energy Reduction Blueprint for the Worcester Green Low-Income Housing Coalition and in Winter 2015, students conducted a Micro-Wind Turbine Feasibility Study to determine the optimum site location with respect to wind speeds, environmental impact, and social influence.





Students collaborated with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the Central Massachusetts Regional Stormwater Coalition, to provide the towns of Millbury, Holden, and Southbridge, Massachusetts with a comprehensive analysis of their cost of compliance with the new 2014 MS4 permit. The project caught the attention of the 495/MetroWest Partnership's Water Resources Committee and WPI students Eric Correia, Cameron Peterson, and Michael Giroux presented their findings at the Partnership's March meeting.

Working with Seven Hills Foundation, students developed and implemented a low-tech assistive technology kit to assist clients with physical and cognitive disabilities. The students began by assessing baseline needs and possible solutions for the kit. Then they designed a prototype and conducted training sessions for staff and program participants. The project laid the groundwork for the low-tech assistive technology kit to be produced and distributed beyond the initial prototype.



The Worcester Community Project Center's faculty and student teams support 20+ Worcester area community organizations annually. During the academic year, students provide 35,000 hours researching a specific issue that is of interest to the project sponsor. In addition to ensuring WPI students have access to a high quality, low cost social science research (or IQP) opportunity, the WCPC is also dedicated to increasing our collaboration with and support of the vibrant Worcester community. If you are involved with a Worcester area community organization that is interested in collaborating with the WCPC we would love for you to introduce us. Additionally, if you are looking to provide an organization with philanthropic support, please consider making a donation to the WCPC. We use philanthropic support to sustain the work of the center and provide for its continued expansion.



WPI

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