



Joelis Velez Diaz '24

BS in Chemical Engineering

Why did you choose to study at WPI?

I visited WPI on December 6, 2019; it was a cold day, but the community made me feel like it was a warm summer day. It was a unique experience that evoked a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, which made me visualize myself being connected and integral to a greater puzzle. From that moment, I knew that WPI was the right fit for me and that I was the right fit for it. I also like that the university is research-based and provides opportunities for hands-on learning. As a senior at WPI, I can say that the same heartwarming community I perceived from day one has remained throughout my four years because the people of WPI embody a great spirit. WPI provided me with a high-quality education and network.

How are you involved with the WPI community?

WPI has many clubs and activities to enjoy and I am involved in a variety of them such as: Teacher Preparation Program, Omega Chi Epsilon Chemical Engineering Honor Society,



Hometown

Cidra, Puerto Rico

Mentor/Advisor

- [Michael Timko](#)
- [Alex Maag](#)
- [Stephen Kmiolek](#)
- [Laila Abu-Lail](#)
- [Kathy Chen](#)
- [Aarti Madan](#)
- [Angel Rivera](#)
- [Anna Gold](#)

Achievements

- NOYCE Scholar
- LSAMP Scholar
- Dean's List (5 semesters)

University Advancement Student Philanthropy Ambassadors (SPA), Society of Women Engineers (SWE), Art and Design Club, Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE), and Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanic and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS).

I chose these activities because they allowed me to connect with others of similar interests and/or backgrounds. Moreover, these groups gave me an opportunity to take on leadership roles, starting in my first year, and to serve the broader community. Through these groups, I forged new friendships and found the ideal balance between pursuing my passion/hobbies and professional development (hard and soft skills).

What's your favorite thing about WPI?

My favorite things about WPI are its people and spirit, as well as the space it provides to support others and share experiences in various ways. For example, the Global School hosted events focused on projects addressing complex global grand challenges. After the event "Reimagining Borders in Latin(x) America," where I spoke about my educational trajectory, a WPI librarian contacted me to exhibit my art I titled "Transcendental Nature" in the WPI Gordon Library. This exhibit included a series of landscapes from Puerto Rico and other works of art more related to deep aspects of the soul. It's like a timeline that traces my journey from leaving Puerto Rico to getting adapted to Massachusetts. It portrays my personal experience, identity, and culture – my soul per say. Furthermore, as a Student Philanthropy Ambassador (SPA) for the Division of University Advancement, I share my experiences and thoughts with WPI donors. WPI provides a nurturing environment that facilitates connections and professional/personal growth.

- Omega Chi Epsilon Chemical Engineering Honor Society, Secretary

Interests

- Painting
- Gardening
- Surfing
- Hiking/the outdoors
- Running
- Soccer
- Climbing

Campus Activities

- Teacher Preparation Program, High School Chemistry
- University Advancement Student Philanthropy Ambassadors (SPA)
- Society of Women Engineers (SWE), Interim Secretary
- Art and Design Club (ADC)
- Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE), Secretary & Interim Community Outreach Chair
- Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanic and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), Secretary
- Humanities and Arts, Spanish Tutor
- Chemical Engineering, Peer Learning Assistant



**The same
heartwarming
community I**

When I first moved to the U.S. mainland from Puerto Rico, it was initially difficult to find a sense of belonging. I felt a clash of dual identities – feeling like I'm not Hispanic/Latino because I am a citizen of the United States, but also not feeling American because Puerto Rico is not a state and Spanish is my native language. Nevertheless, during my college career, I was very fortunate to find friends that became family and support groups, which helped make WPI my home.

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Do you have a faculty or staff mentor?

WPI has exceptional faculty, and it is impossible to choose only one person. I am extremely grateful for the help of my professors and mentors, including but not limited to: Michael Timko, Alex Maag, Stephen Kmiotek, Laila Abu-Lail, Katherine Chen, Aarti Madan, Angel Rivera, and Anna Gold. They guided and supported me while applying to grad schools, working on research, teaching/tutoring, and empowered me to present my life story. Most importantly they believed in me. The optimistic outlook and constructive mindset of WPI faculty and staff is noteworthy because it fostered a safe space to become the best version of myself. These factors were key to achieving my goals during my college career and I am certain that, in the years to come, more students will be very fortunate to have these experiences as well.

How has WPI's project-based learning influenced your education?

Project-based learning at WPI largely influenced my education because it encouraged integrated STEM learning while simultaneously allowing me to address real-world problems. For example, I had the chance to complete my Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP) abroad in Thailand. While there, I

collaborated with a team of eight diverse university students (WPI and Chulalongkorn University) and the farmers of the Khon Kaen Center. For our project, we visited multiple farm plots, which was very exciting and soulful. Having researched the Khon Kaen area ahead of time, I was expecting it to be more forest-like instead of desert, so upon arrival and looking at the soil I thought, "how are we supposed to grow anything here?" But here is the thing: we didn't need to grow anything because the farmers already knew how to do their job better than anyone. My team just needed to assess their problems and help them achieve a healthier community by empowering them and working collaboratively with them. I understand the importance of each person's cultural experience and knowledge and am devoted to helping increase equity for those less fortunate, which helps them thrive. I strive to bring this perspective and approach to my research, how I interact with others, and how I share my knowledge.



9-11a

Elementary Chemical
Processes (CHE 2012)

11-12p

lunch

12-1p

Organic Chemistry I (CH
2310)

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