



Esther Mao '26

BS in Data Science and Policy Studies

Why did you choose to study at WPI?

I was drawn to WPI's learning philosophy that combined both practice and theory. I'm grateful to receive a well-rounded education in both: I can develop a strong conceptual foundation in theory and apply those concepts in a real-world context. WPI's project-based learning approach provides authentic, hands-on, and often interdisciplinary learning experiences. In the real world, nothing exists in a vacuum, so WPI offers opportunities for me to explore the intersection of different disciplines through its coursework and project opportunities.

How are you involved with the WPI community?

On campus I am involved with the School of Arts & Sciences, Greek life, the Data Science Club, and Omicron Delta Kappa, a national leadership honor society. My favorite thing about my various involvements are the opportunities to collaborate with so many different people. Learning from their diverse perspectives has truly enriched my own worldview.



Hometown

Westborough, MA

Mentor/Advisor

- Robert Krueger

Achievements

- Dean's List
- Data Science Department Community Building Award

Interests

- Finding new ways to stay active
- Trying new foods
- Listening to music
- Crafting / photography
- Current affairs

My first involvement at WPI was my sorority, Alpha Phi. Being a part of Greek life provides me with countless leadership and learning opportunities and a strong support system. Greek life has truly helped me grow as a person and leader. I am also a member of the Data Science Club. Data science is a relatively new major and the club offers a community for those interested in data science. It's been extremely fulfilling to have watched our club grow throughout the past year!

Lastly, I'm a member of the School of Arts & Sciences Student Advisory Council, which allows me to be directly involved with arts and sciences initiatives across campus. I am grateful for the opportunity to help support the work that the school does, as well as meet people from many different disciplines and learn about their accomplishments.

What's your favorite thing about WPI?

The strong sense of community. While academics are highly valued here, the environment isn't cutthroat and instead is highly collaborative. Students and faculty, alike, are eager to help you succeed. I also love meeting individuals from so many different backgrounds. I love that I almost always run into someone I know when I walk on campus.

Do you have a faculty or staff mentor?

Dr. Robert Krueger. I met him during my freshman year when I had questions about the requirements for my policy major. We quickly realized we had a common interest in bridging the gap between the social sciences and data science. I have worked on a few projects with him over the course of the past year. He's helped me find countless opportunities and pushed me out of my comfort zone. In working with him, I have become a stronger student and

- Reading (especially history books and biographies)
- Music

Campus Activities

- Alpha Phi Women's Fraternity
- Data Science Club
- Omicron Delta Kappa (National Leadership Honor Society)
- School of Arts & Sciences Student Advisory Council
- Social Sciences & Policy Studies Department research assistant



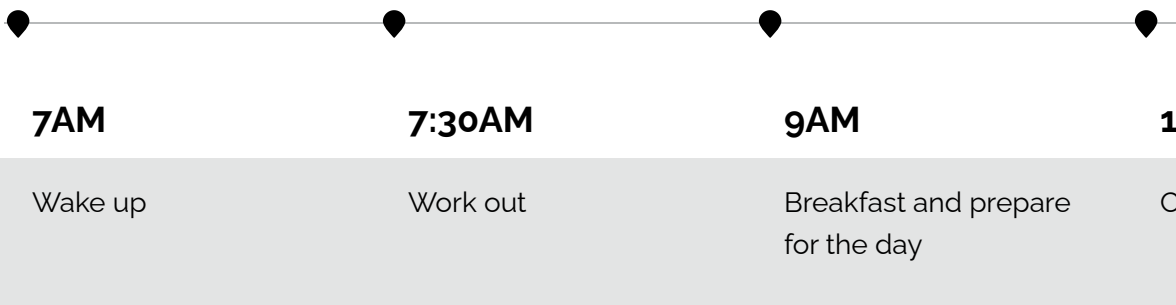
With my diverse project experience, I feel prepared to transfer my different skills from an academic environment to a fast-paced professional setting.



overall thinker. I am truly grateful for him investing his time to help me grow as both a student and a person.

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

Project-based learning has helped me truly understand the technical theories and concepts that I've learned in the classroom, as well as develop soft skills beyond the classroom. Whether it's course projects, IQP ([Interactive Qualifying Project](#)), or MQP ([Major Qualifying Project](#)), these many opportunities allow me to develop a deep understanding of my own disciplines and how they operate in the real world. They also offer an opportunity to collaborate with and learn from other people. With my diverse project experience, I feel prepared to transfer my different skills from an academic environment to a fast-paced professional setting.



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