



May 1, 2020

Subject Letter of Affirmation: WPI STARS Innovation Credit

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves to demonstrate that WPI's Social Justice Faculty Learning Community and the Critical Conversations Series, meet the requirements of the Innovation Credit for the STARS Survey. As Dean of Arts and Sciences and the coordinator of WPI's social justice initiative, I can evaluate the significance of these programs. This response is organized by the criteria for this credit.

This innovation credit describes a new, extraordinary, unique, groundbreaking, or uncommon outcome, policy or practice.

The Social Justice Faculty Learning Community (SJ FLC) initiative is a response to the need to consider the social and ethical implications of the STEM disciplines and the social justice teaching opportunities offered by STEM topics. The SJ FLC, spearheaded by Lisa Stoddard, Kathy Chen and Tiffany Butler, exemplifies this by working towards the integration of social justice themes across the curriculum at WPI. The effort brought 11 faculty together in a workshop to develop ways to integrate social justice concepts and case studies into their courses and projects. Participating faculty represented disciplines across WPI, including Civil/Environmental Engineering, Biomedical Engineering, Computer Science, Humanities and Arts, Chemical Engineering, Interactive Media and Game Development, and Social Science and Policy Studies. They worked together to develop and actualize projects, course content, and assignments to increase the breadth and depth of understanding of how STEM fundamentally influences social justice. For example, courses in Civil and Chemical Engineering developed the case of the Flint water crisis to examine principles of infrastructure development and engineering ethics. Faculty from Biomedical Engineering included themes of access and equity to biomedical innovations, and Civil Engineering faculty looked at implicit racial biases in traffic engineering. This Faculty Learning Community was the first in a series of workshops and small grant programs that will help STEM faculty identify, analyze and integrate cases, topics and themes of social justice in the way that they teach science, technology, engineering, and math.

The Critical Conversations series was established in 2018 provide cooperation and engagement throughout the WPI Community to address social justice concerns. The series was established in response to a call from the Office of the Dean of Arts & Sciences, to open the dialogue around tough questions being asked in the world. This series provides a forum for the WPI community and our strategic partners to respond to complex science, and its impact on the world. WPI has a way of talking about innovation that acknowledges the social and ethical implications of any new technology. The various perspectives converging around important and timely topics is not typical, but they are critical in everything we do at WPI. Therefore, critical conversations serve to expand understanding of new discoveries and uncover meaning in many dimensions, thereby igniting the spark for figuring out what is next. Recent topics have included: The World's First Genetically Edited Babies, Artificial Intelligence and Ethics, and most recently Climate: The Science of Change.

The innovation credit is not already covered by an existing STARS credit. This set of social justice programs has never been included in any other STARS credit.

The innovation practice, program, or outcome has occurred within the past three years. This set of social justice programs is currently in its first and second year.

The institution has not previously received a STARS innovation credit for this specific practice, policy program, or outcome. This set of social justice programs has not been previously reported for an Innovation Credit, or any other STARS credit.

Sincerely yours,



Jean King, PhD
Dean of Arts and Sciences
Professor of Biology and Biotechnology



Laureen Elgert
Associate Professor of Social Science and Policy Studies and
International Development, Environment and Sustainability