



WIT Online EduPod Episode 4: Graduate Education and Programs

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SPEAKER: You're listening to the WIT Online EduPod series. WIT Online partners with faculty, staff, and students to enhance their curriculum by developing and delivering flexible and innovative online learning experiences. The WIT Online EduPod Series includes conversations with the Wentworth community on topics in online teaching and learning.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: Hello, everyone. I'm Ke'Anna Skipwith with from Wentworth Online, and I will be your host for today's podcast. We are so glad that you're tuning in from wherever you are. I'm so excited to have Durga and Amy join me today. This month, we're discussing graduate programs, and also, the growing number of graduate programs at Wentworth that will offer convenient, flexible, as well as high quality educational experience.

Before we get started today, I'd like to welcome our guests, Durga and Amy, to the show and have them introduce themselves to our listeners.

AMY SISON: Thank you for having us. My name is Amy Sison, and I'm the director of graduate admission. My team and I work with prospective students, getting the word out about our graduate programs and what they have to offer, answering their questions, and assisting people through the application process and through enrollment.

DURGA SURESH-MENON: Hello, everybody. My name is Durga Suresh-Menon. I'm the special assistant to the provost for graduate programs. As long as my title is, I say that I do everything. That's why I have a long title.

So I am in the provost office. I am the Academic Affairs person for program development, for collaboration with Amy, who has been amazing joining our team. And I also work with marketing and the deans and the chairs. And in every aspect of larger programs at Wentworth, I try to make myself useful and help in developing and promoting our graduate program.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: So Durga, what does graduate education look like at Wentworth, and what characteristics distinguish it from other schools in the area?

DURGA SURESH-MENON: Wentworth graduate programs are exploding. I think that's the word I want to use. And exploding in every good sense that I can think of.



And the reason I say that is we started off with a very small number of graduate programs. And in my role, one of my major tasks has been to see how we can grow our graduate programs, how can we expand our offering. So we are in the process of relaunching other graduate programs.

We are in the process of developing five new graduate programs for fall of 2021 and beyond. I'm only talking about 2021 now. That does not mean that we don't have plans for 2022 and 2023. We're also looking at graduate certificates.

I think COVID-19 has taught us that people don't want necessarily to have a one year long graduate program or two year long graduate program. What they're looking for is something really quick, something to shine their skills up again and get to the workforce with even a better umph in their current roles.

And what makes us different? I think I ask that question all the time. I ask that of my graduate coordinators and my directors. And one thing that always comes up is the faculty. I cannot say anything is the biggest draw for our graduate program than our faculty. We have a world class faculty.

And not only do we have a world class faculty in the knowledge that they have, but it's the passion that they bring to their jobs and the way they go after helping our students. I find that to be incredibly heartwarming, and I think that is our best characteristic.

Do we have other things, like other world class architecture program that has a one year, two year, three year track. So you could come in as undergrad, finish your grad program in one year, or you could come with a background in anything but design and still become an architect in three years. So we are niche. We are unique in our program offerings.

Our program offerings are really quick. We are not going to keep the students in school for a very long time. We want to do it fast. We want to do it well, and we want to get them out very prepared to the field.

And, again, let us not forget, we are the school of do, learn, and succeed, which basically means that a lot of our programs are applied which means that it's not theoretical. You come, you learn, you touch, you feel, and you apply. And I think that's another very big characteristic.

Do we have a lot of perks to doing graduate programs at Wentworth? Yes. We have definitely-- and I attribute a lot of this to Amy joining our team with her amazing ideas, whether it's scholarships or it is discounts that we're offering to different constituents. I think now, I call it-- I don't know how many people will agree with us-- I call me and Amy the power team, and I think we are constantly thinking about what more we can do.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: That's great. And I totally relate-- it's like Wentworth is building this whole ecosystem where you have graduate admissions, the faculty. What you're doing in your role, Durga, is all coming together to make this package for students to apply what they're learning and just go forward with it.

DURGA SURESH-MENON: I was going to say, and Ke'Anna, let's not forget. You are a very big part of it. And I think it's great to have you as the president, because to see what an integral part of the team you have become for all of our online offerings. And I'm sure that a lot of people are hearing it now that about you. But you know it would be remiss of me if I didn't mention that without Wentworth Online, none of our graduate programs would be as successful as they are right now.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: Thank you for the compliments, and I'll make sure I share that with the team. On to Amy, can you share with us the graduate programs that Wentworth currently offers and what modality are these programs being offered in?

AMY SISON: Yes. So we are currently offering and accepting applications for our master's in architecture program that Durga mentioned that has three different pathways, our master's in engineering and civil engineering, a master's of science in project management, a master's of science in technology management, a master's of science in construction management, and an MS in facilities management.

We just relaunched our MS in applied computer science for 2021, so we're accepting applications for that. But please keep an eye on our web page. Because as Durga mentioned, there are many more programs in the works. We are developing new degrees that will launch in 2021 and new certificate programs, and also pathways for those programs. So if you may not have the technical background or expertise, we're working on pathways to bring students into these programs and advance in their careers.

As far as the different modalities, the architecture program is on campus program. We offer the project management, construction management, and technology management and facilities management are all completely online. We also offer project management and construction management and civil engineering in hybrid formats. These hybrid formats typically meet one day on campus with the rest of the coursework online.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: Great. So we have a diverse portfolio. And I'm excited to hear more about how it's going to grow in the coming semesters as we prepare for that. Durga, how are the graduate programs designed to prepare, in your prospective, students to advance them in their careers, or even future careers that they're thinking about?

DURGA SURESH-MENON: We have something called a graduate curriculum committee. And what this is a group of extremely dedicated faculty. Most of my talk will come back to our amazing faculty.

And what they do is they're constantly looking into their own program to see what can we do to make our course offerings better. And what immediately comes to mind is, what have we done during the COVID-19 time? I'll start by talking about this resiliency management course that was put together by one of our adjuncts that teaches for us in our facility management. Because it really made sense.



It really made sense to look at what was happening in the world right now, and then getting our students prepared to face that. And we did a webinar with that. And then we are so excited that the students are going to come in and their first course is going to be about resiliency management, contingency management, how do we prepare-- or I should say, facility management in the time of the pandemic, right?

But we had speakers who are also our adjuncts come from Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Pearson and-- I'm sorry. I forgot the third place. But the idea was that we have these adjuncts who are doing this in their day to day jobs, and we are able to bring this expertise, not just with our full time faculty, but also with our adjunct. And they're able to do the course offerings.

In our technology management program, which is, again, being relaunched in a way, we have started our first course as emergency management. How do you manage your technology company or your-- whatever company that you have, where how do you manage the decisions that you make for this emergency? We are doing in our project management class, risk management. So there is all these different pieces that go into our grad programs that are current.

And one of the things that we're doing is we are revamping our programs. We are looking into our courses. Like our construction management is getting more in-depth with real estate in construction management. They're getting really into the weeds with facility management and buildings and how we can truly make our programs the strength of what the students come to learn.

Because a lot of times if you hear about student feedback, what we hear from students is, my program is great. I love Wentworth, but I wish I learned this. We are now listening to what our students want because a lot of our part time students have full time jobs. So-- and you know that because you deal with them on a regular basis, so how do we satisfy the needs?

I love that President Thompson always makes this point about how can Wentworth, Boston, Massachusetts and other region. And I think we are becoming very focused on that, and I think this also aligns with our strategic plan where we are talking about high value learning. And I think that is the driving force now behind graduate education at Wentworth that we focus on high value learning. And we want our students to have an experience that is transformative, and I think, again, one of our strategic goals as well.

And I think what we're doing right now is we're taking graduate education and aligning it to a strategic plan. In the same time, aligning it to the needs of what other constituents want, our stakeholders want. And I think it's a call to action.

I don't know how else to say that. It's a call to action that people are either worried about their job, or people are losing their jobs and they're restarting again. How do we help?



And then we add that to our alumni. We add that to our advisory council. We add that to our employers of our students, and we say that, right? How can we help? How can we step up?

So we look at this as a call to action that we are answering. Not that we had not been working about on this with a strategic plan, but COVID-19 has taught us very, very good lessons.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: Great. Can you share maybe one or two examples how the applied experiences are being used in the online and hybrid graduate programs?

DURGA SURESH-MENON: Lots of simulations, lots of case studies. And when we pivoted some of our courses, which are happening right now, from the face-to-face to online, I think our faculty stepped up more than anyone else.

Of course, we had the technology and your expertise to back us up, but the faculty still had to do a pivot from going on from the hands on, very intensive, whether it's studios in MR or anything else. We went into a lot of synchronous teaching right now, and I think the synchronicity has really helped. I think everybody, both in terms of technology.

You remember you did that thing about helping faculty think through what they should do when they pivoted? I forget your article's name, Ke'Anna, that you sent out to help the faculty, right? That helped. That helped do this pivot.

So I think you're doing a lot of simulations, a lot of synchronous learning, a lot of asynchronous case studies that students can look at. And you're truly having more conversations. I think that's been the big thing that we're doing, that it's still applied. You still feel heard whether you're in class or you are in an online class.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: Amy, does the department prefer applicants immediately out of an undergrad program, or do they prefer applicants with work experience?

AMY SISON: Yeah. I think it depends a little bit on the program, but we definitely encourage both of those populations to apply. So we have students who are doing the four plus one track and are going right through and getting their graduate degrees right away.

But we also have a large cohort of students who they may be coming part time. They're working during the day. And having that balance in the classroom, I think, is really important to everyone's experience so you're getting kind of a broad perspective. So I wouldn't say we encourage one or the other. We really welcome both of those.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: And also, are there students from other states or other countries encouraged to apply?



AMY SISON: For sure, yes. We love having, again, a more diverse population, especially with our online programs. It makes it very easy for students to be in different states but still be a part of our community. And I think that's really important.

Currently, most of our international students are in our architecture program because that's on ground program. But if you were an international student and you wanted to work remotely from your home country and get some of these online degrees, we would welcome that as well.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: And then, what are some parts for advancing a graduate education at Wentworth?

AMY SISON: Yeah. So Durga kind of touched on a lot of the things that are going on and the exciting parts, that Wentworth experience. My big take away, and to kind of echo what Durga said, is we really are the University of Now. We are pivoting constantly to change our programs and make them in a way that really delivers the experience that the students need to advance in their careers at this time.

We have excellent faculty that have that real world experience that are bringing that to the classroom. Our full time programs provide a new laptop, which I think is a huge perk for students who are studying, especially in the online format. We have a great co-ops and career center in that students can also utilize, work on their interviewing skills, update their resume. All of those things that kind of come together to really, really support the students.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: So how long does it take for students to complete a graduate program full time versus part time?

AMY SISON: So most of the programs, the full time programs, can be completed in one year. We did mention if you're coming from a non-architecture degree, then you may take two or three years to complete full time program, depending on what your undergraduate experience is in. And most of our part time programs typically take about two years to complete.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: So that's great. You still have time to work towards your degree but also apply those skills as you're going, which is one, two year. That goes by so, so fast so that's great. What kind of program exists currently now for graduate students that you can share with us?

DURGA SURESH-MENON: There are many things. We have very active graduate student clubs that they formed within their graduate programs. Overall for graduate programming, we are looking to do more things. I'm in my 11th month in my role, so I'm still trying to see what else the graduate students want.

We are planning a lot of programming this fall for our students, whether it is virtual or it's going to be on the ground. We love on ground events. We have done a graduate student women's brunch, which kind of restarted-- and I know you're all part of it. That happened in March.

So basically, what we are doing right now is we're looking to see what our graduate students needs are going to be come this fall. We want to do activities that that are very inclusive. We want to do things for telling all of our students of color and all minority students that we see them, we hear them, and we want to do more.

We want to let our international students know that we love them. We want them, and we want to support them. I think that is the most important thing.

We're actually looking at what kind of events will truly be useful for our students. For example, we never had-- this is Amy and me spit-ball. Nobody who listens to this podcast hold us to it when you see us in person. We want to explore many avenues.

Why don't we have a graduate fair? We do a big fair for the undergraduate where the graduate students also show up. It's not like we say that, no, graduates can't go. But why not do something very special for the graduate students?

I'd like to make a point that our graduate population is small. Left to our own devices, Amy and I are going to grow this to be not small. So I think we want to start thinking about events that can be done small, but that can also be scalable.

So we are actually right now-- again, Ke'Anna, you are involved-- working on this amazing grad orientation, right? We're also thinking about a graduate resource fair which we want to do with our Center of Academic Excellence. A big shout out to Mary McCormack and her team who are constantly thinking about how they can help our students, and how they can contribute to the success of our students.

Great shout out to Annamaria Wenner's team, who are always, again, looking to see how we can support-- and that's going to be a very big collaboration that's going to come out from the Office of the Provost, which is me, and student affairs, which is Annamaria's team. And we're looking at, what can we do.

We're talking about a graduate lounge. We're talking about coffee hour. Definitely talking about social events.

This is a really small thing. I've heard it's very small. It's the virus that's put a brake on a lot of our plans. But we're definitely looking to see what we've got.

I would also be very remiss at this point to say that we have a new provost, Ian Lapp. And Provost Lapp is all about the students. I cannot tell you how much he is excited about welcoming this new graduate class, which is also his first incoming graduate class. And we are constantly discussing with him as well about what we can do for our graduate student. Stay tuned.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: That's so exciting to hear about the upcoming things. So as we wrap up this episode, are there any final thoughts or comments on what we discussed today?



AMY SISON: I guess I would want to comment. I'm sure there's a lot of people out there thinking about, should I do graduate school? Should I not? Please reach out to us. We're here to answer questions for you, help you through that process.

I strongly believe that there's no better time than now to start on your graduate degree and start making yourself more marketable with this ever changing workforce that's happening today. But yes, please connect with us. Please ask questions and reach out. That's what we're here for.

If anyone wants to get in touch with graduate admissions, we have hopefully an easy email address. That's just gradadmissions@WIT.edu. So please reach out to us and connect with us, and we are here to help.

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: Great. So how can our listeners get in touch with you personally, or maybe the graduate admissions team, for more information about what you're doing, things about how they can apply? Feel free to share that contact informational website.

DURGA SURESH-MENON: I can tell you in my email address. It is S-U-R-E-S-H-M-E-N-O-N-D @WIT.edu. I'm working on getting a better email address. We are definitely looking at getting a graduate studies email address.

But I think we have the best admissions team on the planet. And yes, I said the planet. I want to say universe, Amy, but you get it.

Please contact us about gradadmissions@WIT.edu. We have got the best counselors. They know who to put in touch, and our turnaround time is amazing.

So please, please reach out. Talk to us. Ask us questions. You don't have necessarily jump onto a graduate programs.

We have test drives. You can come and take a class and there will be no strings attached. There's so many things that are happening right now, so definitely reach out to us at gradadmissions@WIT.edu. I think that is the best conduit to get more information, or our website WIT.edu

KE'ANNA SKIPWITH: Great. So thanks again, Durga and Amy, for taking the time and speaking with me about this important topic and sharing your perspectives, your ideas, and everything that you have towards this graduate admissions and graduate education at Wentworth. Take care.

AMY SISON: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thanks for tuning in. We post new episodes every month. For more episodes and information, you can visit the WIT Online Learning Hub at sites.WIT.edu/WIT-online.

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