2008 Award Recipient

Helen G. Vassallo ’82 (MBA)

Helen Vassallo, you are an inspirational teacher, leader, speaker, and mentor to young women and men. Truly, WPI is indebted to you for the immeasurable ways in which you’ve served the university over the last three decades.

Growing up in a household that esteemed the transformative powers of education, you received a BS summa cum laude from Tufts University, an MS in pharmacology from Tufts University Medical School, a PhD in physiology from Clark University, and an MBA from WPI. In 1982, you joined the faculties of WPI’s Management and Biology and Biotechnology departments, following a distinguished career as an educator, researcher, and business leader in the fields of physiology, pharmacology, and anesthesia.

Committed to improving all facets of university life, you’re an advisor to Phi Sigma Sigma sorority, you advise first year women, and you mentor and counsel new young women faculty members. You became the second female professor (a distinction earned when you taught molecular biology at the Institute in 1967), and the second woman to be named a full professor. You are the first woman to have been elected secretary of the faculty, the highest faculty post at the university. A member of the President’s Council for the Advancement of Women and Minorities and chief justice of the Campus Hearing Board, you have also served as chair of the Committee on the Status of Women, which was established in 1996.

At WPI your research interests span organizational behavior, project management, management of planned change, management of biotechnology, and medical product liability. You served as head of the Management Department from 1989 to 1995 and held the Harry G. Stoddard Professorship in Management from 1991 to 1996. In 2003 you received the university’s Board of Trustees’ Award for Outstanding Teaching. You have authored numerous articles, two books, and a monograph, and you co-hold two patents. Among your many honors and awards, you were named Woman of the Year in 1981 by the American Business Woman’s Association. Most recently, you received the city of Worcester’s 2008 Women of Consequence Award.

You not only have dedicated your career to educating our future scientists, engineers, leaders, and entrepreneurs, but you have championed a work-life balance and other issues that women face in the workplace. The headline in a faded 1985 Sunday Telegram article perhaps summed it best: “Helen Vassallo Discloses Way to Find Happiness.”
Helen Vassallo, for your devotion to this university and for all of your successful pursuits, we honor you today with the William R. Grogan Award for Support of the Mission of WPI.