Michelle Petkers Gass ’90

Michelle Gass, as a successful alumna, you are a source of great pride to Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

During your undergraduate years, you participated in the Newman Club, campus hearing board, IFC, Washington Project Center, cheerleading, and Alpha Gamma Delta sorority. You were a member of Tau Beta Pi and Phi Lambda Upsilon and received several WPI honors, including the General Chemistry Award and the President’s IQP Award.

After graduating with a degree in chemical engineering, you joined Cincinnati-based Procter & Gamble's health-care products research and development group. Along with your knowledge of chemical engineering, you discovered a knack for understanding the consumer and driving innovations from that perspective.

In 1996, you relocated to the West Coast and began your career at Starbucks Coffee Company as category manager for blended beverages, marketing, and category management. At Starbucks, your passion for discerning consumer needs and attitudes transformed the coffee giant’s newly introduced ice-blended coffee and mocha drinks into a mini-empire. The Frappuccino grew from a small part of the business to a line of 10 flavors in three versions. At the same time, you attended the University of Washington's evening executive MBA program, earning your degree in 1999.

As Starbucks has grown, so have your responsibilities. In 2001 you were promoted to vice president of the beverage category. In May 2004 you were elevated to senior vice president, category management; you currently oversee a 150-person department and drive the company's beverage, food, coffee, and merchandise product line globally. Since your joining Starbucks, the coffeemaker’s stock price has made an orbital leap of 451 percent. Today, with more than 7,500 retail locations in North America, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific Rim, annual sales are at $5 billion.

Michelle Gass, it is with great pride that WPI presents you with the Ichabod Washburn Young Alumni Award for Professional Achievement.