

W  TS

REFLECTING ON THE PAST
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Winter 2019 Newsletter

WELCOME BACK, EVERYONE!

Wow! What a semester!

I hope everyone had a great winter break and is refreshed for the semester ahead! Thanks for taking a look into WiTS's second newsletter of the school year. I hope that the following articles give you a glimpse into our members' perspectives on various issues and events and help see what we're all about.

As 2018 came to an end, I began to reflect on the insane growth that WiTS experienced. I am still in disbelief! I am super proud of the hard work by our execs, council and members who helped us keep pushing each other to break boundaries. There are so many things that we did that I didn't think would have been possible eight months ago. So, thank you to all of our members who stuck with us and helped us create something truly special!

This newsletter's theme is all about reflecting on some of the events from the past year, as well as looking ahead to things to come. We are lucky enough to have numerous first-years who joined WiTS this past semester. A few of them wrote about their first semesters here at Dal.

A major achievement for WiTS this past semester was launching the Peer Mentorship Program with the Faculty of Computer Science and it's super encouraging to see the impact of it as you'll see in the following pages. Making the jump to university can be challenging for various reasons and we're happy to provide any sort of support to the incoming class. This issue also features an awesome article about gender representation in video games, and addresses topics such as following your passions in university and how to stand out from the crowd when applying to jobs. WiTS has incredibly diverse members and this newsletter gives them a platform to express whatever they'd like to say.

What's happening next?

WiTS is hoping to ride this success into 2019! We'll be continuing our bi-weekly social hangout sessions on the alternating weeks of meetings as well as hosting more social events for our members, including another We Talk Tech. Our meetings are the place to be to hear about upcoming plans and provide your input on our decisions. I'm incredibly excited to see what's possible for WiTS in this upcoming semester and I hope to see you at a meeting or event!

Talk soon!

Alicia Wong, WiTS President

WITS AND THE SENSE OF BELONGING

Sanjana Swami *First Year*

In the middle of the week, after all the classes, for a few hours in the evening, WiTS meets. Meetings are held every other week, and during the off week, peer mentorship hangouts take place. The ambience of the former is more formal than the latter. Yet, in both kinds of meetings, the warmth and welcoming nature of the community remained constant from the first meeting of the semester until the last.

With inclusivity being the driving force of the community, the meetings gave a voice to each of the members regarding the planning and details of the upcoming events. The open nature of the executive board allowed every member to be a part of each upcoming event, instead of just a participant.

Additionally, the society was involved in many incredible events like **CAN-CWIC, We Talk Tech, Women in Tech Day and Kids Learning Code**. Not only were all these events brilliant learning opportunities but they also fostered and solidified a friendship between us. Internal events like the Halloween social, Self-care night, Pizza Night, etc. gave us ample opportunities to relax and get to know one another.

Through the peer mentorship program, the society greatly eased the transition to university life. Whether it was a coding assignment, selecting courses for

the winter term, or help with a scholarship essay, there was always somebody in the room ready to help another out. With some of the mentors also being our TAs for different classes, clarification of concepts and open discussion of course material was easily found and was also less intimidating than other more formal tutorials.



In the span of a semester, the society not only eased me into the first year of my computer science degree, but also gave me a chance to learn and build friendships in an inclusive and supportive environment. It built in me a sense of belonging within the community and I look forward to continuing as a WiTS member next semester.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH WITS AND WHY IT'S SO COOL: A NOVEL

Anaik Chacon First Year

When you start university, you don't realise the vast amount of people you will meet. As of now, your first semester is probably over. Personally, as I transitioned into university, I heavily underestimated the network you develop during these first three months. **And when I really thought about it, I thought: if in three months you meet waves of people, by fourth year, you might as well know half the country.**

The main detail about this phenomenon I want to point out (I say phenomenon because of a lack of a better expression and also to sound fancy) is that **many of those people you will meet will make you feel that they are genuinely there for you – there for you in the sense that people care.** Whether it is just asking how your day went, or if you need help in that Calculus 1, assignment 35, question 9b that you have been ranting about for a while now, they are there for you.

I do not want to imply that you will meet bad people and university is horrible, no. I want to imply that some people, unfortunately, you will meet but eventually stop

seeing after a while; whether it's because of a scheduling conflict or some other reason. Some people you just stop seeing after a while.

What I really want to say is that there is a surprising amount of people you meet at Dalhousie that genuinely care and actively seek to help you. For me, most of these people I met through WiTS. However, different people will feel differently about networking based on their experience. But for me, I felt as if I could call my mentors, friends, and teachers from WiTS my second family (to be cheesy like that). The members of WiTS feel so much like a community that it makes you want to be part of it. Members laugh together, struggle together, and experience together. Even when we do not do things together, I felt as if I could always count on WiTS for support. And after you get so used to the idea that you will spend all your university life struggling alone; after attempting that Calc 1 question for 3 hours straight; after you underestimate the vast amount of people you meet during university, I can assure you it is so heartwarming to be proven wrong.



THE POWER OF PEERS

Sofia Castro
First Year

When I first arrived at Dal, I was worried that my first semester was going to be hard. New classes, new people, new culture, and a new country. Thankfully, my first semester was wonderful all thanks to WiTS.

WiTS has a peer mentorship program that aims to establish connections between all the girls studying computer science regardless of their year of study. As a first year student, I really appreciated this because I received insight and honest opinions about the different classes I was taking and what my future classes would be like. I also got help choosing my winter semester courses which took away some of the stress of wondering about which courses would be better.

The peer mentorship program, combined with meetings and other fun activities, helped me make new friends and explore the city. Some of the many fun activities I got to participate in were decorating cookies for Halloween, We Talk Tech, Canada Learning Code events, and going out to try Indian food by the waterfront. Everyone at WiTS is fun and welcoming, which felt comforting when moving to a new country.



Finally, WiTS helped me find out about other events taking place in the city and allowed me to engage more with the community. The main event outside of Dal was Can-CWiC, which was a cool event allowing me to meet many companies that could possibly be internship opportunities for me in the future. This event also hosted a series of discussions which allowed me to engage in discussions about women empowerment.

MY FIRST SEMESTER IN THE FACULTY OF COMPUTER SCIENCE

Rasleen Kaur-Gandhi
Third Year

I am an international student from Delhi, India. I started school in Dalhousie's Faculty of Computer Science in September 2016. I became interested in computer science in high school when I took a course in C++. I was equally excited and nervous to start my first semester at Dalhousie.

When I started university, I didn't know anyone in Halifax or at Dalhousie, so orientation helped me connect with people from different parts of world. Through orientation, I have made good friends with whom I have been in touch with for the last two years.

After discovering the [Computer Science Learning Centre](#), I became more confident in my courses. The Learning Centre is a place where students can help each other, and discuss course topics in an environment focused on learning.

As the semester progressed, I found myself making many connections with other students in computer science. The computer science building became my second home, a comfortable place to complete homework and laugh with friends.

Overall, my first semester was good, but still stressful from living so far from home. I was not used to living alone in a new country, but overtime friends helped me adjust and I thoroughly enjoyed my first semester in Computer Science.

THE POWERFUL GIRLS OF GAMING

Tabea Marzlin First Year

When I was four years old, I stole my older brother's Gameboy to play Pokemon Fire Red. It was my very first video game, and it changed my life forever.

It's no secret that there is a troubled dynamic in gaming culture concerning gender representation. White males make up the vast majority of protagonist characters, which is not surprising considering that even today only 20% of game developers are women. These statistics have certainly had an impact on me, and made both my parents and I concerned about my dream to work in the games industry. However, I want to celebrate the characters that inspired me to make it this far in the first place.

I was lucky enough that in Pokemon, I always had the choice to be a girl. The trainers, gym leaders, and even champions were often women. **There was no question to me that I was welcome in this world.** The next Nintendo series to capture my love was The Legend of Zelda. In titles like Ocarina of Time, Princess Zelda plays a stealthy ninja, and in Wind Waker, a pirate captain. She was my earliest female icon, and she continues to be my favourite character in any video game.

Outside of Nintendo games, Tomb Raider, featuring Lara Croft, is one of the oldest series with an adventurous,

strong-willed female protagonist. Those games always felt like my own version of Indiana Jones. Especially in the modern releases, Lara is written as a fully fleshed out emotional human being, and has movies to herself now.



Bruno Henrique via Pexels

Without these girls, and the people who chose to develop games featuring positive female role models, I would not be the same person I am today. I would not be studying computer science at Dal, or becoming a game developer myself. Representation is so important to remember in any form of media, particularly one as interactive as gaming.

CONCERTO IN C#

Maria Jessen Third Year

I didn't plan to study computer science.

In high school. I took most of the science and math courses and only started to get into computer science after taking a grade 12 programming course for fun. At the same time, I took lots of music courses. I was a member of several school and community ensembles, and I was taking private piano and harmony lessons.

This combination of STEM and arts seemed like a good fit for me – I knew the science and tech route would lead to a career, and I was very passionate about music. I still wasn't clear on what I really wanted to do (I flipped between compsci, medicine or teaching music about once a week through grade 12) but I thought I had figured out the best post-secondary path – a double major in computer science and music – to make sure I kept all my doors open through university.

I soon realized that a double major wouldn't make sense for me. Music double-majors take a Bachelor of Arts in Music, which would have required that I take extra arts classes that I wasn't interested in. After consulting with an advisor, I decided a minor in music would be a better way to maintain my music studies while keeping a reasonable workload that wouldn't jeopardize computer science coursework.

I am very glad I made that decision. The minor has been a much better fit for my schedule and interests. Computer Science and music are a surprisingly good mix; both are very math-oriented, with underlying foundations in algebra and logic, and both are inherently creative – I am just as likely to have to think creative-

ly when solving a coding problem as I am when I'm performing a sonata. Both fields require discipline and planning and being able to make quick decisions to deal with unexpected bugs or trips. In my very first programming class back in grade 12, I was surrounded by artists, many of them musicians as well – coding was just another outlet for their creative minds.

As similar as they are, computer science and music are different enough that I find myself using one as a reprieve from the other at times. That was something I liked in high school and am glad I get to keep in university – I get to do something for credit that doesn't always feel like work. When my code isn't working, or a math assignment is stressing me out, I always have a piece of music I can focus on instead to give my mind a break while still getting things done. Conversely, if I'm struggling to memorize a piece or just need to get out of the practice rooms, I can go back to my IDE and build something instead.

If you're looking for a way to combine your passions with your vocation or explore areas outside of your major while gaining electives, I recommend looking into a minor. Be mindful of your limits and don't overload yourself; if you aren't prepared to continue a skill at the university level, there are other ways to keep learning. Otherwise, if you've worked at a skill for a long time and can't see yourself continuing to study it full-time – whether it's music, a language, or art – consider taking on a minor to keep up the challenge. You may be pleasantly surprised by the mix.

STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Rebecca Ansems
Recent Graduate

Perhaps you're just starting your Bachelors or maybe you're already a few semesters in, regardless learning how to stand out from the crowd is very important. Soon you'll be applying for co-op jobs (or real jobs after graduation) and you'll be potentially competing against dozens (or even hundreds or thousands if you apply for a larger company's internship program) of other students who share all the same basic qualifications as you. So how can you "win"? How do you get the job you really want (or at least an interview)?

GREAT GPA

This is probably the most obvious way to separate yourself from your classmates. Do well in your classes, have an extremely competitive GPA, and you might be able to get your resume on the top of the pile.

SIDE PROJECTS

Side projects show a potential employer two things: they show that you're able to start and complete (the most important part) a project and that you're passionate about coding. This can also give you an opportunity to show employers that you're interested in what they do. For example, if all you've done in class is make basic Java applications but you're really interested in game development what better way to show that off then by making a game?

HACKATHONS

Hackathons are a great opportunity to learn a lot, really quickly. Hackathon projects are generally not as clean or as polished as side projects but they can still be "something" to show a future potential employer. Plus you'll get bonus points if you manage to actually win a hackathon (and you'll get a prize or money!).



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