

FURRIES @ WPI



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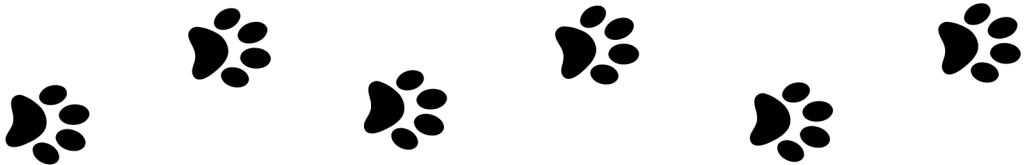
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What are Furies? ? ? ?

A furry is a self-describing term for someone who has an interest in anthropomorphic animals, or animals that have human traits such as walking on two legs or talking. Furies like to create “fursonas”, which are animal representations of the creator. Fursonas and other furry characters don’t have to look realistic, many furies tend to gravitate toward giving their characters bright fur colors or species that don’t exist in real life. Many furies create or commission art of varying medias, such as drawings, stories, 3D models, or mascot-style costumes called fursuits. Furies often gather at conventions, the biggest of which gather over 15,000 attendees.

The furry fandom has strong ties to the queer community; it provides members the opportunity to express themselves in ways that make them more confident in their identity. The fandom provides a safe space for individuals who may not be able to express who they are in their daily lives.

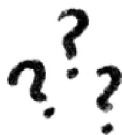


Who are we?



Eli

he/him



I'm Eli! Electrical and Computer Engineering student by day, queer gator-coyote by night. I have a lot of passion for the furry fandom, retro tech, and listening to music. I love drawing, crafting, sewing, being creative, and integrating all of that with engineering and getting technical. Being a furry is very intertwined with my queerness; the fandom was how I was able to explore both my gender identity and my sexuality. The furry community is a huge part of my life and I wouldn't trade it for the world.



Eli is a crafty goofball with a big passion for WPI. He's incredibly interested in the history surrounding the school and its traditions, and has joined the Student Alumni Society (SAS) to pursue that.

-Zen

Who are we?

Zen

they/them

What's up! I'm Zen, a 20 year old queer CS Student. I transferred from UMass Boston, so this is my first year here in Worcester and at WPI. I have been a part of the furry fandom for 7 years, and it's been a huge part of my life. Not only is it how I met my closest friends both at home and here at WPI, but it's how I came to fall in love with WPI in the first place.

Zen is one of the most passionate and hard-working people I know. They have a strong interest in urbanism and transit, and is a very skilled Mario Kart player. They recently joined SAS too!

-Eli



Furry and Queer

By Zen and Eli

The furry fandom has served as a safe space for queer folks to discover their identity for as long as it's existed. I (Zen) speak from personal experience. In 2017 when I found the furry fandom, I wholeheartedly believed I was a straight male. Being in an accepting and safe queer space, I was able to explore my identity and figure out who I am over time. I proudly and openly identify as gay and nonbinary, and I would not have learned this by age 20 without the space the furry fandom provided. I would not be the same person I am today without it.

The fandom creates an incredibly open and welcoming space that encourages people of all walks of life to explore and find their identity and place in the community. For some, it provides validation for their existing questions about themselves, and for others it lets them discover themselves.



According to a mid-2020 online study conducted by Furscience, only 10.1% of furries self-identify with being straight, compared to 88.3% in the US based on the 2020 census.

Furscience detailed that queer furries were more likely to have a stronger connection to being a furry than straight furries.



The furry fandom gives its members the opportunity to experiment with their gender identity by giving themselves a fictional representation of themselves that they can play with. Some transgender furries said that when they were questioning their gender identity, they tried transitioning their fursona before themselves, because they view their fursona as a projection of themselves, or the ideal version of themselves. There is no limit on the number of fursonas or characters you can have, so some people have a wide range of characters of varying gender identities/expressions.



Games such as VRChat or Second Life allows furries to view themselves as their ideal furry self in a mirror. It can be a very affirming experience.



Art by Eli

Culture on Campus

By Eli and Zen

Furry lives at WPI are vibrant and fun. We've formed a great close-knit community around campus and keep in touch frequently.

Furry life at WPI is not a new phenomenon. I (Zen) have met alumni from as far back as the class of 1980 at convnetions! We wanted to get an idea for how life was before the pandemic and folks meeting far more online.



Alumni from the early 2010s have told us furry life on campus was almost nonexistent, with very few furries on campus. Most furry interaction occurred online or at conventions, and the most local furry convention at the time was in Connecticut.

We spoke with a class of 2020 alumni named BetaEtaDelota, who discovered the fandom in his sophomore year. Beta has a furry-centered YouTube channel that he was successfully able to maintain alongside his studies and as an Alpha Chi Rho brother. He told us there was not a lot of furry activity on campus at the time.

He met WPI furries through a shared interest in the fandom, and hung out like regular friends afterwards.

The furry scene today for us parallels what Beta experienced a few years ago, just on a slightly larger scale. We're able to talk about and share furry things with our friends, go to conventions together, and share the experience of having a unique relationship with sexuality and gender.



Conventions

By Zen



Furry conventions serve as large gathering places for furries to see old friends, meet new ones, and hang out together. Common events at conventions include bombastic dances/raves, a large shopping area of furry centered and operated brands called the “Dealers Den”, and independent artists selling commissions, merch, and knick-knacks in the “Artists Alley”.

Conventions hold a special place in many furries’ hearts. For me, conventions are where I’ve often met some of the most important people in my life. It’s an opportunity to create real and meaningful connections with people who you’d otherwise never get the chance to meet.



Anthro New England



Anthro New England is the premiere convention for our local area, hosted in Boston. ANE has been running since 2014 and has relocated throughout Boston several times from their incredible growth. ANE not only draws incredible amounts of people from New England, but also hosts attendees from all over the world!





Furpocalypse

Furpocalypse is another New England convention hosted in Stamford, Connecticut. It's always hosted right around Halloween and maintains a spooky theme as a result. Upcoming for 2024 is the theme "Astraphobia"!

Anthrocon

Anthrocon (AC) is (at the time of writing) the second largest furry convention in the world.

Hosted in Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania, AC has drawn over 13,000 furries to attend. It originated all the way back in 1997, originally in Albany, NY. Anthrocon today is even officially partnered with the city of Pittsburgh, and is a beloved event to all local yinzers (residents of Pittsburgh).





Art by Ashley

Furry Artists on Campus



By Eli

There are a significant number of furry artists on campus, spanning across a variety of mediums. I personally enjoy using drawn art as a means of exploring identity, relaxation, and expressing myself. I also really enjoy making fursuits, because I find it extremely rewarding to bring someone's beloved character to life.



I talked to my friend Xavier, who is currently developing a written story featuring his many furry characters. I asked him why he enjoys writing, to which he responded: "It feels like a way to express myself and share silly little stories about my characters. I try to add a more profound takeaway than 'this story's pretty cool'".



I was curious to know why all of his characters are specifically furry rather than human, and he told me that: "Humans are boring. With furry characters you can have way more intricate designs than just clothing. With humans, you're limited to "their eye

color is x” or “their clothing is y” but with furry characters you can have way more flexibility in terms of their design which can impact their character development”.

Xavier told me he intends to have a fantasy novel-esque universe, but it is currently outside the scope of his free time. He plans on finishing his story once he gets around to it!

Most furry artists focus on drawn visual art, as it is one of the most accessible ways to share what your fursona looks like to others. All it takes is a pencil and paper, or a computer and free drawing software.



I spoke with my friend Remy, who enjoys drawing on his iPad. I asked him how and when he first got into drawing, and if he had been a furry artist from the very beginning. He told me: “I started drawing about 8 years ago, however I didn't start doing it seriously until around 5 years ago. I think I started off as a furry artist because of Undertale. I didn't know basic anatomy, so everything I drew looked like weird blobs and rectangles. I eventually discovered a furry animator on Youtube that I began copying and learning from. And that's when

I started to improve a lot on my anatomy.”

Drawn art allows for self-expression that may be difficult to do in other mediums.

Remy told me “I think it's easier for me to get a picture down than to try to describe anything I'm

feeling in words. I don't do humans because there's an emotional

detachment to furry characters. I'm not worried about the uncanny valley of “if I don't draw this person well, it'll be creepy.”



Remy's aspirations for his art is to improve and to challenge himself. He intends to keep drawing for the rest of his life, with computer science as a main job and art as a hobby. We both agree it's a good pastime!





Art by Remy

Fursuiting on Campus

By Eli

On October 31st, 2023, a clear and crisp Halloween night, a group of fursuiters ran around campus for some fun photos and silly shenanigans. It went so much better than any of us had hoped.

Originally I was hanging out with my friends Xavier, Remy, and Ashley in Remy's apartment. I had brought both of my suits: my gator coyote named Blu and my spunky canine Rubik. Ashley had brought their lemonade otter fursuit. Ashley wanted to fursuit on campus, and although I was hesitant, they ended up convincing me. I was in my fullsuit of Blu, Remy wore Rubik, and Xavier remained out of suit to keep an eye on us and take photos.



Being on campus as a giant animal ended up being a ton of fun! We really enjoyed being goofy animals, as we were able to let loose and play characters on campus that we normally wouldn't have been able to. We ran around on Alumni Field, pressed our faces against the windows of CC to give the people inside a good laugh, and got fun videos of us inside the Unity elevator.

Beta had mentioned he had fursuited on campus at one point, but had a very different experience from us. He mentioned he fursuited on a rainy day and that he had only come across one other person, whose only reaction was a strange look.



We chose Halloween as a time to fursuit on campus because it was more socially acceptable to wear a costume out in public than a random day. Other students got a kick out of it and we were asked for photos! We will definitely be doing it again on future Halloween nights.



Although not quite fursuiting, furries in the Student-Alumni Society have also taken up performing as WPI's mascot, Gompei. Mascoting has a lot of parallels with fursuiting, but the audience is incredibly different. When mascoting, you are expected, and most people at the event know the character. Fursuiters at a convention are expected and normalized, but you are far from the only fursuiter and not everyone will know who you are. Fursuiting in public is unexpected and you (or your group) are the only fursuiters there. Gompei is not allowed to talk and represents WPI itself, whereas fursuiters represent the person themselves and their characters, which allows for more flexibility in performing and presentation.

Performing as Gompei has its perks! Gompei is a bit of a celebrity on campus and garners attention from the student body. He can hype up a crowd and make everyone laugh and smile just by being silly.

Fun Facts!

Furries have an active presence within WPI's Student Alumni Society! SAS is in charge of the Gompei mascot costume, so furries have been able to use their fursuited experience to enhance their performance as Gompei.

The WPI Planner, a tool actively used and recommended by advisors, was made by a furry! In 2014, our very own Henrique Polido, aka Nican, created the planner as an IQP to repair an even older planner project. Despite being 10 years old, it's still maintained by WPI ITS today.

A major content creator in the fandom comes from WPI! Ben Duquette, Class of 2020 is known as "BetaEtaDelota", or just "Beta", on YouTube. Ben joined WPI as a Biomed major and graduated with a mechanical engineering degree. Ben discovered the fandom in his sophomore year and has grown to become one of the largest creators in the fandom.