

CITATION OF
ANGELA RODRIGUEZ

FOR THE
**ROMEO L. MORUZZI YOUNG FACULTY AWARD FOR
INNOVATION IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

As a stress researcher, Professor Angela Rodriguez knows that student stress undermines both well-being and learning. In fact, the stress of traditional exams interferes with the very purpose of an exam – to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their learning. With that in mind, Professor Rodriguez has implemented a transformative approach to giving exams using an open-ended, semi-graded, group format that focuses on high-level application and synthesis.

In her psychology classes, students complete exams in small groups and submit one collective response. For example, in Health Psychology, groups design a health communication promoting a particular behavior change, justify why that strategy would be effective, and tailor their communication for a specific audience. After they draft initial responses, Professor Rodriguez engages students in a class-wide discussion and provides feedback to the groups, and they are given time to refine their work. The groups are graded not only on their first submission but also on the progression of their work.

This innovative approach to exams reduces student stress by providing peer and social support and allowing students to capitalize on collective expertise. This format is also a better representation of the collaborative nature of the scientific process. Students are able to navigate differing points of view and employ peer review to converge on a high quality work product. One student commented that the format “greatly improved my learning experience ... [and] left me with a deeper understanding and memory of the class content.” In addition to enhancing student learning, group exams also benefit the instructor by reducing the grading burden, which in turn frees up time and energy that can be reinvested into students and the course.

For her work to remove stress-related barriers to performance and transform exams into real-world learning experiences, WPI presents the 2023 Romeo L. Moruzzi Young Faculty Award for Innovation in Undergraduate Education to Professor Angela Rodriguez.

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE – APRIL 28, 2023