

CITATION OF
John-Michael Davis
FOR THE
**ROMEO L. MORUZZI YOUNG FACULTY AWARD FOR
INNOVATION IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

WPI's distinctive degree requirement, the Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP), has students work in teams alongside faculty advisors and project sponsors to address real-world problems at the intersection of society and technology. The vast majority of IQPs happen off campus at one of the many project centers WPI has around the world. As Director of the Puerto Rico project center (PRPC), John-Michael Davis has worked to deepen student learning before, during, and after their IQP experience through a series of curricular innovations that links the projects students work on during IQP to a larger body of community-engaged research and scholarship and also to redesign the Puerto Rico project center so that both students and the communities they work in experience deepened benefits.

Professor Davis redesigned the PRPC taking it from a generalist project-center and transforming it into two strategic research streams addressing challenges in Puerto Rico: repurposing abandoned schools and climate resiliency. This approach has developed expertise with community partners and attracted external funding including a \$24,900 Sociological Initiatives Foundation grant to support community-driven adaptive reuse of abandoned schools and participation in a \$6M NOAA-funded Caribbean Collaborative Action Network (CCAN) to advance climate resilience with grassroots organizations.

In addition to this, Professor Davis instituted 3 new innovative experiences:

- 1. Pre-departure summer reading sessions:** Students engage with Puerto Rican literature and documentaries, write reflections, and participate in two facilitated discussions prior to the IQP prep term building cultural competence and cohort cohesion, setting a reflective foundation for ethical community-based research.
- 2. Cultural Excursions and Community Learning:** Curated excursions so students experience diverse regions and community initiatives across Puerto Rico. Paired with weekly shared meals and office space at *Taller Comunidad La Goyco*, a San Juan cultural hub, these activities “high touch” environment fostering belonging, cultural understanding, and peer support. Students describe these experiences as transformative and inspire deeper engagement with their projects.
- 3. New Post Experience Course: ID 400x: Post-IQP Academic Publishing:** A publishing pathway enabling teams to transform IQP research into peer-reviewed articles. Since 2023, Davis has published three journal articles with eleven students and two sponsor elevating students’ scholarship and professional development, and motivating teams to produce exceptional work while also expanding their reach.

For this work, we are proud to present the 2026 Romeo L. Moruzzi Young Faculty Award for Innovation in Undergraduate Education to Professor John-Michael Davis.