

1999 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Teaching Recipient

Professor John A. McNeill

To successfully fulfill the position of Professor within the WPI Plan, an individual must be more than a lecturer. The WPI Plan envisions a Professor that is as multi-dimensional as the WPI Plan itself. Through his teaching, project and academic advising, and procuring of funds for research, John A. McNeill exemplifies this model.

Professor McNeill provides his students with motivation and inspiration in the challenging area of Microelectronics and Analog Devices. One student says, "as a lecturer, he is the clearest, most organized, and most interesting I have met at WPI. No matter how dense or difficult the subject matter may be, he is able to break it down and help you not only learn it so that you can really remember it, understand it, and use it, but also so that you can understand the role that it will play in a career as an [electrical] engineer."



He creates an image of openness and approachability to many of his students that is unsurpassed. Examples of this include bringing his children in for the day or teaching the finer points of golf to his students. An alumna points out, "Professor McNeill's relationships with his students extend far beyond the traditional line of thought that says, 'I'm the professor. You're the students. I'm here to teach you things you don't know and that I do know.' Rather, he creates an atmosphere of 'I'm a little older than you and have some real work experience. Let me share with you what I know and we can learn together.' Professor McNeill doesn't demand respect from his students, rather he earns it."

As an advisor, he encourages students to think for themselves, and rather than directly answering a question, he will patiently guide them to the answer. Professor McNeill knows that it is not to the students' benefit to be told the answer. He has gone out of his way numerous times to help his students find co-op jobs, summer internships, and full time careers. His commitment to his students is shown by his willingness to extend office hours whenever needed and via an open-door policy to any student, even one not under his advisement or in one of his classes.

Professor McNeill has made several improvements in the ECE project program, including the development of corporate-sponsored projects and the Ireland project site for ECE MQP's. Annually, these limited opportunities are the most sought after by undergraduates in the department. Professor McNeill is also the founder of the New England Center for Analog and Mixed-Signal IC Design. He willingly overloads his schedule by volunteering to teach extra classes to ensure that students with an interest in analog electronics are not short-changed.

He is also greatly respected by his ECE colleagues. As stated by a faculty member in the ECE department: "John is a superb teacher, highly respected by his students and fellow teachers alike for his patience, clarity, mastery of subject, and the ability to convey a sense of the importance of the material. Almost single-handedly, he has restored to analog microelectronics its proper place in the mix of things ... offered in Electrical Engineering. He's done a remarkably good job!"

Finally a student of Professor McNeill issues this endorsement. "[He] has been my mentor in Electrical Engineering, and I see him as a model for my own career. His ethics, patience, and hard work combined with an incredible ability in his area of study make him an excellent role model for anyone. He has truly touched the lives of many more students than you will ever hear about."

For his dedication to expanding opportunities for students in Electrical and Computer Engineering; for advising people, as well as projects; and for dedication to and genuine care for the growth of students, we proudly present the 1999 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Teaching to Professor John McNeill.