



*A Resolution of the Faculty of
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
March 17, 2022*

We, the Faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, note with profound sorrow and a great sense of loss the passing of our friend and colleague Prof. Dean O'Donnell, full Teaching Professor of IMGD, who died March 7, 2022. Dean O'Donnell graduated from WPI with a B.S. in Physics in 1986 before earning his MFA from Brandeis University in 1990 and returning to WPI as a professor in 1993. In 2004, Prof. O'Donnell was one of six faculty who established and led WPI's top-ranked and dynamic Interactive Media and Game Development program, the first such degree-granting program in the nation.

While at WPI as an undergraduate, Dean O'Donnell was active in the performing arts community as a student writer, actor, and producer. After graduating, he enrolled in Brandeis University's Dramatic Writing MFA and was invited to stay an additional year as an artist in residence. He has written numerous short plays, including "Legwork," which has been staged in various venues, from Yale University to the Viaduct Theatre in London, and in 2002 was converted into an independent film by Javier Reyna.

*In 1993, Dean O'Donnell returned to WPI, this time as a professor in the Drama/Theater program, where he taught and advised students, wrote and produced plays for the on-campus theater community, was active in managing and producing our New Voices festival, and started a Theater and Theatre Technology concentration. Simultaneously, Prof. O'Donnell continued to play a leadership role in the larger Boston theater community, most notably as the series coordinator for the Dark Night Staged Reading Series, the mission of which was to promote and foster new works and connect playwrights with local directors, actors, and support personnel. It was during this time in 1998 that Dean O'Donnell produced with director Marc Smith an augmented reality-enhanced rendition of *The Story of Dr. Faust* for the Foothills Theater. About this innovative collaboration, Dean O'Donnell explained "It's not photo-realistic; it's a surrealistic thing. Think *Toy Story*. It's one more tool in our tool box."*

His broad thinking about storytelling took Dean O'Donnell into writing for games, working for such companies as Epic Games, Activision, and Iron Lore Entertainment. In fact, the giant statue of a minotaur that now stands in WPI's Gordon Library was from Dean's time at Iron Lore. Meanwhile, he continued to experiment with game engines and theater technologies to enhance live performances.

When the opportunity arrived to collaborate with a small team at WPI—including Mark Claypool, Mike Gennert, David Finkel, Fred Bianchi, and Patrick Quinn—to propose a major in Interactive Media and Game Development, Dean O'Donnell was uniquely qualified to help design and implement the new program. Core to the degree is his course "Storytelling in Interactive Media and Games," which students often refer to as the ARG course—a large design project that has run across the university in the last weeks of D term for the past 16 years.

In addition to his curricular work, Prof. O'Donnell was pivotal to the culture of IMGD, both in never forgetting the fun and possibilities of the medium but also in the professional outreach and mentorship he provided. He drew from theater pedagogy to introduce Master Classes to bring game professionals to WPI for intensive courses. He worked with students to design and implement our PAX East booth to highlight student work at a major industry event. For students wanting to work with industry partners, he negotiated MQP sponsorships with such giants as Disney and TenCent. During Showfest—an end-of-year event that Dean created for students to come together, barbeque, and play each other's games—he set up an interview couch, invited outside game developers and designers, and gave the students opportunities to be professionally interviewed about their newly created and released media, all streamed on Twitch, managed by Prof. O'Donnell himself.

While so much of Dean O'Donnell's energy focused on student vision and student creativity, he maintained his own research and creative practice. Most recently, he began exploring built gamic environments, such as escape rooms and new opportunities in interactive theater, which he included in his teaching and project advising. In 2018, Prof. O'Donnell established the annual IMGD on-campus escape room. He hosted Board Game Night for graduate students. He started a Twitch stream for Dungeons and Dragons. And so much more.

It is hard to fit into here his love and delight for all things Disney and Star Wars, his love of his wife and dog, and his joy from being with friends, playing games, and telling jokes. He was the heart of WPI's IMGD program since its inception.

Therefore, let it be resolved that we, the Faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, recognize and express our admiration of and eternal gratitude to Prof. Dean O'Donnell, who continued to have deep passion, vision, and empathy for all things and people related to IMGD. He founded a new type of degree at WPI; he nurtured it as it grew into successful undergraduate, graduate, and extracurricular programs; and he celebrated the enormous success of our students and alumni. Let it also be resolved that this resolution be inscribed in the permanent records of this faculty as a memorial to our beloved colleague, and that a copy be delivered to his family.



*Gillian Smith
Director, IMGD (2021-Present)*



*Jennifer deWinter
Director, IMGD (2016-2021)*



*Mark W. Richman
Secretary of the Faculty*



*Winston Soboyejo
Provost and Senior Vice President*



*Laurie Leshin
President*