

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

*Hooding and  
Graduation Ceremony*



9 SEPTEMBER 2021

## DEAN'S MEDAL FOR OUTSTANDING DOCTORAL WORK

The Dean's Medal for Outstanding Doctoral Work is the highest honor awarded by the College of Professional Studies to a doctoral graduate. It was established to acknowledge exemplary academic achievement and to recognize demonstrated creativity.

The process for determining a recipient involves evaluating nominated candidates based on the following criteria: the degree of comprehension, innovation, and creativity; the scope and importance of the work to a field of study; and the caliber of writing. Faculty advisors from all three doctoral programs are invited to nominate students whose final doctoral work they deem exceptional. A review committee composed of faculty from the college chooses three finalists, and the Dean of the College makes the final decision.

2020 Dean's Medal Recipient  
September 2021 Speaker

### **Brent Musson, LP.D**

Dr. Brent Musson, graduate of the Doctor of Law and Policy program, is the recipient of the college's highest academic honor, the 2020 Dean's Medal for Outstanding Doctoral Work for his thesis, "LA Multifamily Housing: Obstacles to the Adoption of Off-Site Construction as a Method of Increasing Production."

The founder of innovative developer MUSSON Factory, Dr. Musson is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®</sup>, a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, licensed real estate broker, and general contractor. He holds degrees in real estate development, urban planning, and supply chain management from the University of Southern California, and he has been a consultant to the international real estate development industry for two decades, providing global supply-chain management, asset management, project management, and program management to projects on three continents. Dr. Musson also served three terms in policymaking roles as Councilman in Altadena, California—as a member of its Land Use Committee, and on the West Altadena Project Area Committee. As a keynote speaker or featured guest, he has shared his expertise in real estate finance, project management, international best practices, global logistics, and continuous improvement strategies with audiences across the globe.

Dr. Musson's research, which has produced two pending patents, explores the industrialization of multifamily housing development. According to Dr. Musson's thesis advisor and professor, Ivan Rupnik, Ph.D., Associate Professor at Northeastern's College of Arts Media and Design and Lecturer, Northeastern's College of Professional Studies, Dr. Musson "was able to build upon a national survey I conducted of obstacles to off-site construction (OSC), crafting his own interviews for major stakeholders involved in housing delivery in Los Angeles. Working closely with Professor Gary Painter, an economist from USC, he was also able to adapt an economics theory to help him assess his findings. His dissertation was therefore truly interdisciplinary and, more importantly, will help address real societal issues facing U.S. cities."

Dr. Musson writes in his thesis abstract that his study examines "the obstacles to the adoption of OSC in Los Angeles through the theoretical framework of oligopoly theory, a current macro-economic framework that offers an explanation as to why key housing production actors might be motivated to limit the supply of housing during a housing shortage." He goes on to explain that "this study is the first to examine OSC through the lens of the housing crisis as an economic market failure and contributes to the body of knowledge regarding the obstacles to the adoption of OSC. It examines the motives of the decisionmakers that set housing production levels by either exploiting OSC to boost production or by acting as a bottleneck impediment to OSC housing production in the LA Metro area."

Dr. Rupnik called Dr. Musson someone who "epitomizes the greatest potential of Northeastern University, the College of Professional Studies and the Doctorate of Law and Policy, bringing real-world experience and problems and leaving the program with a new set of skills that he will, in turn, directly apply to the betterment of those who need it most: the most impoverished members of society."

2021 Dean's Medal Recipient  
November 2021 Speaker

**Michael Urmeneta, Ed.D.**

Dr. Michael Urmeneta, graduate of the Doctor of Education program, is the 2021 recipient of the Dean's Medal for Outstanding Doctoral Work for his Dissertation in Practice, "Seeing the Unseen: An Action Research Study of First-Generation College Student Persistence at a Mid-Size Private Institution in the Northeast."

Dr. Urmeneta's passion is to serve students by helping educational institutions "move the needle" with an agile and collaborative approach to research and analysis. For over 25 years, he has worked with academic institutions, leading institutional effectiveness, analytics, and student success initiatives. Active on a national level, his work has been recognized by the Association for Institutional Research, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the National Association of College and University Business Officers, and EDUCAUSE. His broad academic training paired with his varied work across the student life cycle has consistently allowed him to forge meaningful relationships across diverse constituencies, ultimately impacting institutional policies, procedures, and priorities. In his most recent role as director of analytics and business intelligence for the New York Institute of Technology, Dr. Urmeneta provided strategic insight to the Institute's schools and colleges, the office of the president and the board of trustees. Previously, he served at New York University in key administrative roles including admissions, financial aid, enrollment and retention, alumni relations, and development.

In his Dissertation in Practice, Dr. Urmeneta examined whether establishing a series of targeted interventions could increase a sense of belonging and persistence for first-generation college students at a mid-sized, private institution in the Northeast. He first examined the graduation rate at his research site, particularly of first-generation students, then implemented and studied initiatives to effect change, developing an interdepartmental task force including students and faculty that has continued to meet following the conclusion of Dr. Urmeneta's research and participation. His research showed that targeted interventions—in this case, an event series, a resource website, and a communications campaign—could indeed impact a sense of belonging, positive engagement, and increased involvement among first-generation students—and that robust programming can occur even in resource-constrained environments and despite the challenges of a global pandemic.

"Secondary questions that flowed from [the] initial inquiry focused on the experiences and challenges of first-generation college students as a whole," Dr. Urmeneta wrote in his dissertation. "The questions aimed to identify the specific needs of first-generation students and intervention characteristics that would be most effective. These questions include, (a) What was essential to first-generation students? (b) How did they define success? (c) What struggles did they face? (d) Did they feel connected to the institution? and (e) Were they engaged with the college environment? These questions were posed to participants, collaborators, and stakeholders to understand first-generation students and increase the institution's ability to serve them."

According to the chair of his dissertation committee, Dr. Joseph McNabb, Professor of the Practice at Northeastern's Graduate School of Education, Dr. Urmeneta "has done exceptional work throughout his doctoral studies. His creativity and insight in investigating and improving the lives of first-generation students at his research site are exemplary. His Dissertation in Practice possesses a logical, organized flow of well-documented ideas. It is a model of scholarship, research, collaborative leadership, and advocacy."