John Willson, PT, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physical Therapy. He completed his PhD in biomechanics and movement science at the University of Delaware and began his career in academia at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse before joining the ECU faculty in 2012. He is the Director of the Human Movement Analysis Laboratory and his research is focused on identifying factors that contribute to both acute and overuse knee injuries associated with running and other physical activities. He has over 40 publications in peer-reviewed journals and in 2012, Dr. Willson received the Steven J. Rose Excellence in Research Award from the American Physical Therapy Association, Orthopaedic Section. Dr. Willson is a strong advocate for student engagement in research and he actively promotes student involvement in his research as reflected in the numerous publications that are co-authored with students.

1. What do you like best about working at ECU?

My colleagues. The weather. Our facilities and resources. Saying "aarrgh"!

2. What do you find most exciting about your research and its potential?

Many of my current projects involve the analysis of running mechanics associated with lower extremity injuries. I find the prospect of minimizing the impact and incidence of injuries associated with exercise and recreational activities to be very exciting. Removing barriers that contribute to an inactive lifestyle is a very satisfying research endeavor for me.

3. What excites you about teaching?

A guiding principle in my teaching is to motivate students to be critical consumers of physical therapy literature. I feel strongly that, in order to function effectively and ethically in the face of contemporary physical therapist responsibilities, students must be highly trained to practice using independent, self-determined, professional judgment and actions based on best available evidence.

4. What do you hope students take away from their experiences working with you on your research?

I strive to develop research skills in physical therapy students and provide opportunities for students to be actively involved in research. My hope is that students gain an appreciation for the application of the scientific method to clinical questions and how research can positively
influence physical therapy interventions for movement-related disorders. I also aim for my students to participate in the dissemination of research findings from our lab. In my opinion, the opportunity to present at meetings and contribute to scholarly manuscripts allows physical therapy students to distinguish themselves from their peers and provides a competitive advantage for career advancement activities such as residency programs and academic doctoral studies after graduation.

5. What is your favorite teaching or research moment?

As our cohorts of students pass through the curriculum, what I enjoy most is watching students develop the confidence to be skeptical of treatment techniques or outcomes that lack empirical evidence.