

2019 Professional Development Grant Report

College English Association Conference

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B. Restatement of Creative Work / Professional Enhancement Activity

In March 2019, I attended the College English Association (CEA) Conference in New Orleans, LA, where I presented research about The Joy Project in the College of Arts and Humanities at Arkansas Tech University. The Association's website is as follows:

<http://www.cea-web.org/>

C. Brief Review of Creative Work / Professional Enhancement Activity

The CEA is an important peer-reviewed national conference in the discipline of English. At the conference meeting, I presented a paper on an Academic Administration Panel; the paper, entitled "The Joy Project: Helping Faculty Find Joy in and out of the Classroom," was chosen to be part of a panel about academic administration. The abstract is below:

One of the main challenges facing colleges and universities today is student retention. To help in this effort, many institutions have looked to improve their training of faculty advisors. Research shows that the vast majority of time, students do not drop out of college because they cannot do the level of work expected of them, but rather because of "life challenges:" financial struggles, the inability to cope with stress, mental or physical health issues, or family pressures. To help many students stay in college today, faculty need to advise students in these areas as much as they need to advise them about what classes to take. But what we found in my college and in the surveys of faculty at other institutions is that faculty members themselves tend to struggle in the same areas as their students. The question then became, "How can we help our faculty members build an effective work-life balance, as that will also better train our faculty as advisors?" In search of that answer, we thereby asked, "How do we help faculty to experience joy (i.e., epiphany, transcendent revelation, breakthrough discovery, synergy) within their lives and within their classrooms, especially at an underfunded state institution where the

rewards for faculty are unlikely to be financial?” This talk will explain the steps I have undertaken in my work for the dean’s office at the Arkansas Tech University College of Arts & Humanities to address the above questions via a college-wide endeavor called “The Joy Project.” I’ll share the resources we have made available to faculty to help them understand joy both inside and outside the classroom; I’ll discuss the partnerships we are creating with local institutions to understand joy and stress in the workplace; I’ll share the reactions from faculty to this project (both positive and less positive); and I’ll outline our future plans for The Joy Project. My hope is that this talk can be of use to faculty in the humanities at other institutions who are facing similar challenges helping their students, themselves, and their colleagues find a work-life balance that is not just livable, but frequently joyful.

D. Summary of Outcomes / Experiences

My panel was comprised of senior faculty in the discipline from the United States and Canada. We each discussed different challenges at our institutions and how we came up with unique approaches to those challenges based on research. My presentation generated the most discussion; faculty in the room were particularly taken with the idea of implementing a version of The Joy Project at their own institutions, and asked for advice, especially about administration buy-in. Since the conference, I have been in contact with two faculty members from other universities who attended the session, and have been consulting with them about steps to begin to form a Joy Project that would make sense for their local campus communities. In addition to giving my talk at the conference, I moderated a panel on Revising Classroom Experiences and Expectations. As well, I attended multiple sessions on academic administration.

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

Every time I speak about The Joy Project, no matter the campus or location, faculty latch onto the idea and are enthralled with the concept and its implementation. This indicates that something is happening in higher education where faculty do not feel connected to happiness, and this affects many components of their lives in and out of the classroom. The Joy Project is needed not just locally, but nationwide.

I am extremely grateful for the Professional Development Grant to allow me the opportunity to continue my research.

Copies to: Dr. Carl Brucker, Department Head, English & World Languages
 Dr. Jeffrey Woods, Dean, Arts & Humanities
 Dr. Phillip Bridgmon, Interim Vice President, Academic Affairs

F. Appendix

Copies of my talk are available upon request.