APPLICATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

**All questions must be completed to be considered for grant award.

Choose one: [ ] Creative Activity [ ] Research Activity [x] Professional Enhancement Activity	**Application Deadline Date:** __Feb 1_____ (i.e. October 1, February 1, or April 15) **Date of Last PDG Award** (Semester and Year awarded): __Spring 2018_____ **Date of ATU Faculty Appointment** (Semester and Year): _Fall 2012_____

1. Project Title: _Working Class: How Adult Students Create Connections in the Online Classroom_____

2. Name of Principal Investigator/Project Director: Jeremy Schwehm_____

3. School (abbrev): eTech_____ **4. Department: __PS**_____ **5. Campus Mail Address: 715 N El Paso Ave**

6. PI/PD Campus Phone: _356-2095_____ **7. Amount Requested: $ 561.39**_____ **8. Total Cost of Project: $ 961.39**_____

9. Will total funds awarded be expended by June 30th of the current fiscal year: Yes___x___ No _____

10. If not, what is the total to be expended this fiscal year: $_____

11. What is the total to be carried over to the next fiscal year: $_____ (*if approved by the VPAA*)

12. Project Completion Date: _____3/8/2019_____ **13. Travel Dates: 3/6/19 to 3/8/19**
<div align="center">(<i>if applicable</i>)</div>

14. Does this project involve:

Yes No
[ ] [x] human subjects?
[ ] [x] animals/animal care facility?
[ ] [x] radioactive materials?
[ ] [x] hazardous materials?
[ ] [x] biological agents or toxins restricted by the USA Patriot Act?
[ ] [x] copyright or patent potential?
[ ] [x] utilization of space **not** currently available to the PI/PD?
[ ] [x] the purchase of equipment/instrumentation/software currently **available** to the PI/PD?

NOTE: If the answer is "yes" to any of the above questions, the investigator must attach appropriate documentation of approval or justification for use/purchase.

SIGNATURES
Department Contribution (if applicable): **$**_____

Account Number: _____

_____
Chairperson   **Date**

School Contribution (if applicable): **$** _400.00_____

Account Number: __ET DEAN_____

_____
Dean   **Date**

This Section to be completed by the Office of Academic Affairs
Previous PDG Award final report received: Yes_____ No_____ PDC Committee Award Recommendation: Yes____ No____ PDC Committee Proposal Rank: _____ of _____ Total Proposals. Recommendation of VPAA: Yes____ No _____   Recommendation of President: Yes____ No _____ Award Date: _____

B.   Abstract

The purpose of this research presentation is to present research on how students work in the online classroom to build connections with peers and faculty. Presentation attendees will explore if the amount of work was related to perceptions of engagement, and the overall attitude of students toward the importance of creating connections in the online classroom. Three specific research questions were addressed in this study: a) how do adult students in online classrooms work to build connections with peers and faculty, b) is there a relationship between amount of work and perceived engagement, and c) do adult students value building connections, including engagement activities designed by the instructor, in the online classroom?

The Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) is a leading organization in research and practice on adult students in higher education. I am a tenured faculty member in the Department of Professional Studies, which serves a significant number of online, nontraditional learners. I am requesting funding to cover travel expenses to the 2019 AHEA national conference in Orlando, Florida on March 7-9, 2019, where I will present research on the ways in which adult learners create connections in the online classroom. In this presentation, participants will learn, through a discussion of the presenters research, about active and passive students, student perceptions of connecting in the classroom, the interaction of faculty and students in creating connections, and the relationship between levels of connection and demographic, environmental, academic, and social variables.

C.   Restatement of the Problem Researched

The purpose of this presentation was to provide an opportunity to discuss ongoing research into the ways in which adult students work to build connections in the online classroom. The central path for adult student social engagement and for negotiating meaning for learning is the classroom (Kasworm 2005, 2010; Philibert, Allen, & Elleven, 2008). To be meaningfully engaged in the online classroom, adult students must be engaged with others in learning activities that are professionally and/or personally relevant (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Adult students value positive interpersonal relationships with faculty and peers (Kasworm, 2010; Zemke & Zemke, 1981), but often lack the time to develop these relationships. Adult students utilize their limited time strategically to build relationships with the highest potential for professional or personal benefit (Allen &

Zhang, 2016). According to Poniatowski (2012), online courses designed with increased interactivity components positively impact student engagement, but participation in interactive components of an online course require a significant time commitment on the part of the adult student. In other words, it requires work.

The aim of this ongoing study was to explore how students worked the online classroom to build connections with peers and faculty, if the amount of work was related to perceptions of engagement, and the overall attitude of students toward the importance of creating connections in the online classroom. This study utilized a cross-sectional, concurrent, mixed-methods design. The participants for this study were identified using purposeful, non-random sampling techniques, which is considered a Type 4 mixed-methods design (Onwuebuzie & Collins, 2007). Three specific research questions were addressed in this study: a) how do adult students in online classrooms work to build connections with peers and faculty, b) is there a relationship between amount of work and perceived engagement, and c) do adult students value building connections, including engagement activities designed by the instructor, in the online classroom?

Retention is a major issue in online programs. Engaging students in high-impact practices in the online environment can benefit retention, as well as additional measures of student success. Attending the conference will enable the researcher to present research findings on engaging students in the online environment. In addition to dissemination of research, the researcher will have the opportunity to network with/learn from other faculty and researchers working with adult learners, as well as share strategies used at Arkansas Tech to engage the online student population. Information on best practices based on the end results of the workshop session can be packaged to offer professional development for ATU faculty at the departmental, college, and university level through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

D.   Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

The proposal was accepted on December 12, 2018, giving the presenter an opportunity to travel to Orlando, Florida on March 6 – 8, 2019 and present to a group of subject matter experts on working with nontraditional students. The presentation was evaluated and reviewed, with the feedback used to enhance the presenter's practice, as well as generate research for publication in scholarly journals. The concluding discussion aided the presenter in both identifying future research opportunities, but also in compiling a list of

best practices and strategies that can then be reviewed for use within the Department of Professional Studies and the College of eTech, as well as developed into training materials that can be utilized university-wide.

<u>Outline of the Session</u>

I. Introduction

    a. Welcome

    b. Theory to Practice (engagement in online learning)

II. Why is Connecting Important?

    a. Involvement vs Engagement

    b. Increased Learning

    c. Sense of Belonging

III. Student Attitudes, Actions, and Experiences

    a. Attitudes

    b. Actions

    c. Experiences

IV. Conclusion

    a. Question/Answer Session

    b. Best Practices

D. Summary of the Experience

The following topics were covered: a) student perceptions of interaction, b) student approaches to interaction, c) why students connect, and d) the relationship between attitude and perception of interaction. The majority of students in this study perceived collaborative activities to be important to their success as online students. The preferred means of interaction was small group discussion and FlipGrid (asynchronous video chat). Students preferred method of interaction with their online professors was via email.

Participants in this study reported moderate to high levels of participation in engagement activities. Additionally, participants in this study had a positive view toward engagement activities in quantitative measures of attitude. In open-ended responses, three themes emerged from the data: a) engagement activities as

a necessary evil, b) averse to engagement activities, and c) engagement activities as enhanced learning. Participants with lower scores on perceptions of engagement reported feelings of anxiety in relation to engagement activities. Participants with higher scores on perception of engagement tended to view engagement activities as enhancing learning. In most cases, students worked to create connections in the classroom to build a support network.

D. Conclusions

I presented research findings on student engagement in the online learning environment, particularly how students work to create connections in online classrooms. Approximately 20 individuals were in attendance at the presentation. The presentation began with an overview of engagement theories and their application in the online environment. This was followed by an in-depth discussion of research results on student engagement in the online classroom. Based on discussions that took place after the presentation, I was able to compile a list of best practices for improving student perceptions of engagement activities in the online environment. I shared these practices with colleagues in my academic department. Additionally, I am collaborating with a colleague to publish the results of this research in an academic journal.