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TITLE: C^4: Creating a Collaborative Cohort Community

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AUTHOR AND ADDRESS:

Professor Susan Boam-Wood
Online M.Ed Program Coordinator
114C Butterfield Hall
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania,
Edinboro, PA 16444

EMAIL CONTACT: boamwood@edinboro.edu

PHONE CONTACT:

Office - (814) 732-2202 (do NOT leave a message on voice mail)
Cell – (814) 397-3416

NO FAX currently available in my office

C^4: Creating a Collaborative Cohort Community

ABSTRACT: There are many concerns about the efficacy of utilizing distance education for teacher training. One of the most commonly perceived problems of online teaching and learning is lack of sufficient and/or effective communication between the instructor and students and limited collaboration among students during the distance learning process. Lack of sufficient interaction can lead to student isolation and alienation that often leads to high dropout rates in online courses. However, perceived distance education remoteness can be prevented by establishing a cohort of learners who work together throughout their program in support of one another. This session will present answers to questions and solutions to problems of online interaction via establishment of cohort communities. This will be done by presenting formative evaluation results from student surveys in an integrated online cohort community in a special education M.Ed. program. In addition, informal student perceptions from frequent probing obtained during the first year of the online M.Ed. program will be reviewed. Analysis of types of cohort asynchronous and synchronous activities and assignments that are perceived by students to be helpful in minimizing distance education disconnection will be examined. Finally, a summary of progress to date will be presented to support the importance of accepting a group of students as an ongoing cohort in order to maximize interaction in an online program.