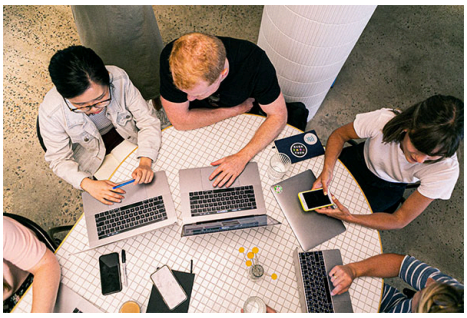
David Feldon Receives National Science Foundation Grant | CEHS

05/04/2020



Dr. David Feldon, a researcher in the Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University, has received a grant from the National Science Foundation funding a $2.5 million project to study the relationship between soft skills training and career success among graduates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

In 2018, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine produced a report called *Graduate STEM Education for the 21st Century*. In this report, they argued that STEM graduate programs needed to build in training in “soft skills” such as communication, project management, and leadership so that their graduates would be more successful in industry-based employment. They based this recommendation on frequent claims from industry groups that soft skills are a substantial unmet need.

Feldon’s project tests this assertion by surveying 9,000 STEM Ph.D. recipients when they complete their degrees and following their professional success using data procured through the IRS, U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey will assess graduates’ soft skills and gather information about any soft skills training they received in graduate school, as well as their career and employment goals. Then, researchers will analyze the extent to which the survey responses predict career trajectories. The results of this project will help determine whether soft skills training is a valuable investment for STEM graduate programs.

This project is in partnership with the Institute for Research on Innovation and Science (IRIS) at the University of Michigan. IRIS specializes in analyzing the types of federal data listed above as part of its work tracing the economic impacts of research grants to universities more broadly. More information about them can be found on their website.