

# **NGLC grant fuels Connected initiative**

Since its inception in 2008, Abilene Christian University's mobile-learning initiative, Connected, has increased student engagement by employing mobile technology in the classroom. This week, the university announced it has received a nearly \$250,000 grant from Wave I of the Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC). The \$20 million grant program is largely sustained by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and administered by Educause.

The grant money will be used to implement ACU's mobile-enhanced inquiry-based learning (MEIBL) program in two STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs, one at Del Mar College and the other at California University of Pennsylvania. Both institutions have a number of low-income students who are at a high risk of failing or dropping out. MEIBL is a blended learning strategy which aims to create an active learning environment that will increase student engagement and independence while encouraging learners to complete their courses.

Research conducted through ACU's Connected initiative shows how classroom mobile device usage consistently improves student engagement. Student teams can effectively use pre-class viewing of instructive podcasts to reduce in-class instructional time and facilitate just-in-time review before exams. These uses of mobile technology foster independent, collaborative and active learning processes in basic science labs.

"Providing new methods of learning to students who otherwise would drop out or fail is precisely the foundation of ACU's mobile-learning initiative," said Dr. Dwayne Harapnuik, director of faculty enrichment at ACU. "It's an honor that the NGLC recognizes the benefits of our MEIBL program."

Over the next 18 months, California University of Pennsylvania and Del Mar will implement MEIBL with students in biology, zoology and botany courses. ACU currently uses MEIBL with more than 400 students in chemistry and biochemistry courses and will apply the MEIBL to other classes with a portion of the grant money.

In this first wave of grant funding, NGLC has awarded a combined total of \$11 million to organizations developing promising education technology solutions.