



Information for course co-ordinators

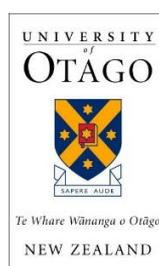
University of Otago

Higher Education Development Centre – Student Learning Development

www.otago.ac.nz/pass

hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz

03 479 8801



Introduction

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) are weekly interactive study sessions aimed at supporting student success, and facilitated by second or third year students. PASS typically targets papers that are perceived by students as difficult or “high stakes” (e.g. compulsory papers for course progression such as BSNS, or papers requiring high marks for competitive limited entry courses such as HSFY and LAWS). The PASS programme is based on the very successful Supplemental Instruction (SI) programme developed in 1973 by Dr Deanna Martin, at the University of Missouri, Kansas City.

PASS are not intended to replace lectures, tutorials or labs: they are *supplementary* to them. PASS focus on both content-specific and general academic skills. Course content is not ‘re-taught’, but rather the facilitators promote collaborative learning exercises, interactive problem solving activities, discussion and debate. Facilitators also assist students to gain an understanding of expectations, and become familiar with the concepts and language of the discipline. This ‘active’ learning encourages students to take responsibility for processing the subject material, thereby helping students to develop effective and independent learning skills necessary for success in their studies. In addition, the more relaxed setting of the PASS environment creates opportunities for students to connect with others and develop friendships or study groups, all of which play a vital role in enhancing students’ learning experiences and supporting their integration into university.

The PASS programme:

- Targets subjects rather than students, thereby avoiding the remedial stigma often attached to supplementary instruction programmes.
- Focuses on facilitation, not teaching. PASS facilitators do not re-teach the material or introduce new material. Facilitators initiate discussion amongst students and share successful learning strategies.
- Encourages students’ development of independent and transferrable learning skills, such as planning for learning, monitoring of learning, and evaluating one’s learning.
- Integrates content knowledge and learning skills. In other words, students develop and awareness of “how to learn” and “what to learn”.
- Is recognised by the University as an important resource for supporting students transition to university study.
- Recruits quality peer facilitators who have demonstrated strong academic and communication skills.
- Provides ongoing professional development for PASS facilitators. All facilitators undergo training prior to the beginning of Semester 1 each year, and professional development activities, including peer observations and student feedback, continue throughout the academic year.

- Benefits from the leadership of academic staff who are active researchers in Higher Education.
- Encourages course co-ordinator support to promote the benefits of PASS to students in their course.
- Undergoes regular evaluation from students, PASS facilitators, and PASS mentors to inform the administrative aspects of the programme and professional development of facilitators.
- Does not require departments to individually fund the cost of PASS.

Succeed with PASS

There is a range of academic and social benefits for students who participate in PASS (Martin & Hurley, 2005; Prebble et al., 2004; Topping, 2005). In addition to providing students with effective learning strategies, PASS provides students with a sense of belonging, particularly for students not living in residential colleges (i.e. Locals students).

Participation in PASS can contribute to the success of *all* students regardless of their academic ability when starting at university or ethnicity (van der Meer, Wass, Scott, & Kokaua, 2017).

A systematic review of 29 studies on PASS between 2001 and 2010 revealed that participation in PASS “is correlated with higher mean grades, lower failure and withdrawal rates, and higher retention and graduation rates” (Dawson, van der Meer, Skalicky, & Cowley, 2014, p.1). The review found that PASS has the following specific effects:

- Students who attended 8 or more sessions of PASS had a 10% higher final grade, compared to students who attended no sessions;
- Students who attended PASS sessions reported greater satisfaction with their knowledge and improved confidence in applying their knowledge in new situations;
- Students reported that PASS had helped to develop their sense of belonging and retention in their various institutions.

Data gathered on the PASS programme at the University of Otago mirrors these outcomes.



Succeed with PASS

PASS – Peer-Assisted Study Sessions
Interactive study groups facilitated by successful second and third-year students.

- Free 50-minute weekly sessions.
- Gain a more in-depth understanding of course material.
- Get better marks without paying for a private tutor.

Find out more at: otago.ac.nz/pass



Adding a new paper to PASS: Information for paper co-ordinators

To ascertain whether PASS is appropriate for your paper or not, we ask you to consider the following:

1. Is the paper a pre-requisite, core, or 'high stakes' paper?
2. What is the current failure rate in your paper?
3. Based on student feedback, do the current offerings of tutorials/labs adequately attend to students' learning needs?
4. What is your rationale for offering PASS to your students?
5. If your paper is included in the PASS programme, are you willing to promote PASS to your students?

If you are interested in discussing your options further, please email hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz to arrange a meeting with a member of the PASS team.

The PASS team: Contact details

Dr Rob Wass

Rob is the academic leader of the peer learning programmes, which includes PASS.

rob.wass@otago.ac.nz

03 479 7091

Dr Tracy Rogers

Tracy is responsible for the day-to-day running of the PASS programme.

tracy.rogers@otago.ac.nz

03 479 5786

Curtis Day

Curtis provides the administrative support for the PASS programme, including timetabling and attendance monitoring.

curtis.day@otago.ac.nz

03 479 8801

Dr Julie Timmermans

Julie provides advice regarding professional development of PASS facilitators and enhancements of the PASS programme.

julie.timmermans@otago.ac.nz

03 479 7522

PASS Mentor Team

Six PASS mentors assist with the training and recruitment of facilitators. The mentors all have extensive experience as facilitators and receive ongoing support from the academic staff involved in the PASS programme.

References

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