



Student Learning Development

Higher Education Development Centre

PASS

Peer Assisted Study Sessions



Information for University of Otago Staff

PEER ASSISTED STUDY SESSIONS

Overview

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) are weekly interactive study sessions aimed at supporting student success and facilitated by second or third year students who have done well in the paper. PASS typically targets papers that are perceived by students as difficult or courses which are “high stakes” (e.g. compulsory for course progression such as BSNS, or requiring high marks for competitive limited entry courses such as HSFY or LAWS101). PASS 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 sessions are not intended to replace lectures, tutorials or labs: they are *supplementary* to them. PASS focuses 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 course. In addition, the more relaxed setting of the PASS peer to peer environment creates opportunities for students to connect with other students and develop friendships or study groups, all of which play a vital role in enhancing students’ learning experiences and supporting their integration into the university culture.

[PASS is]...“a helpful tool to learning the ropes to studying and great way to understanding content” Survey respondent.

The Essential Elements of the PASS Programme

- *The programme targets subjects rather than students* - By targeting subjects rather than students PASS avoids the remedial stigma often attached to supplemental instruction programmes.
- *Focus on facilitation, not teaching* - The facilitators do not re-teach the material or introduce new material. The facilitator initiates and facilitates discussion amongst participants and models successful learning strategies at key moments during the sessions. Students who attend the study sessions are ultimately responsible for processing the subject material.
- PASS encourages the development of *independent and transferrable learning skills*
- *The facilitator serves as a “model student”* - Facilitators function as “model students” of the discipline, rather than authority figures. They help students formulate and answer their own questions. This process helps students develop a more sophisticated approach to learning while maintaining a focus on mastery of content and understanding.
- *Integration of content, understanding and learning skills* - “How to learn” and “what to learn” are both focused on in facilitation of the study sessions.
- *Quality peer facilitators* - The senior student who facilitates study sessions has performed to a high level in the course.
- *Facilitators are trained* - Facilitators receive training prior to the beginning of the term. In-service training continues throughout the academic year. These training sessions include specific teaching/learning theory and strategies.

- *The programme is supervised* - The programme is supervised and coordinated by an accredited professional staff member.
- *Faculty support the programme* - It is important that the lecturer(s) of the subjects in which the programme operates understand the philosophy behind the programme, and support its implementation. They can play an important role in identifying potential facilitators, as well as “marketing” the programme in their course.
- *The programme is evaluated* - The programme is evaluated for two reasons: to continuously improve the programme, and to inform faculty about the impact of the programme.

Adapted from the supervisor’s manual of the Peer Assisted Study Sessions Programme (The International Centre for Supplemental Instruction/Peer Assisted Study Sessions, 2005).

PASS @ Otago

PASS was implemented at the University of Otago in 2008 by Jacques van der Meer and Carole Scott. The programme was first piloted in a single School of Business core paper, BSNS101. The success of the pilot led to PASS being offered across 7 core business papers and the Human Body Systems, for PhysEd students the following year. PASS is currently offered in a total of 24 papers over four divisions. The PASS programme is coordinated through the Higher Education Development Centre (HEDC) Student Learning Development in the ISB building.

How PASS works

PASS sessions - PASS sessions integrate how-to-learn with what-to-learn. The programme is voluntary and supplementary to other in-course teaching. It is not a remedial programme, but is open to all students irrespective of their academic ability. Sessions are held weekly, starting week 2 of the semester before student encounter issues with their studies. Participating students review course content, through active learning exercises and activities, working together to develop sound study techniques and strategies. Problem solving, understanding expectations, and becoming familiar with the concepts and language of the discipline are all desirable outcomes of the PASS session. PASS can also assist first year students to successfully negotiate the transition from high school to university study. While generally targeting first year papers, PASS has also been successfully implemented in higher level papers.

The PASS Team - The PASS Team are responsible for the on-going training and support of the PASS facilitators. In addition they offer facilitators opportunities for professional development and ensure the quality of the programme. The current team is made up of Carole Scott, PASS Coordinator, Hayley Knight, PASS Administration Assistant, a team of six mentors (a brief description of these roles is given below), and Dr Rob Wass as HEDC Academic Adviser to programme.

PASS Facilitators - The PASS facilitator’s role is to plan and facilitate weekly interactive study sessions that focus on both a content-specific and general academic skills, in a student centred, relaxed and inclusive learning environment. As a successful and high achieving student, the PASS facilitator acts as a role model student. The PASS facilitator is not a tutor and does not reteach content in the PASS session. PASS Facilitators attend an intensive 1.5 days training before the start of the academic year. This is followed by ongoing mentoring and professional development throughout the year.

PASS Mentors - PASS Mentors are senior, experienced facilitators who assist with the training and support of the facilitators. Much like the role the facilitator has as a “model student” to the students in their PASS sessions, the mentors offer their experience as successful “model facilitators” to help guide

and support facilitators to become confident and effective in this role. Mentors assist with quality assurance of the programme by conducting regular observations of individual PASS sessions.

PASS Coordinator – An accredited PASS coordinator implements the PASS programme and is responsible for the overall coordination, development and quality control of the programme, liaising with department and college staff to identify targeted courses, and the recruitment, supervision, training and support of facilitators and mentors. In addition the co-ordinator is responsible for the reporting of results data to appropriate stakeholders.

PASS Administration Assistant - The PASS Administration Assistant is responsible for the collating recording and analysing of weekly attendance data, and data from the student/participant and facilitator surveys conducted at the end of the semester. They also assist the coordinator with training and the development of the programme.

PASS Statistics and Outcomes

In order to assess the effectiveness and quality of PASS @ Otago the programme is regularly monitored and evaluated. Facilitators collect attendance data for their weekly sessions and this data is later used to compare student attendance with their final course mark at the end of the semester. This data is also used to track fluctuations in attendance and gauge student engagement with the programme.

Opinion surveys of participating students and facilitators also provide useful data that enables the PASS team to evaluate programme effectiveness. This data also helps inform our training programme and the professional development needs of our facilitators.

PASS @ Otago has received much positive feedback from students through the surveys and in department course evaluations. Student comments on the value of PASS and its impact on their studies say:

Survey Question	Percentage strongly agreed/agreed
Overall I found PASS useful as a study tool	89%
I feel I have a deeper understanding of the course because of PASS	86%
I would recommend PASS to other students	87%
Overall I found the PASS facilitators helpful	90%

Research shows that there are many academic and social benefits for students who participate in PASS (Martin & Hurley, 2005; Prebble et al., 2004; Topping, 2005). PASS provides students with the opportunity to develop effective study skills and learning strategies relevant to the discipline they are studying in. PASS can also contribute to the student’s sense of belonging within the group, discipline or university community. Engaging in the group activities PASS offers, can also contribute to the development of skills and attributes outlined in the Otago Graduate Attribute Profile, such as interpersonal and communications skills, team work, and critical thinking.

“It helps manage your time, involves good study strategies, ensures you that you're not alone” Survey respondent.

“A helpful tool to learning the ropes to studying and great way to understanding content” Survey respondent.

A recent systematic review of PASS programmes (Dawson, van der Meer, Skalicky and Cowley, 2014), evaluating 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” (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 over the last seven years on the PASS programme at the University of Otago mirrors these outcomes. Below is data from semester one 2015.

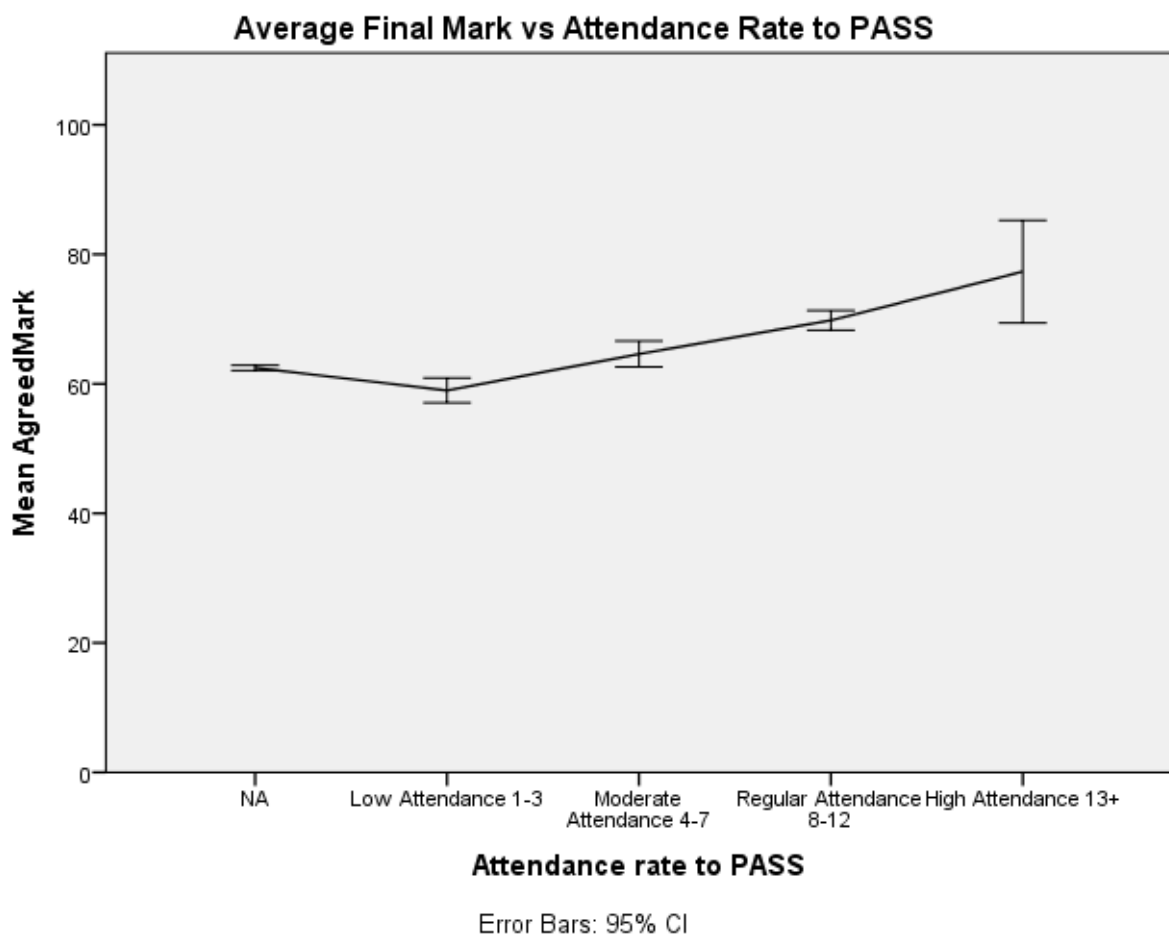


Figure 1: Average final mark of students attending PASS in semester one 2015

[My main reason for attending PASS was]... wanting to ensure high grades for papers I was confident in, and wanting to ensure a pass mark for a paper I was less confident in. Survey respondent 2015.

The following is a link to our new Introduction to PASS video for Academic staff

<https://unitube.otago.ac.nz/view?m=jtIN8x9rsMI>

A similar video is available for students.

Implementing PASS for a paper in your course/department

How we can support you?

HEDC has an accredited PASS supervisor and administration team who can assist you to set up PASS for a paper or papers in your course. The implementation of PASS for your paper will require very little of you in terms of administration. While we may ask you to recommend potential students for the facilitator roles, the team will arrange the recruitment and training of facilitators, and will provide their supervision and ongoing support. We will also arrange contracts and payroll matters, schedule sessions, arrange rooms and resources for facilitators and organise the marketing and promotion of PASS in your paper for you.

What will it Cost?

For more information regarding PASS facilitation training and operation costs please contact

SLD Reception

Student Learning Development

Higher Education Development Centre

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References

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