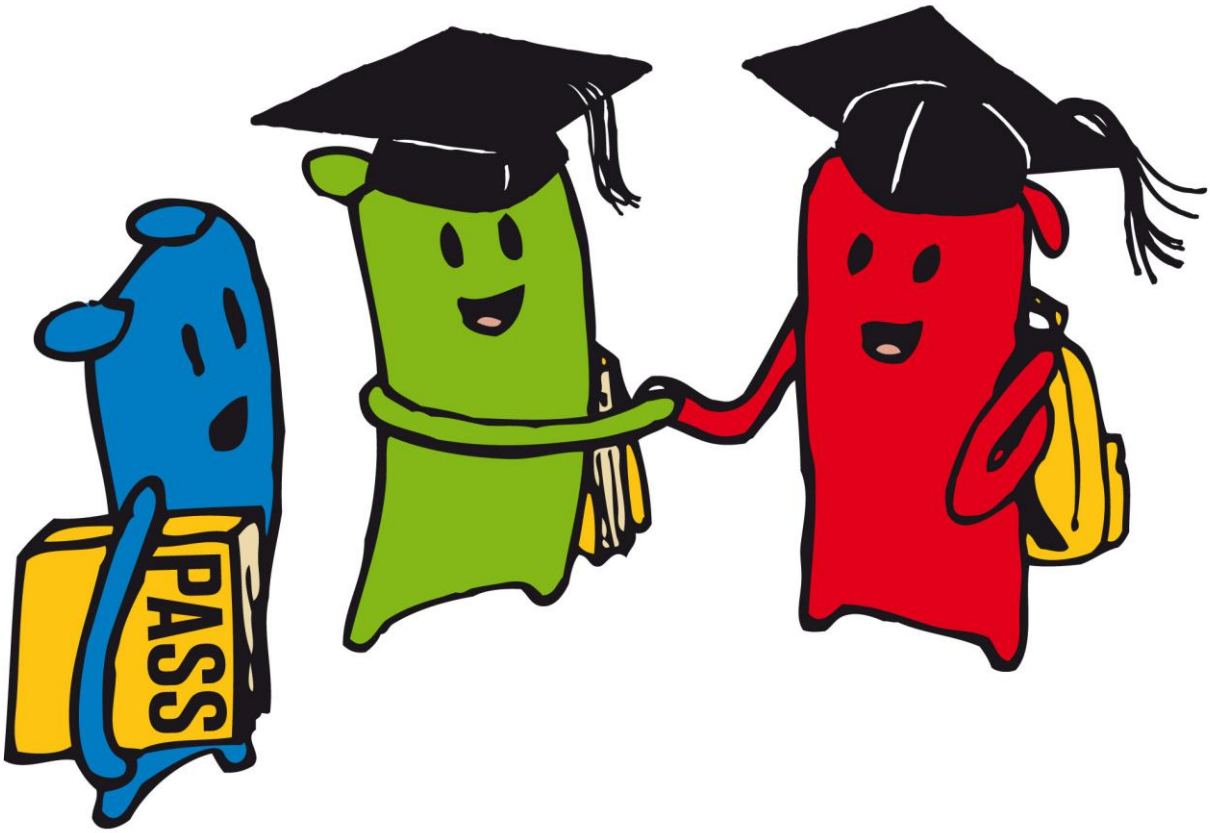
Peer Assisted Study Sessions
PASS

Information for Staff



PASS

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OVERVIEW 3
BRIEF HISTORY OF PASS AND OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PASS 3
THE SIMILARITIES/DIFFERENCES IN ROLES OF LECTURER/TUTOR AND PASS LEADER 4
THE WORKLOAD OF A LECTURER/TUTOR FOR A PASS COURSE 4
THE MAIN 10 ELEMENTS THAT OCCUR DURING A TYPICAL PASS SESSION 4
HOW FIRST YEAR STUDENTS BENEFIT 6
HOW PASS LEADERS BENEFIT 7
INSTITUTION BENEFITS 7
OUTLINE OF A PASS SEMESTER TIMELINE 8
FACULTY INVOLVEMENT AND COOPERATION 8
POSSIBLE FAQ'S FROM FACULTY STAFF 9
THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF PASS 10

Overview

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) is a learning enhancement program. PASS is designed to organise and improve the ways in which students prepare for the course outside of class. PASS is attached to courses to provide students with a systematic and disciplined approach for processing the course material assigned by the lecturer.

During the program a PASS Leader is assigned to a course. This is a student who has demonstrated proficiency in a targeted course and completes PASS leadership training. The PASS leader attends some of the lectures to keep up with the course content being presented and to model effective student practices and attitudes. The PASS leader schedules and conducts 2 to 4 group meetings a week, depending on cohort size and timetable. During these sessions, the PASS leader uses interactive learning strategies which encourage involvement, comprehension and synthesis of course content. In addition, the PASS leader will incorporate demonstrations of effective study techniques.

Brief History of PASS and of the Australian National Centre for PASS

PASS is based on Supplemental Instruction (SI) which was initially developed by Dr Deanna Martin at the *University of Missouri – Kansas City* over 30 years ago. Since then, SI has spread to some 35 countries around the world. SI targets courses with higher than desirable failure rates and/or courses which are perceived by the students as being very difficult. The program assists students with mastering and integrating course content, learning and study strategies.

SI has been adapted in a number of Australian universities where it is usually known as PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions). PASS commenced operation at the University of Wollongong in 2002 and currently is offered across all faculties at that University.

The University of Wollongong's program has been commended by national and international experts for its PASS program and is the National Centre for PASS. As such the University assists other universities with the implementation and development of the PASS program since 2005, the National centre has trained over 200 staff from nearly 40 institutions throughout Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Hong Kong. PASS operates at a large range of institutions including the University of Sydney and University of Melbourne and other GO8 universities in Australia.

The similarities/differences in roles of lecturer/tutor and PASS leader

PASS Leaders are different from tutors in a number of ways. The chart below outlines these differences and helps explain the role of the PASS Leader.

	PASS Leader	Tutor
Characteristics	2nd year model student – recording HD or D pass overall in the program	Content specialist
Status	Peer	Academic elite
Goal	Helps students to be successful	Sometimes teaches course matter only
Mode	Group participation/collaborative learning	Sometimes a passive learning environment
Orientation	Student orientated	Lecturer-Oriented
Instructional Duties	Leads group – leaves teaching to lecturer/tutors	Re-lectures or re-teaches group. Also grades assessable tasks

PASS typically supports 1000 and 2000 level introductory, first year courses and has nothing to do with the lecturer's ability to teach. The primary reason for the introduction of PASS is usually because this course is historically difficult where data has shown many students have struggled and failed, thus producing high failure and withdrawal rates. The focus of PASS is the difficulty inherent in the course itself and/or acquires discipline specific learning skills

The workload of a lecturer/tutor for a PASS course

At the University of Newcastle the PASS program can be completely maintained and managed by the PASS program within the Student Support Services Division. The minimum input required of the lecturers and tutors in a PASS supported course is the following:

- A few minutes at the beginning of lectures for the PASS Leader to make announcements when needed
- Time to meet briefly with the PASS Leaders, if possible, to inform on what is happening in the lecture and receive feedback from PASS sessions. At a lecturer's request, leaders can also provide very valuable and early feedback on concepts that students are struggling with
- Be positive in your support and marketing of the PASS sessions.

The main 10 elements that occur during a typical PASS session

1. ***PASS Sessions are peer-facilitated*** – PASS Leaders are ideally students that have recently taken the course from the same lecturer in the previous year and received a HD or D grade. All PASS Leaders should be approved by the lecturer for competency. The PASS Leader never re-lectures or introduces new material, the Leader's responsibility is to organise and add structure to group study, the responsibility for processing course material and answering questions remains with the students. The primary function of the PASS Leader is to facilitate discussion among participants and model successful learning strategies at key moments in the PASS sessions.

2. ***The PASS Leader serves as a model student*** – The PASS Leader functions as a "model student" of the discipline rather than an authority figure. PASS Leaders help students formulate and answer their own questions. This process helps students become life long learners and develop the capabilities to learn how to study.

3. ***PASS sessions integrate content and learning skills*** – The PASS sessions integrate the review of lecture notes, textbook readings, outside supplemental readings along with appropriate modelling of learning strategies. Emphasis is made on the "how to learn" as well as "what to learn". Through practice and developing effective learning strategies, students can adopt and transfer these strategies to other courses and content areas. Collaborative learning strategies are used in PASS sessions as a means of creating a more active learning environment for student participants. PASS creates and fosters independent learners.

4. ***The PASS Leader attends the targeted class lectures*** – It is recommended that the PASS Leader attend some of the targeted class lectures, this means the PASS Leader becomes knowledgeable about what is occurring in the course and ensure they are kept up to date on what is happening for the student within the course each week. At the least they should have access to the course outline and the Blackboard site.

5. ***The PASS Leader receives training*** – All Leaders receive training prior to the start of the term. These training sessions include specific teaching/learning theories and strategies. The training covers the following areas:
    - Techniques to avoid re-teaching – the PASS Leader never provides the answer to the students but provide strategies to find the answer
    - Learn how to re-direct questions back to students to help develop independent learning
    - Methods for facilitating group discussions
    - Study and time management skills
    - Learning activities such as lecture reviews, quizzes, etc, that can be done during study sessions
    - Ways to deal with problem students

6. ***The PASS Program is supervised*** – The PASS Supervisor, a trained professional staff member, supervises the PASS Leader and the PASS program across the University. Among other duties, the PASS Supervisor periodically attends PASS sessions throughout the academic term and provides feedback to improve the program and offer support for the PASS Leaders. The PASS Supervisor will have attended the PASS Supervisor training workshop and be accredited for this training.

7. ***Faculty and Academic Support for the program*** – The lecturer of the targeted course should both understand PASS and support the attachment of PASS to this course. The PASS Supervisor usually meets with the lecturer prior to PASS sessions being scheduled to ensure the lecturer understands the PASS model and to answer any questions. Faculty members are encouraged to find ways to integrate PASS into the overall course mainly by marketing and positive referral to their students. Academic staff may also play a role in selecting or referring suitable PASS Leaders.

8. ***Regularly scheduled sessions*** – PASS is in place from the start of the academic year – typically starting in week 2 or 3, following the first lecture. Generally 5 or more sessions for the one course

are offered weekly, depending on the number of students enrolled in the course and the demand. Students attend PASS sessions on a voluntary basis.

9. ***Program evaluation*** – PASS is evaluated by the PASS Supervisor each academic term. Reasons for this are; 1) to continuously improve the overall quality of the program by gathering information about its strengths and weaknesses and 2) to inform the Faculty and University community about the overall impact of the program on the student and their results. The PASS program will be evaluated appropriately by assessing Institutional outcome measures eg. final grades, course withdrawal rates, Institutional retention rates, etc. This evaluation can often impact on further funding and awarding of grants. The evaluation is carried out by qualitative feedback, surveying of student responses and grade reports. Attendance is tracked by PASS Leaders and collated for data recording by the PASS Supervisor.

10. ***PASS targets courses not students*** – While historically academic improvement programs attempt to diagnose students who may be struggling academically, the PASS program targets courses where data indicates large portions of students have recorded fails or have withdrawn due to difficulty in passing. Other areas of PASS are;
    - PASS avoids remedial stigmas by focusing on the course rather than the individual students
    - the PASS program provides systemic change in the learning environment for all students enrolled in the target course
    - while all students may not take advantage of the voluntary service, it attracts an equal proportion of students from differing ability and cultural groups
    - PASS does not segregate students based on prior academic performance or predications of academic success
    - PASS sessions work best with heterogeneous groupings of students
    - data shows that participating students receive higher measures of academic achievement in comparison to their non-participating counterparts

How First Year Students Benefit

- PASS is proactive and participatory rather than reactive and passive, so the students have the opportunity to discuss with their peers parts of their program they feel are relevant
- Data indicates students earn higher course grades while they learn effective study skills
- PASS provides peer collaborative learning experiences which promote assimilation into the campus culture
- PASS enjoys a non-remedial image while offering academic support to all students enrolled in historically difficult programs
- PASS makes efficient use of study time
- PASS provides an opportunity for students to develop relationships with other students and staff, an important factor in retention
- PASS provides employment opportunities for students as PASS Leaders in areas that are aligned with their study
- PASS can break down barriers for a range of areas; cultural, social, religious, etc
- PASS provides opportunity to develop skills and confidence to communicate with other students
- PASS provides a place to learn University jargon in a non-threatening environment
- Students are able to learn in a relaxed atmosphere
- It provides a place to realise the benefits of learning in a collaborative way
- PASS can break down the barriers of social capital deficiencies

How PASS Leaders Benefit

Academic
- Improve study skills
- Re-caps first year content
- Revision tool
- Improves skills such as report writing

Future Employment
- Improved communication skills
- Experience in leadership
- Experience to act professionally
- Time management skills
- Facilitation skills
- Exposure to cross cultural sensitivities

Leadership
- Experience in performing a leadership role
- Understanding of different leadership styles required to be successful
- Improved communication skills
- Ability to listen and evaluate situations

Faculty Relationships/Mentoring
- Ability to form professional relationships – with PASS Supervisor, lecturers and tutors
- Privy to internal politics regarding University staff
- Recognition as a high achieving student

Life Skills
- Empathy
- Confidence
- Team work
- Analytical skills
- Patience
- Self control/awareness
- Listening skills
- Communication skills

Institution Benefits

- Savings – proven retention of students
- Opportunity for students who excel in their studies
- Meet key points of the Bradley Review
- Used as a marketing strategy – especially for International cohorts
- Equips students with social capital
- May lead to a possible reduction in work load for academics
- Viable and achieving possibilities for retention of students
- Gives the University a visible identity within the international PASS community

Outline of a PASS semester timeline

Before the start of semester

- Identification of the historically difficult courses
- Meet with Faculty academics and secure their co-operation
- Hire and train PASS Leaders
- Identify campus resources – rooms, marketing and advertising material
- Organise timetable and liaise with enrolments about setting up courses

During the semester

- PASS Supervisor to attend first and second week classes as much as possible
- PASS Supervisor to observe and support sessions throughout the term as appropriate
- Conduct weekly or bi-weekly meetings with all PASS Leaders
- Maintain timesheets and payroll responsibilities
- Assist PASS Leaders with attendance, surveys, scheduling and Faculty relations
- Maintain morale of PASS Leaders with professional development and workshops or gatherings.
- Collect attendance data from PASS Leaders and enter into database for end of semester reports
- Administer surveys to students in selected courses

End of Semester

- Collate students Nustar grade records of all PASS attendees
- Compare performance of PASS groups vs non-PASS groups
- Send out full reports to all stakeholders

Faculty involvement and cooperation

- Permit PASS leaders to attend class as an observer when they can, including PASS Supervisor on some occasions
- Agree to make grades available to the PASS Supervisor for evaluation purposes. Is permission needed?
- Allow PASS Leader to occasionally address the students at the start of class in making announcements about PASS
- Make time available for the PASS Leader to meet with a Faculty member to discuss the course and target specific PASS sessions if required
- Determine if the lecturer would like anonymous feedback from the PASS participants – usually no names are given to Faculty staff about who attends PASS sessions
- Ask the Lecturer to share reactions to PASS program – good or bad. These can be used in reports or to change approaches
- PASS Supervisor may request or discuss if old exams/tests are available for distribution as PASS session material

Possible FAQ's from Faculty staff

Why was my course selected for PASS?
PASS targets historically difficult courses. These courses usually contain content that students consider to be challenging. PASS is designed to support Faculty teaching and is assigned to a course because of **what** is being taught, **not** because of the manner in which it is being taught.

What will I be required to do?
PASS is not intended to create additional work for the Faculty. You can support PASS by granting time for occasional in-class announcements and be supportive of the program simply by encouraging students to take advantage of PASS. Faculty should avoid the suggestion that only those who do poorly will benefit. Additionally, the PASS Supervisor we will be in contact with you about the following aspects of the program:

- Assisting in selecting and approving candidates for PASS Leaders for your course;
- Allow PASS Leaders to meet with the relevant lecturer for a brief time to seek any guidance on structure of PASS sessions covering a specific topic

What should I expect from the PASS Leader?
The PASS Leader will attend some lectures of the targeted course; maintain a professional attitude about matters such as course standards, grades and student complaints; discourage students from attending PASS as a substitute for tutorials or lectures; share PASS materials with the Faculty member before use,; and provide feedback to the Faculty if requested to do so.

What should I expect from the PASS Supervisor?
That they will cooperate with Faculty in selecting candidates for PASS Leaders and place Leaders only with the approval of the Faculty; train all PASS Leaders according to established guidelines and standards; monitor the activities and presentations of PASS Leaders for as much as necessary by attending class with them, helping them plan sessions with assistance from trained PASS Supervisors; supervising their performance; provide supplies, training, in-service experiences, consultation for PASS Leaders; provide Faculty with an end-of –term comparative analysis of student performance.

The Theoretical Perspectives of PASS

Some of the theoretical frameworks that underpin PASS are:

Theory	Theorists	Theoretical Principles	Application to PASS
Behavioural Learning Theory	Watson Skinner Bandura Ausubel Herbart	• behaviour is based on positive reinforcement of desirable behaviour • break down complex tasks into their component parts • emphasis is on cause and effect relationships (process to product) • modelling is important (Bandura)	• concentrates on process not product • models on high achieving students • gives other students perceptive(?)b on course • integrates learning skills • multiple buy-in from university community
Cognitive Developmental theory	Brunner Piaget Flower & Hayes	• mental structures develop gradually as learning is constructed through organisation and integration of new information and experiences • as learners assimilate knowledge, they think differently about a concept • learners use prior knowledge when learning new knowledge	• learning new knowledge from peers • life-long learning techniques • learn new concepts to assist study • learn how to study not just what to study • safe space
Social Interdependence theory	Geertz Vygotsky Bakhtin Doyle Erickson	• social interaction causes conflict that stimulates cognitive development • knowledge is actively built by learners, working together cooperatively and interdependently • knowledge is produced rather than distributed • knowledge and understanding are not constructed individually but in dialogue with others, and facts are “true” in that social context	• work in a collaborative approach • be part of a learning community • promote independent learning
Interpretive/Critical theory	Freire Apple Kozol Marx	• Good pedagogy empowers learners to take control of their own learning processes • Education is a political process in that it involves issues related to power and control • Learning should have as its goal liberation rather than domination • Educational practices should seek to overcome the learner’s “culture of silence”	• introducing an educator as a facilitator • facilitating collaborative learning

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