
Australasian Centre for PASS

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) - Guidelines for Best Practice

These guidelines have been collaboratively developed by a working party representing the Australasian PASS community. Published 2nd December 2010.

Purpose

This document outlines the guidelines for best practice for PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) in the Australasian region and serves to distinguish PASS from other Peer Learning initiatives.

What is PASS?

PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) is a non-remedial approach to learning that provides peer-led, active learning environments in which students can work together to better understand course content. PASS programs in Australasia are an adaptation of the Supplemental Instruction model introduced in the United States of America at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) in 1973, where the International Centre for PASS/SI is still situated, and from where National Centre's for PASS/SI are accredited across the globe. PASS is commonly attached to traditionally difficult units or is implemented to create discipline-specific learning communities. PASS is voluntary and offers regularly scheduled, weekly sessions, which focus on integrating course content (what to learn) with academic reasoning and study skills (how to learn).

Objectives of PASS

PASS at a tertiary level responds to key strategic objectives - such as retention, transition, the first year experience, and social inclusion agendas - by enabling students to co-construct knowledge under the guidance of more experienced peers, the PASS Leaders/Facilitators.

The general objectives of the PASS program are to:

- Improve student retention and progression rates
- Enhance the quality of the first year experience
- Deepen understanding of the discipline
- Improve academic performance of attendees
- Develop and improve knowledge of adult learning principles
- Create and foster a student-centred approach to learning
- Foster collaborative and active learning and engagement
- Enhance social inclusion and create a non-threatening learning environment
- Create discipline specific communities of practice
- Facilitate social-connectedness
- Provide leadership development for high-achieving students

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Essential Elements for an Accredited PASS Program

Programs endeavoring to achieve best practice for PASS will demonstrate the following attributes:

1. PASS Programs:
 - a. are managed by an accredited PASS Supervisor who has undertaken training with an accredited National Trainer.
 - b. are student-driven with PASS Leaders/Facilitators and participants determining the content of PASS sessions
 - c. are monitored and evaluated through attendance data, student feedback, and students' final marks. Outcomes are reported to stakeholders.
2. PASS Supervisors:
 - a. and senior Leaders/Mentors model PASS principles and facilitation skills both in training and ongoing professional learning in order to inform best practice.
3. PASS Leaders/Facilitators:
 - a. are paid or appropriately compensated.
 - b. are provided with an initial minimum two day training program and ongoing professional learning.
 - c. are provided with a Leader/Facilitator manual to support them in their role, such as the University of Wollongong National Centre manual or another manual of recognised and equivalent quality.
 - d. do not reteach the course material. They are specifically trained and supported to redirect student questions in order to develop students as independent learners and to ensure that PASS sessions do not become a replacement for tutorials.
4. PASS sessions:
 - a. are small study groups in which the ratio of students to Leader/Facilitator is not more than 20:1, although an even smaller ratio may be ideal.
 - b. are voluntary and are open to all students enrolled in the unit/subject/course. Whilst maintaining the inherent voluntary and non-remedial nature of PASS, strategies may be employed to encourage attendance at PASS by particular students.
 - c. are not linked to the awarding of marks for the unit/course/subject.
 - d. are facilitated by a student who is at least one year beyond the level of the target unit in their own studies, has successfully completed the unit they are supporting, and has also demonstrated excellent interpersonal and communication skills through a targeted recruitment and selection process.
 - e. are designed to supplement existing learning opportunities open to all students, such as lectures, tutorials, practicals, etc.
 - f. are aligned with unit/subject/course content, with PASS Leaders/Facilitators



- g. integrate both course content and related study skills.
- h. provide an active, collaborative peer learning environment.
- i. do not deal directly with assessable tasks.
- j. are regularly monitored and Leaders/Facilitators are provided with guidance and feedback for ongoing improvement.

Desirable Elements for an Accredited PASS Program

The following aspects, although not essential in terms of being accredited to run a PASS program within Australasia, are deemed highly desirable in terms of operating a quality program:

1. PASS Programs:
 - a. provide an opportunity for a broader learning community to be established outside of the boundaries of individual courses and faculties, and between staff and students.
 - b. provide opportunities for high-achieving students to engage in both social and academic cross-disciplinary collaboration and networking.
 - c. are provided with a suitable, designated PASS venue for Leader/Facilitator preparation and conduct of sessions.
2. PASS Supervisors:
 - a. engage with the broader Australasian PASS community of practice through, for example, the PASS List and annual PASS forums.
3. PASS Leaders/Facilitators:
 - a. are provided with opportunities for further professional learning by, for example, taking on more senior roles in the PASS program, such as Senior Leaders/Mentors, or administrative roles. This contributes not only to their PASS leadership skill development but also to the development of leadership and graduate capabilities more broadly.
 - b. undertake peer observations and provide and receive feedback in order to facilitate best practice and professional development.
 - c. are provided with opportunities and professional learning to support them to apply for annual Leader awards and to attend events such as the annual PASS forum.