UniPASS Report Semester 2, 2011

“UniPASS guided and supported me through my unit; it stopped me from falling behind”

Nichola 2012, Humanities Student
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Background

University Peer Assisted Study Success (UniPASS) was run in semester one 2011 as a pilot initiative of The Learning Centre and moved to the Student Transition and Retention Team (START) office in semester two. UniPASS is an academic mentoring programme where weekly group study sessions are run by senior students. UniPASS has multiple benefits for learners. Apart from improving academic performance, study skills and social integration, its follow-on benefits are to improve student transition and retention. Also, due to its HEPPP (Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme) funding arrangements the programme works to improve retention of low SES, regional, remote and Indigenous students.

At its core, UniPASS uses peer to peer relationships in a collaborative learning environment to meet the above aims. The sessions provide a place where a trained senior student creates a non-hierarchical, non-threatening learning environment. The senior students are trained in facilitation techniques and do not re-teach content; instead they strive to enable students to become active, independent learners. UniPASS targets units that have a history of difficulty for students and not by targeting at-risk students directly. This enables UniPASS to be inclusive and voluntary, avoiding any remedial stigma so that students at varying levels of achievement can integrate and aspire to improve.

The UniPASS model has been adapted from Supplemental Instruction (SI), which was initially created by the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) in 1973 as a way of improving academic performance of medical students, and its Australian counterpart (PASS: Peer Assisted Study Sessions) from the University of Wollongong (UOW). This model has a strong history of research and evidence to support the positive effects on student learning.

HEPPP Targets

Centre for Aboriginal Studies

The Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) was approached regarding UniPASS support due to the widening participation targets linked to HEPPP funding. In semester two 2011 the UniPASS pilot supported the CAS Bachelor of Education Regional and Remote programme. Three indigenous peer learning facilitators successfully completed the facilitator training. However, no UniPASS sessions were run because the UniPASS model was not compatible with the course timetable. The CAS Bachelor of Education Regional and Remote course is taught in full-time study blocks on Bentley campus, the students travel to Perth for a two week study period and this time proved too busy for students and facilitators to run UniPASS sessions. The programme coordinator reported that the facilitator training was well received and highly beneficial for the academic and professional development of the indigenous participants.
HEPPP Targets (continued)

Low Socio-Economic Status Students
Widening the participation of low Socio-Economic Status (SES) students is an important strategic goal for Curtin and for HEPPP funded programmes like UniPASS. An essential part of the pedagogical framework of UniPASS is that it is inclusive and non-remedial. Therefore, low SES learners are not targeted individually but units that have a significant number of low SES learners are targeted instead. The numbers of low SES attendees will naturally increase as UniPASS becomes more widely accepted.

Regional and Remote Students
The targeting of CAS students in 2011 aimed to meet the regional and remote student participation HEPPP target. Due to the difficulty in delivering UniPASS to CAS regional and remote students, an online UniPASS pilot was initiated in semester one 2012. The online pilot is being run with external students enrolled in a first year Humanities unit as a means to test the technological constraints and customise the pedagogy for online facilitation.

UniPASS 2012
Considering the positive results of the pilot, UniPASS has been expanded this year as part of START’s transition and retention strategy and Curtin’s widening participation obligations. The programme has expanded rapidly from three units in semester two 2011 to 14 units in semester one 2012. Currently, UniPASS is running 71 sessions per week and has employed 34 casual peer learning facilitators. During semester one, UniPASS is supporting all faculties except CAS. A UniPASS pilot using online delivery is being run for external students studying a first year Humanities unit to determine the effectiveness of online delivery for the UniPASS model.

UniPASS is expected to continue its current level of support for semester two 2012 with some notable new initiatives which aim to determine the benefits of the UniPASS model under different faculty areas. Firstly, the first year Humanities unit online pilot will continue with the addition of students from Open Universities Australia to enable sufficient time to determine the UniPASS model’s applicability to online delivery. Secondly, meetings indicate that indigenous students enrolled in the CAS bridging communications unit are going to be supported by UniPASS. Finally, the West Australian School of Mines’ (WASM) Kalgoorlie campus is likely to utilise UniPASS next semester to support their regional students.
Summary
UniPASS is a new programme at Curtin University so we anticipate that modifications will be needed as it develops. The best outcomes for programmes such as this are achieved in the second and subsequent years of operations – particularly when the peer learning facilitators are recruited from students who have participated in UniPASS sessions in previous years, creating a student culture of collaborative learning (we have two such facilitators this year). The success of peer learning is now well evidenced around the globe, it appears to have particular resonance with current generations of students, who, having grown up with social media technologies, seem to respond to the non-hierarchical collaborative learning that UniPASS offers.

Given the strong record of this style of programme here and elsewhere, we expect that UniPASS will become a valuable addition to the support provided to Curtin University students and be essential in enabling the university to meet its widening participation obligations under the Bradley review.
**First Year Human Biology Unit UniPASS Results**

**Average Grade and Fail Rate**

Attendees are defined as having attended 5 sessions or more per semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UniPASS Non-Attendees</th>
<th>UniPASS Attendees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Grade</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fail Rate</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- UniPASS attendees average 12% higher grades
- UniPASS attendees have a 13% lower fail rate
- Attendance Rate: 6.63% of students in this unit were UniPASS attendees

**Effect on Borderline Students**

7 students would have been likely to have failed this unit without UniPASS. UniPASS participation at Curtin has been typically associated with 12% higher grades. We may infer that UniPASS attendees who had a final score between 50 - 61% would have potentially failed without UniPASS.

52 students or 12.78% of non-attendees could have potentially passed if they had attended UniPASS. These students had grades of between 37% and 49%, so assuming a typical 12% increase in grades they could have possibly passed the unit.

**HEPPP Targets**

- This first year human biology unit was selected because 12.31% of the students were identified as low SES according to the DEWR postcode categories. Due to the inclusive and non-remedial nature of the program low SES students are not targeted directly but through unit selection.
First Year Construction Management Unit UniPASS Results

Average Grade and Fail Rate

Attendees are defined as having attended 5 sessions or more per semester.

- UniPASS attendees average 12% higher grades
- UniPASS attendees have a 14% lower fail rate
- Attendance Rate: 19.13% of students in this unit were UniPASS attendees

Effect on Borderline Students

2 students would have been likely to have failed without UniPASS. UniPASS participation at Curtin is typically associated with 12% higher grades. We may infer that students who had a final score between 50 - 61% would have potentially failed without UniPASS.

26 students or 12.17% of the total cohort could have possibly passed if they had attended UniPASS. These students had grades of between 37% and 49%, so assuming a typical 12% increase in grades they could have potentially passed the unit.

HEPPP Targets

- This first year construction management unit was selected because 6.45% of the students were identified as low SES according to the DEWR postcode categories. Due to the inclusive and non-remedial nature of the program low SES students are not targeted directly but through unit selection.
First Year Science Unit UniPASS Results

Average Grade and Fail Rate

Attendees are defined as having attended 5 sessions or more per semester.

- Attendance Rate: 3.57% of students in this unit were UniPASS attendees. Only 2 students regularly attended UniPASS in this unit, the sample is probably too small to be statistically relevant but the trend is indicative of UniPASS results in the other units.

Effect on Borderline Students

The sample size is probably too small to be statistically relevant

HEPPPP Targets

- This unit was selected because 13.33% of the students were identified as low SES according to the DEWR postcode categories. Due to the inclusive and non-remedial nature of the program low SES students are not targeted directly but through unit selection.
*Further information*

Semester one 2011 report:


Information for academic staff:


University of Missouri-Kansas City SI:
http://www.umkc.edu/cad/si/

University of Wollongong:

Australasian Journal of Peer Learning:

University of Western Australia PASS programme results
http://www.business.uwa.edu.au/students/learning/pass

University of Wollongong PASS programme results: