

HEQCO

Access and Retention Consortium Mohawk College

Piloting an Online Goal-setting Program to Improve the Success of College Students

Primary Investigator (PI): Tim Fricker, MEd (Dean of Students, Mohawk College)

Co-Researchers: Patrick Gaudreau, Megan Pratt, Nicole Redmond, Melissa Gallo

Overview

The Promotion of Academic Success of Students (PASS) program is a 40-minute internet-based retention intervention through which first-year students receive information and tools, and complete exercises about effective goal setting, goal planning, and goal coping strategies. The objective of the program is to facilitate academic achievement (higher grades and goal progress), school perseverance (reduce the number of courses dropped in a semester), and retention (after the first year), while encouraging the development and maintenance of a positive academic experience (school motivation, school engagement and stress management).

The PASS program was originally developed and tested at the [University of Ottawa as part of ARC 1.0](#). Now, as part of ARC 2.0, this project seeks to validate the use of this innovative intervention in a new context: the Canadian community college.

Through this project, Mohawk College will customize, pilot and evaluate the efficacy of implementing the PASS program intervention on their campus. Validating this intervention for college students will bring us one step closer to understanding its applicability to students across Ontario. This intervention and its accompanying support materials will also be made available broadly by offering support and training to qualified colleagues in other Ontario colleges who are willing to implement and evaluate the PASS program on their campuses.

The overarching research questions for this research project are:

- To what degree can the PASS program intervention be effective when delivered at a Canadian community college?
- How do underrepresented and marginalized students respond to this intervention?

Methodology and Timeline

The project will be conducted in three phases:

- Phase I: Developmental Phase (2017–2018 academic year)

The first phase will focus on revising the PASS program to implement at Mohawk College. Phase I will culminate with an operational manual complete with the intervention content, software platform details and operational guidelines and processes which could be of value to other institutions interested in implementing similar types of projects at their campuses.

- Phase II: Randomized Control Trial (2018–2019 academic year)

In Phase II, a randomized control trial (RCT) of the revised PASS program will be conducted to estimate the educational efficacy of the program with college students. About half of Mohawk's incoming first-year student population will be invited to participate in this phase.

As part of the RCT, participants will first complete a baseline questionnaire to provide the research team with information about variables that are predictors of students' academic success and retention. The data collected by the questionnaire is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the PASS intervention for different types of students. Students in the treatment group will complete the intervention, while students in the control group will complete a neutral activity. Participants will complete two followup questionnaires and will also be tracked for two years following the intervention using their administrative data.

- Phase III: Randomized Field Trial (2019–2020 academic year)

In Phase III, a randomized field trial (RFT) will be conducted. This study will be virtually identical to the Phase II study outlined above; however, the PASS program will instead be included as part of Mohawk's regular services in order to evaluate the real-life effectiveness when delivered in a less controlled and more realistic manner. Here, the PASS program will be incorporated into Mohawk's mandatory activities, and all incoming first-year students will be randomized into either the PASS program or into a neutral activity control.

Contact Information

For more specific information about this project or for any questions, please contact Helen Tewolde, Senior Researcher and Manager, Centre for Equitable Access at HEQCO (htewolde@heqco.ca), or Tim Fricker, Dean of Students at Mohawk College (tim.fricker@mohawkcollege.ca).