



Promoting At-Promise Student Success

PASS FELLOWS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Promoting At-promise Student Success (PASS) Fellows Program is a professional learning community (PLC) that provides an opportunity for faculty, staff and administrators to engage in collective inquiry and action related to improving outcomes for at-promise students enrolled at the University of Nebraska Kearney, Lincoln and Omaha campuses.

After five years of studying the Thompson Scholars Learning Communities– a program that provides support services for racially minoritized, low-income, and first-generation college students across NU, PASS researchers identified a new way to promote student success, through a framework called ecological validation.

The mission of the PLCs is to facilitate learning about the concept of ecological validation, identify research-based strategies for change, envision ways to enact a culture of ecological validation at the institutional level, and support campuses in integrating ecological validation-related approaches into practice. The PASS Fellows Program is a collaboration among the University of Nebraska, the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, and the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California.

STRUCTURE OF THE PASS FELLOWS PROGRAM

- A 3-year commitment (2021-2024), with the first year of the program focusing on learning, and years 2 and 3 focusing on design and implementation of culture changing initiatives at the University of Nebraska.
- Each campus-based PLC has two NU lead fellows and one lead researcher from the PASS research team who co-facilitate meetings. The size of the PLC varies by campus: UNK = 12, UNL = 11, and UNO = 18. PLC members received a \$1,000 stipend in the first year, and \$2,000 per year in subsequent years.
- The Fellows were selected by each campus CAO to represent diverse areas of campus and each campus cohort contains a mixture of faculty, staff, and administrators. Fellows are adept in communicating to varied campus stakeholders, have strong cultural competencies, demonstrate a track record of supporting at-promise students, and have sufficient time to commit to participating in the PLC.

OVERVIEW OF AY 21-22 ACTIVITIES

- From October 2021 through June 2022, PASS Fellows met on a monthly basis for 2 hours, sometimes in person, and other times via Zoom. In advance of the meeting, Fellows were required to read and review articles, resources, and data focused on the topic of ecological validation.
- During the meetings, the PLCs reviewed the readings, engaged in large and small group discussion, and participated in collaborative activities designed by the PASS research team in partnership with NU.
- Near the end of the year, the PLCs began to identify potential approaches and projects that aimed to move the campus towards a culture of ecological validation. In the summer of 2022, each campus PLC will participate in a retreat to begin vetting projects and planning for implementation.
- At the end of August 2022, the Fellows from all three campuses will meet one another for an all-PLC retreat, which serves as an opportunity to cross-pollinate ideas, engage with one another, and present ideas for future implementation.

YEAR ONE ACCOMPLISHMENTS & RESEARCH

The PLCs have the unique opportunity to engage with internal data, broader research, and examples of practice from other institutions, all while co-designing the cultural vision of their respective campuses. During the Year 1 learning phase, Fellows learned to codify their own work experiences and conceptualize a shared language for engaging at-promise students. Some of the concepts Fellows mastered were: identity-consciousness, strengths-based validation, collaborative and holistic norms, proactive and reflective practice, cross-unit issue identification and work considerations, and barriers and opportunities to redesigning systems.

As the first program to teach the new concept of ecological validation, PASS researchers have had invaluable opportunity to observe the framework in action. As part of their membership, Fellows were invited to serve as participants in a broader research study designed and executed by the PASS team. The PASS team collected data from each PLC meeting, post-meeting surveys, pre-meeting written reflections, interviews, and focus groups with the Fellows. These data, analysis, and subsequent publication of materials and resources have the potential to guide other colleges and universities and improve retention efforts, and support for all students centering the use of ecological validation.

NEXT STEPS

Starting in the summer of 2022 and during Years 2 and 3, PASS Fellows will design, implement and assess projects and approaches that focus on institution-wide efforts to improve outcomes for at-promise students. Fellows will design approaches, vet these ideas with the other campuses, and then develop a proposal for implementing a culture-changing approach on their campus.

A key facet of this work will be to communicate ideas with campus-based leadership and practitioners in order to keep stakeholders informed about ideas that develop in the PLC, solicit feedback and partner on implementation.

The PASS team is also currently designing deliverables to present to the public on the concept of ecological validation including a book and a set of audiovisual resources and practice briefs. We have also established a Resource Library that contains the pre-readings and activities from Year 1, as well as suggested further reading about topics covered during the learning phase of the program.