

ABSTRACT

Saint Peter's University (SPU), of Jersey City, New Jersey, an eligible Minority Serving Institution (MSI) under Title III, will establish the *Peacock Success by Optimizing Data and Support (PODS)* Project, an Early Phase Postsecondary Student Success (PSSG) Program, to improve postsecondary success for underserved students, including retention and completion. The PODS Project will address Absolute Priority 1 by: adopting an evidence-based, integrated, holistic, team-based advising approach; conducting an individual-level randomized control trial (RCT) to test the effect of PODS advising on improving credit accumulation, retention, and persistence for underserved students; and addressing the Competitive Preference Priority.

SPU will implement three interventions to improve academic success, and increase retention, persistence, and progress toward graduation among underserved undergraduate students through: (1) PODS team-based advising; (2) retention-data platform expansion and training; and (3) establishing a Male Resource Center. Over the 48-month project period, SPU will provide holistic, integrated, team-based advising for 719 first- and second-year students; increase access to support for 2400 students by improving use of the Navigate retention-data system; train 100 faculty members to use the retention-data system to support and communicate with students; train 30 new faculty mentors; and engage at least 200 male students in services through the Male Resource Center, including a for-credit course, Leadership Lab workshops, and social and cultural programming to boost their sense of belonging and academic success.

Outcomes for the PODS Project are to: increase the percentage of first-year students with targeted credit accumulation by 4%, increase first-year retention by 4%, increase persistence to the third year by 4%, and increase progress to graduation rates by 4%, over the baselines, in the aggregate and among underserved students; and increase on-campus engagement and sense of belonging for BIPOC male students. Ultimately, the project will put SPU on a course to eliminate equity-based gaps in academic outcomes.

SPU will conduct a rigorous individual-level randomized control trial that will produce evidence of PODS-advising effectiveness using a design that meets WWC Evidence Standards with or without reservations. The study will be conducted by WestEd, the project's external evaluator. Evaluation questions include: (1) *What is the impact of PODS-advising participation on student retention, persistence, credit accumulation, and GPA?* (2) *What is the impact of faculty use of the Navigate platform on student retention, persistence, credit accumulation, and GPA?* (3) *What impact does student engagement with the MRC have on students' leadership skills and sense of belonging?* and (4) *To what extent is the PODS Project implemented with fidelity?* The impact study will examine differences between the retention, persistence, credit accumulation, and academic performance outcomes of students who receive PODS advising compared with control group peers. Four student cohorts will participate in the RCT, and will be randomized into treatment and control conditions. Each student will have an equal probability of assignment to the treatment group. Students will be followed for up to two years. Outcome measures include: continuous re-enrollment at SPU one year (retention) and two years (persistence) from baseline; number of credit-hours completed in the outcome year (credit accumulation); and academic performance as measured by overall GPA. Analyses spanning multiple years will examine cumulative credit-hours completed and cumulative GPA over the full period covered by the analyses.