



# PALS FAQ



University  
of Windsor

Frequently Asked Questions about your Peer Assisted Learning Sessions

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## WHEN ARE THE SESSIONS?

General Chemistry & Intro Organic Chemistry	TBD
Economics	TBD
Engineering Math	TBD

*To access your sessions, go to your Blackboard PALS Organization, and join the "Virtual PALS" session*

## HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

\$0. It's free!

## DO I HAVE TO ATTEND?

No... Attendance is completely voluntary, but is also strongly encouraged. There will be no grade associated with your participation – your instructor will have no way of knowing who goes to sessions. Evidence does show though, that participation in PALS leads to better learning and higher course grades.

## OK, BUT WHAT IS PALS???

PALS is a program designed to help you improve your learning skills and your understanding of course material. With two weekly sessions run per class, these are much smaller than your regular lectures, allowing for greater engagement with your peers, the course content, and learning activities. The PALS Leaders will guide you through collaborative learning exercises, pairing *what to learn* with *how to learn* it! ***Study smarter. Not harder.***

## WHAT ABOUT THE ONLINE VERSION? WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?

Online learning has come a long way, and we are excited to offer a version of PALS through Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. This will allow students to connect from anywhere with internet – from multiple types of devices. There are tools like a shared whiteboard for problem-solving, break-out groups for smaller discussions, and a chat section. This means that it will be much more interactive than you would

probably anticipate. You'll have the option to use your mic and web cam (your leaders will be!), but you can also choose to leave them off if you're participating from your couch in your PJs. Just another option to enhance the flexibility and increase your chances to partake.

## SO, WHO WILL BE THE LEADERS?

Ever wish you could do something over, knowing what you know now? Your PALS Leaders are students themselves and are prepared to share with you what they have learned through their own experiences. They have taken this course, have done well in this course, and will be a valuable resource to you. The leaders will try to attend most classes, so they are aware of what is being taught each week and will prepare activities based on (a) the most difficult material, and (b) the students' needs. There will be *two leaders per course*, running one face-to-face session on campus and one online session using Blackboard Collaborate.

## HOW IS PALS DIFFERENT FROM THOSE SOS SESSIONS I HEARD ABOUT?

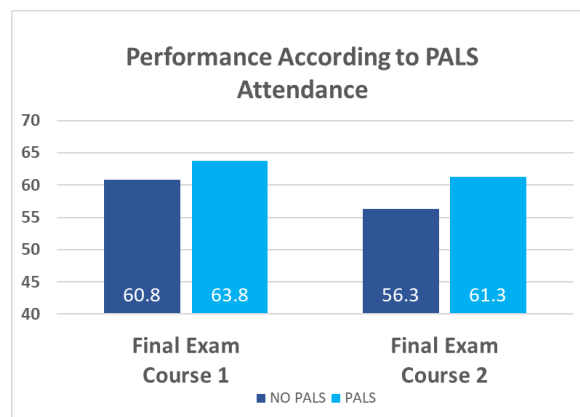
As science students, you have a wide variety of help services available to you. Check out the Campus Resources Sheet (under Resources) for more information and website links.

The short answer to this is that SOS (Students Offering Support) is a *paid* service (usually \$10-\$20) that offers *tutoring* before exams. The money goes toward helping students travel to developing countries for "Global Impact Projects" and the structure of the sessions is much different. The SOS sessions may be helpful, but they are not integrated into your specific course, and there's nothing saying you can't attend both!

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Research shows that students who attend sessions like PALS gain a deeper understanding of the material, enhance their learning skills, achieve better grades, and are less likely to withdraw from their courses. The images below show some results of our pilot test from 2017-2018. Students earned between 3 and 5% higher on their final exams... If you go from a potential 65% to a real 70% that's a difference of two letter-grades (C to a B-)! Even top-performing students benefit from these sessions by improving their own study skills, helping other students, and earning even higher grades!

course withdrawals according to PALS attendance



## I WANT TO KNOW MORE!

PALS is actually based on a model called *Supplemental Instruction*, which was developed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1973. This model has proven to be successful in institutions varying in size, location, and organizational structure. The key features of the model are:

- PALS targets historically difficult courses instead of at-risk students
  - This model avoids the reputation of “remedial program” because it focuses on the difficult content within the course, rather than the individual students. That means it is *not* just for those who are struggling. By integrating students of differing ability levels and demographic groups in a collaborative atmosphere, the sessions provide a change in learning environment and allows students to learn *with* and *from* each other.
- Sessions are peer-facilitated
  - Students who have previously succeeded in this course, usually with the same instructor, go through a rigorous application and interview process, and are selected for a variety of characteristics and skills important for facilitation. The leaders do not re-lecture or introduce new material. They, instead, organize and add structure to the sessions. The leaders facilitate critical thinking, discussion, and problem-solving among the group of participants through the use of various learning activities.
- The PALS leader attends the targeted class lectures
  - When possible, leaders will attend the classes so they are kept up on what is being taught throughout the semester.
- Sessions integrate content and learning strategies
  - Sessions actively integrate review of lecture notes, textbook readings, problem-solving, outside readings, and appropriate use of learning strategies; combining *what to learn* with *how to learn*. Through practice and mastery of effective learning strategies, students can adopt and transfer these strategies to other subjects and content areas.
- Faculty support the PALS program as an integrated part of the course
  - While your instructor is not directly involved with the program, and will have no way of knowing who attends the sessions, they do encourage students’ participation and discuss the course content with the PALS Leaders so the sessions are as useful as possible.
- Sessions are regularly scheduled throughout the term
  - Sessions will occur twice per week for each course, on a regular schedule. The number and duration of sessions may differ according to the student needs (e.g., if there is a midterm coming up there might be a longer or additional review session).
- Leaders are trained
  - The leaders receive training on how to plan for and facilitate dynamic sessions prior to the start of classes. Training also persists throughout the term, incorporating student feedback and supervisor support to enhance the sessions.
- The program is supervised
  - The supervisors are specifically trained in the official model and how to supervise and administer the program. You may see a supervisor attending a session or two throughout the term in order to evaluate the session and provide helpful feedback to the leaders.
- The program is continually evaluated and improved
  - All similar programs undergo evaluation, but it is especially important for UWindsor since it is so new. The overall quality of the program as well as the effectiveness will be evaluated using multiple sources of data including attendance records. This is necessary to inform our university administrators about the impact of the program and to secure funding for the future.