



# TASSR Highlights

## Study Groups: How to Get Students to Buy In and Stay In



As a leading voice in student success for the state of Tennessee, the [Tennessee Association for Student Success and Retention](#), hosted their annual conference in October, 2016, at the Read House in Chattanooga. One of the many relevant sessions was ***How to Get Students to Buy In and Stay In***.

Robin Leib, a Learning Center Specialist at Roane State's Oak Ridge campus, presented on her efforts to create and sustain student led study groups for Anatomy and Physiology. Biology 2010 (Anatomy and Physiology I) is a gateway course for many students across the state seeking to enter nursing programs and allied health majors. As a gateway course, it often presents a seemingly insurmountable obstacle for the students and for staff in academic support positions. The 2015-16 TBR Course Revitalization Project Summary reports that only 54.8% of students complete the course with a C or better and notes that one factor for this success rate is that "Students often lack the proper study skills and time management to prepare effectively."

The study groups that Leib has initiated specifically target the issues of study skills

and time management rather than simply focusing on course content. This emphasis takes into account current research showing that students, particularly those in a commuter setting with conflicting family and work obligations, succeed most when given opportunities to engage in metacognition with their peers. The study groups create what Leib calls “a key social environment that adds more than the pragmatics of ‘how to study.’” Study Groups that meet in the Learning Center at times staggered throughout the day, fitting the broadest range of student schedules possible, provides a “built-in” opportunity “to meet peers and develop cooperative learning skills.” Near-peer and professional tutors are available to offer content specific assistance, but the students themselves are directly responsible for sharing their knowledge and identifying expertise and gaps in knowledge.

While pedagogically appealing, study groups are time intensive to form and sustain. However, both exit surveys and performance data indicate that the outcomes are definitely worth the investment. Students who participated in the initial pilot project “stated that they study for other classes completely differently now that they have been in a study group” and have requested that the Learning Center offer study groups for additional classes. In turn, these students not only have become fully invested in their learning, but their use of academic support services has increased the overall traffic in tutoring through what Leib refers to as “the crowded restaurant principle.” The performance data is encouraging as well, as a grade analysis for fall 2016 reveals that Anatomy and Physiology students who did not participate in study groups averaged a 61% passing rate while study group participants averaged a 64% pass rate. More significantly perhaps is that 45% of those students who persisted throughout the semester, meeting with their groups each week, earned an A in the course compared to 20% among non-participants.

Like so many other great TASSR presentations, Leib’s session offered a fresh take on the challenges that confront us each semester and inspired the audience to try something new on their own campuses. The 2017 conference will no doubt continue that tradition, so please plan to join us in Chattanooga in October. You will find information about the conference and accommodations at [www.tassr.org](http://www.tassr.org).

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[Tennessee Association for Student Success and Retention](#)

7<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Conference  
October 5 – October 6, 2017  
The Chattanooga Hotel  
Chattanooga, TN