

Integrated Developmental Networks: PASE & B-WELL Programs for Academic and Career Readiness

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This case study examines the transformative impact of the PASE, a psychology students support initiative, and B-WELL community programs at the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Metropolitan Campus. Designed to address academic, professional, and psychosocial challenges faced by underrepresented Hispanic students, these initiatives integrate developmental networks to enhance retention, resilience, and career readiness. By leveraging mentorship frameworks, experiential learning, and National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career readiness competencies, the programs exemplify effective strategies for fostering wellbeing and institutional growth. The programs draw the eight core career readiness competencies—career & self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity & inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork, and technology. This foundation is supported by evidence from the WWC Practice Guide and SSIPP framework on effective advising, while NAS highlights experiential learning and faculty engagement as critical practices for minority student success. The Metro campus Psychology undergraduate program, PASE integrates mentorship, individualized professional development plans, and experiential learning opportunities to connect academic pathways with career outcomes. It also includes upperclassmen mentors in structured mentorship and advisory roles. B-WELL strengthens developmental networks through impactful outreach to 400 high school students annually while engaging faculty and graduate students to support mental health community-based projects. Now, nearing two years of implementation, PASE and B-WELL outreached approximately 1,296 High School students, have a 76% referral rate for assessments, provided mentorship through four graduate psychology students, and increased participation in research and career exploration activities. These programs foster psychosocial, emotional, and career wellbeing through mentoring rooted in NACE competencies, promoting belonging and aligning academic efforts with professional aspirations. Programs aim to further enhance retention, academic engagement, and institutional resilience.

Keywords: Institutional resilience, developmental networks, career readiness, mentoring, psychology students

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Introduction

This case study examines the ongoing transformative impact of the PASE (Psychology Students Support Initiative) and B-WELL (Building Wellness and E-Learning Leaders) community programs at the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico Metropolitan Campus. Designed to address academic, professional, and psychosocial challenges faced by underrepresented Hispanic students, these initiatives integrate developmental networks to enhance retention, resilience, and

career readiness. By benefitting from mentorship frameworks, experiential learning, and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies, the programs exemplify effective strategies for fostering wellbeing and institutional growth. The program designers applied the eight NACE Career Readiness Competencies—career & self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity & inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork, and technology—to guide student career and professional readiness (NACE, 2021).

Context and Program Overview

The Interamerican University of Puerto Rico is a private nonprofit Hispanic serving institution of higher education serving mostly low income and underprivileged populations. The Metropolitan Campus is in the most populated area of Puerto Rico and proposes to serve the diverse needs and interests of its students and the surrounding community. For local context, 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria, 2020 earthquakes and the Covid-19 pandemic, had a significant effect in reducing college enrollment in the Island. The Metro planning teams have done a thorough analysis of enrollment trends for Metro and the whole Island and have concluded that these events had a significant effect not only on enrollments (as evidenced by the decreased enrollments in all higher education institutions), but also students' emotional and mental health behaviors. The PASE and B-Well Programs are part of the efforts that the Metro campus has taken to reinforce newcomers to stay focused and engaged in their career pathways (National Center for Education Evaluation, 2021). The coordinators developed both programs as part of the five-year project, Reversing the Covid Tide: A Responsive, Flexible Student Support Program for Increased Enrollment and Graduation Rates in Puerto Rico, funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

One of Metro's strategies aims to update and strengthen the Psychology degree pathway to not only attract additional enrollment but to ensure student retention and success by addressing their mental and emotional needs (Bailey et al, 2015). Metro's Psychology Department project has a recursive design that includes a summer bridge (Step-Up) program to support high school transition to Metro, a student career mentoring program for undergraduates (PASE) and a Building Wellness and E-Learning Leaders (B-WELL) community outreach that includes Metro Faculty and local highschoolers. Within this framework, the project includes a developmental network for wellbeing that embraces active participation from faculty, undergraduate and graduate psychology students, and the community. The PASE program exemplifies this approach by integrating Individualized Professional Development Plans (PIDPs) and structured mentorship from upperclassmen and graduate students. B-WELL extends this model into the community, engaging high school students and promoting mental health awareness through faculty-led initiatives.

PASE is a Student Support and Services Program that looks forward to developing professional and research skills with career counseling to advise on student's professional pathway selection (National Academies of Sciences, 2019). Because professional psychology requires at least a master's degree, the program aims to develop skills that help students connect with future professional plans and thus motivate them to stay and graduate. As part of the Metro Psychology Department, PASE integrates different developmental networks for mentorship.

First, Metro's Career/Internship Coordinators (CIC) referred each participant to an Individualized Professional Development Plan that starts with a career oriented psychological assessment provided by a Counseling Psychology supervised practice student from the Interamerican Clinic of Psychological Services (CISP). Recursively, students not only learn about themselves, but immersed in an assessment experience, they become observers of an advanced training psychology pursuit. Participants voluntarily discuss their assessment results and inquiries with one of the Career/Internship Coordinators (CIC).

Metro Campus CIC are licensed psychologist faculty members who provide mentorship on a one-to-one basis to assess their career interests and offer advice on choosing their future pathway. Personalized support is fundamentally about tailoring student services to students' unique interests and motivations and needs to ensure that they receive the resources that will help them succeed (Bailey et al, 2015). This complements experiential learning opportunities as students have access to Blackboard platform learning modules. The instructors and CIC designed PSYC 1001 (Professional Development Towards the Field of Psychology) to include experiential learning activities. They use the online space as a platform for undergraduate participants to gain knowledge related to the field of Psychology and to develop various professional skills through structured applied activities. PSYC 1001 learning modules topics are: Professional Development in Psychology, Ethics and Diversity, Professional Communication Skills, Internship Experiences, Research Training Skills, and Psychological First Aid Skills. Learning modules experiences are integrated into a once-a-month meeting with undergraduate participants, peer and graduate student mentors and Career/Internship Coordinators as well as other invited faculty members.

Literature Review

The developmental network framework includes different levels of mentorship to support professional and research skills with career shadowing experiences. These include family, peers, schools, communities, and broader societal systems. This is based on the idea that development must be understood through the lens of person-context interactions (Lerner, 2006). Each academic year PASE provides connections for academic pathways and career outcomes for at least 40 enrolled undergraduate psychology students. Early 1st and 2nd year undergraduates couple with upperclassmen mentors who play structured and informal advisory roles with their classmates.

PASE (2024-2025) also included a doctoral Psychology Intern level student able to provide career-oriented assessments, psychotherapy, crisis management, consultation and design workshops for the student community. Also, coordinators recruited three psychology degree

graduate students as community mentors. These graduate psychology students also participated in the B-WELL community outreach program. The doctoral intern and the graduate students strengthened developmental networks assisting PASE participants and offering mental health-oriented workshops to 493 high school students at the B-Well 2025 Innovations Conference.

Another core objective of the B-Well component is to provide faculty at the Metro Campus with professional development opportunities and create initiatives to promote integral wellness. In alignment with this goal, Mental Health First Aid workshops were offered to empower faculty members as “first responders” in situations involving student mental health concerns. To date, over 80% of Metro full-time faculty have successfully completed the certification. Also, during each academic term, approximately 20 participants enjoyed ecological walks, outdoor meditation sessions, personal development workshops, and team activities aimed at social and emotional growth. These tasks are fostering connections and strengthening community bonds.

Conceptual Foundations

Within this context, developmental networks expand the traditional understanding of mentoring by acknowledging that multiple people often share mentorship responsibilities, each contributing uniquely. This approach aligns with dynamic paths where individuals navigate complex environments and need diverse forms of support (Higgins et al, 2001). The PASE and B-WELL programs draw on several key frameworks and research findings to support their design and implementation:

- **WWC Practice Guide:** Evidence-based advising practices, such as holistic, integrated advising and personalized student-advisor relationships, are embedded in PASE (National Center for Education Evaluation, 2021).
- **SSIPP Framework:** The proactive, personalized advising model used in PASE and B-WELL aligns with the SSIPP framework (Community College Research Center, 2018).
- **NAS on Experiential Learning:** Research on minority student success highlights the importance of experiential learning and faculty engagement, which supports B-WELL’s community-based mental health projects and PASE’s research and career exploration activities (National Academies of Sciences, 2019).
- **NACE Career Readiness Competencies:** The eight NACE career readiness competencies—career & self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity & inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork, and technology—guide program design and student development (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021).

Outcomes and Impact

The program’s aim has been to further enhance retention, academic engagement, and institutional resilience. Now, nearing two years of implementation, PASE and B-WELL have achieved significant outputs. B-WELL outreached approximately 1,296 HS students, and PASE has a 76% student participation rate after referral for assessment for Individual Professional Development Plans and a retention of 95% of undergraduate participants during last year. Both components included mentorship approaches through faculty, graduate psychology students and peer upperclassmen increasing participation in research and career exploration activities. Our programs foster psychosocial, emotional, and career wellbeing through mentoring rooted in NACE competencies, promoting belonging and aligning academic efforts with professional aspirations.

Step-Up Summer Bridge Program Highlights (August 2024)

- Participants: 22 first-year psychology undergraduates

Program Components

- Two-week integration and student enrollment in GEIC 1010: Information and Computing Technologies (3-credit, General Education requirement)
- Workshops (5 total):
- Transition to University Life; Developing Communication Skills; Strengthening Teamwork; Leadership Development; Achieving Balance and Success

PASE Program Outputs (2024–2025 Academic Year)

PASE has several steps towards the goal of the following areas: Peer Coaching/Tutoring, Internship Experiences, Undergraduate Research Experiences (CURES) and have served programmatic outputs such as:

Student Engagement & Retention

- 42 students recruited before September 2024:
- 24 freshmen/sophomores
- 18 upperclassmen peer mentors
- 95% retention rate among admitted students:
- Supported through PSYC 1001 (online modules) and in-person activities: orientations, community activities and workshops

Psychological Support

- 64% of participants received one-on-one services from the doctoral intern

Experiential Learning & Mentorship

- 8 students voluntarily presented their

- professional development portfolios
- Included research tasks, clinical shadowing, and graduate course observations
- Graduate mentors facilitated research and community engagement
- Community networks with PASE participants
- Collaborations with Metro Association of Psychology Students (AEPSIM) and B-WELL

Student-Led Initiatives

- PASE students organized a panel discussion on Adolescence (Netflix series) - May 16, 2025
- Featured 3 clinical psychologists and 1 forensic social worker
- 29 participants between undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and other people from the UIPR Metro Campus community

Outcomes: Qualitative Assessment

Here are some of the verbatims that reflect a Outcomes: Qualitative Assessment from UIPR Metro Campus Psychology Faculty members about the outcomes of PASE and B-Well participation:

- “The students have been able to clarify many doubts about the profession. The program has taught them to be more optimistic and has given them the opportunity to gain greater knowledge about psychology in general.”
- “Students showed genuine excitement about psychology, especially regarding how it can be applied professionally. It gave them a chance to explore the field through real experiences and understand what working in psychology actually looks like, and reflect on the competences a psychologist must have, such as empathy, critical thinking and ethical responsibility. PASE sparked a sense of purpose and inspired some to explore psychology as a future career.”
- “During my interactions with students, they appear very enthusiastic and grateful to be a part of the program. They share their thoughts on how amazing the workshops have been, together with the shadowing classes they attend. They look and feel more confident in their decision to pursue their studies after being assisted through mentoring and counseling.”
- “Yes, I have observed positive changes in student engagement and motivation as a result of PASE and B-WELL. Students appear to participate more actively in university events and demonstrate a higher interest towards working in the psychological field.”
- “During their participation in classes, the students’ knowledge level has changed in positive ways dramatically.”
- “The strengths of the PASE and B-WELL programs lie in their holistic approach to student development. I think they effectively support social-emotional learning, promote mental well-

being, and create a safe, inclusive environment. These programs help build resilience, improve peer relationships, and empower students to take ownership of their learning and behavior.”

Inter B-Well Program: Outputs & Interim Outcomes (2024-2025)

Aligned with the competencies of NACE and the requirements of the Reversing COVID Tide-RCT proposal, the Inter B-Well program prepared an Innovations Conference that included mental health community project presentations after visiting nine public schools during the period from January to April 2025 oriented towards the development of “Wellness Leaders”.

Reach & Engagement

- Schools Visited: 9 public high schools
- Workshop Participants: 493 junior-year students
- Event: Innovations Conference showcasing student-led mental health projects

Experiential Learning Workshops

Total Workshops Delivered: 18

- Facilitators: Psychology mentor students & PASE doctoral intern
- Topics Covered:
- Mental health & emotional wellbeing
- Coping strategies
- NACE-aligned career competencies

Student Feedback

- 93% agreed they could apply what they learned to daily life
- 94% would recommend the activity be offered again

Mentoring & Career Guidance

- Psychology graduate mentors and professionals provided:
- Career orientation
- Insights into psychology and mental health fields
- Guidance on essential skills and competencies

Student Innovation Projects

- Focus: Community mental health issues and NACE competencies
- Skills Developed: Problem-solving, teamwork, communication
- Project Submissions: 7 out of 9 schools submitted proposals

Top Projects Recognized

- Agustin Stahl School - Academic Stress & Performance Anxiety
- Tomas C. Ongay School - Managing Stress & Performance Anxiety
- University Gardens HS - Academic Stress &

- Student Wellbeing
- Featured a web app as a community solution

Winning Project Highlight: STAHL Consciente

- Goal: Reduce academic stress through personalized goal setting and support
- Features: Tutoring and practical strategies Incentive-based point system Focus on self-management and motivation

Documentary Production

- A short film documented the students' creative and learning journey during the Innovations Conference

Here are some of the junior students' thoughts during the process of creating their innovative projects:

- "We want to work on academic stress and creation of tools we can develop."

- "Mental health is a very important thing, especially in adolescents because we are learning and seeing new things."

Also, after the workshops these verbatims were documented when asked on how to define "mental health":

- "It is the vision of our own identity that we forge on the road to grow and live overcoming difficulties."

- "It is fundamental, because apart from the physical aspect, we must be mentally well."

- "It is your peace; not everything has to be good but be aware."

Some students also expressed their interest in studying psychology:

- "Psychology is important because it gives people the tools to be mentally healthy."

- "I would like to study psychology because it is very different and interesting."

- "I want to study psychology because it has to do with mental health... it caught my interest."

Conclusion and Future Directions

The PASE and B-WELL programs at the UIPR Metro Campus demonstrate a forward-thinking, evidence-based approach to supporting underrepresented Hispanic undergraduate students. By integrating developmental networks, layered mentorship, and career readiness frameworks grounded in NACE competencies, these initiatives have significantly advanced student engagement, psychosocial wellbeing, and institutional resilience. Key findings demonstrate measurable improvements in student retention, academic engagement, and psychosocial wellbeing. The involvement of graduate and doctoral psychology students has enriched mentorship structures, while outreach efforts—such as the B-WELL Innovations Conference—have extended the program's influence on high school communities. Both initiatives look forward to fostering early interest in mental health and career development. The programs have not only met their initial objectives but have also laid the groundwork for a sustainable model of student support. Looking ahead, future efforts will focus on:

- Expanding outreach to additional schools and community partners, enhancing faculty participation in mentorship and experiential learning, strengthening data collection for longitudinal impact studies, and scaling successful components to other academic departments.

By continuing to align with institutional priorities and national frameworks, PASE and B-WELL are positioned to serve as models for inclusive student development in higher education. Together, these efforts aim to solidify a culture of belonging, resilience, and professional growth, empowering students to thrive both academically and beyond.

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