

**Project Title** Fostering Student Success with Psychological and Emotional Resilience Training (PERT)

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**Name, title, college/district office of each team member who created the innovation.**

1. Dr. Thomas E. Rojo Aubrey, Residential Faculty/Director of Behavioral Health in the Counseling, Glendale Community College
2. Dr. Lynn Mizzi Brysacz, Residential Faculty in the Counseling Department, Glendale Community College
3. Sarah Padelford, Residential Faculty in the Counseling Department, Glendale Community College
4. Dr. David Gerkin, Residential Faculty in the Counseling Department, Glendale Community College
5. Dr. William Beverly, Residential Faculty/Director of Behavioral Health in the Counseling Department, South Mountain Community College
6. Andrea Scherrer, Residential Faculty in the Counseling Department, Scottsdale Community College

Three Colleges: GCC, SMCC, & SCC"

**Winning innovations should fall into one of the following categories. Select the category most strongly aligned to the project (maximum of one)**

Other

Student Success

**Winning innovations should meet one or more of the following criteria. When submitting your college's winner, please select the criteria that best apply to the innovation (select all that apply).**

Quality.

Students and/or staff agree that the innovation increases quality in the course, program, office, or institution. Evidence of quality may include student ratings or letters of support from colleagues. Quality is difficult to measure, but the committees might want to wrestle with criteria that define quality in their colleagues.,

Efficiency.

There is evidence that the innovation contributes to a more efficient way of doing things. Student ratings, perceptions of outside consultants, and pre- and post-comparison of time involved are examples of evidence.,

### Creativity.

The innovation should be original or the adaptation creative. The program description or letters from experts are examples of evidence.,

### Timeliness.

The innovation should be no more than five years old at the institution, but must have been around long enough to have been tested so that it meets most of the criteria.

### **Project Summary (maximum of 1,000 characters)**

We are currently dealing with a troubling completion problem in community colleges. However, as Dr. Angela Duckworth says, "It is impossible to disentangle the academic outcome of graduation from social, emotional, and physical well-being." Since we are unable to pinpoint a single cause for poor completion rates, the solution needs to focus on "taking care of the whole student." Unfortunately, current educational efforts have failed to address students' underlying mental health and emotional problems.

As a solution, we developed a resilience and well-being program called Psychological and Emotional Resilience Training (PERT). The goal of our PERT curriculum is to foster resilience and well-being thereby enhancing student learning, academic performance, and increasing completion rates. Individuals who have taken courses using the PERT curriculum have shown improvement in various standardized measures. They also report renewed commitment to their academic goals."

### **Project Description (maximum of 1,000 words)**

In recent decades, access to college has increased but completion rates have shown poor results. In 2019, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, the total post-secondary completion rates of 2012 cohort students were:

- 37.31% for a four-year private for-profit university
- 39.22% for a two-year public college

There are several reasons why students drop out of school. While school can be exciting and provide opportunities to meet new people, it can also be stressful. During college, students will face a variety of demanding challenges in their academic and personal lives. The problem is that our education system places little importance on fostering resilience and well-being so students can meet those demands.

The stress of college may be one of the contributing factors to a decrease in mental health and emotional well-being among college students. One large survey of freshman college students found (Saleh, Camart, & Romo 2017):

- 86.3% were suffering from anxiety
- 79.3% were suffering from depression
- 62.7% were struggling with low self-efficacy
- 57.7% were struggling with a lack of optimism
- 57.6% were struggling with low self-esteem

Besides emotional problems, 64 percent of students who left college reported they were “no longer attending college because of a mental health related reason” (NAMI, 2012, p. 8). It is little wonder that 74.2 percent of college students reported they would like to receive more information on stress reduction from their college or university (ACHS, 2019).

Unfortunately, a more harmful type of stress is also impacting our students. Research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among other researchers, found that exposure to traumatic stress has become common in our society:

- More than 1 in 3 women and nearly 1 in 4 men have experienced sexual violence . . . at some point in their lives
- One in four girls and one in six boys have been sexually abused before they turn 18 years old
- One in four Americans has been beaten by a parent
- One in three couples engage in physical domestic violence

More specifically, according to Read et al., by the time a student enrolls in college, 66 to 85 percent report exposure to a lifetime traumatic event, at times reporting multiple exposures (2011). This does not take into account the unprecedented exposure to traumatic stress in 2020. Regrettably, traumatic experiences leave imprints on our nervous system that cause counterproductive thoughts that fuel emotional problems, which can drive self-sabotaging behaviors. These struggles directly relate to students’ abilities (or inabilities) to complete their educational goals.

The goal of the PERT curriculum is to foster resilience and well-being to enhance student learning, academic performance, and increase completion rates. It will also improve happiness and quality of life to increase the likelihood of success in all areas of mental, emotional, and social life.

The vision is to help build a resilient campus by cultivating a culture of well-being that protects and heals the mind, body, and spirit of students. Our curriculum also aligns with the criteria established by the League for Innovation in the Community College.

Quality: Faculty, staff, students, and professionals in the field of mental health have expressed how we are pioneering a curriculum that can enhance student learning and increase resilience and well-being for success.

**Efficacy:** Students and professionals who have taken the resiliency courses or workshops have expressed how the curriculum has improved their lives. In addition, standardized assessment tools have shown a reduction in depression scores, anxiety scores, burnout scores, compassion fatigue and traumatic stress scores, and levels of perceived stress scores. Individuals who have taken courses using the PERT curriculum have also shown improvement in measurement scales of mindfulness, resilience, and internal locus of control.

**Cost Effectiveness:** The course textbook meets the Maricopa Community Colleges' "low cost (<\$40) textbooks)" qualifications to help reduce financial cost for students.

**Replication:** The material can be adopted by any other college. It is as simple as adopting content material in a college or university course. The content material has a diverse application with material in both academic and professional resiliency. This means it can be used in FYE courses and student success courses in the form of academic resiliency. It can also be used in occupational programs (e.g., nursing, fire sciences, law enforcement, behavioral sciences, EMTs, etc.) in the form of professional resiliency.

**Creativity:** The Psychological and Emotional Resilience Training (PERT) model was developed by a faculty member of Maricopa Community College. We are one of the few colleges nationwide teaching students the skills to protect and heal their mind, body, and spirit from the negative effects of traumatic stress. In addition, we are the only school connected to an industry certification in resiliency and well-being.

**Timelines:** For the past 3.5 years, we have been teaching a comprehensive resilience and well-being model, known as Psychological and Emotional Resilience Training (PERT) at Maricopa Community Colleges.

This model of resilience and well-being has been embedded and taught in CPD 150, BHS 150, and BHS 155 classes at three Maricopa community colleges. The model has influenced the development of two courses, BHS 155 and CPD 180. MCOR is also using workshops to teach the model. Curriculum is also CEU approved by AzPOST

The PERT model was originally intended to train first responders and active-duty military personnel in psychological and emotional resiliency. The intent was to give professionals the ""armor"" to mitigate the negative effects of exposure to high levels of traumatic stress.

We are using the same resiliency skills (in the form of academic resiliency) to help improve students' mental and physical health, academic performance, and increase persistence and completion rates. The curriculum covers 6 areas: Self-regulation, Mental flexibility, Character strengths, motivation, and self-direction, Positive psychological strengths, Social connectedness and community building, and Self-care and revitalization.

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