Growth Mindset for College Students
An evidence-based program to improve retention and equity

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The Joyce Foundation

RAIKES Foundation
Thank you for your interest in Growth Mindset for College Students!

We’ve been working hard over the years to rigorously test and improve this program, with the ultimate goal of making it freely and easily available to colleges across the country. We believe that all schools should have access to the best research-based education programs, and we’re tremendously excited to bring you this program.

This Program Information Packet is intended for college administrators and faculty who are interested in learning about and implementing Growth Mindset for College Students on their own campus. (We hope that’s you!) The information provided here will help you understand the research behind the program and the process for implementing it. This packet also provides guidance for introducing your colleagues to Growth Mindset for College Students and information about where to find a variety of other helpful documents, such as FAQs.

We’re looking forward to collaborating with you and your college. Together, let’s unmask students’ true potential.

Sincerely,
The PERTS Team

Contributors

Growth Mindset for College Students was created by researchers at Stanford University and the University of Texas at Austin, including Drs. Carol Dweck, Dave Paunesku, Carissa Romero, Greg Walton, and David Yeager. The software, logistical processes, and materials used to help colleges run Growth Mindset for College Students were created by PERTS in partnership with multiple colleges, including long-term partners Ivy Tech and Santa Monica College. Thanks to generous support from the Joyce Foundation and the Raikes Foundation, PERTS is thrilled to make Growth Mindset for College Students available to all 2- and 4-year colleges in the United States. In doing so, we hope to advance our mission to empower educators everywhere to implement evidence-based strategies effectively.
# Table of Contents

60-Second Overview ................................................. 4

The 30-Minute Module: Research, Content, and Impact ...... 6
   The Research: An Introduction to Growth Mindset ........ 6
   Program Content (The Online Program) .................. 7
   Program Impact ................................................. 9

Program Implementation Guide .................................. 12
   Registration and Setup ...................................... 15
   Dashboard Overview ......................................... 16
      Step 1: Organization ..................................... 17
      Step 2: Prepare to Participate .......................... 17
      Step 3: Quiz ............................................... 20
      Step 4: Launch and Monitor .............................. 20
   Day of Program Overview .................................... 21

References ............................................................. 22
60-Second Overview

Here’s the “60 second” description of Growth Mindset for College Students. This overview provides a summary of the key sections in this Information Packet. For more details about each section, please see the relevant section of the packet.

The 30-Minute Module: Research, Content, and Impact

Growth Mindset for College Students is an evidence-based program designed to increase college students’ academic motivation, resilience, and achievement. As we describe in The Research: An Introduction to Growth Mindset, it takes aim at the common misconception that intelligence is fixed — a pernicious misconception that erodes students’ motivation and makes them less likely to persist and succeed when they encounter academic difficulties. The online module takes only 30 minutes for students to complete and consists of survey questions, brief passages of reading, and writing exercises. In previous randomized controlled studies, Growth Mindset for College Students has led to improved academic performance and persistence — including higher student retention and graduation rates.

Program Implementation Guide

The program can be administered multiple times in an academic school year (e.g., in first year courses that take place in the fall and spring semester), but each individual student should only complete the program once. We will deliver reports twice in an academic year (in November and April). It typically takes about 2-4 weeks to finalize the program logistics for your college and less than one hour to register and get set up on our online platform.

In a nutshell, program implementation looks like this:

1. **Learn and Discuss.** Download this Program Information Packet to learn how participation works and discuss your options with your colleagues. Wow — you’re already on top of it! Amazing!

2. **Sign up.** Enter your email at perts.net/college-mindset, create a user account, review our Terms of Use and Privacy Policy, and decide how your students will participate. The Registration and Setup section goes into considerable detail
about how to get your college set up to participate using our online platform.

*Once our team approves your participation, your spot is secured.*

3. **Participate.** Once you’ve completed all pre-launch tasks, students complete the 30-minute module independently or in a supervised setting such as an orientation program or first-year experience class.

4. **Track Impact.** Track participation in real time to see how many students completed the program, and come back to download the report about the program’s impact on student survey outcomes. There are two reporting periods in an academic year.

   ○ **Reporting Period 1:** Students complete the program between June 1st and November 15th, and your college receives a report on November 22nd.
   ○ **Reporting Period 2:** Students complete the program between November 15th and March 25th, and your college receives a report on April 1st.

**FAQ**

We’ve created this packet to provide you with detailed information about the program, and most of the answers to your questions can be found in the relevant section of this packet. Just in case, we’ve also compiled answers to the most commonly asked questions in the FAQ section on [perts.net/college-mindset](http://perts.net/college-mindset). If you can’t find the answer to your question there, please contact us at support@perts.net.

*Note:* We’re a small team, so while we aim to respond to questions in 2 working days, during high volume times it may take up to 7 days. Please wait 7 days before submitting a follow-up.

**Supporting Documents**

On our website you can also find several supporting documents for you to reference as you get this program set up at your college, including: a shareable brochure, sample instructions that participating faculty/staff will need to administer the program, and a printable implementation checklist.
The 30-Minute Module: Research, Content, and Impact

The Research: An Introduction to Growth Mindset

Many studies have found that students are more academically motivated and successful if they believe their intellectual abilities can be developed—a belief called growth mindset—than if they believe that their intellectual abilities are static—a belief called fixed mindset (Dweck, 2000). These two beliefs shape students’ interpretations of academic difficulties and affect the way students feel and behave when they encounter an academic challenge (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Romero, Master, Paunesku, Dweck, & Gross, 2014; Stipek & Gralinski, 1996).

When students believe their intellectual abilities are fixed and they come across an academic challenge, they are more likely to believe that they have “reached their limit” or that “there’s no point” because they “aren’t smart enough” to succeed. These beliefs make students feel dumb and frustrated, and they often lead to academic disengagement. In this way, a fixed mindset can lead students to avoid the very strategies that would help them succeed, like asking for help, studying longer, or trying new study strategies.

In contrast, when students have a growth mindset they are more likely to interpret challenges as temporary and surmountable. This interpretation spares them many of the negative emotions and behaviors that a fixed mindset elicits in response to setbacks. Rather than anxiety and self-doubt, challenging coursework can elicit interest and curiosity. As a consequence, students with a growth mindset are more likely to respond to challenges by engaging in behaviors that help them learn, such as seeking out help, working through problems, and asking questions. Over time, these behaviors add up, and students who have a growth mindset outperform students who hold a fixed mindset on a variety of outcomes (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Romero et al., 2014; Stipek & Gralinski, 1996), especially in the face of difficulty (see Figure 1).

Students’ mindsets about intelligence can influence a host of important academic behaviors, but — like any belief — they are themselves amenable to change. Research
shows that individuals’ mindsets about intelligence are shaped through their experiences (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016; Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Sun, 2015) and that they can be affected through well-designed targeted activities, like Growth Mindset for College Students (Paunesku et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2016a).

![Diagram of the recursive process for growth mindset versus fixed mindset.](image)

**Figure 1. The recursive process for growth mindset versus fixed mindset.**

**Program Content (The Online Program)**

On to the good stuff! The active ingredients of Growth Mindset for College Students are contained in a single, 30-minute web-based program. As described in the Program Implementation Guide, students complete the program independently or in a supervised setting during new student orientation, a first-year course, or a developmental course, like College 101.

The online program applies numerous persuasion and behavior change principles to lay the foundation for a growth mindset. Students learn scientific evidence showing that the brain is malleable and that certain behaviors can rewire the brain and increase one’s intellectual abilities over time. Students also learn about the importance of effective study strategies and of getting help from others in order to realize such gains.
While these messages are at their core simple, their delivery has been honed through years of research with college and high school students around the United States (Byrk et al., 2013; Yeager et al., 2016b). The program leverages source credibility (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949), self-persuasion (Aronson, 1999), rich metaphors (Gentner & Wolff, 2000), and social learning principles (Bandura, 1977) to provide students with a new conceptual framework (Gripshover & Markman, 2013) for thinking about the malleable nature of intelligence and its implications for academic challenges.

On the day of the program, facilitators either read a brief script or send an email to students to direct them to the website to begin the program. Students then simply log onto our website and go through the program on their own.

The program consists of survey questions, reading passages, personal stories from other students, and writing exercises. It is broken up into four main sections:

1. Students first complete a brief survey assessing their mindsets and related attitudes and behaviors.
2. Next, students complete an empirically tested growth mindset activity in which they read passages about neural plasticity, strategies for growing their intelligence, and stories from other students.
3. Students then complete writing exercises where they are asked to help us explain the concept to other students.
4. Finally, students complete a second set of survey questions to assess their change in mindset and related attitudes and behaviors.
Program Impact

We’ve been testing Growth Mindset for College Students since 2010 in multiple randomized controlled trials with thousands of college students. Below are some of the highlights from our past studies.

Four Percentage Point Increase in Continuous, Full Time Enrollment (Yeager et al., 2016a)
In one study, a previous version of Growth Mindset for College Students was tested with 3,565 first-year college students at a 4-year public university. An analysis of the university’s demographic data prior to the program found that minority and first-generation students were 10 percentage points less likely than the rest of the student body to complete the first year fully-enrolled through both terms, a powerful predictor of ultimate graduation. The growth mindset intervention increased the percentage of full-time enrolled minority and first-generation students from 69% to 73%, cutting the inequality gap by 40%.

Five Percentage Point Increase in Student Success Rate (Gripshover et al., in prep)
Another study targeted 966 community college students who tested into a remedial skills course. In this sample, all students had a history of lower previous achievement. The growth mindset program led to a 5 percentage point increase in the student success rate after two years. Success rate was defined as the proportion of students who transferred, graduated, or remained enrolled during each semester following the intervention. Specifically, students in the growth mindset treatment group accumulated significantly more credits over time compared with the control group (Figure 2, left), and they were more likely to earn an associate’s degree or transfer after two years (Figure 2, right).
Which students are more likely to be impacted by Growth Mindset for College Students?

Growth Mindset for College Students was developed with the ultimate goal of increasing student learning equity. While having a fixed mindset can negatively impact anyone, it can be especially harmful for certain groups of students who have to contend with challenges due to stereotypes or structural factors, such as worse academic preparation (Aronson, 2002; Steele, 1997; Stephens, MarYam, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). These groups include students who:

- Belong to groups about which negative stereotypes exist about their intellectual ability and who may be underrepresented on campus (such as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino/a, or first-generation students).
- Have a history of academic struggle (such as students who test into developmental math or English courses).

As discussed in The Research: An Introduction to Growth Mindset, these beliefs can lower students’ motivation and undermine their achievement, which contributes to group-based achievement gaps. However, research finds that helping students develop a growth mindset can reduce these inequities (Aronson, 2002, Paunesku et al., 2015, Yeager et al., 2016a). For that reason, Growth Mindset for College Students should be most effective for underrepresented minority students, first-generation students, and
for students who have a history of academic struggle.

**How can a 30-minute program impact student success?**
Growth Mindset for College Students can affect how students think about their own potential, which in turn can impact their adaptive learning behavior, such as spending more time studying and seeking out help. Over time, these helpful learning behaviors build on themselves, which leads to increased academic performance, engagement, and motivation. This in turn only serves to further reinforce their beliefs that they can overcome challenges and increase their intelligence.

This is why even very brief growth mindset programs can have a surprisingly powerful effect on student success, even if students don’t remember participating in the program at the end of the year.
Program Implementation Guide

We’re thrilled that you’re thinking about implementing Growth Mindset for College Students, and we have worked hard to make the process as easy as possible for you and your colleagues! In this section, you should find all the information you need to understand how to implement this program with ease.

We created a web-based Dashboard that will guide you through all the steps needed to implement Growth Mindset for College Students at your school (described in more detail below). If you follow the instructions on your Dashboard, you should be able to complete Growth Mindset for College Students successfully without any face-to-face or phone support from PERTS staff.

It’s not that we don’t want to talk with you. We’re sure you’re fun, charming, and clever. In fact, you must be if you’re even thinking about implementing Growth Mindset for College Students! However, our goal is to empower hundreds of colleges to implement this program successfully, and it would be cost prohibitive to do so if it was necessary for us to provide each college with personalized coaching. That’s why we’ve worked hard to automate everything we can and to provide you with all the resources you need to be successful.

With that said, we’re still learning, and we’re sure we’ll get things wrong. If something is confusing, if you have a question, or if something doesn’t seem to be working, we want to know! If you have any problems at all or if you have ideas for how to improve Growth Mindset for College Students, please email us at support@perts.net. We’re counting on you to help us make this program better for your own college and for other colleges around the country.

Read on to learn how to get your school set up to participate in Growth Mindset for College Students!
Before You Register Your College

You and your colleagues will need to make several important decisions about how to implement Growth Mindset for College Students. We recommend that you review this entire Program Information Packet with your colleagues so that everyone at your college is on the same page about what needs to happen and when, and so that everyone has the opportunity to raise potential implementation challenges and solutions.

This section of the packet will help you understand what those decisions are and what implications they might have. Some big ones to consider include:

Which administration method will you use to implement Growth Mindset for College Students?

How you deliver the program to students can impact the way students perceive the program and their likelihood to participate. We recommend you choose one of two options, and have provided detailed implementation instructions for both:

Option 1: Students complete the program independently.

In this option, students will be provided a link or the student handout to complete the program in an unsupervised setting. Students can either use their own computers at home or university computers on campus.

**Invitation Logistics:** We encourage colleges to frame the program as a welcoming activity. You may choose to invite students by embedding the link in various materials (e.g., checklists, online dashboard/portals, and/or in emails delivered to students).
Potential Resources: Lists of students to invite, Facilitator Instructions, faculty and staff responsible for inviting students to participate by embedding participation links in desired materials, and the Student Handout.

Option 2: Students complete the program in a supervised, in-person session.
In this option, students will participate in the program during a supervised, in-person session. Students can either use their own computers or university-provided computers.

Logistics: Please reserve space for students to complete the program in a supervised setting (e.g., a computer lab). Please coordinate with relevant offices as early as possible to ensure that students can attend the in-person session.

Potential resources: Facilitators to lead sessions, Facilitator Instructions, rooms to hold sessions in, computers for students to complete the program on, lists of students to invite.

Please review the Facilitator Instructions for more tips and resources on how to implement Growth Mindset for College Students.

In what context will you implement Growth Mindset for College Students?
The context in which you deliver the program to students can impact the way students perceive the program and their likelihood to participate. You will choose from the following options:

- Option 1: Students complete the program as part of their orientation.
- Option 2: Students complete the program as part of a First-year course.
- Option 3: Students complete the program as part of a Developmental course.
- Option 4: Students complete the program in another setting not listed above.

Regardless of which option you choose, it is important that students are not asked to complete the program in more than one context as this could impact program effectiveness.

Who will be involved in implementing Growth Mindset for College Students?
Depending on how you choose to administer the program at your school, you may need to involve colleagues from several offices at different points in time. For
example, some people on your implementation team could include: instructors for first year courses, computer lab schedulers, or the new student orientation team.

You may also involve or discuss the program with the following offices and individuals:

- Admissions and New Student Orientation, to coordinate how the program will be framed in relation to orientation activities more generally.
- Student Life, to discuss how to best invite students to participate.
- A member of your IT department if you elect the custom portal as your sign in method.

We encourage you to consider who at your college might need to be involved as early as possible in your planning process.

**Who will be your Organization Liaison?**

Your organization liaison must read and agree to our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). This person will be the main point of contact between PERTS and your college. By default, your organization liaison is the first person from your college to create an account on our website, but you may want to change your liaison. This person will also be listed as the main point of contact for questions about the program from your students or staff.

**Registration and Setup**

When you have a handle on the above, start by creating a user account:

- Go to [perts.net/college-mindset](http://perts.net/college-mindset) and enter your email address. A link to the online Dashboard will be sent to your email account. This link expires for security purposes, so please be sure to sign up when you have access to your email.
- After you’ve clicked on the link, you will enter your first name and last name, phone number, and you will create a password. User account setup, complete!
Dashboard Overview

After you create a user account, you will have access to your Dashboard. Your Dashboard outlines all of the tasks involved in implementation, including preparing for participation, student participation tracking, and access to your college’s report after students have participated. As you’ll see, most of the tasks don’t take much time to complete. You can leave the Dashboard and come back at any time, your progress will be saved.

You can always sign back in to your dashboard by going to perts.net/college-mindset and clicking the “Sign in” link, or by going directly to perts.net/login.

The green line at the top of the Dashboard will help you monitor your school’s progress with implementation. Below the green line, you will see buttons that correspond with key actions for your program. Below is a quick summary of each button:

- **Tasks**: Look at your implementation steps and their associated tasks.
- **Participation**: Track student progress in the program.
- **Reports**: Download your school’s report.
- **Organization**: View your school’s approval status and address.
- **Users**: Invite and manage other users on your team.
If you are managing multiple programs, locations, or years, they are all listed for you on your Dashboard.

The section below outlines each of the steps and tasks you’ll find on your Dashboard under the “Task” button. You can go out of order with some of these tasks, but you will need to complete all of them before students can participate. In some cases, the tasks are required for legal reasons. In other cases, they are crucial for configuring the system appropriately for your students to have a smooth experience. We’ve created a short and sweet one-page version of this Checklist on perts.net/college-mindset.

**Step 1: Organization**

The first set of tasks are about getting you and your organization set up in our system and making sure the right people have access to the Dashboard to help with program registration.

- **1.1 Find your organization:** Select your school/organization by searching for it and confirming that it is the correct organization. After you select your organization, you will see the rest of the tasks for this step listed below.
- **1.2 Invite Colleagues:** Next, you can send invitations to any colleagues who will help you oversee or who will be running Growth Mindset for College Students at your college. This will give them access to this dashboard so they can help administer the program. You can return here anytime to invite more colleagues or to manage your team.
- **1.3 Organization Liaison:** Here you will be asked to confirm your organization’s liaison for this program. The liaison will be the main point of contact for your organization. They will be publicly listed at neptune.perts.net so that others can contact them with questions. You can return here and change the liaison at any time. *If you will not be liaison, you must invite the liaison to the Dashboard in task 1.2.*

PERTS will review your organization and either approve or email you if there are any problems within 7 days. For now, you may skip to the next section.

**Step 2: Prepare to Participate**

In this set of tasks, you will be able to review our terms of use and make decisions about how your organization will implement Growth Mindset for College Students.
The elections and agreements you make in this section will help us customize the program for your college and grant us official permission to provide you with services.

- **2.1 Read and Agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy.** This program is not part of a research study, but we are collecting student data and identifiers in order to facilitate a high quality experience for students and administrators and in order to provide reports and other data back to your school. Agreeing to our terms grants PERTS permission for such data to be collected, stored, and provided back to Authorized Users. *Your college’s spot in the program is not secured until you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy.*

- **2.2: Review the Information Packet.** Carefully review the Program Information Packet (this document!) for Growth Mindset for College Students. Distribute it to any colleagues who will need to be familiar with the program. *The packet includes answers to most questions colleges have about the program.*

- **2.3 Administration Method.** In this task, you will select how you would like the 30-minute module to be administered to students. Here is an overview of the options; for more information, please refer to “Which administration method will you use to implement Growth Mindset for College Students?” earlier in this document:
  - Option 1: Students are provided a link to independently participate in the program. Students will complete the program on their own computers prior to arriving on campus.
  - Option 2: Students participate in the program during a supervised, in-person session. Students can either use their own computers or university-provided computers.

- **2.4 Administration Context.** In this task, you will select the context in which you’ll be administering the 30-minute module to students. Here is an overview of the options; for more information, please refer to “In what context will you administer Growth Mindset for College Students?” earlier in this document:

- **2.5 Sign In Portal.** Here you will decide how you would like students to sign in to the program. Students can sign in through a custom portal created by your own college’s IT department or through a generic portal at perts.me. There are pros and cons to each approach listed below. Your decision here will help us customize the facilitator instructions and your students’ experience. *A link to detailed instructions on how to create a custom portal are available in this task on your Dashboard.*
● Custom Portal. Choose this option if you want to implement the program on a custom portal with the help of your organization’s internal network authorization. Be sure to consult with your IT team before selecting this option.
  ○ Pros: This is the best option because your college's network will be in control of the students' identifiers we receive and because sign in can be automated, eliminating common errors.
  ○ Cons: Requires your IT team to construct a special web page, for which we provide detailed instructions that you should share with your IT team.

● Generic Portal. Choose this option if your IT team will not set up a custom portal for your college.
  ○ Pros: Less work for your IT team, as your IT team will not need to set up a special web page.
  ○ Cons: Increases the chances of identification errors as students enter the module, such as a student mistyping their information.

□ 2.6 Reserve Resources. You will need to reserve resources to complete the program as needed, particularly if you decide to implement in-person when students are on campus. This may include computer labs or laptop carts, or scheduled times and days for students to access the module.

□ 2.7 Orient Your Team. This task reminds you to orient all colleagues and offices who will be involved in administering the program to students. Depending on how you choose to administer the program, this may include individuals responsible for sending out email invitations to students and promoting the program in orientation materials, or individuals who will administer the program to students in-person (e.g. instructors, computer lab staff, new student orientation staff).

**Obtaining buy-in from colleagues who will directly administer the program is critical to the program’s success.** They must all understand what they are supposed to do and why it is important. Prepare these individuals for their duties by reviewing the appropriate Facilitator Instructions with them and by providing opportunities for them to ask questions and take part in planning.

□ 2.8 Expected Participation. To help you gauge how successful you were at reaching your participation goals, please approximate how many students you expect to take part in the program.
2.9 Expected Launch Date. You will need to decide when to invite students to take part in the program.
2.10 Other Growth Mindset Efforts at Your College. In this task, you will summarize the other ways in which your college is currently promoting or planning to implement growth mindset on your campus.
2.11 How Did You Learn About this Program? Here, you will share how you learned about PERTS and Growth Mindset for College Students.

Step 3: Quiz

3.1-3.7 Quiz. At this milestone, you will be asked to take a short quiz to test your knowledge of the appropriate administration protocol so that you can be sure you are following this protocol appropriately. Growth Mindset for College Students should be administered following this specific protocol. Not following the protocol could cause the program to become ineffective.

You can also learn more about the research behind Growth Mindset interventions by reading Social Psychological Interventions in Education: They’re Not Magic, by David Yeager and Greg Walton.

Step 4: Launch and Monitor

On this page, you will be able to monitor and launch Growth Mindset for College Students, track students’ participation, and view the program’s results.

4.1 Monitor Program.

- Program Readiness.
  - Not ready yet! We need more information to customize your students’ experience. Make sure you’ve done all previous tasks. You may also have to wait for approval from your PERTS account manager.
  - On Your Mark: You’re ready to go as soon as the program opens for participation in June.
  - Launched! You’re ready for program participation. Your students can participate any time between June and March. Just follow the Facilitator Instructions to invite them. When all students have completed the program, come back here and click “We’ve Finished the Module.”
○ You marked this module as complete. Students can still participate if they need to make up a missed session.

● Monitor Participation. Here you will be able to see how many students started the program and how many completed it. A participation table will be displayed when the module is ready.

☐ 4.2 Report. In early November and early April, we will make a report available showing the impact of the program on survey outcomes at your college and across other participating colleges.

Day of Program Overview

The Facilitator Instructions provide detailed step-by-step instructions for day of program implementation. Students will go through the online module either in class or at home and will need access to their own computer and a Wi-Fi connection. Day of program implementation will look a little different depending on how your school decides to administer the program to students (i.e., independently vs. supervised, during orientation vs. in a first-year course), but the general steps will be the same.

1. The facilitator either reads or sends students an email with a script provided by PERTS.
2. The facilitator provides students with the program website URL and the access code.
3. Students sign in to the program website and enter their student identifier (dependent on the sign in method you select).
4. Students go through the 30-minute online module on their own. Your college will be able to track how many students completed the program in real time.

To provide better security to our users, PERTS does not support some older browsers which are known to have serious vulnerabilities. These currently are: Internet Explorer version 10 or earlier, and Safari version 5 or earlier. Please make sure your participants have access to up-to-date browsers when planning PERTS programs.

And THAT’s the long version of how to implement Growth Mindset for College Students at your college!
References


