

PERRLA Case Study

Western Nebraska Community College – TRIO Programs

Executive Summary

WNCC's TRIO Veterans Upward Bound and TRIO Student Support Services teams first offered PERRLA via grant funding and later purchased a site license after students made it clear they wanted to keep using it. PERRLA supported 125 students across two programs and worked best when it lived quietly in a student's workflow – one less thing to worry about for students who already have a lot on their plate. As WNCC staff put it, "those that used it benefited," and when the license was at risk, students actively told staff, "don't take it away!"

The Challenge

WNCC's TRIO students are balancing a lot – school, work, family, and in many cases, a campus environment that's new to them. When a paper is due, the priority is getting it done, not getting the formatting right. As one staff member put it, students “tend to think only in the immediate.”

That pressure compounds a deeper issue: confidence. Many students are scared to submit. They're not sure if their paper looks right, and that uncertainty follows them all the way to the grade. WNCC saw PERRLA as a way to give students one less thing to doubt.

→ Formatting anxiety undermined student confidence

→ Advisor time lost to formatting basics instead of real support

About TRIO Programs

TRIO Veterans Upward Bound serves military veterans who want to build college-ready skills and transition into higher education.

TRIO Student Support Services supports WNCC students who need academic help and meet at least one of three criteria: low income, first-generation college student (no parent holds a four-year degree), or a documented disability.

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Implementation Notes

TRIO Veterans Upward Bound and TRIO Student Support Services partnered together to cover ~125 students.

Introduced at orientation; integrated into module links & faculty comments; reinforced by student successes.

Time period: Aug. 1, 2024 – July 31, 2025

What Staff Liked

WNCC staff appreciated that PERRLA was easy to administer and flexible in reporting. The team singled out three practical wins: minimal support burden, measurable student satisfaction, and simple admin controls. As one interviewee put it, PERRLA “checked every single box” when it came to budget, reporting, student use, and flexibility.

Outcomes & Results

Students who engaged with PERRLA stopped showing up to advisors with formatting questions. The ones who used it were more confident submitting their work – and noticeably less anxious waiting for grades to come back.

PERRLA also created an unexpected peer effect. Work-study students became informal champions – when a peer walked into the office unsure about a paper, they were the first to say: "Did you sign up for PERRLA?”

What Happened in Practice

Quiet wins: For most of the pilot, there wasn't a lot of noise – and that was a good thing. Faculty didn't complain, students who used it reported it helped, and support tickets were low. As one staff member said, the lack of complaints "says a lot."

The turning point: The real proof came when the grant ended and access was temporarily removed. Students who rarely advocate for themselves spoke up immediately – and that moment convinced leadership to buy a site license.

Low disruption: Because PERRLA fit into students' existing workflows, it didn't create friction. Once students cleared the small learning curve, it became a time-saver for every paper after that.

Lessons & Recommendations for Others

Treat PERRLA as a workflow tool: Don't force curricular changes; let it sit where students already work.

Build a small onboarding nudge: A short video or a single webinar with participation credit helps students clear the initial learning curve. Peer and advisor nudges work especially well.

Watch for the “quiet until removed” signal: Low complaints are often good news. If students push to keep the tool, that's real evidence of value.

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