MENTORING. THRIVING.

Academic Initiatives and Student Success (AISS) serves to retain, graduate, and foster career success. As part of the Student Success & Retention Innovation area, the primary purpose of Academic Success & Achievement (ASA) is to support students and help move them toward graduation. Most programs in ASA are based on the cornerstone of peer mentorship. ASA programs serve students in the academic probation process, first-generation college students, specific cultural identity groups, graduate students, and students identified as needing or those requesting additional support in navigating college.

Collectively, the programs and services of ASA connect with well over 8,000 students annually, freshmen through graduate, to enhance student engagement, access, persistence, and timely graduation. Research shows that peer-to-peer interactions play a pivotal role in this process, as it is effective in helping students learn new material and behaviors. Students who experience supportive environments, peer interactions, set goals, and learn essentials non-cognitive skills (e.g., time management) are more successful scholars.1

SUPPORTING STUDENTS AS THEY THRIVE

Students have the opportunity to interact with peer mentors in a variety of ways through ASA programs. When selecting a peer-mentoring program, one of the challenges students face is feeling like the program does not speak to their identity or interests, or that the program is “one size fits all.” In some instances, the program scope can be too narrow to appeal to students at different points in their academic career. To meet this challenge, ASA provides students with the opportunity for individualized services. We anticipate having the ability to offer our services to at least 25% of UA students each year as they navigate different points in their academic career. ASA is able to provide direct support needed or connect students to the right resource to get them from their first day on campus to graduation.

Peer Mentoring is a good match for the student who likes to check in with someone on a regular, in-person basis and build a relationship. Peer mentors work with students to coach them in skill development, navigating the UA, balancing academics and life, and identifying goals each semester. Additionally, at a time when mental health is a concern for so many of our UA students, the peer mentors serve as a resource to help them address stress levels, exam preparation, understanding UA policies and enrollment options, and also refer students to Counseling & Psych Services (CAPS) for more urgent mental health concerns.

Workshops/discussion groups are offered to students seeking a comprehensive approach to academic support while broadening their connections with peers. Students will meet individually with their peer mentor and also have the opportunity to attend workshop/discussion groups led by their peer mentor that exposes them to non-cognitive topics that contribute to their success outside the classroom (e.g., UA 101: terms and resources; building relationships with faculty; introduction to graduate school, etc.).

ASA proposes offering peer mentoring to a diverse population of students:

Ethnically underrepresented students – the Cultural Learning Communities (CLC) are facilitated in partnership with the four Cultural Centers on campus; they currently only serve freshmen. Through this request we propose expanding the CLCs to create a new learning community that is specifically to serve multiracial students, and four to five new communities specifically for graduate students of color. As the UA approaches the status of being a Hispanic serving institution (HSI), it will result in more students of color on our campus, and we want to ensure we have programs in place to support their retention and graduation.

First-generation college students – the First Cats program will focus on mentoring specifically for first-generation college students. In 2017-2018 SSF provided ASA funding to expand this option to second-year students, and we served 102 sophomores with two peer mentors. There was more interest from students for mentors than we were able to accommodate, and additional

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support at all academic levels—including graduate students—was requested multiple times throughout the year. Approval of this request will assist us in working with all students seeking support.

**Students on academic probation**—undergraduate students that find themselves on academic probation the first time, at any point in their college career, are mandated by their college to participate in an academic recovery program. Pathways to Academic Student Success (PASS) is housed in ASA and is required for students in the colleges of Medicine, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Education, Eller College of Management, Public Health, and Agricultural and Life Sciences. PASS serves between 750 and 1,000 students on academic probation each year. Students who experience supportive environments, peer mentoring/interaction, set goals, and develop essential skills like good time management are more successful scholars. The PASS program and curriculum were created with that research in mind.

**Students seeking additional support**—we also have some students at the UA who do not find an immediate connection to campus. ASA is able to identify students who do not appear to be supported through their college or other programs on campus, and we reach out to that group and offer them the opportunity to come in and meet with an ASA staff person. For first- and second-year students, this may be connecting them to a peer mentor, or to another existing program. Sometimes students are unaware of their resources and all the UA has to offer. ASA is able to serve as that connection point.

**Digital Outreach and Mentoring**—Many of our students are not looking for a structured program; they prefer an “on-the-go” approach that is available when they personally need it. Digital peer mentors send out Wildcat Connections, a weekly electronic newsletter. This provides information on important upcoming dates and deadlines, what’s happening on campus, and provides resources. Digital peer mentors are also available for a phone call or drop-in hours, and they maintain the Wildcat Connections social media platforms that include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest.

### ASSESSMENT & HOW WE JUDGE SUCCESS

Data is gathered on retention rates for all students involved in ASA peer mentoring programs. We know peer mentoring is successful because our data has consistently shown participants in ASA peer mentoring based programs return to the UA the following year ten percentage points, on average, higher than their peers.

Assessment will include hosting focus groups and conducting surveys at the end of every semester in order to gather data on participant’s experiences and skills development. Additionally, enrollment and academic standing will be assessed to determine persistence and overall academic performance. PASS will conduct additional assessment that determines academic improvement and the number of students no longer on academic probation.

Finally, we will work with our division’s assessment and research office to conduct a propensity score matching report that creates a comparison group of students that did not participate in ASA peer mentoring to help determine effectiveness.

### LONG TERM PLANS

This proposal is requesting funding for three consecutive years to maintain consistency and sustainability of programs and services. The UA has strategic planning goals specific to preparing students for a productive future, and is committed to increasing its freshman retention rate, creating 100% engagement, and improving graduation rates. The programs and services provided by ASA are designed to strategically address these goals. The ASA peer mentoring experience enhances delivery through peer-to-peer interventions and program opportunities. This proposal further contributes to the University goal of improving productivity and increasing efficiency.


