NAVIGATE. EXCEL. GRADUATE. THRIVE.

To thrive means to grow or develop vigorously, to flourish. Students thrive when they engage socially and academically, and when they feel a sense of belonging in the Wildcat community. By focusing on the assets each student brings with them to college and connecting them with valuable campus resources, Thrive Center is committed to ensuring that students do not just survive at UA, but thrive. As part of the Student Success & Retention Innovation area, the mission of Thrive Center is to advance a community where students successfully navigate through, excel in, and graduate from the University of Arizona prepared for life after college. Most programs in Thrive Center are based on the cornerstone of peer mentorship. Our programs serve students in the academic probation process, first-generation college students, specific cultural identity groups, students who have experienced homelessness or the foster care system, transfer students, and students identified as needing, or those requesting, additional support in navigating college.

Collectively, the programs and services of Thrive Center connect with well over 15,000 students annually 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 and peer interactions, set goals, and learn essential non-cognitive skills (e.g., time and life management) are more successful scholars.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS AS THEY THRIVE

Students can interact with peer mentors in a variety of ways through Thrive Center programs. They may choose to participate in a program that centers their first-generation experience, a program that speaks to their racial or ethnic identity, a program that has structured schedules, or a program that flexes with their schedule and interests. Thrive Center student staff are extensively trained in paraprofessional counseling, communicating across communities of difference, university policies, presentation skills, and professionalism. We are not just supporting and investing in the students we serve, but also the student staff who conduct most of the one-to-one interactions.

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 students, peer mentors serve as a resource to help them address stress levels, exam preparation, and understanding university policies and enrollment options. They can refer students to a life management counselor housed in Thrive Center and free of charge to program participants, or Counseling and Psychological 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.). Thrive Guides, a new initiative beginning this spring, will also offer workshops all students can attend without needing to be part of a program. These workshops will focus on topics we refer to as “adulting.” These can include everything from academic strategies and time management, to changing a tire or how to do your own taxes.

Thrive Center has been fortunate to garner institutional support to expand current programs, create new programs, and hire more professional staff through strategic plan funding, but our reach and effectiveness are enhanced exponentially with the support of student peer mentors, peer educators and student assistants. We do not have institutionalized funding to maintain our current staffing levels, and therefore are looking for support from the Student Services Fee Board.

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*Indicates potential staff supported by funding included in this proposal. Thrive Center currently has 72 total undergraduate staff and 6 graduate assistants funded from SSF, strategic plan and Thrive central budget.
Thrive Center proposes offering peer mentoring to a diverse population of students:

**Ethnically underserved students** – The Cultural Learning Communities (CLCs) 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 serves students in the LGBTQ resource center and increase our capacity to serve all freshmen in the B.L.A.C.K. program at African American Student Affairs. Previously B.L.A.C.K. had volunteer mentors serving new freshmen. This change will allow peer mentors to be paid for their time and to receive the comprehensive training and supervision Thrive Center provides to our 50+ peer mentors. The Cultural Learning Communities expect to serve over 100 students.

**First-generation college students** – The First Cats program will focus on mentoring specifically for first-generation college students. First Cats currently provides mentoring for freshmen (approximately 120 students) and sophomores (approximately 80 students). This request will allow us to expand our support for first- and second-year students with a total of 15 peer mentors and a capacity of up to 200 freshmen and 150 sophomores and students on academic probation.

**Students on academic probation** – The University of Arizona has revised its academic probation policy to define probation as being the second semester in which a student has a cumulative GPA below 2.0. Students in this group (700+ students per semester) are now required to complete an online assessment and meet with a strengths coach in Thrive Center to determine the best intervention for their situation. An intervention could be meeting with a life management counselor, a learning specialist, a strengths coach or a peer mentor. Students for whom peer mentoring is the appropriate intervention will be referred to Thrive Guides or First Cats for support. Thrive Center anticipates pairing over 300 students on academic probation with a peer mentor each semester.

**Students seeking additional support** – Thrive Center also supports several other student populations, including: students who have experienced homelessness or the foster care system (Fostering Success), transfer students (Transfer Student Center), students navigating difficult financial circumstances (Financial Wellness), and those seeking life skills (adulting with Thrive Guides). We also know that for students to be successful they need support that meets them where they are. This proposal will also allow us to support students with virtual peer mentoring via Zoom and expanded evening hours.

### ASSESSMENT & HOW WE JUDGE SUCCESS

We gather data on retention rates for all students involved in Thrive Center peer mentoring programs. We know peer mentoring is successful because our data consistently show participants in Thrive mentoring programs return to the University at rates ten percentage points, on average, higher than their peers. As an example, the retention rate for all full-time Arizona students starting in Fall 2018 was 83.2%. Students who participated in First Cats mentoring were retained at 94.8%.

Our plan will include hosting focus groups and conducting surveys at the end of every semester to assess participants’ experiences and skill development. For those students on academic probation, we will also review how many students are able to move off probation following program participation.

Finally, our senior coordinator for assessment will conduct a propensity score matching report that creates a comparison group of students who did not participate in Thrive peer mentoring to determine program effectiveness.

### LONG TERM PLANS

This proposal is requesting funding for three consecutive years to maintain consistency and sustainability of programs and services. Our programs are consistent with university goals of increasing student retention, persistence and graduation for all students. Student Services Fee funding will allow us to maintain and expand our current student staffing levels.

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