The New Student Success Model: SOAR+ Program

Plan. Support. Succeed!

All Faculty Meeting – November

Talitha Gentry (Co-Chair and Director of the SOAR+ Program)

Keith Goode (Co-Chair and Director of Onboarding and Specialized Advising)

Dr. Roderica Williams (Ex-Officio and Dean of Student Success and Retention)

Dr. Dennis Baskin (Ex-Officio and Associate Provost of Student Affairs)

SOAR+

PLAN. SUPPORT. *SUCCEED!*

SOAR+ Program Activity

Before we dive into the details of our new SOAR+ program, let's take a moment to reflect on your own college journey. We'd like you to consider a simple but powerful question:

> ## What Support Services Helped You to Succeed in College?

Think about the advisors who guided you, the mentors who inspired you, the financial aid that made it possible, or the peer connections that kept you motivated. These experiences inform our vision for SOAR+ and help us understand what truly makes a difference in student success. As we share this new model with you today, keep these personal experiences in mind—they are the foundation upon which we've built this comprehensive support program.

ADD A MENTI POLL HERE

Rationale for Constructing a New Student Success Model at Harper

Addressing Systemic Barriers

Too many of our students face obstacles that prevent them from reaching their full potential. These barriers—financial constraints, lack of academic preparation, and unclear pathways—require a coordinated institutional response.

Advancing Equity Goals

Our data reveals persistent equity gaps across student populations. The SOAR+ program specifically targets students who need support most, ensuring that all students have access to the resources necessary for success.

Building on Best Practices

SOAR+ consolidates the most effective components of our previous programs into one sustainable, scalable framework. We've learned from past initiatives and designed a model that can grow with our institution.

The higher education landscape has changed dramatically. Students today face unprecedented challenges—from financial pressures to navigating complex degree requirements to balancing work and family responsibilities. At the same time, we have more evidence than ever about what works. Research consistently shows that early intervention, holistic advising, financial support, and a strong sense of belonging are critical to student persistence and completion.

Components of the SOAR+ Program

SOAR+ brings together eight interconnected components designed to support students throughout their academic journey. Each element has been carefully crafted based on research and our institutional data about what drives student success.

Financial Awards

Holistic Advising

Mentoring

First Year Seminar

Programming

Wraparound Services

Academic Support

Career Development

SOAR+ Program Eligibility

One of the most innovative aspects of SOAR+ is our auto-opt approach. We've removed application barriers to ensure that eligible students automatically receive support. Here's who qualifies:

1

Base Criteria

Must be a **new, first-time-in-college, credential or degree-seeking student** enrolled in at least **9+ credit hours**

2

Plus At Least One Additional Factor

- **Developmental placement** in Math and/or English
- **High school GPA ≤ 2.5**
- **High school GPA 2.5–3.0** with demonstrated financial need
- **Undecided major**

This eligibility framework ensures we're reaching students who would benefit most from structured support. By automatically enrolling eligible students rather than requiring an application, we eliminate a significant barrier and ensure equitable access to resources. Students can opt out if they choose, but the default is inclusion—a critical shift in how we approach student support.

Elimination of Barriers
No Application Required

The Traditional Approach

Historically, student support programs have required applications, essays, interviews, or other gatekeeping mechanisms. While well-intentioned, these requirements often excluded the very students who needed help most—those who lacked information about opportunities, didn't have time to complete additional paperwork, or felt intimidated by the process.

The SOAR+ Innovation

SOAR+ flips this model. **Eligible students are automatically enrolled**—no application, no essay, no waiting. We've analyzed our data, identified who needs support, and proactively brought them into the program. Students can opt out if they prefer, but the default is inclusion.

> **Research shows** that automatic enrollment dramatically increases participation rates, especially among underrepresented and first-generation students. By removing barriers to entry, we ensure that support reaches those who need it most, not just those who know how to navigate the system.

This approach represents a fundamental shift in our philosophy. Instead of making students prove they deserve support, we're declaring that support is their right. Every eligible student will benefit from SOAR+ unless they actively choose otherwise—a powerful statement about our commitment to equity and student success.

SOAR+ Student Financial Award

Financial barriers are among the most significant obstacles to student success. The SOAR+ financial award addresses this head-on by providing meaningful, recurring support that helps students focus on their studies rather than their bills.

1

2

3

Semester-Based Awards

Students receive financial support each semester in a $600 award each academic year they remain in good standing and meet program requirements.

Flexible Usage

Awards can be applied to tuition, fees, books, supplies, or other education-related expenses. We recognize that students have diverse needs, and flexibility ensures the award provides maximum benefit.

Stacked with Other Aid

SOAR+ awards complement—rather than replace—other financial aid. Students can receive federal grants, scholarships, and SOAR+ funding simultaneously, maximizing their total support.

The award amount has been calibrated to make a real difference without creating dependency. Research shows that even modest financial support can significantly impact retention and completion, especially when combined with advising and mentoring. By reducing financial stress, we enable students to engage more fully in their education and take advantage of enrichment opportunities.

Required New Student Orientation Experience

Every SOAR+ student's journey begins with a comprehensive orientation designed to set them up for success from day one. This isn't a passive information session—it's an interactive, engaging experience that builds community, clarifies expectations, and connects students with resources.

01

Campus Navigation & Resources

Students learn where to find essential services, from the library to tutoring centers to the food pantry. We demystify campus geography and culture.

02

Academic Expectations & Success Strategies

We establish clear expectations for college-level work and introduce proven study strategies, time management techniques, and academic support resources.

03

SOAR+ Program Overview

Students meet their advisors and mentors, understand program requirements and benefits, and develop their first-semester success plan.

04

Community Building

Through icebreakers, small group discussions, and collaborative activities, students begin forming the peer connections that will sustain them throughout their college journey.

Orientation sets the tone for the entire SOAR+ experience. By investing time upfront to build relationships, clarify expectations, and connect students with resources, we significantly increase the likelihood of early engagement and long-term success. Students leave orientation feeling welcomed, informed, and excited about their Harper journey.

Connection and Partnership with a Holistic Academic Advisor

At the heart of SOAR+ is a reimagined approach to academic advising. We've moved beyond transactional, schedule-focused advising to embrace a holistic, culturally responsive model that treats students as whole people with complex lives and aspirations.

The CONNECT Holistic Advising Approach

Cultivate Relationships	Organize Resources
Navigate Challenges Together	Normalize Help-Seeking
Empower Decision-Making	Communicate Proactively
Track Progress and Celebrate Success	

Refined Communication Plan
Multiple touchpoints throughout each semester using students' preferred communication methods—text, email, app notifications, phone calls, and in-person meetings.

Harper App Integration
Students and advisors connect seamlessly through our mobile platform, making it easy to schedule appointments, access resources, and stay informed.

Semester-Based Advising & Transfer Checklists

Clear milestones and action items ensure students stay on track toward graduation and are prepared for transfer if that's their goal.

SOAR+ Dashboard & Early Alerts
Advisors monitor student progress in real time, receiving alerts when students miss class, struggle with assignments, or show other warning signs, enabling proactive intervention.

Mentoring Options to Meet Every Student's Needs

Research consistently shows that mentoring relationships significantly improve student retention, academic performance, and sense of belonging. SOAR+ offers unprecedented flexibility in matching students with mentors who can best support their unique needs and goals.

Peer Mentors

Current Harper students who have successfully navigated the challenges our SOAR+ students face. They provide relatable guidance, share practical strategies, and model what success looks like.

Faculty Mentors

Instructors who offer academic expertise, career guidance, and insider knowledge about their fields. They help students connect classroom learning to professional aspirations.

Staff Mentors

Harper employees from across the institution who bring diverse perspectives and help students understand college operations, access resources, and build professional skills.

Distinguished Alumni

Successful graduates who remember their Harper journey and want to give back. They provide inspiration, networking opportunities, and real-world career insights.

Workforce Partners (BILT Model)

Industry professionals who offer career-specific mentoring, internship opportunities, and direct pipelines to employment in high-demand fields.

Student Choice Matters: Students rank their mentoring preferences, and we use an equitable matching process to ensure fair distribution across options. All mentors receive training and a stipend to recognize their valuable contribution to student success.

Unparalleled Academic Experience

First Year Seminar (FYS)

The First Year Seminar is where SOAR+ students build the foundation for college success. This credit-bearing course combines academic skill development with personal growth, career exploration, and community building—all in a supportive, cohort-based environment.

1

2

What Students Learn

- **Critical thinking and problem-solving** strategies applicable across discipline

- **Time management and organization** techniques for balancing life.

- **Research and information literacy** skills essential for academic success

- **Career exploration and goal-setting** to clarify their academic and professional paths

- **Campus resources and navigation** to access support when needed

- **Growth mindset and resilience** to overcome challenges and setbacks

How It's Different

FYS isn't a traditional lecture course. Classes are interactive, discussion-based, and project-oriented. Students work in teams, engage with guest speakers, visit campus resources, and complete a culminating project that demonstrates their learning.

The cohort model means students move through the course together, building relationships that extend beyond the classroom. Many FYS cohorts continue meeting informally throughout their time at Harper, creating lasting support networks.

Faculty teaching FYS receive specialized training in equity-minded pedagogy, student development theory, and culturally responsive teaching. This ensures that every section provides a high-quality, inclusive experience that honors students' diverse backgrounds and learning styles.

Culturally Responsive Programming and Enrichment Experiences

Education extends far beyond the classroom. SOAR+ offers a rich calendar of programming designed to build skills, foster belonging, and expose students to opportunities they might not otherwise encounter. Every event is intentionally designed with equity and inclusion at the center.

Student Success Skills Enrichment Workshops

Interactive sessions covering topics like effective note-taking, test preparation strategies, stress management, presentation skills, and collaborative teamwork.

Financial Literacy Workshops & Self-Paced Modules

Practical education on budgeting, student loans, credit management, saving strategies, and long-term financial planning. Available in both live and online formats to accommodate different schedules and learning preferences.

Excursions & Cultural Experiences

Organized trips to museums, theaters, professional sporting events, cultural festivals, and campus activities. These experiences broaden students' horizons and create shared memories that strengthen cohort bonds.
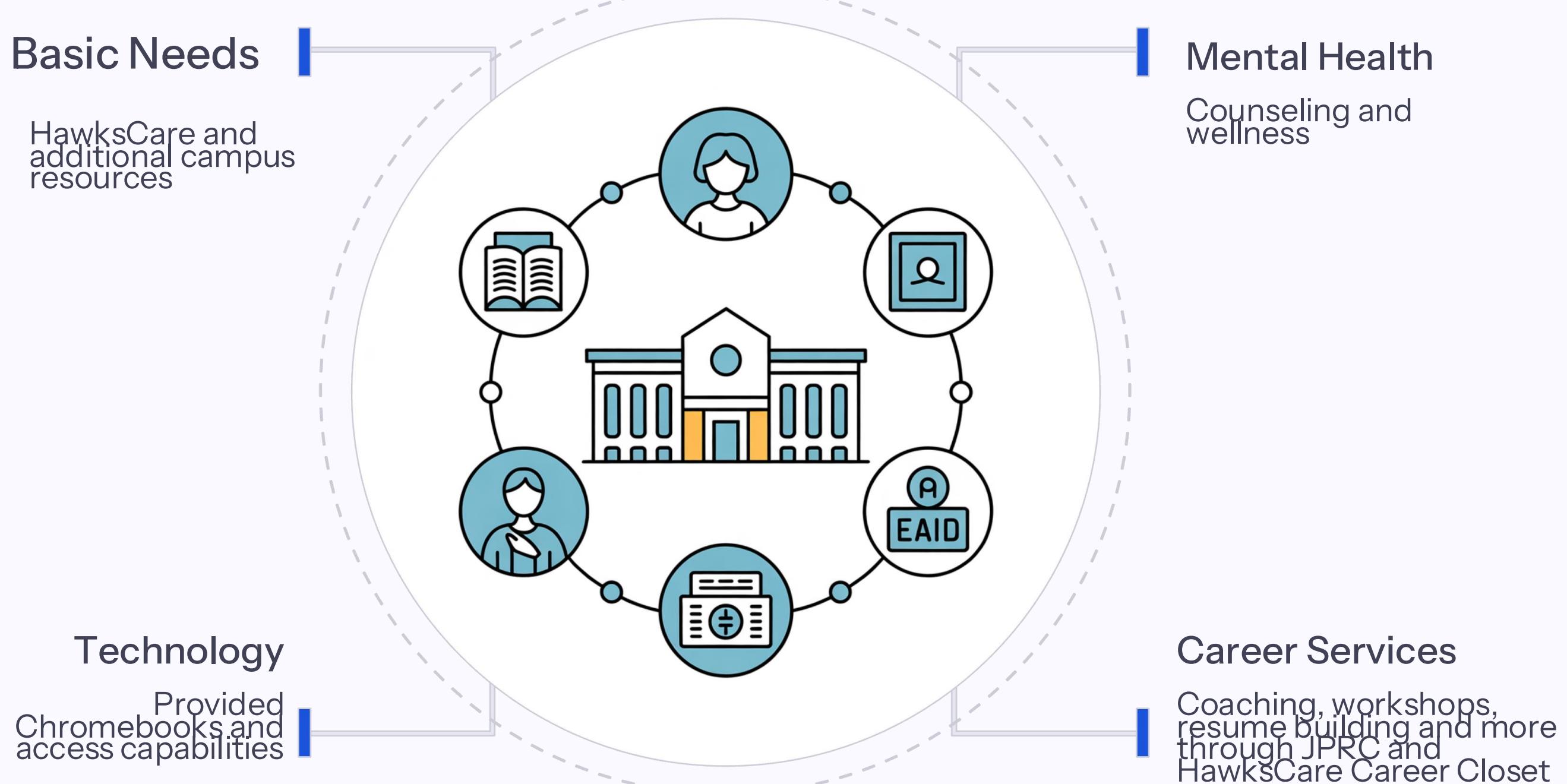
Pre & Post Workshop Assessments

We don't just offer programs—we measure their impact. Students complete brief surveys before and after workshops to gauge knowledge gain and behavior change, helping us continuously improve our offerings.

Fostering Sense of Belonging

Team-building activities, affinity group meetings, and cultural celebrations create spaces where students can be their authentic selves while building connections with peers who share similar backgrounds and experiences.

Enhanced Wraparound Services and Tailored Support

Basic Needs

HawksCare and additional campus resources

Technology

Provided Chromebooks and access capabilities

Mental Health

Counseling and wellness

Career Services

Coaching, workshops, resume building and more through JPRC and HawksCare Career Closet

SOAR+ Kickoff Event
January 23rd, 2026

Mark your calendars! The official launch of SOAR+ will be a celebration of our commitment to student success and an opportunity for our inaugural cohort to connect with faculty, staff, mentors, and each other.

1

Morning: Welcome & Program Overview

Students and families join us for breakfast and an inspiring keynote from Dr. Proctor and Dr. Williams, along with SOAR+ staff, faculty, and other stakeholders who embody the SOAR+ spirit.

2

Mid-Morning: Advisor & Mentor Matching and Campus Resource Fair

Students meet their advisors and mentors for the first time, beginning relationships that will sustain them throughout their Harper journey, and will also can partake in an interactive expo to explore Harper's support services, student organizations, and other enrichment opportunities.

3

Noon: Wrap Up and Harper Swag Share!

Wrap up of the event along with an opportunity to grab Harper swag to represent your participation in the inaugural cohort of the SOAR+ Program!

Faculty and staff attendance is strongly encouraged! Your presence demonstrates our institution-wide commitment to SOAR+ and helps students see the breadth of support available to them. Plus, it's going to be a great event—don't miss out!

Get Ready to Help Our Students SOAR!

The SOAR+ program reflects the next evolution of Harper's focus on equity and student success. It consolidates the most effective components of past programs into one sustainable framework that is **built to grow and adapt** with our students' needs.

This ambitious initiative didn't happen in a vacuum. It represents countless hours of collaboration, data analysis, program design, and commitment from teams across our institution. We couldn't have accomplished this transformational work without the tireless efforts of our colleagues in:

- **Student Affairs** – designing holistic support structures

- **Academic Affairs** – developing curriculum and faculty partnerships

- **Enrollment Services** – creating seamless pathways for students

- **Communications & Marketing** – crafting our message and brand

- **Transfer Services** – ensuring students have clear pathways beyond Harper

- **Human Resources** – supporting staff development and hiring

- **Office of Institutional Research** – providing critical data and assessment

- **Financial Services** – managing awards and sustainability

- **Interdisciplinary Programs, HSI, and DEI** – centering equity in design

Now we need *your* partnership. Faculty are at the heart of the SOAR+ experience. Your engagement in the classroom, your willingness to use the early alert system, your participation in programming, and your mentorship can make the difference between a student who struggles and one who thrives. Together, we will ensure every SOAR+ student has the support they need to succeed.

Questions and Answers

How can I support SOAR+ students in my classroom?

What training is available for faculty mentors?

How does the early alert system work?

Contact Information

Talitha Gentry (Co-Chair and Director of the SOAR+ Program)
Email: gt35155@harpercollege.edu

Keith Goode (Co-Chair and Director of Onboarding and Specialized Advising)
Email: kgoode@harpercollege.edu

Dr. Roderica Williams (Ex-Officio and Dean of Student Success and Retention)
Email: wr24915@harpercollege.edu

Next Steps

- Visit the SOAR+ website for detailed program information
- Sign up to be a faculty mentor
- Mark your calendar for the January 23rd kickoff event
- Share your ideas and feedback with the SOAR+ team

Thank you for your commitment to student success. Together, we will help our students SOAR!