

## **N4A Model Practice Award**

### **University of Pittsburgh's H.A.I.L. Program**

#### **Goals and Objectives**

At the University of Pittsburgh, we saw a need for supporting student-athletes making the transition to their new college home. This transition presents challenges for many student-athletes including time management, navigating the higher educational system, and building academic skills for college success that cause stress that can prevent students from meeting their full potential (Thompson et al., 2021). To better support this transition for our student-athletes, we built a program to address the transition to college and provided multiple touch points of support.

Based on the school slogan and traditional fight song of the University of Pittsburgh titled “Hail to Pitt,” the H.A.I.L. Program, or the Holistic Achievement, Integration, and Learning Program, serves a dual purpose: first, as a rallying call for our student-athletes to reach their fullest academic, athletic, and personal success while upholding the academic excellence and integrity of our school, and second, as a guiding model for our Peer Academic Coaches, or PACs, to ensure a standard curriculum of academic and life skills are passed onto our student-athletes. Following an internal review, the H.A.I.L. Program was developed with a new life and academic skills-focused curriculum, including a renewed spotlight on the delivery format by PACs, to better match the needs of our student-athletes. This programming emphasizes holistic achievement, ensuring students are building skills that can be used in all aspects of student life from the classroom to field, including communication and organization. Integration is another key component as PACs work to build connections with students to help them persist, identify needs, and connect them to campus resources. Finally, learning is at the heart of this program. We hope that students learn how to be life-long learners with highly effective strategies that have been demonstrated to lead to college success. Each weekly meeting is centered on holistic, meaningful conversations that build learning tools that can be used inside and outside of the classroom, campus life and events, and personal well-being.

## **Goal 1: Shaping the Standard**


To ensure that our student-athletes have the best possible resources available to assist them in their academic, athletic, and personal endeavors, our first focus had to turn away from the student-athletes themselves, and, rather, focus on the training of our PACs. Prior to this program, PACs did not receive much in the way of formalized training in best academic and learning practices, leaving many peer-led meetings to lack consistent subject matter. As our eyes and ears on the frontline, our PACs are indispensable in the information they provide to both student-athletes and academic advisors. With the ability to create a comfortable, more informal learning environment where student-athletes can more openly express themselves, PACs had to be equipped with the ability to handle the diversified needs of our student-athletes and to deliver the same base of skill-building lessons that our department expected. In addition to using the richness of their personal backgrounds and experiences as college students, H.A.I.L. Program training allows our PACs to serve as vital sources of information, modeling good academic and personal practices.

**Objective:** Provide training to our PACs to better prepare for meetings with student-athletes by equipping them with weekly objectives, resources, and standard practices that best reflect department goals.

To achieve this goal, the following steps were taken:

- Creation of the H.A.I.L. Program which set out to make a standardized set of lesson plans for PACs to follow, provide academic resources and techniques of working with students, and establish a five-part training module that consists of in-person and online workshops.
- PACs are assigned to complete the intensive online training course and in-person orientation prior to their first day, covering NCAA rules, ethics and academic integrity, facilitating productive meetings, completing feedback, supportive communication styles, and the foundations of teaching and learning.

- Weekly emails titled “Monday Minutes” are sent out to PACs with reminders and objectives to guide a meeting’s discussion with the goal of these communications to create a sense of community among the PACs, as well as guide meeting priorities and approaches to increase fidelity of intervention.
- Pitt’s learning management platform, Canvas, houses a H.A.I.L. Program syllabus and structured weekly lesson plans that PACs can access for each meeting
- Following meetings, PACs are required to create a summary report of the session.



PEER ACADEMIC COACHING LESSON PLAN	
WEEK 1	
H.A.I.L to Pitt Program	
<b>Student Name:</b>	<b>Date of Appointment:</b>
<b>Topic: Syllabus Review &amp; Teamworks Calendar</b>	
<b>Learning Objectives</b> Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locate key dates on the syllabus</li> <li>Locate course resources in the syllabus and in Canvas</li> <li>Demonstrate an understanding of course requirements and assignments</li> <li>Demonstrate an understanding of course grading</li> <li>Use Teamworks to create reminders for due dates and appointments</li> <li>Use Teamworks to schedule working blocks to complete assignments</li> </ul>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activities</b></p> <p><i>Check boxes as you complete each part of the lesson.</i></p> <p><b>Direct Instruction (I do)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Walk the student through all the parts of a syllabus including where to find the course schedule, assignments/assessments, and how the student will be graded for the course.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrate how this aligns to the structure in Canvas and where students go to find announcements, modules, assignments, and discussion boards.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrate how to add important dates and reminders to Teamworks.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discuss backward planning (starting with a due date, breaking down the task, and blocking time to work on each step of the task). Use handouts from Study Lab on weekly course tasks for support.</li> </ul> <p><b>Guided Practice (We do)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pick another class and have the student try to walk you through the steps above and provide feedback as they work through it.</li> </ul> <p><b>Independent Activity (You do)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assign the student to complete the remaining courses on their own to show to you at the next meeting. Record in next week's meeting if this was complete or if the student still needed support in completing it. Continue to revisit backwards planning throughout the semester to check for understanding.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Formative Assessment</b></p> <p>Use the guided practice to ask questions to check for understanding and mastery of the learning objectives above. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What assignments will you need to complete in this course throughout the semester?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are there any recurring assignments like discussion boards or weekly reflections?</i></li> <li>• <i>How can you contact the professor for extra help?</i></li> <li>• <i>What percentage of your grade is participation in the recitation?</i></li> <li>• <i>Can you show me how you set a reminder in Teamworks?</i></li> <li>• <i>Looking at the week ahead, how can we plan to complete the assignments for this class that works with your practice and game schedule?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Notes:</i></p>
<b>Questions or Comments:</b>	

Example of a weekly lesson plan that PACs review in their weekly meetings with their student-athlete.

## **Goal 2: Skill Building for the Classroom and Beyond**

It is well known that student-athletes do not have the same amount of time to dedicate towards their academic work as non-athlete students, especially when large sections of their days are spent practicing, competing in sporting events, and other sports related activities. As a result, many students often miss classes due to competitions and are unable to devote as much time to studying and learning academic skills like a typical college student, making targeted support all the more crucial. It is not new to have learning specialists taking time to work with student-athletes to complete assignments (Steinberg et al., 2018) . However, using PACs as an extension of the learning specialist with a curriculum to follow makes this program unique; helping to build independent learning and providing the learning specialists more time to prioritize high-need students.

**Objective:** Create an easy-to-follow curriculum that outlines the most significant skills and highlights critical points of a given semester where more focus should be placed such as midterms, class scheduling, and finals that can be used by a student in all future semesters.

To achieve this goal, the following steps were taken:

- Collaborating within our academic support unit, we determined skills of focus that would best support our students transitioning to Pitt including: communication, self-advocacy, finding resources such as tutors and writing labs to help them, using university technologies, and time management.
- Established a semester-long syllabus that highlights a weekly skill for the student-athlete to begin practicing and mastering.
- Using a “learning to learn” approach with student-athletes to help them develop strategies for success, in addition to building self-regulation and metacognition to most successfully apply these new skills independently.
- Monitor progress of individual students to provide further targeted support.

## H.A.I.L. to Pitt Semester Programming

### ASSSA H.A.I.L. to Pitt Program Mission Statement

THE HOLISTIC ACHIEVEMENT, INTEGRATION, & LEARNING PROGRAM STRIVES TO EMPOWER STUDENT-ATHLETES TO REACH THEIR FULLEST ACADEMIC, ATHLETIC, AND PERSONAL SUCCESS WHILE UPHOLDING THE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE & INTEGRITY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH.

Week	Programming
<b>1</b>	<b>Review Syllabus</b> <b>Using the Teamworks Calendar</b> <i>Due dates, Exam Schedules, Blocking time for work, &amp; Reoccurring reminders for weekly assignments, Estimating the time for tasks and using course task lists (Pitt study skills lab)</i>
<b>2</b>	<b>Academic Goal Setting &amp; Expectations</b> <b>Features of Canvas</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Intro to notetaking skills &amp; Cloud Storage (OneDrive)</b> <i>Oregon State Notetaking Guide (Canvas)</i>
<b>4</b>	<b>Writing Discussion Boards (Follow-up to Life Skills &amp; Based on writing skills)</b> <i>Sentence Starters, Claim + Evidence + Analysis Structure</i> <b>Learning Strategy of Focus</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Registering for Classes 101</b> <i>Course Search &amp; Intro to Pathways Appointments</i> <b>Learning Strategy of Focus</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Develop a Midterm Study Plan</b> <i>Syllabus Review, GPA Check (<a href="https://www.upj.pitt.edu/pub/gpacalculator/">https://www.upj.pitt.edu/pub/gpacalculator/</a>)</i> <b>Self-regulated learning study cycle</b> <i>Distributed Practice</i>
<b>7</b>	<b>Study Strategy Inventory &amp; Test Day Strategies</b> <i>Pitt Study Skills lab Resources</i> <i>Reducing Test Anxiety</i> <i>Essay/short answer &amp; multiple choice, Math study strategies</i>
<b>8</b>	<b>Using Library Sources (Follow-up to Life Skills)</b> <i>Academic Integrity</i> <i>Library &amp; Google Scholar, Purdue OWL, Scheduling a Writing Lab Tutor</i> <b>Learning Strategy of Focus</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Notetaking Check-in</b> <b>Learning Strategy of Focus</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>GPS (Growth, Purpose, Social connectedness) Mindset</b> <i>GPA Check (<a href="https://www4.upj.pitt.edu/pub/gpacalculator/">https://www4.upj.pitt.edu/pub/gpacalculator/</a>)</i> <b>Learning Strategy of Focus</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Using Feedback to Improve</b> <b>Learning Strategy of Focus</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Develop a Finals Study Plan</b> <i>Supporting executive function by asking questions (cognitive modeling)</i>
<b>FINALS</b>	<b>Walk-in Hours Available or Scheduled Individual Appointments</b>

\*Learning strategy of focus will be based on Individual Academic Plan and weekly assignment needs.

Example semester-long syllabus for student-athletes to follow, teaching them the skills needed to be successful at the collegiate level.

### **Goal 3: Fostering Connection & Belonging**

The transition to college, or from one college to another, is challenging even for the most confident of students, and finding a sense of belonging can create even more struggle. But, when a student has the additional responsibility of being a student-athlete, they often have a hard time overcoming the “athlete” part of their identity and fail to connect with their broader campus and other non-athlete students (Rubin & Moses, 2017). This disconnection can deteriorate further if a student fails academically, athletically, or socially, which reaffirms a belief in their mind that they do not belong and cannot succeed where they are. Feelings of belonging are undeniably linked with student success, making this concern a top priority (Allen et al., 2022).

**Objective:** Foster connections and meaningful relationships between student-athletes and PACs so that student-athletes build trust, persistence, confidence, and a sense of belonging with their peers and Pitt.

To achieve this goal, the following steps were taken:

- Set up weekly recurring meetings between student-athletes and one designated PAC. Creating consistency builds rapport among the student-athlete and PAC to allow them to share their knowledge and own experiences of struggles and failures.
- Create space for student-athletes to share highs and lows of athletic and academic experience outside of their team community.
- Encouraging PACs to move conversations away from purely academic topics to campus activities, events, and resources to inspire student-athletes to link with peers and form an identity beyond athletics.
- Train PACs to create open and inclusive environments where student-athletes can share their frustrations in order to find personalized avenues for their success.
- Summary reports help to communicate student needs from tutoring to mental health checks.

### **Program Description**

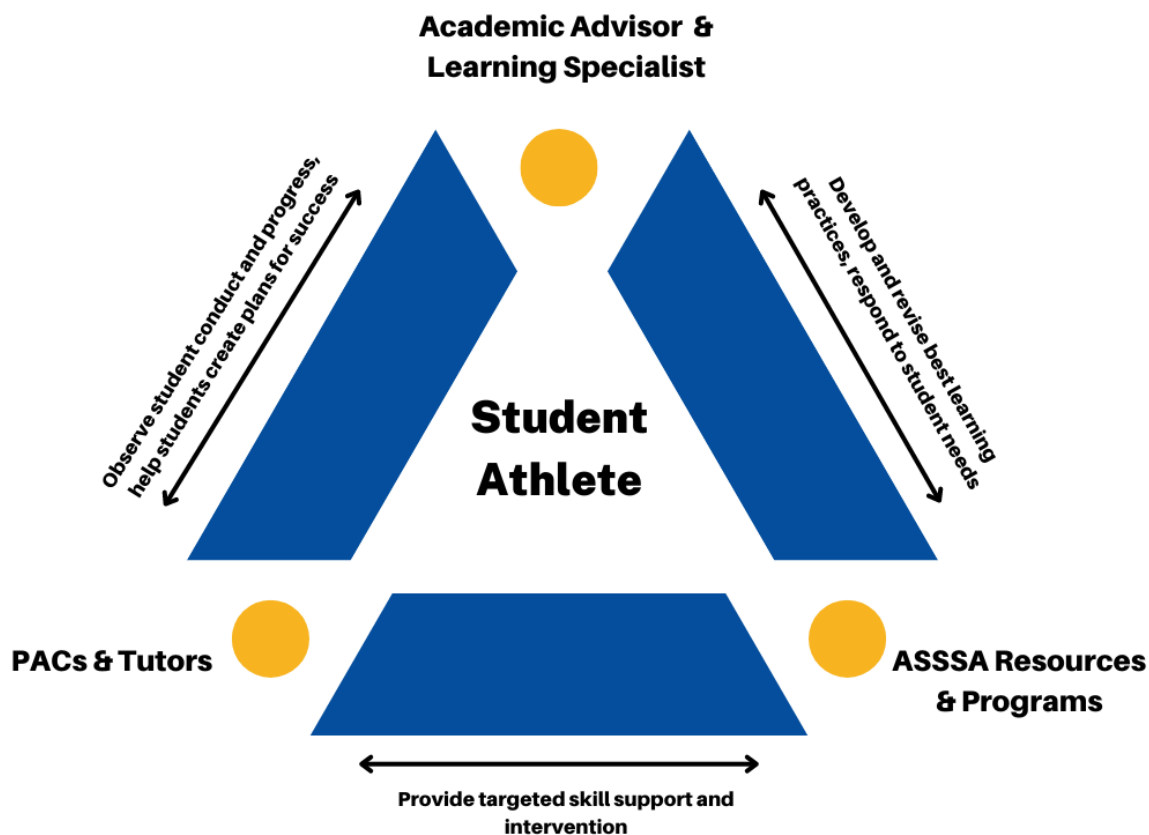
The H.A.I.L. Program is designed for freshman and transfer students' transition into the University of Pittsburgh. The goal of the program is to measure and equip students with the foundational skills they need for success at Pitt.

Prior to establishing the H.A.I.L. program, we did not have a systematic way to ensure all student-athletes had access to academic coaching. There was also no set way of ensuring our students were receiving the skill-building information through our PACs who all approached teaching differently. When student-athletes needed higher levels of support, it was challenging to discern what foundational skills they had, what to work on, and what needed to be taught from the beginning, delaying critical academic assistance. It was also difficult to flag at-risk students to receive further learning interventions when PACs did not have a way to recognize or communicate academic, social, or personal issues they saw during meetings.

While many similar programs center on issues related to the successful academic adjustment to the student-athlete experience, the H.A.I.L. Program was designed to use a holistic, "total person" approach, which provides support for a variety of areas that impact the complete academic, personal, and career development of student-athletes. Complementing the athletic skills of our students, the academic and life skills that are necessary for all are the main focus of a semester-long curriculum that engages student-athletes with peer tutors who pass on academic and practical knowledge, monitor progress, and emotionally support students. This provides student-athletes the unique opportunity to learn from current, experienced students, whom they build trust with, but also receive coordinated help from a dedicated support staff.

Within the H.A.I.L. Program, a triangle of support is built around each student-athlete. A symbiotic relationship exists between peer tutors, advisors, and tutoring resources, with the student-athlete at the center, to guide what learning aids and practices are best suited for a student during the decisive first semester they are at Pitt. An all-hands on deck collaboration supervises a student-athlete's development, making sure they are progressing and receiving coordinated care and support.

## TRIANGLE OF SUPPORT



### Program Evaluation

The H.A.I.L. Program relies on student feedback in order to evaluate its effectiveness on student-athlete development. First, we require our PACs to record weekly meeting summaries detailing what was accomplished during the session (e.g., what skills were addressed, student-athlete preparedness, goals set for future meetings, and any concerns the PAC may have). From these summaries, along with in-person meetings with advisors and learning specialists, we are able to

see how a student-athlete is progressing through the program. For our student-athletes, they are given the opportunity to send quantitative and qualitative feedback on the program via surveys. Below we evaluate the success of delivering training to our PACs and their impact, cost of programming, overall student-athlete GPA performance, and results of our most recent H.A.I.L. Program survey.

### **Program Outcomes**

Since H.A.I.L. was implemented, we have seen improvements in the fidelity of program delivery from our PACs and stronger coordinated care efforts. With 15 PACs, we have been able to increase our reach for student support beyond our 2 learning specialists, serving 72 students in Fall 2023. PACs have received training and periodic check-ins with advisors and have reported feeling better prepared for meetings and working with student-athletes. Demonstrated in their summary reports, PACs consistently use our Canvas resource page to access and refer to their training materials and Monday Minutes for consistent delivery. Communication around the support triangle has also increased. PAC reports, along with campus progress reports, are also used during early intervention and midterm reviews between our learning specialists and academic counselors to determine if support needs to be increased. Taken together, we have been able to provide more targeted support in a more timely manner.

Running a program like this does sound costly, however we are able to deliver this program as part of our annual tutoring budget at no additional cost. In Fall 2023, for example, we held 72 30-minute sessions a week for a total cost of about \$400/week and the sessions ran for 12 weeks for a total semester cost of about \$5,000 from our tutoring budget.

More target support in a timely manner has been good for all student-athletes. In the Spring 2022 semester, the overall student-athlete GPA was 3.09, 20 students had a 4.0 GPA, 150 students had above a 3.5 GPA, and 60% of students earned above a 3.0 GPA. By the Fall 2023 semester, a year since the program was started, the overall student-athlete GPA had improved to a 3.3, 27 students earned a 4.0 GPA, 196 students had above a 3.5 GPA, and 72% of students earned above a 3.0 GPA.

Student-athletes currently participating in the H.A.I.L. Program were given a chance to reflect on how the program has had an effect on their college experience in an anonymous survey (n = 21). In this sample, 90% of the student-athletes agreed with the statement that, “My PAC helped me feel more confident as a college student.” For the item, “The H.A.I.L. the program helped me to better manage my time as a college student,” 81% of the student-athletes agreed. Lastly, 90% percent of student-athletes who completed the survey agreed that they “had a better understanding of university technology systems” and that their “PAC connected them to resources in the academic center to help them succeed.” Below are the testimonies of their experiences with H.A.I.L.

“A great mental check on my performance and getting great feedback from a friendly face who wants you to succeed in all facets.” -Men’s Wrestler

“After my weekly meetings I had a clearer understanding of how to plan out my week, and where to go if I ever need help with anything.” -Men’s Baseball Player

“I like having someone to talk through things- especially when planning my week full of work/practices.” -Women’s Softball Player

“I would say just to have a better understanding of what I need to do academically, almost a reminder as to what to work on. Also just talking can relieve some mental stress which I found very beneficial.” - Men’s Swimmer

“A great resource if there were any questions or help with anything on campus.” -Men’s Football Player

“It was a way to talk to someone that has gone through the same thing as me with school and has that advice to give that is extremely helpful.” -Women's Lacrosse Player

“These meetings help me to organize and improve overall awareness of school and the future of my academic career.” -Men’s Track & Field

### **Potential for Adaptation**

For other institutions of any size, the foundational aspects of the H.A.I.L. Program can be easily adapted to fit their department through the following ways:

- Adopt or further expand the use of PACs who act as an extension of an advisor. For small schools, this can fill gaps in information about their students, and for larger schools, this can personalize the existing layers of support and increase communication.
- Revise syllabus to offer skills, services, or connection to campus specific to what each institution needs.
- Coordinate with existing support systems on campus if an institution is not able to consolidate resources into the athletic department.
- Alter the length of the program to be longer or shorter, as necessary.

### **Challenges and Obstacles**

- **Student Buy-In** - Getting students to show up for meetings is half of the battle. Many students who are not familiar with these types of meetings do not understand their importance, finding it frustrating to have to fulfill yet another task and it may become difficult to see consistent attendance, especially in the first weeks of a semester. Until they experience the benefit these meetings have, some students will choose not to go. This leads to increased oversight of the student-athlete by academic advisors and learning specialists, as well as increased involvement of coaching staff. Reminding the students that these meetings count toward their overall study hours makes the students more receptive to accepting help.
- **Communication Around the Triangle** - Advisors are constantly inundated with communications from students, coaches, and other faculty and staff, sometimes leaving messages to and from PACs to go unaddressed. It is imperative that our PACs receive feedback from advisors and have an open channel for communicating concerns. Advisors

are expected to maintain relationships with our PACs in order to best understand how student-athletes are adapting to the H.A.I.L. Program.

### References

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