**Project SOAR: Quick Info for Participating Schools**

**What is Project SOAR?**
Project SOAR (Student Outreach for Access & Resiliency) is a service-learning experience that places 75+ UA undergraduate mentors in Tucson middle schools each semester. Mentors are enrolled in either Higher Education (HED) 350 (fall, summer) or HED 397B (spring), both of which examine issues of college access. Mentors meet 1-on-1 or with a small group of middle school youth weekly, addressing topics including academic strengths, self-esteem, conflict resolution, career exploration, and the college search process. Mentoring pairs or groups remain consistent throughout the semester in order to develop a strong, positive relationship.

**What is the goal of SOAR?**
The goal of the program is to encourage middle school students to think about their futures after high school, and to

a) gain a basic understanding of what college is,

b) why it might be important for their future career, and

c) how one goes about searching for and applying to college.

Mentors share their experiences regarding the college search process, the college experience both in the classroom and on campus, major selection, balancing homework with other obligations (work, family, clubs, athletics, etc.), and discuss the basics of financial aid.

**Who are the mentors?**
- **Role-models:** Most importantly, SOAR mentors are role-models excited to work with middle school students who are interested in learning more about college
- **Majority female:** Females enroll in the program at higher rates than males, usually 70% to 30% respectively
- **Racially diverse:** Since the program began in 2005, fewer than 50% of the students enrolled in SOAR have identified as white (49.8%). Latinos make up 23% of the enrollment, followed by Native Americans (13.5%), Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (9.2%) and African/African Americans (4.3%). Each enrollment figure for the students of color in SOAR is larger than their representation on campus as a whole (20%, 1%, 5%, and 3% respectively. Additionally, each semester an average of 15 SOAR mentors have a first language other than English!
- **Academically diverse:** Project SOAR has enrolled students from 13 colleges since 2005. Students majoring within the College of Education make up only 5.8% of program participants. The College of Science (21.8%--61% of whom are Psychology majors), Social & Behavioral Sciences (13.7%), Undecided (10.2%), College of Medicine (9.6%), and the Eller College of Business (6.8%) enroll the most students. Those colleges with less significant enrollment include the Agriculture (5.4%), Nursing (3.6%), Humanities (3.3%), Public Health (1.6%), Engineering (1%), Architecture (0.6%), and Art (0.6%).

**Mentors are not...**
- **Future teachers:** Only 6% of students enrolled in SOAR are majoring in Education, thus an overwhelming majority do not have training in classroom management or lesson planning. SOAR staff work with the mentors to design one-on-one or small group activities around the
goals of the program, and discuss strategies for effectively engaging mentees, but classroom management and curriculum development are not part of the course content.

- **Tutors**: The goal of SOAR is provide college information and career exploration opportunities for middle school students. Goal setting, identifying academic strengths, and self-esteem building is also often covered during mentoring sessions. While some mentees may come to their mentors for academic assistance, our mentors are not trained tutors. Most schools choose to pair up mentors and mentees during the students’ elective periods—so as not to interfere with core coursework.

- **Counselors**: SOAR mentors are role models and will do their best to inspire and challenge mentees to set goals for their post-high school futures. They will work throughout the semester to get to know the mentees on a personal level in order to understand each student’s strengths, interests, cultural background, and to tap into these aspects when discussing college. However, these mentors are not trained counselors and while we expect them to be open and honest with their mentees and to provide thoughtful advice when appropriate, we ask that the mentors work with school counselors, teachers and administrators when mentees reveal personal problems that need to be further addressed by education professionals.

**Determining Mentees...**
Project SOAR works with school administration (often counselors and community coordinators) to pair mentors and mentees. SOAR provides school site coordinators with the names of the mentors, their contact information, major, academic strengths, and a list of hobbies and interests. The coordinator identifies students they believe would benefit from the SOAR program and matches these students with the listed SOAR mentors.

**Middle school students who tend to benefit most from this experience are:**

a) students who are strong or average academically, but would benefit from an extra motivational push regarding academic success

b) students who are strong or average academically, but struggle socially and would benefit from the attention and encouragement from a college-aged role model

c) students who know they want to go to college, but would benefit from a greater understanding of the college search process and strategies for receiving financial aid

d) students who are excited to meet weekly with a UA college student and understand the goals of the program

**Students who have benefitted little from the program have been:**

a) those with truancy issues (studies show that the best mentoring outcomes result from regular contact between the mentor and mentee—students who are frequently absent benefit little from the match and SOAR mentors have not been shown to reverse patterns of truancy)

b) those who are reluctant to be pulled from their elective course, or see a SOAR mentor as punishment