Introduction

Nationally recognized as a contributing factor in summer melt, the demands to meet enrollment milestones can function as unintended barriers to college attainment (Basko, 2022; Gonser, 2019). Amplified for marginalized students who may lack the needed resources to navigate the ECU enrollment process, the summer months leading to the fall semester can be stressful as enrollment barriers reinforce feelings of uncertainty regarding college attendance and campus belonging. In a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article on summer melt, Aaron Basko (2022) shares the following observation of the role played by the summer enrollment process:

> It has become clear to me that this dynamic starts from the early stages of a student's relationship with a college. In fact, I believe one of the critical test points occurs precisely at the time when we see summer melt. From this viewpoint, melt is not so much an admissions issue as it is the **very first phase of the retention problem**.

To combat summer melt, campuses are implementing policy initiatives and innovative projects devoted to supporting students through the enrollment process and in turn, enhancing campus yield. Over the last two years, ECU has heightened the recognition of enrollment challenges:

- A reoccurring theme within the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) working group discussions.
- Recognized as a contributing factor in lower marginalized student yield rates by Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Commission working group on Student Access and Success.
- Highlighted recommendation by Inside Track consultants in the May 2022 ECU enrollment partners student journey mapping exercises.
- Mobilization of academic departments through increased participation of academic units in combatting summer melt through early spring programming, initiating student contacts, and early course registration.

Peer Enrollment Coaching Project Design

During the summer months before their first fall semester, gaps appear when marginalized students navigate the college enrollment process (Castleman & Paige, 2020). For some students, their college educated parents function as *family enrollment coaches* as they personally guide them through enrollment milestones. Others, especially low-income, first-generation students, lack the family enrollment support needed to establish connections with key campus resources and complete business processes like filing and interpreting financial aid, paying tuition and fees, completing housing contracts, and submitting immunization records.

In an effort to augment campus yield rates, this summer 11 peer enrollment coaches guided admitted students through key enrollment milestones. Applying best practices in summer yield programming, the Peer Enrollment Coaching project emphasized 4 important components:

1. Completion of academic enrollment benchmarks
2. Targeted student profile data analytics
3. Personalized peer coaching through call center design
4. Engagement with peer coaches in orientation events

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An essential element of the Peer Enrollment Coaching project included targeting students through milestone data analytics. In step with the summer enrollment process, student contact lists were generated by combining multiple factors including enrollment deposit payment, housing contracts and Campus Living deposit payment, orientation registration and fees, low or no course registration, immunization records deadlines, profiles with system hold tags, NC Gear Up Specific high schools, FAFSA filing status, and Admitted Students Day attendees.

Personalized Enrollment Coaching

Utilizing peer enrollment coaches to proactively contact admitted students, upperclassmen coached admitted students through a ***personalized enrollment process***. Over Summer 2022, the project employed 11 upperclassmen to serve as peer enrollment coaches. Led by PASC professional staff, peer enrollment coaches provided targeted messaging by phone, sent follow up email correspondence, offered on demand virtual enrollment sessions, connected students to campus resources, and participated in orientation outreach. The peer enrollment coaches provided 5 key support functions:

- **Guided students in a personalized enrollment process** by proactively contacting demographic profiles of admitted students and guiding them through key enrollment milestones by phone or on demand virtual enrollment sessions.
- **Problem solved barriers** by escalating issues to professional staff for support and solutions.
- **Supported orientation academic activities** including outreach events and registration support.
- **Established campus resource connections** (Academic Advising, Financial Aid, Cashier's Office, Office of the Registrar, Campus Living, Student Health).
- **Extended ECU welcome and reinforced belonging.**

Role of the Pirate Academic Success Center

The project was administered by professional staff members of the Pirate Academic Success Center (PASC). PASC utilized enrollment milestone data to target students who were not meeting enrollment milestones and initiated outreach activities through peer coaching and nudging techniques. Building on past summer recruitment practices for PASC based learning communities, PASC staff utilized data analysis to identify at risk students so that peer enrollment coaches could guide students through the summer enrollment process.

Project Outcomes

Peer enrollment coaches were trained in call center techniques and their call center activities were organized using a simplistic call center design. Based on enrollment milestone data in specific time periods, peer enrollment coaches were assigned call lists, provided scripts, and assigned phone stations throughout the Pirate Academic Success Center. Call outcomes were recorded and when necessary, students were referred to PASC professional staff and campus resource partners. Table 1 provides an overview of the call outcomes recorded by the timeframe of the calls. In addition, the timeframe of each calling period is summarized in Appendices A, B and C.

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Table 1:
Call Outcomes Summary by Calling Period

Call Month	Number of Students	Key Enrollment Factors	% of Successful Contacts	Parent Contact	Student Contact	Not Attending	Voicemail Message
May (7 days)	5,226	Enrollment Deposit	7% (446)	74	289	83	5,758
June	14,467	No Orientation Fee Registration Status	26% (2,957)	260	1,333	1,364	5,496
July – August 5	3,688	Registration Status	35% (2,421)	269	2,122	30	1,385

Table 2:
Campus Referrals Ranking by Calling Period

Call Month	Top 3 Campus Referrals		
May	Orientation	PIER Registration & Advising	Housing & Dining
June	Orientation	PIER Registration & Advising	Housing & Dining
July 1- August 5	Housing & Dining	Financial Aid/Tuition	Orientation

If not ECU, where?

A 2021 EAB Report focused on Targeted Yield-Performance Turnarounds recommends campuses ask students about their fall intentions. When students indicated that they would not be attending ECU in the Fall, peer enrollment coaches recorded where or why the student changed their intended plans. Call outcomes were shared weekly with the ECU Office of Admissions. Table 3 summarizes the responses recorded.

Table 3:
Top Reasons for Not Attending ECU

Student Intent	Number of students
Attend 4-year NC Public University	606
Declined to indicate	567
Attend NC Community College	106
Gap Year	18
Joined Military	12

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Table 4:
Higher Education Intention

Destination	Number of Students
Other 4-year NC Public	606
NC Community College	106
Other 4-year NC Private	65
Out of State	92

Table 5:
Intent to Attend Another NC System Institution

Destination Institution	Number of Students
NC State	117
UNC-Charlotte	96
UNC-Chapel Hill	88
App State	87
UNC-Wilmington	61
UNC-Greensboro	57
A&T	45
Western Carolina	16
NC Central	12
Winston-Salem State University	10
Fayetteville State University	6
UNC-Pembroke	5
UNC-Asheville	3
Elizabeth City State University	3

Recommendations for Action

The Peer Enrollment Coaching project afforded a behind the scenes view of the student experience during ECU's summer enrollment process. As each milestone was presented, so were the obstacles our internal processes presented to our incoming students and families. Unintended barriers can accumulate and function as stressors and to forgo enrollment. The following seven action items were identified from PASC professional staff and from the peer enrollment coaches themselves.

1. **Establish a Data Analytics Dashboard**
   - **Establish an analytics dashboard of student progress metrics.** A dashboard is essential for ECU to establish proactive efforts to lower summer melt rates, increase applicant yield, and support student success. While program efforts like peer enrollment coaching are valuable, their effectiveness is hampered by a lack of up to date, easily accessible student metrics that allow targeted messaging campaigns to be productive.

2. **Implement a Centralized Data Reporting System**
   - **Remove student data reporting silos.** While grassroots efforts to contact students are noteworthy, the efforts remain compartmentalized and unshared among campus stakeholders. For example, when peer enrollment coaches reported a student's intention to attend elsewhere, it was only reported to the Office of Admissions. This did not get relayed to academic advisors and other campus partners. Campus stakeholders like Financial Aid continued to work on behalf of the student, not knowing their intent had changed. This lack of shared data wastes valuable campus resources, time, and effort.
   - **Implement real time milestone data.** Efforts to assist students falling behind in meeting enrollment milestones is also hindered by lack of real time data. Static reports prevent staff from accessing predictive data or sustaining proactive support efforts.

3. **Centralize Communications with a Comprehensive Website Redesign**
   - **Establish one centralized website** for incoming students that is updated prior to Pirate's Aboard.
   - **Remove multiple freshmen checklists and centralize information**. Currently there are more than seven different freshman checklists, all have contradictory dates and information.
   - **Update outdated website information by Pirate's Aboard** (Admitted Students Day). Check accuracy of links and dates from previous enrollment years.
   - **Simplify text on websites** and lessen higher education language and abbreviated terms.
   - **Supply enrollment information in multiple formats.** Widen accessibility with videos, how-to guides, and other Universal Design for Learning formats.
   - **Elevate student understanding of Pirate Port** as an essential enrollment resource, highlighting relevant modules for the enrollment process.
   - **Evaluate deadline and mandatory language**. For example, because of language on websites, students who missed the enrollment deposit deadline reported thinking it was too late to attend ECU.

4. **Course Registration and Academic Advising Supports**
   - **Revise PIER registration website in step with the enrollment process**. The PIER registration directions function well in May but are never updated for June or July processes. This leaves students with ineffective website assistance via the PIER registration system. Students reported not knowing next steps in their degree program planning out of the May context.
   - **Increase access to 4-year major planning guides.** In some areas, academic advisors emailed this resource to their advisees, in other areas this was not a practice.

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- **Refer to 4-year plans as recommended course sequence.** Students interpret 4-year planning guides as a must follow course sequence and have difficulty navigating course availability to match perceived expectations.
- **Standardize academic advisor contact protocols with incoming students.** Some academic units were proactive in establishing connections with incoming students in their majors. Other units refrained from contacting students until they met a minimum milestone, commonly course registration or Orientation registration. This practice resulted in two outcomes: 1) left students who lacked the funds to pay both an enrollment fee and orientation fees unsupported by academic advisors and 2) caused students to fall behind in class registration.
- **Link placement test information in Pirate Port.** Lessen student confusion by removing the need for Canvas access to placement tests.

5. **Expanded Options for Summer Orientation**
    - **Offer multiple methods of orientation delivery during the summer.** We currently have a "one size fits all" approach to orientation delivery. Limited to June and July, face to face only options leave students with little flexibility. Waiting until August move in for another orientation session places students behind in many key tasks including accepting Financial Aid, paying tuition and fees, book purchases, and academic planning.
    - **Increase focus on academic milestones in orientation.** Provide greater access to academic advising, Disability Support Services, textbooks, and other academic related supports.
    - **Move Orientation fees into fall billing statements**. Our most economically vulnerable students are left behind with ECU's current May 1 deposits and fees structure. Their lack of ability to pay orientation fees leave them unable to register for classes in May. For many, registration was the entry to academic advising supports.

6. **Heightened Transparency of Enrollment Process Milestones**
    - **Transparent and equitable access to payment processes** and fee waivers. Increase awareness of fee waivers for economically vulnerable students. Proactively work with high school counselors to assist with waiver form processing.
    - **Publish enrollment milestone due dates for all processes** by Pirate's Aboard event. Allow students and families early access and planning timelines for meeting enrollment expectations.
    - **Make Campus Living housing and living learning community assignments earlier** or standardize housing costs. Late processing impacts student billing as differential costs for residence halls change billing statements.

7. **Establish Annual Peer Enrollment Coaching Program**
    - **Establish a recurring operating funds for the program**. Costs of student payroll in 2022 was $20,000 for 11 peer coaches, 20 hours per week, May to August.
    - **Expand of peer enrollment coaching** to include Spring and Summer terms.
    - **Extend program for other student populations.** Consider peer coaching for transfer and distance education students as they enroll.
    - **Provide professional staffing resources to sustain the project.**

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Project Limitations

While successful, the summer enrollment coaching project lacked a systems approach to supporting students as they navigated enrollment milestones. The project was challenged by data needs, reporting system, and call center logistics.

- **Improved data requirements.** The need for real-time, up-to-date analytics cannot be emphasized enough. We relied on ECU BIC reports to identify student enrollment progress. These reports lacked a dashboard system and were never "real time". These reports were always one business day behind resulting in phone contacts to students who had met milestones after the reporting data pull.
- **Call center reporting system.** Before next year's enrollment cycle, a new reporting system needs to be identified and utilized. This applies not only to the peer enrollment coaches, but to other campus stakeholders tasked with contacting students. ECU must establish a reporting system that removes data silos and shares information throughout the campus.
- **Call center phone system and calling support**. Although the integration of the Mainstay communications system will be instrumental in improving methods of contacting students next summer, the new system will not be the only system needed. The call center infrastructure itself should be improved and redesigned for increased effectiveness.

Conclusion

Research indicates that as many as 40% of high school graduates accepted into college do not enroll as a result of difficulties experienced while navigating enrollment benchmarks (Castleman & Paige, 2020; Sanchez, 2021). Disproportionately impacting marginalized students, there is a gap in enrollment support between high school graduation and fall college enrollment. In an Iowa study, students who qualified for state financial assistance showed higher rates of summer melt prompting state leadership to further investigate the enrollment behaviors of low-income students (Olster, M., 2021).

The number of students lost to summer melt is problematic for ECU enrollment. In a 2020 presentation on college choice, Wang, Zhou, and King from ECU's Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research (IPAR) reported ECU summer melt increased by 34% in 2020 in comparison to 2019. They suggest the following "Connect and Communicate" strategies:

- Engage with students early and continue to reach out to them proactively in the summer months.
- Create digital messaging campaigns with reminders of important tasks and student resources.
- Be people first in your digital communication strategies by personalizing both messages and processes.
- Use "nudges" (personalized and timely messages to urge students to complete tasks and navigate processes).
- Connect (and maintain connection) with parents.
- Simplify the acceptance and post-acceptance processes & reduce information overload.
- Provide students with a checklist of all the tasks they need to do over the summer to prepare for college but engage students with one focus at a time.

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- Engage current students by assigning them as peer mentors to incoming students.
- Create a social community where incoming students can connect with one another.
- Increase inter-campus collaboration to provide support and reassurance.

Peer Enrollment Coaching meets many of IPAR's recommendations while combining nudging strategies, peer connectivity, and enrollment milestone data to better guide ECU admitted students through the fall enrollment process. Students who were contacted expressed gratitude for the guiding influence of their ECU peer enrollment coach. Parents noted ECU was the only campus contacting their student in this manner. Not only working to solve enrollment problems, peer enrollment coaches also functioned as an extension of welcome to the Pirate Nation. Establishing community connections as an important first step toward campus belonging.

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Appendix A: May Call Outcomes and Campus Referrals

May 1st marks a significant milestone in the summer enrollment process. Recognized as an indicator for beginning enrollment numbers as summer melt season begins the Peer Enrollment Coaching team began contacting Admitted student lists the third week of May. First focusing on four key milestones which included payment of Enrollment Deposit, payment of Housing Deposits and fees, registration for Orientation and payment of fees, and PIER course registration status. Chart 1 summarizes the key questions students requested assistance with as they engaged with peer enrollment coaches. Orientation, registration, and advising related questions procured the highest number of questions from enrolling students. Table 1 provides a summary of the impressions shared by the peer enrollment coaches in student journey mapping exercises at the conclusion of the project.

Chart 1:
May Campus Referrals

In order of the number received, the highest referrals were for orientation, registration processes, and followed by questions regarding majors.
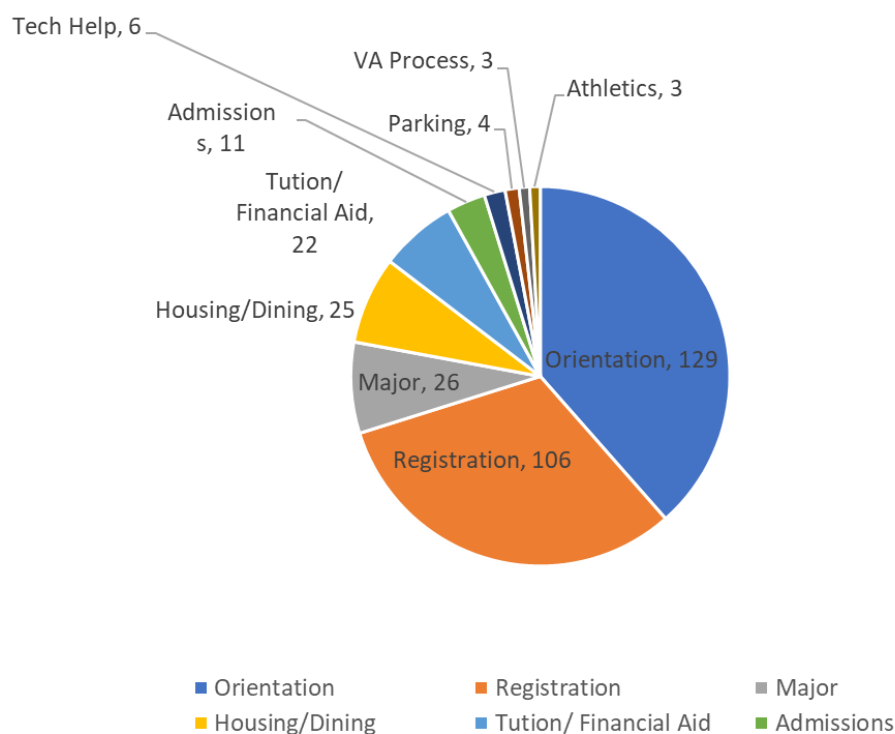

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Table 1:
May Student Journey Mapping

Key Milestones	Common Barriers	Feelings	Change Recommendations
FASFA	Affording deposits	Questioning college	Centralized information
Enrollment Deposit	Waiver process	Stressed	Transfer some deposits into fall billing
Housing Application & fees	Family financial status changes	Anxious	Placement tests on Pirate Port not Canvas
Orientation Fees/registration	Access knowledge- email & Pirate Port	Excited	Centralized 1 website, 1 check list
Living Learning Community Applications	Correct Phone Numbers	"Not ready"	Advertise enrollment deposit differently- students believed after May 1, they could no longer attend ECU
PIER course registration	Multiple deposits due same time	overwhelmed	Help students set up email, Pirate Port etc.
	Limited access to technology	Questioning campus choice	
	Access to final transcript	Low confidence	
	Location of Placement exams – Canvas?	Frustrated	

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Appendix B: June Call Outcomes and Campus Referrals

With graduation ceremonies behind them, enrolling students increase their engagement with peer enrollment coaches as they navigate important milestones. Campus transition is becoming more "real" as they question housing assignments, seek to understand FAFSA packaging, register for classes, and attend orientation. Chart 2 summarizes the key questions students requested assistance with as they engaged with peer enrollment coaches in June. Orientation, registration, and academic advising related questions acquired the highest number of referrals from enrolling students. Table 2 provides a summary of the impressions shared by the peer enrollment coaches in student journey mapping exercises at the conclusion of the project.

Chart 2:
June Campus Referrals

In order of the number received, the highest referrals were for orientation, registration and advising, followed by housing and dining.
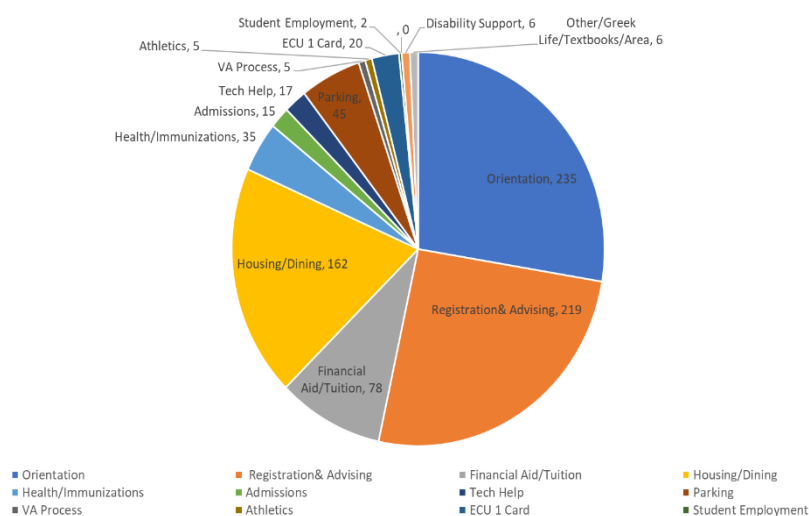
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Table 2:
June Student Journey Mapping

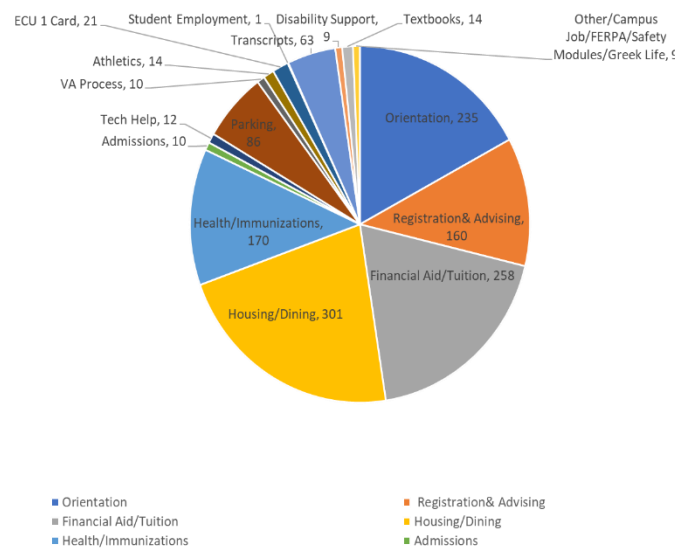| Key Milestones	Common Barriers	Feelings	Change Recommendations
FASFA	Orientation access	Overwhelmed by paperwork	Specific information on health insurance, immunization processes
Enrollment Deposit	Old information on website	Confused	Proactive academic advisor contacts
Housing Application & fees	Email access issues	Hidden stress	Move in dates clearly published
Orientation Fees/registration	No more access to HS email	Excited	June communication from FA and Billing Statements
Living Learning Community Applications	Wrong contact information on file	"Not ready" and not asking for help	
PIER course registration	Residency Status	overwhelmed	
Advisor Connection	Confirming receipt of final transcripts	Questioning campus choice	
Insurance Waiver	Missing FAFSA information	Graduated- now what?	
Immunization records	Who to talk to?	Falling behind	

Appendix C: July 1- August 5 Call Outcomes and Campus Referrals

For students who have fallen behind in completing enrollment milestones like course registration or attending orientation, the last weeks of the enrollment process evokes feelings of confusion, frustration, and distress. Chart 3 summarizes the key questions students requested assistance with as they engaged with peer enrollment coaches. Table 3 provides a summary of the impressions shared by the peer enrollment coaches in student journey mapping exercises at the conclusion of the project.

Chart 3:
Campus Referrals July 1- August 5

In order of the number of referrals, the highest campus referrals include housing and dining, Financial Aid and tuition, orientation, student health and immunization, registration, and academic advising.

Table 3:
July 1-August 5 Student Journey Mapping

NEW Milestones	Common Barriers	Feelings	Change Recommendations
Campus Living assignments	Registration limitations- Closed courses	Sticker shock- bills!	Additional Orientation delivery methods
Meal Plan decisions	Establishing advisor connection	Unsure of future	Follow up with "partway enrolled" students
Send final transcript	Housing assignments/ roommate assignments	Worried about finances	Check in and reminders for last milestones before school starts
Accept FA package, loans	Payment plans sign up	Stress- anger	Departmental cross training- calls passed around campus
Billing statement	Can't attend on campus orientation- no other options	Family financial stress	
Sign up for payment plans	Lateness of billing statements- short process time	Overwhelmed	
Finalize Registration	Changing majors/access to help	Questioning campus choice	
Purchase Course Supplies- Books, Technology needs Parking			

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Appendix D: Peer Enrollment Coaches

Peer Enrollment Coaches were recruited from multi-cultural student organizations, PASC student staff, campus partner recommendations, and PASC learning community students. Applicants were interviewed and asked to recount their own ECU enrollment journey. Students selected relayed experiences that closely aligned with program goals and are themselves representative of marginalized student groups.

Table 4:
Summer 2022 Peer Enrollment Coaches

Coach Name	Major	Classification
Adam Harrison	Business	Junior
Andy Lewis	Elementary Education	Junior
Britani Melgar	Business	Junior
Edgar Romero	Psychology	Sophomore
Emely Palacios-Angulo	Information Technology	Senior
Ethan Flower	Community & Regional Planning	Junior
Grace Evans	Speech & Hearing Sciences	Junior
Jaidyn Steward	Elementary Education	Sophomore
Kylie Oakes	Nursing	Junior
Makaylia Wilson	Psychology	Junior
Matthew Elvington	Geology	Junior

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