



# Amid Dramatic Enrollment Growth, Robust Support Continues to Increase Student Retention and Grades

## *Greatest Gains for At-Risk Students*

A case study of the University of North Alabama (UNA) and Tutor.com  
Updated April 2024



University of  
NORTH ALABAMA

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# Institution Snapshot

**Enrollment:**

10,529

**Partner Since:**

2021

**Institution Type:**

Public university offering diverse programs for on-campus, online, international, adult, dual-enrollment, and early college students

**Most Popular Subjects:**

Drop-off writing review  
Chemistry  
Live writing support  
Computer science  
Physics  
Calculus

**Access:**

All UNA students can access Tutor.com on demand at any time via single sign-on through the University's learning management system (LMS), Canvas®.



# Growing Enrollment and a Need for Scaled Support

While higher education institutions nationwide are facing enrollment declines, the University of North Alabama (UNA) has experienced a surge of new students, setting enrollment records for each of the last 14 consecutive terms.

To ensure that all UNA students would get the support to succeed and progress through their studies, UNA sought to expand and scale its support services in 2021. Allie Mills, Director of the UNA University Success Center, characterized her mandate: **“Figure out tutoring.”**

The University’s existing services weren’t comprehensive—and they weren’t ideal for students who couldn’t be on campus during daytime weekday hours. Now, Mills describes the reaction that her early college students have when they learn about UNA’s Tutor.com program: **“Almost every single student says: I love that there’s online tutoring available whenever I need it.”**

**“We were looking for something that could be a service to all of our students, especially those off campus and online.”**

— Allie Mills  
Director, UNA University Success Center

The service has become so popular that students and faculty are quick to spread the word about it. While the University still has an in-person writing center, its hours are limited during the week. “For faculty to be able to say, ‘Send your paper in and someone will look at it and get back to you with feedback’—that has been impactful,” Mills said.

**“From the beginning, we wanted to provide support for students who work or have extracurricular activities and aren’t even free until 8:00 or 9:00 p.m.—and we couldn’t pay student peer tutors to sit there until midnight,”** said Mills.



## The challenge:

Provide round-the-clock support for all students, on and off campus



## The solution:

Partner with Tutor.com to provide 24/7 on-demand tutoring, writing review, test prep, and career help



## The impact:

Drive student success and increase retention rates

# Key Support Program Features and Benefits

The program launched at the beginning of the fall 2021 term. Reflecting on the consistently high usage rate, Mills recalled, “We came back five times to buy more session time.”

**“Our Tutor.com program took off in a way I never could have imagined, and its popularity continues to soar, particularly among early college students.”**

— Allie Mills, Director, UNA University Success Center

Accounting for its popularity, Mills identified **five critical Tutor.com program features**:



## **24/7 tutor availability**

Allowing students to log on whenever their schedules permit



## **On-demand access**

Facilitating both planned and last-minute studying



## **Session anonymity**

Protecting students' privacy and enabling them to seek help without fear of embarrassment



## **Quality control**

Maintaining high-quality expert help across thousands of sessions



## **Wide variety of subject offerings**

Ensuring every student can access support quickly in any topic

**“I really think it helps to have someone available outside of regular school hours. Most of the time I don't get to work on homework until well after the regular tutors are gone for the day. Thanks!”**

— UNA sociology student

One statistics student wrote in a post-session survey, **“This was a really helpful resource, considering I am working late in the evening. I appreciate this being available 24/7.”**

Another student who participated in a discrete mathematics session expressed, “I love this service so much! **It is especially helpful when it’s short notice and you can’t get in contact with professors.** My course only has office hours for two hours a week, and it can be hard to make them. I love that I can get individual help and instant feedback on my work.”

Similarly, a student who accessed live writing help shared, **“I love the real-time feedback for last-minute fixes.... And it’s a Saturday. The fact that this service is also available on the weekend is amazing.** I don’t know how I did last semester without this service, and I hope my school keeps offering it.”

Mills shared further insights into student usage trends: “We see with our male student athletes especially that they’re **embarrassed to come and ask for help.** If they use Tutor.com, nobody’s going to know.” She added, “It’s low stakes for students. They can log on at any time, get help from a quality tutor, ask their questions, and log off.”

When students connect for help, they find that it’s not only available, but it’s also encouraging. An accounting student wrote, “I have so much anxiety about math,” going on to say that their tutor “was patient and offered simple explanations and reasoning.” **The words “patient” and “above and beyond” are frequent refrains in student comments.**



# Three Amazing Outcomes, with Noteworthy Gains for Students Who Are Struggling

To track the efficacy of the program, UNA has monitored retention, grades, and GPAs for Tutor.com users and non-users.

The results have been indisputably positive for Tutor.com users, consistently demonstrating measurable success for those who seek support.

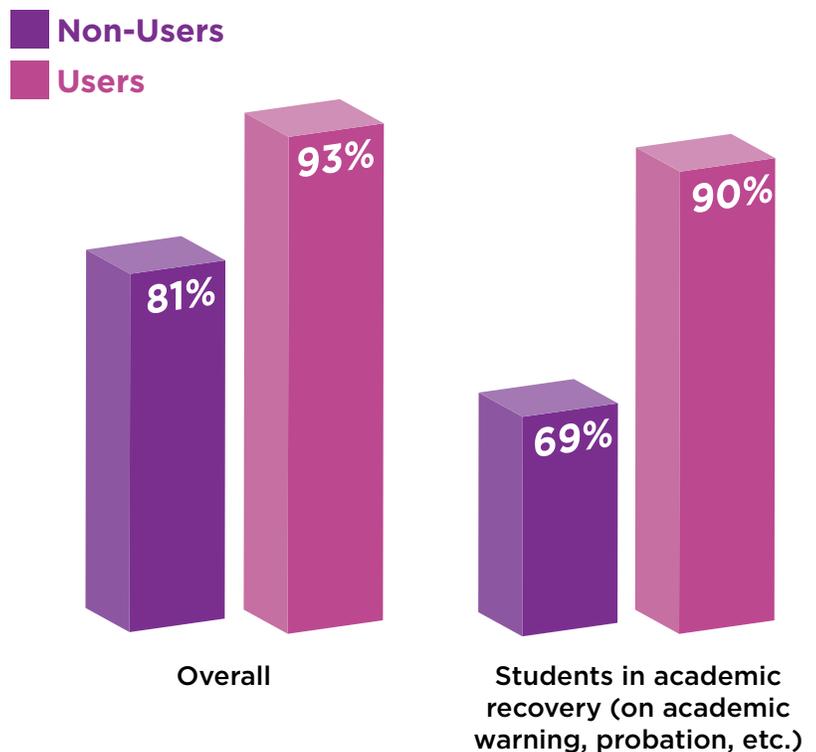
One of the most exciting outcomes is the **positive effect of Tutor.com engagement on students who were in academic recovery, i.e., not in good standing.**

## 1. Higher Retention Rates

From fall 2023 to spring 2024, **93 percent** of Tutor.com users were retained, compared to 81 percent of non-users. Outcomes were even more impressive for learners who were not in good standing. When these students used Tutor.com, they were retained at a rate of **90 percent** from fall 2023 to spring 2024. Their peers who didn't engage with the program were retained at a rate of only 69 percent.

At-risk students who used Tutor.com had *better* retention rates than the overall population of students who did not use Tutor.com.

### Retention Rates (Fall 2023–Spring 2024)





## 2. Higher Grades

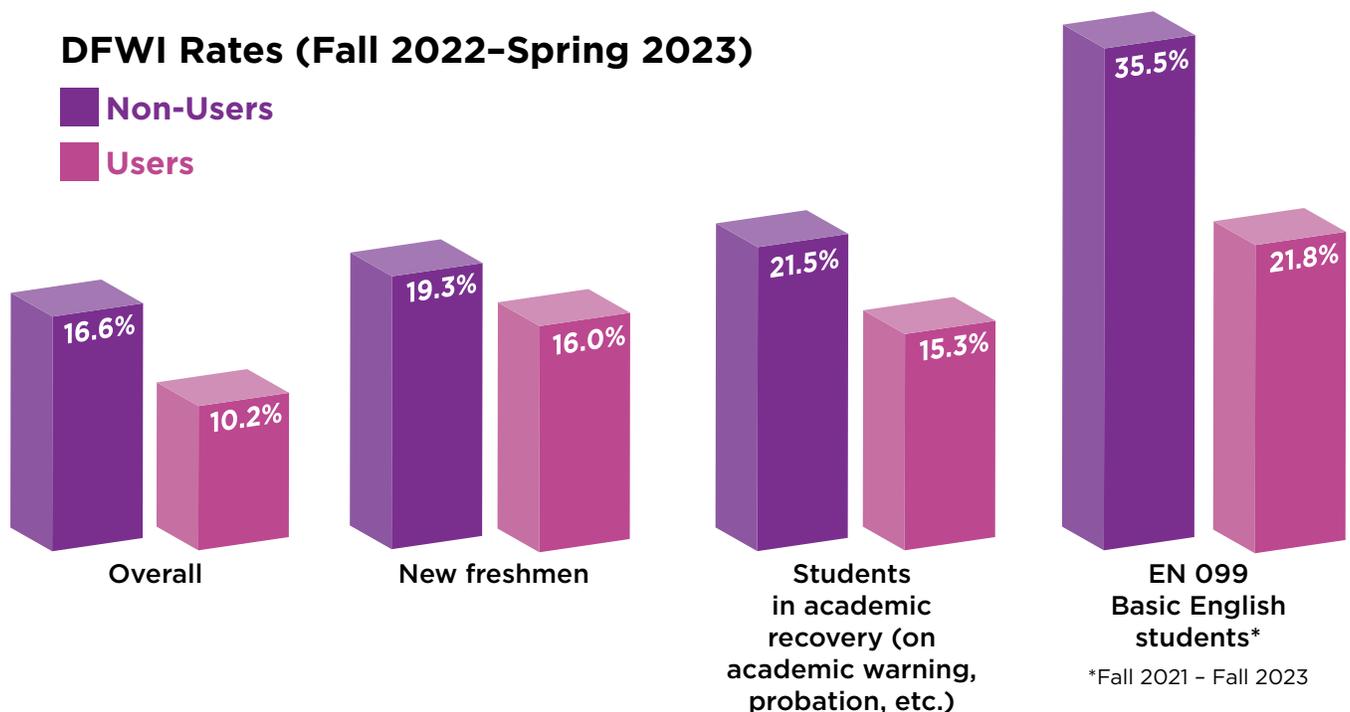
Another benefit of the program: **Tutor.com users earned higher grades than non-users.**

This is reflected in DFWI rates (percentage of students with grades of D or F, withdrawals, or incompletes) among the macro-population of UNA students overall as well as the micro-populations of new freshmen, students enrolled in English courses, and students who were not in good standing.

In every group, there was a **lower DFWI rate for students who used Tutor.com.** Among students not in good standing, there was a 6.2 percentage-point difference in DFWI rates for Tutor.com users as compared to their peers who did not utilize the service.

### DFWI Rates (Fall 2022–Spring 2023)

■ Non-Users  
■ Users





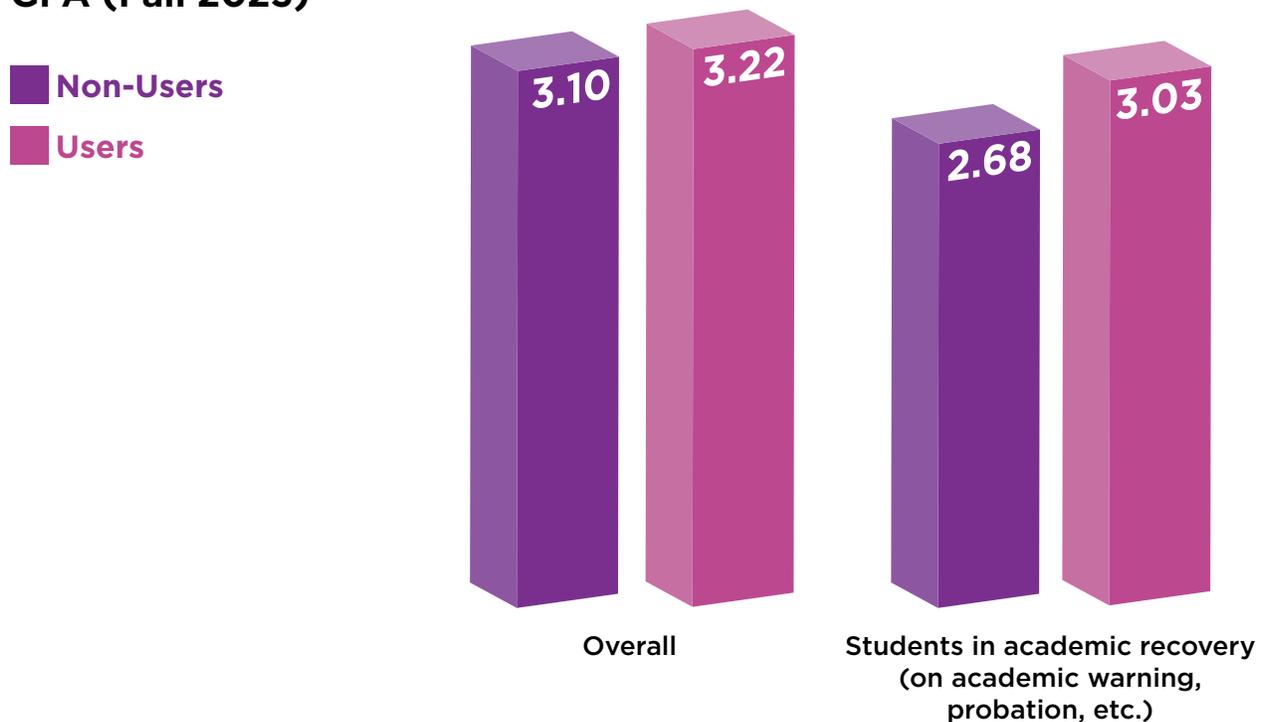
### 3. Higher GPAs

During the fall 2023 term, **Tutor.com users achieved higher GPAs than non-users.**

As with DFWI rates, **Tutor.com engagement correlated with better results for students who were struggling.** Among students not in good standing, Tutor.com users earned an average GPA of 3.03, while non-users earned a 2.68 on average.

What's more, students not in good standing who used Tutor.com made significant gains that helped them earn GPAs nearly equivalent to those of the overall student population.

#### GPA (Fall 2023)



# Praise for the Program & Future Plans

Students have been quick to share their positive experiences in post-session surveys:

**“I love my experience so far on this site! My tutor was extremely helpful in leading me in the right direction, but allowing me to solve the question on my own. Great experience, I am so happy my university has this tool!”**

— UNA statistics student

**“It really helps me that UNA offers this. I use it at least once a week!”**

— UNA computer science student

**“Excellent feedback and very helpful. This service is so awesome to have as a student and future nurse educator.”**

— UNA nursing and healthcare student

**“The tutors are amazing. They are able to answer my questions and explain why that’s the answer. I would totally recommend this service to my friends.”**

— UNA accounting student

As one of the program’s foremost advocates, Mills explained that the initial push at launch was to encourage students to use the program. Given student enthusiasm for and success with the program, the focus now is on continuing to build faculty engagement, and increasing awareness through word of mouth. Collaborating with the Tutor.com team, Mills also provides resources for faculty members to make the most of Tutor.com’s early-alert system, which facilitates the provision of additional support for at-risk students.

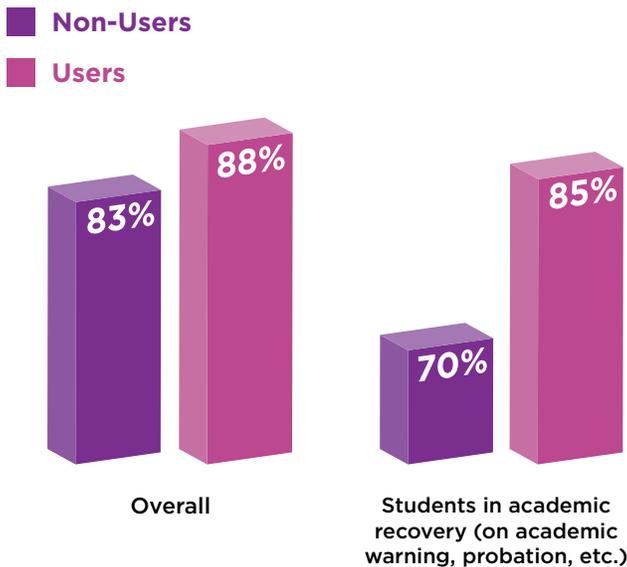
With ongoing awareness-building initiatives, UNA plans to continue its upward trajectory, supporting increasing enrollment with 24/7 tutoring at scale—and improving outcomes for both the institution and its students.

# Appendix:

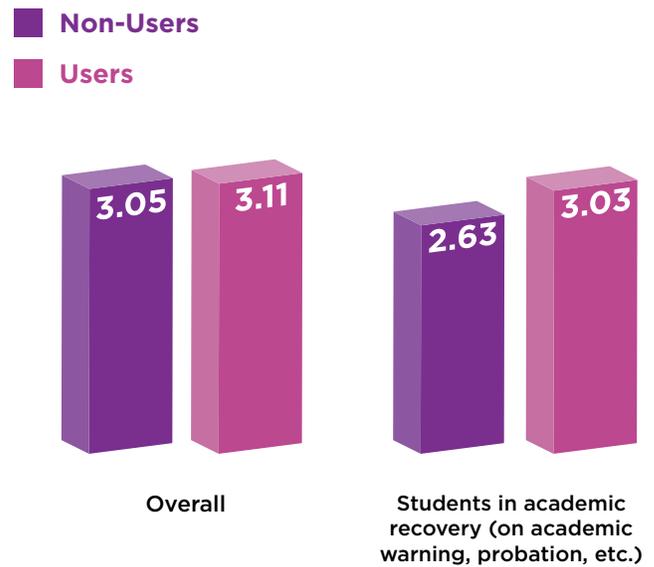
## A History of Student Success Through the UNA and Tutor.com Partnership

The recent positive outcomes highlighted in this case study are part of a longstanding trend that began with UNA's Tutor.com partnership in 2021. Below are key findings from a prior case study.

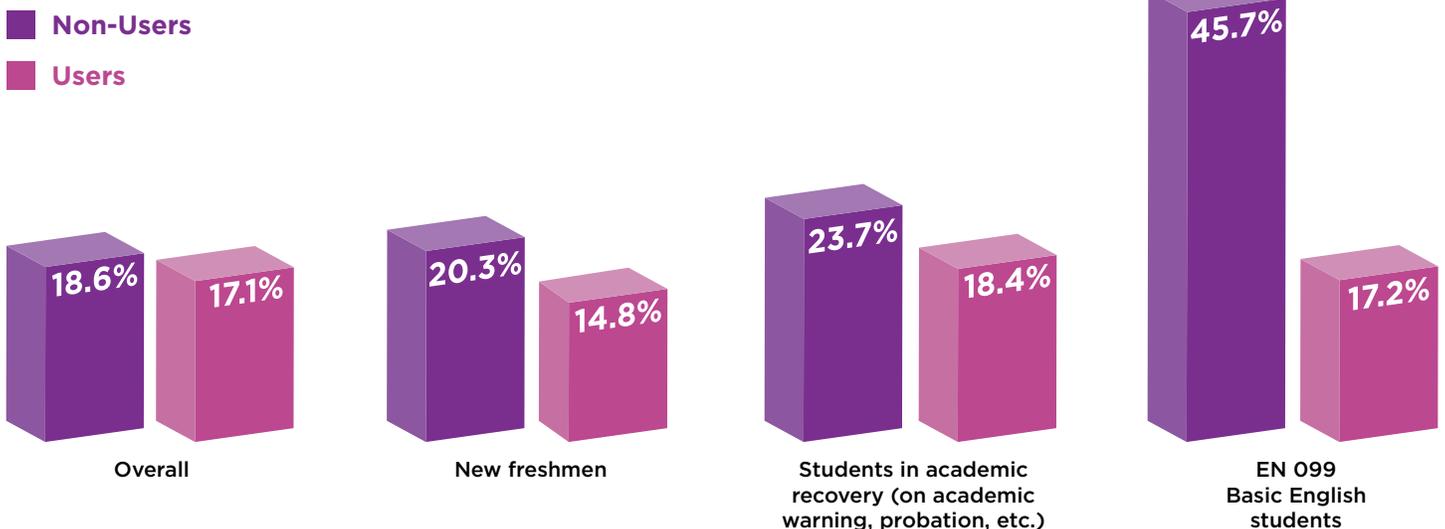
### Retention Rates (Fall 2021–Spring 2022)



### GPA (Fall 2021)



### DFWI Rates (Fall 2021–Spring 2022)



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