



SUPPORTING NON- TRADITIONAL LEARNERS



Implementing Wraparound Student Services

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Introduction

Today's college students are more diverse than ever—not just in race, ethnicity, and age, but in life experience, responsibilities, and learning pathways. The traditional image of an 18-year-old living on campus and attending full-time classes represents a shrinking minority. Increasingly, students are parents, caregivers, veterans, full-time workers, or returning adults seeking a better life through education.

Yet many institutions still operate with student services designed for yesterday's learner. A recent brief by The Hunt Institute underscores the urgency of this mismatch. Their findings reveal that nontraditional students often experience disconnection from campus resources, lack of clarity on how to navigate support systems, and limited access to essential services like tutoring, mental health care, and emergency aid.¹ Despite the fact that many of these students demonstrate high levels of motivation, resilience, and determination, the aforementioned systemic gaps contribute to lower retention and graduation rates.

To truly move the needle on student success and equity, institutions must build a more comprehensive and coordinated support infrastructure: wraparound student services.

This whitepaper by Upswing outlines a practical framework for implementing wraparound support systems that respond to the full spectrum of student needs. Drawing from national research and on-the-ground experience, it presents four key pillars for success:

01

A single, centralized access point that streamlines student navigation and reduces institutional silos.

02

24/7 academic support that adapts to students' schedules, not the other way around.

03

Flexible mental health services that are culturally responsive, multimodal, and destigmatized.

04

Timely intervention for critical life needs, including housing insecurity, food access, child care, and emergency aid.

¹ <https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/final-A4A-brief-april-22.pdf>

Each section highlights best practices, real-world examples, and actionable steps institutions can take to create a more inclusive and supportive student ecosystem.

Finally, this whitepaper introduces Upswing's Wraparound Student Services Platform as a scalable, tech-enabled solution to help institutions operationalize these supports. By integrating tutoring, advising, mental health referrals, and emergency outreach into a unified platform, Upswing empowers institutions to provide holistic care—without overburdening existing staff or systems.

Student success can no longer be measured by academic metrics alone. It must also reflect whether students are seen, supported, and equipped to overcome the very real challenges of modern college life. This paper offers a roadmap to make that vision a reality.

A Single Source For All Student Needs

When students face challenges—academic or otherwise—they often don't know where to turn. The patchwork nature of institutional services can feel overwhelming, especially for nontraditional students. There may be a food pantry in one building, a tutoring center in another, and a counseling service accessible only via a separate web portal. This fragmentation creates confusion, discourages help-seeking, and puts the burden of coordination on students.



Creating a single source for students to seek help is one of the most powerful strategies an institution can deploy to support student success. This approach involves building or adopting a unified resource that acts as the central access point for all services, from tutoring to mental health, financial aid to emergency assistance.

Why a Centralized Access Point Matters

- 1. Reduces cognitive load and frustration.** Nontraditional students are often balancing complex schedules. Navigating multiple websites, offices, and staff just to get help adds unnecessary friction. A unified platform simplifies their experience.
- 2. Increases help-seeking behavior.** When services are scattered, students are less likely to seek help at all. A centralized portal makes it clear where and how to get assistance, removing barriers like uncertainty, shame, or fatigue.
- 3. Enables early intervention.** A single platform can track engagement across services. If a student requests mental health support and also flags a transportation issue, institutions can proactively coordinate support and reach out before the student disengages entirely.
- 4. Enhances staff collaboration and coordination.** A centralized system enables academic advisors, mental health counselors, and financial aid staff to share relevant information (with appropriate permissions) to provide holistic, wraparound support.



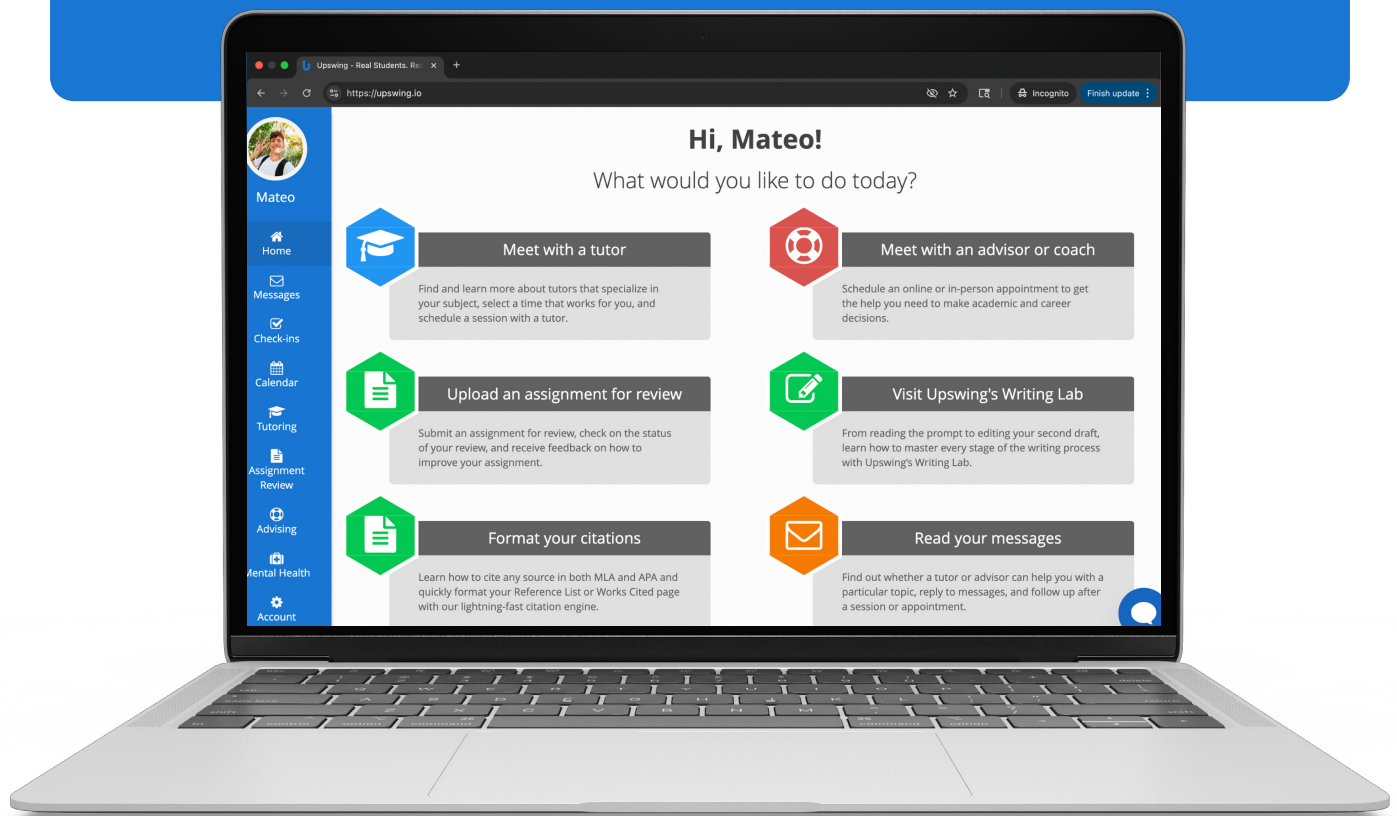
Building an Effective Centralized Access Point

To be successful, a centralized system must go beyond a website with links. It must:

- Be mobile-friendly and accessible 24/7
- Offer real-time support or clearly defined response windows
- Integrate various departments—academic advising, financial aid, counseling, tutoring, student affairs—into one interface
- Allow students to easily request, track, and follow up on support requests
- Include a triage or smart-routing system that connects students to the right resources quickly

— How Upswing Can Help —

Upswing's platform serves as a single access point for academic, wellness, and basic needs support services. Through Ana, an SMS-based assistant, students can get nudges, reminders, and access to support with one text, making help accessible even for those on the go.



The Upswing platform provides students easy access to support services like mental health, advising, assignment review, and tutoring all in one location.

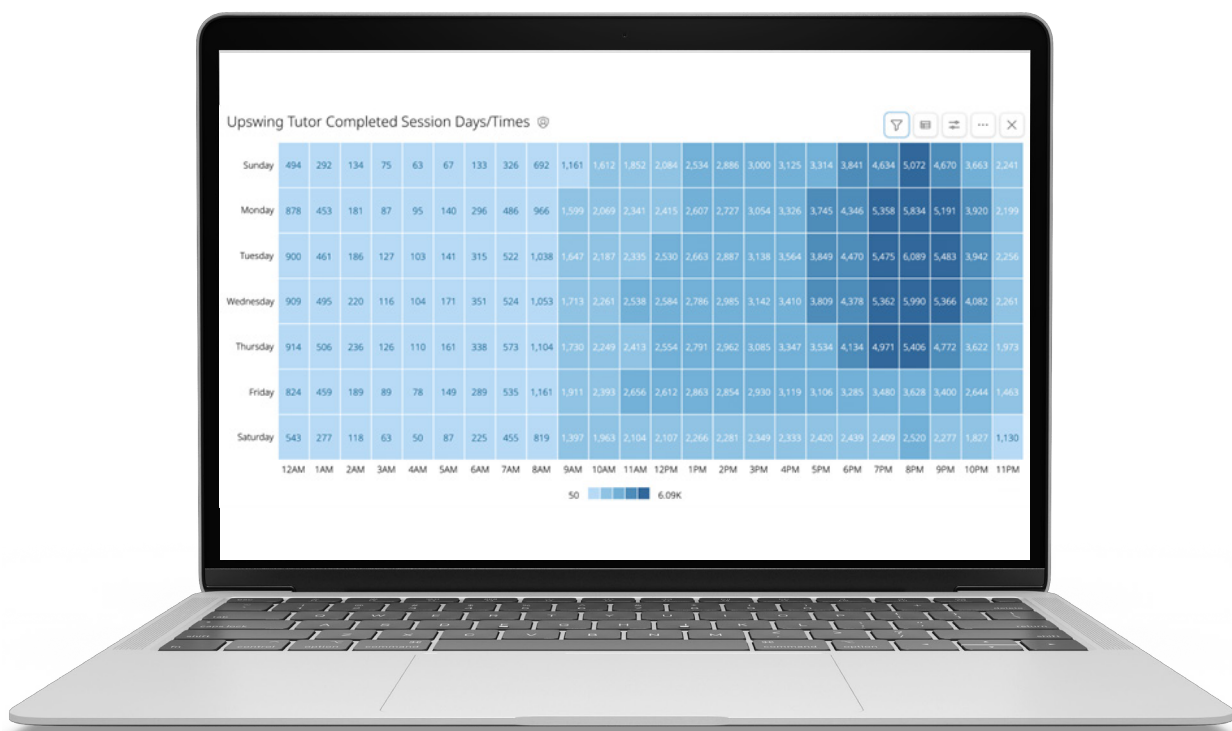
By eliminating institutional silos and creating a clear, supportive front door to all services, institutions demonstrate a fundamental respect for students' time, complexity, and persistence.

24/7 Academic Supports

02

Many nontraditional students take classes in the evening, on weekends, or fully online. They often juggle coursework with jobs and family obligations. For these students, traditional tutoring hours (typically 9am–5pm) simply don't work.

Institutions that compete for these students must adapt by offering academic support that is accessible 24/7. Doing so not only meets students where they are, but affirms their commitment to success.



As seen in the above chart, the majority of completed tutoring sessions within Upswing's wraparound student services platform occur between 5 and 10pm when campus learning centers are often closed.

Why Round-the-Clock Support Matters

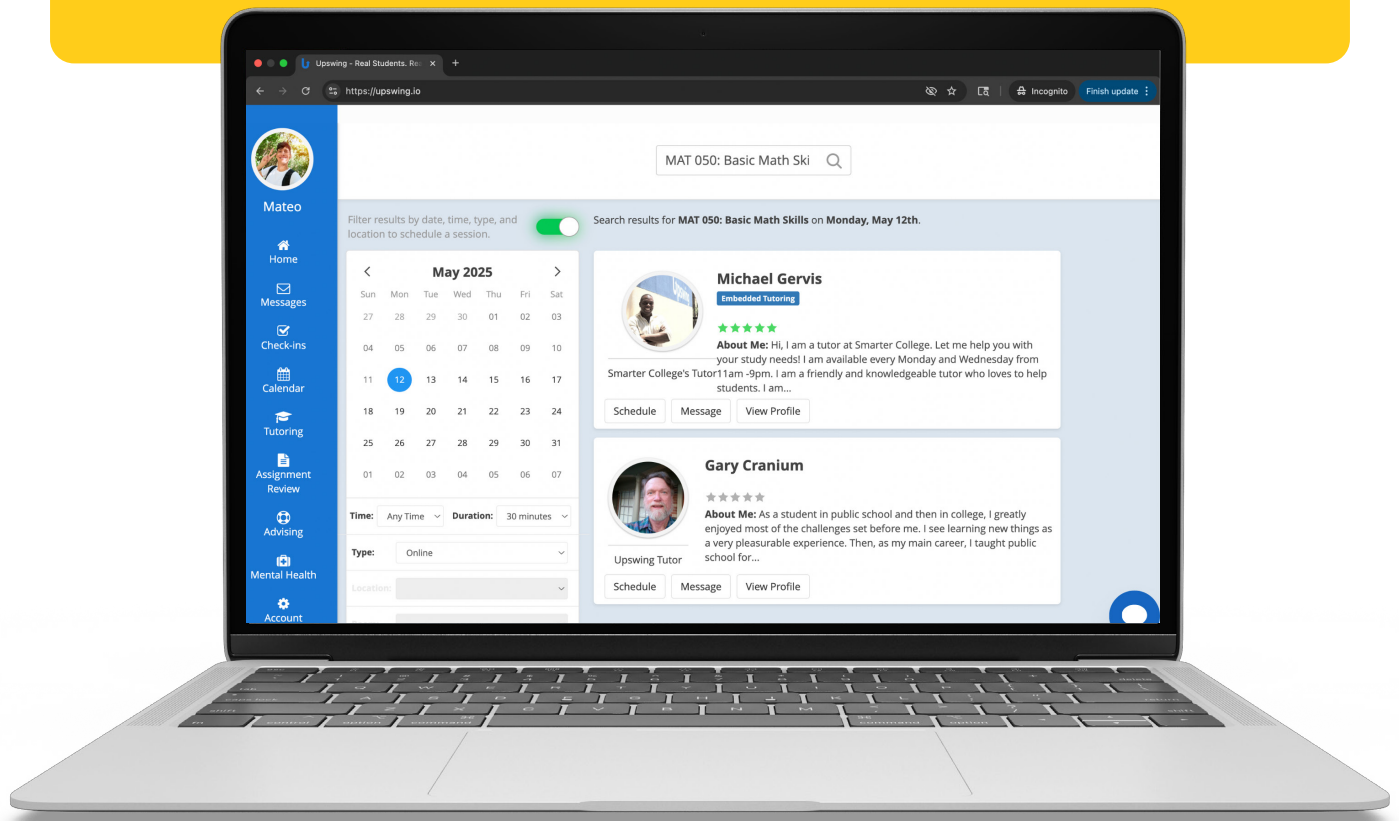
- 1. Learning doesn't stop after hours.** Students may be writing papers at midnight or studying for exams on Sunday mornings. Offering academic help only during business hours sends the message that students must conform to institutional schedules rather than the other way around.
- 2. Immediate help prevents deeper struggles.** A student stuck on an assignment who can get help within minutes is more likely to stay on track than one who has to wait until the next day. Real-time tutoring can prevent cascading academic failure.
- 3. Flexibility supports equity.** First-generation students or those in rural areas may not have access to in-person help. 24/7 online support levels the playing field.

Elements of Effective 24/7 Academic Support

- On-demand tutoring in high-enrollment subjects like math, writing, and chemistry
- Scheduled virtual coaching for time management, study skills, or specific courses
- Asynchronous paper review with guaranteed turnaround times
- Integrated analytics to track usage and outcomes, helping staff identify at-risk students

— How Upswing Can Help —

Upswing provides support for on-demand tutoring through a virtual platform that allows for campus staff to meet with students both on-campus and virtually. This increases staff flexibility. However, when campus staff is unavailable, Upswing is also staffed with qualified professionals who are available around the clock. This ensures that regardless of the hour or the student's location, help is just a click away.



Institutions that offer round-the-clock academic support send a powerful message: we are here when you need us. This responsiveness builds trust and makes students feel valued.

Flexible Mental Health Support that Meets Students Where They Are

As mental health concerns among college students continue to rise, institutions must urgently reimagine how they deliver support—especially to nontraditional students. These learners often balance high-stress responsibilities such as caregiving, full-time employment, and financial insecurity, all while trying to persist through their academic programs.

To truly support mental wellness, institutions must offer flexible, responsive, and culturally attuned mental health services that are accessible across time zones, platforms, and student lifestyles.

Why Mental Health Flexibility Matters

- 1. The need is high—but help-seeking is lower.** Nontraditional students often experience high levels of stress, but underutilize counseling services due to stigma, time constraints, or not being aware of available services.
- 2. Mental health affects academic persistence.** Emotional well-being and academic performance are deeply intertwined. Unchecked mental health challenges can lead to missed classes, lower grades, or dropping out.
- 3. One-size-fits-all doesn't work.** Student-parents, veterans, and first-gen learners have different stressors. Support must be tailored.

Key Components of Flexible Mental Health Support

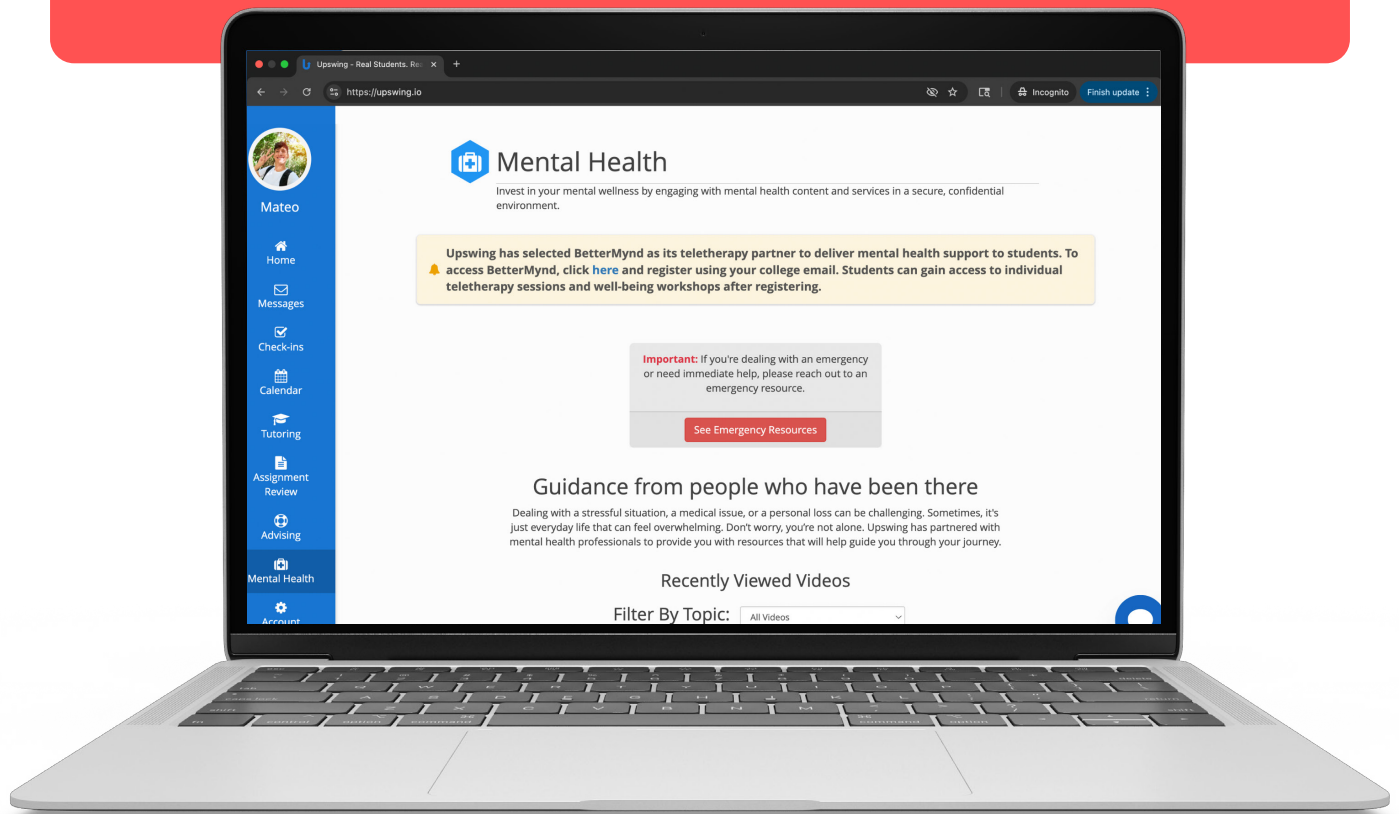
- Multimodal delivery: In-person, teletherapy, text-based counseling, and self-help or preventative modules
- Culturally responsive providers: Trained in trauma-informed care and diverse student experiences
- Integrated outreach: Wellness checks during advising, proactive nudges, faculty training to identify signs of distress
- Peer-led support: Groups and ambassadors trained to foster connection and reduce stigma
- Crisis response: 24/7 support lines and local referrals for students in immediate danger or need





— How Upswing Can Help —

Upswing provides a library of mental health support and content that students can access anonymously. For those seeking more hands-on support, students can also get access to similar peers who can provide support for challenges that they are currently going through. Upswing also provides access to licensed mental health counselors that are available 24/7.



By embedding mental health across the student journey and making services easily accessible, institutions normalize help-seeking and promote resilience.

Solving for Critical Care Needs During Pivotal Moments

No matter how academically prepared or emotionally resilient a student may be, life can present moments of crisis that threaten their ability to stay enrolled and succeed. Housing instability, food insecurity, child care disruptions, or unexpected financial emergencies can quickly derail educational progress.

While students may see these moments as personal failures, we must help them see these instead as moments to seek help and receive timely intervention.

Understanding the Stakes

- Basic needs insecurity is widespread. Over half of college students face food or housing insecurity, with nontraditional students being particularly vulnerable.
- Crises are tipping points. A missed rent payment or loss of child care can cause a student to stop out.
- Small interventions yield big returns. A \$300 microgrant or referral to a shelter can mean the difference between persistence and dropout.

Key Components of a Strong Response

- Centralized emergency hub: A single portal for accessing food, housing, childcare, and financial help
- Fast, flexible aid: Emergency funds disbursed quickly and without red tape
- Community partnerships: Collaborations with local nonprofits for shelter, food, and legal services
- Proactive outreach: Using data to flag at-risk students and check in before issues escalate
- Destigmatization: Promoting aid as a success tool, not a last resort



— How Upswing Can Help —

Upswing provides a virtual assistant that proactively engages with students, not only reminding them of key milestones throughout the academic year, but also asking if there is anything they need help with. When students bring up challenges related to critical needs support, Upswing can refer students to food pantries, child care support, shelter and more, all in their local area.

Conclusion: Reimagining Student Success for the Modern Learner

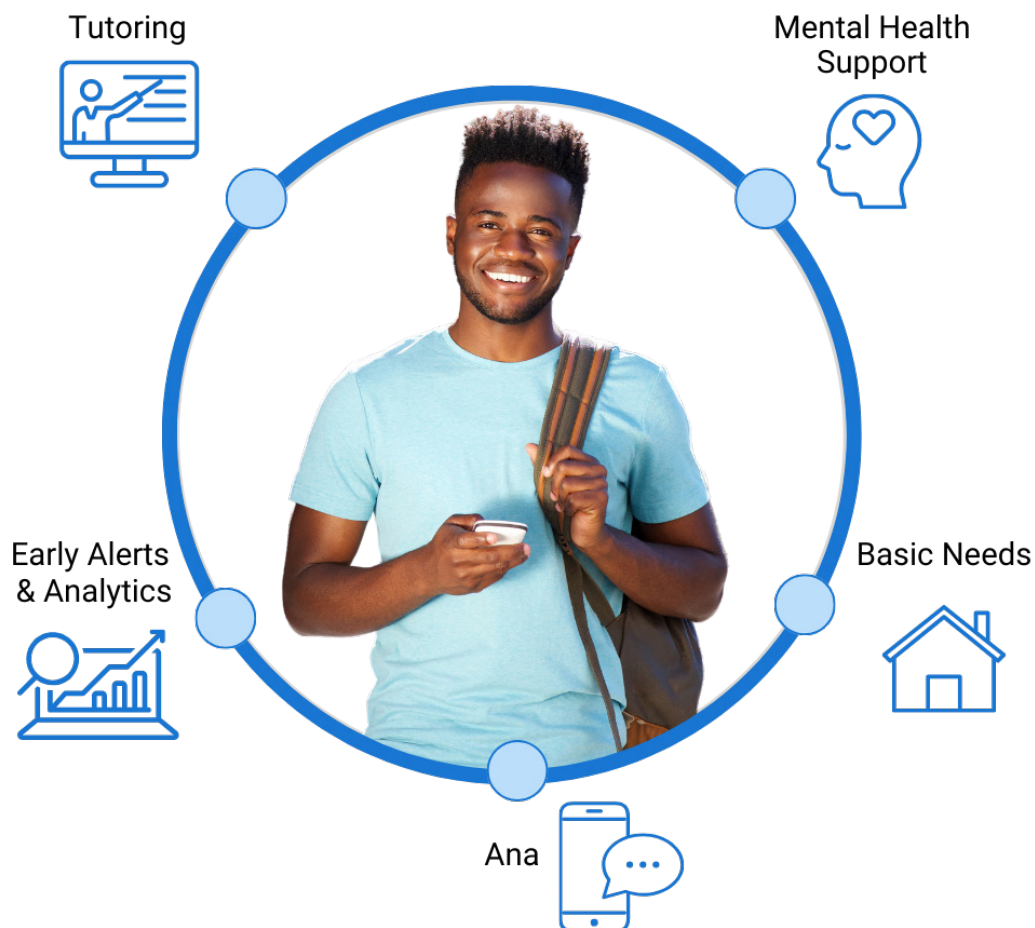
The challenges facing today's nontraditional students are not marginal. They are central to the future of higher education. Institutions must evolve to support the full student journey, addressing not just academic needs, but also emotional and basic life challenges.

Implementing wraparound services is not just a smart decision for retention purposes, it's also critical to the overall health of so many underserved populations. Institutions that prioritize holistic support will retain and graduate more students, foster equity, and build stronger communities.

How Upswing Can Help

Upswing's Wraparound Student Services Platform is built to help institutions deliver on this promise. Our solution unifies tutoring, advising, mental health referrals, and emergency aid coordination into one streamlined platform. With tools like Ana, our SMS-based assistant, we empower students to get the help they need when and where they need it.

By partnering with Upswing, institutions can create a safety net that not only prevents dropouts, but propels students forward. Together, we can redefine what student success looks like in the 21st century—and ensure no learner is left behind. You can reach out to us for more information at <https://upswing.io/request-a-demo/>.





Are you ready to align your student support strategy
with today's students' most urgent needs?

Schedule a demo with our team today.



Email: retention@upswing.io