Handbook for ESL Peer Consultants

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Introduction

What is ESL Peer Consultation?

In ESL Peer Consultation, students help other students (who are not native English speakers) with their conversational English skills and acculturation to the U.S. and Harvard. This might include: fine-tuning general speaking/listening skills in English (improving pronunciation, expanding vocabulary and becoming more fluent); understanding American idioms or customs; developing social and conversational skills (“small talk”); or practicing oral presentations for classroom or professional contexts. The program runs during the academic year and there is no ESL Peer Consulting during the summer.

Eligibility to Become an ESL Peer Consultant

To be an ESL Peer Consultant, you must:

- be a registered student in Harvard College, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard Kennedy School, or Graduate School of Education,
- be a native speaker of English or highly fluent in English,
- be proficient in at least one language other than English,
- share an interest in working with people from different cultures, and
- have earned an honors grade (A- or better) in at least one academic course.

ESL Peer Consulting could be a wonderful experience for you if you:

- are interested in helping other students,
- would like to share your enthusiasm for languages and culture, and
- are interested in cross-cultural teaching.

Professionalism and Privacy

As an ESL Peer Consultant, it is important for you to conduct your consulting relationships in a professional manner. You have accepted a paid position and are expected to adhere to certain professional guidelines. These guidelines include:

- **Contact your consultee within 24 hours of accepting a consulting job.**
  If you accept and are assigned a consulting job, an email will be sent to you and your consultee with one another’s names and contact information. Please contact your consultee within 24 hours to schedule a meeting time and location. At this time, you may ask your consultee for more details about the kind of help the consultee is seeking. If you do not hear back from your consultee, please contact the BSC as soon as possible.

- **Keep appointments and arrive on time.**
  Be clear about meeting times and places, and always be on time for appointments. Make sure you and your consultee know how to reach one another between meetings. If you need to cancel a meeting, give your consultee at least 24 hours of advance notice. Remember, while both of you are busy students with your own deadlines and demands, your consulting meetings are an important commitment for both of you.
• **Meet face-to-face with your consultee.**
  ESL peer consulting is expected to take place in person, rather than electronically (via email or video chat). It is not permissible to consult via email, text messaging, or internet chatting, other than for administrative matters (confirming appointments, etc.). Exceptions may be allowed in select situations, only after consultation with the BSC’s program supervisors.

• **Be responsive and responsible.**
  Your consultee has reached out for help. Most consulting takes place at times of the year when both you and your consultee are very busy. Be clear and honest about your limits, and let your consultee know about any deadlines or constraints you might have so you can plan ahead to have sufficient meeting time. You can also consult with the BSC about additional resources that you can offer your consultee.

• **Protect your consultees’ privacy.**
  Your work with consultees is private. Whether you know the consultee socially or he/she is a stranger to you, you are responsible for honoring and protecting the consultee’s privacy. This means that you do not publicly acknowledge that you are this person’s ESL peer consultant, or discuss your consulting with anyone outside the BSC in any way that identifies the consultee.

For more information about the BSC’s privacy policy, please visit the Privacy Policy page on the BSC website (http://bsc.harvard.edu/pages/privacy) or speak with a program supervisor.

• **Be wary of dual relationships and conflicts of interest.**
  ESL Peer Consultation is a professional relationship between consultant and consultee. A dual relationship exists when you are not only a consultant; you are also the consultee’s friend, roommate, teammate, etc. Dual relationships always run the risk of creating a conflict of interests, when the interests of your professional consulting relationship come into conflict with the interests of whatever other relationship you also have with the consultee. As all professionals do, you have a responsibility to be aware of conflicts of interests, and address them promptly and openly when they arise. For example, ESL Peer Consultants might encounter the following dilemmas when there is a dual relationship with the consultee:

  “I don’t feel like I can say, ‘No, I don’t have more time to consult with you,’ to my consultee because she is also my friend.”

  “I feel I can’t offer constructive suggestions, because my consultee is also my teammate, and if I seem critical it will affect our relationship on the team.”

  “I am having trouble separating time I am spending with my roommate as a friend versus as a consultant. Every time he asks me a question, I don’t want to have to figure out whether or not I’m on the clock.”

In general, it is better to simply avoid dual relationships when you can – don’t take on your friends, roommates, teaching fellows, etc. as consultees, and don’t begin other relationships with your consultees while you are still consulting them. But given the realities of student life, this may not be possible. So it is especially important to:

• be aware of the risks, and
  • talk with your consultee and/or a program supervisor as soon as any problems arise or if you anticipate that a problem might arise.
ESL Peer Consultant Applications

Applications are accepted at the end of August. For details, please go to the BSC website.

You may not accept a consulting job until your application has been completed and processed. This includes:

- BSC ESL Peer Consultant Application Form
- Employment/Tax Forms (may take up to 10 days to be processed by HU Payroll)
- Completion of a 30-minute interview with a program supervisor
- Attending an ESL Peer Consultant Orientation session

*International Students:* If you have questions about your employment forms, please visit University Financial Services at 1033 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd floor.

Please call 617-495-2581 or e-mail bsctutor@bsc.harvard.edu if you have any questions.

How Consultees Get Assigned to ESL Peer Consultants

You will be notified of any consulting opportunities on the BSC peer tutoring/peer consultation app, MUSE. You will also be notified by email unless you opt to not receive email notifications. If you are interested in an opportunity listed, click “Interested” or otherwise click “Cancel”.

Once you are assigned a job, you and your consultee will receive an email confirming the match. The email contains pertinent information such as your and your consultee’s contact information. Consultants are required to contact their consultees within 24 hours of accepting a consulting job. If you are unable to contact your consultee or if after a few attempts you have not received a response from your consultee, please contact the BSC as soon as possible so that we can address any issues.
Compensation

Fiscal Responsibility

As a paid consultant, you are responsible for keeping track of how many hours you consult each consultee, reporting these hours accurately and promptly, and keeping your own accurate records of your financial reporting.

If your consultee happens to question the hours reported, your payment may be delayed until the discrepancy is resolved.

Reporting Hours

Some guidelines for reporting hours:

- Report your hours immediately following your consultation meetings on the MUSE app.
- Hours must be reported for the actual day they occurred, e.g., if you consulted someone on April 22nd, from 3pm-4pm, your reporting must indicate that date and that you consulted for 1 hour that day.
- It is not advisable for students to work more than a total of 20 hours per week. Additional guidelines apply to students who have Federal Work Study positions. If you are a Harvard College student, please refer to the Harvard College Student Employment Office website for more information. If you are a graduate student, please consult with your program director or advisor.
- You may only report hours for consulting matches that have been assigned through the BSC. You may not arrange consulting jobs independently; all peer consulting jobs must be arranged through the BSC.
- Payment can not be issued for hours that are reported more than three weeks past their occurrence. Please make sure to keep up with reporting your hours.

If you have questions about reporting hours or payroll issues, please call 617-495-2581 or email bscfinance@bsc.harvard.edu.
Fees/Pay

ESL Peer Consultants earn $16 per hour for one-on-one consulting.

Consultants may not accept payment directly from a consultee. All financial transactions take place through the BSC. The BSC will charge the consultee/program and pay the tutor.

ESL peer consultants are required to attend a monthly group supervision meeting. Your contract may be terminated if you miss more than one supervision meeting in a term.

Late cancellations, missed appointments, and preparation time

If your consultee cancels the appointment with less than 24-hours notice or does not show up for an appointment, you may report the appointment as “no show”. You will be paid for an hour and your consultee will be billed an hour.

By mutual agreement in advance between you and your consultee, you may also report up to thirty minutes of preparation time per session. When you report prep-time, you will be prompted to note how you use your prep time.

The Consulting Process

Some tips from experienced ESL Peer Consultants about how to be a good consultant:

- Contact your consultee within 24 hours after receiving an assignment. Introduce yourself, exchange contact information and express your own preferences for communicating (phone numbers or emails). Suggest a few different time slots that you have available for meeting; find a convenient public place to meet (a café, a Harvard library, a House dining hall). Speak very clearly and be sure that your consultee understands where/when you would like to meet for the first session. Make sure there are no misunderstandings. Ask your consultee to describe what he/she looks like or will be wearing, share similar information about yourself, so that you will be able to recognize one another.

- In the first meeting, have an open conversation with a new consultee to help set the stage for a good working relationship. The more organized and professional you are, the more your consultee will feel confident in your abilities. The first meeting can set the tone for future sessions.

  - Introductions. Explore your consultee’s understanding of the ESL Peer Consulting Program (expectations, motivations).
    - The purpose of the program is to help students improve their English conversational skills and adjust to Harvard and the American culture.
    - Be specific about the fact that you are NOT allowed to write or edit your consultee’s schoolwork, including papers and course assignments.
- Establish ground rules. Specify the duration of your sessions (60 or 90 minutes often works well); discuss cancellation policy (you may report an hour if your consultee misses an appointment or cancels it with less than 24 hours notice); by mutual agreement in advance between you and your consultee, you may, occasionally, also report up to half-an-hour of preparation time (you are not expected to spend time preparing for each session).

- Identify goals for your consultation. These are some of the activities that you may want to consider in your consultation:
  - Working on pronunciation.
  - Learning about American culture: reading/discussing different situations that have arisen for your consultee in the past.
  - Practicing small talk.
  - Working on listening comprehension.
  - Practicing talks/presentations.

- Set a time for your next sessions.
  - As your consultation progresses, make the best of your experience by actively participating in supervision meetings; learn about resources available to your consultee; and contact the BSC if you have any questions or concerns at any time.

**What if my consultee needs more help than I can provide?**

Your consultee may need help beyond what you can provide, for example, writing help or instruction, formal English language training, financial assistance, or personal counseling. Your role then becomes to help your consultee connect with the appropriate university resources. The staff at the BSC will support you in this important role. Please speak to a program supervisor or the BSC Assistant Director to see how you can support the consultee. You can also refer the consultee to the BSC.

**What if it’s not working out so well?**

Whatever the reason, if a particular consulting situation is not working out, please let us know as soon as possible so we can advise you and/or make a new consultee/consultant match.

**Academic Integrity**

As an ESL Peer Consultant, you must be aware about issues of academic integrity. All coursework the consultee produces and turns in must be the consultee’s own work. You are not allowed to write/edit any of your consultee’s work. In addition, undergraduate ESL Peer Consultants are expected to abide by the College’s policies on academic integrity as outlined in the rules on academic dishonesty in the Handbook for Students and in Harvard College’s Honor Code.

In addition, we strongly discourage you from sharing your work with your consultees, to prevent any potential for plagiarism.
Supervision

As an ESL Peer Consultant you are required to participate in monthly group supervision meetings. These meetings provide you with the opportunity to share your consulting experiences, concerns, strategies and resources with other consultants and BSC program supervisors. Consultants who miss more than one unexcused supervision meetings per term may not be allowed to continue participating in the program.

Consultation with BSC Staff

This handbook can only begin to address the nuances, challenges, and interesting developments you will encounter during your consulting experience. The BSC staff is always eager to hear from ESL Peer Consultants about their questions and discoveries. Both consultants and consultees are encouraged to consult with the BSC as needed, either individually or as a consultant/consultee pair.

Things that peer consultants have brought up include, for example:

- Concerns about a consultee who seems depressed, anxious, angry, or troubled;
- Feeling uncomfortable about pressure being put on you by a consultee, for example to meet more often than you can or to provide writing/editing assistance;
- Feeling unsure how to handle requests from consultees to help their family members or friends; or when you feel stuck and unsure how to be of help to a consultee.
- When a consultant has disclosed something that is related to possible gender or sexual based harassment. ESL Peer Consultants, being BSC employees, are exempt from the requirement to share information about gender or sexual based harassment with the Title IX coordinator. Even so, it is important to consult with the BSC staff when you hear information of this kind from your consultee so that, together with you, we can figure out the best way to support your consultant.

Please consider the BSC a primary resource for you, and contact us whenever you would like to share or consult with us about your consulting experience.