Handbook for Peer Tutors

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Introduction

What is Peer Tutoring?

Peer tutoring is an opportunity for students to connect with another student who had previously done well in the course. Students seek formal peer tutoring from other students for many reasons: to discuss new information and concepts they are learning; to review material they already know; to refresh their mastery of material they have forgotten; to prepare for an exam or presentation; or simply to get academic assistance beyond the help provided by the course faculty and teaching fellows.

The rules of the College specify that a student may not accept compensation from another student for private tutoring without the prior written permission of the Dean of the College. The Dean has authorized the BSC to oversee such tutoring in the Peer Tutoring Program. Over 4,750 hours of peer tutoring takes place through the BSC’s tutoring program each academic year.

Most tutoring is one-on-one, although occasionally peer tutors work with small groups of students. Peer tutoring is expected to take place in person, rather than electronically (e.g., via email, video chat, or social networks). Exceptions may be allowed in select situations, only after consultation with the BSC’s peer tutor program supervisors.

Eligibility

To be a peer tutor, you must be a registered student in Harvard College or the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. The peer tutors include approximately 450 students each year, with varied backgrounds and interests. Students with career interests in teaching or other helping professions appreciate the opportunity for hands-on practice, and students with other career interests appreciate the opportunity to work with the concepts and materials of their field. Peer tutoring could be a wonderful experience for you if you:

- have earned an A- or better in the subject(s) you want to tutor
- are interested in helping other students
- would like to share your enthusiasm for a particular subject
- are sensitive to others' difficulties with their coursework

(Note that first-year students are not ordinarily eligible to be peer tutors, although occasionally they may begin in their second term.)
Professionalism and Privacy

As a peer tutor, it is important for you to conduct your tutoring 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 tutee within 24 hours of accepting a tutoring job.**

  If you accept and are assigned a tutoring job, an email will be sent to you and your tutee with one another’s names and contact information. Please contact your tutee within 24 hours to schedule a meeting time and location. At this time, you may ask your tutee for more details about the kind of help the tutee is seeking.

- **Keep appointments and arrive on time.**

  Be clear about meeting times and places, and always be on time for tutoring sessions. Make sure that you and your tutee know how to reach one another between meetings. If you need to cancel a meeting, give your tutee ample notice. Remember, while both of you are busy students with your own deadlines and demands, your tutoring meetings are an important commitment for both of you.

- **Be responsive and responsible.**

  Your tutee has reached out for help. Answer emails or calls promptly so that your tutees will get the assistance they need in a timely way. Most tutoring takes place at times of the year when both you and your tutee are very busy. Be clear and honest about your limits and let your tutee know about any deadlines or constraints you might have so that you can both plan ahead.

- **Protect your tutees’ privacy.**

  Your work with tutees is private. Whether you know the tutee socially or the tutee is a stranger to you, you are responsible for honoring and protecting the tutee’s privacy. This means that you do not publicly acknowledge that you are this person’s tutor and that you do not discuss your tutoring with anyone outside the BSC in any way that identifies the tutee.

  For more information about the BSC’s privacy practices, please visit the Privacy page on the BSC’s website or call the BSC to speak with a BSC peer tutoring program supervisor.

- **Be wary of dual relationships and conflicts of interest.**

  Peer tutoring is a professional relationship between tutor and tutee. A dual relationship exists when you are not only a tutor, but you are also the tutee’s friend, roommate, teammate, etc. Dual relationships always run the risk of creating a conflict of interest, i.e., when the interests of your professional tutoring relationship come into conflict with the interests of whatever other relationship you also have with the tutee. You have a responsibility to be aware of conflicts of interest, and address them promptly and openly when they arise. For example, peer tutors might encounter the following dilemmas when there is a dual relationship with the tutee:
“I don’t feel like I can say to my tutee, 'No, I don’t have more time to tutor you,' because my tutee is also my friend.”

“I feel I can’t offer constructive suggestions or tutoring advice, because my tutee is also my teammate, and, if I seem critical of her, 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 tutor. 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, etc. as tutees, and don’t begin other relationships with your tutees while you are still tutoring them. But given the realities of student life, this may not be possible. So it is especially important to (a) be aware of the risks and (b) talk with your tutee and/or a BSC peer tutoring program supervisor as soon as any problems arise.

**Peer Tutor Applications**

Eligible Harvard College students will receive an email each August with details of how to sign up to become a tutor. We encourage you to sign up in the late summer, either in person at the BSC or by downloading the application form from our website by clicking on **Becoming a Peer Tutor**. You may not accept a tutoring job until your application has been completed and processed. This includes:

- BSC Peer Tutoring Application Form
- Employment/Tax Forms (takes 3-5 business days to be processed by HU Payroll)
- Completion of online training (approximately 30 minutes)
- Scheduling of Peer Tutoring Orientation meeting (first time Peer Tutors)

**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 email bsc@bsc.harvard.edu if you have any questions or to get more information.

**How Tutees Get Assigned to Tutors**

After receiving a request for a peer tutor, the BSC sends an email to all the peer tutors for this course describing the student’s request. If you receive such an email and you would like to take the job, call or email the BSC promptly. If you are not interested in taking the job, just don’t respond to the email. Jobs are generally assigned to the first eligible tutor who responds. For some courses, requests might be filled quickly; if you have difficulty obtaining a job through this process, please call us at 617-495-2581 or email bsctutor@bsc.harvard.edu.
Once you agree to take a job, you and your tutee will receive an email confirming the match. The email contains pertinent information such as your contact information, the tutee’s contact information, the official match number for the job (which you will need to report your hours), and links to important information.

Tutors are required to contact their tutees within 24 hours of accepting a tutoring job. If you are unable to contact your tutee, or if after a few attempts you have not received a response from your tutee, please let us know so that we can contact the tutee and clarify the situation.

A week after a tutor/tutee match is made, you and your assigned tutee receive an email from the BSC checking in about how the tutoring is going. We want to be sure that tutoring is off to a good start and that we can help address any questions or concerns that may arise.

Compensation

Fiscal Responsibility

As a paid tutor, you are responsible for keeping track of the hours you tutor each tutee, reporting these hours accurately and promptly, and keeping your own accurate records of your financial reporting.

Reporting Hours

You will not be able to access the payroll website until you have been assigned at least one job. When you enter your hours, you will need the match number, your tutee’s name, and the dates and times of your meetings.

Some guidelines for reporting hours:

- Record your hours directly to the BSC at https://payroll.bsc.harvard.edu.
- Hours must be reported weekly for the actual day they occurred, (e.g., if you tutored someone on Monday, April 22nd, from 3pm-5pm, your online reporting must indicate that date and that you tutored for 2 hours that day).
- It is not advisable for students to work more than a total of 20 hours per week. Additional guidelines apply to Federal Work Study positions. Please refer to the Federal Work Study page of the Harvard College Student Employment Office website for more information.
- You may only report hours for tutoring matches that have been assigned through the BSC and have an official BSC match number. You may not arrange tutoring jobs independently.
- Payment cannot be issued for hours that are reported more than 30 days past their occurrence. Please make sure to keep up with reporting your hours each week.
- You will not be paid for hours tutored before they were assigned and officially matched through the BSC.

Your tutee will receive an automatic email every Sunday indicating the hours you reported that week. This email also indicates which portion of your time is being charged as preparation time, if any.
If your tutee disputes the hours that you reported, your submission will be rejected, and you will not be paid until the discrepancy is resolved.

**Group Tutoring**

You may be offered the opportunity of tutoring two or three students together as a group. Group tutoring requires additional skills, and these tutoring matches will be closely supervised by the BSC. Extra support is available for tutors providing group tutoring. If you have questions about group tutoring, please consult with a BSC peer tutoring program supervisor.

**Pay**

Peer tutors earn $18 per hour. Peer tutors in the Award Peer Tutor program earn $20 per hour and are required to attend a weekly, unpaid meeting for discussion, reflection, and supervision. The pay rate for group tutoring is pro-rated depending on the size of the group. For each additional tutee (up to five tutees), the tutor is paid an additional $2.50 per hour. Pay rate is determined by the actual number of tutees who attend a particular session. The policy on late cancellations and no-shows also applies to group tutoring (see below).

All financial transactions for peer tutoring take place through the BSC. Peer tutors are not permitted to accept any kind of payment directly from a tutee. The tutor reports hours worked directly to the BSC. The BSC then charges the tutee’s term bill, and pays the tutor.

A screen snapshot of the data entry page is below. Please make sure you enter hours through this portal, not in PeopleSoft (the way you might for other jobs on campus).
Late Cancellations and No-Shows

You may report one hour of tutoring if your tutee cancels the appointment with less than 24-hours’ notice or does not show up for an appointment. It’s usually helpful for the tutor to advise tutees that they will be charged.

Preparation Time

By advance mutual agreement between a tutor and a tutee, a tutor may also report up to thirty minutes of preparation time per session. Tutors must request permission each time they plan to use preparation time. In the automatic email a tutee receives each Sunday containing the tutor’s reported hours, the email will also indicate which portion of the tutor’s time is being charged as preparation time, if any.

If you anticipate needing to spend more than thirty minutes preparing for most tutoring sessions, then the BSC suggests you do not tutor for this course. Please consult with a BSC peer tutoring supervisor if you have questions about the best ways to make use of your preparation time.

The Tutoring Process

What are some tips from experienced peer tutors about how to be a good tutor?

In the first meeting, have a conversation with your tutee to help set the stage for a good working relationship. Remember that the tutee may be feeling nervous! So take a bit of time to get to know each other and to set expectations about tutoring:

• Introduce yourself. Say something about your academic interests and ask your tutee about their academic interests. It’s good to start off with their strengths before you jump into their difficulties or questions.
• Ask your tutees what they would like help with and what they hope for from tutoring (e.g., help with problem sets, practice using new vocabulary, particular concepts, etc.). Talk with them about how they can make the best use of your tutoring hours – e.g. try to start a problem set before the meeting with you, or look over the reading first and come in with questions.
• Describe anything relevant about your own teaching/learning style and encourage tutees to let you know when you have not been clear or when they need something explained in a different way.
• Be sure you both understand how your hours together will get reported and billed.
• Review the BSC policy prohibiting tutoring through electronic communications so that the tutee will not expect that you’ll answer questions or tutor via email or other electronic means.
Additional tips:

- Perfection is not a prerequisite for peer tutoring. You don’t have to know everything all the time. One of the best learning experiences for a tutee might be simply to listen to you think aloud as you struggle with a difficult problem.

- One particularly effective technique is having your tutees explain to you, in their own words, the material you are reviewing so that you both get a better sense of where to concentrate your efforts once you notice exactly where the tutee gets confused or has questions.

- One strategy to encourage the tutee to take charge of their own learning is to have the tutee, rather than you, be the one who is doing all the writing (equations, diagrams, etc.). An additional benefit of this strategy is that it helps ensure that all written work is the tutee’s and not yours.

- You might need to explain material in different ways to adapt to different tutees’ learning styles. Some students learn best, for example, when they see/read the material, others when they hear the material, still others when they manipulate the material such as by making a diagram, and still others when they speak the material back to someone. A conversation about the tutee’s preferred learning styles might make for a more productive tutoring experience.

- Use questions as a way to guide your tutee and help your tutee to become more adept at tackling the material. Questions can help the two of you trace the original source of confusion and also to help the tutee develop skills to use questions to work through the material, e.g., what is the problem asking? What do I know? What did the course cover that relates to this material? What would my tutor ask me about this material?

- With any of these suggestions, you’ll want to be sensitive to the particular relationship and the specific needs of your tutee. Often, the more you tutor, the more questions you might have about how to go about it. The BSC is available to consult with you about your peer tutoring experience.

What if my tutee needs more help than I can provide?

One of the challenges of being a peer tutor is to know your own limits and also to be aware of the other wonderful resources available to your tutees. As you and your tutee get to know one another, it may become clear that your tutee needs help beyond what you can provide. Your tutee may need writing help or instruction, English language instruction, financial assistance, or personal counseling. Your role is to help your tutee connect with the appropriate university resources. You can consult with the BSC staff about these resources.

What if my tutee seeks my help by email or some other electronic medium?

Peer tutoring is expected to take place in person, rather than electronically (e.g., via email, video chat, or social networks). Exceptions may be allowed in select situations, only after consultation with the BSC’s tutoring program supervisors. In general, tutors should not engage in the work of tutoring
(answering questions, discussing course materials or ideas, etc.) electronically. The use of electronic communications are certainly appropriate for scheduling and logistical issues, but not for peer tutoring.

Some of the reasons for not allowing electronic peer tutoring include:

- Keeping track of tutoring hours can be complicated and unwieldy - and a source of misunderstanding about what constitutes "bill-able" tutoring time.
- The potential for plagiarism (whether intentional or unintentional) increases when the tutor provides content in a format that can easily be cut and pasted.
- It’s difficult to maintain boundaries on tutor availability once the door to electronic communications is opened. The BSC’s peer tutoring program does not expect tutors to be available 24/7 via electronic means, even for "quick questions."
- The Bureau's peer tutoring program is private in accordance with FERPA and College policies, and electronic media are not private.
- Effective peer tutoring requires close attention to nonverbal cues; this kind of awareness is difficult to achieve using electronic media.

Some rules of thumb to help you think about how to respond to a tutee’s request for electronic communications:

- If more than 5 minutes of your time will be needed to do justice to the tutee’s request/question, you should have a face-to-face communication, not an electronic one. You need to communicate this to your tutee.
- Consider whether the request/question is better handled at this juncture by the course staff (e.g., if the tutee asks you whether an answer is correct or asks you to check the problem set).

What if it’s not working out so well?

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

**Academic Integrity**

As a peer tutor, you must be especially vigilant about issues of academic integrity. All coursework the tutee produces and turns in must be the tutee’s own work. All peer tutors are expected to abide by the guidelines outlined in this handbook. In addition, tutors and tutees 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*. 
Here are some particular points about academic integrity to remember when tutoring:

- The pen, keyboard, screen, and paper being used in a tutoring session should be the tutee’s, and the tutee should be the only person using these instruments. In addition to being a good pedagogical strategy, this practice will help to ensure that you are not inadvertently editing the tutee’s paper, writing the tutee’s code, or solving the tutee’s problem set. Your role is to help the tutee to do these things, not to do them yourself. From a teaching/learning perspective, the more tutees do on their own, the more they will learn. Tutoring is often about building the tutee’s independence in learning.

- While all students need to be aware of the collaboration policies and guidelines for their particular courses, remember that tutoring should never be a collaboration on a product. A tutor and tutee work together on the process of learning, approaches to the material, and identifying where and why the tutee is stuck or confused. The product – whether a problem set, code, or a paper – needs to be solely the work of the tutee.

- Assume that it is never all right to share your own work with a tutee (such as a paper you have written, a problem set you have completed, or your computer code). If you share your work with a tutee, you run a real risk of violating the course rules, as well as the risk of providing your tutee with material they might intentionally or unintentionally plagiarize. Some alternatives to sharing your work with a tutee include:
  
  o See if there are sample papers, extra problem sets, answer sheets, etc., provided by the course itself that you and your tutee can also use in your tutoring sessions.
  
  o Use questions as a way to guide your tutee’s thinking: What might be the next step here? What do you already know about this topic? How about if we look back at the lecture notes from this day to see what they say?

- Consult with a BSC peer tutoring supervisor if you are unsure about how to avoid or deal with questionable situations.

Consultation

This handbook can only begin to address the nuances, challenges, and interesting developments you will encounter during your tutoring experience. For any kind of teaching or tutoring, ongoing discussion and consultation are recommended, valuable tools for producing the greatest benefit.

Consulting with Fellow Peer Tutors

The BSC encourages tutors to seek out fellow peer tutors for informal consultations. Peer tutors tell us that it’s very helpful to share their experiences with each other. If you would like to consult with another tutor, please contact the BSC and we’ll readily put you in touch with a tutor.
Topics of consultation might include:

- where are some good locations to meet my tutee?
- what's it like to tutor in ___ course?
- what's a good approach to take with a tutee when the tutee isn't sure how to formulate a question?

As a reminder, when you consult with fellow tutors, all privacy rules continue to apply. Please take care to refrain from disclosing any identifying information about your tutee.

If you are concerned about your tutee, consultation with the BSC peer tutoring supervisors is the appropriate choice rather than another tutor. See below for information on BSC consultations.

**Consulting with the BSC**

The BSC is always eager to hear from peer tutors about their questions and discoveries. Both tutors and tutees are encouraged to consult with the BSC as needed, either individually or as a tutor/tutee pair.

Good times to consult with a BSC peer tutoring supervisors include:

- when you are concerned about a tutee who you sense is depressed, anxious, angry, or troubled to an extent that they are unable to engage productively in the tutoring.
- when you are feeling uncomfortable about pressure being put on you by a tutee, for example to share your notes, give answers, or to meet more often than you can.
- when you feel stuck and unsure how to be of help to a tutee.
- when you would like to learn more about teaching strategies.
- when a student has disclosed something that is related to possible gender or sexual based harassment. As a BSC employee, BSC peer tutors are exempt from the requirement to share information about gender or sexual based harassment with the Title IX coordinator. Even so, it’s important to consult with the BSC staff when you hear information of this kind from your tutee so that, together with you, we can figure out the best way to support your tutee.
- when you need any kind of support around your tutoring.

Please consider the BSC a primary resource for any dilemmas, questions, or thoughts about your tutoring experience.