BUREAU OF STUDY COUNSEL
CENTER FOR ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

2017-18 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 has 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 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 Bureau of Study Counsel to oversee such tutoring in the Peer Tutoring Program. Over 8,600 hours of peer tutoring takes place through the BSC’s Peer 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 Tutoring Supervisors.

Eligibility

To be a BSC peer tutor, you must be a registered, degree-seeking student in Harvard College or any of Harvard’s graduate schools (except the Extension School). The BSC peer tutors include more than 500 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 course(s) you want to tutor, or by faculty recommendation, or consultation with a BSC Peer Tutoring Supervisor.
- are interested in helping other students
- would like to share your enthusiasm for a particular subject
- are sensitive to others' difficulties with their coursework

Since BSC undergraduate peer tutors have typically qualified to tutor by taking the Harvard course they plan to tutor, undergraduate students in their first semester at Harvard are not yet eligible to tutor for most tutoring requests received by the BSC. However, freshmen in their fall semester who are fluent speakers of languages other than English might be eligible to tutor students in the fall semester. Please contact the BSC to find out more. The BSC encourages freshmen to register with the BSC in the spring semester to begin tutoring.
Graduate students who did not attend Harvard are typically eligible to tutor Harvard courses for which they took an equivalent undergraduate course or higher level course. The BSC welcomes graduate students as BSC peer tutors. Please contact the BSC for more information.

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, the confirmation will appear on your dashboard in tutoring.fas.harvard.edu; you will also receive a confirmation email with each other’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.**

  Please make sure to confirm the meeting time and place with your tutee, and make sure that you and your tutee know the best way to reach each other. Always be on time for tutoring sessions. If you need to cancel a meeting, please give your tutee ample notice.

- **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 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 Supervisor to anticipate any complications that may arise.

Peer Tutor Registration

Eligible Harvard College students will receive emails from the BSC with details of how to register to become a peer tutor. You may not accept a tutoring job until all of your paperwork has been completed and processed. This includes:

- BSC Peer Tutoring Registration in tutoring.fas.harvard.edu
- Employment/Tax Forms (takes 3-5 business days to be processed by Harvard’s Payroll Office)
- Completion of the peer tutor online training (peer tutors are required to complete the online training each year that they plan to tutor)
- Scheduling of peer tutor orientation meeting (for first time peer tutors or returning peer tutors who have not yet attended an in-person orientation. Returning peer tutors are welcome to attend to share their experiences. Peer tutors are paid for their attendance at the orientation. Given scheduling constraints, peer tutors may begin tutoring before attending an orientation.)

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 bsctutor@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 notifies all the peer tutors for the course through tutoring.fas.harvard.edu. If you would like to take the job, select the “interested” option. Select the “decline” option if you are not. Jobs are distributed by the BSC staff among the peer tutors who have indicated their interest. 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, 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 tutoring assignment is made, the peer tutor and tutee receive an email from the BSC checking in. 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. (Please note that, as of September 2016, due to technological difficulties this check-in email is not working, but we hope to restore the functionality in a future semester. In the meantime, please contact the BSC with any concerns or questions.)

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

Some guidelines for reporting hours:

- Record your hours directly to the BSC to the peer tutor timecard in tutoring.fas.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. If a student asks you to be their tutor, please direct the student to the BSC so that the BSC can make the match official and thereby enable you to be paid for your work.
• Payment may not be able to be paid 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 email each time you report the hours you tutored, which includes preparation time. 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 to tutor two or three students together as a small group. If you have questions about group tutoring, please reach out to a BSC Peer Tutoring Supervisor.

**Pay**

BSC Peer Tutors earn $18 per hour. Peer tutors in the BSC Peer Tutor Fellows Program (PTFs) earn $20 per hour. 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).

The College subsidizes the peer tutoring fees in order to make tutoring accessible to all students. While BSC Peer Tutors are paid $18/hour (or $20/hour for PTFs), students pay $7/hour to receive peer tutoring. In addition, Financial Aid automatically reimburses the $7 fee on a student's term bill at the end of each semester in proportion to the student's financial aid package. Please note, if a tutee is a graduate student, funding might be available for tutoring fees. Please direct the tutee to the BSC to explore this option.

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 a sample peer tutor timecard is below.
Late Cancellations and No-Shows

You may report one hour if your tutee misses an appointment or cancels the appointment with less than 24 hours’ notice. Please confirm each tutoring meeting that you have scheduled, and do not assume that you will meet at the same time every week. You must have proof of confirmation from your tutee (email, text, etc.) with the specific date of the scheduled meeting in order to charge for a missed appointment. The BSC will not be able to pay you for this hour unless you can provide the proof of confirmation.

Preparation Time

By advance mutual agreement between a peer 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. Please note that the cost of preparation time to the tutee is subsidized along with the other tutoring fees.

If you anticipate needing to spend more than thirty minutes preparing for most tutoring sessions for a course, then the BSC suggests you speak with one of the BSC Peer Tutoring Supervisors to explore whether or not to tutor for this course. The BSC will not be able to compensate peer tutors for prep time over 30 minutes if you have not received prior permission from the BSC.

Please speak 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. 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. 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.
- 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 Peer Tutoring Supervisors are available to speak 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 Harvard 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 help with study strategies, writing, English language instruction, financial assistance, or personal counseling. Your role is to help your tutee connect with the appropriate university resources. You can speak 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 Peer Tutoring Supervisors. In general, peer 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 "billable" 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 BSC’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 assign a new tutor.

**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. 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 of tutoring – whether a problem set, code, or a paper – needs to be solely the work of the tutee.

• BSC Peer Tutors are prohibited from helping students with take home exams.

• BSC Peer Tutors are not permitted to help students with applications.

• BSC Peer Tutors are not permitted to edit or proofread assignments.

• 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 current course that you and your tutee can 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?

o If you have prior course material which you think could be useful for your tutoring meetings, e.g., practice problems which don’t show your own work or an exam guide, you must obtain permission to use these materials. Please contact the BSC and the BSC will make this request to the course. Please note that BSC Peer Tutors are not permitted to have access to the solutions to problem sets.

• Speak with a BSC Peer Tutoring Supervisor if you are unsure of how to approach a request from your tutee.

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 reflection and discussion are recommended and valuable tools for producing the greatest benefit.

Consulting with Other Peer Tutors

The BSC encourages tutors to speak with other peer tutors about approaches to tutoring. If you would like to speak with a fellow peer tutor, please contact the BSC and we’ll readily put you in touch with another peer 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 hasn’t begun the problem set before the tutoring meeting?

As a reminder, when you speak with other peer 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 a BSC Peer Tutoring Supervisor 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 reach out to the BSC as needed, either individually or as a tutor/tutee pair.

Good times to consult with a BSC Peer Tutoring Supervisor 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 speak 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.