

## Course Tutor Confidential—A Guide to Making the Most Out of the Embedded Tutoring Model

Dr. Genie Nicole Giaimo, GGiaimo@Middlebury.edu

Simone Edgar Holmes '20.5, Past Head Tutor

Avery Lopez '20, Past Head Tutor

Constance Laranja Gooding '23, Current Head Tutor

Tutors have a desire:

- **For clear rubrics/assignments from faculty so they can support writers**
  - Peer Tutor: “What I would like from working with a class/faculty: (1) copy of rubric for each assignment (2) meeting before meeting class to discuss my role and what the faculty member would like from me for each assignment.”
- **For mentorship on writing pedagogy—to have pedagogical discussions about writing:**
  - Peer Tutor: “The professor I was working with posted examples of the different writing styles the course required online. It was very helpful in allowing me to prepare for my meetings with students/peers.”
- **To meet early and set expectations about course outcomes, together.**
  - Peer Tutor: “Students come into tutoring meetings often asking a ton of questions about prompt/assignment, for example. It puts tutors in a tough spot if the professor has not communicated their goals/expectations for each assignment. It also makes the tutor look unprepared/unprofessional.”
- **For consistent communication and meetings throughout the semester**
  - Peer Tutor: “bi-weekly meetings and/or email check-ins with the professor would be great.”
- **To be a deliberate part of the classroom culture and learning process:**
  - Peer Tutor: “my professors often used my opinions/perspective to get a better gauge of how the class was doing/how they felt about each particular assignment. Last semester, unfortunately, this was mostly only communicated towards the end of the semester (we did not meet as frequently as we probably should have, looking back). BUT this semester Prof X has been reading through each client report form [from WOnline] and meeting with me throughout the semester. Through the forms and our conversations, Professor X can get a closer view into how their students are really doing in the class. I would urge faculty to take advantage of the unique position/role of peer tutors.”
- **To be introduced to the students in the class, early in the semester.**
- **For consistent hours/work throughout the semester**
  - Peer Tutor: “What didn’t work for me was poor communication—[there was also] not enough work, [I was] not so much a mentor as a peripheral resource.”
- **To make meeting with students a requirement of the course:**
  - Peer Tutor: “Making tutoring sessions required for at least the first few assignments had resulted in a more fulfilling experience for students (who formed

a relationship with a tutor they trusted to know their work and course expectations), tutors (who were able to work more regularly and perform a mentorship role in the class), and faculty (who were able to see increased writing awareness in their students and received extra support in matching students' needs and meeting course learning goals)."

- **For faculty to set and maintain expectations around tutor engagement in the course:**
  - Peer Tutor: "After telling me students were required to meet with me at least twice, she failed to enforce the rule (probably in part due to my lack of communication). I suppose I just wish we had been more engaged with one another throughout the semester."
  - Peer Tutor: "I think that professors encouraging students to take advantage of their FYSM during the entirety of the semester, rather than just for one assignment, would be helpful—my prof had one required meeting and every student waited until the last week, which was meant I couldn't meet with all of them! It also meant that I didn't have consistent work all semester."
  - Peer Tutor: "it seems like Professors do not always know how much work to give their tutors but strong communication and clarifying work expectations can help tutors to have more consistent paid work throughout the semester."
- **For fair division of labor between tutors (if there is more than 1 tutor assigned to the course):**
  - Peer Tutor: "[It was hard to be] overlooked as a second tutor for the class. [I] was never included on the website as another tutor; no response via email, only one meeting."
- **For honest engagement with faculty regarding circumstances that may impact their engagement with the course/tutor:**
  - Peer Tutor: "Something that didn't go well was some students seemed disengaged and confused about their research paper and I'm not sure if the prof knew/did anything about this. Yet, most of the students said they really liked the prof overall."
  - Peer Tutor: "In one course there were some things going on in the professor's personal life that they alerted me to, but it was felt by the students and their assignments. The professor's feedback was unclear to students, and the prof's explanation upon students' questioning was helpful, but the professor was difficult to reach via email and office hours."
- **For faculty mentorship:**
  - Peer Tutor: "I was unable to assess my performance/effect on student writing, due to the professor mistakenly thinking I wanted to see the grades of students (which I did not)."
  - Peer Tutor: "I would have liked more guidance from the professor and a follow-up meeting around the end of the term to see how engagement with me impacted the students' writing."

#### **Ways to engage with/work with your peer tutor:**

- Meet with tutor to set expectations for their role in the course
- Require students to schedule individual sessions with course tutor
- Jointly provide written feedback on a paper/essay draft in concert with the peer tutor

- Review writing assignments with the peer tutor prior to assigning them to students (to get feedback on how they understand the learning goals/outcomes)
- Review writing assessment rubrics for individual assignments with the peer tutor to get feedback on how they understand the evaluation of the writing
- Invite the peer tutor into the class to help facilitate a peer review session
- Invite the peer tutor into the class to help facilitate a discussion about a writing topic, such as citation, revision, writing process, writing planning, time management etc.
- Have transparent conversations with your tutor about hours/work expectations/goals. For example, is the tutor looking to work a certain number of hours? Do they want to learn about a particular element of academic writing or pedagogy? How can both tutor and faculty articulate and achieve their respective goals?

#### **Further Advice to Faculty:**

- Interaction and relationship building are both key to partnering with the Writing Center.
- Set clear expectations for your course tutor and students and stick to them.
- Be in communication with your course tutor. Even just a check-in email goes a long way.
- Consider sharing some more of the writing teaching responsibility with your peer tutor—they are great at talking about writing process, idea development, decoding assignment prompts and professor feedback, etc.
- A tutor’s position in a course is in continual negotiation throughout the semester as tutors acquire the knowledge and skills that enable them to enact their roles, and as students and instructors learn what to expect from the tutors—it takes time to set rapport!
- Be aware of classroom dynamics surrounding peer tutoring. For example, tutors are often forced to engage in “impression management” (demonstrating authority or even deemphasizing their authority) with students due to their “near-peer” status—these power differentials between peer tutor and students ought to be considered and managed by faculty (with support from the Writing Center Director) (Colvin, 2007).
- If you have questions about how to work with your peer tutor or about writing pedagogy, contact Dr. Giaimo, [ggiaimo@middlebury.edu](mailto:ggiaimo@middlebury.edu) for an individual consultation or to learn about faculty workshops and programming on writing pedagogy.