

Effective Practices for Online Tutoring

[Planned Adoption Spring 2019]

The Transfer, Articulation, and Student Services Committee 2018-2019

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Introduction

The following document was created by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges Transfer, Articulation, and Student Services (TASSC) committee. This paper aims to assist community college faculty with the development of effective practices for online tutoring programs. As such, this paper contains multiple sections that include (1) Audiences for Online Tutoring, (2) Benefits of Online Tutoring, (3) Online Tutoring Literacy, Skills, and Practices, (4) Online Tutoring Interfaces and Resource, (5) Restrictions/Parameters Around use of Services, (6) ADA Compliance, and (7) Accreditation. The following paper should be use to develop, enhance, and identify areas of concern for online tutoring programs.

Audiences for Online Tutoring

The California Community College (CCC) system serves 2.4 million students at 114 community colleges. These students largely commute to campus, work off-campus in part-time and full-time employment, and have family responsibilities. These factors complete for students time and can impact students' enrollment decisions, use of campus services, and ability to study. To positively support students, colleges have created multiple methods of course delivery. This includes: (1) traditional face-to-face classrooms where students attend lectures, (2) hybrid or blended classrooms where a specified number of courses hours are supplemented with online learning, and (3) online courses where students do not meet in a physical classroom and course learning can be accessed anytime and anyplace. The CCC can further support students by offering flexible resources such as online tutoring services.

According to the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC), “the goal of online tutoring is to create a virtual tutoring environment for students that emulates a face-to-face experience which can help a student achieve success in a given class” (Smith, 2012). As such, online tutoring was designed to meet the needs of community college students who are enrolled in traditional face-to-face, hybrid and fully online learning opportunities.

Community colleges can utilize two types of online tutoring: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous tutoring occurs when both the tutor and the student are communicating in a real-time online chat. In asynchronous tutoring, the tutor responds to a student's request for help, usually within 24-48 hours (Brown, 2012). Both tutoring types offer opportunities and challenges for students. For example, synchronous tutoring allows for direct real-time communication between the tutor and student. For this to occur, the tutor needs to be available at various hours to meet their students needs. Coordinating an online tutoring time can become an added challenge for both individuals. Asynchronous tutoring is a flexible option for students. However, it requires clear communication from the student in how the question is asked so that the tutor can effectively respond.

Benefits of Online Tutoring

Online tutoring provides multiple developmental opportunities for all students enrolled in face to face, hybrid and online courses. This includes the organization of information, development of ideas, and citation of sources. Online tutoring can also create opportunities to electronically document students' prior knowledge, areas of difficulty, and progression of learning. For example, tutors can implement pre- and post assessments, scaffold the delivery of information, and model how to solve problems in each session. Moreover, data can be collected for multiple students in each course and help develop overall classroom interventions to improve content delivery and learning outcomes. Utilizing data driven tutoring models also supports community colleges initiatives (i.e. Guided Pathways, AB 705, etc) which seek to improve student retention, completion and success.

Online Tutoring Literacy, Skills, and Practices

Online components to education, such as online courses, degrees, counseling and tutoring are becoming more prevalent. The number of students taking online courses has increased dramatically in the last five years. It is because of this growing trend that learning centers have found it essential to incorporate technology and other online resources to adapt and meet the needs of students. Online tutoring allows students who cannot make it to campus to receive assistance, providing equitable opportunity beyond the boundaries of the campus. Effective skills and practices for both the tutor and tutee are critical in the success of an online tutoring program. These skills and practices may vary depending on type of platform, program, and subject matter being tutored. However, there are some basic skills and practices that are required for any and all types of online tutoring.

Asynchronous Tutoring vs Synchronous Tutoring

The asynchronous form of online tutoring entails interaction between the tutor and tutee that is time-displaced. Students submit their work and/or question, then waits for a response. Because this type of tutoring is limited in vocal discussion, tutors initial response should be in a friendly positive tone to establish a trusting relationship. By doing this, the tutee will read the feedback as constructive and gentle. (Sabatino, 2014)

Synchronous tutoring occurs online during an interactive, real-time chat, often using a program that has an on-screen, file-sharing, or whiteboard with microphone and speaker so that tutor and tutee are able to hear each other. (Sabatino, 2014)

The Tutee: Necessary skills students need to take full advantage of online tutoring

Aside from basic computer literacy, the student should be well versed in the platform being used for online tutoring. In order for the student to get the most out of the tutoring session, he or she should have knowledge of expectations, best practices and answers to frequently asked questions *prior* to the tutoring session.

This pre-tutoring information can be made available via handouts and published on the learning center's website. However, a more proactive approach can entail on-campus orientations or online readiness tutorials/modules. Incorporating the completion one of these prep sessions as a requirement before online tutoring can ensure a higher result of success for both the student and the tutor. Best practices should include, but not limited, to the following:

- Do not wait or hesitate! Participate in a tutoring session early in the semester. Seek assistance immediately after you first begin to experience difficulty in class. If you seek tutoring the day before an exam or when you feel that you are in danger of failing, it may be too late.
- Test your technology. Be ready with a webcam and speakers or a headset, if applicable.
- Choose a location. Prior to starting your session, plan ahead and choose a quiet location that allows you to concentrate and hear and communicate with the tutor.
- Read all pertinent material and try to work all parts of the assignment prior to the tutoring session. This will allow you to ask specific questions and pinpoint exactly where you may have difficulties.
- Gather course materials. Have at hand textbooks, notes, assignment guidelines, the syllabus, and other relevant information.
- Set reasonable goals about what can be accomplished. It is not realistic to ask questions about a semester's worth of material in one tutoring session,
- Be patient (particularly during busy times such as mid-terms, final exams, etc.).
- Assume responsibility. A tutor's role is to help and guide you, not to do the work for you.

The student should be prepared to actively participate and contribute to the tutoring session. According to Sabatino (2014), the following set of criteria can be used for an online tutoring session:

- The student provides information about the assignment;
- The student explains any concerns with the assignment and/or writing;
- The tutor and student determine the focus of the tutoring session;
- The student asks questions about his or her writing or assignment;
- There is a shift in the role of tutor and student;
- The student responds to feedback given by the tutor about the student's paper or assignment;
- The student makes revisions, corrections and/or additions to the assignment
- The tutor and student develop a plan for future revisions and/or tutoring;
- The student self-reflects.

The Tutor : Important and necessary skills tutors need to provide effective online tutoring Effective interaction and collaboration cannot happen without the skillful support and moderation of trained tutors. Tutors should be encouraged to spend less time on direct instruction

and more on facilitating constructive inquiry (Garrison *et al*, 2000). Tutors should learn to be good judges of when to guide, when to facilitate, when to question, and when to provide direct instruction. Research also suggests the online tutors should adopt both proactive and reactive strategies (Wong, Chin, Tan & Liu, 2010).

Scaffolding

According to Feng, Xie & Liu (2017), when it comes to creating an online tutoring program, one method is to design a structure of how guidance is to occur; also known as “learning scaffolds”. According to their research, successful scaffolding of online tutoring can be divided into three targets: social, teaching, and cognitive. Although all three targets should be utilized, the beginning of an online tutoring session should focus primarily on developing a social presence. This could involve a welcome or introduction, kind online discussion etiquette, and positive motivation and thoughts on a student’s progress and efforts. The mid phase of an online tutoring session should focus on the teaching presence. This includes focusing on the assignment and study material, providing learning support and explaining the links between learning activities and learning objectives. Finally, each tutoring session should focus on the cognitive presence in the final phase. This target can be reached by guiding students through self-reflection, exploring their own thinking and practice, and check for understanding.

Digital Badges

The term “digital badges” dates back to 2010 (Gibson *et al*, 2015). From the perspective of online tutoring, badges have the potential to motivate tutors, encourage reflection, and recognize skills that online tutors have acquired through practice (Hrastinski, Clevelan-Innes & Stenbom, 2018). The badges created can be targeted goals individualized to meet the needs of a particular campus, student population, and/or subject matter discipline.

Badges are earned when the tutor provides an example of a particular skill by submitting a copy of a chat discussion or transcript taken from an actual online tutoring session. The following are three examples that a tutor may use. The first badge focuses on the tutor skill to encourage discussion. Here, the tutor is encouraged to have conversations that emphasize discussion rather than direct instruction or lecturing. The tutor should ask questions and give the student time to explain their ideas. The second badge example is the tutor skill to encourage reflection. Here, the tutor’s conversations are to conclude with reflection of what she/he has learned. Finally, the third badge focuses on the tutor skill of providing emotional support. Here, the tutor’s conversations should illustrate encouragement that can help a student turn possible frustration into a productive dialogue.

Allowing a tutor to reflect on their own tutoring skills, while earning “digital badges”, can be a valuable training method and provide for quality assurance and promote progression in their skills and practices.

Videos

In educational settings, instructor/tutor-made videos can be used to supplement and reinforce previous instruction and aid students in mastering complex materials (He, Swenson, & Lents, 2012). Supplemental video lectures can complement classroom lectures, illustrate how to think through and solve problems, provide clarification, or give students an opportunity to review content they did not understand at their own pace and as often as needed to establish mastery of the material (Brecht, 2012).

With the invention of mobile devices, faster computer processors, and increased bandwidth, virtual tutoring has become more effective. Video creation is now possible for almost anyone to do with small digital video recorders, phones, or tablets. And these videos can be quickly and easily distributed on popular online services such as YouTube and Vimeo.

Video recordings are inexpensive and can be easily shared in online tutoring in which the student learns from observing others learn. Research indicates that watching a video of a tutor helping another student solve complex problems has shown to be effective. For example, when second-year physics students viewed a video of a simulated conversation between a student and tutor about quantum mechanical tunneling, they performed better on a post-test than others who had viewed alternative videos on the same topic in a traditional lecture format (Muller, Sharma, Eklund, and Reimann, 2007). Asking students to solve physics problems collaboratively while watching the video showed to be even more successful (Chi, 2013).

In all types of online tutoring, whether synchronous or asynchronous, there should exist a set of established guidelines for structure, expectations, roles and responsibilities and training for both tutors and tutees.

Online Tutoring Interfaces and Resource

Colleges may offer students the option of accessing both a proprietary online tutoring service such as Smarthinking (linked through MyPortal or other student registration management platform), as well as CVC-OEI's NetTutor (linked through Canvas online course management platform). De Anza College currently offers students access to online tutoring through both Smarthinking (accessed through MyPortal) as well as NetTutor (linked through Canvas). Other available proprietary online tutoring options, quoted from <https://www.onlineschools.org/online-tutoring/>:

Online Tutoring Options

As you might expect, there are a number of dedicated online tutoring services out there. Some reputable brick-and-mortar tutoring companies geared toward primary and secondary learners, such as Top Notch Tutoring, have even begun to supplement face-to-face work with online-only services. And many web-based college programs provide complimentary tutoring for enrolled

students; these institutions include Walden University, Kaplan University, and Strayer University.

In addition to these options, students and parents may choose from a wide selection of online, private tutoring companies. Here are three of the nation's leading providers below and included information related to their tutorial offerings, cost, platform, and relevance for different types of learners.

Tutor.com

This company offers a wide range of tutorial services aimed at K-12 students. Courses cover four core subjects — math, science, English, and social studies as well as advanced placement (AP) courses and SAT tutorials. Tutor.com has the following features:

- A user-friendly, synchronous platform
- An interactive whiteboard
- Chat functions
- File-sharing capabilities.
- There are three payment plans available:

The cost for tutor.com services are listed as follows:

- One hour (per month): \$39.99
- Two hours (per month): \$79.99
- Three hours (per month): \$114.99

The allotted time can be applied to any subject, and unused minutes may be rolled over to other courses. All three plans include 24/7 access (including mobile devices) and do not require any long-term contractual obligations. A money-back guarantee is offered to clients who are unsatisfied with Tutor.com services after a six-month window. Students belonging to families of active military service members may qualify for free tutorial services.

The tutors who work for this site include licensed teachers and professors, graduate students, and certified experts in their respective fields. The courses are specifically designed to help students achieve higher grades, complete their homework, and build self-confidence.

Smrthinking.com

This company specializes in tutorial services for college students and advanced high school-level learners. Courses cover nine different subject areas:

- Writing
- Reading
- Mathematics
- Science
- Business
- ESL
- Spanish
- Nursing and Allied Health
- Computers and Technology

Courses in English, ESL, and Spanish adhere to an asynchronous format, while the remaining subjects are taught using a live whiteboard that directly connects tutors and students. The price structure does not follow a month-by-month format; instead, students pay for a predetermined number of hours; any unused minutes expire after four months. Additionally, students pay to have tutors review materials they have written.

Smarthinking services are priced as follows:

- One hour of tutoring: \$35
- Four hours of tutoring: \$120
- One essay submission: \$19.95
- One long essay submission: \$34.95
- One SAT long essay review: \$9.95

According to the company's website, the average tutor has taught professionally for more than nine years, and 90% have an advanced degree in the subject they teach.

[De Anza College's Writing and Reading Center currently has an institutional contract with Smart Thinking which allows currently enrolled students to access up to 5 hours of tutoring per quarter with Smart Thinking:

<https://www.deanza.edu/studentssuccess/onlinetutoring/>]

eTutor

This site specializes in individualized tutorial services for K-12 students.

Courses for elementary, middle, and high school learners are divided into four categories that include more specific subjects:

- Mathematics: Algebra, Computation and Analysis, Probability and Statistics, Estimation and Measurement, and Geometry
- Language Arts: Listening, Literature, Reading, and Writing
- Science: Astronomy, Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Ecology, Geology, and Physics
- Social Studies: Economics, Geography, History, Politics, and Sociology

Learners can also choose from two different tutorial formats. The eTutor Independent Program uses a self-guided curriculum that allows students to learn at their own pace; students receive individualized instruction, and parents may request report cards to track their child's progress. The eTutor Guided One-2-One Program features coursework similar to the independent program, but requires students to interface with their tutor for at least one hour per week using real-time software.

Prices are determined by two factors: the tutorial format and the age of the student. Elementary learners who enroll in the independent program pay monthly tuition of \$149, while middle and high school students in the self-guided program pay \$249 per month. Elementary students who use the One-2-One format must pay \$249 per month, while middle and high school students in the program are charged \$399 per month.

Colleges may also develop their own local online tutoring service/site, but the effort and expense involved in doing so appears to be prohibitive. The California Virtual Campus - Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI) provides tutoring resources to augment other tutoring services/resources that local colleges may have. The OEI-Net Tutor site (<https://cvc.edu/cvc-oei-student-experience/tutoring/site>) has multiple links to the resources. As of this paper's publication, there are two services available:

1. The Net Tutor online on-demand service, where students can connect to a live tutor. Net Tutor also has an [Online Tutoring Handbook](#) with recommendations for faculty on how to encourage students' effective use of the service.
2. The LSI WorldWideWhiteboard tutoring platform, which provides all California Community Colleges a free system-wide license for use and training of the platform which can be used for students, faculty, and staff to collaborate and tutor online

Online Tutoring Center versus Online Resources

An online tutoring center would be a service/site/link accessible to students through the college's website, online course management platform (such as Canvas), or registration management platform (such as MyPortal). The online tutoring center would provide students fully online, on-demand, synchronous access to a live tutor. This differs from putting resources online on a college website, where students access such resources to help increase academic success, but are not accessing fully online, on-demand, synchronous access to a live tutor. Some very popular online resources for asynchronous tutoring/teaching videos are Khan Academy and Youtube.

Video Conferencing and Campus Services

Existing proprietary video conferencing services may be leveraged to deliver tutoring as well as other campus services, but the logistics of using such services would have to be set up locally.

Through the California Virtual Campus - Online Education Initiative (CVC-OEI), California Community Colleges have access to the following services:

LSI WorldWideWhiteboard tutoring platform: Provides all California Community Colleges a free system-wide license for use and training of the platform. The platform can be used for students, faculty, and staff to collaborate and tutor online.

Confer/Zoom <https://www.cccconfer.org/>: The California Community Colleges has set up a systemwide account and access for faculty and staff to CCC ConferZoom. Use of this service is feasible for faculty-student or staff-student online one-on-one or group tutoring or other synchronous services such as counseling, but because students currently may not set up free CCC Confer accounts, it is not feasible for student-student peer tutoring.

- College of the Canyons' faculty resource distance learning webpage for CCC Confer:
<https://www.canyons.edu/Offices/DistanceLearning/Pages/ConferZoom.aspx>
- Chabot College's pilot project using CCC Confer for online tutoring:
<https://www.chabotcollege.edu/learningconnection/ctl/FIGs/tutoring/onlinetutoring.asp>
- De Anza College, the Student Success Center tried to use CCCConfer for tutoring several years ago, and had big challenges with training tutors, as it was not user-friendly. It has improved since then, but further attempts to use updated CCCConfer platform has not been attempted due to the effort involved to schedule and train in-house student peer tutors.

Restrictions/Parameters Around Use of Services

In Progress

ADA Compliance

Online tutoring programs should have an understanding of challenges students might encounter in online tutoring. This includes English as Second Language learners or students working in noisy or quiet environments. Colleges must also ensure their online tutoring services are designed to support all students, including those with disabilities. Online tutoring services should include assistive technologies that can be integrated to support students who have vision, hearing, learning, attention, and mobility limitations. Programs should consult with their Disabled Student Offices when designing online tutoring programs to ensure their services are compliant with state and federal regulations.

Accreditation

According to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), accredited institutions are most successful when curriculum, programs and services foster student learning and achievement via data informed program design, implementation, and assessment. The ACCJC recommends four standards as a framework to promote student success (2014). These include: Standard I: Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity; Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Support Services; Standard III: Resources; and Standard IV: Leadership and Governance. While all standards are important, the following section will focus on the second standard of Student Learning Programs and Support Services.

Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Support Services

Effective online tutoring programs goals and outcomes should be aligned with the overall mission of the institution to ensure high quality programming, student learning, and adequate use of resources. Moreover, online tutoring programs should support the fields of study specific to each institution. This includes developing strong channels of communication between online tutoring programs and academic departments to ensure that the goals, learning outcomes, expectations and standards are understood and aligned.

Online tutoring programs that are designed using short- and long-term goals, learning outcomes, and a continuous assessment of services create opportunities for a highly successful comprehensive program review focused on student development and achievement. For example, colleges can collect student demographic data (i.e. gender, age, major, course, enrollment status, units completed, degree goal, grade point average, etc) and affective outcomes detailing students feelings and attitudes of services (availability of tutors, program hours, validation, technology, etc.). Community colleges can use student data to market tutoring programs, improve technology services, increase access and engagement, track student learning, and create professional development opportunities.

Conclusion

The CCC serves a diverse group of students with a diverse range of needs. To help students achieve their goals, programs and services must be aligned with system wide initiatives, informed by data driven pedagogy, and assessed regularly to ensure student learning and achievement. This paper sought to inform community college stakeholders on effective practices for online tutoring. As research continues to grow in this field, so too should programs and their development of services aimed at supporting students both inside and outside of the classroom.

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