In Fall 2013 I participated as a Dedicated Tutor in one section of English 120AC, in its second semester as a pilot accelerated English course. I worked with instructor Meg Pasquel, while another tutor, Booh Edouardo, participated as a Dedicated Tutor for the section taught by Blaze Woodlief. We each were paid for 5 hours/week, tutoring in and out of class, attended most class sessions, and developed workshops which we taught during class time using an additional 15 hours for professional development.

Activities and Use of Hours

I attended class for two hours nearly every Monday and many Wednesdays, and was available on a very flexible basis before and after class on both days for meetings with students. I also provided my email address and frequently emailed back and forth with students. Students also came by regularly during my scheduled hours in the Writing Center, where I worked 6 hours a week on the days that the class did not meet. Both email availability and additional Writing Center hours were essential in terms of providing enough support and flexibility for students.

Changes from Previous Semester

In the second semester that this course was offered, some changes were made to DT duties and hours. Booh and I both felt that we needed to have at least the flexibility in our schedules to attend all class meetings and to be available both, if not four days a week on campus.

The hours designated to develop specific workshops and lessons which we offered in class were a slight change from the previous semester and were very successful. These workshops were developed after consulting with instructors about student needs. Teaching time in the classroom made students more comfortable with DTs and more likely to consult with us both in and out of class. Moreover, familiarity with the course material, carried over from the previous semester in my case, allowed us to anticipate student needs particular to each essay and develop workshops that were tailored to these issues.

In-Class Workshops

I developed two intensive workshops, one on quoting, and another on incorporating a rebuttal into an argumentative research paper, which I presented to the class. Both were developed as PowerPoint presentations with accompanying worksheets and could easily be modified for other classes and will be made available to other dedicated tutors online. I incorporated material from a section of English 150 into the quoting workshop to improve upon the “quote sandwich” model, and developed the rebuttal workshop using explanations of common fallacies in argumentative writing. These workshops were designed to better prepare students in advance for material covered in English 150 and English 155. Booh taught workshops on writing attention-grabbing introductions, creating PowerPoint presentations, and using text-to-speech readers for revision and proofreading. Students responded enthusiastically to these workshops.
and effectively applied the new skills to their final essays in ways which we felt were quite impressive. These workshops also cemented tutor-student relationships and increased student use of the dedicated tutors outside of class.

Email Policies

I established deadlines by which students needed to email me in order to receive feedback and give me enough time to respond. I usually responded with detailed comments in a Word document or within the email text itself, but also used Gmail Documents to edit and comment on documents in realtime with students. I recommend that future DTs in this and any other course train students to use MS Office comments and/or Gmail Docs as an improvement on email document editing.

Some students who worked full time or had two jobs, or whose schedules otherwise would not have allowed them to get tutoring, took advantage of this option consistently. For others, the email option provided them with a better way to get last minute advice or help over the weekend when I could not meet them on campus.

Email can be problematic and time-consuming, however, if basic ideas aren’t yet clear. A future video-chatting option would be an interesting addition to the DT’s repertoire.

Recommendations

Tutor presence in class as much as possible was essential for the establishment of rapport with students. Booh and I both put in many volunteer hours to make this possible, going above and beyond in order to ensure that students in the accelerated classes received the support they needed. We both felt that attending all class sessions was important. The instructors felt that our presence enabled us to have a better understanding of and response to student needs; we could contribute to discussions of readings, explain material in a different way, and otherwise act as co-teachers in certain aspects of the class.

Professional development hours for creating workshops to be delivered in-class were also a great boon to our success this semester. Students commented that workshops were very helpful and that they would have liked to see more of them. Students were extremely attentive and appreciative of the intensive workshopping of certain aspects of their papers. Workshops should be specifically designed to complement difficult or novel aspects of each essay. In the future, workshop development time might also be spent on creating mini-lessons that combat grammar issues which plague College of Marin English students.

Out-of-class tutoring services were most utilized when papers were due (5/semester), and we needed to be available as much as possible during these times, in addition to attending class. At 10 hours/paper, on average, and 3-4 hours/week in class, along with the workshop development hours, I would advise for an increase of hours for DTs of this accelerated course.
Since student interest/availability is so variable from week to week and semester to semester, DTs who also work as ISs in the Writing Center can maximize their availability without having to provide their services on a volunteer basis. A DT who was only available on campus for the budgeted 5 hours a week would find that this limited availability hampered the effectiveness of the program.

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