TUTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

This handout highlights those aspects that are frequently recognized in successful tutor-student relationships: (1) building trust, (2) maintaining high and explicit expectations, (3) successfully dealing with resistance and self handicapping behaviors, and (4) preserving boundaries. The main-points are tutors should:

- Look for student strengths.
- Don't expect miracles.
- Don't be afraid to ask.

Building Trust
There are at least four facets involved in building trust: modeling competence, displaying consistency, remaining honest, and empowering the student. Below are suggestions of how to achieve these principles in your sessions.
- **Modeling Competence**:
  - *Spend time planning and organizing for the sessions* to avoid confusion or uncertainty about what is to go on in the sessions. Start each session by asking the student to read the assignment from his planner or course syllabus. Then start the work for the session.
  - *Model organization for the student*. Be organized during the sessions. Your papers and notebook should be neat and organized and you should follow your plan for the session.
  - *Keep planner* and make sure the student sees you use it for appointments and assignments. Note, the planner does not have to a hard copy version, but could be on your phone, for example.
  - *Make sure that the student has some success in every session*. This will show student that the instruction is working
  - *Make specific assignments for the next session*. After planning the work for the next session write it down in your planner and have the student write it down in his/her planner. You may also want him /her to repeat the assignment to make sure he/she understands what is expected for the next session.
  - *Devote initial sessions to planning and organizing* for the semester.
- **Consistency**
  - *Maintain consistency* in activities across sessions. Stick with skills to be focused on and avoid abrupt shifting to other skills or activities.
  - *Maintain organization*. The first session of the week should be devoted to the homework for that week and organizing for the rest of the week.
  - *Keep up with course syllabi*.
  - *Do not deviate from assigned work* at a session except in special cases.
  - *Maintain a regular time and place* for the sessions. Avoid canceling sessions and changing times.
  - Always <u>be on time</u> for the sessions.
- **Honesty**
  - *Follow through* on all your promises.

     o *Admit fallibility*. Admit it when you don't know something and explain that learning for you often requires time and hard work.

- **Empower Student**
  - *Allow* the student <u>choices</u> of activities whenever possible.
  - *Praise* student contributions whenever possible.
  - *Let the student be the teacher*. Ask them to make up questions on his/her readings and to teach you about the content of his/her classes.
  - *Assume you can trust the* student until their behavior shows you otherwise.

Maintain High and Explicit Expectations
- **Academic Expectations**
  - *Set high but reasonable course grade expectations*.
  - *Discuss the rationale for striving for high grades*. The best rationale is that the student has the ability to make this grade and thus by achieving it the student will be living up to their potential. Less preferable reasons include that the course may be marked on a curve making it difficult or impossible to predict how much work will produce a passing grade, so working extra hard makes strategic sense. Also a B will balance off a D or F and act as insurance against falling below the 2.0 that is necessary for eligibility.
- **Behavioral Expectations**
  - *Make behavioral expectations explicit in the initial sessions*. These include taking class and sessions seriously, punctuality for sessions, no unexcused absences, be prepared for sessions. If you use a written contract put these expectations into the contract.
  - *Make explicit the ground rules for emergency help*
  - *Review expectations periodically*
  - *Set student expectations of tutor*. In order for expectations to be more reciprocal, the tutor should discuss with the student what the student can expect from the tutor such as punctuality, consistency, etc.,

Resistance and Self Handicapping Behavior
- **General Policies**
  - *Be very strict at the beginning*. It is important that the tone of the sessions and the tutor-student relationship be established at the outset. The tone at the beginning should be business-like and strict.
  - *Discuss a problem the <u>first</u> time as it occurs*.
  - *Establish a plan with your student to solve the problem*.
  - *If a problem persists, (more than a week) discuss it in the weekly meetings or bring it up privately with the tutorial coordinator*. A meeting with the student and your the tutorial coordinator may be necessary.
  - *In judging the validity of a student excuse, think about the student's priorities*. Students who are mandated to attend tutoring need to recognize that it takes priority over their athletic obligations. Again, a meeting with the student, your the tutorial coordinator may be necessary. A second criterion is the believability of the excuse.
- **Specific Problems**

- *Student Unprepared for Session*
  - Don't get angry but be firm.
  Discuss the reasons the student was unprepared.
    - If reason is not very good (I forgot, etc, tell the student go back to their dorm and get the materials they forgot.
    - If the student has brought the materials, but hasn't done the work. You can sit with them while they does their work.
    - As a less desirable alternative, you can have a back up lesson on some skill from homework assignments that needs to be covered.
    - If problem persists (more than a week) discuss it in the weekly meetings or bring it up privately with the tutorial coordinator.
- *Student Late for Session*. A student is late if they arrive more than ten minutes after the agreed upon starting time.
  - Find out why the student was late to see if the excuse is reasonable.
  - Remind student of your time constraints.
  - Tell student that they need to call/text if they will be late.
  - Don't provide extra time to make up for tardiness.
  - Tell student that in the future that you will only wait 10 minutes and you will leave and it will count as a missed session. You need to follow through on your threat.
  - If tardiness persists notify the tutorial coordinator.
- *Missed Session*. Advance notice required. Students should be instructed that you must be notified in advance if he/she can't come to a session and that the reason for missing a session must be acceptable.
  - Develop a procedure for giving advance notice. Make sure the student knows how to reach you. Give the student your telephone number or e-mail or some other way to leave a message for you. Also make sure he/she knows how to reach you on the day of the session. We want to avoid the possibility of the student leaving a message about the need to miss a session which you don't get. You also want the student to feel responsible for contacting you and to follow a procedure that will insure that you get the message.
  - Acceptable Excuses: illness, medical issues, family problems requiring the student to be away from school and team travel.
  - <u>Unacceptable Excuses:</u> Forgot, overslept, and unscheduled team activity or meeting. Notify tutorial coordinator if this happens.
- *Strategies for Missed Sessions:* Notify the tutorial coordinator when student misses a session without advance warning or an acceptable excuse and make sure to log a "No Show" report.
  - Assume student will show up at the next agreed upon session.
  - It is not a good idea to call the student to find out why they missed a session. <u>Let him/her call you.</u> It is the student's responsibility to get in touch with you to explain absence. Calling may only reinforce the belief that others will do things for them and that they don't have to be responsible.
  - At next session ask for explanation. Remind student that the

sessions need to be given priority over other activities and that they need to at a minimum call/text you in advance. Go over acceptable

excuses.

- Explain that you are a student and have your own work to do and have only a limited amount of time to work. Thus arriving late, missing sessions, wasting time at the sessions etc. puts an extra burden on you as well as decreasing the amount of help the student receives.

Requests For Emergency Help
Some students will have a tendency to do assignments particularly papers at the last minute and will want to change the agenda for a session to get emergency help. They will come into the session without having done the agreed upon work and ask for help on the paper or other assignment that is due the next day or in a few days. This is also an example of self handicapping behavior, in which the marginally or less than acceptable work can be excused by lack of time to do a good job.

In general, **DO NOT provide emergency help**, especially if the assignment is one that the student should have known about and could have planned for. It is important to stick to the assigned work whenever possible. If you help students, they may get the idea that they don't have to prepare for the sessions and plan ahead for course assignments. You risk having the student do it again. Explain to the student that you won't help if they are not prepared and your job is not to do the work for them but for them to learn to do the work themselves.

Strategies to limit Emergency Help:
This problem should not arise very often if semester planning and organization has been emphasized and if time has been devoted in each session to looking ahead at upcoming papers and exams and beginning the assignments and making them part of the session agenda. However, there will be times when a paper assignment comes up without much advance warning. In these cases you may change the agenda and help the student if the following conditions are met:
- The assignment is one that is truly unexpected and the student could not have planned for it in advance. For example, sometime professors will not give paper topics until the last minute so the student has a short time period (e.g. less than a week) to write it.
- The student has done some preliminary work on the assignment and is not waiting for you to do it for him/her.
- You inform the student that this is special help and it won't become a habit.

Cheating and Plagiarizing
Students will sometimes engage in activities that cross over the line between legitimate and illegitimate academic behavior. These activities range from asking other students to write papers for them, copying other students work and handing it in as their own, cheating on exams, or plagiarizing from books. This latter behavior is sometimes the result of students not knowing where the line is between legitimate and illegitimate

behavior. Other times it is a more deliberate attempt to not do the work because the student has decided to take the easy way out. Plagiarizing is a serious offense that can make the student subject to dismissal.

Strategies to limit plagiarism:
- Discuss at some point early in the semester what is acceptable and unacceptable and how serious unacceptable behavior is.
- Do no accuse the student of plagiarizing. It can be delicate matter that could sour the tutor relationship.
- If you think the student is cheating or plagiarizing bring it to the attention of the tutorial coordinator.

Maintaining boundaries
Entering students are typically overwhelmed by the demands they face during their first year at university. This is the first time many have lived in a dormitory situation away from home. The academic demands are much higher than they are accustomed to and there is much less structure. These problems are especially difficult for under prepared students. Because of the time intensive, individual and personal nature of the relationship the student may have unrealistic expectations about the amount and nature of the assistance the tutor will provide.

It is important that the tutor not feel responsible for "rescuing" the student.

Strategies to Maintain Academic Boundaries
- No matter how desperate the student appears do not type for the student, or write portions of papers, provide students with notes or do any work the student can do.
- When the student makes a request for help and you are not sure whether it is appropriate, ask yourself the following question. Am I helping the student become an independent learner by doing this or am I trying to "rescue" them making them more dependent.
- Consult the tutorial coordinator if you are still unsure about the legitimacy of a request.

Overview and Strategies to maintain Personal Boundaries
Because of the impersonal nature of CAL and because the tutor and student might spend a lot of time together the tutor-student relationship may become an intensely personal one. Maintaining boundaries between the tutor's professional and personal relationship can be a problem. The student may make requests for help with personal problems.

The student may share personal information and activities some of which the tutor may find inappropriate. Some students come from environments that are pretty homogeneous; urban ghettos, small town rural, upper middle class white communities etc. They may be unaccustomed to dealing with the diversity that they find at university. They may come in with sexist, racist, anti-white, or homophobic attitudes. They may express these ideas in the tutor sessions.

- You need to let the student know where you stand on these issues without trying to change their ideas.
- If the student confides in the tutor about behavior that may be unethical such as plagiarism or potentially illegal activities, you can express your personal view on the matter without being overly moralistic or disapproving. You should also consult with the tutorial coordinator if you are concerned.
- Avoid any personal involvement with the student that might interfere with the instruction. Do not lend the student money or buy them notebooks or other school supplies. If they need supplies and don't seem to have the money to buy them consult with their advisor. They will find a way get the supplies.
- <u>Confidentiality</u> All personal and academic information about the students conveyed in the sessions and in our tutor meetings should be treated as <u>confidential.</u> Do not discuss student's grades, probationary status or other aspects of the student's academic performance with anyone outside of the tutor meetings or with other support staff. The student you may be working with may be a high profile athlete who is a public figure of sorts. Particular caution needs to be observed for these students.

<u>Overview and Strategies to maintain Athletic-Academic Boundaries</u>

When tutoring student athletes one instructional principle involves relating course work to the student's own experiences. Obviously one area where the student has a lot of knowledge and interest is in sports. Thus, showing how concepts have their analogy in the students sports life can make concepts more meaningful to students and easier to learn. However, this is a two edged sword. By trying to relate course work to athletics, the student may feel demeaned, because it may suggest that the student is only an athlete and not capable of being a normal student.

- *Academics come first.* It is important under all circumstances to make it clear that as far as you are concerned academics has priority.
- *Athletic- academic problems.* If the student brings up a problem in the athletic area, the tutor can be a sympathetic listener and try to help out if the issue affects academics. The most common problem is a time conflict between practice and classes or assignments that are due. The procedure to be followed is for the student athlete to try to work through the conflict with his or her coach. If that fails then the tutor should bring the matter to the attention of the tutorial coordinator, and the student's advisor.
- *In general it is better if the tutor does <u>not</u> <u>initiate</u> conversations about the student's individual or team athletic performance.*
- *If student brings up the team and his performance, it is acceptable to show some minimal interest and spend only a few minutes discussing the issue at the end of the session.* It is important to not let it distract from the academic work of the session.

Provide Structure

One major task that you face with your students is to help them develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning as they meet the academic demands at university. Beyond the pure intellectual demands there are other structural or procedural demands which act as a prerequisite to succeeding academically. These includes meeting paper and other homework deadlines, attending classes, organizing study time, tutoring notes, preparing for exams.

- Emphasize planning.
- Make sure the student to uses a semester and weekly/daily planner.
- Try to refer to one of these in every session.
- Add keeping and using planners to the contract obligations.
- Model organization.

Emphasize organization and planning

One of the major problems students have is managing and organizing their time and planning ahead. This is an area that will need much work. Organization and planning should be made part of each tutoring session.

- Plan ahead for the next session. At the end of each session the tutor and student should agree upon what the agenda will be for the next session. This agenda should include a specific assignment in which the student has to do something to prepare for the session.
- Write it down. Make sure the student writes down the assignment in their planner.
- Make sure student brings their planner to each session. the student needs to get in the habit of having planner accessible and to actually use it on a regular basis.
- Periodically help students organize their notebooks and papers.
- Help the student learn to set priorities. This includes estimating how long assignments will take, deciding how much time should be devoted to each assignment , long term or short term; deciding which assignments need to be completed first.