

Tutoring Services: The Student Experience at Cuyamaca College

December 2022

Background and Purpose of the Study

Cuyamaca College's Tutoring Services partnered with the Institutional Effectiveness, Success, and Equity Office (IESE) to conduct focus groups with students to learn about their experiences and knowledge of Cuyamaca College's Tutoring Center. The purpose of this project was to learn about students' experiences and identify institutional barriers to student success in order to gather suggestions for improving services, processes, and support at Cuyamaca College through an equity lens.

Focus Group Participants and Protocol

A total of 13 students participated in four separate one-hour focus groups. Focus group participants included students enrolled as of census in Fall 2022 classes. Focus group participants were placed into one of three groups:

- Group 1 - Tutoring experience (attended more than one session in the last year)
- Group 2 - Tutoring experience (received tutoring services only once or haven't received tutoring services in the last year)
- Group 3 - No tutoring experience

Each participant received a \$20 gift card for their participation. Two members of the IESE office attended each session, with one acting as facilitator and the other as the note-taker. The focus group protocol is included in the [Appendix](#), along with the different question sets for each group.

Summary of the Findings

Students shared feedback about their experiences with Tutoring Services at Cuyamaca College, including communications about tutoring, access and barriers to tutoring, impressions of tutoring, and recommendations. Approximately 89% of students who answered stated that they initially heard about tutoring services through their professor. Among students who were seeking tutoring services, one student reported they were unable to access in-person tutoring for their enrolled course. Students accessed tutoring both online and in person, and liked the flexibility of being able to request and access tutoring in person or online. A number of students expressed a desire to receive in-person tutoring, but many of these students indicated they had schedules that prevent them from doing so. Approximately 90% of focus group participants had not heard of NetTutor Services provided by Cuyamaca College. Of those students who had not heard about NetTutor services, when asked if they would be interested in using this service in the future, all indicated they were interested or somewhat interested in using NetTutor in the future. Students' primary concern was that the tutoring appointments did not allow enough time to cover all of the material students wanted to cover. Overall, students felt tutoring had a

positive impact on their success and indicated they would recommend tutoring to other students.

➤ Communication, Barriers, and Student Impressions

How Students Learn About Tutoring Services and What Led Them There

When asked how they first heard about tutoring services at Cuyamaca College, eight out of nine students said they heard about tutoring services first from a professor. One student explained their professor offered extra credit to practice speaking Spanish with a tutor, which motivated them to continue to use tutoring services regularly (once a week). Some students used tutoring to improve their writing by having their essays for English, English as a Second Language (ESL), or Arabic reviewed. Other students used tutoring to better understand course material and study for tests. Among focus group participants, tutoring services were utilized for the following disciplines: Child Development, Communication, Arabic, English, Spanish, Chemistry, and Math.

When participants who received tutoring services more than once were asked, “What led you to return for additional services?” participants shared this feedback:

- *“To just help me with things that I don’t understand. I always use it with any class that gives me essays.”*
- *“I use it mainly for essay help. Or if I have specific questions, especially because I am finishing biology and physics, and I need to dive back into tutoring. I need as much assistance through tutoring as I can get.”*
- *“Learning a new language, it’s good to practice with a native [speaker], not only can I get help with an assignment, and I can hear pronunciations and all that is very beneficial. I also take online courses. With tutoring services, it seems like they are available at the times that work for me.”*

Responses for these focus group questions were similar across both Groups 1 and 2, which included students with tutoring experience who attended more than one tutoring session in the last year, received tutoring services only once, or haven't received tutoring services in the last year.

Impressions of Tutoring Services: Students Who Had Not Utilized Tutoring

Students in Group 3, who had no prior tutoring experience at Cuyamaca College, were asked questions regarding barriers to accessing tutoring services and their impressions of tutoring services.

All students stated that there were no institutional barriers preventing them from receiving tutoring services if they were interested in receiving them. One student, who was returning to

school after taking some time off, said they “had a personal barrier,” and it was their lack of confidence that was preventing them from feeling comfortable enough to reach out for assistance after being out of school for so long.

Of the three students who provided their overall impression of tutoring services at Cuyamaca College, one student had no impression, one student had a positive impression, and the third student had a negative impression that prevented them from seeking tutoring services in the future. This student's negative impression stemmed from an online tutoring session for Math at another local college. The student said the tutor was rude and did not help them understand the material, resulting in a negative tutoring experience. In addition, this participant said they had friends who also had negative tutoring experiences at another local college. The student concluded by saying, “Now I feel that all tutors are not professional....”

When asked which circumstances would lead them to seek out tutoring, students said that it mostly depended on the difficulty of their current coursework and whether or not they felt they needed assistance understanding the material or completing assignments.

➤ Access to and Student Experience with Tutoring Services

Access to Tutoring Services

Eight out of 10 students received tutoring services online, one student received tutoring services both online and in person, and one student received tutoring services in person. Students who received services exclusively online stated it was due to convenience and that their schedules prevent them from being able to attend tutoring in person. Five out of 10 students preferred online tutoring services, compared to four out of 10 students who preferred in-person tutoring services. Please note that some students stated they preferred in-person services but were unable to attend due to their work schedules or other responsibilities, such as child care. There was one student who preferred to receive both online and in-person services, depending on the subject. Another student, discussed more fully below in the *Student Experiences with Tutoring* section, reported in-person tutoring for their course was unavailable.

Participant responses on this topic included the following:

- *“I choose online because I am a working adult.”*
- *“I did it online because I work.”*
- *“I didn't use in-person tutoring because I cannot go.”*
- *“Before COVID it was better in person, but after COVID, it is better [for me] to be online.”*
- *“I prefer in person because I can discuss with the tutor and she can write for and in person is better.”*

- *"I prefer in person because they help me improve my essays."*
- *"[I] received tutoring online, but felt like it was a waste because tutoring for Chemistry should be done in person... No tutoring is available in person for [my] course."*

Similarly, students in Group 3 with no prior tutoring experience were asked if they would prefer in-person or online tutoring. All participants stated that they preferred to receive tutoring online if they were interested in receiving tutoring sessions in the future. Please note that the students in the group all take online or a combination of online and in-person courses, which they indicated worked better for their schedules.

Students across all groups (Groups 1, 2, and 3) were asked about their experience with NetTutor, if any. All students except for one stated that they were unfamiliar with NetTutor's services. The one student said they thought their Economics professor might have mentioned it in class, but that they had never used it. After briefly explaining NetTutor's purpose, all students expressed some level of interest in future use.

Tutoring Services Appointment Preferences

Eight out of ten students preferred to request tutoring appointments online through email, the online form, or canvas. The other two students preferred to make an appointment in person.

One student expressed their frustration with having to request a new appointment every week, and suggested that there be an option to request a recurring appointment throughout the semester or a consecutive number of weeks.

Student Experiences with Tutoring

Across all groups (Groups 1, 2, and 3), only two students reported having negative experiences with tutoring. As mentioned earlier, one student had a bad experience with another local college's tutoring services, which impacted their outlook on tutoring services in general. The other student was unable to receive in-person tutoring services for a Chemistry course because there were no in-person tutors available. However, the student indicated they were able to receive tutoring online instead, but that it was difficult to learn the material over Zoom. Other participants reported positive experiences, and some shared detailed examples, which are shared below.

- *"First I got this person and requested her to speak Spanish instead of English. She has been really professional and friendly. I felt connected with her even through Zoom. I request her through Zoom and she knows how I learn. I see her once or twice a week. She makes me feel very comfortable. She is energetic and enthusiastic to help the students, her name is Nancy."*
- *"I shared my screen to go over my speech with my tutor. She told me what I could fix, or alter, talking over a phone. I am more of a visual student, so just having Zoom available benefited me a lot."*

➤ Student Impact

Recommending Tutoring to Other Students

All students in Groups 1 and 2 said they would recommend tutoring to other students, including the one student who reported having a negative experience because they were unable to get in-person tutoring for their needed course. Students recommend tutoring if someone is struggling with a particular subject, and for additional help with writing and essays. One student said they would recommend tutoring because one day in class, after a tutoring session, it made them "...[feel] like a superstar because [they] knew the answer and felt like [they] understood it."

Tutoring Impact on Course Success

Participants in Group 1, who had received more than one tutoring session in the last year, were asked if they thought tutoring services had an impact on their course success. All students except one concluded that they thought it did have a positive impact on their course success. One student said that you can bring your grade up an entire letter grade by using tutoring. Other students mentioned that it had contributed to overall improved grades and GPAs. The one student who did not believe tutoring had an impact on their course success said it was due to the online tutoring format and the tutoring sessions not being long enough.

➤ Student Recommendations

The following action items were among students' suggestions to improve the student tutoring experience at Cuyamaca College:

Consider Extending the Length of Some Tutoring Sessions

- *30-minute and one-hour tutoring sessions are not long enough to cover the material students needed to cover.*

Increase Tutoring Availability and Scheduling

- *Have at least two tutors available for every course.*
- *Provide students the option of meeting with tutors in person and online for their course.*
- *Provide more information to students about NetTutor.*
- *Provide an option to schedule recurring tutoring appointments on the same day and time of the week.*

Build a Strong Reputation

- *Work with Grossmont Tutoring to improve tutoring for students, and/or differentiate Grossmont and Cuyamaca Tutoring Services.*

Appendix: Focus Group Protocol

Script for Facilitator

Overview:

Welcome everyone, and thank you for joining us. My name is [name], and my colleague's name is [name]. We are from Cuyamaca College's Institutional Effectiveness, Success, and Equity Office, and we are conducting a study to learn about students' experiences at Cuyamaca College. We are going to treat this as a group discussion today. I will serve as your discussion facilitator and will ask you a few questions. We would like you to talk about each question while [name] and I take notes on what you are saying.

Once we have interviewed several groups of students about their experiences, the feedback we receive will be compiled, and a summary will be prepared for the College. Please be assured that no comments will be linked to any specific person, and no names will be included in summaries. This information is being collected in order to improve student experiences at Cuyamaca College.

Ground Rules:

- Before we begin, I'd like to mention a few ground rules for our discussion:
- I will be asking questions about your experience and/or thoughts on tutoring services at Cuyamaca College.
- Please feel free to speak up and share your thoughts. We are interested in hearing your opinions based on your personal experience.
- There are no right or wrong answers, so please provide your honest opinion, even if it is different from someone else's point of view.
- Please raise your hand when you would like to speak.
- If you don't want to answer a particular question, that is okay.
- We want to hear everything you have to say, but we also want to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.
- We also need to cover all the questions, so please keep this in mind in case we need to end one discussion a bit abruptly to move on to the next question.
- We will try to catch up with you later if you have a point that you would like to discuss more fully.
- Our discussion will last about one hour.
- Feel free to turn on your camera, if you feel comfortable doing so. If you would rather leave your camera off, that is okay, too. We will not be using the chat, so please share your responses verbally.
- Does anyone have any questions before we start?

Focus Group Questions:

Group 1 - No Tutoring experience (slides with questions):

Topic:	Question:
Student Introductions	What is your name? How long have you been a student at Cuyamaca College? What is your major or program of study?
Communication, Barriers, and Student Impressions	How did you first find out about tutoring services?
	What initially led you to seek out tutoring?
	What led you to return to tutoring for additional services?
Access and Student Experience	For those who received tutoring, did you receive services online or in person? What was your experience like?
	What is the easiest way for you to request a tutoring appointment?
	Would you recommend tutoring to other students? Why or why not?
	How would you prefer to receive tutoring for Cuyamaca classes in the future?
	Have you used NetTutor services through Cuyamaca College?
Student Impact	Did receiving tutoring services impact your success in the course? Why or why not?

Group 2 - Tutoring experience - received tutoring services only once or have received tutoring services, but not in the last year (slides with questions):

Topic:	Question:
Student Introductions	What is your name? How long have you been a student at Cuyamaca College? What is your major or program of study?
Communication, Barriers, and Student Impressions	How did you first find out about tutoring services?
	What initially led you to seek out tutoring?
	For those who received tutoring, did you receive services online or in person? What was your experience like?

Access and Student Experience	What would be the easiest way for you to request a tutoring appointment if you were interested in receiving services in the future?
	Would you recommend tutoring to other students? Why or why not?
	How would you prefer to receive tutoring in the future?
	Have you used NetTutor services through Cuyamaca College?
Student Impact	Did receiving tutoring services impact your success in the course? Why or why not?
Student Recommendations	Which changes can be made to tutoring that would impact you seeking out services in the future?

Group 3 - Tutoring experience - more than one session in the last year ([slides](#) with questions):

Topic:	Question:
Student Introductions	What is your name? How long have you been a student at Cuyamaca College? What is your major or program of study?
Communication, Barriers, and Student Impressions	What is your impression of tutoring services at Cuyamaca College?
	Are there any barriers that prevented you from using tutoring services?
	Is there a circumstance that would lead you to seek out tutoring?
Access and Student Experience	What would be the easiest way for you to request a tutoring appointment if you were interested in receiving services in the future?
	Have you heard of NetTutor services available through Cuyamaca College?

Conclusion:

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with your honest feedback. You will receive a \$20 Target gift card for your participation today, which will be emailed to you by the end of the semester. Please contact us if you have any questions about these focus groups and how your responses will be shared with college staff.

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