Feedback from tutors (5 responses received)

Not sure if this would fit into the policy, but it would be nice to include something to do with the support of the school when there are problem students. I know of several people who have been threatened or treated inappropriately by students and it was not clear what the schools responsibility to the tutors there was. I had an incident two years ago where a student was very aggressive and threatening to me and I reported it to the school and that was the last I heard of things. It might be nice for tutors to be aware that they do have the support of the school when incidents like this occur.

Again, might not be relevant for this document. Other than that the rest of it looks good.

This is a great idea! I think under "Rights of Tutors" where it says that tutors should "have teaching materials for each session at least one working day before the first session" should be changed to a slightly longer period of time, as one day is not much if you want to prepare and be able to ask questions in between your own work.

Also, this year, first year tutorials were allocated before TAS was opened. This seemed a bit inequitable as it meant everyone did not get the same chance to apply for tutoring. It would be good if the application and selection process were the same for everyone so that everyone gets the same opportunity to apply for tutoring.

I have some minor feedback on the tutors rights and responsibilities document.

In the first section: Responsibilities

Many units do not yet use Turnitin and many tutors have not yet had the opportunity to be shown how to use this program - perhaps a note should be added that training will be made available.

As for timely return of assignments, I know of a couple of occasions where it took a number of days for assignments to be made ready by the office for tutor collection and so I'm wondering whether it isn't more appropriate to say something like: that tutors will have 2 weeks from the point at which assignments are made available for collection.

I would also add a point under responsibilities to say something like: that tutors will make reasonable arrangements to meet with students to discuss academic issues (outside of class time), i.e. a set meeting hour. I'm not sure how exactly to word this.

In the Tutors section I would clarify the 'to be treated with patience and respect' such that it makes explicit that this refers to both treatment by staff and students.
Lastly, while I think the Lecture Opportunities aspect is commendable, I wonder whether codifying it makes it too hard to execute practically. There are a lot of tutors at the moment, the numbers don't look like decreasing, and that potentially means a lot of lectures. While I understand that it is an 'opportunity' and therefore may not be taken up by all, it does look good on the CV so I imagine that a fair few PhD's may wish to take you up on this - are enough slots available?

Great to see the TLC moving on the policy guide for tutors! Out if interest I consulted that ancient document raising some concerns about the part time teaching experience, produced by a bunch of tutors (including me) many years ago. You may remember it? Things have changed a bit since then but I was most encouraged to see many of the concerns we raised being addressed in this new policy document.

I just thought I'd mention a few things for the TLC to consider.

1. Given that tutors are expected to meet the marking deadlines it would appear reasonable to include, in the Rights of Tutors, an expectation that they receive marking guides etc in a timely fashion to meet these objectives.
2. Include some statement relating to treating fellow tutors in a collegial fashion (e.g. fostering a team attitude among tutors working on a unit)
3. In our original document one of the key concerns among tutors was that they were not always clear about what were "reasonable" and "unreasonable " requests/expectations from students (e.g. Availability, provision of materials for students missing labs etc) and would have liked some guidance from course-coordinators. I guess this kind of thing might be covered in training or be able to be raised in meetings? But it could be worth making it explicit somewhere in the policy that course-coordinators will advise tutors on what they broadly consider to be reasonable and unreasonable requests. This would aid in the consistency of student experience across lab/tutorial groups too.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL

All appear to be fair enough!
Something that may be useful to better enable tutors to meet some of the expectations is a formal document which provides information about such things as:
- University policy on academic conduct
- School policies on assignments such as extension requests, late penalties, and penalties for exceeding a set word limit
- WebCT
- Turnitin
- Online Class Registration Software (OLCR)
- Unit Information Management System (UIMS)
- Expected deadlines for the return of marked assignments
- Available student support services (e.g., LL&RS, Counseling)

Whilst I concede that this information can be obtained by tutors by digging around on the internet for hours... A document that includes all this information for tutors would ensure that the expectations are met, and would make life easier for everybody. It would take a bit of work getting the document prepared, but once prepared it would become an invaluable resource for tutors.
Other information about tutor selection procedures and payment would be useful info to also include in this document.

RIGHTS OF TUTORS

I think that is a really good thing having ‘to be treated with patience and respect’ and ‘to be given professional regard as important members of the School’s teaching program’ as part of the expectations.

Something missing… which could be added is a right to receive detailed information regarding payment for tutorial teaching work.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

“To have access to training courses that develop their teaching skills”
- More advertisements (e.g., via post-grad mailing list) regarding teaching courses would be useful.

“receiving feedback…”
- The current process for SPOT forms results in a minimal response for tutors. For example… for many units I have taught in the past I have received around 5-10 responses on my SPOT form, from a student sample of around 80. This makes the whole process almost a waste of time. I suggest that the school of psychology consider giving out SPOT forms during tutorial classes (given out, and then collected by someone other than the tutor of course). Whilst this may require a extra work logistically… it would be of great benefit to tutors as they would receive MORE feedback of a HIGHER QUALITY than exists via the current policy for SPOT. The current procedure for SPOT forms is satisfactory for the lecturers (as they get enough responses) but in my opinion it is unsatisfactory for tutors in psychology. Increasing the quality of feedback for tutors will increase the quality of tutoring which benefits both the professional development of the individual tutor and the psychology department as a whole.

“opportunity to present a lecture…”
- This sounds wonderful in theory. However, currently in the psychology department I do not believe this is common practice and there may be barriers to implementation of this policy. Things for consideration: Does the responsibility of obtaining a lecture opportunity fall upon the shoulders of the tutor, lecturers, or the unit co-ordinator? Is it possible to implement some sort of incentive scheme for lecturers/unit co-ordinators to allow for tutors to provide the odd lecture? How, and how much will tutors be paid if they provide a lecture? How many lectures per unit is the department willing to have presented by post-graduates? Should there be an official policy of a psychology department for a certain number of post-graduate lectures to be given per year in order to help this initiative succeed? Are staff members actually willing to spend their time mentoring or providing feedback for post-grad lectures (what incentive do they have)?

SELECTION PROCEDURES

It may be worthwhile considering having a priority for more senior tutors to take on tutorials for later years whilst first-time tutors be encouraged for early year tutoring (This does appear to be an unofficial kind of policy currently?). An issue here is if senior tutors apply for first year tutoring and are awarded tutes because of their extra experience… this could constrict the number of available tutes for beginning tutors. Perhaps a policy here could be for 1st year coordinators giving priority for ‘early career’ (for lack of a better term) tutors?
I am of the personal opinion that priority should also be given to straight Phd students whom have the goal to continue with a teaching/research career rather than clinical... as the teaching experience is arguably more important for these students for the CV later down the track than those students primarily interested in clinical/organizational/neuro type work (This also seems to be an unofficial/official? Policy of psych department currently?).

PAYMENT

There needs to be more transparency from the psych department regarding payment. Information could be included in the potential general info document I mentioned at the beginning of this document. This information needs to be kept up to date (The current payment info sheet Rose is handing out has out of date pay rates on it... also the sheet lacks clarity).

Information in advance about individual psychology units would be useful for prospective tutors....
- How many tutorials per semester?
- Length of tutorials (e.g., 1 hr or 2?)
- Timing of tutorials (e.g., once a week, or every second, etc?)
- Number of assignments, and the word count for each

I think the above information would contribute to the department meeting the proposed right of tutors of: “to be given professional regard as important members of the school’s teaching program”

INFO FOR ‘SUPER’ TUTORS

Current proposed document does not address the relatively new category of tutor...
- Wording of the position would be better as something like “coordinating tutor” rather than “super” or “senior” tutor. The usage of super/senior implies some sort of superiority of the coordinating tutor rather than what it is they actually are... that is: having a coordinating type of role. This implied superiority in the current terminology may create unnecessary tension between post-grad students, and makes the coordinating role of the coordinating tutor more difficult. In addition... for CV purposes, “coordinating tutor” sounds more professional and impressive than “senior/super tutor”. Finally, the term “super tutor” is simply a bit silly... and is not really informative as to the coordinating tutor’s role.
- Responsibilities need to be made clear... Deal with student enquiries? Deal with tutor enquiries? Deal with WebCT discussion boards? Run tutor meetings? Prepare lab materials and/or slides? Keep tutors informed about developments in the unit during semester? Writing handouts?
- The above responsibilities will be varied across the different units... Therefore it would seem appropriate for the unit coordinator to create a formal document of their expectations of the coordinating tutor before semester begins and to set a rate of how many extra hours will be paid per week (and the pay rate). This could potentially be done in collaboration with the coordinating tutor or before the allocation of the coordinating tutor. Once this kind of document is prepared for each unit it is likely to remain relatively stable over successive years... however it should be the responsibility of the unit coordinator to keep it up to date as things evolve over time.
- A potential issue for the future for this role will be that if pay rates are different across different units it may create tension within the group of coordinating tutors as some may perceive unfairness if they are not getting paid the same as someone whom they perceive has a less involved role. Perhaps it is worthwhile for academic staff to discuss some sort of standard practice for the allocation of role and payment for coordinating tutors?
Unit coordinators need to make other tutors in the unit aware of the coordinating tutor status and role within the unit to avoid confusion and possible tension during the teaching semester. A clear departmental policy regarding the coordinating tutor position would aid this.