Handbook for ESL Peer Consultants

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Introduction

What is ESL Peer Consultation?

In ESL Peer Consultation, students help other students (who are not native English speakers) with their conversational English skills and acculturation to the U.S. and Harvard. This might include: fine-tuning general speaking/listening skills in English (improving pronunciation, expanding vocabulary and becoming more fluent); understanding American idioms or customs; developing social and conversational skills (“small talk”); or practicing oral presentations for classroom or professional contexts. The program runs during the academic year and there is no ESL Peer Consulting during the summer.

Eligibility to Become an ESL Peer Consultant

To be an ESL Peer Consultant, you must:

• be a registered student in Harvard College or the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences,
• be a native speaker of English or highly fluent in English,
• be proficient in at least one language other than English,
• share an interest in working with people from different cultures, and
• have earned an honors grade (A- or better) in at least one academic course.

ESL Peer Consulting could be a wonderful experience for you if you:

• are interested in helping other students,
• would like to share your enthusiasm for languages and culture, and
• are interested in cross-cultural teaching.

Professionalism and Confidentiality

As an ESL Peer Consultant, it is important for you to conduct your consulting relationships in a professional manner. You have accepted a paid position and are expected to adhere to certain professional guidelines. These guidelines include:

• **Contact your consultee within 24 hours of accepting a consulting job.**
  If you accept and are assigned a consulting job, an email will be sent to you and your consultee with one another’s names and contact information. Please contact your consultee within 24 hours to schedule a meeting time and location. At this time, you may ask your consultee for more details about the kind of help the consultee is seeking. If you do not hear back from your consultee, please contact the BSC as soon as possible.

• **Keep appointments and arrive on time.**
  Be clear about meeting times and places, and always be on time for appointments. Make sure you and your consultee know how to reach one another between meetings. If you need to cancel a meeting, give your consultee at least 24 hours of advance notice. Remember, while both of you are busy students with your own deadlines and demands, your consulting meetings are an important commitment for both of you.
• **Meet face-to-face with your consultee.**
  ESL peer consulting is expected to take place in person, rather than electronically (via email or video chat). It is not permissible to consult via email, text messaging, or internet chatting, other than for administrative matters (confirming appointments, etc.). Exceptions may be allowed in select situations, only after consultation with the BSC’s program supervisors.

• **Be responsive and responsible.**
  Your consultee has reached out for help. Most consulting takes place at times of the year when both you and your consultee are very busy. Be clear and honest about your limits, and let your consultee know about any deadlines or constraints you might have so you can plan ahead to have sufficient meeting time. You can also consult with the BSC about additional resources that you can offer your consultee.

• **Protect your consultees’ confidentiality.**
  Your work with consultees is confidential. Whether you know the consultee socially or he/she is a stranger to you, you are responsible for honoring and protecting the consultee’s privacy. This means that you do not publicly acknowledge that you are this person’s ESL peer consultant, or discuss your consulting with anyone outside the BSC in any way that identifies the consultee.

  For more information about the Bureau’s confidentiality practices, please visit the Confidentiality page on the BSC website or call the Bureau to speak with a counselor.

• **Be wary of dual relationships and conflicts of interest.**
  ESL Peer Consultation is a professional relationship between consultant and consultee. A dual relationship exists when you are not only a consultant; you are also the consultee’s friend, roommate, teammate, etc. Dual relationships always run the risk of creating a conflict of interests, when the interests of your professional consulting relationship come into conflict with the interests of whatever other relationship you also have with the consultee. As all professionals do, you have a responsibility to be aware of conflicts of interests, and address them promptly and openly when they arise. For example, ESL Peer Consultants might encounter the following dilemmas when there is a dual relationship with the consultee:

  “I don’t feel like I can say, ‘No, I don’t have more time to consult with you,’ to my consultee because she is also my friend.”

  “I feel I can’t offer constructive suggestions, because my consultee is also my teammate, and if I seem critical it will affect our relationship on the team.”

  “I am having trouble separating time I am spending with my roommate as a friend versus as a consultant. Every time he asks me a question, I don’t want to have to figure out whether or not I’m on the clock.”

In general, it is better to simply avoid dual relationships when you can – don’t take on your friends, roommates, teaching fellows, etc. as consultees, and don’t begin other relationships with your consultees while you are still consulting them. But given the realities of student life, this may not be possible. So it is especially important to:

• be aware of the risks, and
• talk with your consultee and/or a Bureau counselor as soon as any problems arise or if you anticipate that a problem might arise.
ESL Peer Consultant Applications

Eligible Harvard College and GSAS students will receive an email at the end of spring and summer with details of how to apply to become an ESL Peer Consultant. We encourage you to apply anytime during the summer or at the beginning of the fall term. For instructions on how to apply, please visit bsc.harvard.edu or contact us at 617-495-2581.

You may not accept a consulting job until your application has been completed and processed. This includes:

- BSC ESL Peer Consultant Application Form
- Employment/Tax Forms (takes up to 10 days to be processed by HU Payroll)
- Completion of a 30-minute interview with a BSC counselor
- Attending an ESL Peer Consultant Orientation session

International Students: If you have questions about your employment forms, please visit University Financial Services at 1033 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd floor.

Please call 617-495-2581 or e-mail bsc@.harvard.edu if you have any questions or to get more information.

How Consultees Get Assigned to ESL Peer Consultants

After receiving a student’s request for an ESL Peer Consultant, the Bureau sends an email to all the ESL peer consultants describing the student’s request. If you receive such an email and you would like to take the job, call or email the Bureau promptly. If you are not interested in taking the job, you do not have to respond to the email. Jobs are generally assigned to the first eligible consultant who responds. Jobs often are filled quickly; if you have not yet successfully obtained a job through this process, please call us at 617-495-2581 or email us at bsctutor@bsc.harvard.edu.

Once you agree to take a job and are assigned the job, you and your consultee will receive an email confirming the match. The email contains pertinent information such as your and your consultee’s contact information, the match number for the job (which you will need to report your hours), and links to important information. Consultants are required to contact their consultees within 24 hours of accepting a consulting job. If you are unable to contact your consultee or if after a few attempts you have not received a response from your consultee, please let us know so that we can contact the consultee and clarify the situation.
Compensation

Fiscal Responsibility

As a paid consultant, you are responsible for keeping track of how many hours you consult each consultee, reporting these hours accurately and promptly, and keeping your own accurate records of your financial reporting.

Reporting Hours

You will not be able to access the payroll website until you have been assigned at least one job. Please don’t assume you will remember your hours. Instead, it’s a good idea to keep a log including the name of the consultee and dates/times you meet. Consultants find it helpful to report their hours on the payroll website promptly after they met with their consultee.

Some guidelines for reporting hours:

- Report your hours on https://payroll.bsc.harvard.edu

  Hours must be reported weekly for the actual day they occurred, e.g., if you consulted someone on April 22nd, from 3pm-4pm, your online reporting must indicate that date and that you consulted for 1 hour that day.

  It is not advisable for students to work more than a total of 20 hours per week. Additional guidelines apply to students who have Federal Work Study positions. Please refer to the “Undergraduate Student Job Info” page of the Harvard College Student Employment Office website for more information.

  You may only report hours for consulting matches that have been assigned through the BSC and have an official BSC match number. You may not arrange consulting jobs independently; all peer consulting jobs must be arranged through the BSC.

  Payment can not be issued for hours that are reported more than 30 days past their occurrence. Please make sure to keep up with reporting your hours each week.

  Your consultee will receive an automatic email every Sunday indicating the hours you reported that week. If your consultee disputes the hours that you reported, you will receive an email letting you know that your submission has been rejected and you will not be paid until the discrepancy is resolved.

  If you have questions about reporting hours or payroll issues, please call 617-495-2581 or email bscfinance@bsc.harvard.edu.
Group consulting

Occasionally, you may be offered the opportunity to consult with two or three students together as a group. Group consulting requires additional skills and these consultants will be closely supervised by the BSC and may be required to attend additional supervision meetings.

Fees/Pay

ESL Peer Consultants earn $16 per hour for one-on-one consulting.

The pay rates for group consulting are as follows:

- Group of 2 consultees: $16.50 per hour
- Group of 3 consultees: $19.00 per hour
- Group of 4 consultees: $21.50 per hour

For group consulting, consultants are paid by the actual number of consultees who attend the session. The policy on late cancellations and no-shows also applies to group tutoring (see below). Consultants may not at any time accept payment directly from a consultee. All financial transactions take place through the Bureau of Study Counsel. The BSC will charge the consultee/program and pay the tutor.

ESL peer consultants are required to attend a monthly group supervision meeting. Your contract may be terminated if you miss more than one supervision meeting in a term.

Consultants may not at any time accept payment directly from a consultee. All financial transactions take place through the BSC. The BSC will charge the consultee/program and pay the consultant’s paycheck.

Late cancellations, missed appointments, and preparation time

You may report one hour of consulting if your consultee cancels the appointment with less than 24-hours notice or does not show up for an appointment. By mutual agreement in advance between you and your consultee, you may also report up to thirty minutes of preparation time per session.

The Consulting Process

Some tips from experienced ESL Peer Consultants about how to be a good consultant:

- Contact your consultee within 24 hours after receiving an assignment. Introduce yourself, exchange contact information and express your own preferences for communicating (phone numbers or emails). Suggest a few different time slots that you have available for meeting; find a convenient public place to meet (Holyoke Center, Au Bon Pain, Gutman Library, a House dining hall). Speak very clearly and be sure that your consultee understands where/when you would like to meet for the first session. Make sure there are no misunderstandings. Ask your consultee to describe what he/she looks like or will be wearing, share similar information about yourself, so that you will be able to recognize one another.

- In the first meeting, have an open conversation with a new consultee to help set the stage
for a good working relationship. The more organized and professional you are, the more your consultee will feel confident in your abilities. The first meeting can set the tone for future sessions.

- **Introductions.** Explore your consultee’s understanding of the ESL Peer Consulting Program (expectations, motivations)
  - The purpose of the program is to help students improve their English conversational skills and adjust to Harvard and the American culture.
  - Be specific about the fact that you are NOT allowed to write or edit your consultee’s schoolwork, including papers and course assignments.

- **Establish ground rules.** Specify the duration of your sessions (60 or 90 minutes often works well); discuss cancellation policy (you may report an hour if your consultee misses an appointment or cancels it with less than 24 hours notice); by mutual agreement in advance between you and your consultee, you may, occasionally, also report up to half-an-hour of preparation time (you are not expected to spend time preparing for each session).

- **Identify goals for your consultation.** These are some of the activities that you may want to consider in your consultation:
  - Working on pronunciation.
  - Learning about American culture: reading/discussing different situations that have arisen for your consultee in the past.
  - Practicing small talk.
  - Working on listening comprehension.
  - Practicing talks/presentations.

- **Set a time for your next sessions.**

  - As your consultation progresses, make the best of your experience by actively participating in supervision meetings; learn about resources available to your consultee; and contact the BSC if you have any questions or concerns at any time.

**What if my consultee needs more help than I can provide?**

Your consultee may need help beyond what you can provide, for example, writing help or instruction, formal English language training, financial assistance, or personal counseling. Your role then becomes to help your consultee connect with the appropriate university resources. The staff at the BSC will support you in this important role. Please speak to counselor to see how you can support the consultee. You can also refer the consultee to the BSC.

**What if it’s not working out so well?**

Whatever the reason, if a particular consulting situation is not working out, please let us know as soon as possible so we can advise you and/or make a new consultee/consultant match.
Academic Integrity

As an ESL Peer Consultant, you must be aware about issues of academic integrity. All coursework the consultee produces and turns in must be the consultee’s own work. You are not allowed to write/edit any of your consultee’s work. In addition, we strongly discourage you from sharing your work with your consultees, to prevent any potential for plagiarism.

Click here for the Handbook for Students section on Academic Integrity.

Supervision

As an ESL Peer Consultant you are required to participate in regular group supervision meetings. The meetings provide you with the opportunity to share your consulting experiences, concerns, strategies and resources with other consultants and BSC counselors. Consultants who miss more than one unexcused supervision meetings per term may not be allowed to continue participating in the program.

Consultation with BSC Staff

This handbook can only begin to address the nuances, challenges, and interesting developments you will encounter during your consulting experience. The BSC staff is always eager to hear from ESL Peer Consultants about their questions and discoveries. Both consultants and consultees are encouraged to consult with the BSC as needed, either individually or as a consultant/consultee pair.

Things that peer consultants have brought up include, for example:

- concerns about a consultee who seems depressed, anxious, angry, or troubled;
- feeling uncomfortable about pressure being put on you by a consultee, for example to meet more often than you can or to provide writing/editing assistance;
- unsure how to handle requests from consultees to help their family members or friends; or when you feel stuck and unsure how to be of help to a consultee.

Please consider the BSC a primary resource for you, and contact us whenever you would like to share or consult with us about your consulting experience.