Combining Writing and Content Tutor Training:

Creating Cross-Disciplinary Learning Communities

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Douglas College

The LEARNING CENTRE

Presentation Plan

- Our Context
- Tutor Training Program
- Implications/Discussion

DOUGLAS COLLEGE

- 10,000 FTE – 2 campuses
- undergraduate university transfer courses
- diploma and certificate programs
- applied bachelor’s degrees and degree completion programs

The LEARNING CENTRE

A tutoring centre in the library:

- primary focus: first year foundation courses
- tutoring in other courses (depending on tutor backgrounds)
- Writing Tutoring – over half of all tutor sessions

Learning Centre Staffing

- 2.5 faculty positions (backgrounds in composition/rhetoric, English, ESL, student success, Writing Centre coordination)
  - Roles: tutor recruitment, tutor training, materials development, cross college liaison
- 3.5 support staff
  - Roles: tutor hiring, supervision, scheduling, operations
- 30-40 peer tutors per term

Our Approach: helping students adapt to the "culture" of the courses they're in:

Tutoring sessions, in addition to the specific content or writing assignment under discussion, focus on:

- time management
- reading skills
- understanding/following assignment instructions and course syllabi
- strategically mapping out the work (time and work steps) required to complete large assignments
- managing anxiety/panic/stress
- developing motivation/commitment/intention
- using resources/tools effectively
- problem solving

Our Training Focus:
Improving Tutoring Skills (Writing and Content):

Tutors learn to:

- assess/address gaps in student knowledge/skills/attitudes
- negotiate tutoring session goals/agendas
- encourage student agency, responsibility, independence
- develop active listening, question-asking techniques
- identify instructor expectations, assignment requirements
- develop student awareness of (and skills with) using resources and course tools
- develop student critical and strategic reading skills (textbook, research skills, course packs and study manuals, online course materials, syllabi, test questions, info literacy)
- observe ethical standards and maintaining professional boundaries
- work with counter-productive student attitudes/motivation
- deal with diversity

Tutor Hiring:

Writing Tutors:

- Writing tutors are recruited from many content areas (psychology, criminology, social work, nursing, history, philosophy)
- Writing tutors are hired for writing proficiency but also for ability to tutor in multiple subject areas

Content Tutors:

- Hired to tutor a range of courses

Tutor Training Program Components

1. Self-paced Online Training
   - College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) certified training, levels 1-3
   - Focus is on generic tutoring strategies
   - Writing tutors and Content tutors are regularly separated for specialized training

2. Tutor Meetings
   - Live and online meetings throughout the semester
   - Breakout sessions to focus on content or writing-specific training issues

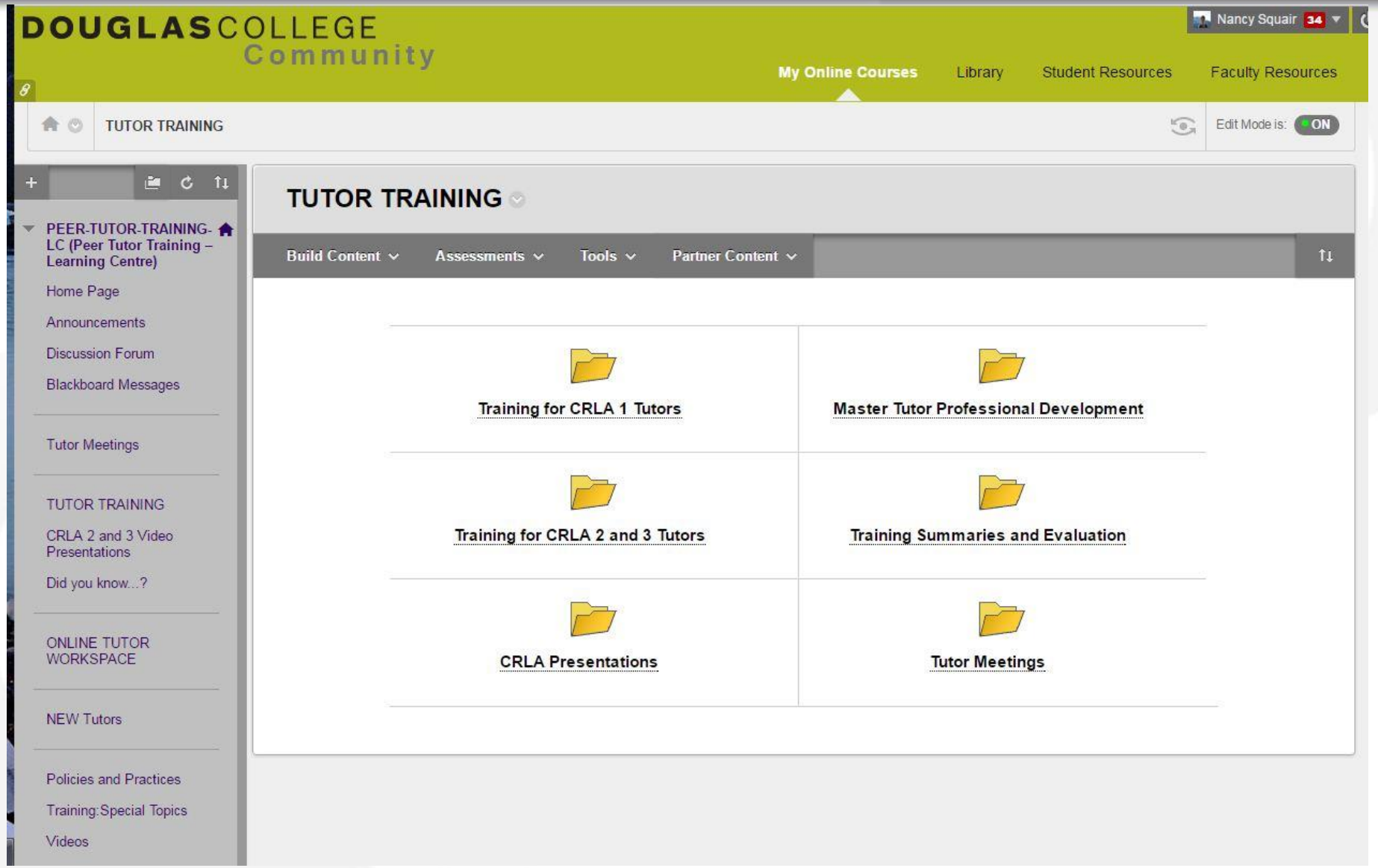
3. Peer-to-Peer Online Discussion Forum in Blackboard
   - Tutors create discussion threads and share tutoring strategies, experience
   - Discussions cross disciplinary boundaries

4. Observations: Faculty and Peer

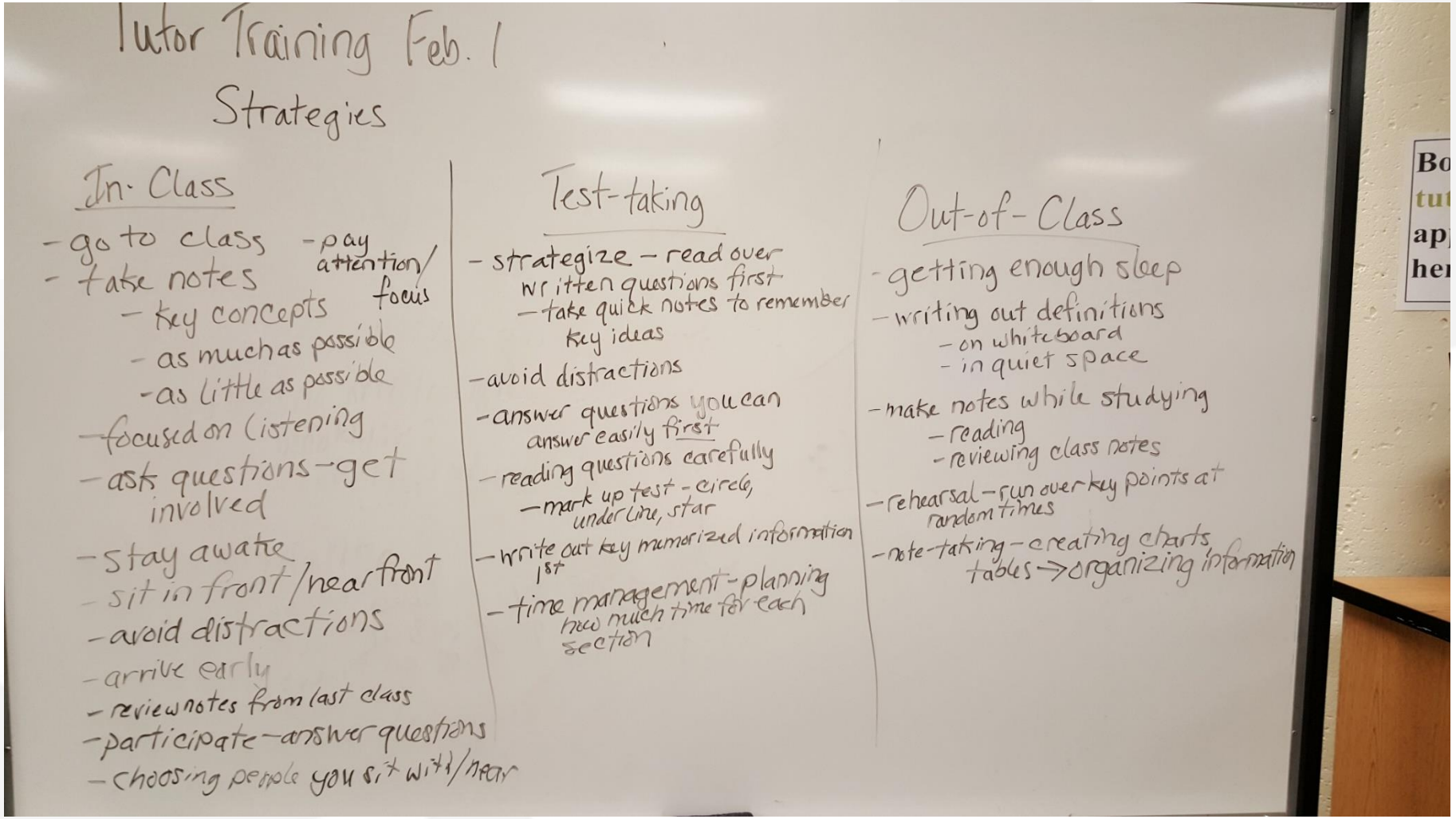
Semester meeting and training task schedule (shows self-paced training activities and live tutor meetings)

Week	Date	F2F Tutor Meetings Mondays 10:30-11:30	OLT Tutor Meetings Time TBA	CRLA 1: Training Task	CRLA 2: Training Task	CRLA 3: Training Task	Master Tutor: Training Task
1	Jan 4-8	Saturday Training Day (Jan 9) – 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.					
2	Jan 11-15			Pre-Service Training	**Start Up Training Tasks:**	**Start Up Training Tasks:**	**Start Up Training Tasks:**
3	Jan 18-22	F2F--Followup to Saturday training--Take Control of your Learning (Cecil) (some metacognitive/reflection on the key themes)	Collaborate--(Cecil) Ways to do Global email response (via email)		*Peer Observation *Submit Presentation Plan	*Peer Observation *Submit Presentation Plan	*Setting Goals *Peer Observation *Reading Report
4	Jan 25-29	BB--Self-Regulated Learning (Reading and discussion) (Nancy)		Faculty Send-off / Journal	Prepare Presentation Video	Prepare Presentation Video	
5	Feb 1-5	F2F (Cecil) Implementing SRL	Collaborate (Nancy) Non-Essay Writing Assignments (Nursing)	Journal	Post Presentation Video	Post Presentation Video	
	Feb 8-12	Reading Break					
6	Feb 15-19	BB: View and comment on Study Skills presentations in BB		Journal			
7	Feb 22-26	F2F (Nancy) Tutor Stress	Collaborate (Cecil) Grammar	Journal	Content: Tutoring Cycle Writing: ESL Students	Content: Motivation Writing:ESL students	Midterm Report
8	Feb 29-Mar 4	BB (Cecil)		Journal			
9	Mar 7-11	F2F (Nancy) Dealing with Diversity	Collaborate (Nancy) Non-Essay Writing Assignments (Business)	Journal	Culture	Assertiveness	
10	Mar14-18	BB (Nancy)		Journal			
11	Mar 21-25	F2F (Cecil) Reflecting on the term	Collaborate (Cecil) Non-Essay Writing Writing Assignments (CFCS)	Journal	Anxiety	Self-Regulated Learners	
12	Mar 28-Apr 1	EASTER MONDAY		Journal	Finish Off Training	Finish Off Training	End of Term Report
13	Apr 4-8	No Meeting	No Meeting	Training Summary Report	Training Summary Report	Training Summary Report	Training Summary Report
14	Final Exams	Wrap Up Meeting/Party -- Friday Apr 8, 3-5 p.m. Writing Activity: Future Uses					

Online Tutor Training Course—Self-paced online training by CRLA level (screen capture from tutor training course)



Tutor Training—Live Face-to Face meeting on self-regulated learning strategies: Large group discussion notes generated by tutors from writing and content areas



Tutors working in groups in live training meeting

Peer to Peer Online Discussion forum [peer mentoring]

Question posted by a writing tutor

Learning new things to be a more effective tutor

“This might be a discussion specific to writing tutors but feel free to comment if it applies to you! I've noticed that sometimes in online tutoring students will have questions about a particular type of grammar error or about the format of an assignment type that I don't know very much about. Today, for example, a student was concerned about her use of passive voice. I realized that I really didn't understand what passive voice was enough to look for it or explain it. Because I wanted to honor the student's request, I went online and found a resource and figured out what it was and how to find it and I did end up noticing it a few times in the paper. I thought it was only fair for me to take the time to figure this out and I'm really glad I did because I learned something, too. In other cases students might have specific concerns about APA that I don't know the answer to and have to look up. I know that tutors are not meant to have all the answers or tell students how to do everything, but in many cases it would seem beneficial to the student for the tutor to be aware of certain issues. So, my questions are:

1. Have you ever taken time to learn about a particular concept or grammar issue in order to help a student? Did you do this in the moment? Or maybe after the session?

2. If you have done this, did you find it was beneficial to you to learn this new information?”

Response from a biology tutor
[part of a larger thread in response to the initial question]

“As a face-to-face tutor I am always learning new concepts from students. I know biology basics and when the student brings something new up, I always admit I am unaware of the concept and I get them to explain it to me in their own words. This is beneficial to both myself and them. When we are both unsure, I try to relate other aspects that relate to the concept and I try to get the student and myself to critically think and come up with an answer. I actually find tutoring to be more effective when I am unsure about something because both the student and myself have to make sense of it. Plus odds are that concept will appear with other students so its always nice to learn new things. ”

How does this shared training create multi-disciplinary communities?

- Tutors receive general tutor training but bring their subject-area content expertise into tutor training and tutor sessions
- Through training and working with tutors from other disciplines, tutors:
  - recognize and articulate disciplinary conventions and study skills for their own content areas
  - understand disciplinary conventions and study skills in other subject areas
  - recognize commonalities across disciplines
  - incorporate this awareness into their tutoring

Our Conclusions:

- Training all tutors in tutoring skills and pedagogical knowledge is an effective strategy. Research (Hsiao, Brouns, Bruggen, and Sloep, 2015) indicates that tutors trained in tutoring skills are more effective than tutors trained specifically in content knowledge
- Value of integrating tutor training activities across a Learning Commons model
- Cross-disciplinary tutor training still needs to be supplemented with specific writing tutoring training (which leads to the next point--)
- Need for qualified writing centre directors who keep abreast of current trends and topics in Writing Centre pedagogy even in a Learning Commons model

References and Resources

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