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Online Education Initiative: Tutoring Pilot Evaluation Report

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Introduction

The Online Education Initiative (OEI) is a state-wide project managed by the Foothill-De Anza and Butte-Glenn Community College Districts and is funded through a five-year grant disbursed by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) is the independent third-party evaluator for the Online Education Initiative.

The OEI's long-term goal is to ensure that significantly more students are able to complete their educational goals by increasing both access to and success in high-quality online courses. To this end, online courses have been coupled with a set of robust academic and student support services such as Quest for Online Success, a program designed to prepare students to succeed in online courses, and NetTutor, an online tutoring service. This report presents the findings from the evaluation of a yearlong pilot of NetTutor's online tutoring services and the impact of those services on students, faculty, and staff at each college.

Project Background

Online tutoring is one of many pieces that the OEI is working on to meet the initiative's long-term goal described above. The first 18 months of the OEI were spent planning and implementing pilots of services and products which were rolled out in three phases over the course of the spring, summer, and fall 2015 semesters/terms. Twenty-four community colleges were selected to participate in the pilot phase of the OEI. The colleges were divided into three groups of eight. The first two groups (16 colleges) began to pilot student support services in the spring 2015 semester/term; the third group, referred to as "full launch" colleges, piloted an online course management system (Canvas) in addition to the student supports that were piloted in the spring and summer 2015. Table 1 below shows the 24 pilot colleges and their assigned groups.

Table 1: OEI Pilot Colleges

Pilots of Online Tutoring Services	Pilots of Quest for Online Success	Full Launch Pilots (Online Tutoring, Quest for Online Success, and Canvas)
Barstow College	Antelope Valley College	Butte College
Columbia College	Cabrillo College	Coastline College
Imperial Valley College	College of the Canyons	Foothill College
Los Angeles Pierce College	Hartnell College	Shasta College
Mt. San Antonio College	MiraCosta College	Fresno City College
Ohlone College	Monterey Peninsula College	Lake Tahoe Community College
Saddleback College	Rio Hondo College	Mt. San Jacinto College
Victor Valley College	West Los Angeles College	Ventura College

Purpose and Roll-Out of the Pilots

As noted above, OEI piloted three programs: online tutoring, Quest for Online Success, and Canvas, the course management system. The online tutoring pilot was designed with two main purposes in mind. The first was to learn about students' experience with online tutoring services and their perceptions of the impact online tutoring on their success in online class(es). The second was to develop and improve policies and procedures and work out operational issues based on the implementation lessons gathered over the one-year pilot which consisted of the spring, summer and fall 2015 semester/terms.

Online Tutoring Pilot Evaluation and Data Sources

The following data sources were used to evaluate the online tutoring pilot:

- 1. Pre-tutoring survey (spring and fall 2015):** This survey was administered at the beginning of the semester/term prior to students using NetTutor. The purpose of the survey was to learn about students' previous experiences with face-to-face and/or online tutoring services prior to utilizing NetTutor. In addition, the pre-tutoring survey sought to understand students' perceptions regarding whether previous tutoring had a positive impact on their success in the course(s).
- 2. End-of-term survey (spring, summer and fall 2015):** This survey was administered at the end of the semester/term. The goal of this survey was to understand how students learned about the online tutoring that was offered for their classes and their experiences with the online tutoring services.
- 3. Tutoring usage reports (spring, summer, and fall 2015):** NetTutor provided the RP Group evaluator with information on the amount of time (in minutes) students spent using online tutoring, detailed by college and course. The organization also provided information regarding the type of tutoring services accessed by students.
- 4. Faculty survey (spring and fall 2015):** The faculty survey was administered at the end of the semester/term. The purpose of this survey was to understand faculty's experiences with OEI staff and NetTutor in general, as well as their perceptions about how online tutoring may have impacted their students.¹
- 5. Single point of contact (SPOC) survey (spring 2015):** This survey was administered at the end of the semester/term. It sought to understand SPOCs' experiences with OEI staff, NetTutor, and working with faculty at their college to implement the pilot of NetTutor.²

¹ Results from these surveys are not presented as standalone findings rather they are inter-woven into the narrative of the report's overall findings.

² Results from these surveys are not presented as standalone findings rather they are inter-woven into the narrative of the report's overall findings.

- 6. Qualitative data from interviews (spring and fall 2015):** The RP Group evaluator conducted interviews with staff from Link-Systems International (NetTutor’s parent company), NetTutor, and OEI. The purpose of these interviews was to gather the perspectives of the staff from OEI and NetTutor on the overall implementation of the tutoring pilot.

It is important to note that during the course of the online tutoring pilot, the RP Group evaluator encountered a problem matching NetTutor usage data with survey and student-level data collected through each college’s local student information systems. Unfortunately, each system used a different unique student identifier, which prevented the evaluator from reporting success rates for students who used online tutoring versus those who did not.

In This Report

The first section of this report details the online tutoring program design and describes the program’s implementation. Furthermore, it illustrates how lessons learned between spring and fall 2015 were used to refine and strengthen the online tutoring services. Next, Section II lists the online courses that were coupled with NetTutor’s online tutoring services and discusses student usage of the online tutoring services. Section III then provides the most salient findings from a pre-tutoring and an end-of-term survey administered to students that were enrolled in the online courses included in the pilot. Finally, the report is wrapped up with some concluding remarks.

I. The Online Tutoring Program

Program Design

Each pilot college submitted up to five online courses to be paired with NetTutor’s online tutoring services through the OEI. Courses eligible to be part of the pilot were required to be from a list of 19 C-ID³ approved Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) courses. In addition, faculty recruited to participate in the pilot had to have their courses undergo the OEI’s rigorous course design review process.⁴ All costs associated with piloting the online tutoring services provided by NetTutor were fully covered by the OEI.

The communication process put in place by the OEI staff involved the identification of a single point of contact (SPOC) at each of the pilot colleges. The goal of this approach was for the SPOC to serve as the communication liaison between OEI staff, NetTutor, and faculty. Each pilot college worked with NetTutor to perform a direct-to-subject integration into the college’s

³ The Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID) is a statewide numbering system independent from the course numbers assigned by local California community colleges. When a course is designated with a C-ID number, it signals that participating California colleges and universities have determined that courses offered by other California community colleges with the same C-ID number are comparable in content and scope to courses offered on their own campuses, regardless of their titles or local course number.

⁴ The OEI staff developed a scoring rubric based on national standards for high-quality online courses. All courses taught in the spring 2015 pilot were scored against this rubric.

local course management system (CMS).⁵ All students enrolled in any of the courses offered through the pilot had access to online tutoring services via at least one link that was embedded into each instructor's online course homepage.

Online tutoring services comprised two components: 1) synchronous tutoring, in which both student and tutor are live simultaneously and chat with each other, and 2) asynchronous tutoring, in which students submit a question or composition that will be reviewed and returned by a tutor at a later time. Specific tutoring services included the following:

- Live tutors with subject matter expertise in subject areas taught as part of the pilot⁶ (Ask NetTutor)
- Asynchronous tutoring through which students could submit a question on a 24/7 basis (Question and Answer Center)
- Asynchronous paper/essay review services on a 24/7 basis (Paper Center)

Every course had live tutors available for a minimum of 80 hours per week, with certain high-volume subjects offering tutoring 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Mathematics and English tutoring was available in both English and Spanish. Tutoring sessions were held on Link-System International's (LSI) collaboration platform, the WorldWideWhiteboard, and all sessions were recorded and kept in a private archive. Moreover, there was a one-day turnaround for asynchronous question submission and a two-day turnaround for asynchronous paper/essay review.

In addition, NetTutor worked with each faculty member to co-create the "rules of engagement" (ROE),⁷ which outline how the tutors will interact with students. The rules of engagement provided faculty the opportunity to customize NetTutor to help ensure the tutoring would be helpful for their students.

Furthermore, the OEI staff provided SPOCs, faculty, and other college staff such as tutoring coordinators with a variety of outreach resources to assist them in promoting and creating awareness of online tutoring support as well as effective methods for embedding tutoring into the courses. Finally, NetTutor provided customized marketing materials for each college, such as flyers, a number of instructional videos on how to use the various services offered through NetTutor, and faculty webinars. The primary role of faculty was to promote the online tutoring services to their students.

⁵ The integration of the online tutoring services into each college's CMS eliminated the need for students to download any additional applications, thereby minimizing technical issues when accessing NetTutor and also gave students a single sign-on access to NetTutor rather than having students log in with another username and password.

⁶ NetTutor hires tutors that are subject matter experts with previous teaching or tutoring experience. They all have a bachelor's degree; most also have graduate degrees.

⁷ NetTutor's Rules of Engagement is a unique faculty support that allows faculty to communicate with the tutors about their expectations regarding the interactions between students and tutors.

Program Implementation Process and Timeline

The year-long pilot of NetTutor's services provided an opportunity for the OEI staff overseeing the implementation of the online tutoring services as well as NetTutor staff to work with the colleges to develop and refine the program's policies and procedures. Additionally, it allowed them to work out operational issues associated with the integration of the online tutoring services into the colleges' course management systems. The sections below provide an account of the implementation of the online tutoring pilot, which began in the spring 2015 semester/term, continued through the summer 2015 semester/term, and concluded in the fall 2015 semester/term.

Spring 2015

In spring 2015, the pilot's first semester, OEI's Chief Academic Officer and the Director of Basic Skills, with the support from a Program Support Coordinator, oversaw the day-to-day operations of the online tutoring pilot. As noted earlier, eight colleges participated in this pilot (refer back to Table 1 for a list of pilot colleges).

LAUNCHING THE ONLINE TUTORING PROGRAM

The OEI staff worked with NetTutor, SPOCs, faculty, and information technology (IT) personnel at each college to put in place the following systems and processes:

- Embedding NetTutor into each college's local course management system
- Creating live links for students to access the tutoring services directly from of each faculty member's course homepage
- Identifying ways to support SPOCs and faculty in the promotion of online tutoring services to students
- Ensuring faculty were aware of NetTutors' Rules of Engagement and took advantage of the process
- Developing a process for NetTutor to provide usage data to the OEI staff

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SPRING 2015 ACTIVITIES

As with any new program, there are always components that are implemented as envisioned and others that encounter obstacles. In addition, there are program components that show promise and should be continued with refinement. Ultimately, the implementation obstacles provide valuable lessons for program improvement.

The lessons from the initial implementation of the online tutoring pilot in spring 2015 revealed that improvements could be made in the areas of communication, student usage of online tutoring services, identification and resolution of technical issues, and data matching between evaluation activities and NetTutor usage data. What follows is a summary of the recommendations for improvement from the evaluation of the spring 2015 tutoring pilot and a description of how these were subsequently addressed in summer and fall 2015.

- **Communication.** Re-examine the communication structure implemented by the OEI (a single point of contact at each college functioning as the liaison between faculty, the OEI, and NetTutor). This approach was not as effective as originally envisioned; information about OEI was not reaching faculty in a timely manner.
- **Student tutoring usage.** Develop an outreach process to alert individual faculty members whose courses have low tutoring usage rates.
- **Identification and resolution of technical issues.** Establish a systematic procedure to flag technical issues with the online tutoring services and clear communication guidelines between the colleges and NetTutor to expedite their resolution.
- **Data matching.** Create a mechanism to match data for evaluation purposes based on a common student identifier. Surveys developed for evaluation purposes by the RP Group used college-assigned student ID numbers as the student identifier, whereas NetTutor's usage reports used students' names, email addresses, and a unique string of numbers given to each student. The different student identifiers did not allow for student-level data to be matched with course success and/or survey data. As such, it was not possible to fully assess the impact of tutoring services on students' academic outcomes.
- **Areas that should be expanded upon.** The initial outreach materials and recruitment strategies provided to faculty and SPOCs were well received. However, despite these resources, student usage of online tutoring was not as high as OEI staff would have hoped. Therefore, new and creative ways to support faculty and provide them with additional customized resources would be beneficial. In addition, the full potential of NetTutor's Rules of Engagement was not attained. Given that the Rules of Engagement can provide an avenue for faculty to communicate their expectations for how tutors should interact with students, ways to help faculty take full advantage of this resource could be identified.

Towards the end of the spring semester pilot, formative feedback from faculty and SPOCs at the pilot colleges regarding ways to improve communication between the colleges and the OEI prompted the creation of the Online Tutoring Resource Guide.⁸ One of the purposes of this guide was to gather and organize in one place all of the materials, resources, and effective practices to promote the use of the online tutoring services. Moreover, the guide also detailed the NetTutor implementation process and provided SPOCs and faculty with important contact information, such as whom to call if there are any technical issues. The first iteration of the guide was distributed to the colleges in summer 2015.

Summer 2015

The number of colleges that participated in the summer online tutoring pilot doubled from eight to 16 colleges, increasing the number of courses that needed tutors and the number of students

⁸ <http://ccconlineed.org/student-success-resources/tutoring/>

who could access the online tutoring services. In addition, NetTutor was made available to students in all online courses (OEI and non-OEI) offered at the original eight tutoring pilot colleges. The inclusion of additional colleges and students in summer 2015 allowed the OEI staff to ascertain whether NetTutor had the capacity to provide tutoring services at a larger scale, which is aligned with OEI's long-term goal to offer all three academic supports (tutoring, Quest for Online Success, and others) at all California Community Colleges.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SUMMER 2015 ACTIVITIES

Given that the courses offered in the summer semester/term are compressed into eight weeks, as compared to 16 weeks in spring and fall, the pre-tutoring survey was not administered in summer 2015. However, the OEI staff used the summer to update the Online Tutoring Resource Guide and identified strategies to address the recommendations for improvement that emerged from the spring 2015 online tutoring pilot. These strategies were put in place in the fall 2015 semester/term and are described in the following section.

Fall 2015

Fall 2015 was the final semester of the year-long online tutoring pilot. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, 24 colleges took part in the fall online tutoring pilot. As the online tutoring services continued to be scaled, it became necessary to modify how NetTutor was integrated into the colleges' course management systems. The time it took NetTutor to implement the direct-to-subject integration was no longer manageable for the increased number of pilot courses and thus was replaced by a "buffet-style" integration. Under this "buffet-style" integration, students are presented with a drop-down menu of courses from which to select the course/subject in which they want to be tutored, rather than being directed from the tutoring link on their courses' homepage to subject-specific tutoring.

REFINING AND STRENGTHENING THE ONLINE TUTORING PROGRAM

As noted earlier, during summer 2015, OEI staff came up with strategies and approaches to improve the delivery of online tutoring services based on the implementation lessons that emerged from the spring 2015 pilot, which were implemented in fall 2015. Presented below is a description of these improvements in three areas: 1) communication, 2) increasing student usage of online tutoring, and 3) data matching.

1. IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

As one approach to improving communication, OEI developed and offered monthly webinars to keep SPOCs aware of what was happening in the OEI and help build a sense of community between SPOCs across the pilot colleges. Each monthly webinar included a presentation followed by time for questions and answers.

Some of the topics presented included:

- NetTutor
- Readiness modules
- Embedding basic skills
- Open educational resources
- Proctorio⁹
- Cranium Café¹⁰

Additionally, weekly e-newsletters were published and sent via Constant Contact to SPOCs, faculty, and other college staff. Furthermore, in response to faculty feedback from the spring 2015 survey in which faculty asked for more communication from the OEI, two virtual meetings were held for faculty. However, these meetings were discontinued due to low attendance.

2. INCREASING STUDENT USAGE

A process was established for OEI staff to receive weekly tutoring usage reports by college and course from NetTutor. Based on information from the usage reports, the OEI staff would contact the relevant SPOCs and ask them to alert individual faculty members whose courses had low usage rates.

Additionally, as noted earlier, the Online Tutoring Resource Guide developed in spring 2015, and it was also updated for fall 2015. As cited previously, one of the purposes of this guide was to gather and organize all of the materials, resources, and effective practices to promote the use of the online tutoring services in one place. The Resource Guide was emailed twice to SPOCs and it was posted on the OEI website.

As another strategy to increase student usage, faculty began including in their courses an assignment that introduced students to the tutoring services. Faculty either made the assignment mandatory and/or provided an incentive such as extra credit. This approach was intended to expose students to the online tutoring services, especially those who had never used them, hopefully leading students to find value in online tutoring and thus encouraging them to continue accessing this resource. The Online Tutoring Resource Guide that SPOCs were asked to share with faculty provides some suggestions for introductory, low-point assignments. Below are some sample assignments:

- Visit NetTutor and ask the live tutor a question about grammar, punctuation, or APA formatting rules.
- Put your first name, the instructor name, and the name and section number of this course onto a Word document. Save the file as pdf. Then, upload that pdf to NetTutor's Paper Center.

⁹ Online exam proctoring (<https://proctorio.com/>)

¹⁰ Cranium Cafe replicates on-campus style student services accessible entirely online (<https://www.craniumcafe.com/>)

- Go to NetTutor when a live tutor is available. Ask the tutor a question, such as, “Why did you become a tutor?” “What other careers have you had?” or “What was your biggest struggle when you were a student?”

Other strategies to boost student usage included a video designed to increase students’ awareness of the online tutoring services, as suggested by a faculty member in the spring 2015 faculty survey. Planning for the student video began in late summer and footage for the video was shot in fall 2015. The intent of this video is to provide students with information about the benefits of online tutoring. Faculty from several of the pilot colleges were interviewed for this video. In addition, live tutoring sessions were filmed and included in the video as a way to demystify online tutoring.

In addition, faculty members were encouraged to identify students not doing well in their courses and refer them directly to tutoring. Finally, NetTutor staff began working on a tool that would be available to SPOCs at each of the colleges that would enable them to track their own usage data in real time—Stats on Demand, which was released in spring 2016.

II. Usage of Online Tutoring Services

This section lists the online courses that were coupled with NetTutor’s online tutoring services and discusses student usage of online tutoring services.

Online Tutoring Availability across Colleges and Courses

As previously described, over the course of the NetTutor pilot, the number of participating colleges doubled each semester/term.¹¹ At the same time, the number of faculty teaching online courses increased, as did the number of online courses taught through the OEI. Table 2 on the next page shows the number of colleges, faculty, and courses taught over the life of the pilot.

Table 2: Number of Colleges, Faculty and Courses Taught During the Online Tutoring Pilot, Spring 2015 to Fall 2015

	Spring 2015	Summer 2015	Fall 2015
Colleges	8	16	24
Faculty	22	32	51
Courses	24	44	85

As previously mentioned, each pilot college could offer up to five online courses for which tutoring services would be provided through the OEI. Colleges were required to choose the courses they would offer through the OEI from a list of C-ID approved Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) courses.

¹¹ Antelope Valley was part of the readiness colleges, but did not participate in the summer tutoring pilot. Shasta College was part of the full launch group and took part in the summer tutoring pilot (refer back to page 3 for a list of colleges).

These course options included the following:

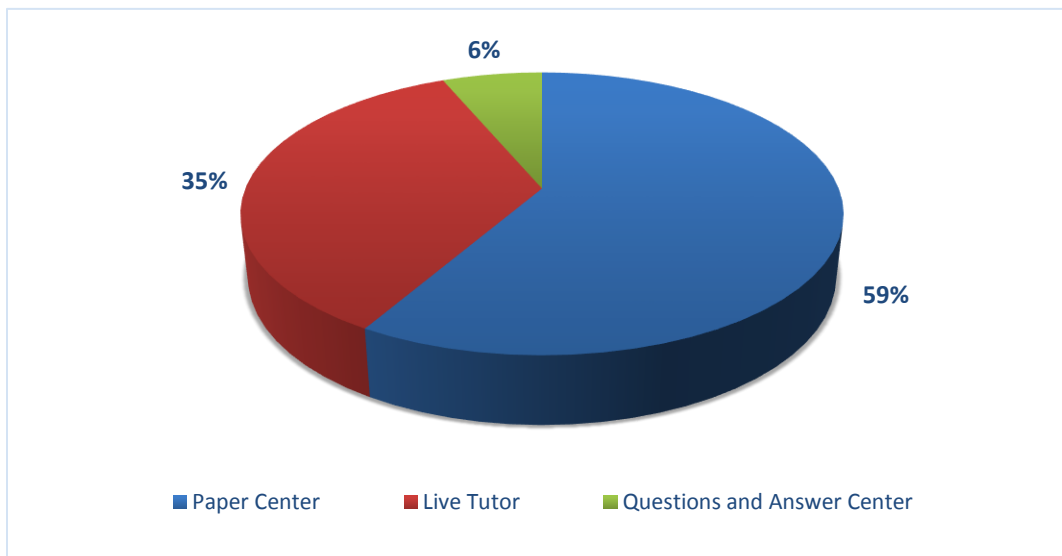
Administration of Justice 110	English 100	Philosophy 100
Anthropology 120	Geography 120	Political Science 100
Child Development 100	Geography 100	Political Science 110
Communications 150	Geology 100	Psychology 110
Economics 201	History 130	Psychology 205B
Economics 202	History 140	Sociology 110
Economics 210	Math 100	
	Math 110	

NetTutor Usage Rates

Online tutoring provided during the pilot consisted of three sets of services: 1) live one-on-one tutoring (Ask NetTutor), 2) asynchronous paper/essay review (Paper Center), and 3) asynchronous question submission (Question and Answer Center). In addition, it was necessary to promote awareness of the online services offered to students in order to encourage usage, and therefore increase the chance for tutoring to make a difference in students' academic outcomes.

The Paper Center was the most utilized service, followed by live tutoring. The frequency of use of each service is illustrated in Figure 1 below. Out of the 1,252 total sessions, 58.7% (726) were from the Paper Center, 35.5% (445) were from Live Tutoring (Ask NetTutor), and 6.4% (81) were from the Question and Answer Center (Q&A).

Figure 1. Utilization of Tutoring by Type



Information gleaned from interviews with various tutoring professionals and the tutoring vendor indicates that a good online tutoring utilization target rate is approximately 10% of students initiating at least one interaction. While the tutoring usage rate for the first semester of the pilot

in spring 2015 was only 8.6%, both the summer and fall 2015 pilots exceeded the 10% utilization target with rates of 12.7% and 12.3%, respectively. Table 3 below provides tutoring usage details by semester/term.

Table 3: Tutoring Participation By Semester

	Spring 2015	Summer 2015	Fall 2015
Colleges that offered tutoring	8	13	21
Students that used online tutoring	72	149	326
Number of tutoring sessions	154	275	823
Number of tutoring minutes	3,276 (55 hrs.)	4,552 (76 hrs.)	17,142 (268 hrs.)

The online tutoring usage data offer a strong indication that the outreach efforts by faculty and the SPOCs at each of the pilot colleges, the outreach resources and methods for embedding tutoring into the pilot’s online courses provided by the OEI, and the marketing materials provided by NetTutor staff may have had a positive effect in increasing student usage of tutoring services over the course of the pilot.

III. Student Survey Findings

As noted previously, two core components of the evaluation of online tutoring used with OEI courses were surveys administered to students in those courses. Findings from the pre-tutoring survey, completed by students prior to utilization of NetTutor, as well as the end-of-term survey, are summarized in the following sections.¹²

Pre-Tutoring Student Survey: Summary of Key Findings

Faculty teaching online courses as part of the tutoring pilot were asked to administer a pre-tutoring survey to their students approximately one week into the spring and fall 2015 semesters/terms (due to the compressed schedule, a pre-student survey was not administered in summer). The purpose of the survey was to learn, prior to students’ utilization of NetTutor, about their previous experiences with face-to-face and/or online tutoring services as well as their perceptions of the impact of those services on their course success. Of the 73 faculty who taught OEI online courses in the spring and fall 2015, 64 administered the survey to their students. A total of 1,607 out of 3,011 students (53.4 % response rate) across 19 pilot colleges completed the survey.

The pre-tutoring survey captured both quantitative as well as qualitative information from students. The quantitative results will be shared first, followed by students’ perspectives.

¹² As described in the data sources on page 4, faculty and SPOC surveys were also administered. The data collected from these surveys was formative in nature and informed the recommendations for program improvement and subsequent modifications to the tutoring program design. The findings from these two surveys are incorporated throughout the implementation section of this report on page 7.

Pre-Tutoring Survey Quantitative Findings

For students who had previously used in-person or online tutoring, the accessibility and convenience of online tutoring versus in-person tutoring was the main reason students cited for gravitating to online tutoring. Otherwise, students' experiences with online tutoring were similar to experiences with in-person tutoring. Regardless of tutoring modality, the majority of students cited that tutors were knowledgeable in their subject areas, helped them understand materials in a different way, and taught them new skills. However, a couple of things stood out from the survey:

- Of the 1,506 students who answered the question about prior experience with online tutoring, over half (58.4%) indicated having never accessed any type of tutoring.
- The majority of students who *had* used online tutoring previously had used the asynchronous types of online tutoring modalities. The most frequently cited asynchronous methods included submitting a question or assignment and getting a response at a later time via email, reading online supplemental materials and/or study guides, and watching videos on specific topics

Pre-Tutoring Survey Qualitative Findings

Students were also asked in the pre-tutoring survey what thing they valued most and least about in-person and online tutoring. Six hundred and fifty-two students shared their perspectives. A few themes emerged from the analysis of these open-ended responses that did not surface in the survey's close-ended (quantitative) questions.

In particular, students noted that in-person tutoring allows for personal connections to be developed with a tutor, which students appreciated. Having these connections made students more comfortable asking questions about things they found challenging and/or felt confused about. In the words of two students:

Face to face interactions have always been helpful for me. I learn better with hands-on tutoring and practicing the new skills with the instructor there to correct my mistakes and show me where I began to get lost.

Things could be explained on paper and I learn easier when I see things. I learn better with person-to-person teaching. Tutoring helped a lot to learn my style of learning. Not only verbal, but illustrations and or combo works best for me.

In contrast, students cited the lack of engagement and connection with tutors as the least valuable aspects of online tutoring. One student shared:

It was less personal and I found it harder to connect the materials to my work.

Many students further shared that when accessing in-person tutoring at their college, there were not enough tutors to help all of the students who needed assistance. A number of them also felt that in-person tutoring sessions were too short. Moreover, students mentioned the limited hours of many tutoring centers.

Three students described:

What I found the least valuable about in-person tutoring was [that the tutoring center did] not have enough tutors working or their schedule [did] not meet my schedule when I need tutoring.

There was not a lot of time [with the tutors]. The college only offers you 30 minutes [per tutoring session] which is nothing. [I] had to go several times a week because I never got the help I needed [in the short sessions].

The hours that [were] available [were a problem]. I work, so evenings and weekends are essential for me and that seems to be the least amount of tutoring time available.

In contrast, students stated that online tutoring gave them the ability to go at their own pace. The majority of students that took online courses indicated utilizing some form of asynchronous online tutoring. Two students stated about the benefits of this capacity for self-pacing:

I can pause and replay videos if I don't fully understand a concept.

[I liked] being able to learn at my own pace and use [online tutoring] when it is most convenient for me.

However, students also encountered some difficulty communicating effectively in an online environment. Some students cited struggling to convey their questions to tutors via email and not being able to understand the tutors' responses. In the words of two students:

It was hard to ask some questions about math problems because you can't use certain math symbols with a keyboard/computer.

My tutor provided a "trick" graph to use, but since [the tutor] couldn't speak directly with me, I was utterly confused and frustrated. However, at my school there is a tutoring center and [in-person tutors there] drew the same graph and explained it to me and it made complete sense.

The takeaways from the pre-tutoring survey suggest that in-person and online tutoring are both important resources that meet the needs of different student populations. Moreover, based on student feedback regarding the limited hours tutoring centers are available, especially on the weekends, tutoring sessions not being long enough to provide meaningful assistance, and the lack of enough tutors, particularly in certain subject areas, to meet the demand for tutoring colleges need to explore ways to respond to students' identified needs.

End-of-term Tutoring Student Survey: Summary of Key Findings

The goal of the end-of-term survey was to understand how students learned about the availability of online tutoring and their experiences with the tutoring services. The survey was administered in the latter half of the spring and fall 2015 semesters/terms by 65 out of the 73 faculty who participated in the 2015 online tutoring pilot (as with the pre-tutoring survey, due to the compressed schedule of the summer term, an end-of-term survey was not administered). A total of 571 out of 3,186 (18.2 % response rate) students across 22 pilot colleges completed the

survey.¹³ The end-of-term survey collected both quantitative as well as qualitative information from students. The quantitative results will be shared first, followed by students' perspectives.

End-of-term Student Survey Quantitative Findings

Eighty-two percent (2,612 out of 3,186 students) of students who participated in the end-of-term survey did not utilize online tutoring services. The primary reasons cited by students included feeling that they did not need tutoring and/or not having time. Many of these students were balancing a full-time unit load and full-time work and others were also balancing family responsibilities on top of school and work.

Of the students that *had* utilized the online tutoring services, 35% (202 out of 571) indicated finding out about online tutoring through an email from their instructor, which may suggest that faculty play an important role in promoting the use of online tutoring to their students. Overall, the students who used online tutoring had a positive experience with the services. The majority of students who used NetTutor found the services easy to access and the platform easy to use.

End-of-term Student Survey Qualitative Findings

Students were asked what they liked about online tutoring. One of the most cited responses was having easy access to help from home as well as the 48-hour turnaround time for receiving feedback. One student shared:

I could send my work right from my own computer, without making an appointment, driving to the tutor, etc. It was wonderful. Fast turnaround as well.

Furthermore, the majority of students attributed positive characteristics to their tutors, such as being a good listener, friendly, patient, courteous, and encouraging. Students also cited having positive interactions with their tutors and their tutors' quality of service. Students indicated that their tutors were able to understand their questions, encouraged critical thinking, were knowledgeable about the subject matter, suggested techniques to better understand the materials, and taught them new skills. Three students described:

The tutors were helpful and encouraging. They helped me with paraphrasing which is difficult for me and I got my first "A" because of them.

The tutor brought up good questions, which made me think differently and see things from a different point of view, which of course helped me improve my papers and assignments.

The tutor helped my success in the class by pointing out the weaknesses that I have in writing like grammar, verb agreement, citations, etc. By providing feedback, it really helps me a lot because I know where to pay attention in order to improve my writing.

¹³ During the final semester of the tutoring pilot, a change was made in how the end-of-term survey was administered. Among the changes made was the combining of the end-of-term tutoring survey with the end-of-term survey for Quest for Online Success. The merging of these two surveys made the survey longer, potentially impacting survey completion rates.

Conclusion

One of the key ways for the RP Group's evaluator to draw conclusions about the success of the online tutoring pilot was to examine data across the three pilot semesters to see if trends and/or changes over time could be identified. However, the majority of data, such as the type of tutoring used and student satisfaction with online tutoring services, remained relatively consistent across the pilot semesters.

More specifically, the data showed the following:

- **Overall, findings regarding the implementation of the OEI online tutoring pilot are promising.** Over the course of the year-long pilot, lessons were learned and strategies developed to improve and strengthen the online tutoring services in the areas of communication (within colleges and between college, OEI, and NetTutor staff), student usage of online tutoring services, and identification and resolution of technical issues. The enhancements made by the OEI staff to the online tutoring services over the course of the year led the RP Group evaluator to say with a high level of confidence that **the online tutoring program model was implemented with reasonable fidelity to its design.**
- While the spring 2015 pilot's tutoring usage rate data of 8.6% was below the 10% target threshold,¹⁴ **the summer and fall 2015 online tutoring pilots exceeded the 10% utilization target rate:** 12.7% and 12.3%, respectively. These results are a good indication that the outreach efforts by faculty and SPOCs, as well as methods for embedding tutoring into the pilot's online courses provided by the OEI and the marketing materials provided by NetTutor staff, had the intended effect of increasing student usage.

Given the findings presented in this report, the RP Group evaluator can conclude that the pilot met its two primary objectives: (1) learn about students' experience with online tutoring services and their perceptions of the impact online tutoring had on their success in their online class(es), and (2) use the pilot to develop and improve policies and procedures as well as address operational issues based on the implementation lessons from the 24 California community colleges that took part in the OEI online tutoring pilot.

While the online tutoring pilot was successful, it will be critical that the colleges and OEI continue to track usage rates to ensure these rates stay at or increase above the usage rates gathered at the end of the pilot. Finally, it is important to recall the data matching issue described earlier in this report. Without access to student-level data, the OEI will not be able to determine whether online tutoring is having an impact on student academic success.

¹⁴ According to various tutoring professionals and the tutoring vendor indicated that a good target rate of utilization for online tutoring services is approximately 10% of students initiating at least one interaction.

Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The RP Group strengthens the ability of California community colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for *all* students.

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