Guidelines for the Selection and training of Tutors and Demonstrators

Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning
Guidelines for the coordination, selection, appointment, training and evaluation of tutors and demonstrators at Rhodes University

Introduction
Rhodes University prides itself in its use of tutors and tutorials as a distinctive feature of the teaching and learning experience at this institution. While small group tutorials are not unique to Rhodes, the extent to which peer learning facilitation through tutors and demonstrators is employed, remains a significant feature of the Rhodes experience.

Changes in the higher education context are placing much greater demands on teaching staff, including tutors and demonstrators, and there is a growing need to support, develop and ensure proper management of tutors and demonstrators at Rhodes. The following guidelines are provided to assist Heads of Departments and lecturers in the development and management of a tutor / demonstrator programme in their departments.

Coordination of tutorial / practical programme
It is important that a tutorial / practical coordinator be appointed to oversee all aspects of the tutorial / practical programme. This includes organising the selection, appointment, training, etc. of tutors / demonstrators.

In large departments it may be necessary to appoint a senior post-graduate student who is an experienced tutor, to act as Senior Tutor with some coordination duties. The Senior Tutor acts as a link between tutors / demonstrators and coordinator / department and can respond to routine administrative or communication problems.

Planning of tutorials
Tutor / demonstrator coordinators should meet regularly with tutors / demonstrators to ensure adequate two-way communication between department and tutors / demonstrators. Coordinators need to ensure that weekly briefing sessions are held where the content and methodology for tutorials / practical sessions are discussed. At briefing meetings the coordinator or lecturer-in-charge receives feedback from tutors / demonstrators about tutorials / practical sessions and about difficulties experienced by tutors / demonstrators and / or students. Coordinators are responsible for the evaluation of tutors and demonstrators and the tutorial / practical programme on a regular basis.

Conditions of service
Tutors / demonstrators are appointed to work for a maximum of six hours per week. All tutors and demonstrators, including Graduate Assistants appointed to tutor or demonstrate, are expected to perform their tutoring / demonstration tasks in accordance with the departmental and institutional guidelines that apply to tutors / demonstrators. Tutors / demonstrators should be furnished with a document outlining departmental expectations of tutors / demonstrators and tutorials or practical classes as well as what tutors / demonstrators may expect from the department. This will include information about the departmental disciplinary code for tutors / demonstrators.
Selection of tutors

In departments where the pool of potential tutors / demonstrators is not restricted, the following process may be helpful in ensuring the selection of the best students as tutors / demonstrators:

- A letter inviting application is posted on departmental notice boards (and website) towards the middle of the third term.
- Application forms requesting basic information and inviting prospective tutors / demonstrators to motivate why they would be good tutors / demonstrators are made available.
- Set closing date for applications (the first week of the fourth term is reasonable).
- Staff members sift through application forms and rate applicants:
  - Important factors to consider are:
    - Academic record
    - Involvement in extra-curricular activities (school and university taken into account)
    - Any leadership roles
      (The above two criteria are important as they are likely to have contributed to the development of a sense of community and individuals’ interpersonal skills.)
    - Public speaking activities (development of confidence)
- It may be helpful to interview potential tutors to ascertain level and nature of motivation, potential level of commitment, and potential approach to tutoring / demonstrating, to make clear departmental expectations and to allow the prospective tutor to clarify any concerns.
- Positions are confirmed in January or February.

1.1 Tutor training and development

There needs to be adequate formal training for tutors / demonstrators at the beginning of each academic year. Such training should include:

- Orientation to the department
- Orientation to tutoring / demonstrating
- Nature and purpose of tutorials / practical classes
- Facilitation of small groups
- Group dynamics
  - How people learn in groups
  - Issues of diversity with special emphasis on language, culture and gender
- Department’s expectations of tutors / demonstrators
- Tutors’ / Demonstrators’ expectations of the department and of students

At the end of the first term a session for the debriefing of tutors / demonstrators should be held. The need for further training should be evaluated at this point.
**Tutors / demonstrators as assessors**

Where tutors / demonstrators assess student work, adequate training and support for this task needs to be given. Lecturer moderation of tasks assessed by tutors / demonstrators is imperative to ensure reliability of the assessment process. Some departments have successfully developed and incorporated a clear process to enable students to appeal against perceived ‘unfair marking’. This process (via the Senior Tutor or Tutor Co-ordinator and then to the lecturer responsible for the task) not only serves to reassure students, but also provides a ready indicator of assessment problems. In cases where this process has been formalised, appeals have been rare.

**Second and third year students as tutors**

It is recognised that tutors in their second or third year of study may not be as mature as postgraduate tutors in terms of their own academic development. Departments intending to use such students must bear in mind that they may require more support from tutor coordinators and course lecturers.

**Code of conduct for tutors and demonstrators at Rhodes University**

The Code of Conduct for Tutors and Demonstrators is directed towards encouraging professionalism in tutor / demonstrator practice. Individual departments have developed Codes of Conduct and have found these to be helpful in the management of tutors. The suggested Code of Conduct set out below is based on working examples from Rhodes departments.

Tutors / demonstrators should:

- Diligently carry out the tasks assigned by the department.
- Be sensitive to the diverse nature of the student body with particular emphasis on language, culture and gender.
- Facilitate learning and guide students through the process of knowledge construction in the discipline.
- Where relevant, support students to bridge the gap between their fear of technology and their access to technology.
- Support and encourage students to develop positive self-images as learners, and positive images of the discipline area.
- Be empathic in their encounters with students. Tutors must enable students to risk constructing and testing their knowledge within the tutorial / practical context.
- Refrain from discussing staff members or other students with members of their tutorial / practical group.
Tutor / Demonstrator Practice that would support the Code of Conduct would require tutors to:

- Attend tutorial / practical briefing sessions. It is mandatory for tutors / demonstrators to prepare the tutorial / practical work prior to the meeting with the lecturer.
- Prepare thoroughly for each tutorial / practical. This involves having a thorough understanding of the work as well as planning the way the tutorial / practical will be conducted.
- Never miss a tutorial / practical without making prior arrangements.
- Create and maintain a comfortable atmosphere within the tutorial or practical group.
- Be enthusiastic about their subject.
- Help students to recognise that risking making mistakes enables learning.
- Be patient with students.
- Value the opinions of their students.
- Encourage participation at tutorials.
- Make use of the full tutorial period. Extra time can be utilized for revision purposes or dealing with student problems.
- Assess assignments accurately, promptly and in a constructive manner.