How Effective Program Promotion Drives Usage and Ongoing Student Success

A case study of Surry Community College (SCC) and Tutor.com
Updated October 2024

SURRY Community College™

tutor.com™

The goal:
Go from good to great

Seeking to improve outcomes and offer students enhanced academic support resources, Surry Community College (SCC) partnered with Tutor.com in 2014.

Need for the program accelerated over the pandemic; even beyond, SCC has continued to build the program's momentum. As engagement increased, outcomes improved. In the words of Alan Unsworth, Dean of Instructional Support: **"The more students used Tutor.com, the better they did."**

The need for on-demand support has remained strong. As Unsworth put it: **"Students need the flexibility because so many of them work."** Tutor.com has served as an extension of SCC's support services: **"Everything that we offer is available 24/7,"** Unsworth noted.

The challenge:
To improve student success, the College needed to build program awareness and drive usage.

The solution:
College leaders implemented strategies for **effective program promotion and charted impact**.

Institution Snapshot

Enrollment:
3,000 students earning certificates, diplomas, or degrees

Tutor.com Partner Since:
2014

Institution Type:
Two-year community college serving the counties of Surry and Yadkin in North Carolina

Most Popular Subjects:
Essay drop-off review
Statistics and statistical methods
Precalculus
Algebra
Chemistry

Access:
SCC includes a Tutor.com link at the top of every webpage in Moodle™, its learning management system (LMS). Students may access Tutor.com anytime, 24/7, via single sign-on.
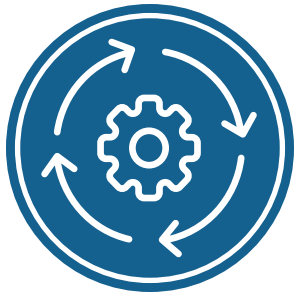
Effective Promotion Methods

Unsworth identified four key promotion methods to support the growing number of Tutor.com sessions per year:

I. Link Placement

Prominently displaying the Tutor.com program link in a fixed position on every Moodle page

II. Recurring Campaigns

Conducting regular schoolwide outreach featuring Tutor.com information and graphics

III. Targeted Outreach

Sharing tutoring information with students in high-enrollment courses as well as those who may be struggling, both at the start of term and on an ongoing basis

IV. Faculty Guidance

Acquainting (and reacquainting) faculty members with the program at annual meetings
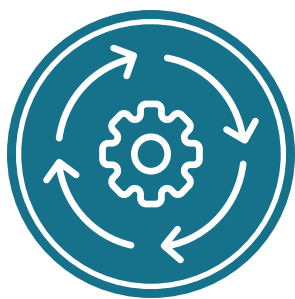
I.   Link Placement

Tutor.com operates 24/7, so students can get support whenever their schedules permit. In a post-session survey response, one chemistry student explained, "I work part-time after class, so after college, I don't have much time to go to the writing lab and schedule and wait for appointments. **This [service] allowed me to accomplish what my professor wanted in my free time without having to drive back to the campus**."

As this student's comment attests, the availability of help was not the blocker—awareness was. To increase knowledge of the program, SCC leaders leveraged the school's LMS, which students regularly visit.

> **"The course page is one place where we know students need to engage, so gaining prominent real estate on the LMS pages has been critical to increasing our student body and faculty member awareness of the program."**
>
> — Alan Unsworth
> Dean of Instructional Support

Single sign-on ensures ease of access, and for students, seeing Tutor.com repeatedly in the same location increases recognition and encourages them to incorporate sessions into their help-seeking routines.

II. Recurring Campaigns

Availability and link placement are necessary—but not sufficient—for building program utilization. Ongoing education is also needed. Unsworth shared, **"Our experience has been that the Tutor.com program link (presented without explanation) can leave students and faculty confused. Many were wondering, 'What does this link actually do for me?' So, there was still a need to educate our campus about the resource."**

To build awareness across multiple channels, SCC changes its Tutor.com social media graphics and messaging three times per semester; the College publishes periodic posts about Tutor.com's drop-off writing review service and no-cost webinars, as well.

"We also included promo graphics and explanatory text in our college's eNewsletter, posted signs on campus bulletin boards, and left Tutor.com business cards on tables in classroom buildings."

— Alan Unsworth
Dean of Instructional Support

Displaying program information in these high-traffic areas helps increase the likelihood that students see, understand, and take advantage of academic support resources.

> **"** I absolutely love this service! It is extremely helpful when I am in a bind and in need of extra help. I would not have been able to make it through my math classes without it! **"**
>
> — SCC statistics student

III. Targeted Outreach

As data in the next section demonstrates, **repeated Tutor.com use correlates with greater success**.

By targeting outreach to students in high-enrollment courses, SCC multiplied the reach of its communication efforts. For instance, academic support coaches assigned to a 100-level online English and math course posted about tutoring services in the "Course Announcements" section of Moodle on the second day of class.

Regular program utilization has benefits beyond improved grades and persistence. For example, students who participate in multiple sessions can identify their favorite tutors and opt to work with them again.

> **"I am so grateful that I have access to a tutor 24 hours a day due to my work schedule. It really accommodates my learning schedule. Thank you Surry."**
>
> — SCC math student

SCC also uses Tutor.com early-alert notifications to provide just-in-time support for students requiring additional assistance, following up to refer them to Tutor.com or on-campus tutoring.

IV. Faculty Guidance

Faculty members serve as a vital source of trusted information for students.

> **"We know that buy-in from faculty is absolutely key to sustaining robust support services. We encourage faculty to promote the Tutor.com service to their students and require or incentivize the use of on-demand tutoring sessions and asynchronous essay review."**
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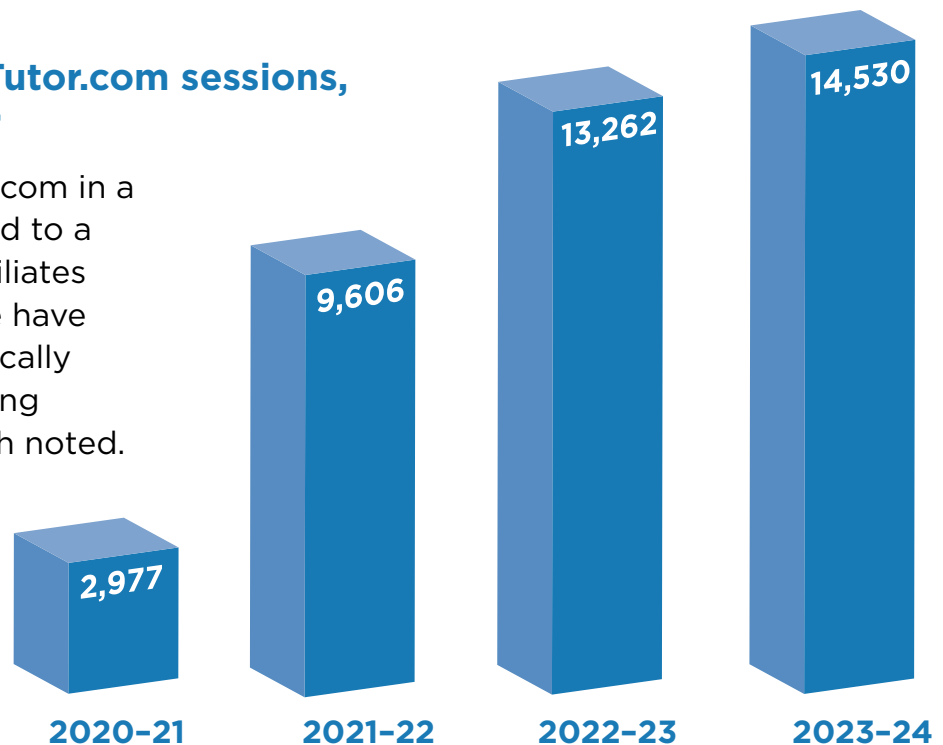> **— Alan Unsworth**
> **Dean of Instructional Support**

Tutor.com offers 24/7, personalized student support in subject areas tailored to SCC courses. The College additionally provides online resources for faculty members, including an instructional video, helpful PDF guides, an outline of Tutor.com's writing support methodology, and answers to frequently asked questions.

By educating faculty and showcasing program benefits, SCC has developed a model for achieving sustained multilevel stakeholder engagement.

Exceptional Results:
More Usage, Better Grades

Total number of Tutor.com sessions, by academic year

"By promoting Tutor.com in a variety of formats and to a variety of college affiliates and stakeholders, we have been able to dramatically increase understanding and usage," Unsworth noted.

2,977 2020–21

9,606 2021–22

13,262 2022–23

14,530 2023–24

With increased engagement, the College has experienced improved student success, as well—with "success" defined as a student earning a grade of C or better. Unsworth explained: **"We have found that if we can get students to visit Tutor.com just one time per semester, we see a success rate above 90 percent."**

The 2023–24 academic year is a case in point. For the fall semester, 92.8 percent of students who used Tutor.com at least one time earned a grade of C or better. For the spring semester, that percentage was 92.3. In the summer term, the percentage jumped to 96.5. **These rates are more than 10 percentage points higher than the average overall SCC student success rate for the past academic year.**

**"I can't get to the school for tutoring…
This English class was worrying me that it would bring down my GPA, but now that I have found this help, it is not a concern!"**
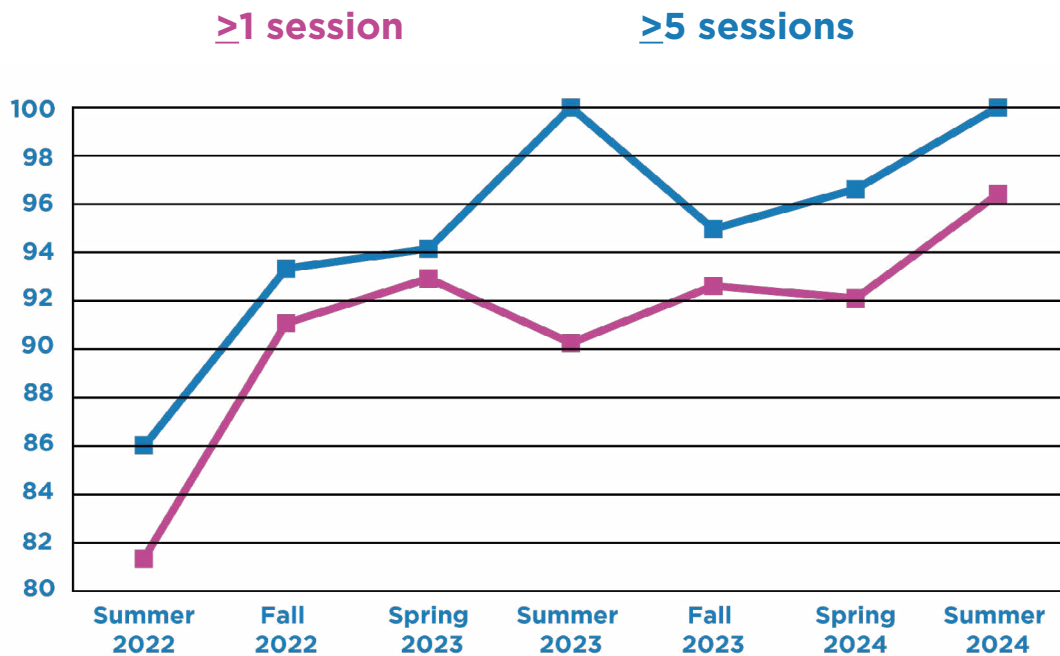
— SCC live writing help student

Exceptional Results:
More Usage, Better Grades

More striking still are the success rates associated with greater numbers of Tutor.com sessions.

Success rate* by number of Tutor.com visits
* Grade of C or better

>1 session   **>5 sessions**

SCC and Tutor.com demonstrate that purpose-driven partnerships, accompanied by powerful awareness-building efforts, promote student success—and the numbers prove it.