

# **An exploratory study: Tutors' self-assessment as a strategy for making work emotionally sustainable**

**Odegaard Writing & Research Center**

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# Research Context & Question

- **OWRC**: large interdisciplinary writing center, sessions are highly varied and unpredictable (genres, disciplines, academic standing)
- No ironclad rules, so tutors need to be self- and situation-aware; this trait can go awry (“**I’m a bad tutor**”)
- Popular image of tutoring as mainly cognitive work

What role does tutor self-assessment play in making our emotionally rich work un/sustainable?

# Tutor Emotions: Literature

## Affective experience of writers:

- Brand, A. G. (1989). *The psychology of writing: The affective experience*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- McLeod, S. H. (1991). The affective domain and the writing process: Working definitions. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 11(1), 95-105.

## Role of tutors in helping manage these emotions:

- Hudson, T. (2001), "Head 'em off at the pass:" Strategies for handling emotionalism in the writing center. *Writing Lab Newsletter*. Retrieved from <https://writinglabnewsletter.org/archives/v25/25.5.pdf>
- Mueller, S. (2009). Training tutors in emotional intelligence: Toward a pedagogy of empathy. *Writing Lab Newsletter*. Retrieved from <https://writinglabnewsletter.org/archives/v33/33.2.pdf>
- Nkambou, R., Bourdeau, J., & Mizoguchi, R. (Eds). (2010). *Affective tutors: Automatic detection of and response to student emotion*. Berlin: Springer.

# Tutor Emotions: Literature

**What about the emotional labor of tutors?** (more focused on the cost to tutors and their strategies for managing this work)

- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Noor, N. M. & Zainuddin, M. (2011). Emotional labor and burnout among female teachers: Work–family conflict as mediator. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 14(2), 283-293.
- Berry, K. & Cassidy, S. (2013). Emotional labor in university lecturers: Considerations for higher education institutions. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 2(2), 22-36.
- Christina Rowell (Department of English, East Carolina University): call for participants in 2015 MA thesis research focused explicitly on tutors' emotional labor

# Tutor Emotions: Survey

Posed three questions aimed at eliciting the range and magnitude of emotions tutors experience in their work:

- ~30 participants
- Anonymous and optional, but administered in person in the context of our monthly staff meeting
- Conducted using PollEverywhere (text-in, real-time display)

# Tutor Emotions: Survey

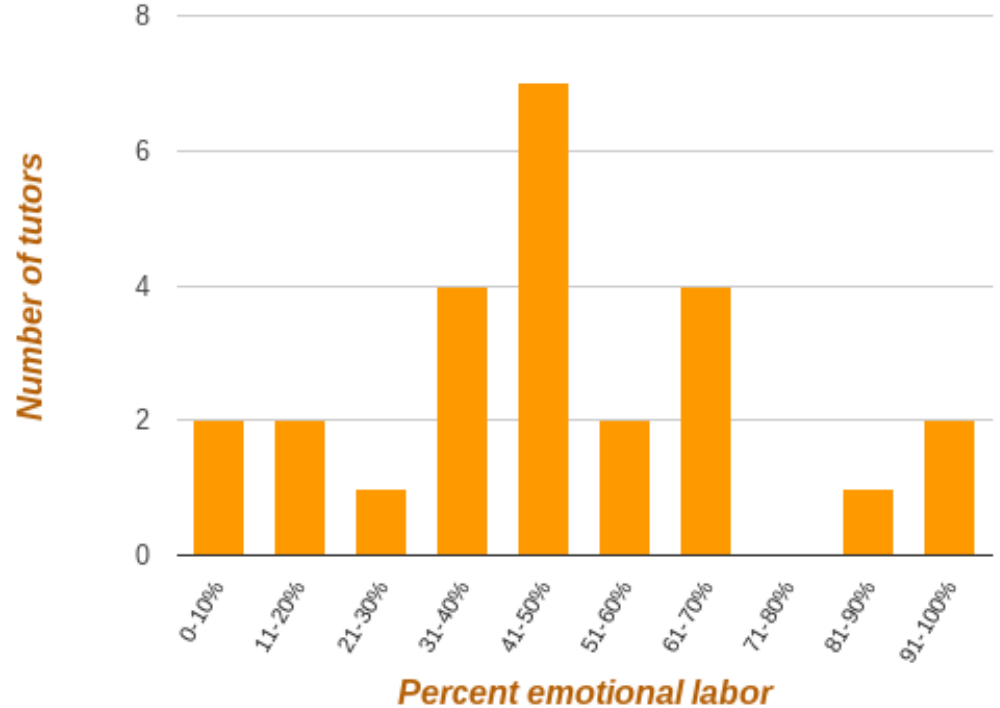
Name positive, negative, and ambivalent emotions that you might feel within a typical shift:

Comfort	Determination	Celebratory	Appreciated	Eager
Relief	Hope	Crushed it	Collaborative	Enthusiasm
3	Resistance	Effervescent	Helpful	Excited
	Tenacious	Triumphant	Impressed	Happiness
	Patient	YES!	Sympathetic	Joy
	6	Satisfaction	Warm	Engagement
		7	Protectiveness	Conscious
			10	Fulfillment
				Curious
				Metacognitive
				Interested
				24
Anxiety	Despair	Disappointment	Dismissed	Meh
Apprehensive	Resignation	Frustrated	Intimidation	Exhausted
AWKWARD!	Disillusionment	Derpy	Self-conscious	Fatigued
Cautious	Impatience	9	Shame	Wearry
Fear	4		Shy	Tired
Worried			Suspicious	Lethargy
Unease			Responsible for outcomes	
Trepidation			Embarrassment	12
Tentative			Anger	
Hesitant			10	
Nervousness				
Panic				
Concern				
??				
Confused				
				33

# Tutor Emotions: Survey

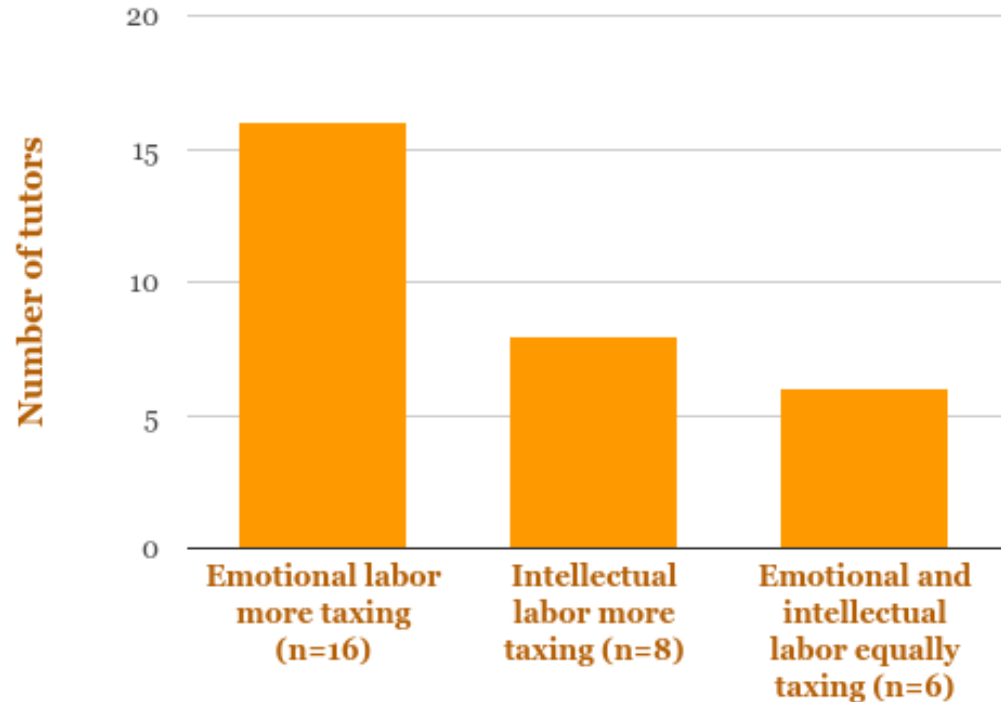
“Emotional labor” means managing your emotions in order to manage the emotions of others.

For a typical session, what percent of your work would you call emotional labor (e.g. 0%, 50%, 80%), with the remaining percent (out of 100) being intellectual labor?



# Tutor Emotions: Survey

For a typical session, which is more taxing: the emotional labor, or the intellectual?





# Self-assessment: Focus Group

## Posed questions to 20 focus group participants:

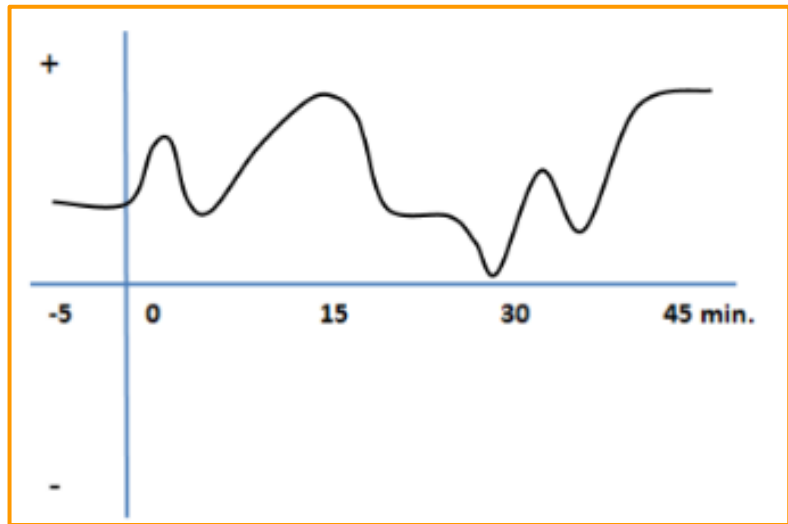
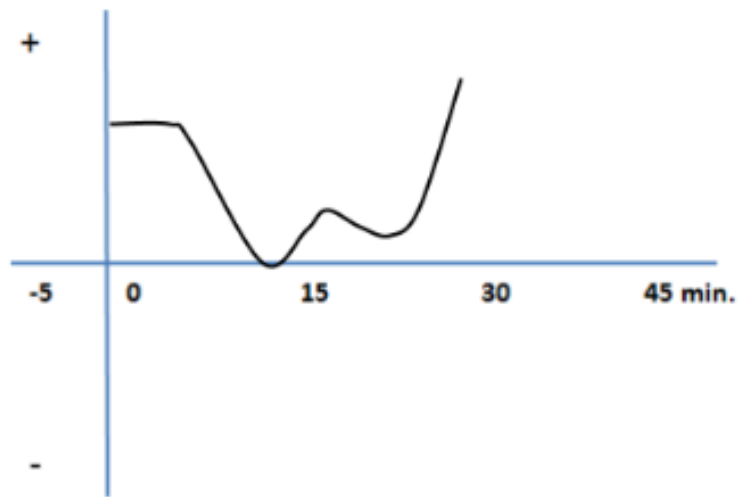
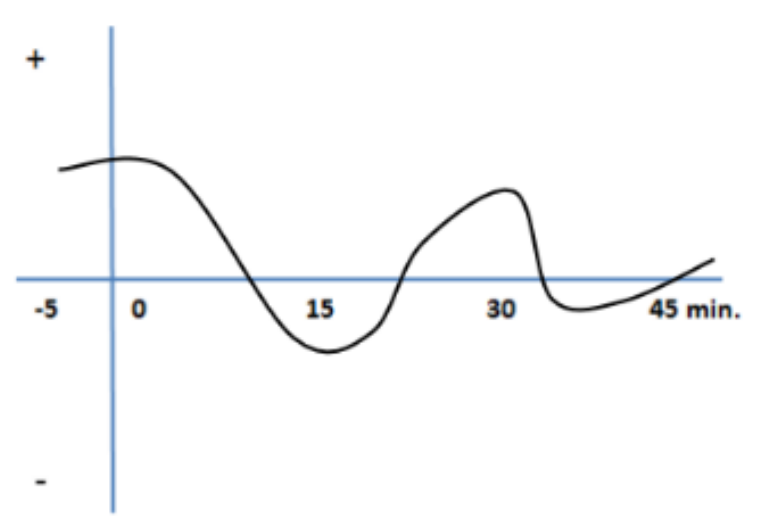
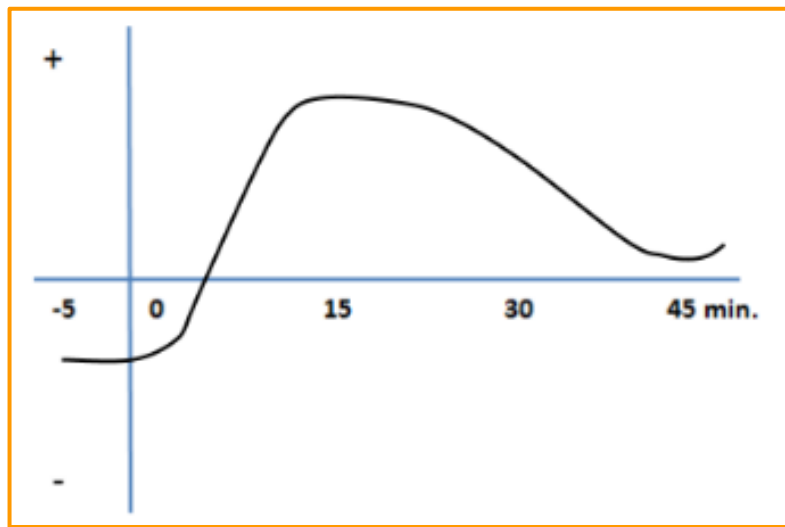
- How do you measure your successes and failures? What do you use as benchmarks, what do you look for as evidence?

## Classified responses into emergent categories:

- Sources of benchmarks and evidence (e.g. **writer reactions, own emotions, co-workers' practices, tutoring literature**)
- Results informed design of interviews

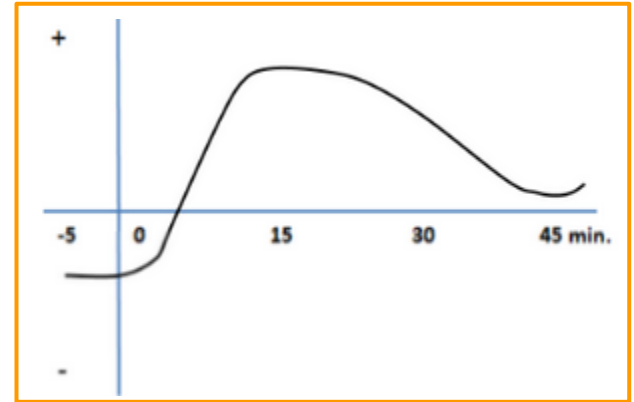
# Self-assessment: Interview

- In-person observation of five tutors (one session apiece)
- Created transcripts while observing (capturing major conversational events)
- Immediately following, interviewed tutor using transcript as a prompt: What were you feeling at different points in the session? Why?



# Self-assessment: Interviews

“in the latter part, I had a general down sloping feeling and then an uptick at the end ... I was feeling pressed for time and I wanted [to cover] everything she wanted to address, particularly the conclusion because she said she had the most trouble with that, but then I could tell that I was becoming less non-directive, but I could tell it probably wasn't the best way to get there because of our philosophy.”



# Limitations & Considerations

- Data might be biased because we know the interviewees, but it is easier to build rapport
- Self-reported: We didn't have time to do extensive analysis of transcripts and include the observer's thoughts in our report, but observations did help
- Hard to control for tutors' emotional states pre-session
- Subjectivity of grouping descriptive words
- Data might be atypical (sample size)

# Further Work

- **Apply this research in tutor training** to address expectations of incoming tutors (re: emotional content of work)
- Work toward a provisional understanding of the emotional variability of tutoring; further work should identify the role of **tutor self-assessment** in making emotional labor un/sustainable
  - Additional analysis of interview data to inform subsequent research design → probably need to see how self-assessment practices change over the course of tutors' careers (longitudinal)
  - Larger sample size (less exploratory, more systematic)