

## Chapter 21. From the Archive of a Tutor Representative's Email Correspondences (Summer 2022)

Anonymous

For many years, the administration of a small, private liberal arts college in the Northeast fought to deny contingent workers' right to union representation. Fortunately, in 2010, the contingent workers won the right to establish ABC, a local union that includes adjunct professors and other instructional staff such as tutors. SR, who has worked as a professional writing tutor since fall 2007, has volunteered for the (unpaid) position of tutor representative (2010-present). She advocates for better wages and working conditions for professional math and writing tutors in the college's academic support and tutoring center. Since she cannot interact with most of her fellow tutors in person on a regular basis due to the working conditions of contingent labor (especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic), she relies on email correspondences to communicate with them. Although there was no tutoring in the summer, she had to cope with the extraordinary challenges when the tutor coordinator abruptly announced leaving his position, and the center was relocated to a smaller space.

The following excerpts are from SR's email correspondences with tutors and the union president. Although these excerpts have been edited to protect the confidentiality of certain stakeholders, the integrity of the content remains intact. While \*\*\* represents content that was deleted, information in square brackets [ ] was added to provide the necessary context to facilitate readers' comprehension. Readers reviewing this information can gain an insider's glimpse of the complexity of her role.

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**June 13, 2022:** Union Update: Medical Assistance Fund (MAF) Reimbursement, Additional 5 percent Compensation for Online Tutoring, and Adjunct Professional Development Fund

CC: XYZ Secretary and ABC President

Dear Tutors,

I hope this email finds you well. Below are several important items for you to review:

(1) Please review this very urgent message from the secretary of our sister union XYZ, which represents staff employees at the college. She helps facilitate the application for the Medical Assistance Fund (MAF), a vital, shared resource for both unions.

Her email is in the CC if you have questions regarding MAF reimbursement:

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[MAF is a pool of money that the college had agreed to establish after collective bargaining with ABC and XYZ, which means that the amount allocated for MAF may be negotiated with each contract. Part-time employees who belong to ABC or XYZ that are not eligible for health insurance coverage from the college due to their limited hours of employment may apply to MAF annually to receive reimbursement for their out-of-pocket medical expenses.

Every year around April, Human Resources (HR) sends the XYZ Secretary the application, which she subsequently distributes through a mass email. Applicants must complete the forms, attach their receipts, and send the entire package to the external contractor that administers the fund on the behalf of the college by the stated deadline. Applicants are given about a three week period from when the application is made available to complete this process.

The external contractor must review all applications and calculate the amount of each eligible applicant's reimbursement. The percentage of an individual's reimbursement is dependent on the number of eligible applicants and their total qualifying expenses each year. This mechanism ensures that all eligible applicants receive at least some percentage of their requested reimbursement. Usually, around the middle or end of May the funds are distributed, but this year, for whatever reason, the funds had not been distributed yet.

The XYZ Secretary had been anxiously waiting to hear from HR to determine when the funds would be deposited in applicants' paychecks. She finally obtained the list from HR with the amount of each applicant's reimbursement. She is planning to email the individuals on the list along with "a final e-blast" to ensure that all applicants receive news from her. If an applicant does not receive an email from her, that individual should contact her immediately. She provides an estimated time frame of when applicants should expect to receive the reimbursements in their paychecks. She also notes that these benefits are tax deductible.]

If you are approved for MAF reimbursement, you should see "Medical Reimbursement Account" (MRA) noted in your pay stub along with the amount you are approved for.

(2) I reached out to HR about the additional 5 percent compensation for online tutoring. HR reassured me that Payroll has received the list of each tutor's cumulative online hours from the tutor coordinator. As a result, if you performed any online tutoring in spring 2022, you can expect to receive retroactive pay for that work in your paycheck. However, HR has not heard from payroll about the exact pay cycle yet. The next two pay dates are

06/23/2022 and 07/07/2022. You can check on the college's electronic payroll system then to see if you have received it.

[In response to the drastic demand for online work due to the pandemic, ABC union negotiated the additional 5 percent payment for online work in the new contract to compensate members for using their own equipment at home. SR discovered through a tutor's complaint that a few tutors who did work online during the winter intersession when the center was closed did not receive their retroactive 3 percent raises. As a result, she contacted HR to ensure that tutors would be paid the new hourly rate along with the additional 5 percent for online work and then followed up with tutors].

(3) If you are engaging in any professional development related activities such as attending conferences and/or conducting research, you can apply for reimbursement of your expenses through the adjunct professional development fund. The guidelines and form are in the attachment for you to review carefully. After you have completed the form, please email the form and supporting documents to the Coordinator for Academic Affairs for processing.

[The adjunct professional development fund is a much under-utilized resource, which ABC fought for its members to have. During the lockdown period when the college was closed due to the pandemic, members could apply to the fund to receive reimbursement for technology upgrades since all operations moved online. Since SR has applied and received reimbursement from the fund to attend conferences and purchase materials, she strongly urges tutors to take full advantage of it.]

Best,  
SR

**June 23, 2022: Retroactive Pay for Online Tutoring**

CC: Tutor Coordinator

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[SR informs tutors that they should have received the retroactive payment for online tutoring in their paychecks today. SR thanks the tutor coordinator responsible for accurately tracking each tutor's online hours and submitting the paperwork to HR.]

**June 30, 2022 Email A: Updated COVID Protocol Effective July 1, 2022**

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[SR forwards Campus Safety's message to tutors.]

**June 30, 2022 Email B: Tutor Coordinator's Departure**

CC: Tutor Coordinator and Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs

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[SR forwards the coordinator's message to tutors regarding his departure. She graciously thanks him for his invaluable fifteen years of service to the center.]

**July 4, 2022: Center Update:** Tutor Coordinator's Departure and Moving into New Space

Dear ABC President,

I want to provide you with a brief update on important changes affecting the center's operations.

The tutor coordinator has decided to leave his position, and he will begin working in his new position at the college tomorrow 07/05/2022. He called me on 06/30/2022 to let me know personally, and he did send an email to all the tutors informing us of his decision. As a result, the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs will oversee the center's operations including contacting tutors in regards to their fall 2022 schedules.

[Two administrative assistants from another department contacted tutors to confirm their fall 2022 schedules.]

The center is moving to a smaller space. The tutor coordinator should have everything set up in our new (unmarked) room located across from the cafe on the first floor of the D Building. Although the tutor coordinator informed us about the move, tutors have not seen the space yet. We shall see it for the first time when we start tutoring in fall 2022.

[During the 09/09/2022 orientation meeting on Zoom, tutors found out that the start of tutoring must be delayed a week until 09/19/2022 because the new room is too small to accommodate all of the furniture from the old center. Thus, the excess furniture had to be moved out first to make room for tutoring. The Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs noted other challenges with space, which may prompt the need for increased online tutoring in the future.

The Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs has appointed the former director of the center, who now occupies a different position in the college, to graciously step in to help manage the center. However, the former director admits that she can only devote half her time to managing the center since she has not left her primary position. She hopes tutors and student workers will contact her when they encounter any problems. Everyone expects a rocky start to fall 2022.]

Best,  
SR