

## **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Panther Academic Support Services:**

*Using the NetTutor® Online Tutorial Service to Extend the Outreach of the Learning Assistance Center*

Johanna Dvorak, Director  
Panther Academic Support Services (PASS)  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

**Client:** University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Panther Academic Support Services

**Challenge:** The Milwaukee campus of the University of Wisconsin (UWM) is located on the bluff north of downtown Milwaukee. Founded in 1956, UWM serves about 30,000 students from all 50 states and 80 countries. Learners are drawn to UWM by its world-class faculty, its growing research reputation in a variety of disciplines, and the access it offers to the largest job market in the state of Wisconsin. Students in the university's online, face-to-face, and blended courses alike enjoy access to an extensive set of learning resources. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Panther Academic Support Services (PASS), with its multiple campus locations, provides the course-related peer tutoring, academic coaching, including both face-to-face and online peer tutoring and academic support.

PASS aggressively tackles the needs of students. Working in close collaboration with the National Council of Learning Centers Association, it recruits students who demonstrate the ability to explain subjects to their peers and trains them as tutors to lead group-based Supplementary Instruction sessions and one-on-one tutorials. PASS also publishes standards and best-practices guides and uses direct observation of tutor performance to inform new tutors as to what works and why.

Yet, as with any campus-based program, one area of need remains. What happens when the peer tutors go home for the day? Students in online courses, in particular, continue to need help, even late at night, on weekends and on holidays.

**Solution:** To address the issue of after-hours access, UWM's PASS program has partnered with Link-Systems International (LSI) to provide after-hours online tutoring via the LSI NetTutor® online tutoring service. Some of the considerations leading to this decision were:

- Like PASS, NetTutor conducts rigorous, on-going tutor training.
- UWM PASS was familiar with the secure and robust interface on which NetTutor tutoring takes place, LSI's WorldWideWhiteboard online collaboration tool.
- Sharing a common tutoring environment, the highly trained tutors at NetTutor are regularly observed to verify that they use best-practices. For example, rather than give answers, they employ the Socratic Method and scaffolding techniques to encourage and enable independent learning. They address underlying issues with attention to both the learning goals and the learning context of UWM courses.
- Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all tutoring pedagogy, NetTutor management works directly with UWM, using the same textbooks, tutoring style, and standards of approach used by the peer tutors of UWM and PASS.

NetTutor can offer the assurance of a uniform, shared quality of tutoring content since all NetTutor tutors work at the LSI facilities. Published research about the method and technology of NetTutor documents the proven contribution of the service to student success.

**Result:** By working with NetTutor, PASS has been able to assure online students of anywhere, anytime support even when they cannot log into a peer tutor's session. It is important to instructors that the professional tutors of NetTutor supply assistance that meets the same standards as if the student were on campus with a peer tutor. In the most stressful times for peer tutors, such as such as the first weeks or final weeks of the semester, this complements and completes the online services of the PASS program itself. In addition, LSI has worked with PASS to market the extended availability of online tutoring to students who need assistance.