



Study Assistance Guidelines

First Peoples Directorate
Indigenous Student Success Program

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1. Study Assistance Program

1.1. OVERVIEW

The Study Assistance Program provides personalised academic support to help ACU Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students build confidence, develop effective study skills, and become more independent learners throughout their university studies.

Study Assistants are casual employees at ACU who provide this tailored academic support. Individuals from any cultural background, with appropriate skills and qualifications including evidence of strong academic achievement, are encouraged to apply to be a Study Assistant.

The Study Assistance Program is fully funded by the Australian Government through the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP).

1.2. STUDY ASSISTANT SKILLS & ATTRIBUTES

A Study Assistant benefits from having strong communication skills, patience, adaptability, and a supportive attitude.

Key attributes include:

- Ability to coordinate tuition with students
- Ability to build and sustain collaborative, respectful relationships with diverse peoples
- Possess an understanding of the key factors impacting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participation in Higher Education
- Ability to support and enhance students learning of subject specific content
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Knowledge of subject content
- Capacity to manage administrative aspects of the program (promptly submitting session reports and accepting contracts)

1.3. REGISTRATION

You will submit your Registration within ACU's Study Assistance management system, WillowSoft. Following your registration as a Study Assistant, the University will ensure that you're suitable and well-matched to student needs. If you are ultimately matched to one or more students, you will be offered a casual contract as a Study Assistant.

1.4. PAY RATES

Study Assistants, as Casual Staff, are paid in line with the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement 2022-2025](#), or successor Agreements.

Applicable payment rates are specified in Schedule 2 – Sessional Academic Salary Rates, and will be in line with one of the following depending on your level of qualification.

- Other Required Activity – Normal Rate
- Other Required Activity – Co-ord/PhD rate

2. Key Understandings and Tips for Study Assistants

This section is adapted from the work of V. Nakata. For further reading, see: Nakata, M.N. and Nakata, V. (2017) Supporting Indigenous Students to Succeed at University: A Resource for the Higher Education Sector.

2.1. UNDERSTANDING STUDENT CHALLENGES

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are academically under-prepared for higher education study and so experience numerous learning challenges. These challenges can include any or all of the following:

- Gaps in their prior knowledge and skills assumed in subjects and courses
- Increased time on tasks as students work hard to close knowledge gaps while also trying to work out how to go about academic learning and develop their academic skills
- Low levels of confidence and belief in their abilities, higher levels of frustration, stress, panic, distress, and anxiety, often exacerbated by or leading to unease in peer interactions or with academics, and/or discomfort in classrooms and the university environment
- Other concurrent challenges arising from personal circumstances, which can add to stress and anxiety levels and can also impact time on academic tasks. (Please note that assisting with these challenges is not part of the role of Study Assistants - refer students to the IHEU Coordinator for support with personal matters)

2.2. THE STUDY ASSISTANT ROLE

The role of Study Assistants is to assist students with academic learning issues related to a subject or academic skills development. Essentially, this means assisting students to learn how to go about academic learning, as well as to understand academic content and students' prior knowledge gaps in the subject's assumed knowledge.

As well as helping students to improve their results and chances of success, Study Assistance should help students develop the capabilities they need to eventually be independent in their learning.

2.3. THE STUDENT-TUTOR RELATIONSHIP

The most important element of successful tutoring is the tutor-student relationship. The relationship needs to be one a student can trust, be at ease with, and feel safe enough to talk about what they don't understand or don't know how to do.

Many students feel embarrassed that they need help and are reluctant to have a tutor in the first place, so take care not to judge. If the relationship is not working, please let your IHEU Coordinator know as soon as possible.

2.4. AREAS WHERE STUDENTS OFTEN REQUIRE ASSISTANCE

ACCESSING HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

Many Indigenous commencing students may not have been exposed to the informal academic know-how that helps students navigate university expectations. As a result, they may be unsure how to begin tasks, manage time, organise study, or identify what support they need.

Useful support includes sharing your own experience with:

- The need for consistent study beyond class time (often 12–14 hours per week including contact and tutoring hours).
- Understanding and using course outlines.
- Taking, refining, and organising notes from lectures, readings, and workshops.
- Backward-planning assessments and managing timelines.
- Identifying core concepts and likely exam content.
- Effective study, exam, and motivation strategies.

While sharing your experience is valuable, encourage students to experiment and find what works best for them so they build confidence and autonomy.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Students may need help making sense of:

- Subject content, weekly readings, lectures, and assessment expectations.
- Academic concepts, arguments, propositions, and main ideas in texts.
- English and academic terminology.
- How weekly ideas connect and build across the subject.
- How the subject fits into their broader course and why it matters.

ACADEMIC SKILLS

Students often benefit from guidance in:

- Understanding and following course outlines.
- Academic reading strategies (previewing, skimming, scanning, identifying arguments, summarising).
- Note-taking from lectures and readings.
- Interpreting assignment questions and understanding task words.
- Planning written assessments, including timelines, essay structure, word allocation, and rubric interpretation.
- Research skills (database searching, evaluating sources, identifying keywords, skimming for relevance).
- Academic writing (structure, argumentation, synthesis, clarity, grammar, proofreading).
- Referencing (in-text citations, reference lists, styles, and language for discussing authors' ideas).
- Oral communication (presentations, participating in tutorials, expressing ideas clearly).
- Study and exam strategies (workload management, revision techniques, memorisation strategies).

FEEDBACK AND REASSURANCE

Students may seek:

- Feedback on conceptual understanding, drafts, and skill development.
- Guidance when unsure if they are “on the right track” or where they went wrong.
- Support when feeling anxious, behind, or overwhelmed.
- Help interpreting assessment feedback and using it to improve.
- Reassurance that their challenges are common and that academic skills develop over time.

2.5. GENERAL ADVICE FOR STUDY ASSISTANTS

Understanding Student Needs

- Many new students feel overwhelmed and unsure how to begin academic tasks.
- Students may struggle to identify what help they need, especially in unfamiliar subjects.
- Students with lower English proficiency may find lectures, readings, and academic language challenging.

Working Effectively with Students

- Agree together on what to work on and how to approach it.
- Lead early on if needed but always involve the student in decisions.
- Adapt your approach to their learning style (discussion, note-taking, diagrams, listening, Q&A, etc.)

Encouraging Independence

- Ask what the student has already tried before helping.
- Encourage them to bring their Course Outline and any problem areas to each session.
- Promote active learning rather than doing tasks for them.

Building Consistency

- Weekly attendance leads to the best progress.
- End each session by planning what you'll work on next time.
- Encourage students to attend even if they didn't complete agreed tasks—avoid judgement and keep them engaged.

Supporting Skill Development

- Demonstrate how to do a task, then let the student try it themselves.
- Provide timely feedback and opportunities to practise.
- Use positive reinforcement to build confidence and persistence.

Working With More Independent Students

- Senior students may only need reassurance, targeted help, or occasional check-ins.
- Clarify preferred meeting or contact arrangements early on.

Supporting Reluctant or Shy Students

- Be patient, reassuring, and gentle in your approach.
- Take initiative to get started if they hesitate.
- If low engagement limits your ability to help, inform your IHEU Coordinator.

Monitoring Attendance

- Let your IHEU Coordinator know if a student's attendance drops or they stop responding.

Keep in mind that Indigenous students are often dealing with challenges in their personal lives, as well as the challenges that come with being academically under-prepared. We encourage Study Assistants to be empathetic but honest in your approach to students who react inappropriately in a tutoring session. If you cannot manage the situation or recover the situation and continue with the session, let your IHEU Coordinator know when you do your feedback report immediately after the session ends. It is not your job to counsel students, but you are entitled to common courtesies and respect during sessions.

2.6. IMPORTANT DOS AND DONTs



Guide Learning

- Help students plan and approach assessments effectively
- Give feedback on practice tasks (past exams, quizzes, presentations)

Use best-practice feedback

- Use comment boxes to explain issues and suggestions
- Encourage active engagement through face-to-face or live feedback when possible

Develop academic skills

- Provide feedback on structure, clarity, grammar, referencing, and alignment



Academic Misconduct

- Don't complete any part of a student's assessment
- Don't help with graded tasks beyond guidance

Poor session management

- Don't ignore technical issues - contact the IHEU Coordinator
- Don't provide personal counselling
- Don't schedule sessions during the student's classes

Overstepping

- Don't submit assessments or handle administrative tasks for students

3. Using the Willowsoft Platform

3.1. WHAT IS WILLOWSOFT?

WillowSoft is the online system you will use to manage your Study Assistant registration and work at ACU.

Think of it as your one-stop shop for:

- Scheduling sessions with students
- Recording when sessions happen
- Logging your hours (though timesheets must also be lodged in Staff Connect)
- Running online video sessions with students

You'll access WillowSoft through your web browser (like Chrome, Safari, or Edge). There's no app to download - just go to the website and log in.

3.2. QUICK START CHECKLIST

Follow these steps to get started as a Study Assistant:

- Register at <https://acu.willowsoft.app/signup>
- Complete your tutor profile, including information about your:
 - Qualifications, including evidence of strong academic achievement
 - Subjects
 - Work rights
 - Working With Children Check (WWCC)
- Attend an online interview with IHEU staff
- Sign your contract
- Log in to WillowSoft to see your assigned students
- Complete assigned induction modules (paid)

3.3. LOGGING INTO WILLOWSOFT

Once you've registered, you can log in at any time using this link: <https://acu.willowsoft.app/>

Which login button should I click?

If you are NEW to working at ACU (you don't have an ACU staff email yet): Enter the email address and password you used when you signed up, then click the **'Email Login'** button. If you are a current ACU student, do not use your student login details.

If you ALREADY have an ACU staff email: Click the **'SSO Log In'** button and sign in using your staff login details

TIP:


If you're unsure which option to use, try 'SSO Log In' first. If that doesn't work, use 'Email Login' with your registration details.

3.4. FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND WILLOWSOFT

To access the main menu, click the **menu icon** (three horizontal lines) in the top left corner of the screen. This opens a menu where you can go to:

- **Tutor Students** - View your assigned students and manage sessions
- **My Profile** - Update your personal details and qualifications

GETTING HELP IN WILLOWSOFT

Each page in WillowSoft has help resources built in. Look for this **icon**  to access guides specific to the page you're on. These guides include step-by-step instructions with screenshots.

3.5. SCHEDULING AND MANAGING SESSIONS

Whys use Willowsoft for scheduling?

WillowSoft has a built-in scheduling tool for booking sessions with students. We ask you to use this tool (rather than Outlook, text messages, or other methods) because it:

- **Protects your privacy** - You don't need to share your personal phone number with students. WillowSoft can send text messages without revealing your number.
- **Keeps records** - All scheduling attempts are tracked, which helps if there are any disputes.
- **Confirms sessions** - Students can confirm that the session time works for them.
- **Supports no-show claims** - If a student confirms but doesn't show up, you have evidence for your payment claim.

During your first session with a new student, discuss a suitable schedule of sessions and then book these using WillowSoft.

How to schedule sessions

Watch this video for an overview of scheduling, changing, and cancelling sessions: [Creating and managing a tutor session \(video\)](#)

Help guides for managing sessions

- [Creating and managing a tutor session](#) - How to schedule a new session with a student, including setting the date, time, and location.
- [Changing, cancelling or updating a tutor session](#) - How to change the time or cancel a session if plans change.
- [Student confirmation, changes or cancellation of a tutor session](#) - What happens when a student confirms, requests changes, or cancels. Also covers how to record 'no shows'.
- [Conducting an online tutor session using WillowSoft video conference tools](#) - How to run an online tutoring session using WillowSoft's built-in video meeting feature (similar to Zoom or Teams, but free and built into WillowSoft).

3.6. MISSED SESSIONS AND LATE CANCELLATIONS

If a student misses a session or cancels with less than 24 hours' notice, you need to record this in WillowSoft.

How session confirmations work:

- When you schedule a session, the student receives an email asking them to confirm
- If they haven't confirmed 24 hours before the session, WillowSoft automatically sends them a reminder
- You can also send a reminder text message yourself through WillowSoft

What to do if a student doesn't confirm:

If the student doesn't confirm, cancel the session in WillowSoft.

What to do if a student confirms but doesn't show up:

This is called a 'no show'. Record it in WillowSoft by completing the session report and marking it as a no show.

No show payments:

If your student does not show up to a confirmed session, you can claim 1 hour of pay. **Important:** The no show must be logged in WillowSoft before you can claim payment.

3.7. STUDENT REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONAL SESSIONS

If a student needs an extra session outside of what you've scheduled, they can submit a request through WillowSoft using the 'Interactions' function on their student homepage. The Student Services Team will receive this request and notify you as appropriate.

3.8. COMPLETING SESSIONS AND GETTING PAID

WillowSoft and Staff Connect replaces paper timesheets. Here's how the payment process works:

- 1 Complete your session report**
At the end of every tutoring session, complete a 'Session Report' in WillowSoft. This records the date, time, and hours you worked, as well as any notes on how the session went. These Study Assistant notes are not visible to the student.
- 2 Student completes their feedback**
After you submit your session report, WillowSoft automatically sends the student an email and SMS asking them to confirm the session happened. The student can also submit notes on how the session went. These student notes are not visible to the Study Assistant.
- 3 Submit your timesheet in Staff Connect**
Submit a timesheet in Staff Connect that accords with your worked hours in WillowSoft.
- 4 Payment is processed**
You will only be paid after BOTH you and the student have completed your feedback in WillowSoft and you have submitted a timesheet in Staff Connect.

Important: Complete your session report straight away and support your student in doing the same - ideally as the last task during each session. This avoids delays in getting paid. The session hours and date must match what you've documented in WillowSoft, otherwise your pay claim will not be approved by the IHEU Coordinator.

Watch this video for an overview: [Completing sessions and providing feedback \(video\)](#)

For step-by-step instructions, see: [How to complete a tutor session and provide feedback \(help guide\)](#) - This guide also covers recording 'no shows' and scheduling follow-up tasks.

3.9. TECHNICAL SUPPORT

If you require further assistance, please contact the IHEU Coordinator who can provide support.

Getting Help from Staff (Screen Sharing Support)

If you get stuck and can't find the answer in the help guides, your Coordinator can help you in real time. WillowSoft has a feature that lets staff see your screen while you're logged in (called 'Ghost Mode'), so they can guide you through what to do. Contact your IHEU Coordinator to request this support.

4. Study Assistant Roles & Responsibilities

When you register to become a Study Assistant, it's important to understand that registration does not guarantee paid work. Being added to the Study Assistance pool simply means you are eligible to receive a casual contract and work schedule. Any work schedule you're issued reflects the maximum number of hours you may be asked to work, but the actual hours will depend entirely on operational needs and student demand at the time.

4.1. DOCUMENTATION AND REGISTRATION

- Complete the online registration, submit all necessary documents. This includes:
 - Qualifications
 - Subjects
 - Work rights
 - Working With Children Check (WWCC)
- Attend any interview
- Complete induction activities (paid)
- Ensure documents remain up to date (e.g. Working with Children Check, Working Rights, Qualifications) while engaged as a Study Assistant

4.2. COMMUNICATION

- Respond promptly to all study assistance-related requests
- Inform the Coordinator of any concerns about the program as soon as possible

4.3. CONFIDENTIALITY & CONTACT INFORMATION

- Respect the confidentiality of all personal and academic information
- Notify the Coordinator promptly if your contact details change

4.4. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

- Provide high quality assistance and maintain professional integrity
- Always comply with ACU's Staff Code of Conduct
- Avoid conflicts of interest (e.g. assisting family members, partners or class members)
- Follow ACU's policies and values while assisting students
- Raise any issues regarding breaches of conduct or conflicts of interest to the Coordinator promptly

4.5. SESSIONS & ATTENDANCE

- Conduct sessions in safe, agreed-upon locations or online, depending on the students' needs
- Provide at least 24 hours' notice if unable to attend sessions (except in emergencies)
- Maximum of two unnotified absences per work schedule before it may be cancelled

4.6. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

- Support academic growth by providing guidance while allowing the student to complete their own work
- Adhere to ACU's Academic Integrity expectations and policies

4.7. RECORDING HOURS AND GETTING PAID

- Record session details (date, times) in WillowSoft at the end of every session
- Ensure the student completes their feedback in WillowSoft after each session
- Submit a timesheet via Staff Connect
- Payment can only be processed after both you and the student have completed feedback in WillowSoft, and you have submitted a timesheet via Staff Connect

4.8. CONTRACT & WORK SCHEDULES

- Accept the contract. If your contract is not accepted in a timely manner, it may be cancelled
- Your work schedule(s) will stipulate the start date, end date, maximum number of claimable hours, and identify your student(s)
- Assistance hours cannot exceed those stated in the work schedule. Additional hours require approval from the coordinator
- Study Assistance is based on the demands and requirements of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students. In some cases, students choose not to access the total number of hours stated in the contract and Study Assistants can only claim the number of hours they have worked with a student/s









4.9. TRAINING

- Complete induction modules within 3 months of the contract start date
- Submit the 2-hour training time in via Staff Connect

4.10. WORK SCHEDULE & CONTRACT TERMINATION

- Work Schedules and Contracts may be cancelled if sessions are not productive or if either party fails to meet responsibilities
- Inform the Coordinator immediately if you are unable to continue with the program

5. Contact

NSW	<p>Yalbalinga</p> <p> (02) 9701 4258</p> <p> yalbalinga@acu.edu.au</p>	QLD	<p>Weemala</p> <p> (07) 3861 6122</p> <p> weemala@acu.edu.au</p>
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