Supplemental Instruction (SI)

Information for University of North Georgia Faculty and Staff

University of North Georgia
Supplemental Instruction

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Supplemental Instruction (SI)

Overview

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic support program utilizing peer-assisted study sessions to enhance student performance and retention. Deanna Martin, Ph.D., first developed Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri at Kansas City in 1973. In 2006, Gainesville State College established an SI program targeting traditionally difficult, entry-level courses that result in a high percentage of D or F grades and drop rates. After consolidation, in spring of 2013, the SI program was implemented on the Dahlonega campus. Since its implementation, students who have attended SI sessions earned statistically significant higher final course grades and drop out of courses less frequently than non-participants. On average, students who attend SI sessions earn at least half a letter grade higher than those who do not attend the sessions.

SI offers regularly scheduled study sessions, led by SI facilitators, to assist students with course content and study skills. In addition, students have an opportunity to work together to compare notes, discuss readings, develop organizational tools, and predict exam questions. SI facilitators are current students who have demonstrated academic competency in the subject area, and are trained in facilitating group activities using collaborative learning methods.

Key Elements of Supplemental Instruction

- SI identifies traditionally difficult courses instead of high risk students; SI is not a remedial academic program. A “difficult” course typically has 30% or more students who earn a low grade (D or F) or drop out of the course.

- SI consists of regularly scheduled, out-of-class, peer facilitated review sessions. Students learn to combine how to learn with what to learn.

- Participation in SI is voluntary, free, and open to all students in the course.

- SI Facilitators attend all lectures for the targeted course.

- SI Facilitator training includes discussion and application of how students learn, group facilitation methods, study techniques, and strategies for improving academic performance.

- A trained professional staff member supervises the SI program.

- Supplemental Instruction is offered only for classes in which the academic department supports SI.

- SI sessions begin the 2nd week of classes.

- SI facilitators encourage the group to process the material. Facilitators are not considered experts in the subjects and they do not relecture to participants.
Research and Assessment

Data collected by the International Center for Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri-Kansas City from 719 institutions in the United States and 146 institutions in twelve other countries demonstrates two key findings:

1. Students participating in SI earn higher course grades and withdraw less often than non-SI participants.
2. The more sessions a student attends, the higher the final course grade.

Since the implementation of Supplemental Instruction at The University of North Georgia, data collected supports the national trends. An extensive study will be conducted beginning fall 2014 to assess longitudinal success. As the program continues to move forward, data from semester surveys and additional information gathered from the registrar’s office will be used to gauge the program’s success.

On average, students who attended SI sessions earned almost a letter grade higher in courses vs. those who did not attend SI. The chart below shows final course grade comparisons from one semester for the UNG SI program. To view more data, please contact the SI Director.

We regularly develop further assessment and research using our data, and welcome interest from faculty members who would like to partner with us on a project.

SI Awards

At the culmination of each semester, the Supplemental Instruction department hosts an awards luncheon to celebrate our SI facilitators and the success of the semester. All faculty and staff involved in the SI program that semester are invited to join us in recognizing the students’ accomplishments. Each semester there will be two awards luncheons (one on the Dahlonega campus, and one on the Gainesville campus). As the end of the semester approaches, you will receive all pertinent details regarding the event and will be asked to RSVP. We hope to see you all there!

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the instructor’s role in Supplemental Instruction?
The success of the SI program hinges on instructors endorsing the program. Attendance has been shown to increase in classes where the instructor regularly encourages students to participate in SI. SI is also most successful when the faculty member meets with the SI facilitators periodically to share information about the class outcomes and objectives. Faculty is asked to sign a HW policy form, which indicates their preferences on whether or not HW problems can be worked on during SI sessions.

Many SI Facilitators apply for the program with a desire to build a relationship with a faculty member. Faculty members are not responsible for supervising or training SI Facilitators, but are welcome to develop advising/mentoring relationships with their facilitators.

Although SI Facilitators regularly attend the course, instructors are welcome to provide resources to SI Facilitators (ex: notes, practice exams, etc.) that could be used to plan SI sessions. Moreover, faculty endorsement of SI (through announcements or referrals) can encourage student participation in SI.
What is the instructor’s time commitment to SI?
We do not expect instructors to be involved any more than they are willing. Minimally, we would like Facilitators and faculty to meet at least once to start the semester, then periodically as needed. Any additional time is based on supporting student participation or supporting the SI Facilitator.

What is the class time commitment?
SI Facilitators traditionally find it useful to use time during class to accomplish the following:
- Introduce SI.
- Promote SI sessions through signs or by writing on the chalk/white board.
- Verbally announce SI as allowed by the instructor.

What benefits do I receive as an instructor?
Instructors have noticed a variety of benefits. Common benefits include:
- Improved interactions with students during office hours.
- Opportunity to mentor the SI Facilitators, who are often interested in graduate school and/or teaching.
- Facilitators can provide instructors with feedback about difficult course content.
- Some SI participants become more actively involved in class.
- Improved student learning is reflected in final course grades and instructor evaluations.

Who supervises the SI facilitators?
The SI Program Director and Coordinator are the lead SI supervisors. Mentors for the SI program also conduct observations of the facilitators and provide additional guidance.
Instructors often mentor or advise SI facilitators as needed; however, instructors should refer compliments and concerns about the performance of an SI facilitator to the SI Program Director and/or Coordinator.

Is there training for faculty teaching SI-supported courses?
Starting in fall 2014, we are offering online training for SI faculty in order to ensure that any questions are answered and that all faculty has a foundational knowledge of what SI entails. The faculty training consists of modules dealing with different topics related to the SI program at UNG and can be completed whenever is best for you. The link to the training will be emailed to all SI faculty prior to the start of the semester and will then be available on our website.

What criterion is used when determining whether a course is considered difficult?
The determination of a course as “traditionally difficult” is not based on instructors’ teaching ability. In fact, most courses supported by SI are determined before instructors’ teaching assignments are confirmed.

SI emphasizes historically difficult courses, rather than students with difficulties. At University of North Georgia, a course is historically difficult if patterns show that 25% or more students regularly receive a grade of D, F, or drop the course.

What is the theory supporting SI?
As summarized by Congos (2002):
“Therist such as Dewey, Piaget, and Bruner advocate learning in peer groups (collaborative learning). SI brings students together to collaborate to study and learn common subject matter...many SI activities are consistent with Piaget’s concept of constructivism wherein students must construct their own
knowledge and use it to gain an understanding of material to be learned (Piaget, 1964). Educational research (Dimon, 1988; Keimig, 1983) finds that it is difficult to teach transferrable study skills apart from content. Therefore, SI’s effectiveness comes from applying how to learn course content directly to the content in historically difficulty classes.”

**Why does the SI Facilitator attend class?**

SI Facilitators attend class to stay abreast current content being covered. The notes they take are not typical students’ notes—SI Facilitators’ notes are SI session plans and ideas. Facilitators also use class time to focus on converting class content into SI session material.

Facilitators’ in-class actions should role model appropriate student behavior. They prepare differently in advance and look for different things than a typical student. SI Facilitators can assist instructors in class (ex: distributing/collecting documents).

**How is SI promoted to students?**

During the first week of classes the SI Facilitator will make a 5-10 minute presentation to the class to highlight the benefits of SI and explain the program. In addition to these brief presentations during course lecture, SI facilitators will be holding one-hour informational sessions during the first week of class to explain to participants what can be expected at SI sessions throughout the semester.

SI will be promoted on a continual basis throughout the semester through our OrgSync organization page, email correspondence with all students enrolled in the course, electronic and paper flyers, and much more.

We also rely heavily on an online SI schedule ([www.ung.edu/supplemental-instruction](http://www.ung.edu/supplemental-instruction)) to keep information about SI constantly updated. Students may also receive e-mail updates about the SI schedule for their course.

**What should I put in my syllabus about SI?**

Here are two sample syllabus statements that can be adapted to fit your course.

*Basic syllabus statement:* Supplemental Instruction (SI) is offered for this course. For information about the dates, times, and locations for SI sessions, refer to the SI website: [www.ung.edu/supplemental-instruction](http://www.ung.edu/supplemental-instruction) or speak with your SI Facilitator.

*Longer syllabus statement:* Supplemental Instruction (SI) is offered for this course. SI sessions are group study opportunities, scheduled two times per week. These sessions are facilitated by your SI Facilitator, who is attending class and preparing SI sessions based on the class content. Students should attend SI sessions to ask questions about course content and to develop learning/study strategies. Students who participate in SI sessions typically earn higher final course grades and exam grades than students who do not participate in SI. SI attendance is voluntary, and it is not a substitute for class attendance or individual studying. For information about the days, times, and locations for SI sessions, refer to the SI website: [www.ung.edu/supplemental-instruction](http://www.ung.edu/supplemental-instruction) or speak with your SI Facilitator.

Starting fall 2014, the SI department will be prescheduling all SI sessions prior to the start of the semester. Once the sessions are scheduled for each semester, you will receive an email with all pertinent session information.
What happens at SI sessions?
SI session content can vary greatly, based on the course, course content, upcoming quizzes/exams, number of students present, and time of the semester. All SI sessions are guaranteed study time based on collaborative learning methods. Some methods used are: practice problem solving, group discussions, study skill development, lecture/book note clarification, and textbook reading review.

When are the SI sessions?
For most courses, there are two 60-minute sessions per week. Specific days, times, and locations are posted on our website. Sessions are typically held in the late afternoon and early evening.

Can instructors attend SI sessions?
In general, we do not want instructors at SI sessions. The dynamic of the session changes immediately. The tone tends to change to match the instructor’s typical classroom setting. Moreover, students turn to instructors to ask questions, rather than to their SI Facilitator. While we do not encourage instructors to attend SI sessions for their specific course, you may set up a time to visit an SI session outside of your specific discipline or area of expertise. Instructors who are curious about the content of sessions or would like to set up an SI session visit should contact the SI Director or Coordinator to learn more.

Can faculty members find out which students are attending SI sessions?
We strongly prefer not providing instructors with this information. Attendance at SI is voluntary, and we know our schedule of sessions may not accommodate every student. Instructors also benefit from not knowing the SI participants because it removes any perception of bias in grading.

Attendance taken at SI sessions is for our program evaluation. Instructors may request our end-of-the-semester report comparing final grades of SI participants vs. non-participants.

Can I offer extra credit to students who participate in SI?
Generally speaking, Supplemental Instruction programs recommend that students receive no academic credit (i.e., extra credit) simply for participating in SI sessions. As mentioned, SI should be voluntary and we know that it is not equitably accessible to all students. Here at UNG, we have had faculty members interested in providing extra credit to students for participating in SI sessions. We are willing to partner in this type of opportunity, as long as students have multiple ways to receive the extra credit (ex: attend SI session, 1:1 with professor, or 1:1 with tutor), making it equitably accessible to all students. If offering extra credit for participating in SI is of interest to you, please contact the SI Director or Coordinator to discuss the opportunity further.

How will I receive updates about the SI program?
The SI department would like to keep faculty and staff as updated as possible throughout the course of the semester. In order to do so, starting fall 2014, faculty teaching SI supported courses will receive a monthly newsletter on the first Monday of each month. These monthly newsletters will include topics such as session changes, upcoming SI events, reminders, data highlights and a facilitator highlight. If you would like to see a particular item included in these newsletters, please contact the SI department at si@ung.edu.
How can I provide the SI department with feedback?
We want to hear from you! Without your feedback, we cannot make the changes and improvements necessary to continue to grow. Starting in fall 2014, there will be a 24/7 feedback form on the Supplemental Instruction website (www.ung.edu/si). Simply click on “Feedback Form” in the navigation bar and let us know how we are doing any day of the week. If you would prefer for your feedback to be anonymous, the name and email fields are not required. If you choose to provide your name and email address, the SI department will follow-up with you regarding your feedback as soon as possible.

In addition to the 24/7 feedback form now available on the Supplemental Instruction website, the SI department will continue to administer an end-of-semester survey to acquire overall feedback from the semester. You will receive a link to the survey in your university email account. The information you provide in this survey helps us to make improvements for upcoming semesters, so please take a moment to complete it.

If you have any questions or concerns throughout the semester that you would like to express directly to the SI staff, we are happy to meet with faculty at any point throughout the semester. Simply contact us directly and we will coordinate a time to meet that works for both of us. We greatly appreciate any and all feedback.

Can instructors provide input on the SI Facilitator who is hired?
Our current application process in place looks for candidates who have the content knowledge and the ability to facilitate group learning. We provide training for the latter, but we are unable to increase SI facilitators’ content knowledge. Therefore, we strongly prefer SI facilitator candidates who are recommended by faculty. As a faculty member, keep an eye out for students with strong content knowledge and strong communication skills. A recommendation form can be found on our website or by contacting the department at si@ung.edu.

In addition to recommending students for the SI position during the application process, faculty will now have the ability to provide input during the interview process. Beginning in fall 2014 (hiring for spring 2015), the SI department will be implementing a two-step hiring process for new SI facilitators. This new hiring process will include a group interview in addition to the individual interview process used in previous semesters. For the group interview, we will be inviting faculty to help evaluate the candidates’ performance, allowing for further input into hiring decisions. The group interview will focus on observing core traits we are looking for in our SI facilitators, such as leadership, strong communication skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork, and the ability to handle pressure.

Why does the SI program use final course grades?
The traditional basic model of assessing the SI program includes students’ final grades in the course. SI is able to obtain final course grades without students’ prior consent based on provisions in section 99.31 of the Federal Education Rights to Privacy Act. This provision states:
(a.) An educational agency or institution may disclose personally identifiable information from an education record of a student without the consent required by 99.3 if the disclosure meets one or more of the following conditions:
(1) The disclosure is to other school officials, including teachers, within the agency or institution has determined to have legitimate education interests.
(6)(i) The disclosure is to organizations conducting students for, or on behalf of, educational agencies or institutions to:
(C) Improve instruction
(6)(ii) The agency or institution may disclose information under paragraph (a)(6)(i) of this section only if:
(A) The study is conducted in a manner that does not permit personal identification of parents and students by individuals other than representatives of the organization; and
(B) The information is destroyed when no longer needed for the purposes for which the study was conducted.

How will I know that SI is working for my particular course?
As mentioned previously, the SI department conducts a data analysis at the end of each semester using students’ final course grades to determine the effectiveness of the program for each individual section. If you would like additional progress reports throughout the semester, we would be happy to create a comparison of SI participants vs. non-SI participants using midterm or exam grades. In order to do so, please contact your campus representative directly with your request and the grades needed to conduct the assessment.

How can I request SI for a particular course?
Request for SI sessions for a particular course should be made the semester prior to ensure adequate time to locate, hire, and train qualified SI Facilitators. Contact the SI Director for more information.

SI is not being offered for my class. Can I create SI on my own?
While we would like to offer SI for every course where there is interest, we do have limitations. We are definitely advocates of support for student learning! However, creating your own program must not conflict with conditions established by the University of Missouri-Kansas City, who own rights to the SI program name and format. We certainly encourage all initiatives to provide support for student learning; however, University of North Georgia instructors and departments who want to “create SI” on their own are encouraged to speak with the SI Program Director to avoid conflict.