



Weber State University
Academic Support Centers and Programs
Supplemental Instruction
Program Review Report

June 28, 2011

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Dear Reader:

The Supplemental Instruction (SI) Program has been part of the Academic Support Centers and Programs (ASC) at Weber State University since 1990. Weber State University's commitment to providing different types of learning assistance to students with diverse learning needs has kept pace with the institution's increased enrollment.

This External Review committee used the *Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education* (CAS) outline that was provided by the Student Affairs Division to guide its comments and recommendations. The report is written in an adapted format of the SWOT analysis. Instead of providing the viewers of the report with a list of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, we have opted to provide a list of Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities. Since we, as program review members, understand that the primary purpose of the report is to address challenges in which to improve current services, we want to let the staff of the Supplemental Instruction Program know that we made a decision to limit the number of strengths in order to focus on program improvements.

We would like to thank all of the people who contributed their many hours and expertise in writing this report and who answered questions and provided additional information during the review committee's visit to campus. We felt that this self-study was well written and succinct. We were all very impressed with the professionalism, cooperation, and honesty that we received from the staff and students. We understand that a program review can be perceived as intimidating by its participants, so we are grateful for the sincerity that was afforded us during our 2-day campus visit.

Although we were sorry we were not able to talk with students who attended and did not attend SI sessions, we do feel we had enough information to make some valuable recommendations. A member of our team, Professor Robert Fudge, had an SI section attached to his course and, therefore, was able to provide us with his personal experience.

Once again, we have spent many hours beyond the initial review discussing our recommendations and addressing the best format and presentation of our ideas so they are beneficial and productive. We hope you will find our insights useful and inspiring as you make changes to certain aspects of your program. We know you are all remarkable individuals who care about the academic and personal development of all WSU students. Indeed, the faculty, administration, staff and students are lucky to have you.

Respectfully,

Robert Fudge, Associate Professor, Philosophy- Weber State University
Brooke Kelly, Director, Developmental English- Weber State University
Karin E. Winnard (Chair), Tutorial Coordinator (LARC)- San José State University

1. Unit Mission, Goals and Outcomes:

The WSU Supplemental Instruction (SI) mission and goals were constructed in accordance with NADE standards and written in such a way as to be consistent with and supportive of both Academic Support and Weber State University's mission and goals.

Strengths:

- The Academic Support Center and Programs mission statement supports and is consistent with Weber State's mission.
- The Supplemental Instruction mission statement supports and is consistent with the Academic Support Center mission statement.
- The Supplemental Instruction overarching goals support the SI mission statement.
- The Supplemental Instruction goals are focused on improving student performance and retention.

Challenges:

- It is not clearly stated that Supplemental Instruction targets students enrolled in "at risk" courses rather than targeting "at risk" students.
- It is not clear how the second program goal, concerning the development of students' affective skills, is assessed.
- It is not clear how the third program goal assesses the specific skills and outcomes mentioned.
- Anecdotal evidence from SI leaders suggests that it is the higher-performing students who attend SI more frequently than "at risk" students. Showing that these students outperform and persist at higher rates than non-attendees do not demonstrate the program's efficacy.
- The fourth bullet point under overarching goals states, "Help SI participants achieve higher grades in the targeted classes than students who do not attend SI." This is inconsistent with "Improve the academic performance of SI participants as compared to students in the same courses who did not participate in SI" which is found under the section listing program goals.
- The fifth program goal establishes more of a competition between students enrolled in SI vs. students not enrolled in SI enrolled in the same course.
- The goal to increase the number of SI participants each year is insufficiently concrete.

Opportunities:

- The original premise of SI is to "target traditionally difficult academic courses—those that that typically have 30 percent or higher rate of D or F final course grades and/or withdrawals..." (Arendale, 1994). SI targets "high risk" courses rather than "at risk" students and seeks to integrate the development of effective meta-cognitive strategies with the learning of specific course content. It is *highly* recommended that this be made

clear to faculty and students who participate in this program. If this is a modified program, it is suggested you assign a name other than Supplemental Instruction to the program.

- Clarify that it is the SI leaders' affective skills that are being assessed.
- Either eliminate the third program goal or specify which academic and affective domain skills are being referred to and develop an assessment instrument for them.
- Replace the fourth and fifth goals with goals targeting the academic development of students. For example: 30% of students enrolled in SI-supported classes will be recruited into SI, with the goal of their performing in the class at least one grade level above their reported GPA.
- Replace the overarching goal "Help students to become independent learners..." (p.1) with "Improve the academic performance of SI participants as compared to students in the same courses who did not participate in SI." (p.24) Include meta-cognitive skills development in this goal.
- Establish a concrete goal (e.g. 30% consistent student attendance prior to the 4th week of the course) for each SI course.

2. Programs and Services

The SI program exists to provide collaborative learning groups that promote the development of learning strategies and the understanding of course concepts specific to historically-difficult classes. SI leaders undergo weekly training to assist their attendees to become independent learners and to be more successful in their classes.

Strengths:

- SI Program staff and ASC administration are clearly concerned with students' needs to be successful at Weber State University.
- The SI Program demonstrates a desire to direct resources to classes where learning assistance is most needed.
- The SI Program staff is open to exploring the possibility of offering SI in non-traditional areas such as the Community Involvement Learning center and online instruction.
- The number of repeat students attending SI sessions has increased over time.
- Institutional and student outcomes as well as historical research suggest that SI attendees will benefit from participating in this type of "collaborative learning" model.
- The SI Program staff work with academic advisors to inform students about the SI option that is attached to certain courses and sections.
- Online SI leader training modules are being considered for basic administrative information and/or instruction.

Challenges:

- It is not clearly stated that Supplemental Instruction targets students enrolled in "at risk" courses rather than targeting "at risk" students.

- Faculty who have SI sections attached to their classes are not sufficiently informed about the program's rationale, training, expectations, or functions.
- Faculty are not aware of the concrete expectations regarding how frequently SI leaders are to meet with them.
- The Program Review states, "It is important for SI leaders to be extroverts." It is not clear what link there is between a specific personality trait like extroversion and success as an SI leader.
- Due to a lack of attendance requirements, many students treat SI as a last minute exam review session, decreasing the program's overall effectiveness.
- No contract or list of responsibilities is distributed to students interested in attending a SI section.
- Criteria for choosing which courses are eligible for SI are not clearly stated in either the report or to faculty.
- It is unclear what predictors are used to determine which students will attend SI.
- There are no clear incentives encouraging students to sign up for SI and attend on a regular basis.
- There is no established policy regarding how many times a student can miss an SI section before he/she can no longer participate.
- There is no cap on how many students can attend a given SI session.
- Attendance at some SI sessions is less than 4 students.
- Pay raises for SI leaders are based upon the number of students attending that particular section.

Opportunities:

- Clearly state the purpose of the SI program and differentiate it from tutorial services.
- Establish an orientation program for professors new to SI to familiarize them with how and why the program is implemented, and what their role in the program will be. Distributing a copy of the paper "*Understanding the Supplemental Instruction (SI) Model*" (Arendale, 1994) is recommended. Part of this training may include communicating guidelines of how SI leaders are trained, supervised, and evaluated and inviting faculty to agree on ways that they will encourage students, particularly students having difficulty, to attend the SI sessions.
- Establish a semester-based schedule for SI leaders to meet with the faculty members assigned to them.
- Replace "extroversion" with a more performance-relevant predictor of success for SI leaders.
- Require students to sign up for SI at the beginning of the semester and restrict access right before exams to those students who have been attending the sessions regularly.
- Develop a list of expectations and responsibilities expected of students who attend SI sections. Either distribute during the SI leader class presentation or the student's first day attending the SI section. This can be in the form of a contract they sign.
- Establish and articulate clear criteria for choosing which courses are picked for SI and why.
- Conduct surveys to find out why students attend or would attend an SI section.

- Work with faculty to determine what actions they can take to encourage students to attend the SI section. Giving an appropriate “pop quiz” or exam the 2nd week of the semester to illustrate the difficulty of the course (and then dropping this score from the final grade) is one suggestion.
- Establish a policy whereby students who sign up for SI and miss more than, for example, three sessions are no longer eligible to attend.
- Establish a maximum number of 15 students per session and a minimum of 4. (Students will bring friends if they know they need a minimum to have a session.)
- If possible, when attendance at SI sections is low, offer as a possibility the number of sessions from three times per week (1 hour) be reduced to twice each week (1.5 hours) to capture interest and increase attendance.
- Increase SI leaders’ pay using criteria that assess their effectiveness as a facilitator and role model instead of basing it on the number of students who attend their sessions.

3. Leadership and Staffing

The SI program is staffed by three professional staff, one support staff person, and thirty nine students. Two of the student workers serve as assistant supervisors.

Strengths:

- The professional staff have extensive experience, with two of the three employees having more than 15 years’ experience in the field.
- SI leaders undergo weekly training, about which they report a high level of satisfaction.
- SI leaders and supervisors demonstrate a high level of maturity and commitment to the program.
- Faculty and supervisors evaluate the SI leaders.

Challenges:

- The program seems insufficiently staffed to perform requisite observations of SI leaders during the semester.
- Students who are Assistant Supervisors observe and evaluate their peers.
- An imbalance of gender and cultural representation of SI leaders was read in the report.
- Inviting experienced SI leaders to attend new SI leader training sessions.
- One hour per week seems insufficient for effective training.
- SI leaders meeting individually with SI supervisors several times a week.
- No formal awards program for excellent performance by SI leaders is in place.
- SI leaders can be hired mid-semester and then singularly trained to facilitate new SI sections.

Opportunities:

- Only have professional staff conduct observations and evaluations of all SI leaders.

- It is not recommended that students supervise their peers except in the area of administrative tasks and follow-through. Actual observations and follow-up meetings are the responsibility of the SI professional supervisor.
- Monitor the demographic make-up of SI leaders to ensure it is reflective of the overall campus community. Establish goals to recruit African American, Native American, and Hawaiian SI leaders, commensurate with their representation in the overall student body.
- Invite experienced SI leaders into training sessions only to make or be part of a presentation. Training for *new* SI leaders is for new staff, not returning staff.
- Increase training sessions to 1.5 hours and reduce the number of training sessions to increase productivity and efficiency.
- Establish a set weekly or biweekly (2x/month) staff meeting for all SI leaders and SI supervisors to meet and discuss successes, challenges, and opportunities that have arisen. Supervisors are to meet with individual section leaders on an “as need” basis.
- Establish an awards party at the end of each semester to recognize excellence.
- Hire and train all SI leaders at the start of the semester. Training individual SI leaders after this time reduces their ability to feel included in the previously established SI leader team and is cost and time inefficient.
- Create a welcome gift bag for new SI leaders to be distributed at student staff orientation.

4. Financial Resources and Budget

Financial resources devoted to the SI program have increased by 7% from 2006/2007 to 2009/2010, despite general economic challenges. During the same period, the number of SI sessions offered has more than doubled, and the number of individual students served has increased by roughly 22%.

Strengths:

- Salaries for SI leaders and Assistant Supervisors have been significantly increased from 2006-2009.
- Cost per student served has decreased significantly from 2006-2009, reflecting greater program efficiencies.
- More students returned to attend SI sessions in 2009 compared to previous semesters.

Challenges:

- There is no minimum number of students required to attend an SI section in order for it to run.
- SI training happens more than once a semester for late hires.
- Unclear how SI leader pay compares to other trained non-instructional student pay across the university.

Opportunities:

- Achieve greater financial efficiency by establishing a minimum number of students (4) necessary to hold SI sessions. Refer smaller groups of students to use tutorial services in these particular instances or create the option of SI leaders holding a tutorial session instead of an SI session. (Note: This may mean that SI leaders would be cross-trained with tutors.)
- Recruitment and hiring of SI leaders takes place only at the start and end of every semester; no new hiring takes place after the SI training starts.
- Look into the pay of SI leaders being comparable to other student jobs on campus that require equivalent training.

5. Facilities, Equipment and Technology

SI sessions are held at both the main campus and the Davis campus, in classrooms and conference rooms equipped with a variety of technologies.

Strengths:

- SI sessions are held across campus, in buildings where the supplemented classes are held.
- Sessions generally are held in smart classrooms.
- Data (users compared to non-users) is collected and analyzed.

Challenges:

- Lack of appropriate space for SI sessions during peak scheduled class time.
- Smart classrooms are often locked during non-peak times.
- Space for SI sessions at the Davis campus is severely limited.
- SI leaders currently schedule their own rooms for SI sessions.
- SI leaders often provide personal e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers to students eligible to attend their SI sessions.
- Tracking of SI attendance is inefficient.

Opportunities:

- Dedicate space in buildings where SI can be held during peak class periods.
 - Work more closely with departmental staff in areas where SI sessions are held, to ensure that scheduled rooms are always open. This is particularly needed at the Davis campus.
 - Work with academic chairs to allocate appropriate space and time for SI leaders to facilitate their sessions. Remind the faculty that student persistence in these classes and retention at the institution is part of the WSU's mission.
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- Restrict SI leaders from communicating with students via their personal cell phones, e-mail, and social media. All communication is to take place through ASC's email

account and telecommunications system. This restriction encourages a more para-professional relationship between the SI leaders and the students.

- Contact other similar-size universities that offer Supplemental Instruction and inquire as to what system and software they use to track attendance (e.g., AccuTrack, TutorTrac or Grades1st). One suggestion is to have the SI leader distribute a Student Information Card to all the students in the class during their initial class presentation. Interested students complete the card (which also has their requested session times on it) which is then collected and put on electronic file in the ASC office. When students attend the SI session, they only sign in with their ID # and/or their name since all their necessary information will already be on file.

6. Ethical and Legal Responsibilities

All SI leaders are trained on ethical and legal responsibilities, as required by PPM 10.1.

Strengths:

- Clearly tied to PPM 10.1
- All SI leaders receive training on their ethical and legal responsibilities as a WSU student employee by the Executive Director of Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action.
- These standards are reiterated in the SI manual.

Challenges:

- Exchange of cell phone numbers between SI leaders and students and vice versa.

Opportunities:

- Establish a policy discouraging the exchange of personal cell phone numbers between SI leaders and students (see Facilities, Equipment, and Technology section).

7. Assessment and Evaluation

The SI program assesses for both SI leader effectiveness and overall effectiveness of the program, vis-à-vis program goals.

Strengths:

- SI leaders evaluated on the basis of the skills imparted during training.
- Goal of observing all SI leaders twice during the semester.
- Student usage patterns indicate students' SI attendance increases when faculty are "enthusiastic" and maintain a "high degree of cooperation with the supervisors and SI leaders."
- SI program instituted ambitious program goals.
- Program's expectation of students' academic performance is strong.

- Program's Core Student Learning Outcomes are concise and clearly written.

Challenges:

- There is insufficient oversight of SI leaders.
- Stating that students who attend SI perform better than their peers does not establish that it is because of SI (see "Unit Mission, Goals and Outcomes" section above).
- Unclear whether difference in performance between those who attend SI sessions and those who do not is statistically significant.
- Self-evaluation by SI leaders.
- SI leaders are not intended to lecture or provide instruction during SI sessions.
- Not all students attending SI are "struggling students."
- There is no requirement that students attend SI sessions a minimum number of times during the semester.
- It cannot be expected that students who attend SI sessions academically outperform those who do not.

Opportunities:

- Require that the SI professional staff conduct SI leader observations and follow-up meetings with the student within 48 hours to discuss the facilitator's successes, challenges, and opportunities. Two out of four leaders the panel met with reported no observations last semester.
- Establish more broad-based goals concerning SI attendance, especially concerning at-risk students.
- Reframe assessment so that it is based on withdrawals/failures/incompletes, not grade performance.
- Perform appropriate analysis (e.g., chi-square) on performance data to test for significance.
- Self-evaluation by SI leaders is unreliable and, therefore, unnecessary. Discontinue.
- SI leaders facilitate the discussion of course material and development of meta-cognitive strategies. Several SI leaders repeatedly spoke to us about teaching course content. It is suggested that SI leaders are more effectively trained (including the clarification of their responsibilities vs. faculty) in using other strategies besides lecturing or teaching course material... which is what faculty are paid a much higher salary to do.
- Reiterate the purpose of Supplemental Instruction and that it is open to *all* students enrolled in the targeted course.
- Require students to register for SI at the start of the semester. This practice promotes commitment. Implement policies that empower the SI leader to perform their responsibilities effectively and inform the participants about the value of their attendance and the benefits they will receive when they participate and follow program policies. (For example, students cannot attend a review session if they have not attended 90% of the previous sessions; students who miss 3 sessions cannot continue to attend that SI section for that semester.)

- Ideally, the students benefiting the most from SI would attend the session, and the students who do not attend would not need to attend. As a result, the academic performance of all students in the targeted class would be above average.