Identifying Key Skills for Supplemental Instruction Leaders:  
An Assessment of Supplemental Instruction Leaders and the Supplemental Instruction Program at Iowa State University

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Abstract
This report is a summary of specific skills necessary to be a successful undergraduate SI Leader for any subject area or class. The evaluation assesses and defines critical interpersonal, administrative, communication, leadership, teaching, learning, and troubleshooting skills that play an integral part in SI Leader success at ISU. Findings result in useful recommendations for improving the selection of and support for SI Leaders.

Executive Summary

Purpose
SI Leaders are hired based on possession of certain skills and characteristics that are determined by SI program administrators; however, those skills and characteristics are quite subjective and based on determination of supervisors who do not work as SI Leaders on a daily basis. The purposes of this assessment are to identify key skills that are required to be a successful SI Leader and also to identify how and when those skills should be developed.

Methods
The design for this evaluation is a descriptive qualitative cross-sectional case study design (Fitzpatrick, 2011). The approaches used for this assessment include utilization focused evaluation and participant-oriented evaluation. These were chosen in order to include a large number of stakeholders in the process and to ensure that data collected in this report could be used in a specific and meaningful way to make decisions about current processes.

Data were collected through a questionnaire and two focus group sessions. The questionnaire was administered during an SI Leader staff meeting in order to improve the participation rate. The questionnaire was open-ended and allowed SI Leaders to rank skills based on their importance. SI Leaders also supported each ranking with how they specifically used each skill within the position and why they believed it to be important. The data collected from the survey were used to select focus group participants as well as create focus group session questions to guide discussion.

Two focus group sessions were conducted in order to collect additional data and more specific perspectives about required skills and staff development. Each focus group was comprised SI Leaders with varying backgrounds and experience within the position. Focus group data were analyzed and coded for themes and subthemes.

Findings
Data were collected from 33 questionnaires and two focus group sessions comprised of a total of 15 SI Leaders. The data revealed two main themes including key SI Leader skills and skill development.

Key SI Leader skills. This main theme offered subthemes in skill categories including interpersonal, intrapersonal, and administrative skills. A large majority of the data pointed to
interpersonal skills being most important. Specific skills that were identified within the interpersonal category included: leadership, facilitation, communication, teaching, and social skills. SI Leaders stated that they work with a large number of stakeholders throughout the process and must be able to interact effectively with diverse individuals in a variety of settings.

Specific skills that were identified within the intrapersonal category included: self-reflection, patience, and self-starting skills. These skills were important in order to ensure that Leaders would continue to improve themselves and learn from mistakes. Also, many Leaders stated that since there is not a lot of direct supervision, they needed to be able to motivate themselves and have self-direction in order to be successful.

Specific skills that were identified within the administrative category included: time management, organization and planning, and technology skills. These skills are important in order to ensure SI Leaders are working efficiently and productively within limited time frames.

**Development of skills.** This theme included subthemes related to skills required of a successful SI Leader candidate and skills developed within the position. SI Leaders believed that some skills must be present within a candidate in order to be successful within the position, while other skills may be developed and honed through experience in the position.

SI Leaders agreed that successful SI Leader candidates must possess at least fundamental development within the skills listed in the interpersonal and intrapersonal categories in order to be successful within the position. Many believed that it would be possible to determine if a candidate possesses these skills through review of professional documents and the interview process.

Most Leaders stated that they had possessed many of the necessary skills as candidates, but they had also further developed those skills while working as an SI Leader. Most reported that they had developed the skills through observation of other sessions or actual facilitation of sessions rather than through structured staff development opportunities.

**Discussion**
The data explain the importance of skill assessment and development for SI Leaders and can be utilized to inform hiring practices and staff development opportunities. More intentional practices could support the development of these skills within the position itself and help SI Leaders and SI Leader candidates understand the importance of identifying their own strengths and weaknesses in order to be successful within the position.

Although many focus group participants stated that it would be difficult to provide training for many of the skills identified in this report, it is important to be aware of how SI Leaders define success and how they believe skills could be developed. The findings emphasized the need for further exploration of staff development and hiring processes in order to fully incorporate SI Leader feedback and recommendations.

**Recommendations**
Based on the findings of this study recommendations include:
• Outline a plan in order to continue evaluation of SI Leader competencies and skills.
• Consider conducting more complex evaluations around the subject of staff development opportunities in order to understand what staff want to learn
• Offer opportunities for senior SI Leaders to develop trainings based on specific skills outlined in this report.
• Include specific skills outlined in this report in job descriptions and position postings.
• Implement group interviews in order to assess interpersonal skills and see how candidates interact with one another.

References