Iowa State University
Dean of Students Office
Supplemental Instruction-Academic Success Center

Analysis of Comments from Student Feedback, 2012-2013

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Abstract
In courses with Supplemental Instruction (SI) offered, students are eligible to complete a program evaluation during the final weeks of each semester. This report uses students’ comments to identify reasonable suggestions for improvement of the SI program.

Executive Summary

Purpose
The purpose of this assessment is to present a qualitative summary of student’s comments from the end-of-semester evaluation.

Methodology
Two online program evaluations—one for SI participants and one for non-participants—have been used (with slight modifications over time) for multiple years. No changes to the questions have been made since 2009.

Students received an e-mail notification of the program evaluation, directing them to the online location of the evaluation. Students self-selected which evaluation form to complete. Following conclusion of data collection, frequency data were compiled and reported. Copies of these surveys are available for each SI Leader. Quantitative data from the evaluations are summarized in another report titled Frequency Summary of Student Feedback.

Each survey include open-ended comment prompts as follows:
• In the participant survey, Please write suggestions for improving SI and/or the SI website.
• In the non-participant survey, Please write suggestions for making the SI program more suitable to meet your needs.

Following the quantitative analysis, these comments were sorted to determine useful suggestions to improve the SI program. 865 total comments were received, many which are not included in this report due to being:
• No apparent relationship to other comments (i.e., no theme),
• For a specific SI Leader, and not related to the overall SI program,
• Positive comments about SI that do not suggest improvement, or
• No suggestion for improvement.

Findings
What follows are 6 themes based on suggestions appearing numerous times.

1. Improve session logistics. Some form of this theme is, by far, the most frequent complaint about SI. These range from:
   • SI needs to be later in the day versus SI must be in the morning.
   • SI can’t be on [___]day because of [activity]. (ex: Mondays, because of Greek chapter meetings.)
   • SI must be near [one side of campus] because that’s where I live, versus SI must be [the other side of campus] because that’s where I live.
   • I commute to campus, so SI must be offered exactly on [day] and [time] in [location].

2. Students need options for support. As shown by scheduling issues, SI is unable to serve every student. Hence, it appeared throughout comments that students used other programs instead of SI.
3. **SI Leaders must be clear, accurate, and effective.** These suggestions refer to Leaders’ communication online, in-class, in SI sessions, and in documents. Other comments assert SI Leaders should be passionate, energetic, and helpful.

4. **Exam reviews are questionably helpful.** Students appear to have frustrations with the exam review sessions, based primarily on content limitations within a 1 or 2 hour review, or with the number of people present.

5. **Students still unaware of the value of SI.** We frequently receive comments such as “I did not know SI was offered,” and most of these come from sections of classes where an SI Leader is not in attendance. Every student, regardless of section, receives…Students are upset when the SI Leader does not attend and plan for their section of the course. Multiple sample comments show the breadth of this issue: For courses with many small sessions, we will never be able to have one Leader per section.

6. **Worksheets from SI Leaders are valuable, but can be improved.** Suggestions here also conflict, but the reasonable suggestions include:
   - Post logistics on each worksheet (like name, day, time, corresponding textbook pages and/or lectures, etc).
   - Post worksheets online earlier.
   - Share answer keys to worksheets.
   - Post every worksheet, not just use them in SI only.
   - Content should be diverse (ex: concepts and problems).

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Given our limitations of resources (budget, space, and time) the following recommendations for improving SI should be considered and implemented if possible. These recommendations are listed based on the six themes and, not surprisingly, overlap with the common reasons why students do not attend SI.

1. **Improve session logistics.** Our scheduling limitations result from the following”
   - *Classroom availability.* We are limited to the rooms available, but we can improve this selection by considering departmental rooms. This creates more work for us during scheduling, but may open up more options for students.
   - *Leader availability and student availability.* We are unable to schedule SI sessions if the Leader is not available (i.e., class). When factoring in student availability, we make SI available to a limited population during core class times. We can still target afternoons by requiring every Leader to offer at least one session before 5pm.
   - *Conflicting opportunities.* Over 100 SI sessions occur weekly, most falling within about 20 hours of popular days/times. Even though we try to offer a wider range of sessions, we will never overcome conflicts. We must continue to vary sessions, but a key may be asserting the benefit of SI through promotions. For example, we will offer Monday SI sessions, but could communicate with Greek leadership the value of SI sessions that do not conflict, or help Greek leadership prioritize.

We schedule over 100 SI sessions per week, and there are about 20-25 overlapping hours that are most popular in the scheduling survey data for each Leader. Hence, we are unable to resolve all conflicts, but may resolve some by:
   - Communicating with selected groups the importance of academic success.
   - Determining core days/times for non-academic conflicts, and scheduling around these. (For example, A ECL 365 sessions could be scheduled to occur before or after the weekly NREM club meeting in the same location.)

2. **Students need options for support.** We can encourage SI Leaders and Instructors to promote all options relevant to their courses.
3. **Leaders must be clear, accurate, and effective.** This theme shows how SI Leaders must possess three talents: knowledge in the course, facilitation skills, and a positive attitude, and then be clear in their use of these talents. We may change our screening and selection process based on these criteria, and look to supplement Leader orientation and on-going support accordingly.

4. **Exam reviews are questionably helpful.** No apparent solutions exist to communicate clearly with every student, but clear promotion of every session should help students understand limitations of each session. Extra promotion of an agenda and content for an exam review may alleviate this confusion. Two related circumstances also exist:
   - Some SI Leaders are underutilizing the website feature “About SI for this Course,” which enables them to share a general facilitation plan and philosophy. Leaders who use this are less likely to have confused/frustrated students.
   - Each year, we hear of more exam review sessions offered by Instructors, TAs, Learning Community Peer Mentors, etc. This is good for the student, but potentially confusing or conflicting. We recommend SI Leaders consider:
     - Planning their exam review logistics early, and communicate this to the instructors.
     - Pairing with others for their exam reviews.

5. **Students still unaware of the value of SI.** We are left wondering: When is it best to promote SI? Regardless of method, our promotional goal must be: Make every student aware SI exists for their course, and let the student choose whether to use SI. This is critical for courses where some sections are not targeted by a specific Leader.

6. **Worksheets from SI Leaders are valuable, but can be improved.** We can directly use the students’ suggestions to:
   - Improve our worksheet template for Leaders, giving options to fit varying needs of worksheets.
   - Encourage use of worksheets by SI Leaders every time it fits their facilitation plan.
   - Require consistent use of answer keys (yes or no), and sharing their decision with students.
   - Require posting of every worksheet.

Some Leaders have tried sharing electronic resources through other places besides our SI website. While some places may offer additional features, the SI site is the only place students should go for these references.

The phrasing of the “comments” questions for the end-of-semester surveys do not request “positive” feedback, which has concerned some SI Leaders. Hence, we recommend replacing the existing prompts with the following prompts, identical in each survey:
   - Please comment about something you strongly feel is done well with SI.
   - Please comment about something you strongly feel should be improved with SI.

We expect these new prompts provide balanced feedback, and hopefully the word “strongly” reduces the number of flippant comments.