Supplemental Instruction Leader Retreat Evaluation, Fall 2014

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Supplemental Instruction Leader Retreat Evaluation, Fall 2014

Abstract
The Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders completed pre- and post-retreat surveys to assess the effectiveness of the new one-day SI Leader retreat. Results suggest that the retreat is an effective option for SI Leader professional development, and minor improvements are still needed for future retreat activities.

Evaluation Report

Purpose
The purpose of this report is to show the effectiveness of the one-day SI retreat, in terms of SI Leaders’ perceived comfort and growth in knowledge and skills in the Strengths philosophy.

Methods
The SI Leaders were brought together for a required, one-day retreat on the Saturday of Week 4. The intended outcomes of the retreat were to recognize leadership as it relates to change; introduce and encourage meaningful dialogue about the Strengths philosophy; deepen understanding about one’s own Strengths; and introduce application of the Strengths philosophy to SI. At the start of the retreat, SI Leaders were asked to fill out an 11 question survey regarding their knowledge of Strengths. The survey was completed again at the close of the retreat, with 4 additional open-ended questions.

The initial survey consisted of 11 questions:

- Questions 1-11 were statements regarding knowledge of the SI Leader position, requesting Leaders to rate statements based on their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=slightly agree, 5=agree, 6=strongly agree).
  1. I understand the basic fundamentals of Strength-based Leadership.
  2. I can name my own top 5 Strength Themes.
  3. I understand my own top 5 Strength Themes.
  4. I understand how my own top 5 Strength Themes can be used to improve my experience as a student.
  5. I understand how my own top 5 Strength Themes can be used to improve my experience as an SI Leader.
  6. I understand how my own top 5 Strength Themes can be used to improve the experiences of students in my SI sessions.
  7. I understand how I could apply my own top 5 Strength Themes to my future career goals (exploration, search, interview process, job skills, etc).
  8. I am able to identify Strength Themes other than my own.
  9. I understand the benefits of working with people who have Strengths Themes different from my own.
  10. I understand the challenges of working with people who have Strengths Themes different from my own.
- Question 11 was a qualitative question requesting SI Leaders identify their own meaning of leadership.
- The post-retreat survey consisted of 15 questions such that questions 1-11 were identical to the first survey. Questions 12-14 allowed the Leaders to recommend improvements to future retreats. Question 15 was for returning SI Leaders only, allowing for feedback regarding the new format for professional development, with the use of the one-day retreat.
Both surveys took approximately 5 minutes to complete individually. Quantifiable results from questions 1-11 were recorded and analyzed using SPSS to produce frequency data and comparisons of means between pre- and post-retreat surveys.

**Findings**

49 SI Leaders in Fall 2014 completed both the pre- and post-retreat surveys. Table 1 shows the mean scores for each question, on a Likert scale of 1-6. Ten paired-samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the retreat on Leaders’ knowledge and development of Strengths. As illustrated in Table 1, there was a statistically significant increase across all ten questions. Additionally, the eta squared statistics indicate large effect size (>.14) for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>PreTest</th>
<th>PostTest</th>
<th>Pre to Post Comparison</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Basic Fundamentals</td>
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<td>2. Identification of Top 5</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.45</td>
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<td>3. Understanding of Top 5</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>5.33</td>
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<td>4. Application as Student</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>5.24</td>
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<td>5. Application as SI Leader</td>
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<td>1.15</td>
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<td>6. Application to Sessions</td>
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<td>1.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Application to Career Goals</td>
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<td>1.28</td>
<td>5.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Identification of Themes</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>5.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Benefiting group work</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Challenging group work</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

The reliability of the Pre-Test scale was tested and found to be significant (Cronbach’s Alpha=.906). The reliability of the Post-Test scale was also tested and found to be significant (Cronbach’s Alpha=.797).

Leaders’ feedback and recommended improvements to the retreat (post-retreat Q12-14) were analyzed using an open coding method, allowing categories to arise. These categories were then summarized into themes, using the language of the Leaders as descriptors. Each of the themes arising from the qualitative data are discussed below.

As the first-ever SI retreat, program designers wanted to discover the appropriateness of some of the logistical details for the new retreat. Leaders were first asked about the location and timing of the program. While several indicated a change in location would not have “influenced learning” and the “overall enlightenment would be the same,” in general, SI Leaders noted the on-campus location was “more comfortable” and that meeting in a potentially “unfamiliar place” would be “less comfortable.” While some Leaders indicated an off-campus location would be accessible with their own transportation, their overall message was that such a location would be “more difficult to get to” and likely have “made the day longer” with transportation time and “getting back to campus.” The overall theme was that an on-campus location is not only “convenient for everyone” and provides “lots of technologies” and “classroom style space and resources,” but also makes sense as “SI is a campus-based job.”

The primary theme in the feedback from the Leaders on suggestions for future locations of the semester retreat was to continue to utilize Howe Hall and the spaces selected for the first retreat. Leaders indicated several characteristics to include when considering future retreat space. Appreciating the variety of activities, Leaders noted the importance of the ability “to move around and not stay in the same space all day,” which would necessitate “large open areas and smaller breakout areas” with “lots of tables, open space, moveable desks, whiteboards”, etc. The Leaders requested a future location remain “large enough” to accommodate the group’s size, while remaining “in a neutral location.”

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the frustration with the Next-Gen Room not allowing food or drink, one Leader indicated the desire to ensure they “can bring drinks into the rooms” during future retreats. While the overwhelming theme was to continue to hold future retreats at Howe Hall, several suggestions were made for alternative sites including Hixson-Lied, Sunstream Retreat Center, and Hoover. Another frequent suggestion was an outdoor theme, with suggestions ranging from outdoor activities at Howe Hall to holding the entire retreat at a camp ground, park, recreational building or a high ropes course.

Attempting to find the most beneficial point in the semester for the timing of the retreat, the Leaders were asked when they would prefer receiving the professional development. While there were multiple suggestions for varying points throughout the semester (within the early weeks, after first round of exams, before midterm, after midterm, pre-final), the thematic response was that this retreat’s timing was appropriate, leaving “plenty of time in the semester to execute new ideas” and “to make changes and improve.” Some Leaders noted frustration with the timing, as indicated in their comments about losing several “hours out of the weekend before a huge test week.” Most suggestive was to not move the retreat more than one week earlier or later; however, several Leaders also noted the usefulness of the Strengths topic discussion and activities prior to the upcoming Career Fair.

When asked for suggested improvements to the retreat, many Leaders indicated no changes were necessary. These Leaders responded with positive comments expressing satisfaction with the format, noting the retreat was “a really enjoyable event” and which presented the opportunity “to learn in a fun environment,” with “a good mix of learning and activities.” Several Leaders found the small group activities to be beneficial to the point that they requested more, even suggesting the groups be formed “with people who had the same strengths.” While a few noted the desire to explore “our strengths longer and more in depth,” a strong theme in the responses incorporated the Leaders requesting more concrete tools with “examples of how to actually apply strengths into our sessions” and “tie our strengths to actual facilitation ideas.” Additionally, as in the orientation post-test feedback (see Fall 2014 Orientation report), Leaders requested “more time to talk to other SI Leaders,” “so leaders can discuss what works for them.” Less common comments, but interesting for consideration in future planning, a few Leaders noted the expectation of “lot’s of listening at some points” and requested “smaller breaks more frequently to keep people focused.” A few Leaders requested agendas to follow throughout the day, while others requested more coffee and “tank game”, a shorter schedule and more time for lunch (likely suggested to have additional time to chat with other Leaders about SI in general, as noted earlier).

Returning Leaders were asked to reflect on the new format with the one-day retreat, as compared to the previous semester’s professional development plan, which instead required more staff meetings and workshops throughout the semester. Eighteen returning Leaders responded with comments regarding the increased effectiveness of the retreat format toward their development. The most common themes point to the opportunity provided by the retreat to spend “more time to further develop and understand our own skills” and, because “it is more focused,” they were able to “get deeper into it.” Returning Leaders found they learned more during the retreat than during last semester’s staff meetings and workshops, which “seemed more like a task to complete” and “a chore” than an opportunity for growth and development. Additionally, returning Leaders found the retreat “more fun” and “more like a development/bonding session,” with the opportunity to “get to know each other more,” “be more comfortable” and “spend more time as a team.”

Fewer returning Leaders (12) responded with comments regarding how the new professional development format is less effective than previous semesters, with more staff meetings and workshops in place of the one-day retreat. These comments remained relatively positive, however, and were limited primarily to the length of the retreat day, the lack of flexibility in attendance dates/times and topics, and broader scope of the Strengths topic “not as directly related to the day-to-day as an SI Leader.”

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Discussion
The findings show the new one-day retreat supports SI Leaders’ growth in desired knowledge and skills. The mean scores indicate that these students have a greater understanding of Strengths-based Leadership concepts and practice after completing professional development activities during the retreat. Thus, the retreat, as a new format for professional development, appears to have achieved its predicted outcomes. Additionally, returning Leaders expressed through their qualitative comments that the new format involving the one-day retreat is not only preferred, but also more beneficial to their development than the past format utilizing only staff meetings and short workshops. Based on these measured results, the SI program will continue the current professional development format with a one-day retreat and fewer staff meetings and workshops for the spring 2015 semester, and consider minor adjustments based on qualitative data received through the open-ended questions.

Several of the Leaders comments and recommendations will be considered when planning the retreat for Spring 2015. Early ideas to incorporate these recommendations include the following:

- Continue to hold future retreats at Howe Hall or a similar space on campus. Leaders responded quite clearly that they preferred to remain on campus for convenience and to avoid transportation issues. They also enjoyed the multiple offerings for space, which allowed for large and small group activities.
- Continue to schedule future retreats on or around Week 4 of the semester, attempting to align with Career Fairs, while avoiding home games and other major campus-wide activities.
- Divide new and returning Leaders for some portion, as new Leaders will need the initial material and activities provided during the first retreat (the material was new to all Leaders this semester, but future returners will now have this baseline knowledge). Some separation of activities during the retreat will prevent boredom as the baseline material is revisited, and also allow for more in depth development of Strength-based Leadership concepts and practice, which is in line with the current feedback requesting more depth and practice.
- Provide activities for application of Strengths to SI sessions and leadership roles. Leaders feedback included requests for direct application to SI sessions and facilitation activities. In response to the feedback received, these activities will also include time for Leaders to interact and share what is working or needs improvement in their own sessions.