

What is SI?

Overview

The Supplemental Instruction (SI) Program is an academic support program that increases student performance and retention in courses with historically high rates of withdrawals, Ds, and Fs. Often these courses are large-enrollment, lecture-format classes that function as gateways to a particular major or professional field or fulfill a distribution requirement. The SI Program targets high-risk courses, not high-risk students.

Format

SI is a collaborative, guided study session that lasts 50 minutes, three times a week. The classroom experience is enhanced and expanded, not duplicated. Attendance is voluntary and open to all students enrolled in the course. The leader is a model student—either undergraduate or graduate—who excelled in that course, or a comparable one, during a previous semester. The leader attends all lectures, reads assigned material, maintains close communication with the instructor, and receives regular training and evaluation. The leader facilitates and encourages the group to process the material and does not act as an authority figure who lectures to participants or simply answers questions.

Topics and questions posed by attendees guide the leader in facilitating the session. Because a variety of learning skills are foundational to content mastery, SI integrates what-to-learn with how-to-learn. Areas of skill development include questioning techniques, note-taking, graphic organization, problem-solving, vocabulary acquisition, memorization, and test preparation. Review of lecture notes, supplementary materials, demonstrations, comprehension checks (*e.g.*, informal quizzes), prediction of test items, review of recent exams, and other activities help students process and retain the material.

Results

Research shows that students who regularly attend SI earn one-half to one full letter grade higher on their final course grades than non-participants. These performance differences are still evident when the SI group is compared to a motivational control group—*i.e.*, those who wanted to attend but were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. Program data also shows that SI attendees have higher re-enrollment and graduation rates than non-participants.

History

SI has been implemented internationally and in hundreds of institutions in the U.S since its development in 1973 by Deanna Martin, Ph.D., at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. The U.S. Department of Education has recognized SI as an Exemplary Educational Program. SI has been available on the UNC-CH campus since 1990. The SI program at UNC has been administered by the Learning Center, under the supervision of Christina Perry (cp@unc.edu), and in coordination with individual departments.

Schedules

Leaders' contact information and session schedules are advertised through participating courses and on the Learning Center's web site: www.unc.edu/depts/lcweb.