Supplemental Instruction (SI) at GCC Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is SI?
Supplemental Instruction (SI) offers weekly collaborative learning sessions to students in participating classes. SI participants meet an SI leader and with their classmates outside of class to discuss challenging concepts, practice problem solving and develop student strategies.

2. Why is SI successful?
SI sessions are not remedial, but instead an opportunity for students to work together with a trained leader on course content. SI has been shown to improve student learning by about one course grade, providing a time for quality study focusing on key course concepts and modeling more effective study habits.

3. Who leads SI sessions?
SI sessions are led by GCC students who have excelled in the target course, usually having taken the course in the previous semester. SI leaders are trained in a three hour workshop during which they learn strategies that encourage active learning. In SI sessions, leaders discuss class materials and best study practices. SI leaders do not re-lecture or go beyond content covered in class.

4. How do students know if SI will be offered?
If possible, SI workshops are listed on the college class schedule. All SI sessions are announced by the instructor at the beginning of the semester, if possible with the SI leader present. A finalized SI schedule is distributed to faculty and counselors at the beginning of each semester.

5. How often and how long are SI sessions?
SI sessions usually are once a week, but can be planned with greater frequency. Each session lasts one hour.

6. For which courses does SI work best?
SI is used successfully across the GCC curriculum, from math to French to computer science to religion. Talk with your colleagues about how they have adapted SI to your discipline.

7. How much work do I need to do?
SI at GCC is set up to minimize the course instructor workload. In that way, faculty have been able to sustain SI year after year without burn-out. You will need to identify potential SI leaders (SI staff will train them). And, you will want to monitor SI, checking in with the SI leader to see how things are going. The SI staff will set up rooms for SI sessions and take care of signs if an SI session is cancelled.

Some faculty provide SI leaders with specific work sheets or other materials to use during SI sessions, but that isn’t required. SI leaders can use upcoming assignments, practice tests or other material provided by the instructor.
8. How should I choose SI leaders?
SI works best when the SI leader took the same course in a recent semester. As the semester draws to a close identify students who performed well on course assessment and also have the characteristics that will make them an effective study session leader: good listening skills; willingness to help others; empathy; and ability to explain ideas clearly. The SI staff will train new SI leaders, emphasizing the need to help students solve problems themselves—not to provide answers or offer mini-lectures.

9. Should I offer extra credit for SI?
The SI literature finds that SI works best when students are motivated intrinsically rather than by promises of “extra” points if they attend SI. In addition, there are ethical issues about offering points for sessions that some students cannot attend because of scheduling conflicts. That said, some instructors do offer a small bonus, perhaps best as a nudge for students if they try SI at least one time.

10. Who keeps records of SI attendance?
SI staff arrange for SI leader payment and provide a sign-up sheet for each SI session. At the end of the semester, SI staff can provide records summarizing which students attended which sessions. In addition, SI staff will offer an evaluation procedure for SI in your course.

11. What are the potential problems with SI?
Sometimes SI attendance will lapse, perhaps for one meeting after a major test. SI staff will alert you if attendance lags for several sessions in which case you will want to consult with students in the course and with the SI leader.

On occasion, SI leaders will try to be model professors, lecturing during the SI session—even though they have been advised not to. Faculty need to step in, perhaps with help from the SI staff, to advise SI leaders about a more appropriate role to help students learn.

I’m hooked! How do I get started?

Nancy Yaldizian (nancyy@glendale.edu; X 5357) is ready to set up SI sessions. For more information about SI contact Mark Maier mmaier@glendale.edu X 5468.