A Proposal for the Implementation of Supplemental Instruction for Large General Education Classes

Meghan O’Donnell, University Learning Center
Dorothy Briggs, SALT Center

Academic support will be critical for the General Education courses that will be taught in Centennial Hall with anticipated enrollments of 2000 students per course. The following is a joint proposal from the University Learning Center and the SALT Center for the phased-in implementation of Supplemental Instruction (SI) for large General Education classes. SI is a nationally recognized academic assistance program that utilizes peer-assisted review sessions that help students process the information the instructor presents in lecture. SI sessions are offered throughout the week and are open to any student enrolled in the course.

SI significantly differs from tutoring in many ways. First, even though SI leaders have successfully completed the course in a previous semester, they are given access to all of the current course materials and are required to attend the course lectures alongside the current students. In addition, SI leaders meet regularly with the instructor and collaborate with the instructor in preparing the materials used in SI sessions. This feature of SI is particularly beneficial to Gen Ed courses which may vary considerably in content, assignments, and expectations from semester-to-semester, depending on the instructor. For example, in each of the past three semesters, INDV 101 Language has had a different instructor, textbook and significant alterations to the course content.

SI leaders also act in a distinct role from TAs, as it is not the SI leader’s role to introduce new material to students and SI leaders are never involved in the grading process. SI leaders serve as model students who help to integrate course content and learning strategies during SI sessions in order to create an informal cooperative learning environment.

Over the past year the University Learning Center has been conducting pilot SI programs with two large General Education courses: INDV 101 Language (~440 students per semester) and INDV 103 An Economic Perspective (~500 students per semester) with promising results.

In Spring 2008, an SI-tutoring hybrid was implemented for INDV 101 Language in conjunction with the MASTR program. The INDV 101 Language SI leaders attended lecture and had access to course materials, but their SI sessions were a combination of structured activities and drop-in tutoring. In Spring 2008 113 students were seen (26% of the class) and their average final grade was 10% higher than those students who did not attend SI. In Fall 2008, 82 students (19% of the class) were seen and their final grade was 8% higher than those students who did not attend SI.

In Spring 2009, traditional SI was implemented for INDV 103 An Economic Perspective. So far this semester 260 students have come to SI (53% of the class). And, on the first exam the average score for students who participated in SI was 9% higher than those who did not participate in SI.

The impact of the current SI Pilot Programs have been measured qualitatively using student surveys and looking at instructor TCEs, as well as quantitatively by analyzing the number and demographics of the students we see and correlating this information with their final grade. In the future, we will also look at retention data such as persistence and graduation rates among the students who participate in SI.

The proposed program will impact a significant number of students. In the first year alone, SI would offer academic support to 9,000 students and create on-campus jobs for 45+ students. Over three years, this would increase to offering academic support to 20,000+ students and employ 100+ students. (For more details concerning how the program would be phased in, see Appendix A.)

As mentioned in the application, SSF allocation would not be the sole funding for this effort. The SSF funds would be used in the first three years of the program to support the wages and training of the student workers (mostly SI Leaders) and Operational Costs. Student Affairs has committed the funds to support an SI Coordinator who would design, implement and oversee the program, which includes the task of exploring ways to make the SI program financially self-sustaining.