Suggestions for Improving Attendance in SI Sessions  
Revised April 20, 2000

Because of the voluntary nature of SI attendance outside the course lectures, the issue of SI session attendance will be a continuing issue for all programs. A variety of factors can influence the participation rates: academic difficulty perception by enrolled students, percent of students from previous academic terms receiving D and F final course grades and withdrawals, class size, knowledge-level of the SI program by students, percent of students living on or near the campus, percent of full-time/part-time students.

Estimating SI attendance for the course. While the historic participation rate at the University of Missouri-Kansas City has averaged 38 percent for all courses where SI was offered during the academic term, there have wide variances within individual courses. Also, another issue is the number of times that students choose to attend SI. It is important not only to have high total participation rates -- students attending at least one SI session -- but also that they come regularly. SI research suggests that there is a positive relationship between increased SI attendance and higher final course grades.

An exception to this finding is for students who attend 20 or more times per academic term. Research suggests that these students generally would have dropped the course, but persist to the end of the academic term and earn grades of C. With non-math/science majors taking college algebra, occasionally these students may be satisfied with a grade of D since this may be a passing grade for these majors. It appears that these students work hard enough to get the grade they need in this course and then devote their energies to other courses.

Getting off to a good start on the first day. It is assumed that the SI leader has delivered a well-planned and rehearsed first day announcement to the students in the course. While the presentation may be short -- ten minutes -- it will establish the credibility of the SI leader and the program in the minds of the enrolled students. Using data from previous academic terms, it is helpful to report the positive difference in grades for SI participants compared with the non-participants. If this is the first time that SI will be offered in connection with this course, use data from other courses. If this is the first time that SI has ever been offered on campus, use data from the national data base maintained by UMKC. It is critical that the first-day presentation goes very well. The SI leader ought to have an outline of the speech on large note cards that they hold as they deliver their short talk. Many SI programs report that also having a one-page overview handout that contains many points made during the presentation is very helpful. A few programs have even developed a short three to five minute video tape with former SI participant testimonials to help make this first-day presentation even more effective. It might be possible to do a mock SI sessions that lasts five minutes or so in the class with the professor's permission.

Suggested topics for the SI overview talk with the students during class: what is SI, why this class has SI, how SI works, why SI works, research on outcomes of SI attendance (using data from the campus as well as the national SI data studies), who should attend SI sessions, what
SI can and can not do, how often students should attend SI sessions, what happens during SI sessions, among other possible topics and issues.

Suggestions from other SI programs. The following suggestions have been contributed by staff from the SI network from across the globe. The SI supervisor should discuss these strategies with the course professor ahead of time. Sometimes the course professor would need to spend additional time or give permission for the activities to occur. The UMKC program uses many of these strategies. Feel free to contribute successful strategies that you develop at your institution. Please send them to UMKC so that they can include them with future editions of this list. Send suggestions to David Arendale, arendaled@umkc.edu

Activities before the beginning of the academic term by the SI supervisor:

1. Give announcements about the SI program during new student orientation programs. Include information in orientation print literature. This develops an awareness of SI and they will be more receptive to the first-day announcement given in courses that have SI.

2. Give announcements about the SI program during parent orientation programs. They can advocate students to attend SI sessions during telephone calls during the academic term, especially if students mention challenges with the academic course material.

3. Be sure that all academic advisors are aware of the SI courses so they can encourage students to enroll in their courses. Provide a schedule of classes that will have SI support for the academic term.

4. Provide information in the course listing registration booklet concerning the SI courses and basic information about the program.

5. Some SI programs report that they preschedule one SI session meeting time for these courses and list this information in the registration booklet. This gives students an opportunity to schedule their other courses around the SI meeting time. Often the prescheduled SI session time is just before or after the course lectures. These times are historically popular with students. The rest of the SI session times would be scheduled after enrolled students completed the SI survey on the first day of class.

6. Gain the support of academic tutors, student lab assistants, lab instructors, recitation leaders, graduate teaching assistants, and others to encourage students to attend SI sessions. Work with them to differentiate the service available through SI sessions and how it complements and enhances the services provided by the others.

7. Establish an Internet web page that provides information about the SI program. This can provide times and places for SI sessions, a forum for on-line chat room SI sessions, descriptive material about SI, and a location for interested SI leaders to post information about the course (e.g., handouts, text questions predicted).
Activities by the course professor during the academic term:
1. To encourage attendance, ask the course professor to prepare mock examination questions and announce to the students that these worksheets -- while available to everyone in the course -- will only be discussed during the SI sessions. Make copies of the mock examination available in the back of the classroom.

2. The course professor could post one difficult problem or concept on the blackboard in class and state that this will be discussed during SI this week.

3. The course professor regularly (i.e., weekly) gives verbal encouragement for ALL students in the course to attend SI. It is critical that the professor not just invites students who are receiving poor grades. If the reputation for SI develops that it is only for poor students, students will not come to avoid the remedial stigma.

4. Let it be known that the mock examinations developed by the SI leader have been reviewed by the course professor and that they fairly reflect the types of questions to be expected on the upcoming examination.

5. The professor could attach a small handout or bookmark to all exam papers to encourage everyone to attend SI sessions. The SI Supervisor should work with the professor to design and copy the materials.

6. The professor could select one or more of the quality examination questions predicted during SI sessions by the participants to be used on the upcoming examination.

Activities by the SI leader during the academic term:
1. The first day SI handout should include a comparison of final course grades for SI and non-SI participants from previous academic terms for this or similar courses. This handout could be updated throughout the academic term with comparisons of the groups on unit exams.

2. During the second week of class, distribute a short one page handout that summarizes SI. This can help inform the students who have recently added the course.

3. In SI sessions, especially during the first two weeks, the SI leader should reiterate how SI sessions work, the role of the students, and role of the SI leader. As the number of returnees increase, the announcements may be briefer. If new SI participants attend, the SI leader should share this information briefly again. This helps to reduce unrealistic expectations about SI sessions that might lead to some discontinuing attendance at further sessions.
4. SI leaders frequently create a worksheet for SI sessions. It could be an empty matrix box, sample problems, etc. The students in the SI sessions would create the information to put in the worksheet. This is especially helpful in problem-solving courses (e.g., math, science). SI participants report that they like to have a tangible “take-away” from the SI sessions. This helps to fulfill that perceived need.

5. Throughout the academic term the SI leader could distribute reminder handouts to encourage attendance and remind students of the meeting times/locations. These could also give the differences in mean test scores for the SI and non-SI participants.

6. Report the number/percent of examination questions (objective or essay) covered during the SI sessions to the entire class.

7. Include quotations from past SI participants on how SI helped them with promotion handouts.

8. Write the SI schedule on a corner of the black board at before every class session.

9. At the end of each SI session, remind participants of the next SI session time and location.

10. As SI leaders sit in different locations throughout the room over the academic term, they could take the initiative to personally invite students to attend the SI sessions.

11. SI leaders could announce in class that relevant study strategies will be emphasized at strategic times during the academic term, for example, test taking skills before a major examination.

12. When permissible, use old unit tests in SI sessions to help students formulate possible test questions for upcoming exams.

13. Provide book marks for the students in the class throughout the academic term. The book marks should include the SI schedule.

14. SI leaders should sit in different places in the classroom to meet new students and be more accessible for questions about the SI program. This also allows the SI leader to model good lecture note taking strategies for more students in the class who may observe him or her during the class.

15. With the professor’s permission, the SI leader could place a difficult problem or concept on the blackboard and announce to the class that it will be discussed during the next SI session. The SI participants would then work to providing an accurate and complete answer to the question.
16. Copies of handouts and mock exams could be made available during class. The SI leader could explain that these were samples of the types of activities that are accomplished during SI sessions.

17. Create large posters to put on bulletin boards in the classroom and place some in the hallways outside the classroom that remind students of SI benefits, SI session times, and SI session locations.

Activities by the SI Supervisor during the academic term:
1. After the first major examination, the SI Supervisor gather test scores and prepare a one-page report concerning SI vs. non-SI test differences back to the class: test score mean, A and B percent rate, and the D, F or course withdrawal rate. The SI leader would distribute the finished handout to the course.

2. If attendance is very low, have the SI Supervisor meet with the class for the last five minutes of a class session. During this time the course professor leaves the room and the SI Supervisor solicits comments from the students on reasons for low attendance. The SI Supervisor informs the class that if attendance does not improve the SI sessions will be canceled.

3. With permission from the book store director, one SI Supervisor printed book marks with SI information and the prescheduled SI session. The book mark was placed at the end of the first chapter inside the required textbook for the course. At their institution one SI session is preplanned before the beginning of the academic term. [Usually just before or after a class sessions.]

4. Resurvey the class to see if the initial assignment of SI sessions is still the best times for the class.

5. If the class has graduate teaching assistants, student lab assistants or the like, solicit their assistance in encouraging student attendance.

6. Create an SI awareness video tape of three to five minutes to play during the first or second class period of the course. Include comments from former SI participants.

7. If SI is offered in several courses each academic term, place an advertisement in the student newspaper listing the SI schedule. Also, include a short description of SI or provide comments from SI participants.

8. If the SI sessions have not been viewed recently, observe several SI sessions. While not a pleasant thought to consider, the students may be "voting with their feet" and are not attending the SI sessions because of something that the SI leader is doing. With the intense time pressures facing many students, they will make quick judgements regarding
the value of the SI sessions. These students will express their views to others enrolled in the course. Research with customer service reveals that when a person has a bad experience, they tell their friends about the incident. Then these people will tell others. Research suggests that each incident of bad service is shared with ninety-seven other people. This reinforces the need for clinical supervision of the SI program. Is the SI supervisor attending the first six SI sessions for the academic term? Is the SI supervisor spot checking every week or two throughout the rest of the term?

9. Meet with the faculty member once or twice during the academic term. The more clearly the professor understand the SI model, the easier it is for them to see it as something that is worthy of their time and support. They will be more likely to say positive things about the program in class.

10. Ask for a few minutes to share about the SI program during an academic department meeting. This provides a public forum to share about the SI program and build more support from the academic department.

11. Advertise the SI program in the campus newspaper. This helps to build a public support for the SI program and that it can be beneficial for all students.

Activities after the academic term:
1. Review the criteria for selecting this course originally. Sometimes the reason for low attendance is that students do not perceive this course as difficult. Check to see if about 30 percent or more of the students are receiving final course grades of D and F or are withdrawing from the course. If the general impression by enrolled students is that most students receive passing grades, even academically under prepared students may think that they may survive the course since nearly everyone else is passing. While the course may be perceived to be difficult by faculty members, academic advisors or department chair persons, the most important perception is the one held by the students enrolled in the course. While the 30 percent D/F/W guideline is not mandatory for success in all courses where SI is offered -- perhaps SI is being offered for only a subpopulation of students in the course -- this guideline has often identified courses that enrolled students would also identify as historically difficult for any student who is in the course.

2. If the class has graduate teaching assistants, student lab assistants or the like, see if students attended their sessions instead of attending SI sessions. On a few rare occasions, these individuals have offered activities that looked similar to SI sessions. If they do -- which is a pleasant compliment -- you may need to discontinue SI in this course due to duplication of service. When given a choice, students may go to graduate teaching assistants instead of SI sessions -- especially if the GTAs also serve as graders for the course professor.