

# Oakland University Supplemental Instruction Program

## FACULTY GUIDE

### ***Why my course?***

SI typically supports 100- and 200-level introductory, core curriculum or “gatekeeper” courses. SI is part of your class for several reasons, none of which have anything to do with your ability to teach. The primary reason is because this class is a historically difficult course that many students struggle with and fail, thus producing a high DFW rate for the course. The focus of SI is the difficulty inherent within the course itself.

### ***Why do students struggle?***

A number of factors play a role. Some students have difficulty in certain courses because the subject was not taught or was taught differently in high school. For others, the depth and breadth of the course make it difficult for students to organize. The material may be too conceptual when they are used to dealing with things on a more concrete level. Still others may have difficulty with the class size. The rigors of college-level courses often catch students off-guard. Lastly, some students may have poor study skills.

### ***How much work will it be for me to have SI support?***

SI is completely maintained and coordinated through The Tutoring Center. All we ask of faculty in SI-supported classes is that they provide the following:

- A few minutes at the beginning of class for the SI Leader to make weekly announcements.
- Time to meet with the SI Leader, allowing him/her to keep you apprised of what’s happening in the SI sessions.
- Disbursement of a 5 minute survey during the third or fourth week of the semester.
- If needed, test/exam scores for the students enrolled in the course.

### ***Will I have to change my teaching style?***

No. SI attempts to help students learn how to be successful in the course, regardless of the way you teach. It is **not** our intention to dictate how you should teach your class. SI will *support* your teaching. The SI Leader will provide you with student feedback. Because they regularly meet with the students in smaller groups, the SI Leaders may have insight into concepts that are troubling students, misunderstood test questions or unclear assignments. If you would like, your SI Leader can share this information with you. Understand, however, this information is not intended to be a criticism of your teaching.

### ***Will SI Leaders just help students complete their homework?***

Absolutely NOT! SI Leaders do not facilitate the sessions so students can complete homework together, work on group assignments or complete take-home exams. On the contrary, the purpose of SI is to help students become successful and independent learners. By doing their work for them, SI Leaders would run the risk of making the students believe that it is not necessary for them to understand the work or how to go about completing their assignments. Instead, SI Leaders may discuss typical problems, create new problems or work problems that were not assigned. SI Leaders may discuss how to organize material, how to prepare for assignments or exams, and how to develop problem-solving abilities. SI is intended to supplement what the students do on their own time. After attending SI sessions, students should be better prepared to work problems alone or prepare for exams. SI supports students, not by doing the work for them, but by helping them figure out how to do it successfully on their own.

### ***What goes on during SI sessions?***

A typical SI session is an hour-long meeting in a classroom on campus and might include a review of lectures and assigned readings, group work and discussion, problem-solving and critical thinking activities or a mock exam. The SI Leader's primary focus is to assist students in understanding the course material while helping them develop effective study skills that are applicable to the content. The SI Leaders will never structure sessions as a forum to re-lecture students who missed class.

### ***Isn't SI simply a test preparation study group?***

No. While some students may attend SI prior to an exam, national data suggests that students who regularly attend SI improve their class standing by one-half to one whole letter grade. With this understanding, SI Leaders constantly promote SI as guaranteed study time, encouraging students to participate in SI on a weekly basis.

### ***May I visit the SI sessions?***

It is not recommended that instructors attend SI sessions. Unfortunately, when instructors attend SI sessions for their course, the dynamics of the group generally change. Students tend not to deliberate over course content with each other because they are tempted to ask the professor for information or answers to questions. Students who attend SI sessions are guaranteed anonymity so that they will feel free to ask any question and reveal any weakness in understanding course material or in learning skills. The presence of instructors may inhibit students from revealing weaknesses and risking attempts at answers. SI Leaders will provide the instructor with feedback about how the sessions are going.

### ***What does the SI Leader do in my class?***

The SI Leader's class attendance has a twofold purpose:

- 1) To model effective classroom behavior by arriving on time, listening, taking copious lecture notes, reading assigned chapters prior to lecture, completing required assignments and observing what is happening in the classroom.
- 2) To gather information that will help him/her gain a sense of what you expect from your students regarding the concepts and ideas you emphasize in lecture. It also helps the SI Leader to process the information he/she will use during SI sessions.

### ***Are SI Leaders teachers?***

No. SI Leaders are typically undergraduate students. They happen to be excellent students, but they are still students. They do not have to know everything about the subject because they are neither teachers nor experts. The SI Leader's job is to lead small group study sessions in an effort to help others learn how to be good students in the class. SI Leaders have taken the course, so they know what students need to do to be successful. SI Leaders head discussions about the course content not only to help students focus and better understand, but also to help them learn how to figure it out on their own. SI Leaders help students learn how to identify key points, problem solve, organize and remember, prepare for exams, etc. While they may talk about the lecture, review the textbook and identify important concepts and topics, SI Leaders are not the "answer people." Their focus is on helping students develop the skills they need to succeed. SI Leaders are not there to teach the lesson – they are there to help students figure out how to learn the lesson.

### ***What is the SI Leader NOT permitted to do?***

The SI leader is NOT available for grading exams or papers or to proctor exams. As a rule, we request that you not ask SI Leaders to run copies and errands or to distribute exams, graded papers and other class literature. It's important for SI Leaders to maintain their peer status among the students in the class. SI Leaders are paid to attend class, keep up with the material and run study group sessions. SI Leaders do not answer questions you ask the class as they are not there as students. The SI Leaders are in class to get a better sense of the areas emphasized during lectures so that they can design and develop more focused SI sessions. The SI Leader is NOT permitted to lecture for you, help you construct exam items or participate in determining a student's grade. The SI Leader is not a teacher. To assume that they could fill in would place them in a teaching role, and that is not where they need to be.

### ***What if I have concerns about the SI Leader?***

Immediately call the director of The Tutoring Center at (248) 370-4460 to discuss your concerns and to resolve any issues.

### ***Can I give extra credit for SI attendance?***

As a rule, we do not support providing extra credit to students for attending an SI session for the following three reasons:

- 1) Some students may not be able to attend SI because of schedule conflicts. As a result, these students would have no way to participate in the extra credit.
- 2) Asking the SI Leaders to police the sign-in sheet gives conflicting messages. For example, if a person attends the SI session for five minutes – signs in and then leaves – should the SI Leader report or ignore it? Having to monitor attendance in such a way takes the SI Leader's attention away from the purpose of SI.
- 3) Lastly, in an attempt to analyze the effects of SI participation, it would be undesirable to have a student's grade artificially enhanced by "bonus points" given for merely having a name show up on an attendance sheet. If there is any effect to be gained through SI attendance, we would like to be able to say with greater confidence that it was the result of what was experienced during SI.

### ***What's the difference between SI Leaders and Peer Tutors?***

For all intents and purposes, SI Leaders are tutors. However, a number of things differentiate the two:

- Instead of working one-on-one within a particular subject (i.e., psychology), SI Leaders support specific courses (i.e., PSY100: Foundations of Contemporary Psychology).
- SI Leaders also attend class with the students and then develop SI sessions that support or supplement the lectures for that course.
- Whereas students go for tutoring with particular questions in mind, SI Leaders design and facilitate their SI session agendas, focusing on key course concepts.

### ***How are courses picked for SI?***

Historically difficult courses are identified simply by virtue of their high rate of unsuccessful completions (grades below a C and withdrawals). Over time, these courses have demonstrated their difficulty, regardless of the faculty who teach them or the material that is used. At OU, these courses typically are difficult for any student, although some students struggle more than others.

### ***How can students find SI sessions?***

SI support is promoted in a variety of ways. Course sections with SI sessions attached to them are listed in the SAIL system so that as students register for their courses they can see which sections will have SI offered. SI Leaders make introductory SI announcements, distribute program brochures and post SI fliers. Following that, SI Leaders make weekly announcements reminding students of the session schedule and may offer “teasers” about SI session activities. Additionally, the master SI session schedule is always posted on The Tutoring Center website.

Students can also seek additional information about SI (session locations, days and times) in these ways:

- 1) Visit The Tutoring Center in 103 North Foundation Hall.
- 2) Call, e-mail or go online: (248) 370-4215, tutoring@oakland.edu, [www.oakland.edu/tutoring](http://www.oakland.edu/tutoring)

### ***Is there an online resource for students that cannot attend SI?***

Yes. Every SI Leader is assigned an eSpace page to be dedicated to his/her SI session. All students registered in the course will have access to the SI Leader’s page, unless the student contacts the SI Leader and requests to be removed from it. SI Leaders are required and highly encouraged to enhance their sessions by posting extra resources on eSpace. Students who cannot attend SI can still benefit and become engaged to the session by receiving announcements from the SI Leader and accessing the material the SI Leader uses in the sessions.

### ***Are there other online study aids from The Tutoring Center?***

Yes, The Tutoring Center website provides several study aids for students, including study skills links, videos and math resources.

### ***Is The Tutoring Center interested in SI Leader referrals?***

Absolutely. We use a variety of publicity methods to attract qualified students for SI Leader positions, but *we need faculty’s help*. Courses have the greatest chance of offering SI support when a student is identified as a potential candidate in the preceding semester. Faculty recommendations are our most important and valuable source of applicants.

### ***How are the SI Leaders trained?***

Each semester, SI Leaders are mandated to attend an intensive one or two-day SI training program. The training is always held just before the start of the term, so that SI Leaders are ready to begin working and attending lectures on the first day of class. Training topics include:

- The role of the SI Leader
- Developing working relationships with faculty
- Planning and conducting SI sessions
- SI sessions samples and demonstrations
- Study skill assessments and collaborative learning techniques
- Public speaking: SI announcements in the classroom

*Adapted from Angelo State University’s Supplemental Instruction Program Faculty Guide*