Building a Community in SI Sessions
Training and Implementation

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Agenda

- Institutional Context
- Why community building is important?
- Connection to the SI model
- Training on Community Building
- Mini-training activity
- Evaluation
- Questions
About Northwest

- Four year public university
- Approximately 6,500 students
- Academic Success & Retention
  - Within Academic affairs
  - Newly reorganized unit
  - Academic Advising, Academic Coaching, Orientation, University Seminar, Academic Support, Student Athlete Success, & Retention Support
  - Academic Support consists of SI and tutoring
- SI Program
  - 31 years old
  - 26 SI leaders
  - 3-4 SI Mentors
  - 1 Graduate Assistant
Why is community building important?

Defining Community

Group Dynamics Perspective
• Cooperative groups need trust and communication among members (Levi, 2017)
• Building connections among members foster trust and communication (Lencioni, 2002; Levi, 2017)

Student Learning
• A inclusive and productive class climate can enhance student learning (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010)
• Positive relationships in the classroom and can improve classroom management (Marzano, 2007)
### Connection to the SI Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How community building helps...</th>
<th>How it reinforces community...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redirection of Questions</strong></td>
<td>Students will be more likely to answer questions and support one another when questions get redirected</td>
<td>Draws more students into conversations which translates into student-to-student interaction which can lead to greater community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wait Time</strong></td>
<td>Students will be more likely to speak and break awkward silences</td>
<td>Pauses allow for students to contribute to other student responses and assist one another which can foster community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Checking for Understanding</strong></td>
<td>Makes checking for understanding less intimidating for students</td>
<td>Successful checks for understanding boost self-esteem and create a more positive classroom climate Unsuccessful checks for understanding provide the SI leader opportunities to encourage and support students</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Integrating Community Building

• Training on Community Building
  • Initial Training
  • Ongoing Training
• Evaluation
  • Observations
  • Surveys
Training

• Part of initial training since Spring 2015
• Started off as a 10-15 minute session during initial training
• Expanded to about 30 minutes for new SI leaders and 15 for returning SI leaders with some ongoing training
• Variety of activities and methods created by SI mentors
Training

Learning Outcomes
1. Understand the value in building community and relationships in SI sessions
2. How does building community look different throughout the semester
3. Difference between icebreakers and building community
4. Understand several strategies to get to know students (formal and informal)
Mini-Training Session Example
### Evaluation - Observation

#### Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demeanor/ Relationships with Students</th>
<th>Positive environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Building community, Relationships, &amp; Professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Using Praise and Encouragement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rating:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demeanor/Relationships with Students</th>
<th>Rating: 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Friendly environment; good reinforcement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dog made it friendly!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Good laughter and energy throughout the sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lots of laughter and jokes...I like it</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Nice job asking if they wanted music, it creates a comfortable and relaxed environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The dog with the bottle stuff at the end might have been a bit excessive...it got ok</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building community, Relationships, &amp; Professionalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Nice chatting before the session begins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bringing the dog creates a friendly environment--let’s chat about this later</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Great job greeting the students by name when they walked in</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Be sure to introduce us, the observers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- You handled the student on the phone well--just brushed it off</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- I’m glad you checked in on the student who came in late</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Asking them about a past assignment is good because it shows you care and want them to succeed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- When a student was asking a question, there was a couple of points, where you started talking at the same time they were...be cautious with that because it could feel like you are not listening. I did not feel the students interpreted it that way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Be cautious with the side conversations with students as it may feel like you are not attentive to their needs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Using Praise and Encouragement</td>
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<tr>
<td>- &quot;It’s ok.&quot; - good reassuring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- &quot;Yep!&quot; - good reinforcement</td>
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</table>
Evaluation – Student Survey

- Student Survey
  - Paper
  - Implemented in class
- Question: The SI leader made me feel welcome to sessions.
- Likert Scale: 1- Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>4.46</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Survey scale and survey format switched Spring 2017, so results after Fall 2016 are not included.
Evaluation – Student Comments

Spring 2018 Comments:
• She was very welcoming and engaging in SI sessions. She wanted us to do well and was always willing to explain and answer questions, Kahoots, worksheets, and study guides were helpful in reviewing for tests.

• We start out at SI sessions getting to know each other because some people are shy when they come so that way we all feel comfortable around each other, and then we spread out into groups and she gives a set of questions for us to look over and we work them for 5 mins then regroup and go over the problems

• She always made me feel like she cared about me as a person and as a student trying to be successful. We always had a blast doing trasketball, Jeopardy, and doing the flyswatter games. Our SI was like a little family and I enjoyed getting to know the people who were there and I build some great relationships and look forward to going.
Student comments continued:

• She made me feel like I mattered at this school.

• We did ice breakers a lot in the beginning to get to know each other and get out of our comfort zones. That helped later on in future SI sessions, it created relationship with peers. We would also split up into groups where we could brainstorm together. I never felt like I was put on the spot or embarrassed for getting a question wrong.

• He was cheerful and welcoming from the last day all the way up to the last. He would always be willing to answer questions and always tried to make the group feel close and fun. He highlighted things that we should focus on and that greatly helped the success in the class.

• I also really enjoyed meeting new people and those from the other class so we could discuss what we learned in class and drawing conclusions together.
Negative/Constructive Comments

• When I would attend, he made the people who could not attend all SI’s very unwelcome. He did not care to ask you any questions about yourself (like your name) or about the class. He only cared about the learning of those who went all the time and engaged only with them.

• A lot of time was spend doing “ice breakers,” which means that time was lost for actual learning. I felt as if I could have studied/learned more on my own.

• She is amazing! She didn’t waste my time with pointless icebreakers, and she provided helpful worksheets to help me further understand the coursework.
Conclusions

• Community building in SI Sessions reinforces the SI model and can help with student learning
• SI leaders need assistance in balancing icebreakers versus other community building approaches.
• Community building looks different for different courses and the type of student attending those courses
• Ongoing training throughout the semester is helpful
• Incorporate building community as a part of your SI leader evaluation process
What’s Next?

- Incorporating more training within the context of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Use focus groups of students to evaluate SI programming and structure which include community building.
- Refine observation rubrics to refine the important elements of community building.
Questions?

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Materials & documents can be found here:
https://goo.gl/XFL8xR
References


