SI Observation Volunteers:
A Program to Develop Current and Future SI Leaders at UNLV

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Points to Cover During Breakaway

• Reasons for starting a volunteer program in SI at UNLV
• Weekly Observation Process; how it is different from Mentor or Peer Observations from SI Leaders
• **Recruitment, Training** and **Evaluating** SI Observation Volunteers

• Group Activity
• Questions
University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)

- Founded: 1957
- Identity: Public, coed
- Enrollment (Fall 2017): 30,471 students
- Source of Funds (Fiscal Year 2017):
  - State Appropriations 30.4%
  - Tuition & Fees 29.3%
  - Grants & Other Contracts 16.1%
  - Other (Private Gifts, Capital Grants & Endowments, etc) 24.2%
• Notable Mentions:
  • Hotel College Named World’s Best in hospitality and leisure management (QS World University Rankings, March 2017)
Supplemental Instruction housed under Academic Success Center’s Learning Support Unit

- SI services offered at UNLV since 2012
- Subjects include lower division Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, World Literature and Economics
- **Fall 2017**: 19 sections partnered with SI, serving 737 unique students
- **Spring 2018**: 26 sections partnered with SI, serving 774 unique students
• SI Mentors not always able to provide timely observations/feedback to all SI Leaders due to their own class schedules and/or work availability

• Administrative faculty schedules may not allow for observing SI sessions on a regular basis

• Budgetary constraints need to be considered when hiring additional SI Mentors or Observers to provide feedback to SI Leaders
SI Leaders need to be recruited before each semester to effectively facilitate SI sessions
A lack of available student pipeline creates additional recruitment challenges prior to the semester

Yet each semester...
- Some qualified students that apply to be an SI Leader are not able to attend courses where there is most need, but meet all other eligibility requirements
- Some qualified students apply in the middle of the semester when the SI program is not hiring new SI Leaders for that semester

There is always a risk of losing these students during the semester due to a variety of reasons
To address these issues, we piloted a program to recruit volunteers during the summer 2017 term.

The **SI Observation Volunteer** was appointed to observe SI sessions weekly and complete guided observation forms to provide additional performance feedback to the SI Leaders as “student observers.”

Through the program, volunteers could be recruited year-round, be actively involved in the Supplemental Instruction process, and critically see firsthand how a variety of sessions were run on campus.

This ultimately would become a recruitment pipeline of future SI Leaders for the following semester.
Primary goal of observations at UNLV is to ensure sessions followed the principles of SI (eg *Wait Time 1 and 2, Redirecting Questions, and Checking for Understanding*) for a diverse student population.

Mentors and Peer Observers can utilize their varying levels of experience facilitating SI sessions to provide feedback.

SI Observation Volunteers would be recruited without experience facilitating an SI session.

They are tasked to observe the session as a “student observer” (ie provide insight into how session may be perceived by other students participating in the SI).
Weekly Process of SI Observations for Volunteers

SI Observation Volunteer Cycle

- Observation
- Mentor Meeting
- Feedback to SI Leader
SI Observation Volunteer Recruitment

- UNLV Academic Success Center Website
- Recruitment Flyers
- Applicants for SI Leaders (Schedules/Availability did not match with current course need)
- Word of mouth

Emphasized potential for volunteer experience:
- Stay current on course material to prepare for graduate school exams
- Volunteer on campus helping peers
- Utilize critical thinking and evaluation skills
Listed duties of an SI Observation Volunteer

• Must have completed the prospective SI course they wish to volunteer for with a grade of “B” or higher, have a 3.0 or above GPA, and be highly recommended by UNLV faculty

• Additional expectations of the Volunteer include:
  • Show up to scheduled shift on time and prepared to observe an SI Leader and their session
  • Complete the Observation Form using stipulated evaluation criteria
  • Be available to observe up to two, one hour sessions per week
  • Communicate regularly with an assigned SI Mentor and other SI staff
  • Exhibit professionalism in dress and communication
  • Maintain at least a 2.75 semester GPA and 3.0 cumulative GPA
  • Attend all semester meetings/trainings (approximately two per semester)
• Review of SI Elements (eg Wait Time 1 and 2, Redirecting Questions, Checking for Understanding)

• Session Diagram Discussion

• Mock Observation
Training of SI Observation Volunteers

SI Session Diagrams

Note. SI Session Diagrams. Adapted from Learning to Train SI Leaders, Manual for Supervisors (p. 22) by International Center for Supplemental Instruction, The University of Missouri-Kansas City, MO: Academic Support and Mentoring University of Missouri-Kansas City Attebury Student Success Center. Copyright 2013 by The Curators of the University of Missouri.
Using SI Session Diagrams

• How would you describe Session #1 and Session #2?
• Who is the SI Leader in each session? How can you tell?
• Which is the more effective SI Session? Why?

While scenarios seem obvious to inexperienced SI staff, goal of the trainer is to provide multiple possibilities for the interaction diagrams for volunteers to recognize multiple scenarios that can occur during observation.

We want them to take detailed notes in addition to drawing the diagrams on the observation form.
The Process of Observations

• Observe the session and take notes
• Review and organize notes
• Complete the Observation form, attach additional feedback to form as needed, and submit documents to designated areas
  • Assigned Google Drive Folder
  • Paper Dropbox located in the ASC Tutoring Lab
What went right in the session?
What didn’t go well in the session?
How could the session be improved?
What kinds of interaction patterns have you noticed/documentated?
How much Wait-Time is the leader using?
To what extent is the leader utilizing/providing techniques to explain the language of the discipline?
Is the leader providing the “big picture”?
Is the leader incorporating strategies/techniques/ideas introduced in training?
Is the leader providing organizational strategies that help students learn the material? (e.g., charts for summarizing types of problems, strategies to solve them or vocabulary exercises that group terms)?
Approximate Weekly Time Breakdown

2.00 hours, Observation of two (2) SI Sessions

2.00 hours, Reviewing notes, completing Observation Form, and submitting completed forms

1.00 hour, Meeting with Mentor to review completed forms, feedback on performance

5.00 hours Total
Performance Evaluation is based on the following criteria:

- **Observation Forms** (Quality and Timeliness)
- **Continuing Education** (Training Attendance, Mentor Meeting attendance, other duties as assigned during Mentor Meetings)
- **Staff Evaluations** (Based on Mentor feedback, and noted interactions with other SI staff and faculty)
• Observed SI Leaders received a wider variety of feedback throughout the semester.

• SI Observation Volunteers became acclimated to the SI Culture as they continued to observe SI Sessions and met with mentors weekly.

• Having invested their time volunteering in SI, volunteers were more likely to remain in the program and be considered for SI Leader positions the following semester.
“My experience as an SI Observation Volunteer has taught me how much of an impact an individual can make... By attending SI sessions and providing course content feedback to SI leaders, you're not only looking for ways that the SI leaders can improve, but you're also looking for ways that you can improve as an SI Observer, and as a student as well.”

Amber, SI Observation Volunteer, Summer 2017
“Learning is a process, and it’s messy...The goals of SI are student oriented, and through my observations, I’ve become acutely aware of how important active peer-to-peer interactions are in students’ knowledge and confidence in their own abilities. The process towards these goals is sometimes messy and uncomfortable, but necessary.”

Winna, SI Observation Volunteer, Summer 2017
Activity
If you could only take one thing from the information present, what would it be?

What are some ways the SI Observation Volunteer program can be improved?
Questions?
Thank you!

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