

An Instructor's Guide to SGID@SOU

Small Group Instructional Diagnosis to Improve Learning and Teaching
I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn. • Albert Einstein

What Is Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID)?

Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner; put yourself in his [or her] place so that you may understand. . . what s/he learns and the way s/he understands it. • Soren Kierkegaard

Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) is a voluntary evaluation process that uses structured small group discussion among students in a class to provide confidential feedback to an instructor, generally around the midpoint of a term, with the purpose of improving student learning and teacher instructional practice. Even a late term SGID can be useful, providing information for improving subsequent offerings of a course. The process is designed to identify course/instructor strengths as well as to generate possible revisions and modifications to content and delivery. The SGID classroom discussion is facilitated by a faculty volunteer who meets with the class without the instructor present. S/he gathers structured input from students and provides it to the instructor in a summary report.

Although using the SGID process may be recommended to a faculty member, either to document elements of teaching effectiveness or to assist with addressing challenges, it is never mandated, and summary information provided by the facilitator is confidential. A faculty member may choose to use this information in her/his files or otherwise share it, but is not required to do so.

How do I schedule a SGID?

Who dares to teach must never cease to learn. • John Cotton Dana

To receive contact information for SGID facilitators, email [Larry Shrewsbury](mailto:larry.shrewsbury@sou.edu), the temporary “point person” for SGID, (shrewsbury@sou.edu), putting “I want to schedule a SGID” in the message line. Instructors then contact potential facilitators directly with the understanding that their first choice may not be available. In the first communication with a potential facilitator, the instructor provides information about the preferred date, time, and location of SGID administration so that the facilitator can determine immediately if s/he is available. If the facilitator agrees to conduct the SGID process, the two then work together to schedule mutually agreeable times for the meeting with the class and for the post-SGID summarization.

What does the facilitator need to know before meeting with the class?

Asking the proper questions is the central action of transformation. • Clarissa Pinkola Estes

The SGID facilitator and the instructor exchange the following information via phone, email, or, if the facilitator and the instructor prefer and can arrange it, in person:

- Course title and number
- Where the course meets and the kind of course session (lab, studio, hybrid, etc.)
- Confirmed date and time of the SGID administration (the beginning or end of the class session is recommended so that class content isn't unduly interrupted).
- The number of students in the class. The SGID process generally takes thirty to forty minutes, although it could take as long as fifty with a large class.
- Method(s) available for recording feedback during the general session so that the class can view it (overhead, Elmo, other technology, large chart paper, chalkboard, or whiteboard). If using a chalkboard or whiteboard, the facilitator will identify a student scribe to record large group data for use in writing the summary report. The instructor should let the facilitator know what is available in the classroom and make sure materials are available and operational on the day of the SGID.

- It is not necessary for the facilitator to know anything about the course content to facilitate a SGID. While the instructor may choose to identify specific areas of concern, knowing too much may cause preconceptions that interfere with the facilitator's ability to report objectively and accurately what students actually say.
- Because there are only two SGID questions (*What do you feel are the strengths of this course?—Keep this. What suggestions can you make for improvement of the course. Change/modify this.*), it isn't necessary to print forms unless the facilitator prefers. Students can use their own paper for both the individual writing and the group summaries. These materials are destroyed after the report is written.
- Why the instructor is requesting a SGID. If an instructor determines that s/he would like to change the questions to target particular issues such as the use of a new technology, this should be discussed with the facilitator so that s/he is prepared. The instructor is responsible for providing the facilitator with enough copies of these materials (handouts for students/small groups) and for notifying the facilitator of the exact questions in advance. New questions should be kept simple so the process can be completed in the allotted time.
- The preferred method/time for providing summary report should be negotiated prior to administration of the SGID.

How long does the SGID process take and how does it work?

Listen. Do not have an opinion while you listen because frankly, your opinion doesn't hold much water outside of Your Universe. Just listen. Listen until their brain has been twisted like a dripping towel and what they have to say is all over the floor. • Hugh Elliott, Standing Room Only Weblog, February 14, 2003

The University of Minnesota's Center for Teaching and Learning has an excellent training video, "Student Feedback through Consensus," that is very similar to the processes used at SOU. You can view it at <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/consultations/sfc/video/index.html>

In-class process: The SGID process takes about half an hour, slightly longer for a large class. The instructor should prepare the class for a guest, but the facilitator will introduce and explain the process/purpose after the instructor leaves, asking class members first to write about the questions alone and then to form small groups to reach consensus on their responses, being specific, providing examples, and focusing on *why* as well as *what* in addition to making suggestions for improvement/implementation. Each group has a recorder who records group input. Questions are designed to elicit constructive feedback:

- 1) What do you feel are the strengths of the course? (Keep this.)
- 2) What suggestions can you make for improvement of the course? (Change or modify this.)

After brief discussion, the groups report to the class and the suggestions are summarized by the facilitator who seeks clarification from students as necessary. Students are then polled to measure their agreement with the summary statements and the results are shared with students. The facilitator checks in to make sure that all significant concerns have been addressed. All student written responses (always anonymous) are collected and students are thanked for their participation and assured that these materials will be destroyed once the summary report is written. The instructor never sees their handwritten responses. This ends the in-class process.

What happens after the facilitator meets with the class? The SGID facilitator compiles the classroom data in a word-processed summary report that is provided to the instructor. The pair discusses appropriate responses, with the SGID facilitator helping the instructor interpret the information, put it into perspective, and determine how to respond to student feedback. This may include planning for improvement or enhanced communication with the class. This supportive process may occur by phone or email or in person, depending on the preferences and availability of the two. The instructor is also encouraged to discuss the comments with the class, although this is not mandated.

Who gets SGID information? SGID data is confidential and a copy of the summary report is provided only to the instructor who can determine what s/he wishes to do with it. S/he may choose to include a copy of the SGID report in a personnel file or an application for tenure and promotion, and/or share it with a Dean or Chair, but the choice of what to do with the report is determined by the faculty member who requested the process.

What are some benefits of using the SGID process?

The faster you go, the more students you leave behind. It doesn't matter how much or how fast you teach. The true measure is how much students have learned. • William Glasser

- Any time you use a new textbook or new teaching strategies or new technologies, it's useful to ask students about their effectiveness so that you can make adjustments during the current term and/or plan changes for the next time you teach the course.
- A SGID provides documentation, should you choose to use it as such (SGIDS are never mandated), for systematic efforts to improve instruction for purposes of promotion and tenure or other evaluative needs.
- Regardless of how effective your teaching has been, not all classes will be equally responsive to your strategies and materials. A SGID can identify problem areas to address and strengths to build on during a term when strategies that have worked before do not seem to be as effective.
- No matter how clearly you believe that you have communicated course objectives, no matter how carefully designed your assignments are, someone is bound to misunderstand something and a SGID can help determine how well students understand course requirements.
- Even the most carefully-designed policies, assignments, and course structures may have unintended consequences that impact students negatively. Things that seem reasonable to you may not seem so to your students. Sometimes a rationale that clarifies your purposes and/or reasons for a policy or assignment is all that's needed to quell student discontent and encourage increased student acceptance of methods and materials.
- The SGID process gives students a voice regarding what happens in a course. Whether or not the instructor is able to address specific concerns, students still have an opportunity to provide structured input.
- A facilitated SGID discussion provides students with an opportunity to gain different perspectives on events or assignments from their peers, allowing them to see that not everyone agrees on instructional issues.
- A SGID can enhance students' perceptions of instructor openness and willingness to engage in dialogue. There is an affective/cognitive connection for many students. How a student feels may determine what a student learns and what a student learns often determines how a student feels. While students are often described as being either motivated or unmotivated, even highly motivated students can be demotivated by classroom incidents or policies that they perceive to be unfair, unkind, inflexible, or that otherwise negatively impact their learning. The "ripple effect" (Kounin, 1977) posits that teacher interactions with one student may affect their peers, leading students to develop their own theories about whether or not the classroom environment will be supportive.
- Gathering and acting upon student input encourages student retention and can also lower student stress.

How can I use SGID data with my students?

The most precious gift we can offer anyone is our attention. • Thich Nhat Hanh

The SGID process is confidential and no one mandates what an instructor must do with the data. However, **it is strongly suggested that anyone who has her/his students queried via SGID follow up with them since engaging in the process generates student expectations that the course will change or that student concerns will at least be acknowledged.** Discussion of the responses with the students can include thanking them for their participation, summarizing what the instructor learned from the responses, addressing concerns, and letting students know which, if any, of their hoped-for changes will be implemented. If there are suggestions that will not be implemented, the instructor can explain, providing a rationale whenever possible. Possible reflective response questions to help an instructor determine what to address based on the summary report include:

- I can/am willing to change/modify this. (Explain how and when for each issue that can be changed or modified.)
- I can't change this. (Explain why as well as sharing potential actions that might be taken in the future.)
- I am not willing to change this. (Provide a rationale for these items.)

After the SGID: What's next?

The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another. • Marva Collins

After the SGID process, the instructor can continue to check in with students regularly, gauging their satisfaction with changes and modifications being made. One way to assess the effectiveness of these efforts is the "Ticket Out the Door," collected as students leave the classroom. Students take one or two minutes at the end of a class session to respond to questions posed by the teacher who collects the anonymous responses as students leave. One possibility for this kind of formative assessment is to ask students to reflect on two questions related to issues the SGID process revealed: "What's working?" and "What still needs work?"

An adult learning concept, *mattering* (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989) has been linked to retention and perseverance for all students. Mattering includes the following, all of which can be reinforced by students' participation in the SGID process and in continued follow-up queries:

- Attention:** Students believe that they are recognized/seen as individuals. Instructors can address this through comments on papers, encouraging students to get to know one another, learning students' names, and asking their opinion about course issues.
- Importance:** Students believe that instructors/advisors care about what the student's goals are. Updated information is provided, advising goes beyond the formulaic and is linked to student needs. Absences are noticed. Students' opinions are taken seriously.
- Dependence:** Students feel that they are an integral part of class and that others depend on them. They are not allowed to be invisible in discussions and other class interactions. Their input is actively sought and acted upon.
- Ego-extension:** Students believe that others will be proud of their accomplishments.
- Appreciation:** Students are recognized for who they are and what they have done, receiving credit for life experience, for example. The multiple life roles that learners are juggling are seen and taken into account. Modifications are available. Learners are trusted.

Can't I just do a SGID myself? What are the benefits of using a facilitator?

You can. However, students may feel uncomfortable being completely honest when you're present. They may also expect immediate answers for the issues raised, while you may prefer to have time to consider your responses. In addition, using a facilitator gives you the opportunity to go over the data collected with someone who can help you put it into perspective and start planning how best to use the input.

SGID@SOU Facilitators

2013-14

Roni Adams

adamsr@sou.edu

Education, bio coming.

Carol Ferguson

ferguson@sou.edu (preferred method of communication)

I am a Professor of Biology and am an entomologist who enjoys teaching undergraduate science majors and non-majors about the wonder of the diverse natural world. I teach Invertebrate Zoology, Animal Behavior and Conservation of Natural Resources and Women in Science integrations classes as well as general biology for non-science majors.

Jim Hatton

Email (hattonj@sou.edu) or phone (552-8213) is okay.

I am a math instructor specializing in developmental mathematics. I have been at SOU for 4 years. Previously I taught for 26 years at the College of the Siskiyous. While there I was co-facilitator for a grant on classroom-based assessment and I also organized workshops on ethical behavior, clicker use in the classroom, and faculty evaluation procedures among others.

Laura Jones

Email is preferred: jonesl@sou.edu

My teaching career spans three decades and includes university, high school, community groups, and special populations. I am most inspired by work that invites exploration into personal and societal values. Research interests are teaching, learning, relationships, and spirituality. After-hours activities include camping, hiking, and watching good films.

Mike Rousell

My preference for contact is email (rousellm@sou.edu)

I'm currently an assistant professor in Education with 30 years of teaching and school counseling experience in Canadian public schools. I'm now married 41 years, I still play hockey, and my grandchildren provide me with my happiest moments.

Alena Amato Ruggerio

I definitely prefer to be contacted via e-mail instead of telephone: Alena.Ruggerio@sou.edu

I teach public speaking, persuasion, and argumentation and debate in the Department of Communication. Originally from Ohio, I have been teaching at SOU for nine years.

Larry Shrewsbury

First choice: shrewsbury@sou.edu; second choice: office phone 541-552-6583

I starting teaching at SOU in Fall 1992 as a part-time instructor for the Mathematics department, one year after getting my Master's Degree here (General Studies in Science/Math). I have been teaching full-time for the last six years (I have been a Senior Instructor since Fall 2011).

John Sollinger

sollinj@sou.edu

I am an Associate Professor in the Biology department. In the last 12 years at SOU, I have taught mostly University Studies classes: large and mid-sized lecture Exploration lectures and laboratories, USEM, and Integrations (with a CBL component). I use both the banking system (large lectures) and lots of active learning activities in smaller classes.

Kemble Yates

I can be contacted either by e-mail (kyates@sou.edu) by phone ([541-552-6578](tel:541-552-6578)).

Professor, Mathematics. I have worked at SOU since 1987. My specialty area is applied mathematics, and I have been heavily involved in faculty governance and service.