**English Supplemental Instruction Survey (Fall 12)**

**Introduction**
In an effort to learn more about students’ attitudes about the English Supplemental Instruction program a survey and a series of focus groups were conducted during the Fall 12 term.

**Methods**
The survey was developed by Supplemental Instruction Faculty and the Office of Institutional Research and was administered to students in English courses that were receiving the supplemental instruction service (See survey Appendix A). A total of 110 students completed the survey.

For focus groups, a series of discussions were conducted with 18 different groups with five different classes with approximately five students in each group. Students were prompted to discuss:
- Whether having tutors in your class seem to make a difference, why, how?
- What might be suggestions to improve how they work with you?

**Results**
The results for the overall respondents are in Table 1 and 2.

**Table 2: Respondents reporting of the assistance they received.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nothing</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Much</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much assistance did you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>receive from the Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistants?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Respondents rating of the helpfulness of writing assistants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How helpful were the WA in helping you to pass the class</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Slightly helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How helpful were the WA in helping you understand how to write better.</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Slightly helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How helpful were the WA in motivating you to stay enrolled</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Slightly helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How helpful were the WA in helping you to enjoy the course</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Slightly helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students participating in the focus groups discussions shared a wide range of comments. For a list of the actual comments, see Appendix B. Below is a collective summary for each prompt.

**How did the SI support help?**

- While not all students reporting utilizing the writing assistants, nearly all students who received assistance reported that the tutors were very helpful.
- Several students reported that the tutors helped to improve their study skills, showing them how to get more organized and plan.
- Most students reported that the most important factor in the tutors’ effectiveness was their kindness and accessibility.
- Many students reported that the tutors brought a student perspective to the material that was distinct from instructors.
- Many students noted that the individual attention given to each student was important.
- Most students commented that tutors provided additional help when teacher was busy and noted that this was particularly helpful when there was an upcoming project deadline.
- Some students felt the tutors were more approachable than the instructor.
- Some students reported that the tutor was helpful in them getting started with a project.
- Many students reported that tutors’ suggestions helped with details on assignments.
Suggestions:

- Most students had no suggestions for improvement because they felt like the support was very helpful and the program was operating well.
- Several students suggested that the support be targeted at special times, when things are particularly busy.
- Several students suggested that an additional tutor would be very useful at times when assignments are due.
- Several students suggested that the same tutor be available for both the class and lab.
- Suggestions by some students for the tutor to coordinate assignments more closely with the teacher for more useful guidance.
- Suggestions made by several students for the tutor to have contact information available to hand out.

Summary

Prior to summarizing the results, several limitations of the current study must be acknowledged. Firstly, the focus groups were conducted with a small sample of students, thus making results hard to generalize. Qualitative data is hard to collect, summarize, and characterize and can be unreliable. In terms of the survey, the number of respondents is only a proportion of the total students, so only reflects a sample of student opinions.

Most of the students who participated in the focus groups reported that the support provided by tutors was very helpful. Some students suggested that in addition to helping students perform better in the class, it helped them with study skills, motivation, and getting started on a project. It was noted that this help was particularly appreciated in times when the teacher was very busy. These finding were also reflected in the end-of-term survey results. For example, 85.5% of the survey respondents reported that the writing assistants were helpful or very helpful in helping them understand how to write better and 77.7% reported that the writing assistants were helpful or very helpful in helping them pass the class.

According to students, the factors that were most important to tutor effectiveness were their kindness and approachability. Several students suggested that having student tutors was important as they could help from a student perspective. In all five courses, there were only positive comments and few suggestions on how to improve the program. In fact, most students suggested keeping or even expanding the support. Several students commented that having the same tutors for both class and lab would be the most productive. Some students suggested the teacher and tutor coordinate on assignments for better clarity.
In sum, the program seems to provide an important source of assistance for those students who chose to use the support. One of the most important features of the effectiveness of the program is the approachability and personality of the individual writing assistant. The program needs to carefully choose and train future writing assistants in order for the program to have a continued strong impact. Students also discussed that they needed the support primarily at particular times during the term. It may be that writing assistant scheduling be more targeted to times when students particularly need the assistance. Nevertheless, these findings seem to correspond to previous studies that suggest the program is aiding students success in basic skills English.
Appendix A: Survey

Writing Assistants/Supplemental Instruction Survey

In order to help us improve the Supplemental Instruction/Writing Assistant service, we would like to learn more about your experience this term. Participation in this survey is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your status as a student or as a participant in the Supplemental Instruction service.

1). What level is this course?
- □ 439/411
- □ 420/440
- □ 250/260
- □ 260P
- □ 1A

2). How much assistance did you receive from the Writing Assistants?
- □ Nothing
- □ A little
- □ Much
- □ Very Much

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2). How helpful were the Writing Assistants in:</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Slightly helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping you to pass the class.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping you understand how to write better.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating you to stay enrolled.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of the course</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3). What did you like most about having a Writing Assistant in your class?

4). What suggestions do you have for improving the Writing Assistant program?
Appendix B: Focus Group Comments

Comments for: Did having tutors in your class seem to make a difference, why, how?

- They helped with step by step direction. Very good to have added perspective when putting papers together.
- They provided hands on help, from a student’s perspective.
- They were very open and approachable.
- They made assignments understandable.
- They made revisions on class work and essays clear.
- They helped students stay on topic and stay organized.
- They give you tips to help you get unstuck.
- They are very positive and motivated to help.
- The program is worth the money.
- They had more time for students and were easier to talk to than the teacher.
- Sometimes the student was able to explain it in a way that made more sense.
- They are good at helping to gather details and helping me think.
- They go around asking students, they don’t just wait for us to ask questions.
- They focus on you one-on-one, which is so important and helpful.
- Tutors keep you updated on assignments.
- One student calls the tutor outside of class and that works very well for her.
- They are very helpful in the lab.
- Their involvement in class discussions is helpful.
- Having more than one tutor would be better.

Comments for: What might be suggestions to improve how they work with you?

- Would be more helpful for her to rotate into other groups.
- Maybe have the SI leaders only at the labs. A lot of time she is just listening like all the other students. She is most helpful individually in the lab.
- Have her post her outside times.
- Have more than one tutor.
- Have her help give information about the assignments and the schedule.
- Make students more aware of individual assistance available. Have her and the instructor make repeated announcements.
- Mostly all students agreed it would be helpful to have access to the tutor outside of class and lab times.
- Good idea to meet in small groups outside of class.
- Free time would be helpful.
- One student said the current tutor had already offered extra time and she took advantage of it early on in the term.
- Regarding extra hours, several students expressed that they hardly have time.