

Small Group Instructional Diagnosis*

A Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) is an interactive tool for obtaining student input on the effectiveness of instruction. Ideally it can take place just before or around the mid-point of the semester, thereby allowing the instructor to respond and improve upon his/her instruction in the same term. However, an SGID can be performed at any time during the semester.

An SGID is an excellent way to find out if students are satisfied with the learning environment and if there might be better ways to help them learn during the remainder of the semester. Doing an SGID early in the semester gives sufficient time for the instructor to implement meaningful improvements to the course and his/her instruction based upon the students' feedback. In addition, students are often impressed that their instructor is making a genuine effort to listen to their views and is seeking to make meaningful changes to improve the course and their learning. This, in turn, gives students a greater sense of participation in their own learning, a sense of contribution that often leads to added trust in the professor and a willingness to engage in the learning process.

Privacy is everything

One of the key features of SGID is that it allows students to provide extensive, consensus-based feedback while protecting the privacy of students. In addition, SGID is meant as a means to assist the instructor in improving the effectiveness of his/her teaching and it is not intended for use as a tool to evaluate the instructor by others. In order to give students greater freedom to express their views while protecting their privacy, it is advisable that SGID is conducted by a facilitator outside the instructor's department, or preferably outside the instructor's college to further eliminate the possibility of any negative impact on the instructor's teaching record. Under no circumstances shall the SGID results be available to any person other than the instructor. In addition, the facilitator shall not discuss the outcomes of SGID with any other person other than the instructor nor shall he/she keep any record of the outcomes of SGID. To protect the privacy of students, only the "SGID summary report" (compiled by the facilitator) shall be handed to the instructor; all other written documents or forms generated during the SGID process shall be destroyed by the facilitator.

SGID Procedure

Overview

We describe below three steps in the SGID procedure: two steps involve the SGID facilitator and the students, one involves the SGID facilitator and the faculty member, and one, the final step, involves the faculty member and his/her students in the class.

In-class Process

At the beginning of the SGID evaluation, each student is asked to individually respond to three questions:

- Q1) What do you like MOST about this class and class instruction?
- Q2) What do you like LEAST about this class and class instruction?
- Q3) What suggestions do you have for your INSTRUCTOR to improve your learning?

A final question to which each student responds individually is, "How much have you learned in this course thus far? The choices are: nothing; little; an above-average amount; a large amount? One or two

* Adapted from the SGID document by Dr. Paul Farnsworth and (with permission) from the document available http://www.ferris.edu/fctl/Learner_Centered_Teaching/SGID.htm

other questions specific to a faculty member's needs or interest can also be posed. Next, the class is divided into groups of three to five students. In these groups, the students work together to come up with a list of answers for each question based on group consensus. All students in a group must agree with a statement before it is included in the summary stage. To maintain privacy of students, the individual-student reports are to be kept by students. Finally, the SGID facilitator leads a class discussion in which all the small group reports are compiled into a class report. During this part of the process, students have the chance to vote on whether or not they agree, disagree, or are neutral about each answer that was generated by each group.

Students are told during the in-class process that the instructors will receive a compiled report during a meeting with the facilitator and will then provide feedback to the class. Students are also told that the compilation does not associate any particular feedback with any specific student.

The unique quality of an SGID is that the answers to each question are only those that were reached by group consensus. This practice eliminates individual complaining and focuses the feedback on those areas of the course that students can agree on are effective or need improvement.

Reports and Meetings

After the SGID, the facilitator prepares a written report and meets with the instructor to present and discuss the report. These data are compiled into a Final Report for each class. The results of the SGID are intended for the faculty member only. He or she, in turn, can decide whether or not to include the results in any tenure, post-tenure, or other decisions, evaluations, etc.

A consultation or follow-up conversation between the faculty member and SGID facilitator is recommended. Such a conversation provides the faculty member an opportunity, after first reviewing the results, to ask follow-up, clarifying or other "next step" questions. We recommend that the faculty member receive the results within 5 days of the SGID.

Faculty Member Reports Back to the Students

It is very important for the faculty member, after reviewing and considering his or her responses to specific suggestions or comments from the students, to spend at least a few minutes in class talking with the students about the SGID feedback. The faculty member can, for example, discuss his or her responses to specific comments or explain his or her rationale for particular course policies or assignments. It is important that this conversation occur, not only because it completes the feedback-response cycle, but also because it further demonstrates to the students the importance and value of their feedback and the specific ways in which their feedback will be used to improve the course and their learning.

Scheduling an SGID

If you are interested in having an SGID scheduled for any of your courses, Professor Gary A. Smith, 277-2297; gsmith@unm.edu. A date for a SGID can be scheduled at any time, even before the semester begins. If you request an SGID, you are also encouraged to volunteer to be a facilitator. Not only does faculty learn important student perspectives by facilitating a SGID but it is easier to distribute the facilitating tasks when everyone benefiting from a SGID is also willing to conduct one for a colleague.

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