

## **Checking in with Your Class: Classroom Visits with Small Group Instructional Response**

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Have you ever taught a new course and wondered how it was going? Or felt a nagging sense that something was going wrong in your class but you didn't know what it was? You don't have to wait until the end of the quarter and your official student evaluations to figure it out. We can help you ask your students. For many years, Santa Clara faculty members have benefited from a helpful Faculty Development service: the Small Group Instructional Response (SGIR).

Developed in the 1970s through a FIPSE Grant by Professor D. Joseph Clark of the University of Washington, SGIR (also called SGID and SGIF—Small Group Instructional Diagnosis or Feedback), along with other similar methods, is used at many colleges and universities. SGIR was introduced to Santa Clara by our first Faculty Development Director, Elizabeth Moran, and we have been offering these consultations ever since. Faculty consultants enjoy the opportunity to visit classes outside their own discipline, learning about other teaching approaches in the process.

The SGIR is a simple but powerful procedure that gives faculty members valuable information on how our classes are going—in the middle of the quarter, when we can still address problems and make any necessary adjustments. What does an SGIR involve? A faculty member contacts Faculty Development, preferably in the first half of the quarter, to ask for an SGIR and is then scheduled with a faculty development consultant. The consultant makes sure the faculty member understands the process, requests a syllabus in order to get a sense of the course, and then sets a date with the faculty member.

Generally, for the first half of the class or 30 minutes, the consultant sits in the back and observes course dynamics. Then for the last half hour, the professor introduces the consultant to the class, explains that he or she wants to see how the class is going at the middle of the term, and leaves the room. For the remainder of the class, the consultant asks the students to work in small groups and answer these questions: “What do you like about this course?” “What do you think needs improvement, and what specific suggestions do you have for bringing about these improvements?” As the students report back in their groups, the consultant writes responses on the board, reviewing them to get a sense of class consensus. If there is disagreement on some point (more homework, less homework) the consultant attempts to determine and report approximate percentages on each side of the question. The consultant then records the answers (generally with a smartphone photo of the board), thanks the students, and ends the class.

The consultant then meets with the faculty member (perhaps over coffee) to discuss the results. The consultant usually shows the faculty member a summary or a photograph of the record of student response, maintaining the anonymity of individual students. At the beginning of the next class, the faculty member thanks the students and responds to their comments, explaining what can be changed that quarter (explaining assignments more clearly or providing a grading rubric, perhaps) and what cannot (learning outcomes or grading standards, perhaps).

Many find that SGIRs not only provide valuable insights and improve class morale, but that after an SGIR a faculty member's numerical evaluations usually improve. Students invariably are grateful to the professor for taking the time to solicit their opinions in a candid and confidential manner. The professor in the course is usually very pleased to learn just how much s/he is doing right, as well as what can improve the particular course and the broader pedagogical style of the teacher.

In order to provide SGIRs to all interested colleagues, Faculty Development will usually provide SGIRs to your classes for two terms only. After that, we encourage you to conduct your own mid-term evaluations using the tools we've posted.

To arrange an SGIR in your own class, contact [Faculty Development](mailto:facultydevelopment@scu.edu) ([facultydevelopment@scu.edu](mailto:facultydevelopment@scu.edu)) or call (408) 554-4408.

### **Consultations and confidentiality**

The Faculty Development program assures strict confidentiality of consultations with individual faculty regarding teaching, scholarship, and professional development. Our services, including the classroom visit/SGIR program described above, are strictly voluntary, developmental, and confidential; results are shared only with the faculty member and never to be used in a faculty performance evaluation. SGIR consultants may not discuss their findings with anyone but the faculty member. We also strive to provide students complete anonymity when we solicit their feedback on a course during the SGIR process.

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