

# UNL officials question student success in tutoring classes

By Joel Strauch  
Staff Reporter

When the Academic Success Center was shut down last year, one of the center's old programs was restarted to replace it.

That program, Supplemental Instruction, will expand this fall, but center supporters say it's a weak replacement for an excellent university resource.

Supplemental Instruction classes are taught by teaching assistants and offered to students in certain courses, said Elizabeth Grobsmith, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs.

The program used to be offered through the Academic Success Center. When former Chancellor Graham Spanier closed the center in May 1994, the classes were restarted through the academic affairs office.

"We've run it about two years, and we're expanding it in the fall because it's having concrete results," Grobsmith said. "Students in the SI sections have been getting half to a whole letter grade better than students not in it."

During the last school year, six sections of Supplemental Instruction were offered in Biology 101, Chemistry 109, History 100, Political Science 100, Psychology 181 and Sociology 101.

More sections will be offered this fall, and a freshman learning community will be started through the Supplemental Instruction program.

"It's just amazing," Grobsmith said. "Every semester we've done it, the SI students grades are so much higher."

Ken Kiewra, former director of the Academic Success Center, doesn't find the program so amazing.

Although Supplemental Instruction started in the center, Kiewra said, the classes don't even begin to compensate for the lost services offered by the center.

Supplemental Instruction doesn't reach the number of students the center did, Kiewra said. It doesn't reach the students who need help most, he said, and doesn't teach what it should.

The supplemental classes began as one of the Academic Success Center's many services. But Kiewra said the center became too overburdened to continue the classes along with everything else it did.

*"It's just amazing. Every semester we've done it, the SI students grades are so much higher."*

**ELIZABETH GROBSMITH**

associate vice chancellor for academic affairs

"We were tutoring thousands of students, giving hundreds of workshops and teaching four classes a year — on a staff of four," he said. "The math isn't hard to do."

So the center offered to train people to teach the supplemental classes if the different departments would pay the new teachers.

"Nobody took us up on it," he said. "And now they are presenting it as a new program."

The center stopped offering supplemental classes in spring 1992, and the academic affairs office restarted them in fall 1994.

Kiewra said it would have been cheaper to run the program the way the center proposed and that the classes would have reached more people.

"When there was an Academic Success Center, we had at least 10 sections of SI going on," he said. "Now they have six, and that's all they're doing."

Biology professor Richard Boohar, who regularly sent students to the center for help, said the supplemental classes just weren't as effective.

"SI reaches a very small fraction of the students that the center did at a much greater cost, proportionately," he said.

*"The danger of SI is students may get better grades because they spend more time working with the content, not because they are learning more effective study strategies."*

**KEN KIEWRA**

former director of the Academic Success Center

Each of the six sections of Supplemental Instruction reach between 4 and 19 students. That's between 120 to 200 students a year.

Kiewra said the Academic Success Center helped tutor 4,000 to 5,000 students a year.

The classes help, said former supervisor Tom Meyers, but only in small ways.

Meyers supervised Supplemental Instruction when it was a part of the Academic Success Center and after it became part of the academic affairs office. Meyers left the program in May.

Don Gregory, director of General Studies, will supervise the program this semester.

"No one is doing the workshops that we did at the center," Meyers said. "And no one will see the students on a regular basis like we did."

Doug Jose, Academic Senate president, said eliminating the center was a matter of budget priorities.

"We think it provided a service, but it was a matter of having the dollars to do it," he said. "There wasn't as much payoff from the budget spent on the Academic Success Center."

Boohar said no one would admit it was a mistake to eliminate the center.

"The official view is, 'We don't have a problem, so of course we don't need it,'" Boohar said. "There is nobody on campus who does what the Academic Success Center did anymore."

"Believe me, I've asked."

But the supplemental program is still in its experimental stages, Grobsmith said, and the expansion will reach a great deal more students.

Even an expanded program would only reach students in chosen classes, Meyers said.

"The Academic Success Center was available to every student," he said, "not just any subgroup."

Boohar agreed that supplemental classes were targeted at a different audience than the center.

"It just reaches people who want to do better in a particular course," he said. "It doesn't reach the group who is in desperate trouble."

Delivee Wright, director of the teaching and learning center, said it seemed the current administration had given up on those students who need the most help.

"Our campus is a public institution and decision makers have decided that we should only accept able students," she said.

Beyond that, Kiewra said, the classes are poorly attended and don't teach what students need to learn.

"What often happens is it ends up being a review session of the content," he said.

Grobsmith and other administrators say the classes are increasing students' grades, motivation and study skills. However, Kiewra said, there is more to learning than just getting good grades.

"The danger of SI is students may get better grades because they spend more time working with the content," he said, "not because they are learning more effective study strategies."

The problem with the supplementary programs, Kiewra said, is that their main concern is making the students with problems feel comfortable.

"The hell with that," Kiewra said, "Let's make them better learners, and then they'll be more comfortable."

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