



# The Risks and Rewards to Instituting a Mentorship System within SI

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## INTRODUCTION

The University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) currently has over 14,000 student enrolled with a 20:1 student to faculty ratio. The Supplemental Instruction (SI) Program began in Fall 2000 with eight leaders assigned to two courses (Math and English) across eight sections. The SI Program at UHD focuses on courses that have a high drop/failure/withdraw rate. As of Spring 2016, the Supplemental Instruction Program at UHD oversees twenty courses with twenty-seven supplemental instruction leaders spanning across approximately 40 sections.

The mentoring program began in Fall 2015 to address a lack of communication between SI leaders and administration. In addition, consistent, daily management of and contact with 20+ SI leaders was determined to be too much of a burden for one person. This presentation provides an overview of the risks and rewards to implementing an SI mentoring program.



Figure 1. Spring 2016 SI leader cohort.

## OBJECTIVES AND GOALS FOR IMPLEMENTING MENTOR PROGRAM

- Enhance communication between SI leaders and supervisors.
- Increase rapport and camaraderie between current and incoming SI leaders.
- Create a system where the SI program can grow while still maintaining integrity and efficacy.
- Provide immediate feedback for SI leaders to recognize their strengths and improve on their weaknesses.
- Improve communication and transfer of SI-related resources and advice.
- Create a friendly and supportive workplace environment.
- Create a record of performance in order to determine eligibility of rehire.
- To relieve stress from supervisor on maintaining regular contact with over twenty people.

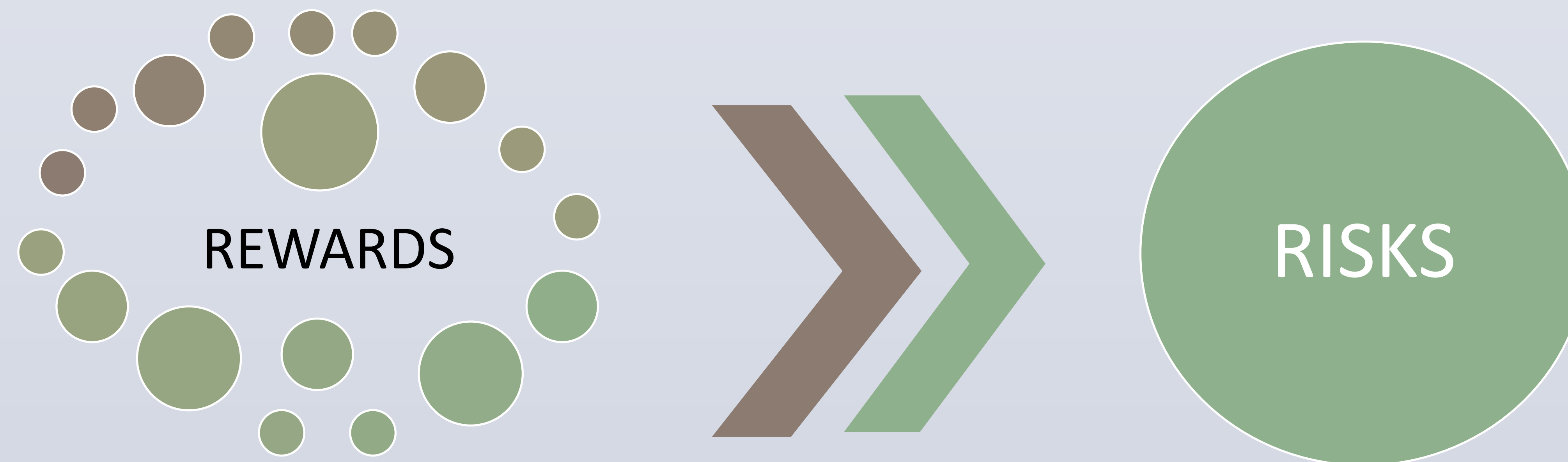
## MENTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Conduct regular observations of mentee(s) and fill out an observation form for each instance. The observations are used to provide immediate feedback and recognition of successes while giving advice on future improvements.
2. Maintain regular meetings/contact with mentee(s). These meetings are designed to assure that the mentees are completing assigned tasks such as faculty communication, logbook, student communication, exam review preparations, etc.
3. Maintain regular meetings/contact with the supervisor. These meetings are designed to provide feedback regarding mentee's performance and to resolve any issue the mentee may be having that needs supervisor attention.
4. Update the performance record regularly. The performance record documents weekly progress on key responsibilities and tasks. These notes might include whether communication between faculty and SI leader was conducted or whether the mentee was late/missed their SI class or session.
5. Review the performance record with the mentee(s). This includes any conflicts the mentee had or any positive feedback regarding the mentee. The mentee is allowed to view his/her performance record at any time and the mentors are encouraged to review this with the mentee on a regular basis.
6. Resolve issues that do not need supervisor attention. These issues include changing prep times, minor faculty difficulties, or issues regarding students.
7. Provide resources to mentee(s). Resources include: previous exam review material, strategy cards, online textbook resources, and any other materials the mentee might need to prepare for his/her course.
8. Maintain an open line of communication. Mentors are advised to maintain a friendly, inviting open line of communication in order to prevent feelings of authoritativeness. Mentors are there to encourage mentees and to escalate issues to the supervisor on a need basis.



Figure 2. Francisco Delgado (an SI for history) meets with his mentee, Jackie Olvera (an SI for history), to provide feedback about her last exam review and to go over her performance record and logbook.

Figure 3. Francisco Delgado meets with the SI Coordinator, Tanu Uppal, on a weekly basis to review his mentee's performance record and provide feedback on his mentee's progress.



- Build rapport and camaraderie among SI leaders
- Extra hours/pay
- Develop a professional (and personal) relationship in the workplace
- Gain essential leadership skills
- Resume/CV builder
- Relieve supervisor of some communication burden
- Allow the program to sustain growth

- More than one mentee was difficult to accommodate into schedule
- Difficult to maintain regular contact towards end of semester
- Scheduling conflicts in regards to conducting observations and meetings
- Mentor/mentees resource availability when assigned to different courses
- Keeping the performance record up to date

## CONCLUSIONS

During the first year of the mentor program, the goals that we sought to achieve were attained. Incoming SI leaders received extra guidance from their peers in addition to their training at the beginning of the semester. Not only was there an overall positive effect on new SI leaders, but this program proved to be beneficial to the mentors as well. At the very least, mentors gained leadership skills; in some cases mentors ended up learning from their mentees, whether it was academic or not. The overall success rate of the program was tremendous and will continue to improve over the next few years.

## TESTIMONIALS

“I really enjoyed building a professional and personal relationship with my mentees. Even previous mentees still come to me for questions or even personal advice regarding their academic life.” –*Ashley (Mentor, Fall 2015 & Spring 2016)*

“I benefited from being a mentee because it served as a guide to know what I was doing right and wrong. The feedback really helped me get better at the job. As a mentor, I helped my mentee stay on track and take care of his tasks.” –*Miguel (Mentee Fall 2015, Mentor Spring 2016)*

“My experience as a mentor was rewarding in so many ways. I got to guide my mentee as a new SI Leader and my mentee, a post bac student. with an engineering degree, had a lot to teach me about professional development.” –*Emilia (Mentor, Fall 2015 & Spring 2016)*

## FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

In the future, we would like to improve the mentor program by instituting a better matching to avoid scheduling conflicts between mentors and their designated mentees. Furthermore, we hope to host social events at the beginning and throughout the semester so that mentees and mentors can establish a connection early on. This will ultimately make the mentees feel more comfortable with their mentors as well as other coworkers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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