Assessing a new Psychological Methods Supplemental Session

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Overview

• **Introduction**
  • *Why doesn’t psychology have discussion sections?!*
  • Goals for the Optional Section

• **Methods**
  • Direct & Indirect Sources of Evidence
  • Analytic Strategy

• **Results**
  • Quantitative & qualitative student learning findings

• **Discussion**
  • How can the psychology program benefit?
  • How did we benefit as budding educators?
Introduction

Discussion Sections in Psychology

• Why aren’t we included?! 
  • Are we too small of a program? 
  • Would students even benefit? 
  • Discussion section design?

• Where to start: Research Methods!
  • Knowledge of research methods is essential!
  • Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods could use a discussion section...
Introduction

Goals for the Optional Section in Psychology

• First Goal: find creative ways to reinforce Learning Outcomes from Psychological Research Methods course.
  • 2 course section L.O.’s overlapped
  • Employed ‘active learning’ strategies (Niemi, 2002):
    • Think-Pair-Share, Buzz Groups, etc.

• Second Goal: assess value of a discussion section for psychology research methods
  • Must supplement IoR’s course layout without burdening Instructor
  • Must be worth the student’s time commitment
Methods

Sources of Evidence

• **Direct (measuring student performance)**
  • Needs Assessment survey (includes content mini-quiz)
  • Mid-Semester Assessment (includes content mini-quiz)
  • Term Exams

• **Indirect (measuring quality of learning process)**
  • Qualitative questions
  • Framed around students’ self-assessment of competence

Analytic Strategy

• Between-group comparison of direct evidence
• Content analysis of indirect evidence
Results

Sample Overview

• 2 groups:
  • T.A. Office Hours: Attended \((n = 6)\) or Did Not Attend \((n = 17)\)
  • Optional Section: Attended \((n = 4)\) of Did Not Attend \((n = 19)\)

Quantitative Analyses

• Attending O.H.s or Optional Section *not associated* with competence

• BUT, Attending O.H.s \((t = 3.131, p = .004)\) or Optional Section \((t = 2.362, p = .033)\) linked to better scores on the content mini-quiz
Results

Quantitative Analyses cont.

Students who attended the supplemental session:

• Higher mean scores on exams 1, 2, and 3, but not exam 4
• For exams 1, 2, and 3: difference was approx. 3 to 4 points each, or $1/3$ of a standard deviation
• All differences non-significant

[Bar chart showing exam scores for exams 1 through 4, with blue bars representing attended and orange bars representing did not attend.]
Results

Qualitative Analyses (from Attended Optional Section group)

• Q: “In what ways [was the optional section] helpful, or how could [it] be improved?”

• Responses by Content:
  • Helpfulness
    • “I find it helpful because they're challenging.”
    • “Helps me to understand more the lecture concepts by expanding more on them.”
    • “They were helpful because the concepts we have been learning in the course we go over and discuss them thoroughly.”
Qualitative Analyses cont.

• Clarity
  • “When I do attend, it [becomes] clear to me if I understand something or if I need to go over it more.”
  • “The subjects we learn in the Optional Section relates strongly to what we are learning/will be learning in lectures.”
  • “I am less afraid of asking questions, and have understood the concepts more clearly.”

• Application
  • “And better yet, I feel like in class we learn the material but not so much of how we are going to use it as psychologists. In these section[s], we actually apply what we learn.”
Discussion

How can Psychology @ UCM Benefit?

• P.L.O.s are reinforced by attending both O.H.s AND the Optional Section
  • Optional Section are more feasible choice to fit students’ schedules?
• Optional Section -> chance to apply concepts to real-world situations
  • Students use psychology education from UCM in their daily lives
• Optional Section was efficacious
  • 50-min sessions were short, sweet, and to the point!

How did we benefit as budding educators?

• Course creation!
  • Overall lesson plan, learning outcomes, session activities
• Illuminated difference between providing info, and helping students process the info
Discussion

Limitations

• 1) Causal generalizability could be enhanced by randomization to conditions in future I-T-T research
• 2) Unequal sample sizes & small N reduced power, but could be easily overcome in future designs

Future Directions

• A Research Methods Optional Section is of *Practical Significance*!
• Psychological Science could easily implement an optional discussion section
• Could allow students to choose when they want to attend, what fits into their schedule
Thank You!

Questions or Comments?

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