

Assessing a new Psychological Methods Supplemental Session

Daniel Mello & Paul Carroll
Graduate Students of Psychological Science

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED





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 ($n = 4$) or 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*

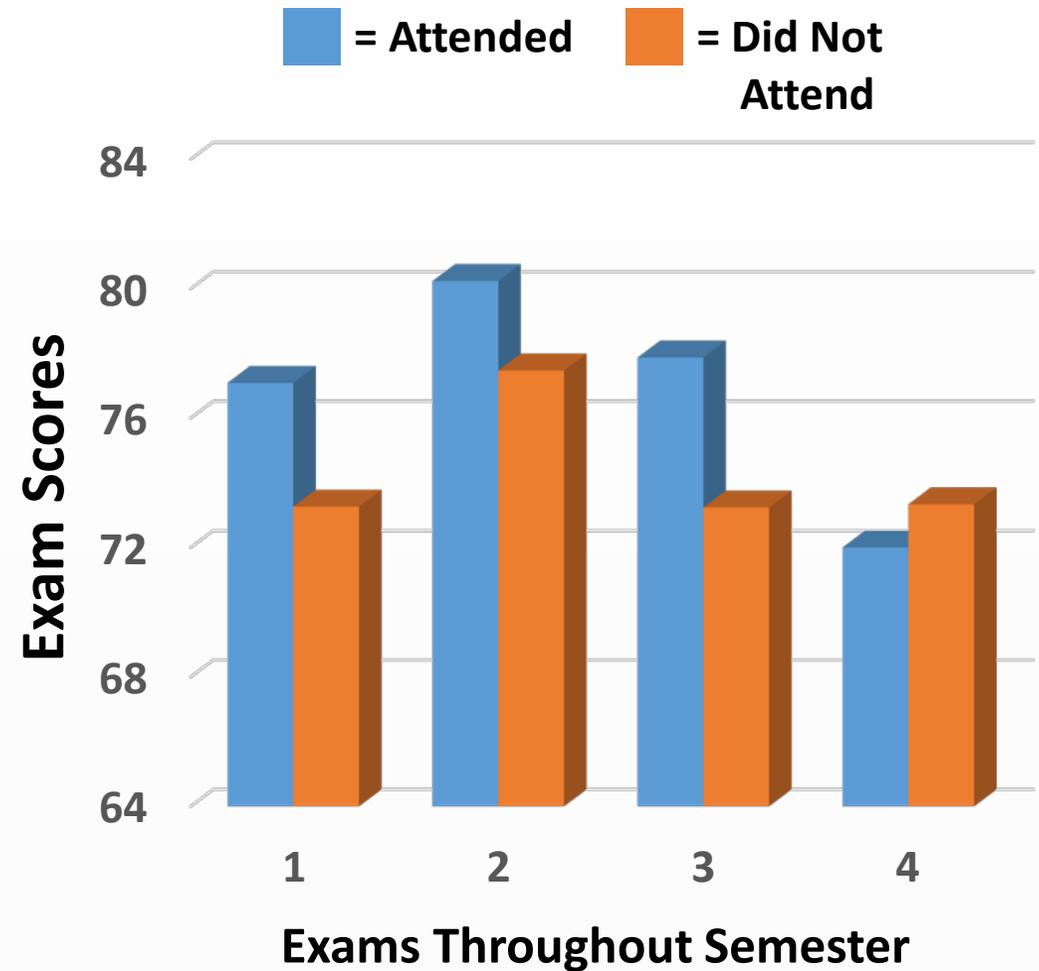


Results

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*





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

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?

For references & other correspondences, contact: dmello2@ucmerced.edu