



Assessment Practices in Psychology: Using Archival Data to Inform Curriculum Decisions

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With Special Thanks to Diana Robinson

Background

- *Health Psychology* (CLP 4314) and *Social Psychology* (SOP 3004) are upper division courses, each of which surveys a specific content area of the discipline.
- In an effort to achieve student learning outcomes, both courses include significant writing assignments involving review of the literature in their respective content areas.
- Unfortunately, many students enter these upper division courses without strong research writing skills and the quality of students' written products varies widely.

Background

- Given competing demands on instructional time (i.e., content-specific instruction versus writing skills instruction) several questions arose:
 - Might it be better if students came to upper division content courses with previous instruction in writing research papers?
 - Should courses that teach these research writing skills be pre-requisites for upper division content courses?
- A challenge was put forth by the sage and kindly director of CUTLA. In a gentle manner, she suggested:
 - Quit whining and wondering and do something about it!
 - Wouldn't assessment be a fabulous way to answer the question?

Three Assessment Questions

- Is prior completion of *Experimental Psychology* associated with better student writing scores?
 - We can assess *a priori* whether *Experimental Psychology* should be considered as a pre-requisite for other upper division major courses.
- Is prior completion of *Careers in Psychology* associated with better student writing scores?
 - We can evaluate *ex post facto* whether the new *Careers in Psychology* improves student writing.
- Do student writing scores improve with the requirement of multiple writing assignments? If so, is the improvement associated with prior exposure to other courses?

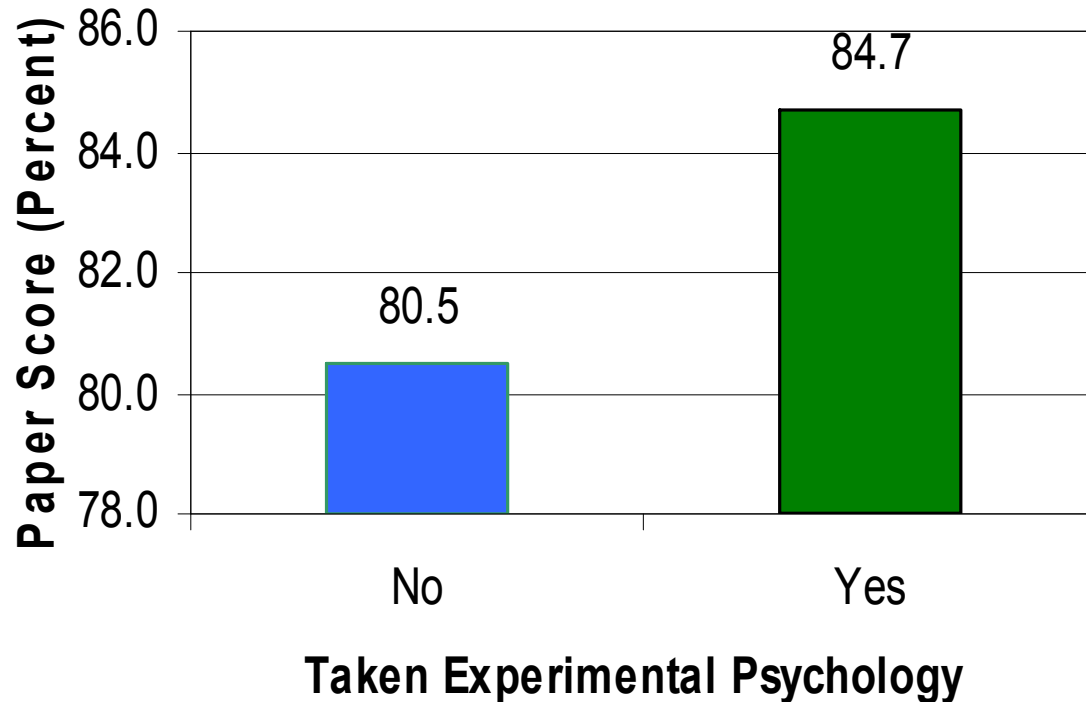
Method

- Variables examined:
 - Writing assignment scores
 - Prior completion of *Experimental Psychology*
 - Prior completion of *Careers in Psychology*
 - UWF overall GPA (covariate)
- Collected from archival records
 - Faculty grade books
 - Student SASS audits

Sample

- 163 students from 4 sections of 2 courses
- Average age = 25.3 ($SD = 7.5$)
- Average GPA = 3.10 ($SD = 0.58$)
- 77% female/23% male
- 73% Psychology majors/27% other majors
- 36% completed *Experimental Psychology*
- 34% completed *Careers in Psychology*

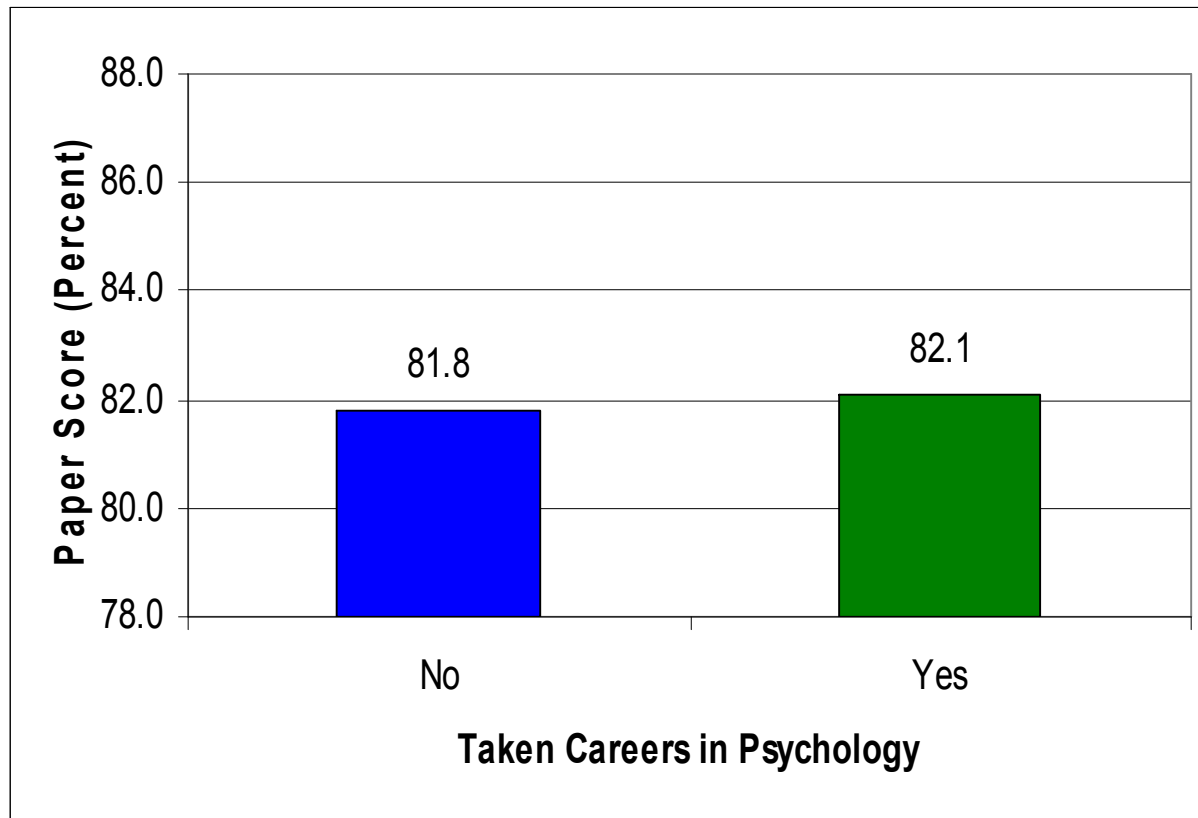
Results: Is prior completion of *Experimental Psychology* associated with better student writing scores in *Health and Social Psychology*?



Taken Experimental: $F(1,142) = 9.72, p < .01$

gpa (covariate): $F(1,142) = 47.17, p < .001$

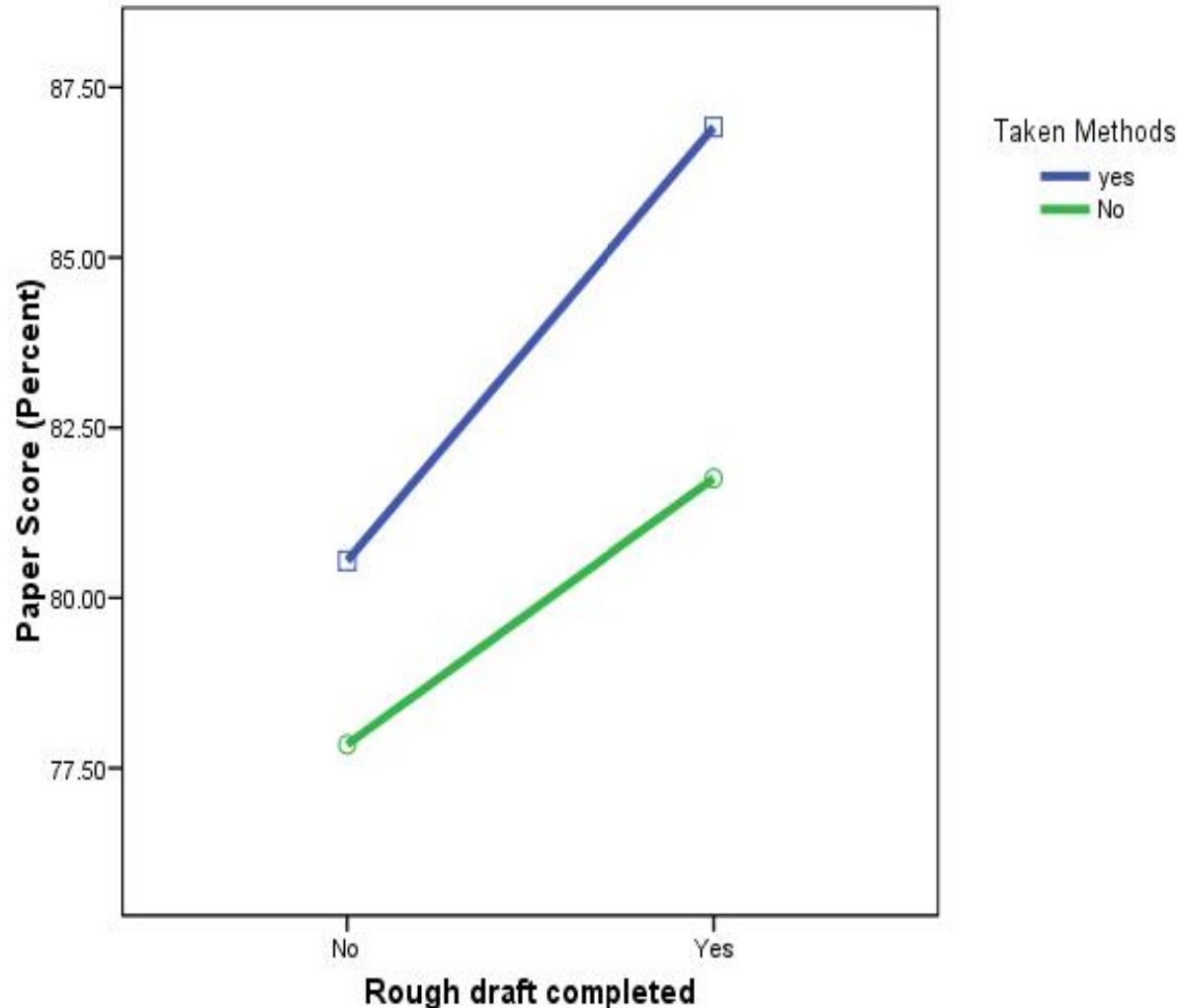
Results: Is prior completion of *Careers in Psychology* associated with better student writing scores in *Health and Social Psychology*?



Taken Careers: $F(1,142) = .15, ns$

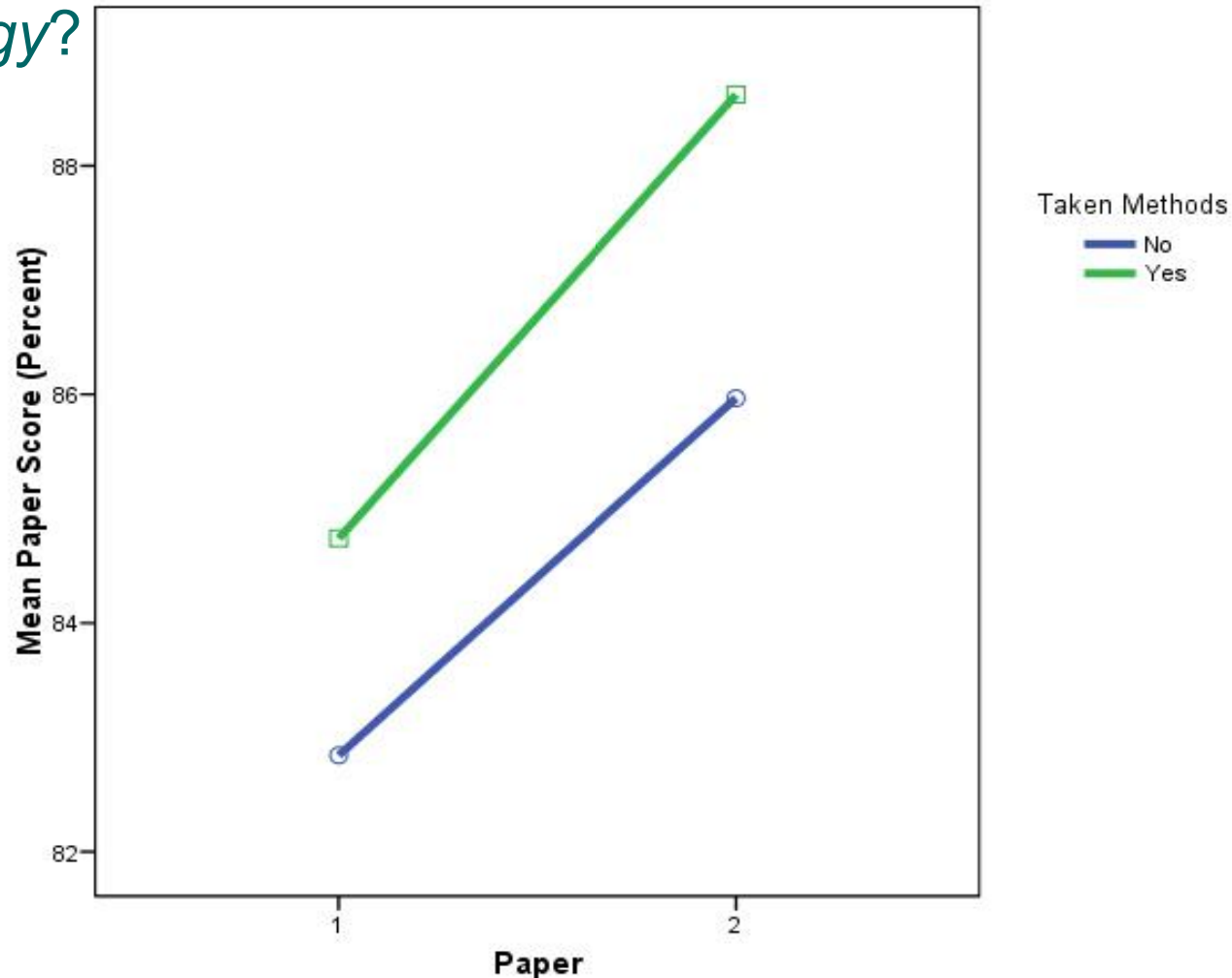
gpa (covariate): $F(1,142) = 42.70, p < .001$

Results: Do writing scores improve with the requirement of a rough draft in *Social Psychology*? If so, is the improvement associated with prior exposure to *Experimental Psychology*?



Rough Draft: $F(1,99) = 6.13, p < .05$; Taken Experimental: $F(1,99) = 3.75, p = .06$; RDxEXP: *ns*; gpa (cov): $F(1,99) = 47.17, p < .001$

Results: Do writing scores improve with the requirement of two writing assignments in *Health Psychology*? If so, is the improvement associated with prior exposure to *Experimental Psychology*?



Paper: *ns*; Taken Experimental: *ns*; PxEXP: *ns*; gpa (cov): $F(1,41)=8.64$, $p < .01$. Without covariate, Paper is significant: $F(1,41)=9.68$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

- Is prior completion of *Careers in Psychology* associated with better student writing scores?
 - No
 - May be associated with other outcomes not assessed
- Is prior completion of *Experimental Psychology* associated with better student writing scores?
 - Yes
 - Students who have completed *Experimental Psychology* achieve an average score that is half a grade higher
- Do student writing scores improve with the requirement of multiple writing assignments?
 - A qualified Yes
- If so, is the improvement associated with prior exposure to *Experimental Psychology*?
 - A qualified No

Conclusions

- Archival data can be a very rich resource for curriculum planning
- Ethical issues and access to confidential student data must be addressed
 - Staff expertise and efficiency
- Collaboration between colleagues is essential
 - To compare similar data (such as paper scores) across classes
 - To increase sample size and statistical power