Research Methods in Psychology – active doing vs. passive learning

In Fall 2015 I had two Introductory to Psychology classes. Of those classes, one of the classes was an honors class that required the students to engage in an honors research project. As such, I decided to have all of my students’ research, design, run and analyze their own research studies. The studies ranged from exploring how different majors report and experience stress to how the gender of an experimenter can significantly impact how much students share about their sexual preferences and past.

At the end of the semester I give a common final to all of my introductory students. One thing I wanted to analyze was whether or not learning research methods by carrying them out throughout the semester benefitted my students in learning that material particularly. To explore this I pulled questions from the final having to do with research methods (e.g. asking students to identify the independent variable and the dependent variable in an experimental study example).

I then determined if my honors students did better on the research methods questions than on the test as a whole and performed the same analysis on my non-honors students.

My honors class general test average was 81.36% (SD=17.67) while the average on the research methods section was 88.36% (SD=8.60, p=.14). On the other hand, my non-honors class general test average was 69.93% (SD=19.60) while the average on the research methods questions only was 71.79% (SD=16.36, p=.754). While this finding is only approaching a near significant trend, it is interesting to see that my honors students did perform slightly better on the research related questions that on the test as a whole while my non-honors students did not differ between their scores. I intend to use this information in the future and possibly incorporate a research project into all of my Introduction to Psychology courses to help solidify research methods to my students.

