CATS – Slow and steady wins the race… or does it? Test completion time is negatively correlated with test grade

When I watch some of my students complete a 50 question multiple choice exam in 12 minutes, I wonder to myself, “that student can’t possibly be getting an A, can they?”

I decided to explore this question by correlating completion time with test grade. I looked at all of my Introduction to Psychology classes (N=113) and found that the time it took to complete the exam (range 0-50 minutes) was significantly negatively correlated with exam score (range 0-100 points, r=-.40, p<.001). This finding means that, on average, the longer students take to complete the exam, the lower their exam grade is. This finding could very well be mediated by a third variable, for example, perhaps students are second guessing their answers and therefore taking longer and choosing incorrect responses when they go back and change their answer. I plan to report these findings to my students, to show them the correlation but also to discuss statistics with them!

