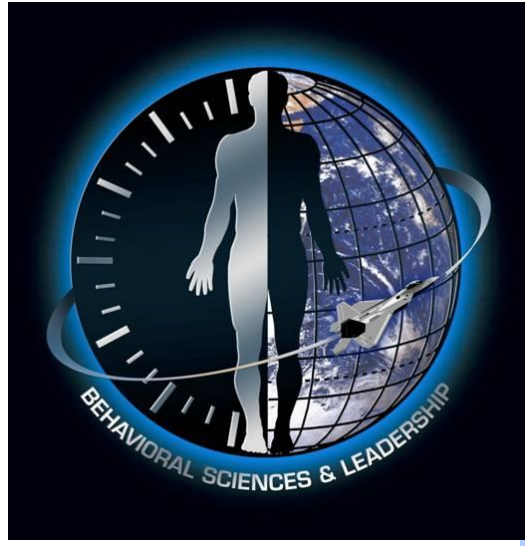


# Teaching and Assessing Respect for Human Dignity in a Cognitive Psychology Course: Relevance of the Field Trip Experience



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## Introduction

Although the concept of Respect for Human Dignity (RFHD) has been examined by diverse disciplines (Bennett, 2001; Kalb, 2007), it continues to present challenges in definition, assessment and in the determination of optimal learning experiences with which to promote it. RFHD is defined in this study as “those behaviors and attitudes of professionalism and equity that demonstrate an ability to interact with another person in a way that is mature, considers another person’s basic rights, and demonstrates fair, equitable treatment.” The goals of the present study were to evaluate the effectiveness of a field trip experience in generating the learning outcome of RFHD in a cognitive psychology course and to build data driven decision making into modifications for course design.

## Hypothesis

Cadets in the Cognitive Psychology course who participated in the field trip to the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind will show an increase in RFHD compared to cadets who did not have this opportunity.

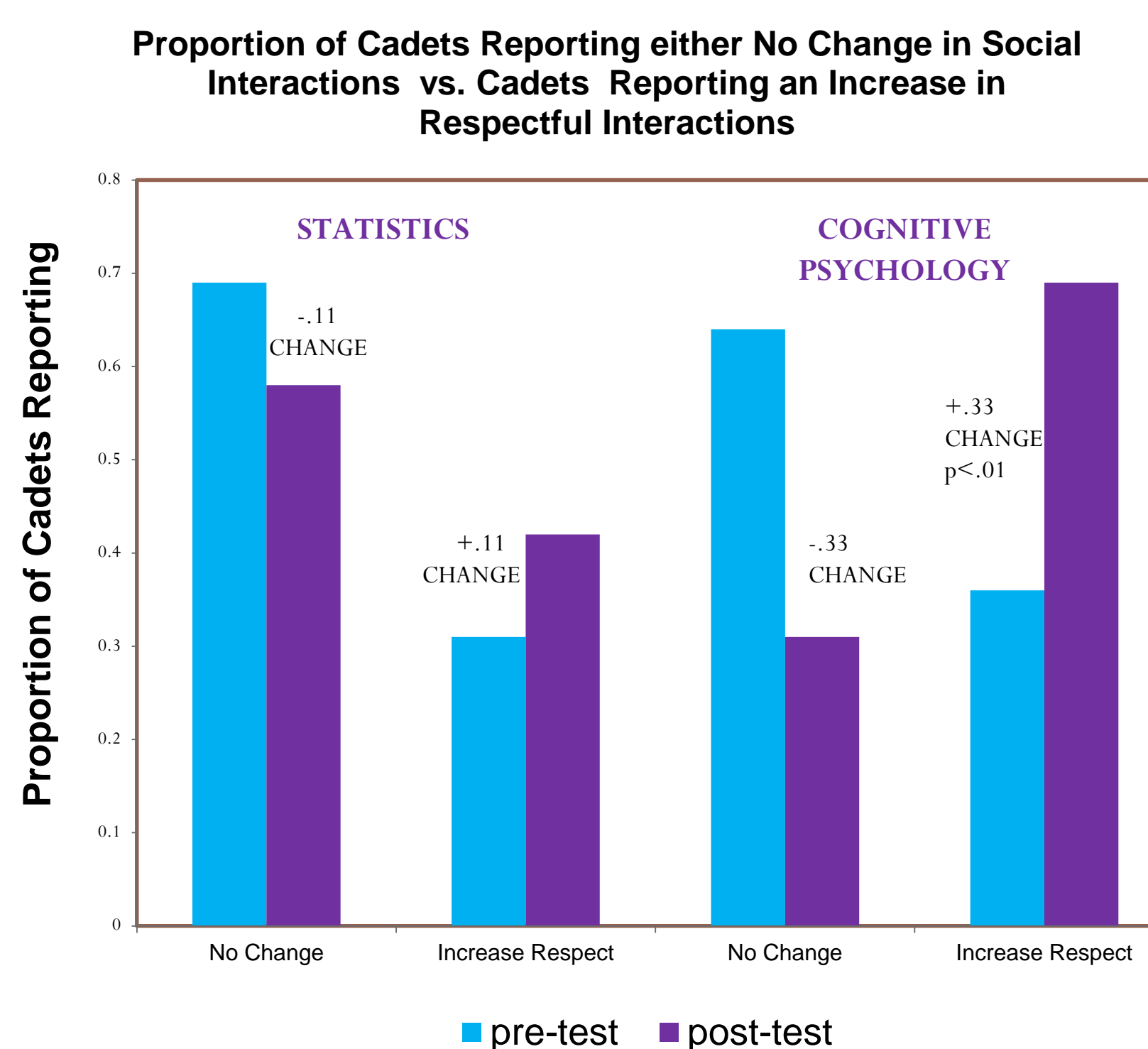
## Methods

- 37 cadets in a cognitive psychology course who participated in the field trip and 47 cadets in a statistics course who did not participate in the field trip voluntarily responded to a validated, anonymous survey of RFHD.
- Each group was surveyed with the same measure at the beginning and end of the semester regarding issues related to RFHD.
- The measure included 10 questions with a corresponding Likert scale (e.g. How likely is the rater to speak up to support disadvantaged people, role model RFHD, be respectful of others’ political and religious views, etc.).
- The survey also included three open-ended questions about whether or not such experiences should be included in a course and what kind of changes they experienced within themselves.
- An individual who was neither the instructor for the course nor the principal investigator explained the study to students and administered all surveys.

## Results

Chi-square tests were conducted to assess whether cadets reported no change or reported an increase in respectful interactions based on experiences in the course (pre-post answers to open-ended question #2).

The Cognitive Psychology students showed a significant change over the semester,  $\chi^2(1)=7.05, p<.01$ , while the other students did not,  $\chi^2(1)=.865, p>.05$ . (See the graph below.)



For the Likert questions, a composite score was calculated using all 10 questions, as well as a sub-score that focused on RFHD without including leadership-based questions.

2 (class) X 2 (pre-post) ANOVAs for each score (total, subscore) showed no significant effects.

However, trends were noticed for each, with only cognitive psychology students showing increases in RFHD post-field trip.



Blindfolded Cognitive Psychology cadets participating in Goal Ball with blind students at the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind.

## Conclusions

Cadets in cognitive psychology significantly increased on the open ended question of RFHD by 33%, while the cadets in statistics increased by 11%. Although the ANOVAs for summary score means on the objective measure and specific item analyses were not significant, trends were observed which showed cognitive psychology cadets moving in the direction of increased RFHD across the semester.

There were a couple of unexpected findings. Cadets in the statistics course reported that the intensive group based project work that is required contributed to them increasing on RFHD, even though the result was not significant. Also, certain leadership qualities that may relate to RFHD are developed over the course of a semester, but are independent of course experiences.

This study illustrated that, on at least one measure, the field trip that the cognitive psychology cadets participated in contributed to their RFHD with cadets reporting that they are more likely to appreciate different perspectives, listen better and judge less. In addition, this study can inform decision making regarding syllabus design.

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