

Cumulative final exams: Exploring the impact on long-term student learning

Abstract:

This project will examine the short- and long-term impact of cumulative final exams on student learning. The Department of Psychology uses content exams to monitor student learning in our classes. Students complete these exams at the beginning and the end of the semester. Student learning is determined by the amount of improvement (i.e., the change scores) when the pre- and post-test scores are compared for each student. Recently, we have noticed an interesting trend in these content exam change scores. Those courses that include a cumulative final are associated with students having higher change scores than are those courses without cumulative finals. We propose to systematically examine the impact of cumulative final exams on student learning throughout our departmental curriculum. In addition, we would like to examine the long-term impact of cumulative exams on student learning by re-testing students from courses with and without cumulative final exams on course content 6 months and 1 year after course completion. Based on related work in cognitive psychology (c.f., Roediger & Karpicke, 2006), we suspect that those students who were in courses with cumulative finals will perform better on these delayed tests than will students in courses without cumulative finals.

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