

"PSY-2020 Attitudes" Autumn 2014, Course evaluation

"PSY-2020 The Psychology of Attitudes" is an elective course in the BA Psychology program. In 12 two-hour lectures, the course introduces core concepts, theories, and research methods in the domain of attitude formation and change. The lectures are based on a well-established textbook for undergraduate students. The book is complemented by several research articles as well as by classroom demonstrations and exercises. The course ends with a four-hour school-exam that covers the contents of the whole course. For students who do not pass the exam, a follow-up exam is offered early in the semester afterwards. The English-taught course targets advanced BA students (not: first-year students), but is otherwise open for students from all study programs, and for international exchange students.

The Autumn-2014 class had 75 registered students. Of these, 71 took the exam in November 2014. The most frequent grade was a "B"; the average grade was halfway between "B" and "C" (see the Appendix for detail). After the follow-up exam in February 2015, the class was invited by email to participate in a short, anonymous online survey to evaluate the course.

At this point in time, from the initially registered 75 students, only 62 could still be contacted (for the other students, the email address was no longer valid). From the invited 62 students, 19 completed the survey between April 15th and May 11th, 2015. That is circa 1/3 of the class. Whereas that is a relatively small proportion of the class, response rates in that order of magnitude are not uncommon in online research. Of the 19 respondents, 13 were regular BA Psychology students at the University of Tromsø, whereas 6 respondents studied something else or were exchange students.

The survey is shown on the next page, the results are discussed afterwards.

[Online course evaluation for "PSY-2020 Attitudes" \(Autumn 2014\)](#)

Thank you for participating. The evaluation is run by the course teacher (Assoc. Prof. Frank Siebler, frank.siebler@uit.no) and shall help to improve the course. Your answers are anonymous.

Here is a short reminder of the course goals:

"The course introduces core concepts, research methods, and theories in the domain of attitude formation and change. Students acquire a thorough understanding of both classic approaches and recent developments. The course aims to provide students with the methods and theoretical tools required to design studies and interventions that deal with the measurement or change of attitudes. Students will use this knowledge to design an empirical study."

Please answer the following questions with these course goals in mind.

It is possible that you don't remember all of the aspects below, or that you have not done all of them. If so, then please just leave the relevant question(s) unanswered.

The course textbook (Bohner & Wänke, 2002) and the articles were ...

not at all useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very useful

The lecture slides ("Powerpoint") were ...

not at all useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very useful

The lectures themselves (the course teacher's live presentations) were ...

not at all useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very useful

The classroom exercises (for example, on designing research materials) were ...

not at all useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very useful

The weekly documents for the exam preparation ("exam tips") were ...

not at all useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very useful

The ten-page homework assignment ("arbeidskrav") was ...

not at all useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very useful

The four-hour exam at the end of the course was ...

a bad fit to the course goals ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ a good fit to the course goals

After the exam, a five-page summary and explanation of the exam results was distributed. This summary was ...

not at all useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very useful

What was your student status in Autumn 2014:

- ☐ Registered as a regular BA Psychology student at the University of Tromsø
- ☐ Something else (exchange student, not BA Psychology student, and so on)

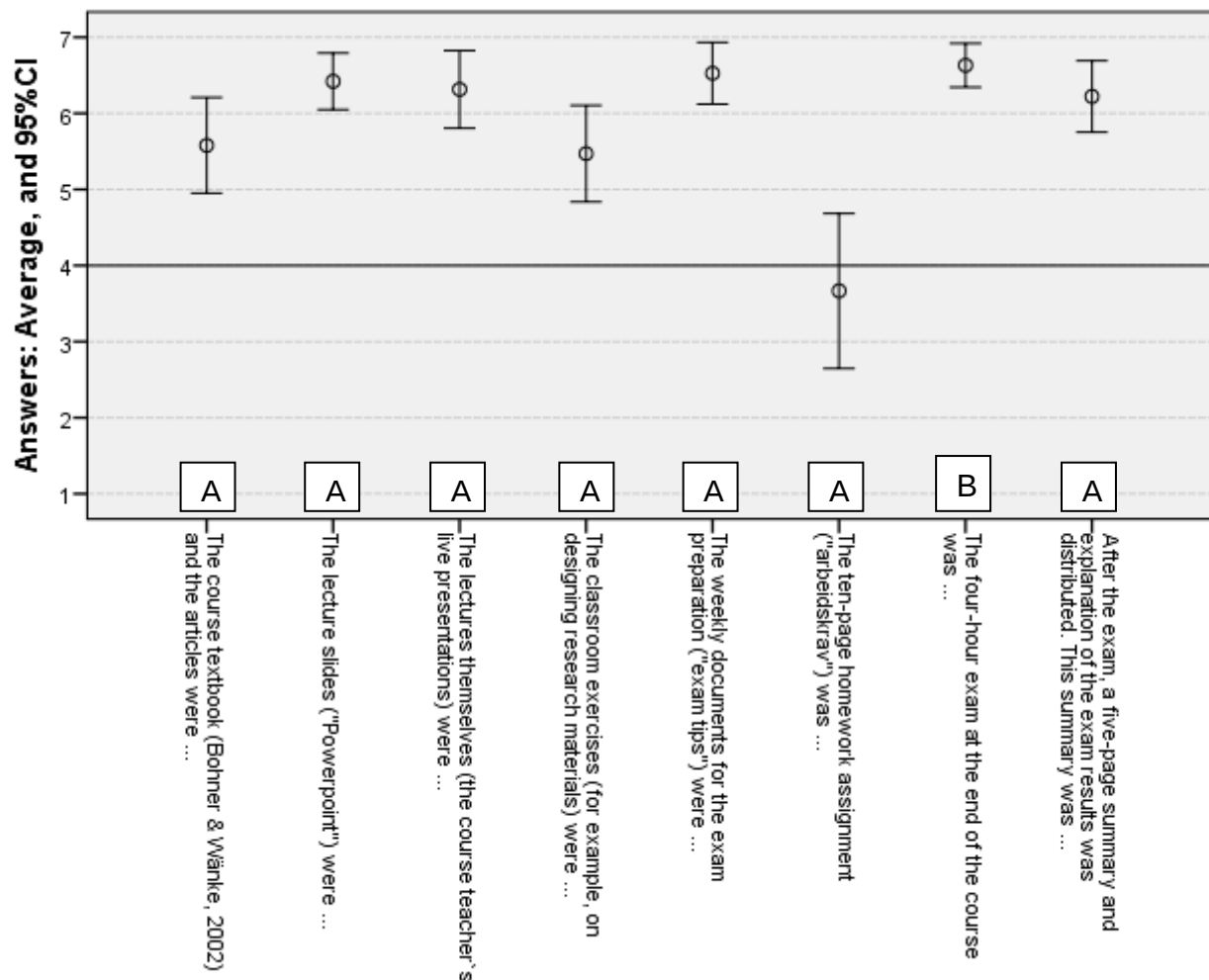
If you want to make comments or suggestions concerning the course (its materials, the teacher, the exam, and so on) or this questionnaire, then here is the place to do it:

[That was all, thank you!](#)

Please click on the button below to send your answers.

Closed-format answers

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The course textbook (Bohner & Wänke, 2002) and the articles were ...	19	5,58	1,30
The lecture slides ("Powerpoint") were ...	19	6,42	,77
The lectures themselves (the course teacher's live presentations) were ...	19	6,32	1,06
The classroom exercises (for example, on designing research materials) were ...	17	5,47	1,23
The weekly documents for the exam preparation ("exam tips") were ...	19	6,53	,84
The ten-page homework assignment ("arbeidskrav") was ...	15	3,67	1,84
The four-hour exam at the end of the course was ...	19	6,63	,60
After the exam, a five-page summary and explanation of the exam results was distributed. This summary was ...	18	6,22	,94



A Answer scale: 1 = "not at all useful" to 7 = "very useful"

B Answer scale: 1 = "a bad fit to the course goals" to 7 = "a good fit to the course goals"

The answers are generally very positive, and are qualitatively best described in three groups.

Group 1 shows those aspects of the course that received the highest possible ratings, namely an average evaluation between the scale points 6 and 7. The respondents found the lecture slides ("Powerpoint") as well as the lectures themselves (the live presentations by the course teacher) very useful. The same is true of the weekly documents for the exam preparation. The respondents further considered the four-hour exam to be a good fit to the course goals, and found the five-page explanation of the exam results very useful.

Group 2 shows those aspects of the course that received high, but not the highest ratings, namely an average evaluation between the scale points 5 and 6. The course literature (textbook and articles) as well as the classroom exercises (for example on designing research materials) were considered useful, but not *maximally* useful.

Group 3 contains the ten-page homework assignment. In fact the course *did not* have any homework assignment -- the question had been added to provide a baseline or standard of comparison. Compared to all other answers, the ratings for this non-existent element were much lower (slightly below 4), showed larger variation in the answers (a wide 95% confidence interval), and also received a smaller number of answers (15 out of 19). We can therefore be reasonably sure that the positive ratings for the other questions really do reflect positive experiences, and not something else (such as, for example, a general tendency to give nice, polite, and socially desirable answers -- which is a major concern in attitude research).

Open answers

Ten respondents also gave verbal feedback:

1. "I didn't like the book, I think it should be updated with newer curriculum :)"
2. "This course was very interesting. The teacher explained the theory and various studies relevant to the theory for the lecture, wich was very helpful to put the theory in another perspective."
3. "The course was very good autumn 2014. I learned a lot, and the teacher showed good knowledge in the topic."
4. "The powerpoint slides were so informational that the textbook was somewhat redundant."
5. "Very happy with both the course and the teacher. The teacher was very good at explaining and very motivating during the whole course."
6. "I think the way the course was held, was the best way to do it. The teacher was clear and easy to follow inn his lectures."
7. "I really liked the course. The teacher was very good, and if we had any questions he gladly answered them. Think I went to all the lectures, and learned alot from them. Thanks!"
8. "the course text book was a bit outdated"
9. "Læreren er svært god til å organisere og presentere pensum for studentene - dette var veldig nyttig for meg som student i dette faget!"
10. "Kanskje anskaffe en pensumbok som er av nyere dato, siden sosialpsykologi har utviklet seg mye de siste tiårene"

Overall the open answers are in line with the closed-format answers: The students were very satisfied with the lecture slides and the live lectures (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9), but less so with the textbook which they considered outdated (1, 8, 10). I will come back to the textbook in the Discussion. Interestingly, none of the open answers commented on the research articles, the classroom exercises, the exam and the five-page feedback to it, or on the survey question about the (non-existent) ten-page homework assignment.

Discussion

Nineteen students (of 62 who could still be reached at the time point of the evaluation) completed an online survey to evaluate the course "PSY-2020 The Psychology of Attitudes (Autumn 2014)." Whereas the low response rate is not untypical of online research, the results must be taken with some caution because all kinds of self-selection biases may have influenced who did versus did not participate in the course evaluation.

That said, the results show that the respondents were very satisfied with the course. For the lectures (both the slides and the live presentations), the satisfaction shows in the closed-format answers as well as in the open answers. For the exam and the later five-page explanation of its outcome, the satisfaction shows only in the closed-format answers, but receives no comment in the open answers. The most straightforward explanation here is that the students signed up for the course first and foremost out of interest in its contents ("Attitudes"), not for an expected good grade in the study transcript. If so, then it is not surprising that they had their doubts about the textbook which is not brandnew -- doubts that can be found in both the closed-format and the open answers. Here it will be important to explain more clearly why the textbook is used (the first part of the course uses it to cover basic, classic, and wide-spread theories and measurement methods; the newest developments in the field are then covered in the second part of the course using the *research articles* from the reading list). From course teacher side, it also seems important to point out more clearly what the exercise on designing research materials is useful for (being able to construct a proper, professional-quality attitude measure is practical for all kinds of future career paths, within and outside science). This element of the course did not receive comments in the respondents' open answers, but it showed slightly lower usefulness ratings in the closed-format answers, and had actually been an issue in the exam (see the Appendix, p. 3).

Finally, I would like to thank the respondents for their time and valuable feedback.

Appendix

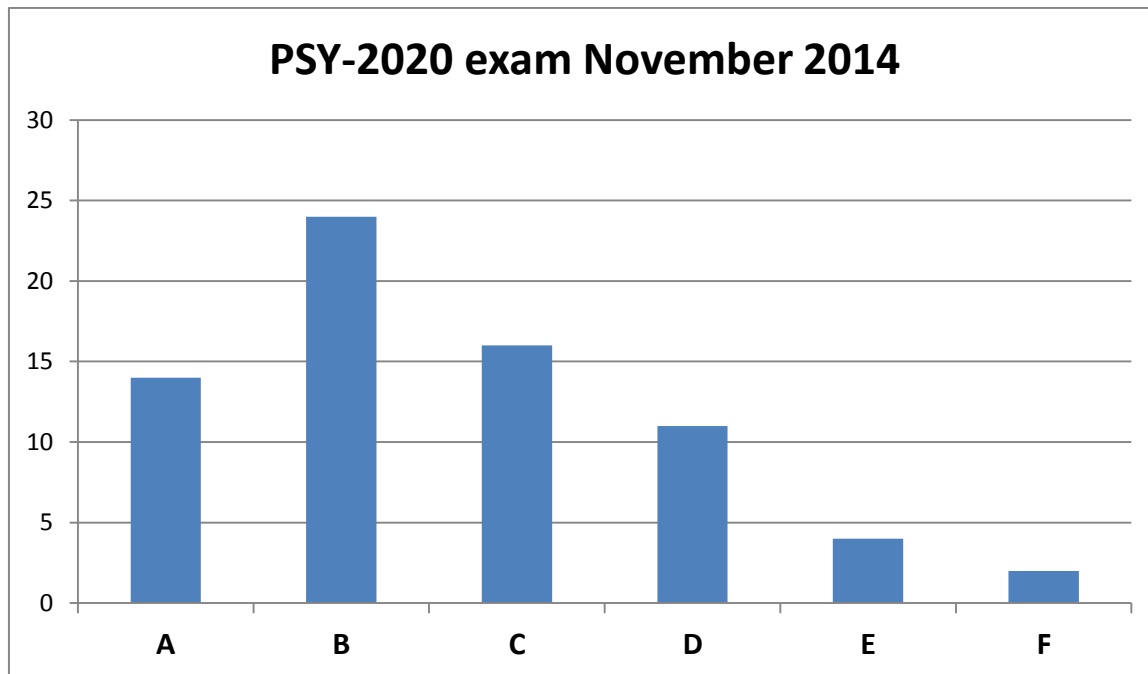
The five-page explanation after the exam

(see the next pages)

PSY-2020 Autumn 2014, Grading and results

The exam for "PSY-2020 Attitudes" (November 20, 2014) had 15 main questions (some with sub-questions). Together, the questions covered all sessions of the course. The name or title of the session to which a question belonged, was listed in the exam next to the question's number. All questions had to be answered. The required answers differed in length between a few words as the minimum, and circa one page as the maximum. Because of the large number of exams and the short deadline for completing the grading, two separate examination committees graded the exams. The examination committees had two members each. They received the exams in an anonymous form, that is, with candidate numbers written onto them instead of the student names. For each exam, both members of the committee needed to agree on the final grade.

Detailed, written instructions for the examiners defined the normatively correct answer to each question, together with the permissible range (i.e., answer variants that should also count as correct). Each question had a certain number of maximum points that could be achieved, from 2 points (for simple definitions) over 4-6 points (for questions that required more thought and/or own formulations) to 10 points (for the detailed description of a full study or program of research). The maximum number of points for each question was listed in the exam; the examiners gave partial points for partially correct answers. The maximum number of points for the whole exam was 90 points. 75 points or more counted as an A. For each 15 points less, one grade was subtracted (B = 60-74, C = 45-59, and so on). Summarized results across the whole class are shown on the next pages.



		grade		
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A	14	19,7	19,7
	B	24	33,8	53,5
	C	16	22,5	76,1
	D	11	15,5	91,5
	E	4	5,6	97,2
	F	2	2,8	100,0
	Total	71	100,0	

The grades cover the full range of the grading scale. The most frequent grade is a B. More than half of all exams received an A or B; more than 3/4 of all exams received an A, B, or C. That is a very good result.

Where do the differences in the grades come from?

The general picture is that they come mostly from the questions that required to actually formulate a long answer in one's own words.

The simple reproductive questions ("what is the definition of ...") were answered correctly most of the time. Some questions asked for short (ca. half a sentence) examples to illustrate a concept. Here the answers used examples that sometimes were taken from the course materials and sometimes were taken from everyday life; in either case, these answers were usually correct too. In one question you were asked to apply a theory to a novel real-world problem, by filling in the words "few" and "many" into the word-gaps of pre-formulated sentences. Here most answers were correct too.

Other questions, in contrast, required long self-formulated answers: to describe, in one's own words, a complete study, a whole research program, or a set of critique against a given research instrument. Here many points were lost. Partly that was due to manifest knowledge gaps, as shown by the absence of an answer attempt, or by an answer that had very little to do with the course contents (using "folk wisdom" or "layman's psychology" instead of the theories and concepts from the course). Another reason for lost points was a lack of ability or motivation to formulate complete answers. For example, one question asked to "describe and explain three alternative explanations" for a given effect. A whole page was reserved (left blank). Some answers listed correct keywords, but did not even try to explain them (one or two sentences of explanation would have been enough), and therefore received fewer points than the possible maximum for this question.

Finally, I was surprised how many exams could not spontaneously produce a correct Likert scale and a correct semantic differential for a novel attitude object, although we had a dedicated session on constructing research materials where we had practiced exactly that. This question was meant to be "really easy"!

In sum: If you wonder "why did I get this grade," the reason is most likely: "You lost (partial) points at several places, for answers that were wrong, incomplete, imprecise, or unclear. The number of lost points was probably small for each question by itself, but the loss added up across the exam as a whole. A loss of 15 points still allowed an A, but from then on, the loss impacted the grade."

Were there differences between the two grading committees' results?

No, there weren't any. Both committees followed the same, detailed, written instructions, and their results were the same. The following *t*-test tables show that both committees gave grades with the same average and the same standard deviation -- the differences between the committees are tiny (circa one tenth of a grade), and are not anywhere close to statistical significance. That means that both committees were equally "lenient" or "strict".

Group Statistics

	Examination committee	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
grade	Committee 1 (exams 1-36)	35	2,69	1,28
	Committee 2 (exams 37-74)	36	2,56	1,30

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
grade	Equal variances assumed	,006	,937	,426	69	,672
	Equal variances not assumed			,426	68,987	,672

Were there "unfair" questions?

No, there weren't any. -- The following reliability analysis is based only on "my" stack of exams, because I don't have the question-by-question points for the other stack.

The left-hand table shows that Cronbach's Alpha is .89 if we give equal weight to each of the 15 exam questions, or .90 if we take into account that different questions had different numbers of maximum points. For a regular questionnaire, .89-.90 would be a very good reliability score. For an exam, .89-.90 is an excellent reliability score.

The right-hand table shows, separately for each exam question, what Cronbach's Alpha would be if that question had not been asked. If a question is "bad," then removing that question should increase Cronbach's Alpha drastically. However, as the table shows, we can remove any question, and Cronbach's Alpha would still be the same (or would become a tiny bit worse). That means that all questions were "good" and contributed in the same way to the total grade.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.89	.90	15

Item-Total Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
v1	.89
v2	.89
v3	.89
v4	.88
v5	.89
v6	.89
v7	.88
v8	.88
v9	.88
v10	.87
v11	.87
v12	.87
v13	.88
v14	.88
v15	.89