

Connecting Concepts and Students :

How Group Debates Transformed First-Year Psychology

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Challenges

We have a large cohort of 1600 students from multidisciplinary, international students, elective students. In the past, this group has expressed concerns about being unable to engage with assessments which they have found to be too conceptually difficult. An additional challenge was to reduce marking workload and improve scaffolding with the major assessment.

Educational initiative

To address these challenges a new and authentic assessment was introduced in sem 1, 2023 unit offering. We designed a fun group debate assignment to address the aims and objectives of understanding theoretical concepts, forming networks and friendships, active listening, and more importantly, critical thinking. This initiative additionally aimed at improving the scaffolding to the major assignment - argumentative essay. Furthermore, with the unit cohort predominantly being first year this initiative facilitated student networking and friendships, an important aspect of settling into the university.

01 Diversity in cohort

- Faculties/courses, countries (cultural), nationalities (domestic and international), age, gender, abilities, prior learning/skills set (e.g. engineering, psychology, law)
- Different levels of intrinsic motivation, capacity, levels of engagement, leadership qualities and personality types

- Logistical management of a large markers team, marking of individual tasks in a large cohort (consistency and moderation)
- Time pressure of providing feedback prior to next assessment tasks

02 Unit management

01 Diversity in cohort

- Shift in Educators' perspective from diverse cohort as a challenge into utilising diverse cohort as a strength
- From student self-selection of groups to student allocation into groups that facilitates multi perspective ideas and voices, i.e. learning with and from peers
- Diversity as a tool in team work practice reflecting real world

- Group submissions made the marking time and cost effective
- Improved scaffolding of feedback with markers providing detailed feedback for students to reflect as a group and prepare for following assessments

02 Unit management

03 Student learning experience

- Student Motivation : Challenge in motivating students to undertake self-study and engage with learning resources
- Connection: The student connection between theory and application (article matrix) in their focus area of study (student found it challenging/wanted to connect how to apply PSY1011 knowledge into their respective focus areas of study).

04 Peer discussion and interpersonal skills

- Need to improve student experience through peer discussions and collaborative learning, Group work (APAC requirement), forming friendships and building networks

05 Unit and Assessment Design

- Previous iterations of assessments focused on major written assessment which aligns with the learning outcome but focused largely on teaching psychology concepts and theories
- Students found foundational psychology difficult/dry to engage with in terms of using a formal structure (article matrix/plan) to scaffold preparation for the major assessment (argumentative essay)
- Assessment tasks that are authentic and fit for AI era (rethink AI resistant)
- Individual tasks did not provide opportunity for networking and collaboration

06 Unit evaluation (S1,2023)

- Student performance : The overall distribution of scores indicated most students struggling to do well with the written assessments
- Student evaluation and feedback : A high proportion of qualitative comments showed disengagement with article matrix most commonly saying it was challenging

FOUNDATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY



Unit Learning Outcome

- LO1 Describe the key stages in the development of approaches to modern psychology
- LO2 Compare and contrast psychological theories related to a core body of knowledge in psychology and link them to real world settings
- LO3 Explain the neurobiological basis of psychology and its application to learning and memory
- LO4 Outline a range of psychological disorders and how they impact mental health and wellbeing
- LO5 Effectively communicate psychological ideas with diverse audiences, across various modes

03 Student learning experience

- Student Motivation :
 - Foster a collaborative learning
 - Peer assisted learning in tutorials with tutor supervision
 - Improved accountability with groups setting internal deadlines
- Connection: Authentic assessment (Debate) improved translation of learning and enabled students apply theory in their focus area of study in collaborative environment

04 Peer discussion and interpersonal skills

- Supported introduction to peer interactions , forming friendships and building networks
- Facilitated opportunities for leadership through group work

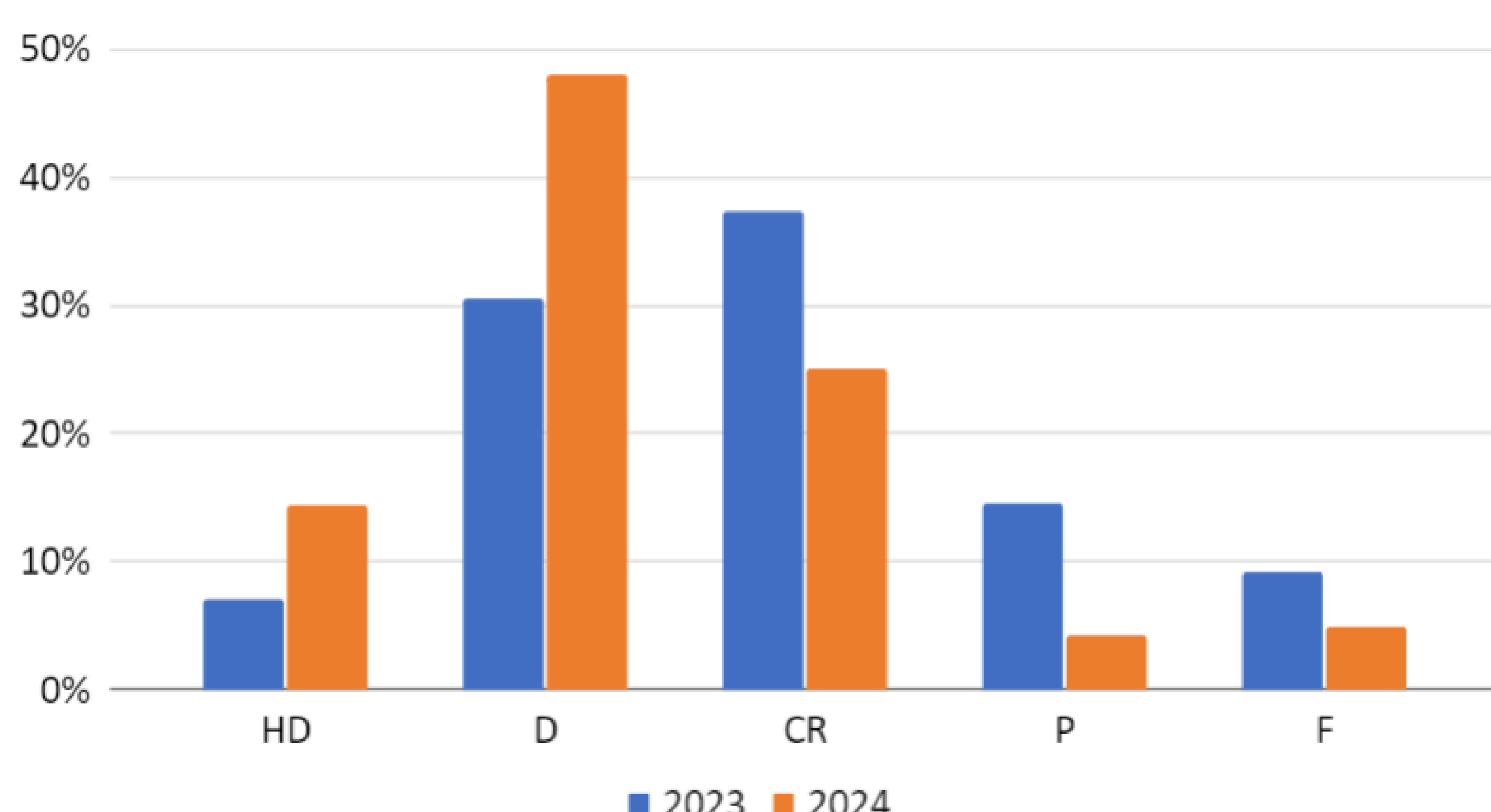
05 Unit and Assessment Design

- In order to make the assessment more engaging we returned to the diverse background of our cohort which inspired us to innovate a strength-based approach to inspiring us to use multi perspective to the advantage of students' learning through group debate
- Group work guidelines for collaborative work in Psychology, Group statement of participation (purpose is to tag regular meetings and ensure equal contributions)
- Group task ensured collaboration, networking and friendships

06 Unit evaluation (S1,2024)

- Student performance : The overall distribution of scores indicated most students exceeded expectations
- Student evaluation and feedback : A high proportion of qualitative comments indicated good engagement with the group debate

PSY1011 Grade Distribution 2023-2024



Student Testimonials

Group debate was a nice task as it allowed us to get to know each other and really think about both sides of our topic, which was cool to think about applying the theory to real world.

I found the group presentation and the argumentative essay were the most effective. Even though my group experienced difficulties when working on the group presentation, we still learned valuable lessons and gained constructive feedbacks that we could bring to practise in the argumentative essay.

As a first year student I enjoyed the group debate as it allowed me to get to know the people around me and work with them collaboratively. I really enjoyed the seminars each week and they were very engaging.

The group debate was a positive experience and allowed me to collaborate with other students who I was able to learn from and bounce ideas off of.

The group debate presentation was a good way into applying learnt knowledge and working together with other students. It helped boost understanding of the content learnt.

The debate allowed us to learn how to research and dissect articles/information online and gain information from peer reviewed and trusted sources