THE BENEFIT OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL STATISTICS

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For students of psychology, mathematically-based courses--such as those in statistics--are often dreaded. In their unique role as part-teacher and part-student, teaching assistants may provide qualitatively different aide and support than that given by professors.

Psychological statistics requires students to grasp, and apply, mathematical concepts that build upon one another as the course progresses. While some students--due to either past experience or natural ability--may understand statistical concepts with ease, others will struggle and find that a great deal of effort; repetition; and practice is required of them. Due to this great divergence, it is rather common for students to get the impression that they, alone, are having difficulty; they may quickly become too frustrated and embarrassed to turn to the professor for assistance. A teaching assistant (TA), however, usually has but a few years of experience over the students, therefore providing a less subjectively threatening individual to whom the student can turn for help. In this context, the student may feel freer to ask more basic questions; and many TAs will gladly assist students with homework problems during their office hours.

In addition, though more experienced than the students, a statistics TA will likely recall which concepts they found to be initially more difficult than others, and what techniques proved especially beneficial in learning the material. While the professor may be too far removed from the initial experience, a TA will presumably to able to use these experiences to benefit the students.

For the poster presentation, specific examples of the above points will be provided. Of particular focus will be types of questions for which a statistics TA is sought, and statistical tests that prove the most difficult for students to comprehend (as evidenced by more requests for assistance).