Effective strategies for teaching and learning law: an analysis of student experience and perception

SLS Conference 2009- University of Keele

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Aim of this paper

- **To identify what students determine to be the most effective ways to teach law**

- **Students were given a teaching and learning questionnaire**

- **20 questions designed to assess attitudes towards the <u>main</u> learning forums:**

    - **Lectures**
    - **Seminars (tutorials)**
    - **Other learning resources**
    - **Independent learning**

- **Students answered in relation to what had <u>been</u> the most effective methods in the past - <u>not</u> what they considered the least demanding or time consuming methods**

- **The results can be used to reflect on and shape teaching strategies in relation to law (I am avoiding the 'P' word!)**

The participants

- **Students predominantly from UoG but also from UoK, UoN and Holborn College (Kaplan)**

- **209 students took part**
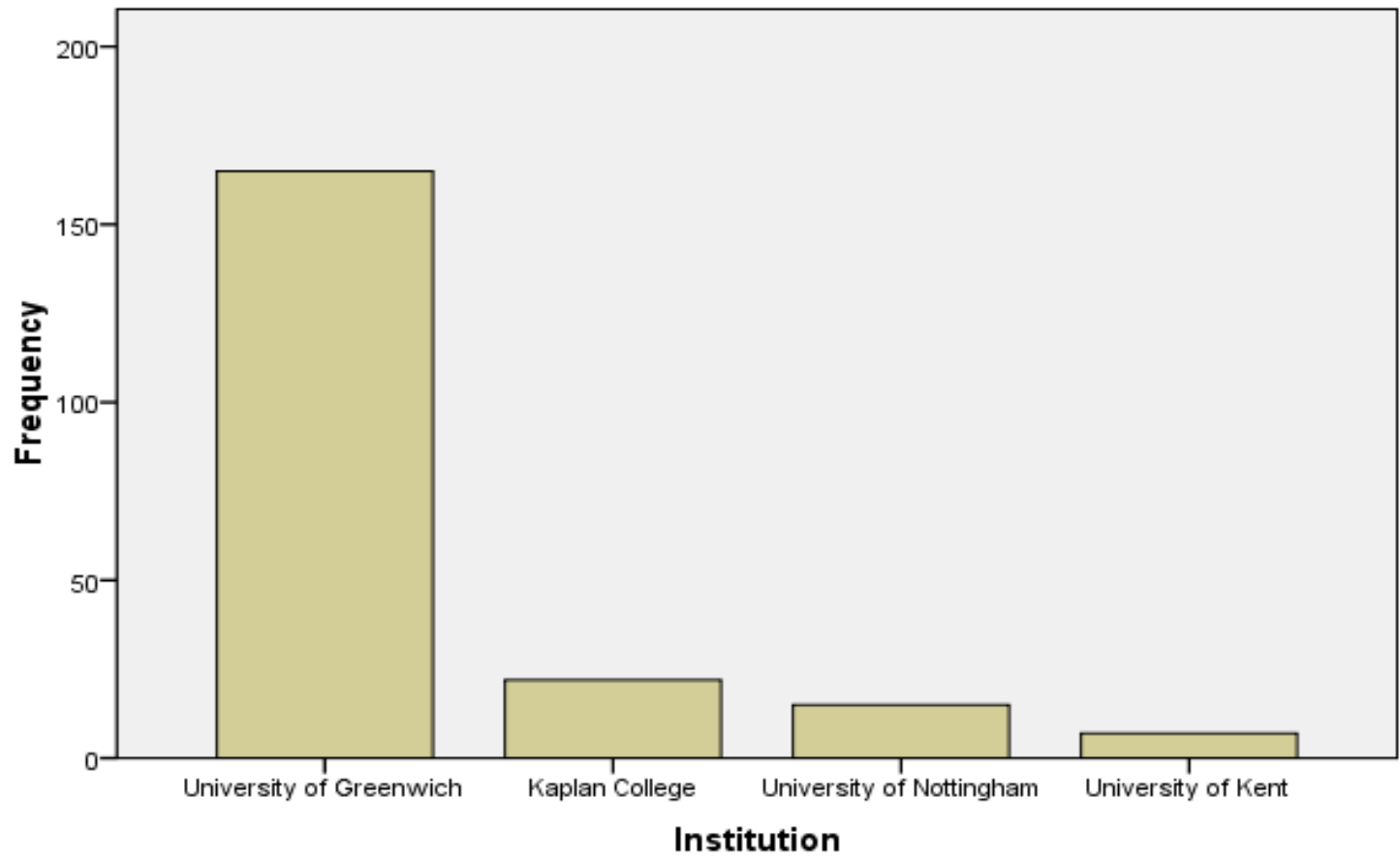
Possible limitations of the study

- **Relatively small number of participants (209)**

- **Mostly UoG students – representative? (UCAS points = 240)**

- **Stats include whole sample - risk institutions other than UoG skew figures- when examined no evidence of this (any differences are noted)**

- **Comparisons between institutions limited due to differences in numbers / teaching/ cohort (e.g. Lecture numbers)**

- **Answers depend on individual experience – so no constants**

- **Some students answered as to what they have experienced and like/ dislike, others answer with a view to what they have not experienced and expect**

- **Some questions required students to tick boxes - risk of answering without proper consideration**

- **In order to analyse statistics by ability - used predicted grades**

However…

I do believe that some general trends can be drawn from the feedback. Most students from Greenwich (165) :

Year   Yr1 – 40 (24%)   Yr2 – 65   (39%)   Yr3 – 60 (37%)

Gender   48 male (29%)   117 female (71%)

Ethnicity   White 53 (34%)
                Black 38 (24%)
                Asian 48 (31%)
                Other 18 (11%)

Age   8- 21 68%   22- 40- 29%   40+ – 3%

The feedback

- **Please refer to the survey throughout**

- **For the most part the visuals follow the order of the questions in the survey**

- **Focusing on most interesting stats and feedback**

- **Some questions required students to record comments- here only the most frequent responses were recorded**

- **Where percent scores are given this does not include non responses**

- **Where questions are analysed in relation to variables, graphs only record frequency (not %)**

Lectures …….

The following graph refs to data from Q18

How much knowledge do you gain from lectures?

Confirms lectures are the main learning forum
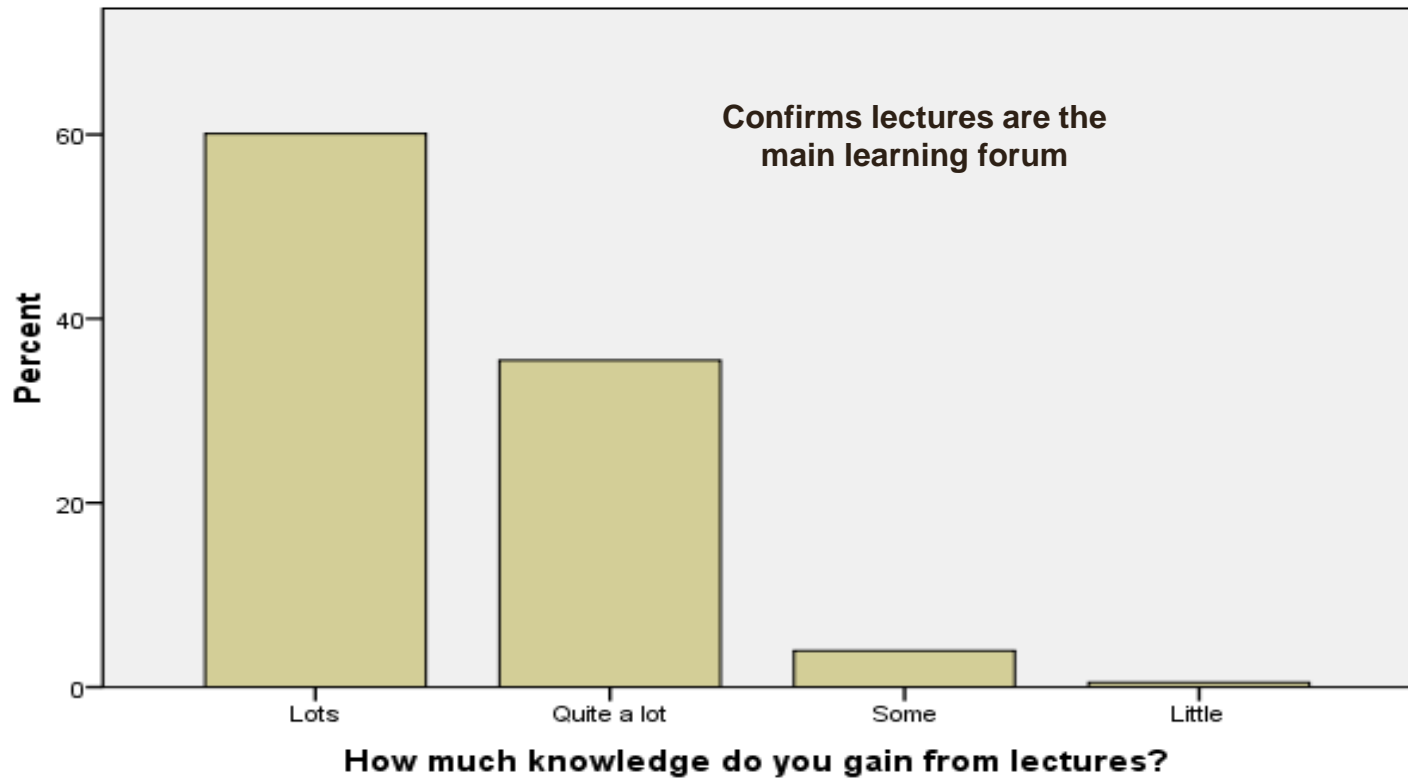
This graph is devised from data re Q 15 which assesses effectiveness of various resources
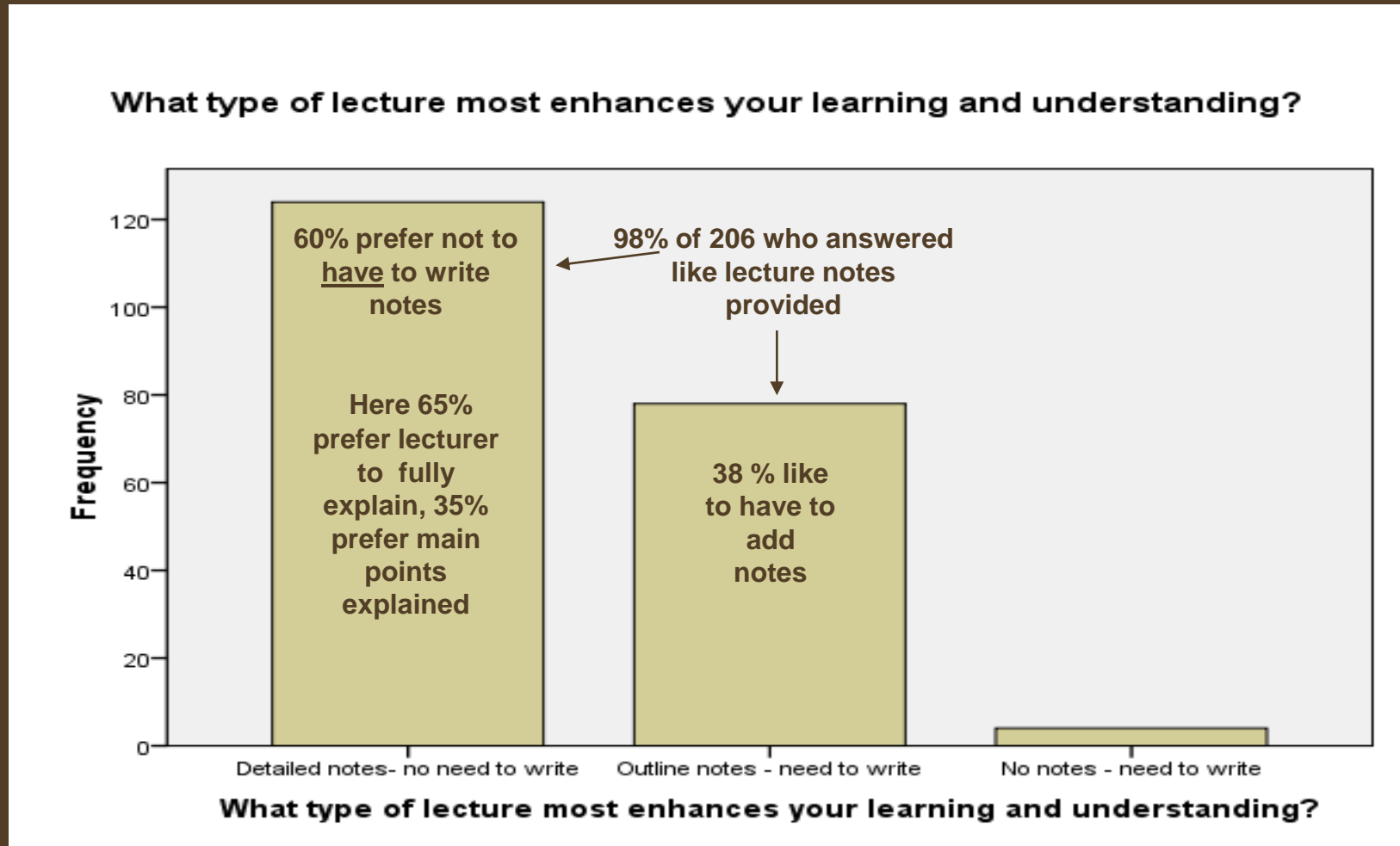

Assess effectiveness of lecture handouts in increasing understanding

High impact = 79%
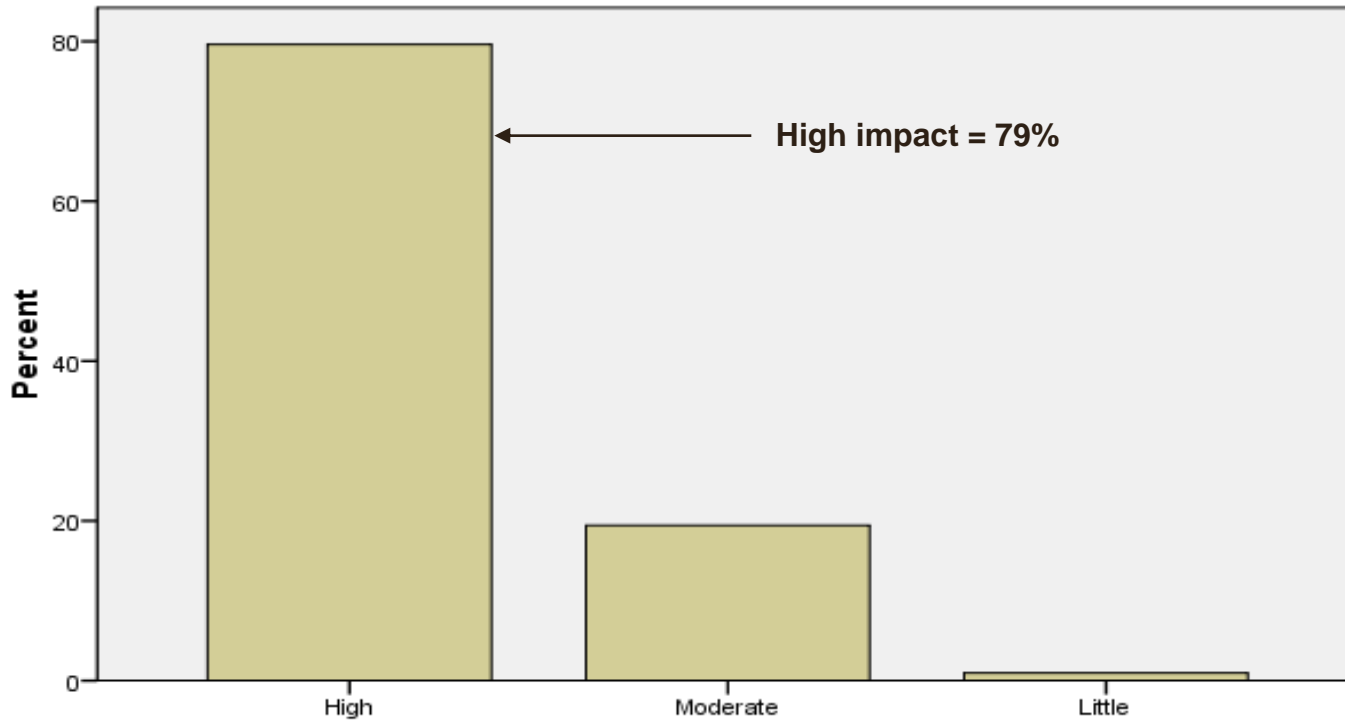
Assess effectiveness of lecture handouts in increasing understanding

# Question 1 – relates to the provision of lecture notes & note taking

This graph combines answers (a) and (b) into one category of "detailed notes"

What type of lecture most enhances your learning and understanding?

60% prefer not to have to write notes

98% of 206 who answered like lecture notes provided

Here 65% prefer lecturer to fully explain, 35% prefer main points explained

38 % like to have to add notes

Frequency (y-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120)

x-axis categories:
- Detailed notes- no need to write
- Outline notes - need to write
- No notes - need to write

What type of lecture most enhances your learning and understanding?

Year of study

Graphs showing variables - Key to breakdown of variables shown here
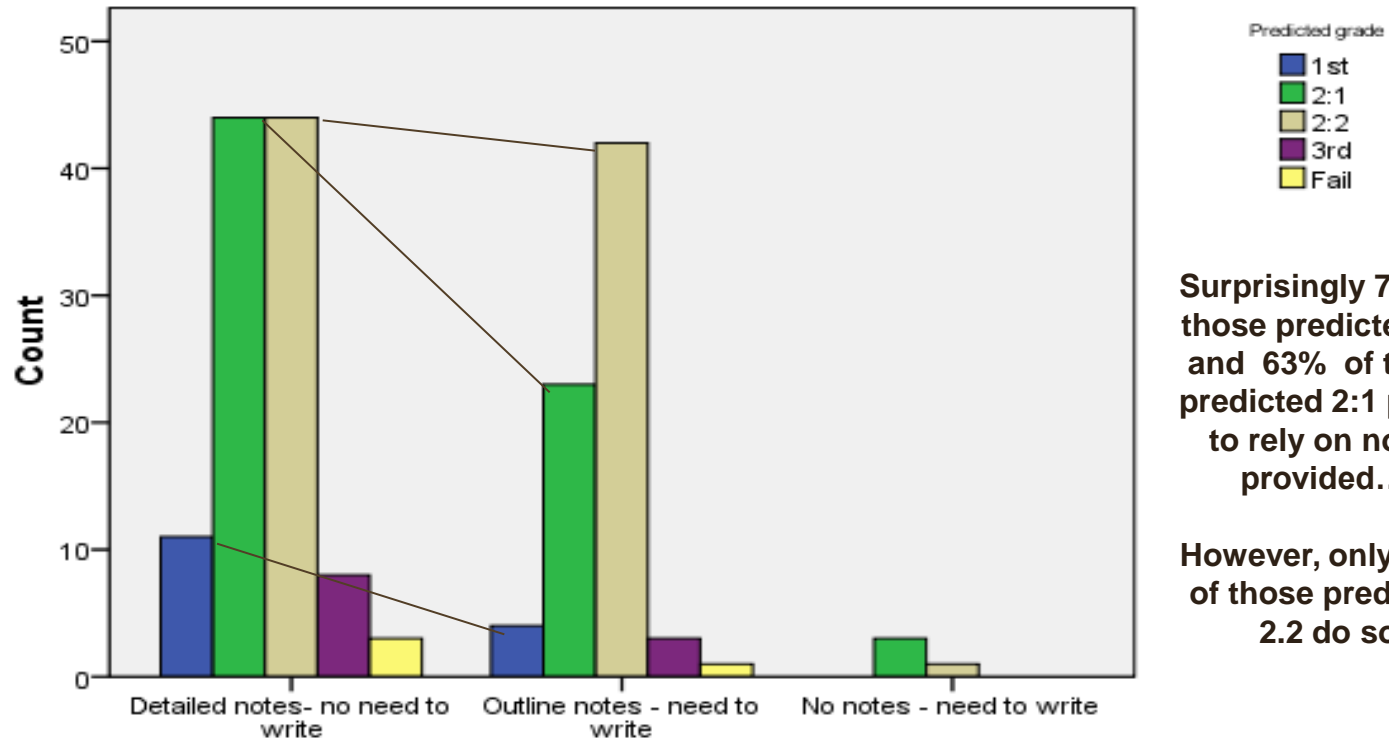
Bar Chart

Year of study
- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
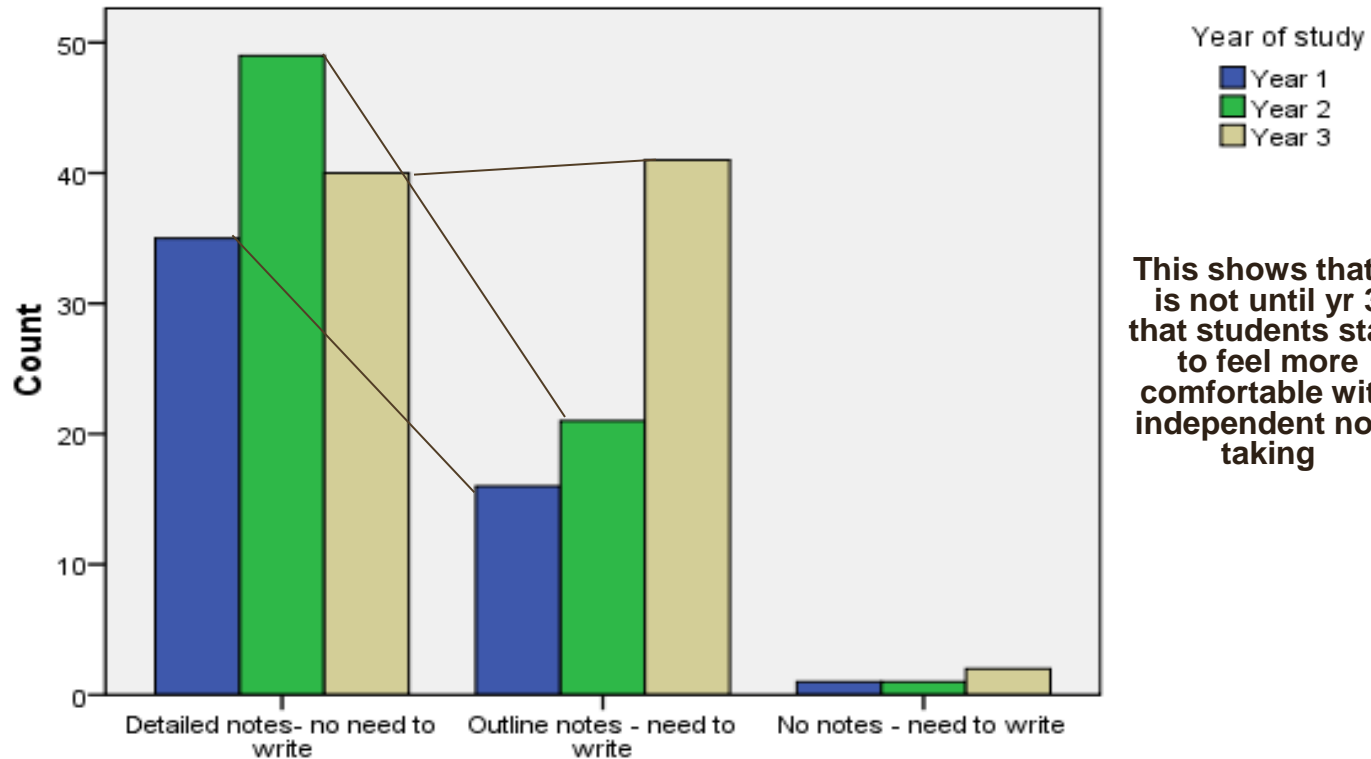
This shows that it is not until yr 3 that students start to feel more comfortable with independent note taking

Predicted grade

Bar Chart

Surprisingly 73% of those predicted 1st and 63% of those predicted 2:1 prefer to rely on notes provided….
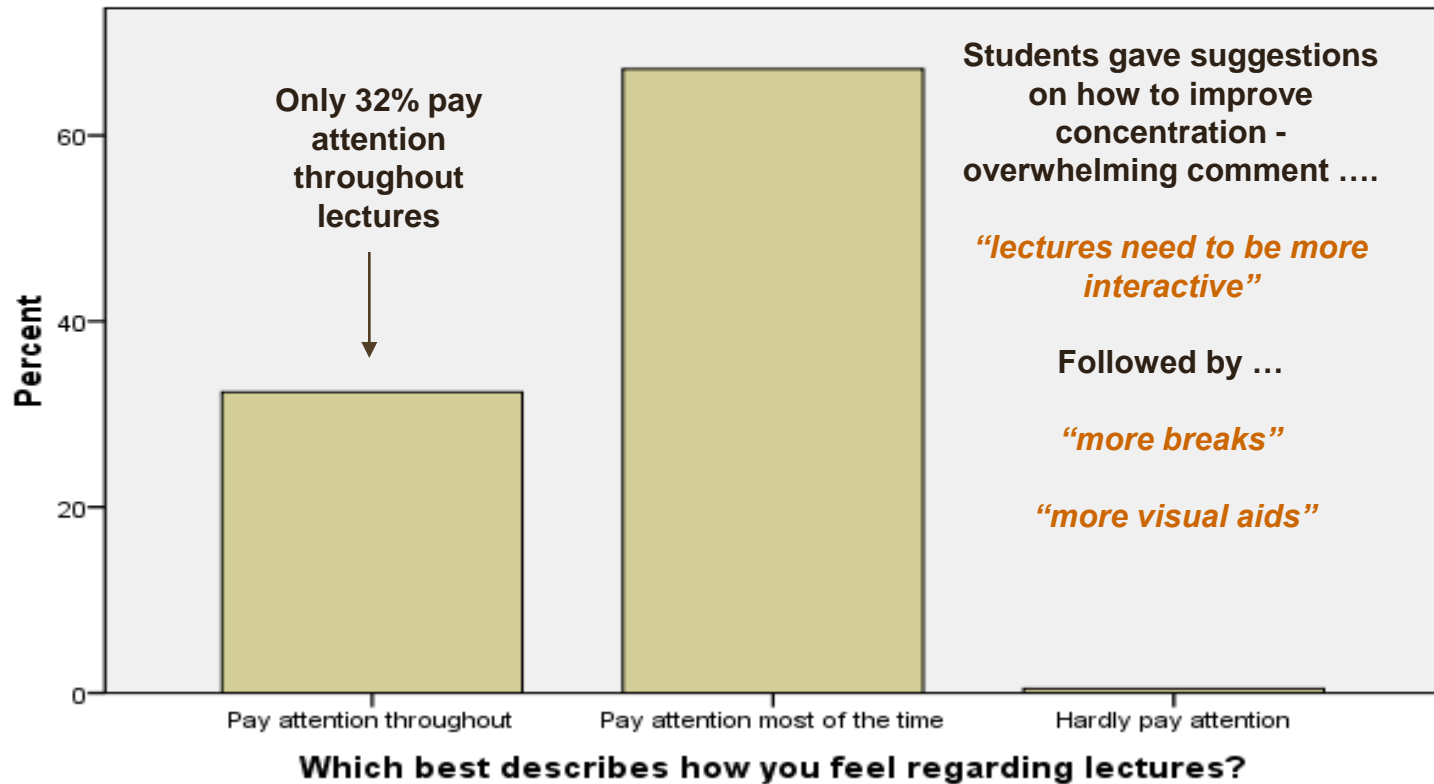
However, only 50% of those predicted 2.2 do so

Question 2 – assesses ability to multi task during lectures

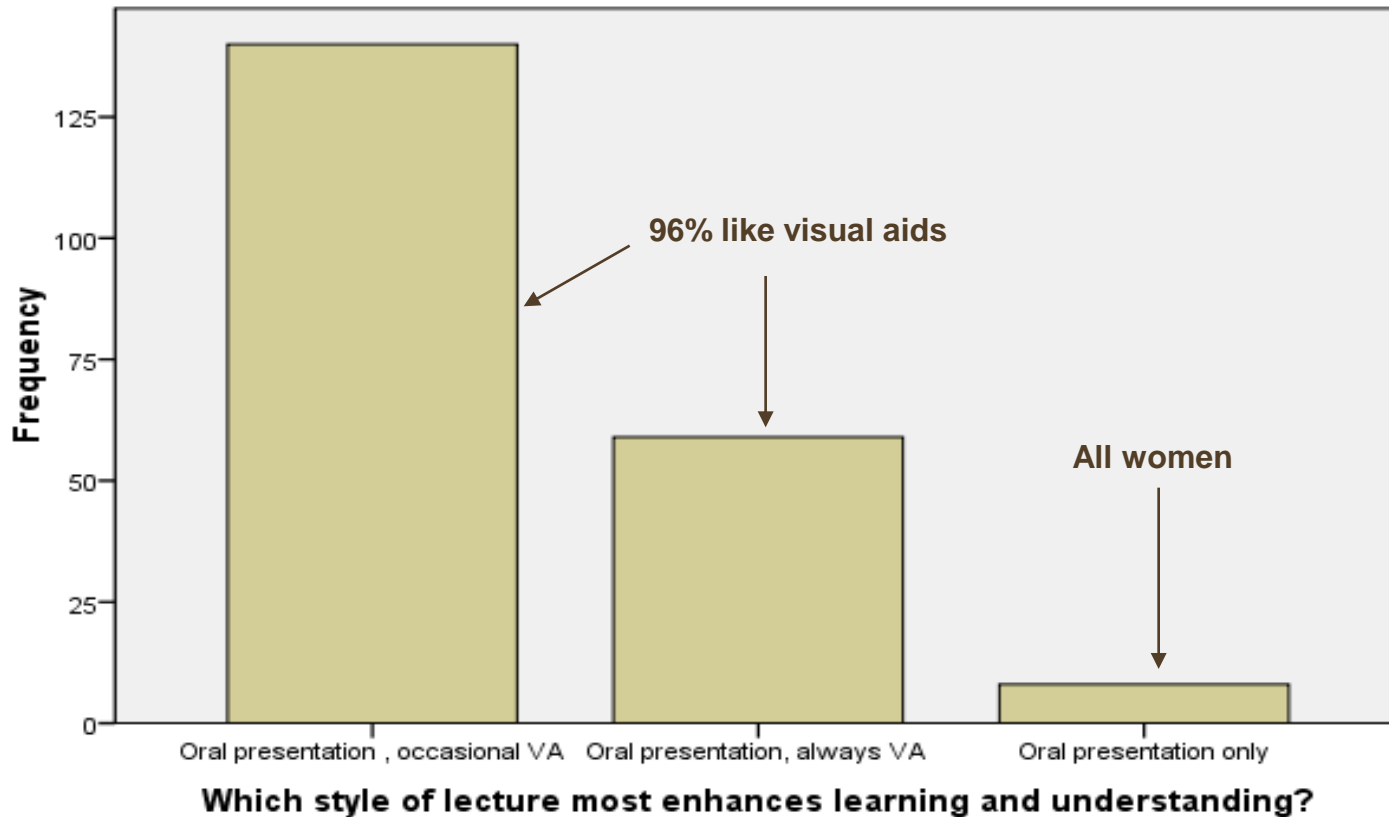## Which best describes how you feel regarding lectures?

No real trends but slightly more men (11%) as opposed to women (7%) find it difficult

73% of students can lose track when required to watch, listen and write at the same time

Percent

60

40

20

0

Generally able to watch, listen, write; sometimes lose track

Able to watch, listen, write and keep track

Difficult to watch; listen, write, often lose track

Which best describes how you feel regarding lectures?
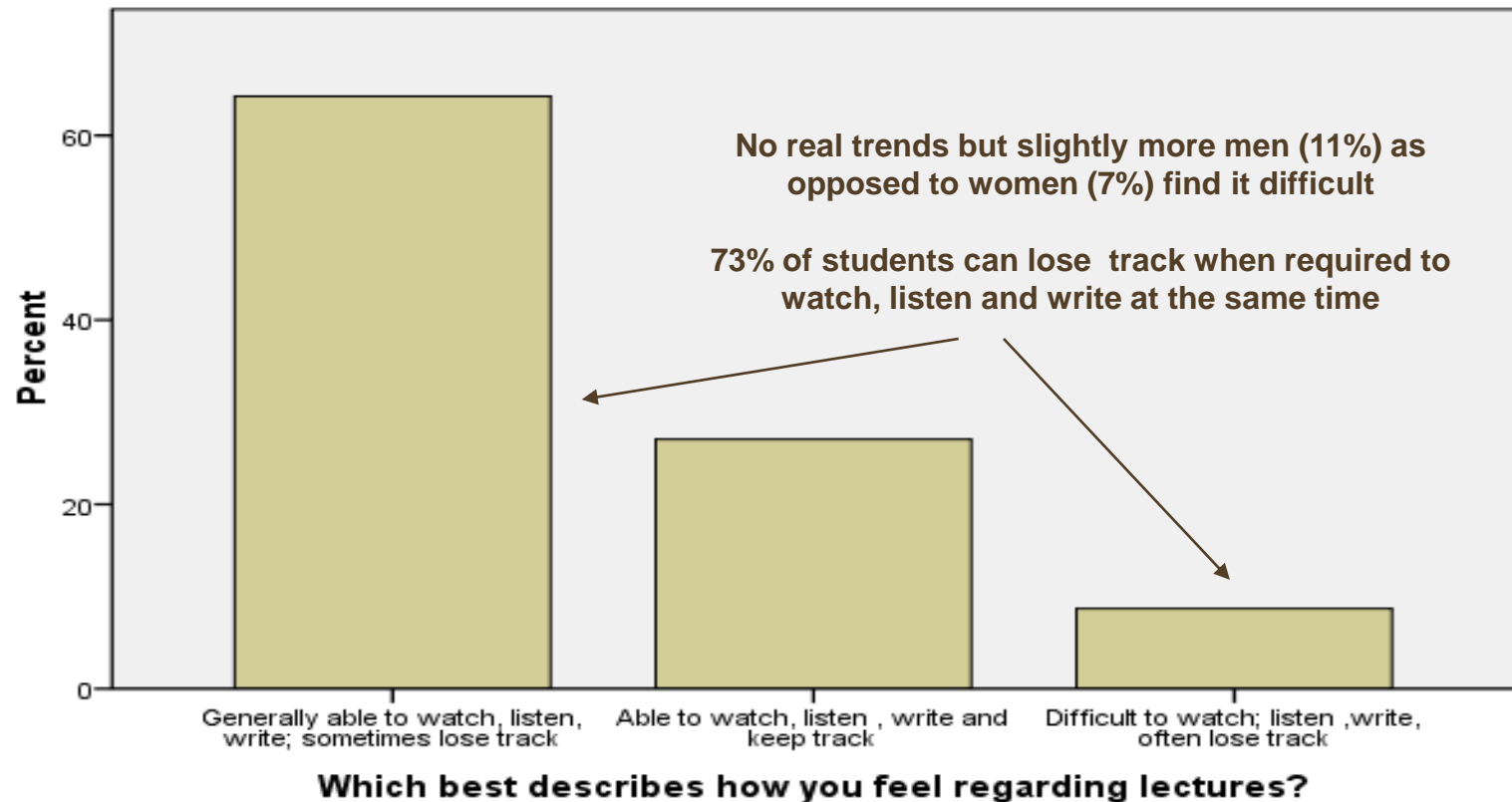
Question 3 - assesses attention span during lectures
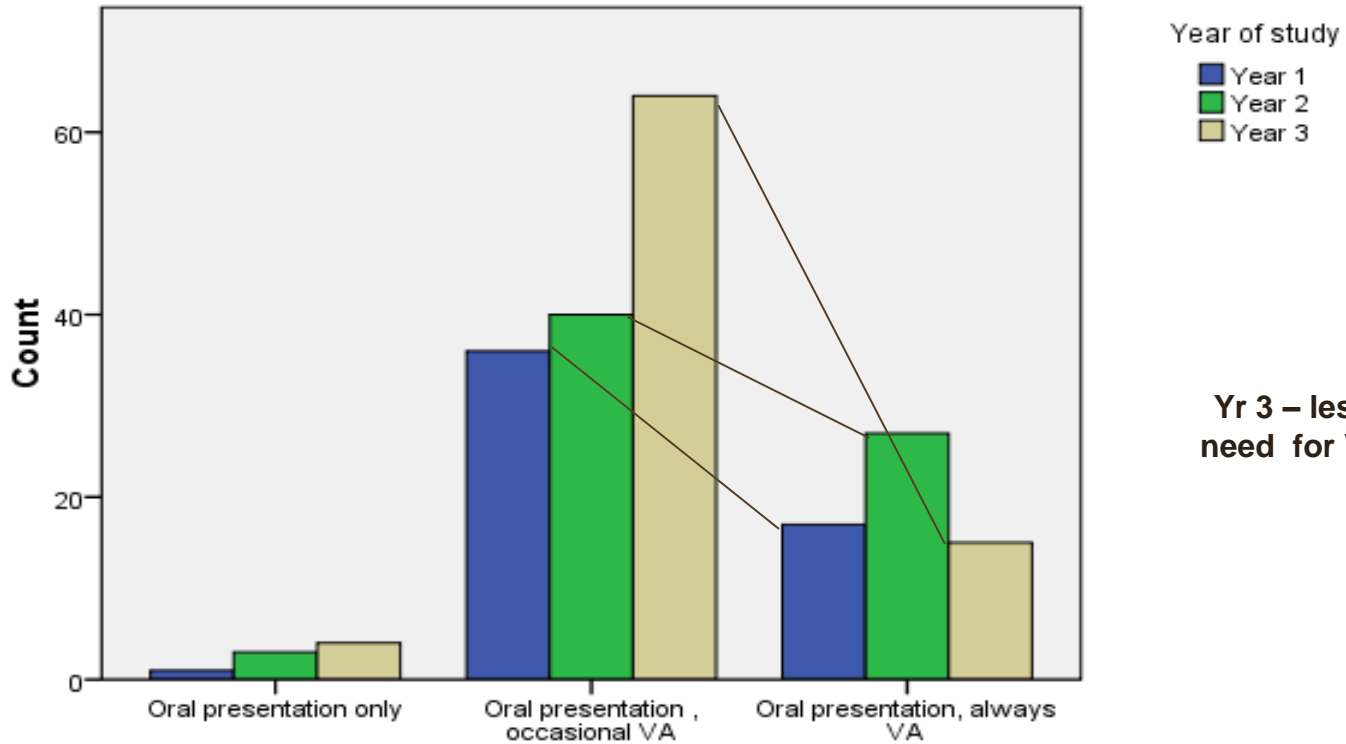
Which best describes how you feel regarding lectures?

Only 32% pay attention throughout lectures

Students gave suggestions on how to improve concentration - overwhelming comment ….

"lectures need to be more interactive"

Followed by …

"more breaks"

"more visual aids"

Percent

Pay attention throughout | Pay attention most of the time | Hardly pay attention

Which best describes how you feel regarding lectures?

Question 4 - assesses benefit of visual aids
(power point, animations, video etc)

Which style of lecture most enhances learning and understanding?

96% like visual aids

All women

Frequency

Oral presentation , occasional VA   Oral presentation, always VA   Oral presentation only

Which style of lecture most enhances learning and understanding?

Year of study
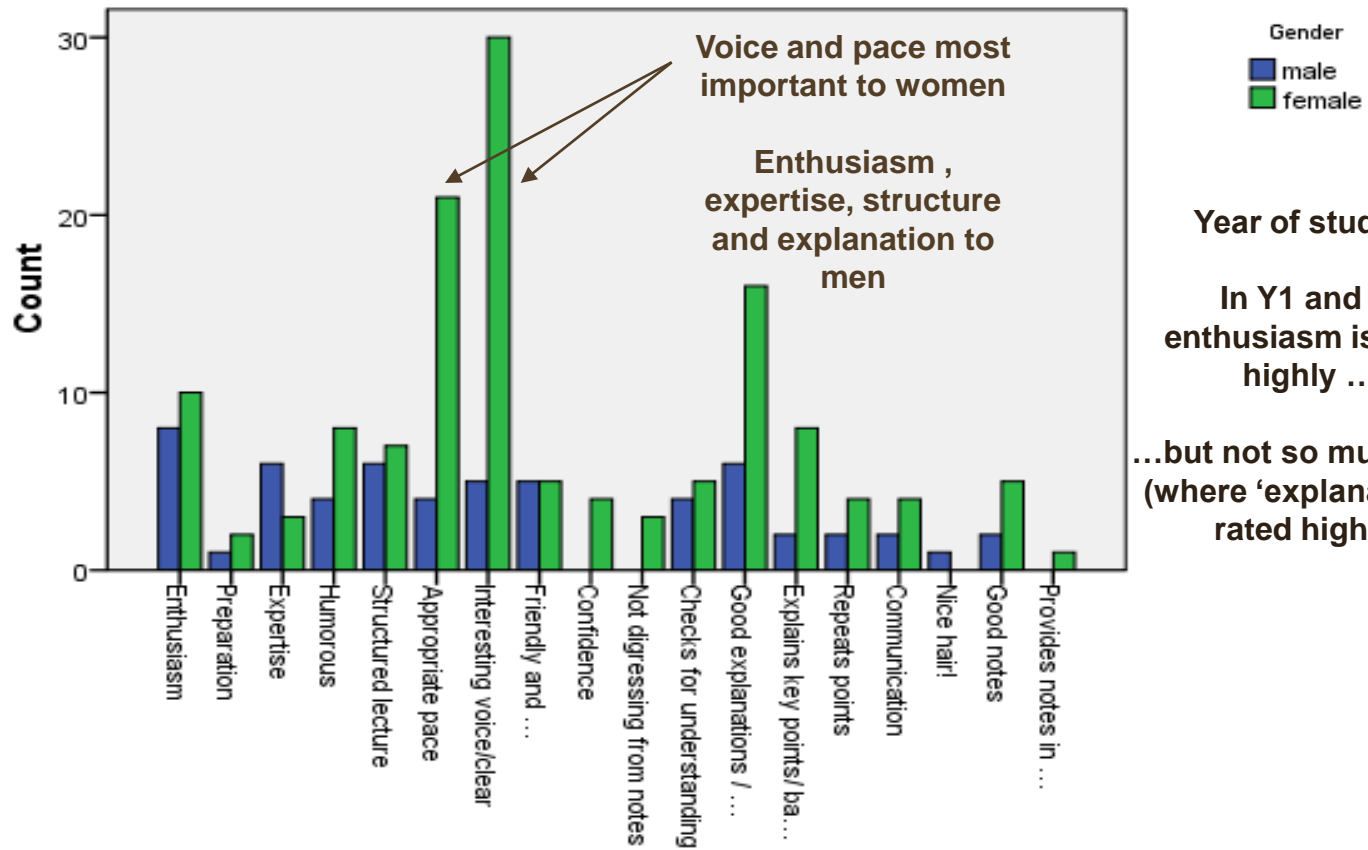
Question 5 - assesses attributes of a good lecturer

(Open question- graph records most popular answers)

Which attributes are essential in a good lecturer?

Voice and pace are most important – pace crucial where students have to take notes

Quite a lot said that lecturers need to provide real life / plenty of examples

Enthusiasm and humour also featured highly

(in the 2009 NSSS 100% UoG students said staff were enthusiastic teachers)

Nice hair!
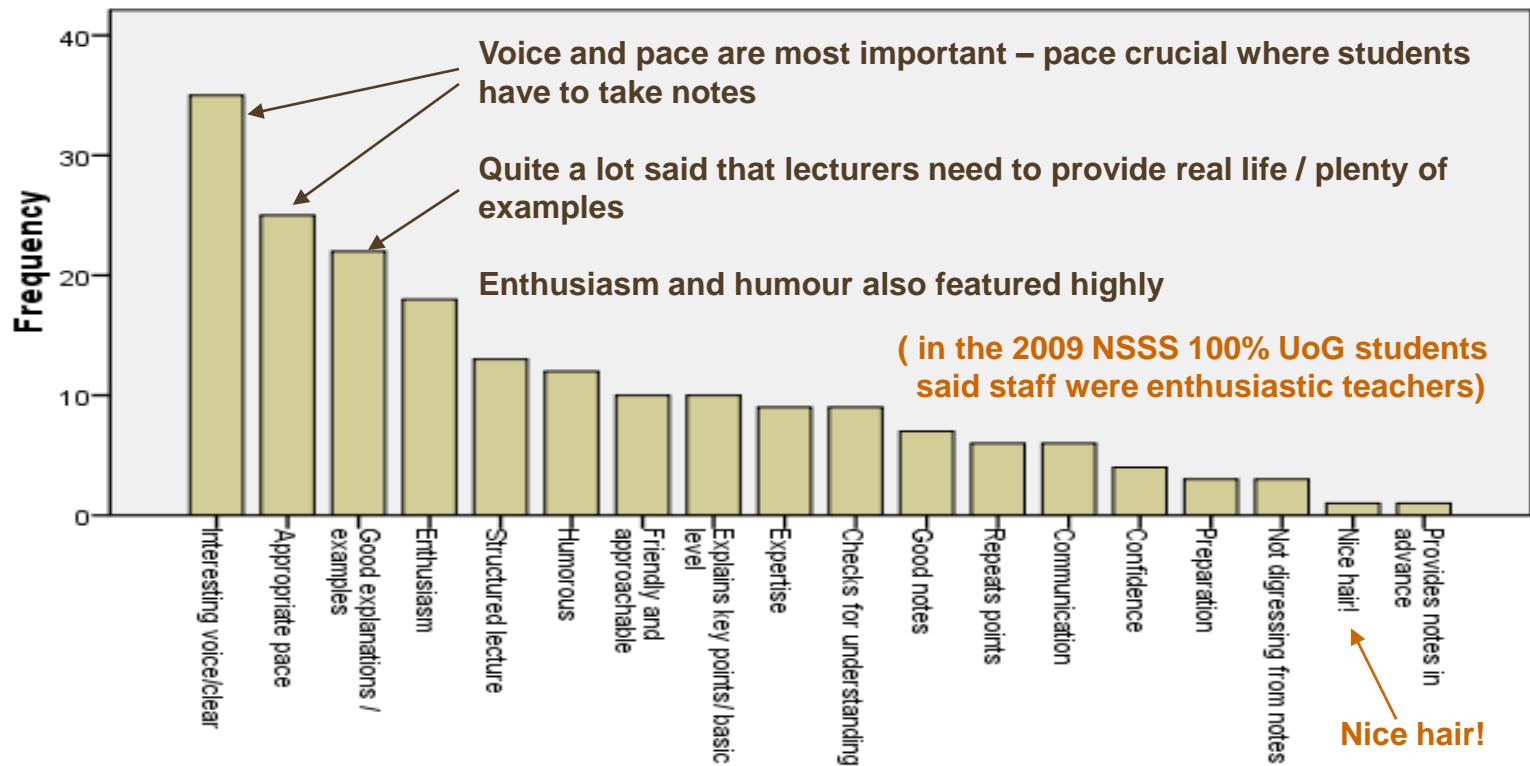
Gender / Year

Seminars….

Data from Q18

How much knowledge do you gain from seminars?

Not as much as lectures which was 60%

Question 6 – assesses effectiveness of :

(a) homework v class questions
(b) individual v group work

Which type of seminar best enhances your learning?
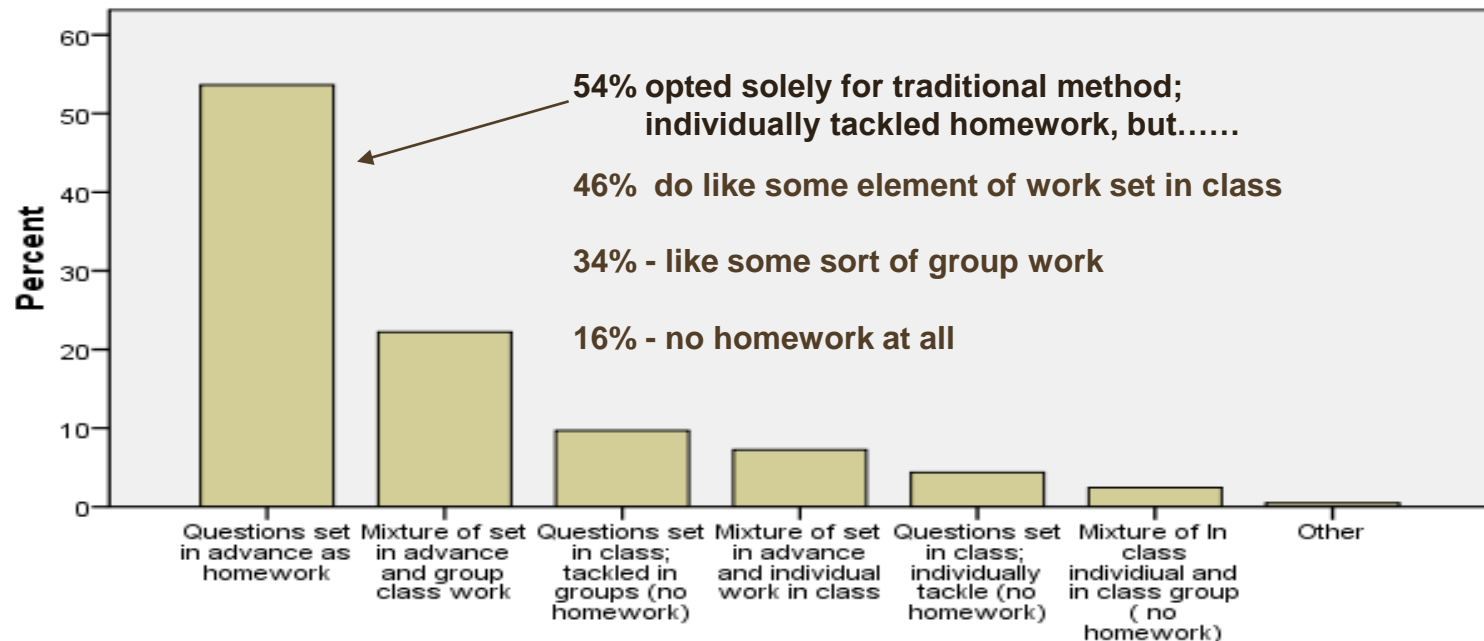
54% opted solely for traditional method; individually tackled homework, but……

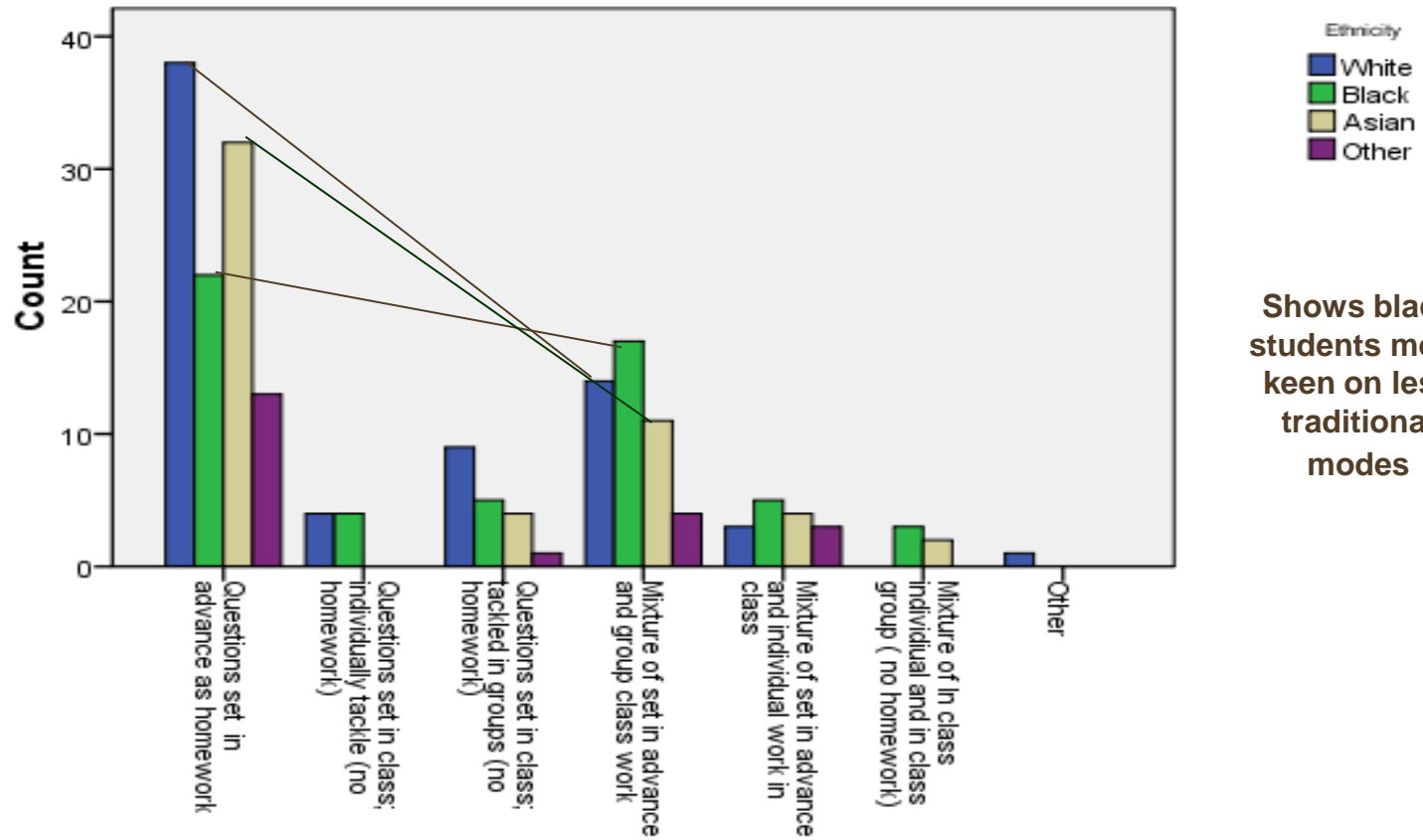**46% do like some element of work set in class**

34% - like some sort of group work

16% - no homework at all

Bar chart with y-axis "Percent" (0 to 60) and x-axis "Which type of seminar best enhances your learning?" with categories: Questions set in advance as homework; Mixture of set in advance and group class work; Questions set in class; tackled in groups (no homework); Mixture of set in advance and individual work in class; Questions set in class; individually tackle (no homework); Mixture of In class individiual and in class group (no homework); Other

Ethnicity

Bar Chart

Shows black students more keen on less traditional modes
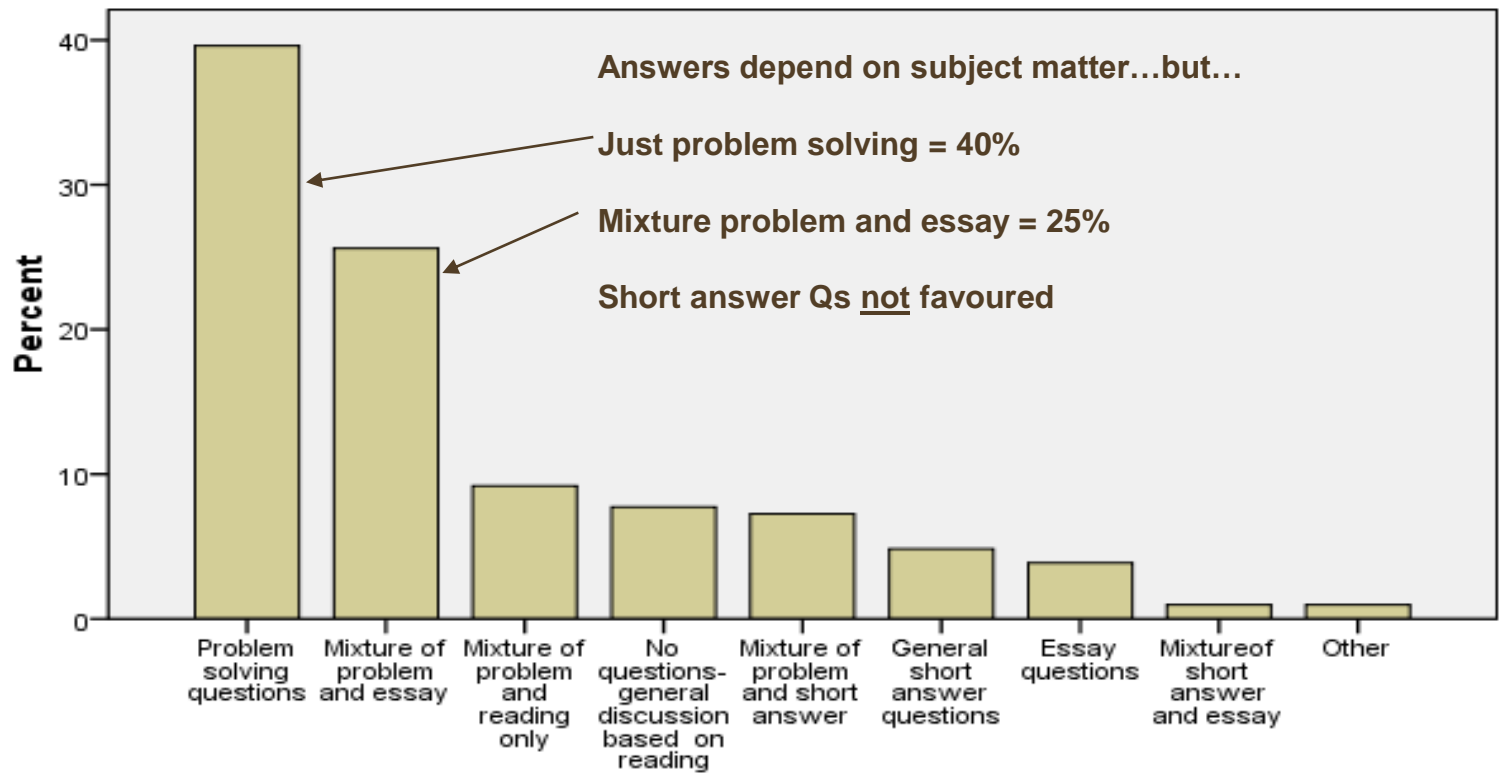
Gender

Bar Chart
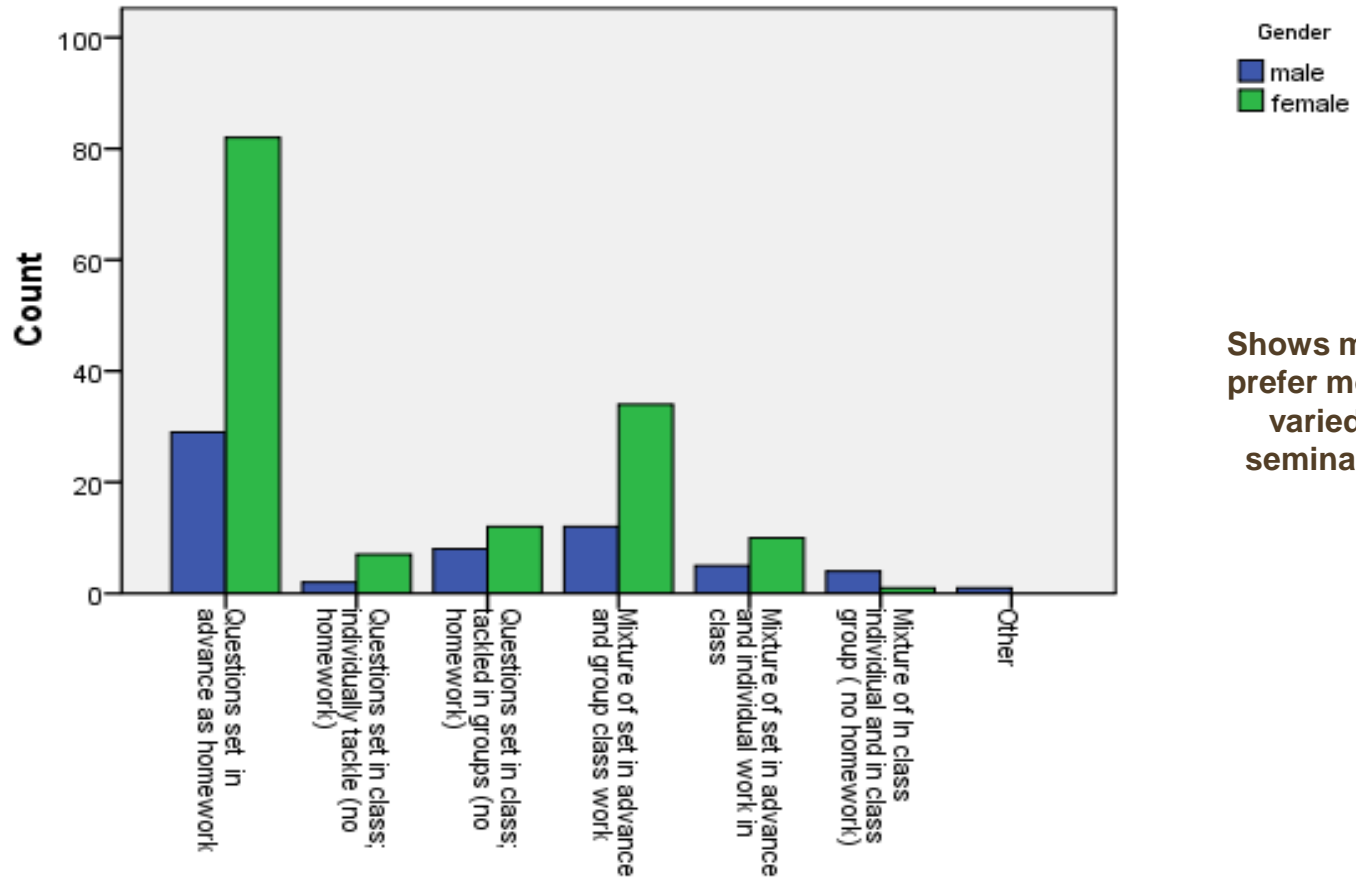
Shows men prefer more varied seminars

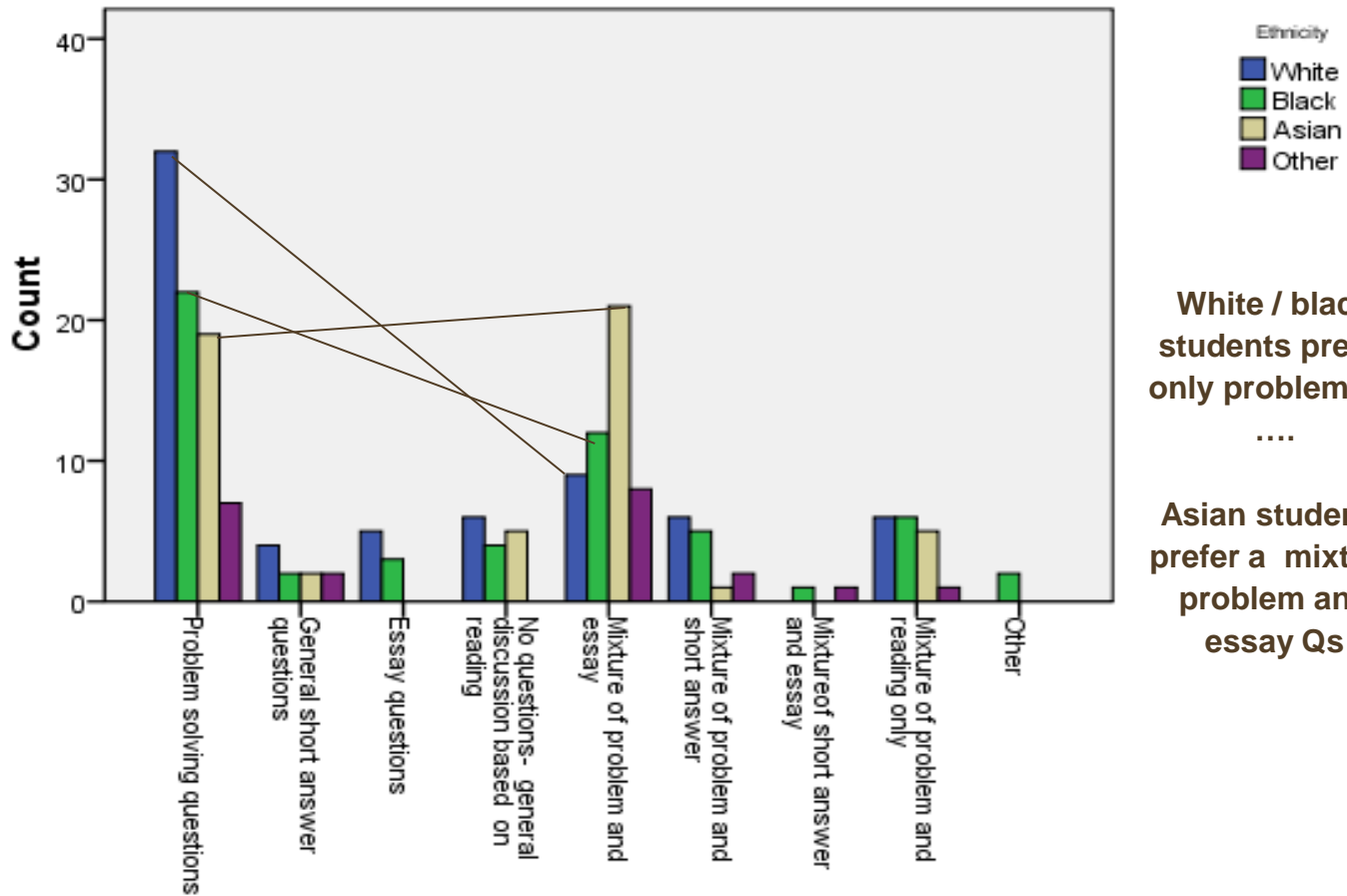# Question 7 – assesses benefit of types of seminar question

Which type of seminar best enhances your learning?

Answers depend on subject matter…but…

Just problem solving = 40%

Mixture problem and essay = 25%

Short answer Qs <u>not</u> favoured

Ethnicity

White / black students prefer only problem Qs ….

Asian students prefer a mixture problem and essay Qs

Question 8 - assesses benefit of suggested answers

How helpful are written suggested answers?
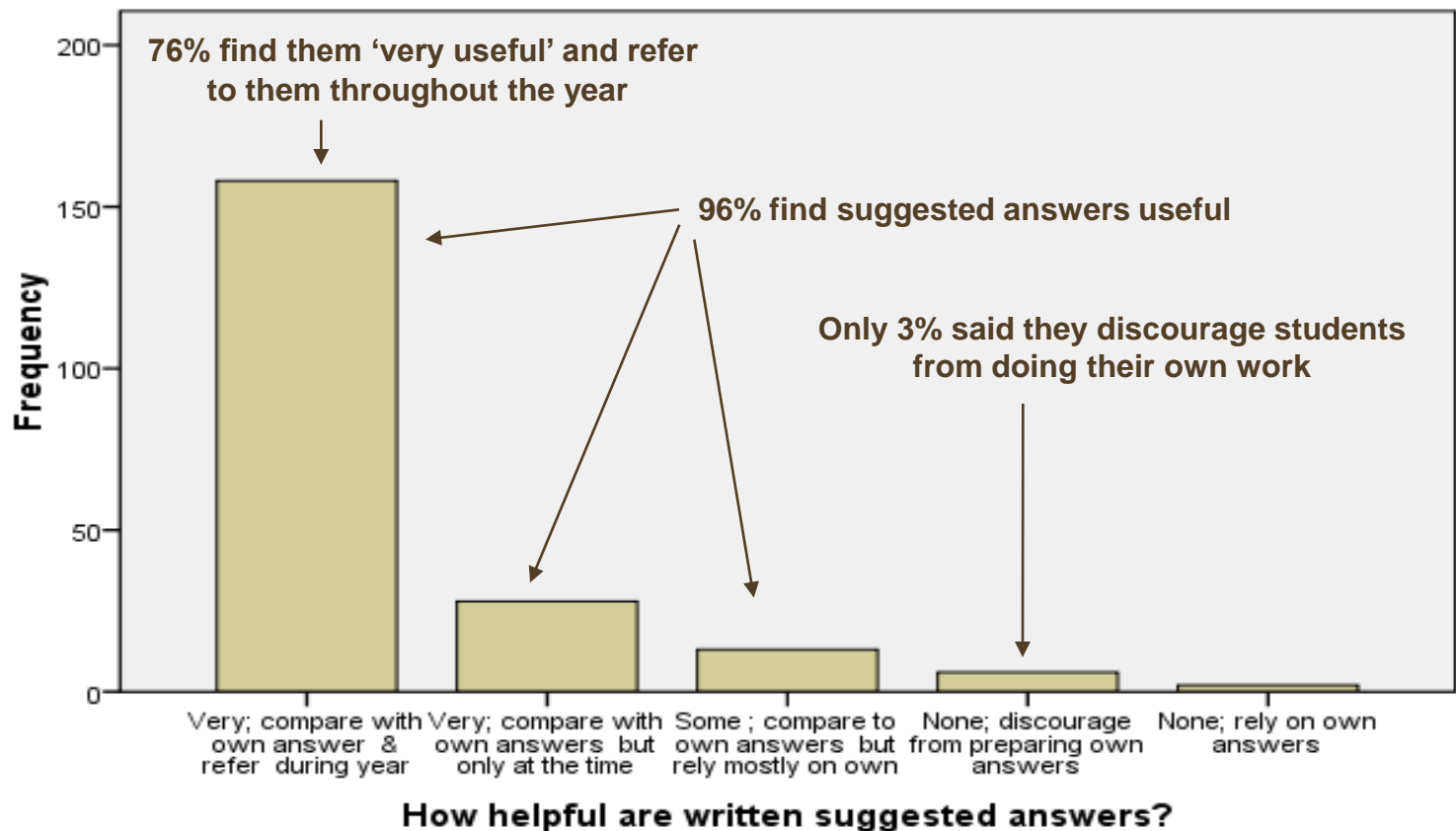
76% find them 'very useful' and refer to them throughout the year

96% find suggested answers useful

Only 3% said they discourage students from doing their own work

Frequency

Very; compare with own answer & refer during year | Very; compare with own answers but only at the time | Some ; compare to own answers but rely mostly on own | None; discourage from preparing own answers | None; rely on own answers

How helpful are written suggested answers?

Year group

This graph is taken from Q15

Assess effectiveness of advice on structuring answers in increasing understanding

High impact on increasing understanding

140 students 73%

41 students

8 students

2 students

High   Moderate   Little   None

Percent

Assess effectiveness of advice on structuring answers in increasing understanding
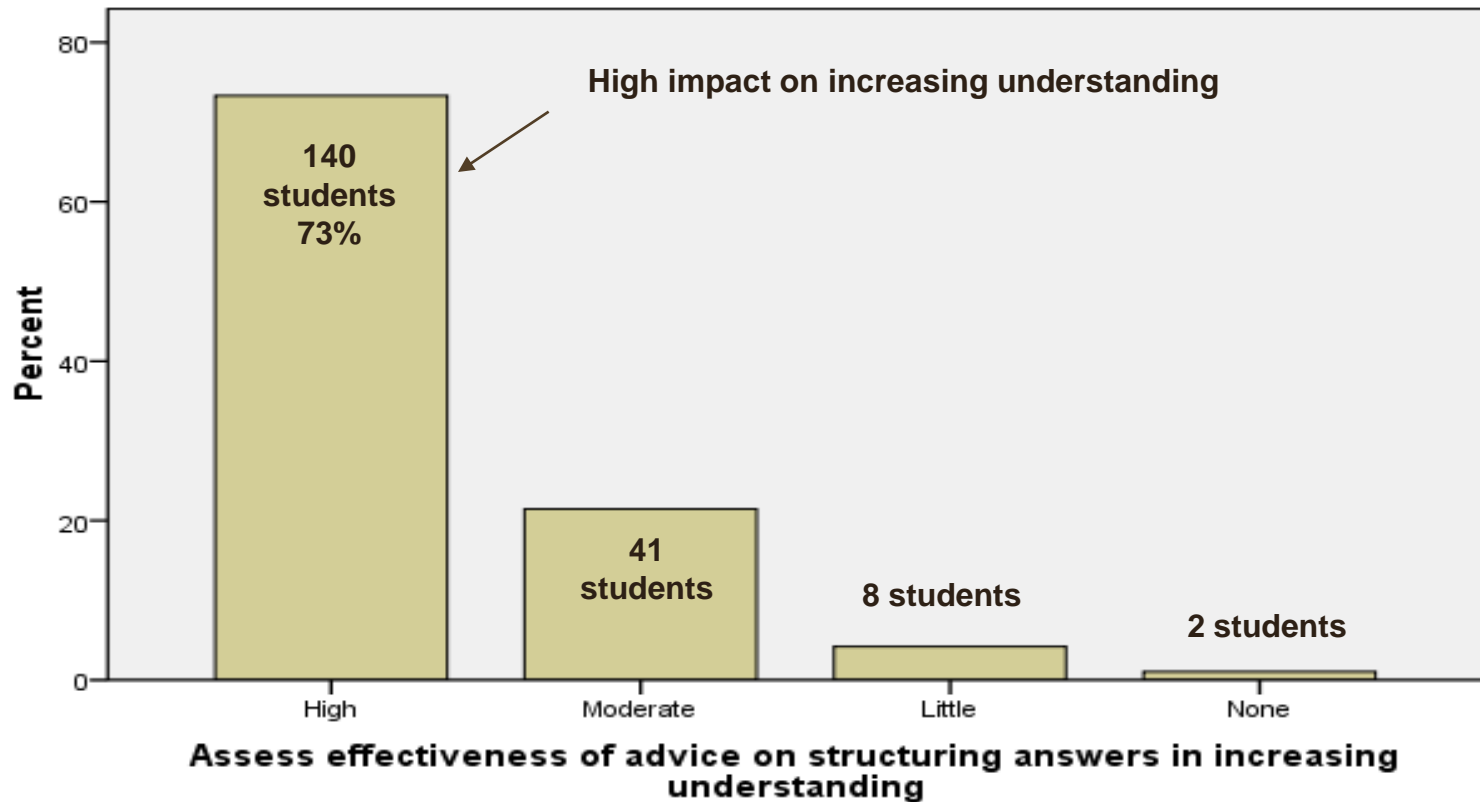
# Question 9 – assesses levels of tutor / student participation in seminars

Which style of seminar organisation most enhances learning and understanding?

63% prefer a balance…

but….30% get more from seminars when tutor is doing most of the talking

and…. 33% of those predicted a 1st like their tutor to do most of the talking

Equal combination of tutor and student discussion | Tutor to do most of the talking; occasional student input | Students to do most of the discussion, tutor facilitator | Tutor to do all the talking | Other
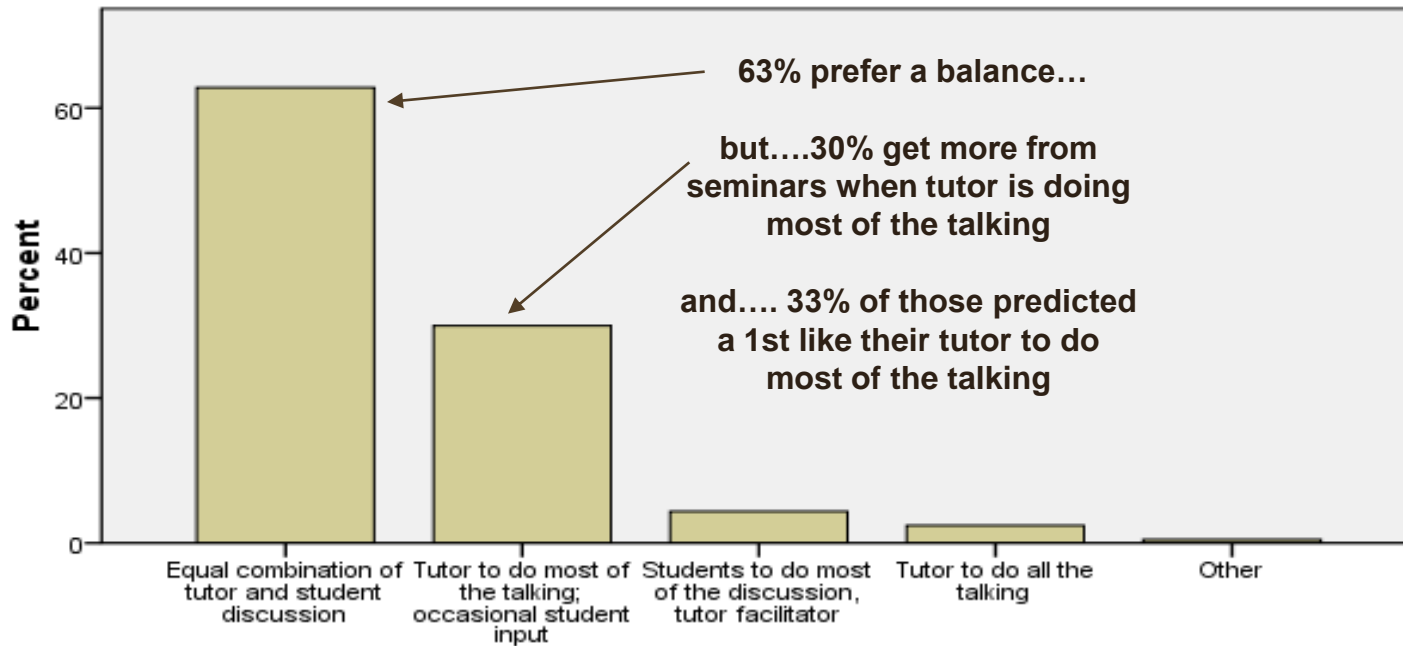
Which style of seminar organisation most enhances learning and understanding?

Question 10 - assesses whether all students should be asked to contribute
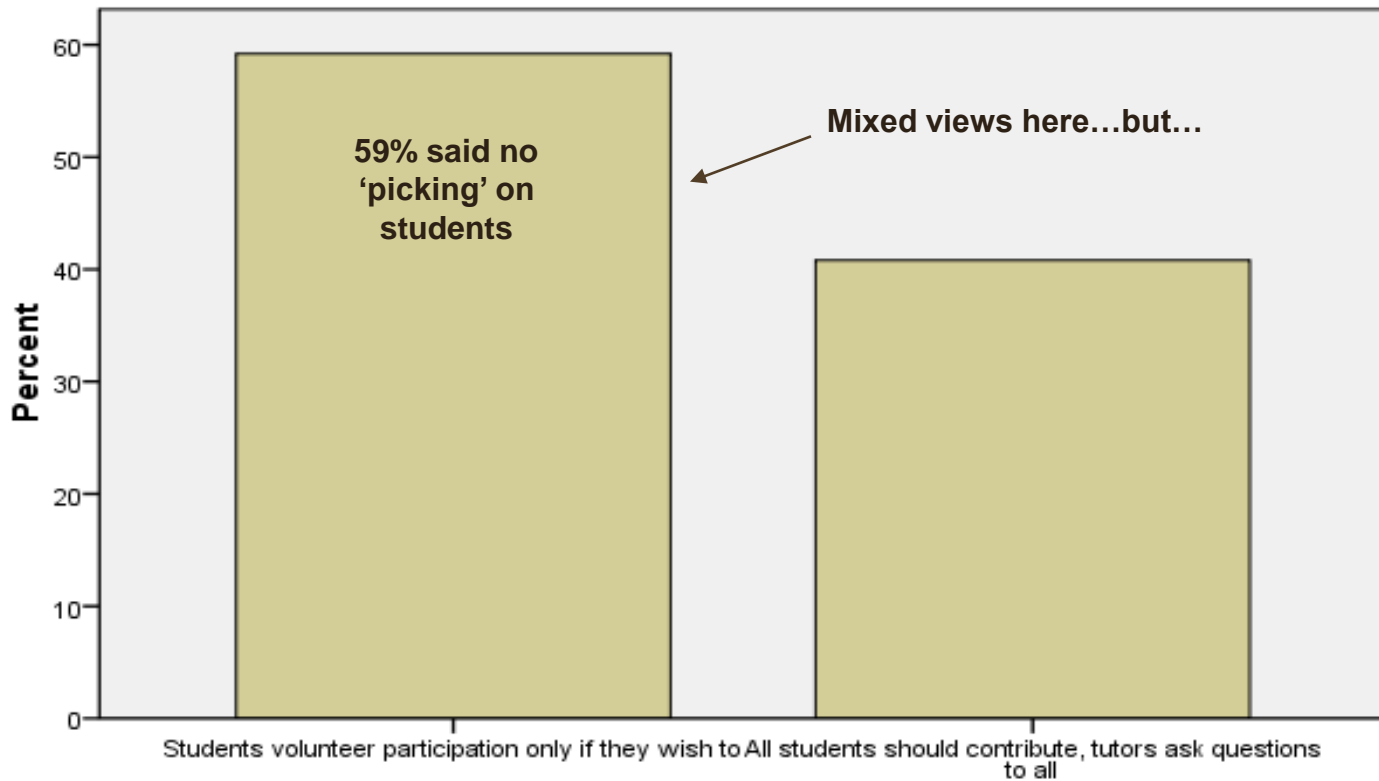
Gender

Ethnicity

Bar Chart

Black students more inclined to think all should participate
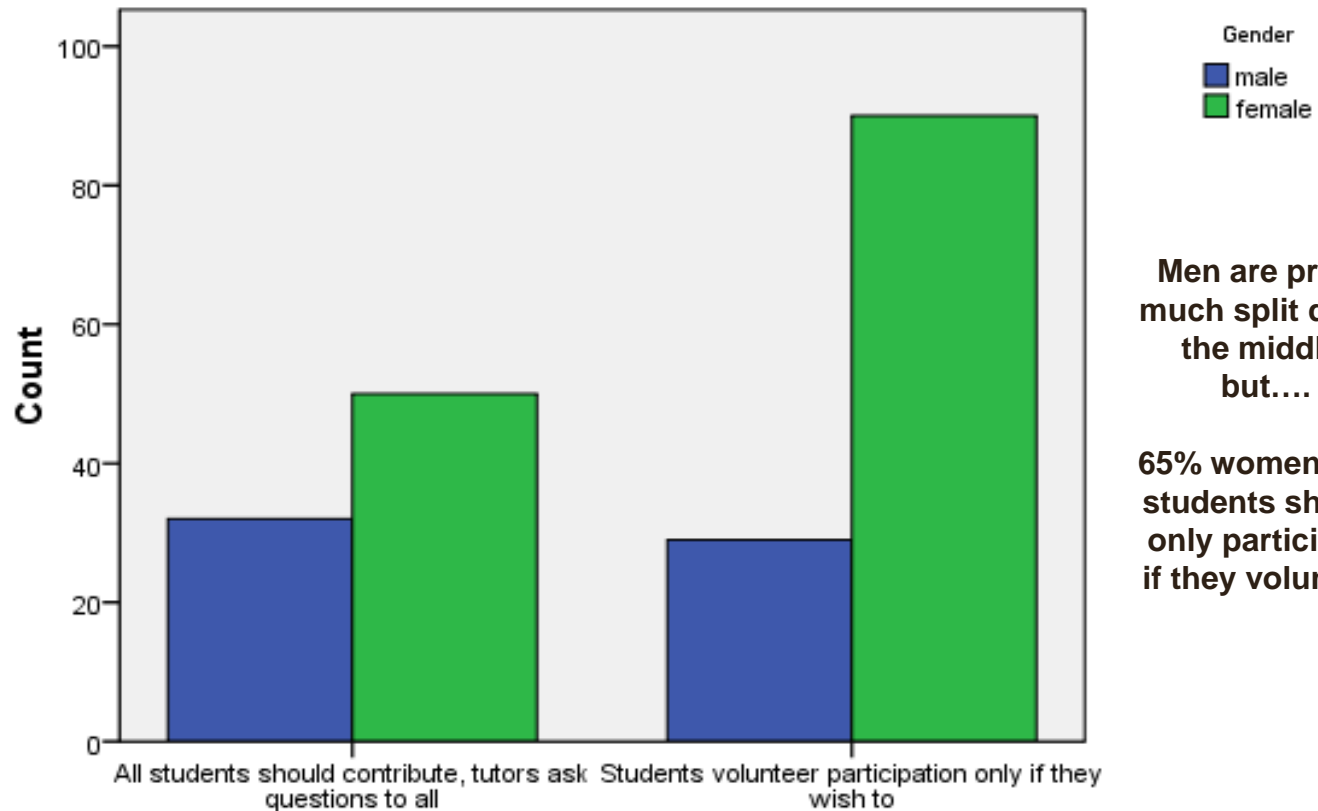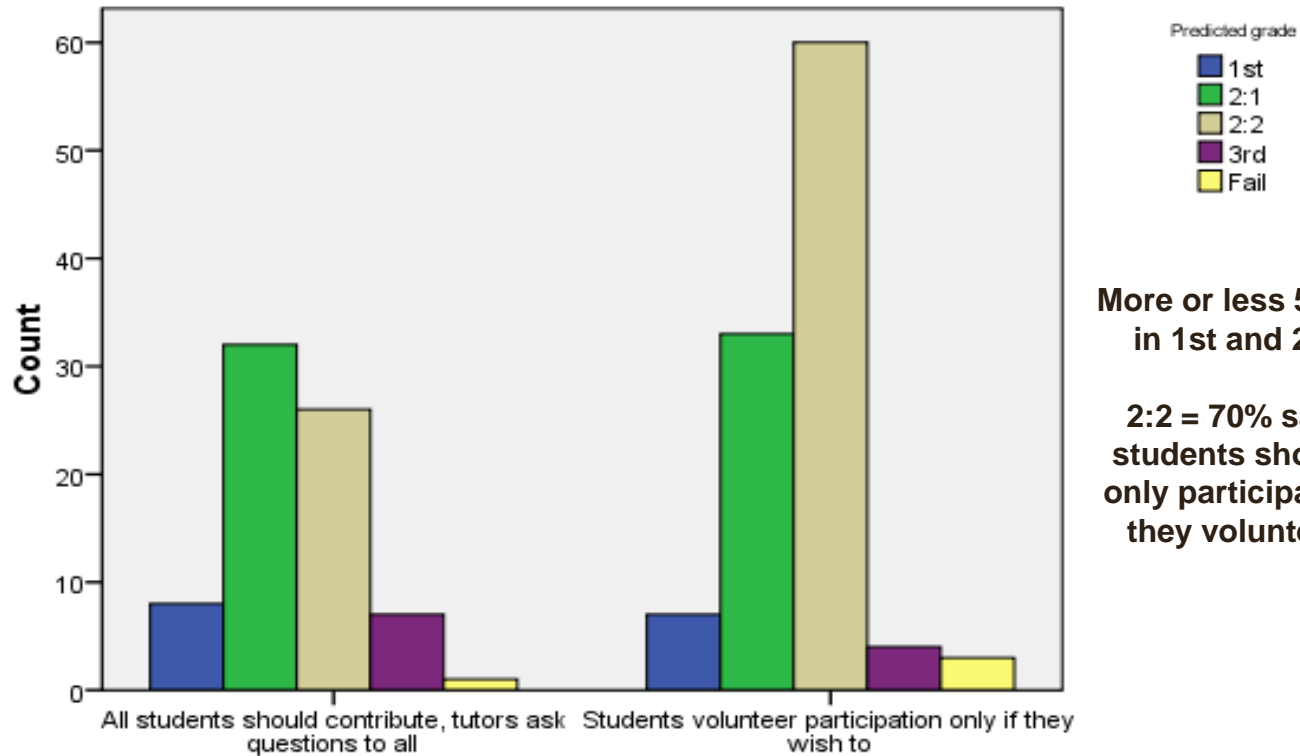
Predicted grade

Bar Chart

More or less 50/50 in 1st and 2:1

2:2 = 70% said students should only participate if they volunteer

Question 11 and 12- assess the value of giving presentations
These 2 charts show UoG only
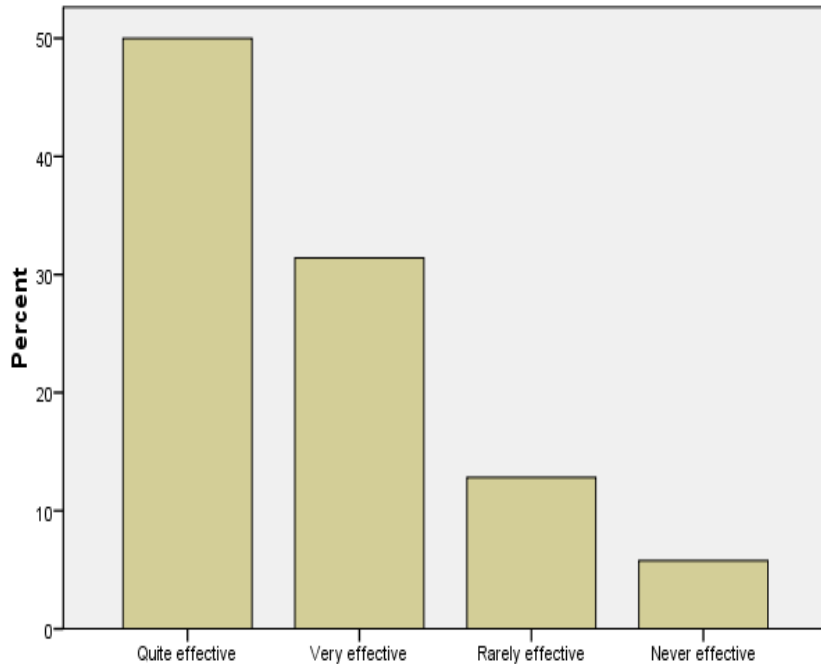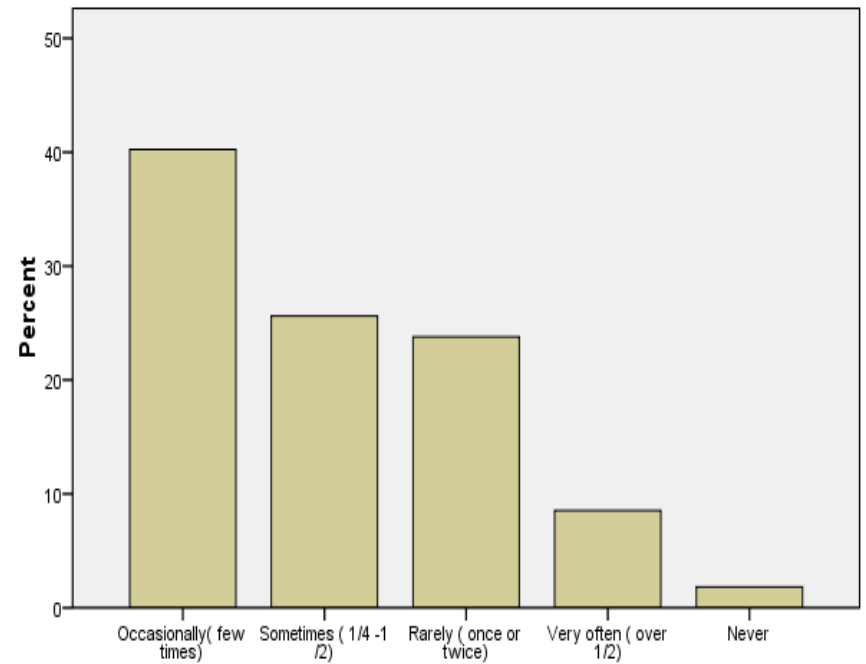
Although 81% said presentations were 'very' or 'quite' effective in enhancing learning, 66% said they should only give rarely or a few times
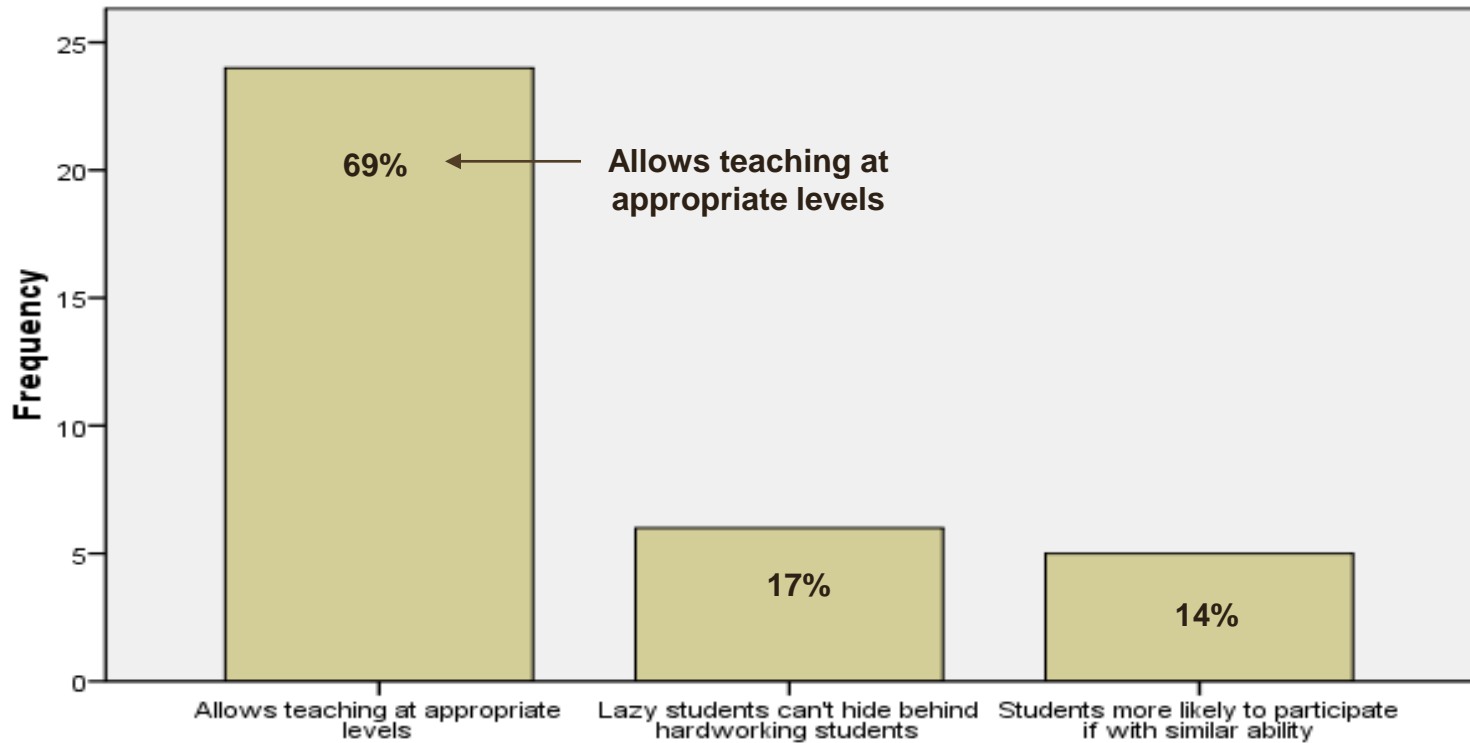
Question 13 – assesses whether seminar groups should be streamed

(discounting 24 non responses)

Should seminar groups be streamed according to past academic performance?

139 students - 75%

46 students - 24%

It is interesting that each variable almost mirrors this ratio, including those predicted 1st and 2:1……

…except black students were more against streaming (88%)
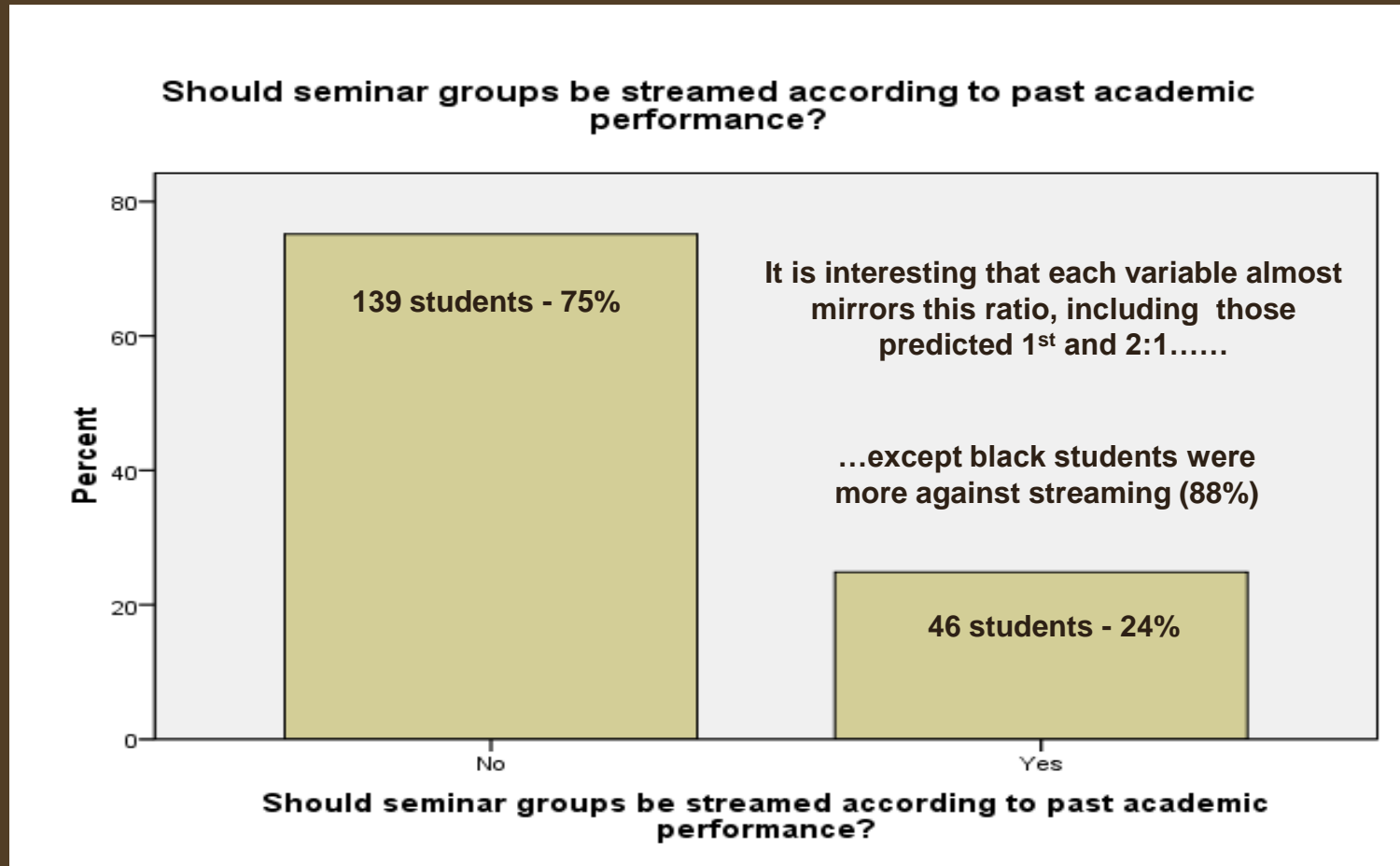
Comments from the 46 who said 'yes' to streaming

Comments where the answer to the previous question was 'Yes'

Frequency

69% — Allows teaching at appropriate levels

17%

14%

Allows teaching at appropriate levels

Lazy students can't hide behind hardworking students

Students more likely to participate if with similar ability

Comments where the answer to the previous question was 'Yes'

Comments from the 139 who said 'no' to streaming

Comments where the answer to the previous question was 'No'

Prevents different ability students learning from each other

Discourages weaker students

Also interesting…..

44%

27%

Frequency axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60

Categories:
- Different abilities can't learn from eachother / share opin
- Discourages weaker students who get further behind
- Discrimination / unfair / leads to different teaching
- May not reflect ability
- It makes top groups too competitive
- Tutors favour top groups
- Causes a divide
- Top groups get over confident/ complacent

Some of the comments made about mixed ability groups….

It's better to mix up strong students and weak students as they help each other and performance sometimes changes. The strong might be weak in some areas and those considered weak strong in areas – **Kaplan**

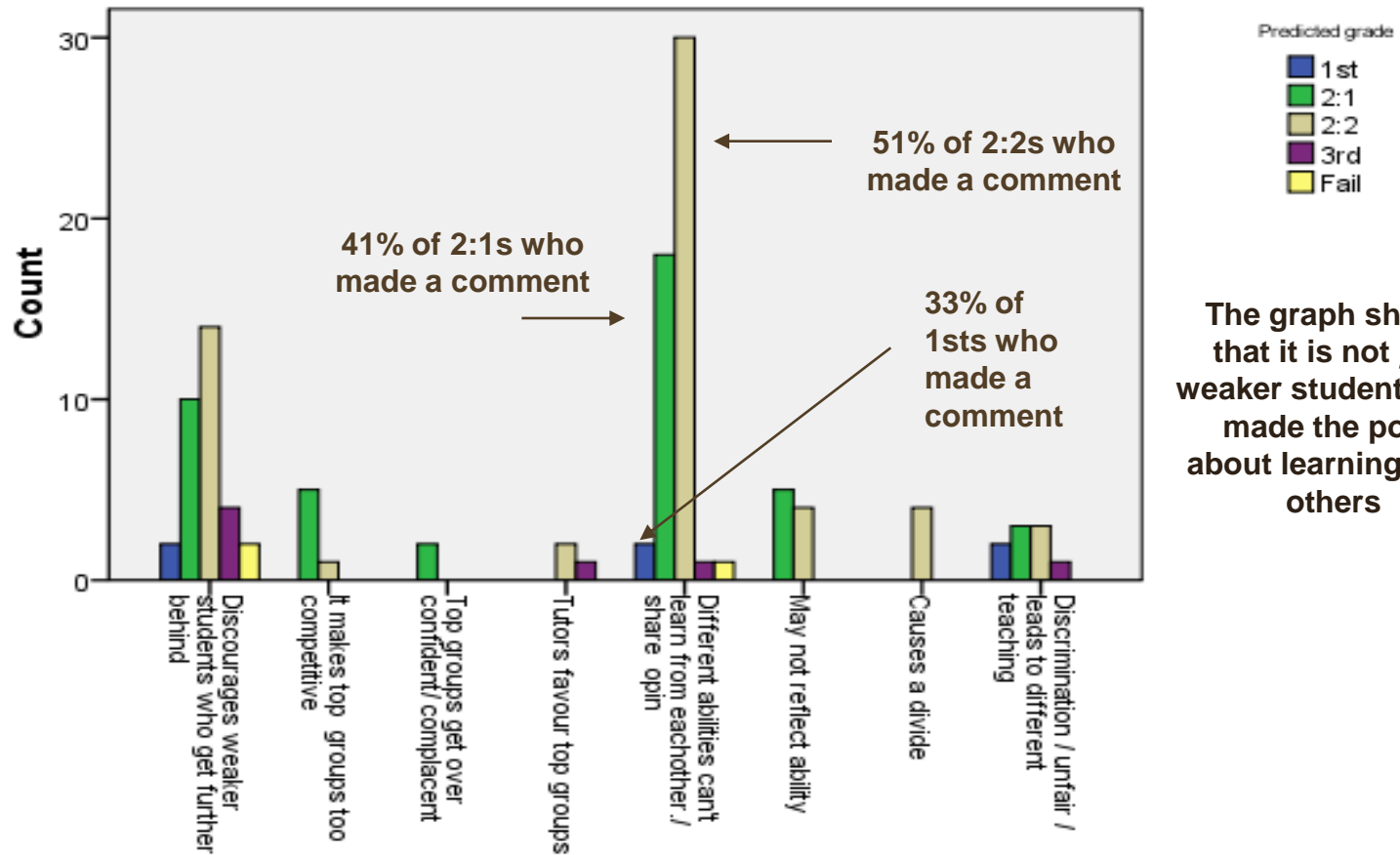*Students become motivated by students better than themselves-* **Nottingham**

The mix helps bring different ideas together. I can explain things to others and sometimes they explain things to me- **Kent**

All students can learn from each other - **Greenwich**

Each student should have an equal chance. Tutors may not put as much emphasis on those students who get 40 in comparison with those who are obtaining first class- **Greenwich**
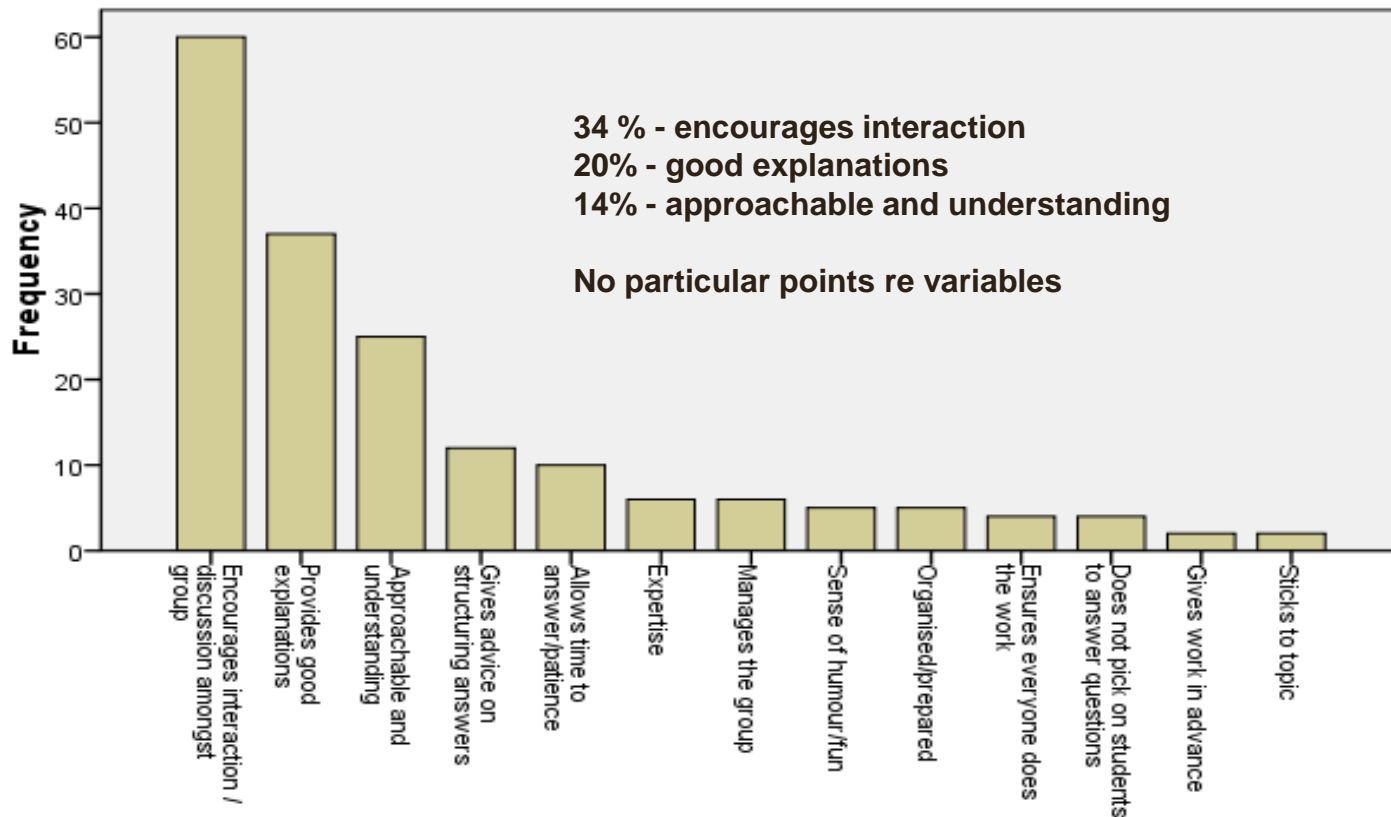
Who said streaming prevents learning from others…

Question 14 - assesses attributes of a good seminar tutor
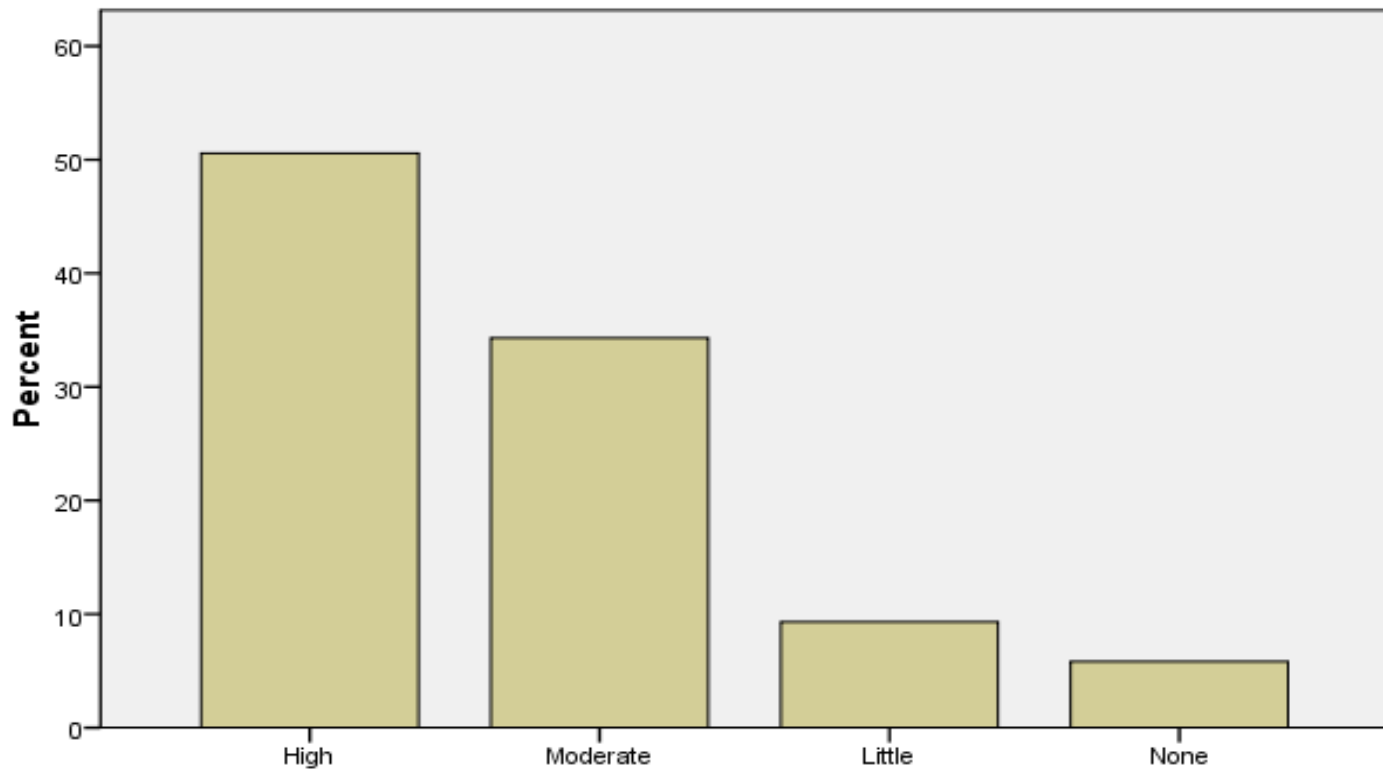
(Open question- graph records most popular answers)

What attributes are essential in a good seminar tutor?

34 % - encourages interaction
20% - good explanations
14% - approachable and understanding

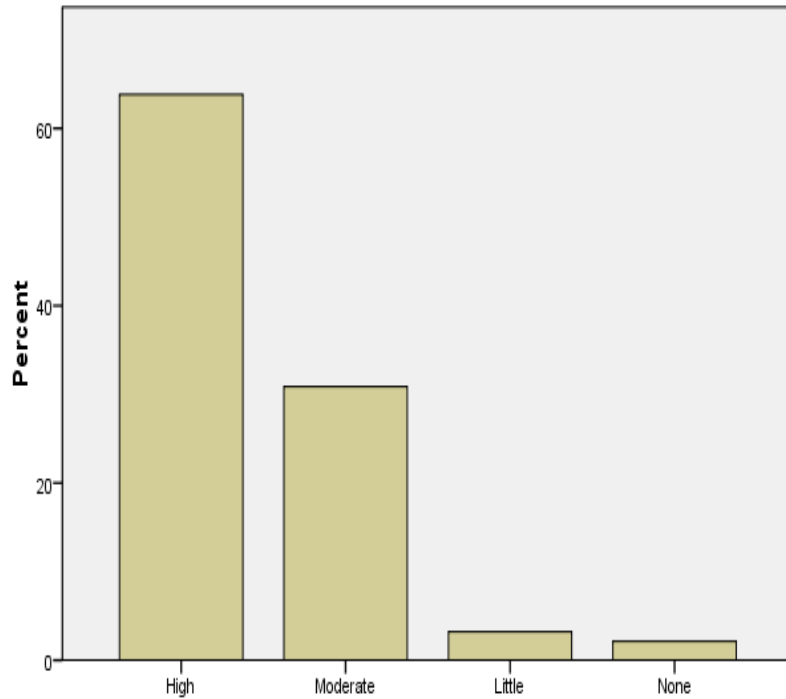No particular points re variables

Other aspects of learning….

The following graphs relate to Q15

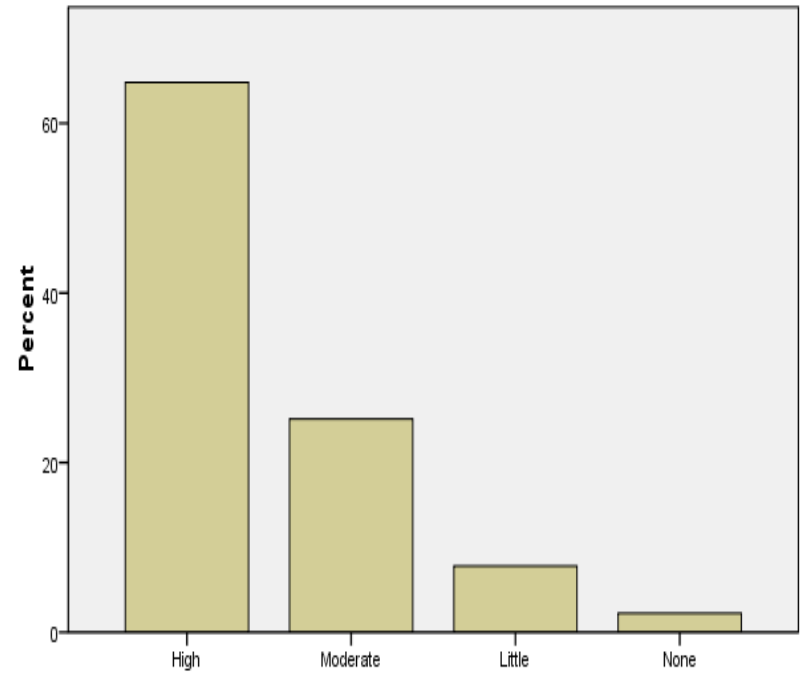**Assess effectiveness of one to one tutorials in increasing understanding**
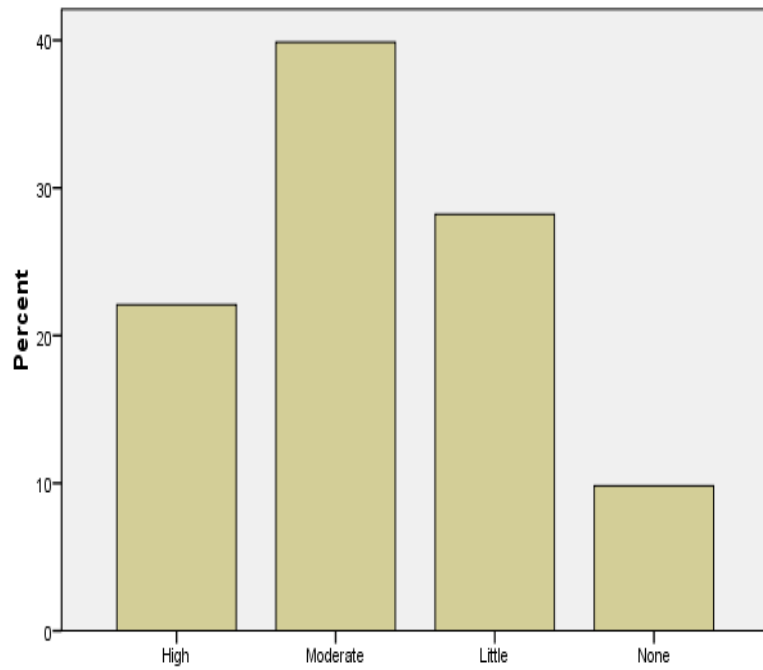
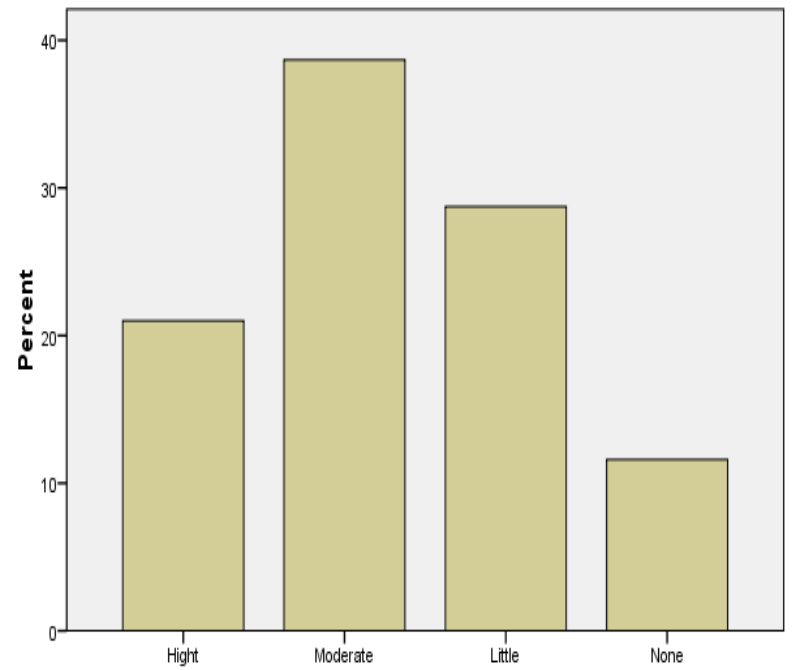**Assess effectiveness of revision lectures in increasing understanding**

Assess effectiveness of revision charts & flow charts in increasing understanding

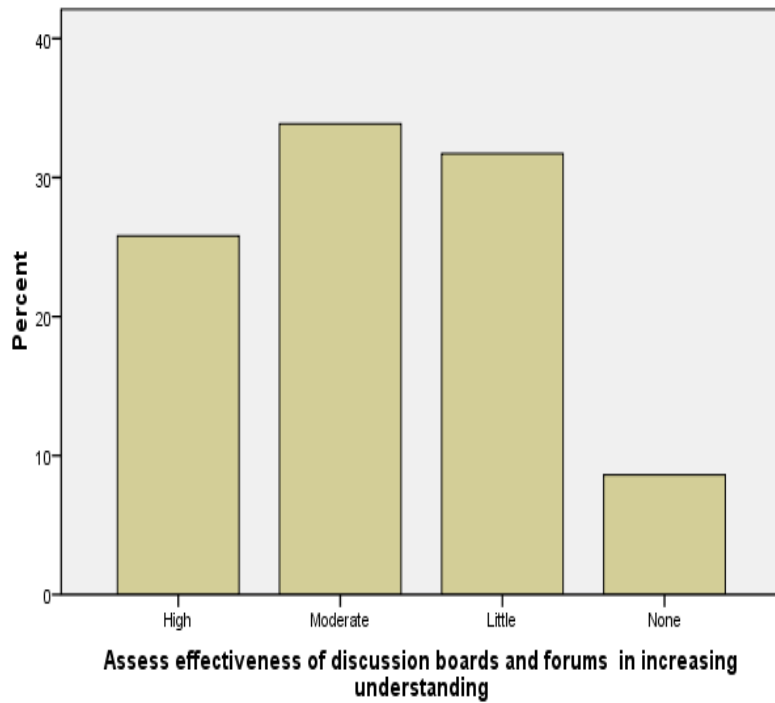Assess effectiveness of quizzes in increasing understanding
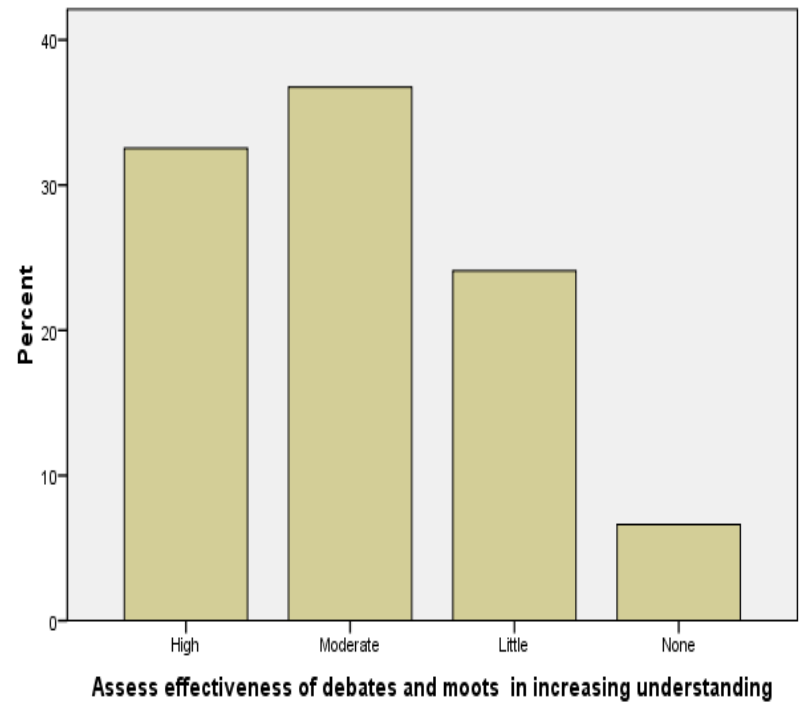
Assess effectiveness of multi choice questions in increasing understanding

Assess effectiveness of discussion boards and forums in increasing understanding

Assess effectiveness of debates and moots in increasing understanding

Assess effectiveness of student study groups in increasing understanding

Attitude to types of research….

Q16 and 17 and 18 - assess types of research

(excluding newspapers)

57% find reading textbooks challenging/difficult although …
67% said they aid understanding

71% find cases difficult / challenging to read

56% find journals difficult to read

43% said they gained lots from their own independent reading ,
41% said quite a lot

As was shown earlier…

60% said they gained lots from lectures
45% gained lots from seminars

14% said they gained lots from talking to friends

Other comments….

Question 19 - suggestions to enhance learning & understanding
(Open question- graph records most popular answers)

Identify anything that would enhance your learning and knowledge

More activities

More feedback

Working harder
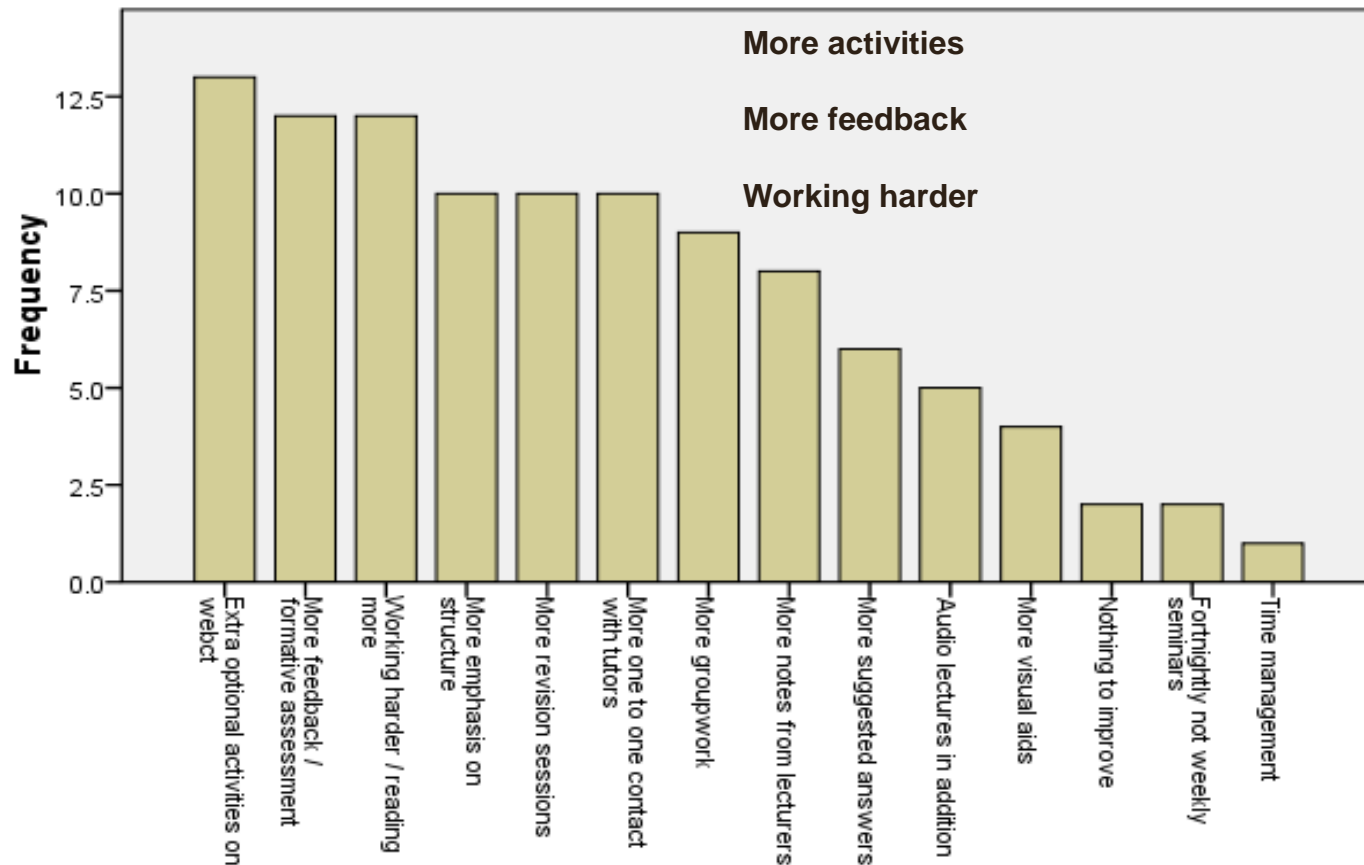
Question 20(a) – positive aspects of degree study compared with school
(Open question- graph records most popular answers)

Identify the most positive aspects of studying at degree level

Independent study – 23 students

Question 20(b) - negative aspects of degree study compared with school
(Open question- graph records most popular answers)

Identify the most negative aspects of studying at degree level

40 students (40% who answered) said Independent study/less support

38% 78 who answered said difficulty with the amount or level of work

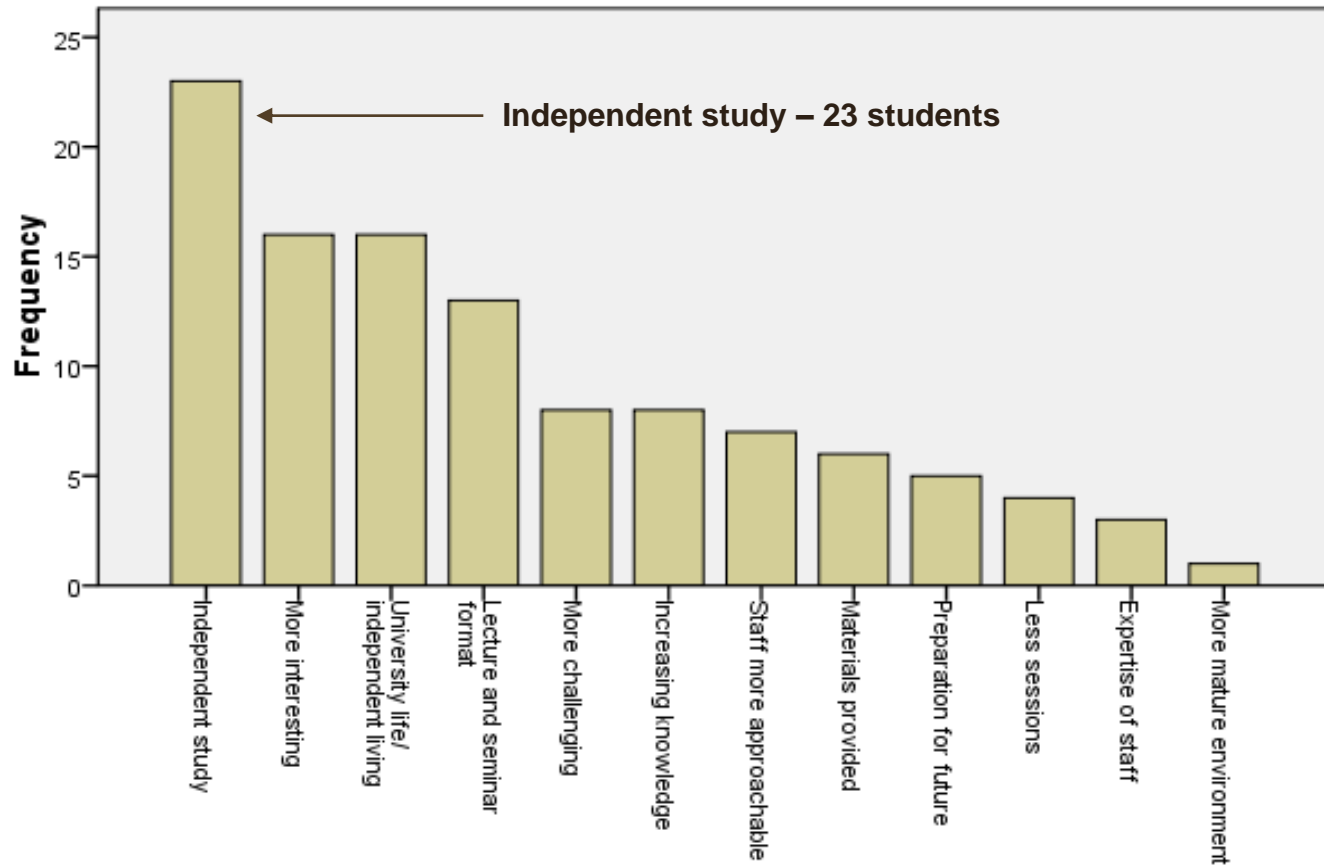Note that some who cited independent study as a negative also cited it as a positive

Frequency axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40

Categories:
- Independent study / less support
- More / too much work and reading
- More challenging / difficult
- Students too competitive
- Some lazy or disengaged students
- Learning groups too large
- Students unwilling to share knowledge
- More academic students favoured
- Cost of study

What does the survey show?

(at least in relation to students at UoG)

- **Many students find studying at degree level difficult :**

  - **57% said reading textbooks is challenging**

  - **78% who commented on negative aspects of degree study referred to difficulties with:**

    - **independent study**
    - **the level of effort required**
    - **the difficulty of the work**

    …this was 37% of the 209 students

- **Bridging the gap :**

  – **Chasm between school & university - level of difficulty**

  – **Chasm between school & university - expectations re: learning**

    Problems increased by:

      – **school practices : draft coursework**
      – **parental help**
      – **reliance on internet & 'cutting and pasting'**
      – **modern life : reading takes a 'back seat'**

- **Students appear to require a greater level of support then we might anticipate in order to gain confidence, learn effectively and embark on independent study**

Conclusions - Lectures

- **Students identify lectures as most important for enhancing learning. Lectures should be:**

    - well paced
    - with enthusiastic delivery
    - plenty of realistic examples
    - humour is beneficial where appropriate

- **Provision of detailed notes but with intermittent opportunities for students to write (e.g. blank boxes for cases) - satisfies those who prefer outline notes & maintains student attention**

- **Yr3 students to be given less detailed notes**

- **Introduction of visual aids where not used**

- **Interaction as much as possible – students can 'switch off' where lecture is wholly formal….**

    ....as students requested 'more breaks' …

    Q & A sessions in 'mini breaks' in order to allow interaction and give variety (possible use of PRS) – this would not affect formal part of lecture

Conclusions - Seminars

- Non streamed seminar groups – do we underestimate how much students learn from each other, regardless of their ability? (extension work a possibility)

- Interactive seminars without allowing students to 'take over'

- Seminars to focus on problem Qs but with some essay Qs too

- Qs set as homework but occasional class work and group work (including the odd presentation)

- Requesting answers v volunteering answers? - very different responses - probably a decision for the tutor based on the specific group

- Bullet point answers to be provided, with emphasis on structuring answers

Conclusions - other resources

- **Multi choice tests, quizzes, discussion forums, debates & moots only have moderate impact**

- **Revision lectures and charts are highly favoured**

Is this amount of support spoon-feeding/ wrong?

- **Spoon-feeding?**

  - **The support does not involve draft reading of work**

  - **The support does not involve a 'correction service'**

  - **The support does not involve seminar questions and suggested answers that closely resemble exam and assignment questions**

  - **The support does not involve teaching just to the exam**

  - **The support does not include case lists for exams**

  - **The support does not exclude the requirement for independent research – it gives students a solid learning base to compliment their own independent learning**

Thank you for your kind attention

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