

Elizabeth A. Suter

Department of Communication Studies, elizabeth.suter@du.edu

INTRODUCTION

This study is interested in the impact of a critical adoption studies course on student perspective-taking. A core objective of the course is to teach students about the complexities of adoption from the often contradictory vantage-points of the adoption triad (adoptee, birth family, adoptive family).

This study proposed three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Awareness of the value of perspective-taking will increase between pre-and post-course assessments for students enrolled in a critical adoption studies course.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Self-assessment of the need to improve perspective-taking skills will increase between pre- and post-course assessments for students enrolled in a critical adoption studies course.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Self-reported perspective-taking abilities will increase between pre- and post-course assessments for students enrolled in a critical adoption studies course.

These research questions are important because promoting student awareness of the value, need to improve, and ability to perspective-take is integral to fostering skills in communicating across difference.

As a critical family communication scholar living in a world with ever-increasing siloed, polarized communicative environments, I remain committed to enhancing students' ability to communicate across difference. My efforts aggregate a discipline-wide campaign to promote better dialogue skills in and outside the classroom.

INTERACTIVE SECTION

I invite you to write responses to one or more of the following questions on the sticky notes provided:

1. What teaching practices can you recommend for challenging students to see the complexities and messiness of a topic? (Alternately stated, what teaching practices can you recommend for moving students away from black and white thinking?)
2. Do you see any relationships between perspective-taking and dialogue skills? And if so, what relationships do you see?
3. What do you see as the role of perspective-taking in the university classroom?
4. What have you done in your courses to encourage students to value perspective-taking?
5. What have you done in your courses to foster student perspective-taking abilities?
6. What outcomes should we expect from courses that encourage students to understand society from other people's perspectives?

METHODS

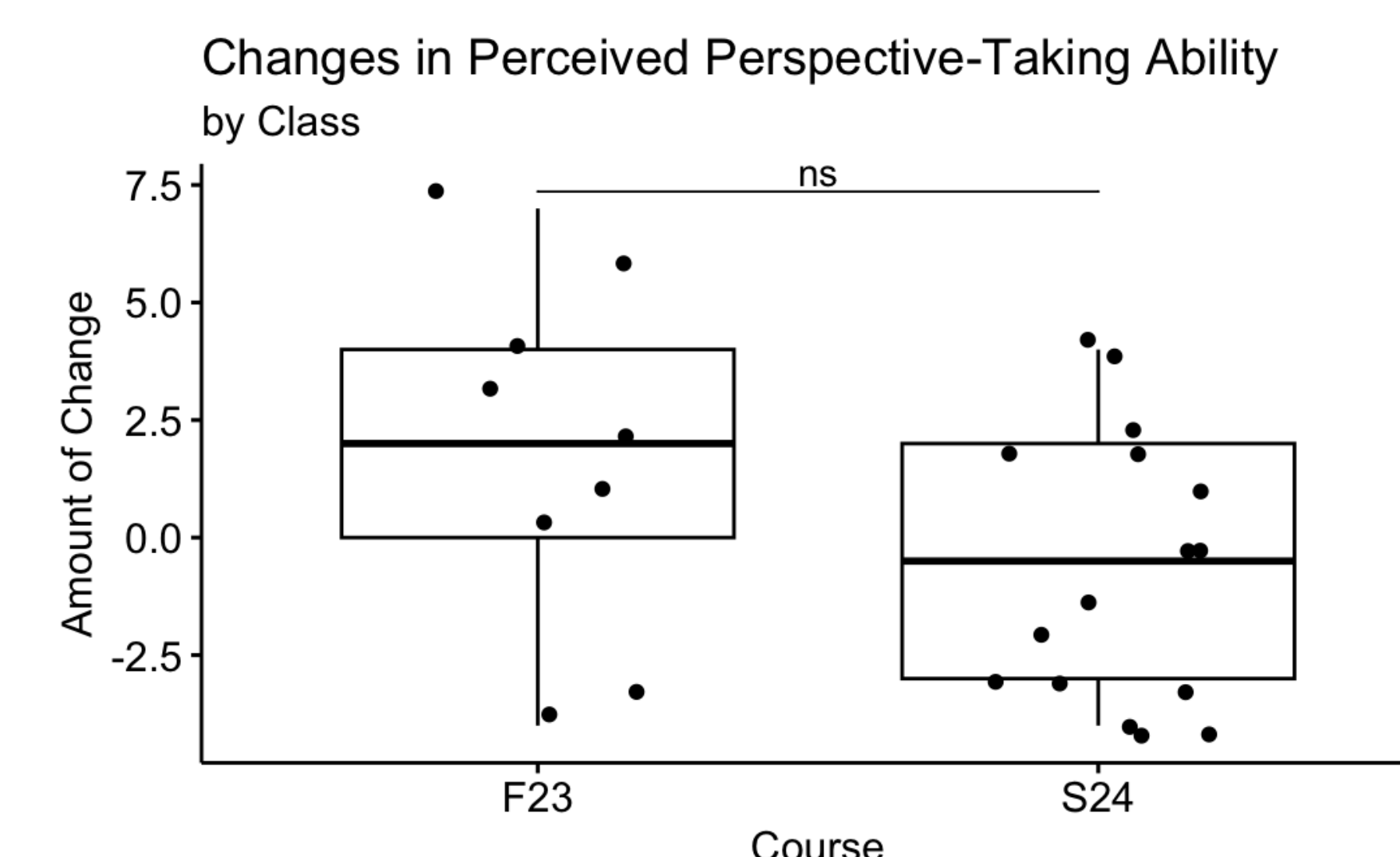
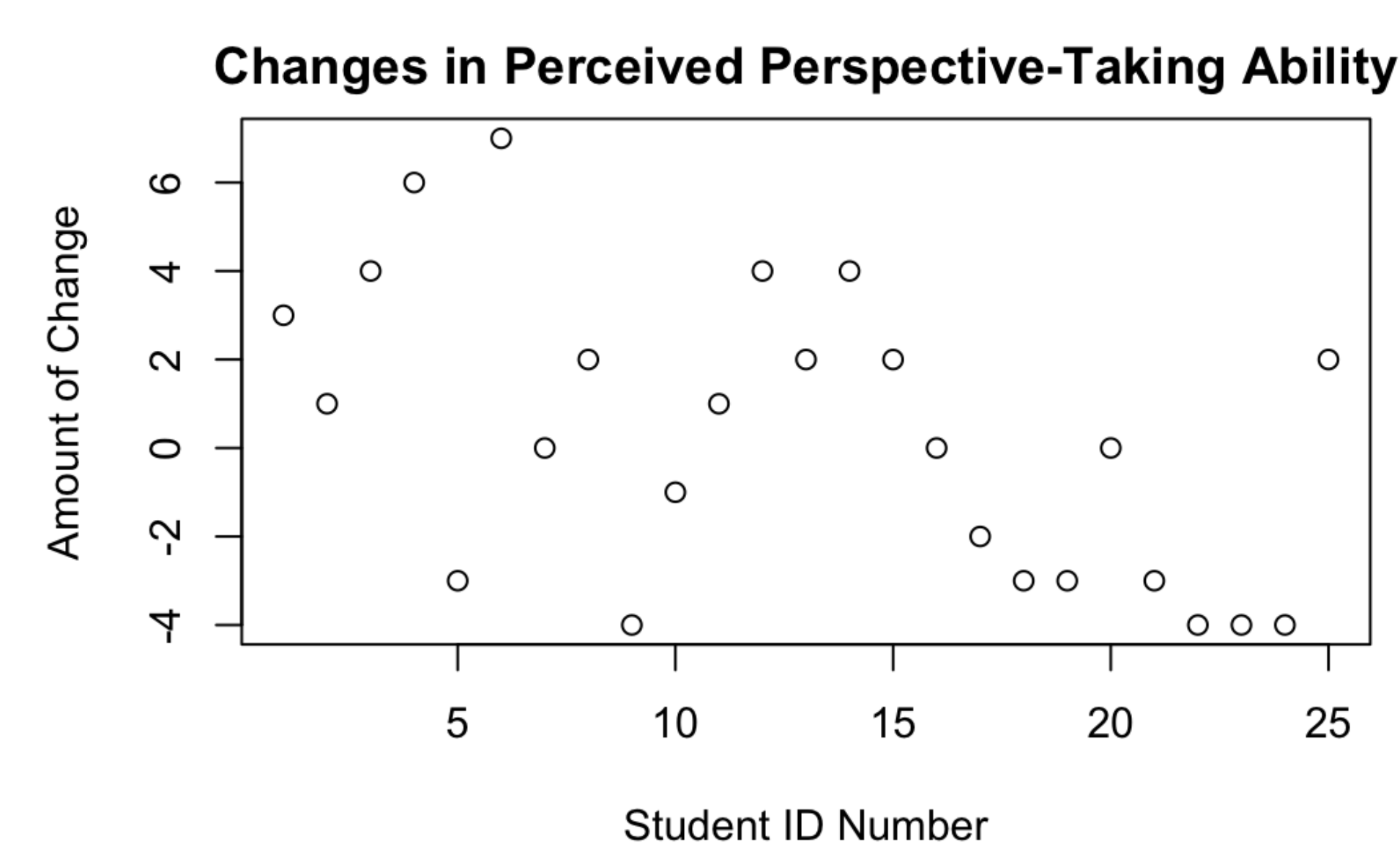
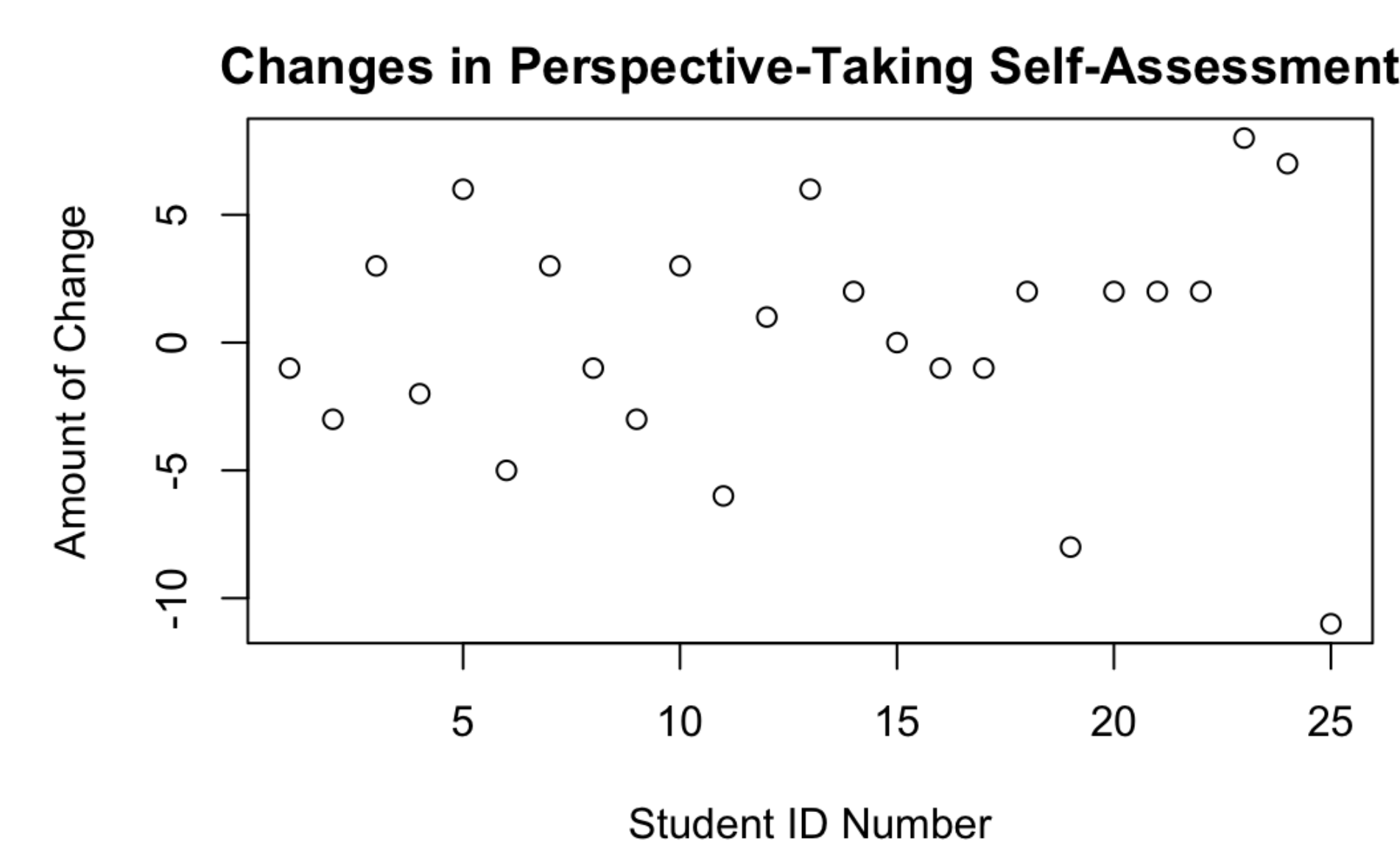
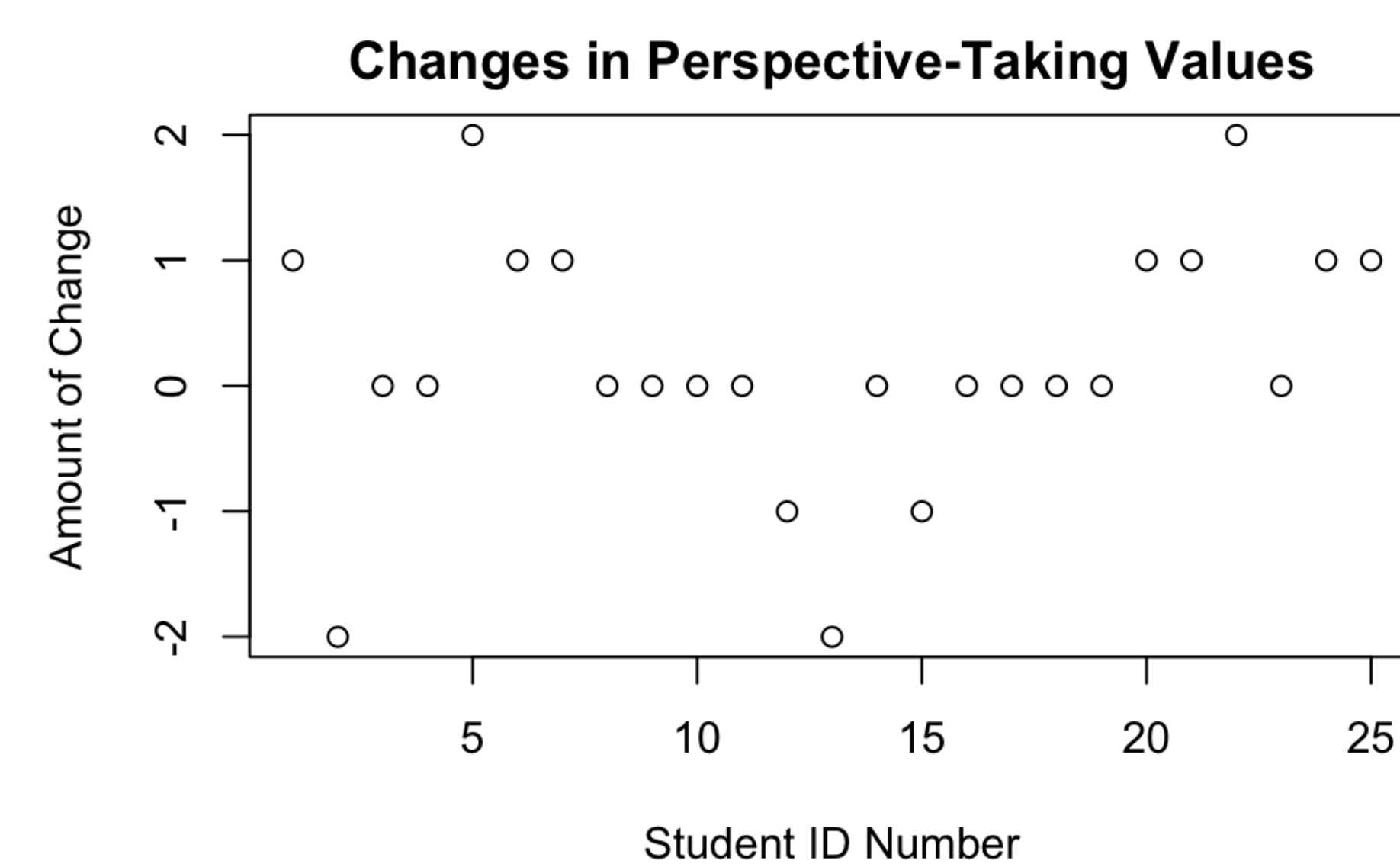
- Participants: 25 students were recruited from two sections of a critical adoption studies course taught by Elizabeth A. Suter during the 2023-2024 academic year.
 - 9 students were recruited from the Fall Quarter 2023 First Year Seminar (FSEM) section of the course.
 - 16 students were recruited from the Spring Quarter 2024 Advanced Seminar (ASEM) section of the course.
- Materials: Students completed three scales, both at the start and at the completion of the course. Students completed the:
 - Perspective-Taking Values Scale (Ragins & Ehrhardt, 2021); 6 questions (5-point scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), such as:
 - "It is important for people to consider the world from other people's perspectives"
 - Perspective-Taking Self-Assessment Scale (Ragins & Ehrhardt, 2021); 6 questions (5-point scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), such as:
 - "I need to do a better job imagining how other people feel."
 - Perspective-taking Ability (Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980)); 7 items (5-point scale, 1 = does not describe me well to 5 = describes me well), such as:
 - "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision."
- Procedure & Design:
 - Student scores from the beginning and the end of the course were compared as represented in Table 1 and Figures 1, 2, & 3.
 - Figure 4 shows the difference between the two classes on the perspective taking ability scale.
- This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Denver.

RESULTS

Self-Assessment Scores between Pre- and Post-Course Administrations

Course	Perspective-Taking Values (mean pre-score)	Perspective-Taking Self-Assessment of Need to Improve this Skill (mean pre-score)	Perceived Perspective-Taking Ability (mean pre-score)	Perspective-Taking Values (mean change)	Perspective-Taking Self-Assessment (mean change)	Perceived Perspective-Taking Ability (mean change)
Fall 2023 (FSEM) (n = 9)	29.4 (on a 30-pt. scale)	23.8 (on a 30-pt. scale)	25.2 (on a 35-pt. scale)	0.30	-0.30	1.80*
Spring 2024 (ASEM) (n = 16)	29.4 (on a 30-pt. scale)	22.4 (on a 30-pt. scale)	27.4 (on a 35-pt. scale)	0.10	0.50	-0.60
Total (N = 25)	29.4	22.9	26.6	0.20	0.20	0.28

* = p < 0.1



CONCLUSIONS

- Based on this limited sample, there was one measure with meaningful change.
 - After completing the course, First Year Students perceived their perspective-taking abilities were higher than at the start of the course.
 - Thus, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.
 - It may be that First Year Students have more growth related to perspective-taking abilities as compared to Seniors.
- The other measures for both the FSEM and ASEM courses had no meaningful change.
 - Reasons why this might be?
 - **First**, overall, the scales had high initial scores, leaving little room for improvement. In particular, the average pre-test score was 29.4 on a 30-pt. scale for the Value of Perspective-Taking Scale.
 - **Second**, the type of student who enrolls in a class on adoption may be different from the general population in important ways. For instance, students who choose this course may have a predisposition toward perspective-taking.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Increase the sample of students.
 - Current results based on a limited sample of 25 students total, 9 of whom were first-quarter, first-year students (FSEM) at DU and 16 were last-quarter, senior students (ASEM) at DU.
 - This academic year (2024-2025), I am two recruiting students from two sections of this course:
 - Fall Quarter, 2024: First Year Seminar
 - Winter Quarter, 2024: Advanced Seminar
- Modify the Hypotheses to investigate change in either direction rather than all in one direction
 - In the need to improve skills scale, only 1 student had the same pre- and post-course score. All others either increased or decreased.
 - It is possible the course increased their awareness of the need to improve their skills or after completing the course they perceived they increased their skills, so less need for improvement.

REFERENCES

- Davis, M. H. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy. *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 10, 85.
- Ragins, B.R. & Ehrhardt, K. (2021). Perspective-Taking Mindsets Measures. *PsycTESTS*. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/t80869-000>