



Fig. 1-2 Students conducting archival research on 1960s Japan, smelling a book from the 1600s (left), dressing in retired mascot costumes (right).

Introduction

In my SoTL research project, I explore how first year student perceptions of learning, especially learning related to General Education and Global Awareness, may be enhanced through an interactive student-centered Growth Mindset teaching intervention. Does a Growth Mindset teaching intervention positively affect first year student perceptions of General Education experiences at UWSP? My research engages with scholarly literature on mindset interventions (Paunesku et al. 2015; Yeager et al. 2013; Duckworth et al. 2014), first year seminars (Araujo et al. 2014; Lamar and Lodge 2014; Korgen and Durdella 2016), and performative or embodied learning in general education courses (Redaelli 2015; Barske 2018). Building on the work of Gregory Walton, I employ “wise interventions,” or “special remedies for social problems” that involve “changes to a specific situation or decision framework to encourage better behavior in that context” (2014, 74). In this case, the “social problems” I hope to address include the devaluing of non-STEM learning, negative reactions to the liberal arts, and assumptions about the relevance of studying foreign languages and cultures.

My first year seminar entitled “From Samurai to Hello Kitty: Pop Images of Japan,” fulfills the learning outcomes for the FYS Foundation Level and Global Awareness under UWSP’s newly redefined General Education Program. As we play with and yet challenge global “pop” images that sell Japanese culture as historically warrior-based, sexualized, or “cute,” students improve their ability to “describe the value of a liberal arts education” and “identify key components of critical thinking.” In addition, through co-curricular assignments such as organizing a campus-wide screening of a Japanese *anime* film, students develop a sense of belonging as a cohort and a community. According to Stanford University’s Project for Education Research that Scales (PERT), my course already addresses two of the three pillars for academic success, namely “belonging” and “relevance and purpose.” Therefore, this semester I decided to experiment with the third pillar, “growth mindset.”



Planning and Screenplay: Miyazaki Hayao
Director: Miyazaki Goro
When: Wednesday, October 26, 2016 6:00 PM
Where: Dreyfus University Center (DUC) Theatre
Who: Sponsored by History, International Studies, Kanto Anime Society, FYS 102/566, and UW OPID
Free with UWSP ID and cosplay welcome

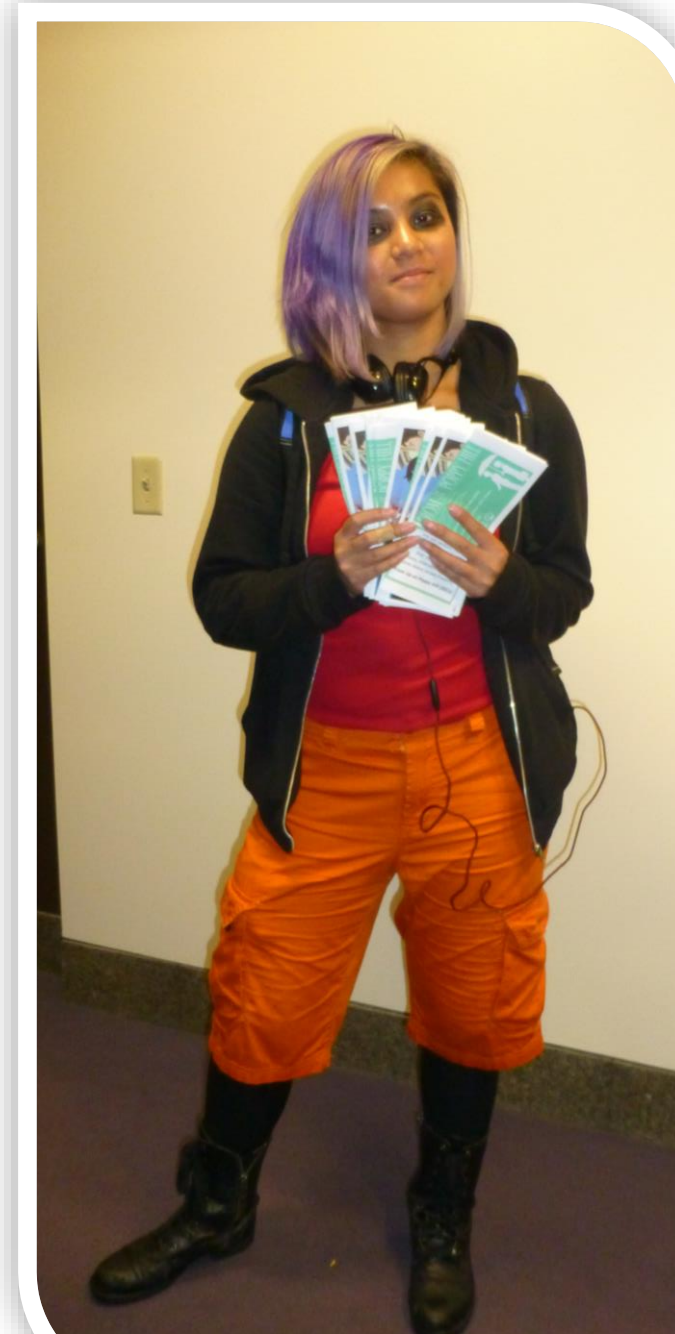


Fig. 3-5 Students hosting a screening of the Japanese film *From up on Poppy Hill* (2011) set in 1960s Japan (left and right). Student hand-drawn poster advertising the film event (middle).

Not Yet, But Soon?: Growth Mindset and Enhancing Perceptions of General Education in a First Year Seminar

Growth Mindset Intervention

Seeking qualitative data with some quantifiable survey evidence, I adapted SoTL tools from the Mindset Kit created by PERT scholars. At the beginning of the semester, students completed a pre-survey responding to Likert scale questions such as “Intelligence is something basic that you cannot change” and “Anyone can learn a foreign language.” Then following an adaptation of the PERT intervention lesson plan, students engaged with recent theories on fixed versus growth mindset approaches to learning. We discussed neuroplasticity through a short Sentis Brain Animation Series (2012) video, engaged with a clip from “The Power of Belief” (2012) about chess prodigy Josh Waitzkin, and read research by Carol Dweck (2010) coupled with visual graphs comparing actions associated with fixed vs. growth mindsets. We also grappled with the concept of “grit” as linked to a growth mindset presented in the work of Angela Duckworth (2013; 2016).

While growth mindset interventions have been successful in many learning and community environments, my research also adds a more interactive, high impact, and culturally embedded embodied learning component to the intervention. As students prepared to generate their own visual maps of growth mindset transformations, we first engaged in *kikō* (気功) breathing exercises. Building on the Japanese concept of *ki* meaning energy or life force, these movement exercises help to cultivate life energy and to detoxify our embodied selves. Echoing medical *qigong* practices, the *American Journal of Chinese Medicine* notes the medicinal benefits of Japanese *kikō* (Elinoff et al. 2009). In this case, students were encouraged to move their *ki* to open themselves up to new ideas and new ways of being in the world, while also sharing in the communal benefits of moving *ki* together.

Finally, students worked in pairs to transform fixed mindset statements about learning into growth mindset statements. More specifically, they focused on statements related to studying Japan and Japanese cultural practices, embracing foreign languages, and learning in general education courses for the Arts and Humanities. Students then produced their own statements such as “fixed= I don’t need a foreign language, I’m good with English,” which they transformed into “growth=I could learn foreign languages to be come a more globally aware person. It might be fun” (Fig. 6). As they worked on the floor together, we developed an inside joke that relates to the title of my poster, namely that a growth mindset often involves admitting that I am not good at something “yet,” but with hard work and determination, I could be good at just about anything “soon.” Here we were reminded of the title of a children’s phonics book featuring Hello Kitty, “Not Yet, But Soon!” (Fig. 7). This link helped to tie the content of the course to the intervention, since we unpack Hello Kitty as a symbol of global consumerism that defines Japan’s “soft power” and “gross national cool” (Yano 2009).

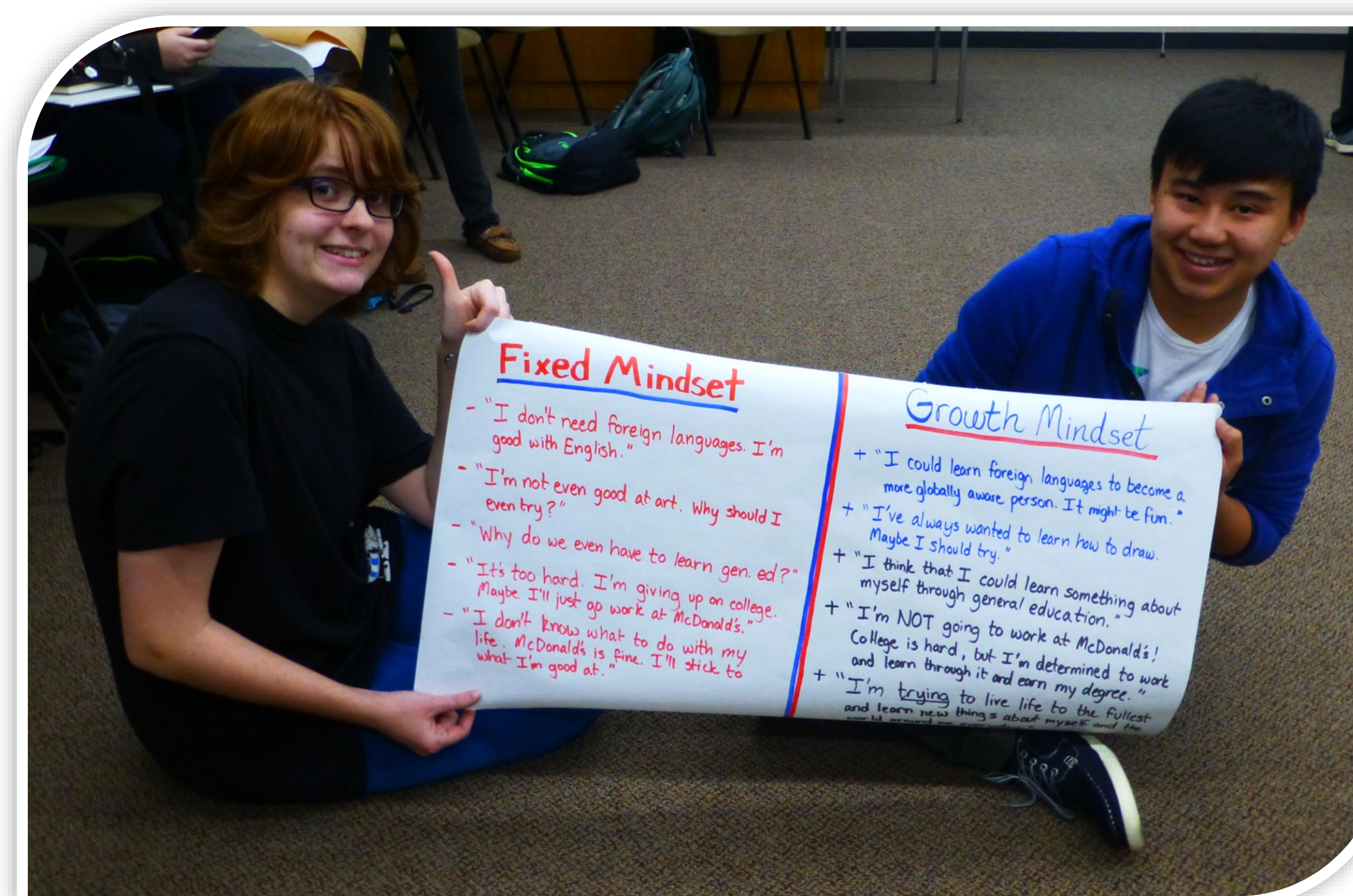


Fig. 6 Students converting fixed mindset statements about learning into growth mindset statements.



Fig. 7-8 Connecting Hello Kitty (left) to a growth mindset—we are not good at something yet, but soon, with hard work, we could be. The intervention also fostered cohort-building (right).

Preliminary Results

Shortly after the growth mindset intervention, students completed a post-survey, which included some open-ended questions for them to articulate in their own words what they gained from the experience. Overall, student survey responses seem to demonstrate that the growth mindset teaching intervention may have changed their perspectives. In terms of altering patterns of action, the post-survey suggests that with over 91% of students embracing a growth mindset view of intelligence, nearly 75% of students would be willing to take courses beyond their major or minor.

Although I still have a good deal of data to analyze further, including qualitative student self-assessments and final presentations, this teaching intervention proved meaningful enough for me and my students that I will most certainly bring growth mindset activities into a greater range of my courses. Students also shared openly very personal reactions to the intervention. One student nearly in tears “confessed” that she has been hard on herself due to fixed mindset assumptions about learning and success. In their final presentations, several students mentioned that the growth mindset discussions were the most impactful aspects of the course. And the embodied learning component of moving positive *ki* energy together also proved helpful for healing in the classroom when our growth mindset discussions opened a space for grappling with sensitive issues such as race tensions on our campus. In the end, as one student articulated in the final exit survey, “by embracing a growth mindset, we are able to become more than we thought we were.”

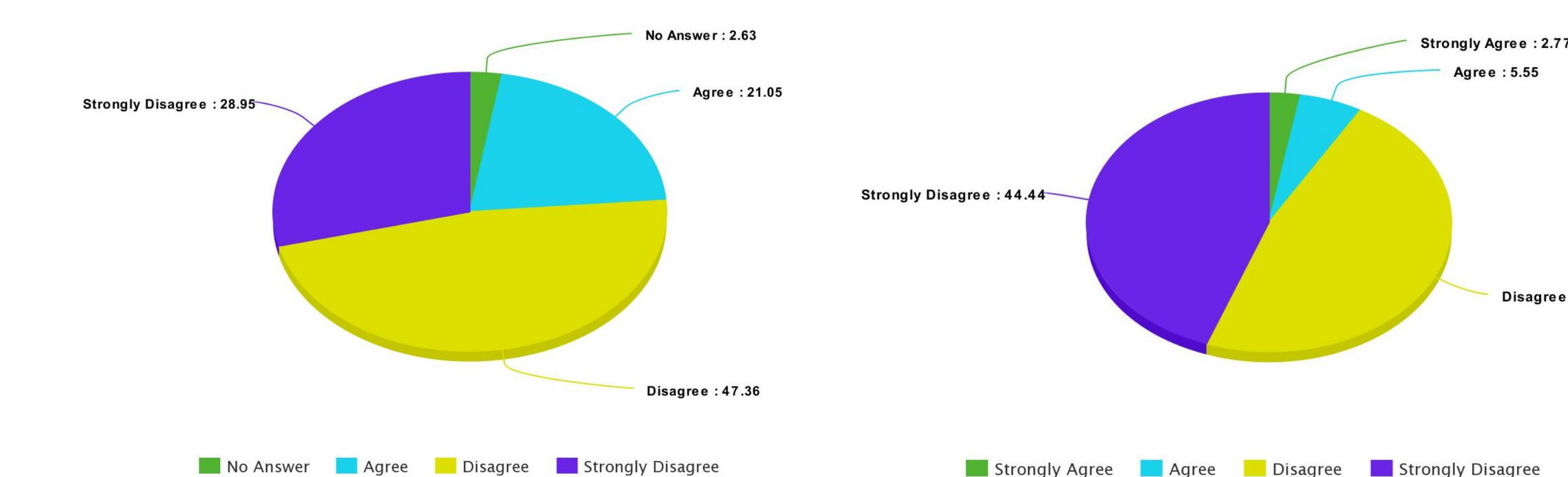
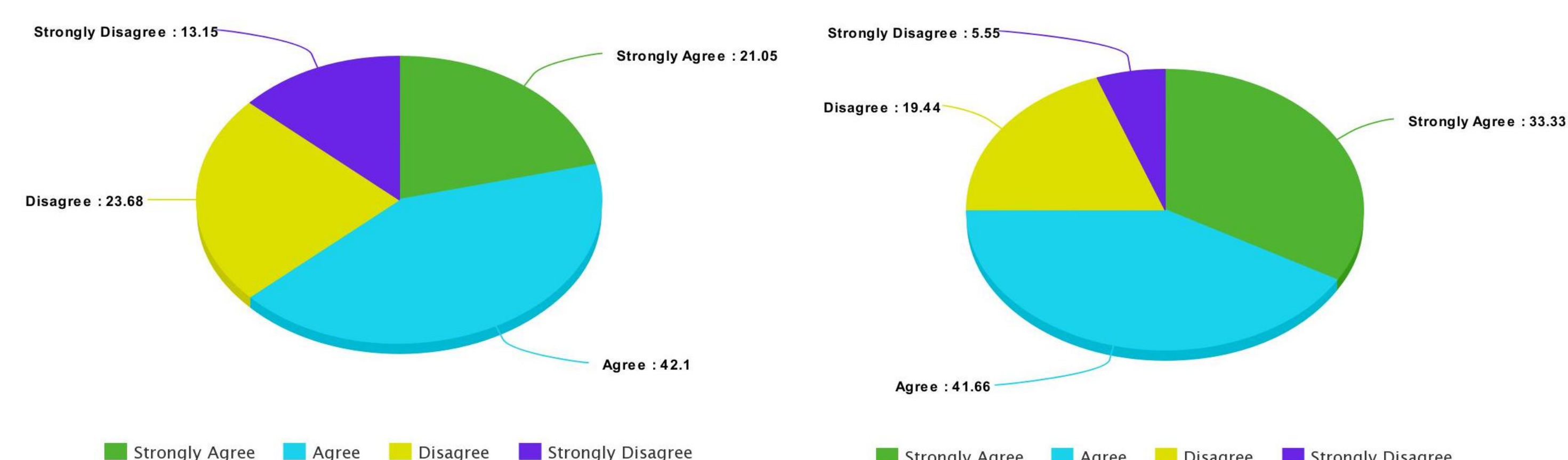


Fig. 9-12 “Intelligence is something very basic that you cannot change,” pre-survey results with 38 students (above left), post-survey results with 36 students (above right). “I am interested in taking courses outside my major or minor,” pre-survey results (below left), post-survey results (below right).



Special Thanks to OPID, Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars, Provost Greg Summers, Dean Chris Cirimo, Chair Lee Willis, and my amazing FYS students for supporting this research.