

Research Assistance Linked to Student Retention

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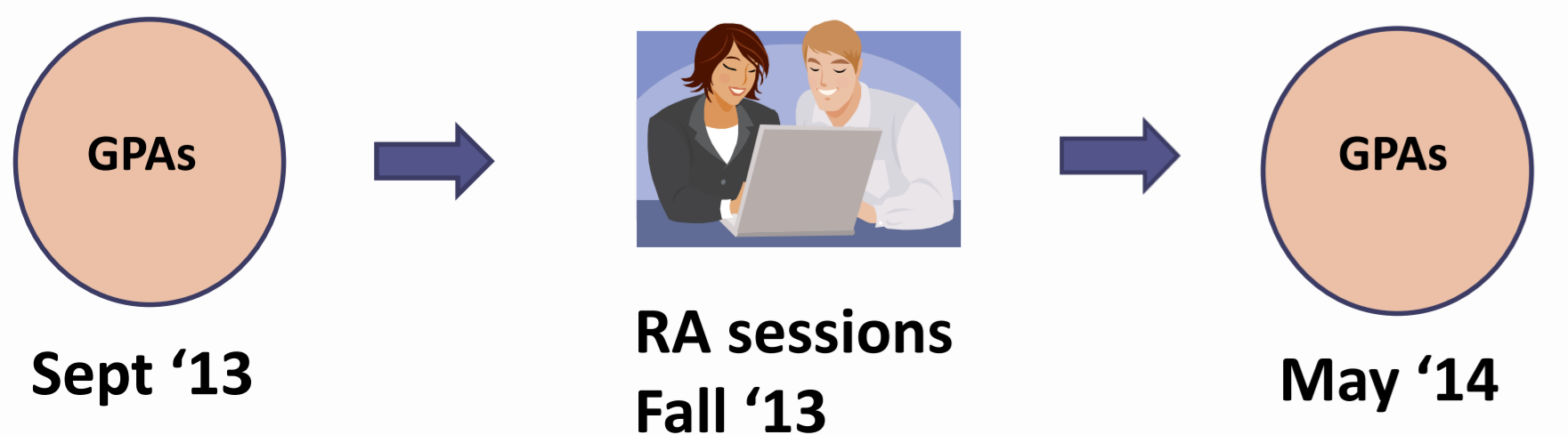
Our question: Does a library-based, Research Assistance (RA) program improve the academic success of readmitted Arts & Social Sciences students, strengthen their personal connection to the university, and thereby increase the likelihood that they will remain at Dalhousie to complete their degree?

What we know from the literature:

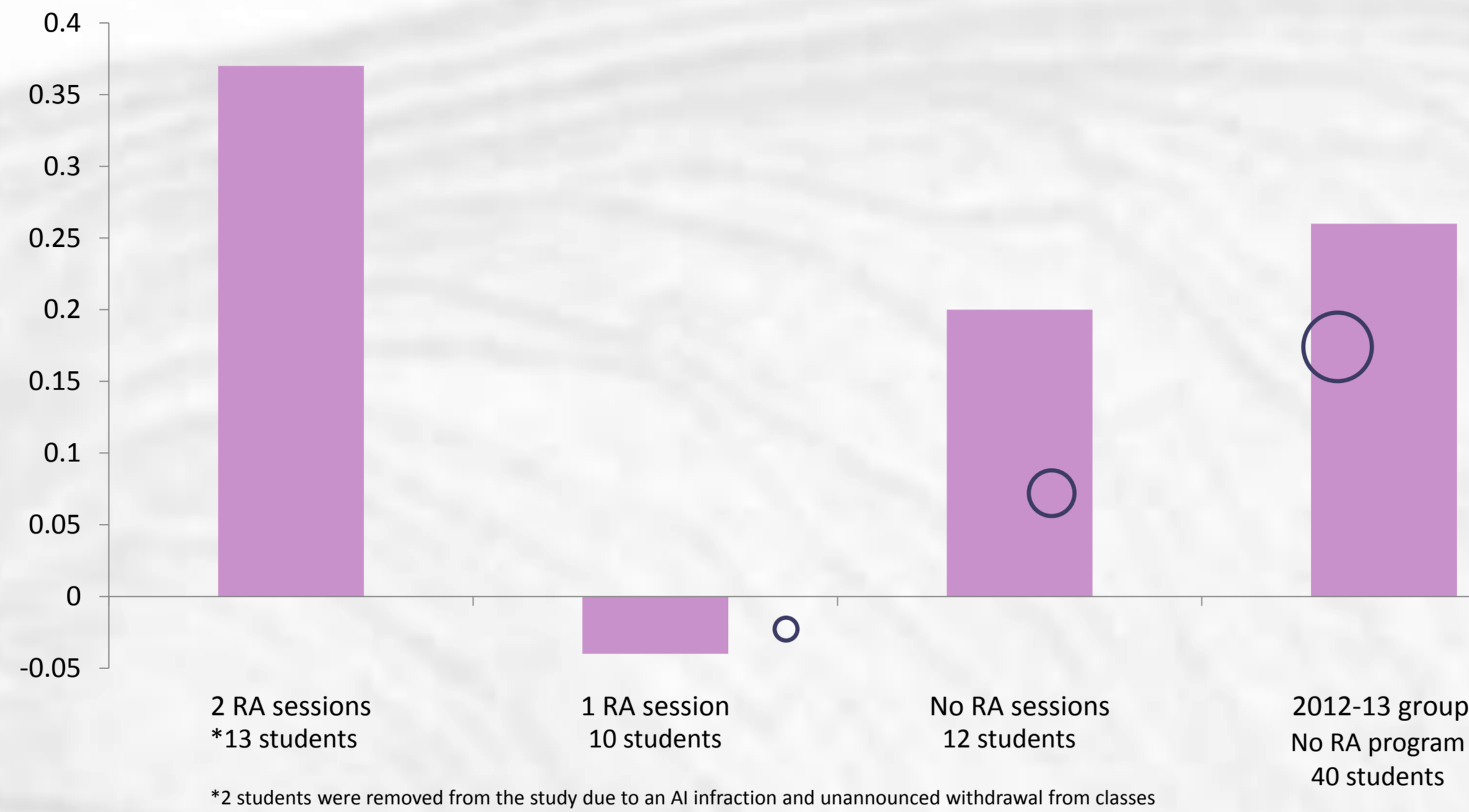
- Academic performance is the single most important factor affecting retention. A student's personal connection to the university is another powerful factor. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)
- Research skills are crucial to academic success and many first year students lack these. (Kelly, 1995)
- One-on-one RA would therefore have an indirect positive effect on retention by impacting the factors above. (Bell, 2008; Blackburn, 2010)

Data Collection:

25/38 readmitted students participated in the RA program. This group was surveyed and their average Sept-May GPA change compared to those who did not participate.



Average Change in GPA:



What happened here? The first RA session was more like a formal Information Literacy session, rather than an informal RA session. We suggest that the real impact of RA on GPA came from the second session which was less formalized, and customized to the student's specific research question.

Assignments: 9 of the 23 students lacked an assignment to base their RA session on. Their average GPA change: -.01. Average GPA change of the 14 who had assignments: +.32.

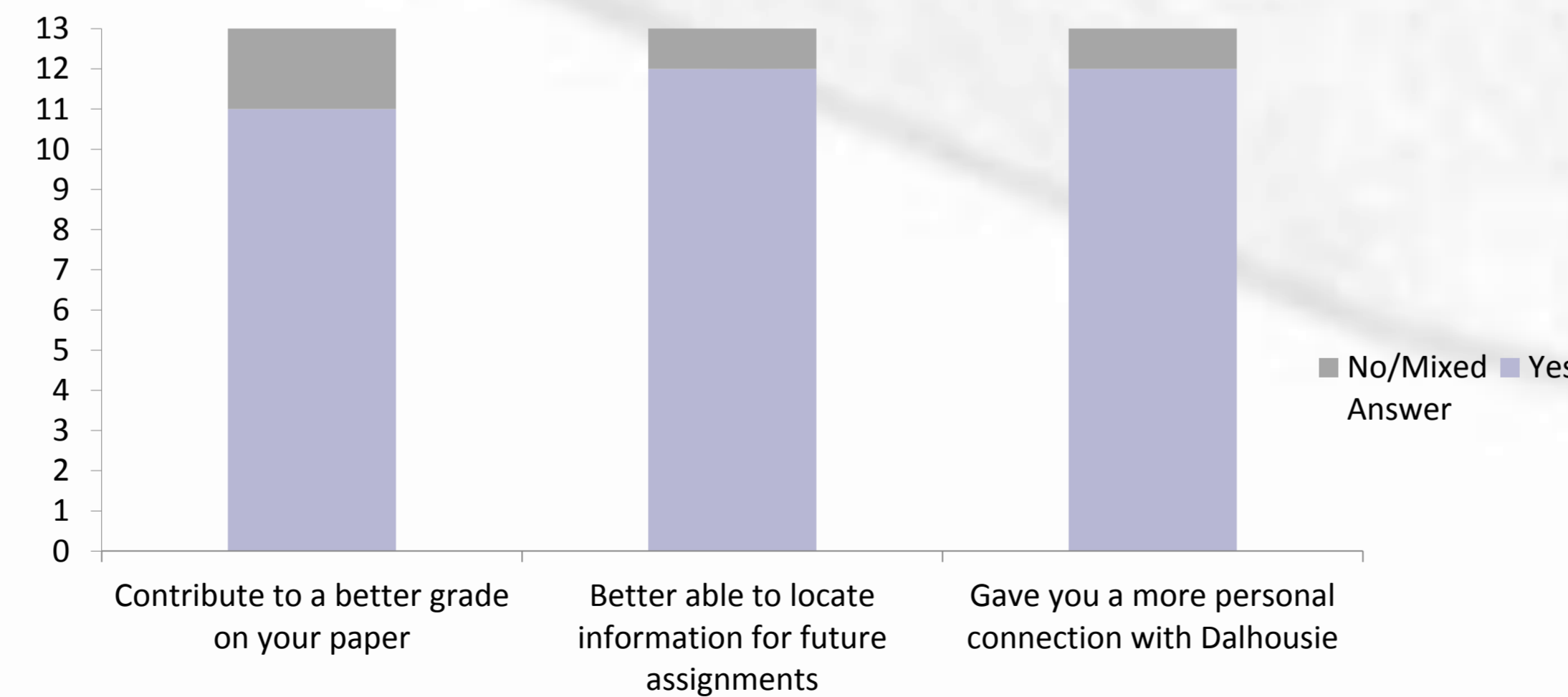
Our assessment suggests that:

- One-on-one RA increases students' personal connection with the university
- There is a correlation between 2 RA sessions (or RA sessions directly associated with an assignment) and better grades
- Based on research and theories in the literature, the above outcomes result in higher retention

Recommendations:

- This was a **seed** project and participation was unpredictable. We should repeat this study and expand the target population (i.e., more data!)
- Expand the program to other departments and to students on academic probation
- Modify the RA program based on experience & feedback
- Our research office should conduct a robust analysis of student GPA changes related to various outreach/intervention programs.

Survey Results: (response rate: 13/25)



When asked how else the RA impacted them and their studies, 8 of the 13 survey respondents gave an emotional impact. They said it made them feel...

EMPOWERED
independent
Encouraged
CONFIDENT
eager