

# Thesis success

## Understanding students' thesis processes and their experiences with thesis seminars



Marlous Dekker-Regelink | HEIR Conference | 7 September 2016



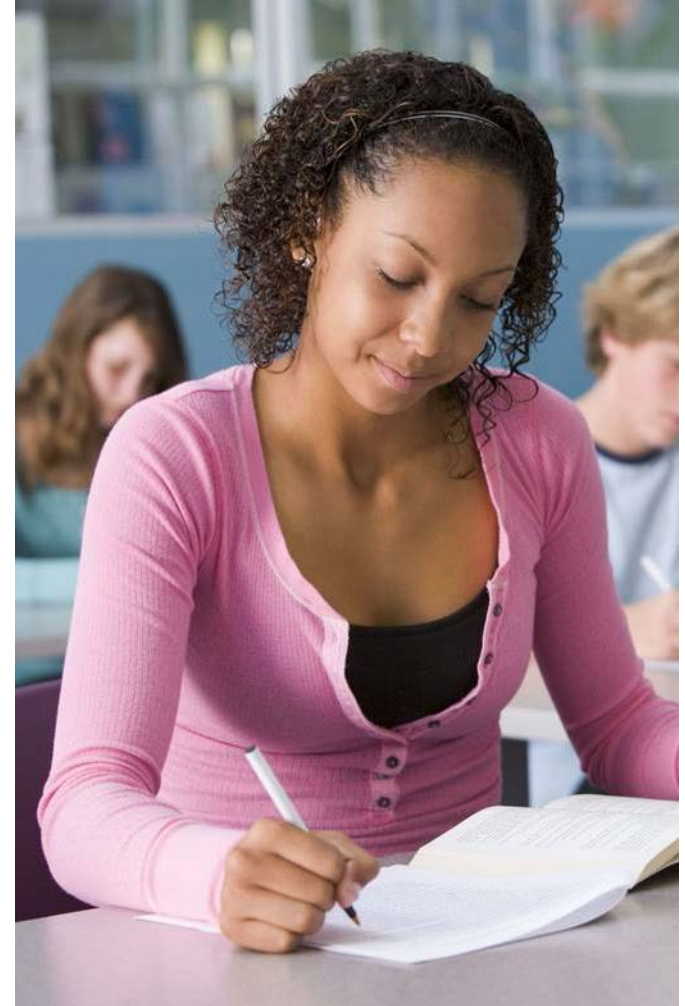
Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

# Central question

What is the value of thesis seminars for BA students?

# Index

1. Thesis seminars
2. Research design
3. Preliminary results
4. First observations



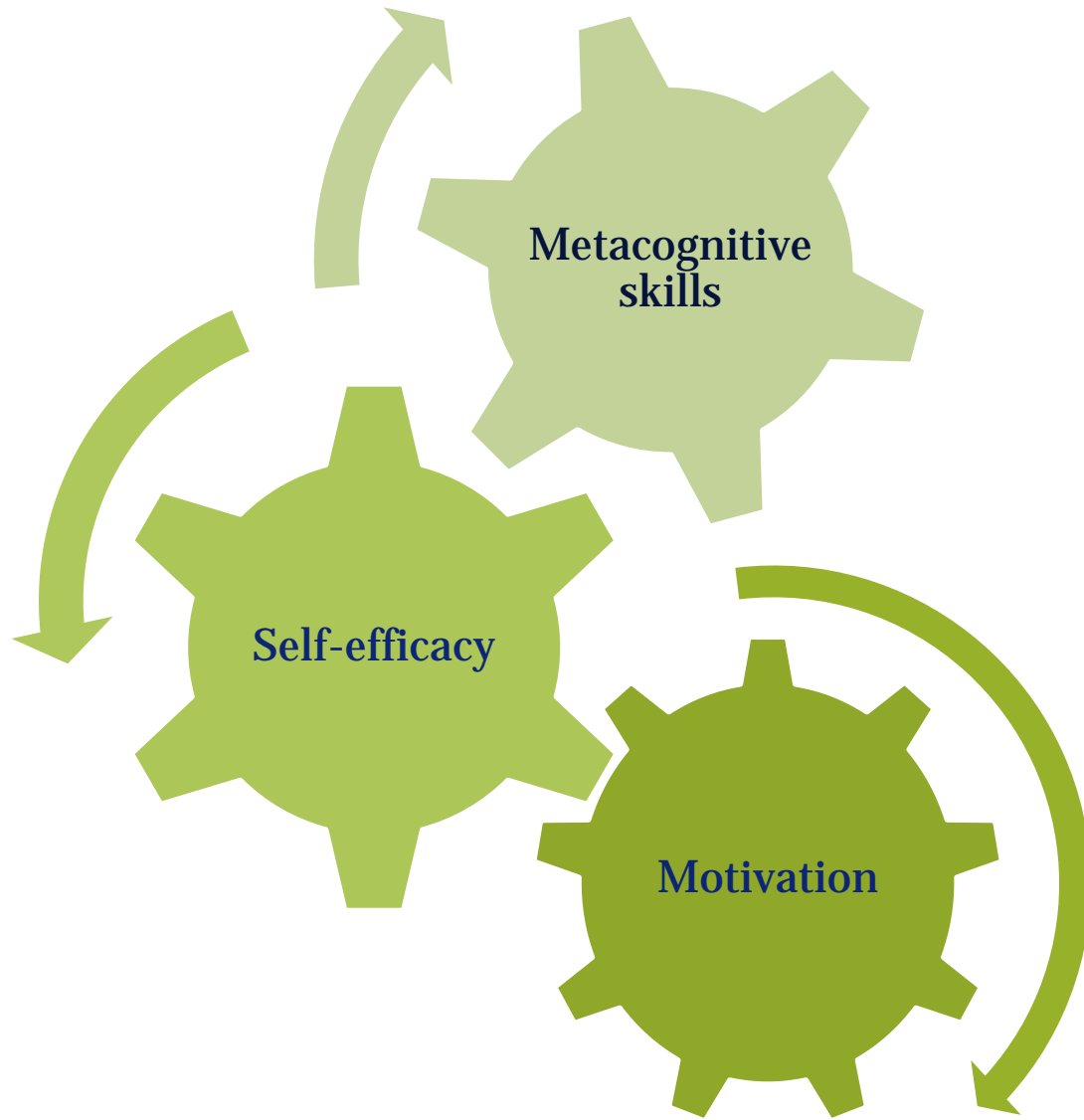
# Thesis seminars for BA students

- Faculty of Humanities
- 25 BA programmes
- 97 seminar groups
- 90 seminar teachers
- 1000 BA thesis students



# Exploring the thesis process

- What do BA-students need in order to be successful in writing their thesis?
- What happens during thesis seminars and how do students experience this?
- How do students reflect on writing their thesis?
  - Self-efficacy (academic and metacognitive skills)
  - Intrinsic motivation
  - Seminar



# Research design

## Mixed methods:

- Literature review
- Thesis seminar design review
- Student questionnaires (three measurements)
- Interviews with seminar teachers
- Focus group interviews with students

## Research sample:

10 BA-programmes, 30 seminars, 26 teachers, 469 students

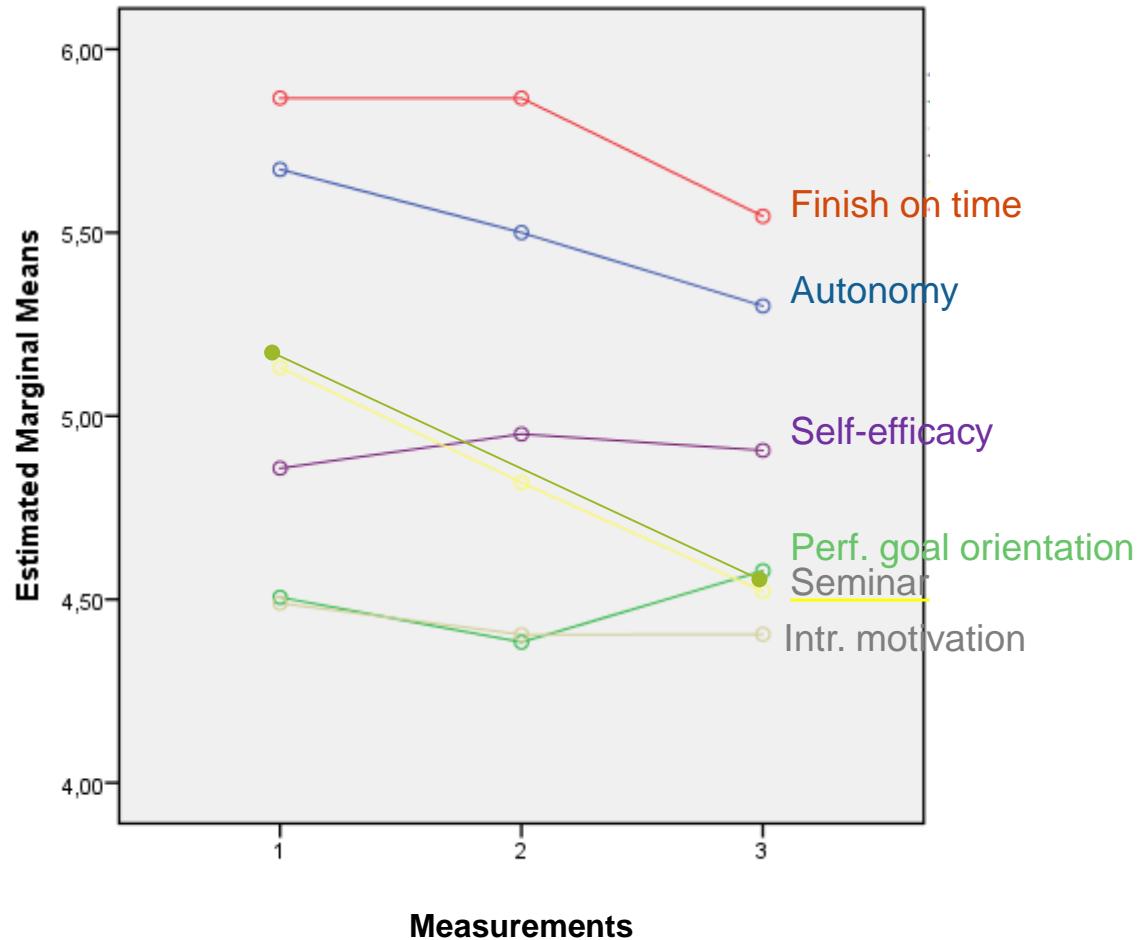


# BA thesis seminar design

<b>Focus on content</b>	<b>Focus on process</b>
Teacher = thesis supervisor	Teacher ≠ thesis supervisor (mostly...)
All students may attend	Only thesis students attend
Detailed instructions and assignments	General instructions and assignments
Emphasis on teacher feedback	Emphasis on peer feedback
Grading of assignments (40%) and thesis (60%)	Grading of thesis (sometimes also participation)



# Students' perceptions



# Thesis process: obstacles

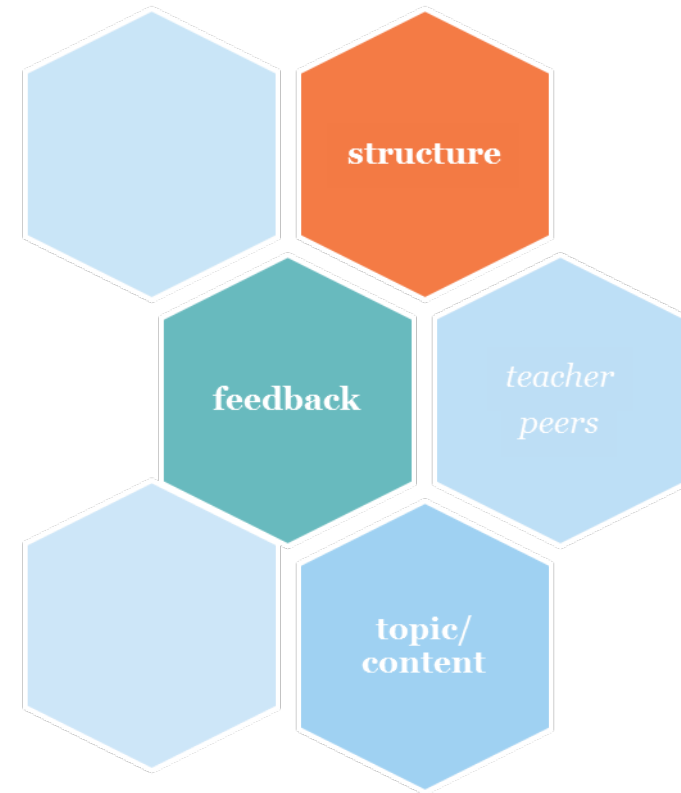
- Level of freedom limited
- Content expertise teacher lacking
- Academic skills student lacking
- Group size too big
- Feedback too late, not specific enough
- Teacher differs from supervisor

# Thesis process: success factors

- Autonomy student
- Clear structure and deadlines
- Small groups
- Examples of theses
- Timely and detailed feedback
- One-on-one supervision
- Peer support
- Adapt supervision to needs student

# First observations

- Structure and deadlines are needed, but not appreciated by every one
- Teachers' feedback essential, peer feedback additional
- Content oriented seminars seem to be better (based on interviews), but this does not show in results questionnaire
- Experienced autonomy does not depend on type of seminar
- Experienced usefulness of seminars is dropping over time
- Notable differences in students' self-efficacy and teachers' opinion of academic skills



# Questions?



# Thank you for your attention



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**Marlous Dekker-Regelink**  
*Educational Advisor*  
*Faculty of Humanities*

**Telephone +31-71-5272153**

**Email [m.l.dekker@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:m.l.dekker@hum.leidenuniv.nl)**