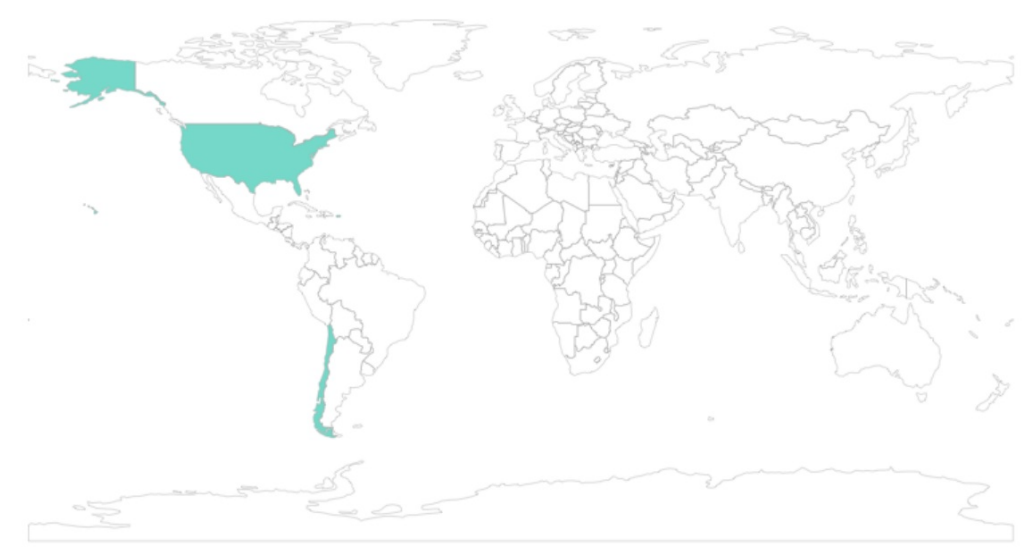# A Cross-National Participatory Evaluation to Improve University Teaching and Learning

A collaboration between the Universidad Andrés Bello (UNAB), a private university in Chile, and LASPAU, a Harvard-affiliated nonprofit focused on strengthening higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The team is working together to gradually improve teaching and learning quality in UNAB's School of Veterinary Medicine.

Ample evidence from educational research and evaluation suggests that students learn better when they are actively engaged in the learning process and receive continuous feedback on their performance.
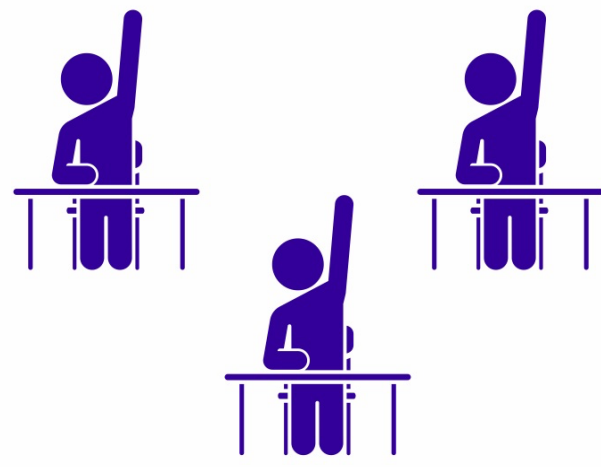
We are using evaluation to understand the kinds of active learning methods that work best in the context of UNAB's School of Veterinary Medicine, and to better understand how to align teaching and learning strategies with veterinary students' approaches to learning

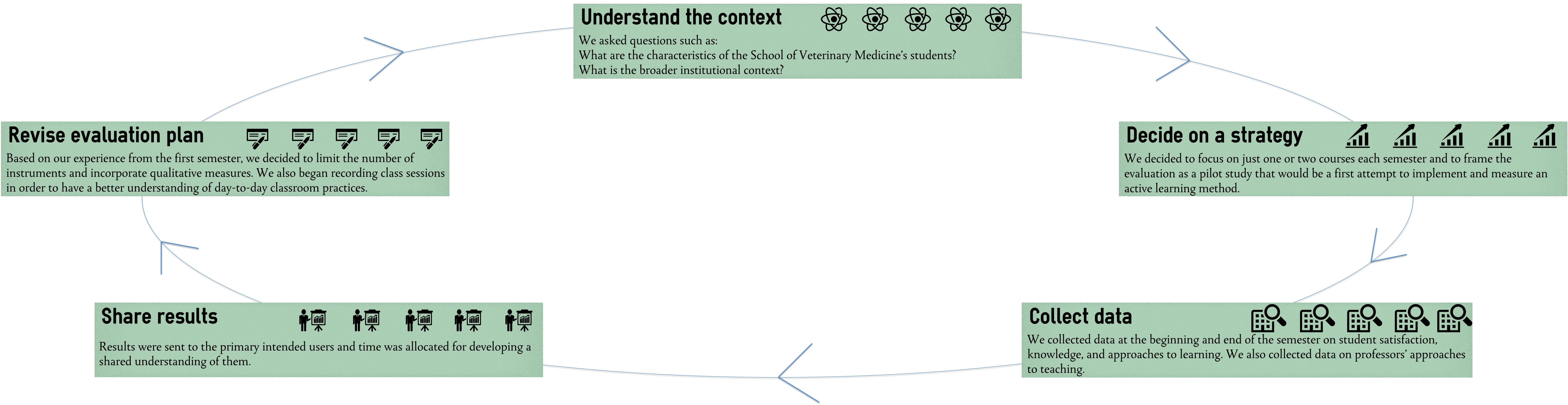Our approach to evaluation is:
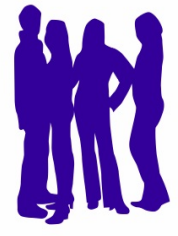
Participatory

Two external evaluators are working with professors and administrators from UNAB's School of Veterinary Medicine to define and address evaluation questions that are relevant and of high priority. Qualitative data collection has been incorporated to ensure the inclusion of student voices.

Utilization-focused

The evaluation has been designed to address the needs of the primary intended users.

Evaluation Cycle

Understand the context

We asked questions such as:
What are the characteristics of the School of Veterinary Medicine's students?
What is the broader institutional context?

Decide on a strategy

We decided to focus on just one or two courses each semester and to frame the evaluation as a pilot study that would be a first attempt to implement and measure an active learning method.

Collect data

We collected data at the beginning and end of the semester on student satisfaction, knowledge, and approaches to learning. We also collected data on professors' approaches to teaching.

Share results

Results were sent to the primary intended users and time was allocated for developing a shared understanding of them.

Revise evaluation plan

Based on our experience from the first semester, we decided to limit the number of instruments and incorporate qualitative measures. We also began recording class sessions in order to have a better understanding of day-to-day classroom practices.

Example of Findings

As part of our efforts to improve teaching and learning, we wanted to better understand professors' approaches to pedagogy in the targeted courses. We used the Approaches to Teaching Inventory, which measures approaches on two scales: Information Transmission/Teacher-Focused (ITTF) and Conceptual Change/Student-Focused (CCSF). Data collected from the professors of three targeted courses (see graph below) demonstrates a wide range along both scales, suggesting that the professors vary in their approaches to teaching and learning.
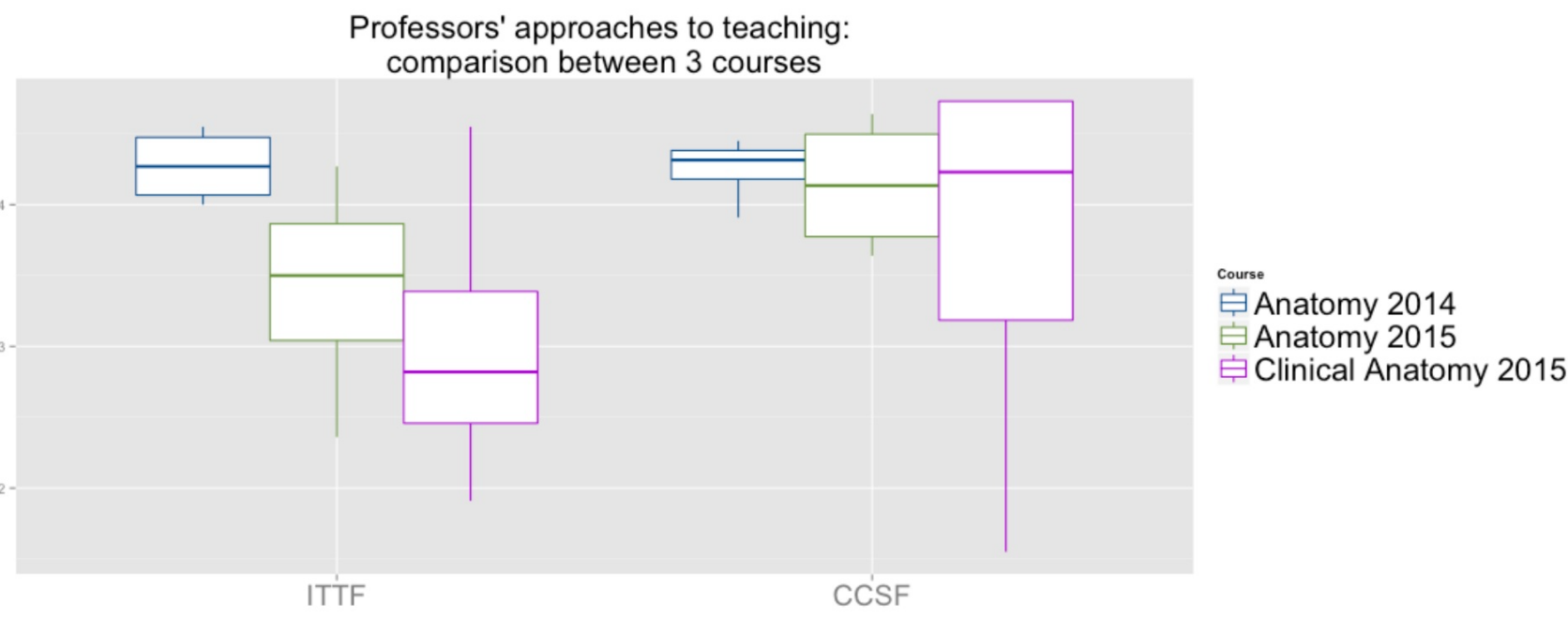
We wanted to know whether there was an association between students' learning orientations and student success. Using a Spanish version of the ASSIST survey, we measured students' levels of deep, strategic, and surface apathetic approaches to learning. Using data from the first semester of the project, we saw that students who increased on the deep approach to learning scale were associated with higher final grades (r=.27, p<.05). Students who increased on the strategic approach to learning scale were also associated with higher final grades (r=.26, p<.05).
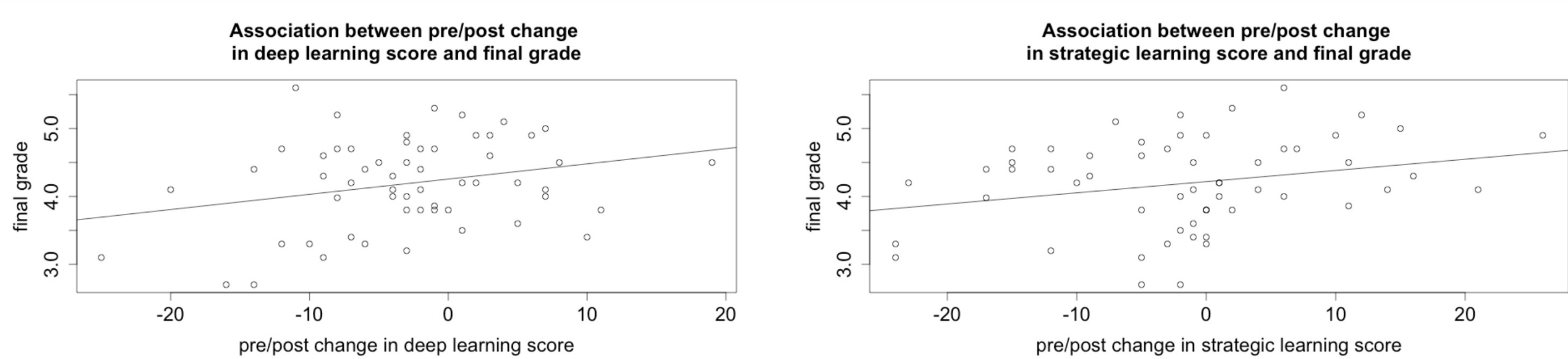
During the second semester of the project, we collected data from students in a third-year clinical anatomy course. We did not observe much pre/post change in their learning approaches, but did notice that students had a high score on the fear of failure sub-score. We used a focus group to better understand the sources of their fear of failure, and found that students felt they were not receiving adequate feedback on their performance, which impeded their ability to improve.
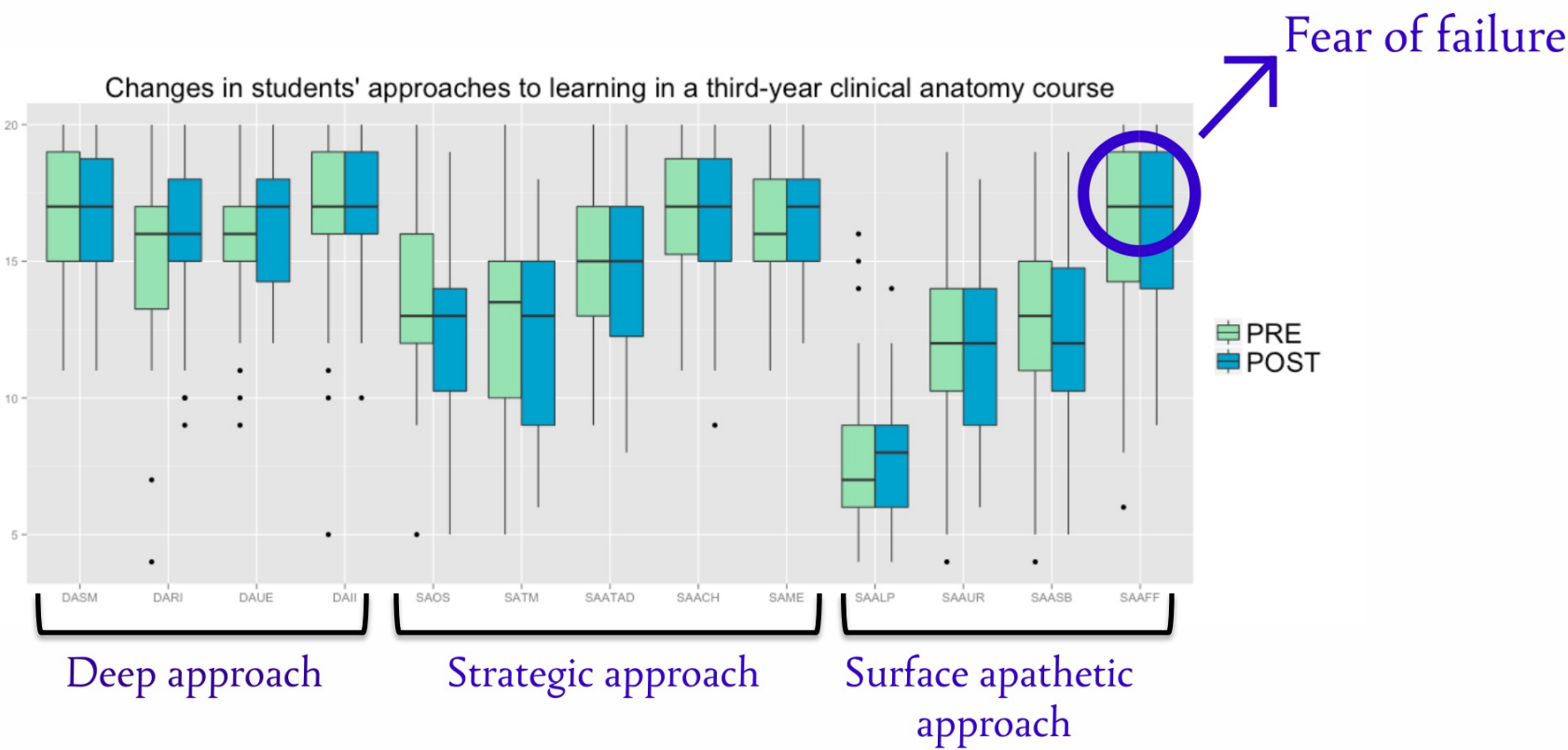
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