

# Perception of Preparedness for PA Clinical Rotations

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## Introduction

- There are 224 PA programs in the US and over 9000 PA students enrolled in PA programs across the country (Brown & Sivahop, 2017).
- The average PA program has 53.7 weeks of supervised clinical practice experiences (SCPEs) (Physician Assistant Education Association, 2016). This calculates to be well over 10,000 preceptors training PA students at a minimum. It is a well-accepted fact that PA programs often have a difficult time finding SCPEs and clinicians to supervise.
- Maintaining SCPEs can be difficult for PA programs, especially with continued growth of PA programs (Brown & Sivahop, 2017).
- To help to determine how well prepared preceptors felt PA students were in various aspects of medicine and PA training, we prepared a survey to assess perception of preparedness for clinical rotations, both by preceptors and students.
- Uncovering areas of weakness will assist PA programs in focusing on ways to improve preparation for the clinical year and perhaps increase preceptor retention.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to:

- Assess preceptor perception of PA student preparedness for clinical rotations.
- Assess student perception of their own preparedness for clinical rotations.

## Methods

- A cross sectional study was done using a web-based survey sent to preceptors of PA students across the United States (US) and PA students currently enrolled in PA programs in the US.
- Participants were recruited through faculty at PA Programs across the US. PA faculty were asked via email to send the survey link to preceptors and students in their programs.
- No identifying information or IP addresses were collected.
- The study was approved by the MCPHS University Institutional Review Board.
- Survey Instrument
- The preceptor survey included 14 questions that asked preceptors to assess the PA student preparedness for clinical rotations.
- The student survey included 15 questions that asked the students to assess their preparedness for clinical rotations.
- Both survey included questions asked the respondent to identify in what areas of medicine students were most prepared, how prepared they were overall and areas that needed improvement. The preceptor survey also compared preceptor impression of PA students versus medical students.
- Preceptors were asked information including: practice setting, number of years in practice, length of time worked with PA students
- Both surveys collected demographic information including: gender, age, ethnicity
- Microsoft Excel was used for analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to summarize the responses to the survey.

## Results

Figure 1: Strongest Attribute Of PA Students

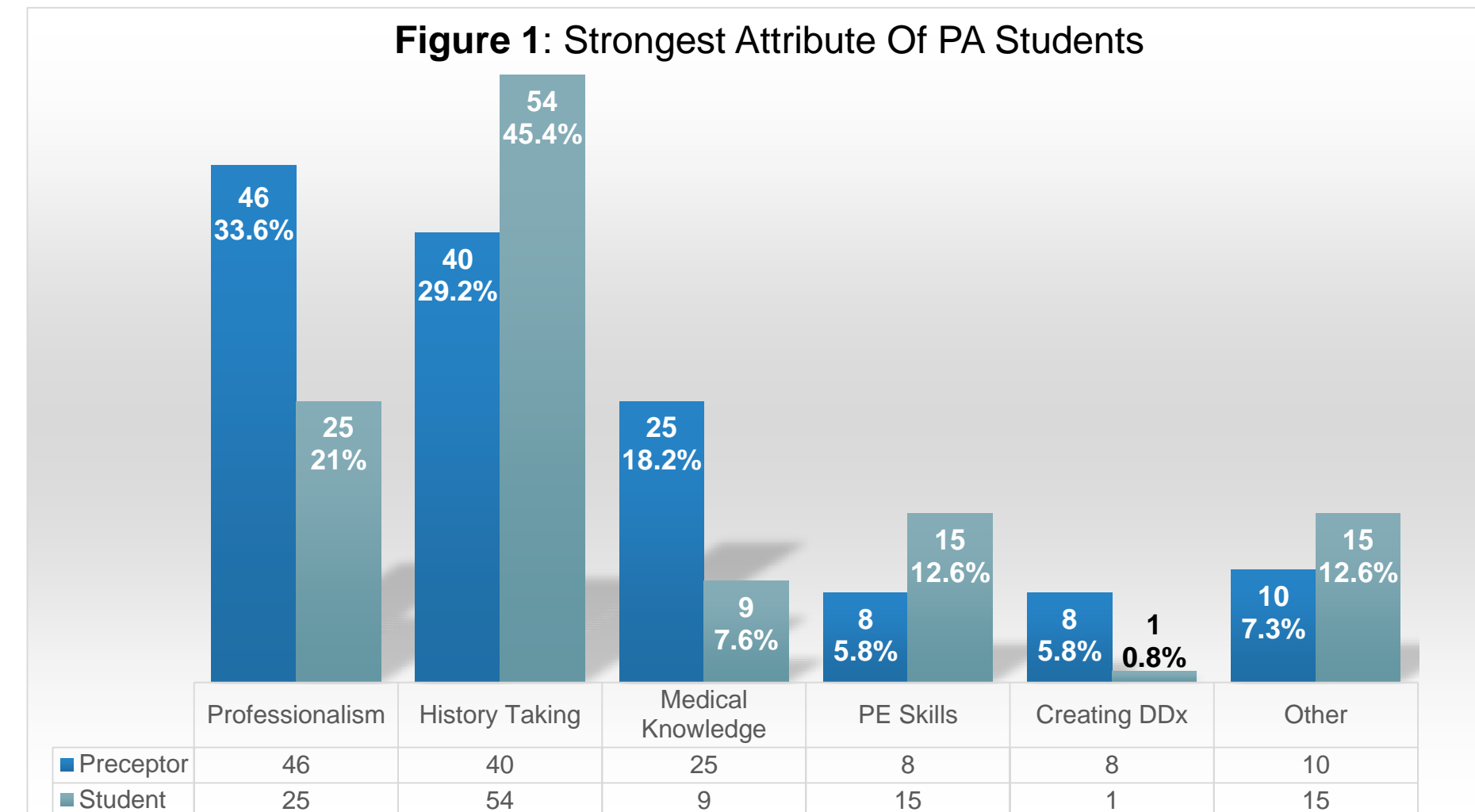


Figure 2. Area of Medicine Students Best Prepared

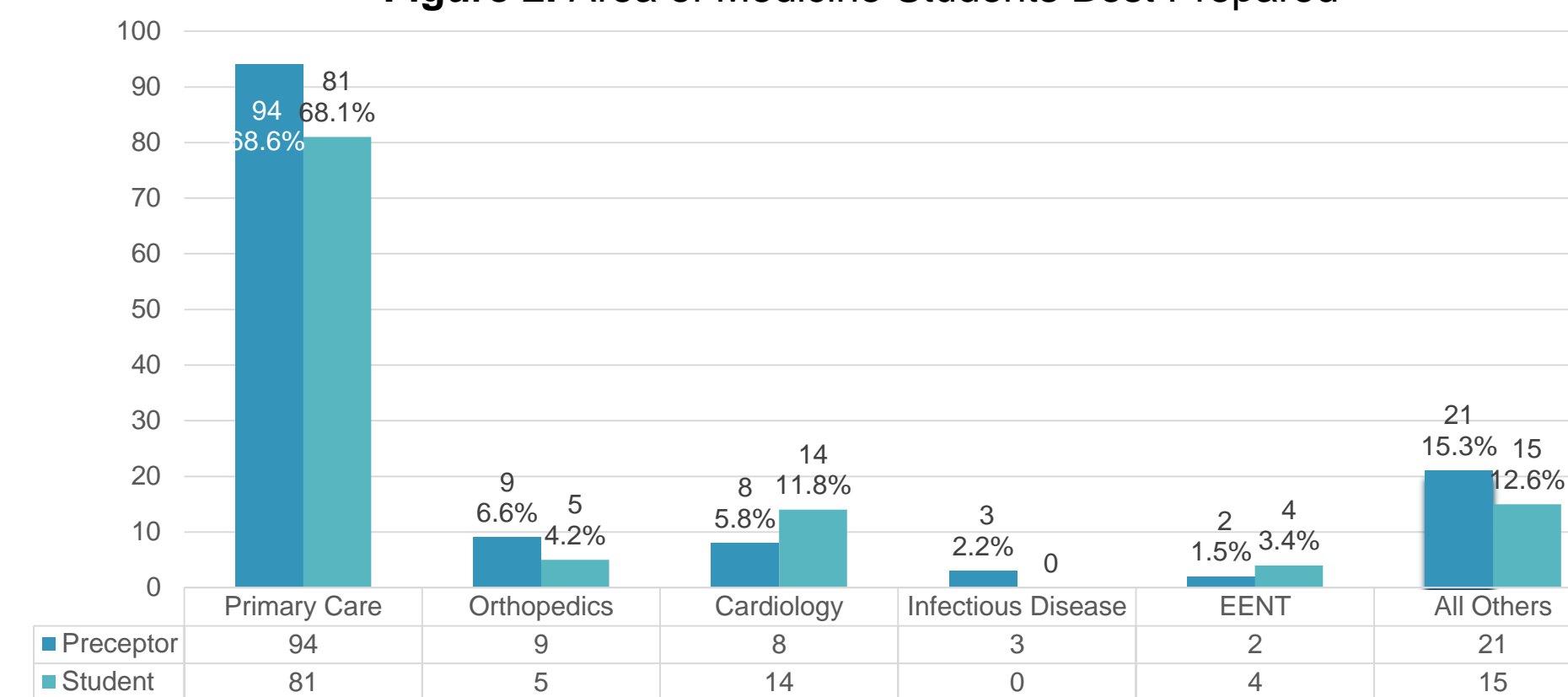
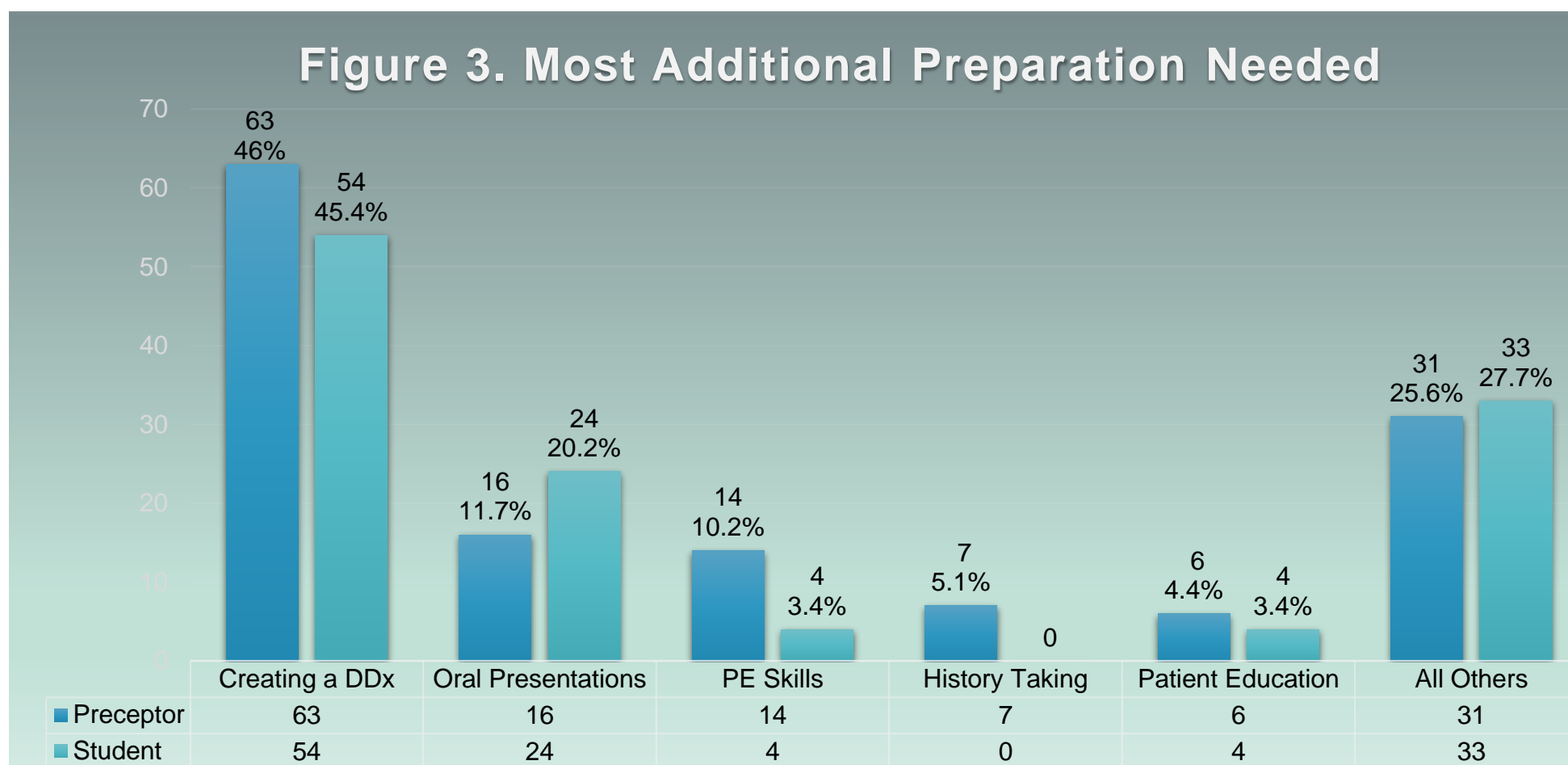


Figure 3. Most Additional Preparation Needed



## Student Results

- 119 students completed the survey
- 96.7% of students were in their clinical year or graduates of a PA program. Only 3.4% were in their didactic year of PA school.
- PA students felt well prepared (41.2%) or adequately prepared (43.7%) for clinical rotations
- PA students indicated their strongest attributes are history taking (45.4%), professionalism (21%) and PE skills (12.6%). (See Figure 1)
- Primary care (68.1%) is the area for which PA students think they are best prepared. (See Figure 2)
- The two areas PA students indicated were most in need of additional preparation are Creating a Differential Diagnosis (45.4%) and Oral presentations (20.2%). (See Figure 3)
- Most students had 1 to 2 years (47.1%) of healthcare experience prior to starting PA school
- Of those with healthcare experience, the majority (92%) thought it was helpful in preparing them for clinical rotations.

## Preceptor Results

- 137 preceptors completed the survey
- Preceptors indicated:
  - the strongest attribute of PA students was Professionalism (33.6%) and History Taking (29.2%). (See Figure 1)
  - the area of clinical medicine PA students were best prepared for was Primary care (68.6%). (See Figure 2).
  - PA students needed the most additional preparation in Creating a Differential Diagnosis (46%). (See Figure 3)
  - PA students were well prepared (43.1%) or adequately prepared (35.8%) for clinical rotations.
- Of the preceptors that have experience training 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical students (n=98), 27.55% thought the PA students were better prepared and 41.84% thought PA students were equally prepared.
- Of the preceptors that have experience training 4<sup>th</sup> year medical student (n=91), 44% thought PA students were equally prepared and 7.7% thought PA student were better prepared.
- 65% of the preceptors have a friend or relative that is a PA.

## Conclusion

- Students and preceptors both had similar perceptions of preparedness.
  - Both perceived primary care as the area of medicine students were best prepared for.
  - Students and preceptors found creating a differential diagnosis was the area perceived most in need of additional preparation.
  - Both students and preceptors felt the top two strongest attributes of students were professionalism and history taking.
- Limitations of the study include:
  - There was a small response rate. Only 119 students responded to the survey, while there are between 30 to 100 students in each of the 224 PA programs across the country. The survey may not be generalizable to all PA students.
  - The survey instrument was not a validated instrument.
  - The survey asked students their perception of preparedness for rotations, however students may not accurately be able to evaluate their preparedness level.
- Further research is needed to determine more specific areas of medicine where additional preparation is needed.
- Identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses as perceived by both the preceptors and students can help PA programs gain insight into areas that need to be improved in the curriculum.

## References

Brown, D. & Sivahop, JN. (2017). Challenges of Clinical Education. *Journal of Physician Assistant Education*, 28(3S), S28-S32. Physician Assistant Education Association (2016). By the Numbers: Program Report 31. *Physician Assistant Education*. Retrieved from [http://paeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Program-Survey-31\\_V4\\_Updated-June-2017.pdf](http://paeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Program-Survey-31_V4_Updated-June-2017.pdf).