

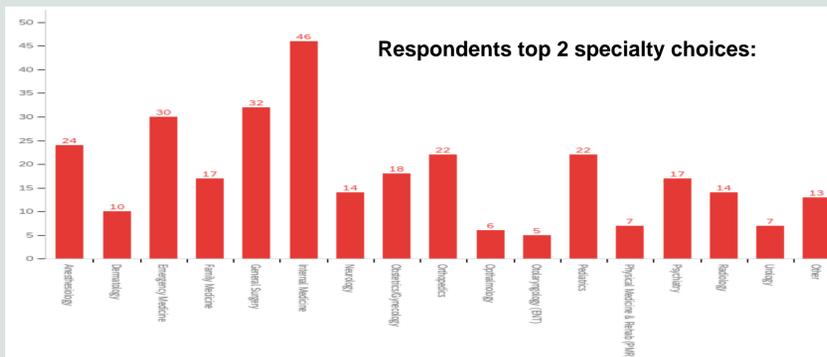
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INTRODUCTION

- USMLE Step 1 numeric scores have been a large component of residency applications, indicating an applicant's competitiveness.
- The recent Step 1 change from numerical to pass/fail nonnumeric outcome shifts emphasis to other aspects of residency applications, including their numeric Step 2 score, research, extracurriculars, and letters of recommendation.
- Since specialties differ widely in competitiveness, focus on exam scores and other application components, the impact of the Step 1 change may differ based on a student's chosen specialty.
- We sought to determine how student perceptions of Step 1 format change were impacted by their desired specialty choice. To our knowledge, there are no prior studies on this topic.

METHODS

- Students and faculty collaborated on a survey for the Class of 2024 at WSUSOM to determine perceptions and impact of the Step 1 format change.
- We gathered data on specialty interests, perceived stress, and newly emphasized factors of residency applications.
- The survey was anonymous, optional, IRB-approved, offered via Qualtrics. 140 responses (47%) were received.



- Students were grouped based on specialty choice into a Primary Care (PC) group and a Competitive Specialty (CS) group
- PC group included students interested in Pediatrics, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, and OB/GYN
- CS group included students interested in Ophthalmology, Surgery Radiology, Otolaryngology, Urology, Dermatology & Orthopedics
- Both groups had representation from a diverse range of races and gender identities

RESULTS

Support of the change to non-numerical scoring differed based on specialty interest with those in the competitive specialties group LESS supportive

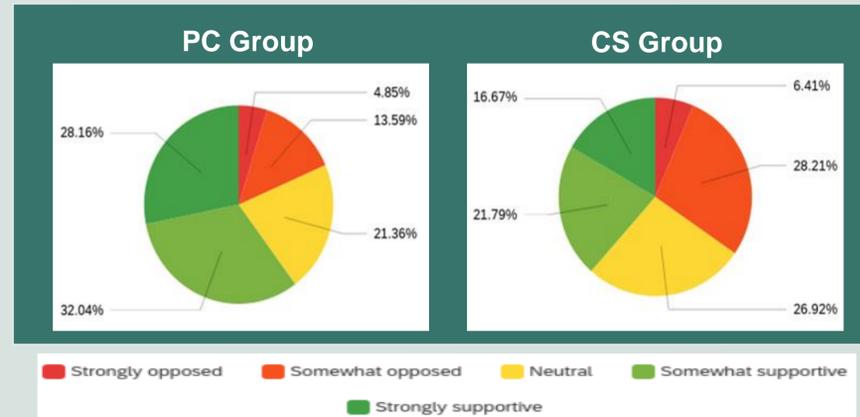


Figure 1: 60.2% of the PC group versus 38.5% of CS group was strongly/somewhat supportive of changing Step 1 to a non-numeric format. 18.5% of the PC group versus 34.6% of CS group was strongly/somewhat opposed to this Step 1 format change.

Most students in both groups felt the most important deciding factor in residency applications would be Step 2

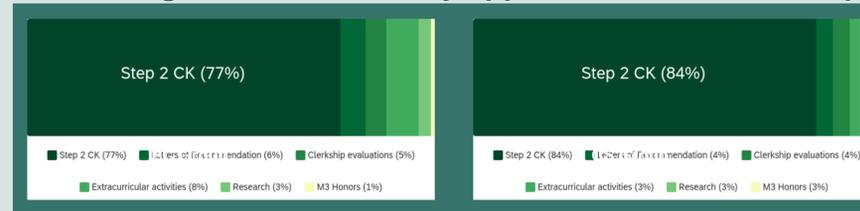


Figure 2: 77% of the PC group and 84% of the CS group felt that Step 2 CK scores would be the most important deciding factor in residency applications.

A greater percent of students in the competitive specialty group reported studying LESS for the nonnumeric Step 1

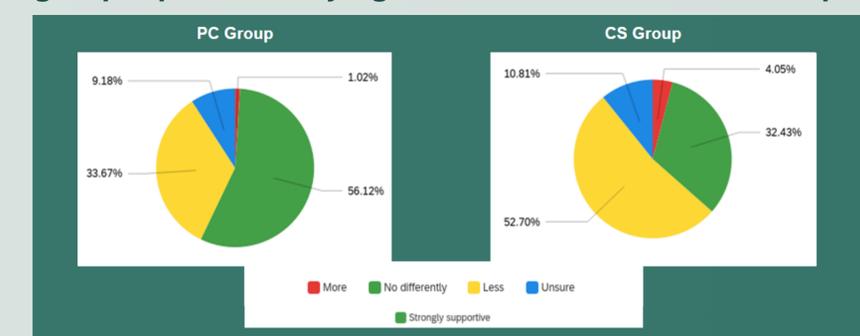


Figure 3: 52.7% of CS group vs. 33.7% of PC group stated they studied less for Step 1 because it was a non-numerical score compared to a numerically scored exam.

DISCUSSION

- The change of Step 1 to non-numerical scoring may impact students differently based on their chosen medical specialty.
- Students in the CS group were more opposed to the change to non-numerical scoring change than students in the PC group. This may be because the nonnumeric format change reduced one key way to distinguish themselves during an exceptionally competitive residency selection process.
- When asked which factors may be more important in residency applications after the Step 1 scoring change, both groups felt the main deciding factor would be Step 2 CK scores. The PC group emphasized extracurriculars as the next most important factor whereas the CS group almost equally emphasized letters of recommendation, research, and extracurriculars. One direction of future study is to survey program directors and compare the importance of these different aspects based on their specialty.
- A larger portion of the CS group reported they studied less (52%) since the Step 1 non-numerical scoring change versus the PC group (33.7%). A variety of reasons could have caused this difference, including more preparation during preclinical years and studying to pass versus studying to score high.
- Future studies may include how students who took the Step 1 in this new format view the Step 2 CK and changes in study habits during the clinical years.
- One limitation of this study was that it was done at one institution, sampling more students from many institutions could further validate this study.

CONCLUSIONS

- **A student's desired specialty choice may impact some perceptions related to Step 1 and impact their experiences.**
- **Students may need different kinds of support to meet their needs during this pivotal time and may elect to emphasize different areas of their application, such as extracurriculars, letters of recommendation, or research.**
- **More information of relative importance and resources in these areas as well as effective ways to optimize Step 2 studying may help students feel more supported while navigating this new landscape of residency applications.**

References

<https://medschoolinsiders.com/medical-student/most-competitive-specialties/>
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