

BRIEF REPORT

MATRICULATING STUDENT SURVEY 2013

Health and Well-Being

OVERVIEW

In 2013, the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA or the Association) reinstated the Matriculating Student Survey in order to gain a better perspective of the characteristics of first-year physician assistant (PA) students. After survey development, pilot testing, and submission to human subjects review board, PAEA administered the survey in September 2013. Due to this administration date, most respondents were already enrolled in a PA program prior to completing the survey, as approximately 90% of students matriculated into their programs in August 2013 or prior. This may have influenced how matriculants responded to the survey, notably the findings from questions regarding health, well-being, and how they spent their time prior to matriculation.

For the purposes of this issue brief, the terms “matriculants” and “students” will be used interchangeably. In this report, comparisons were made between students enrolled in a PA program longer than six weeks (those who matriculated between January and July 2013; this group of students will be referred to as “earlier matriculants”) and students enrolled six or fewer weeks at the time of the survey administration (between August and December 2013; this group of students will be referred to as “later matriculants” for the purpose of this brief). Table 1 shows the number and percentage of matriculants in each group, as well as the number of programs each group represented.

Table 1. Students and Programs by Time of Matriculation

	January-July 2013 Earlier Matriculants		August-December 2013 Later Matriculants		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students	2,329	59.2	1,607	40.8	3,936	100
Programs	100	60.6	65	39.4	165	100

Later matriculants rated aspects of their health and well-being more positively than did earlier matriculants.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Respondents were asked to consider aspects of their health and well-being in the past week and rate each on a 10-point scale, with “1” representing “as bad as it can be” and “10” representing “as good as it can be.” Figure 1 compares earlier and later matriculants and the rates at which they responded feeling positively (an “8” or higher on the aforementioned scale) towards statements regarding their health and well-being.

Overall, later matriculants rated aspects of their health and well-being more positively than did earlier matriculants. The largest difference (8%) between the groups’ ratings of each aspect was in the overall physical well-being category.

Figure 1. Percentage of Matriculants Positively Rating their Health and Well-Being, by Time of Matriculation

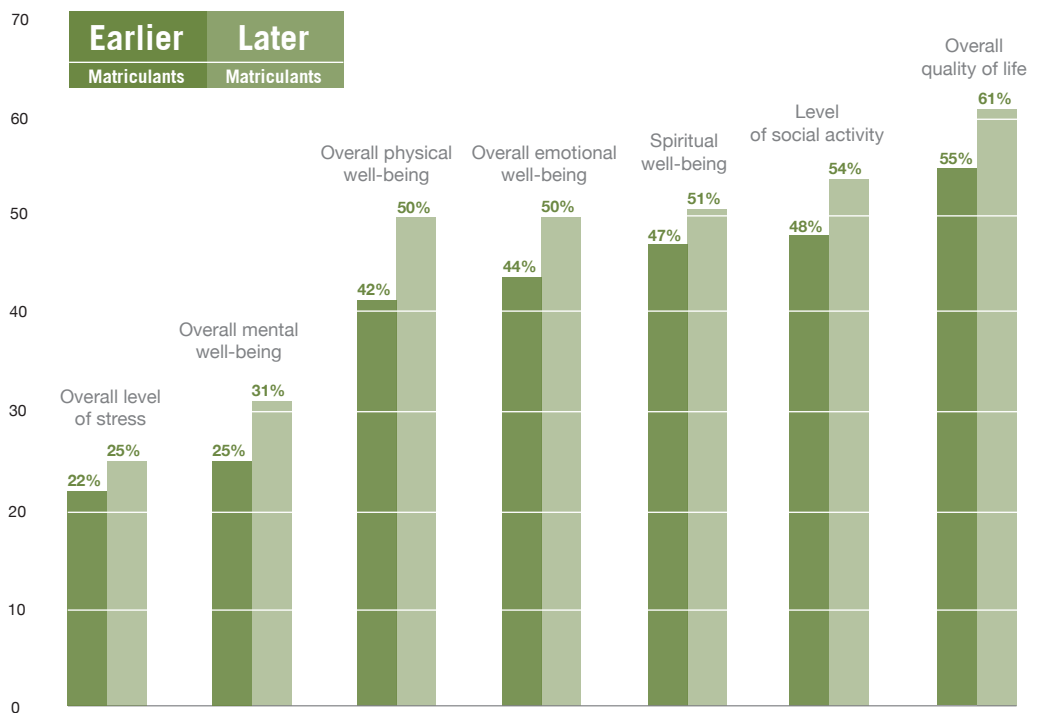


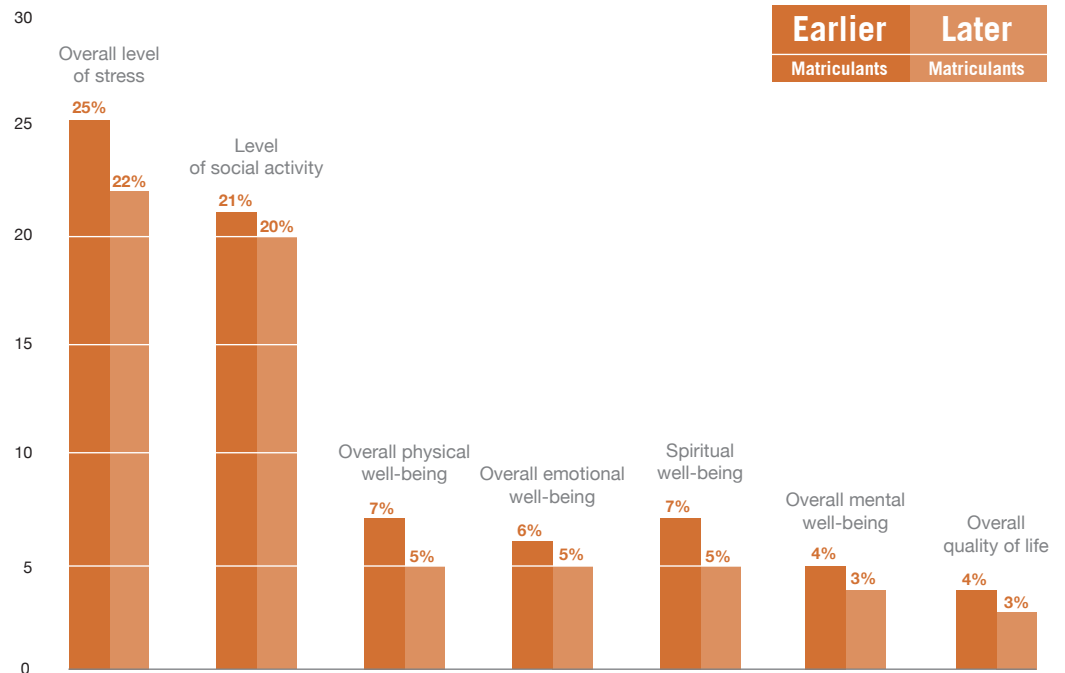
Figure 2 displays the rates at which each group of matriculants reported feeling negatively (a “3” or lower on the scale) towards statements about their health and well-being in the past week.

Regardless of their matriculation date, respondents indicated higher rates of feeling negatively towards their level of overall stress than other aspects of their health and well-being.

Earlier matriculants reported feeling negatively towards their level of stress at higher rates than did later matriculants.

Earlier matriculants reported feeling negatively towards their level of stress at higher rates (25%) than did later matriculants (22%). This is most likely a result of these students being further into the PA curricula and having a more demanding workload.

Figure 2. Percentage of Matriculants Negatively Rating their Health and Well-Being, by Time of Matriculation



LEVEL OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their level of social support in the past week on a 10-point scale, with “1” representing “not at all satisfied” and “10” representing “highly satisfied.” Seventy percent of later matriculants and 68% of earlier matriculants reported feeling satisfied (an “8” or higher on the aforementioned scale) with their level of social support.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

Students, regardless of when they entered into a PA program, felt similarly towards their finances. When asked to rate their level of financial concerns on a 10-point scale, with “1” representing “constant concerns” and “10” representing “no concerns,” roughly a quarter of both earlier (26%) and later (24%) matriculants reported feeling very concerned about their finances (a “3” or lower on the previously described scale). A slightly higher percentage of students in each category (28% of earlier matriculants and 30% of later matriculants) felt little to no concern in regards to their finances (an “8” or higher on the aforementioned scale).

39%

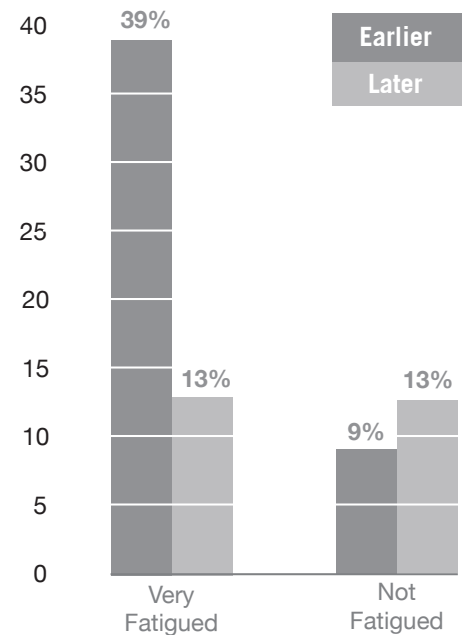
of earlier matriculants reported feeling “very fatigued” in the past week, in comparison to only 13% of later reporting the same.

LEVEL OF FATIGUE

On a 10-point scale, with “1” representing “constant tiredness” and “10” representing “no fatigue,” matriculants were asked to rate their level of fatigue in the past week. Figure 3 shows the ratings of each group; “very fatigued” includes responses “3” and lower, while “not fatigued” includes responses “8” and greater.

Thirty-nine percent of earlier matriculants reported feeling “very fatigued” in the past week, in comparison to only 13% of later matriculants reporting the same, a difference of 25%. Very few (9%) earlier matriculants reported feeling “not fatigued” in the past week. These findings are not surprising, as they are most likely a result of earlier matriculants having spent more time in their respective PA curricula than later matriculants.

Figure 3. Percentage of Matriculants Indicating Their Level of Fatigue, by Time of Matriculation



TIME SPENT PRIOR TO MATRICULATION

Students were asked to consider how they spent the majority of their time during a typical week prior to their matriculation into a PA program; respondents were able to select up to five answer choices.

Regardless of matriculation date, students indicated spending a majority of their time before entering a PA program doing the following activities: being with friends or family, paid work, exercising/sports, sleeping, and engaging in solitary activity (e.g., reading and watching television; see Table 2).

Table 2. Students' Activities Prior to Matriculation into PA Program, by Time of Matriculations

Activity	Earlier Matriculants		Later Matriculants	
	n	%	n	%
Being with friends or family	2,131	92.6	1,502	94.6
Paid work	1,752	76.1	1,162	73.2
Exercise/sports	1,589	69.0	1,109	69.8
Sleep.....	1,516	65.9	1,020	64.2
Solitary activity.....	1,121	48.7	883	55.6
Preparation and consumption of meals.....	731	31.8	486	30.6
Traveling/commuting.....	664	28.8	647	40.7
Studying/reading/writing for school.....	567	24.6	339	21.3
Attending class or other scheduled edu. activity.....	533	23.2	156	9.8
Volunteer work.....	349	15.2	203	12.8
Research.....	70	3.0	61	3.8
Other.....	131	5.7	85	5.4

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

As previously mentioned, one of the limitations of this report is the number of matriculants who responded to the survey after being enrolled in a PA program for a month or more. This may have influenced how they responded to the survey, especially questions regarding their health and well-being.

Studying the health and wellness of matriculants is important, as these issues may affect retention and completion rates. Further study on the impact of health and wellness issues is needed, and therefore will continue to be areas of focus on subsequent PAEA Matriculating Student Surveys. Beginning in 2014, the survey will be delivered to program directors for administration within the same month of matriculation, which will likely decrease the confounding factor of length of experience in the PA program curriculum. Future exploration is needed to determine if and how these hygiene factors change over the course of a student's education through graduation.