



## BACKGROUND

Burnout is often defined as a prolonged state of emotional exhaustion and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.<sup>1</sup> The medical student population experiences significant rates of burnout,<sup>2</sup> prompting medical educators to construct wellness programs that employ various methods to improve outcomes (e.g., social support, advising, and curricular modifications).<sup>3,4</sup> Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) has demonstrated early signs of benefit in higher education settings.<sup>5,6</sup> However, little research has been done to investigate ACT in medical education. While recent research suggests resilience training in medical education offers some benefit,<sup>7</sup> the extent to which the current literature has incorporated training rooted in a Contextual Behavioral Science (CBS) approach remains unclear.

## PURPOSE

The primary goal of this project was to investigate medical students' perceptions of a customized ACT curriculum at a western U.S. medical school and to use this information to guide future curricular changes within our institution.

## METHOD

**Participants:** First- and second-year medical students (N = 25).

**Setting:**

- Students completed two interactive, online ACT modules, as well as follow-up, in-class or online ACT sessions during their first year of medical school.
- A voluntary post-training survey was administered via Qualtrics.com and collected via third-party (i.e., UNR PST Lab) to maintain anonymity and meet IRB requirements.

**Design:** One-time, within-subject sampling.

## RESULTS

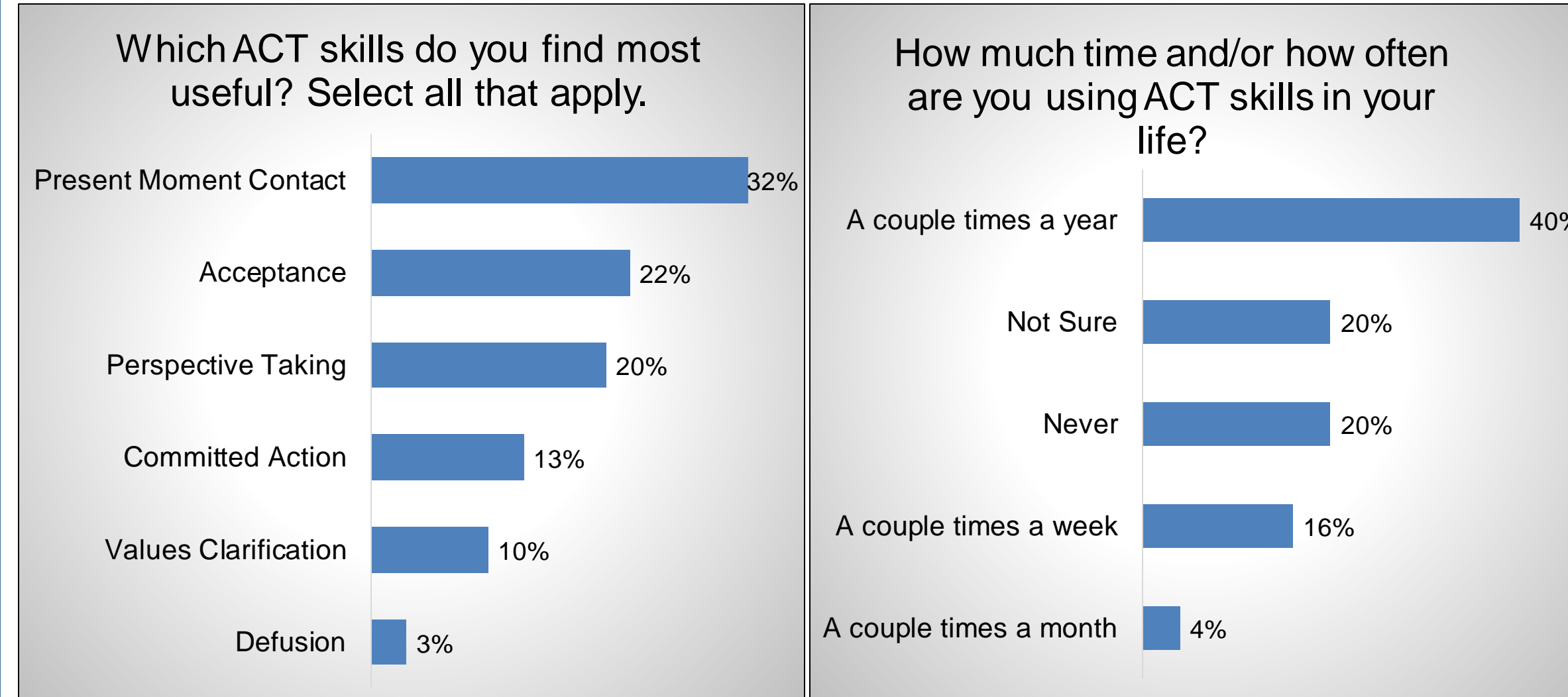


Figure 1. Most useful ACT skills

Figure 2. Frequency of use

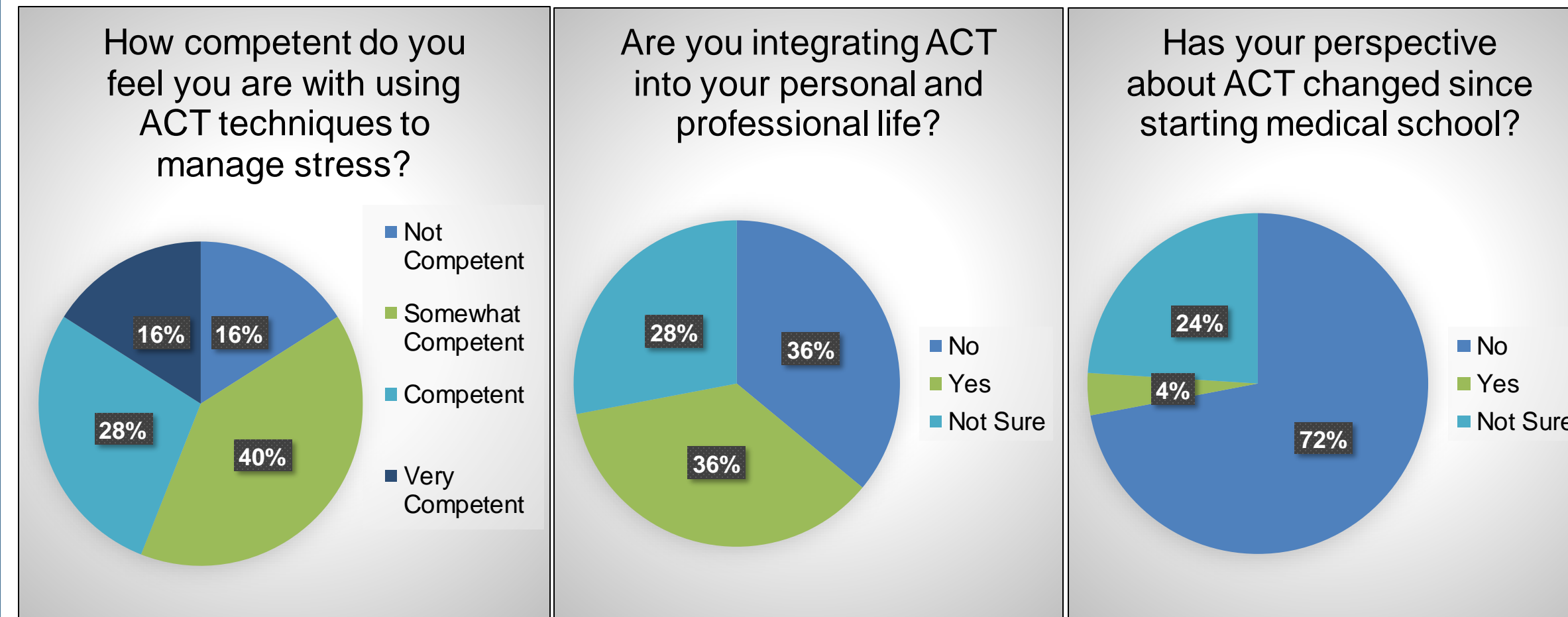


Figure 3. Student competence

Figure 4. Integration in personal and professional life

Figure 5. Perception over time

### How can medical educators better train students to develop psychological flexibility in both their personal and professional lives? (Selected Comments)

- "Talking about their own experiences and vulnerabilities."
- "Maybe group meetings to discuss experiences we have where we use ACT training, or where we think we could have used it."
- "Exposure! I think people have to be exposed to all sorts of different circumstance[s] and people of different walks of life."

## SUMMARY

- "Present Moment Contact" was the most preferred (32%) and "Defusion" the least (3%) (Fig. 1).
- 84% of students reported feeling at least "Somewhat competent" with using ACT techniques to manage stress (Fig. 3).
- While many students (64%) reported using ACT skills at least "A couple times a year," "Never" (20%) and "Not sure" (16%) represented a significant portion of responses (Fig. 2).
- "Not sure" (24%) represented a significant portion of responses regarding perception over time (Fig. 5).
- Integration in personal and professional life demonstrated a nearly even distribution of responses (Fig. 4).

## IMPLICATIONS

- Most students felt at least somewhat competent using ACT techniques to manage stress. However, "Not sure" was a significant portion of responses in several categories (Figs. 2, 4, and 5), perhaps suggesting some degree of confusion or uncertainty regarding skills learned during ACT or the questions on the survey.
- Despite reporting competency in ACT techniques, many students reported "No" or "Not sure" whether they were integrating ACT in their personal and professional lives. Students may not perceive ACT as being useful or relevant in their personal and professional lives.

## DISCUSSION

- Further investigation is needed to determine the role of ACT within medical education and how ACT can be best adapted to meet the needs of the medical student population.
- The medical student population may benefit from ACT metaphors that are specifically designed for it.
- Medical school culture may, in part, account for the responses seen in the post-training survey. Additionally, how the training was implemented likely affects medical student perception of ACT.

**REFERENCES:** Refer to the attached [link](#).