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COVID-19 in 2020: Defining Medical Student Roles During the Pandemic



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Introduction

- The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted medical education globally.
- In the early months of this pandemic, medical students stopped clinical rotations to minimize exposure and to preserve personal protective equipment.
- Strategies for online teaching, sharing information about CoVid-19, and engaging students in clinical work are still evolving as the pandemic continues.

Objective

- Design a course at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine to address the educational needs that have arisen as a result of the pandemic.

Methods

- Rising 3rd and 4th year medical students participated in a 4-week course designed to:
 - Prepare students for leadership
 - Communicate emerging knowledge about the SARS-CoV-2 virus
 - Prepare for the societal impact of the pandemic
 - Maintain student wellness
 - Provide opportunities for service, education, research, and reflection
- Students completed an end-of-course evaluation and a pre-post retrospective survey.

Table 1. Quantification of projects in each service track, and number of students and faculty who contributed to their success.

Service Track	Number of Projects	Number of Students	Number of Faculty
Service to Patients and Healthcare Workers	21	40	17
Service to Self and Peers	20	69	8
Service to Humanity			
Art and Creativity	7	11	5
Communication and Education	15	44	8
Scholarship	33	64	22

Figure 1. Distribution of student response to the prompt “I will use the information learned from components of the course in patient care as a medical student or a physician.”

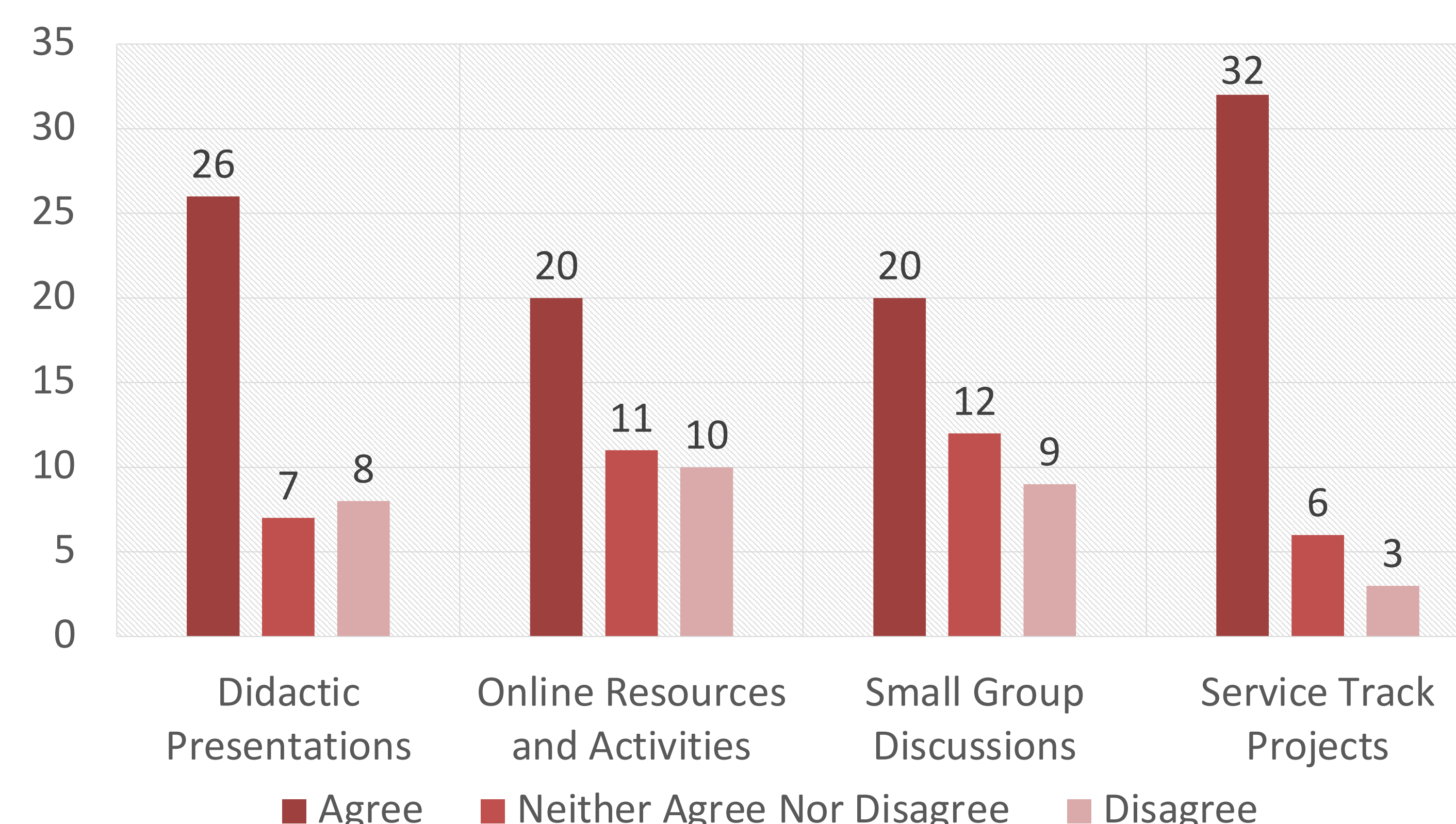


Table 2. Comparison of average rising third- and fourth-year medical students’ assessment of utility of information gained from each teaching modality used in the curriculum, utilizing a 5-point Likert Scale.

Teaching Modality	4 th Years, Ave.	3 rd Years, Ave.	p-value
Didactic Lectures	3.43	3.56	0.732
Online References	3.22	3.33	0.741
Small Groups	3.17	3.33	0.602
Service Tracks	3.61	4.22	0.030*

* Denotes statistically significant difference

Results

- Students completed 96 service, education, and research projects during the course.
- 63 % (133/245) of students completed the end-of-course evaluation and 20% (41/210) completed the pre-post retrospective survey.
- Majority of students indicated that the course met its objectives.
- Significant increase in agreement with the statement “I understand how I can contribute to patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic” (**mean increase 0.51, p =0.006**).
- Significantly greater agreement among rising 3rd years with the statement “I believe my service projects have added value to my medical education” (**mean difference 0.41, p =0.047**).

Discussion

- This course successfully helped develop a greater student appreciation for the role of service-learning in medical education.
- Rising 3rd and 4th year medical students demonstrated a strong understanding of the risks they may face as physicians and are eager to contribute to patient care despite those potential risks.
- Service-learning offers valuable opportunities for medical students to influence the health of their communities while away from clinical duties.