

A Cultural Pathway to Osteopathic Medical School: The Native American Pre-Admissions Workshop

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INTRODUCTION

Native Americans (NAs) experience significant health disparities compared to the general US population.¹ Medical education has a key role to play in addressing these inequities; however, it is currently falling short.² Providers lack sufficient knowledge of NA heritage, cultures, perspectives, and social determinants of health.³ Under-representation begins in the medical education pathway, with only 0.3% of residents and merely 0.15% of faculty serving the 2.9% of identifying NAs.^{1,5,7} Because NA health professionals are more likely to serve the NA community, training more NAs has the potential to address current workforce challenges in Indian Country.⁸ However, there is a void in literature specific to the recruitment, training, and development of NA providers in the US workforce. This likely contributes to the limited success of US medical schools to train NA physicians.⁹

OBJECTIVES

Our primary objective is to increase awareness of osteopathic medicine, including introduction of osteopathic practice and philosophy, among NAs interested in pursuing a career in medicine. Our secondary objective was to provide prospective NA applicants exposure to the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes necessary for successful matriculation to osteopathic medical school.

METHODS

Due to COVID-19, the Native American Pre-Admissions (NAPA) Workshops (Spring and Fall 2021) were virtual via the telecommunications platform Zoom. This allowed nationwide participation for learning about the partnership between Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine (OSU-COM) and Cherokee Nation, Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine, clinical skills, admissions, current student perspectives, and how the principles of Osteopathic Medicine parallel traditional NA beliefs and practices. For example, the osteopathic tenets address the body as a unit, with the person representing a combination of body, mind, and spirit. These same principles embody wellness and healing beliefs for many NAs.

RESULTS

NAPA Workshop Overview

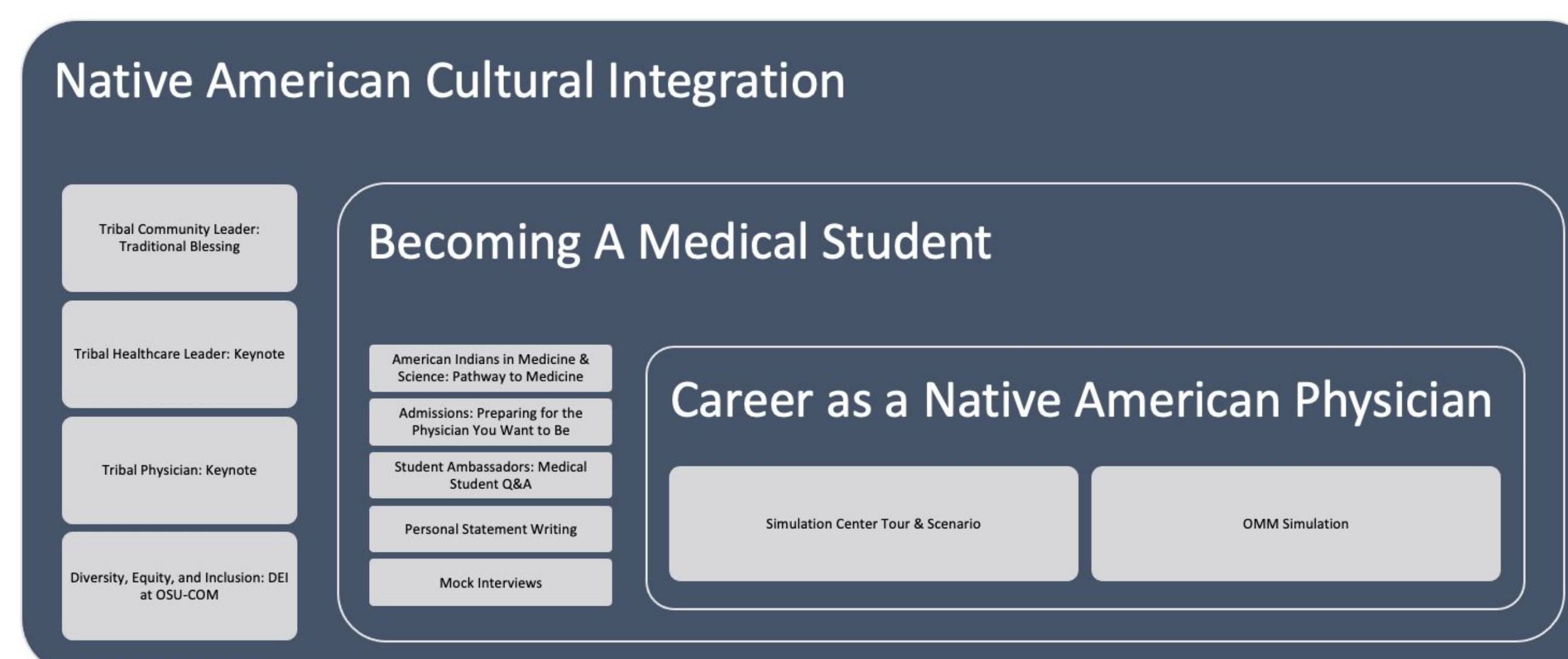


Figure 1. Participants engaged in cultural integration through keynote addresses from leadership within the NA medical community, ranging from community members to healthcare administrators and physicians. University leadership provided a wide-lens view of the work being done in diversity from the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion along with the Office of American Indians in Medicine and Science. Participants learned how about the pathway to medical school through a series of talks and guided activities, including how to write personal statements, the application process, and mock interviews. Participants learned about the future career as a NA physician through observing NA medical students complete a Simulated Clinical Scenario and an Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine (OMM) Simulation.



Inaugural NAPA Workshop Survey: Participant Plans

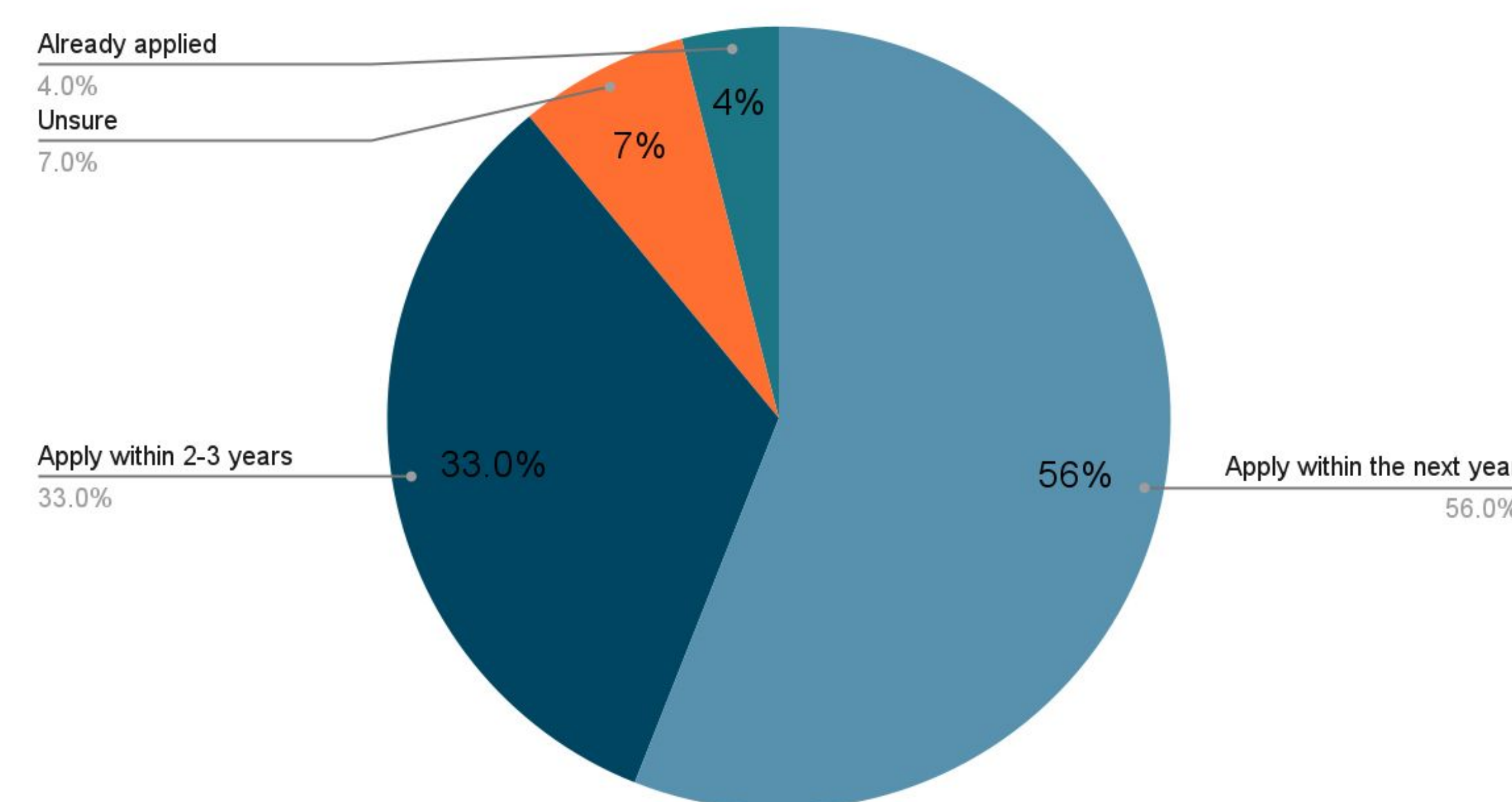


Figure 2. At the time of the inaugural NAPA conference that 56% of participants planned on applying to medical school within the year, 33% within the next 2-3 years, 7% were unsure and 4% had already applied.

Number of Students who Applied or Got Accepted

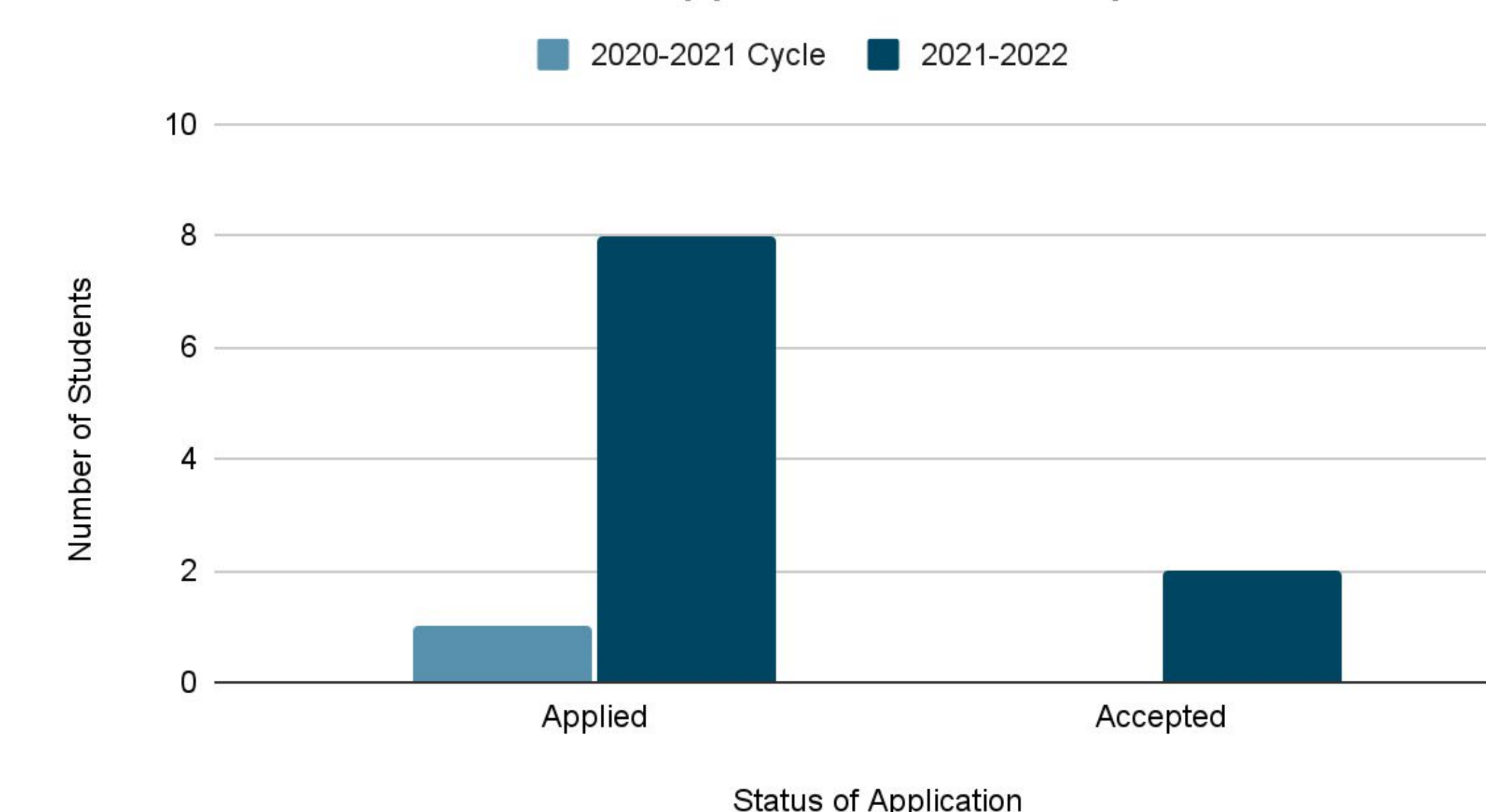


Figure 3. Data obtained from both conferences includes a total of 41 students participate. 27 students participated in the spring of 2021, while 14 participated in the fall of 2021.

DISCUSSION

NAPA Workshop participants gained exposure to Native American (NA) healthcare leaders and cultural integration of medicine. Prospective students learned how to apply to osteopathic medical school and transition into being students themselves while receiving insight into a future career as a NA physician. The NAPA Workshop is an innovative program led by NA medical students. Therefore, implementing an intervention within the NA community itself to increase outreach, education, and mentorship for increased NA enrollment in medical school. This project builds upon the osteopathic practice and principle that the body is capable of self-regulation, self-healing, and health maintenance on the population level by providing interventions to heal the lack of physicians serving the NA community from within the community itself.

CONCLUSION

Building on OSU-COM's existing pathway programs focused on underrepresented groups, including Native Explorers, Native OKStars, Operation Orange, and the Minority Association of Pre-Medical Students (MAPS) Conference, the Native American Students of Osteopathic Medicine (NASOM) organization created the NAPA Workshop. The Student-led NAPA Workshop has resulted in an additional, culturally sensitive pathway for increased recruitment of NA medical students, the most underrepresented group in medicine, furthering OSU-COM's mission to recruit, train, and retain physicians serving rural and tribal communities.

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