



COLLEGE OF  
HEALTH PROFESSIONS

# Perceived Stress Levels in Relation to Program of Study

Kellan Mallory, Erin Dial, & Craig Coleman  
Marshall University



COLLEGE OF  
HEALTH PROFESSIONS

## Background

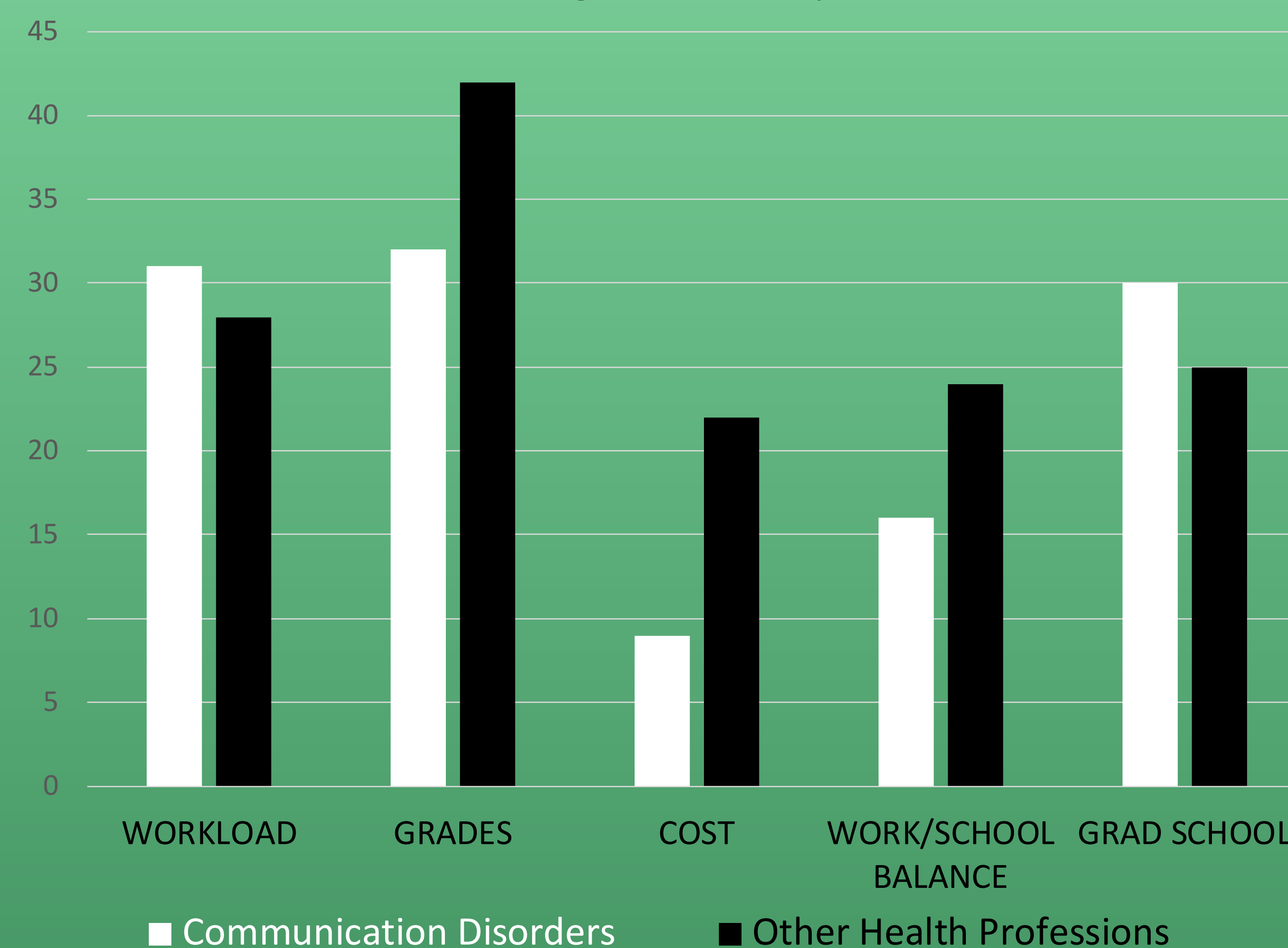
Students in health profession training programs have reported high levels of stress throughout the course of their studies (Amanya, Nakitende, & Ngabirano, 2017). Unmanaged, it can have an adverse effect on a student's social, emotional, and cognitive well-being. In Communication Disorders (CD) training programs specifically, students have reported high stress levels both at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Beck, Verticchio, & Schaab, 2015), which may be due in part to rigorous coursework, clinical expectations, interpersonal factors, etc. A few efforts have been made to better understand the issue and support the mental health needs of CD students. Beck, Verticchio, Seeman, Milliken, & Schaab (2017) implemented a mindfulness program over one academic year, which yielded positive results in reducing students' perceived stress. However, much remains unclear about the prevalence of the issue, and if and how perceived stress is different among CD students compared to students in other Health Professions programs (e.g., Nursing, Physical Therapy, Dietetics, etc.). Understanding these topics would help instructors recognize concerns in students' holistic functioning and embed stress coping strategies into students' training program.

## Purpose & Methods

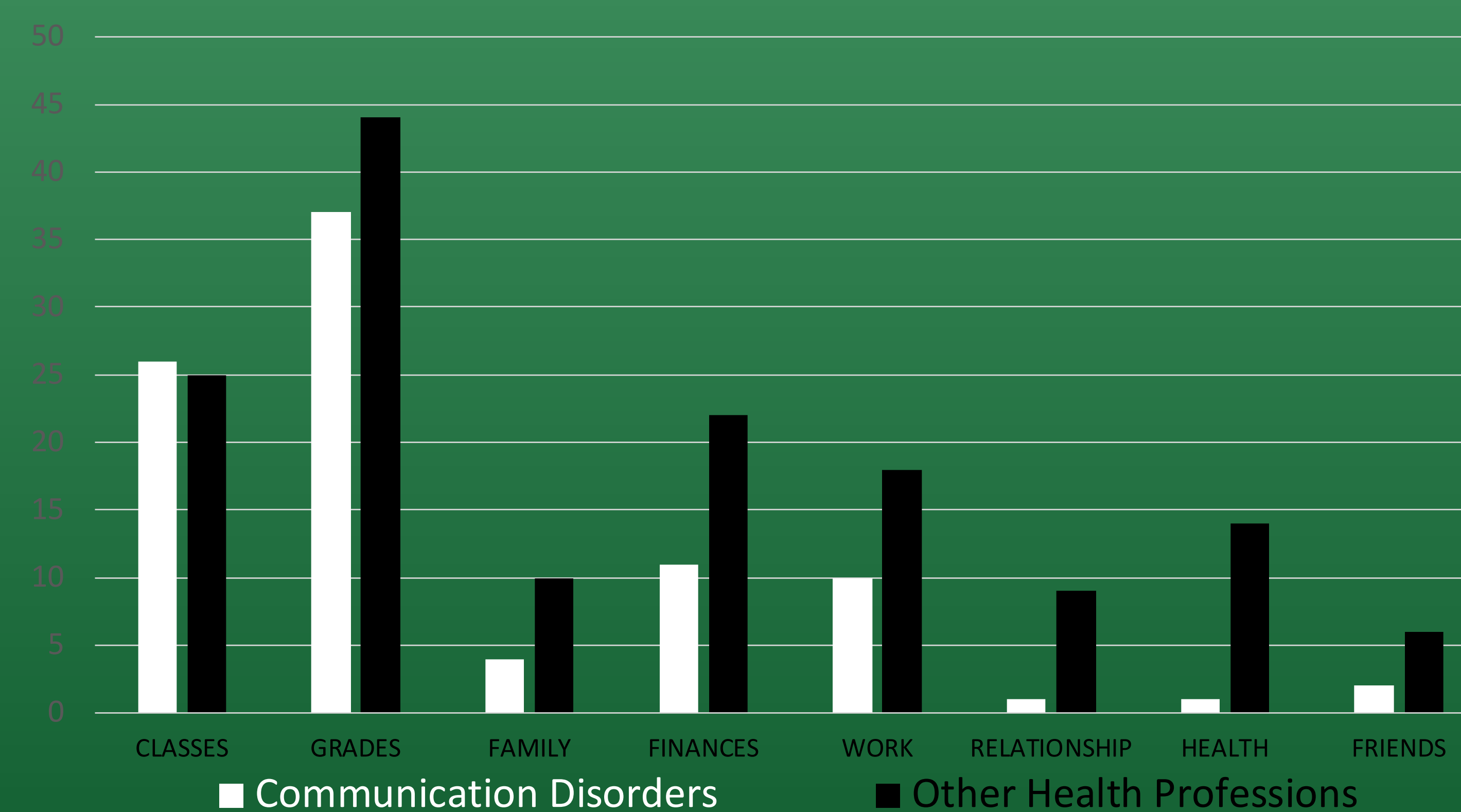
The purpose of this study was twofold. The first was to measure students' perceived stress level related to various factors within their specific program of study (e.g., workload, grades) as well as other factors (e.g., health, relationships, etc.). The second was to assess whether or not differences existed between CD and other HP students. The study consisted of a 14-item survey comprised of questions assessing the physical, emotional, and psychological effects students feel in relation to stress. Forty-five Communication Disorders students and 63 other general Health Professions students completed the survey. Results between the groups were compared descriptively.

## Results

Stressors Directly Related to Students' Program of Study



Factors Impacting Students' Overall Stress



Disclosures: The authors have no financial or non-financial relationships related to this study.

## Discussion

Both the CD and HP groups reported highest levels of stress pertaining to program workload and grades. The most notable differences between CD students and HP students, when looking at stressors related to program of study, were found in cost, work/school balance, and graduate school admissions. Overall, HP students reported higher stress levels due to cost of education and work/school balance, while CD students reported a higher occurrence of stress related to graduate school admissions. This may be attributed to the fact that the master's degree is the entry level in the field of CD, whereas many other HP (e.g., nursing) are able to enter the profession with a bachelor's degree. Further, when looking at factors impacting overall stress, HP students have higher occurrences of significant stress in all areas other than classes. This may reflect that CD students possess more effective coping mechanisms than other health professions due to the demanding and competitive nature of the program, and the fact that students in CD may have more rigorous admission criteria, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Overall, HP students generally reported higher levels of stress than CD students. Future studies should aim to explore this trend, which may involve further analyzing students' coping mechanisms. In addition, students' resiliency levels should be measured using a standardized tool in order to assess their ability to handle adverse situations. Resiliency results, coupled with perceived stress levels, would be useful in understanding the holistic functioning of students. Ultimately, it will be important to provide students with effective stress relief tools in order to promote personal wellness and academic growth in students' respective fields.

## References

- Amanya, S. B., Nakitende, J., Ngabirano, T. D. (2017). A cross-sectional study of stress and its sources among health professional students at Makerere University, Uganda. *Nursing Open*, 4,5(1), 70-76.
- Beck, A., Verticchio, H., & Schaab, H. (2015, November). Perfectionism, stress, & CSD students. Poster session presented at the Annual Convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Denver, CO.
- Beck, A. R., Verticchio, H., Seeman, S., Milliken, E., & Schaab, H. (2017). A Mindfulness Practice for Communication Sciences and Disorders Undergraduate and Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Students: Effects on Stress, Self-Compassion, and Perfectionism. *Am J Speech Lang Pathol*, 26(3), 893-907. doi: 10.1044/2017\_AJSLP-16-0172.
- Misra, R. & McKean, M. (2000). College students' academic stress and its relation to their anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 16(1), 41-51.