An Evaluation of Board Preparation Resources

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INTRODUCTION

Every year second year medical students prepare to take the COMLEX-USA Level 1 administered by the NBOME. It consists of 400 questions given over the course of eight hours testing students' knowledge in anatomy, behavioral science, biochemistry, genetics, immunology, microbiology, Osteopathic Principles and Practice, pathology, pharmacology, physiology, and health promotion and disease prevention. This examination is the first in a series of exams towards becoming a licensed osteopathic physician in the United States. The majority of students will scour the internet and receive advice from other students who previously took the examination to formulate a personalized study strategy. Many of these products boast that they can help students achieve their ideal score by giving testimonials of students who scored in the 90th percentile. There are numerous board preparation resources on the market and many students are avid believers of the UFAPS (UWorld, First Aid, Pathoma, and Sketchy) method. In fact, the Zanki deck, which was released on Meddit, a sub thread on Reddit, a couple of years ago uses UFAPS to make the cards in the 10,000+ deck. In this study we asked students of Oklahoma State University Class of 2021 to evaluate several resources for their usage and value in preparation of the COMLEX-USA Level 1 Exam. Students were also asked several other questions pertaining to their board preparation, such as months spent preparing and the number of board questions completed. Data from this study will be given to future classes to aid them in preparation for their COMLEX-USA Level 1 examination.

METHODS

A team of four professionals and one medical student developed a survey over a series of meetings. The goal was to create a short survey that asked students (class size of 120) to evaluate thirty-seven (37) popular board preparation resources regarding their personal use and perceived value. Once the survey template was completed in Microsoft Word, it was then formatted to fit the Survey Monkey software. The final version of the survey was sent to the students in Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine Class of 2021 via email. Data was extracted from the survey responses into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, where responses were given numerical value (i.e., extremely effective=1, moderately effective=2, and ineffective=3) and analyzed. Questions with open-response fields (number of questions completed, and months spent preparing for boards) were re-coded into ranges as seen on the graphs.
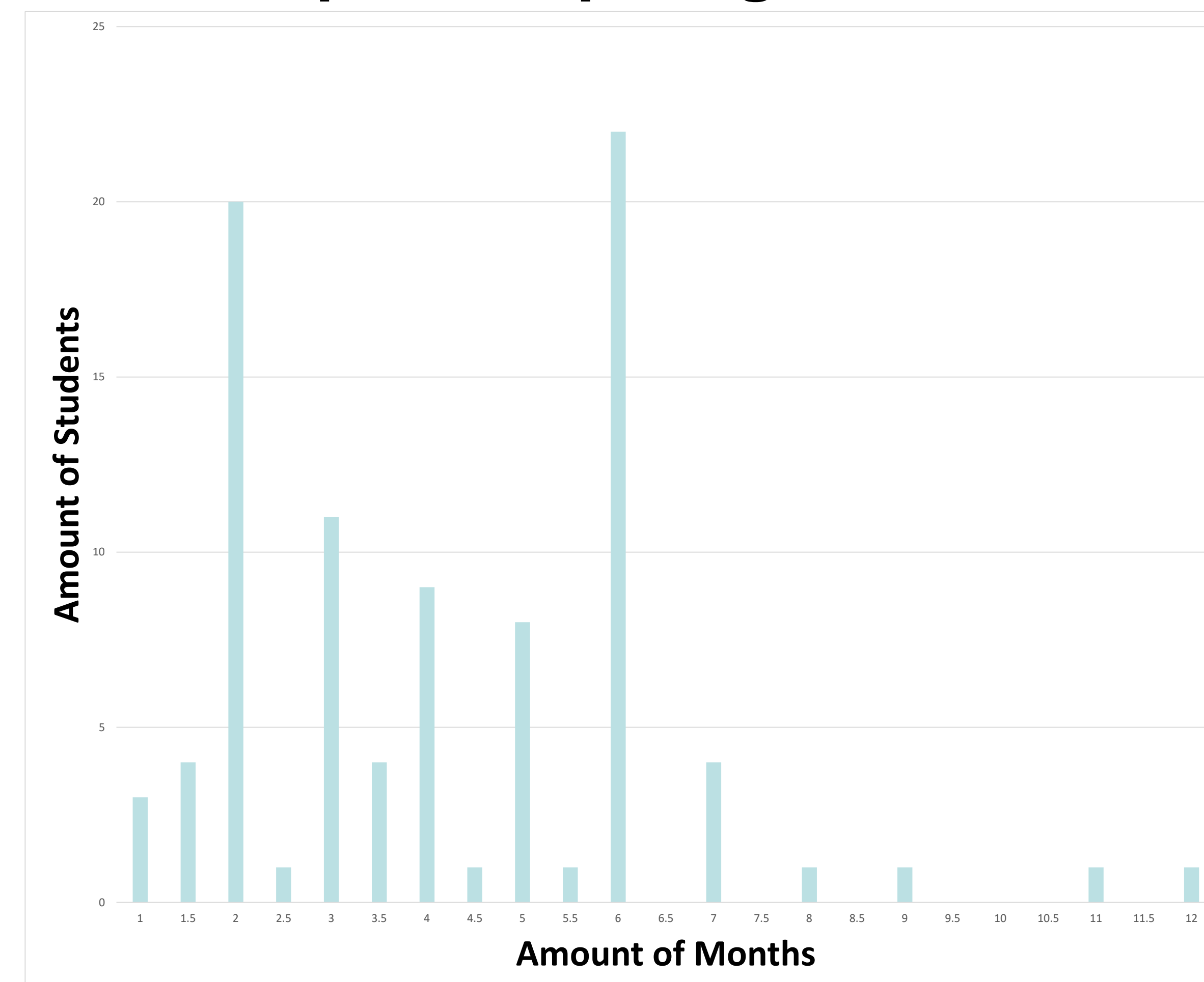
RESULTS

Months Spent Preparing for Boards

Figure 1: The self-reported amount of months spent preparing for boards. Mean=4.33 months Mode=6 months Median=4 months

Value of Board Preparation Resources

Figure 3: Value of board preparation resources arranged in order of extremely effective to least effective. Item with the greatest total response (mode) is Sketchy Micro.
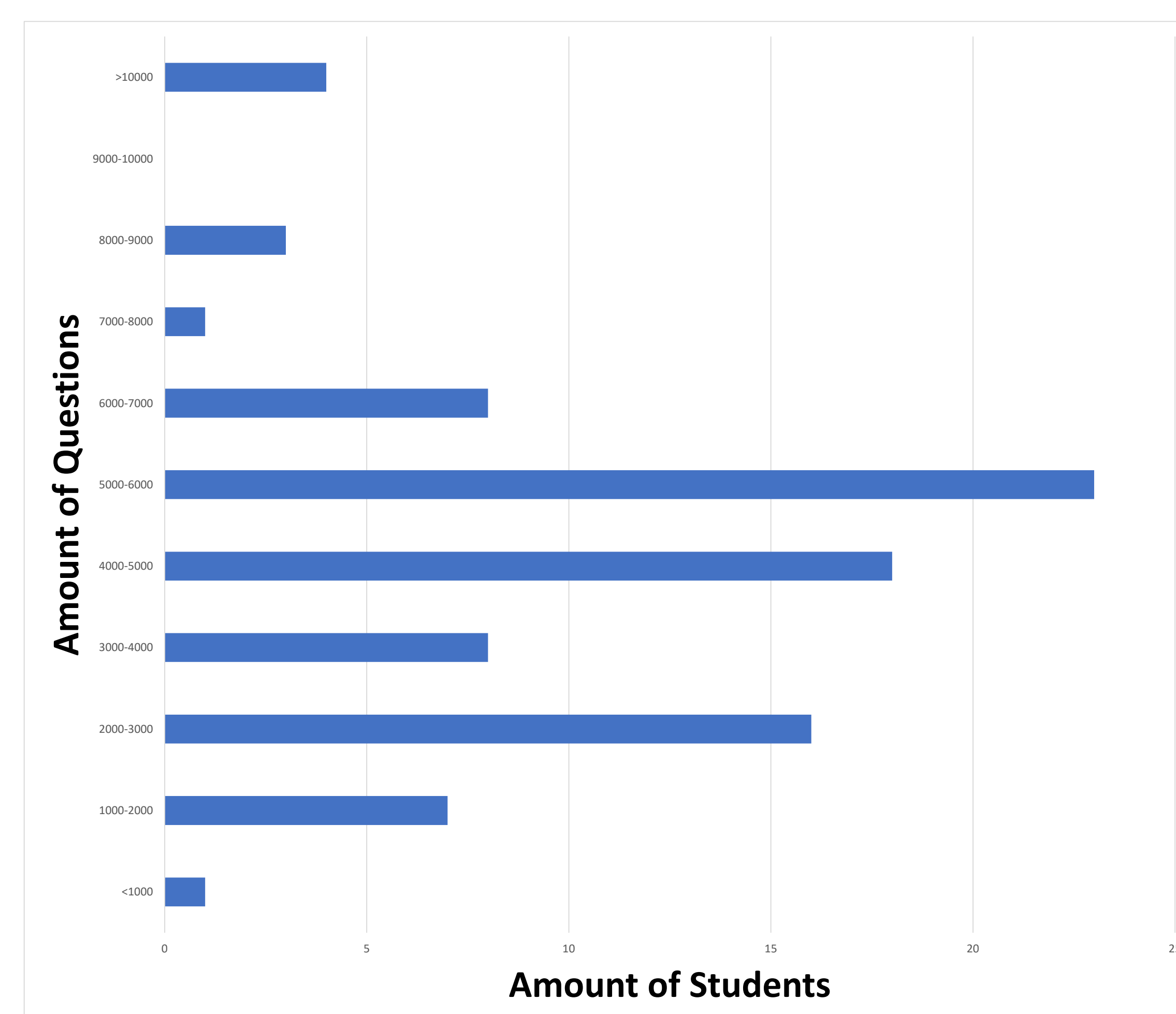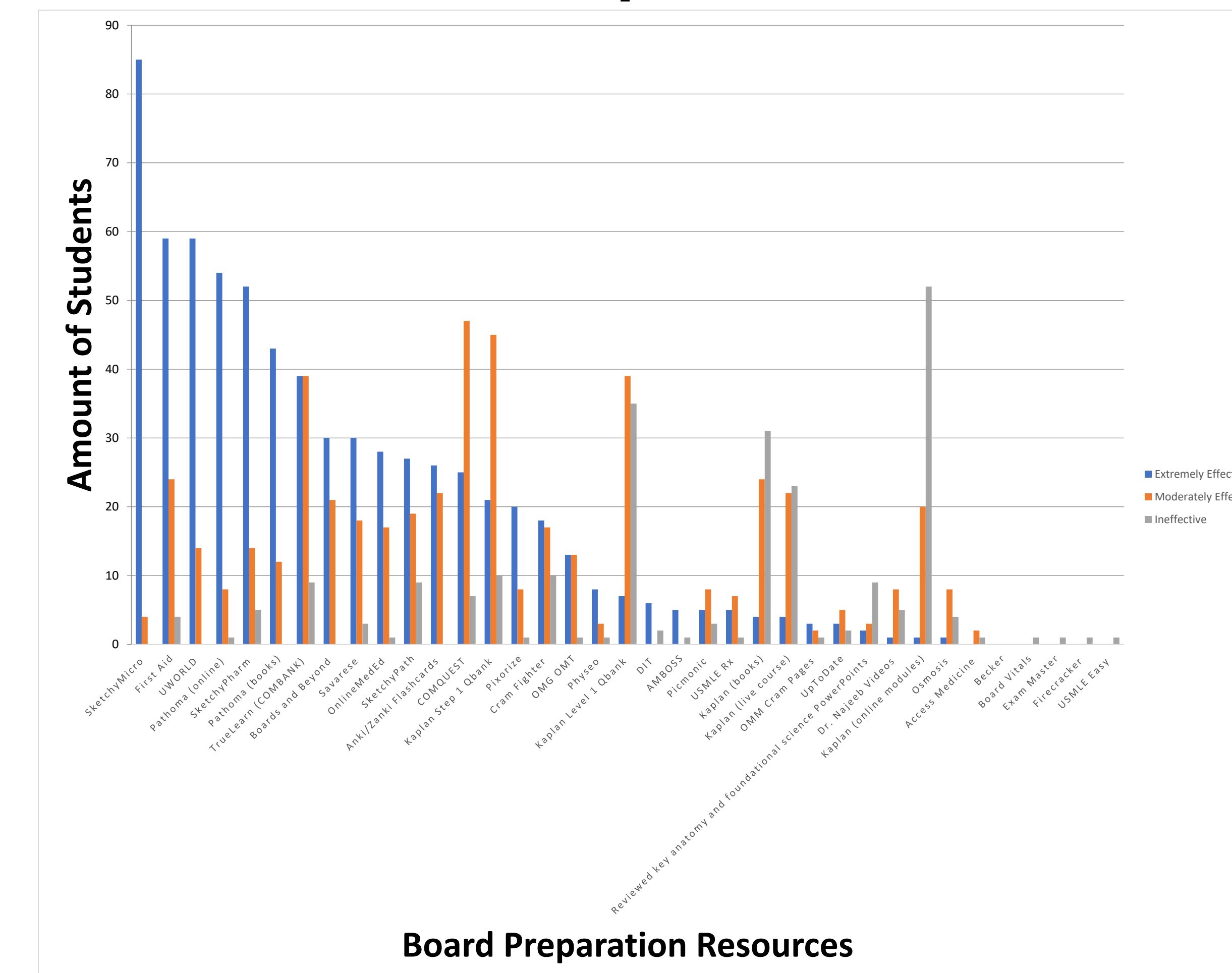
Amount of Questions Completed

Figure 2: The amount of questions completed, self-reported. Mean=4547.96 questions Mode=5000 questions Median=4500 questions
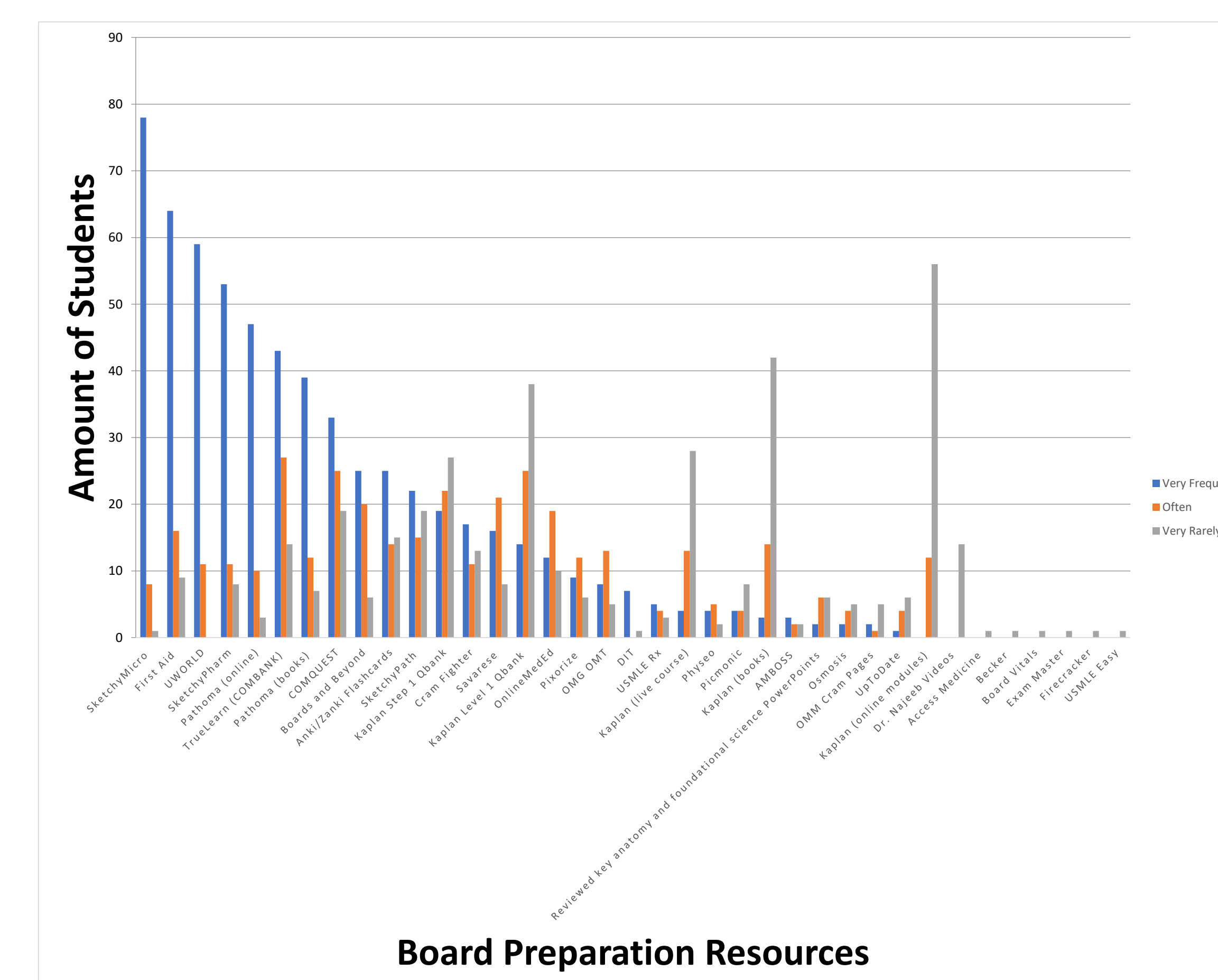
Usage of Board Preparation Resources

Figure 4: Board preparation resources in order of used frequently to rarely used. Item with the greatest response (i.e., mode) is First Aid.

Figure 2. Location of items that appeared only once.

OBSERVATIONS

There were 94 respondents. Of those respondents 42.39% were females and 57.6% were male. For students of Osteopathic schools taking the USMLE is optional, within the OSU-COM Class of 2021, 38.30% planned/took the USMLE, 54.26% did not plan on taking the exam, and 7.45% were still undecided. As seen in figure 1, the majority of students stated they spent 6 months prepping, but the average amongst all students for preparation is 4.19 months. Most students completed about 5000-6000 questions (figure 2). The average amount of question completed is 4547.9. Because the key question was which resources student found most helpful in their board preparation figure 3 and 4 where formatted in descending order of resources that were extremely effective and used very frequently. In figure 4, the item with the greatest response is First Aid, but it was not used most frequently. More students used First Aid, yet many of those students used it often or rarely. It is important to note that the Top 5 resources for value and resources are not the same nor are they in the same order. There was also a discrepancy is the number of students rating the resources, of which there are several possible explanations that could be further studied.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

This information can be used to help future classes prepare for the COMLEX-USA Level 1. Having developed this survey, it can be used in future studies to evaluate new resources as they come on the market.

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