

# Field of Dreams? Exploring Nursing Students' Perceptions of DNP-PhD Dual Degree and Bridge Program Options

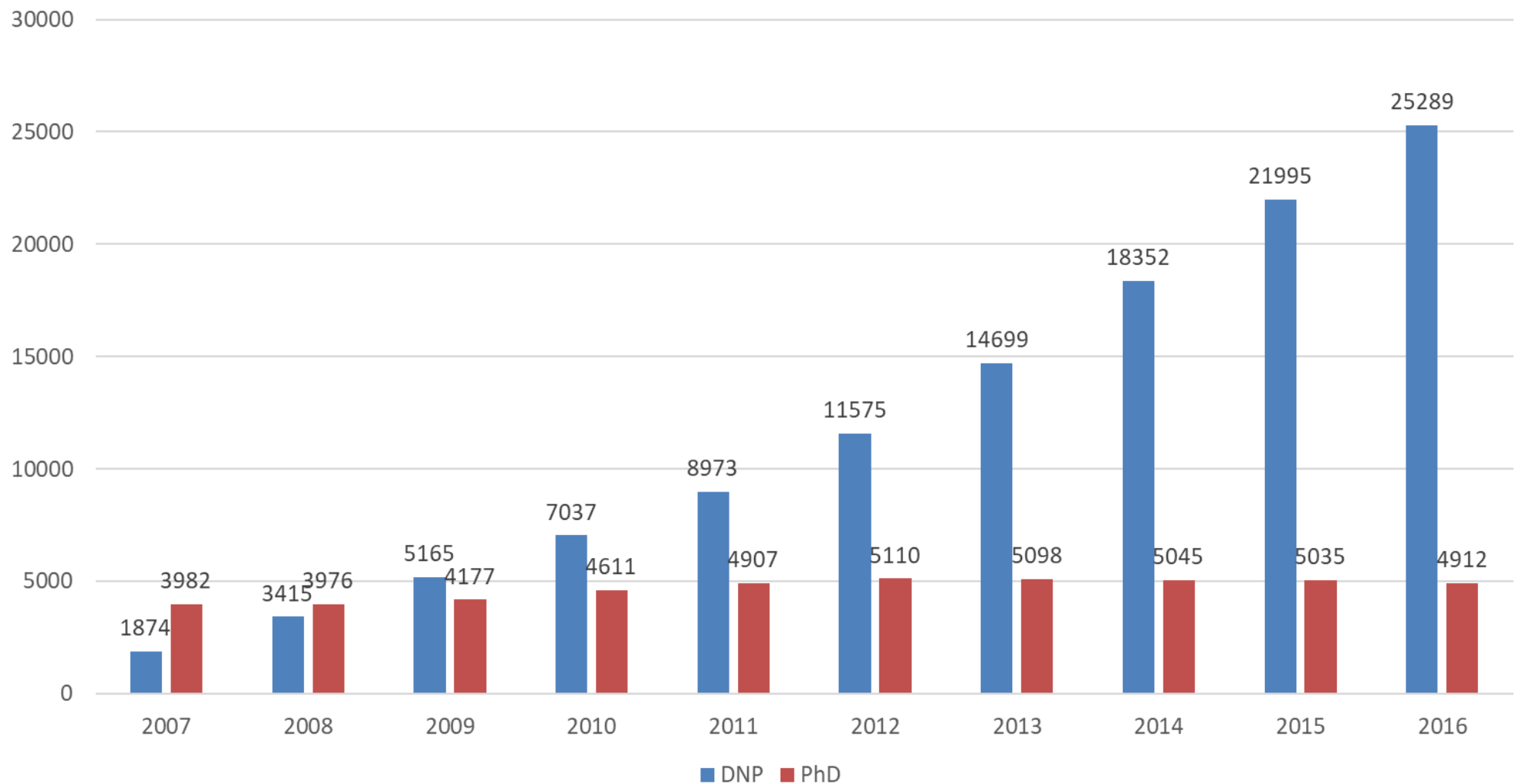
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# DUELING DOCTORATES?

DNP and PhD Enrollment, 2007-2016



Source: AACN, 2017

# DUAL-ING DOCTORATES

- Concerns that DNP programs are “siphoning off” potential PhD applicants
- Dwindling MS→PhD population, pathway
- Synthesizing two distinct foci, two terminal degrees
- Balancing pressures to decrease time to completion and age at entry with program requirements and applicant preparation

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME . . .



. . . but probably worth checking this out first.

# PURPOSE

- To assess interest in
  - DNP/PhD dual degree
  - DNP ↔ PhD bridge degrees among current BSN, MS, DNP and PhD students
- To assess perceptions of advantages, disadvantages, and barriers for doctoral education, dual degree and bridge options

# METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

- Online survey sent to current students(N = 725)  
Spring 2018
- Yes/maybe/no items
  - Current program
  - Interest in doctorate and dual doctorate (BSN, MS)
  - Interest in earning other doctorate (DNP, PhD)
- Open ended questions
  - Interest and disinterest
  - Perceived barriers to earning DNP/PhD dual degree
  - Perceived advantages

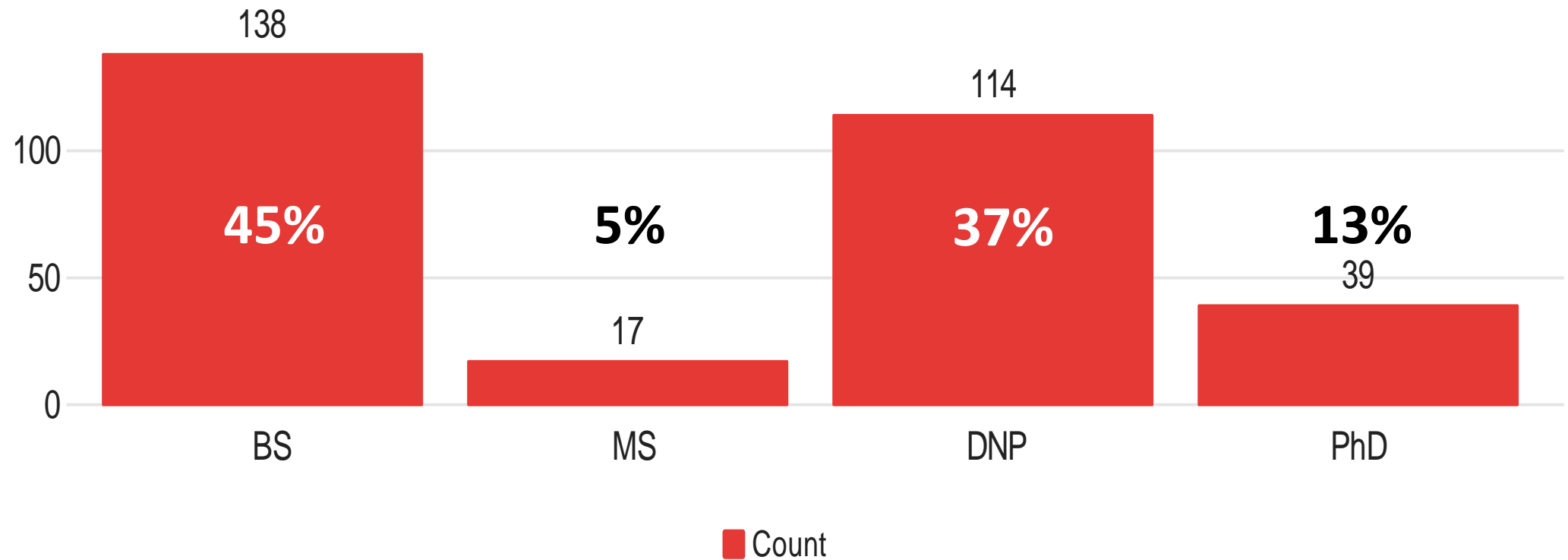
# METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

- Forced choice responses summarized and compared with descriptive statistics
  - “Yes” = definite interest
  - “Maybe” = tentative interest
  - “No” = definite disinterest
- Content and thematic analysis of text responses
  - Overall and aggregated by student group and question
  - Nvivo 12 Plus for frequencies, key words in context, inductive exploration and coding
  - Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) for positivity and negativity of responses
  - Chi square comparisons of proportions

# RESULTS

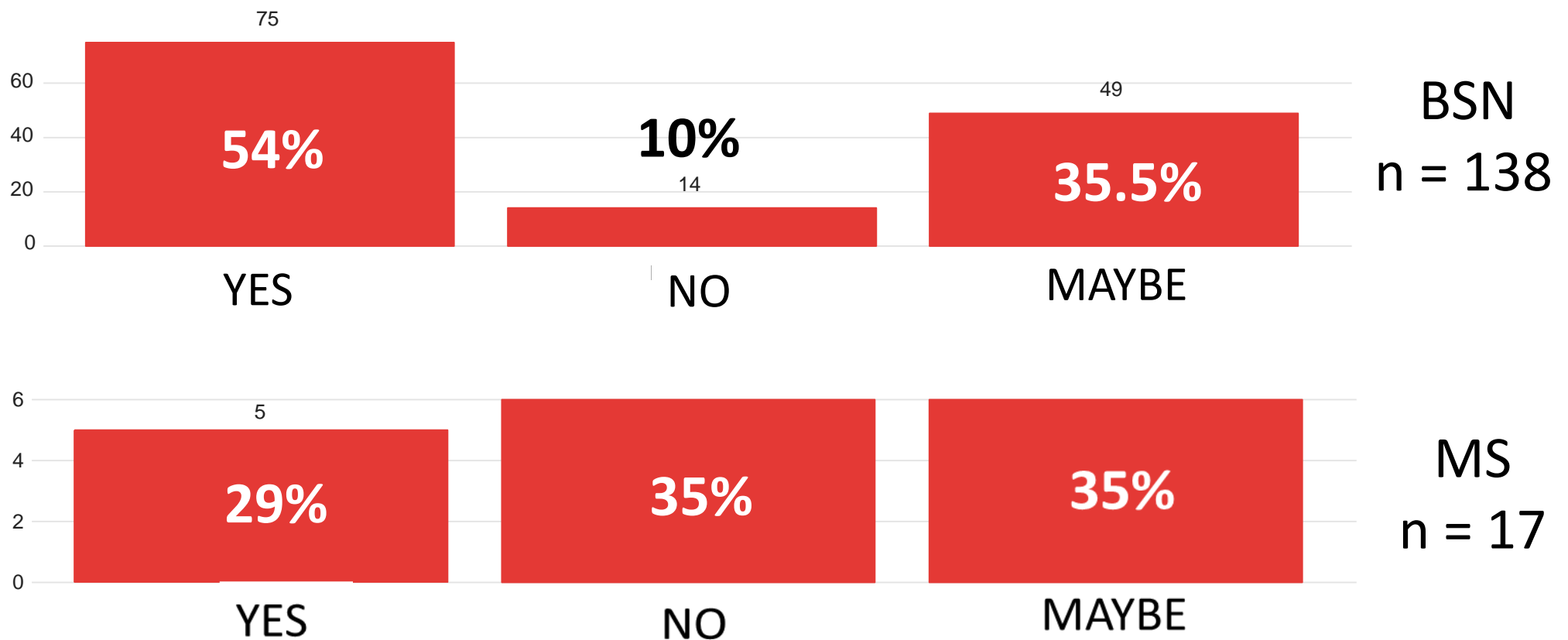
- 42% response rate (n = 308)

Which degree are you currently pursuing?



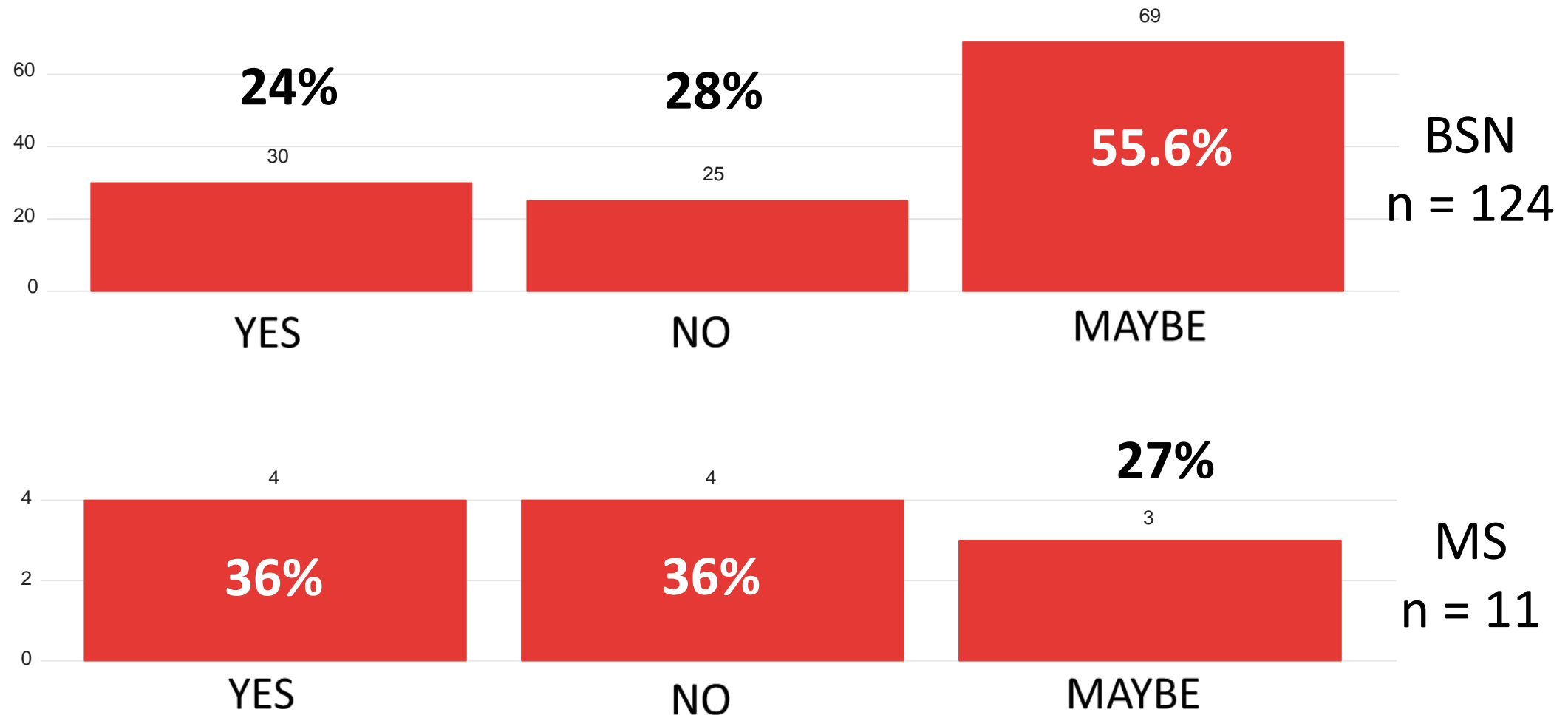


# ARE YOU INTERESTED IN PURSUING A DOCTORAL DEGREE AFTER COMPLETION OF YOUR CURRENT DEGREE, OR IN THE FUTURE?



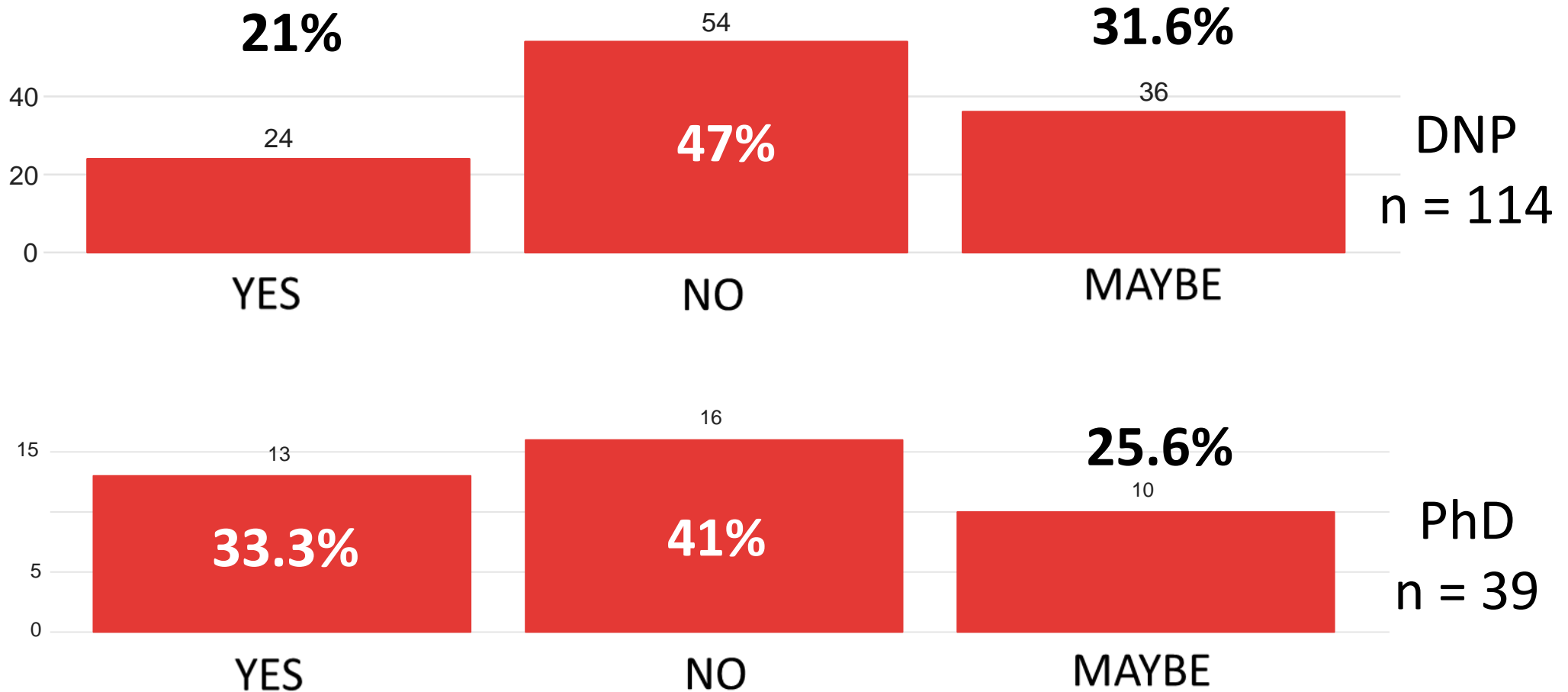
$\chi^2 = 9.076$ ,  $DF = 1$ ,  $CI$  6.8043 to 49.6842,  $p < 0.01$

# WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN EARNING BOTH A PHD AND A DNP DEGREE IN A DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM?



$\chi^2 = 1.724, DF = 1, CI -5.8353 \text{ to } 45.8084, p = 0.19$

# WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN A BRIDGE PROGRAM TO EARN THE OTHER DEGREE?



$\chi^2 = 0.419$ ,  $DF = 1$ ,  $CI -11.9296$  to  $22.6549$ ,  $p = 0.52$

## POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE COMMENTS

- NVivo sentiment analysis suggested BSN and PhD students more positive overall
- Drilling down with LIWC (significant differences at  $p < 0.05$  level)
  - Overall BSN comments more positive than PhD
  - BSN more positive on barriers than PhD
  - BSN more positive on interest than PhD MS
  - PhD free text “thoughts” responses more negative than DNP
  - N.S results indicate that overall:

**+ . . . BSN . . . . DNP . . . . MS . . . PhD -**

# MOST FREQUENTLY USED TERMS

	BSN	MS	DNP	PhD
<b>All responses combined</b>	Time (2.94%)	Degree (5.71%)	Research & Time (3.01%)	Research (3.18%)
<b>Advantages</b>	Research (2.75%)	Practice, professional, research (4.88*)	Research (3.72%)	Research (4.63%)
<b>Barriers</b>	Time (7.73%)	Time (9.09%)	Time (8.46%)	Time (9.09%)
<b>Why interested?</b>	Research (3.26%)	Knowledge (8.0%)	Research (3.5%)	Practice (4.48%)
<b>Why not interested?</b>	Research (4.11%)	**	Research (5.08%)	Clinical (2.78%)
<b>Thoughts</b>	**	**	Bridge (1.41%)	**

\*Very small response set

\*\*Too few responses to analyze

# QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: THEMES

- Regard for research science
  - Desire for strong, rigorous science training
  - Positive regard for the role of nurse scientists in relation to nursing and health care

*“practical, clinical research that is patient- centered and effects positive changes in the real world setting.” (PhD)*

*“Knowledge is power and the more you understand the research side, the more you can implement that research into patient care.” (BSN)*

*“flimsy science coursework paired with an excess of filler coursework. . . we study fluff versus hard science.” (DNP)*

*“It will satisfy my interest in both nursing practice and research at the highest level.” (MS)*

# THEMES

- Career opportunities and prestige
  - Linked by perceptions of advancement, higher pay, greater flexibility, more respect
  - Personal and professional achievement

*“More knowledge, capability, opportunity”  
(BSN)*

*“More letters behind your name.” (PhD)*

*“Differing career options, prestige, more alphabet soup following my name. None of which is actually appealing to me at this time.” (DNP)*

*“Being at the top of your field in research and in clinical work. It ties in continuing education and being able to give the best you can to the patient.” (BSN)*

# THEMES

- Time
  - Seen as a major investment and resource drain
  - Concerns about workload also linked with time
  - Tensions between “education is always valuable” and sacrifice of “work time”
  - Work/life balance

“Time and money.” (DNP)

“A lot of time spent studying and working towards the degree, perhaps an overload of work.” (BSN)

“Time length before earning money.” (BSN)

“Time in a day to complete both roles. Extensive time for dual completion.” (PhD)

“Cost time off work.” (MS)



# THEMES

- Synthesis, specialization, differentiation
  - BSN students described synthesis, convergence, complementarity of clinical and research roles; saw being a researcher as another kind of specialization
  - MS, DNP and PhD students linked specialization with divergence; more either/or thinking

“To conduct research, work with patients . . . could help me to see the real problems, to conduct studies, and search for solutions in the data that I can get through my daily clinic services.” (BSN)

“I lean much more toward patient care vs research.” (DNP)

“could take away time from focusing on research” (PhD)

“more opportunities for work and things to specialize in” (BSN)

# LIMITATIONS

- Respondents were current students
- Very few MS respondents
- Few responses for several questions
- Selection bias among responders
- Items not pre-tested, ? reliability
- “Maybe” option undifferentiated



## IF WE BUILD IT. . .?

- MS increasingly small population in U.S. and may see DNP as redundant
- Excitement about the possibility of being a “scientist-clinician” or “clinical scientist”
- Concerns about investing time and money for (as yet) unclear career trajectory/role



# IMPLICATIONS

- Findings suggest efforts should be focused on
  - BSN to DNP/PhD
  - DNP to PhD bridge
- Defining the DNP/PhD role
- Helping students envision both doctoral education & dual preparation earlier on
- Preparation as clinician-scientist more than 1 + 1
  - Focus on implementation and translational science?
  - Integration and synthesis vs. “stacking”
  - Balancing costs with scalability, sustainability

# QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS?



Thank you!