

# Impact of Eating Disorder Course for Nutrition Students: Shifts in comfort, confidence, and eating disorder knowledge

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To evaluate the effectiveness of an educational intervention to improve comfort, confidence, and knowledge in working with eating disorders for nutrition students

**Design:** Quasi-experimental

**Methods:** The study examined the impact of a four-module course on nutrition students' (nutrition undergraduate, dietetic internship, or graduate) comfort and confidence levels in working with individuals with eating disorders, risk of development of an eating disorder, and their knowledge of working with eating disorders. The study employed a pre-test/post-test design to assess changes in participants before and after the intervention.

**Setting:** Virtual administration

**Participants:** 5 participants completed pre and post surveys

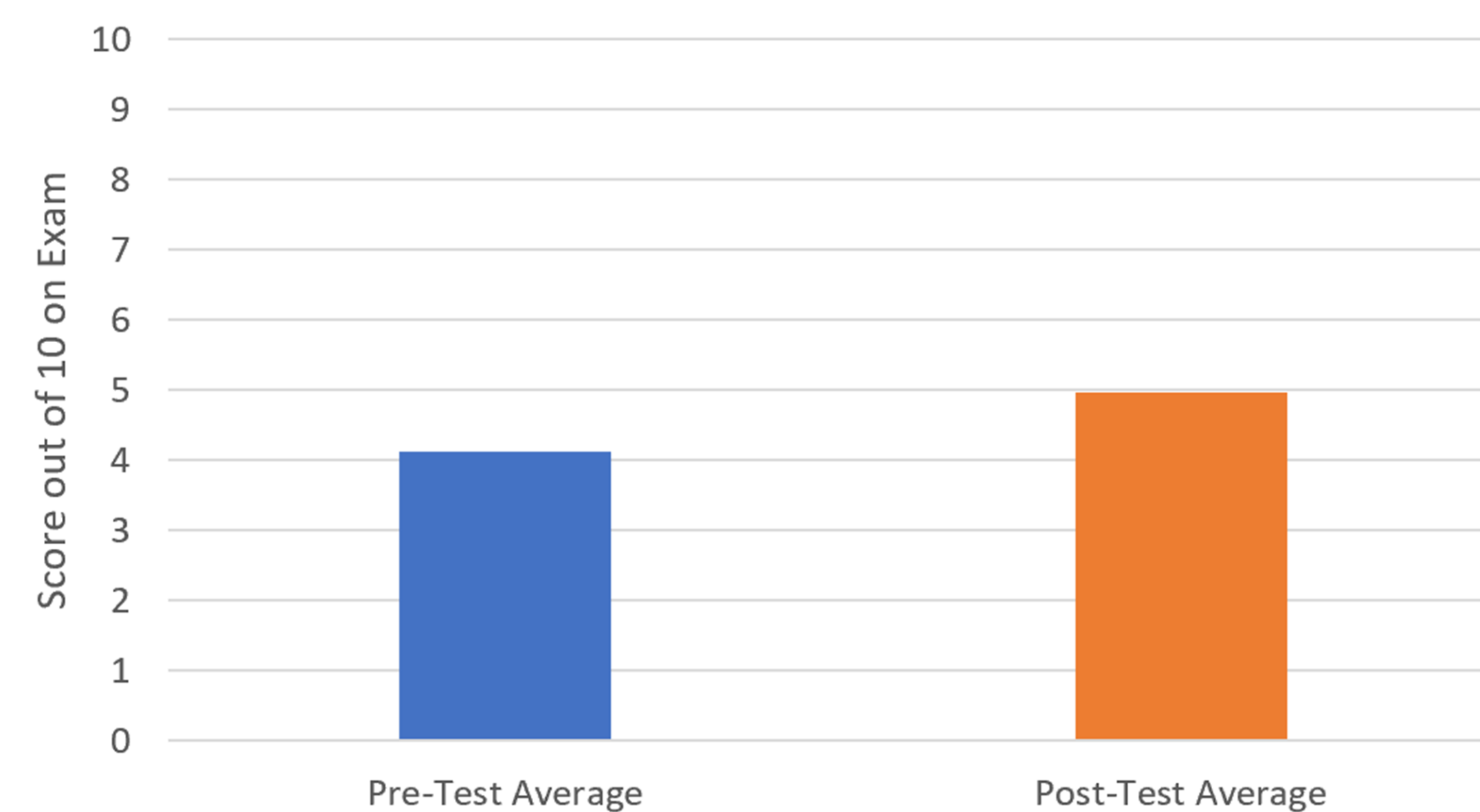
**Intervention:** Participants completed a four-hour course on eating disorders written by an eating disorder expert in the spring of 2024.

**Results:** The use of an eating disorder course for nutrition students increased students' self-reported levels of confidence and comfort when thinking about working with eating disorders in their future careers. There was not a significant difference in pre-test and post-test knowledge assessment, however participants' scores remained the same or increased. The average of the participants' pre-test and post-test EAT-26 assessment did not show a significant change.

**Conclusions and Implications:** The use of an eating disorder course for nutrition students has the potential to improve student comfort and confidence in working with eating disorders, as well as their overall knowledge of nutrition counseling for eating disorders. It is imperative to continue to consider the impact that eating disorder education may have on the risk of eating disorder development for nutrition students.

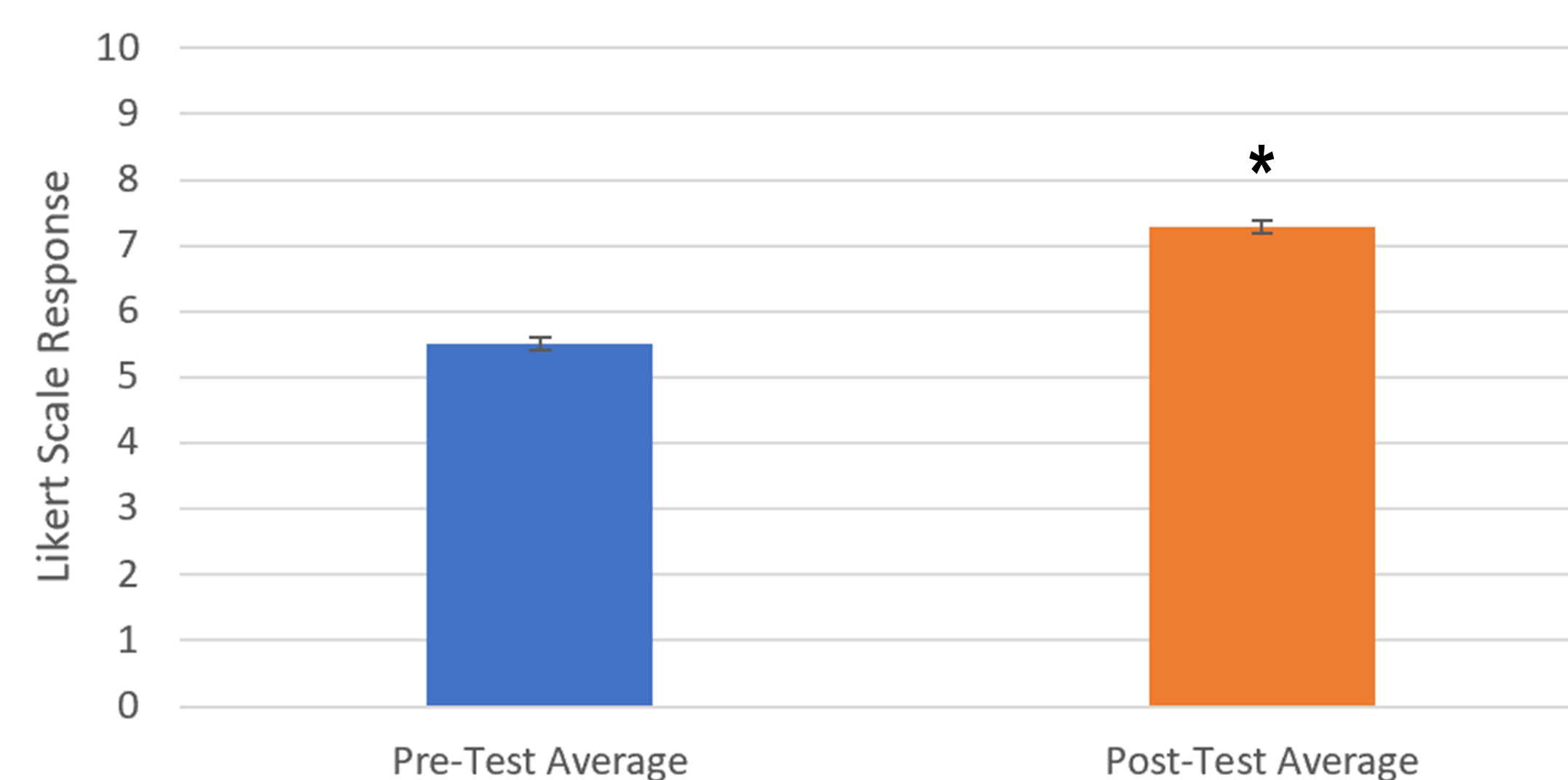
## RESULTS

### Comparison of Eating Disorder Knowledge



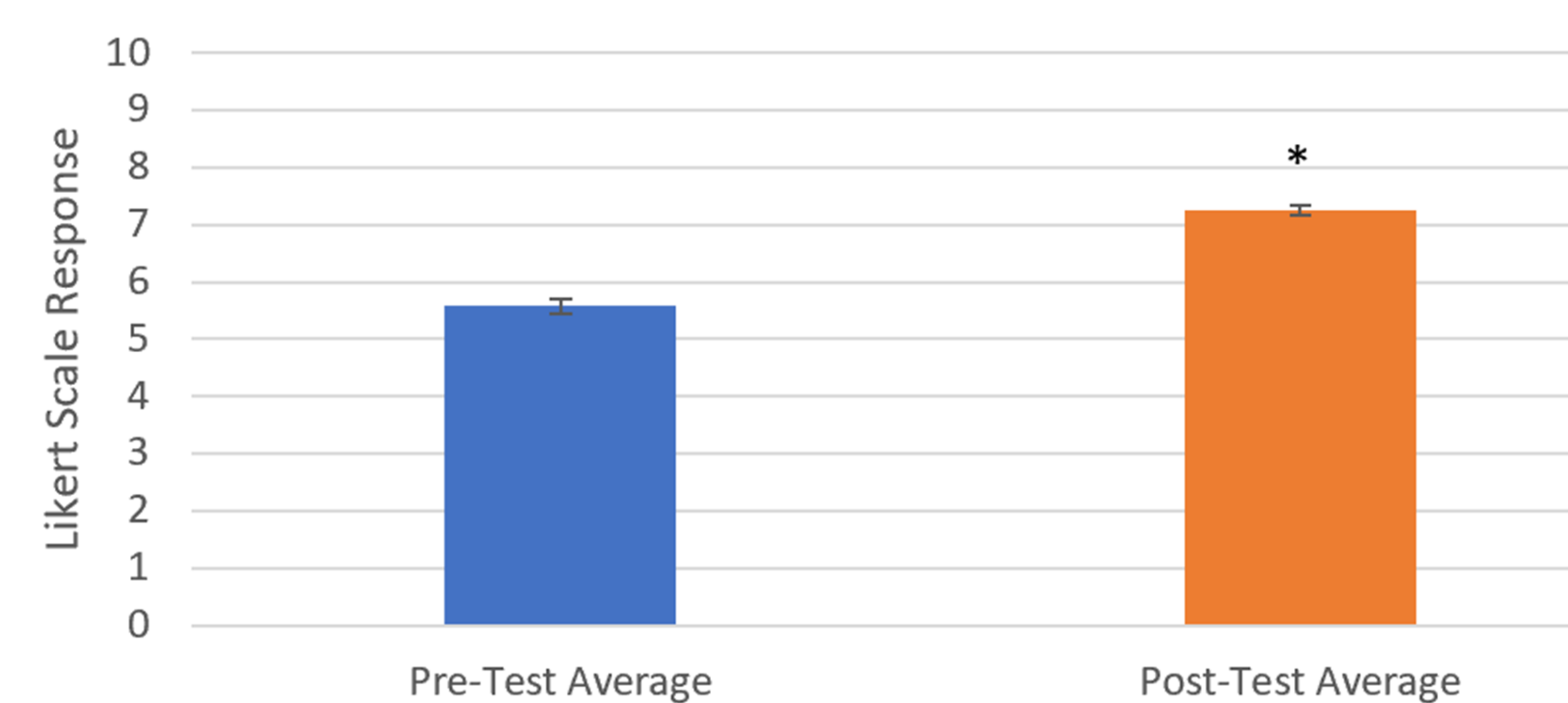
**Figure 1.** Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Knowledge Assessment (n=5). Maximum score of knowledge assessment was 10.0.  $p > 0.05$  indicating no statistical significance.

### Self-Reported Comfort Levels in Thinking About Working with Eating Disorders



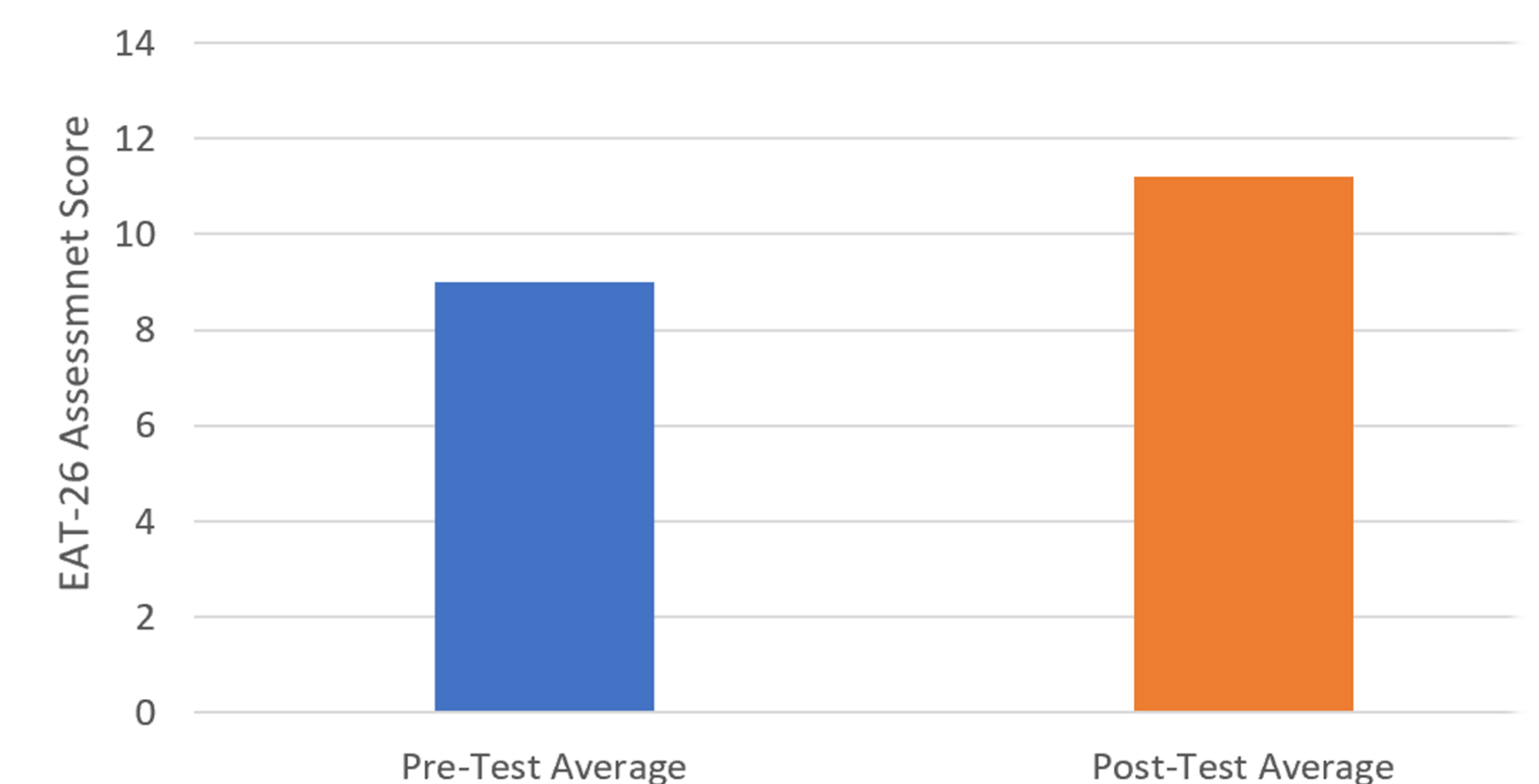
**Figure 2.** Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Self-Reported Comfort Levels in Thinking About Working with Eating Disorders (n=5). Participants used a 10-point Likert scale with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 10 indicating strongly agree. \*Paired t-test  $p < 0.05$

### Self-Reported Confidence Levels in Thinking About Working with Eating Disorders



**Figure 3.** Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Self-Reported Confidence Levels in Thinking About Working with Eating Disorders (n=5). Participants used a 10-point Likert scale with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 10 indicating strongly agree. \*Paired t-test  $p < 0.05$

### EAT-26 Assessment Results



**Figure 4.** Pre-Test and Post-Test values of EAT-26 Assessment (n=5). EAT-26 scores range from 0-78, with a score of 20 or higher indicating an eating disorder pathology level.

## INTRODUCTION

- Eating Disorders are complex illnesses with serious mental and physical implications.
- Those going through treatment for an eating disorder have the best recovery outcomes when they are able to access care from clinicians with appropriate eating disorder education.<sup>1</sup>
- Dietitians are the medical professionals who spend the most direct time with clients, as well as the most time discussing food, yet most receive no formal eating disorder education.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Dietitians are at an increased risk for developing eating disorders themselves, which has the potential to impact their effectiveness in eating disorder counseling.<sup>3</sup>
- The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an eating disorder course as an educational tool for nutrition students without triggering risk for disordered eating, and to produce a result of increased knowledge, comfort, and confidence, in working with eating disorders, thus better preparing students to work with eating disorders in their future careers.

## METHODS

- This study was conducted in the spring of 2024, virtually, with the partnership of KMB For Answers and with permission from the IRB at the State University of New York at Oneonta.
- Participants were recruited virtually through dietitian social media groups, dietitian list-servs, and word of mouth.
- The study had six dietetic student participants who completed pre-test materials, the intervention course, and post-test materials. One participant did not complete the pre-test materials in full and so their responses were excluded from the final data.
- Prior to completing the course, participants were asked to respond to statements about comfort and confidence in thinking about working with eating disorders using a 10-point Likert scale, complete the EAT-26 assessment, and complete a 10 question assessment of eating disorder knowledge.
- Participants were then asked to complete the course. The course was comprised of four modules and covered assessment, diagnostic criteria, interventions, monitoring/evaluation, and counseling techniques for different five different eating disorder diagnoses. It was created by an eating disorders expert.
- After completing the course, participants were asked to respond to statements about comfort and confidence in thinking about working with eating disorders using a 10-point Likert scale, complete the EAT-26, and complete a 10 question assessment of eating disorder knowledge.
- Quantitative data (Likert responses to comfort/confidence, EAT-26 scores, and knowledge assessments) were compared using paired t-tests.  $P < 0.05$  was considered to be significant.

- Our research suggests that the implementation of an eating disorder course for nutrition students has the potential to increase their knowledge of nutrition counseling for eating disorders. All participants either maintained their pre-test score or showed improvement, with the group average reflecting improvement.
- Within the sample utilized, the results also suggest that this course can be implemented without an adverse outcome to the risk of the development of an eating disorder, as measured by the EAT-26; however it is impossible to account for other risk factors outside of the scope of this study that may otherwise impact this risk.
- There was a significant difference in pre-test and post-test reports of comfort and confidence after participants completed the course, with  $p < 0.05$  in both comfort and confidence. This suggests that this course created a beneficial foundation for participants' clinical growth in eating disorder counseling.
- Participants were representative of a variety of educational levels (undergraduate, graduate, and dietetic intern) and also obtained education from a wide range of schools, providing a unique mixture of previous eating disorder education.
- The sample size utilized was small and was composed of female-identifying individuals. While this is more common in the dietetic community, it may not be truly reflective of the experience of the dietetic student.
- Participants did not receive any compensation from the researchers and this, in addition to the time commitment of the study, could have impacted the investment of the participants, thus the results of the knowledge-based outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

The use of an eating disorder course for nutrition students has the potential to improve student comfort and confidence in working with eating disorders, as well as their overall knowledge of nutrition counseling for eating disorders. It may be beneficial to its implementation to offer incentive to students, so as to increase investment in the material. It is imperative in the implementation of a course such as this to consider the impact that eating disorder education may have on the risk of eating disorder development for nutrition students.

## REFERENCES

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