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# Spring 2021 CSWE Member Pulse Survey Results

## IMPACT ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION FOR SPRING 2021

As COVID-19 continues to force higher education institutions in the United States to make adjustments and alter their operations in spring 2021, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) conducted a “pulse” survey of members to collect real-time data on the shifting landscape of social work education in the United States. This is the third pulse survey that CSWE has conducted since March 2020, previous reports can be found on [CSWE’s Research webpage](#). The survey was conducted from March 10, 2021, to March 24, 2021, through the Qualtrics online survey platform. Respondents were asked to answer the questions on the survey with information accurate as of March 10, 2021, capturing the situation at a moment of time during the rapidly changing pandemic situation. E-mail invitations were sent to program representatives from all CSWE accredited and candidate baccalaureate and master’s social work programs as of March 8, 2021, as well as to primary contacts for the practice doctorate and research doctorate program sections for the CSWE Annual Survey of Social Work Programs.

Respondents were 266 unique institutions representing 226 baccalaureate programs, 130 master’s programs, 10 practice doctorate programs, and 23 research doctorate programs (institutions could respond regarding more than one program level). The percentage of invited respondents submitting data is found in Table 1.

**TABLE 1. Survey respondents by program level.**

	Baccalaureate	Master’s	Practice doctorate	Research doctorate
<b>Responses received</b>	226	130	10	23
<b>Percentage of invited programs responding</b>	39.9	39.9	52.6	29.1

## QUICK TAKES

A preliminary analysis of total enrollment in social work programs from the 2019 and 2020 CSWE Annual Surveys shows a positive trend in social work enrollment for all degree levels. From fall 2019 to fall 2020, enrollment increased by **1.4%** in baccalaureate programs, **1.3%** in master’s programs, **10.2%** in practice doctorate programs, and **5.5%** in research doctorate programs at responding institutions that reported data in both years.

Among all program levels, almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that more students were reporting mental health challenges compared to previous years (**63.4%**). No respondents believed that fewer students were having mental health challenges. Respondents also reported that they were aware of more faculty/staff members experiencing mental health challenges than in previous years (**58.1%**), but that only **32.1%** of faculty/staff members were reporting more challenges, including only **18.7%** at Minority Serving Institutions.

Traditionally in-person programs remained in-person for spring 2021 for **14.7%** of respondents, whereas **36.5%** of traditionally in-person programs moved entirely online. A new option was added for programs that moved in-person programs to “hyflex” options, with **24.9%** of all programs selecting the option. More baccalaureate programs (**20.8%**) remained entirely in-person than master’s (**5.4%**), practice doctorate (**0.0%**), or research doctorate (**13.0%**) programs. At the baccalaureate, master’s, and practice doctorate levels, fewer programs responded that they had remained in-person in spring 2021 than in fall 2020.

A majority of programs at each level reported that spring 2021 total enrollment remained flat or increased compared to spring 2020 total enrollment (**70.4%**), with **36.3%** reporting an increase in enrollment. Enrollment increased by more than 10% for **10.3%** of all programs and for **22.2%** of master’s programs. Among programs reporting a decline in enrollment, **70.6%** said that enrollment decreased by 10% or less.

At all program levels respondents reported that enrollment in the social work programs increased more than enrollment at their respective institutions. At the master’s level, **14.0%** of respondents said enrollment had increased at their institution as a whole, whereas **40.4%** said that enrollment in their social work program increased.

More than three-quarters of all respondents (**76.4%**) indicated that applications for the fall 2021 semester have increased (**45.0%**) or remained flat. Among master’s programs, **60.5%** saw applications increase, as did **54.1%** of research doctorate programs, **40.1%** of baccalaureate programs, and **40.0%** of practice doctorate programs.

Most programs reported that it was a challenge to find appropriate field placements for their students for spring 2021 (**71.3%**), down slightly from **77.3%** in fall 2020, primarily due to field sites cancelling or modifying placements for students (**50.9%**). Programs reported that they were offering increased remote field placement settings or activities (**77.4%**), modifying the number of field hours students were completing (**60.4%**), and substituting simulations for field hours (**28.3%**).

More than half of respondents indicated that their programs’ budgets had newly been reduced going into spring 2021 (**54.7%**). Of the programs experiencing a budget cut, **61.1%** indicated that the cut was by 10% or less. Another **43.6%** reported no change to their budgets, whereas **1.6%** reported budget increases.

The majority of programs that responded to the question indicated that no changes had been made to their staffing levels for spring 2021 (**63.0%**). The number of full-time faculty members decreased in **9.1%** of programs, whereas **8.7%** reported reductions in part-time faculty members, and **11.3%** reported reductions in the number of staff members. The number of full-time faculty members on campus increased for **6.4%** of programs. There were no furloughs for faculty or staff members in the last year for **71.7%** of programs. Hiring freezes were in place for **41.3%** of respondents, down from **64.8%** in fall 2020.

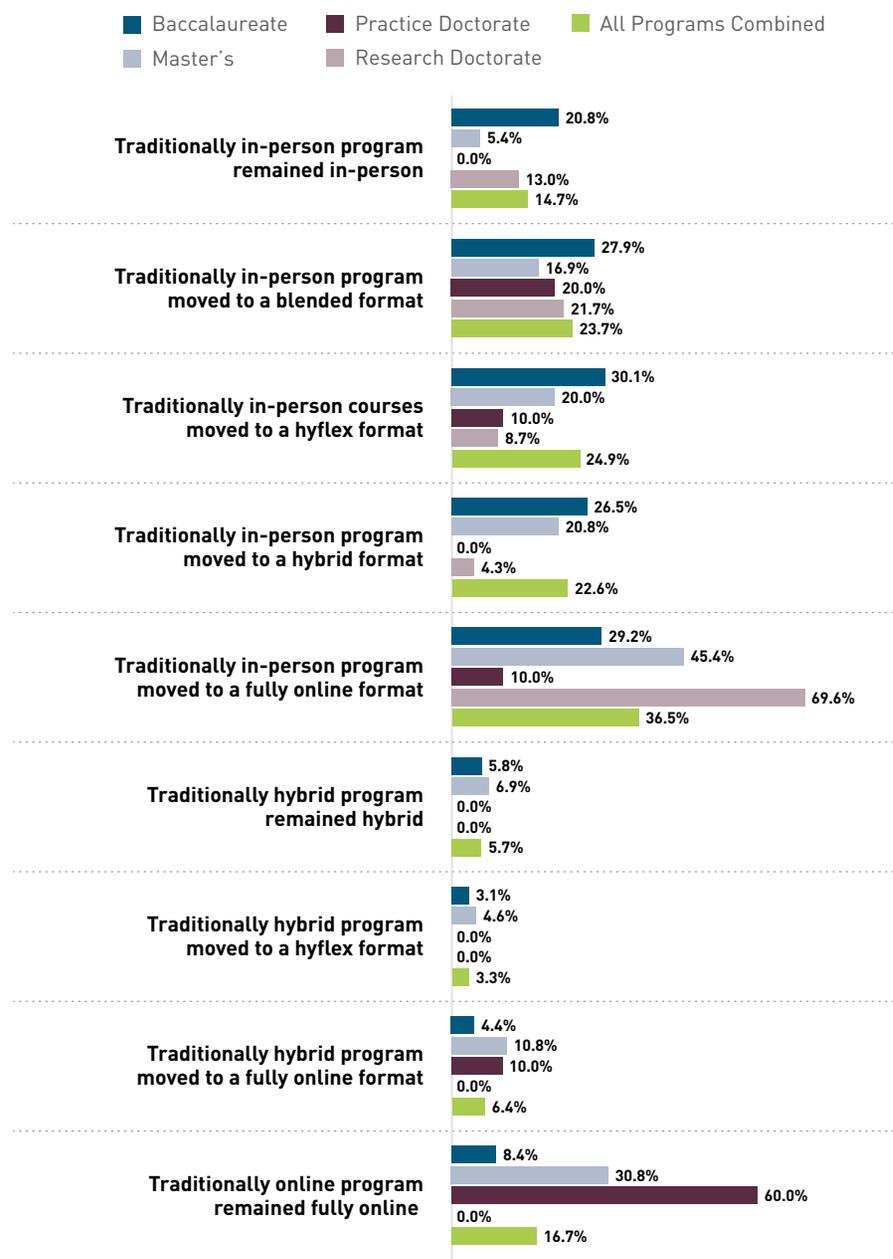
## Course administration in spring 2021

Respondents were asked to describe how their programs were being administered in the spring 2021 semester and whether this was different from the way they had traditionally administered the programs. Data was collected by program level and is presented in Figure 1, along with the compiled percentage of all responding programs. The survey asked programs to identify all the ways that programs had changed this semester, which results in the sum of the percentages being more than 100%. Based on the results of the fall 2020 pulse survey, a few changes were made to the categories for spring 2021: It was clarified that courses administered through synchronous virtual platforms, such as Zoom, were not considered in-person courses for the purposes of this survey; “hybrid” was changed to only refer to a program in which one course was offered fully online, whereas “blended” was added to refer to a course in which at least 50% of the course time was administered remotely; and “hyflex” was added to refer to a program in which students are able to self-select whether they attend in-person or remotely on a class-by-class basis. Hyflex was a popular option at the baccalaureate level, with 30.1% of programs responding that in-person courses were moved to a hyflex format.

Notable items in the data were that 30.8% of master’s programs and 60.0% of all practice doctorate programs indicated that they already had online programs before the pandemic and that those programs remained online with no change. Removing the online programs from the equation, we found that just under a quarter of baccalaureate programs said that their in-person programs had remained in-person this semester (22.7%), down from 26.9% in fall 2020, whereas only 7.8% of in-person master’s programs remained in-person, down from 17.4% in fall 2020. No practice doctorate programs reported that they had kept their in-person program in-person this semester, but three research doctorate programs had in-person programs remain in-person, up from zero in fall 2020.

Differences were also seen when the data were broken down by CSWE geographic region, Carnegie classification, Minority Serving Institution (MSI) status, and institution type. At the baccalaureate level, 35.0% of programs in the Mid-Central region (IA, KS, MO, NE) indicated that their in-person programs remained in-person, compared to 20.8% of

**FIGURE 1. Program format changes for spring 2021 by program level; percentage of responding institutions identifying each choice.**

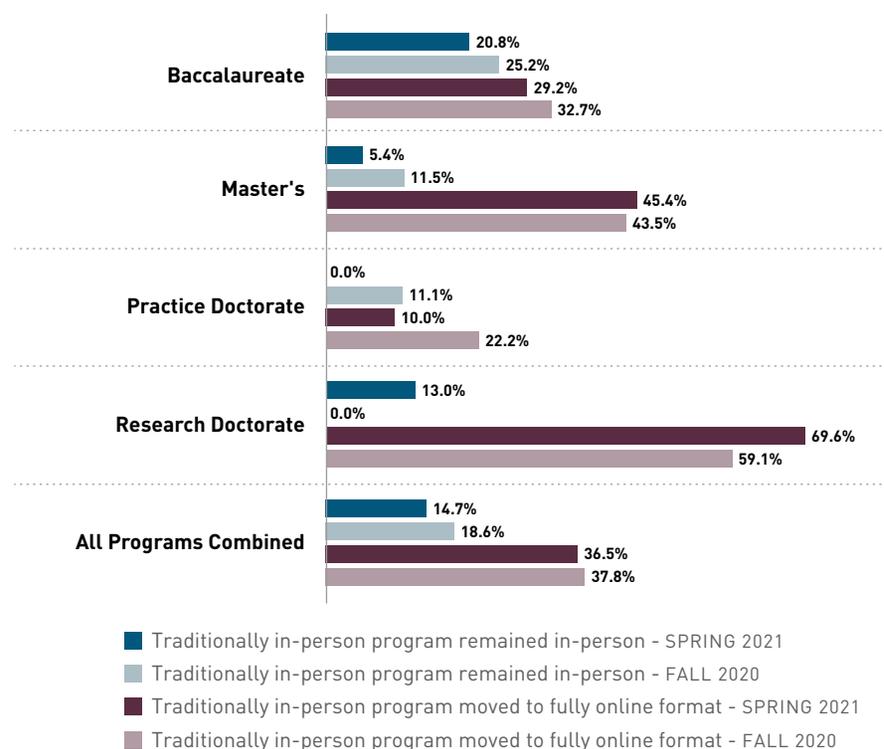


programs overall. Of programs in the West (AZ, CA, NV, HI), 72.7% moved in-person programs entirely online, as did 52.4% of programs in the Northeast (NJ, NY, PR, VI), compared to 29.2% overall. However, only 15.9% of programs in the Southeast (AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN) and 15.0% of programs in the South Central region (AR, LA, NM, OK, TX) did so. Similarly, by Carnegie classification, 36.0% of Baccalaureate/Diverse Fields (Bac/Div) institutions kept their programs in-person, but only 4.0% of Doctoral Universities–Very high research activity (R1) and 8.0% of Doctoral Universities–High research activity (R2) did the same. Among R1 institutions, 36.0% moved an in-person program entirely online, as did 44.0% of R2 institutions. Only 14.3% of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and 11.1% of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) kept programs entirely in-person, whereas 55.6% of HSIs moved their programs entirely online, compared to 29.2% of baccalaureate programs overall.

At the master’s level, 45.4% of all programs indicated they moved in-person programs to a fully online format, whereas only 5.4% of programs remained entirely in-person. Of note, 80.0% of in-person programs in the West region remained in-person, as did 75.0% of programs in the Northeast. Only 25.0% of programs in the Southeast moved in-person programs entirely online. Also, 69.2% of Mid-Central (IA, KS, MO, NE) in-person programs moved to a hybrid format, and 77.8% of West in-person programs moved entirely online. Another outlier was that 23.5% of Doctoral/Professional Universities (DPU) kept in-person programs entirely in-person.

As seen in Figure 2, fewer respondents at any level other than research doctorate programs indicated that their entirely in-person programs remained entirely in-person in spring 2021 than in fall 2020. This may be due to a more concise definition in the spring 2021 survey for respondents to not include synchronous virtual classes as “in-person”, as well as having more options for blended courses, hyflex courses, and hybrid programs. Traditionally in-person programs moving to be fully online also varied by degree level, but generally stayed consistent from fall 2020 to spring 2021.

**FIGURE 2. Comparison of spring 2021 to fall 2020 response rates for program format changes for spring 2021 by program level; percentage of responding institutions identifying each choice.**

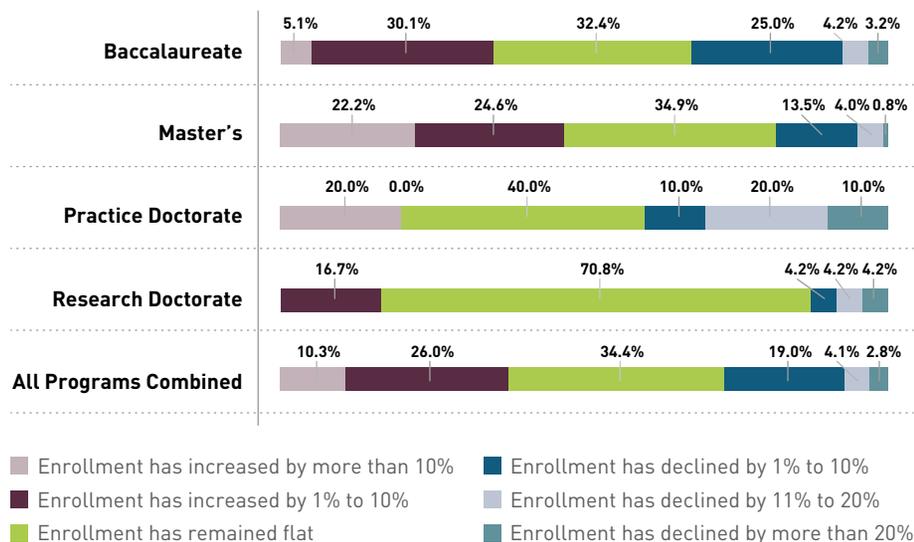


## Enrollment changes—Based on 2021 Pulse Survey

A majority of programs at each level reported that spring 2021 total enrollment remained flat or increased compared to spring 2020 and fall 2020 total enrollment, as seen in Figures 4 and 5. At the baccalaureate level, 35.1% of programs reported increased enrollment from spring 2020 to spring 2021, whereas 46.8% of master’s programs and 20.0% of practice doctorate programs reported that enrollment went up. At the master’s level, more than 20% of programs reported enrollment increases of more than 10% from spring 2020 to spring 2021. At the research doctorate level, 70.8% of programs saw their enrollment stay flat from spring 2020 to spring 2021.

Of all programs responding, 26.9% saw a decrease in enrollment. At the baccalaureate, master's, and research doctorate levels, most of the institutions reporting declines in enrollment experienced decreases of less than 10%. Combined, only 29 total programs across the country that responded to the survey reported that enrollment declined by more than 10%.

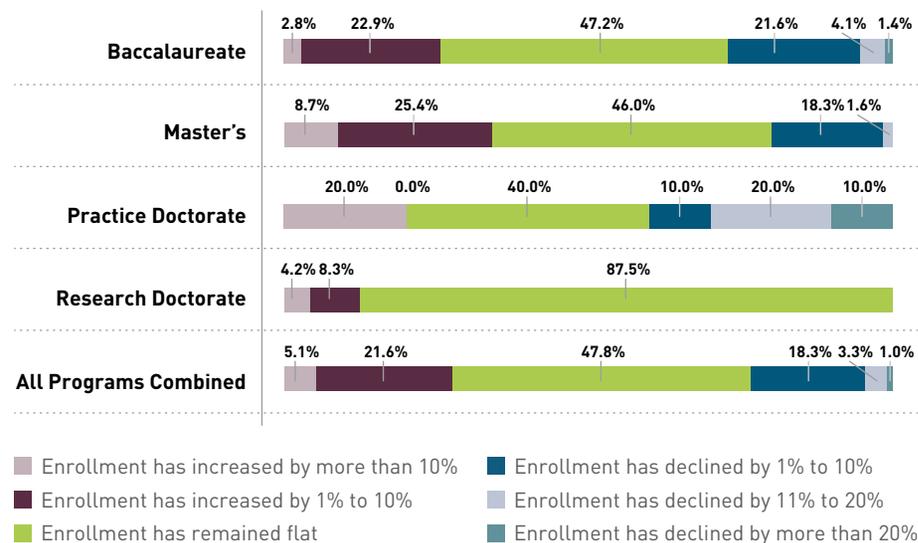
**FIGURE 4. Percentage of institutions reporting changes in enrollment for spring 2021 compared to spring 2020, by program level.**



Data points of note from spring 2020 to spring 2021 include no MSIs at the baccalaureate level and no HBCUs at the master's level reporting an increase in enrollment of over 10%, whereas no MSIs at the master's level reported declines in enrollment. Geographically, 50.0% of master's programs in the Southeast region saw enrollment increase by 1% to 10%, compared to 24.6% of programs overall. By institution type, no Private-other (nonreligious) master's programs reported a decline in enrollment.

Respondents were also asked about changes in enrollment from fall 2020 to spring 2021. At all degree levels, a higher percentage of respondents said that enrollment stayed flat from the fall to spring semester this year, but more than a quarter of all programs (26.7%) reported that enrollment increased from the fall to spring.

**FIGURE 5. Percentage of institutions reporting changes in enrollment for spring 2021 compared to fall 2020, by program level.**

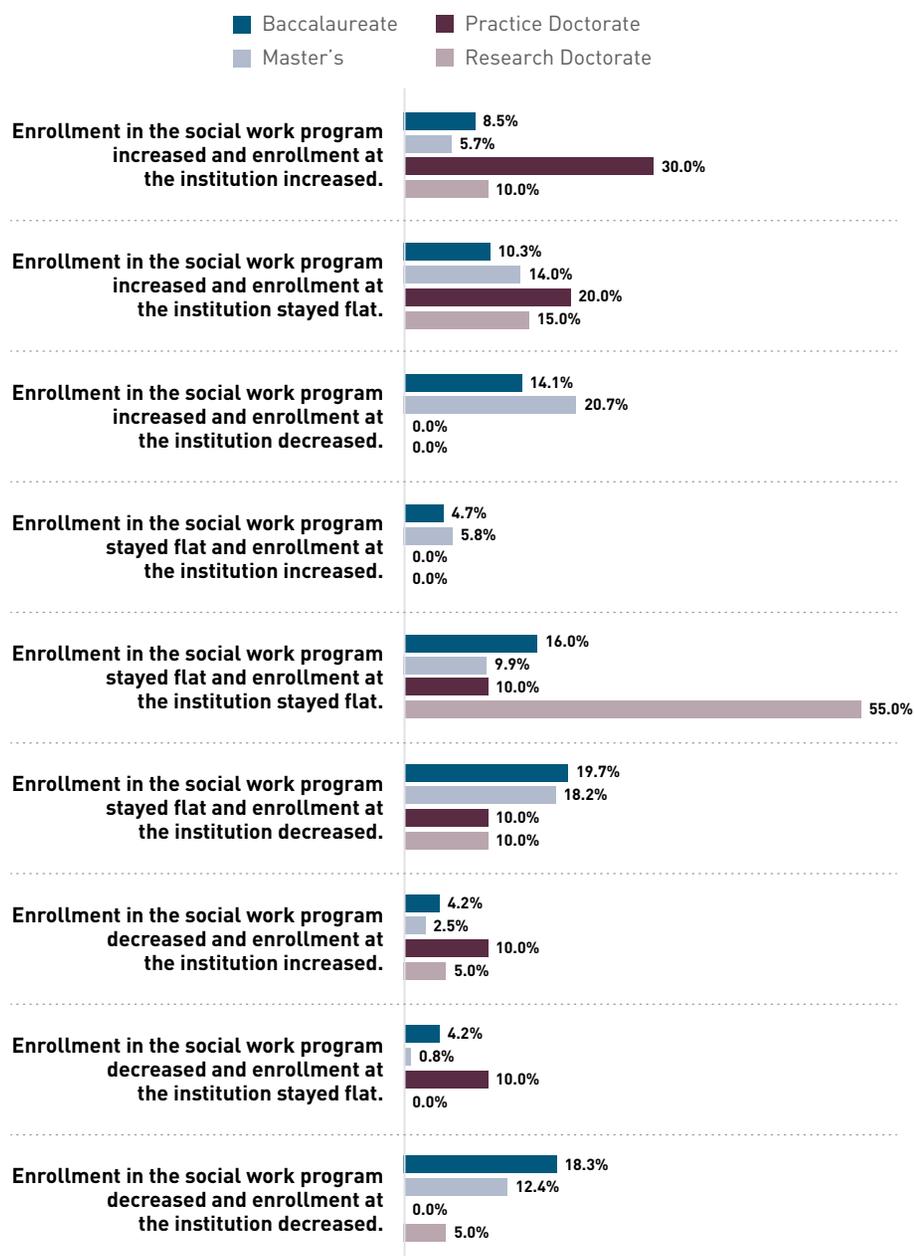


## Enrollment changes compared to institution as a whole

Anecdotally, in fall 2020 CSWE heard that social work programs were maintaining or increasing enrollment better than their institutions as a whole. To investigate this further, respondents were asked to identify which statement best represented the change in enrollment in their program versus their institution as a whole (Figure 6).

At the baccalaureate level, 17.4% of respondents to the question said enrollment had increased at their institution as a whole, 30.5% said it stayed flat, and 52.1% said it decreased, compared to 32.9% saying their social work enrollment increased, 40.4% saying it stayed flat, and 26.7% saying it decreased. Similarly, at the master's level, 14.0% of respondents to the question said enrollment had increased at their institution as a whole, 24.7% said it stayed flat, and 51.3% said it decreased, compared to 40.4% saying their social work enrollment increased, 33.9% saying it stayed flat, and 15.7% saying it decreased. The practice doctorate and research doctorate programs also reported that enrollment in the social work programs increased more than enrollment at their respective institutions.

**FIGURE 6. Percentage of institutions reporting changes in enrollment in the social work program and the institution as a whole for spring 2021 compared to spring 2020, by program level.**



## Enrollment Changes—Based on 2020 CSWE Annual Survey

The CSWE Annual Survey of Social Work Programs captures enrollment data annually from programs across the United States. The 2020 Annual Survey was administered from December 2020 to March 2021; the 2019 Annual Survey was administered from November 2019 to February 2020. Respondents were asked in each of the years to report total enrollment in their social work programs, by degree level, as of November 1 of that year. For this report, a preliminary trend analysis was completed looking at total enrollment by degree level for both years by comparing enrollment for programs that reported data in fall of 2019 and fall of 2020.

The data showed a positive trend in social work enrollment for all degree levels. Table 2 shows that from fall 2019 to fall 2020, enrollment increased by 1.4% in baccalaureate programs, 1.3% in master's programs, 10.2% in practice doctorate programs, and 5.5% in research doctorate programs at responding institutions that reported data in both years.

**TABLE 2. Change in enrollment from fall 2019 to fall 2020 in social work programs reporting data in both years, by program level.**

	N	Change in Enrollment (%)
<b>Baccalaureate</b>	422	1.4
<b>Master's</b>	213	1.3
<b>Practice Doctorate</b>	10	10.2
<b>Research Doctorate</b>	52	5.5

Supplementary trends were found when analyzing the data by additional variables. At the baccalaureate level, public institutions saw enrollment increase by 2.6%, whereas private-religious affiliated programs experienced a 4.1% decline in enrollment, and private-other institutions saw an 11.9% decrease. HBCUs saw a 6.6% decline in enrollment and HSIs saw a 3.4% decline, whereas Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) saw a 1.1% increase in enrollment and non-MSIs saw a 2.8% increase. By Carnegie classification, increases in enrollment were seen at DPU (7.9%), R1 (6.0%), Baccalaureate/Arts & Sciences (Bac/A&S) (4.7%), Master's Colleges and Universities—Large programs (M1) (1.4%), and Bac/Div (0.3%) classified institutions; R2 (-2.2%), Master's Colleges and Universities—Medium programs (M2) (-2.6%), and M3 (-7.2%) classified institutions saw declines in enrollment. Geographically, the North Central

region (CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY) saw the biggest increase in enrollment (16.9%), followed by the West (6.4%) and Southeast (5.7%); the New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT) (-1.6%), South Central (AR, LA, NM, OK, TX) (-2.7%), and Northeast (NJ, NY, PR, VI) (-10.9%) saw the biggest decreases in enrollment. The 29 programs that had entirely online options prior to the pandemic saw a 10.7% increase in enrollment.

At the master’s level public institutions saw enrollment increase by 7.1%, whereas private–religious affiliated programs experienced a 0.3% decline in enrollment, and private–other institutions saw a 15.8% decrease. HBCUs saw a 7.8% uptick in enrollment, AANAPISIs saw a 3.7% jump, and HSIs saw a 2.1% increase, and non-MSIs saw a 0.9 % increase. By Carnegie classification, increases in enrollment were seen at M2 (7.3%), R2 (4.4%), M1 (4.0%), and DPU (0.4%) classified institutions, whereas R1 (-1.5%) and M3 (-1.1%) classified institutions saw declines in enrollment. Geographically, the North Central region again saw the biggest increase in enrollment (12.4%), followed by the Southeast (9.3%) and Mid-Central (5.1%) regions. The West was the only region that saw a loss in master’s enrollment, down a surprising 17.6% for programs that reported data in both 2019 and 2020. Another surprise was that the 54 programs that had entirely online options prior to the pandemic that reported data in both years saw a 0.3% decline in enrollment.

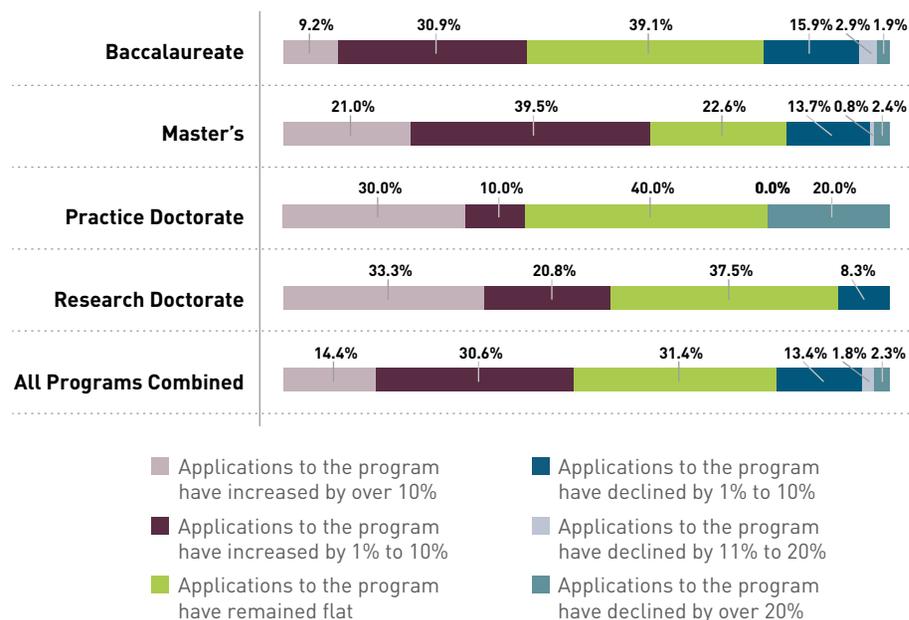
With only 10 practice doctorate programs responding to the Annual Survey in both years, there was insufficient data to break down enrollment any further and maintain anonymity of the submitting institutions.

Lastly, at the research level, public institutions saw enrollment increase by 2.1% and private–other institutions saw a small 0.5% increase. Private–religious affiliated programs experienced an 11.8% decline in enrollment. Collectively, MSI classified institutions saw a 23.2% jump in enrollment, whereas non-MSIs saw a 2.3% increase. By Carnegie classification, an increase in enrollment was seen at R2 institutions (2.7%), but R1 institutions lost 1.6% of their enrollment from 2019 to 2020. Geographically, the Great Lakes region (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI) saw a 25.2% increase in enrollment, followed by the Mid-Atlantic region (11.5%). The Southeast (-2.0%) saw a decline in enrollment, but the largest drop was in the West region, with enrollment down 17.6% for programs that reported data in both 2019 and 2020. Not enough research doctorate programs have entirely online programs to provide a breakdown.

## Applications for fall 2021

Programs were asked about the number of applications they received for the fall 2021 semester compared to those for the fall 2020 semester. As shown in Figure 7, the majority of respondents indicated that applications to the social work programs at all levels were either flat or up, including 60.5% of master’s programs, 54.1% of research doctorate programs, 40.1% of baccalaureate programs, and 40.0% of practice doctorate programs seeing the number of applications increase.

**FIGURE 7. Percentage of institutions indicating applications for fall 2021 by program level.**



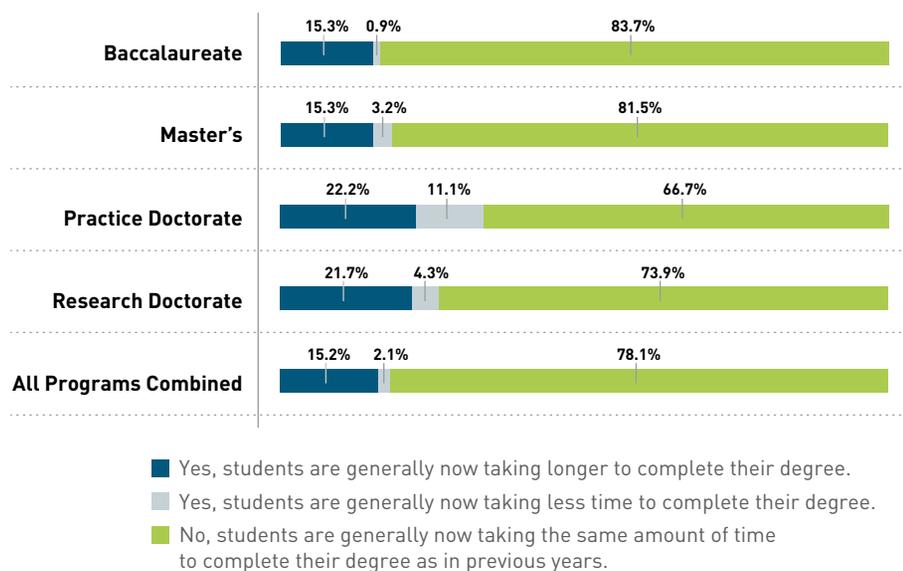
Some data points of note: 30.0% of R1 baccalaureate programs reported that applications had increased by more than 10%, compared to 9.2% of programs overall; however, 54.5% of baccalaureate programs in New England and only 15.6% of Mid-Atlantic (DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV) programs saw applications increase by 1% to 10%, compared to 30.9% overall. At the master’s level, a higher percentage of R1 institutions (25.0%) and M2 (33.3%) actually saw a decrease in applications by 1% to 10%, compared to 13.7% overall. Among MSIs, 57.7% saw an increase in applications of 1% to

10%, compared to 39.5% overall. By geographic region, in the West, 42.9% of respondents indicated a 10%+ increase in applications, whereas only 5.0% of Great Lakes respondents reported a 10%+ increase in applications, compared to 21.0% overall.

## Student time to degree

To gauge the impact of the pandemic on students' academic progress, respondents were asked whether they noticed any change in the time to degree for their programs' students compared to previous years (Figure 8). The majority of respondents said they saw no change, and most who saw a change said their students were now taking longer, in general, to complete their degrees.

**FIGURE 8. Percentage of institutions indicating any change in time to degree for students in their social work program, compared to previous years.**



## Modifications to campus operations due to COVID-19

Respondents at all program levels were asked to indicate how their institutions were modifying operations due to COVID-19 (see Table 3). For spring 2021, the cancellation of in-person events on campus (84.9% of respondents), cancellation of student and faculty/staff international travel (74.0% and 73.2%, respectively), practicing social distancing in the classroom and office (87.5%), and the wearing of face coverings at all times on campus (81.9%) were some of the most frequent responses. Modifications selected least frequently were primarily related to requiring faculty/staff members to work remotely, with only 12.8% of respondents requiring all faculty/staff members to work fully remotely and 14.7% indicating that their campus was requiring some faculty/staff members to work fully remotely. Also, 37.0% of respondents said that their campus currently allowed all faculty/staff members to work fully remotely. However, 55.8% of respondents indicated that their campuses allowed some faculty/staff members to work fully remotely and 60.8% that their campuses were modifying faculty/staff member in-person hours to allow for social distancing in the office. A new response choice about offering **hyflex** options for students prompted almost half of respondents (46.8%) to say that their campuses now offered a hyflex option for students.

Table 3 presents the percentage of respondents who indicated that each of the statements about modifications to campus operations due to COVID-19 were occurring on their campus for the spring 2021 and fall 2020 surveys. Responses were very similar for these semesters, suggesting that campuses have not made many adjustments between the two semesters. One of the biggest changes was that fewer campuses required only that face masks be worn indoors in spring 2021, with more campuses requiring that face masks be worn at all times.

**TABLE 3. Percentage of respondents indicating that a type of modification to operations is currently occurring due to COVID-19.**

Modified Operation due to COVID-19	% of respondents indicating FALL 2020	% of respondents indicating SPRING 2021
Cancelling in-person events	83.3	84.9
Cancelling all student conference attendance	65.6	60.4
Cancelling some student domestic travel (i.e., only cancelling travel to certain states)	22.8	27.9
Cancelling all student domestic travel	56.2	56.6
Cancelling all student international travel	74.3	74.0
Cancelling some faculty/staff domestic travel (i.e., only cancelling travel to certain states)	25.4	26.8
Cancelling all faculty/staff domestic travel	62.3	63.0
Cancelling all faculty/staff international travel	75.7	73.2
Allowing some faculty/staff members to work fully remotely	58.7	55.8
Allowing all faculty/staff members to work fully remotely	31.5	37.0
Requiring some faculty/staff members to work fully remotely	14.5	14.7
Requiring all faculty/staff members to work fully remotely	9.8	12.8
Requiring face covering be worn at all times on campus	77.5	81.9
Requiring face coverings be worn only in indoor spaces on campus	24.3	13.2
Practicing social distancing in the classroom/office	91.3	87.5
Modifying faculty/staff in-person hours to allow for social distancing in the office	65.9	60.8
Flexible attendance policy	54.3	47.5
Flexible grading policy	24.6	36.2
Allowing all students to choose to attend all courses virtually (ex. hyflex model)	N/A	46.8
Providing resources to ensure online platforms are accessible to all students—laptops/computer devices for those who do not have them	59.8	56.6
Providing resources to ensure online platforms are accessible to all students—data plans for those who do not have them	32.6	35.1

Some data points to note include the following:

- In the West region 35.0% of respondents indicated that all faculty/staff members are required to work fully remotely, higher than the 12.8% overall, but down from 58.7% in fall 2020.
- A high percentage of HBCU institutions required that face coverings be worn at all times on campus (92.3%), compared to the average of 81.9%. In the West region 95.0% of institutions also required face coverings be worn at all times.
- Flexible grading policies were found more frequently at R1 (58.3%), and Private-other institutions (62.3%) and less frequently at Bac/Div institutions (15.4%), compared to the average of 36.2%.
- More HBCU (69.2%), HSI (64.3%), R2 (71.9%), R1 (69.4%), and BAC/A&S (69.2%) institutions gave laptops/computers to students who did not have them, compared to the average (56.6%).

## Field Placements

Respondents were asked to identify how, if at all, their schools or departments were modifying field placements for students. Table 4 shows the percentage of responding programs whose campuses were making the modifications. The most popular response was that programs were offering increased remote field placement settings or activities (77.4%), including a high number of institutions in the West (95.0%) region. Modifying the number of field hours that students were completing was a change noted by 60.4% of respondents.

A small number of programs cancelled all their field placements (0.4%), and 18.5% cancelled some field placements. Almost a third of respondents substituted simulations for some of the required field hours for students (28.3%).

Table 4 presents the percentage of respondents that indicated that each of the statements about modifications to field placements due to COVID-19 were occurring on their campus for the spring 2021 and fall 2020 surveys. Similar to Table 3 in the modifications to campus section, responses in this section were very similar for both semesters, suggesting that programs have not made many adjustments to field placements between the two semesters.

**TABLE 4. Percentage of respondents indicating that a type of modification to field placements is occurring due to COVID-19.**

Modifications to Field Placements due to COVID-19	% of respondents indicating FALL 2020	% of respondents indicating SPRING 2021
Allowing students in some placement settings to modify their field placement work	41.3	45.7
Allowing students in all placement settings to modify their field placement work	46.7	51.7
Requiring students in some placement settings to modify their field placement work	10.5	13.6
Requiring students in all placement settings to modify their field placement settings	8.3	5.3
Offering increased remote field placement settings or activities	77.0	77.4
Modifying the number of field hours students are completing	56.5	60.4
Substituting the number of field hours with simulations	29.7	28.3
Cancelling/suspending some field placements	15.6	18.5
Cancelling/suspending all field placements	1.4	0.4
No changes are currently being made to field placements	4.7	1.9

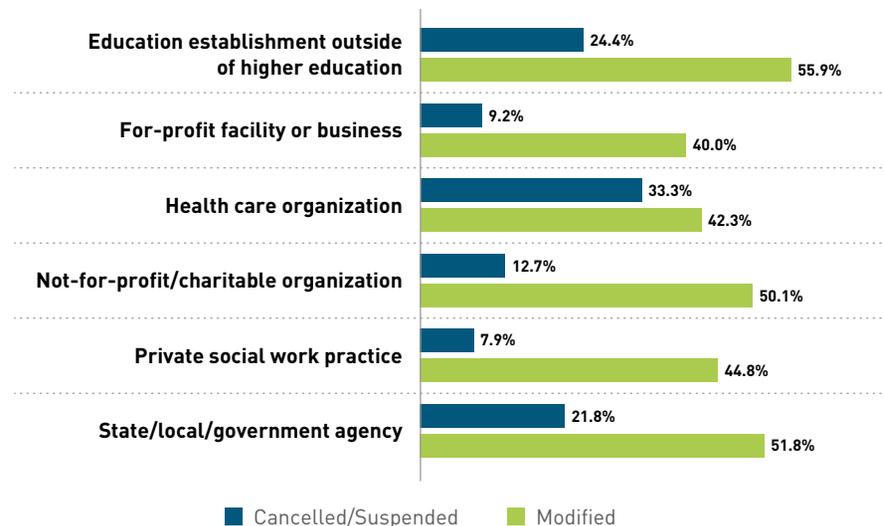
The 232 programs that had modified, suspended, or cancelled field placements were asked to identify who had made the decision (Figure 9). Overwhelmingly, respondents said that the field placement location or the institution as well as the site had made the decision.

**FIGURE 9. Decision maker for cancellation, suspension, or modification of field placements for spring 2021.**



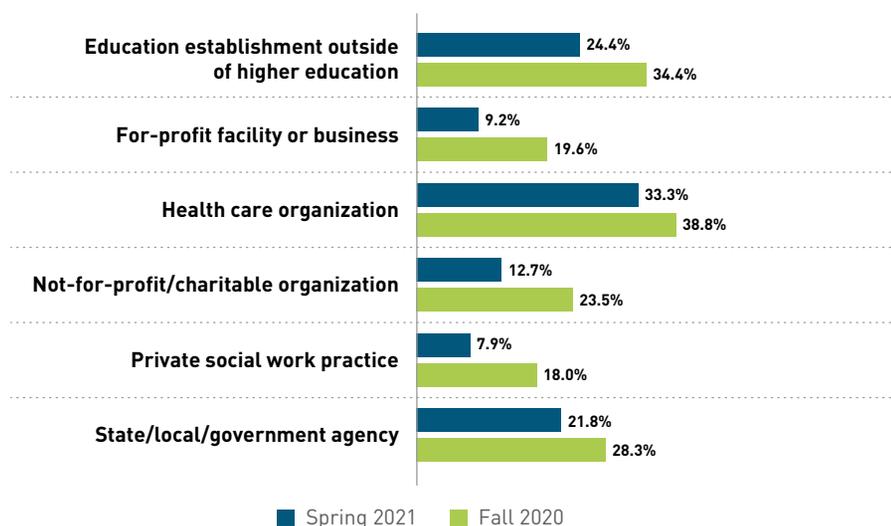
Programs were also asked to identify approximately what percentage of field placements in different types of settings had been cancelled/suspended or modified by either the institution or the field placement location for spring 2021 (Figure 10). Of note, respondents indicated that student field placements in education establishments other than higher education, such of elementary schools, were particularly affected by modifications (55.9%) and cancellations (24.4%). The experience at health-care organizations was similar, with 42.3% modified and 33.3% cancelled/suspended. State/local/government agencies saw 51.8% of student field placements modified and 21.8% cancelled/suspended. In general, far more programs saw field placements modified as opposed to cancelled.

**FIGURE 10. Approximate percentage of field placements cancelled/suspended or modified by type of setting for spring 2021.**



A positive sign in Figure 11 is that a smaller percentage of field placements at all types of settings were cancelled/suspended in spring 2021 compared to fall of 2020. Similar decreases were seen in the percentage of placements modified between spring 2021 and fall 2020, although an almost identical number of placements at state/local/government agencies were modified (51.8% in spring 2021, 52.1% in fall 2020), whereas a higher percentage of placements at private social work practices were modified in spring 2021 (44.8%) versus fall 2020 (38.9%).

**FIGURE 11. Approximate percentage of field placements cancelled/suspended by type of setting for spring 2021 and fall 2020.**



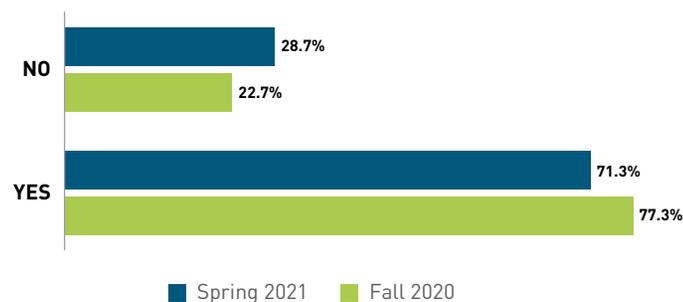
An analysis of the open-ended responses about field placements found that some agencies were not accepting students for field placements in spring 2021 or were accepting fewer students. New rationales that emerged for agencies accepting fewer students were that some settings believed the field students were liabilities for the agency due to potential COVID-19 exposures and agency staff being too overwhelmed/burnt out to supervise students. School, hospital, and nursing home settings were identified as locations declining to accept field placement students, which is consistent with the data from Figure 10. Respondents were also concerned about the health and safety of their students, particularly in regard to COVID-19 and workplaces not enforcing mask requirements on site. A new theme that emerged was agencies indicating that they would only accept COVID-19 vaccinated students for field placements, which is sure to become a larger trend for the fall 2021 semester as more individuals are vaccinated. Respondents indicated that many institutions are using simulations to replace field placements, whereas others are concerned about properly supervising students doing field placements in virtual environments:

“We are concerned that field placement agencies will continue to utilize remote services for the foreseeable future—this is not a sustainable model for supervision for our students; we have tried to steer clear of settings that primarily provide remote services but this has been very difficult and has stretched thin our options.”

“Even those agencies that kept students took fewer students than in the past so we have a larger number of agencies to work with. For upcoming fall 2021 placements, agencies are saying no to having a student at all due to being tired from the past year.”

More than two-thirds of programs said they were having a harder time than normal securing appropriate field placements for students this semester due to the pandemic (71.3%) (Figure 12). This was lower than the 77.3% of programs who replied in the affirmative in fall 2020.

**FIGURE 12. Percentage of programs having challenges securing appropriate field placements for students due to COVID-19 in spring 2021 and fall 2020.**



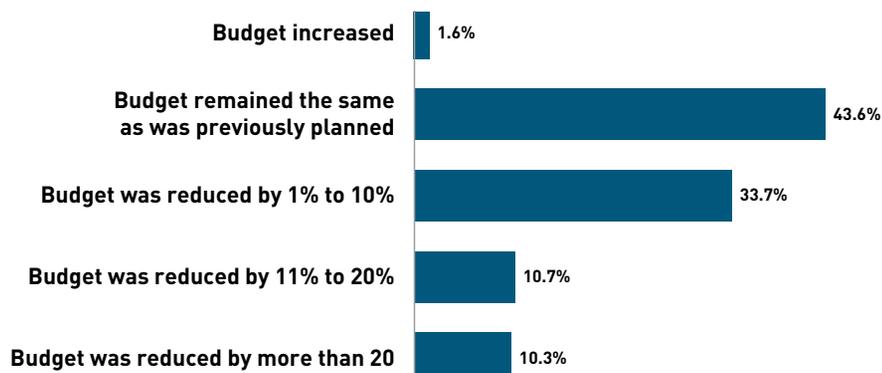
Concerns were also raised in open-ended responses about the risk of students contracting COVID-19 through their field placements; field placement locations not allowing students to continue their placements in the middle of the semester before students complete their required field

placement hours; and ensuring that students are adequately prepared to work as social workers postgraduation, and especially that graduates are prepared to work face-to-face with clients in the future. Several respondents also indicated that their partnerships with agencies have helped get them through the pandemic by finding collaborative ways to get students the training they needed, whereas a few others said that they had no issues finding field placements. Most respondents (88.4%) indicated that they did have a continuity plan to use if students were unable to attend their field placements.

## Budget and Staffing

More than half of respondents indicated that their programs' budgets had been reduced for spring 2021 (54.7%) (Figure 13). Of the programs experiencing a budget cut, 61.1% indicated that the cut was by 10% or less. Of note, 81.1% of HBCUs reported a budget reduction, with 27.3% saying that their budget was reduced by more than 20%, compared to 10.3% overall. Compared to fall 2020, fewer respondents said their budgets were reduced in spring 2021 (54.7% in spring 2021 versus 65.9% in fall 2020).

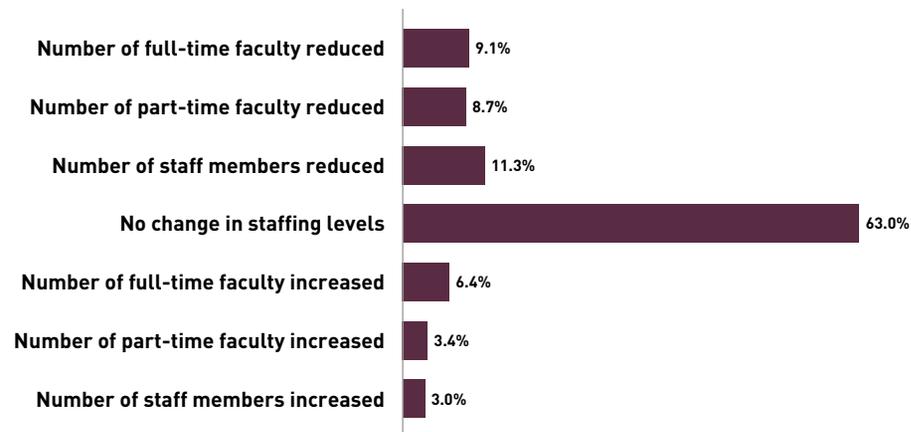
**FIGURE 13. Percentage of respondents indicating new changes to program budgets for spring 2021.**



The majority of the programs that responded to the question indicated that no changes had been made to their staffing levels for spring 2021 (63.0%) (Figure 14). Of the programs that indicated a reduction in full-time faculty members, part-time faculty members, or staff members, most indicated a

reduction of only one category of employee (e.g., only the number of full-time faculty members was reduced). Slightly fewer programs indicated that the number of full-time and part-time faculty members were reduced in spring 2021 (9.1% and 8.7%, respectively) compared to fall 2020 (13.6% and 12.8%, respectively).

**FIGURE 14. Percentage of respondents indicating changes to number of faculty/staff members for spring 2021 semester (respondents could select all that applied).**

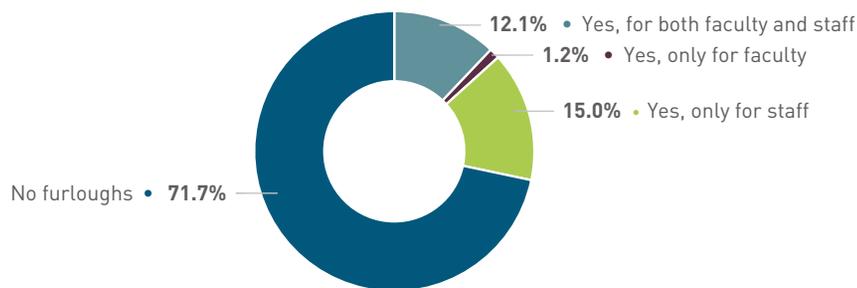


Respondents were also asked whether their campuses had hiring freezes in place, and 41.3% indicated that there was one in place in spring 2021. This was down considerably from 64.8% in fall 2020. Notably, 58.1% of R1 institutions had a hiring freeze compared to only 25.8% of DPUs, whereas 55.2% of Private-other institutions and only 34.1% of Private-religious affiliated institutions had a hiring freeze in place.

Figure 15 shows that more than two-thirds of programs indicated that their institution had not implemented at least one furlough for faculty and/or staff members in the last year (71.7%), whereas 12.1% of respondents had given furloughs to both faculty and staff members, 1.2% had given furloughs for faculty members only, and 15.0% had given furloughs for staff members only. To note, 87.1% of R1s had not given a furlough, but only 58.1% of M1s had not given a furlough. Among Public institutions, 16.8% had given furloughs for faculty and staff members, whereas 27.6% of Private-other institutions had given a furlough only for staff members. The Southeast

(88.1%) and South Central (86.4%) regions were the least likely to have given furloughs; only 25.0% of respondents from the Northwest (AK, ID, OR, WA) had given no furloughs.

**FIGURE 15. Percentage of respondents indicating that a furlough had occurred in the last year at their institution.**



The last question of the budget/staffing section asked about part-time faculty members choosing not to return to teach in the 2020–2021 academic year due to concerns about COVID-19. A majority of respondents (78.0%) said that they had not noticed part-time faculty choosing not to return to teach, and 16.7% indicated that less than 25% of their part-time faculty chose not to return.

## Mental Health and Financial Well-Being

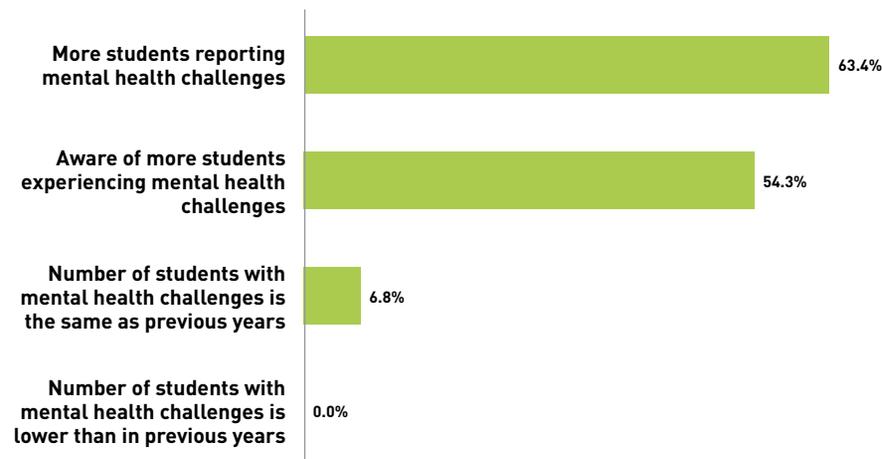
### STUDENTS

A new section of the survey asked about student and faculty/staff mental health and student financial well-being. Respondents were asked whether they were aware of more students and faculty/staff members experiencing challenges and whether those same groups were reporting more challenges (respondents could select both), or whether the number of individuals with challenges was the same as previous years or lower than previous years.

Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that more students were reporting mental health challenges (63.4%) (Figure 16), whereas 54.3% said that they were aware of more students experiencing mental health challenges, but not necessarily reporting them. No programs said that fewer students were experiencing mental health challenges. Of note, more

respondents from MSIs said that they were aware of students experiencing mental health challenges (64.6%) than students reporting mental health challenges (56.2%). In the Northwest more respondents said they were aware of more students experiencing mental health challenges (88.9%).

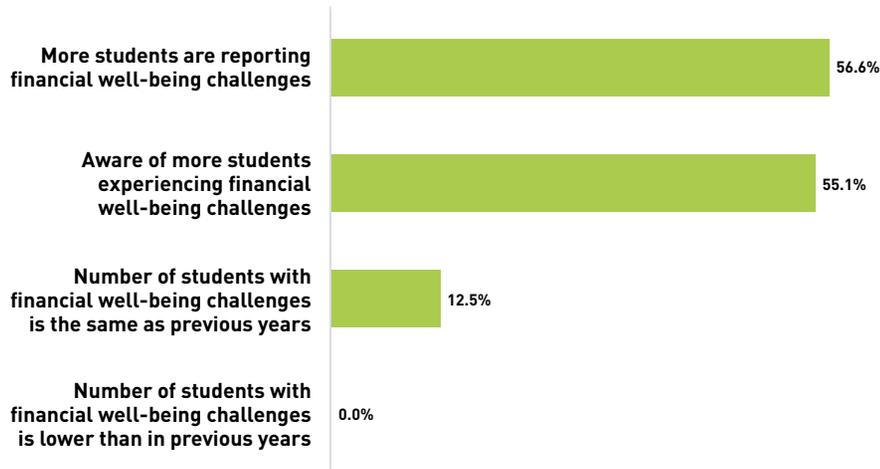
**FIGURE 16. Percentage of respondents indicating their perceptions of student mental health in spring 2021.**



Respondents were also asked whether they believed that most of their students with mental health challenges were seeking help for their challenges and the places where they believed the students were seeking help from. More than two-thirds (69.1%) said that they believed their students were seeking help from campus resources, 58.5% said that they were seeking help from community/external resources, and 22.6% believed they were seeking help from the social work department’s resources. Some (17.7%) did not believe that most of their students with mental health challenges were seeking any help.

More than half of respondents indicated that more students were reporting financial well-being challenges (56.6%), and more than half said they were aware of more students experiencing financial well-being challenges (55.1%) (Figure 17). No respondents said that fewer students were having financial well-being challenges at their institution. No unique findings were seen when breaking these responses down by variable categories.

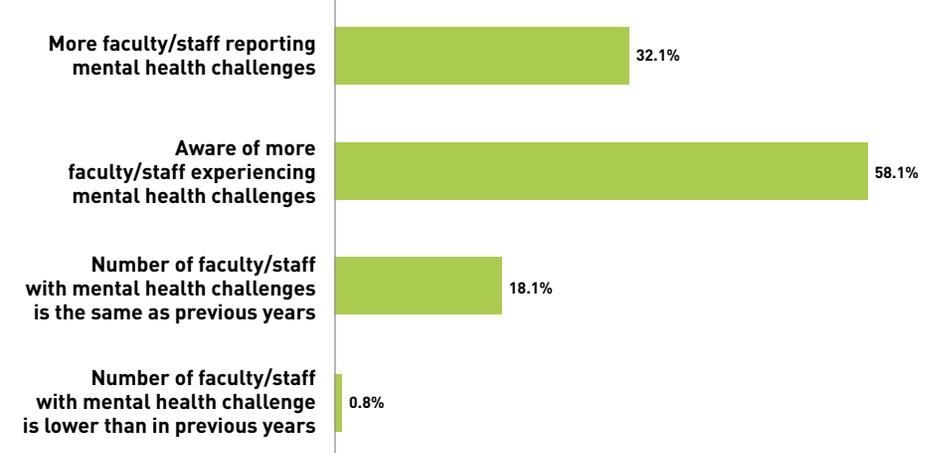
**FIGURE 17.** Percentage of respondents indicating varying perceptions of student financial well-being in spring 2021.



## FACULTY/STAFF

The survey asked a similar question about faculty/staff mental health challenges. Diverging from the responses to the student question, many more respondents said that they were aware of more faculty/staff members experiencing mental health challenges in spring 2021 (58.1%) versus faculty/staff members reporting mental health challenges (32.1%) (Figure 18). Of note, only 18.7% of respondents at MSIs said that more faculty and staff members were reporting mental health challenges, whereas 58.3% of those respondents said they were aware of more faculty/staff members experiencing mental health challenges. These responses align with themes that emerged in the open-ended questions about what was keeping respondents up at night, with many respondents citing staff workload and staff mental health as personal primary concerns. One respondent’s concern exemplifies this: “Are we burning out our faculty—asking them to do more, pivot on a moment’s notice based on our university and state guidelines, and then also looming are budget cuts and financial precarity. It’s exhausting! I am exhausted, we all are.”

**FIGURE 18.** Percentage of respondents indicating varying perceptions of faculty/staff mental health in spring 2021.



## What’s keeping program/department heads up at night?

Lastly, respondents were asked to identify in an open-ended format the number one issue currently keeping them up at night. A qualitative analysis of the 219 responses identified the emerging themes, listed in order of prevalence below.

- Mental well-being.** By far the most prevalent theme identified was that program/department heads were concerned about the mental well-being of their students, faculty members, and staff members. Examples of responses include “students experiencing stress due to the pandemic” and “balancing academic work and concern for mental health with students, staff, and colleagues.”
- Health and safety.** Another major concern was the health and safety of their students, faculty members, and staff members who came to campus and went to in-person field placements. “Our number one concern continues to be caring for our students, faculty, and staff, including keeping them physically safe with COVID protocols” was a common type of response.

- **Continuing quality education.** “Providing quality SW education in light of the many changes and challenges.” Respondents were adamant that they wanted to ensure that students continued to receive a quality education that prepared them to succeed as professionals postgraduation, not just getting them a degree.
- **Enrollment, recruitment, and budget.** Many respondents simply stated “declining enrollment” as a concern, although others tied that to budget concerns. Some respondents mentioned “the continuation of our program given low enrollment,” or the institutions’ financial well-being and enrollment numbers as concerns.
- **Field placements.** As mentioned earlier in this brief, field placements for students are a concern for program/department leaders. “Finding placements for the upcoming students in field practicum” was a common theme.
- **Virtual pedagogy/student engagement.** “Some students struggle with online education.” The challenge of engaging students in a virtual environment and helping them succeed was a common theme.
- **Staffing levels/faculty burnout/self-care.** “Not having enough time to do all of my work in developing/supporting the program, faculty, and students;

care for my family; and engage in self-care.” Program deans and directors are noticing burnout in both their faculty/staff members and themselves and are seeking ways to engage in self-care. Exacerbating the burnout was concern among many programs that older faculty members were retiring due to the pandemic, and that their institutions might not support hiring a replacement as a tenure-line faculty member. Staff morale was also a theme here.

- **Fall 2021.** “What will fall semester 2021 look like? Can we plan for in-person classes? Should we instead plan for a hybrid model?”

Additional themes mentioned less often included racial justice, programs completing their accreditation requirements, and student financial hardships. Some of the themes in spring 2021 were different than in fall 2020, specifically less concern about caregiver responsibilities of faculty/staff members and students and the 2020 presidential election, whereas worries about mental well-being and staff member burnout/morale increased in prevalence in the spring 2021 responses.

Suggested citation: Bradshaw, R. (2021). *Spring 2021 CSWE Member Pulse Survey Results: Impact on social work education for spring 2021*. Council on Social Work Education. [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Research-Statistics/CSWE\\_Spring-2021-Pulse-Survey\\_Brief.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Research-Statistics/CSWE_Spring-2021-Pulse-Survey_Brief.pdf.aspx)