

Social Work Field Education during COVID-19

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Throughout 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic infected hundreds of millions of people worldwide, with nearly 5 million confirmed deaths by late 2021 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; World Health Organization, 2021). During 2022, 244,986 deaths with COVID-19 listed as a contributing cause occurred among American residents (Ahmad, 2023). In the United States, the pandemic has caused rapid changes to our home, school, community, political, and economic lives, tripling unemployment rates and triggering an economic crash more severe in three months than in the two years of the Great Recession (Pew Research Center, 2020). The impact rates were much worse for women, racial minorities, and immigrants, with lost income, food scarcity, delayed medical care, housing insecurity, and changes in K–12 education the most significantly represented (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

SOCIAL WORK AND EPIDEMICS

Social workers are urgently needed to mitigate the many negative impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak, and it is our role to help individuals, families, and communities materially and emotionally, assisting them to “reclaim hope” during and following this time of national and international loss and grief (O’Leary & Tsui, 2020, p. 274). The histories of the public health response to epidemics and social work’s aid to the poor have been intertwined since the earliest days of each, with social workers serving families and marshaling resources on the front lines (Hitchcock, 2016; Stuart, 2020; Wald, 1918).

In the pandemic response, social workers have been called upon to help individuals cope with, develop services for, and advocate policy solutions related to increased

isolation of elderly persons and those with pre-existing health concerns, vulnerability to family violence, xenophobia and racism particularly targeting Asian Americans, closure of government and community-based resources, and economic crisis (Bright, 2020). Under-testing, undersupply of personal protective equipment (PPE), and little early federal coordination of services and resources have led to a particularly acute level of need in the United States, with case surges overwhelming hospitals (Walter-McCabe, 2020) and layoffs overwhelming the unemployment insurance systems in some states.

Meanwhile, the disease is impacting Americans from oppressed groups more seriously, with higher mortality among the lowest-income patients (Bright, 2020). Macro social workers have been called upon to help advocate and organize for worker protections for frontline service workers and social workers themselves; paid sick leave for essential and at-home workers; benefits for persons out of work; release of compromised nonviolent prisoners; and access to treatment services, including methadone or other medication-based services for opioid use disorder (Shdaimah & Strier, 2020; Walter-McCabe, 2020). Holding the line on policies blocking pandemic evictions, safe food delivery services, safety measures for children (Goldman et al., 2020), and adult residential living settings, as well as increased shelter capacity for people previously or newly experiencing homelessness, are other areas in extreme and urgent need of attention from macro social workers. Nearly every social issue is impacted by the spread of COVID-19. For example, sexual health educators working internationally have estimated that their client base could see an additional 1.3 million unintended pregnancies in 37 countries, leading to 1.2 million unsafe abortions and 5,000 pregnancy-related deaths (Church et al., 2020). With schools closed to in-person learning, parents' employment and work-life balance are jeopardized (Waller et al., 2021).

Interprofessional collaborations and services have become more critical than ever. In an Italian study of social work services during Italy's peak infection period, the pandemic brought to light places where cohesion between health providers and social work services were weak, and they have been strengthened by necessity during the crisis (Gregori & Perino, 2020). Interprofessional teams including social workers are also evolving new virtual care innovations (e.g., palliative care toolboxes for PCPs, in Roberts et al., 2020), and academics and providers are collaborating in new ways (e.g., virtual co-education of hundreds of health educators who go on to train citizens about COVID-19 in dozens of countries; Aluisio et al., 2020).

COVID-19 has necessitated the advancement of clients', providers', and students' uptake of telehealth platforms and other technology-based social work and education interventions; while these gains may benefit access to services and increase innovations (Patterson Silver Wolf, 2020), they may also lead to over-adoption that diminishes their quality post-pandemic (Teräs et al., 2020).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

Field education, the experiential heart of all professional education, has been seriously limited by the dangers of COVID-19, and placements have been cut and changed in ways that could not have been imagined prepandemic. Professional schools in other disciplines around the world have had to very quickly adapt to a new world where hands-on

learning is blocked to keep professionals in training and their patients, clients, and students safe. Teacher training has lost thousands of hands-on student teaching placements and quickly evolved ways to engage teacher candidates in alternative preservice training. Some adaptations include use of Twitter (Asim et al., 2020), evidence-based social media collaborative spaces (Baker et al., 2020), and simulated teaching of student avatars (Lee & Freas, 2020; Monroe et al., 2020). Teacher field education has also worked to increase contact with faculty liaisons through collaborative technologies and e-coaching (Pike et al., 2020), e-portfolios of student internships (Hendrith et al., 2020), and the viewing and discussion of videos of exemplary online teaching (Prado et al., 2020).

Similarly, adaptations to the disruption of medical school field education have included simulation practice, independent study, virtual lectures allowing interaction with trusted instructors and peers, and nationally available video instruction that engages both visual and auditory learning (Coe et al., 2020).

SOCIAL WORK FIELD EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

The social work profession, too, calls field education its signature pedagogy, the synthetic, integrative curricula area in which students are socialized to the profession (Boitel & Fromm, 2014). As a result of the pandemic crisis, social work field placement sites are now tasked with finding balance between limiting clients' and staff members' exposure to others while providing critical services. Agencies hosting MSW students must also consider the capacity needed to teach a social worker in training, whose presence is an asset to helping the agency manage client needs, but who, as a student, is limited in their capacity to provide services without direction from agency staff (Bright, 2020). Some have highlighted the increased opportunities for students and social workers to use this time, when some clinical services and placements are shut down, to focus on mezzo- and macro-level social work, such as advocacy, online organizing, community education, and asset mapping (Perez et al., 2020). In response to the increased structural, community, and family needs created by the pandemic and the disruption it has caused to site-based social work field education, the following COVID-19 case study is offered to describe and analyze one large public social work school's response and to draw conclusions that may prove useful in future times of crisis.

CASE STUDY: THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK (UMSSW) FIELD EXPERIENCE

UMSSW operates on a tightly knit downtown professional school campus founded in 1807 as a school of medicine, with schools of law, pharmacy, nursing, public health, dentistry, and a nationally known hospital. Interprofessional, collaborative responses to the pandemic prioritizing health and medical science have been central to university and UMSSW adaptation to the pandemic.

By necessity, the Office of Field Education (OFE) at UMSSW changed from a fully functioning, in-person field experience to a mostly online, remote field experience for nearly 900 MSW students, 350 agencies, 1,500 field instructors and task supervisors,

and 65 liaisons. OFE essentially redesigned the program while attempting to conform to mandates from federal and state health officials; University of Maryland, Baltimore and University System of Maryland leadership; Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) requirements; UMSSW leadership; and the needs and demands of students.

Leading and Making Policy

The enormity and challenge of this undertaking cannot be underestimated. Leadership and policy-making processes have been critical in the UMSSW response to the pandemic. Leading this effort with humanity, vulnerability, constructive positivity, and hope has been essential to prevent despair and paralysis in a frightening, grief-surrounded, and uncertain time (see Brown, 2015). Often, the collaborative decision-making team had to take immediate action, with reassurance that the team would share responsibility and immediately correct mistakes if they were made, with decisions rooted in the education of professionals and the nine core competencies as the compass. As these events occurred, one member of the team was battling COVID cases at home, making vulnerable, empathic leadership even more essential.

In response to the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Maryland Crisis Management Advisory Group (CMAG) convened meetings of the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, including the campus-wide Experiential Learning Work Group, which addresses matters related to field placements, internships, and practicums for students attending each school on University of Maryland's professional school campus. The work group, which is co-led by leaders in the medical and social work schools, presented its recommendations to CMAG on August 4, 2020, and received approval to implement them effective the 2020–2021 academic year. OFE organized a School of Social Work Experiential Learning Work Group to develop a plan that built on CMAG's approved policies and procedures, which included modifications to field education at UMSSW for the 2020–2021 academic year that are detailed in the following section. The plan acknowledges that the safety of interns, field instructors, and clients are paramount to all stakeholders.

Adapting Policy

To finish the 2019–2020 school year during a national crisis, and to fill 830 placements for the 2020–2021 school year, tremendous flexibility and creativity of all stakeholders were essential, while keeping social work ethics and high standards centralized for the competency-based professional education of a generation of Maryland social workers. UMSSW classroom instruction entered the 2020–2021 school year fully virtual and changed to hybrid form in academic year 2021–2022. Campus COVID-19 policies were initially in place, including daily self-screening and report, and testing before visiting the campus, but classes were off campus and fully remote and field placements were off campus and mostly virtual. To offer the necessary flexibility and manage continued instruction, the UMSSW OFE made policy adaptations that included

- Allowing field hours to include conduct of skills lab modules for macro and clinical practice; crisis intervention hotline rotations; voter registration campaign

participation; and an expanded list of approved, universally applicable online training webinars.

- Reducing the amount of required field education time to 85 percent of UMSSW's previous requirement: Foundation students must complete 51 days (previously 60) and advanced students must complete 76 days (previously 90) for the academic year. This requirement still exceeded the CSWE baseline time requirement for field education before the COVID-19 reduction allowance.
- Allowing students and field instructors to determine an individualized field schedule for the completion of field time, approved by their liaison.
- Revising the employment-based placement opportunity, per CSWE guidance, to allow students' employment in relevant agencies to apply to field time, in the parameters of the nine core competencies.
- Offering flexibility to agencies to begin field activities:
 - modifying the start date of the placement (early or late in the semester);
 - allowing hybrid experiences to either start remotely and move to in person, or start in person with agency staff while providing telehealth;
 - supporting a spring semester start to field into summer, and using the incomplete policy to allow students to complete field while avoiding additional tuition costs; and
 - arranging block placements for advanced students during which they work full time for one semester only.
- Eliminating international field placements: Semester abroad placements at University of Greenwich in London and Rajagiri College of Social Science located in Kalamassery, Cochin, India were suspended as a result of COVID-19 and restricted international and university travel policies.
- Relaxing stringent requirements for field instructors in certain cases in which an unlicensed MSW-level supervisor is available at a strong field placement site.
- Expanding the number of faculty field instructors for new grassroots placements that have the capacity for strong task supervision but no licensed social worker on staff.
- Requiring contingency planning of all sites, since a partial or full shutdown of field activities may be necessary at some point in the future.

Current Placements

In-Person Services. With safety precautions formally approved, some students continued on-site at field placements such as local hospitals, community health clinics, homeless services organizations, inpatient behavioral health programs, and assertive community treatment teams providing intake and discharge planning, health screening and resource needs assessment, case management and crisis intervention, individual and group therapies, and diagnostic intervention services. In one case early in the pandemic, students placed in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services were at the nexus of guiding resources to fight the pandemic and were granted permission to not only finish their

practicum year but extend their experience into the summer to aid in the national crisis response. Still other students at a rape crisis center prioritized their ethical commitment by completing their clients' individual therapy until their discharge from services in late May 2020, when services in every other context were shutting down due to COVID.

UMSSW worked to develop partnerships with initiatives developed in its communities to directly address the negative impact of COVID-19. UMSSW students joined a neighbors' network that was created during the pandemic, providing virtual and in-person checks on vulnerable households to assess basic needs, mental health issues, or somatic health services (Wenger, 2020). Other students assisted families facing eviction due to their inability to work during COVID or provided services to homeless individuals quarantining in a local hotel. Local schools have continued to provide meals to their students and families who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program, and UMSSW students assisted them, as well as contacted and served families experiencing other material or service-related insecurities due to COVID. These activities were essential during the inception of the pandemic, and students received credit toward their practicum requirements for their work. As agencies and the people they serve have adapted to COVID conditions, students have continued to work in several key areas affected over the longer term such as eviction prevention, housing and food insecurity, and assistance to elderly neighbors.

Virtual Services. Student transitions to providing virtual clinical services to individuals, couples, families, and groups during COVID-19 happened rapidly in spring 2020 and continued into 2021, with staggeringly fast learning about the key skills and ethics of telehealth provision and multiple technological platforms (primarily agency client data systems and HIPAA-compliant online telehealth platforms requiring strict confidentiality standards from students working remotely off-site). Despite the challenge of Medicaid restrictions on student provision of tele-mental health therapy, students are able to perform these services in settings that take other insurances or provide services for sliding-scale fees.

Other agencies have adopted, and adapted, use of social media to stay in touch with their communities and have accessed client-centered electronic platforms that will keep confidentiality intact. These same agencies are training students to use these platforms as an additional skill and have expanded their orientations for students to be inclusive of technology training. UMSSW conducted virtual simulations for students among many other remote field activities under development and encouraged students to engage in telephonic and virtual meeting platforms in partnership projects including voter registration, assessment of isolation and needs in households of elderly people, and crisis intervention and referral for services on call-in lines previously used for information purposes.

Over the 2020–2021 academic year, agencies adapted to the new “COVID normal” by developing additional capacity to safely provide client services. Those agencies resuming in-person services that also wished to host students submitted proposals to the UMSSW OFE describing their safety protocols and provisions for how they would keep their stakeholders safe from COVID exposure. The OFE reviewed and approved these proposals to ensure student safety and included a requirement for review of safety protocols as part of all students' agency orientations.

COVID Impact on Placement of Students in the Field. Overall, the decline in enrollment at UMSSW was far less dire than initially expected. Around 830 student placements were needed for assessment year (AY) 2020–2021—approximately the same number as for any other year since 2015. Despite the challenges facing field coordinators to identify placements in agencies coping with COVID, only about 70 students were still without a confirmed placement at the official start of the 2020–2021 academic year, despite the significant reduction of available agency-based placements.

Dozens of sites related to social work for aging populations had evaporated, as assisted living traffic was strictly monitored, and senior centers remained shuttered. With K–12 public schools closed in Maryland, some school social workers had elected not to host students, while others signed up for more students to help with engaging hard-to-reach families in a virtual education world largely inaccessible to many. Small agencies, made unstable due to funding impacted by COVID, remained uncertain about their ability to remain open at all, let alone accept a student for training. These changes to agency capacity for students required even more adaptation and creativity in the UMSSW OFE placement strategy. In addition to continuing to expand student engagement in virtual platforms, the OFE took advantage of the rising prevalence of macro placements, such as providing especially meaningful work and learning opportunities in Maryland communities reacting to the pandemic, economic downturn, and racial justice uprising simultaneously.

Preparing Students. Communication with students was paramount, with field seminars, town hall meetings, emails, direct calls, and coaching from field instructors, liaisons, and OFE faculty working together to address student concerns, questions, and fears. Online town hall meetings, hosted both by the school as a whole and by the OFE, were a key venue for sharing up-to-the minute information about safety and the disease itself, campus policy, and adaptations in field procedures and policy. New student town halls also dealt with the usual arrival anxieties, now heightened, while transparently describing preparations for the start of a most unusual school year.

Prepandemic, all first-year students already attended a field seminar online, and this structure was critical in terms of student communication and support. Field seminar is an opportunity for students to meet and discuss their field experiences, with students learning how to bridge material and concepts learned in the classroom with their practice experiences in field placement. UMSSW seminars are online; occur monthly; and focus on the integration of student critical self-reflection and antioppression, privilege, and cultural humility. The seminars are led by adjunct seminar instructors responsible for ensuring students exercise critical self-reflection and awareness as they move through field experiences.

Beginning with campus closure on March 12, 2020, students were directed to follow their field placement agency guidelines about whether to report to field as usual. Some were asked to report in person for the duration of the year to provide critical COVID-19-related services in hospitals, shelters, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and other sites. Others reported only briefly to conduct minimal terminations with their clients and seek remote tasks to complete the semester. Concerns for students' safety were paramount and were held in balance with the fundamental social work ethics underpinning students' learning as they built professional identities

as social workers in the field. By March 19, 2020, University of Maryland, Baltimore Interim President Bruce Jarrell mandated that all students vacate field sites in two days, so on that same day, the OFE notified all field stakeholders of the mandate, requiring that students negotiate remote work with their clients and projects in field. In six more days, the OFE issued another bulletin to all field stakeholders with the CSWE guidance allowing students to truncate their field requirement to 85 percent of total required time in field. Three bulletins in two weeks reflected the rapid-fire way in which change was occurring, and the necessity that all UMSSW stakeholders adapt to change as quickly as possible.

The reduction in field time to 85 percent meant that most students, excepting only advanced students on an extended field schedule, had already completed their field requirement. The OFE made it clear, however, that students were not permitted to jump ship; rather, they were mandated to complete a checklist of specific termination criteria, including a humane termination communication with clients and completing all outstanding case documentation and projects, before leaving their placements. Any student wishing to continue with their placement in person was required to submit a proposal for remaining on site, including their reason for doing so. Some students did submit a proposal, citing their ethical commitment to remaining on site, or macro opportunities to address the pandemic.

Before their dismissal at the end of March 2020, most students were asked to prepare with their field instructors a remote activity plan, drawing from a listing of alternative field education learning activities that could be completed remotely on a temporary basis. In addition to virtual engagement with clients, the plans incorporated online training and assigned projects specific to the agency. Students were instructed that client-related virtual meetings should be conducted in accordance with field site policies for secure communications. Students were also asked to work with field instructors to include a variety of different activities across several competency areas. All plans were approved by the field liaison before any activity was counted toward students' remaining field hours and required details about specific activities students would pursue, along with the specific date, time, location, and number of hours to complete each activity. A log of completed activities was submitted to the field instructor to receive comments on these activities as part of the student's semester field assessment. Students were also required to provide certificates of completion or other appropriate verification of online training they completed to receive credit for field hours.

Like Americans in general, some MSW students were severely affected by the pandemic's attendant economic downturn and school closures. Student parents were taking care of children throughout the day while managing coursework and field duties. With restaurant and many other temporary and flexible jobs typically held by students eliminated, students' already-precarious livelihoods were threatened. The UMSSW Student Support Office raised over \$50,000 to create a fund for students in crisis who might be able to continue their studies with timely financial support. Reminders about existing services such as the Student Counseling Center were circulated, along with links to campus information and resources about combating the virus itself.

By October 2020, the remaining 70 placements still needed for the 2020–2021 academic year were secure. For the first several weeks of the fall 2020 semester, OFE leaders were in continual contact with students without established placements, and

creative efforts to recruit and design placements continued. Communication with students included

- Continual emails and telephone calls.
- Multiple options for Zoom calls with OFE leaders.
- Acknowledgment of and empathy for the students' frustration and anxiety, with reassurance that they would not be left behind, through calls, online meetings, and emails during which OFE faculty and leadership expressed their own concerns and frustrations at not being able to meet students' needs or identify placements able to receive them.
- Information about the structural barriers to traditional placements during the pandemic, including that many longtime site partners were shut down, especially in the Maryland counties slow to reopen since they were hotspots in the Washington, DC, suburbs.
- Reassurance about contingency plans for experiential learning hours while students awaited placement, which included
 - starting the semester with macro projects and macro process recordings,
 - joining simulations with supervision in small groups led by faculty,
 - conducting rotations on hotlines,
 - participating in the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign,
 - engaging in volunteer opportunities in community-based agencies, and
 - completing additional online webinars and training opportunities.
- Partnership with students to identify new placements in their own networks, including places where they, or someone they knew, had worked or volunteered. These included colleagues, mentors, friends, parents, or siblings with private practices, positions in adapted social service agencies, or opportunities in school systems for providing additional support to children suddenly schooling from home.
- Information about new placements under development, including the downtown Baltimore COVID-19 field hospital at the convention center and the nearby quarantine hotel, and a pending Baltimore City-funded initiative to assist an anticipated 500 families evicted due to COVID.
- Reminders about registration options and deadlines so that students could make informed decisions in their own best interests, including deferment of admission, switching to part time, or taking a leave of absence.

Preparing Field Instructors and Field Liaisons. The UMSSW OFE encouraged field agencies to safeguard student safety during the COVID-19 pandemic to the greatest extent possible. Virtual trainings were and continue to be held for field instructors and liaisons beyond the usual orientations, with some offering continuing education credits. These trainings included remote field instruction methods, discussions of preparing safe working environments, and review of policy changes, including flexibility with reduced hours and adjusted start of field dates.

In AY 2020–2021, a variety of preparations were made with field instructors and liaisons, including requiring that sites with any portion of in-person student time complete an Experiential Learning Proposal and Off Campus Checklist to confirm the agencies' ability to provide in-person field in a safe manner and their readiness for the learner (UMSSW, 2020). They were also required to review a Statement of Risk waiver with students during the agency orientation. The goal of this review is to inform students fully of the risks they may be exposed to by working in the field. Students acknowledged in the online electronic field notebook that they had received a copy of the Statement of Risk, and field instructors were advised to review the statement with students when they began field placement. Field instructors were also asked to help orient students to and support their full participation in Safe on Campus (Symptom Assessment for Employees and Students on Campus)—the University's COVID-19 system—to track and monitor employee and student COVID exposure and illness on and off campus. UMSSW provided students with a cloth mask, and students were encouraged to use their own masks as well. Any additional PPE needed by students in field (gloves, face shields, body suits, etc.) must be provided by the agency. Finally, an addendum to the usual annual Affiliation Agreement was executed for all active field placement agencies to cover changes and/or new responsibilities of UMSSW and the agency as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In AY 2021–2022, many of these protocols were still in place to ensure students' safety against COVID and agencies' capacity to host them appropriately.

Field liaisons connect with and support students and field instructors throughout the year, and more than half of adjunct liaisons have taught Foundation Field Seminars, which were already facilitated online prepandemic. Seminar instructors were trained to help students and placements through the transition and were given professional development training on the skills of field seminar facilitation online. Training specifically for facilitating seminars was offered in July 2020, on the 6 Pillars of a Brave Space (Stubbs, 2019). Grounded in restorative practice, this model identifies and invites the vulnerability, perspective-taking, leaning into fear, examination of intentions, mindful intention, and critical reflection needed to learn and enter the social work profession. Particular to this time of global crisis, the 6 Pillars offered a framework in which seminars could engage in necessary discourse about structural oppression and racism central to social workers' responsibilities as social justice agents (Stubbs, 2019). Though they might have previously taken on a more facilitative role, seminar instructors were also taught the ongoing use of the Socratic method and open-ended questions to model and teach critical thinking skills and social workers' lifelong critical reflection to help anchor students in a familiar teaching environment, despite being fully remote (Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Marlowe et al., 2015; Ruch, 2002; Smith, 2020).

Lessons Learned. Responding to the pandemic threw into sharp relief two of the key tensions in professional education. The first is between a field placement as work and as education and between worker versus student identities. Students in field do not receive the pay, worker's compensation, sick leave, or decision-making power of many professional social workers, and are therefore especially vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. Instead, students must be protected by the OFE's faculty, policies, and liability insurance. At the same time, social workers in training were in many cases part of

the front line of the community's medical and humanitarian response to a full-scale health and economic disaster of proportions never seen in their lifetimes. Facilitating safe engagement in those efforts was critical to student growth as professionals, learning what it means to be a social worker at its very core. Students had to learn their role as a first responder in a crisis, and many, like the students who asked to remain in placement, sought an exception to remote field, or extended their work in placement, did so out of their sense of duty: the ethical responsibility of social workers to do no harm and to be among the first to respond with help. Students are learners, yet so many had already shown their readiness to assume the role of professional social worker during the pandemic crisis. Approaching work with students typically means focusing on their learning needs, yet COVID reminded the OFE of all to be learned from students—their enthusiasm and vigor was inspiring.

The second tension is the one between humane flexibility toward students in field education policies and upholding high standards for the profession. Many students' family and economic lives were pulled to the breaking point. Without immense and rapid creativity, humane policies that promoted students reaching their goals on expected timelines were in direct conflict with keeping to standards that define entry to the profession and protect future clients. Particular to UMSSW, the CSWE reduction of time in field allowance enabled some programs to reduce time in field to a total of 765 hours (85 percent of the 900-hour CSWE minimum threshold for accredited programs). UMSSW elected to reduce time to 85 percent, but 85 percent of the program requirement is 1,200 hours. Thus, students graduating from UMSSW after encountering the challenges of COVID still exceeded the CSWE typical minimum threshold of 900 hours: UMSSW students graduated in 2020 and 2021 with a minimum of 1,016 hours if they experienced both foundation and advanced years of field at the reduced 85 percent rate.

To navigate these tensions practically and ethically, instructors and liaisons had to be open to training and guidance on frequent, vulnerable, and open communication; collaborative policy development; and technological support. Charles Darwin (1859) told us that rapid adaptation is the key to survival in a changing environment, and this has been central to the response. Social work scholar Brené Brown (2015) urged us all to embrace essential vulnerability while navigating and adapting to the unknown. To adapt to change, to proceed into the unknown, one must embrace the risk and pain inherent in trying, and possibly failing, and then trying again. Maya Angelou once said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better" (Winfrey, 2011). Navigating the ever-changing demands of the pandemic and economic downturn forced all of us in field education to tap into the height of our adaptable, yet vulnerable selves.

CONCLUSION

The need and demand for social workers has been urgent both locally and nationwide during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Students have risen to the occasion, showing an interest in and willingness to support field agencies during this complex time. MSW students have learned to quickly adapt to telehealth and other digital ways of providing services, where feasible, in some cases reducing their experience to protect the well-being of the clients and communities they serve. Some have also served on the

front lines, showing immense grit, determination, and bravery to risk their own health and well-being in service to others. While UMSSW operated differently than usual in 2020–2021, its core values remained as strong as ever, and its program grew stronger from the adaptations made during the COVID pandemic.

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