

Trends in Nursing Education: Spring 2024 Findings



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At CORE Higher Education Group, we consistently engage with academic professionals who express a range of challenges associated with nursing education. These challenges span various aspects of program administration—from managing student enrollment and facilitating preceptor participation to navigating accreditation requirements and standards set by agencies such as by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). Such issues underscore the complexities of operating nursing education programs and highlight the critical need for effective solutions to streamline these processes.

In 2022, CORE worked with The University of Connecticut School of Nursing to conduct a comprehensive survey among nursing programs within colleges and universities in the United States to evaluate the landscape of nursing education. Nearly two years have passed since that initial assessment, prompting a reevaluation to discern ongoing and emergent trends within the sector. With the execution of a follow-up survey, CORE aims to delineate continuities and changes in the field, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of the current state of nursing education. For the review and analysis of this whitepaper, we worked with Dr. Crystel Farina, Associate Dean for BSN Programs and Assistant Professor at George Washington University in 2024.

Since moving forward from the pandemic, the reverberations continue to affect various facets of educational and institutional operations profoundly. These shifts necessitate an ongoing evaluation to effectively adapt to the evolving educational environment.

We asked nursing education administrators for their unvarnished takes on the positive and negative trends in nursing education. Their insights are integral to this report, providing a grounded view of the developments that shape the field.

The intent of this whitepaper is to validate and perhaps challenge the prevailing sentiments at institutions across the country, aiming to contribute constructively to the discourse on the future of nursing education.

METHODOLOGY

CORE Higher Education Group, in collaboration with the University of Connecticut School of Nursing, developed the 2022 survey to investigate prevailing trends in nursing education. For continuity and comparability, the structure of the survey was largely maintained in the subsequent study.

However, we added a few additional questions and modified a few of the available answers based on the results from 2022 and qualitative feedback we received from CORE's Nursing Education Advisory Board.

The latest survey was executed in March through April of 2024 to nursing programs within colleges and universities in the United States.

Despite a lower participation rate in 2024, with 41 respondents compared to 150 in 2022, the consistency in responses between the two surveys suggests the reliability of the findings. This consistency underscores the stability of trends over time, affirming the representativeness of the smaller sample.

The survey's methodology, including a comparative analysis and the calculation of standard error deviation, enhances the reliability of the results. Generally, the smaller the difference in the standard error, the more similar they are in reliability. The data yields meaningful insights into prevailing trends and provides valuable information for decision-making in nursing education programs. This approach ensures that the findings remain robust and reflective of broader sectoral dynamics.

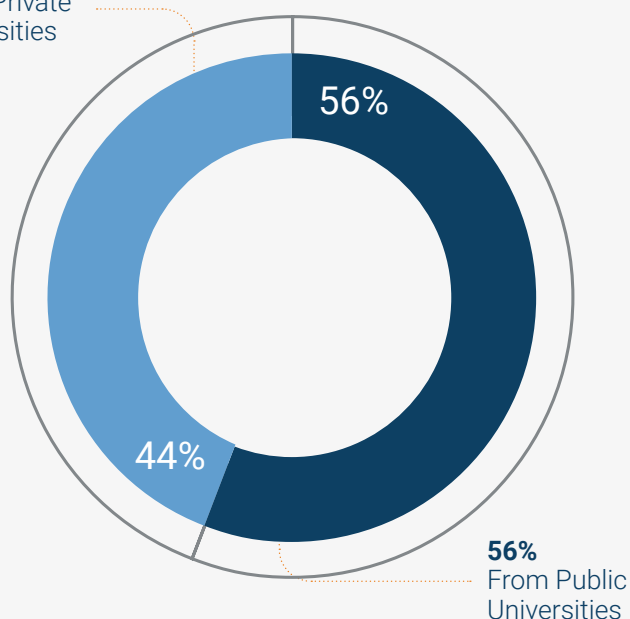


DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

In 2024, the overwhelming majority of respondents came from programs who presented both undergraduate and graduate level programs. 56% of respondents were from public universities and 44% from private.

73% of respondents worked in programs that offered both graduate and undergraduate programs. With that result in mind, we are not splitting those results out as we did in 2022 because the number of graduate programs only respondents was very small.

44%
From Private
Universities

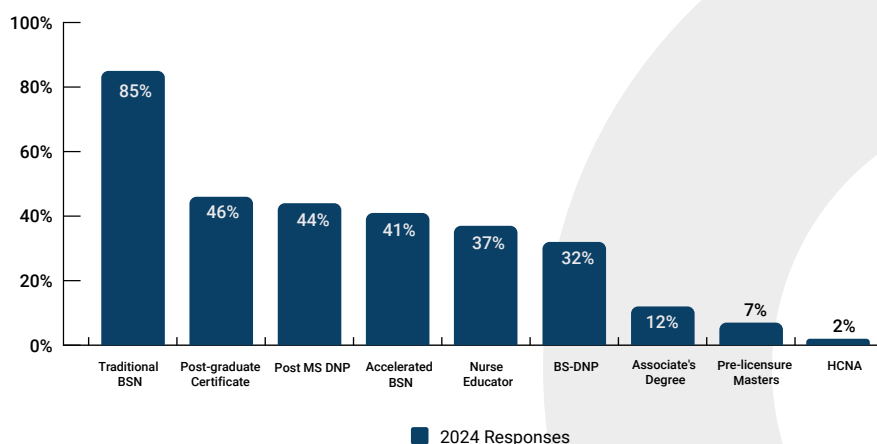


73%

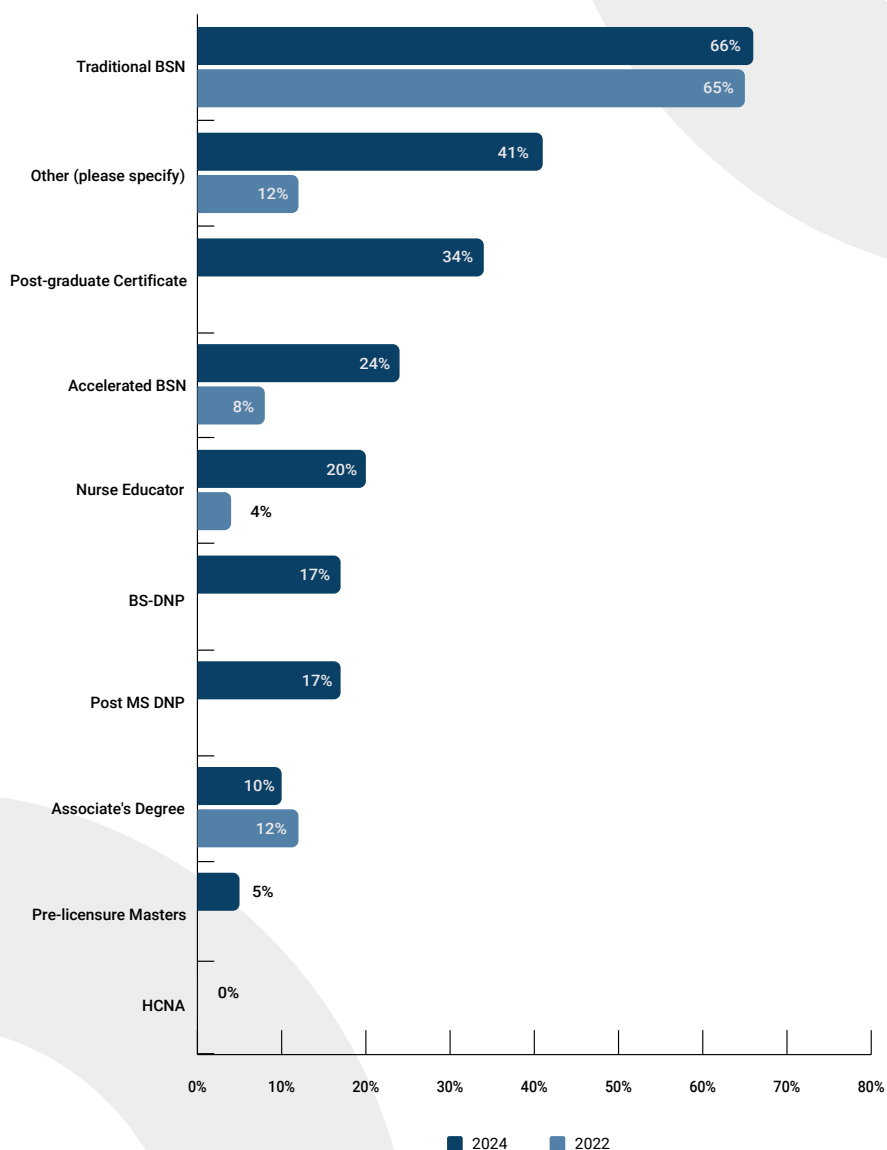
of respondents worked in programs that offered both graduate and undergraduate programs

n = 41 respondents in total with some offering multiple trends

**What type of Nursing programs does your Institution offer?
(select all that apply)**



What Nursing programs do you support in your current role?



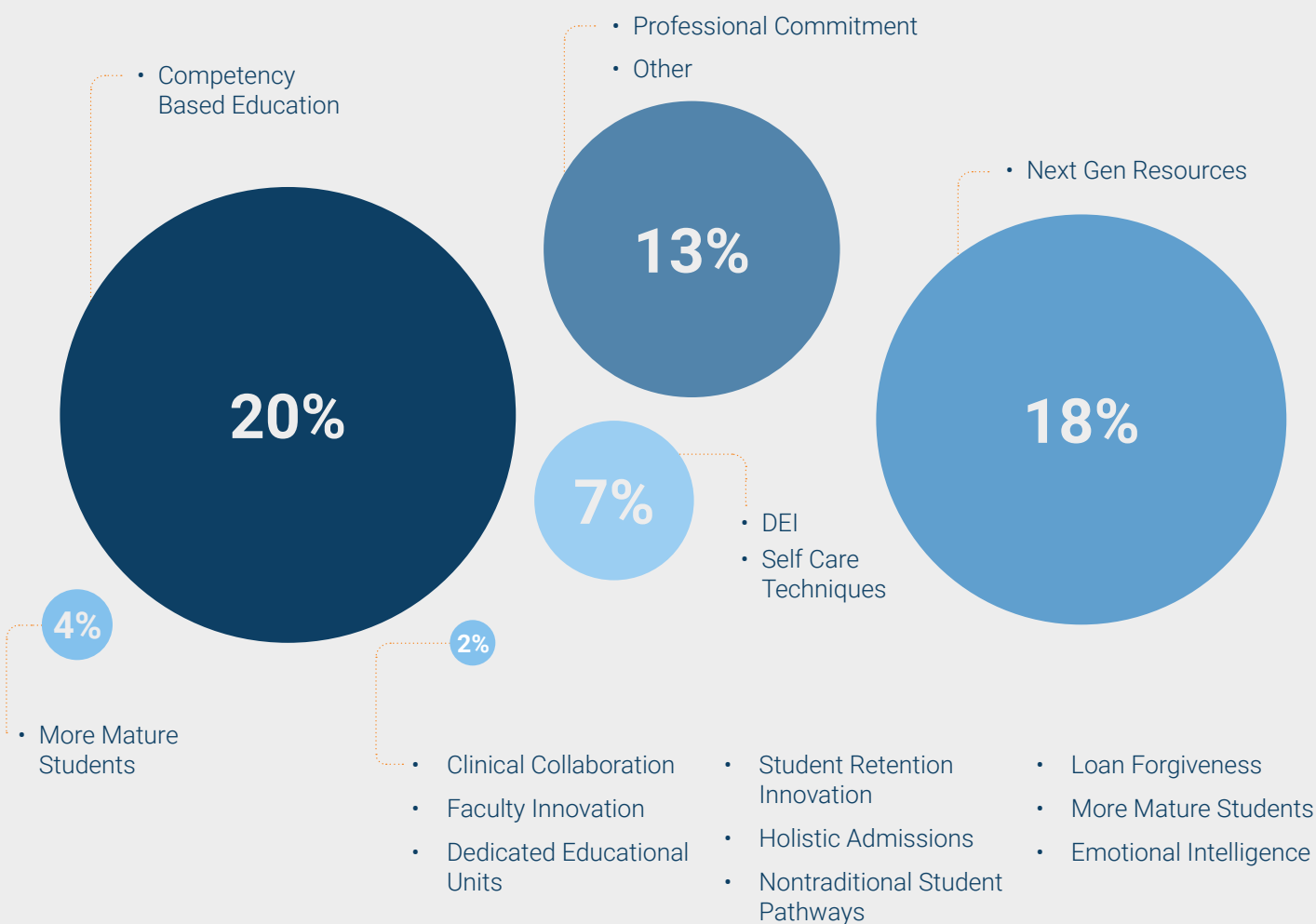
THE TOP TRENDS

We asked respondents (via open text response) to give us a sentence or two on the most positive and negative trends they are currently seeing in nursing education.

First, the positive. Several respondents - nearly 25% - cited the ongoing commitment to competency-based education as an increasingly positive trend for the nursing student body. Others noted the increased availability of Next Gen Resources, including advancements in simulations and case study based learning.

Other noteworthy positive trends included the increased professional commitment from students post-COVID, a very real concern that was showcased in the 2022 survey, as well as DEI initiatives and a continued emphasis on teaching student self-care techniques.

Positive trends in nursing education



The survey calls attention to several pressing challenges that continue to affect the quality and effectiveness of programs. These issues, consistently highlighted by nursing education professionals, include the qualifications of faculty, student readiness, and the prevalent burnout and stress affecting both students and faculty.

- Qualified faculty
- Student readiness
- Burnout and stress

The issue of securing qualified faculty is consistently raised, with several underlying factors contributing to this challenge. Here are a few direct quotes from the responses:

“Lack of qualified faculty, especially because of the significant pay gap that exists between academia and clinical practice. Individuals give up a great deal when they decide to teach.”

“Older faculty who want to teach as they were taught in their nursing programs years ago.”

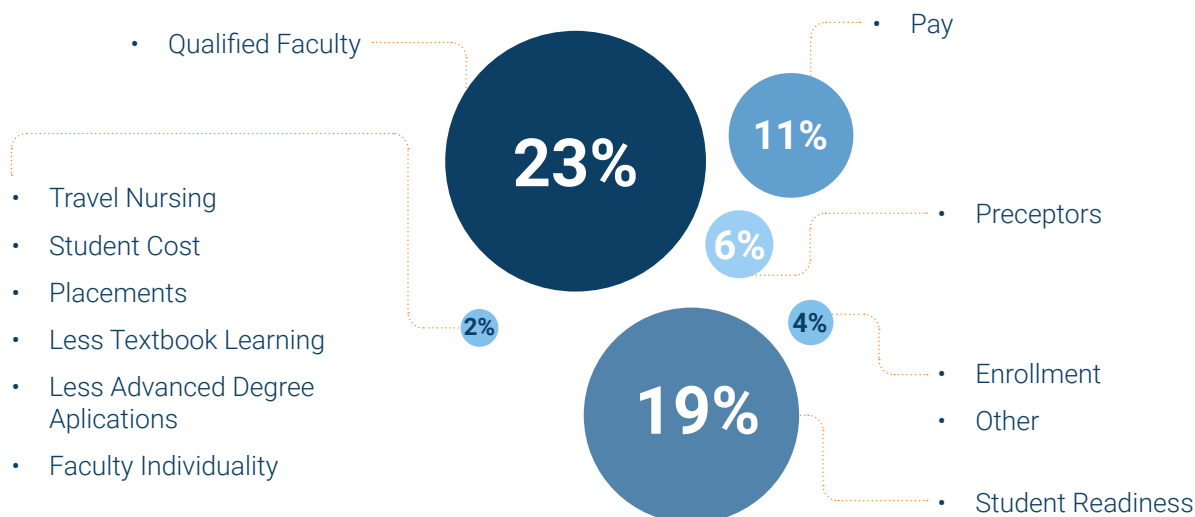
“Shortage of educators and staff nurses decrease the amount of hands-on patient care experience students get prior to graduation.”

UNDERLYING ECONOMIC FACTORS

Compensation remains a fundamental issue, emerging as a key factor behind the challenge of securing qualified faculty. The disparity in pay between clinical practice and academic roles often serves as a deterrent for potential educators, impacting the overall quality of education and student outcomes.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including reevaluating compensation structures, updating curricular offerings to reflect modern pedagogical standards, and providing support systems to mitigate burnout and stress among educators and students alike. By tackling these issues, nursing programs can enhance their ability to prepare well-rounded and competent nursing professionals.

Negative trends in nursing education



n = 41 respondents in total with some offering multiple trends

STATUS OF ENROLLMENT

Compared to our 2022 survey, we are seeing a far greater percentage of respondents citing their enrollment size as decreasing significantly. This comparison chart shows that the slight decrease many were experiencing in 2022 has only exacerbated. This observed decline in enrollment may be attributed to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has potentially intensified hesitations about entering the nursing field. The pandemic's impact on the healthcare sector could have influenced perceptions of nursing as a career, affecting student enrollment decisions.

To put in perspective 37% of respondents feel like their enrollment size is decreasing slightly or significantly, with 22% feeling it is significant. Compare that to 33% in total and only 7% feeling significant decrease 2 years ago.

Please note: The standard error for the proportion of respondents indicating a decrease in enrollment in 2024 is approximately 0.075, and for 2022, it is approximately 0.038. These values reflect the variability of the sample proportions, indicating that the increase in the standard error in 2024 is likely due to the smaller sample size compared to 2022.

However, it is also important to recognize the dynamics at institutions where enrollment is on the rise. While the increase is modest, it suggests that certain programs are successfully attracting more students, possibly due to innovative recruitment strategies or enhanced program offerings that resonate with prospective students' needs and aspirations.

The stability in enrollment numbers at some schools further indicates a level of resilience and possible satisfaction with the educational offerings. These institutions may have effectively adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic, maintaining their appeal to students.

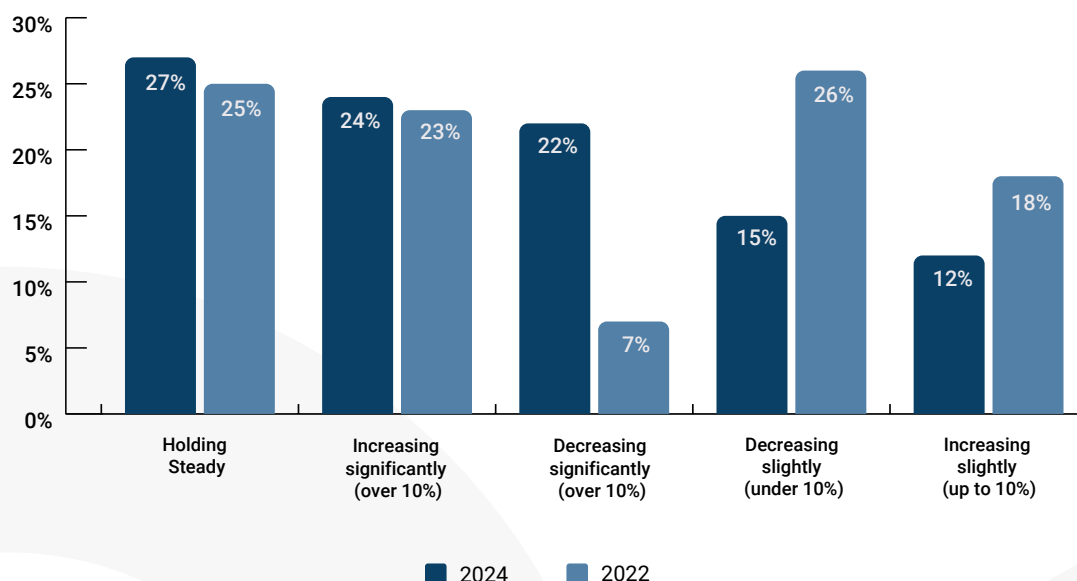


To further understand these trends, it would be beneficial to analyze additional factors that could influence enrollment decisions:

- **Program Innovations:** Schools experiencing growth may have implemented cutting-edge curriculum changes, integrated technology in teaching, enhanced simulated-learning experiences, or offered new specializations that align with current healthcare trends.
- **Marketing and Outreach:** Effective marketing strategies and outreach programs could play a significant role in influencing prospective students' perceptions of nursing education. It is becoming essential to focus on the professional image of nursing to market the profession as a fulfilling and rewarding career.
- **Student Support Services:** Enhanced support services, such as mentoring, career counseling, and financial aid, could be attracting students to programs that prioritize student wellness, welfare, and career readiness.
- **Post-Graduation Employment Opportunities:**
The promise of stable employment and competitive salaries in the nursing field, especially in regions with healthcare shortages, might influence enrollment positively. Post-pandemic, many healthcare institutions are experiencing large turnovers in nursing positions, increasing the opportunities for competitive salary options and more diversity in specialty nursing areas.
- **External Economic Factors:** Broader economic conditions, such as job market trends and economic recessions, can also impact individuals' decisions to pursue higher education in fields like nursing.

Understanding the factors that lead to these trends is crucial for developing strategies to attract and retain students, ensuring the continued health of nursing education programs.

What is the current status of your enrollment size for the program you support?



TRENDS WITH PRECEPTORS

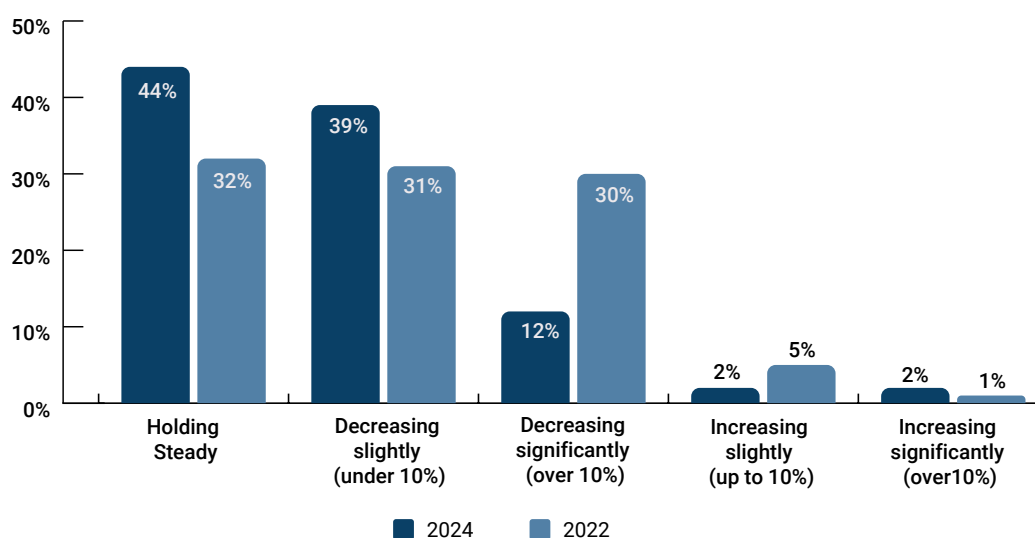
In our 2022 survey, 61% indicated their programs were experiencing some level of decline related to finding preceptors. The two driving factors then impacting the decline across all respondents were competition with other programs and preceptors changing positions/ changes to their availability.

Fast forward to 2024, and the preceptor pool challenge isn't getting any better, but also isn't getting much worse, either.

In 2022, 32% of respondents cited their preceptor pool was holding steady. In our survey this spring, 44% of respondents noted their pool is holding steady.

Moreover, there was a notable decrease in respondents who reported a significant decline in preceptor participation, from 30% in 2022 to 12% in 2024. This reduction could indicate that while the overall challenge of securing preceptors persists, the rate of decline has slowed, suggesting that some of the measures implemented by educational institutions to mitigate this issue might be starting to take effect.

What are the main factors impacting Preceptor participation?



Note: The calculated standard deviations for the proportions related to preceptor trends from pages 7 and 8 are as follows:

- Standard Deviation for Stability in Preceptor Pool (2024): 0.496
- Standard Deviation for Stability in Preceptor Pool (2022): 0.466
- Standard Deviation for Significant Decline in Preceptor Pool (2024): 0.325
- Standard Deviation for Significant Decline in Preceptor Pool (2022): 0.458

The standard deviation has decreased significantly from 2022 to 2024 (from 0.458 to 0.325).

The decrease in standard deviation for significant decline suggests a stronger consensus among respondents in 2024 that the rate of decline in preceptor participation is not as severe as it was in 2022. This could be interpreted as a positive sign that efforts to stabilize preceptor availability might be taking effect, or at least that the situation is not deteriorating as rapidly as it previously was.

Due to the qualitative feedback from our 2022 survey, we added more options for respondents for 2024. With that in mind, it's only worth comparing the like for like option between the two surveys and providing additional commentary on the new choices.

The biggest change, and one we would say is quite statistically significant, is the number of respondents who cited competition with other programs as their biggest challenge. In 2022 that accounted for 33% of the responses. In the 2024 survey, even with more response choices available, that number skyrocketed to 76%.

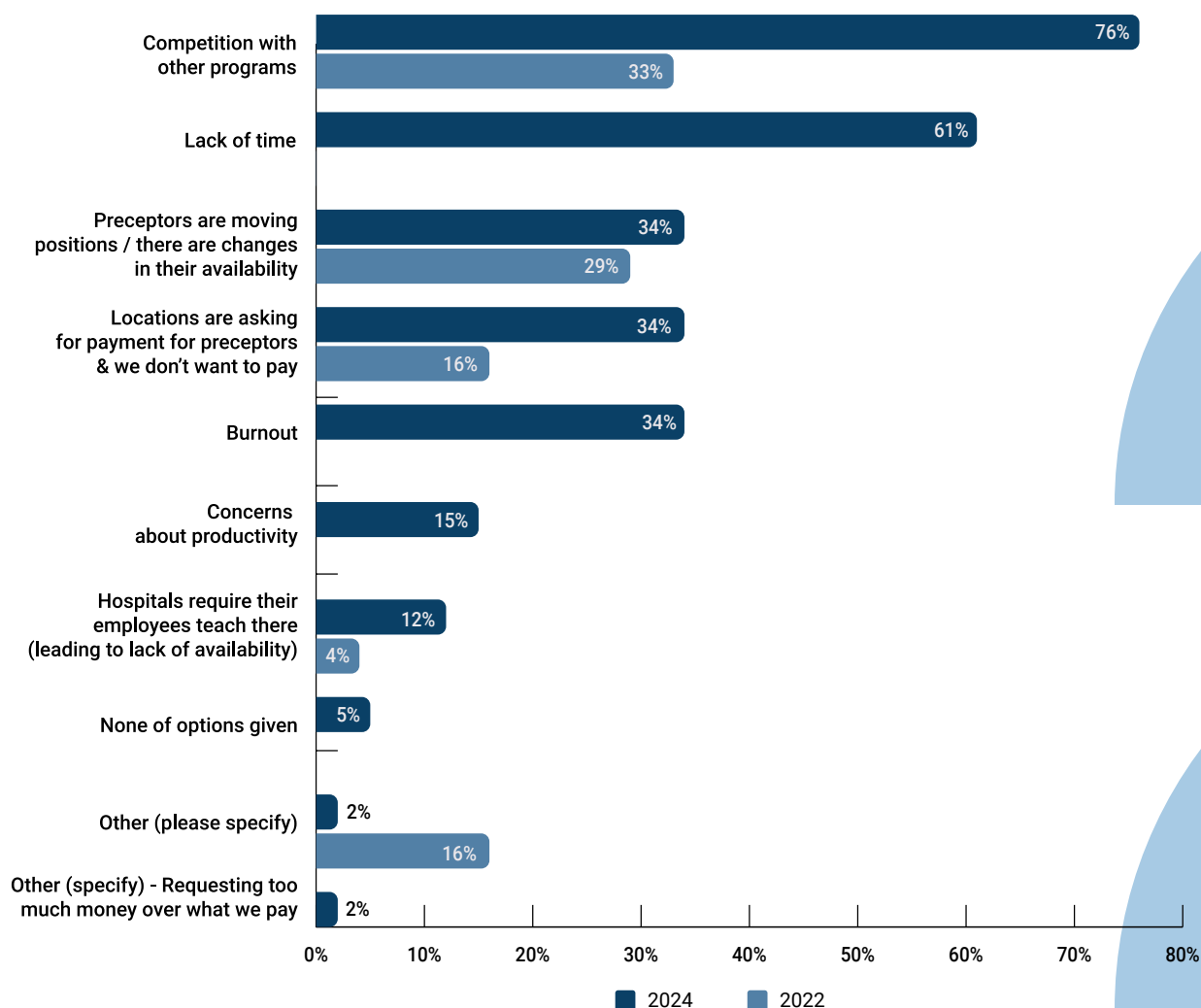
We've spoken at length in various articles about the need to explore more incentives for preceptors participating, including checking whether your school can offer preceptors CEUs or advertise tax credits that may be available through your state by nurses becoming preceptors.

Given the challenging conditions highlighted in the 2024 survey, where 34% of respondents identified burnout and 61% cited a lack of time as significant barriers to preceptor engagement, a proactive approach is essential.

It should be noted that while the preceptor pool may be holding steady, the level of experience of preceptors has changed in certain areas of the country. There are more preceptors with less than 2 years of clinical practice experience available and less availability of the experienced seasoned nurse.

Educational institutions must consider innovative solutions to mitigate these issues and ensure that preceptors feel valued and supported in their roles.

What are the main factors impacting Preceptor participation?

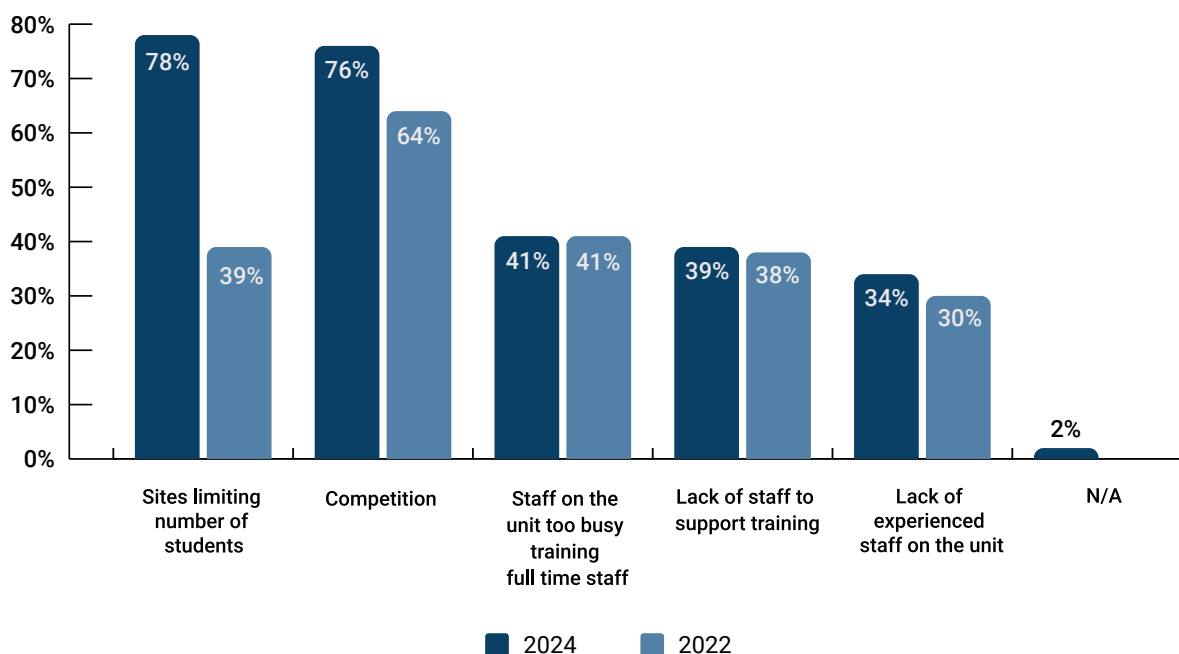


CHALLENGES WITH CLINICAL PLACEMENTS

When comparing against 2022's results, many of the responses are unchanged or similar in percentage. However, one difference is very evident and worth calling out.

78% of respondents said that sites are limiting the number of students per placement site in our 2024 survey compared to 39% in 2022. That makes student limits a much larger challenge than competition against other schools for preceptors right now - though both were comparably chosen. Additionally, this increases costs to academic institutions requiring the hiring of additional clinical instructors to support fewer students on a unit.

What challenges do you face securing clinical placements?

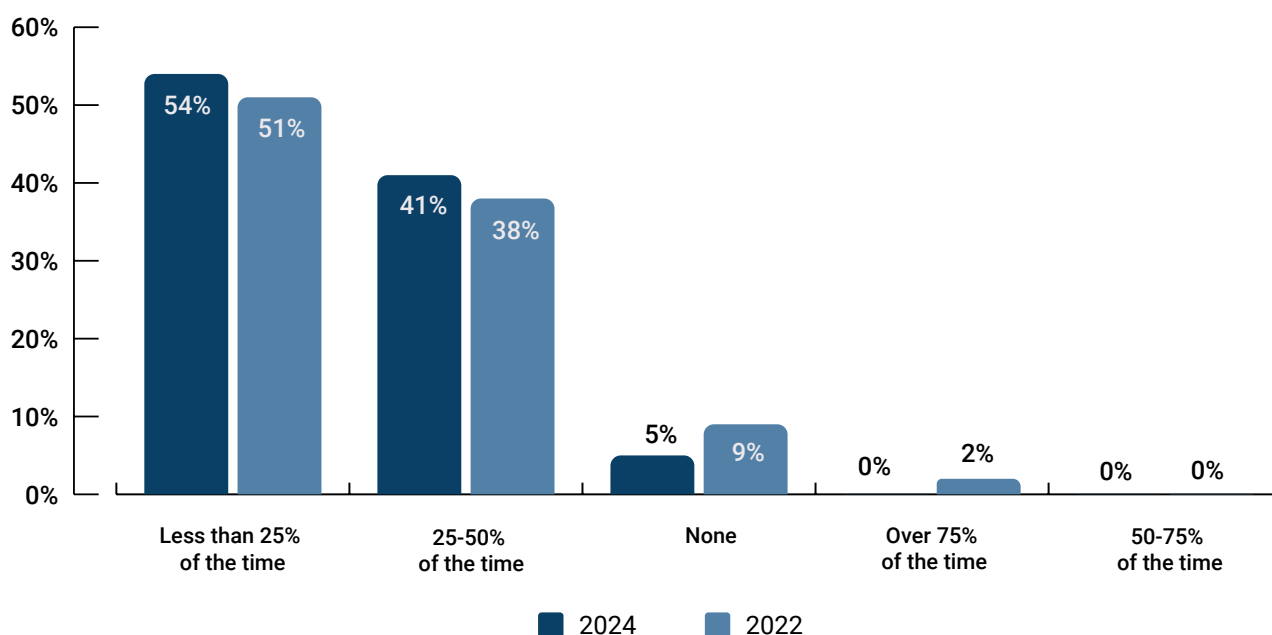


HIGH QUALITY SIMULATION

The utilization of high quality simulation in nursing education has seen a slight increase, indicating a growing acceptance and integration of this technology as a critical educational tool. In 2022, a substantial majority, 91% of respondents, reported utilizing high quality simulation in their programs. By 2024, this figure had risen modestly to 95%, suggesting a steady but slow progression in its adoption.

These trends reflect an overall positive trajectory towards the normalization and potentially deeper integration of high quality simulation within nursing education curricula, supporting its critical role in enhancing clinical competence and preparedness among students. These trends also reflect the National Council of State Boards of Nursing's recognition that high quality simulation is an acceptable replacement for direct patient care (Hayden, et al., 2012).

How much high quality simulation do you use in the program you support?



Note: The standard errors for the proportion of respondents using high quality simulation in nursing education programs are calculated as follows:

- Standard Error for 2024: Approximately 0.034
- Standard Error for 2022: Approximately 0.023

The standard error has increased slightly from 2022 to 2024. This increase, despite the higher proportion of respondents reporting the use of high quality simulation in 2024, can be attributed to the smaller sample size in 2024 compared to 2022. This indicates a slight decrease in the precision of the estimate due to fewer respondents in the latest survey.



CHANGES IN COURSEWORK

Consistent with what we saw from some of the positive trends cited in the open text question, the types of classes being added most by nursing schools right now reflect the changing socioeconomic dynamics and the need to have an inclusive approach to care:

- 58% of respondents are adding DEI courses
- 55% of respondents are adding Competency-based learning
- 50% of respondents are adding Case-based learning
- 45% of respondents are adding Active learning courses
- 40% of respondents are adding Evidence-based courses

All of these reflect the changes in the model and framework for nursing education outlined within the 2021 AACN Essentials, and are all significantly higher in percentage than 2022 responses. Even with the smaller sample this is a confident conclusion we can draw to institutions acting on new guidance with energy and conviction.

This suggests schools are reacting to the new curriculum guidelines and evaluating how to evolve their programs to meet the changing care dynamics in their communities today.

HYBRID LEARNING

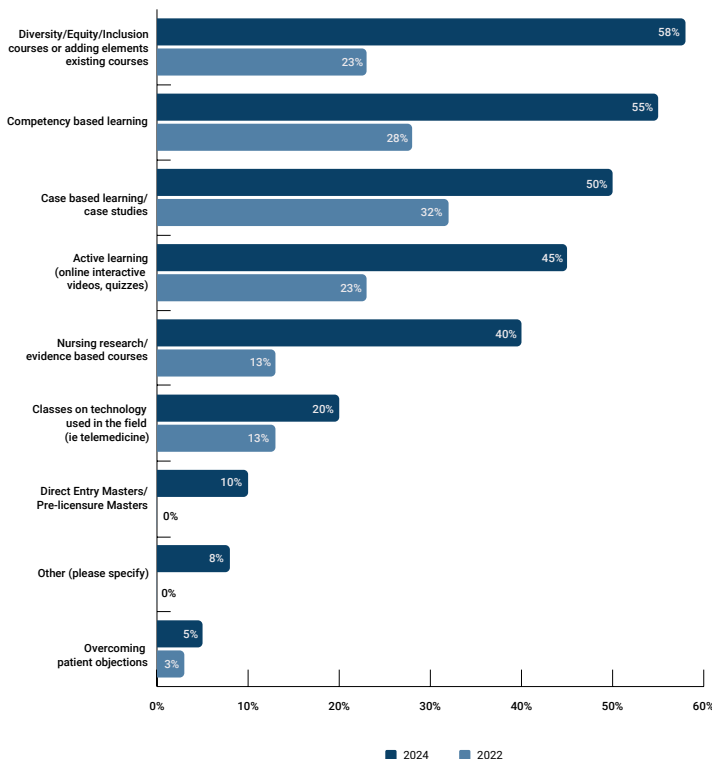
In 2022, we noted that hybrid learning is much more prevalent across graduate programs. 80% of respondents indicated then that they offer a hybrid approach to learning, while 68% of undergraduate respondents said they offer hybrid.

With 73% of respondents in this survey offering both undergraduate and graduate programs at their school, it was somewhat surprising to see hybrid class offerings going down in the last 2 years.

In 2022, 75% of respondents said they did offer a hybrid approach for the nursing programs they supported. In 2024, only 63% said they offered a hybrid approach.

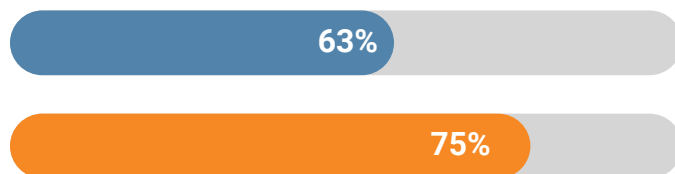
This merits further questioning of whether these schools had offered hybrid classes in the aftermath of COVID and decided to sunset the approach because of cost, effectiveness, or other factors.

What types of classes are you adding (select all that apply)?

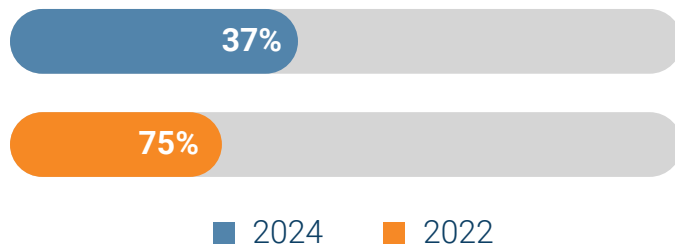


Do you offer a hybrid approach to classes for the nursing program you support (in person and online)?

YES



NO



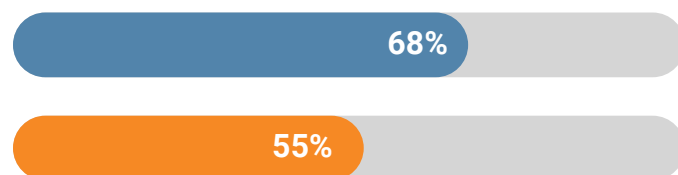
IPE REQUIREMENTS & TRACKING

The tracking of Interprofessional Education (IPE) requirements within college nursing programs has seen a significant uptick since 2022, underscoring a positive trend towards enhanced collaborative learning environments in healthcare education. This increase is indicative of the growing recognition of the importance of interprofessional collaboration in preparing nursing students for real-world clinical settings.

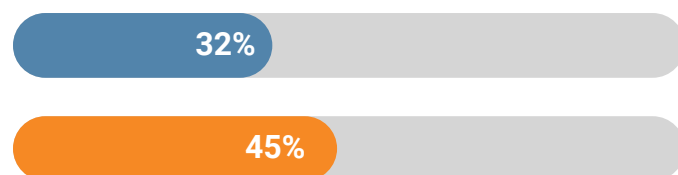
From the data collected in our 2022 and 2024 surveys, there has been a notable 24% increase in the number of students who have IPE requirements during their clinical rotations.

Do your students have IPE requirements during clinicals as part of your curriculum?

YES



NO



■ 2024 ■ 2022

How do you track those IPE requirements?

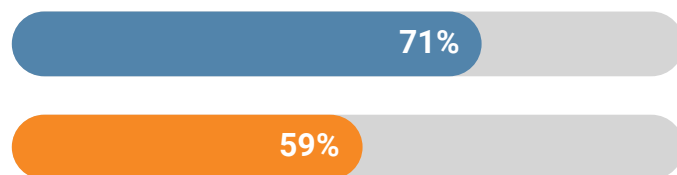
In a Homegrown software solution



In a purchased software tool



Manually (ie on paper, in excel, via survey)



■ 2024 ■ 2022

This shift not only reflects the expanding adoption of IPE curricula but also highlights the educational community's commitment to fostering interdisciplinary skills among nursing students.

Despite the rise in IPE requirements, the methods used to track these requirements raise some concerns about the efficiency of administrative processes. As of 2024, a significant 71% of respondents reported still using manual methods such as paper records or Excel spreadsheets to track IPE requirements, up from 59% in 2022. Meanwhile, the use of third-party software for tracking has decreased slightly from 21% in 2022 to 17% in 2024, and the use of homegrown software has decreased from 14% to 12%.

This persistence in manual tracking methods, despite the availability of more sophisticated technological solutions, suggests a potential area for improvement. Investing in more advanced, integrated software solutions could streamline the tracking process, reduce administrative burdens, and potentially improve the accuracy and accessibility of IPE compliance data.

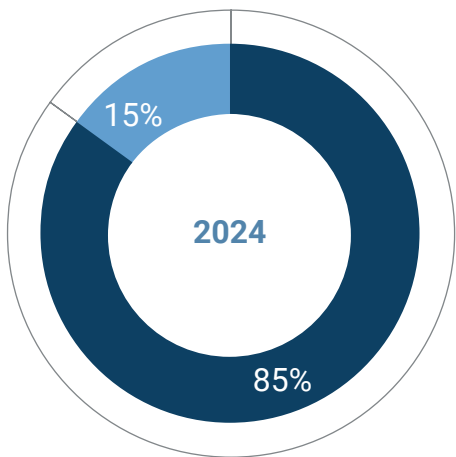
- 71% of respondents are tracking IPE requirements on paper or in excel from the 2024 sample compared to 59% in 2022
- 17% are using a third party software compared to 21% in 2022.
- 12% are using a homegrown software compared to 14% in 2022

TRACKING STUDENT COMPETENCY

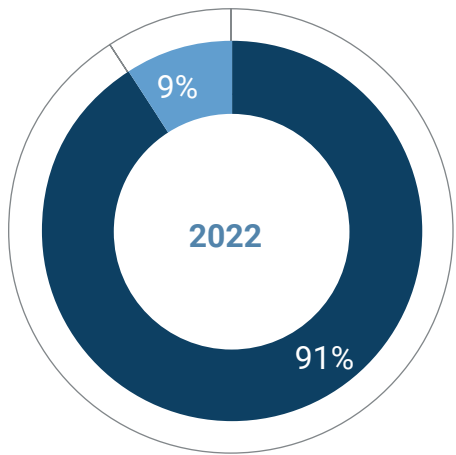
As we analyze the progression from 2022 to 2024, it becomes evident that what was once a preparatory query regarding competency-based learning has now evolved into established practice within nursing education programs. Initially posed to gauge preparedness for competency-based learning, the question has since shifted to focus on the current methodologies employed to assess student competencies effectively.

The data reveal that many programs that were in the planning stages of implementing competency measurement in 2022 have now successfully integrated various effective methods. This transition underscores a significant advancement in educational strategies, reflecting a broader commitment to enhancing the measurement of student success and readiness.

Is your program tracking and assessing student competency?



Is your program preparing to track and assess student competency?



■ YES ■ NO



TRACKING STUDENT COMPETENCY (CONTINUED)

Key Methods for Measuring Competency

The 2024 survey highlights four primary methods that nursing programs are using to measure student competency:



Course Outcomes & Objectives:

Cited by 83% of respondents, this method remains a cornerstone of competency assessment, focusing on the specific achievements and skills gained through course completion.



Program Outcomes:

Also noted by 83% of participants, this approach evaluates the broader educational objectives of the nursing program, ensuring that all graduates meet the established educational standards.



Accreditation Standards:

Referenced by 71% of respondents, this method aligns student competencies with the requirements set by accrediting bodies, which is crucial for maintaining the educational quality and licensure eligibility.

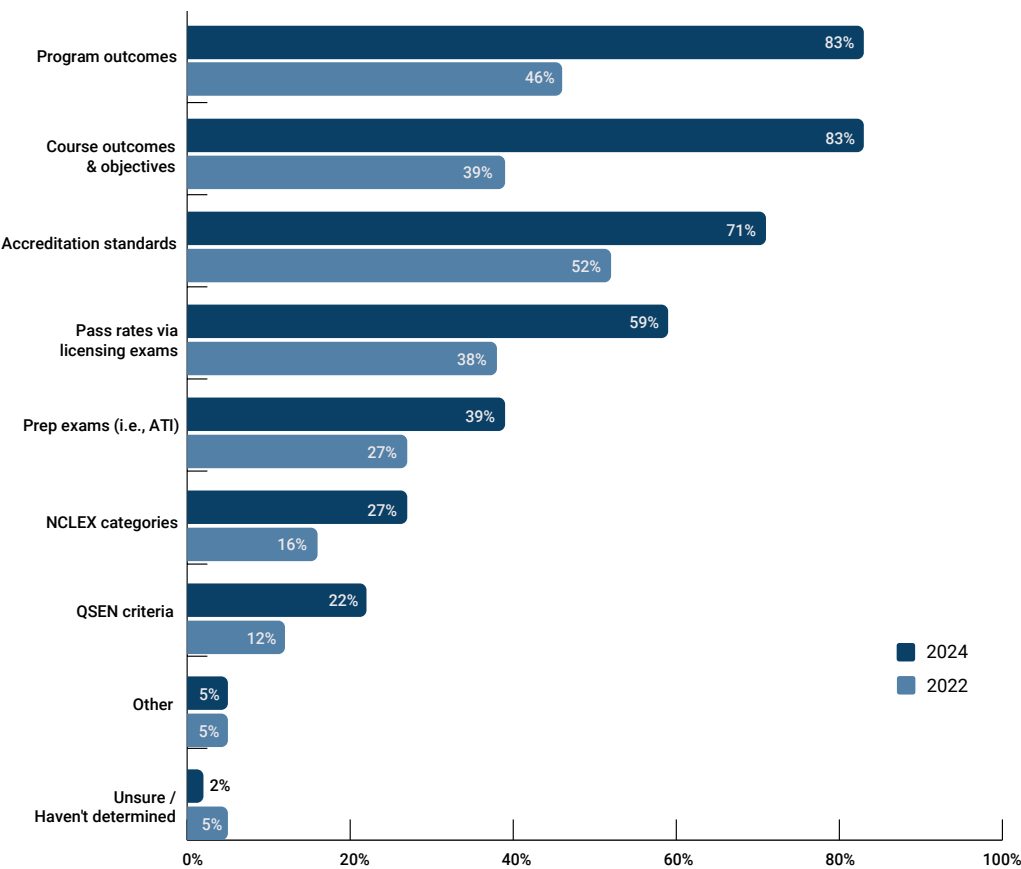


Licensing Exam Pass Rates:

Utilized by 59% of programs, the success rate on licensing exams like the NCLEX serves as a direct indicator of the practical application of learned competencies.

Additional methods reported include preparation exams such as ATI, cited by 39% of respondents, NCLEX categories by 27%, and QSEN criteria by 22%. These tools provide further nuanced insights into specific areas of competency and readiness. Furthermore, respondents in the 'Other' category mentioned using resources like Kaplan and Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs), highlighting the diversity of tools available to assess student performance comprehensively.

What type of criteria is used to measure student competency (up to 3 methods)?



TOP CHALLENGES IN NURSING EDUCATION

We solicited insights from the 2024 survey respondents regarding the principal challenges encountered in their programs.

Among the 41 responses, two prominent issues were highlighted:



Externship Logistics:

42% of respondents identified the logistics of managing externships as their primary challenge, reflecting complexities in coordination and execution.



Preceptor Availability:

22% of respondents noted that securing adequate preceptors remains a significant concern, underscoring the ongoing difficulties in finding qualified professionals willing to supervise students.



“Sites limiting student numbers, the amount of requirements for students to attend clinicals and they are different amongst sites.”



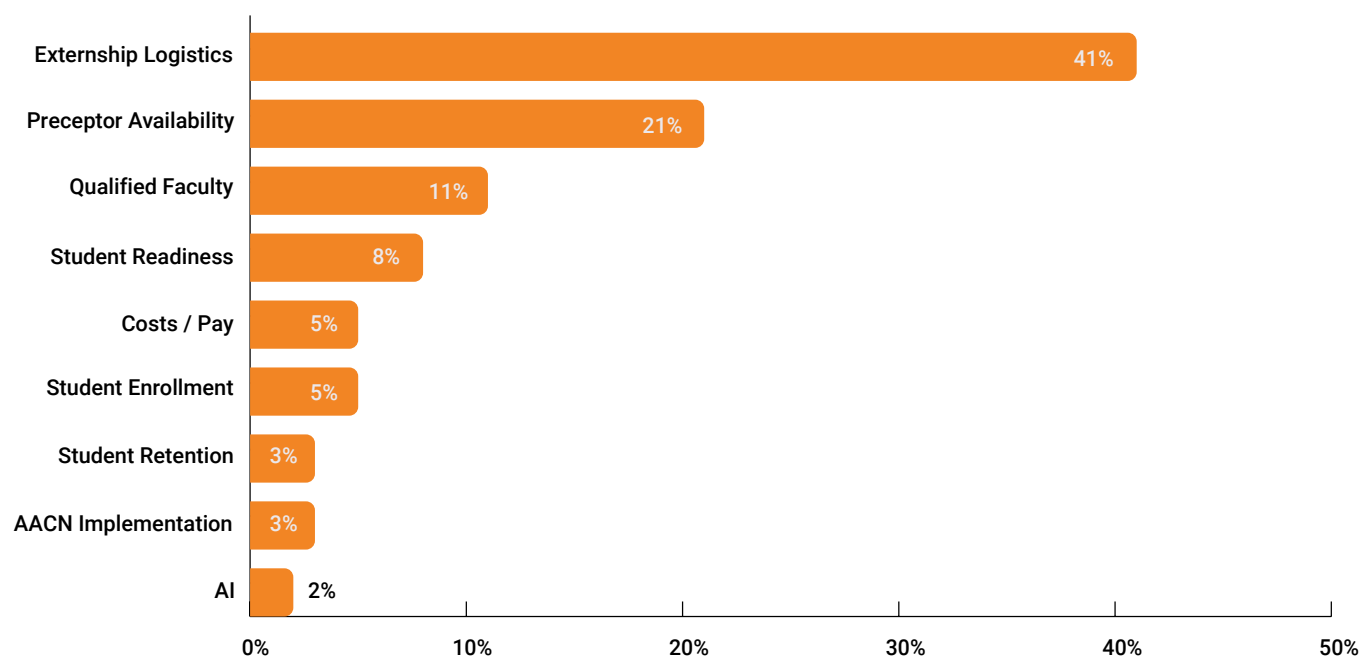
“Lack of facilities to participate in instructor-led clinicals. Limit on the number of students allowed in a group. Day availability.”



“Providing students with quality hands-on practice in a healthy environment.”

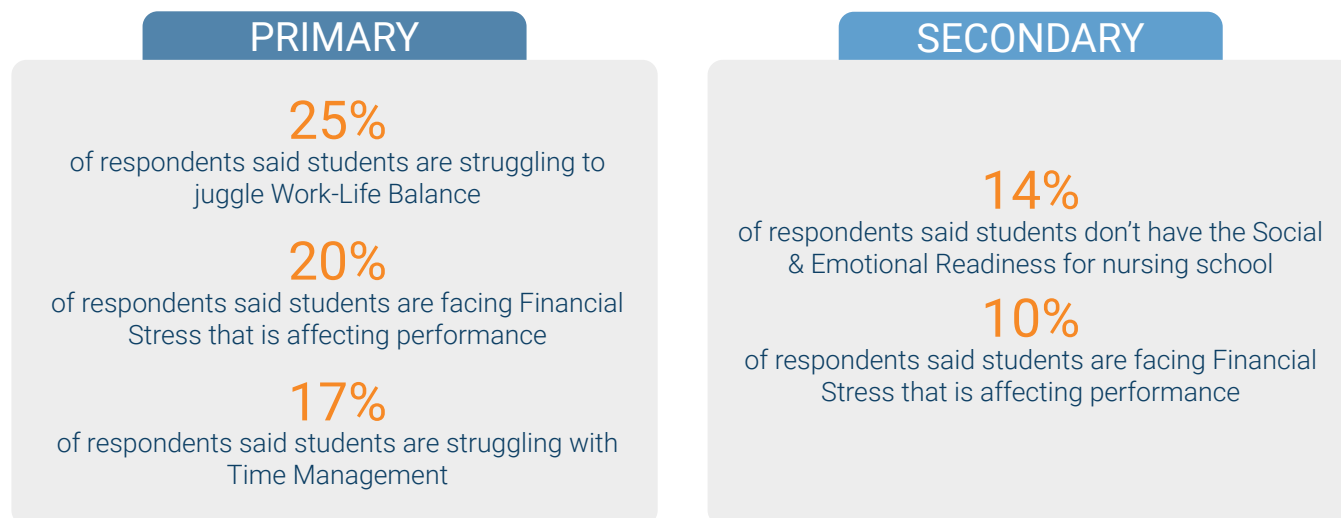
It's clear the logistics of providing students with placement are wide-ranging and challenging for programs.

Top issues for clinical programs:

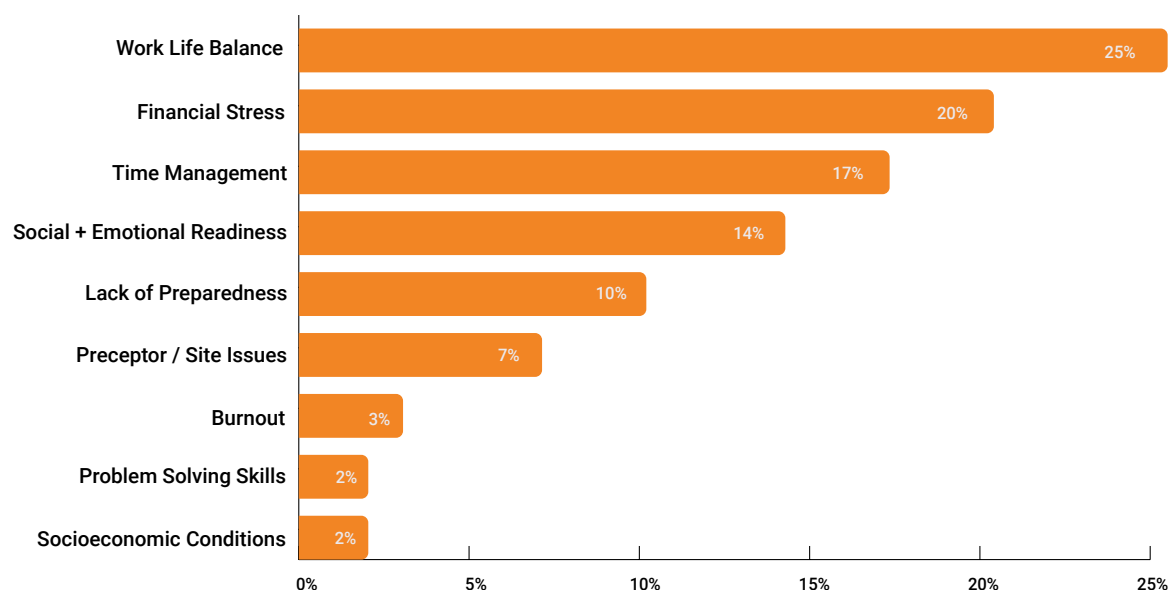


REPORTED CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS IN NURSING PROGRAM

Among the challenges programs are observing for students, we identified three primary challenges and two secondary challenges from the survey results:



Biggest challenge students are facing in their nursing programs:



Full comments from a few survey respondents illustrate the challenges:

- “Lack of money to pay for college. Have too many other things going on in their life (work, children) to focus on college courses.”
- “Students are not ready for the rigor of college coming from high school...Lack of maturity and professionalism needed for the nursing profession.”
- “Rising tuition costs. Managing coursework with increased levels of employment stress post COVID”

FEEDBACK FROM PRECEPTORS ON STUDENT PREPAREDNESS AND CLINICAL TEACHING

In our survey, we sought to understand the primary concerns preceptors have regarding the nursing students they supervise. The data revealed that student preparedness remains a significant issue, with 26% of responses highlighting a deficiency in readiness for clinical environments.

Key Concerns:

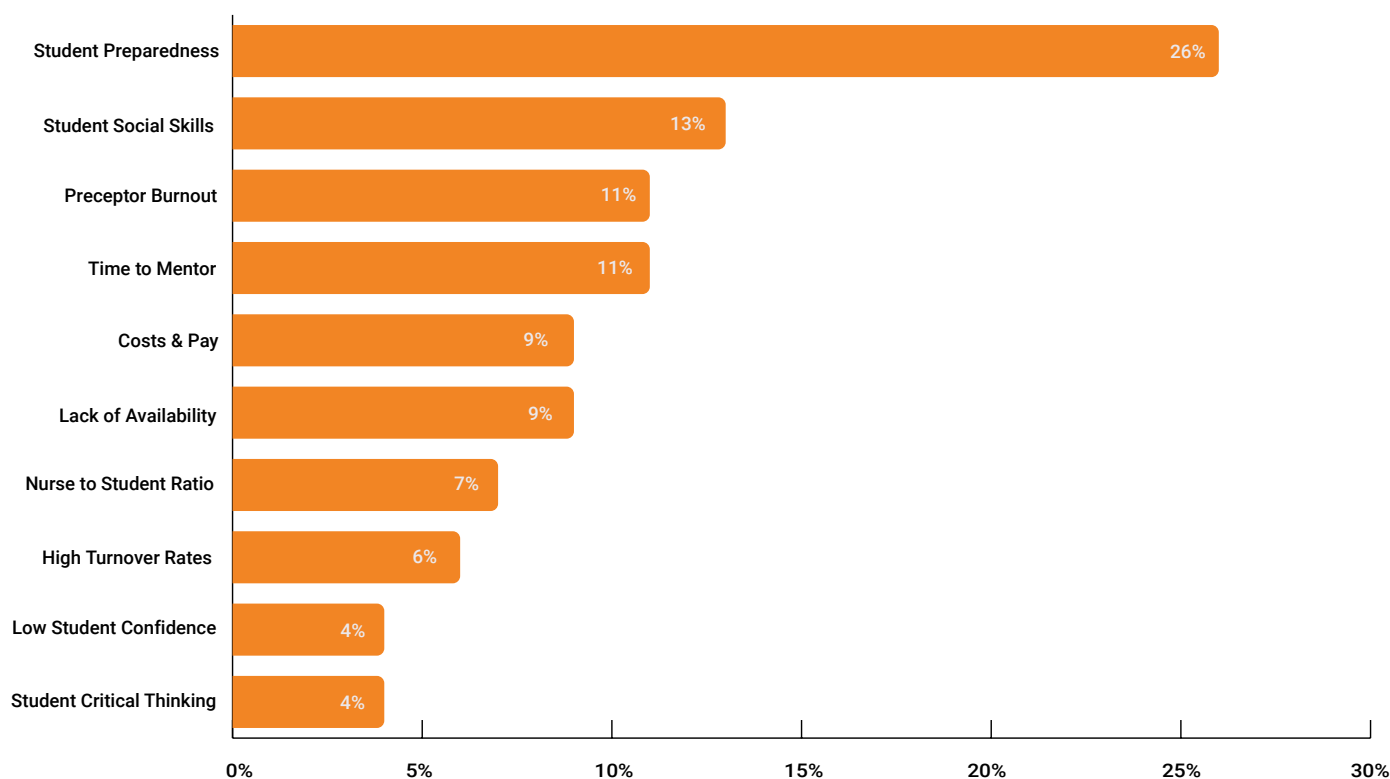
- **Lack of Essential Skills:** Preceptors noted that students often lack critical communication and employability skills, which are vital for effective functioning in clinical settings.
- **Real-World Preparedness:** There is a consensus among preceptors that students are not as well-prepared for real-world clinical demands as they could be. This gap affects their ability to integrate seamlessly into clinical teams.
- **Time Constraints and Educational Challenges:** Preceptors frequently cited their limited time availability as a major barrier to providing thorough, hands-on instruction. This issue is compounded by the need for adequate compensation for their time and efforts, particularly noted among MSN-NP/DNP preceptors.

Additionally, inconsistency in clinical faculty—often attributed to turnover due to better-paying opportunities—impacts the continuity and quality of clinical education.

Resource Constraints at Clinical Sites: Clinical sites are often overwhelmed by the volume of student placements they are requested to accommodate, which can lead to scenarios where there are too many students and not enough preceptor time to go around. This overcrowding can dilute the learning experience for students and strain resources at clinical facilities.

These findings underscore the need for educational programs to enhance the preparation of nursing students to meet the demands of clinical practice.

Biggest Concerns Programs are Hearing from Preceptors:





Learn more about CORE Higher Education Group

These surveys are meant to give you a well-informed, peer-to-peer resource as you assess the unique challenges of your program. It is our hope that the findings presented herein will resonate with your own experiences and observations within your academic environment.

If you are looking for ways to optimize your clinical education processes, we're here to help!

Contact CORE to learn more about our suite of software solutions for your clinical education programs.

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