

# Principal Goal for the Future of Nursing Scholars

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## Description

Building the capacity of the nursing workforce to meet the health needs of the United States' population has long been a priority of federal agencies, health systems, philanthropy, and academic and clinical stakeholders, especially over the past four decades. Increasing workforce capacity remains an omnipresent concern given the loss of over 100,000 nurses from the clinical labor market in the last year alone and the continued loss of nursing faculty. Up to a third of current faculty in American nursing schools are estimated to retire by 2025, of which 44% hold research-focused doctorates. These compounding concerns, the loss of nurses in clinical practice setting and impeding retirement of many nurse educators, illustrate the need for innovative approaches to recruiting and retaining future nurse scholars.

## Nursing Project

The number of individuals enrolling in nursing PhD programs has remained stagnant and not kept pace with faculty retirements, thus creating concerns by schools of nursing on how to address the nursing workforce shortage. The current and projected nursing faculty shortage, in combination with the slowing of new trainees entering the PhD nursing pipeline, will have serious consequences. Not only will the faculty shortage affect the nation's educational capacity to prepare new nurses at all educational levels, but it will also challenge our capacity to grow the field of nursing science at a critical time of increasingly complex demands facing society.

the foundation's future of nursing scholars program also addressed the challenge presented by the 2010 American association of colleges of nursing's (AACN) position statement to explore innovations in PhD nursing education to meet that goal (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2010). The AACN position statement called for innovations in PhD nursing education to address the need for new PhD prepared nurses to be skilled in leadership and interdisciplinary science and communication. Jointly, these national reports spurred changes across the nursing educational landscape, including the commencement of the Future of Nursing Scholars program to support the development of a cadre of PhD prepared nurses.

While the Institute of Medicine's recommendation of doubling the number of nurses with doctoral degrees by 2020

was achieved, only 14% of doctoral level nurses are PhD prepared, while 86% are Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). Between 2010 and 2019, the number of DNP graduates increased by 500% while the number of PhD graduates had only grown by approximately 50%. This is of concern given that PhD prepared nurses are highly sought as faculty and are essential to the development of research needed to support evidence-based practice and add to the body of nursing knowledge. Collectively, these reports underscore the urgent need for more PhD prepared nurse scholars who have been rigorously prepared to conduct research, educate future nurses, and lead interdisciplinary teams.

## Future of Nursing Scholars

The principal goal of the future of nursing scholars program was to prepare a large cadre of PhD prepared nurses from diverse backgrounds who would pursue long-term leadership careers focused on advancing science and discovery while simultaneously strengthening nursing education, and leading transformational change in both the nursing profession and health care. The future of nursing scholars program also sought to shift the paradigm in PhD nursing education through an accelerated, 3-year PhD education model and providing leadership and trans-disciplinary skills deemed essential to develop this next generation of nurse leaders. Starting in the 2014 academic year, the future of nursing scholars program provided scholarships, intensive mentoring, leadership development, and postdoctoral research support to five cohorts of nurse scholars. Each nurse scholar received financial support over 3 years for tuition, living expenses, and research activities, and had access to a national network of colleagues and peers. Scholars who planned to pursue a faculty position after graduation were also eligible to apply for a competitive.

A key program goal was to graduate approximately 200 new PhD prepared nurse scientists. In addition to graduating PhD prepared nurse scientists and educators, the program sought to demonstrate that an accelerated PhD trajectory could be accomplished successfully when students and mentors were deliberately selected and supported by the school. The program aimed to support graduates in pursuing productive scholarly careers, specifically in academic settings, and to pursue leadership opportunities. To understand the impact of the program on scholars and participating schools, the future of nursing scholars program conducted an independent program

evaluation. The objective of the evaluation was to describe the impact the future of nursing scholars program had on scholars' career and leadership outcomes, participating schools of nursing, and the perceived impact of the program on the field of nursing science, more generally.

Academic nursing is at critical crossroads as we bear witness to the havoc brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic and society's awareness of racism that permeates much of American society. Pausing and pivoting, strategies are also needed as senior nursing faculty has retired in larger than ever numbers. Investing in the current and the next generation of nurse-scientists is one of the pressing problems facing our discipline if we are going to solve problems plaguing nursing and the health concerns addressed by nurses.

Supportive academic environments that encourage and promote nurse-scientists career trajectories are needed. As faculty in academic nursing units, nurse-scientists are accountable to high disciplinary standards of the tripartite mission of research, teaching, and service, guided by academic policies set forth by the American association of university professors, which are upheld by many universities for faculty. While it is quite an honor and privilege to be part of the professoriate, these are particularly taxing times for nurses in their tripartite academic mission. Sustaining active research programs is particularly challenging in schools of nursing. Much has been written about challenges academic nursing faculty confront.