



Initial evaluation of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholars program

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholars (RWJF NFS) program was developed to enhance the career trajectory of young nursing faculty and to train the next generation of nurse scholars. Although there are publications that describe the RWJF NFS, no evaluative reports have been published. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the first three cohorts ($n = 42$ scholars) of the RWJF NFS program.

Methods: A descriptive research design was used. Data were derived from quarterly and annual reports, and a questionnaire (seven open-ended questions) was administered via Survey Monkey Inc. (Palo Alto, CA, USA).

Results: During their tenure, scholars had on average six to seven articles published, were teaching/mentoring at the graduate level (93%), and holding leadership positions at their academic institutions (100%). Eleven scholars (26%) achieved fellowship in the American Academy of Nursing, one of the highest nursing honors. The average ratings on a Likert scale of 1 (not at all supportive) to 10 (extremely supportive) of whether or not RWJF had helped scholars achieve their goals in teaching, service, research, and leadership were 7.7, 8.0, 9.4, and

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9.5, respectively. The majority of scholars reported a positive, supportive relationship with their primary nursing and research mentors; although, several scholars noted challenges in connecting for meetings or telephone calls with their national nursing mentors.

Conclusions: These initial results of the RWJF NFS program highlight the success of the program in meeting its overall goal—preparing the next generation of nursing academic scholars for leadership in the profession.

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Introduction

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholars (RWJF NFS) program was established in 2008 to support the development of promising junior faculty as future academic nurse leaders in a teaching-focused or a research-intensive university (Conn, 2013). The program offers both financial and mentorship support for scholars to facilitate the development and advancement of their programs of research, leadership, and teaching effectiveness, with visibility in nursing, scientific, and policy communities at state and national levels. Notably, the program provides the scholars with experiential learning opportunities related to health policy development through research and scholarship.

The program is highly competitive and selective; each academic institution may sponsor no more than one applicant per year and may have no more than two scholars at once. The application process includes submission of a concise proposal, which consists of the applicant's research goals, project description (background, approach with time line, and potential impact), and academic and leadership experience. The applicant's proposal is reviewed by the National Advisory Committee (NAC), which consists of senior scientists and leaders in the areas of nursing, public health, policy, and medicine. Based on this review, semifinalists from the pool of applicants are selected for face-to-face interviews by the NAC (Conn, 2013). Those selected to be nurse faculty scholars are provided \$350,000 over 3 years to implement their research and to take part in the leadership training activities.

One of the unique features of the program is the intensive mentorship provided to the scholar. He or she has a primary nursing mentor (a senior nurse scientist/leader) in his or her school of nursing, a senior non-nurse researcher outside the school (but within the applicant's home institution), and a national nursing mentor. The RWJF NFS NAC serves to recommend possible national mentors; however, the RWJF NFS program home office makes the final decision based on the scholar's goals in research, teaching, and service (Coffman, Goodman, Thomas, & Roberson, 2013; Conn, 2013).

Over the 3-year period of the fellowship, scholars are required to attend meetings, trainings, and networking activities. During this period, the scholar initiates a program plan designed for his or her own future goal in academic nursing, personally and professionally, in the areas of research, teaching, and service. The scholar, in collaboration with his or her primary, research, and national mentors, initiates the program development goals. The scholar is expected to be self-directed and is responsible for keeping his or her mentors abreast about the degree to which he or she is achieving the objectives that they have mutually developed, agreed, and submitted to the national program office. Notably, scholars are required to submit reports quarterly and annually about their accomplishments and how they are meeting the goals of the program (Conn, 2013).

The first (2008) and second (2009) cohorts of the RWJF NFS programs consisted of 30 scholars (15 scholars per cohort). Subsequent cohorts were reduced to 12 per year, from 2010 to present, because of reduced funding from the RWJF for most of their programs. As of August 2013, there were 42 faculty scholars who successfully completed the 3-year program coming from a variety of universities nationwide. The scholars are diverse in terms of their programs of research and scholarship; leadership and teaching experiences; academic nursing aspirations; research intensiveness; and demographic characteristics including geography of their institutions, gender, and race. Although there are two publications (Coffman et al., 2013; Conn, 2013) about the description and the promise of the RWJF NFS program as one of the initiatives fundamental to retaining junior faculty and shaping the future generations of academic nurse leaders in the country, there are no published reports about the evaluation of the program.

The overarching goal of this study was to evaluate the first, second, and third cohorts of the RWJF NFS program. Specific aims were to identify the scholars' accomplishments in the areas of teaching, research, scholarship, leadership, and service and describe the importance and contributions of primary (senior nurse scientist), research (non-nurse scientist), and national (academic nurse leader) mentors in assisting scholars to achieve the program goals and objectives and develop skills as future academic nurse leaders.

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