



## Integrating emerging areas of nursing science into PhD programs

Susan J. Henly, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>a,\*</sup>, Donna O. McCarthy, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>b</sup>,  
Jean F. Wyman, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>a</sup>, Patricia W. Stone, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>c</sup>,  
Nancy S. Redeker, PhD, RN, FAHA, FAAN<sup>d</sup>,  
Ann Marie McCarthy, PhD, RN, PNP, FAAN<sup>e</sup>,  
Anna C. Alt-White, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>f</sup>, Jacqueline Dunbar-Jacob, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>g</sup>,  
Marita G. Titler, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>h</sup>, Shirley M. Moore, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>i</sup>,  
Margaret M. Heitkemper, PhD, RN, FAAN<sup>j</sup>, Yvette P. Conley, PhD<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Minnesota, School of Nursing, Minneapolis, MN

<sup>b</sup> Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

<sup>c</sup> Columbia University, School of Nursing, New York, NY

<sup>d</sup> Yale University, School of Nursing, West Haven, CT

<sup>e</sup> University of Iowa, College of Nursing, Iowa City, IA

<sup>f</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Nursing Services, Washington, DC

<sup>g</sup> University of Pittsburgh, School of Nursing, Pittsburgh, PA

<sup>h</sup> University of Michigan, School of Nursing, Ann Arbor, MI

<sup>i</sup> Case Western Reserve University, Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing, Cleveland, OH

<sup>j</sup> University of Washington, School of Nursing, Seattle, WA

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### ABSTRACT

The Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science aims to “facilitate and recognize life-long nursing science career development” as an important part of its mission. In light of fast-paced advances in science and technology that are inspiring new questions and methods of investigation in the health sciences, the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science convened the Idea Festival for Nursing Science Education and appointed the Idea Festival Advisory Committee to stimulate dialogue about linking PhD education with a renewed vision for preparation of the next generation of nursing scientists. Building on the 2010

**Author Note.** Susan J. Henly was Chair of the CANS Idea Festival Advisory Committee. She and Donna O. McCarthy were the primary writers of the paper. Jean F. Wyman was Chair of the Steering Committee, Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science, and had significant roles in the conception and implementation of the Idea Festival for Nursing Science Education. The order of authors in positions 4–12 was determined at random. All authors met criteria for authorship. IFAC members Jerilyn K. Allen, ScD, RN, FAAN, Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, Baltimore, MD, and Suzanne S. Prevost, PhD, RN, COI, University of Alabama, Capstone College of Nursing, Tuscaloosa, AL, were nonauthor contributors.

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\* Corresponding author: Susan J. Henly, University of Minnesota, School of Nursing, 5-140 WDH, 308 Harvard St SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

E-mail address: [henly003@umn.edu](mailto:henly003@umn.edu) (S.J. Henly).

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American Association of Colleges of Nursing Position Statement “The Research-Focused Doctoral Program in Nursing: Pathways to Excellence,” Idea Festival Advisory Committee members focused on emerging areas of science and technology that impact the ability of research-focused doctoral programs to prepare graduates for competitive and sustained programs of nursing research using scientific advances in emerging areas of science and technology. The purpose of this article is to describe the educational and scientific contexts for the Idea Festival, which will serve as the foundation for recommendations for incorporating emerging areas of science and technology into research-focused doctoral programs in nursing.

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## Introduction

The societal mandate for nursing as a profession includes practice and research (Donaldson & Crowley, 1978; International Council of Nurses, 1999); research is critical to building the science that underpins nursing practice (e.g., Abdellah & Levine, 1965; National Institute of Nursing Research [NINR], 2011). Priorities for nursing research reflect commitment of the discipline to the promotion of optimum health of populations amidst ever-changing demographic, epidemiologic, political, technical, and health care environments. Doctoral programs in nursing, both doctor of nursing practice (DNP) and doctor of philosophy (PhD) programs, are central to ensuring that nursing practice and nursing science keep pace with the increasingly complex and global environments for health and health care (Institute of Medicine, 2010). Research-focused doctoral programs offering the PhD degree are critical to preparing a sufficient cadre of nursing scientists to generate the new knowledge needed to advance the practice of nursing, improve the quality of health care, shape health policy, and positively impact the health of all people (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2006).

Nursing science concerns the “conditions necessary and sufficient for the promotion, maintenance, and restoration of health in human beings” (Donaldson, 2003; Donaldson & Crowley, 1978). As such, nursing science is expansive, incorporating health and illness experiences of individuals, families, and communities over time and in ecological context. Research to build nursing science includes descriptive studies; design and evaluation of interventions for health promotion and disease prevention, mitigation of symptoms, and compassionate care at end of life; exploration of mechanisms driving health risks, symptom expression, and treatment responses; and assessment of nursing systems, quality of care, patient outcomes, and health policy (Henly, 2016). Nursing scientists conduct basic and bench research, clinical intervention trials, implementation studies, and comparative effectiveness research including

cost analyses (Grady & McIlvane, 2016). Thus, nursing research spans the continuum of translational research, from problem identification (T0) to basic and bench science (T1), clinical intervention trials (T2), dissemination and implementation studies (T3), and comparative effectiveness research in real-world settings (T4; cf. Drolet & Lorenzi, 2011; Khoury et al., 2007).

A significant challenge for PhD programs in nursing is to prepare graduates who understand the breadth of the discipline and possess the in-depth knowledge and skills in increasingly specialized areas needed to launch and sustain competitive careers as nursing scientists. This challenge becomes all the more urgent in light of shrinking research resources, rapid advances in science and technology impacting health care and health sciences research, and pressures to increase the numbers of doctorally prepared nursing faculty.

## PhD Preparation

A hallmark of the research-focused doctoral degree is an individualized program of study that supports development of expertise in the core knowledge and research methods of the discipline and depth in a selected area of scientific investigation (AACN, 2010). The centerpiece of a PhD program of study is the dissertation, an independent research project completed under the guidance of the advisor that adds new knowledge to the discipline and prepares the graduate to embark on a scientific career. PhD degree programs in nursing are expected to have the environment, faculty, resources, and infrastructure to educate students to develop the science, steward the discipline, and educate the next generation of scholars (AACN, 2001, 2010).

Doctoral education in nursing has proceeded against a backdrop of changes with the potential to impact quality of nursing scientist training. The number of research-focused doctoral programs in nursing in the United States increased from 20 in 1970

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