



The impact of the Nurse Faculty Scholars program on schools of nursing

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholars program was conceptualized as not only promoting the growth and development of early-career faculty but as enhancing the research infrastructure of scholars' schools of nursing.

Purpose: At the completion of the scholars' three years of support, deans/directors were asked to provide feedback regarding the institutional impact of the scholars' participation in the program.

Methods: Phone interviews were conducted on the first five completed cohorts and a six-item questionnaire was developed to obtain some quantitative data.

Discussion: The program was viewed as having accelerated the scholars' leadership and scholarship, and their influence within the school/university and regionally/nationally. Deans/directors generally agreed that the scholars' experience helped build the school's research portfolio.

Conclusion: Looking back on how the participating schools of nursing fared, one can say that the program's institutional expectations were achieved most of the time. The program helped scholars build their own reputations and that in turn had consequences for the school's standing as a whole. A number of components are described that can be replicated singly or in various combinations by schools/universities interested in adopting aspects of this program.

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The Impact of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Nurse Faculty Scholars Program on Deans' Perceptions

When the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Nurse Faculty Scholars (NFS) program was conceptualized, it was intended to promote the growth and development of junior faculty and enhance the research infrastructure of scholars' schools of nursing, especially those schools that were less research intensive. The shortage of nursing faculty was the driving force behind the development of the NFS program. It was important that an initiative be developed to address the faculty shortage because it was predicted that there would not be enough faculty available to teach in PhD programs in future years (Dreher, Smith Glasgow, & Cornelius, 2012). The number of research-focused doctoral programs increased 65% between 2001 ($n = 86$) and 2010 ($n = 133$), intensifying the demand for research-savvy faculty (Kim, Park, Park, Khan, & Ketefian, 2014). The nursing faculty shortage was exacerbated by growth in practice-focused doctoral education that dramatically outpaced research-focused education (Smeltzer et al., 2015), thus further affecting the number of faculty prepared to mentor fledgling researchers. In 2014, there were only 3,065 students enrolled in 134 PhD programs in comparison with 18,352 students enrolled in 264 DNP programs (AACN, 2015; Broome and Corazzini 2016).

Research career development is important to the development of nursing academia, nursing knowledge, and the discipline (Happell & Cleary, 2014). In addition to contributing to the overall productivity of individual scholars, it was anticipated that the program would positively affect other aspects of the institutional development of each school of nursing (SON), so that the scholar and the school's scholarship would become better known in the wider university, in part through the scholar's mentorship by a research mentor outside of the SON. Scholarly productivity is a function of both individual characteristics, such as a passion for research; intrinsic motivation; solid research training; and environmental factors, such as institutional supports; and the number of senior professors who can serve as role models and mentors (Bevil, Cohen, Sherlock, Yoon, & Yucha, 2012; Bland, Center, Finstad, Risbey, & Staples, 2005; Dundar & Lewis, 1998).

In addition to the faculty shortage, the expectation for scholarship at schools of nursing was considered when developing the NFS program. Schools of nursing at research universities are expected to have faculty who can sustain a high level of scholarly productivity, including research funding, in order to be seen as academic equals (Kulage et al., 2013; Pierce, Cook, & Larson, 2004), but faculty at comprehensive universities are also increasingly expected to demonstrate scholarly productivity (Ahmad & Prelock, 2012; Travis & Anthony, 2011). These heightened expectations for scholarship can be seen in the range of institutions—more research intensive and less research intensive—that have been home to

American Nurses Foundation scholars in recent years (Messmer, Zalon, & Phillips, 2014) and that have joined the National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence (Harden & Watman, 2015). Even when the primary institutional focus is on the scholarship of teaching and learning, faculty are still expected to have a programmatic focus, be knowledgeable about and able to use appropriate research methods, and obtain research funding (Broome, Ironside, & McNelis, 2012; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997). Having a strong foundation in research methodology is becoming ever more important as nurses achieve leadership positions in academic and health care systems that have changed to maximize patient-centered outcomes and efficient care (Toles & Anderson, 2011).

NFS Program Expectations

The NFS program was developed with both short- and long-term expectations for scholars and their schools of nursing. A full description of the program with scholar outcomes is in the first article in this issue; a subsequent article also describes the leadership training in detail. In the short term, the expectation was that scholars would receive leadership training that exposed them to current issues in general academic higher education and nursing, and this exposure would lead them to knowledgeably discuss such matters and engage others in their schools to address key trends in health care, nursing education, and academia. Long-term expectations for scholars as they completed the program included development of a cogent program of research that included productive dissemination of their research findings, obtaining additional funding, and qualifying for various prestigious honors and recognitions, thus building personal and school reputations. In addition, scholars were also mentored to provide additions to the scholarly literature on nursing and interdisciplinary education (IOM, 2003), collaborations with communities, addressing the goals of the 2010 IOM report on *The future of nursing*, and its subsequent assessment (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016); and the importance of creating continuously learning systems (IOM, 2013). Therefore, the longitudinal expectation for schools was that each participating school would become of greater value to the academic health center or university in which it is embedded.

Schools in the NFS Program

Although an individual applied to the program, formal institutional support was required as part of the application process. Schools were required to submit letters of support from the university's chief academic officer (e.g., provost) and the nursing dean/director that specified what support would be made available and

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