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The American Academy of Nursing Jonas Policy Scholar Program

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Global improvements to health require both advancements in the practice of evidence-based healthcare as well as advancements in healthcare policy to improve health outcomes.

Traditionally, the field of nursing has emphasized practice, research, and teaching, but these days there is a vital need for nurses to undertake leadership roles in the creation and evaluation of healthcare policy within their own countries. To impact change, nurses must view policy as something they can influence rather than something that happens to them. International nurse leaders should be engaged in health policy decision making and have a voice in implementation efforts.

In the United States (US), to address the current gap in the preparation of emerging nurse policy leaders—armed with both a knowledge of bedside practice and a knowledge of boardroom politics—the American Academy of Nursing and Jonas Philanthropies launched a partnership in 2014 creating the Academy Jonas Policy Scholars Program. The program was envisioned to advance three interrelated goals, namely:

1. a) Generate a pipeline of early career scholars who assist in shaping practice, education, and research policy related to nursing and the work of the American Academy of Nursing
2. b) Provide a mechanism for the American Academy of Nursing expert panel leaders to mentor early career policy scholars on key policy issues relevant to the Academy
3. c) Aid expert panels in accomplishing their strategic aims

The membership of the American Academy of Nursing (the Academy) includes approximately 2,500 leaders in nursing from around the world with a shared mission to elevate nursing by convening and celebrating exceptional nurse leaders and by shaping and advancing policies that positively impact health and healthcare. An important resource within the Academy is its growing number of expert panels. Organized to develop policy recommendations advancing a range of contemporary issues affecting the health of populations at the national level, the 24 current expert panels produce policy briefs, position statements, and other advocacy instruments. After a process of national recruitment and intensive screening, doctoral (PhD and DNP) and postdoctoral emerging nurse leaders are selected to participate in the Academy Jonas Policy Scholars Program. The ideal candidate is a nurse and a doctoral (PhD or DNP) student or post-doctoral fellow at time of submission, who is willing to make a two-year commitment to the Jonas Policy Scholars Program. The selection committee evaluates applicants on their potential for scholarship and leadership. Examples of scholarship include a history of presentations at professional meetings, multi authored publications, and receipt of honors, awards, or fellowships. Leadership potential can be demonstrated by prior leadership experience in organizations such as the Student Nurses' Association, experience leading initiatives as a student or in work settings, or participation in policy-related initiatives. Applicants must also have a minimum grade point average of 3.5 (on a 4.0 scale).

Through a process of one-on-one mentoring by Fellows of the Academy, each Scholar is assigned to work with one of the expert panels. Scholars attend the annual policy conference meetings of the Academy held each year in Washington, DC, to meet face-to-face with their assigned expert panel mentors. Scholars work virtually to provide research support to expert panels throughout the year. Over a period of two years, Scholars learn the ins-and-outs of the process for creating and evaluating healthcare policy.

The Academy has enrolled five cohorts of Jonas Policy Scholars who have worked with a total of 18 expert panels. In addition to the managerial assistance they offer to expert panels, scholars have also made substantial contributions to advancing healthcare policy in the US. Scholars have contributed to policy briefs that have addressed the need to reduce toxic stress in pregnant women and young children; that promote the use of technologies to support human milk and breastfeeding; that address the necessity for full practice authority for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses; that educate nurses on the importance of providing better care to military veteran and families; and that address the importance of environments that reduce noise exposures.

Currently, Scholars have contributed to over 25 peer-reviewed, archival journal publications, and several have won awards for the work they completed with their expert panels. For instance, an alum of the Jonas Policy Scholars program, who was a postdoctoral fellow when she participated as a Scholar, recently received the 2018 Nursing Outlook in Practice Award, an honor directly related to her work with her expert panel. The American Academy of Nursing also inducted two Scholars from the first cohort into the Academy at the 2018 conference.

The results of the American Academy of Nursing Jonas Policy Scholars Program show clear evidence that the investment of the Jonas Philanthropies and the Academy in developing nurses to lead the design of the national healthcare agenda within the United States has been instrumental in assisting the profession of nursing in their efforts to address the roots of health issues in a holistic manner within the US. Preparing doctoral and postdoctoral emerging nurse leaders with the skills to translate research into policy will transform health and health care globally. Future efforts should explore replication and adaptation of the Jonas Policy Scholar Program as a global exemplar for equipping nurse leaders in healthcare policy as a way for nurses to create and evaluate healthcare policy within their own countries.

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References:

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Abstract Summary:

The American Academy of Nursing Jonas Policy Scholars Program is an innovative and forward thinking model that has enhanced the leadership skills of doctoral and post-doctoral nursing students in shaping the United States healthcare system through policy development.

Content Outline:

- Explain why doctorally prepared nurses should be involved in policy.
- Describe the components, goals, and purpose of the Academy Jonas Policy Scholar's Program
- Discuss the Academy Jonas Policy Scholar application criteria and process
- Identify the different types of policy documents produced by the American Academy of Nursing
- Summarize ways Academy Jonas Policy Scholars have advanced policy within the United States

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