



Executive Summary

In 2008, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), in partnership with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), launched the New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) program to urge schools of nursing to intentionally diversify their nursing programs, among other goals. AACN serves as the NCIN program's national program office, charged with monitoring and supporting the implementation and progress of the program. The NCIN program is designed to:

- help alleviate the national nursing shortage
- increase the diversity of nursing professionals
- expand capacity in baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs
- enhance the pipeline of potential nurse faculty¹

Through grants to schools of nursing, NCIN provides \$10,000 scholarships to college graduates who are enrolled in accelerated bachelor's of science in nursing (ABSN) and accelerated master's of science in nursing (AMSN) programs and who are from groups underrepresented in nursing or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.² In total, 130 different schools of nursing received \$35.1 million in support to award 3,517 scholarships — 2,723 (77%) for ABSM students and 794 (23%) for AMSN students. The RWJF also provided funding and technical assistance for several initiatives, such as mentoring and leadership development programs, to support NCIN scholarship recipients and their peers in accelerated nursing programs.

In 2009, RWJF asked ETS to conduct an evaluation of the NCIN program. In the first phase of the evaluation, we focused specifically on the accomplishments of the NCIN program. In the second phase of the evaluation, we broadened our work to produce three studies: a study of teaching and learning activities in NCIN grantee accelerated nursing programs (Millett, Stickler, & Wang, 2015a); a study of the experiences and plans of NCIN alumni (Millett, Stickler, & Wang, 2015b); and a study of the influence of NCIN on the culture at grantee nursing schools, summarized in this report. For the present study, we hypothesized that the various activities of the NCIN program were influencing the culture at the grantee schools of nursing.

¹ Source: <http://www.newcareersinnursing.org/about-ncin> (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2013b)

² The eligibility requirements for the NCIN program include membership in a group that is underrepresented in nursing or a disadvantaged background (e.g., economically disadvantaged), U.S. citizenship or permanent residency, a baccalaureate degree in a non-nursing discipline, and acceptance into an entry-level accelerated nursing degree program for non-nursing college graduates.

To learn if our hypothesis was on point, we proposed to conduct a descriptive multiple case study examining the implementation of the NCIN scholarship program for the students and the related technical assistance provided to the schools of nursing. We conducted campus visits at eight schools of nursing in academic year 2013–14 in order to learn through interviews with program staff, participants, and other nursing program students and alumni how the NCIN program fit into the daily lived experiences of the school of nursing community. The schools of nursing were selected for the case study site visits based on geography, their status as a public or private school of nursing, the type of NCIN scholarships they awarded, and their funding history over the first six rounds of funding (see Table 1).

Table 1: Schools of Nursing Selected for NCIN Case Study

School of Nursing	Geographic Region	Public or Private	NCIN Scholarship	Funding Rounds					
				1	2	3	4	5	6
Azusa Pacific University School of Nursing	West	Private	ABSN and AMSN	x	x	x	x		
Duke University School of Nursing	South	Private	ABSN	x	x	x	x	x	x
Kent State University College of Nursing	Midwest	Public	ABSN	x	x	x	x	x	
Nebraska Methodist College of Nursing and Allied Health	Midwest	Private	ABSN			x	x	x	x
Southern Connecticut State University	Northeast	Public	ABSN		x	x	x	x	x
University of Mississippi Medical Center School of Nursing	South	Public	ABSN		x	x	x	x	x
University of Rochester School of Nursing	Northeast	Private	ABSN and AMSN	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Wyoming Fay W. Whitney School of Nursing	West	Public	ABSN	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: ETS New Careers in Nursing Schools of Nursing Case Study.

Note: At the time of the school selection, six funding rounds had passed.

We acknowledge two important limitations of case study research. First and foremost, it is not possible to generalize the results to the wider population of schools of nursing. The eight schools in this study may differ from the larger corpus of schools of nursing. However, it would have been difficult with respect to resources to carry out the study with a greater number of sites. Second, we need to acknowledge that our own subjective feelings about the NCIN program, based on our deep experience with it, may influence our analyses and presentation of the findings.



The findings from the case study visits highlight several ways in which the NCIN program may have impacted schools of nursing and accelerated nursing program students, including both scholarship recipients and non-recipients.

- *The NCIN scholarships provided critical financial supports for students who received them.* In many cases, the \$10,000 scholarship funds enabled recipients to complete their accelerated nursing program, or to do so without incurring additional debt or endangering their academic performance by working nights and weekends on top of a full-time course and clinical practicum load. The flexibility to use the funds at their discretion (e.g., for tuition, child care, transportation, etc.) enabled students to meet their most pressing financial needs during their accelerated nursing program. Students also repeatedly expressed how the scholarship bestowed a sense of pride and confidence in themselves. However, many scholarship recipients continued to face financial challenges and many still accumulated substantial debt in order to complete their accelerated nursing program.
- *The NCIN program may have helped to increase the diversity of the case study schools of nursing, and that of all grantee schools.* School of nursing deans and directors acknowledged that NCIN's goal of promoting diversity in nursing education strongly aligned with their schools of nursing's goals to promote diversity. The NCIN program resulted in increased enrollment of male nursing students at NCIN schools — well above average male enrollment levels for BSN programs nationwide — which will contribute to improvements in gender parity in nursing. Progress also was made in the enrollment of women from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, with rates that were also well above average racial/minority enrollment rates nationwide, an accomplishment that may impact the diversity of the nursing field for decades to come. In many of the case study schools, increases in diversity led to an increased focus on teaching cultural competence³ and addressing the needs of patients from all cultural backgrounds in course discussions and clinical practice. Yet there remains room for improvement in this area, both at the NCIN schools of nursing and within the field more generally. Additional work may be needed to incorporate cultural competency training at all levels of the teaching and learning experience — in-class, clinical, co-curricular, and peer-peer learning.
- *The orientation, mentoring, and leadership programs developed by NCIN schools of nursing generally provided needed additional supports for students.* Throughout the seven years of NCIN's existence, schools of nursing used the NCIN toolkits (e.g., orientation, mentoring, and leadership) to either establish new programming elements or to strengthen extant programming. Students described several ways in which the mentoring and leadership programs enhanced their personal development and opened the doors to additional career opportunities. Program liaisons described how the improvements in orientation programs helped prepare new accelerated nursing students for the rigors of the programs.

³ According to Bettancourt et al. (2002), cultural competence in health care describes the ability of systems to provide care to patients with diverse values, beliefs and behaviors, including tailoring delivery to meet patients' social, cultural, and linguistic needs.



- *The NCIN program activities supported not only the NCIN Scholars, but also other students in accelerated and non-accelerated nursing programs at many case study schools. It seems that NCIN successfully helped the schools of nursing to achieve some aspects of their missions, particularly those related to diversity and leadership, schoolwide. Across the case study schools, faculty and staff indicated that the orientation, mentoring, and leadership programs will largely be sustained after the NCIN program ends. They most likely will be extended to all students in the accelerated programs, and sometimes in other nursing programs, if they were not already offered broadly. Staff at several case study schools reported that efforts to increase diversity schoolwide will be continued at their schools of nursing. Schools may also continue to track student demographics to assess progress toward diversity goals.*
- *As the national program office, AACN was responsive to the needs of the grantee schools of nursing and supported the sharing of practices. AACN strove to design NCIN programs and toolkits both “for” and “with” the NCIN grantee community, to respond to needs for additional student supports. To further support grantee schools of nursing, AACN also convened annual meetings of NCIN program liaisons from each grantee school and fostered the development of a Scholars Network for past and present scholarship recipients. In addition to documenting the many ways in which NCIN may have influenced the cultures and practices of nursing schools, the findings of the study also point to several recommendations for the nursing field:*

Recommendation #1: Schools of nursing should aim to build on the progress seeded by NCIN in the areas of student diversity, cultural competence training, and student support services. All schools of nursing could utilize the NCIN toolkits to develop or enhance orientation, mentoring, and leadership development programs for students, and to recruit more male and underrepresented minority students into their degree programs. NCIN schools that have successfully made these improvements could continue to enhance their programming to meet student needs and continue recruiting applicants from diverse backgrounds, while sharing lessons learned with other schools of nursing through professional associations and publications. All schools of nursing, whether or not they were NCIN grantees, may want to increase efforts to incorporate cultural competency training at all levels of the teaching and learning experience.

Recommendation #2: Government and philanthropic organizations supporting the field of nursing should explore ways to raise funds to support the financial and mentoring needs of accelerated nursing students in order to promote improvements in the nursing field more broadly. One option to consider would be to advocate for revisions of federal financial aid rules for second bachelor’s degree students. Another option is a national campaign to fund scholarships and grants for accelerated nursing students to ease the financial burden of these fast-paced programs and enable students from low-income backgrounds to enter the nursing field and break the cycle of poverty. Yet a third option would be for schools of nursing to focus on raising funds specifically to support financially needy accelerated nursing students, given the challenges of financing these short-term programs.



Recommendation #3: The existing networks of NCIN scholars and program liaisons should be sustained and supported, to ensure the ongoing sharing of lessons learned.

These efforts would benefit not only individual nursing students, but also schools of nursing and the nursing field, particularly if lessons learned and resources are shared broadly through professional nursing organizations.

In summary, our case studies of eight NCIN schools of nursing revealed several ways in which the NCIN programs may have positively influenced the cultures of schools of nursing and the experiences of individual students, both scholarship recipients and their peers. Our findings highlight the importance of and need for programs to support accelerated nursing program students.