



Illinois Nursing Workforce Center, May 14, 2025, Appendix A
FY25 Nurse Educator Fellow Individual Abstracts

The Illinois Nursing Workforce Center and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) collaborated once again this year with recognizing the recipients of the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowships. This year's class of 56 honorees represent nursing education programs at 32 different institutions of higher education with accredited nursing programs leading to initial licensure as a Registered Nurse. These nursing programs are at public community colleges and universities, and non-profit and for-profit independent colleges and universities throughout the state of Illinois.

The Nurse Educator Fellowship program is designed to retain well-qualified nursing faculty in Illinois with a salary supplement to be used for the faculty member's professional development, scholarship or other endeavors as nurse educators to improve the preparation of future nurses. Fellows are selected through a competitive process and two rounds of applications were accepted in FY25 to allow greater access to the IBHE fellowship program. From both rounds of awarding fellowships, there was some attrition due to changes in applicants' employment. Each fellow received a \$10,000 salary supplement for a total of \$560,00 awarded in fellowships.

The Illinois Nursing Workforce Center Advisory Board (INWC) and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) celebrated the recognition of the 56 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellows at two virtual events on May 30, 2025 and July 11, 2025. In addition to the recognition presentations, each fellow was required to submit a 200 to 250-word abstract describing the fellowship experience as seen below.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Amanda Bodinet MSN, RN, CPAN

Affiliation

Aurora University

The IBHE Nursing Educator Fellowship Program is an honor to receive and will support my passion for nursing education in my role as an Assistant Professor of Nursing. My goal is to improve student and programmatic outcomes with technology integration, enhancing practice readiness and competency-based education.

The funds I receive will be instrumental in supporting integration of technology into my pedagogy and new curriculum development. The funds will support my attendance at the NLN education summit "Future Trends of AI in Nursing education" to stay at the forefront of AI in education and integrate these tools into classrooms to enhance interactive teaching modalities. Additionally, the funds will support my attendance at NLN's "Curriculum Deeper Dive" to assist in supporting competency-based education and use of simulation.

To further advance competency-based education, I will allocate the funds to incorporate standardized patients into our simulation-based learning experiences, providing a comprehensive patient-nurse dialogue and enhancing the communication skills of our nursing students.

Lastly, the funds will support my professional growth through obtaining my Certified Nurse Education certification and attending the SIGMA conference to disseminate my research findings on the impact of Virtual Reality Simulation use in the classroom. Utilizing the knowledge and skills gained from these funded opportunities, I will continue to enhance my expertise as a nurse educator and improve my ability to foster a dynamic and inclusive learning environment for the diverse student body I serve.

Julie Ellis-Nelson MSN, RN, CMSRN, CNE Aurora University

Thank you very much for selecting me as one of the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship Award Recipients. As nursing faculty, ongoing education is an essential part of our professionalism and our performance reviews. Each year I see advertisements for nurse educator conferences that I know would help inspire my teaching and help me develop as an educator, however the cost to attend and travel is often beyond my budget. Being awarded these funds has created an opportunity for me to attend the Elevate and Educate: Transforming Nursing Education conference this summer in Colorado. I was particularly drawn to this conference because it occurs during the summer when I do not have a heavy teaching load. The conference agenda also addresses many of the current issues in nursing education and will support me not only as a faculty member but as a leader among my peers in my role as an Associate Professor and Nursing Curriculum Committee Chair. I hope to return from this conference ready to participate in curriculum improvements as our school prepares to adapt to the new AACN Essential Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education. Knowing that I have the funds for this conference has given me an extra boost to get through the spring term and prepare for a summer of curriculum development!

Zeb Koran RN, APN, DNP, NEA-BC Aurora University

Thank you so much for selecting me to receive a 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship award. With these funds, I am able to pursue three interests. With the release of the AACN Essentials, I am now leading curriculum revisions in competency-based education (CBE) with various assessment methods of learning and I would like to continue to gain expert knowledge in CBE. Attending a conference on this topic would enhance my knowledge and allow me to apply new strategies to the curriculum and assess competency across the program.

With exams still being a part of assessment, I would like to increase my knowledge regarding psychometrics and develop guidelines for exam review. I would also like to investigate the possibility of decreasing the challenges, when taking exams, for those students who have English as a second language (ESL). I hope to accomplish these goals through the purchase of resources and attending some online courses.

Nurse resilience is of great interest to me; particularly students beginning their nursing education and transitioning through their first year of practice. With the funds I am receiving, I will be able to pay for the tools I would like to use, provide a stipend to the students who complete the study, purchase some research resources, and attend a research conference.

Kelvita Raggs DNP, MSN/Ed, RN, PEL-CSN Chamberlain University, Addison

I am deeply honored to have been selected as a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. Receiving this award and the accompanying

funding has significantly impacted my ability to remain active and engaged in the field of nursing education across the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service.

The funding has been used to support my membership in the Greater Illinois Black Nurses Association, which has provided access to valuable professional development resources, mentorship opportunities, and a broader network of nurse leaders committed to advancing equity in healthcare. In addition, the award is being used to fund travel and accommodations for attendance at the National Black Nurses Association Conference in Dallas, Texas. This opportunity will allow me to engage with nationally recognized nurse leaders, attend research-focused seminars, and participate in workshops that promote academic and professional growth particularly for nurses from marginalized backgrounds.

As the only African American full-time faculty member on my campus, this award has empowered me to strengthen partnerships that support underrepresented nursing students and advocate for structural improvements in how we recruit, mentor, and retain diverse nursing talent. The Fellowship has allowed me to build critical relationships that will continue to benefit our students and our community.

I offer my sincerest gratitude to IBHE for this opportunity. It has enabled me to proudly represent the minority community, expand my impact in nursing education, and take meaningful steps toward building a more inclusive and equitable future for the nursing profession.

Karen Gutsmedl MSN, APN-RN, FNP-BC, CNE Chamberlain University, Addison

It has been an absolute honor to have been selected as a recipient of the FY2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship award. I have already used some of the grant funds I received back in March/April 2025 to further my practice as a nurse educator. At the beginning of the year, I prepared for National League for Nursing (NLN) Certified Nurse Educator (CNE) examination and on March 21, 2025, I passed the CNE exam. Furthermore, I took the opportunity to attend the NLN Nurse Educator Research Conference (NERC) that was held at the end of March 2025 in Washington, D.C. I was exposed to various innovative nurse education practices and gained so much knowledge from the presentations and networking with fellow nurse educators and interprofessional colleagues.

After passing the CNE exam and attending NERC, I have felt that my practice has evolved onto the next level. Moreover, I am currently part of a Faculty Leadership Development Program through Chamberlain University, and I feel even more committed to my role as a nurse educator and meeting the needs of the students, the university, the nursing profession, and the health of the nation. I plan to maximize utilization of the remainder of the funds towards professional development opportunities, maintaining licensures/certifications, subscriptions for technological platforms that engage educational active learning activities in class, and towards my interest in potential research studies that will promote student mental-health and wellbeing. Thank you, IBHE, for being one of the many catalysts to my accomplishments this year.

Jamie Lopez MSN, BSN, APRN, RN, FNP-BC Chamberlain University, Chicago

I am grateful to be selected as a recipient of the 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship Program award. Once awarded, I plan to use the funds to pursue my advanced nursing degree, participate in continuing education activities, and attend conferences to enhance my knowledge as a family nurse practitioner and nursing educator.

A portion of the award will support the pursuit of my Doctor of Nursing Practice degree with a concentration in Educational Leadership. This degree will allow me to acquire the advanced knowledge necessary to facilitate effective learning, cultivate an enriched classroom, and provide educational guidance for future generations of nurses as they prepare to enter this rewarding profession.

I also plan to use the award to support my memberships in the American Nurses Association and the National League for Nursing. Participation in these exceptional organizations will provide me access to programs and continuing education to shape the future of nursing, health care, and nursing education.

Lastly, the award will also be applied toward obtaining continuing education credits and participating in conferences related to advancing the nursing profession and nursing education. Courses to be completed will focus on cultural competence, leadership, professional development, current women's health issues, ethics in nursing education, enhancing learning through technology, and certified nurse educator training.

Ashley Day DNP, MS, RN, CNL

College of Lake County

Receiving the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship will significantly strengthen my ability to remain in nursing education by supporting my continued professional growth and advancement in simulation-based nursing education. As a full-time nursing faculty focused on nursing simulation at the College of Lake County, I am deeply committed to fostering an inclusive, learner-centered environment that prepares students to deliver safe, high-quality patient care. The Fellowship will enable me to pursue targeted professional development including simulation-focused coursework and conference participation. Furthermore, the Fellowship award will be valuable in my attainment of Certification in Healthcare Simulation Education.

This professional learning and certification will enhance my ability to deliver innovative and evidence-based simulation experiences. These opportunities are essential for staying current in the rapidly evolving healthcare landscape and meeting the diverse needs of our student population. Additionally, the Fellowship supports my endeavor to collaborate with nurse educators across community colleges, strengthening partnerships in the larger nursing education community. As a recent Doctor of Nursing Practice graduate, I am committed to lifelong learning and contributing meaningfully to nursing education. This Fellowship will support my long-term goal of developing future-ready nurses while sustaining a fulfilling and impactful career in nursing education.

Amanda Dirnberger MS, APRN, FNP-BC

DePaul University

I am deeply honored to be a recipient of the 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship. This generous support has been instrumental in supporting my continued education as I pursue a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. My passion lies in community health, particularly working with populations experiencing health inequities. The learning opportunities and mentorship that are part of the DNP program have been critical to strengthening my skills as a community health nurse practitioner, leader, and educator.

As a nurse educator, I am committed to sharing the importance of holistic nursing care and the importance of engaging with social determinants of health with the next generation of nurses. At DePaul University, in addition to teaching didactic courses, I lead the nursing community-based service learning (CbSL) program and the development of our Master's Entry to Nursing Practice

(MENP) community health nursing clinical program. The IBHE fellowship funding supported me in taking DNP courses focused on leadership and program management, both core functions to my work at DePaul and in the community.

The fellowship funds will also enable me to attend the Association of Community Health Nurse Educators (ACHNE) conference this June, where I will present my first academic poster. The poster highlights quality improvement initiatives I've led as part of DePaul's MENP CbSL program. These projects have helped enhance student engagement while addressing real community health needs.

Thank you for this opportunity and your investment in nurse educators committed to lifelong learning, leadership, and student-centered teaching.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Jennifer Sandoval DNP, MSN, RN-BC

Affiliation

DePaul University

Thank you so much to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) for selecting me as a recipient of the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship 2025. This award has been impactful and instrumental in supporting my professional development as a nurse educator. I have always been inspired to teach and mentor the next generation of nurses. I am passionate about sharing my experiences as a nurse with our future nurses and helping them navigate any barriers along the way. I had amazing nurse educators who mentored and guided me into fulfilling my dreams, and I would love to do the same for my students.

I will be using the funds to work towards obtaining my certified nurse educator certificate (CNE), including the materials needed to review for the exam. This certificate will truly solidify my knowledge of the nursing education field. I will also be using this award to attend nursing conferences that will allow me to interact and meet with nurses across the country. One of the conferences that I will be attending is the Annual National Association of Hispanic Nurses conference in Dallas, Texas. I will have a poster presentation with one of my nurse educator colleagues and one of our current nursing students.

This award has also allowed me to support local and national nursing organizations, and I have been able to rejoin Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI). This grant has truly been monumental in allowing me to become a better educator for my students. Thank you again.

Jacqueline Dalke MSN, RN-CMSRN

Elgin Community College

As a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellowship Award I plan to remain engaged in nursing education through practice, teaching and continuing my education.

In practice, the fellowship will deepen my clinical expertise, allowing me to integrate evidence-based knowledge into my teaching through continuing education to enhance my institution's curriculum. This will help me better prepare students for real-world patient care. In teaching, the fellowship will refine my instructional methods, introducing innovative strategies that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes through courses I plan to enroll in over the summer to focus on my post-master's family nurse practitioner certificate. Exposure to diverse educational settings will expand my perspective and improve my mentorship abilities.

Attending conferences will further enrich my experience, providing opportunities to connect with experts, share insights, and stay updated on emerging trends in nursing education. I plan on

attending The Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (OADN) conference in November of 2025 for the second time with the fellowship funds.

Additionally, the financial support from the fellowship will help me pay off my master's tuition, alleviating financial stress and allowing me to focus more on advancing my career in nursing education.

Sara De Paul DNP'c, MSN, CHSE, CNE'cl, TNCC Elmhurst University

The Nurse Educator Fellowship funds will contribute toward my doctoral nursing practice (DNP) degree. I plan to complete this degree by December 2025 and look forward to bringing the knowledge and leadership I have acquired to Elmhurst University as a Simulation faculty member. A DNP degree will allow me to contribute to both areas of nursing practice, patient outcomes, and the academic setting of educating the next generation. A portion of this award would also allow me to attend the International Association of Simulation and Clinical Learning (INACSL) conference in 2025. My teaching pedagogy and passion are providing educational information through simulation. Virtual reality also falls under simulation activities, and this new education method can be complicated for people to learn. This is an appealing learning format for the new generation of nursing students. INACSL has many partners and lectures on implementing and using virtual reality. Nursing education is changing, and the way students learn is different. Advancing my knowledge of these different aspects will allow me to provide the students with activities and learning that will get them practice-ready. Throughout the year, continuing education will also be achieved by attending webinars on interprofessional curriculum and simulation.

Kristin Sciutto MSN, RN, CNL, CCRN Elmhurst University

I am deeply honored and sincerely grateful to be selected as a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship. This award supports my continued commitment to professional growth and excellence in nursing education.

A portion of the fellowship funds, approximately \$1,000, will be allocated toward renewing my memberships in key professional organizations, including the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, the American Nurses Association, and Sigma Theta Tau International, as well as maintaining certifications as a Clinical Nurse Leader and a Critical Care Registered Nurse. Remaining actively engaged in these organizations and holding relevant certifications is essential to my role as an educator, as I believe it is important to model lifelong learning and remain current in the specialty areas I teach.

The remainder of the fellowship will assist with tuition and textbooks for my Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program, with a concentration in Educational Leadership. As a practicing staff nurse caring for critically ill patients, I witness the challenges new graduates face in clinical settings. This perspective informs my DNP project, which aims to bridge the gap between academic preparation and the realities of nursing practice, ensuring graduates are well-equipped to meet the demands of today's healthcare environment.

This fellowship is not only a generous financial resource but also a meaningful investment in the future of nursing education. Thank you for this opportunity; it is truly a privilege and a blessing.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Kristen Crow MSN, RN

Affiliation

Illinois State University-Mennonite College of Nursing

I am deeply honored to be a recipient for the Illinois Board of Higher Education Fellowship. I have been a nurse for 14 years which includes a background with Psychiatric, Medical-Surgical, Correctional, and Postpartum nursing. During that time, I was a charge nurse and preceptor and officially have been in an educator role for 6 years. I have a passion for teaching future nurses about mental health concerns that clients experience in all aspects of nursing care. All areas of nursing require a nurse to be familiar with assessment, intervention, and treatment of clients diagnosed with a mental illness. As most know, there has always been a stigma related to mental health. If students never experience a clinical situation to assess, prevent, intervene, or treat a client with mental health concerns this could impact their treatment. As psychiatric sites are not always available, it is vital to provide students with scenarios to enhance their learning, meet objectives, and provide future positive client outcomes.

The funds have allowed me to research and develop new simulation scenarios to address the growing concerns of those who have mental health concerns as clinical sites are not always available for students. I also plan to utilize funds to attend education webinars and complete the CNE. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity.

Amanda Hopkins PhD, RN

Illinois Wesleyan University

While I only recently received IBHE funding and, as a result, have been unable to spend any of those monies, I do have plans. Initially, I planned to conduct a study involving transgender populations. While I continue to plan an evaluative study, major changes were necessary due to the current political climate and attacks on DEI. For example, my studies would include LatinX populations but, because of recent Executive Orders, my administration requested several language changes. One example is that I was required to replace the term LatinX (the preferred, more inclusive term) with Latin American populations. While this is only one example, one can now understand the impacts of the current administration on the necessary research changes when working with sexual and gender minority (SGM) populations. I'm committed to the work, and yet, more time and creativeness is required to conduct my research. As such, a pediatric trans actor was hired for the creation of video simulations to use towards creating a more inclusive care nursing curriculum.

Another major manner in which the funds will be spent is towards salary supplementation. As a result of my courses (nursing and gen ed) being popular and frequently having large waiting lists, it was requested that I teach a human sexuality course asynchronously during the month of July and another synchronous course during Fall semester. Because these courses have never been taught online, a great amount of resources including time and money to purchase programs to facilitate course design and online teaching.

Amber Kujath PhD, RN, ONC, FNAON

Illinois Wesleyan University

Receipt of the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nursing Educator fellowship award will significantly enhance my ability to remain in nursing education by providing crucial financial support for both student-based research and professional development opportunities. The funding allows me to continue engaging in the Virtual Dementia Tour Family Caregiver research, which has the potential to positively impact dementia caregiving practices. By covering essential research supplies,

travel costs for the facilitator, and publication fees, this award alleviates financial constraints, ensuring my complete engagement on advancing research in nursing education without the burden of limited resources.

Additionally, the support for attending the Gold Humanism Summit will help me grow professionally, allowing me to network with other leaders in compassionate patient care and gain new insights to bring back to the classroom. This exposure would directly benefit my teaching approach and further my ability to mentor students in the integration of research and clinical practice. As a nursing educator, the opportunity to collaborate with students and faculty on this project aligns with my long-term professional aspirations of contributing to nursing education and advancing the field through research. The funding will enable me to continue mentoring nursing students in research honors, facilitating their development as future leaders in nursing. Ultimately, this award supports my commitment to fostering a passion for nursing education and research, ensuring that I can continue to make a meaningful impact on the next generation of nurses.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Sumar McDonald MSN, RN

Affiliation

John A. Logan College

I am so honored and grateful to receive this Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. I began my career as a nurse educator as a nursing preceptor on a med-surg unit and fell in love with teaching. I continued my education by acquiring my BSN and MSN in Nursing Education and am currently working towards my DNP in Ethical Leadership.

I am currently an Assistant Professor of Nursing at one of our local community colleges and have been for four years now. I am seeking this terminal degree to help increase my nursing knowledge and abilities to best prepare our students with the nursing skills necessary to provide high-quality nursing care in whatever healthcare setting they choose after graduation. My passion is educating these students and seeing them connect the dots between knowledge and practice. Part of being a nurse and nurse educator is pursuing opportunities for lifelong learning, leading to my desire to achieve my terminal doctoral degree. I plan on using the fellowship award to help fund my advancement in my DNP program through tuition aid, textbooks, and fees. Thank you to the Illinois Nursing Workforce Center and the Illinois Board of Higher Education for this opportunity to continue my nursing education. I truly appreciate being awarded this fellowship.

Christina Sosnowski MSN, RN

Kankakee Community College

The Fellowship has played a pivotal role in strengthening my commitment and ability to remain in nursing education through its multifaceted support across practice, scholarship, teaching, and service. As a nurse educator dedicated to preparing the next generation of practitioners, this opportunity has provided the resources, mentorship, and professional development needed to deepen my impact within academic and clinical settings.

Through the Fellowship, I was able to attend two major national conferences that significantly enriched my perspective and professional growth. In March, I participated in the International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses (ISPN) Conference: Advancing Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing—Innovation, Practice, and Culture in New Orleans. This experience broadened my understanding of culturally responsive care and current innovations in psychiatric nursing, which I have since integrated into both classroom instruction and student mentorship.

In April, I attended the National Nurse Educator Summit in Orlando, which offered invaluable strategies for enhancing curriculum design, clinical evaluation, and faculty resilience. Exposure to national leaders in nursing education reaffirmed my dedication to scholarly excellence and inspired new collaborative ideas for interprofessional education and student engagement.

Overall, the Fellowship has reinforced my identity as a nurse educator, supporting both my scholarly pursuits and my role as a mentor and advocate. It has enabled me to remain actively engaged in service to the profession while fostering a sense of community, innovation, and continuous learning that I bring back to my institution and students.

Lisa Barrow MSN, RN

Kaskaskia College

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to IBHE for choosing me as one of the recipients of the Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. Through the support of the fellowship award, I had the valuable opportunity to attend the 2025 ATI Nursing Education Summit in April. The summit proved to be a great experience for my professional growth. It focused on innovative strategies in nursing education and great insight into innovative strategies that can be used within nursing education. It gave a renewed sense of purpose in my role as a nurse educator and a desire to share with other faculty the new and innovative strategies different sessions offered.

One of the most impactful sessions centered on the transition to practice and the many complexities that accompany this period. I gained a deeper understanding of how structured support systems, clear communication, and evidence-based teaching strategies can ease this transition. There were additional sessions that highlighted the importance of mentorship, positive feedback, faculty retention.

By engaging with educators and nursing leaders from across the country, I was able to gather best-practices, tools, and resources that I will share with my own institution and fellow faculty members to help guide our ADN students during their final semester and into their early professional roles. The experience reinforced my commitment to ensuring that our graduates not only pass the NCLEX but are also prepared to step into the workforce with confidence, competence, and a strong sense of support.

Kimberly Storm DNP, RN

Kaskaskia College

During the Spring 2025 semester at Kaskaskia College, the Fellowship played a pivotal role in strengthening my contributions to nursing education through teaching and training. With Fellowship support, I implemented grit-focused activities that led to noticeable improvements in student engagement, resilience, and academic performance. Activities such as reflective journaling, goal-setting, and small-group discussions on overcoming adversity empowered students to develop perseverance and a growth mindset, especially evident during final exam preparation.

Weekly mentoring sessions provided consistent support and structure, allowing students to explore challenges while gaining tools to manage stress and stay focused. These efforts fostered a stronger sense of community, belonging, and self-efficacy among new nursing students.

The Fellowship also enabled me to develop immersive role-playing simulation scenarios. These simulations helped students build confidence in high-pressure clinical situations, preparing them for diverse healthcare settings. Workshops on time management, self-care, and support systems further enhanced adaptability and academic persistence. As part of my service to student success, I

collaborated with the nursing tutor and success coach to launch a TEAS preparation initiative using ATI content.

Finally, attending the ATI Nurse Educator Conference in Orlando in April 2025 provided valuable insights on student retention, quality improvement, and meaningful feedback strategies. Using this knowledge, we are developing a comprehensive retention plan to be implemented in Fall 2025, aimed at improving student outcomes and long-term program success.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Nichole Macon MSN, RN

Affiliation

Kaskaskia College

I am honored to be a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. As part of my commitment to professional development, I attended the 2025 ATI Nurse Educator Summit. In my current role, I teach in the fourth semester of the ADN Program and serve as the LPN to RN Bridge Program Coordinator.

Since stepping into the coordinator role on October 1, 2023, I have identified opportunities for enhancing the bridge program. Our bridge students face distinct challenges as they transition into advanced nursing roles. Many balance coursework with demanding work schedules and family responsibilities, which can impact academic performance and well-being. Additionally, differences in access to resources and support can create gaps in student success.

Students returning to school after a long break often struggle with online learning and clinical work. Those who completed LPN training outside of Kaskaskia College frequently struggle with theoretical knowledge and clinical expectations. As the LPN to RN Bridge Program nears its second anniversary this summer, these observations are especially important in shaping its continued growth and effectiveness.

At the ATI Summit, I participated in breakout sessions that addressed key areas such as student retention, diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), neurodiversity, creating supportive learning environments, delivering constructive feedback, and applying concept-based education. These sessions aligned with the needs of our student population. The strategies and insights I gained will be invaluable in refining my teaching and mentoring to better support student success.

Lara Lash MSN, RN

Lake Land College

As a chosen award recipient for the FY25 Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Fellowship Program, I am honored and grateful. Receiving this award opens the door for opportunities not only for myself as a nurse educator, but for our students, and the organizations and communities we serve here at Lake Land College. Our rural student population has restricted time on the obstetrics (OB) unit which has hindered understanding of content, critical thinking and prioritization of care, and confidence in clinical skillsets. After identifying this barrier, I chose to develop and implement OB escape room simulations to help bridge this gap between theory and hands-on learning.

The funds from this award will further my professional development by becoming a Certified Nurse Educator (CNE), attending OB specific courses and webinars, and joining various nursing organizations for access to credible online resources. This will allow me to create positive impact on student success, retention rates, and academic innovation. Likewise, my skills and expertise can professionally evolve as I foster a safe, inclusive learning environment that is adaptable to meet learner needs.

Additionally, as a tenure-track faculty member finishing year three, I was voted in for tenure beginning in the fall 2025 semester. This advancement will further enhance my opportunities for professional growth and advocacy for student equity within our nursing programs. So, as I strive to make a positive impact on our future generation of nurses, I thank you IBHE, for your dedication to nursing education and the opportunity for personal growth.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Christina Smalley MSN Ed., RN, CNE

Affiliation

Lakeview College

I am incredibly thankful to receive the Illinois Board of Higher Educator Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. The funds for this award will allow me to remain in my full-time nursing educator position while I place focus on pursuing two additional certifications that are imperative to the quality of nursing education that I deliver. Furthermore, funds for this award will allow me to tend to my fiscal responsibilities with my student loan, adding greater potential for me to seek my Doctorate of Nursing Practice in the future. These funds will allow me to finally pursue the Certified Academic Clinical Nurse Educator (CNEcl) and the Certified HealthCare Simulation Educator (CHSE) certifications.

I am the skills lab and simulations coordinator for Lakeview College of Nursing. Hands on nursing education is my upmost passion. I strongly feel that my wealth of knowledge and experiences in nursing has positively impacted my students' nursing education in both the lab and clinical settings, but I recognize that there is a critical need for achieving continued education in these areas to keep up with modern nursing practice. Achieving my CNEcl and CHSE certifications will be instrumental in continuing to deliver high-quality nursing education to future nurses in both the clinical and laboratory settings.

I want to provide my sincere gratitude to the Illinois Higher Board of Educator for providing me with this opportunity. This monetary award will allow me to stay in my current teaching role and have the opportunity for professional growth that I so greatly desire.

Renea McKeown DNP, APRN-CNS, ACNS-BC

Lewis University

The fellowship has helped me expand my knowledge as an educator and better serve my students in the classroom setting. With the funds from this award, I attended the ATI Nurse Educator Summit in Orlando from April 22nd through April 25th. This conference provided me with valuable information to enhance my delivery of complex material, as well as techniques to meet the unique learning styles of our diverse student population. Additionally, I received continuing education hours, which helps support my practice as both a nurse and educator. I love learning new and different ways to educate our students, and this experience gave me just that.

The other portion of the funds will be used to purchase updated equipment for our Critical Care course. A significant aspect of my course is the use of hands-on learning and application. The students are shown equipment during lecture, such as endotracheal tubes, pulmonary artery catheters, and arterial lines. This approach has shown to be extremely beneficial to students, as it makes the content easier to understand and retain. Also, I utilize a simulator three times during the course. The students go through an unfolding case study with the simulator, which allows them to work through the questions in a more realistic way. However, the equipment I have is older and some needs to be replaced. Therefore, I plan to utilize the remainder of the funds to update as much equipment as possible. Thank you for this opportunity.

Nurse Educator Fellow**Affiliation**

Donna Martin DNP, RN, CNE, CMSRN, CDCES Lewis University

I am honored to be a recipient of the 2025 Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. I am utilizing my funds to enhance Self-Care for nursing faculty and students. The ANA Code of Ethics states that we as nurses not only have the obligation to apply all of the provisions to our patients and those we care for, but in addition we must apply these provisions to oneself. This includes personal health, safety, well-being and self-care. Historically nurses have not done a good job in applying the provision of self-care, either because they never have been introduced to the concept of self-care in nursing school, it has not promoted in their work environment, or they do not see it as a priority. Self-care has been identified as so important to the nursing profession that the AACN Essentials have incorporated self-care into nursing education expectations.

I am using the funds to attend conferences to increase my professional and personal knowledge of ways to incorporate self-care into the curriculum of the undergraduate and graduate nursing programs at Lewis University. I have attended the Sigma Creating Healthy Work Environments Conference and will be attending the American Holistic Nurses Association 45th Annual Conference in June. In addition, I am planning to reinforce the importance of self-care with the faculty and nursing students, by using funds to create restoration spaces for nursing faculty and students to utilize and incorporate self-care activities into the curriculum.

Travis Rath MSN, RN

Lincoln Land Community College

Nursing was not my intended career path when I first started on my journey. It was a means to care for my late wife during her fight against cancer. Twelve years later, I find myself grateful for the journey I embarked on. So much so that I wish to continue my educational journey and achieve my Doctorate in Nursing Practice.

Being selected for the Nurse Educator Fellowship award is a great honor and a blessing. I have been a nurse for close to thirteen years now. I started this journey as a certified nursing assistant and continued as an LPN for personal reasons. Once I started the LPN program I found a passion for this calling. It was at that point that I was determined to obtain a Doctorate. Receiving this grant will help achieve that goal I started years ago.

I have recently started the journey of a postmaster's doctoral program with Liberty University. This fellowship grant will help pay for my schooling and ease the burden of tuition and allow me to focus more on my studies instead of working to pay the tuitions fees. I am very grateful for this opportunity to complete the goal I started many years ago. This will also allow me to impart my knowledge onto future generations of nurses to aid and support the communities we serve.

Leah McClellan MSN, FNP-BC, PMHNP-BC

Loyola University of Chicago

Being selected as an Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellow is an honor. As a nursing instructor, I am committed to helping students understand systemic elements that can impact community and mental health equity. To strengthen my role as a nursing instructor and understand how research can advance health equity, I am working to complete my PhD in Nursing.

The IBHE fellowship is helping me advance my PhD studies and research. The funds will help with my tuition and study expenses related to my community-engaged research study, which aims

to understand neighborhood factors related to opioid use in areas disproportionately impacted by opioid overdoses in Chicago. I plan to incorporate what I learn from my study to inform future research, equitable policy development, and teaching to provide insight into systems perpetuating health inequities. As a part of my study, I will use geographic information systems to offer descriptive maps, and the funds will help support these services.

Additionally, I attended an interdisciplinary workshop on addressing social determinants of health in education. This workshop introduced me to policy tools and research that I have incorporated into my community clinical rotations, providing a greater understanding of how policies impact social determinants of health. It also offered examples of incorporating education about social determinants of health into mental health nursing courses. I am grateful for the opportunities the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellow program made possible.

Shalini Shrikanth PhD, RN, CNE, CNEcl Loyola University of Chicago

I am honored to receive the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship and deeply grateful for the professional growth it makes possible. The fellowship will support key areas of my research and development as a nurse educator, enhancing my teaching practice, expanding clinical knowledge, and finding innovative, evidence-based ways to bring nursing to life in the classroom.

I will use the funds to attend the National League for Nursing Education Summit to network and learn innovative teaching methods. To strengthen my teaching and better serve diverse student populations, I plan to attend the Gerontological Society of America's 2025 Annual Scientific Meeting and the Association of Community Health Nursing Educators (ACHNE) Institute. Additionally, this fellowship will allow me to pursue specialized training and certifications in both community health and nursing education. This opportunity allows me to continue working on my current projects focusing on integrating human trafficking education into nursing curricula and Smart Tablet Education for Healthy Living for vulnerable populations in community settings.

Thank you to the Illinois Board of Higher Education for this incredible opportunity. The Nurse Educator Fellowship supports my mission to advance public health nursing and to prepare future nurses with the critical thinking, compassion, and cultural humility needed to serve engage in community initiatives and serve vulnerable populations in various community settings.

Patricia Stapleton , DNP, MS, APRN, CPNP-PC Loyola University of Chicago

I am honored to be a recipient of the FY 25 Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship Program. The funds are greatly appreciated and will be used to allow me to participate in the Coursera Global Studies Certificate program with Johns Hopkins University and national conferences to strengthen my understanding of global initiatives and subsequently improve our current global programs for our prelicensure students. Participation in these programs will enable me to teach students how to be more aware of the needs of both international and local patients, ultimately enhancing their nursing practice.

Globalization encourages awareness of various factors influencing healthcare delivery across different countries, enabling providers to deliver more comprehensive care locally. By exposing student nurses to comparative healthcare systems, they gain valuable insights, expanding their knowledge to address local healthcare issues. International experiences contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural, political, economic, and environmental factors impacting global

health. To contribute to the growing knowledge of the impact of global health experiences in nursing schools, I am currently reviewing reflection logs from prelicensure students who participated in a Community Health Nursing course in England over past years to assess whether their experiences align with program outcomes. I plan to disseminate this knowledge at a future AACN conference.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Anne Bendik MS, APRN, FNP-C

Affiliation

CCC-Malcolm X College

I am honored and grateful to be selected as a recipient of the 2025 Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellowship award. Over the past six years serving as a full-time nurse educator, I have had the privilege of working with students in clinical, classroom, and laboratory settings. Each of these teaching environments presents their own unique strengths and challenges for students and faculty alike. The financial support from the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship award will help strengthen my commitment to optimizing student outcomes in these various areas.

In order to support my students and advance my professional goals, I am finishing a Master Online Teacher certificate through the Illinois Online Network (ION). The courses for this certificate review novel ways to facilitate evidence-based teaching practices. Additionally, I attended a comprehensive pediatric nursing conference in March that highlighted best practices and connected me with experts in the field of pediatric and adolescent care. Lastly, I am excited to begin a Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) program at Rush University.

I can confidently say that the funds from this generous award will be used intentionally to help prepare nursing students for the ever-evolving role as a professional Registered Nurse. I am appreciative of this opportunity for significant professional growth and development. I look forward to my continued work as a nurse educator and seeing the positive impact of this award for years to come.

Lovelle Reynolds PhD, APRN, FNP-BC, CPN, CNE

CCC-Malcolm X College

Thank you for selecting me as a recipient of the 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. I am deeply honored and grateful for this opportunity, which strengthens my ability to remain committed to nursing education through practice, teaching, scholarship, and service. This Fellowship is vital in advancing my professional development and sustaining my contributions to the nursing education workforce through research and dissemination.

This award directly supports my participation in two critical conferences that enhance the visibility of nurse educators and data-driven initiatives in nursing education. I will attend the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Congress in June 2025 in Helsinki, Finland. I will deliver an oral presentation on my program, *Nursing Faculty Launchpad* for novice nursing faculty transitioning from practice to academia. The ICN theme, "Nursing Power to Change the World," reflects my belief that nurses are change agents across all levels—from local communities to global systems. Additionally, I will present a podium session at the National Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers Annual Conference in June 2025 in Philadelphia on the implementation of my four-year, multi-institutional longitudinal study launching in fall 2025, *From Learning to Practice: A Longitudinal Study of Nursing Students' Career Intentions and Outcomes*. Both conferences offer high-impact platforms to share emerging evidence, gain critical feedback from national and

international nursing leaders, and influence broader conversations around nursing education reform, student support, and faculty development. This Fellowship enables me to disseminate timely research, foster academic-clinical partnerships, and promote innovations in nursing faculty development.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Ellen Boushell MSN, RN, CCRN-K

Affiliation

Methodist College of Nursing

I am grateful to the Illinois Board of Higher Education for awarding me the Nurse Educator Fellowship, which will enable increased understanding, knowledge and skills as a nurse educator. With 37 years and only a few as a nurse instructor, I am eager to expand my expertise in both complex medical-surgical care and developing the policy and leadership course. The fellowship monies will support my attendance the Nurse Tim conference and other educational conferences, and training programs that will broaden my understanding of teaching students. I will use the money to maintain my American Association of Critical- Care Nurses membership and look to other organization that will broaden my influence in education and healthcare policy.

I have created an interactive game to improve the knowledge of renal failure, including medications, medications, types of acute renal failure, chronic renal failure. The game incorporated elements of the game Clue and escape rooms. Students worked in teams to solve elements of renal failure at stations and uncover an unfolding case study involving renal failure using characters of Clue. I am working to evaluate the effectiveness of this learning game and determine what changes need to be made. I will continue to work to innovate and create a positive learning environment.

Hayley Schwindenhammer MSN, RN

Methodist College of Nursing

I am honored to be chosen as a recipient of the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship. As a mental health nursing instructor I am always looking for unique learning opportunities for my students. For many students, the specialty of mental health nursing can present unique challenges that impact a students ability to provide high quality care to a very vulnerable population. With the stigma surrounding mental health nursing and mental health clients, I am always looking for ways to help my students overcome the biases in a way that does not jeopardize their role as students and the clients role as a patient.

The funds will be used to purchase virtual reality equipment in order to provide students with real life client interactions in a safe, non-judgmental environment. Virtual reality enables learners to engage in virtual interactions and receive individualized feedback to enhance their knowledge development, understanding and clinical decision-making (Bruce, Wells-Beede, Seo, Han & Thai, 2024). In addition to purchasing virtual reality equipment, I am planning on attending continuing education conferences specific to mental health nursing that will aid in my own professional development. In addition to attending conferences, I hope to purchase a desktop computer for my home office that will allow for greater flexibility as I work on developing my courses.

Lindsay Wilson MSN, RN

Methodist College of Nursing

I am deeply honored and grateful to the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation and the Illinois Board of Higher Education for awarding me the Nurse Educator Fellowship. This award has opened a wealth of opportunities that support me professionally in scholarship, research, and academics.

The fellowship has already enabled me to make significant strides, such as purchasing virtual reality headsets for our college to implement virtual simulations for students. These will allow us to implement immersive virtual simulations for students, specifically focusing on crucial skills like prioritization, delegation, and time management. I'm also excited to share that I will be presenting research on the use of these virtual reality simulations at the NLN Summit in Orlando this September, an opportunity made possible by this grant. Additionally, this funding provided me the opportunity to purchase course materials and membership renewals. As an instructor, having access to these resources is instrumental.

With the remainder of the funds, I am hopeful to be an accepted participant of the ELNEC Workshops in Oregon this summer. I am confident that this opportunity will further my knowledge and expand my resources to strengthen the Palliative Care courses at our college.

Thank you again for this wonderful award. I am committed to stewarding these funds effectively to create a positive and lasting impact on my students, our college, and the wider community.

Dominika Kouba MSN, RN

Moraine Valley Community College

I am honored to be selected as a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellowship 2025. While I have not yet received the monetary portion of the award, I anticipate that the financial support will be instrumental in furthering my career in nursing education. The fellowship will enable me to pursue my Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree by offsetting tuition and educational expenses, strengthening my ability to develop evidence-based teaching strategies that bridge the gap between classroom learning and clinical practice. My goal is to enhance student preparedness and confidence in high-stakes clinical environments, ultimately improving patient outcomes.

Additionally, I plan to attend the National Council of State Boards of Nursing's (NCSBN) *An Introduction to Program Evaluation* course in June 2025. This opportunity will provide me with essential knowledge and skills to lead program evaluation initiatives at Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC), ensuring the continuous improvement of nursing education. By leveraging the resources provided through the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship, I will contribute to the advancement of nursing education by fostering a diverse, competent, and resilient nursing workforce. This award will significantly support my commitment to academic excellence and innovation in nursing education.

Leona Lilly MSN, RN

Moraine Valley Community College

I am deeply grateful and delighted to have been selected as an Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellow. This award is a significant milestone in my nursing career, marking my first major recognition and fueling my passion for advancing nursing education.

This fellowship will directly support my continued education at Lewis University in the Adult Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner (AGPCNP) Post-Masters Certificate Program, covering the balance of my first two semesters. This financial relief is invaluable, allowing me to focus on my studies and career advancement while caring for my family.

Furthermore, I will utilize the funds to attend the Certified Nursing Assistant Educator Association (CNAEA) conference in Springfield, IL, and renew my membership. This will ensure I remain current with the latest policies, technology, and skills essential for training new nursing

assistants. Inspired by a previous CNAEA presentation, I plan to integrate Mentimeter, an interactive presentation tool, into Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC) Basic Nursing Assistant Training (BNAT) program to enhance student engagement. Additionally, I aim to further develop my teaching skills through a train-the-trainer course and by joining the National Black Nurse Association (NBNA).

This fellowship is not just a financial aid; it's an investment in my professional growth, enabling me to better serve my students and contribute to the future of nursing education. I am truly encouraged and excited for the opportunities ahead.

Amy Green MSN-Ed, RN, OB-RNC

Morton College

It is with deep gratitude that I reflect on my journey as a Nurse Educator and the immense honor of receiving the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. Over the past eight years, I have had the privilege of serving as a faculty member at Morton College—a place that has offered me exceptional opportunities for professional and personal growth.

One of the most rewarding accomplishments in my career has been the creation of the NCLEX Success Program (NSP), an initiative aimed at enhancing student outcomes and supporting future nurses as they prepare for licensure. This program stands as a testament to my dedication to student success and the mission of nursing education.

The Nurse Educator Fellowship Award has played a pivotal role in allowing me to sustain my responsibilities as an educator. With these funds, I was able to update my home office to facilitate remote tutoring, purchase essential teaching resources, and continue providing individualized instruction to students in a virtual environment. Without this financial support, continuing my remote teaching would have been extremely difficult.

I am truly honored to have received this award and am committed to continuing my role as a dedicated faculty member. I look forward to making a lasting impact in the field of nursing education and helping shape the next generation of compassionate, skilled nurses.

Toula Kelikian PhD, RN

Morton College

Receiving the monetary portion of the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship Award will directly support my continued commitment of integrating mind-body medicine into our programming and enabling me to expand critical wellness programs that serve underrepresented students and sustain my professional engagement. The ability to implement the next phase of the CARE Program and Serenity Room—specifically, virtual movement-based self-care sessions—will not only enhance student well-being but also strengthen my role and satisfaction as an educator. These initiatives are deeply connected to my identity and purpose in nursing education; they represent more than programming—they are an example of a positive way to handle challenges diverse students face and a reflection of the values that keep me invested in this work.

As a community college faculty member, I have limited access to discretionary funding. Without this award, it would be difficult to provide the tools and resources needed to grow these student-centered wellness offerings. The award will allow me to acquire equipment, certification, and technology essential for program delivery, and it will reaffirm the institutional support for my work. Ultimately, receiving this funding enhances not only the student experience but also my ability to remain resilient, innovative, strong and fulfilled in my faculty role. It ensures I can continue supporting the academic, emotional, and physical well-being of diverse nursing students while remaining an active, long-term contributor to the nursing education workforce.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Elizabeth Moxley PhD, RN, BS, FAHA, FPCNA

Affiliation

Northern Illinois University

The funding received from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Educator Fellowship Award has greatly improved my ability to attend professional conferences, receive scientific updates, and network with colleagues and benefit from research opportunities through these collaborative experiences. I was able to purchase additional research supplies and a nurse educator certification. The supplies will be especially beneficial in supporting research activities for projects involving physical activity interventions, and as a supplement content to the pathophysiology course that I teach. I was able to attend the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurse's Association Symposium in April, where I presented findings from a recent study that I completed with several colleagues. This conference greatly enhanced my scholarship and teaching, provided networking opportunities, and meet new nursing colleagues. I also benefitted from updates in the medical and nursing science. A key presentation for me was presented by a physician who I am collaborating with to write a scientific statement for the American Heart Association. I plan to attend the American College of Sports Medicine conference later this month which is an event that I have always wanted to attend but have not yet had the opportunity. I had planned to attend in 2020; however, it was cancelled due to covid. Once again, I very much appreciate the opportunity to benefit from this opportunity from the Illinois Board of Higher Education

Suzanne Mullis PhD, RN

Northern Illinois University

My name is Suzanne Mullis, and I am currently an Instructor at Northern Illinois University. I am greatly honored to have been chosen as a recipient of the IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship Award. This award has been beneficial in my efforts to strive to be an innovative nursing educator. I am able to improve my professional development and knowledge, giving me the ability to enhance my teaching practice by finding new innovative and creative ways to engage my learners in their nursing education journey.

I have been able to join nursing organizations to help me network with other nursing educators. I have also obtained membership to Think Like a Nurse that has enabled me to gain access to case studies and other materials to incorporate into my teaching, along with the ability to attend sessions on the latest innovations in teaching strategies for nurse educators. I have also completed a course to help me prepare for the Certified Nurse Educator Exam and completed the process of applying to take the CNE exam. I am excited for the opportunity to attend "Elevate and Educate: Transforming **Nursing Education**" conference in June 2025.

Again, it was an honor to receive this award and I would like to the Illinois Board of Higher Education for this opportunity to grow as a nurse educator and scholar.

Debbie Schiltz MSN, RN, ECRN

Oakton College

I am immensely honored and sincerely grateful to be selected as a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship. Although I have not yet received the funds, I am excited for the opportunities this support will provide in advancing my professional growth and impact as a nurse educator.

As a faculty member in an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program with a strong clinical background in emergency nursing and a passion for teaching, this fellowship will help me pursue high-quality professional development opportunities such as attending nursing education

conferences. These events have already proven invaluable in my journey; they have allowed me to engage with innovative educators, explore creative teaching strategies, and build lasting professional connections. I look forward to continuing this growth and bringing fresh perspectives and evidence-based approaches back to my classroom.

In addition, I plan to utilize a portion of the fellowship support to prepare for and obtain the Certified Nurse Educator (CNE) credential, a key milestone in my professional trajectory. Access to study materials and certification preparation resources will be instrumental in reaching this goal. This award reinforces my commitment to both personal and programmatic growth in nursing education. I remain deeply appreciative for the recognition and the future opportunities it will enable, and I am committed to paying that investment forward through excellence in education.

Amanda LaMonica-Weier DNP, MAT, APRN, FNP-BC, CNL, CNE Rush University

I am grateful to be chosen by the Illinois Board of Higher Education to be a 2025 Nurse Educator Fellowship recipient. It is an honor to be recognized and provided with financial assistance for further professional development. These funds will help pay for my tuition at the University of Illinois at Chicago where I am a post-doctoral student in the Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner certificate program. This investment in my education helps me provide additional expertise to the nursing students that I teach. My goal is to be a dual certified nurse practitioner as I am currently a Family Nurse Practitioner. Before entering nursing, I was a secondary teacher, and I have been teaching pre-licensure nurses at Rush University for over eight years. I plan to continue teaching future nurses as part of my long-term career trajectory. Combining these professions has been symbiotic and I will pursue growing in both. As a Certified Nurse Educator with a Master of Arts in Teaching, I am able utilize my background to teach nursing students with evidence-based approaches. This fellowship award allows me to expand the content that I am qualified to teach to students in a time when there is a nursing faculty shortage.

Erin Miller DNP, APRN, PMHNP-BC, CNL Rush University

It is my distinct honor to serve as an Illinois Board of Higher Education Fellow this year. This opportunity has significantly supported my efforts to enhance student learning and improve the quality of the courses I teach. With the fellowship funds, I've been able to dedicate additional time—often during my personal off hours—to mentoring 11 prelicensure nursing students as they pursue innovative capstone projects at my clinical site. These projects include organizing health fairs, compiling community resource guides, and fostering community-based partnerships. This award supports my ability to offer students an enriched, hands-on learning experience rooted in service and advocacy.

I've also begun surveying students about their experiences to better align the courses I teach with their professional and personal growth, while also addressing the unique needs of our clinical population, which consists primarily of returning citizens. While I am disappointed to be unable to attend academic conferences at this time due to the current sociopolitical climate, the ability to invest more deeply in student mentorship has been deeply rewarding. The fellowship has helped sustain this commitment and supported the development of meaningful activities and discussions during key experiential learning moments. These experiences have fostered deeper reflection, connection, and a stronger sense of purpose for students in growing their understanding of social determinants of health, health justice, and the disparities and stigma faced by marginalized groups.

I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to support emerging nurses during such a transformative time in their education and in our profession.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Ginah Haynes DNP, RN

Affiliation

South Suburban College

I am excited to be chosen as a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Nurse Fellowship Award. This grant is an incredible opportunity to further my professional development and support the growth of simulation education at South Suburban College. While I have not yet received the funds, I plan to use them to attend nursing education and simulation courses, webinars, and conferences. I aim to become a Certified Healthcare Simulation Educator (CHSE) and support South Suburban's simulation program accreditation.

In April 2025, I attended the SIM Summit Indiana, hosted by Indiana University Schools of Medicine and Nursing and IU Health. The experience deepened my understanding of integrating simulation into nursing curricula using best practices. This June, I will be attending INACSL25 in Denver, Colorado. I am looking forward to learning evidence-based strategies for simulation operations and teaching methods that I can share with my colleagues and apply in the classroom. In September, I will participate in the Designing & Implementing Simulation-Based Mastery Learning Curricula program at Northwestern University. I aim to develop a simulation curriculum aligned with our student learning outcomes.

Thank you, IBHE, for the resources needed to continue educating the next generation of Registered Nurses. Through training and the support of this fellowship, I hope to bring meaningful improvements to the quality of simulation education at South Suburban College—ultimately helping to improve the health and well-being of the Chicago Southland and beyond.

Sessaly Davis MSN, RN

Southeastern Illinois College

I am very grateful for the opportunities the Nurse Educator Fellowship has provided. It has played a pivotal role in strengthening my commitment to a career in nursing education by allowing me to attend professional development activities that would otherwise not be affordable.

In April 2025, I used the fellowship to attend the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) Conference in Alexandria, VA. This experience deepened my understanding of the accreditation process and highlighted the critical role educators play in maintaining program quality and compliance. Interacting with nurse educators from across the United States gave me renewed perspective, inspiration, and a sense of professional belonging that reinforced my desire to remain in this field.

Looking ahead, I plan to use the fellowship to attend NurseCon at Sea in April 2026, a conference I have long aspired to attend and for which I am already registered. NurseCon offers a unique blend of continuing education opportunities in an engaging, supportive setting designed to reignite passion for the profession. The sessions offered will allow me to explore new teaching strategies, stay updated on clinical trends, and connect with educators and nurses from diverse practice backgrounds.

Together, these experiences are not only enriching my knowledge and skills but are also helping me stay energized and committed to a career in nursing education. The fellowship has provided the resources and encouragement I needed to invest in my professional development and remain dedicated to educating the next generation of nurses.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Heather Brown DNP, RN

Affiliation

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Although I have not yet received the monetary portion of the Fellowship award, I anticipate it will have a significant impact on my ability to improve my career in nursing education. I plan to use the funds to enroll in a Certified Nurse Educator (CNE) exam preparation course and cover the cost of the certification exam. Earning this credential will support my professional development, enhance my teaching effectiveness, and strengthen my role in educating and mentoring future nurses. I will also use part of the award to pay for professional membership dues to Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing. This membership will allow me to stay connected with the broader nursing education community, contribute to scholarship and service, and continue growing as a nurse educator.

With the remaining funds, I plan to attend a nursing education conference in the summer of 2026. This opportunity will allow me to connect and engage with experts in the field, learn about current trends in nursing education, and share best practices with peers. Altogether, these planned uses of the Fellowship funds will directly support my continued growth and long-term commitment to nursing education through practice, teaching, scholarship, and service. I am truly grateful for this opportunity and excited for the impact it will have on my career and the students I serve.

Erica Blumenstock DNP, RN, CPPS

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

I am honored and sincerely grateful to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) for awarding me the 2025 IBHE Fellowship Grant. This esteemed recognition represents an essential investment in my continued professional development as a Program Director and a tenure-track professor. While the awarded funds have not yet been received, they are designated to support my membership in several prominent professional organizations, including the American Nurses Association (ANA), the Illinois Nurses Association, Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing, and the National League for Nursing (NLN).

These memberships will provide essential access to current research, policy updates, and best practices critical to maintaining excellence in nursing education and leadership. As a Program Director, staying connected to national and state-level professional organizations enables me to remain abreast of evolving industry standards, curricular innovations, and emerging healthcare trends, which directly inform program development and student success.

As a tenure-track faculty member, this support will significantly enhance my research efforts by expanding my ability to identify and apply for grant opportunities and scholarly collaborations. The connections, resources, and continuing education opportunities offered by these organizations will play a pivotal role in advancing my academic scholarship and my contributions to nursing education.

Again, I thank IBHE for its commitment to fostering academic leadership and supporting faculty development across Illinois.

Erica Frost PhD, RN, CNE, CCRN

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

I am honored to acknowledge receipt of the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship. I am deeply grateful for this investment in my growth and contributions as a nurse educator. As a faculty member at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) School of Nursing, this will significantly enhance my ability to remain in nursing education, particularly in my efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

The award will provide me with meaningful professional development opportunities that will directly strengthen my teaching effectiveness and expand my impact within nursing academia. I plan to attend the Nurse Educators Conference in the Rockies in June and the NurseTim Nuts and Bolts Conference in August, I will be able to collaborate with colleagues across the country, share best practices, and explore innovative strategies to close equity gaps in student achievement.

In addition, I will invest in critical teaching tools and resources that promote inclusive pedagogy, support the transition to a competency-based curriculum, and improve digital learning strategies in the classroom, including a tablet for classroom teaching and multiple books informing best practices. I will also become a member in the Midwest Nursing Research Society and maintain membership with the National League for Nursing.

Ultimately, this fellowship will increase my capacity to support students, mentor new educators, and contribute meaningfully to curriculum development and inclusive teaching practices. It reaffirms my long-term commitment to nursing education at SIUE and strengthens my ability to help shape a diverse nursing workforce.

Keywana McDonald MBA, MSN, RN, NE-BC Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Thank you for selecting me as a recipient of the 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship award. As a Nurse for over 15 years, I have worked in many different roles, giving me the opportunity to get deeper involved in policy and quality care. As I looked around the various workspaces I was in, I noticed there were not many diverse nurses at the graduate level or in executive level nursing positions; I was frequently the sole representation of diversity among the leadership team. I engaged with the nursing staff on the units I managed to better understand the underlying causes of the significant workforce imbalance. I frequently reflect on how many young individuals aspire to become nurses yet face challenges due to a lack of support or guidance in pursuing that goal. This realization led me to recognize the importance of contributing to the academic environment, where I can play a role in supporting and mentoring diverse students on their journey.

I am honored to utilize this Fellowship funding to support the completion of my Doctoral Degree. With a deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, combined with my management experience and dedication to student success, I am confident that earning my doctoral degree will equip me with the expertise necessary to drive equity initiatives and contribute meaningfully to a more diverse nursing workforce.

Carol Swank MSN, RN St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing

I am honored to have been chosen as a recipient of the 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Award and want to thank the board for selecting me. I have only been working as a nurse educator for a little over four years, but I have been an educator for much longer than that. I discovered a genuine passion for teaching while working as a Paramedic, and that passion has only grown stronger in the nursing profession. Throughout my career, I have consistently interacted with the palliative care team and witnessed the benefits of their involvement in patient care. Yet, palliative care remains one of the most misunderstood and underutilized services in healthcare. Following the new AACN Essentials for Competency-based Nursing Education, I plan to use the funds to develop an educational module on palliative care and combine this education with the HELP (Holistic End-of-Life Project) that our students complete before graduation. I recently developed a nurse-led palliative care screening tool for use outside the intensive care unit as part of my Doctor of Nursing Practice

(DNP) project, which further highlighted the need for increased palliative care education in nursing. Providing more comprehensive education in palliative care to our undergraduate nursing students will enhance our students' knowledge of the subject and enable them to better identify and care for patients with palliative care needs.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Megan Frye PhD, RN

Affiliation

St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing

Thank you to the board for the honor and privilege of being chosen as a recipient of the 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Award. Throughout my nursing educator career, I have taught a variety of courses across all levels. However, where my true passion lies is with community/public health and working with the marginalized populations. Following the new AACN Essentials for Competency-based Nursing Education, the funds will be used to further develop the population health content. Currently, community health students complete a teaching project to the underserved individuals in the community. The project would be enhanced to integrate health equity, ethics, diversity, and inclusion while examining health initiatives and policy development. Students would explore the social determinants of health and the impact on the continuum of care from prevention to disease management in all levels of care. I plan to obtain a poverty simulation kit where the students will participate in the interactive experience and develop further understanding of the multitude of barriers faced by patients. Providing more comprehensive education in population health to our undergraduate nursing students will enhance our students' knowledge of the subject and enable them to better identify and care for patients at the local, regional, national, and global levels.

Judy Skelton MSN, RN, CLC

St. John's College of Nursing

I am sincerely grateful to the Illinois Board of Higher Education for awarding me the Nurse Educator Fellowship. This support will significantly enhance my development as a nursing educator and allow me to pursue long-standing professional goals.

With the Fellowship funds, I will renew my Inpatient OB certification and obtain an AWHONN membership—resources that were previously out of reach financially. I will also attend the AWHONN national convention in June, gaining the latest knowledge in obstetrical care to better prepare my students.

With over 30 years of OB nursing experience and 8 years in education, I am committed to lifelong learning. I now also teach Pediatrics, and this Fellowship will enable me to expand my expertise by purchasing Pediatric Nursing Certification (PNC) modules, attending a Pediatric Certification Review Course, and sitting for the national certification exam.

These efforts will strengthen my ability to provide the highest quality education and model professional growth for my students. Our nursing program benefits from clinical partnerships with a busy Level III hospital that includes a NICU and PICU, offering exceptional learning opportunities. By furthering my own education, I will help ensure our students are well-prepared for the demands of modern nursing practice.

Thank you for investing in nurse educators. Your support impacts not just me, but the many students I have the privilege to teach.

Nurse Educator Fellow

Yuri Guzman MSN, RN, DNP(c)

Affiliation

Trinity Christian College

I am incredibly grateful to be a recipient of the Illinois Board of Higher Education Nurse Educator Fellowship. As a full-time nursing faculty member and current Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) student, this award allows me to continue growing in my practice, teaching, and scholarship.

My background is in cardiovascular ICU, and I currently teach junior-level adult health and lead simulation experiences. The Fellowship will support my ongoing doctoral work focused on integrating Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) into BSN curricula—a crucial area that prepares future nurses to address health disparities and provide equitable, patient-centered care.

Like many nurse educators, I devote time well beyond classroom hours to ensure students receive meaningful, real-world nursing education. I spend evenings and weekends mentoring students, developing innovative simulations, and refining course content to meet evolving healthcare demands. This Fellowship affirms that investment and helps alleviate the financial barriers that often come with continuing professional growth.

Receiving this award during such a transformative time in healthcare reinforces my commitment to preparing the next generation of nurses. Thank you for this opportunity to enhance my contribution to nursing education and to continue making a lasting impact in both academic and clinical settings.

Afrodita Salievskia DNP, APRN FNP-BC

University of Illinois Chicago

I am honored to receive the Nurse Educator Fellowship Program award. The funds will support my continued growth as a professor of nursing at the University of Illinois Chicago. With 12 years of teaching experience, I strongly advocate for educating the educator.

I plan to use the money for the Certified Nurse Educator exam and for preparation materials. I also plan to further my education on how to foster a supportive learning environment for students of all backgrounds and to help my students understand better the diverse realities they will encounter as future nurses. I will look for ways to broaden my teaching strategies and deepen my own understanding of these important challenges. In particular, the *AACN Diversity Leadership Institute* program will equip me, I hope, with the skills to facilitate meaningful conversations, apply adult learning principles, and recognize personal biases—skills that will help me grow as an educator and leader.

I will use the remaining funds for memberships in nursing organizations such as AANP, ANCC, and Sigma Theta Tau. These affiliations will help me stay current with both nursing practice and education issues, ultimately benefiting my students and the broader nursing community.

Susan Tracy DNP, RN

University of Illinois Chicago

I am honored to receive the 2025 IBHE Nurse Educator Fellowship award. This award will significantly strengthen my capacity to remain in nursing education by providing critical resources that support both my professional development and instructional effectiveness. As a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, I am deeply committed to preparing practice-ready nurses who are equipped to promote health equity and serve diverse populations. Over the past seven years, I have contributed to curriculum innovation, student success, and national initiatives, including competency-based education and NCLEX preparation.

The fellowship would directly support my continued growth by funding certification as a nurse educator through the National League for Nursing, allowing me to deepen my pedagogical expertise and mentor colleagues. I will also pursue membership in professional organizations, including the NLN and Sigma Theta Tau, which will enhance my access to evidence-based teaching strategies and networking opportunities. Attendance at the National Nurse Educator Summit will further expand my knowledge and provide tools to advance inclusive, student-centered education. Additionally, the fellowship will allow for investment in teaching resources—such as current educator texts, educational software, and a Surface Pro device—enabling more dynamic and mobile instruction, particularly in under-resourced community clinical settings.

Together, these supports will enhance my ability to deliver high-quality nursing education, remain active in the profession, and continue shaping the next generation of nurses to meet the evolving needs of healthcare.

Katherine Hodur MSN, RNC-MNN

Waubensee Community College

I am honored and grateful to receive the recognition of the Nurse Educator Fellowship Award for my passion and drive toward becoming a more effective nurse leader within higher education. The monetary award with receiving this honor assists with my continued academic journey and education toward a Doctorate in Higher Education with specialization in Community College Leadership. I am currently in my dissertation phase with intent to graduate this year. With being a registered nurse for over 20 years and nurse educator for over 10 years, I felt a need to strengthen my knowledge about being an effective nurse educator and leader within higher education.

My goal with seeking this doctoral degree is to gain a better understanding of the administrative lens toward student success within community colleges. My intention is to use this education toward enhancing my role as nursing faculty. My hope is to have a well-rounded perspective of leadership within higher education so that I can serve my nursing students and nursing program to my best abilities. With that said, thank you for this honor and recognition. This award provides me with the financial support needed as I move closer toward my goal of obtaining a doctoral degree. Thank you, again. I truly appreciate it.

Leesa Thompson DNP, RN

Western Illinois University

I am honored to have been selected as a recipient of the FY24 Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Fellowship Award. This recognition has provided an opportunity to further develop my teaching strategies and leadership skills at Western Illinois University, School of Nursing.

Thus far, the award has allowed me to acquire textbooks and resources for the development of a course titled LGBTQIA+. I intend to use the funds over the summer to attend conferences and educational events that will enhance my knowledge and understanding of care for LGBTQIA+ individuals. I have allocated funds for the Certified Nurse Examination (CNE), a study course, and a textbook. I have utilized the funds for CPR courses that I instruct and Political Action Day in Springfield, IL. I have registered for the ATI Educator Summit Conference and the Annual Institute – Shaping Futures in Community/Public Health Education. I am eager to engage in these events, as they will provide valuable opportunities for knowledge-sharing and networking, contributing to my ongoing professional development and the enhancement of my current courses.

The remaining funds will be directed towards further professional development, including the Nursing Professional Development Certification, National League for Nursing Membership, Illinois Organization of Nurse Leaders Membership, and the American Nurses Association Membership.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Illinois Board of Higher Education for the fellowship award. This recognition will support my personal and professional growth, contributing to a culture of lifelong learning and dedicated service.