



Enhancing Nurses' Engagement in Health Policy: From the Classroom to the Statehouse

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Background

Nurses are needed in the leadership roles that influence public and private policies to promote health (Mason et al., 2016). The *Institute of Medicine's Future of Nursing* report calls on nurses to assume leadership roles in the redesign of the health care system and policies that impact health outcomes and nursing practice. Professional nursing organizations, such as *Sigma Theta Tau International*, support efforts to prepare nurses to participate in policy at all levels of government, including the state level.

Preparing Nurses for Engagement

Many faculty emphasize teaching students *about* health policy, however classroom delivery of health policy content and engagement can be enhanced through active learning strategies. Nurse educators are positioned to prepare state health policy leaders by expanding student engagement beyond the classroom into “real world” state legislatures.

State Legislative Fellowships

State legislative fellowships provide opportunities for students to actively engage in the legislative process.

Through fellowships, students:

- learn the legislative process
- communicate with policy makers
- contribute literature related to policy decisions
- prepare policy briefings
- analyze and evaluate bills related to health care, nursing practice, nursing education
- collaborate with constituents and advocacy organizations
- identify key leadership and advocacy roles for nurses

Organizational Framework

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provided the framework for engaging students in legislative fellowships.

Stage 1: Concrete Experience

Stage 2: Reflective Observation

Stage 3: Abstract Conceptualization

Stage 4: Active Experimentation

Legislative Fellowship Target Areas



Conclusions

Use of Kolb's ELT was valuable for educators to evaluate students' transition from acquiring policy information to active participation in the fellowship as they became health policy leaders. Students who participated in the state legislative fellowship have assumed leadership roles on state policy or advocacy boards, received Governor appointments to state task forces, developed practice policy collaborations, and created health policy mentoring opportunities for other nurses.

Educators are in unique positions to develop legislative fellowships that will enhance nursing students' engagement in health policy and advocacy arenas. Through such fellowships, nurses gain the legislative experience to couple with their expertise in health care and influence health policies.

Key References

- Mason, D., Gardner, D., Outlaw, F., O'Grady, E. (Eds.) (2016). *Policy & Practice in Nursing*. St. Louis, MO: Elsevier
- Betts, V., McGuinness, S., Williams, L. (2015). *Serving the Public Through Policy and Leadership*. In R. Patton, M. Zalon, & R. Ludwick (Eds.), *Nurses making policy : From bedside to boardroom*. (pp. 397-431. New York, NY: Springer.