

Developing the faculty who prepare tomorrow's nurses

Department of Labor grant helps ASU educate nursing faculty in an effort to address the state's nursing shortage

By Jessica Carpenter, ASU News
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Jennilin Boone has a passion for nursing.

For 20 years, she worked in critical care while envisioning a time when she could pursue her master's degree. After her husband lost his job three years ago, Boone thought she had to put those dreams on hold — until she was offered a scholarship to Arizona State University's Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation's [Master of Science in nursing \(nursing education\)](#) program.

The scholarship is part of the [Arizona Nursing Faculty Expansion Project](#) funded by a U.S. Department of Labor grant.

As the country experiences a nursing [shortage](#) fueled by burnout, stress and nurses retiring from the field, one of the biggest barriers to preparing more nurses isn't recruiting students; it's having enough qualified nursing faculty to educate them. This grant will help address that barrier.

It offered Boone an opportunity to pursue her graduate degree online while supporting her family and continuing to work part time as an adjunct faculty member at Northern Arizona University.

She enrolled in the program in 2024 and has since moved into a full-time role as manager of NAU's nursing simulation lab, where she helps educate and develop the next generation of nurses. It's a promotion that would not have been possible without her degree completion looming. Boone officially earned her degree this August.

"I found my voice as a nurse," Boone said. "I found my confidence, my ability to advocate, and so giving that to other people in mass quantities is really exciting to me."

Awarded in 2023, the [\\$5.4 million grant](#) covers 100% of tuition and fees for nurses enrolled in the master's program. These students also have the opportunity to become a Certified Nurse Educator through the National League for Nursing.

“We don’t want to add on more debt,” said [Heidi Sanborn](#), an Edson College assistant clinical professor and project director for the grant. “If we can’t support the nurse faculty who are willing to step in and lead the next generation of nurses, the financial strain of taking on a graduate degree will minimize the potential pool of future educators.”

Originally, the grant funding covered scholarships for 140 students, but by pairing it with existing grants and workplace tuition reimbursements, program staff has been able to increase that to 172 scholarship recipients.

As of this month, 139 students will have graduated from the program. Preliminary data collection for the first group of graduates showed that 13 of the 40 students have become nurse educators, and one graduate is pursuing an additional advanced degree in nurse education. The project team will collect data for one year post-graduation to monitor progression toward careers in education roles.

Beyond tuition coverage, the grant alleviated other financial barriers students faced, including purchasing books, paying graduation fees and even replacing laptops. It also allowed the college to hire a peer mentor who helped students throughout the program.

The online component meant opening up access to students across Arizona — including in rural communities — to help them earn the graduate credential needed to teach without commuting long distances or leaving their jobs. This helps create a pipeline of nurse educators who can develop nurses in underserved areas in dire need of health care providers.

“Some of these students can reach their communities better than I can,” Boone said. “And so, if I can help support them and give them the tools that they need to go back into their communities and support that, I get really excited about that.”

In developing nurse educators, Edson College is feeding right back into Arizona's health care workforce and the communities they serve.

There are still two years left in the five-year grant, but Sanborn and her team are already looking for more opportunities to expand the program. For those who have completed their degree and move into teaching, their impact will be felt long after the grant ends.

In Flagstaff, Boone will teach between 100 and 120 nursing students every semester.

“I’m just extremely grateful for the opportunity that I’ve had,” Boone said. “I hope that we can continue to create nurses who feel like they have the tools they need to become better nurses in the profession. And also help them see that education is valuable and important, and whatever that looks like on their end, that they continue to pursue it.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Jennilin Boone pursued her graduate degree online while supporting her family thanks to a Department of Labor grant. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



Jennilin Boone now helps educate dozens of nursing students at Northern Arizona University every semester. Courtesy photo