



Executive Summary

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholars[®]

Since 2001, the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholars[®]* (*Health & Society Scholars*) has been building the field of population health by producing leaders who will change the questions asked, the methods used to analyze problems, and the range of solutions offered to improve the health of all Americans. Scholars:

- Investigate the connections among biological, behavioral, environmental, economic, and social determinants of health.
- Develop, evaluate, and disseminate knowledge and interventions based upon these determinants.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Board of Trustees has authorized \$93.2 million for the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholars* program through August 2014.

[Read the full Program Results Report.](#)

[Learn more about the program here.](#)

CONTEXT

Although the United States spends more for medical care than any other country in the world, it ranks poorly on many indicators of health and well-being. Experts know that medical care has a limited impact on the health of populations,¹ and that other factors that affect health (determinants of health), such as genetics, personal behavior (e.g., diet and physical activity), social circumstances (e.g., education and poverty), and environmental conditions (e.g., pollution, crowding, and unsafe workplaces), play a major role in health.

¹ e.g., Bunker, et al. “The Role of Medical Care in Determining Health: Creating an Inventory of Benefits,” in *Society and Health*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

A Shortage of Population Health Expertise

Population health focuses on investigating the connections between the determinants of health, medical care, and health status in populations (groups of people sharing common characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, or membership in an HMO, or a common geographic location such as a city, a county, or a neighborhood). By 2001, there were new funding sources and a growing demand for experts who could research, develop, and implement interventions to improve the health of populations. However, experts with such knowledge and skills were in critically short supply.

RWJF's Interest in This Area

RWJF has been supporting training programs for health care and health policy scholars since 1972, including:

- *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars[®]*
- *Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellows Program*
- *Robert Wood Johnson Scholars in Health Policy Research*
- *Investigator Awards in Health Policy Research*

THE PROGRAM

The *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholars[®]* (*Health & Society Scholars*) currently accepts up to 12 scholars per year—two at each of six participating universities: Columbia University; Harvard University; University of California, San Francisco/Berkeley; University of Michigan; University of Pennsylvania and University of Wisconsin.² Scholar-directed research, conducted with the guidance of faculty mentors, is a major element of the two-year program. Other program elements are:

- A structured curriculum (usually seminars) integrating methods, paradigms, and evidence from multiple disciplines
- Opportunities to draw on the expertise and offerings of the broader university and across program sites
- Focused training in skills necessary for leadership, program implementation, and policy change
- Access to competitive grants for small seed research projects

² For the first eight years, the program accepted 18 scholars per year, three at each of its six participating sites.

Scholars who have a doctoral degree in fields including behavioral and social sciences, biological and natural sciences, health professions, public policy, public health, history, and ethics are eligible for the program.

This report covers *Health & Society Scholars* from April 2001 through September 2011.

KEY PROGRAM RESULTS

- As of September 2011, 157 scholars have completed or are participating in *Health & Society Scholars*. The program has 125 alumni, 31 current scholars, and one person who did not complete the program but who participates in alumni activities.³

Scholars have represented a variety of fields and research interests, including:

- Sarah A. Burgard, PhD, MS, a sociologist and epidemiologist who examined how health and work are related
 - Clinical psychologist Dominick L. Frosch, PhD, who explored direct-to-consumer advertising and patient decision-making
 - Medellena Maria Glymour, MS, ScD, a social scientist who studied the relationship between geographic risk factors and adult cognitive impairment and stroke
 - Douglas P. Jutte, MD, MPH, a pediatrician who studied the interaction of biological and social risk factors in early childhood and their relationship to long-term health and educational outcomes
- The scholars have broadened their research and career perspectives and choices. They understand the interdisciplinary nature of population health.

Kate McLaughlin, PhD, is one example. “I have become a completely different type of academic ... My research is able to tackle bigger problems that almost by definition require interdisciplinary approaches and solutions,” she said. McLaughlin is now an instructor in the Department of Health Care Policy at Harvard Medical School.

Many scholars have accepted positions that they would not have chosen had they not participated in the program. For example:

- Clinical psychologist Wizdom Powell Hammond, PhD, MPH, joined the public health faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³ Michelle McMurry, MD, PhD, left after the first year because of a job opportunity. As of December 2011, she is the director of the Health, Biomedical and Society Policy Program at the Aspen Institute.

- Demographer Margaret M. Weden, PhD, MHS, joined the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit organization that works to improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis
- The participating universities are building their population health infrastructure by creating linkages across departments and campuses, including joint faculty appointments, and by establishing new initiatives, departments, and centers. For example:
 - Columbia University established the **Center for the Study of Social Inequalities and Health** and the **Columbia Population Research Center**.
 - The University of California, San Francisco/Berkeley established a **Division of Community Health and Human Development**.
 - The University of Pennsylvania received National Institutes of Health funding to establish the **Center for Population Health and Health Disparities**.
- Recognition of the field of population health—both within the participating universities and more broadly—is growing.
 - Evidence of this recognition includes the *2010 Health & Society Scholars* annual meeting in Washington, which included visits to key officials at the White House and the National Institutes of Health.

THE PROGRAM CONTINUES

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholars is authorized through August 2014 (as of September 2011).

Program Management

National Program Office: The New York Academy of Medicine, in New York, N.Y.

Program Directors: Jo Ivey Boufford, MD and Christine Bachrach, PhD
