Valerie Weiss Award
Awarded to RNs working toward advanced degrees in nursing or a related field. The award is made as a legacy to Valerie Weiss, ARNP, MN, MA, whose professional commitment was an inspiration to her colleagues and patients alike.

MARILYN ACQUAH is pursuing a DNP degree at the University of Washington. She is most passionate about reducing the maternal mortality and injury rate among Black women and holds a deep desire to reshape the health systems that have for too long ensnared Black women in a web of inadequate care and dangerous neglect.

I can’t undo centuries of racism overnight. What I can do is devote my career to caring for mothers and babies while seeking to dismantle the systems that have been built to oppress women who look like me.

CHRISTINA DELGADO is a DNP-Population Health student at the University of Washington where she is focused on social and structural determinants of health (SDOH). She is determined to influence SDOH through interdisciplinary collaboration, community partnerships, and systems-level changes. She has a background as a sexual assault forensic nurse, emergency nurse and clinical nurse educator. Her work has taken her around the globe, and she is the first in her Mexican-American family to earn a college degree.

I’ve always desired a seat at the table where important conversations... and strategies are formed.

BRANDI HARRIS is working toward becoming a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) through an online program through Husson University. She currently works at the King County Correctional Facility (KCCF), where many of her patients suffer from mental health conditions. She is most inspired when patients improve with treatment and is passionate about tackling opioid addictions through a holistic and collaborative approach. Through her own personal challenges, Brandi has built a deep sense of empathy that she shares with her patients every day.

My goal is to work toward removing stigmas through education and advocacy.

BOEUN KIM is working toward her PhD in nursing science at the University of Washington, where she is passionate about researching healthy aging, cognitive health and health equity. Her current project is focused on how walkable neighborhoods support cognitive health in older adults. Her exploration of environmental factors goes beyond the usual look at individual motivation and education. As someone who was born and grew up outside of the United States, Boeun understands firsthand how environment and culture influences health-related beliefs and behaviors. She is eager to bridge disparities, especially those experienced by communities of color.

Fueled by my passion to promote older adults’ health, I have made a commitment to conducting research on health aging, cognitive health and health equity.
BELEN MESELE is pursuing a DNP at Seattle University. Belen moved to the United States from Ethiopia at the age of 12. As time progressed, she found herself drawn to the field of nursing, especially in underserved communities. Currently, Belen is working with Ethnomed to help increase health literacy about common diseases in the Ethiopian community including developing health education materials and organizing community health fairs. She is a member of the Ethiopian Health Council and the founding host of the health segment of the Ethio Youth Media, a television show that promotes physical and social wellness. Belen looks forward to having a larger sphere of influence as a DNP.

*I’m especially passionate about increasing health literacy in underserved communities.*

LETITIA SALAZAR MONK is a healer, an obstetrics nurse, an herbalist, a doula, a teacher, a mentor and now a DNP student at the University of Washington. She brings to life the long-standing healing traditions of her Afro-Latina heritage. A proponent of the reclamation of body autonomy and consent in women’s health, she is a fierce advocate. Currently, she is an obstetrics nurse in a community birth center and has a private practice and teaches about plant medicines and women’s health. After witnessing one too many incidents of health care disparity, she decided that she simply had to become the provider of color so many people had been asking her for referrals to for so long. Letitia is social justice in action, and she will undoubtedly bring even greater influence as a DNP serving her community.

*My passions in nursing practice and health care are related to dignity, cultural relevance and choice.*

EMILY ROBSON is in the DNP program at the University of Washington, studying population health. While working at a community clinic, she became frustrated with how prevention took a back seat to more easily financed treatment. She saw how this type of systematic problem had a negative effect on health outcomes and decided that she needed a different skill set. The DNP program is preparing her to create the kind of changes she wants to see. Emily is most passionate about sexual health education and family planning. She has worked with a variety of populations and has completed community service around the globe.

*I plan to use my degree to empower communities and promote equitable health for all.*

IVANKA VASSILEVA is pursuing her passion to make a difference in the lives of her patients and their families as a master’s degree student at University of Washington in Bothell. Her passion ignited at a young age when she saw the impact nurses had on her family during a time of great loss. Ivanka grew up in Bulgaria and understands firsthand the challenges of making a new life in a new country. Through sheer determination and hard work, Ivanka has steadily moved through her nursing education. She is passionate about learning and teaching and is especially aware of the lack of training available to new nurses. She hopes to address this with a more robust training transition to practice curriculum.

*I am inspired to be a nurse leader and educator. I like to learn, move forward, grow and help others.*

ANGELA WILLIAMS is in the master’s degree program at the University of Washington. She describes working as a nurse in underserved communities as her life’s work, a calling that meant a complete career change. Coming to nursing as a non-traditional student has had its challenges, but Angela has met them with determination. She will use that tenacity to address health disparities, especially those in vulnerable populations when it comes to end-of-life-care. While her strategies and tools are evidence based, her stand-out quality is her uncanny ability to simply “be with” patients in a non-judgement space, meeting them wherever they are. Angela is a long-time community volunteer, serving as a camp nurse, in hospitals and with needle exchange programs.

*I am absolutely committed to the nursing profession.*
**KAT WRIGHT** was inspired to pursue an education by the women in her family who had fewer options. Pursuing her master’s degree at the University of Washington in Bothell, she is most passionate about preventing maternal and infant deaths. As a strong advocate, Kat is eager to explore new models of care to reduce disparities for at-risk patients such as opiate-dependent mothers. She is also an advocate for reproductive health care issues and access for gender diverse patients. Kat volunteers at the Seattle/King County Clinic and is a member of the Parent/Teen Advisory Board at Seattle Children’s Hospital.

*Long-term outcomes for communities depend on healthy and supported women and children.*

**CANDICE XIA** is a DNP student at Seattle Pacific University. A first generation college graduate, Candice is grateful to her family for believing in her education. As a nurse, she is most drawn to the elderly, those struggling with addiction and those with severe mental illness and she believes in the power of community to fight for affordable and accessible health care. She is currently serving as the chair of Community Outreach for the Pacific Northwest Chinese Nurses Association.

*Through evidence-based practice and culturally sensitive care... I can advocate for health care as a human right.*

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**ARIANA GARIN** is in the nursing program at the University of Washington. As a witness to too many friends and family members become victims of the opioid epidemic, Ariana is motivated to find effective strategies to prevent addiction. This includes her commitment to ego-less patient care filled through humility and self-awareness. Ariana is a member of the Latin-x community and knows what it is like to be classified based on appearance, something she doesn’t want any of her patients to experience.

*I am confident that if I approach every encounter with a genuine curiosity...meaningful experiences and consequentially beneficial health outcomes will follow.*

**MAIAH HALL** is a nursing student at the University of Washington. She came to the field of nursing through a series of unexpected life events and a natural inclination. It began in Thailand, where her role as an English teacher to refugees suddenly changed when a student became ill. She soon found herself helping clinicians test villagers during an outbreak of tuberculosis. At home, she became a caregiver for her mom (a 30-year RN herself) after she her went into hospice care.

*Although I say I haven’t chosen this path, I wouldn’t change it at all.*

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**Basic Award**

General scholarship awarded to students enrolled in associate or baccalaureate degree programs preparing for careers as registered nurses.
JENNIFER JENG is pursuing her nursing degree at Highline College and the University of Washington, Tacoma. Born in the United States to a Taiwanese family, she knows firsthand about financial hardship, discrimination, and health disparities. These challenges helped her understand the importance of one’s mental and physical health. As a nurse, Jennifer wants to advocate so that her patients have equitable opportunities for good health. She looks forward to helping them regain their health while taking part in their own plan of care.

I am happy and confident in my dream to become a nurse.

KAMERON JONES is pursuing a nursing degree from Bellevue College. His passion for nursing comes from a natural inclination toward compassionate service strengthened by seeing his grandparents welcome the needy into their church and home. After caring for his grandfather through a terminal diagnosis, Kameron felt even more determined to enter the field of nursing. He is also proud to enter a field where there are so few African American men. As a survivor of poverty, depression and disadvantage, Kameron is in the unique position to build rapport with vulnerable people. He hopes to one day provide preventative care at his own community outreach center.

I know I chose the right career because of the way caring for my patients brings joy to me.

MACKENZIE KYLE KILMER is pursuing her nursing degree from Seattle University, where she aligns with the school’s philosophy of health care as a holistic pursuit. Kyle is passionate about serving expectant families as well as providing public health resources for preventative care and education. Her work in a community clinic fueled Kyle’s personal philosophy to create connections and understanding through compassion and respect for personal identity, experience and diversity.

I want a career through which I can invest in developing a caring community that values health as a foundation critical to the welfare of all.

IN JUNG KIM’s name in Korean means understanding and connection, something she strives to embody as she works toward her nursing degree from the University of Washington. In Jung’s deep understanding comes from cumulative life experiences, from growing up in poverty to struggling with mental health and helping her immigrant parents manage language, cultural and economic barriers. As a young child, In Jung was hospitalized and noticed the small acts of kindness given to her by nurses. She was so impressed that she was guided to a career in nursing.

I thought nurses were superheroes growing up, and I continue to be inspired.

ESTEPHANIE MENDOZA is pursuing a nursing degree at the University of Washington as a first-generation college student from a Mexican migrant family. Growing up in fruit orchards where her family earned a living, she learned about hard work and low wages, discrimination and lack of equitable health care. Thanks to her parents who emphasized fluency in English and Spanish, Estephanie is bilingual. As a nurse, she will be able to move in two worlds at once, allowing for greater connection and accessibility to the Latino community.

A big passion of mine is helping the Latino community live healthier lives by making health care more accessible.

This year, King County Nurses Association awards 18 scholarships of $3,000 each to deserving nursing students from King County. Recipients include students seeking initial licensure as RNs or in graduate entry programs, as well as registered nurses returning to earn BSNs or advanced degrees. Students receiving scholarships demonstrate an understanding of equity and social justice through creative ideas to improve health disparities in our community. They embody the values of collaboration, compassion, innovation and community wellness.

Since 1993, KCNA has awarded $551,750 to 269 deserving students.