

# Empowering Advanced Level Nurses for a Changing World: Creighton's Global Health Vision

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## AS THE WORLD CONFRONTS

increasingly complex health threats from socio-ecological health stressors to health inequity, the nursing profession is uniquely positioned to lead in global health. This article underscores the call to action from global organizations, the integration of planetary health into nursing education, and Creighton University's innovative efforts to develop globally competent nurse leaders. Nurses have long grounded their practice in an appreciation for the broader context in which people live, work, commune, and connect.

At Creighton University College of Nursing, advanced level nursing education programs have responded to the need to promote global health equity. A transformative gift from Kathleen Soto will be used to form Creighton Doctor of Nursing Practice students as leaders in global health equity

through education, formation, and translational research by implementing an accompaniment model to work alongside existing communities around the world. The gift made by alumna Kathy Keough Soto, BSN'75, her family, and the Donald and Marilyn Keough Foundation will create the Soto Nursing Scholars program within Creighton's College of Nursing.

Global organizations are urging action on threats to planetary health, a transdisciplinary, solutions-focused field addressing how human disruptions to Earth's systems impact all life (Planetary Health Alliance, 2025). Nurses are called to lead global transitions addressing sources of harm, promote strategies to protect disadvantaged communities, and advocate for policies that protect the environment. (Kurth & Potter, 2022). Advanced level

nursing education and practice are well-positioned to address these concepts. In fact, there is a crucial need to reinforce nursing education to emphasize knowledge, skills and attitudes in globalization and global healthcare (Kang et al., 2024). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2023) exemplifies global health leadership through four pillars: the promotion of health by tackling climate change, preventing illness via cross-sector policies, providing care through strengthened primary systems and protecting health with emergency preparedness and rapid response.

To support its goals, WHO (2025) underscores the importance of strengthening nursing and midwifery education. Strategic priorities that strengthen nursing education include aligning curricula with health system needs, optimizing domestic workforce capacity, and ensuring competency-based curricula. Faculty development, accreditation, and curricula must evolve with healthcare trends like shifting disease burdens, interprofessional care, and technology. These efforts aim to prepare graduates to meet national health priorities and deliver high quality care.

In alignment with the WHO, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is increasingly

recognized as a pivotal contributor to global health due to their advocacy, policy development, and implementation efforts. The AACN Essentials (2021) emphasize the importance of equipping nurses with practice competencies that engage in system-level thinking, ethical leadership, and policy influence aimed at addressing structural inequities and social determinants of health. By forging strategic relationships with international stakeholders, advanced level nurses contribute to collaborative efforts that shape health systems and influence outcomes on a global scale. Nurses who understand the impact of global structures, regulations, and systemic forces on diverse populations and patient outcomes can drive transformation as leaders and change agents. This role requires a cognitive shift toward big-picture, population-level health perspectives, enabling nurses to create sustainable, inclusive solutions in an evolving global healthcare landscape.

The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree prepares nurses to lead change initiatives that improve outcomes through translation of research into practice. The DNP graduate is skilled in ongoing quality improvement, integration of evidence into practice, and systems leadership. These competencies equip DNP graduates to navigate complex challenges and build strategic partnerships that propel measurable health improvements. Students receiving the Soto Scholarship will collaborate directly with partner sites to identify a priority opportunity in the development of a DNP scholarly project. This project will offer students experience in applying the

knowledge and skills of a DNP.

The Soto Nursing Scholars program is modeled after and will join Creighton University's Arrupe Global Scholars and Partnership program. Established in 2021 with a \$25 million gift from an anonymous foundation, the Arrupe Scholars program immerses Creighton School of Medicine students in global communities to work alongside local healthcare providers and organizations at partner sites in the Dominican Republic, Rwanda, Ecuador and Nepal. The Soto Nursing Scholars program will build on and expand the Arrupe program while tailoring curriculum and immersion experiences to graduate nursing students. Soto Scholars will join Arrupe Scholars at established partner sites and form new partnerships specific to the nursing program. To promote interprofessional practice students from both schools will participate in the joint program's formation curriculum.

The initial gift will support a total of twenty scholars over a four-year period. Soto Scholars will receive a full scholarship to earn a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree from Creighton University College of Nursing and a certificate in global health promotion. Scholars will participate in four international immersions, attend monthly global health education and formation opportunities, and collaborate with international partners where they will implement a scholarly project. The gift also funds travel, programming, and faculty support for the Soto Global Nursing Scholars program.

Soto Scholars will enter the program with a BSN and a minimum of one year's work experience. They will choose from

multiple graduate-level tracks, including leadership, pediatric, neonatal, family, psychiatric mental health, and adult-gerontology acute care nurse practitioner programs. Soto Scholars will conduct scholarly projects at partner sites by collecting data, identifying opportunities to improve health outcomes, and implementing evidence-based interventions. The inaugural cohort of the program is set to launch in the summer of 2026.

Global health challenges continue to expand and grow in complexity. Guided by Ignatian values, Creighton University's Soto Nursing Scholars program will empower graduate nursing students to advance health equity, build lasting community partnerships and practice Ignatian values globally. Through immersive international experiences and sustained collaboration with partner communities, scholars will develop knowledge, skills, and moral courage to lead transformative changes of complex health challenges in diverse global settings. Soto Nursing Scholars will lead advanced nursing practice toward building a more just, resilient, and interconnected future for global healthcare. 🔥

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