

Celebrating our F31 recipients

BY NOELL WOLFGRAM EVANS

The Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award Individual Predoctoral Fellowship National Research Service Award, also known as the F31 grant, administered by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is not easy to obtain, yet four of the 25 PhD students at the College of Nursing are current F31 grant recipients. “To have that many, in a program the size of ours, says a lot about the quality of our program, students and faculty,” according to Rita Pickler, PhD, RN, FAAN, director of the PhD programs.

The F31 is awarded “to provide institutional research training opportunities to trainees at the undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral levels,” according to the NIH website. Or as Pickler put it, “The primary purpose is to support the Fellows in their predoctoral training at the point of dissertation. The funds support tuition and provide a stipend.

“These are students who do really outstanding work,” said Pickler of PhD students Lisa Blair, Marliese Nist, Randi Bates and Eileen Faulds, who all applied for and successfully received F31 grants.

While the grants are awarded to students, they can be considered institutional awards because of the team effort that goes into the application process. To apply for an F31, a student must have a faculty sponsor and often one or more cosponsors. Faculty members and the college research and support staff also play a part through consultation and reviews. “Having great mentors and training enabled me to effectively communicate the significance of the research and training plan for the grant,” Randi Bates said.

“We try to provide strong institutional support for each applicant,” Pickler said. “Part of our responsibility is helping people think about how they can put what they’ve learned into scientific practice.” Whether an F31 grant application is successful or not (and many are not), going through the process can be beneficial in and of itself. “One of the big outcomes of going through the F31 process...is that it makes people think about how they can put what they’ve learned into practical

research. Once you’ve written a grant application of this sort, you have a research proposal that can be sent to other funding bodies.”

Students begin the F31 application process months before the deadline. Before she could start her application, Marliese Nist had to capture her “drive.” “I had to find my passion,” she said, “and figure out how that fits into what the science needs and, really, what is important to patients.”

Along with the application, documents such as a research plan, resource procurement program, equipment availability schedule, biosketches, data tables, and a budget must be written, reviewed and rewritten. When an application packet is completed and submitted, the waiting begins.

On the day that application scores were to be announced, Eileen Faulds parked herself in front of her computer and kept refreshing every 15 minutes until finally her score appeared. “Of course, nothing is certain, but we felt pretty good about our chances,” she said. Scores range from 10 to 90; the lower the score, the better.

When Nist’s score appeared, she could hardly believe it: “I was shocked when I saw a 20.”

Once all applications have been scored, those with the highest ratings move into a secondary review round at the Nursing Research Advisory Council at the National Institute of Nursing (NINR). Then applicants may be asked to provide additional information. Awards are made on the basis of review scores and fit with the mission of NINR. This final process occurs five to six months after the grant is submitted (two to three months after the initial review).

Lisa Blair said receiving the F31 grant meant, “I could continue studying full time.” She also echoed a feeling that the other grant recipients had pronounced, a feeling of being honored.

NIH rankings

In 2017, the College of Nursing achieved the NIH ranking of 20th in the country in terms of how much NIH funding it had been awarded – over \$3 million – to our faculty and students. The college has enjoyed a steady rise in NIH ranking over the past six years: In 2011, the college ranked 46th; by 2016, we had moved up to 26th place. This statistic not only reflects the outstanding success our students and faculty have had in securing NIH grants; it also speaks to the quality of scientific work being done here. NIH rankings help with recruitment of top students and faculty, too. “It’s part of the picture of attracting people to the college who are serious about science,” Pickler explained.



Marliese Nist, Eileen Faulds,
Lisa Blair and Randi Bates

“It’s a huge honor. A real validation that what you’re studying is important,” said Faulds.

Nist added, “It is an honor. It energizes me to build the science and, ultimately, to improve outcomes for my patients.”

Pickler concurred, “Getting these awards early really sets the recipients up for much greater success later on.”

The F31 Grant Awardees

Randi A. Bates, MS, RN, CNP (FNP-C)

Randi Bates is grateful for receiving the F31 as it provides her “with the opportunity to spend more time conducting research and writing about the process and findings.” A Jonas Nurse Leader Scholar (2016-2018), Bates was destined to be a nurse from the moment she helped treat a bee sting during her summer lifeguarding job as a young girl. With her F31 support, she hopes to be able to use her degree to “continue to explore how to avoid poor health behaviors through research and inspirations from clinical practice as a nurse practitioner.”

“We all have different primary mentors,” Bates said of the F31 recipients. “I think that it demonstrates the quality of the overlapping group effort in helping us all succeed. I could not be more thankful to my sponsors and mentors,” Pamela Salsberry, PhD, RN, FAAN, Jodi Ford, PhD, RN, Laura Justice, PhD, and Rita Pickler, “for training me on how to write my first large grant.”

Eileen R. Faulds, MS, RN, FNP-BC, CDE

With her award, Eileen Faulds is in a place that was once just a dream.

“I lacked confidence to think that I could do that (research),” Faulds said. “As an undergraduate, I looked at my teachers and the faculty and thought that what they were doing was the pinnacle. But I never saw myself being able to do it.” And then her son, Ian, was

born with an endocrine condition requiring constant medical care. “There was a nurse practitioner who was inspirational,” Faulds fondly recalled. “She was with us until she retired, and what she meant to me and my family, I wanted to mean to other people.”

Returning to school, Faulds found a way to pursue this new purpose. “I credit the environment at Ohio State. They really push you to think big, to see a problem and work to find a solution,” she said. She is quick to point out that she did not find her success alone. “I had some really great mentors.” She cited Pickler and her advisor, Mary Beth Happ, PhD, RN, FAAN, who “really pushed me, which got me through the application process.”

Marliese Dion Nist, MS, RNC-NIC

The journey to an F31 grant started over three years ago for Marliese Nist. That’s when, during the course of treating patients at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, she started to ask, “What if?” in regards to some of the health issues she was seeing. Nist got the feeling she could do more and went to her supervisors, who suggested taking classes at Ohio State. From her first moments on campus, this new chapter in her career took focus. “Being there (at the college) gave me the confidence to believe that I could do this,” Nist said. She credits her sponsor Rita Pickler and cosponsors Tondi Harrison, PhD, RN, FAAN, and Deborah Steward, PhD, RN, for their remarkable mentorship.

Lisa M. Blair, RNC-NIC

“Honestly, I didn’t understand that nurses could even do research,” Blair shared, “so when I came here, my mind was blown! I’ve loved it from day one, when I was expected to integrate into the culture of research right away in a very real, very meaningful way.” Blair, a nurse who lives and works in the Cincinnati area with her husband Aaron and son Anthony, visited an Ohio State Graduate Expo and was hooked. Now Blair makes the trip up 71N to focus on her goal of improving health outcomes for children with low birth weights. To obtain the F31, she had the help of sponsors Cindy Anderson, PhD, CRNP, ANEF, FAHA, FNAP, FAAN, and Rita Pickler. ✨