

Illinois Nurses Foundation Honors SIUE Emerging Nurse Leaders

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE – In celebration of young nurse leaders who are impacting healthcare and the nursing profession while undoubtedly shaping the future of the profession, the Illinois Nurses Foundation (INF) has named Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Nursing’s (SON) Chelsea Howland and Ashley Whitlatch among its 40 Under 40 Emerging Nurse Leaders.

Howland is an instructor in the SON's Department of Primary Care and Health Systems Nursing and Whitlatch is an advanced practice nurse at OSF Medical Group and a SON teaching assistant. The two were selected as award recipients by a panel of peers based on professional achievement, leadership, and community and association involvement, and were recognized Thursday, Sept. 23 during a virtual celebration.

“As a nursing faculty member and nursing PhD candidate, I aspire to lead future advancements in nursing education and patient-centered outcomes research,” Howland said. “Being recognized as an Emerging Nurse Leader solidifies the impact my role as a nurse can have on the community. Being nominated by nursing colleagues demonstrates the positive support and encouragement I have received as a faculty member.”

Howland became interested in the profession while watching her mother complete her nursing degree and take care of her community.

“Knowing that nursing offered an opportunity to provide care to individuals in need and make a difference in their quality of life has inspired my career,” she added.

Howland is currently pursuing a PhD in nursing from the University of Missouri. Her doctoral work focuses on improving the health of those living in rural communities. She is currently developing an innovative physical activity intervention for rural adults with type 2 diabetes.

At SIUE, Howland teaches courses on nursing research and caring for those with complex needs. She has partnered with faculty colleagues to develop and implement a comprehensive refresher course for registered nurses returning to the acute care nursing workforce. Additionally, Howland is active in numerous professional nursing organizations, including the Association of Diabetes Care and Education Specialists, National Rural Health Association, and the Illinois Rural Health Association.

Howland's advice to fellow nurses is to take time for self-care, develop a mentoring relationship with other nurses, and continue to pursue education and improvement opportunities within the field.

Whitlatch decided to pursue nursing at a young age, having been inspired by visits to the doctor.

“I find complete joy in providing assistance to others,” said Whitlatch. “I love learning about the human body, how it works, and how to properly take care of our bodies. I also love applying my critical thinking skills to patient care.”

Whitlatch's responsibilities as a teaching assistant include tutoring nursing students in pre-clinical and nursing courses, assisting in developing study plans, reviewing NCLEX questions, and assisting students in enhancing and developing effective learning strategies.

"To be recognized for my efforts in nursing is rewarding and warms my heart," said Whitlatch. "It proves that all my hard work is paying off, and I am truly making a difference. It also means that I am making my family and children proud. This motivates me to keep walking within my purpose."

"Ashley is deserving of the 40 under 40 leadership award because of her strength, ambition, and determination to positively impact her clients' health while meeting SON students' learning needs in multiple classes," noted Stacy Skelton, PhD, instructor and student success coordinator in the Department of Primary Care and Health Systems Nursing. "She helps students with time management skills, improving study habits, and practicing test questions. She is shaping the future of the nursing profession."

Whitlatch urges fellow and aspiring nurses to keep working hard to fulfill their goals and dreams.

"Nursing is one of the most challenging but rewarding careers," she shared. "When it gets tough, push through. You'll make a difference in someone's life. This career is humbling, and will make you grateful for your personal situation and life experiences."

[The School of Nursing's](#) programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality research, patient advocacy, and community service. Enrolling more than 1,700 students in its baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. SIUE's undergraduate nursing programs on the Edwardsville campus help to solve the region's shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within all patient service venues. The School's graduate programs prepare nurses for advanced roles in clinical practice, administration, and education.