A September 2000 meeting in Washington, DC, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) Foundation and the Institute of Medicine, focused on strategies to advance scholarship and policy in population health. Nearly 9 years later, the main brainchild of that meeting—the RWJ Health & Society Scholars (HSS) Program—has been a dynamic contributor to that agenda.

The University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison is 1 of 6 major universities where the HSS program has been operating since 2003. The other sites include Harvard University, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, and a joint site at the University of California-Berkeley and the University of California-San Francisco. The centerpiece of the HSS program is a prestigious 2-year postdoctoral fellowship for 6 scholars from a broad range of disciplines, from epidemiology to history to communication sciences to political science and beyond. At UW-Madison, the HSS program is designed to meet 4 main goals:

1. To provide scholars with a broad and integrative understanding of population health.
2. To ensure that scholars understand how to translate new population health knowledge into policy and practice.
3. To provide scholars with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to become leaders in the emerging field of population health.
4. To contribute to the understanding of population health concepts at the university, state, and national levels.

The HSS scholars work alongside mentors and collaborators from across the campus and beyond to conduct multidisciplinary, innovative research that will become the core of population health scholarship in the next generation. A distinguishing feature of the HSS program at UW-Madison is its emphasis on knowledge transfer, providing the scholars with not only solid research training on population health topics, but also the capacity to work with practitioners and policymakers to design and translate research that will be most relevant to improving population health.

For us, 1 of the most satisfying aspects of working with this program has been the increasing number of faculty, staff, and students from all schools and many departments, institutes, and centers across the campus who have begun to embrace population health topics in their work, as well as the connections that have been strengthened or initiated between the university and the policy and practice community. Indeed, 1 goal of the RWJ Foundation in designing the HSS Program was to expand population health research across and beyond campuses by providing funds for not only the postdoctoral scholars, but also for additional Research and Training (R&T) activities. Investments from these R&T funds are intended to support creative activities that enhance the appreciation of, scholarly work in, and policy activities on broadly defined population health topics. Over the years, the UW-Madison HSS R&T funds have supported multidisciplinary scholarly and translational projects and working groups (both on campus and with community partners), population health activities in practice and public policy settings, doctoral dissertation fellowships, and course development awards (to expand population health topics throughout the curriculum). The HSS program at UW-Madison has invested over $1 million in these activities since its inception in 2003.

From the outset, the program has been directed by Professors David A. Kindig, MD, PhD; John Mullahy, PhD; and Stephanie Robert, MSW, PhD; and administered by Jane Lambert, MA. Housed in the Department of Population Health Sciences, the program enjoys excellent synergistic relationships with faculty, staff, and students in the department, and helps integrate population health efforts across campus and beyond.

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