

2017 AACN Grassroots Student Ambassador Prize Report

This past spring, I was given the opportunity to attend the American Association of Colleges of Nursing Student Policy Summit in Washington, D.C. This experience reaffirmed my interest in health policy and helped me understand how I can make a substantial impact in this area even as an undergraduate student. I was also awarded the Student Grassroots Ambassador Prize for my proposal to create a grassroots advocacy campaign in support of Texas House Bill 1938, which would create an opt-out organ donation system in the state. Through this campaign, I was able to mobilize my peers in support of this bill and see firsthand the power of my advocacy group to bring people together in support of this issue.

I recruited interested students from around campus to join the Opt-Out Organ Donation Policy Advocacy Group, and we organized ourselves into committees addressing social media, university outreach, and governmental affairs. The social media committee was in charge of the Facebook page for the group. Through Facebook, this committee ran advertising campaigns, promoted upcoming events that we were hosting, and created informative posts about organ donation policy research for our page. This committee also shared news coverage about our group from local newspapers and television stations.

The goal of the university outreach committee was to garner student support for House Bill 1938. Their first item of business was to create a short survey to determine student opinions on this organ donation policy. The survey was distributed online to students at our university, and it received nearly 1,000 responses. The survey showed strong student support for opt-out organ donation policy, and its results were used to write a student government resolution. This resolution stated that students at the university supported this policy and Texas House Bill 1938. It was passed by the student government and later used by the student government vice president in his testimony at the bill's committee hearing.

The governmental affairs committee hosted many advocacy events throughout the campaign. It began with two events aimed at calling legislators on the House committee where the bill was to be heard in the coming weeks to register support for the bill and determine the attitudes of the committee members towards the bill. This committee also hosted an event for people to write letters to the House committee members in support of the bill. A few weeks later, this committee organized our advocacy group's day at the Capitol. This event took place on the morning of the bill's hearing in the House transportation committee. Our group marched from The University of Texas Tower to the Capitol building and attended the hearing, where the student government vice president and myself testified in support of the bill. After the hearing, the advocacy group met with legislative staff on the transportation committee and distributed packets with more information about the proposed policy.

Ultimately, Texas House Bill 1938 did not make it through the legislative process before the session ended. However, this experience showed me the power of grassroots advocacy to mobilize people in support of an issue. Around 70 people joined the campaign and raised awareness for the issue through local news coverage and our Facebook page. The advocacy group has evolved into the [Health Advocacy Student Coalition](#), which creates a legislative agenda that represents the interests of health-related student organizations from across The University of Texas at Austin. It provides a way for leadership of health-related student organizations from across campus to come together to voice their opinions on legislation related to the mission of their organization, and provides members with opportunities to advocate for relevant legislation that arises at all levels of government. I am excited to use the experience that I gained through this campaign to bring a student voice to health policy issues in the future.