

# Advancing Academic Leadership for Deans

2025-2026 Directory

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American Association *of* Colleges *of* Nursing

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*The Voice of Academic Nursing*



## Advancing Academic Leadership for Deans

Led by the Center for Creative Leadership in collaboration with AACN, Advancing Academic Leadership for Deans is a program that provides participants with an in-depth assessment experience, a range of content and exercises related to successful leadership, and the opportunity to establish a peer network that fosters long-term partnerships and collegial support.

The purpose of the Advancing Academic Leadership for New Deans program is to enhance the executive leadership skills of individuals who seek a high-level skill set to maximize opportunities and meet challenges. This program was developed for deans new to their role or transitioning into a dean role at a new college or university.

This 13-month program features four face-to-face meetings with work done virtually between sessions. Individuals will conduct a Learning Development project at their institution, and the top projects will be presented at an AACN Conference.



**Nashat Abualhaija****Saint Thomas University****Dean of Nursing**

Dr. Nashat Abualhaija is a distinguished leader in nursing education, holding a Ph.D. in Nursing from Barry University, a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Phoenix, and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Alabama, Birmingham. He brings extensive expertise in academic program management, curriculum development, and pedagogical innovation. With a proven track record of enhancing student success, Dr. Abualhaija has held several key academic positions, including Founding Dean and Professor of Nursing at St. Thomas University, Nursing Program Director at Hodges University, and Associate Professor at the University of Texas Permian Basin. Renowned for pioneering online nursing programs and significantly improving NCLEX pass rates, he is committed to advancing nursing education and improving healthcare outcomes. Dr. Abualhaija's professional work includes establishing impactful community partnerships, leading faculty development initiatives, and introducing innovative teaching strategies. He fosters inclusive, student-centered learning environments, preparing future nurses to meet the evolving demands of healthcare. His academic and clinical leadership, combined with his dedication to nursing excellence, make him an ideal candidate for the AACN Advancing Academic Leadership for Deans program.

**Michael Callihan****University of Louisiana at Monroe****Director, Associate Professor**

Michael Callihan is the Director and an Associate Professor at the Kitty DeGree School of Nursing at the University of Louisiana Monroe. Dr. Callihan holds a PhD in Environmental and Occupational Health Nursing from the University of Kentucky, a Masters in the Science of Nursing Education from Gonzaga University, and an AD and BS in Nursing from Miami University of Ohio. After serving in the United States Navy, Dr. Mike Callihan became an emergency nurse and nurse researcher having more than 20 years' experience in emergency medical care, serving as a firefighter/ Paramedic for 23 years and an emergency nurse for 16. Dr. Callihan is one of the only nurses in the world trained in the collection and analysis of biomechanical data with a focus on musculoskeletal injury risk identification and correction in the workplace. The combination of his clinical expertise, research



specialization, and over 20 years' experience in the fitness industry drives the application of his research to practice within the nursing profession.

### **Eurina Cha**

#### **California State University -Los Angeles**

##### **Director**

Dr. Eurina Cha, newly appointed as the Patricia A. Chin School of Nursing (PACSON) Director, was selected for this position by the team of the search committee and appointed by the Dean of the Rongxiang Xu College of Health and Human Services. She is the Inaugural Luce and Ernst Nursing Director at California State University Los Angeles (CSULA). Dr. Cha was hired on July 1, 2024, at CSULA as a full-time administrator to oversee all undergraduate and graduate nursing programs, as well as supervise all faculty, staff, and students. She earned a BSN from Hawaii Pacific University and holds both an MSN and a Ph.D. from Walden University. Currently, she is completing a certificate in Global Health Practice at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr. Cha's clinical focus is in medical-surgical nursing, particularly acute in-patient rehabilitation, as a Certified Rehabilitation Registered Nurse (CRRN). She also holds a public health specialty as a Board-Certified Advanced Public Health Nurse (PHNA-BC) and is a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES). For over 32 years, she has dedicated herself to patient care across various healthcare settings, and for the past 13 years, she has been teaching and managing in higher education institutes across multiple states.

### **Leslie Collins**

#### **Northwestern Oklahoma State University**

##### **Chair, Charles Morton Share Trust Division of Nursing**

Dr. Leslie Collins is an esteemed Associate Professor at Northwestern Oklahoma State University (NWOSU), where she serves as the Chair of the Charles Morton Share Trust Division of Nursing (DON). With a passion for nursing & education, Dr. Collins has made significant contributions to nursing education and health care. Dr. Collins completed her BSN at NWOSU and her MS at the University of Oklahoma. Followed by a DNP from Duquesne University with a project focused on faculty-to-faculty incivility and interventions to help increase civility in nursing education. Since joining NWOSU in 2010, Dr. Collins has been dedicated to fostering a vibrant learning environment for her students as well as a supportive working environment. Dr. Collins is known for her commitment to community engagement. She organizes and completes educational workshops and raises awareness for increasing health literacy. Her efforts have earned her several accolades, including the



John Barton Distinguished Teaching and Service Award as well as the privilege of serving on many task forces/committees for education and health care at the regional, state, and national level. Outside of her academic pursuits, Dr. Collins enjoys being outdoors and spending time with her family. They enjoy mountain jeep trails, hiking, kayaking, & cooking/baking!

### **Randy Hamm**

#### **Barton College**

##### **Executive Director of Nursing and Practice**

Dr. Randy Hamm is an accomplished nursing leader and educator with extensive experience in clinical practice, academic instruction, and administration. He is working towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership (2025), and holds a Doctor of Nursing Practice (2016), and advanced degrees in nursing, health sciences, and leadership. His professional focus includes gender bias in nursing leadership and innovative approaches to education and clinical practice. Currently serving as Executive Director of Nursing and Practice at Barton College, Dr. Hamm designs competency-based curricula aligned with the AACN Essentials, mentors faculty, and fosters partnerships to enhance clinical education. He is also an Associate Professor of Nursing, integrating liberal arts perspectives with evidence-based practices to prepare students for leadership roles in healthcare. Dr. Hamm is a certified emergency nurse and critical care nurse with a history of clinical excellence in emergency and critical care settings. A published author and conference presenter, his work spans topics such as LGBTQ+ education, pediatric pain management, and simulation in nursing education. Recognized with numerous awards, including the Great 100 Nurses of North Carolina and the Daisy Award for Outstanding Faculty, Dr. Hamm exemplifies dedication to advancing nursing education, practice, and leadership.

### **Becky Hulett**

#### **Elmhurst University**

##### **Chair, Department of Nursing and Public Health, Associate Professor**

Dr. Hulett joined Elmhurst University in 2016. She completed her bachelor's degree at Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas in 1995 and her master's degree at Research College of Nursing in Kansas City, Missouri in 2010. She obtained her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree at the University of Kansas with a focus on organizational leadership in 2015. Dr. Hulett has a background in graduate education and online teaching in addition to extensive practice experience in both inpatient and outpatient settings. Her current areas of interest



are leadership and outcomes management. Dr. Hulett is a certified Clinical Nurse Leader, Member of Sigma Theta Tau Honor Society, completed the AACN Diversity Leadership Institute in 2022, was selected to attend Dartmouth Institute for Clinical Microsystems at Dartmouth College, and is a Master Trainer for TeamSTEPPS.

**Jennifer Jones-Locklear**

**University of North Carolina-Pembroke**

**Associate Professor and Chair of the McKenzie-Elliott School of Nursing**

Dr. Jennifer Dawn Jones-Locklear, PhD, RN, serves as the Chair of the McKenzie-Elliott School of Nursing and Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. With over 25 years of nursing experience and 22 years in academia, she is dedicated to advancing nursing education, health equity, and rural healthcare access. Dr. Jones-Locklear earned her PhD in Nursing from East Carolina University, an MSN in Nursing Education from the University of Phoenix, and a BSN from UNC Pembroke. Her research focuses on health disparities, rural healthcare, and global health policy. She has published extensively and presented at national and international conferences, addressing nursing education strategies, trust-building in healthcare, and mobile health innovations. As a leader in nursing education, she has secured major grants to support student training and healthcare workforce expansion. She is a strong advocate for culturally competent care and policy reforms that improve health outcomes in underserved communities. Committed to mentorship and student success, Dr. Jones-Locklear continues to shape the future of nursing through scholarship, leadership, and community engagement.

**Lee-Ann Kenny**

**Belmont Abbey College**

**Chair & Program Director of Nursing**

Dr. Kenny has a decade of experience in nursing education, specializing in baccalaureate nursing programs. Her expertise in assessment, evaluation, and curriculum development is deeply rooted in her years of teaching. Throughout her career, she has consistently sought innovative teaching strategies, leveraging technology to enhance student learning and reduce stress. Earning her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) in 2018 with a focus on nursing education and leadership, Dr. Kenny furthered her commitment to excellence. Her research on innovative technology to improve student outcomes and decrease stress in clinical settings reflects her dedication to student success. Recognized for her exceptional



teaching, Dr. Kenny has received multiple awards nominated by both students and faculty. In 2022, Dr. Kenny joined a small Catholic college as an Assistant Professor to develop and teach in a new nursing program. This role allowed her to further hone her curriculum development skills for both undergraduate and graduate nursing education. In June 2023, she was appointed Chair and Program Director, leading the program to achieve significant milestones. Under her leadership, the program secured final Board of Nursing approval and Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accreditation for all three programs: pre-licensed, RN-BSN, and MSN.

### **Rene Love**

#### **University of Florida**

##### **Dean**

Dr. Rene Love is the Founding Dean of the Ellmer School of Nursing at Old Dominion University. Dr. Love was most recently, the Associate Dean for Graduate Clinical Education and a Clinical Professor at the University of Florida. She began her career in higher education in 1998 at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing. She has since held administrative roles in academia as a DNP Director (University of Arizona) and Psych Mental Health Specialty Coordinator (Vanderbilt University). She is certified as a PMHNP and specializes in trauma, substance abuse and borderline personality disorders. Dr. Love is an internationally recognized expert in advanced nursing practice education and leader in advancing Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs. Her leadership has influenced psychiatric mental health nursing and DNP education, practice, and policy. Dr. Love is past president of the International Society of Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing and past board member at-large for NONPF. Dr. Love graduated with her PhD from the University of Arizona (2015), her DNP (2010) and MSN (1998) from Vanderbilt, and her BSN (1985) from Valdosta State University. She is a Fellow in the National Academies of Practice, The American Association of Nurse Practitioners and the American Academy of Nursing.

### **Katherine Menard**

#### **Northern Michigan University**

##### **Associate Dean/Director**

Dr. Katie Menard PhD, PMHNP-BC, CNE is the Associate Dean/Director for the School of Nursing at Northern Michigan University. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Northern Michigan University (2003), a Master's in Adult Health Nursing from Eastern Michigan University (2008), a graduate certificate in Teaching in Healthcare Systems from Eastern Michigan University (2008), a post-Master's certificate as a Psychiatric Mental



Health Nurse Practitioner from Saginaw Valley State University (2023) and a PhD in Nursing from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (2014). She is a board certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP-BC) and currently practices at Suunta Integrative Health in Marquette, Michigan. Katie's research interests center around working environments in nursing and the experiences of students, staff and faculty in higher education.

### **Chiarina Piazza**

#### **West Coast University**

##### **Dean, College of Nursing**

Dr. Chiarina Piazza is a distinguished nurse leader with over 16 years of transformative leadership experience at West Coast University, where she is the longest-serving nursing leader in the institution's history. As Dean of the College of Nursing, she oversees one of the nation's largest pre-licensure nursing programs, spanning three states and five campuses, with high-level oversight of post-licensure programs. Under her leadership, the California campuses have become a critical pipeline for producing BSN-prepared nurses who excel in the workforce. A proud minority nurse leader, Dr. Piazza has built a remarkable career navigating the complexities of academic, for-profit, and regulatory environments with unparalleled expertise. Her ability to innovate within these intersecting worlds has positioned her as a national advocate for excellence in nursing education, equity, and workforce development. Dr. Piazza holds a PhD in Nursing from the University of San Diego, a Master of Education from Cambridge College, and a BSN from UCLA. She is also deeply committed to community service, serving as a Commissioner for the Sister Cities Commission of Anaheim and previously as a Commissioner for Orange County Human Relations. Dr. Piazza's work reflects her dedication to equity, innovation, and advancing the future of nursing through visionary leadership.

### **Imelda Reyes**

#### **University of West Georgia**

##### **Dean and Professor**

With over 25 years of experience as a nurse and 16 as a nurse practitioner, educator, and administrator, Dr. Reyes brings a wealth of clinical and operational knowledge, skills, and insights to the role of Dean at the Tanner Health School of Nursing at the University of West Georgia. Dr. Imelda Reyes specializes in pediatric care, particularly in Latino communities. She has served on multiple national boards and created curricula to teach nursing students about social determinants of health and culturally-sensitive primary care



pediatrics. Dr. Reyes is dual-certified as a family and pediatric nurse practitioner. She is passionate about integrating evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and interprofessional education into the curriculum, and enhancing the student experience through hybrid, digital, and experiential learning. Her clinical research focuses on identifying and managing overweight and obesity in children and the parental perception of weight and health of children. She is a Fellow in the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and previously served as a Medical Service Corps officer in the U.S. Navy. Education: Dr. Reyes earned her BS in Nursing from Western Michigan University, MPH from the University of Michigan, MSN from Emory University, and DNP from Vanderbilt University.

**Alicia Ribar**

**University of Cincinnati**

**Dean**

Dr. Alicia K. Ribar, Ph.D., is a nationally certified Family Nurse Practitioner with over 30 years of clinical experience and more than 19 years in higher education. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from The University of Toledo, Medical College of Ohio, and her Master of Science in Nursing at Wright State University, becoming a Family Nurse Practitioner. Dr. Ribar completed her Ph.D. in Nursing at Duquesne University and has over a decade of experience as an academic administrator. An expert in curriculum design and evaluation, she has developed traditional and online programs across undergraduate and graduate levels. She has mentored over 30 doctoral students and possesses extensive expertise in higher education accreditation, including with CCNE, COA, HLC, and SACSCOC. Dr. Ribar has been actively involved in Workforce Development and Interprofessional Education, serving as a key faculty member for South Carolina's Area Health Education Centers (AHEC). She has published and presented widely on local, state, and national platforms and has led or participated in several funded research initiatives, including HRSA workforce development grants addressing primary care in rural and underserved areas. Dr. Ribar currently serves as the 19th Dean of the University of Cincinnati College of Nursing.



**Laura Robbins-Frank****National Louis University****Founding Executive Director of Nursing**

Dr. Robbins-Frank dedicated the first 20 years of her 40-year career to neonatal and pediatric intensive care nursing before transitioning into academia. Since 2005, she has taught undergraduate nursing students, both traditional and accelerated, at multiple universities. Notably, she served as the Founding BSN Program Director at Loyola University New Orleans, establishing their undergraduate pre-licensure nursing program in 2020, and is now building the School of Nursing at National Louis University. Dr. Robbins-Frank's teaching expertise spans Foundations of Nursing Practice, Pediatric Nursing, and Pharmacology, areas she has passionately taught for over two decades. She has presented at 26 conferences, sharing insights on neonatal, pediatric, and nursing education topics. Her most recent presentations include a poster based on her dissertation research, Effectiveness of a Virtual Learning Environment for Learning Concepts of Growth and Development at the 2017 National League for Nursing National Summit in San Diego and the 2024 AACN Transform Conference in New Orleans. In addition to writing the chapter "Cardiac Structural Disorders" in Pathophysiology: Concepts of Human Disease (2019), Dr. Robbins-Frank is a frequent reviewer for ATI, Elsevier, Pearson, and Lippincott publishers. She is an esteemed member of the Sigma Theta Tau and Jesuit Alpha Nu Honor Societies.

**Lisa Thiemann****Wake Forest University School of Medicine****Professor and Chair, Academic Nursing**

Dr. Lisa J. Thiemann is professor and chair of the academic nursing department at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine (WFUSM). Her prior academic leadership roles include serving as inaugural director of the Marquette University nurse anesthesia educational program (NAEP), and director of the Duke University School of Nursing NAEP. She has held multiple national, non-profit leadership positions including Chief Practice Officer and Senior Director of Professional Practice for the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, and as Chief Credentialing Officer and the Chief Compliance and Innovation Officer for the National Board of Certification and Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists. Her current and past roles include work with federal and state regulatory agencies (e.g., CDC, CMA, FDA), third party accrediting agencies (e.g., healthcare, and academic), and performance improvement organizations (e.g., NQF). She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Cincinnati, her Masters in Nurse Anesthesia from the Mayo School of Health-Related Sciences in Rochester MN, and her Doctor of Philosophy in



Nursing from Villanova University. In her spare time, she enjoys time with her husband, Tim, and Labrador retriever, Hannah, abstract photography, and continuing to advance her Pilates practice.

**Lindsay Wolf**  
**Jacksonville University**  
**Associate Dean, Chief Nurse Administrator**

Dr. Lindsay Wolf is a full-time Associate Professor of Nursing at the Jacksonville University Keigwin School of Nursing and Associate Dean of Nursing. Dr. Wolf teaches in all programs including the Undergraduate Traditional BSN, ABSN 16-month and 12-month ABSN, Graduate Nurse Practitioner programs and Graduate non-NP programs. Dr. Wolf is a Certified Nurse Educator through the National League for Nursing (NLN), Certified Pediatric Nurse Practitioner through the Pediatric Nursing Certification Board (PNCB) and Certified Lactation Counselor through the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice (ALPP). Dr. Wolf practices as an autonomous pediatric nurse practitioner in pediatric primary care one day a week. Dr. Wolf received her BSN at the University of North Florida, DNP and PNP degree from the University of Florida and MBA from Jacksonville University. Dr. Wolf's main areas of interests include growth and development in the pediatric population, children with special needs, and lactation support and education for breastfeeding families. Dr. Wolf is active in her Catholic Church and enjoys spending time with her husband and five daughters.

