

**CLAIRE M. FAGIN FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

**WRITING YOUR PROFILE**

Tutorial

## Why Write a Profile: Presenting the Essential You

You need to be able to tell your own story in a succinct, engaging way. While your CV provides a comprehensive list of your accomplishments, it is exactly that: a list. A narrative conveys the essentials in an easily accessible format and puts them in a context with which a reader can identify.

There are many opportunities to use a profile. Here are just a few:

- **Speaking Engagements.** As an expert in gerontological nursing, you may often be called upon to present your research, whether to other scientists or the general public. A profile allows you to introduce yourself and your research as a brief, interesting summary.
- **Faculty Web Site.** Your institution's web site likely has a faculty Web page. While full CVs are often too long and dry for that venue, a profile usually fits perfectly.
- **BAGNC Website.** The BAGNC program wants to share your accomplishments, as they reflect well on the program and attract funding organizations.

Your profile, of course, is first and foremost a tool intended for your own use, but it can also serve a greater purpose by connecting you to the broader communication/leadership effort within gerontological nursing in the United States. Simply by mentioning BAGNC and your fellowship, your profile will promote the program and convey the tremendous benefits in investing in future academic gerontological nursing leaders.

If you have never before written a profile, the task may seem intimidating at first, but rest assured. Several fellows on the BAGNC Communications Advisory Committee have used this tutorial to help them create theirs, and they will attest that it is easier and quicker to accomplish than you might imagine

## Telling Your Story

When you write your profile, however brief, you are telling a story. That means it should happen in a logical or emotionally sensible sequence that piques the reader's interest in the beginning, leads him or her to a fuller explanation in the middle, and ends with a satisfying conclusion. Although this may seem a little daunting at first glance, this tutorial offers several tools to use as guides along the way. These include:

- *Brainstorming questions* that will give you an ample pool of relevant material from which to draw both facts and inspiration. These are the kinds of questions a journalist might ask you in an interview for a feature article.
- *Profile templates (3)* that will help you to take an approach in your writing appropriate for your particular story. Each offers a different thematic emphasis.
- *Sample profiles (4)* to use as references and models for your own writing. These profiles are of real individuals and are currently in use as communications materials.

The purpose of these tools is to make your task easier, not complicate it, so there is some flexibility built into them. Feel free to answer some questions and not others, to mix and match elements from all three templates, and even to imitate the sample profiles sentence by sentence if that helps you.

## Getting Started

### Using this tutorial

The following steps are designed to help you get the most out of the materials included here and develop a first rate profile:

1. **Put aside two hours to do your first draft.** Finishing within that time will force you to write fairly quickly. The speed will help keep you from overthinking or self-editing. The first draft is all about letting the words flow without getting in their way. For your second draft, put aside an hour to ninety minutes on a different day. The second draft is all about making judgments—taking an objective look at what you've written and making changes where you think they're necessary.
2. Read through the **brainstorming questions**, and answer those that apply to you. You may want to write your answers down, voice record them, or simply jot down a few notes or key words as reminders.
3. Read through the **sample profiles**. Circle or highlight anything in them that strikes you or that you particularly like. If anything in them reminds you of your own story, make a note in the margins.
4. Review the **story templates**. Read through them all at least once, simply to get an idea of the approach each one takes. The first, *A Career at the Crossroads*, focuses on how and why you made the choice to take your career in nursing to a more advanced level. The second, *A Driving Passion*, concentrates on your love for your work and how you discovered it. The third, *Meeting the Challenge*, focuses more on the work itself and the particular challenge you're tackling in your research.
5. Re-read your answers to the brainstorming questions, as well as any notes you may have written in the sample profiles, with the story templates in mind. Your answers will likely tend to **fit into one of the templates more than the others**. That should be the template that you follow. However, these are guidelines, not precise roadmaps. If you feel an urge to deviate from your template and tell your story in another way, follow your instincts!

### Story Pointers: The Most Basic Template

Not everyone will feel that his or her story fits into one of the templates, but don't let that discourage you. Simply ask yourself: What was the long-term challenge in my life that eventually led me to the Fellowship? Perhaps it was to find a way to do nursing research or help people cope with chronic pain. Once you have identified the challenge, tell the story of how it came to you, which roads it led you down, and how in the end the Fellowship helped you achieve success in meeting it.

Meeting a challenge is the basis for nearly every story ever written. Also, remember that sometimes what constitutes success changes over time. You may have started out wanting to give people your personal nursing care and discovered that you could help far more of them by becoming a leader in nursing education. Ultimately answer the question – so what?

6. Arrange your brainstorming answers to fit under the subheads of your template. If you find that one of the subheads doesn't really apply to you, choose one from another template. **Feel free to mix and match them.** Once again, how you physically organize your material is a matter of personal preference. Some people voice record, others use index cards, still others prefer creating little flow charts. Throw away all the little nuggets of information and memory that don't apply the particular story you're telling. If your profile is about deciding to leave clinical work for the laboratory, an anecdote about dear old Uncle Fred may not fit, unless he is the one who talked you into it.
7. Now is the time to begin actually writing. Remember that your story will be **a snapshot of your career, not a full-length narrative.** Its length should run to about 400 words—approximately two-thirds of a page of single space typing, four to six paragraphs of three or four sentences each. While you should try to address each heading in your template, **YOU DO NOT NEED TO ADDRESS EVERY POINT UNDER EACH HEADING.** Choose what interests you and applies to your particular story.
8. Keep your writing in the **active voice** as much as possible. Choose "she followed" over "she was led." **Use the third person** – "she followed" versus "I followed." Varying sentence length is also helpful, but most importantly, if a sentence is more than two lines long, divide it into two or more sentences. **Vary your vocabulary** so you don't keep using the same word over and over, but don't force words that sound unnatural to your ear (e.g., choose "I thought" over "I cogitated.") Again, feel free to use the sample profiles as sentence by sentence models.

9. **Allow yourself to have some fun with your initial draft.** It is okay to be a little whimsical, and it will certainly add to the flavor if you're accurate and forthright with your thoughts and ideas. Let yourself be pleased by your own words. And if you're writing about yourself in the third person, feel free to directly quote yourself once or twice in the piece. Don't be overly concerned with perfection—that will be editor's job in reviewing your finished draft. Most importantly, don't be afraid to express emotions in your writing, especially passion for your work, satisfaction in your accomplishments, and appreciation for help from mentors, colleagues, and the Fellowship Program. Communicating your feelings will ultimately build a foundation for a strong beginning, interesting middle, and good ending to your story.

#### **Story Pointers: Going Beyond the Personal**

Using words that reveal feeling (e.g., "I was *worried* that I would have to leave nursing, but...") is important because it allows your reader to identify with you and your story. It is also a good idea, however, to let him or her know why the challenge your story describes has implications beyond its personal importance to you. If you originally wanted to provide significantly better care to people suffering with depression, include a line that explains why improving care is important. If you can combine both perspectives, so much the better: "*It was discouraging* (personal) to see how depression could make other chronic illnesses even worse. *People with mood disorders have twice the risk of...* (general) "

10. Once you have completed a draft you like, **put it away for a day or two**, and then take another look at it. If you're satisfied with what you've written, allow someone whose judgment you trust to read it and give you feedback. If you agree with his or her conclusions and recommendations, make whatever changes you think are necessary.
11. Finally, you may find that your profile (at 400 words) is a bit too long for some uses, so we recommend you create a **shorter version** (200 words). The easiest way to do this is simply to cut some of the more detailed information from your story or collapse it into a shorter form. For a sample, see the last profile in this tutorial, which is offered in both full length and shortened forms.

**What Every Profile Should Include**

- Top line should have your name, credentials, and current job title.
- Last line should state your term of the Claire M. Fagin Fellowship
- Below the complete profile you should note the month and year of the version (May 2009).

## **BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS**

### FELLOWS' CAREER BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS

You will probably glean far more material than you need from the brainstorming questions. Don't be concerned. Choosing one of the templates will help you find a thematic focus and cull extraneous facts from your writing.

- What inspired you to choose nursing? What attracted you to geriatrics?
- When you became a nurse, did you set any professional goals for yourself, and if so, what were they? Have you met them? Have you set new goals since?
- Has your career interest changed over time? Has your original interest in bedside nursing, for example, given way to an interest in research?
- What makes your career interest—research in a specific area, teaching, administration, leadership—important to geriatrics nursing?
- Has your career taken any other unexpected turns? Perhaps you started your career as a business person and ended up in nursing school?
- Can you describe the nursing issue that interests you most now? Did some personal experience lead to your interest?
- How has the Claire M. Fagin Fellowship allowed you to address that issue? Through financing your education, introducing you to a peer network, or giving you more professional credibility?
- What other educational, practice, or research opportunities has the Fellowship brought to you?
- What are the key elements of the research are you doing (or did) under the Fellowship?
- Who were your mentors? How have they helped your career and your nursing skills?
- Have you published any work as a result of the Fellowship?
- Have you taken a leadership position in nursing? Can you describe that leadership position?

- What are your hopes for the future of your career?
- Is there anything else—a person, place, idea, event—that you perceive as a landmark in your nursing career?

## STORY TEMPLATES

## STORY TEMPLATE 1

A Career at the Crossroads

- **The choice.** Perhaps you left another career to pursue nursing, were about to leave nursing for another career, or had almost lost faith in your dream of doing research and achieving a graduate degree. Or maybe you had simply made a decision to leave clinical work for research or administrative work. Whatever choice you had to make, it has since proven critical to your career path. Briefly describe how you reached that career crossroads.
- **Getting help.** Describe how you learned about the Claire M. Fagin Fellowship Program, and more importantly, the ways in which it helped you pursue the kind of career in nursing that you wished for. Was the help primarily financial, or did the Fellowship give you more professional credibility, or did the networking opportunities open new vistas for you? Do several or all of the above apply?
- **Current status.** What has all of this led to? What are you doing now? How have you developed career-wise and research-wise? Which of your skills have improved? What surprising possibilities have opened up to you? Has your thinking or approach to nursing challenges grown thanks to the BAGNC program?
- **Giving back.** Discuss how you are now (or intend to be) able to lead other nurses along the same path. Do you see yourself in them? Discuss your interest in mentoring and what you have learned from mentors while in the Fellowship.
- **Assessing the program.** This is your chance to say great things about the Fellowship and voice your appreciation for all that it has done for you.

## STORY TEMPLATE 2

**A Driving Passion**

- **Discovering your passion:** Describe the situation, circumstance, major event, or minor incident that awakened interest in either geriatric nursing as a career or the particular research area in which you're currently engaged. If the passion has always been there, even if you're not sure why, then talk briefly about that instead. Perhaps someone close to you suffered with Alzheimer's Disease (AD) and you wanted to find a way to make AD patients' lives more tolerable. Or perhaps you met a nurse or witnessed a group of nurses doing something that inspired you. Whatever led to the ardor you feel for what you do, start here.
- **The opportunities to follow your dream:** Discuss what has happened since then. Are you still doing the same research? Describe what other exciting things have happened. Perhaps you are now mentoring, recruiting, teaching, or publishing. Have you been promoted? Are you doing further research, or have you taken on leadership positions?
- **Even wider horizons:** Talk about your expectations for the future. Will you continue doing the same research? Are you applying for other grants? Are you being considered for a professional position of greater responsibility? Talk not just about what you hope for in the future, but in what you want the future to bring to you.
- **Assessing:** Talk about your appreciation for BAGNC's Clair M. Fagin Fellowship Program and what it has meant to you. What would you say to a young nurse who asked you about the program? What, to you, are the most important benefits that it offers?

## STORY TEMPLATE 3

Meeting the Challenge

- **Discovering a need.** Many individuals go into advanced training in geriatric nursing to address a need—either through research, clinical application, or administration—that is not being met for older adult patients. Describe the nursing challenge in your own career that inspired you when you first became interested in the Fagin Fellowship Program. Perhaps it was a quality of care issue or even the complications of insurance/Medicare coverage.
- **Pursuing the challenge.** Describe the key aspects of your research. Mention mentors, if appropriate. Describe obstacles and reversals you needed to overcome *and/or* any discoveries you made at this time in your life—whether in your field or about yourself in the context of nursing.
- **Networking broadens scope.** Discuss how the availability of accomplished people doing work in related research fields has become a resource for your own work. Perhaps you have become aware of possibilities in your own research that you would never have realized existed if you hadn't had the opportunity to consult with or mentor others.
- **Assuming responsibility.** Describe how becoming an “expert” in your field has led to opportunities for leadership in the nursing community, either locally (whether that means a city, region, school of nursing, or university) or nationally. Perhaps you now belong to an association, committee, or activist organization that deals with problems in your area of expertise.
- **Assessing the program.** Mention not only how the Fellowship Program has been instrumental in your own career, but in what ways you believe it is important to the nursing community at large.

## **SAMPLE PROFILES**

## Keeping Older Adults Engaged

**Ann Mayo, RN, DNSc**  
**University of California San Francisco**

Ann Mayo would like to see all older adults taking part in decisions about their own medical care. But there's a problem. When some patients begin to lose their cognitive abilities—their ability to think and remember clearly—no one quite knows how to help them remain active in the decision-making process.

"Part of the driver for my curiosity around the subject came from my interaction with other nurses who asked me about their patients," she explains. "They would say something like, 'I saw Mr. Smith this morning, whom I've been taking care of for five years, and talked to him about his diabetes care, but I'm not sure he's really cognitively all there anymore.' Then they would describe Mr. Smith's symptoms, and I would look for some research findings on what to do, but I wouldn't find anything. I finally decided that someone needed to do this research."

That someone was her. Her first step was to apply for a Claire M. Fagin Fellowship award with a very specific goal in mind. Although she had a longstanding interest in medical decision making and she had always provided care for older adults, she had no specific training in the area. "That's why I wanted to do this post doc," she says. "I wanted to retool in gerontological nursing."

The Fellowship allowed her to initiate a study into how older adults with cognitive impairment are included in medical decisions regarding flu vaccines, prostate screening, and mammogram screening. She hopes she'll be able to use her data in a subsequent study, perhaps funded with an RO1, to evaluate possible interventions. "If we know that a certain group of patients still has the ability to participate if we just spent a little more time with them, or if we presented the material in a different way, then perhaps they could stay engaged," she explains.

Dr. Mayo feels that the Fagin Fellowship was critical not only in helping her move into this area of study, but also in rapidly establishing credibility as a gerontological nurse. "Everyone recognizes Hartford and the Claire Fagin post doctoral fellowship," she says. "It's really been remarkable. It's launched this whole new part of my career for me."

In fact, she feels that the Fellowship program has done much more than help individual nurses with their careers. It has also exerted a profound influence on the academic nursing community at large. For example, the California Board of Registered Nursing recently recruited her to help determine where the state needs to go in terms of its gerontological programs. "I know they tapped me on the shoulder because of my association with the Fellowship," she says. "I know because they've told me so!"

## **Geriatric End-of-Life: An Opportunity for Care**

**Suzanne Prevost, RN, PhD, COI**  
**University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences/HCGNE**

As the older adult population continues to grow, more die in nursing homes every year. Suzanne Prevost believes that this poses a new challenge for caregivers. "In the past, there has not been a lot of attention paid to providing the best dying experience for people in these institutions," she says. "But there's a great demand—an opportunity to provide people with an important aspect of care."

Her interest in the subject began when National HealthCare Corporation (NHC), a company that owns nursing homes nationwide, approached her for assistance several years ago. "They came to me and said they had recently found themselves putting a lot more emphasis on end-of-life care in their facilities. They wanted to do a better job at that," says Dr. Prevost, "and they asked for my help."

Today, that interest has burgeoned into full-time research. She is using her Claire M. Fagin Fellowship Award to study the challenges of improving end-of-life care in nursing homes. She initially applied for the Fellowship because she felt in need of research training, but she credits the program with giving her much more than that.

"There have been several different educational opportunities that became available because of my association with BAGNC," she says. "and I've really enjoyed them." Those opportunities included attendance at New York University's Nursing Research Institute, the Hartford Interdisciplinary Scholars Communications Conference in Chicago, the Policy Leadership Institute in Washington, the End of Life Nursing Education Consortium in California, and the Hospice and Palliative Nurses Training Certification.

"All of the training increased my specialty knowledge in my area of research, geriatric end of life," she says. "But it also gave me some very specific communication skills for presenting my work and interacting with the media. And the policy institute was especially helpful. I have always been active in local policy, but I think the [Policy Leadership] Institute increased my confidence in interacting with policy makers at the federal level."

Perhaps most importantly, the program has helped her find a leadership position as associate dean of practice and community engagement, at the University of Kentucky. "I hope that in my new position I will be able to recruit a number of participants into the BAGNC from my new university, and I certainly will use much of what I've learned in terms of both my research and geriatric curriculum development there."

## Promoting Health among Older African Americans

**Tamika Sanchez-Jones, PhD, RN**  
**University of Iowa**

It's sometimes easy to make incorrect assumptions about ethnically and culturally diverse older patients, and that can unintentionally lead to a poorer quality of healthcare. Among older African Americans, for example, a lack of higher education is not uncommon, but healthcare providers don't always take that into consideration. "We kind of presume that everybody can read," says Tamika Sanchez-Jones. "So a doctor might give a patient a pamphlet on diabetes and expect him or her to go home and do everything it says. But a lot of these folks dropped out of school to go to work when they were very young. Maybe they can read some, but do they really understand?"

Educating not only patients but also their healthcare providers around these challenges is the focus of Dr. Sanchez-Jones's work under the Claire M. Fagin Fellowship Award program. It's an area of research she discovered through a suggestion by one of her Hartford mentors, Toni Tripp-Reimer, RN, PhD. Miscommunication can lead to deep misunderstanding. For example, older African Americans may feel they're practicing healthful behaviors when they take herbs or pray more often. Their doctors, on the other hand, may assume that these patients are choosing to be noncompliant and ignoring sound medical advice. The problem, as Dr. Sanchez-Jones sees it, is that these patients are simply not getting the information they require in a form they can understand. Her hope is that she can use health literacy assessment tools to determine where the needs of this patient population actually lie, and from there determine ways to meet those needs.

During the first quarter of her Fagin Fellowship, Dr. Sanchez-Jones began developing a health literacy course with healthcare providers in the Miami Area Geriatric Education Consortium with the help of her co-mentor, Christine Williams, at Florida Atlantic University. She has also completed four book chapters on health literacy, cross-cultural communication, communicating with families, and gerontological education.

Dr. Sanchez-Jones expresses no doubt about the positive effect that BAGNC and the Fagin award are having on the field of gerontology. "When I tell people I'm doing the post-doc and that I also did my pre-doc through this Hartford program, a lot of times they're surprised that there's actually funding and interest in gerontology. That definitely stimulates their interest. They want to know why my project is being funded, why it's important? And often people email me and ask about the program and what it offers."

## **Improving Care for Elders after Traumatic Brain Injury**

**Hilaire Thompson, PhD, RN, ACNP-BC, CNRN**  
**University of Washington School of Nursing/HCGNE**

When an older adult sustains a traumatic brain injury and ends up in emergency care, he or she is likely to undergo exactly the same kinds of treatment that a child, adolescent, or middle-aged adult would. Unfortunately, an 80 year old patient is likely to have a worse outcome. The medical literature blames this outcome on advanced age, but Hilaire Thompson, at the University of Washington School of Nursing, isn't so sure. "Age is just another number," she says, "We need to consider what other factors we might look at. We also need to peel back the onion, so to speak, and examine our own acute care systems to see what new approaches we might try to improve clinical care for these patients."

The Claire M. Fagin Fellowship launched Dr. Thompson's career. The Fellowship made it possible for her to gather together an interdisciplinary team of traumatologists and epidemiologists to examine these questions. She will use the data from the project to broaden her research and apply for an NIH RO1 grant, an early career milestone for biomedical scientists. But her work has already gained important recognition. "It's been recognized that what we're doing is pioneering and important," she says, "and because of that, I will be inducted as a Fellow into the American Academy of Nursing in the Fall."

Thompson switched her focus from acute adult care to geriatrics in 2005 after her own mother had sustained a brain injury. Soon after, she learned about the Fagin Fellowship Award and applied. Receiving the award provided immediate access to the kind of significant research resources, mentoring, and leadership training that could propel her academic career. "The Fellowship has been really useful to me because I'm new to geriatrics, but it has already allowed me to become established. Now, while I wouldn't say I'm an expert, I've become very confident. I actually have two graduate students who are geriatrics specialists working with me, so I feel that I'm helping build the next generation of scholars."

She credits the program with giving her the protected research time she needs, helping her to network throughout the geriatrics community, and allowing her to attend other programs such as the Gerontological Society of America meetings where she gets valuable feedback on her studies. She is also making efforts to increase the amount of geriatrics work presented each year at the Western Institute of Nursing conference. In recognition of the importance of her research in acute brain trauma care, the American Academy of Nursing will induct her as a fellow in Fall 2008.

**Accountant to Nurse to Fagin Fellow****Elena O. Siegel, PhD, RN****Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing/HCGNE**

Why did you choose nursing? That's a question that Elena O. Siegel often finds herself answering, and it's no surprise. For her, it was a life altering decision. She had already established a successful career in accounting, but the call to a new vocation was strong.

"I had an opportunity to be with my mother-in-law during the end of her life," she explains. "She had advanced Alzheimer's, and she was living in a nursing home. That's where I saw the amazing work that nurses do. One day a nursing assistant started describing to me what she was doing, and I found myself overwhelmed. It was like I had been wearing blinders, and they suddenly came off. I realized I had discovered the work I really wanted to do."

She immediately set a new goal for herself to become a bedside nurse in a nursing home, and she systematically went about withdrawing from her position as a controller in private industry. When she enrolled in a nursing undergraduate program, however, her plans once again took an unexpected turn. She realized that she was as interested in looking at the systems and organizational environment that support the work of nurses serving in clinics or nursing homes. So she made another critical choice in her career.

Since then, Dr. Siegel has earned a master's degree with a dual focus in care systems management and nursing, and more recently, her PhD, both from the University of Washington.

She received a pre-doctoral scholarship as well as a postdoctoral Claire M. Fagin Fellowship from the BAGNC Program. She credits the Fellowship not only for funding her work, protecting her time, and helping her to network, but also for legitimizing her as a serious researcher among some of the most well-known authorities and leaders in gerontology. Her post-doctoral work, under the mentorship of Heather Young, RN, PhD, explores the education, training, and experiences that support nursing home administrators' performance in their jobs. And she is currently realizing a long-standing dream of teaching at a Hartford Center for Geriatric Nursing Excellence.

Like so many of her fellow Fagin Scholars, Dr. Siegel is taking a strong leadership role in the nursing field. During the first year of her fellowship term, she joined the Nursing Home Collaborative Project, and she serves on the Advancing Excellence Campaign—a state initiative in Oregon to improve nursing home care.

**Accountant to Nurse to Fagin Fellow (Short version)****Elena O. Siegel, PhD, RN****Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing/HCGNE**

Elena O. Siegel left an established, successful career in accounting to become a geriatrics nurse. Her inspiration came from the “amazing” nurses who cared for her dying, mother-in-law in a nursing home. During that time, Dr. Siegel decided to become a bedside nurse in a nursing home but soon realized she was more interested in studying organizational systems than doing clinical work. Since then, Dr. Siegel has earned a master’s degree with a dual focus in care systems management and nursing, and more recently, her PhD, both from the University of Washington.

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