When we founded the Nova Institute, we had a vision to bring together bright minds from different disciplines to pursue bold ideas. What if we provided these passionate individuals with the support and resources they need to break free from traditional, academic constraints? What might they accomplish if they focused on what truly made their hearts sing? Today, 25 Scholars and Fellows provide the heartbeat of our organization and power our mission.

This unique, transdisciplinary community of thought leaders investigates critical questions, sparks fresh thinking, and discovers cutting-edge solutions. By design, our Scholars and Fellows are from diverse fields—such as medicine, nursing, photobiology, atmospheric chemistry, epidemiology, anthropology, and psychology—that rarely, if ever, have opportunities for collaboration.

Our Scholars and Fellows advance new understanding about how to promote health and flourishing for individuals, communities, and the planet, developing innovative methodologies, tools, and approaches. They inform each other’s work, providing encouragement and inspiration that can’t be found anywhere else.

Nova’s award-winning Scholars and Fellows have published nearly 1,000 scientific, peer-reviewed papers, covering their own research as well as Nova-funded projects, and have had their work cited more than 250,000 times.
When they first connected with the Nova Institute, Carley Riley and Brita Roy were early in their careers and had recently completed the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars program at Yale University. As they started attending meetings at Nova, they found what Riley called “a special community” of healthcare change agents.

The collaborators were impressed by Nova’s transdisciplinary, transformational thinking and its support for their broader vision of well-being—before “well-being” was a common term in academic circles.

Nova agreed to fund a set of epidemiological studies using the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index to look at various aspects of population-level equity and trends in overall life satisfaction to assess hope. “It certainly would have been challenging to go find funding,” Roy said. “Because our focus is well-being, it doesn’t fit neatly into a ‘disease’ box. But this became preliminary data for future proposals.”

Today, their work includes a sweeping set of related projects, from childhood health to gun violence to mental health, aimed at furthering an understanding of population well-being and supporting it within local communities. The Scholars and Fellows community provided mentors, forums to engage and refine their ideas, and general support for their trajectories.
Shortly after COVID-19 reached pandemic status in 2020, Nova Scholar and cultural anthropologist Rebecca Etz, PhD, sent out the first of what would become a weekly survey of primary care clinicians aimed at better understanding their shifting responsibilities and capacities. “It quickly became clear that primary care was in crisis,” said Etz, co-director of the Larry A. Green Center, which managed the surveys in partnership with the Primary Care Collaborative.

She used her findings to convene leaders of physician societies and boards across the key disciplines of primary care later that summer, relying on the urgency of her data to bring the disparate groups together, and helped them craft an unusually unified statement about the financing of primary care. More than two years later, the 50,000 comments in the ongoing survey comprise a unique dataset that Etz and her team continue to analyze. “Were it not for the support of Nova, it never would have existed,” Etz said.

Etz’s journey to that place was largely serendipitous. She had started attending Nova Institute meetings with a close collaborator and Nova Scholar, Kurt Stange, MD, PhD, and came back regularly because she found the environment “magical.” In 2019, she told the community about a convergence moment when key public and academic discussions about primary care were slated to overlap. She wanted to help affect change in this vital policy moment, and the Nova Institute provided critical funding to give her the space to do so. That decision made all the difference when the global pandemic struck less than a year later.

“That openness of time fed an unbelievable amount of work. It protects you from other pressures and provides you a little space. Chance favors the prepared mind, and it allowed me to identify opportunities and take advantage of them in a way I never could have otherwise.”

— Nova Scholar Dr. Rebecca Etz, Co-Director, The Larry A. Green Center
Scholars and Fellows

“The Scholars program is the most diverse of any network I’ve been involved with in terms of interests and fields, spanning the tiny to the cosmic. That’s what’s totally delightful about the enterprise; there are no boundaries. The program exists outside the confines of the discipline people train in so they can think about things outside those boundaries.”

— Dr. George Kaplan, Nova Senior Advisor for Scholars and Fellows, and Founder, University of Michigan Center for Social Epidemiology & Population Health

**SCHOLARS**

George “Bud” Brainard, PhD  
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**FELLOWS**

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**NATURE SACRED FELLOWS**

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Francesca Richardson, PhD

**IN MEMORIAM**

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