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NASPAA Announces Northeast Region Team Winner of its Inaugural Student Simulation Competition

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Washington, D.C. – Last weekend, students competed across the U.S. at five regional sites, for NASPAA’s Student Simulation Competition. The teams were asked to provide a locally led “bottom up” approach to health care reform.

Nationally, 45 teams—representing 93 participating schools—explored more than 4,400 different health care futures. Each health care future compared the team’s policy to a business-as-usual base run that predicts what would happen if no changes are made in the current health care system.

The Northeast region team winner for the 2015 NASPAA Student Simulation Competition hosted at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany, State University of New York included graduate students at the following institutions:

- Tamara Alkhattar, Heinz College at Carnegie Mellon
- Michael Judson, Post University

To be considered for the national winner, each of the 5 regional winners showed mastery of the technical simulation, but this team combined their understanding of the model, with their knowledge of systems, organizational dynamics, and political will. This confluence of factors created a scenario that fixed bottlenecks in the system, balanced public and private funding and created solvent hospitals. This team used a technical model to view the universe of the health care challenges and identify a realistic and possible solution to the problem.

If their strategy were scaled and implemented in regions across the country it would save the U.S. $645 billion dollars annually in 2040. The cumulative savings would be approximately $8.6 trillion U.S. dollars between 2015 and 2040. In addition, the team’s solution yielded $930 billion U.S. dollars in increased productivity in 2040 in the economy due to fewer sick days taken. All of this took place while the population became healthier: death rates dropped by 21.2 percent, emergency room visits dropped by 21.6 percent and high risk behaviors such as obesity, smoking and drug abuse dropped by 50 percent at the end of the simulation in 2040.
“The team quickly realized that timing is critical, and calculated when to start each initiative after reviewing when the benefits accrued from previous initiatives. While testing each of their many alternatives, they had a clear rationale why they were testing each one, and they expected results on specific outcome dimensions,” said Northeast region site judge John Shaw, president of Next Wave. “If it didn’t work, they quickly hypothesized why not — to formulate their next test. Their presentation was focused, and also received highest scores from their peers.”

According to Laurel McFarland, NASPAA Executive Director, “This competition demonstrates the tremendous learning opportunities gained by using simulations to immerse students in situations where they are able to immediately see the complexities and systemic aspects of public policy and management challenges,” said McFarland.

The simulator was developed by the Rippel Foundation as part of their collaborative initiative called ReThink Health, founded in 2007 by a group of the nation’s most influential change-makers in health, economics, politics, business and energy. The simulator is a state-of-the-art policy planning tool based on extensive research and widespread engagement with communities to help them foster catalytic leadership and test innovative ideas for bridging and redesigning their health and health care systems. The ReThink Health Model has been used to support ambitious health reform efforts in cities such as Atlanta, Cincinnati, Pueblo, Colorado and several other locations throughout the U.S.

NASPAA, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, is the global standard in public service education with a twofold mission to ensure excellence in education and training for public service and to promote the ideal of public service. It is the membership organization of graduate education programs in public policy, public affairs, public administration, and public and nonprofit management. NASPAA is also the recognized accreditor of master’s degree programs in these fields. Its nearly 300 members are located across the U.S. and in 14 countries around the globe.

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