

Sasakawa Nursing Fellow Progress Mid-Report

Manami Takahashi

Harvard Medical School, Master of Science in Bioethics

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1. Academic Progress

1) Program Overview

The Master of Science in Bioethics degree program at Harvard Medical School is a one-year, full-time course designed to provide students with a comprehensive academic foundation in the ethical considerations surrounding clinical practice, research, health law, and policy. The curriculum allows students to tailor the education to the specific interests by choosing from a broad range of elective courses. The program culminates in a mentored capstone experience where students engage in a project addressing a bioethics question. The member of the cohort comes from diverse backgrounds, with many individuals already holding terminal or professional degrees in areas such as medicine, law, social work, chaplaincy, journalism, and business. Despite the varied backgrounds, the shared commitment among students is to engage with issues of fairness, equity, and justice within the realms of healthcare and medical research.

2) Coursework of Fall-Term

- Foundations of Bioethics I (required, 6 credits)

Foundations of Bioethics I is the first semester of a year-long, ten-credit, required course sequence for the Master of Bioethics Degree. The course is a multilayered and multidisciplinary approach to bioethics, from the philosophical underpinnings to the application of theory to central challenges in bioethics and, beyond, to law and policy. Foundations I and II together combine textual readings, theoretical critiques, legal and policy approaches to subject matter areas, and examination of other critical forces such as social science, culture, lived experience, and religion that have shaped contemporary bioethics.

- Introduction to Clinical Ethics (required, 4 credits)

Introduction to Clinical Ethics is one of the core courses in the program. The course delves into key principles and themes in clinical ethics, such as informed consent, futility, euthanasia, moral distress, and advance directives. Each session includes interactive case-based discussion, followed by practicum. The practicum is modeled around the experience of a clinical ethics committee with small groups of students

working through a case and crafting an interpretation and set of recommendations.

- Introduction to Research Ethics (required, 4 credits)

Introduction to Research Ethics is one of the core courses in the program. It is organized in a highly innovative manner, designed to provide the student with a comprehensive foundation in research ethics. The aim of this course is to obtain knowledge and skills to manage many of the complex, real-life ethical issues that have attracted public attention in recent years, such as undue influence of research participants, concerns about therapeutic misconception and subject recruitment, concerns about social justice in the context of biomedical research, and uncertainty about new forms of biomedical research.

- Capstone Seminar I (required, 3 credits)

The Capstone Seminar is designed to facilitate individual reflection on personal and others' field experiences, fostering an understanding of the diverse and intricate nature of real-world engagements in clinical ethics, research ethics, or the legal and public policy aspects of bioethics. Together, the Capstone and its associated seminar emphasize the acquisition of knowledge through hands-on experience, bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and the practical expertise inherent in the art of bioethics. A key element of the seminar involves contemplating the role responsibilities, professional skills, and virtues of those immersed in practical bioethics work.

- Clinical Ethics Consortium (elective, 2 credits)

The Clinical Ethics Consortium enable students to discuss a wide variety of real clinical cases and methods of ethics consultation in health care in order to develop expertise in analyzing ethics cases and consults. In addition to participation in monthly multi-disciplinary clinical ethics case conferences with a variety of clinicians, ethicists and faculty from numerous institutions in Longwood Medical Area, students will subsequently gather as a small group to analyze each month's case in greater depth, and examine various approaches to ethics analysis and strategies for ethics consultation.

- Writing and Communication for the Biomedical Sciences (elective, 2 credits)

Writing and Communication for the Biomedical Sciences prepares students for the demands of writing and communicating in the medical sciences. The class provides knowledge and skills for the students to turn raw research into polished academic argument. Also, students will learn how to communicate in various forms, including writing an abstract, grant, and blog, before turning to presentation skills, such as crafting an elevator pitch and how to present at a conference or thesis defense.

3) Education System/ Networking

In my experience as a graduate student in Master's program, I have observed a clear distinction between education system in the United States and Japan. In my current program, each course requires approximately 60 pages of weekly reading, including chapters from books, research articles and opinion pieces, along with 60 minutes of lecture video as preparatory work. During live sessions, students are expected to actively participate in discussions based on the knowledge acquired from the pre-class requirements. In contrast Japan, this emphasis on preparatory work in the education system in United States allows students to delve deeper into discussions, exploring diverse perspectives even within limited class time.

Throughout the fall-term, I wrote about 6 essays per course (total of 35 essays). The process of working on these assignments not only required a thorough review of class materials but also prompted reflection on my views regarding ethical dilemmas in the healthcare field. Transforming my thoughts into well-supported arguments was both challenging and a vulnerable process. Nevertheless, this approach facilitated noticeable improvements in the depth and variability of my considerations.

Networking is also an essential element of the program. For the Capstone Seminar, the students are paired with mentors from wide range of professionals within Harvard community. My Capstone mentor, a social worker and clinical ethicist with more than 15 years of experience at Boston Children's Hospital, provides valuable insights during our weekly meetings to enhance my project's progress. As a postgraduate of this program and teaching assistant for some courses, she brings wealth of expertise and introduce multiple resources to crystalize my project. Additionally, my academic adviser, an acute care nurse and clinical ethicist at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital and a program alumna, ensures that the workloads of the program are manageable for me. Beyond that, she supports me in selecting electives and navigating postgraduate career considerations. Apart from the mentor and academic adviser, I have opportunities to connect with various faculty members and guest speakers at networking events throughout the semester.

4) Self-Reflections of Fall Term

In my academic journey, a key aspect of personal growth has been the ability to bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. I have learned the importance of translating academic concepts into practical solutions, emphasizing the relevance of my studies in addressing tangible issues. This connection has added depth and context to my understanding of bioethics, allowing me to appreciate the impact of theoretical frameworks on real-world situations. Furthermore, considering intricate interplay between theory, culture, religion, and intuitions has led to a commitment to robust pluralism, recognizing that these factors contribute uniquely to ethical considerations. Understanding how these elements intersect has enriched my ability to navigate the complexities of bioethical dilemmas in a global context.

Another valuable skill I have acquired is the art of collecting diverse tools to construct compelling reasoning for ethical decisions. By exploring various perspectives and methodologies, I have honed my ability to approach ethical dilemmas with a versatile toolkit. The emphasis on 'why' and 'how' has become a guiding principle, prompting me to delve beyond surface-level understanding. This commitment to deep thinking has been transformative, encouraging a more nuanced and critical evaluation of bioethical concerns.

Finally, my experience has highlighted the aspects of bioethics that I could not have fully learned and experienced within the confines of the Japanese educational system. The exposure to diverse perspectives, practical applications, and the dynamic nature of ethical decision-making in the real world has broadened my horizons beyond what traditional education in Japan could offer. This international exposure has been invaluable in shaping my approach to bioethics and expanding my worldview.

2. Personal Life Experience

1) Spending Time with Classmates

The cohort of the program consists about 30 students from various professional backgrounds and countries. An enriching aspect of my experience is the active sharing of each student's culture, often through weekend home parties. Personally, I have had the pleasure of experiencing the Chinese Moon Festival, indulging in Indonesian cuisine, and savoring pastries from Sweden. During Thanksgiving holidays, my friends and I came together to cook dinner, creating memorable moments. Engaging in conversations with classmates beyond the confines of formal coursework is essential.

Discussing bioethics in our daily lives has been instrumental in deeply internalizing the knowledge. These informal exchanges have proven to be valuable, as they often spark ideas for my essays during casual conversations with friends.

2) Room Sharing

I share an apartment with two roommates, each with unique backgrounds. One of my roommates is a physician from India who is pursuing studies at the Harvard School of Public Health. The other roommate has been working as a soft engineer in Boston for over 8 years. Despite the common notion that some international students prefer not to share apartments, I personally enjoyed having roommates. Upon my arrival in Boston, my roommates played a pivotal role in helping me settle down. They kindly showed me around the city, offering valuable guidance and support during my initial days as a stranger to the area. While dividing housework presented its challenges, the presence of companions in the house provided a sense of security and comfort. Beyond practical assistance, having someone to talk to at home has enhanced my overall living experience and fostered a sense of safety.

3. Acknowledgement

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Sasakawa Health Foundation for their generous scholarship, which has been crucial in facilitating my pursuit of academic goals at Harvard University. This scholarship has opened doors to opportunities exceeding my imagination. Beyond easing the financial constraints associated with higher education, the foundation's benevolence has acted as a catalyst, propelling me into a transformative journey within the United States. I am truly grateful for the profound impact this scholarship has had on my academic and personal development.