

Sasakawa Nursing Fellowship Progress Report 2023

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Overview and Purpose

I am reporting on the progression of my studying abroad annual year 2023. I am currently studying Nursing Science in the PhD program at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). My future vision is to contribute to advancing health science to improve health and well-being among older adults. In the United States, which is one of the most famous countries for research in nursing and gerontology, I have aspired to learn cutting-edge research methodology. My purpose in studying in the U.S. is to obtain rigorous research skills to create new scientific evidence to address health issues among older adults.

Academic Aspects

Detail Coursework Descriptions

After two quarters, my academic foundation was gradually established by attending coursework to gain critical appraisal skills and analytical skills utilizing various research methodologies. The coursework is mainly divided into three groups: theory, research methodology, and literature review. These courses are mandatory for completing the Nursing PhD program. Ten participants are in each class, which means most classes are small and require high commitment and responsibility to the discussion.

Theory. Theory includes nursing philosophy and theory analysis classes. In courses close to humanities and social sciences, we exercised casting doubt on the underlying assumption of concepts. In the process of examining the assumption, we can get core values embedded in the concepts. For example, I critiqued the concept of “ageism,” which is one kind of discrimination against aging (Butler, 1969); it is underlying philosophical themes of utilitarian justification and relational autonomy rooted in feminist philosophy (Urmson & Rée, 2005; Friedman, 2003). I learned that the meaning of concepts varies depending on historical and cultural contexts, and it

changes over time. In a theory analysis class, major theoretical frameworks related to aging were critically evaluated for application to empirical studies. Grasping the attributes of theories is helpful in understanding the scientific standpoints of theories. It was very good training to deliberate the relevance between philosophical assumptions and clinical practice or health policy.

Research Methodology. I am blessed to have learned both quantitative and qualitative research. In the four quantitative research courses, I built the foundation of epidemiology and biostatistics. The quantitative research classes covered the characteristics of study design, data sampling, psychometrics, types of bias, and assumption and interpretation of the biostatistical analysis. Although some contents overlapped with what I learned in the master's program in Japan, it was useful to reinforce my basis of quantitative research. I obtained biostatistical analysis skills to handle Stata software and nationally representative datasets in the U.S. In addition, each class gave me several opportunities to write research proposals.

In the one qualitative research course, I learned the principles and procedures of three major qualitative research: grounded theory, ethnography, and interpretive phenomenology. In the class, I learned a new concept, intersectionality. It is defined as the social constructions of elements of a person's identity, including gender, race/ethnicity, religion, and disability, which create unequal social relationships and affect social determinants of health (Crenshaw, 1997). Health disparity is a critically prevalent public health concern in the U.S. Learning intersectionality newly broadened my research interests related to health disparities among older adults and triggered me to conceptualize new research questions.

Literature Review. In this class, I learned key characteristics of systematic review and exercised to identify research gaps. After searching systematic review papers, I summarized the study characteristics, findings, research gaps, and future study implications. After this work, I

experienced an “Aha moment” to discover knowledge gaps I had not recognized before. In the final assignment, I wrote up the systematic review protocol in accordance with the latest guidelines. This class cultivated my independent research skills to design systematic reviews.

Research Residency

Research residency is practical training to obtain analytical and collaboration skills for actual research projects. My current research project is an interventional study that applies artificial intelligence (AI) technology to prevent heart disease among women. The research team includes multidisciplinary researchers from UC Davis and UCLA, including computer science and communication. I am mainly committed to data analysis in this project. I learned leadership skills in how a principal investigator organizes a multidisciplinary research team.

Summary of Learning in Two Quarters

There are two major points I learned in the previous two quarters: novelty-oriented research and flexibility. First, novelty. After starting this program, I recognized the importance of identifying research gaps by immersing myself in literature before designing research. It is crucial to consider its current scientific positioning and infer the future clinical implications.

Second, flexibility. Now, I am interested in health equity and digital technology applications among older adults. These topics are especially advanced in the U.S. Before starting to study abroad, I could not imagine how my research interests changed. I noticed the importance of keeping broad research interests, not narrowly defining them by myself.

Next Academic Goals

My next goal for the second year of the PhD program is to clarify my research question and prepare for the qualifying exam. Moreover, I also hope to strengthen my epidemiological

and biostatistical research skills by attending advanced courses at the School of Medicine and Stanford University or UC Berkeley.

Life Aspects

Overview of San Francisco

San Francisco is located on the West Coast, which has a year-round warm climate and racially diverse cultures. The Bay Area is known as a sanctuary of worldwide tech companies in Silicon Valley. Collaborations with UCSF and biotechnology industrial companies are prevalent for implementing evidence to society. The city has a liberal culture that absorbs new things.

Challenges of Cultural Adjustment

Since starting to live in the U.S., I have struggled to adjust to a different cultural mindset from Eastern to Western cultures. I recognized the necessity of confidently expressing my opinion to others to survive in academia in the U.S., a country of meritocracy. I had to trash my introverted personality. Individualism is one of the most famous cultural norms in the U.S. Moreover, folks in this country value diversity and welcome differences between others. On the other hand, in Japan, people have a Collectivist culture and value being inconspicuous, as represented by the famous Japanese quote, “The stake that sticks out gets hammered in.” Whereas both cultures have pros and cons, this experience widened my perspective on how to interpret my own culture and respect diversity and inclusion.

Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles

Another of my ambitions to study in the U.S. is to learn Japanese American history and culture. In December 2023, I visited the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. This has been my longtime wish since I was an undergraduate student. From 1942 to 1946, there were violations of basic human rights in the incarceration camps in desolate areas, such as no

bathroom doors and the deprivation of the right to own housing. Despite the unbearable hardships they faced, their persistence made me admire them. They celebrated New Year's Day by making rice cakes from subsistence farming and trying to preserve Japanese traditional culture. The significance of Japanese American history is underappreciated by most Japanese. I hope to work on raising awareness of Japanese American history for Japanese.

Conclusion

In conclusion, throughout the two quarters, I established the foundation to conduct health research independently, working on coursework and research. I am very lucky to have an environment in which I can explore my intellectual curiosity. I will pursue my next academic goals to strengthen my research and leadership skills and resolve global issues in gerontology.

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