

Sotaro Shimada
Sasakawa Nursing Fellowship 2024 Progress Report

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Overview and Purpose

I would like to introduce my annual report on a doctoral course at the University of Illinois Chicago. My goal is to contribute to creating a society where everyone can live as they wish while illnesses are controlled and recognize aging as a joyful process in life. To achieve this goal, I have chosen pain as a research topic for my dissertation and aspired to get supervision from my advisor at UIC. I aim to cultivate the skills and knowledge related to advanced statistics, leadership, scientific thinking, and project management through the doctoral coursework.

Coursework

Most of my classes were mandated for graduation; therefore, all my classmates were from my cohorts.

- Philosophy of Science for Health Research (2024 Fall)

In this class, we traced the development of scientific reasoning and explanation from Aristotle to Feyerabend to build the foundation of knowledge and the role of truth in health research. Every week, we were assigned to read the books or articles of the philosopher and answer questions related to readings, like “What’s the difference between induction and deduction?” or “What is the scientific inquiry for Karl Popper?”. Each student was assigned a philosopher for the presentation and asked to provide a lecture to other students. Since the students gave lectures, we liked interactive communication to deepen our understanding of what philosophers meant by their arguments.

- Developing Literature Reviews (2024 Fall)

In this class, we could learn how to conduct a rigorous literature review, synthesize the literature, and draft a literature review manuscript. We were mandated to submit a draft of our review manuscript by the end of the class, which was very practical, but the schedules were incredibly tight. We could learn how to write review articles from nursing researchers, peers, librarians, and a statistician with adhesive support from faculty; this enabled us to manage the schedules of the study project. Thanks to those, I successfully submitted the systematic review written during the class, and I am now working on the meta-analysis paper with the statistician who gave the lecture in the class.

- Biometrics and Applied Statistics (2024 Fall)

This class covered fundamental knowledge of descriptive and inferential statistics using STATA software. We watched e-learning and answered small quizzes to prepare for the lecture and group work. The class had a mid-term exam and a final exam. We were asked to run the statistical analysis following the questions and interpret the results in those exams.

- Oral Communication for ITAs (2024 Fall)

This class was not mandatory for graduation; however, I was required to take it to work as an international teaching assistant. This class aimed to improve the overall ability to communicate in English in an academic setting. In the class, we learned how to give lectures, speak with undergraduate students, and make good presentations. This class covered everything we needed to work as a teaching assistant. In particular, I have found that “positive sandwiches,” which is a technique to wrap the suggestion with positive

feedback, are very important for communication in the US. As our classmates were all international students, we also enjoyed the exchange culture.

- Multivariate Analysis for Health Science (2025 Spring)

This is an ongoing class. This course focuses on the application of relatively advanced statistical methods (e.g., MANCOVA, CFA, and mediation) to datasets for secondary analysis provided by our advisors. Using the datasets, we conduct imputation to interpretation step by step and give the presentation to students. Deliverables from this class could be published or presented at the conference. As the skills and knowledge we can learn in this class are essential for the dissertation, we engage with the class to make the project publishable.

- Theory & Theory Development for Nursing Research (2025 Spring)

This is an ongoing class. We learn how nursing theories were developed and how we should apply the theories and theoretical frameworks to our research and practice in nursing. We discuss assigned papers every week and conduct concept analysis and theory evaluations of how these could improve. Also, guest speakers give us ideas on how to apply theories to research. Students conduct either concept analysis or evaluate published theories relevant to our dissertations. This class also requires us to submit the manuscripts by the end of class.

- Research Design and Methods (2025 Spring)

This is an ongoing class. In the class, we can study how to build research projects aligned with our research questions by learning analysis of research design and methods,

including validity, reliability, sampling, quantitative and qualitative methods, research ethics, and interpretation. Each week, we have an interactive lecture related to the topic. Meanwhile, we have a research project about a dissertation published by UIC alumni.

Goal for next year

Overall, I regard this year as a preparation year for the overall PhD coursework, learning the foundation of a nursing researcher. Next year, I will try to sharpen my expertise in pain research and further learn various types of analysis and research methodologies to contribute to the society I desire by conducting impactful cutting-edge research.

Life in Chicago

I reside in Chicago, a metropolis nestled in the Midwestern United States. As one of the nation's largest cities, Chicago enhances a rich tapestry of cultural backgrounds, earning its reputation as a "salad bowl" of diversity. While the summer climate here is more pleasant than that of Japan, winter can be awful, with temperatures plunging to -20 degrees. I reside in Chicago, a metropolis nestled in the Midwestern United States. As one of the nation's largest cities, Chicago enhances a rich tapestry of cultural backgrounds, earning its reputation as a "salad bowl" of diversity. While the summer climate here is more pleasant than that of Japan, winter can be awful, with temperatures plunging to -20 degrees.

Since I lived in the US, I expected to notice some cultural differences compared to Japan. However, I was surprised by the contrast between Seattle, where I used to live, and Chicago, which has its own unique culture. I can't exactly explain why, but I loved the distinct atmosphere in each city. Initially, I assumed I needed to adapt to the local culture and immerse myself in its customs. However, I soon realized that I don't have to adjust completely— only I needed was to acknowledge and accept the differences. I embrace these differences, and others seem to appreciate my perspective as well. By valuing diversity, we allow our perspectives to grow and enjoy a wider range of choices. For example, back in Japan, I only cooked Japanese, Chinese, or Italian dishes, but now, with a friend who prepares Thai, Korean, and Ghanaian meals and shares recipes with me, I have many more dinner options. In the book “Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking,” the author emphasizes the importance of sharing different viewpoints. While not every idea is perfect, exposure to various perspectives can refine our thinking. I've come to truly appreciate the value of diversity and the richness it brings to life. This experience is truly unique and profoundly valuable to me.

Acknowledgments

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