

# **Sasakawa Nursing Fellow 2024 Annual Report**

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## **I. Fall Semester**

The goal for the fall semester was to build a foundational understanding of public health and develop the ability to engage in discussions with classmates with that knowledge. This report provides an overview of my academic progress and new perspectives gained during the semester.

### **1. Academic Learnings**

In the Research Methods and Applications course, I learned not only about the application of various research methods but also the importance of interpreting mathematical and statistical concepts in epidemiology. Understanding why specific formulas are used and how they should be interpreted deepened my appreciation for the epidemiology field. Additionally, I realized that the epidemiology I learned in Japan was basic and did not capture the subject in depth. Given that public health nurses require strong epidemiological knowledge to accurately assess population health using data, I hope to contribute to improving the Japanese education system's approach to teaching epidemiology in the future.

The Foundations of Public Health course covered the history, ethics, and human rights aspects of public health. I was particularly struck by how historical racial discrimination continues to influence health disparities and by the close relationship between public health and politics. At times, I found it challenging to reconcile ideal policies with real-world constraints, highlighting the difficulties of implementing equitable healthcare solutions.

The Health Systems course provided insight into the history of the U.S. healthcare system and how different countries' healthcare policies are shaped by cultural, historical, and national values. The Determinants of Health course examined factors influencing health from biological, sociological, and environmental perspectives. I gained a deeper understanding of the impact of chemical exposure on health and the disparities caused by socioeconomic status and geographical location. In Global and Developmental Perspectives course, I explored global health disparities and the efforts made to address them, reinforcing the importance of a worldwide perspective in public health practice.

Despite the overwhelming complexity of public health issues, the Public Health Interventions course helped me recognize the importance of long-term, incremental efforts to create meaningful change in the public health field. In the Integration of Science and Practice course, I refined my critical thinking skills through small group discussion. Through this course, I became more aware of my own thought patterns and learned to engage more flexibly with differing viewpoints.

### **2. New Perspectives: Balancing Individual Freedom and Collective Benefit**

In Japan, collective benefit tends to take precedence over individual freedoms, as was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where mask-wearing and vaccination faced little public opposition. However, at Columbia University, I encountered many perspectives that emphasized individual freedom over collective benefit. One discussion on HIV transmission through blood transfusion was particularly eye-opening. While I initially thought that high-risk groups should

be excluded from blood donation for safety reasons, many classmates argued that such exclusion constitutes discrimination and that all donors should be screened equally, even if the sensitivity and predictive value of the tests are imperfect. This experience helped me recognize that my perspective, prioritizing collective safety, was not necessarily the dominant viewpoint in global discussions. I came to appreciate the importance of listening to diverse opinions and considering multiple perspectives.

### 3. Racial Issues in Public Health: Considerations for Japan

Through my coursework, I learned how historical racial discrimination continues to shape health disparities today. Initially, the stratification of many studies by race left me perplexed, but as I delved deeper into systemic inequities, I realized that such analysis is essential for identifying and addressing disparities. While race-based disparities are less pronounced in Japan, increasing immigration to Japan suggests that this perspective will become increasingly relevant in the future.

### 4. Fall Semester Summary

This semester deepened my understanding of the complexities of public health and the value of engaging with classmates from diverse cultural backgrounds. I gained a broader perspective on balancing individual and collective interests, as well as on the historical and systemic factors shaping health disparities. Moving forward, I aim to maintain a critical and adaptable approach to public health challenges and work towards long-term, meaningful change.

## II. Spring Semester

The goals for the spring semester are to deepen my understanding of epidemiology, gain research experience, expand my knowledge in mental health, and engage with diverse communities through advocacy and outreach activities.

### 1. Academic Learnings

The Leadership Development and Integration of Science and Practice II courses allowed me to explore my communication and leadership styles while also increasing my awareness of bias and discrimination. By discussing these topics with peers, I developed a more flexible and open mindset towards understanding different perspectives.

In the Analysis of Categorical Data course, I further deepened my understanding of statistical methods, focusing on the rationale behind specific analytical approaches. The Applications of Epidemiologic Research Methods course provided hands-on experience with the SAS statistical software for data analysis. The Epidemiology II: Design and Conduct of Observational Epidemiology course emphasized team-based learning, reinforcing my understanding that epidemiology requires critical human reasoning beyond simple calculations—something AI cannot fully replace.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Care course examined the lifelong impact of ACEs and the importance of creating physically, psychologically, and socially safe environments during childhood. I will be collaborating with a Community-Based Organization (CBO) to deliver Trauma-Informed Care training sessions to staff members, and I look forward to working directly with community members.

## 2. Extracurricular Activities: Trauma Free NYC Student Advocacy Group and Student Well-Being Collective

This semester, I was appointed as the President of Trauma Free NYC Student Advocacy Group, an organization dedicated to raising awareness about trauma and mental health issues while advocating for policy change and community support. Moving forward, I am planning to collaborate with CBOs, students from other healthcare disciplines, and student-led community initiatives to develop impactful advocacy projects. Through this role, I aim to contribute meaningfully to public health practice and positively influence the well-being of vulnerable populations.

Additionally, I joined the Student Well-Being Collective, a group focused on enhancing student well-being through institutional initiatives. Working alongside faculty and staff, I plan to advocate for better support systems that prioritize students' mental health and overall well-being.

## 3. Spring Semester Summary

Now I am halfway through completing the Spring semester. Over the next few months, I plan to further engage in extracurricular activities, gain practical experience in community public health initiatives, and integrate these real-world insights into my academic studies. Additionally, I aim to apply my epidemiology and statistical skills to a mental health-related research project during my summer practicum training, further bridging the gap between theory and practice.

By leveraging my academic and advocacy experiences, I hope to contribute to meaningful change in public health and mental health care, both in the U.S. and Japan.