

Sasakawa Nursing Fellow Progress Report 2026

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2nd year PhD program

March 27, 2026

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This report summarizes my progress as a second-year doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Joe C. Wen School of Nursing. Since last March, significant progress has been made. I would like to express my gratitude to the Sasakawa Nursing Fellowship Program for supporting my academic journey. The experiences I have gained over the past years have greatly enriched my knowledge, broadened my perspective, and enhanced my critical and analytical thinking, enabling me to view the world more holistically. My passion for advancing nursing science has deepened through intellectual engagement with my cohort, faculty, and community engagement. I have shifted my research focus, which I will explain below, to concentrate on people living with HIV, particularly those experiencing homelessness. I plan to investigate cognitive function and its relationship to healthcare engagement among this population, with a future focus on aging individuals living with HIV.

Academic Journey

Spring 2025

During Spring 2025, we studied nursing theory, concepts, quantitative methodology, and Statistics, with a focus on longitudinal analysis using SPSS. In the quantitative methodology course, we developed a mock study and wrote a brief proposal as a final project. We learned to assess the validity and reliability of study designs and methodologies to ensure project rigor. The contents of this course were closely connected with the statistics course, where we used secondary data to run analytical models based on research questions. We understood that planning an analytic model is critical to generating rigorous results from participant data. Additionally, the concept and theory courses taught us how to evaluate individual concepts and their interrelations in formulating conceptual and theoretical framework. Understanding the meanings of theories and their underlying concepts, as well as

the relationships among them, was particularly insightful, as it helped clarify the scope and direction of my thinking regarding my research question. In response to the Los Angeles wildfires of January 2025, my cohort and I collaborated on a manuscript, conducting a concept analysis of *Disaster Preparedness in Nursing* as a final project. This process revealed how a single concept can carry varied meanings, posing challenges to maintaining coherence and rigor in research findings, and how a more precise conceptual definition may strengthen the integrity of theory-guided studies. The theory guides studies to maintain consistency and logical coherence. This exposure to analyzing concepts and applying theory to my research question stimulated my intellectual curiosity and reminded me of the significance and power of nursing.

During this period, we prepared for the Written Qualifying Exam, designed to assess our knowledge and skills acquired over the year and readiness to advance. The exam involved an integrated literature review, including the identification of relevant nursing theories and philosophical underpinnings to guide the review. My topic focused on palliative care among older adults diagnosed with heart failure in both non-rural and rural areas. I screened over 1,500 articles and identified 26 relevant studies for my review. The findings revealed critical gaps in knowledge regarding quality of life dimensions and spiritual well-being, which may influence individuals' attitudes toward palliative care. While my study showed that goal-of-care conversations are limited for older adults with heart failure, particularly in early stages, whether patients are prepared for these conversations has been overlooked. This project provided a valuable opportunity to build confidence in conducting literature reviews independently. I was honored to receive notification of passing the exam, which qualified me for a Master's degree in Nursing.

Fall 2025

In this quarter, we were expected to develop ideas for our dissertation topics. Based

on these topics, we deepened our knowledge in measurement analysis, advanced statistics (a selective course for students conducting quantitative dissertations), and grant writing.

Through the measurement course, we learned about the various measurements used across related studies and how to assess their validity and reliability, which are essential for conducting research. In the statistics course, I had the opportunity to analyze MIDUS datasets and perform secondary data analysis as a final project using R. This experience expanded my understanding of the possibilities and challenges inherent in secondary data analysis. Given the considerable effort and time invested by participants and researchers in creating nationally available datasets, researchers must acquire skills to utilize these data effectively to benefit those in need of care.

Grant writing was eye-opening, as its writing style differed significantly from what we had learned previously. We had to be concise while making compelling points to capture readers' attention rather than expanding the narrative. To write confidently, I learned that rigorous methodology aligned with the research statement, aims, theoretical framework, and methodology, while acknowledging potential limitations and strategies to minimize them, is a critical skill. I greatly appreciate the faculty members whose extensive knowledge guides us toward becoming successful nursing scientists.

Winter 2026

Our program requires completion of three cognate courses before advancing to candidacy. As I was interested in qualitative methodology, I enrolled in courses related to qualitative methods through the Community Health and Anthropology departments. In the qualitative methodology course, we completed a group project in 10 weeks that involved in-depth interviews, observational studies, and development of mock proposals, including mock IRB submissions. Our team focused on e-scooter safety on campus. We interviewed a student who had used e-scooters on campus and observed several locations where many

e-scooter riders congregate. We learned that employing multiple approaches deepened our understanding of the phenomenon, with both expected and unexpected themes emerging and informed better future directions. Collaborating with students from different departments was particularly refreshing, and the public health perspective helped me view the phenomenon through diverse lenses.

Another course from the Anthropology department, “Health and Culture in the Americas,” was fascinating. We were assigned three books to read, wrote reflection papers, and led class discussions on one of the books. Reading anthropological work was a different experience from scientific literature; I found myself drawn into the authors’ stories, imagining what they might have seen or felt, and sometimes feeling a personal connection. We also completed projects for the midterm and final exams. We could select a region in Latin American countries to focus on. I chose Brazil. I discovered the fragility of the country, where political decisions significantly impact individuals’ daily experiences. I seek to deepen my understanding of marginalized populations facing substantial political burdens, to examine the influence of politics on health, and to explore how nursing scientists can contribute to more effective policy development.

Independent Study

At the beginning of winter quarter 2026, I shifted my research focus after meeting a faculty member whose research centers on HIV behavioral health. Drawing on my experience as a nurse at the AIDS Clinical Center in Tokyo, I have maintained a strong commitment to serving this population. The pilot project provides housing and financial services to people living with HIV (PWH) who are experiencing housing instability. I was given the opportunity to contribute to this study by examining cognitive impairment and its relationship to healthcare engagement among participants. In Los Angeles, the number of homeless individuals exceeded 75,518 (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2023). HIV and

homelessness are interconnected, as PWH face an increased risk of housing instability, while unhoused individuals have a higher risk of HIV infection (Aidala et al., 2016). Furthermore, cognitive impairment among PWH and those experiencing housing instability is an emerging concern but often overlooked (Dobbins & Chodos, 2023). I am currently conducting a literature review, which I will present at the Western Institute of Nursing conference in April. Additionally, I am preparing an IRB proposal and developing chapters for my exam to advance to candidacy in September.

Conclusion

Over the past two years of my PhD journey, I have gained an unimaginable breadth of knowledge, skills, and experiences that have fundamentally shaped who I am as a scholar and a nurse. Looking back, I could not have imagined where I stand today. This growth would not have been possible without the unwavering support of those who have walked alongside me: those who sent me off with such warmth and grace, my family, my new friends and colleagues, and the faculty at UCLA who have continuously challenged and inspired me. I remain deeply committed to exploring the unlimited opportunities ahead, contributing to society, and advancing nursing science to bring health equity to those who need it most.

Acknowledgment

I am sincerely grateful for the generous support of the Sasakawa Nursing Fellowship Program, which enabled me to devote myself fully to my doctoral studies at UCLA. This fellowship has not simply funded my education, but it has restored possibilities I had long stopped allowing myself to pursue. I am honored to carry this support forward as I continue to pursue opportunities for professional and scholarly growth and work toward advancing nursing science in Japan and beyond.

References

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