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**Sasakawa Nursing Fellow**

**Academic Year 2025-2026**

**Progress Report**

## **1. Purpose and Overview**

I am writing to report on my academic progress at Johns Hopkins University. I am currently a second-year Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH) student in the Department of Health, Behavior and Society at the Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland, US. Previously, I worked as a nurse in Japan, where I witnessed significant health disparities among patients. These experiences inspired me to pursue further studies to address health disparities through the lens of health communication. As a result, I enrolled in the MSPH program in Health Education and Health Communication at this distinguished institution.

My program consists of one year of intensive coursework followed by a year dedicated to a field placement and the completion of a field placement research proposal project. This year, I have engaged in a six-month field placement and completed my field placement research proposal, through which I have gained significant hands-on experience as a graduate research student.

## **2. Academic experiences**

I completed the coursework required for my degree in the first year and have since begun a field placement as a research assistant at a research center within Johns Hopkins University. Since March 2025, I have been fortunate to work on research projects that align closely with my interest in vaccines and to collaborate with and learn from exceptionally talented supervisors and colleagues. I have been involved in a global vaccine project and have contributed to a scoping review, a mixed-methods study, a qualitative study, and a quantitative study. I always try to respond to my supervisor within ten minutes of her email to demonstrate promptness, and I work hard to keep the project moving forward as much as I can as a graduate researcher. It has been a year since I started, and my supervisor has nominated me as Graduate Student Employee of the Year and remarked that I work like a faculty member. This is a great honor and has motivated me to contribute even more to the project. Although my spoken English is not perfect and can be a disadvantage at times, I remind myself that there are always other ways to contribute.

In addition to this, finding the right position was a long journey. Although a full-time, six-month field placement was required for graduation, every student in my course had to find their own placement. In my case, it took almost a year to find a position that would accept me. Many projects were terminated because of funding cuts during that time, so there were fewer opportunities than before, and international students also faced visa issues. I emailed professors countless times, went through several interviews, and was rejected more than ten times. In the end, I found a position that fits me perfectly, and the journey to get here was one of the most important lessons learned from my time in the US. “Rejection is redirection” is my motto now. Even if you are rejected many times, those rejections can lead you in the right direction—to a place that suits you better. This gives me motivation and energy to pursue my dreams.

I also worked as a teaching assistant for a health communication course in my department. A fellow teaching assistant kindly recommended me, and I worked in the role for one term. Through the course, I learned how teaching practices can differ, for example, in grading and accommodations that I could not have seen while in Japan. If I were in a teaching position in the future, this would help me adopt different aspects. It was a valuable, hands-on learning experience under a professor's guidance.

### **3. Living Aspect**

Studying abroad at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore has given me wonderful opportunities to enrich both my personal life and my academic network. Because my program is two years, I have grown much closer to my cohort during the second year. Additionally, I have been working with graduate researchers on the same project as a research assistant, which has strengthened our relationship and made me feel like a real colleague. As I settled in, I began exploring Baltimore's cafés, watching musicals, and taking a one-day trip to New York with friends to see theater productions. My interest in musicals and opera was sparked during my time in the US, and I am thoroughly enjoying this newfound appreciation of the arts and culture.

### **4. Acknowledgement**

I am deeply grateful to the Sasakawa Health Foundation for their generous scholarship, which has made this invaluable experience at Johns Hopkins University possible. With their continued support, I have been able to devote myself fully to my studies. I am especially thankful that the foundation made it possible for me to study abroad with my husband. His presence and support have given me emotional strength and a sense of fulfillment throughout this journey. I am committed to working even harder to contribute to improving health outcomes both in Japan and globally by integrating my academic knowledge and nursing expertise after graduation.