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URA Fall 2024 Reflection Blog

In this past Fall 2024 semester, I had the opportunity to be a part of the HCAP URA program where we went through an intricate process of pre-planning to learn research skills to be honed during the planning stage. This pre-planning process involved reading and analyzing existing literature to learn methods of research and how we can shape our own research skills. This process also involved a meeting with a librarian in the Hunter College library to discuss how to build proper research questions to express our topics of interest concisely.

During our planning process, one thing I really appreciated from my peers was their willingness to share their own points of views and provide anecdotes despite the sensitivity of the topics we were discussing. By hearing their own stories, I was able to gain insight into what I wanted our research to focus on. This would also serve to foster my own willingness to be vulnerable, making this experience more meaningful and unique. Because we all had so many ideas and experiences, one of the challenges that we saw was not being overzealous and being able to focus on creating one research question that was sufficient to our needs and curiosity. By putting our thoughts onto a board and then taking topics on the board and putting them together, we were able to come up with a research question that we all wanted to work on. Once we came up with the research question, we were even more motivated to begin our next stop of creating a master protocol to conduct our interviews with.

Personally, the interview process was my favorite part of this project. We conducted semi-structured interviews with a person of our choosing following the master protocol. This process was especially rewarding because it reinforced the relevance of our topic as each of our interviewees felt comfortable enough to get vulnerable with us. It told us that this research question we created and everything else we did wasn't for naught, and that this topic was one worth pursuing further. Hearing the stories from our interviewees, we highlighted points relevant to our question and to ourselves as researchers.

Overall, this program taught me a lot about the importance of social research and some of the skills necessary to properly conduct research that can have a lasting social impact. This was one of the first times I had discussed mental health with other people and the first time I have ever created an experiment for researching mental health, and I can say it was a very memorable and rewarding experience to have. It sparked an interest in me I never knew I had! Hopefully in the future I can use what I've learned here and pursue more research to foster a positive impact to my community.