

Being an undergraduate research assistant for HCAP has been the highlight of my Spring semester. Through this opportunity, on one hand, I gained valuable insights into the challenges Asian American students face when choosing their majors and careers, and on the other hand, had the chance to learn many research skills and connect with other students who share a similar interest in learning about this community and conducting research.

I especially enjoyed reading and analyzing the academic articles, which revealed many important themes. For example, family conflict over career decisions is common in Asian American families, where parents consider career choices that are beneficial to the whole family instead of considering the children's personal skills and interests. Since going against parents' wishes can be seen as a failure to fulfill one's obligation, many students ask for help from friends, relatives and role models for support in case of disapproval. Another theme common to Asian American students is lack of resources to help make career decisions. Academic advising is viewed as a helpful way to learn more about career choices related to majors and personal interests and skills. However, traditional advising focuses on careers that make one happy instead of considering cultural stigma and family expectation, which are important for Asian American students when making a career decision. They are also not well prepared when it comes to networking and interviewing as they tend to under-utilize career counseling services. This learning not only helped me gain a better understanding of the importance of a career readiness program but also supported my research by guiding the development of workshop ideas, such as identifying learning outcomes, recommending useful resources, and designing discussions or activities to help students explore their major and career paths. In addition, discussing the articles during our meetings taught me how to critically analyze academic articles and apply those insights directly to our research and program planning.

The other part of this program that really intrigued me was conducting the interview as it was my first time doing so. I learned a lot starting from training to preparing and finally conducting and analyzing the interview for our workshop. Through the human subject research training I acquired knowledge, especially about ethical considerations, informed consent, and other protocols. In addition, preparing for the interview taught me how to design open-ended questions that invite detailed, thoughtful responses, and I developed valuable skills in active listening and adjusting my approach such as asking questions in a different way or probing during the interview. Although I was nervous at first conducting an interview, it turned out to be a rewarding experience. I learned a lot from hearing my interviewee's personal story and how factors such as meeting family and societal expectations, good salary and availability of jobs influenced their academic and career choices. During the interview my interviewee also pointed out the lack of mentoring, advising and resources for learning about majors and careers. When analyzed, these responses echoed what was learned from the academic articles and added insights to what I understood from theory. Both of these findings helped shape the resources that would be included in the workshop.

The final thing we did for the workshop, which I think was interesting, was looking for resources at Hunter College and other universities, which could be used for the career readiness program. At Hunter College, there are different resources available that can help students learn more about majors and careers. Some of them are samples for resume, cover letter, career center, advising, mentoring and workshops dedicated for informing students about different internship and fellowship opportunities. When navigating the career related website, it was found that almost all of the universities have self-assessment tests through which students can find their interests and skills and they all highly prioritize students to meet with an advisor and have many resources dedicated to advising. There were also some colleges that organized a four-year plan for students as they navigate their major and career path. In addition, there were samples for emails about asking for jobs and interviews, resume, cover letter and interview tips. It was a great learning experience because I got an opportunity to learn to use databases for research and through comparing and learning more about what other colleges are using, was able to select some resources that might be beneficial for the students attending the workshop.

In fact, reading the articles and my interviewee's personal story resonated a lot with my own experiences of finding my major and career path as a first-generation undergraduate student. While choosing my major, I had to consider job opportunities, salary, the status associated with certain professions and my family's expectations. When we discussed the readings and were sharing the interviews during the meeting, we discovered that many of us had faced similar challenges. These conversations created a strong sense of oneness and helped me realize that these struggles were not unique, but part of a broader and shared experience within the Asian American community. The research we conducted as a part of this program was very impactful and really inspired me to engage in similar research in the future. The skills I learned from this program such as critical analysis of academic articles, navigating databases for research, designing workshops using literature and students' personal experiences and interview skills, will help me a lot in my journey to medical school and conducting research. I plan to pursue mentoring opportunities in the future, and I believe that understanding the unique challenges faced by Asian American students—such as the cultural stigma around seeking help and the pressure to choose a career path that aligns with family expectations—will enable me to support them more effectively. In addition, learning about this community and their cultural values will allow me to provide them with socially-responsible care, attenuated to their needs, which I believe will help to bridge the gap that exists in providing care to the patients from these communities. The interview skills I learned from the program will help me conduct future interviews with patients as well as with clinical research that requires interviewing participants to learn about the effectiveness of certain treatments or drugs. Overall, this program has equipped me with many skills essential for my academic and professional success.