

This past fall, I had a wonderful semester working as an undergraduate research assistant (URA) for the Hunter College AANAPISI Project (HCAP) under the guidance of Dr. Liu. This role not only deepened my understanding of research methodologies but also opened my eyes to the nuanced mental health challenges faced by Asian American college students.

Joining HCAP, I was excited to immerse myself in the world of academic research as someone who wishes to pursue mental health research in the future. Alongside a few fellow URAs, we started off with first reading different case studies on Asian American college students to broaden our perspectives and get our thinking juice flowing. We explored both general and niche studies, such as those focusing on Hmong women and Tamil families. Every week, we reflected on these case studies, working towards disassembling and reassembling them—breaking them down and then building them up again to see how each of us understood the material.

Dr. Liu, with her extensive expertise, provided us with a solid foundation in research ethics, data collection, and analysis techniques. We also learned to navigate the abundance of articles and journals in the research world. This stage of our research journey was instrumental in honing our research skills and fostering a sense of—dare I say—camaraderie among the team.

A fulfilling part of my experience was collaborating with my fellow URAs. We each brought unique perspectives and backgrounds, which amplified our collective understanding of the issues at hand. Weekly group discussions and collaborative analysis helped us identify patterns and themes that might have gone unnoticed, with Dr. Liu encouraging us to think critically about our findings and consider their broader implications. Personally, I loved these discussions the most, as they allowed me to wrap my head around each person's perspective.

One of the most impactful aspects of my role was conducting interviews with Asian American college students. After learning how to conduct interviews and create our questions, our group crafted our interview questions and script. We even took time to practice interviewing each other and being mindful of how we conducted ourselves as interviewers. We then scouted Asian American interviewees from our college, Hunter College, and coincidentally, they all had a South Asian background. This coincidence added a comedic twist to our study, as it could also be seen as a case study on South Asian American college students and mental health.

Listening to their stories, we noticed common themes of personal and familial pressure to succeed, cultural expectations, and the struggle of balancing dual identities. Through these conversations, I gained a profound understanding of the barriers these students face in seeking mental health support. It became clear that while academic pressure is a universal experience, the added layer of parental expectations creates a unique stressor for Asian American students where they feel lonely in dealing with their personal struggles. This insight was not just enlightening,

but also deeply reassuring in a weird way, highlighting that really, the struggles that Asian American students have with mental health aren't singular experiences, but ones that are very real and in need of addressing.

As a South Asian American student, looking back, this semester was a tough one. I was frequently reminded of my approaching graduation date and the uncertainty of my career path. Engaging in mental health research for students brought personal gratification and many realizations. Ethnic communities and cultural ideas are very dear to me, and I am thankful for the opportunity to research this topic. My role as a URA provided a much-needed sense of relief and direction, giving me more certainty in pursuing research and staying curious.