

The reason I became an Aging Studies major can be directly attributed to my Japanese maternal grandmother, Nanny Rumi. To me, Nanny Rumi was the ultimate example of an individual growing older in a positive way. I admired her indomitable, hopeful spirit, which enabled her to survive three cancers and to find no limitation in her need to use oxygen. She showed me that elders not only have much to share from their diverse life experiences, but that they are also fully capable of being lifelong learners.

However, I did not begin my academic career at Ithaca College in Aging Studies. Instead, I started out as a Physical Therapy major. After completing a summer of gross anatomy and a fall semester of clinical-based physical therapy courses, I realized that a clinical profession is not the best match for me. Luckily, I had picked up a minor in Gerontology my sophomore year after taking Introduction to Aging Studies, a class that furthered my understanding of the diversity of the rapidly-growing elder population. The transition was easy.

What initially attracted me to the Aging Studies program was the highly personable interaction that gerontology students receive from faculty members. As well, in addition to the school's local partnerships and variety of courses, its fieldwork and volunteer opportunities have allowed me to form intergenerational relationships in the Ithaca community and beyond.

For example, I participated in fieldwork at Longview, a local senior residential community, in which I volunteered with the Adult Day Program. My duties included anything from practicing Tai Chi with residents to enjoying lunch with light conversation to making crafts and other projects—all activities to promote social, physical, and cognitive stimulation. It was my first time being immersed amongst elders who had some form of cognitive or physical impairment, and I have continued to visit Longview at least once a week ever since. Also, due to its convenient location and partnership with Ithaca College, I have had several other opportunities to become involved with Longview and its residents throughout my years of study.

I have discovered that gerontology is more than a rewarding academic discipline. It consists of addressing the challenges of those who are growing older, helping to maintain the quality of their lives, and enjoying the wit, wisdom, and creativity of the elder persons. Through volunteering at several local long-term care retirement facilities, I have witnessed how members of a community can benefit from service to elders. Last, I have enhanced my own perspective on aging and insight into the aging of my family members.

Recently, I have accepted the prestigious Congressional Budget Office (CBO) summer health policy internship position as part of the Health and Human Resources Division. Being selected for this particular internship as an undergraduate student is a true honor, and is also a credit to the strong academic program through Ithaca College. I am excited for this learning opportunity to gain valuable insight and experience in understanding the power of governmental agencies to affect positive change with regards to health care programs.

What does the future hold for me? I predict a career choice in an independent, non-partisan and potentially non-governmental agency that serves elders in order to positively influence legislation and policies that affect their lives. I am confident that regardless of the organization I work for, my career and work will continue to be defined by the meaningful interactions I share with elders, our society's teachers of life.