Theodora You: Undergraduate Nursing Student Profile

Serving as a two-time Student Nurses’ Association (SNA) at UH Manoa president, Theodora You has found a way to lean on her support systems (and organizational skills) to thrive personally and academically while pursuing her dreams of becoming a certified nurse anesthetist. She fills us in on her journey at the Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing (NAWSON) (previously known as the Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing (NAWSON)).

Q: What brought you to NAWSON?
A: After high school, my intention was to leave Hawaii to attend college. I applied for a ton of different nursing programs all over the United States and toured several schools. I applied for the Direct Entry Program through NAWSON at UHM (University of Hawaii at Manoa) after a brief conversation with my high school guidance counselor, the idea being that should I get in, it would be a sign that I should stay in Hawaii for undergrad. Upon hearing I was accepted and after examining all my financial options and coming to UHM for a campus visit, I decided that it wouldn’t be such a bad idea to stay close to family and home.

Q: What have you liked most about your time here?
A: My time here has been challenging but very rewarding. The most enjoyable parts of the last couple of years have been the relationships I have formed within NAWSON as well as the personal growth I have worked toward. There is something
really special about learning so much in such a short amount of time with people who are going through the same things you are. Friendship comes easily when you have common mindsets and experiences.

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Q: How did you feel about your journey in nursing before you began school, and how do you feel now?

A: Before I began nursing school, I did not have an understanding of the magnitude of work that nursing school is, or the amount of knowledge that I would need to gain. In my experience, nursing school is so immersive and demanding that you become a different person by the end of it. My thought process and lifestyle have changed so much. Now, as I complete my senior year of school, I feel nervous excitement about the prospect of entering the workforce. It’s very challenging to be a new grad nurse in any circumstance, let alone during a pandemic. I am aware that I am very green in some skills and experience, and there seems to be a Mount Everest-sized heap of things I still need to learn.

Q: You have served as SNA president two times. What drove you to pursue the position the first time? The second time?

A: The first time I ran for president of SNA I observed a lot of the students who had formed the core of SNA were older and graduating, which left a leadership vacuum. We were also slated to have a change in faculty advisor so it was a dynamic time. I saw the situation as daunting, but also as a great opportunity to jump headfirst. I actually ended up liking
presidency more than the position I had held previously because it gave me a chance to connect with people from all over UHM and really plug into NAWSON. I chose to run for president a second time because I wanted the chance to have a smoother version of my first year, which was slightly bumpy due to COVID-19 and my inexperience.

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Q: What would you say to a student who wants to get more involved with activities at the school, professionally and/or in the community?

A: I would say that any student who thinks that they might like being more involved should give it a try! Sometimes we can let fear of being in a new social setting or being overwhelmed by work restrain us from getting the most out of an experience, but you are the one who gets to shape your life. I personally did not want to look back at my undergrad years and mourn lost opportunities, so I think if you have the chance to become involved, you should go for it.

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Q: What tips do you have for other nursing students for succeeding in their studies?

A: There are a lot of aspects that contribute to success in nursing school. Personally, I owe a lot to my support systems like my friends, my family, and the foundation I give myself through taking care of my body and mental health. You have to strive for excellence in your organizational skills and the understanding of content in each class. On top of that, I would say nursing school is unique in that you also have to develop critical thinking skills and be prepared for any situation. Nursing school also requires the development of interpersonal social skills as you form relationships with patients and peers. Everything takes practice, and you can’t expect to succeed every time. Sticking with it and doing your best is all that anyone can ask of you.

Q: Tell us about the Regents Scholarship you were awarded?

A: I am a recipient of the Regents Scholarships that is awarded to 20 freshmen each year based on outstanding academic achievement in high school. It is a huge honor to be recognized for my efforts, and the generosity of the Board of Regents has allowed me to continue to devote myself to school full-time. The Regents Scholarship was also influential in the community and relationships I made with my peers during my
first year of college because we were all part of a group and got the chance to dorm together.

**Q: What advice do you have for students seeking scholarships?**

A: When seeking scholarships, you should use the application process to be yourself and provide information that is important to those who make the selection. For most scholarships, there is a huge applicant pool so the determination of who ultimately gets the scholarship could be decided on how gripping or earnest your application is. Does it stick out from all the other applications? I would also advise those seeking scholarships to apply for as many as possible. Once you start looking, you’ll probably find that a lot of scholarships are applicable to your interests, goals or life experiences.

**Q: What are your goals in nursing?**

A: At the moment, I’m very focused on graduating, passing the NCLEX-RN and finding a job. Although it may not be the most traditional path, I would love to start out my career as a new grad in the ICU because I know my interests lie in acute care. Eventually, I would also love to work toward becoming a certified registered nurse anesthetist, because it’s a logical next step for me after bedside nursing. My one, absolute, overarching goal is to become confident and knowledgeable in my practice. As I mentioned earlier, I’m very aware of the deficits I have as a nursing student, and I’m excited to learn a lot and become a true professional in my field.

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Q: What are your plans for achieving your goals?

A: In order to achieve these goals, I plan on continuing to do my best in an academic sense. Graduating school and passing the NCLEX will certainly take some effort. I also plan to be flexible in my job search. I think it’s important to be open to taking paths that you weren’t necessarily planning on. If an opportunity presents itself in a new location or on a different unit than what I had in mind, I would certainly go for it. My time here has shown me that going after new opportunities almost always yields awesome results.

Q: What do you like to do for fun?

A: I try to find a balance between work and life by doing something that brings me joy every day. It doesn’t have to be a big time-consuming event. Listening to a good song, cooking a meal, exercising or watching a movie are examples of what I would do in my free time. If the luxury of having a large amount of time off presents itself, I would go to the beach or spend time with family. On holidays or breaks from school, I have the chance to travel, which is ultimately my favorite thing to do.

Q: Who or what inspires you, and why?

A: I’m inspired by my family who have sacrificed a lot of their own time and resources in making sure I have all the tools I needed to succeed. I want to make sure that I’m in a position to give back to them, so that idea serves as a lot of my motivation for continuing to work hard. I am also inspired by the nurses who I have met during my time in clinical, and the nurses out there who continue to serve their profession during the COVID-19 pandemic. They deserve a lot of recognition for the expertise that they possess and respect for what they have contributed.
I hope my peers view me as a resource and advocate. I’m excited to become a registered nurse so that I may be put in the position to contribute to my community.”

Q: Parting thoughts?

A: Thank you so much for the opportunity to share a bit about myself and my journey through nursing school. I hope my peers view me as a resource and advocate. I’m excited to become a registered nurse so that I may be put in the position to contribute to my community.