

Siddhartha's Academic Journey at GVSU

Coming to the United States at the age of 19 as a young Nepali student, I had one goal: to build a successful future through education. I initially chose to pursue biomedical however, my first year was challenging and I quickly realized that biomedical engineering was not the right path for me. I began exploring other options and while searching through the Grand Valley State University majors page, I came across nursing.

At first, I was hesitant. In Nepal, nursing is traditionally seen as a profession for women, and men becoming nurses is uncommon. My hesitation was not only about the gender expectations in my home country, but also about what people might say. As someone who already identifies as gay, choosing nursing felt like adding another layer of judgment I might face. Despite these concerns, I have always believed in overcoming challenges. I spoke with my parents about my decision to switch to nursing, and I was surprised for how supportive and open they were.

In 2022, I was accepted into the nursing program. On orientation day, I realized that I was the only international student in my cohort. On the first day of class, I also noticed that I was the only brown and international student in the room. Most of my classmates were local and from very different cultural backgrounds, which made it difficult for me to initially connect with them. Another challenge was transportation. I needed to attend clinical placements but did not have a car. Despite our differences, my classmates showed me kindness and patience. Many of them offered to drive me to clinicals throughout my 2.5 years in the program. Their support helped me feel welcomed and included, and it showed me the importance of compassion and community.

I also faced challenges navigating the program as an international student. When I received an externship opportunity, my program was unfamiliar with Curricular Practical Training (CPT), which is required for international students to work off campus. I had to work closely with the program for almost six months before my CPT was approved. Although this process was frustrating at times, it taught me persistence and advocacy for myself.

Originally, I planned to graduate in four years, but changing my major extended my academic journey to five years. My parents were prepared to support me financially for four years, so during my fifth year I had to find ways to support myself. Through scholarships and my role as a Resident Assistant, which covered my housing and meals, I was able to manage my expenses and continue my education.

Now, as a senior nursing student preparing to graduate this May, I am excited for the next chapter. However, there are still financial challenges ahead. I must pay for my NCLEX licensing exam and apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) so that I can work in the United States after graduation. In addition, I will need to relocate and support myself during the months between graduation and starting employment. Receiving this scholarship would greatly help relieve that financial burden and allow me to focus on successfully completing my nursing journey and beginning my career.

My experience as an international student has shaped me in many ways. It has taught me resilience, independence, and the importance of community support. These experiences have not only strengthened me as a student, but they will also guide me as a future nurse who understands the value of empathy, cultural awareness, and perseverance.