

Meet the Fellow

Taryn Rowan

Host Laboratory: New York State Department of Health, Wadsworth Center

Degree of Study: Bachelor's in Biology

Graduation: December 2024

School: State University of New York - New Paltz

Tell us about your educational background?

I have my associate's in public health and my bachelor's in biology. During my undergraduate experience, I had the opportunity to create my own public health inspired degree track by minoring in disaster studies while still gaining foundational biological science knowledge and skills with my biology major. By merging these fields, I try to diversify my knowledge and approach new knowledge through a public health lens. I am also a current graduate student at City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy where I am obtaining my Master of Public Health (MPH) in Epidemiology and Biostatistics.



What brought you into laboratory science?

I hoped to start my public health career in the laboratory to gain foundational disease science skills. I knew epidemiology was the field that I wanted to be in but was unsure what exactly I wanted to do within epidemiology. I wanted to start at the rigorous science and research level of public health to expand upon my new knowledge learned in my current graduate school program.

How did you hear about the Public Health Laboratory Fellowship Program?

I found the fellowship program during my job search as my undergrad experience was coming to an end and decided to apply.

How did this fellowship match or exceed your expectations?

The fellowship program has exceeded my expectations. I feel incredibly supported by my mentor, the New York State Department of Health, Wadsworth Center, and the APHL Fellowship Team. I am grateful, eager, and excited to have the opportunity for clinical lab experience as well as research experience within my specific project.

Tell us what you learned from your mentor.

My mentor has taught and shared with me her knowledge and expertise in HIV and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) biology, clinical testing, and background as it relates to our specific lab and my research project. My mentor has taught me the importance of the Wadsworth Center and how we work to improve public health. Additionally, my mentor has also taught me great leadership skills and has inspired me to want to be a better public health communicator and leader to others that are new to public health science.

Tell us about your project assignments/laboratory roles.

My project is to research, develop, validate and



optimize an assay to detect HIV-1 DNA and RNA using AbsoluteQ digital Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR). Individuals take pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to reduce their risk of HIV infection, and this medication can suppress typical HIV infection markers, making it difficult to detect and determine if someone is truly infected with HIV. We are using digital PCR to detect low levels of HIV-1, with the goal of being able to provide more definitive results to individuals with inconclusive results in the recommended HIV diagnostic testing algorithm. Outside of my research project, I have other clinical and laboratory tasks such as clinical accessioning, attending meetings and seminars to obtain new knowledge, and routine laboratory decontamination.

How has your fellowship experience inspired you?

My fellowship experience has inspired me to continue to work in the public health laboratory sector as I have found that I enjoy it! My fellowship has also inspired me to build upon my knowledge in viruses as I have found that I am greatly interested in this topic and the laboratory that I work in (Bloodborne Viruses), as well as to connect with other neighboring laboratories to learn all of what the Wadsworth Center has to offer.

How would you describe the Fellowship to other students?

I would describe the APHL Fellowship as a student-focused, supportive, educational, and hands-on learning opportunity where students of all levels can learn more about and experience public health laboratories through the multiple different fields that they offer. The fellowship has endless learning opportunities and great leaders that can help connect you to what you are interested in.

Aside from the laboratory and the science, did you gain any other beneficial life experiences?

I have gained great leadership and networking skills during my fellowship so far that have been incredibly helpful in connecting me to those that can further support me in my public health career.