

On an odd Tuesday morning in the middle of July, one of my campers marched up to me, handed me a coiled-up handful of colorful beads, and said, "Here, for you." To my surprise, he made me a friendship bracelet with my name. Despite the "P" in Pauline and "R" cleverly disguised as a "P", I knew the gesture was worth more than anything. This seemingly small action set off a latent chain of reactions on the inside that made me understand teachers' impact on their students and the youth of tomorrow. Especially as someone who values the full-circle moments of education, this was my "I made it moment" and the validation I needed to cement my aspirations to pursue opportunities of mentorship and instruction.

In retrospect, my appreciation for these heartfelt moments stemmed from involvement in sports from volleyball to flag football to swimming. For me, participating in sports was the first step towards acclimating myself to venturing far outside my comfort zone. My connection to athletics permeated all aspects of my life from an introverted high school freshman to now an Aquatics Recreation Manager and student-athlete tutor. As a manager, I have lived out my passion for being at the center of health and well-being. All my culminating passion for community, teaching, and fitness intersected to create the home I now call Rutgers Recreation. By engaging in such a diverse and inclusive community here at Team Rec, I am part of a team whose goal is to create a healthier environment and uplift those around us. Since my early start on the leadership management team, I learned what it truly meant to employ professionalism, empathy, and patience in a capacity so that my fellow student employees could rely on me in times of need. Everything about Rutgers Recreation, from its Zumba classes to The Big Chill to the eventful End of Year TeamRec celebration, these events that reflect the welcoming community of Rutgers Recreation reminds me why I choose to stay and why I choose to take on the responsibility of a student manager.

Speaking from experience, the work culture and the friendships I have formed that transcend grade levels, majors, and nationalities since my first year at Rutgers have become part of my most cherished relationships and memories. Lifeguards come and go; some graduate and some leave independently. However, seeing the staff grow close and then stay close is a feeling I will never forget. I will always do my best to serve the Rutgers community and ensure that everyone has an unforgettable experience, just like I was able to.

Aside from Rutgers Recreation, I have my "found families" in the Japanese Student Association. As an adventurous soul, I knew I would find my way to travel the world and see places instead of just reading about them. My curiosities guided me to Kyoto, Japan, in the summer of 2023, when I participated in the Rutgers University and Ritsumeikan University exchange program. Upon learning the history of World War II from the Asia-Pacific perspective, I became more aware of the complexities of history and the community-oriented mindset of East Asia. Our cohort's mutual appreciation for American and Japanese culture inspired me to join the Rutgers Japanese Student Association (JSA).

The Japanese Student Association (JSA) prides itself on our cultural authenticity in every event we organize and the educational aspect that we weave into the fabric of our club. As an executive board member since 2023, we have collaborated with the Asian Language and Culture Department to curate various events to educate Japanese exchange students and Rutgers students on the deep connection within Rutgers history. As a Political Science major and a student connected to many different organizations across campus, I helped organize lectures with Professor Wakabayashi, such as: "From Studying War to Forging Peace: Building Solidarities between Rutgers and Ritsumeikan" to raise awareness about Japanese American history on campus and to highlight its parallel relationship to what is happening in other regions of the

world. At JSA, we do not just host educational lectures; we also experience history firsthand.

One powerful example is our field trip to Seabrook Farms in South Jersey, where the stories of Japanese-Americans, especially those affected by WWII internment camps, are brought to life.

JSA fosters a strong sense of Japanese community and deeply emphasizes educating others about the intertwined histories of Japan and America. To be able to create a welcoming environment for students far from home is truly one of the most remarkable feats that JSA endeavors year after year. As an exchange student myself, when I was in Japan with no direct relatives living in the country, I could understand how isolating and anxiety-inducing the experience could be, so by utilizing my personal experiences, I empathized with the students and attempted to create a warm and welcoming environment for them. Sometimes, it is the small moments that mean the most. What was at the time, weekly volleyball peppering sessions at the College Ave Gym turned into one of my most treasured and enduring friendships that spans the Pacific Ocean.

Everywhere I go, I carry bits and pieces of everyone I have interacted with, whether it be their stories, values, or even a "Pauline" friendship bracelet. My lived experiences all lead back to the communities that raised me. The full-circle moments of seeing students gain confidence in themselves are the intrinsic rewards that reinforce my direction and drive to pursue opportunities of hopefully teaching English in Thailand (Princeton in Asia) or Taiwan (Fulbright) for the 2025-2026 school year. In doing so, I may share my story and hopefully inspire others to do the same. With my adventurous and outgoing personality, I know that I will live to regret much, as do most people. However, I intend to live a life that I am proud to look back on in a career that continues to reward and challenge me daily. After all, what is knowledge worth if not shared?