

## Unraveling a Paradox: Jose Mazariego's Quest for Health Equity Through Data

**Jose Mazariego, MPH '24**, a current PhD student in Epidemiology, is a public health researcher whose journey from working nights to fund his education to investigating the complex health outcomes of immigrant communities demonstrates how lived experience, advanced methodology, and dedicated fellowship support can create leaders who tackle public health's most nuanced puzzles.



As the recipient of the [Lyndon Haviland Doctoral Fellowship in Migrant Health](#), Jose can fully dedicate himself to his doctoral studies, researching the "Hispanic Paradox" or "Immigrant Health Effect", a data phenomenon showing immigrants often have better health outcomes than native-born citizens. His work aims to understand why, and how that effect differs across immigrant groups, ensuring policies and programs are built on accurate, disaggregated data.

### *Laying the Foundation: A Statistical Mind Meets a Public Health Heart*

Jose's path to public health began with a love of numbers and data science. He earned his undergraduate degree in Statistics and Quantitative Modeling from Baruch College. But a chance encounter with an MPH student introduced him to a new field: Epidemiology.

*"It was the first time I had ever heard of the word epidemiology or had even come across the field, and I was immediately intrigued."*

He began exploring the research and discovered a calling in social epidemiology and the examination of social determinants of health. His statistical background was a perfect fit, but it was his personal experience as an immigrant that provided the crucial context and drive. Seeing health disparities exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic solidified this path, transforming abstract interest into urgent purpose.

*"During the pandemic, I witnessed a funeral nearly every week at our local church, it was heartbreaking, and it was something that really pushed me to accept that epidemiology is what I should be pursuing, specifically working for the immigrant community."*

### *An Academic Community Invested in Access*

For Jose, choosing CUNY SPH for his MPH and later his PhD was a practical and personal decision. Despite acceptance to other top schools, the financial barrier was immense.

*"Cost was one of the biggest factors... I wasn't eligible for loans, I wasn't eligible for financial aid, I wasn't eligible for anything that would help me pay for tuition."*

CUNY SPH not only offered an affordable path, but also a supportive community that understood his background and ambitions. He applied without the typical year of public health work experience, explaining his situation in a personal letter. The school recognized his potential, accepted him, and provided the foundation for his research career.

## *The Haviland Fellowship: A Catalyst for Focus and Freedom*

A pivotal moment in Jose's academic journey came when he was awarded the Haviland Fellowship, encouraged to apply by Professor Heidi Jones after reviewing his doctoral application. For years, he had balanced intense academic work with the demanding reality of funding it himself.

"I started working at Wendy's back when I was in 9th grade... I worked there all through high school, all through community college... When I transferred to Baruch, I was still working there. Through my MPH, I worked until 1AM, 6 days a week, as a manager."

The fellowship changed everything. It provided the financial stability to quit his nighttime job and immerse himself completely in his studies and research.

"The fellowship gives me this huge opportunity to fully focus on my research and my work, and get the most out of my education. I can be deeply engaged and find balance."

This support extended beyond finances, granting him the time and mental space to build a social network and achieve a work-life balance that had been absent since high school --a critical component of achieving the health outcomes he now studies.

## *Mentorship and Research: Disentangling the Immigrant Health Paradox*



Key highlights of Jose's PhD experience have been his mentorship under Professor Mustafa Hussein and his work at the Center for Immigrant, Refugee, and Global Health with Senior Scholar Kathleen Cuevero and other team members. His research focuses on the "Immigrant Health Effect," using advanced methodologies like machine learning and mediation analysis.

"A lot of my research is to try to disentangle that effect to see how it differs among different immigrant groups, such as people who came in as refugees, undocumented immigrants... Most research looks at immigrants as a homogenous whole."

This work is challenging, often relying on publicly available data as collecting new data from vulnerable populations is difficult. His mentors have been instrumental in guiding him through these complexities and helping him refine his focus.

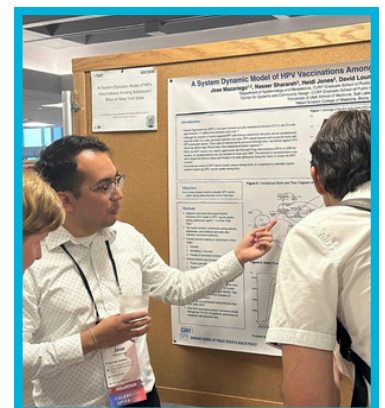
"It has become very ideal, to be honest...I have a community of colleagues and mentors where everybody knows who I am, what my background is, and what I really want to do with my analysis skills."

## *From Fellowship to Future: A Global Vision for Health Equity*

Looking ahead, Jose sees himself as part of a global network of researchers focused on immigrant and migrant health. He recognizes that migration, driven by climate change, conflict, and economic factors, is a defining issue of our time.

"I know the issues I want to tackle are globally relevant and I'm hoping to make changes for immigrant communities to have better health and better access to healthcare."

He aspires to a career in academia or government research institutions, wherever he can best use his skills to advocate for communities like his own, ensuring that research leads to tangible, equitable improvements in health outcomes.



## *The Power of Investing in Students*

Jose's story is a powerful testament to how fellowship support can remove barriers and unlock potential. His advice to future students is rooted in his own experience.

“Never forget where you come from, never forget your own experiences, because that's really what makes a great public health professional, someone who has been there, someone who has experienced those things.”

He sees his work not as an end in itself, but as a means to break down barriers for those who follow.

“I didn't come into the field of public health just to do this research and then move on. It is important to me that my studies and work break down barriers so that other students following behind me don't have to climb those same walls.”

Jose Mazariego's journey from a fast-food manager to a PhD fellow unraveling one of public health's most intriguing paradoxes proves that with the right support, driven students can transform personal conviction into professional excellence, building a healthier, more equitable world for all.

### ***About the Lyndon Haviland Doctoral Fellowship in Migrant Health***

Created by CUNY SPH Foundation Board Chairman and renowned public health leader, Dr. Lyndon Haviland, the Haviland Fellowship is awarded to one student every three years and includes full in-state tuition and an annual stipend of \$35,000. Haviland Fellows are enrolled in a CUNY SPH doctoral program and pursue dissertation topics related to migrant health working with the school's [\*Center for Immigrant, Refugee and Global Health \(CIRGH\)\*](#).

Learn more at [foundation.sph.cuny.edu](https://foundation.sph.cuny.edu).