



Natalie Mo Role Model Profile

PhD Student, School of English and Drama

What is your area of study at Queen Mary? What do you do?

I'm Natalie Mo, an international PhD student with the School of English and Drama. My field of study is Victorian literature. Some fun facts about me include: I review books online on Goodreads; I am the owner of a very pampered cat; I enjoy playing Overwatch (a first-person shooter game) and I often throw down the gauntlet at the start of each match by offering the very controversial statement "cats>dogs."

What is your experience of being disabled at Queen Mary (or in your life more generally)?

I'm from Hong Kong, so living in London was an entirely new experience. My parents didn't want me to get a degree abroad in the first place because they were worried about me being all alone here. I require assistance with daily living and in Hong Kong, I have my family and a live-in support worker. I applied for numerous scholarships/grants and was finally awarded a grant that would help subsidize support worker costs during my time in London. I live on campus (or I did until the pandemic) in an accessible room and a support worker comes by almost every day for 90 minutes to help with physical therapy, daily living activities, and chores. Living alone is still quite difficult because my support worker is only here for a limited time—even a simple act like refilling my water bottle is physically taxing. But I'm eager to advance my career in academia, so it's worth it!

How does Queen Mary support you?

Queen Mary's accessible dorm rooms are fantastic. It's spacious enough for my electric wheelchair to move around and I can also drive it into the bathroom.

How could Queen Mary better support its disabled community?

One of my biggest problems is travel because the Underground is tragically inaccessible for wheelchair users. This particularly impacts my ability to get research materials. The bus ride to Senate House Library and the British Library takes an hour there and back, and I'm frequently lugging heavy loads of books on the way back to make the most of the laborious trip. It would be great if there were a way to request books from those libraries and send them to Queen Mary's library. I know there's an interlibrary loan

system, but I feel guilty about using it because I know it's meant to be a method to get books outside of London. Plus the expensive postal fees are forwarded to my department and I feel bad about using resources for books that an able-bodied person would easily be able to obtain. It'd be great if a specific book loan scheme was created for disabled students for this purpose.

Automatic doors would be fantastic, though understandably expensive. A mobile table specifically for wheelchair users in lecture halls would be amazing too.

Why do you want to be a disabled role model? Why do you think role models are important?

I hope my story can inspire prospective students who may be scared of committing to study abroad due to their disability. We deserve the same opportunities as everyone else. We'll definitely have to do more research beforehand (I have a dozen Word documents on my laptop about funding and disability resources), but once you're here, it's actually not that scary. I won't lie and say it isn't difficult, but it's a worthwhile experience.

What do you want staff and students at Queen Mary to know or understand about disability and the disabled community?

Disability is not a monolith. I use a wheelchair, but I would never presume to be the authoritarian voice of all wheelchair users and assume that my experiences are universal. I think the best way to be an ally to the community is to simply listen because all experiences are different and the best way to create an inclusive society is to ensure all voices are heard.

Simple, everyday ways to help wheelchair users (and this is entirely my opinion) is to hold open doors for us or pull out chairs if we're approaching a table. These tiny gestures can make or break my day.