

Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Programme

Reflective Report

by

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1. Research

When I first heard about the Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Programme, I knew I wanted to do research in nutrition. I didn't know exactly what it would be, but it had to include some nutritional aspect. I first reached out to a researcher I had previously been in contact with. Even though he works at the Genome Center in NYC, I knew he probably had collaborated with researchers in a different field. He kindly put me in contact with two researchers, one of whom was no longer accepting summer students, and Dr. Melissa Davis. I looked into Dr. Davis' lab and research and we eventually organized a virtual meeting. She had nutritional data from African American breast cancer patients that had not been analyzed yet. From this meeting, we determined my project would involve looking at nutrition and inflammation in breast cancer patients.

I was immediately super excited about this project, but still a little nervous because I had not worked in a research lab before, so there were a lot of things I needed to learn. On my first day, Dr. Davis introduced me to the other lab members, including Mrs. Rachel Martini, a PhD candidate, with whom I spent most of my time those summers. Rachel caught me up to date on their research and also taught me how to analyze data using the JMP software, dissect mice, genotype DNA,... My first summer of research was great, but I spent a lot of time learning how to conduct research, so it was mostly during my second summer that I was able to go much deeper into my project. Although learning to analyze data and basic lab techniques during my first summer was necessary and very beneficial, I would have liked to spend more time on my project then.

Initially, I was only supposed to look at chemokines and diet based on 24 hour recalls our participants had filled out. This was done in my first summer. As a result, I was able to take my project further during the second summer. I developed an empirical dietary inflammatory index with the same data from our 24 hour recalls. Based on those results, I developed new nutrition questionnaires to expand our research to Sub-Saharan Africa. Even though my project was done remotely this summer due to COVID-19, I had learned all the necessary tools to conduct the

analyses by myself from home. I was a lot more independent, efficient and had more control over my project the second summer.

I had great support from Dr. Davis and Rachel both summers. We had weekly meetings in which I presented my work from the week and received feedback and advice to continue. Both seemed very invested in my research and were there for me when I had questions about the next steps. Even though my research was done remotely the second summer, we continued with our weekly meetings, and I often met with other lab members as well.

Overall, I am thankful I had the chance to work on this research project. I am grateful for all the skills that I learned and gaining insight into what a researcher does, including the different tasks to be able to fund research.

2. Leadership

I originally applied to the Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Programme for the research component, but the leadership part also greatly helped me learn and grow. My favorite session was the one on intercultural communication and conflict resolution. We learned how to approach conflict or problems we might face in a work setting with the goal to find a solution through communication. This session was extremely helpful for me as I've already faced similar situations and often found myself overwhelmed and confused. Through discussions with my peers, I learned different techniques to resolve these issues.

During most of our sessions, our activities were done in groups. I really appreciated this focus on group work as I got to know my peers better and learn from them. I was always excited to attend these leadership sessions since I knew I'd get to see my friends and catch up while developing my skills to become a better leader.

Sadly, due to COVID-19, our last few leadership sessions got canceled. It was an abrupt end to the program. Even though we stayed in contact throughout the pandemic, we didn't get the opportunity to finish these sessions together.

Overall, the leadership sessions helped me identify my strengths and weaknesses as a leader. I know I still have a lot to learn, but I am grateful I was able to learn about teamwork, leadership and communication. I am looking forward to learning and growing some more in the future.

The Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Programme gave me the opportunity to grow and develop as a researcher and a leader. This program marked the beginning of my

leadership and research journey, and I am looking forward to use what I learned in new and different settings.