

Laidlaw Reflection: Research Summer

By Anna Lysenko on September 9, 2022

I am so happy I decided to do this program, to take this growth opportunity and make it my own. Over the six weeks of Laidlaw Research, I learned more about myself, leadership, and my form of leadership than I thought I would. I honed valuable leadership skills by overcoming challenges, and I can now say that I am truly proud of the academic work, and personal growth, I have accomplished.

The lessons I learned from my six weeks of research were all brought on by challenges I encountered during the process. The first of these was organization, specifically time management. I have never worked during the summer before! Furthermore, other than doing Laidlaw Research, I planned on doing a summer internship at cybersecurity company Captiva Solutions, and a TeamWork Global Leadership program! I was excited about all my plans but still somewhat nervous about all the responsibilities I was taking on. I was lucky to have the reassurance of my family and my friends to tell me that I was capable. I knew I would need some time to adjust but that I would be okay once I got into the rhythm of things. That prediction turned out to be true but the summer still felt strange, for lack of a better word. I kept thinking to myself "Wow, I used to have three months of doing nothing and I was bored. Now I don't have time to be bored.". The key to my success came with an organization schema that worked for my personality: I tend to work in erratic sprouts of energy, and it would sometimes take me a good hour of sitting at a table, writing and deleting words back and forth before I got into a writing rhythm. I found that to work at a more consistent pace, I needed to have a clear to-do list of what needed to be done and by when. Even having something like "Finish paragraph three by Thursday afternoon" would give me

something to work towards, channelling my focus and drive towards a target. It's also worth noting that procrastination, my consistent foe, was another challenge, one I am still working hard to conquer. I noticed that I was most likely to procrastinate when I started to overthink all the work I had to do. Taking things step by step, and following my simple to-do list, helped me keep my anxiety and procrastination in check. It also taught me a subtle lesson about leadership: real leaders know themselves and adjust their strategies accordingly.

In a similar vein, my written organization improved over the six research summers. My research question focused on cyberattacks; a research challenge I encountered was filtering through hundreds upon thousands of tangentially-related documents on mis and disinformation. This problem was resolved by meeting with librarian Courtney Lundrigan, who helped me narrow down my search terms. Another challenge was making sure that my essay properly transferred all the relevant information I found in my research, and carried my enthusiasm for it, yet remained clear and concise. This is a challenge that I have faced for a while in my academic work so the Laidlaw essay was a great opportunity to continue working on it. A leader must know how to deliver information in an absorbable form, to inspire understanding from others.

The final challenge, lesson, and insight I gained from my six weeks of summer research were about keeping an open mind. I came into the project ready to learn. Still, even at the start of my research, I had some rather clear ideas about where I thought the research was going, based on my past research and experiences. I thought that the core of the cybersecurity issue that plagues America was the public's lack of cybersecurity awareness. Research revealed that the American public was more in tune with the country's cybersecurity than I thought! The issue stemmed from

a muddled, outdated government approach, and a lack of focused competence. Overall, my research reminded me that while it's important to come into projects bringing something to the table, it's even more meaningful to let the research form its own puzzle. Before this summer, I knew that a good leader has an open mind but this project taught me that lesson by making me practise open-mindedness in my own work process.

Finally, this summer and this summer's research reminded me how truly important it is to surround yourself with people who support you. Despite my enthusiasm for the project, there were points when I was tired and unsure of myself, not confident in what I was doing or if my work even mattered. It was in those moments that calming messages from friends and hugs from family helped me remember why I wanted to do the project in the first place: to contribute something to the field, to break new ground and share insight that I think is topical to today's world. Of course, I cannot in good conscience write this reflection without mentioning my lovely supervisor Dr Joy Fitzgibbon. Her steadfast support for my passion for this project, and more practical advice about research and organization, gave me ideas and strength that carried me through the summer.

I think back to the start of the summer now and again. I see now that I had some stale, preconceived notions about both my topic of interest, cybersecurity, and leadership. Despite being proud of my open-mindedness, I was somewhat sure of the direction my research would take, and I did not fully reflect on the leadership capabilities this project would need from me until I was in the thick of my quest. However, learn I did, and I am determined to keep working and improving as the program continues into this year, and next summer.