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Laidlaw Leadership and Research Scholar's Program

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Pushing It to the Limits: Laidlaw Leadership and Research Scholar's Program

Summer 2022 Reflection

Through the Laidlaw Leadership and Research Scholar's Program, I was able to dive deeper into my growing interest within the field of women's menstrual health—specifically, my passion in how women's menstrual health pervades within areas of policy, medicine, research, culture, and economics has snowballed throughout the program as I learn more about the field. Before the start of my research summer, I worked with my faculty mentor to develop and polish a protocol to be approved by Cornell's Institutional Review Board (IRB). As well, I underwent rigorous training to understand how to practice ethical research efficiently and effectively through the IRB's Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules. Lastly, with the help of my graduate mentors in Dr. Lujan's lab, I was able to learn and practice walking participants through the research protocol, ensure that I had the answers to any questions or concerns they may have had before consenting to the study, and to obtain participants' informed consent.

One of my largest takeaways from conducting research includes the cyclic process of learning more about confounding factors and limitations of every study. There lied many instances throughout the study where I learned about elements that could have a large impact on period cramps and the data I collected. A couple weeks into the Laidlaw program, I decided to write down everything I would have changed about the study. Many of the changes I noticed

early on happened through amending parts of my IRB application, the consent form, and the details of the study. I plan to make the other modifications in future studies looking at this product. Examples of limitations and confounding factors include studying participants with either spasmodic or congestive dysmenorrhea versus those with a mixture of the two; the participant's ability to recognize and verbalize their different types of pain throughout the study and on the Menstrual Symptom Questionnaire; varying absorption rates across participants with different BMI levels; tracking sleep, diet, and physical activity. Many times, recognizing the confounding factors of my study felt incredibly defeating; however, after reflecting on how my deep interest in women's menstrual health led me to decide to conduct my own study, I was able to restore my intentions and come to the understanding that the research process is a cyclic process of learning that often results in protocol improvement.

Outside of academics, I was able to engage with the Ithaca community beyond the scope of Cornell. Some friends in the program and I learned how to Dragon boat via the Ithaca Dragon boating club. As well, we were able to go to the Ithaca Farmer's market, downtown Cortland, Second Dam, and some of Ithaca's most delicious ice-cream shops, such as Sweet Melissa's and Frosty Cow. I learned a great appreciation for the Ithaca community beyond just Cornell; the extraordinarily beautiful, lakes, and rivers allowed me to appreciate the community to an unparalleled extent.

Socially, I was able to engage with over a hundred Ithacan women through conversations about my study. Our discussions regarded the social and cultural implications of women's health research along with other shared gendered issues many women continue to experience today. Learning from other Ithacans in the community allowed me to gain a broader understanding of

how sexism and misogyny manifests itself differently in Ithaca than it does in other cities within the United States.

Conclusion

This summer has held several challenging moments on academic, intellectual, social, and cultural levels. Through these times of difficulty, though, I was able to reflect on my decision to pursue more stimulating research and leverage my passion for this field to grow into a stronger learner. In all, my research thoroughly challenged my intellectual knowledge and dedication to this passion as it continues to do so today.

In a different sense, my research project pushed me to evoke discussions surrounding women's menstrual health with complete strangers; I was pleasantly surprised to find that many women I discussed menstrual health with were extremely responsive and were able to open up quickly about their experiences. With these conversations, though, I realized how enormous the discrepancy in education is when discussing women's menstrual health. I was distraught to find a lack of research within the field of women's menstrual health, for a spectrum of cultural, social, political, and socioeconomic reasons in the United States.

Aside from research, I was able to fully connect with many members of the program and other students spending the summer in Ithaca. Together, we explored all the creeks and crevasses of Ithaca and better understood the role Cornell plays in many of Ithaca's communities.

Overall, this summer cultivated my appreciation for Ithaca's beauty and its tightly knit community, and the Laidlaw Scholar's Program fostered my challenging yet unparalleled experience this summer in Ithaca.