

My LiA reflection

Over the past six weeks, I have been in Croatia for the Leadership in Action (LiA) section of the Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Scholarship. I chose the self-proposed route since I believed that I could utilise my skill and talent in technology to promote the growth of NGO's. Looking back, I've grown massively, both as a person who lived in another country without their parents for the 1st time, but also as a leader to navigate the world of digital marketing and business.

These 6 weeks have taught me how important it is to lead by example. Going outside our comfort zone and taking on risks in life is how we grow. However, most are afraid of taking the first step. The first step is always scary – What if I mess up? What if it doesn't go according to the plan? What if it's not worth it in the end? The reality is life almost never goes exactly according to plan because we fail to predict absolutely all the factors that contribute to the success/ failure of something. But this isn't always bad. It also means that reality might end up better than we planned.



I wasn't lying when I said I went out of comfort zone

I worked with HULU, an emerging arts association with the challenging goal of promoting visual art within schools and the public, as well as securing funding for artists.



Salon Galić – HULU's main art gallery

Working directly alongside the CEO himself I was in charge of increasing the NGO's outreach and funding. This couldn't have been a better opportunity to put together everything I've learnt about leadership to shape and sculpt the mentality towards visual arts.

I started by addressing the root of the problem – their digital footprint. Social media presence is the key to growth in today's world. Using my software engineering skills that I've learnt as part of my computer science degree; I worked on fixing bugs within the website as well as adding traffic analytics. This was the 1st step in improving its SEO. Next, I added a TLS certificate to the website so that the connection was secure. Without this user would previously receive warnings every time they entered the website which gave a poor reputation of the NGO.

Following this I integrated multiple social media accounts into the website. But the problem was the content itself wasn't receiving much traffic. This is where I knew I needed to utilise my leadership skills in identifying the strengths and weakness of the existing NGO team members. Given their cultural knowledge, language expertise and humour (they really made my 6 weeks fly by) I delegated the role of content creation to them after designing a roadmap for them to follow.

With the improved website and social media content, more and more people signed up to visit our art gallery. That's when I knew I had to capitalise on this opportunity by making a grand introduction. I organised a "Meet the artists" event to bring together everyone at the same time. This way likeminded individuals would get the opportunity to gather and foster a community. After spending hours and hours designing posters for the event, I also coordinated with the rest of the team to photograph and film the event. These footages were then uploaded on our social medias to show off the success of the event and hopefully inspire more people in the future to join the community.



Fruit Kebabs we prepared for the visitors.

Ultimately what had been a small unengaged community soon spiralled into one with regular weekly gatherings.



Visitors at the "Meet the artists" event.

This encouraged amateur artists to also come together and network, granting them with insight from the established artists. This was one example of an unplanned positive by-product – mentorship between artists. Outside work I also developed a great relationship with my teammates. After all good chemistry is essential to the success of a team.



Glow in the dark paddleboarding

I'd like to truly recommend this program to future scholars who are interested in digital marketing. It is one of the most essential skills that's used by all business today and by working alongside a NGO, you will have more reigns over decision making which ultimately puts your leadership skills to test. After this experience I know my confidence in leading something big such as NGO's has increased, seeing the impact I could have on the locals. For this experience I would like to thank all my Laidlaw mentors: Adair Richards and Daniela Bultoc for their amazing leadership training, my program manager Christopher Cullen who helped tremendously throughout the entire process in terms of admin and guidance, and finally Lord Laidlaw himself for sponsoring this entire program and giving me this opportunity of a lifetime to learn and grow.