Laidlaw reflective essay

In the span of six weeks, I embarked on a research journey that not only deepened my understanding of Irish language cinema but also provided profound insights into my own growth as a leader. This reflective report serves as a bridge between the practical knowledge I gained during my research project and the experiential leadership lessons that emerged from the process. It is a testament to the synergy between academic exploration and personal development, where the pursuit of knowledge becomes intertwined with the evolution of one's leadership style. As I recount the experiences, challenges, and achievements of this research endeavour, I will also explore how these lessons have enriched my perspective on leadership and shaped my approach to future challenges.

My journey with the Laidlaw program commenced well before I was officially admitted. It all began when I attended the initial meeting in October, prompted by one of my lecturers who introduced us to the scholarship opportunity. My initial interest in the program stemmed from two main factors. Firstly, I was somewhat dissatisfied with my performance in my undergraduate course, and secondly, I hadn't actively participated in any student societies, so I was eager to connect with a new circle of people. During that meeting, the information shared piqued my curiosity, particularly the ethical leadership component of the Laidlaw program. Having spent a substantial amount of time immersed in finance, consultancy, and technology modules, I felt that diversifying my education and gaining a deeper understanding of ethical work was essential.

As I began to brainstorm ideas, I turned to my dad, who often serves as my partner in such endeavours. He had a background in filmmaking but had to step away from it to raise my sister and me. Despite his attempts to re-enter the industry, age and a lack of recent projects proved to be significant barriers over the years. I had absorbed his experiences since childhood, and together, we started to delve into questions about the Irish Film Industry. My initial ideas were undeniably naive and idealistic. At one point, I almost believed that my one year of Management Science and Information System Studies could somehow allow me to quantify the cultural and authentic value within the film industry and the broader economy – a notion that, in retrospect, seems utterly ridiculous.

I grappled with these profound ideas for weeks, engaging in numerous coffee-fueled brainstorming sessions with my dad. We generated questions repeatedly, but whenever I ventured into the realm of "how can I answer this question," we found ourselves stumped, only to replace one question with another. Eventually, I reached a point of frustration and conceded that I wasn't up to the task of applying to the Laidlaw program. I felt neither intelligent, passionate, nor curious enough to embark on such a journey. Three days later, a consultancy study was released, attempting to quantify the cultural and industrial values of Ireland's audio-visual industry, spanning a dense 80 pages. Interestingly, they hadn't managed to condense it into a single numerical figure either. Moreover, I noticed a glaring gap in their information regarding Irish language content. This discovery prompted me to reach out to the consultancy, and a member of their team agreed to a Zoom meeting. She walked me through their research process and suggested various project directions, one of which involved exploring Irish language content. With this newfound guidance, I was reinvigorated. The importance of external validation became evident to me, contradicting my innate belief that I must single-handedly accomplish everything to earn any recognition.

After a few unsuccessful attempts, I finally found a suitable supervisor on the third try. Professor Ruth Barton, the Head of the Film Department, was not only willing but enthusiastic about offering her guidance. She had previously supervised a Laidlaw project and spoke highly of the program. With her support and the assistance of many others, I managed to complete my research proposal after eight drafts, all within the frantic span of just two days. This accomplishment was achieved, quite literally, with just an hour to spare before the submission deadline.

Upon being accepted into the program following a concise 15-minute interview, I experienced an overwhelming sense of achievement. The application process had already stirred up a significant amount of apprehension, and it had inevitably diverted my attention from my college work. The initial events, where I had the opportunity to meet fellow scholars, partake in celebratory gatherings, and engage in enriching workshops, were thoroughly enjoyable. The journey had already proven to be incredibly enlightening. However, the spectre of imposter syndrome continued to loom over me. My fellow scholars appeared intensely passionate not only about their research fields but also about their

undergraduate studies, consistently offering insightful answers to the questions we encountered. In contrast, I often found myself lacking that level of self-assuredness. Yet, I've come to find reassurance in the notion that being the least accomplished or intelligent person in a room can, in itself, be a significant accomplishment.

In various aspects of my life, I tend to be somewhat slow in generating ideas, and I'm easily distracted. Collaborative efforts can occasionally feel paralyzing, as my focus tends to shift towards the anxiety of not having contributed rather than concentrating on making a meaningful contribution. This tendency persisted both in the Laidlaw workshops and during my research endeavours. In conducting my study on the Irish Language Feature Drama Initiative and the driving forces behind it, I had to formulate a series of interview questions, which, unsurprisingly, didn't come naturally to me. It took me longer than it should have to seek assistance, but when I finally did, progress was reignited. I must remind myself to reach out for help more frequently, as the alternative often results in procrastination out of fear that I may never come up with something useful. Paradoxically, the sure-fire way to avoid coming up with something useful is by succumbing to procrastination. Additionally, I believe I should read more books, as I fear my articulation and vocabulary may have been more robust when I was eleven years old than they are now.

My research project undeniably constituted a journey of its own. As I had hoped, it thrust me into a more professional and adult-oriented environment than I had ever experienced before. It served as a formidable challenge, pushing me to conceive something novel and engage in meaningful research rather than relying on concepts from college lectures or striving for artistic excellence as in Leaving Cert Art. It's important to acknowledge that my confidence in the project wasn't unwavering, and I believe several factors contributed to moments of self-doubt.

Firstly, I observed that many Laidlaw projects thus far had taken the form of well-defined, quantitative analyses or comprehensive reviews of existing literature on specific topics, or at least that was my perception. In contrast, my project didn't neatly fit into either of these categories. The existing literature in my chosen area was both limited and lacking focus, and my work didn't follow a quantitative approach. Secondly, in my college environment, I'm

surrounded by peers aspiring to careers in consultancy, technology, or finance, which sometimes left me feeling inadequate for not sharing their passion for these fields. My research project represented an additional departure from the norm, as my chosen subject stood in stark contrast to the career trajectories of my peers. Thirdly, I tend to lean towards a "everything is subjective" perspective, and the endeavour to distil everything down to a single conclusion challenged this inclination, creating another layer of complexity for me. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that these three reasons can also be viewed as advantages inherent in my research journey. Wrestling with these difficulties and personal reservations has, in fact, fortified my capacity to confront similar challenges in the future.

My project encountered numerous delays, more than I could keep track of. A chest infection, late ethics submissions, and subsequent approvals took weeks off the schedule. Interviewees often cancelled last-minute or failed to show up, and technical glitches rendered certain interviews unproductive. As the project neared its conclusion, my own perfectionism began to impede progress. Meeting deadlines has always been a hallmark of my work ethic, but Laidlaw has introduced me to a series of first-time experiences in missing them.

One unforgettable moment stands out: attending a TG4 launch party where I knew no one. The challenge was to navigate the room, locate individuals I needed to introduce myself to, explain my purpose, and hope they would agree to an interview. It was a long day, and there were moments when embarrassment and the fear of failure crept in. However, in the end, I successfully secured interviews with the individuals I had hoped to meet, leaving me with a profound sense of achievement. This experience not only bolstered my confidence but also marked a significant milestone in achieving one of my goals from my Personal Development Plan: attending networking events, practicing the art of meeting new people, and overcoming the fear of not knowing enough. The TG4 launch party served as a successful example of my growth in this regard.

On another occasion, I actively pursued my personal development objective while participating in the Localise volunteer project at Beaumont Hospital. Our task was to organize a party for patients with acquired brain injuries in St. Bridget's Ward. The planning process required us to take a step back and consider the unique needs of individuals with

serious disabilities when hosting an event. On the actual day of the party, I initially felt overwhelmed, despite my conscious effort to prepare for the challenge. However, I managed to work through it by acknowledging my role, answering to the dedicated nurses who provided constant care to these patients, and seeking their guidance on how I could be most helpful.

My experiences both in the research project and the volunteer project provided valuable insights into my leadership style. I have a natural inclination toward a people-oriented leadership approach. Part of this inclination was influenced by my supervisor, who consistently offered support, accessibility, and a wealth of knowledge. Her leadership style resonated with me and played a significant role in my accomplishments, as I tend to respond better to encouragement than blunt criticism. This experience has led me to believe that I would likely adopt a similar approach when collaborating with others in the future.

In our four meetings with my Action Learning Set over the summer, I gained a profound appreciation for the importance of maintaining a realistic perspective. It was evident that we, as undergraduate students conducting research for the first time, had inadvertently placed undue pressure on ourselves, aspiring to produce work akin to that of PhD candidates or those pursuing two-year Master's programs. While I firmly believe that my research findings offer valuable insights, especially to stakeholders in the Irish Film Industry, I've come to realize that it's an achievement in itself to feel confident in our contributions within the constraints of a six-week research period.

I'd also like to highlight a crucial aspect of my project: the design process of my research poster. I was genuinely enthused about the opportunity to delve into graphic design, enabling me to craft an aesthetically pleasing A1 poster. Upon reviewing previous projects in the flipbook, I couldn't help but notice that my poster featured less text compared to some others. This observation prompted me to question whether my project was overly simplistic or if my findings were excessively narrow in scope. Nevertheless, I firmly maintain that the judicious use of white space in these posters is pivotal. Thus, I stand by my decision to minimize text while ensuring effective communication of the entirety of my research.

In conclusion, my Laidlaw journey has been a transformative experience, challenging me to grow both personally and academically. Through research, volunteer work, and self-discovery, I've learned valuable lessons about perseverance, leadership, and the importance of maintaining a realistic perspective in pursuit of knowledge and growth.