

Reflecting on this summer, I have grown both academically and personally. It has been a difficult journey, as it was my first time designing and executing my own research project without a strict timeline. This challenge and the content from the leadership sessions encouraged me to find new ways to use my skill sets and passions to counter my shortcomings. Internalizing my results from the Clifton Strengths test aided in gaining confidence as a leader. Prior to the test, I had difficulty fully appreciating my top skills of “input”, “connectedness”, “ideation”, “intellection”, and “adaptability” as I viewed them as curtailing my productivity. I envied skills that related to execution, but then I began to realize that brainstorming and problem solving is still making progress. I started to view my ambitions and skillset in a more optimistic light, which empowered me to strengthen my point of view and research journey.

Not only have I grown as an individual, but I was able to find inspiration within my peer groups. Even though we are all united as Laidlaw Scholars, the diversity of my peers’ majors and skill sets was refreshing and allowed me to understand concepts from new perspectives. These differences, however, did not outweigh all of our overwhelming similarities, as traits such as curiosity and ambition are universal to those with an interest in research. Furthermore, the similarities of culture was so comforting to me. I recall several discussions where my peers discussed difficulties in acclimating to an American lifestyle and how part of their research projects is to honor their family and culture. Their stories are very similar to my own and helped me gain a large emotional connection to my experience as a Laidlaw Summer. I can only expect my feelings to grow as I begin my leadership in-action experience next summer.

Now that my summer experience has concluded, I have gained insight into how I can benefit the communities that surround me. I realized the universal benefits of my research into purpose and that aspects of the workshops can inspire diverse ranges of people. Additionally, I

thought more deeply about what aspects of research and service are most appealing to me. I learned that I prioritize translational approaches, such as the teaching and community application portion of my research on purpose. By being involved in both the creation and implementation of the Growing Purpose workshops, I realized that I am most skilled at seeing the big picture potential of projects. I've become inspired to share my ideas with others and trust in my mentors and peers to help execute my plans. Although this summer has revealed that the knit-picky aspects of research are definitely not my specialty, I still feel that I can be a valuable asset in brainstorming and problem solving. I know that my leadership in-action experience will be influential both personally and professionally, and I am excited to work more directly with the communities that inspire me.

In regards to my future plans, my project has illuminated that research and academia isn't the path for me. I realized that what I enjoy most is the social aspect and application of research, but it was very difficult for me to execute my ideas and enjoy the process. Considering my interests and skill sets, I now have goals of being a family and marriage therapist after college. I realized that what I enjoy most about psychology is the personal connections and my ability to place my philosophies about people and the world into practice. I am particularly drawn to the emphasis on interpersonal dynamics and relationship complexities of the profession, as I love reflecting on anything relating to love and family. This exploratory nature of the Laidlaw Scholars program, however, has been the impetus for my ability to discern my future goals. I have grown so much as a person, and I am so excited to see myself and my peers grow throughout this experience.