

“Affective to Effective” helping change assessment at the UCL Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences

Reflective Report on my Laidlaw LiA Project

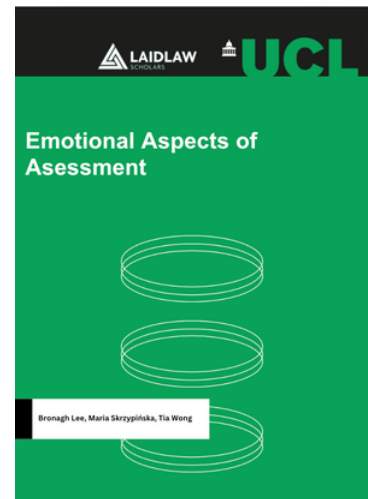
Introduction

When joining the Laidlaw programme, I was at the beginning of my academic journey, amazed by the scientific method and its humble transformative power. I am beyond grateful that I got to experience the entirety of this process; from performing research to practically implementing its findings, and inspiring the realities of others along the way.

This Summer, I had the pleasure of conducting a LiA project at UCL Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences, where I did my Laidlaw Research Project last year. Having continuously worked in the Faculty through the academic year, I confidently talked about issues students were facing but lacked the confidence to suggest solutions - I felt that it was not my place, as an undergraduate student, to comment on the teaching practice of experienced academics. However, I decided to fully embrace that lack of confidence and discomfort when I proposed my LiA project, which led me to spend the last six weeks finding ways to implement the results of my research from last Summer into the teaching practices at the SHS Faculty. Under the guidance of Dr Cathy Elliott, the Faculty's Vice-dean for Education, I conducted independent work aimed at supporting assessment practices, based directly on the findings of my Laidlaw Research Project.

“Emotional Aspects of Assessment” Laidlaw Research Project, 2023

"Emotional Aspects of Assessment," which I collaborated on with Bronagh Lee and Tia Wong, was a qualitative research project that asked students at the SHS Faculty how they feel when they are being assessed, or broadly, how the process of formal assessment affects them emotionally. This perspective proved useful as it clearly showed a connection between the emotional wellbeing of the students and the pedagogical practices and structures of assessment in the Faculty.



This knowledge, along with a significant amount of student suggestions for improvement collected with the research data, informed my work this Summer.

What did I do this year?

My LiA project, hoping to move assessment from “affective” to “effective”, resulted in several outcomes that all aimed to directly improve the educational practices within the SHS Faculty at UCL. One of my key contributions was the creation of comprehensive handbooks and resources designed for both teaching staff and students. These materials were developed based on the wealth of student feedback collected during my research project, as well as successful practices already established within the Faculty. They were crafted to address the emotional challenges students face during assessments and to provide practical solutions for improving their experience. Another significant outcome was presenting my research findings at the SHS Faculty Away Day, where I had the chance to share insights on the emotional aspects of assessment with key decision-makers and academics. Additionally, I began an ongoing collaboration with the Faculty’s Quality Assurance team, focusing on improving assessment practices. As part of this effort, I will be working closely with newly elected student representatives in the coming academic year to ensure that student voices remain central to any changes in assessment regulations.



What I learned

Working on this project, I certainly strengthened my research and project management abilities. Using research findings to shape my independent work, all while coordinating multiple forms of collaboration with Faculty staff, I had to seriously step up my organisational skills, but I couldn't be more glad that I did. The project required careful planning and the ability to bring together various perspectives to create something that would benefit both students and academics, which challenged me to bring my independent project management skills to a new level.

My most transformative learning experience was facing my own presumption that I would need to overcome scepticism, which I anticipated would accompany advising experienced academics as an undergraduate. However, I did not encounter negative resistance; on the contrary, my efforts were met with considerable support and gratitude. This made me realise how my self-perception and confidence in my work were adversely affected by such cautious assumptions. I certainly feel encouraged by the outcomes and the reception of my LiA project to confidently take initiative, where I see a need for change.



Final Reflections

In reflecting on my LiA experience, I am struck by how much it has shaped my academic and personal growth. What began as a step outside my comfort zone evolved into an opportunity to see the real-world impact of my research and ideas. I learned that collaboration, effective communication, and persistence are essential in driving meaningful change, even when it feels intimidating to offer suggestions to experienced professionals. Most importantly, I learned to trust my voice and the value of my contributions. I leave this project feeling proud of the work I've done and excited to keep challenging myself in both my academic and future professional pursuits.