



End-of-Program Reflection

Deliverable 5
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Experience

I initially applied to be a Laidlaw Scholar for the research aspect of the program: I wanted to explore the topic of politics and protest in Hong Kong, and I was lucky enough to have the trust and support of Prof. Falkenheim (whom I asked to supervise my project on a whim after attending my first class with him). However, the program both exceeded my expectations in both the academic opportunities it provided, and also the people it introduced me to. I am so grateful to have had the chance to attend the Laidlaw Conference in New York – a highlight of my second-year – and to have learned so much through the independent work I've completed. Beyond that, I never imagined I would have met such an intelligent and kind group of people, who I could learn so much from.

I've found that I'm more self-driven than I thought; determination and ambition can push me to do things I would not have ever believed I could accomplish. In face of adversity and challenges, I have learned that I can adapt and pivot – although sometimes reluctantly. For example, overcoming the anxiety I had writing and researching a politically sensitive topic taught me to be brave and adaptable, while also ensuring I kept up the best quality of work I could possible produce without biases.



Some of the UofT Laidlaw Scholars at last year's conference hosted by Columbia University.

This experience overall encouraged me to continue with research: I truly enjoy the autonomy and the depth that my two summers allowed for. It has already continued to influence the way I think about communication, leadership, and academia; in particular, it showed me that interdisciplinary study and thinking is just as important as specializing in one area. I still hope to continue pursuing law school after my undergrad, but Laidlaw has helped me create a better frame of mind for why.

Team

I got to work with people of other disciplines, backgrounds, and countries – from here in Canada, to Georgia, to Hong Kong. I've found that despite differences in upbringing, cultural backgrounds, or even age and majors, fellow Scholars are equally eager and passionate about the work they're doing, and open to collaborate. In particular, the Common Purpose Global Futures Experience Program hosted at the University of Hong Kong was an experience that allowed me to meet students from the University of Birmingham through a 3-day workshop on leadership. Through talking to other students, I learned how Hong Kong and England both differed from Canada in terms of its approach to professional growth and cultural dynamics. We were also given the opportunity to visit HandsOn, a non-profit that is providing vital behind-the-scenes assistance to over 150 charities each year through 3,000+ programs. Although I didn't get to participate in the full experiential learning activity, I am nonetheless thankful to Deanna Pickering and the staff at Common Purpose and HKU for welcoming me into their cohort – despite being the only UofT student there.



The Common Purpose cohort at HKU and at the Hands On office.

Intermission: The 2024 North American Conference

The 2024 Laidlaw Scholars Conference was particularly memorable to me. I am so grateful for the opportunity to have learned from Corey through the Oxford Character Project, the research posters, and presentations from other students; moreover, the experience of travelling to New York allowed me to grow closer to our cohort and interact with Scholars from all over the world.



Translating Skills and Experiences

I was surprised at how this program allowed me to further develop my interest in photography. I knew that I would come out of this having developed crucial academic and professional skills, whether it be in research and writing, project management, or even leadership and cultural competency. However, looking back, Laidlaw actually also prompted me to document everything through my preferred medium: my camera. In my first summer, I used my camera to capture traces of political art in Hong Kong, which became an integral and powerful part of my research. I continued bringing my camera everywhere, though – including at the conference in New York, the Hart House Farm, and even to our poster presentation event! In my second summer, photography became an integral part of my LiA, as I built one component around the work I produced in Hong Kong and even joined a photography workshop offered by Trinity College at UofT. I know that the work ethic, creative thinking and problem-solving skills, and communication skills I have acquired and trained through this program will continue to stick with me.

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Epilogue: Bonus Photos!



Our cohort's very first leadership session (left), and our very last (right).



Our poster presentation night at Hart House!



You Jia and Shraddha (the most amazing advisors) at my LiA exhibit 😊 !!!!