

## **Scholar Report**

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Title of Scholarship Project:	Mapping Capstone Projects in Sustainability Programs

### **Introduction:**

This reflective report describes my first summer as a Laidlaw Scholar, giving me a chance to reflect on what I have accomplished and learned so far. I will discuss my experiences of the Laidlaw residentials I attended, and my experience of working on the research project, 'Mapping Capstone Projects in Sustainability Programs'. I will discuss my takeaways from these, describing how this summer has influenced my mindset and my future plans as both an individual and a scholar.

### **Laidlaw Leadership Development:**

To begin this summer's Laidlaw journey, I and my fellow scholars attended a Leadership Development residential in Headingley, Leeds. Over two days, we took part in various activities designed to develop our understanding of leadership, and develop skills needed to action such an understanding. Not only this, but this residential was the first time us, as a cohort, had the opportunity to get to know each other and speak to other scholars in older cohorts.

One of the many activities that sticks out to me upon reflection, is the networking activity on day two of the residential. Firstly, I want to acknowledge how privileged I feel to have been given networking advice at such a young age, this session helped me to understand how important networking is for career development, but also for developing a sense of community and support within a competitive and corporate world. Secondly, this activity provided me and my peers with the chance to get to know each other more. This opportunity helped me to realise how diversely talented every Laidlaw Scholar is, and that each of us have unique goals and motivations driving us throughout this journey. This left me feeling excited and passionate about the journey ahead, as it is clear that my peers will be just as much of a support for me as the Leeds Laidlaw staff team.

The diversity among our cohort also became clear when we looked at our Quintax reports – a type of workplace personality profiling. Prior to this residential, we each completed a Quintax questionnaire, the results of which we saw for the first time during this session. Overall, I feel that my Quintax profile accurately highlighted my working style. In all five of the categories, I continually scored within the 5-7 scale out of 10, three of which I scored a central 5. Initially, I was concerned that such centralised scores was a negative thing, maybe suggesting that there is an indecisiveness in my working style or personality. However, upon reading into the what the categories meant, I realised this was untrue. Instead, these results indicated that I am someone who can apply myself to a range of environments in a range of ways. This activity boosted my confidence, allowing me to trust in my strengths, and understand how I can maximise my potential when working in a team environment as well as in a leadership role.

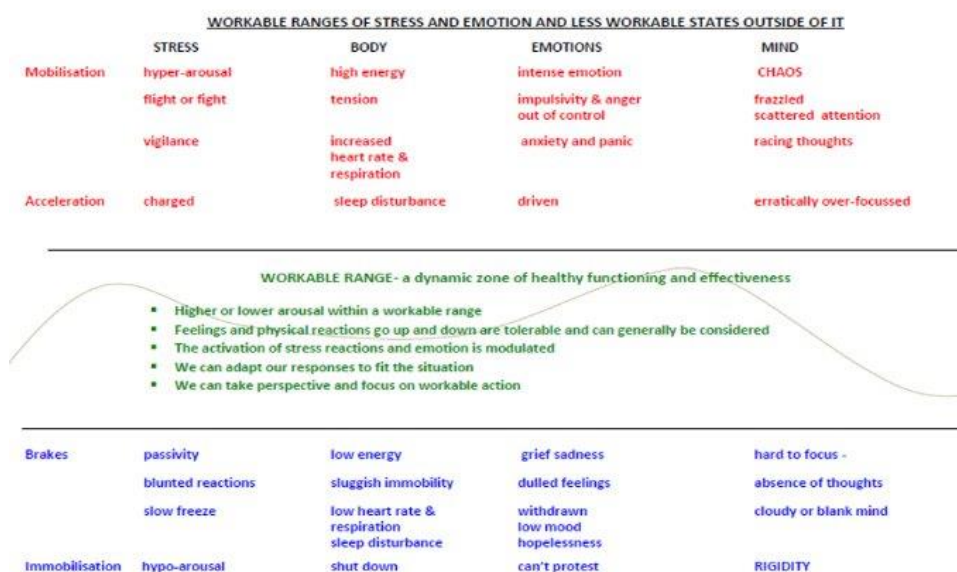
This activity impacted me to an extent that I did not anticipate, and has infiltrated my mindset throughout this whole summer. The Quintax profile explicitly highlighted that as a IPAT-V (the type of personality profile I was allocated), I am "continually involved in the search for self-identity and self-improvement" – a motivation I can consciously attest to being true, as it is one of the reasons I applied to

become a Laidlaw Scholar. However, this strength often results in all the difficulties associated with being a perfectionist. I felt as though the Quintax profile forced me to see, written down, the advice people have given me throughout my life. An example being my tendency to rarely be satisfied with my achievements, or “become despondent with my own abilities, even when things are done well”. This Quintax experience forced me to acknowledge the ways I might be preventing myself from not only reaching my potential, but actually enjoying the process of it!

This realisation was compounded through a personal struggle I was experiencing during the residential. Unbeknownst to me, my body was fighting an acute viral infection throughout July. I had been unwell, suffering from migraines and fatigue, and really persevered to attend this Laidlaw residential. At the time, I was determined to make the most of this opportunity, and would not let anything stand in my way – including my body telling me I needed to rest. Upon reflection, and thanks to the Quintax profile, I have realised that the energy, commitment, determination and passion I put into the things I do, can lead me to put my needs as an individual second. This realisation became clear to me when we were taught about an individual’s ‘working range’. I truly believe this session could not have come at a more poignant time for me. This idea, illustrated in Figure 1, highlights how different factors and circumstances effect our ability to work efficiently. I suddenly realised that I tended to work with the expectation that I should always be pushing myself to work at a sometimes unachievable standard. I was experiencing a case of burn out, it was the end of my first year of university, a year I have truly and thoroughly enjoyed – but my body was telling me a needed a break. The discussions during this session also allowed me to compartmentalise the anxiety and stress I had been feeling entering this Laidlaw summer, as my working range was not in the green zone. In addition to this, a fairly simple PowerPoint slide on the day, gave me the reassurance I needed to promote me to stay on this Laidlaw journey. It simply stated that we, as scholars, were not being asked to produce perfection, but to merely apply ourselves as best we can – within our workable ranges. This has honestly change my mindset and approach to work for good, and for the better.

In conclusion, this residential allowed me to approach this summer with a healthier mindset and approach to work. It taught me that great leadership has to start with being a great leader to yourself. Secondly, it prompted me to approach this research project with my usual sense of passion and energy, but in a way that leaves my perfectionist mindset in the past.

**Figure 1: (taken from residential one SharePoint PowerPoints, personal resilience)**



## **Research Period: Mapping Capstone Projects in Sustainability Programs**

### **Overview:**

The research project I have been working on over this summer is titled; 'Mapping Capstone Projects in Sustainability Programs'. It is a pre-defined research project supervised by Noleen Chikowore, from the School of Earth and Environment at Leeds University. I was motivated to apply for this research project as it aligned with my growing passion for educational reform, research and design. During this first year of studying Liberal Arts at Leeds University, I have been fortunate enough to take a module that examined theories relating to education and its link to society and human development. This research project seemed like an opportunity for me to explore my interest in education further, whilst pushing me outside of my comfort zone. This was due to the fact that I had never been involved in any work relating to Sustainability, let alone conduct independent research. This section will explore a range of meaningful takeaways that the research project has produced, for both myself on a personal level, and for the field of capstone design also.

### **Impact and importance for the field:**

Despite capstone projects increasing in popularity throughout University degree programs, little has been done to assess the successes and weaknesses of their design and implementation. Therefore, this literature review aims to fill this gap. After an initial meeting with Noleen, it became clear that this research could inform curriculum design, by providing instructors with a more holistic understanding of best practices within sustainability driven capstone projects.

### **Summary of work:**

Over the summer period, I worked to produce a mini systematic literature review, with the aim of synthesising design elements of various capstone case studies within the area of sustainability. After a handful of meetings with Noleen, and solidifying my understanding of literature reviews, I began the research process. To start, I defined the scope of the literature, and in turn created an inclusion criteria to begin collecting relevant papers. In order to do this effectively, Noleen helpfully suggested I learn to use a referencing software, and collate my findings onto an excel spreadsheet. This advice helped make the research feel manageable and achievable, despite my lack of experience. After searching the Google Scholar database, an initial longlist of 24 papers was created, which was later narrowed down to a final 16 relevant papers. Next, I reviewed the content of the papers and noted down what type of paper they were (e.g. case study or pedagogically focused), and drew out any information they provided onto the excel document. I designed the document so that it had four main content columns: information about the aims of the capstone project, their design, assessment methods and process of implementation. Once all 16 papers had been added to the document, I drafted sections for the literature review, and proceeded to write the paper.

### **Impact and importance of research for me:**

Carrying out this research project has been an incredible experience, I have learnt so much about myself and I want to take this opportunity to thank Noleen for placing so much trust and confidence in me. From the start of this project, to the end, I had full responsibility over the paper. Although daunting at first, the freedom and authority Noleen gave me over the creation of this literature review, enabled me to realise my capabilities and ignore my self-doubt. I feel very grateful to have worked on a project with someone who made it abundantly clear that, despite my age and lack of experience in researching, we can both learn from each other throughout this process. In turn, this experience has shown me that being a supportive leader is the best way to get the most out of your team. Furthermore, this experience

has helped me to grow my leadership skills immensely. From time management, decision making and planning.

I truly feel that the initial Laidlaw Residential, and my personal takeaways from it, helped me immensely during this research project. Without the self-awareness the Quintax profile had given me, and the epiphany that the working-range model provided me, I do not think I would have completed this project with the same level of enjoyment and self-belief.

### **Looking ahead:**

On a more personal level, this project has helped me to realise what direction I would like to head in, in the future. Having the opportunity to take part in academic research has made a career in academia seem less trivial, giving me an insight into the realities of research. Furthermore, although the literature review wasn't focusing on educational pedagogies, the experience of carrying out this research has helped me to realise that it is an area I would like study more of in the future. Not only this, but researching the design of capstone projects in sustainability programs has increased my curiosity regarding the relationship between theories of education, and their practical dissemination in reality.

### **To conclude:**

I have learned so much during this summer, both about myself and about the process of research. I am incredibly grateful for this experience, and proud of the resilience I've shown throughout this summer. I will continue this Laidlaw journey with an increased sense of self-assurance and confidence, and am excited for this journey to continue.

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### **Supervisor:**

Please comment on your scholar's research period, what you consider to be your scholars' strengths and which leadership attributes you feel your scholar has demonstrated and is particularly skilled in. You could also identify areas which your scholar can develop further.

During the research period, Grace demonstrated a strong commitment to conducting the literature review. Narrowing the focus of the literature review was challenging, and I was unsure whether the scholar would be able to meet the project timelines. However, they managed their time effectively, covering broad themes and a wide range of sources and synthesising the findings concisely on capstone projects in sustainability programs. Grace's ability to stay focused and organised throughout the research period was commendable.

### **Strengths**

- **Analytical Skills:** Grace showed exceptional analytical skills by critically evaluating the literature and identifying key themes and gaps in the research.
- **Attention to Detail:** Their meticulous approach ensured that all relevant studies were included and accurately cited.
- **Communication:** The scholar effectively communicated their findings in an easily accessible way for a broader audience.

- Time Management: Grace managed her time well overall. She balanced her personal and project commitments and delivered the project on time, as indicated in her timeline.

#### Leadership Attributes

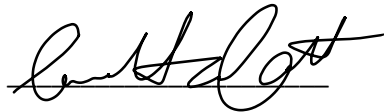
- Initiative: She took the initiative to communicate and schedule meetings if they felt there was a need for clarification or further discussions about the literature review and additional resources beyond the initial scope.
- Collaboration: Grace also demonstrated strong collaborative skills by engaging with their mentor, seeking feedback, and incorporating it into their work.
- Resilience: The scholar showed resilience in facing challenges, such as encountering an overwhelming scope of literature on capstone projects, and they managed to narrow their topic with a clear search strategy of the literature.

#### Areas for future development

Technical Skills: Further developing technical skills, such as using qualitative data analysis software to help organise large volumes of data and use visual tools to represent and interpret findings.

Overall, the scholar has shown great potential and has laid a solid foundation for future academic and professional success. Encouraging them to continue building on their strengths while addressing the areas for development will help them grow even further.

Signature of Scholar



Date: 26 / 09 / 2024

Signature of Project Leader:



Date: 23 / 09 / 2024