



Laidlaw Scholars Program

End-of-Programme Reflection

Giorgi Kaikatsishvili

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Being a Laidlaw scholar was singlehandedly the most challenging, rewarding, transformative and defining experience of my undergraduate life. This program really challenged not just my abilities, but my fundamental beliefs about myself and who I am as a person, and what I really can be a part of in this world. I recall when we all felt imposter syndrome in the beginning, and the fact that I was actually to undertake a research project on my own seemed daunting. There were many times I did not believe that I should have been a part of this program. Truthfully, there were so many challenges on the way - first and second summers were such unique and transformative undertakings that I really had to reconstruct how I think about myself, particularly I needed to finally believe that I have a place and role in this world, and what I was doing - be it my research paper or my series of workshops for high schoolers - they really could make an impact on this world, even if it was so tiny and miniscule. Now I am convinced that they have potential to bring about change and inspire.

I am still unsure about my future, and I definitely cannot say for sure what I am inspired to do, but I can say for certain that whatever it is that I do in the coming years and decades, I will always believe in my ability and potential to bring change, to make a difference. Even more, this experience which was focused on finding my own way and charting the unexplored which started by choosing my own research topics to then devising my own LIA plan - will certainly make me more confident and inclined to not



just seek solutions that already exist, but to venture out, to be a pioneer into the unknown and not to be afraid to create something of my own.

During this experience, so many of my flaws and imperfections showed. Above all, Laidlaw was a humbling experience, but only by going through this process was I able to fully see their existence and then be challenged to work on them. Being stuck on my solar panel literature review or feeling completely failed after my second workshop in Japan was not easy. These summers were probably one of my life's most challenging undertakings, but also one of the most rewarding - I tested my limits and discovered that, yes, after hardship, struggle, and pain, I did pull through. I did author a successful research paper, and I did bring inspiration to a handful of high school kids in a completely different corner of this world. I am extremely grateful to have been pushed to action and to have been challenged by this program.

Throughout both summers, my plans were inevitably imperfect and required many changes. I think the experience of working on my research paper and then teaching in Japan has given me the ability to let go of my ego and superficial motivations of why I was even doing what I was doing, and instead to just refocus on what is really important - the people and goals I serve. Being values - rooted became central to my leadership development, and this expressed itself clearly in my second summer: doing good, even when it felt nearly impossible as my workshop failed and my entire plan had to be rethought and redrawn.

I would say that I am neither strictly extroverted nor strictly introverted, and my natural ability to make new connections is not especially strong, yet being part of an extraordinary cohort and being surrounded by peers was unexpectedly motivational and helped me connect with others in a way that felt genuine rather than performative.

For me, above all else, being a Laidlaw scholar was a venue for truth-seeking: truth about myself - who I am and who I might become. It was also an experiment in testing truths about the outside world: what are the extent and limits of human action and impact? It turns out not too much if we really believe in ourselves.

I am more hesitant and unsure of my future than I have been in my memory. I do not think of this as necessarily bad anymore. I have completely rethought what a valuable contribution to society is, much thanks to this program. After, on one hand doing research on climate and energy justice, and on the other hand, doing direct work to spark spatial, creative thinking in the future generation of a small Japanese community, I realized that I cannot put myself to work without knowing it matters, without knowing that it brings something better to this world, something real, tangible and undeniably “good.” The ideas and goals of the past have slowly given way to confusion, as of now, but this realignment is leading to having a better idea on what I can accomplish in this world and what meaningful impact I can have.