



**Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research
Programme
Record of Reflection**

Summer Research Reflection

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Reflection

The Laidlaw Scholars Programme is something that, since March 2025, I had been looking up to for months. For months, I would think about what kinds of topics I would do given the chance to be in the program; I built an entire notebook dedicated to exploring what ideas interested me the most, sorted into broad categories. The EU, Argentine national economy, the ‘idea’ of a capital city. Looking back at it now in this reflection, I think I learned so many valuable skills by doing this. For one, I had the courage to reach out to professors and discuss topics that interested me, something I had always been too shy to do beforehand. And second, it really helped me think outside the box. I would ask “okay, how can I connect diplomacy to the European Union?” or, “How do I tie perceptions of the national economy into desire for sovereignty?” (a topic I eventually covered in my work). That kind of tying topics together gave me so many great ideas today that I hope I can eventually learn more about later down the line, and even before the program had commenced and I was actually accepted, I had learned a new lesson from it.

The research process was a challenge, I will have to admit. It was my first time ever doing this kind of intensive research, and I think the aspect that hit me the hardest here was the need for a framework of sorts. With a research topic largely focused on international relations, public policy, law, etc..., it was a bit confusing for me, since I had the expectations I was going to try and learn as much qualificative information about my case studies as possible. In the end, I can reflect back on it and say that the challenge was more about understanding how to TURN qualificative information into quantitative (seen in my table 1 in my research report). This was a hurdle I overcame and learned from during the research portion. This ability to synthesize findings, especially so in a comprehensive manner, is a Laidlaw leadership skill I feel I have learned more about how to utilize than before. I believe another hurdle I had to overcome (or at least I learned more about during this process, was time management. I struggled with procrastination a lot, which was honestly very shocking to me, as I truly believed, and I had said out loud, that being in this program that meant so much to me would be enough motivation on top of me studying something I was genuinely very interested in. I want to hypothesize here a bit, and say that this may be as a result of having independent, largely unguided work. At some point after reading the work I had preliminarily

sorted, I did not know how to go from there. This was the kind of self-management that, in hindsight, I should have seen coming. In school work, you have markers for what to do next, i.e. read these sources and then write on this specific question. It's a whole other playing field in your own independent work - everything is fair game, and anything could be useful. So I sifted through piles of papers trying to find something, anything that could fit into the paper. Sometimes I did, and sometimes I did not, and I can say now that that was not the best way to go about doing things for me personally. I know now how valuable bibliographies of the sources I am reading are, and how to jump from one to the other.

This was the longest piece of work I had ever done. At some point, I really struggled to continue. It felt like I was hitting an imaginary wall, where I couldn't get myself to write more, or read more for that matter, even if I tried my hardest.

This lasted for about three days, where each time I returned to my work, I felt this utter exhaustion and sickness, the last thing I wanted to do was write more. I resolved this by trying to spend as much time as I could outdoors, or really anywhere away from my computer (and additionally from any electronics).

Another way I resolved this was by constantly switching between all of my topics, so not writing consistently on one thing for too long. When I got tired of writing



about my case studies' history, I would switch over to theory. When that got boring, I switched to the table. I am in the position today to say that while the topic of disputed territories is very interesting to me and always will be, there were moments when I felt I had done too much, that I had read so much and for so long that I got so tired of it the last thing I wanted to do was continue learning. From my experience with fellow Laidlaw Scholars, I knew I wasn't alone in this feeling. In the end, I am very proud of the work I have created, and if there were to be another opportunity for me to create my own independent research, I feel like I would have a lot of new skills I have learned during this summer to use; self-management, time management, research synthesis, creative thinking, research collection, and more. These are just a few leadership qualities I believe I have really learnt during my time this summer with my Laidlaw project, and this only motivates me for next year when I learn so many other important leadership tools as my first time abroad on my own. Very excited for that day!