

Laidlaw Leadership in Action Project Reflection

Cambridge American Stage Tour 2026

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Introduction

This Summer, I embarked on my Leadership in Action Project as one of the Tour Managers of the 26th Cambridge American Stage Tour (CAST). CAST is an annual theatrical tour run entirely by Cambridge University students – as Tour Managers, Directors, techies, and actors – first established under the patronage of Judi Dench in 1999 and making its way across the East Coast of the United States of America each Summer to perform a Shakespearean show and facilitate educational workshops at schools and universities. My project consisted of a five week cultural immersion experience in the States and will conclude with a final week of the ADC homerun next week.

My LiA was the culmination of roughly ten months of commitment to planning the tour and recruiting its participants. I worked closely with my co-Tour Manager and Company Manager to devise a tour comprising six venues and an adventure across eleven states – handling venues, accommodation, finances, and doing lots of people-wrangling.

SMART Goals

1. Education and Engagement

Deliver interactive workshops and facilitate direct discussion/participation from students. Make notes on participation rates/reception in different styles/types of workshops for different levels of students and adapt future workshops accordingly.

As a Tour Manager, I also fulfilled the role of Education Officer, meaning that I designed and facilitated workshops during the tour. CAST delivered workshops to a range of age groups – ensuring that workshops were tailored to specific student demographics and generated high levels of engagement. Prior to the tour, I created an educational menu, offering options for workshops to teachers so that they – knowing their students best – could provide guidance to us in ensuring positive reception from students. Workshop participants included primarily English and Performing Arts students. An A/B pattern of activities was subsequently devised to cater to both types of students: ‘A’ pattern activities adopted a lecture-style and afforded greater opportunities for a literary focus, while ‘B’ pattern activities were much more interactive and theatrical. Workshops were also adapted to age – and skills and interests, accordingly. For example, for ‘A1: Performance Analysis of King Lear’, different excerpts of the play were chosen with specific discussion points, i.e., as simple as emoting and overall tone, to technical discussions of iambic pentameter, verse, and prose, to thematic and contextual connections.

As someone who does not study literature nor act, it was at times challenging to undertake this role. Collaboration with the directors and actors were critical to devising and improving these workshops. I ultimately left it up to them to select extracts and execute the workshops. Although under my guidance and following my instructions, many of them provided constructive criticisms; we learnt from experience and from each other in fulfilling the educational aspect of the tour over time, demonstrating the necessity of listening as a leader. Leadership cannot be reduced to a top-down dynamic and rather thrives off of the contributions and insights of those who are led as well as those who lead.

Overall, I not only observed high levels of engagement from students but have received complimentary feedback from venues.

2. Connection and Community

Identify moments of community each week and reflect on how my personal leadership and character shaped these moments and/or was challenged by them. This is a step I will take to maximise my personal enrichment - engaging with the community and pushing myself in unfamiliar social encounters.

Coming into the tour, I found myself in a rather different situation to the rest of the company in the sense that I had not been a part of over six months of rehearsals. Apart from the production crew of four, I was pretty unfamiliar with the rest of the company and yet had committed myself to spending the next six weeks as their leader. The first week was socially, a trial by fire. Constantly being in a group of sixteen and getting to know new people in a completely foreign environment was extremely overwhelming. I was very intentional in ensuring that I still made time for myself, sitting poolside in the morning and journaling during the first few days of the tour while in Nashville. My connection to the company certainly grew over time but it was clear that making conscious efforts to socialise and cultivate friendships was critical to building rapport and garnering respect for myself and my professional capacity as a leader.

I do not enjoy reducing leadership to a power imbalance but this experience certainly posed challenges in that I possessed very little authority despite occupying a position of leadership within this group – we were all Cambridge students after all. My co-Tour Manager and the Company Manager also resonated with my struggles on this front. Establishing consensus between the three of us, as the company's leadership body in an official capacity, became important to how we could act as effective leaders at an individual level. The tasks of tour leadership, in a concrete sense, were divided between the three of us and yet, the key to our own success rested in mutual support and

The company and its social dynamics encompasses but only one side of the coin. We were accommodated by host families at each of our venues and despite our busy schedules, travelling, delivering workshops, and preparing and performing the show, I made a conscious effort to connect with, and make time for our generous hosts, offering to cook dinner and enjoying an evening cooking and dining together, as an example. My hosts were particularly keen to learn about Chinese cooking. CAST is as much reliant on the efforts of the company as it is of the venues and their local communities. In order to consolidate trust and rapport with venues, our connections to the hosts were vital.

3. Feedback and Futures

Collate feedback from venues as well as the company to help maximise its continued success and impact in coming years.

Due to CAST's history and continuity at the university, part of my obligations and priorities as a Tour Manager pertain to its future – while the tour/my LiA may formally be over, CAST's impact, and my contributions to it, is far from over.

I await the conclusion of the home-run before seeking feedback from the company. Upon contacting venues to express thanks, we have also requested feedback. Throughout the tour, myself and my co-Tour Manager have put together an extensive document of guidance for next year's Tour Managers. We have observed particular successes as well as failures of the tour concerning a range of issues including company dynamics/managing interpersonal relationships, overseas banking, and tour arrangements, holistically: regarding duration, route, etc.

Conclusion

These past ten months have no doubt been with many challenges and setbacks but altogether, have proved extremely rewarding and enriching – a once in a lifetime experience. I am indebted to my fellow CAST members, particularly my co-Tour Manager and the Company Manager, Cambridge in America (the overseeing organisation and sponsor), our venues and their local communities, and of course the Laidlaw Foundation for funding and supporting this project.

I look forward to the ADC home-run as a final celebration of CAST!