Laidlaw Ethical Leadership and Global Citizenship Reflection
Natalie Ng, University of Cambridge, 2024 Cohort

It has been a great privilege to undertake the Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Programme over the past two years. From Cambridge, to Rome, and to eleven states across the East Coast of the United States of America, I am immensely grateful for the opportunities and places that this scholarship has afforded me.

SUMMER 1: RESEARCH PROJECT

My first Summer was spent conducting research on the role and agency of imperial women under the Augustan Principate. I greatly enjoyed looking into a part of history that I do not formally study as part of my degree course, venturing into ancient history and an interdisciplinary approach that took my historical training into a project that fused classics, history of art, and political theory.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to Rome, immersing myself in its rich history and culture, visiting a range of historical sites and museums.

Research, being a largely independent endeavour, at first seemed to be rather far afield from my leadership training and practice. However, I was enlightened to the fact that leadership is as much intrapersonal as it is interpersonal. Many of the skills that we associate with being a good leader – taking initiative, asking the difficult questions and advocating for yourself and others, organisation, and effective communication – must be honed within and by ourselves before being applied in a group context.

In some respects, this aspect of the programme was on-paper the one where I felt most within my depth. This six-week experience was not dissimilar to six weeks spent as a student during term-time: long days in the library, wading through pages upon pages of sources, sitting and thinking. That is not to say that I did not face challenges; a 5000 word research output was significantly greater than I was used to. Further, I was afforded the luxury of time that I was unfamiliar with, churning out weekly essay after weekly essay. Slowing down, thinking deeply, and really sitting with my sources felt indulgent but required a level of patience that I had not previously trained.

SUMMER 2: LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

If the first Summer was one of familiarity and comfort, the second was the polar opposite. As Tour Manager of the 2026 Cambridge American Stage Tour, I found myself leading a group of sixteen students to embark on a theatre tour of *King Lear* across the Atlantic. While my research project merely felt like an extension and refinement of previously acquired skills, my LiA was lots of learning on the spot and finding myself in rather unanticipated and challenging situations. My intrapersonal development was now tested in the realm of the interpersonal as I wrangled sixteen people around the States, from car to car, from theatre to theatre, from state to state, and even country to country.

Leadership, this time around, was much more collaborative, as myself, my Co-Tour Manager, and our Company Manager held the fort down together across the six weeks. I'd say that the stakes of a six-week theatre tour in and of itself, comparable to my past experiences as a Producer, were stressful and demanding enough without the added unfamiliarity of being in a foreign country. That being said, it was beyond a blessing to meet so many wonderful people with such varied life experiences throughout the tour. As we spent a majority of the tour with host families, my LiA was certainly an experience of cultural immersion and exposure. Furthermore, the majority of our performances took place at legacy venues. Their previous experiences hosting the tour meant that my leadership/my role as Tour Manager was most effectively conducted where I balanced talking with listening and the exercise of control with its surrender.

CONCLUSION

The thread that runs between both Summer's is an awareness of perspective. In my first Summer, my research put me in dialogue with some of the leading scholars of the Augustan Age, while in the second, I have become but one part of the twenty-six year history of the Cambridge American Stage Tour and paved the way for its twenty-seventh. There is a minutiae to my leadership practice that I find empowering rather than diminishing. Small actions have small impacts and any impact is better than none.