



**Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme**  
**Summer Research Reflection**

**A Summer of “Firsts”: Research and Reflection**

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Approved timeline, schedule, and order might sound like a nightmare for some, but definitely not for a “control freak” like me. I tend to create a weekly routine that I follow. It gives me the feeling of power and control over my life. When this routine crumbles due to unforeseen circumstances, this is the time when the challenges arise for me personally.

During my Summer I research experience I had many ups and downs, I challenged myself constantly while staying positive and dedicated no matter what. This research experience tested my leadership skills in ways I could not imagine.

I decided to spend the research period in the Polish capital, Warsaw. It was not my first time being abroad, so I knew how to book flights or do the apartment hunting. The plan was concrete (or it seemed to be): I found a budget place in a nice safe area of Warsaw and booked it back in April. I had a set deadline to pay for it, and I calculated that I should meet the deadline perfectly with the release of our scholarship funds. However, it did not go as planned. Funding got a little bit delayed, leaving me in a new country practically homeless. As an inveterate traveller, I did not give up and had a few days before my arrival in the country to find a new place I would call home for the next 6 weeks of the research. The never-ending search was abruptly ended by a phone call. My friend, who had just moved to Warsaw, told me that she heard I was looking for a place to stay in Warsaw and she was ready to host me for the time I would be looking for an apartment. For one week I stayed with her, and jackpot — I found a great place on the outskirts of Warsaw where I stayed until the end of the research period. One more time I was convinced that the phrase “a friend in need is a friend indeed” portrays the reality of life.

The second time I encountered a challenge was not getting my REB approval on time. It was my first time ever creating an ethics protocol, consent form for the participants, etc. I was hopeful till the last day of the research to get the approval, however, it did not happen and I received it in August, which was after the end of the research period. While waiting for the REB approval, I decided to edit my methodology accordingly, so that I would not rely too much on the interview data in case of not having an opportunity to conduct interviews. After finally being approved by REB and later the Laidlaw Committee, I started reaching out to my potential interviewees. Many of them, whom I initially planned to invite, either already had other commitments planned or ghosted me. By having an optimistic mindset, I contacted 10+ potential interviewees, and after one got back to me with the acceptance to be a part of my project, I conducted the planned interview with them, where they provided unique perspectives and ideas on the topic of my research and shared their own experiences. The main takeaway would be not being afraid of rejections, as one closed door opens so many other amazing opportunities.

I will be forever grateful to this experience for the personal and professional growth I went through. I had many “firsts” during my whole research experience. It was my first academic research experience, so I had to learn everything from the very start: how to structure your thoughts, how to analyze the massive volume of information, as well as how to evaluate the necessary relevant data. It was my first time contacting professors, academia members, politicians, and industry professionals and pitching them my own research idea. It was my first time writing about something that matters to me and that I might potentially make an impact with through my work. Finally, it was my first time going to an international conference as a delegate and an active participant. To gain a deeper understanding of how environmental genocide is viewed and

punished in the worldwide legal system context, I signed up for the prestigious 12th GAJE World-wide Conference/11th ENCLE Conference 2025: “Justice Education in a Changing World: Exploring New Approaches to Global Challenges,” which was held at Lazarski University in Warsaw. I had a privilege and an opportunity to meet judges, lawyers, and owners of legal clinics from around the globe, whom I would not have met if not for this scholarship. Being the youngest participant of the conference, and being surrounded by truly amazing individuals, was definitely inspiring and a once-in-a-lifetime chance. For the whole 4 days I networked and attended multiple workshops not only to listen and gain new knowledge from other industry professionals, but also to express my own opinions and share my experiences, perspectives as a person from a finance rather than a law background. It is extremely important to understand the intersectionality of every sphere of our lives, and apply this knowledge in the future. During the conference week, I also visited the NGO “Ukrainski Dom,” which is located in the heart of Warsaw. This not-for-profit organization focuses on providing help to Ukrainians who, under different circumstances, had to be temporarily displaced to Poland, or for those who permanently immigrated to seek safety or a better future. I learned there for the first time the term “environmental refugee,” which, just like “ecocide,” is not recognized by international law in any country. From that perspective, many Ukrainians that fled their homes can be considered environmental refugees. They had to leave their homes not only to survive bombing, but also due to an inability to continue living in certain areas, as war created natural disasters of an international scale. The prominent example of that would be the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam, which left 584,000 ha of land uninhabitable. It opened my eyes to the fact that law is a perfectly imperfect system that does not go hand in hand with the constantly changing world, and which does not guarantee equal protection and punishment for everyone.

This summer experience taught me that a great leader is not the one who has strict control over everything, but the one who, under pressure and circumstances, is able to adapt and still perform to their best ability, while staying curious and authentic.